

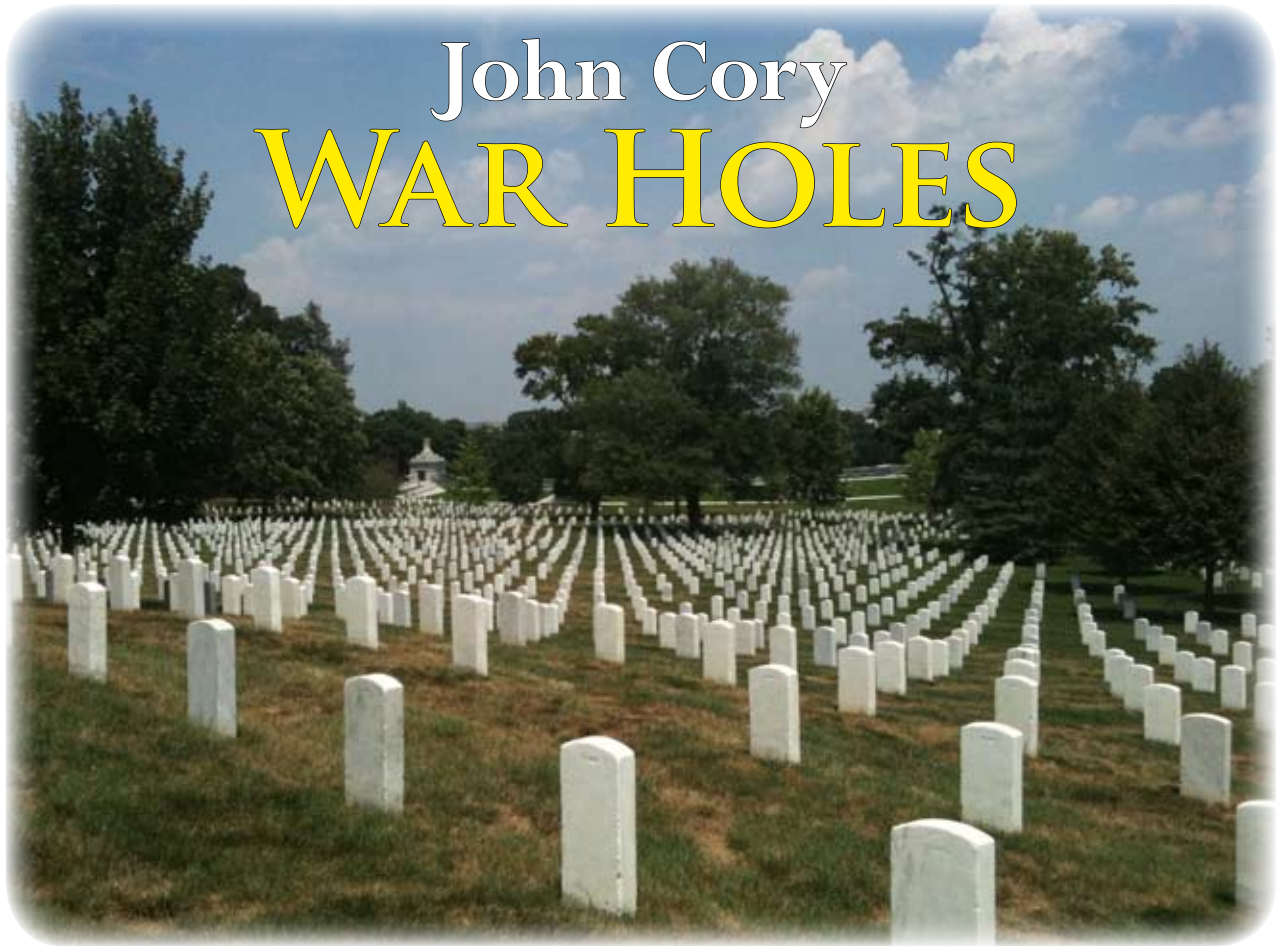
SHALOM

Jewish Peace Letter

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ROWS OF WHITE granite markers drop away and then ripple up the far grassy hill and go on forever across flat green lawns. Arlington Cemetery. It looks like a thousand little scabs trying to heal one big wound.

War is about holes.

Colin Powell planted the seeds for war with a story that had an integrity-hole big enough to drive a WMD mobile-lab truck through. Donald Rumsfeld now tills the book-sales circuit as he works to bury truth down the memory hole. The corporate media cultivated and

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nurtured the lies of Curveball even as they knew there was doubt. They all dug a deep and deadly hole and now scramble to backfill and cover it over.

War is about holes.

The definition of what is a good or bad war; all the patriotic rationalizations and reasons for war, all the war movies and war stories are nothing more than the dirt we shovel in to fill up the holes. Powell and Rumsfeld and the corporate media are all shoveling as fast as they can right now.

War is about holes.

Foxholes. Bullet holes. Fire-in-the hole! Bomb craters. Caves and graves.

Whether Grunt, Fobbit or REMF, a combat tour

(Continued on next page)

is all about holes. Holes you jump into for survival when the shooting starts, and the constant hope and prayer you don't end up in a hole for good.

A mother often describes the arrival of the uniformed messengers of death on her front porch as the moment she felt as if she had suddenly fallen into a deep, dark hole.

There is a hole in New York City. Some say that hole started the war. Some say the war started long before the hole. And there are fights about what should go into or who should be allowed anywhere around that hole. I guess you could call it a hole controversy.

In the controversy surrounding the creation of the national Vietnam Memorial was the issue of the design. Critics said it looked like a long gash in the earth, like a wound or a scar. It was a hole you had to descend into as the black Wall towered over you. And that is exactly what happens when you walk the memorial. You descend into the hole of war and stare at the names behind your own reflection and the reflection of the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. It is a powerful, overwhelming experience. And then you slowly ascend out of the hole of war. Back above ground.

But the names stay there. My friends John Patrick Lambooy, Ronald Peter Huffman, Craig Pyper Fielding and Michael Richard Pickles remain forever captured in that black and white granite reflection of eternity. The youngest KIA name was 15 years old, five names were 16 years old, 12 were 17 years old, and the oldest KIA name was 63 years old. There are eight women on the Wall, approximately 38 sets of brothers, and three sets of fathers and sons. Since 1997, 88 names have been added as they die from the wounds received during their time in Vietnam. It is literally an expanding hole of war these many decades later.

Back in 2007, Stephen Dark wrote a piece for *City Weekly* in Salt Lake City, Utah. It was titled "The Things We Carry," and told the story of the Midvale Boys, as they are known on the Wall: John James Martinez, Frank LeRoy Tafoya and Tom Gonzales. The young soldiers died within 16 days of each other in 1967. LeRoy Tafoya was killed Nov. 22, the fourth anniversary of the JFK assassination. James Martinez died the next day, Thanksgiving. And Tom Gonzales was killed on Dec. 7, Pearl Harbor Day.

Stephen Dark's story was also about the 2001 pilgrimage of Al Schroeder, a Vietnam combat medic, to the graves of the first five men who died under his care. Tom Gonzales was one of those. Al Schroeder was dealing with his own personal demons.

From the article:

Schroeder was caught off-guard by "the depth of emotion I would encounter on the other side of the table from these families," he says. "Somehow, I be-

lieved they had gone on and left it way behind them ..." Instead of encountering memories laid to rest, he found himself "reopening a sore by bulldozing through a Band-Aid."

With the current Iraq and Afghanistan wars, these families and others continually relive their loss with each American death they hear or read about.

When I was a kid, Midvale was a stop on the way to and from Bingham and the Kennecott copper mine. Kennecott was the biggest employer around back then and the mine was a premier elementary school field trip. If I remember correctly, Kennecott is the deepest open-pit copper mine in the world. Just not deep enough to bury the sorrow of war.

War is about holes.

It is about holes in the truth. Holes filled with the black, oily ooze of lies. It is about holes at the dinner table, holes for the holidays, and holes in the neighborhood. It's about holes in families. It is about holes — in all of us.

And lest we forget, at the bottom of those holes are millions of eyes staring back at us, uncomprehending eyes of children, civilians and innocents who are the collateral damage of "Shock and Awe" set free by a MOAB — the Mother Of All Bombs during the Mother Of All Battles — or some other deadly device in the spread of peace and freedom through superior firepower.

It is March, the mark of eight years of war in Iraq and a decade in Afghanistan. March is the forward edge of spring, the planting time. And that's what Powell and Rumsfeld and the media are doing. They are desperately backfilling the holes of their war with the seeds of forgetfulness and false memories and hope that the death blossom will cover their garden of sin.

Out in Louisiana, Miz Remy is planting yellow orchid trees and red dogwoods and seedlings of cucumber, artichokes, red pear tomatoes and coriander — beauty and nourishment. She even has Cherokee black bean seeds directly descended from the black beans carried by the Cherokee on the Trail of Tears. Seeds of history and remembering.

I guess we forget sometimes that we can use holes to plant life, to plant the seeds of hope or the saplings of peace. Not too deep lest we smother the plantings. Not too shallow or we risk it being easily uprooted. But we must be constant gardeners and prevent the weeds of war from spreading and strangling the roots of peace and hope. We must tend to the garden for all our sakes, and for the sake of those lost in the holes of war, and those who stare back and ask: Why?

War is about holes.

Peace is about what we put in those holes. ☆

— *This article first appeared on Reader Supported News.*

Stefan Merken

‘Excuse me. Why Are We in Afghanistan?’

“**W**E ARE ONCE again in another war.” I said this over coffee the other morning as the news reported the start of bombing in Libya. My friend, who understands my pacifist leanings but doesn’t fully share them, started to give me justifications as to why this is not just another war. “This is sanctioned by United Nations Security Council, the Arab League endorsed it, the world needs to stop an insane demonic leader from killing his own people . . .”

Phrase it any way you want. It’s still another war. And what if it turns out to be a long war? The U.S. is still in Iraq, the U.S. is in the middle of fighting in Afghanistan, and now missiles are being dropped on Libya, allegedly to establish a no-fly zone.

Just stop for a minute and think about what is being done in our name.

Somehow, sometime we need to have a national discussion about what we hope to win by fighting one war after another. But when will we have that discussion? If not now, when? Long after the fighting has stopped, the troops come home, the dead buried, the medals awarded, the monuments built, the names posted of young men and women who died, and the mothers, fathers, sisters, wives, children and friends have gone on with their lives? Or maybe after the corporations have made inroads to sell American goods in what is now considered a friendly country? Or after we have established this once-evil enemy as a trading partner and a trade treaty has been set up to let us buy trinkets or TVs at strip malls across America?

After all this, maybe the American public can finally get down to figuring out why we were there fighting yet another war. What was it we hoped to accomplish? What did we ac-

tually do at so much cost to those who died and those who were left behind? And then perhaps we finally can get to the point (which should have come in the beginning) of what we really should have done, should have said, before going to war again.

This national discussion needs to begin with the understanding that war is not the answer. Not yesterday. Not now. Not tomorrow. Never. The home-front warriors who make the decision to go to war are never the ones who fight the fight. As a matter of fact, during the Vietnam War, when the politicians’ own sons were in danger of being drafted, the need to end that pointless war became very evident to those in power. And so they finally ended a failing war which killed some 58,000 U.S. soldiers, maimed another 130,000, not to mention a million or more dead Vietnamese.

So I suggest we begin to have this discussion now. Turn to the person next to you on the bus, the subway, the train, the restaurant, the café, the espresso bar — and talk to him or her. You need to talk to someone, anyone, who doesn’t see the obvious, who doesn’t already agree with us.

Let me help get the conversation started. I have experience in this.

“Excuse me. May I ask you why we, the U.S., are in Afghanistan? What do we hope to gain by being there? The Russians couldn’t win a war there even though they tried for 20 years, so do you think we can? Are you willing to give your life for this purpose? If you disagree with why this is being done in your name, in my name, in our names — have you told your politicians?”

If the person can’t hear you, talk louder so everyone around can hear you. Our future and the future of the world depend upon it. ☆



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E. James Lieberman

The J Street Conference

A New Generation Speaks

A special report to JPF members and friends

THE SECOND NATIONAL J Street conference at the Washington Convention Center, from February 26 to March 1, was well organized and well attended, with plenty of speakers and an informed audience. I was impressed by their diversity and enthusiasm.

The opening session, available on-line, is very much worth watching for its entire two hours. J Street was founded to challenge more established American Jewish organizations that too often interpret all criticism of Israeli policies as bordering on — if not actual — anti-Semitism. J Street supports candidates for political office who back its “Pro-Israel, Pro-Peace” platform, and now proudly claims 170,000 supporters, including 600 rabbis (100 of whom attended). J Street U, a new development, has chapters on 50 college campuses; 500 students were among the conference’s attendance of 2,300. Some 30 organizations participated in the meeting — most of them quite new to me. There was agreement and disagreement among the speakers and audience, but opinions were always expressed with civility and respect. The sessions I attended were models of constructive teaching and debate.

For example, the very first speaker, Rabbi David Saperstein, director of Reform Judaism’s Religious Action Center, took issue with J Street’s opposition to the U.S. veto of the recent UN resolution condemning Israeli settlement building, noting that the veto may give the U.S. more leverage with Israel in the future.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, the Israeli-born activist and founder of J Street, argued that Israel can be Jewish and democratic only if it gives Palestinians land for an independent state of their own. This is the essence of the two-state solution. He invited the Anti-Defamation League to debate and was refused.

Speaker Peter Beinart, prominent dissenter from “Israel-Can-Do-No Wrong” opinion and a former editor of *The New Republic*, wrote in the June 10, 2010, issue of *The New*

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Jeremy Ben-Ami, speaking at J Street’s Giving Voice to Our Values national conference.

York Review of Books — to widespread approval, as well as expected criticism from the right — about the growing rift among American Jews:

Particularly in the younger generations, fewer and fewer American Jewish liberals are Zionists; fewer and fewer American Jewish Zionists are liberal. One reason is that the leading institutions of American Jewry have refused to foster — indeed, have actively opposed — a Zionism that challenges Israel’s behavior in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and towards its own Arab citizens. For several decades, the Jewish establishment has asked American Jews to check their

liberalism at Zionism's door, and now to their horror they are finding that many young Jews have checked their Zionism instead.

Beinart emphasized that the struggle now is for honor, not power. There are, he said, 300,000 Jews living in non-democratic Israel, i.e., in the settlements on the West Bank, where Palestinians are residents but not admitted to citizenship and endure injustice and discrimination. (A book given to all conference registrants — *Breaking the Silence: Women Soldiers' Testimonies*, published in 2009 — provided chilling evidence of injustice and discrimination.) An important point Beinart made: Hamas is empowered by the siege in Gaza. By closing the above-ground economy you get an underground economy.

Anti-J Street conservatives urged Dennis Ross, special assistant to the president and member of the National Security Council, not to participate, but he came and spoke and steered clear of controversy. However, he did remain for the subsequent panel discussion, which gave rise to an on-line report from *Haaretz*, which quoted panelist Roger Cohen of *The New York Times*: "He [Ross] sat in five administrations but couldn't sit after the speech for the debate."

Some of my initial exhilaration was dampened the next day on hearing Gershon Baskin, of Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (www.ipcri.org) speak about saving the two-state solution. An American who protested the Vietnam War in his native New Jersey before his bar mitzvah, Baskin subsequently moved to Israel, where he has been a peace activist for some 30 years. Only this year does he feel that time is running out; the fall elections in Israel, he believes, are crucial. Under the Geneva Convention, Israel is responsible for Arabs living in occupied territories, a responsibility, said Baskin, Israel fails to honor. As in the U.S., Israeli voters are fearful and less knowledgeable than one would hope. Baskin concluded by noting with regret that while the Palestinians gave U.S. representative George Mitchell a requested policy document for a negotiating session, the Netanyahu government did not meet its commitment to do the same.

A session on reviving the Israeli peace bloc lifted my spirits again. "Israel is for all our residents, not just the Jews." "We must end the distribution of political power and favor by ethnicity." "Peace agreement" is a code for not dealing with Palestinians. Israeli peace activists are concerned, but unafraid. The key is Israeli public opinion. Settlements al-

ready built will never be part of the Palestinian state anyway, so land-for-peace is the obvious requirement. The tunnel/highway connecting the West Bank and Gaza is ready to be built — engineering blueprints are complete. These were among the many comments I heard, including observations that many Israelis fear that lifting the siege of Gaza would strengthen Hamas.

On the third day, the workshop titled "Can Young Jews Reclaim (or Redefine) a Robust Connection to Israel?" offered a stimulating range of judgments and concerns from younger people. The global Jewish spirit is greater than Israel and the children of Israel are greater than the state of Israel, said one speaker. In the U.S., children of the intermarried are disengaged. The matrilineal (not patrilineal) determination of Jewishness was an issue, as were limitations on women in religious roles in Israel. "Don't write off the intermarried! Inter-marriage is a widening, not a narrowing, of the tent." There were also calls to differentiate the Israeli government from Israel and the essential moral values of Judaism.

There was great concern expressed about interfaith couples and their offspring. It's hard to be a radical feminist and Jewish, added one woman. That 20-to-30-year-olds have a lot to say and may well eventually become more influential than the aging and established Jewish groups (many of which have dwindling memberships) appeared to reflect a consensus among many in the audience.

Finally, I saw a preview of *Between Two Worlds*, a film directed by Alan Snitow and Deborah Kaufman, which consists of five stories of "dissent, loyalty and courage" in today's Jewish universe. The stimulus for this movie was the fierce protest against a film about Rachel Corrie at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. Corrie, a non-Jewish 24-year-old American woman and member of the International Solidarity Movement, was killed by an Israeli bulldozer as she tried to block destruction of a Palestinian home. The new film also tells the story of adult children finding out about their mother's hidden Communist past; and it covers the controversy about divestment (from corporations viewed as helping oppress Palestinians in Israel) on the UC-Berkeley campus. My reaction to the film sums up my experience: hope and guarded confidence about the future, along with consternation at the way J Street is described in more traditional media. In the end, however, JPF's moral principles seemed to define the entire conference, which gave me a new appreciation of Judaism's diversity and openness. ☆

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Jack Ross

Jewish Voice for Peace: A New Beginning

ON MARCH 11-13, a small conference of around 200 gathered on the University of Pennsylvania campus in Philadelphia with potential significance extending far beyond its modest attendance. This was the national membership meeting of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a group founded in San Francisco in 1996, which in the wake of the siege of Gaza in late 2008 has aggressively grown into a national organization with 27 local chapters and seven full-time staff members.

The meeting and its discussions were closed to the press (though this writer was in attendance), but this only highlights the newsworthiness of the meeting in itself. Late last year, the Anti-Defamation League named JVP on a list it released of the “Top Ten Anti-Israel Groups in America,” and since then well-known members of the group have in some cases met with violence or threats of violence, particularly on the West Coast, and lesser forms of intimidation from various Jewish community leaders.

The furor with which JVP is greeted by the official Jewish community centers largely around the group’s outspoken identification with the movement for boycott, divestment and

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sanctions against the Israeli occupation, increasingly known by the acronym BDS. There have been principled objections to this movement from some who cannot be accused of being apologists for Israel. (Michael Desch wrote a penetrating critique of the movement and its effectiveness for the magazine *The American Conservative* in the spring of 2010).

To its credit JVP appears to be conscious of these concerns and to want to allay many of these criticisms. It delineates few rigid boundaries of discussion and nuance, acknowledging disadvantages to academic and cultural boycotts of Israel, though it draws a firm line against academic institutions involved in the occupation and the Israeli military more generally. Moreover, JVP is decidedly averse to any agenda of narrow Palestinian nationalism, greeting with great enthusiasm an address by

Ali Abunimah emphasizing that the struggle against the occupation is one for democratic and civil rights as opposed to land and sovereignty.

Nevertheless, and perhaps especially for all these reasons, the official Jewish community, or what Peter Beinart has named “the Jewish establishment,” has greeted the rise of JVP, and of the BDS movement generally, with unmitigated hysteria. Indeed, the event at which JVP first made headlines — the interruption by a group of young protesters of a speech by Benjamin Netanyahu to an arm of the Israel lobby in New Orleans — was a direct re-

response to a \$6 million initiative being announced at that conference to combat the larger BDS movement, which was styled as a campaign of “delegitimization” of Israel.

To this, JVP responds that it is agnostic about the political parameters of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but emphasizes that the cardinal principle of any solution must be full democratic, political and civil rights for Palestinians under whichever government they may reside upon resolution of the conflict. Though JVP may have some reluctance to say so explicitly, this must mean that Israel ceases to be a “Jewish” state rather than a state of all its citizens.

In addition, JVP emphatically refuses to be drawn into any official position on Zionism as an ideology. It is therefore no mystery why the Jewish establishment seeks, where it can, the effective excommunication of JVP. Most recently, Hillel, the leading Jewish campus society, refused the application of the Brandeis University JVP chapter for affiliation, citing its opposition to “Israel as a Jewish and democratic state,” an incident that was covered by *The Boston Globe*. Yet Peter Beinart, though still very much in the progressive Zionist camp, has warned that “the best way for the Jewish establishment to ensure that BDS enters the mainstream is to keep doing what its doing.”

The best indicator of the impact JVP and the larger milieu it represents may be its influence on the better-known group called J Street. When it was first founded, J Street appeared to be drawing a line that, while it insisted on being “pro-Israel” and emphatically for a two-state solution, was nonetheless agnostic on first principles with respect to Zionism, as JVP is at least officially. This has changed cosmetically in the last year, as J Street has come to repeat the mantra of seeking to preserve “the national homeland of the Jewish people.” At the same time, J Street has been forced to make stronger appeals to the audience of JVP, by inviting, for example, JVP national spokeswoman Rebecca Vilkomerson to speak at its recent conference.

Perhaps more importantly than its specific views on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, J Street remains deeply committed to maintaining the legitimacy of the “collective” identified as the Jewish establishment, however radically it may wish to reform it. At best ambivalent about “the Jewish collective,” JVP has been perfectly at ease opposing it, leading many in the “collective” who might begrudgingly

accommodate J Street to begin proposing formal lines of demarcation that would exclude the likes of JVP. The Jewish establishment could be making a grave and possibly fatal mistake if it continues to pursue an inquisition against the so-called “delegitimizers.” As David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker*, observed in a recent article, “even J Street is a tough sell to the younger generation.”

One of the most extraordinary developments has been that the young people who have flocked to JVP are far removed from the old stereotype of adolescent leftists rebelling as much against their Jewish upbringing as anything else. Some of those who interrupted Netanyahu in New Orleans even attended Jewish day school. Others, such as Elaina Ellis, of Seattle, grew up in a marginally Jewish family and had her passions brought out by a return to Judaism in college. Ms. Ellis led off a poetry reading the second night of the JVP conference, along with her co-author Rae Abileah, with a reading of the “Young, Jewish and Proud” manifesto issued by their cohort in New Orleans.

For even the Jewish establishment may not realize the full importance of what JVP represents. In one of the most remarkable manifestations of the organization’s growing national reach, in the last year JVP announced the formation of its Rabbinical Council which at this writing numbers 30, including several rabbinical students and one cantor. This is the largest organized dissent by Jewish religious leaders from the first principles of the Jewish establishment, if not from Zionism itself, since 1943. That year, 33 rabbis of the American Council for Judaism issued their founding statement, dissenting from the “American Jewish Conference” which established the “official” Jewish community constitutionally committed to Zionism — what we have now come to call “the Jewish establishment.”

In registering its protest of that establishment today, and of the Israeli policies it has indispensably enabled, JVP could do well to quote the statement of the American Council for Judaism upon the founding of the State of Israel: “We shall continue to reject concepts and programs for Jews that derive from national or racial theories. We pray that the State of Israel may also construct itself upon that basis, granting full equality of rights and obligations, in all aspects of life, to all of its people. But for ourselves, and our relationships in the American scene, we entertain no question as to our determination in these matters.” ☆

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Matthew Hoh

Memorials to Purposelessness

MID-FEBRUARY MARKED the one-year anniversary of the U.S. military offensive into Marjah in Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan. Operation Moshtarak, as it was called, was the largest military operation in Afghanistan since the removal of the Taliban regime in the fall of 2001. However, it served not just as a military operation but also as a high profile public relations campaign and the “official” start of America’s escalation of the Afghan War.¹

Occurring just two months after President Obama’s announcement at West Point in December 2009 to “surge” an additional 30,000 troops into Afghanistan, Operation Moshtarak would prove the chance for the Pentagon and its boosters, desperate for a clear “win” post-Iraq, to demonstrate a smart and new vision of war.

American forces, both in uniform and as elements of the much-heralded “civilian surge,” a self-stylized modern day matting of McNamara’s Whiz Kids and Lawrence of Arabia,² riding in together and wearing white hats, would deliver democracy and justice to a beleaguered, oppressed and yearning rural, tribal and poor population. Root causes of the conflict in Afghanistan, a tragedy unbroken since the 1970s, were too complex or too messy to be of much concern for Operation Moshtarak; while any legitimate political grievances the local population pos-

essed for supporting the insurgency, to include political disenfranchisement or victimization due to exclusion and predation, as a result of U.S., NATO and Afghan government policies, were given similar little regard or consideration. The fact that the con-

conflict in Afghanistan, multilayered and complex, and characterized through a kaleidoscopic host of reasons and causes including, but not limited to, regional, tribal or ethnic civil war, a proxy war between Pakistan and India and an amazing multitude of local feuds which could aptly be described to Americans as Hatfield-and-McCoy-type narratives, many predating America’s arrival into the conflict in 2001, and most im-

portantly, completely irrelevant or tangential to al-Qaeda, were similarly unconsidered.

This hubris and arrogance should not be surprising, since the everlastingly nasty, brutish and terrifying nature of warfare, the fact that the enemy always gets to make decisions too and that, just possibly, the local population may not see Americans or any other occupiers as the ones wearing the white hats, are as troublesome and unfitting to today’s promoters of counterinsurgency warfare as they were to the advocates of “Shock and Awe,” speed and the “Revolution in Military Affairs” in the spring of 2003.

To the politicians, generals, policy makers, pundits, theorists and bloggers, many of whom are resident in Washington, DC, and to whom the title “Chickenhawk” would not be unfairly applied, the question of conflict and war, so far as they are removed from it in physical, emotional and existential connections, consistently remains how we should conduct war and almost never why or to what end. So, noting the nature of those who offered us escalation of war, with all its attendant costs, as a means to better our lives, on this anniversary of Operation Moshtarak and the “official” escalation of the Afghan War, we must continue to argue for a new course forward for the United States in Afghanistan.

Derrick Crowe and the team at Rethink Afghanistan superbly document the hyperbole of promised victory prior to the



Vietnam War Memorial, Washington, DC.

¹ President Obama authorized over 20,000 additional U.S. forces into Afghanistan in March 2009. However, the authorization for 30,000 more U.S. forces in December 2009 by President Obama is publicly acknowledged as his “Surge” and so the “official” escalation of the conflict.

² I can say such, as I was one of the first of that civilian surge into Afghanistan in 2009.

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launch of Operation Moshtarak. Additionally, they refute, based upon evidence and fact, the endless and baseless assertions of progress and success in Afghanistan made by the Obama administration and the Pentagon that have marked the past 12 months. Derrick's article is well worth bookmarking (http://www.thehuffingtonpost.com/derrick-crowe/on-anniversary-of-marjah_b_822606.html), as it will be an important source this spring as we near President Obama's promised date for "accelerated transition" in Afghanistan. At that point we can have a national debate we should have had this past December, but did not, during a much promised strategy review, on the future of our nation's war in Afghanistan — a debate we should not say we did not receive, but rather one we failed to force.

We have a responsibility to force such a debate for many, many reasons. Thousands of American service members have fought and many have died or been forever wounded these last 12 months to clear, hold and build Marjah and countless other nameless valleys and villages in Afghanistan. An argument can be made that after 12 months of very tough fighting, during certain times of the day Marjah can be considered "cleared." The hold-and-build aspects of the operation however, like most of the Pashtun-dominated eastern and southern parts of Afghanistan, to include most especially Kandahar, remain glaringly out of reach.

In a year's time, Marjah may come to look like Nawa, which took nearly two years to become the seemingly one and only model of success in Afghanistan since President Obama's initial authorization of 20,000 more troops to Afghanistan in March 2009. Sangin, this year's Marjah, after another year or two of heavy fighting, may come to look like Marjah. The question is, however, if we ever leave Nawa, and not just our marines, but also our money, how quickly will it again return to Sangin-like or Marjah-like conditions? And what about the majority of the Helmand districts and subdistricts we are not currently occupying? The nature of this war, the enemy and the population will assuredly cause us to see future Nawas, Marjahs and Sangins in villages and valleys whose names are not yet known, but whose vital strategic importance to the peace and prosperity of the United States will surely be proclaimed by those who trumpet war and argue fear in order to achieve such goals. When I resigned from my position with the State Department in Afghanistan some 18 months ago, I used the term Sisyphian to describe the mission given our military in Afghanistan. Now, I still imagine Sisyphus, but with a larger stone.

The name of the next Marjah, Sangin or Nawa — a place to which we will be told we must dispatch more of our young men and women to fight bogeymen hiding in the fields of illiterate and subsistence farmers — is as unknown as are the gains we have received for our sacrifices throughout Afghanistan over this past year. What are known, however, is what the costs have been, what the costs are and what the costs will be. Casualties seen, those physically killed and wounded, I believe are better known and understood than those unseen casualties, particularly post-traumatic stress disorders and traumatic brain injuries, that will rip apart lives and families until the last of this war's generation

passes in the second half of this century. That is a very long time to ask our service members, their families and their communities to continue to pay the price of fighting Afghan farmers in fields that are devoid of al-Qaeda.

The insanity of our expenditure extends past the physical and into the fiscal. The U.S. currently garrisons Marjah with two battalions of marines and sailors. Two battalions form more than 2,000 men and women. Utilizing the White House's standard of \$1 million per service member in Afghanistan per year, the U.S. has now spent and continues to spend at least \$2 billion dollars a year to garrison (i.e., police), Marjah, a rural Afghan hamlet of 50-60,000 Afghan farmers. Not only is this maddeningly absurd, but try and explain this to the residents of Camden, New Jersey, Reno, Nevada, or Tulsa, Oklahoma. Using logic similar to our policy makers and appropriators in Washington, I presume if we were to change those cities' names to Camdahaar, Renostan and Tulsabad, then those cities and their residents could afford the same level of police protection we provide Marjah and countless other nameless valleys and villages in Afghanistan.

As citizens of a democratic republic, we have an obligation and a responsibility not to entrust the lives of our service members and their families, our finances and our communities to those who approach war based on a 2012 political calculus or to those who desire the adrenaline rush of a clash of civilizations or of chasing monsters abroad. We, likewise, have an obligation and responsibility to future generations to pass to them a more prosperous and prouder nation — not an empire, a destroyer or a bully, but a leader, an inspiration and a trusted global partner.

Walk with a child on the Mall in Washington, DC, and it is easy to explain America's wars as enshrined by the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and the World War II Memorial. Walk to the Korean War Memorial and it becomes a little more difficult to explain that part of American history, but it is still possible. Walk now to the Vietnam War Memorial and try and explain that Wall and its names to a child. Purposeless is the honest answer.

We will have a memorial one day to these wars of the early 21st century. If built today, nearly 6,000 names would appear. Many thousands more will be remembered if we justly and honorably include those whose lives ended at home by their own hand because they returned from war desolately changed and traumatically ill.

It was generations older than mine from which we inherited the Vietnam War Memorial. My generation will be responsible for the memorial for America's current wars. Six thousand names on a monument are already far too many. How will we explain those names to our children and them to theirs? How will we explain any more names?

Let's not have this conversation again, next year, on the two-year anniversary of Operation Moshtarak and President Obama's escalation of a purposeless war. Let's not have another monument to another purposeless war. ✧

— *This essay first appeared on The Huffington Post, February 16, 2011.*

Murray Polner

Our Third and Latest War

IN APRIL 2000, nearly 20,000 Vietnamese citizens gathered in Ho Chi Minh City — once known as Saigon — to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their victory over the American invaders and the creation of their relatively stable country. Since the end of the war American and Vietnamese officials have resumed normal relations, and exchanged visits to promote business ventures and tourism. “Business with an Asian Flair: New Service to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam” read a full-page *New Yorker* advertisement by Delta Airlines in 2009.

Looking back at the still highly politicized Vietnam War debate, 16 historians, eminent scholars of the war at home and abroad, have drawn on recent scholarship for their conclusions about that calamitous conflict. The result is *The Columbia History of the Vietnam War*, a brilliant collective exposition of what happened and why. Editor David L. Anderson, professor of history at California State University, Monterey, and former president of the Society for Historians American Foreign Relations, explains: “The assumption behind this work is that many of the historical themes in the study of the Vietnam War have *contemporary relevance*.” (My italics).

Do they! We need only consider our nation’s historical and unceasing addiction to war and military intervention and the abysmal failure to hold powerful decision makers accountable for all those wars and the many deaths they incurred. When the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, was dedicated and thus became a sacred shrine to the dead in a war that should never have been fought, no one in author-

ity who had dreamed up the bloodletting had ever been held accountable, thereby insuring that few if any future lessons would be learned.

So it’s fair to ask, even at this late date, why the U.S., from the early ’50s on, insisted that Vietnam, north and south, large parts of which were impoverished and rural, was of

such vital American interest that it would eventually cost the lives of more than 58,000 American troops, a disproportionate number of whom were draftees, and another 153,000 or so wounded in body and mind, not to mention more than one million southeast Asians? “Few wars in U.S. history have been so affected by domestic politics and few wars have had such a lasting impact,” writes Melvin Small, distinguished professor emeritus of history at Wayne State University.

The U.S. disapproved of colonialism but was fearful of Communist expansion, which, in the 1950s, led Washington to favor France (which was then trying to hold onto its Asian colony) because the battle was

viewed as vital to U.S. national interests. “Washington’s first reason for favoring France was that Europe, not Southeast Asia, was America’s front line of defense in the emerging Cold War,” writes David L. Anderson, a belief which became the basic assumption of U.S. foreign policy in the post-World War II cold war decades. “The United States might criticize France for its behavior in Indochina, but it would not risk a rupture with Paris for the sake of the Vietnamese — especially not for a Vietnamese political movement headed by a man [Ho Chi Minh] with a history of collaboration with Moscow and the Comintern.”

Then, too, the triumph of the Communists in China and the Vietminh’s “ideological and military closeness to the new



SP4 Ruediger Richter, 4th Bn., 503 Inf., 173 Abn Bde (Separate), lifts his battle weary eyes to the heavens, as if to ask why? Sgt. Daniel E. Spencer stares down at their fallen comrade. The day’s battle ended, they silently await the helicopter which will evacuate their comrade from the jungle covered hills in Long Khanh Province, 1966.

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rulers in Beijing raised the specter of a 'Red Menace' in Asia" akin to that of the Soviets in Europe. And finally, "If France, Britain and Japan were to be effective political and economic allies of the United States, French interests in Southeast Asia were worth preserving as part of an American trading block." Americans "had no significant investment in Indochina, but they did have a large stake in the economic health of major U.S. allies." Early on in 1950 the Truman administration recognized South Vietnam and sent \$10 million in military aid to the pro-French Vietnamese in Saigon. "By late 1952, U.S. funds were paying for more than one-third of the French war costs."

Gary R. Hess, distinguished research professor emeritus of history, at Bowling Green State University, argues that by 1965 Lyndon Johnson's essential dilemma was whether "U. S. national security require[d] ensuring the survival of South Vietnam," and points to his retention of Kennedy's cold war foreign policy advisers. Richard H. Immerman, professor of history at Temple University and director of the Marvin Wachman Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy, offers this insight: Eisenhower and Kennedy, he notes, never had the limited vision about Southeast Asia as did Johnson and his hawkish advisers, but neither "demonstrated the foresight or political courage to make a decision based on the realistic assessment that there never would be a viable state of South Vietnam and that a unified Vietnam under Communist leadership would not threaten the United States or its allies."

"Foresight and courage" were certainly lacking throughout the ranks of policymakers and prowar cheerleaders in and out of the Congress. In the earliest stages of the war there were always a handful of American dissenters, such as long-forgotten Senators Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska, insider George Ball, and outsider John Kenneth Galbraith, who challenged the intervention. But

none stood out more than Senator George McGovern, who on September 1, 1970, demanded an end to the failing war and the return of troops to the U.S., telling his Senate colleagues, "Every senator in this chamber is partly responsible for sending 50,000 young Americans to an early grave. This chamber reeks of blood." Not many listened.

Still, despite the continuing dispatch of troops to war, most Americans and the mass media believed that the Reds were out to control all of Southeast Asia. So it was easy to swallow talk about falling dominoes, a bizarre hypothesis dreamed up by home front theorists and later echoed during Ronald Reagan's proxy wars in Central America.

The defeat in Vietnam at first seemed to exhaust American foreign policy elites' appetite for more wars, but not for very long. In Andrew Bacevich's important new book, *Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War*, he explains his opposition to our perpetual wars. Bacevich, whose son was killed while serving in the Iraq war (see his article, "I Lost My Son to a War I Oppose," in *The Washington Post* (May 27, 2007), served in the army during the Vietnam War, retired with the rank of colonel, and is now professor of international relations at Boston University. "In the simplest terms," he writes, "the [American] credo summons the United States — and the United States alone — to lead, save, liberate, and ultimately transform the world," a doctrine which requires the U.S. to spend billions if not trillions of dollars and maintain a permanent military presence in some 700 overseas bases. Conservative Patrick J. Buchanan — yes, *the* Patrick J. Buchanan — has rightly asked about our latest war, "Why is Libya's civil war our problem?"

The invaluable *Columbia History of the Vietnam War* offers cautionary lessons even as our nation fights three wars and continues planning for and spending enormous amounts for our inevitable future wars. ☆

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Richard Deats

My Journey to Pacifism

I WAS BORN in Big Spring, Texas, a small city halfway between El Paso and Dallas, in the Depression-era years. Big Spring is cotton, oil and cattle ranch country. My mother was one of eight children born to a Catholic immigrant from the Black Forest region of Germany. She came alone to work for a family in San Antonio. My mother's father was from Alsace and sailed to America "to escape the kaiser's wars," I was told. My father's father had immigrated from Bavaria and his Scotch/Irish mother was from Pennsylvania. His parents moved to Big Spring, where Papa worked as an engineer on the Texas and Pacific Railroad. They were devout Methodists.

My brother and I were thus brought up in a Catholic/Methodist household. We went to Methodist Sunday school, but we joined all the relatives to go to midnight Mass on Christmas Eve with my mother.

In those days Texas was solidly Democratic and my father was a great admirer of FDR and the New Deal.

His family had suffered greatly during the Depression. My grandfather was mayor of the town, bank president and owner of good farmland, but he lost everything in the Depression except the family home. The Deatses always voted for Roosevelt.

Big Spring was mostly Baptist and Methodist and my Catholic mother went alone to her church, which was in the Hispanic part of the town. We had Jewish neighbors that our family loved as good friends. I was shocked once when my father said something that was anti-Semitic. Although I was taught to respect my father, I proceeded to argue with him

about his remarks, saying that at church we were taught, as we said in those days, "the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God." I always took that as the bedrock of my faith and of plain human decency.



Richard Deats.

My family's outlook was Southern, seeing segregation as the way things were meant to be. My family's patriotism meant supporting America's wars. My dad and brother were both veterans and we always flew the flag in the front yard. Slowly, however, I began wrestling with these issues that seemed so at variance with the biblical prophets and the Sermon on the Mount.

I went to McMurry University, a Methodist college in Abilene, Texas, where I majored in biology and chemistry to prepare myself for medical school. However, I became increasingly drawn to the ministry and, in my junior year, I had a transforming experience when Muriel Lester, International Fellowship of Reconciliation's traveling secretary headquartered in London, came to our campus. She examined the cold war, nuclear weapons and McCarthyism in the light

of the Sermon on the Mount, and spoke of our two journeys, the inner and the outer, which were perhaps best summed up in her saying, "The job of the peacemaker is to stop war; to purify the world; to get it saved from poverty and riches; to heal the sick; to comfort the sad; to wake up those who have not yet found God; to create joy and beauty wherever you go. To find God in everything and in everyone."

She spoke of her work with Gandhi and the Indian freedom movement and challenged us to work for a just and peaceful world. I then joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation and signed up to work in Germany, building houses for refugees.

Following that, I decided to go to seminary instead of medical school, and to prepare myself for a life of spiritually-based activism. As a southerner, I became active in the growing civil rights movement. The witness of Martin Luther King, Jr. had a great impact on me. On one of several

RICHARD DEATS, a United Methodist minister, joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) as a college student and has been active in it ever since. After working on the FOR national staff for 33 years, he still lives in Nyack, New York, doing research and writing.

integrated rides across the South, we visited the Koinonia Community in Americus, Georgia, and worshiped at Dr. King's church in Montgomery, Alabama. He and his wife Coretta invited us to dinner after church. All of his writings, as well as Gandhi's and Muriel Lester's, became important foundations in my outlook on life. I was later to serve on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission, working with Coretta for the recognition of King's birthday, as well as planning rallies at the Lincoln Memorial for "Jobs, Peace and Freedom."

My wife Jan and I taught at Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines. While we were there, the development of the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos into a dictatorship led me to work with IFOR's Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr and Filipino anti-Marcos groups (especially in the churches) to prepare for what became the successful People Power Revolution. The Filipinos drove Marcos from power and brought Corazon Aquino into office. Her important restoration of democracy was incomplete and that remains a great problem of nonviolence: bringing down an oppressor is only the first step. The next steps of achieving genuine social justice are much harder. I worked with other peace and justice struggles in many countries — Bangladesh, Burma, Haiti, Lithuania, Uzbekistan, Thailand, South Korea, Kenya, South Africa, Israel and Palestine, Ecuador, etc.

After receiving my doctorate at Boston University, I worked in Asia for 13 years and then joined the staff of the FOR in the U.S., where I worked for 33 years, serving as director of interfaith activities, editor of *Fellowship* magazine and as executive secretary. I found that work with the FOR expanded my vision as I learned of the nonviolence traditions in Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and other spiritual outlooks.

My work has combined a focus on various campaigns and projects with civil disobedience, e.g., at the White House and the U.S. Mission to the UN, against apartheid and nuclear weapons, the decade of sanctions against Iraq, the imprisonment of persons such as Aung San Suu Kyi and Adolfo Perez Esquivel, and the murder of Amadou Diallo in New York City.

My faith as well as my study of history and of human nature has led me to pacifism, which, for me, is exemplified by the spirit of radical love seen in Jesus and the nonviolent method of Gandhi. This means that life involves, as Gandhi



Muriel Lester.

called it in his autobiography, "experiments with Truth." The Portuguese phrase *firmeza permanente*, permanent firmness for truth and the indomitable will, are implied in the pacifist's life. Violence is powerful but it is a power like cancer, feeding on life, not building life. Nonviolence, on the other hand, is a healing and restorative power. As Jonathan Schell says in his *The Unconquerable World*, the former is coercive force, the second is cooperative force.

This is no neat and complete philosophy, and I celebrate those who come to their pacifism from a radically different perspective. What seems certain today faces unexpected vistas and dilemmas tomorrow. Rereading King today, for example, we realize how sexist he and his times were. Feminists reveal how blind we were (and still are) to this. Adrienne Rich muses, *My heart is moved by all I cannot save: so much has been destroyed. I have to cast my lot with those who age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.* Women have opened our eyes where we did not see. Monotheistic religion and much philosophy have kept us narrowly human centered, unaware of our kinship with all of life. With all of our radical talk we still plunder nature, even as glaciers melt and forests are cut down.

And, we are always asked, "And what about the Hitlers and Stalins?" Yes, theirs were murderous philosophies. In examining their times, most ignore or minimize those who nonviolently stood against them: the villagers of Le Chambon, France, who hid Jewish children and dissenters from German occupation forces; the Norwegian teachers who refused to teach a mandated fascist curriculum; the Christian women in Berlin who confronted the SS and its imprisonment of their Jewish husbands; the development, against incredible odds, of the opposition of Soviet Jewry; the defiance by eminent nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov and his wife Yelena Bonner of the Kremlin's human rights violations and nuclear policies. These are signposts toward a hopeful future. This is not optimism but a determined hope that defies the odds and holds firm, in season and out.

In the final analysis, this is beyond a rational argument. For me, the pacifist vision is part of a vocational commitment, if you will, that follows Dr. King's hope and faith: I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. That is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. ✧

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