

Afghanistan: Promote a Just Peace and Responsible End to the War



In June 2010, war in Afghanistan surpassed the war in Vietnam to become as the longest war in U.S. history.¹ Unlike Vietnam, however, the war in Afghanistan remains largely out of the public spotlight.² In his recent State of the Union Address, President Obama reiterated his commitment to begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan in July 2011. Other high ranking political and military officials have challenged this timeline, saying it will be “conditions based” or only a “token” number.³ The coming months may challenge the President’s commitment to remain firm on his timeline for 2011 to begin to end the war, especially as shifting humanitarian conditions on the ground and lowering public approval for the war are considered.⁴

Public interest has focused on the cost of war given ongoing debate highlighting our national debt, an unprecedented \$14 trillion. The 30,000 troop surge in Afghanistan brought the total U.S. troop level to 97,000. The financial cost of the war in Afghanistan continued to mount at an unprecedented rate in 2010 as the cost of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan together topped \$1 trillion.

The real cost of war, however, must be counted in loss of life – whether the life of a U.S. soldier, Afghan civilian, or insurgent. Over the past decade, the burden carried by military families in the U.S. cannot be understated. 2010 was the deadliest year of the war to date, with almost 500 U.S. soldiers killed in combat according to icasualties.org. The total number of U.S. casualties is now over 1,400, with over 6,500 troops injured.

The human cost, however, remains higher. Tragically, as *Congressional Quarterly’s* Joe Donneley points out, “for the second year in a row, the U.S. military has lost more troops to suicide than it has to combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.”⁵ The President recently announced a new initiative to support military families, highlighting the need to improve the psychological health and well-being of U.S. troops.⁶ While this initiative is welcome, more needs to be done to support our troops in other ways, including updating U.S. policy regarding Selective Conscientious Objection and the creation of a Veterans Trust Fund.⁷

In November, 2010, the National Council of Churches Governing Board adopted a resolution, “A Call to End the War in Afghanistan.”⁸ The resolution calls President Obama to negotiate the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces as soon as possible and in a way that does not further endanger U.S. or Afghani civilians or troops. For the NCC and other faith communities, ensuring that Afghanistan will develop and flourish following the removal of U.S. troops is essential, but so is calling for and working toward an end to the war in accordance with our common witness to peace.

The coming year will offer a challenge for members of United Church of Christ congregations to respond faithfully to this resolution and simultaneously to articulate a position that weighs the conflicting goods of ensuring Afghan security and development with our call to be a Just Peace church in a nation engaged in the longest war in its history.

For more information, contact Mike Neuroth (202-543-1517), neurothm@ucc.org, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/just-peace/>.

¹There is debate about when the war in Vietnam actually started, but many point to August 1964, when the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/afghan-war-now-longest-war-us-history/story?id=10849303&page=2>

²Despite 2010 being the deadliest year for U.S. troops since the conflict began, media coverage of the war in 2010 still lagged well behind other domestic issues such as the economy, health care, and elections. http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/year_news_2010

³http://articles.cnn.com/2010-03-10/world/afghanistan.gates_1_afghan-forces-southern-helmand-province-afghanistan?_s=PM:WORLD;

⁴<http://www2.nationaljournal.com/member/magazine/petraeus-running-out-of-time-to-show-progress-20101028>.

⁵An ABC/Washington Post poll in December found public opinion split almost evenly for and against the war. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/abc-news-washington-post-poll-exclusive-afghanistan-war/story?id=12404367>.

The number of suicides reported by the armed services from the past year is 434 with deaths from combat (excluding accidents and illness) around 460. This number includes only active-duty soldiers, not those who have left the service completely or veterans who are not receiving care from VA's. If an accurate accounting were made, the number of suicides would certainly outnumber combat deaths.

⁶http://www.congress.org/news/2011/01/24/more_troops_lost_to_suicide

⁷<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/24/presidential-initiative-supports-military-families>

⁸<http://conscienceinwar.org/> and <http://www.standwithvets.org/stand-with-vets>

Climate Change: U.S. Must Address Global Warming



Because the 111th Congress and Obama Administration failed to push for legislation to control U.S. carbon emissions, expectations for a climate change bill in the near future have virtually disappeared. While the need to reduce the level of domestic carbon pollution remains urgent, attention has shifted to the need to help U.S. and global communities adapt to the emerging consequences of climate change.

As fossil fuels, like coal and oil are burned for energy, carbon pollution increases. The level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has reached approximately 390 parts per million (ppm) and is increasing by 2ppm per year. This is significantly higher than the 350 ppm threshold scientists agree is needed to maintain a healthy global temperature. With the world population now at 7 billion, reducing carbon pollution is essential. Both China and the U.S. emit around 6 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide a year—much more than any other countries. With one-fourth of China's population, the U.S. per capita rate of pollution makes it incumbent that we take responsibility for our disproportionate role in global warming.

The effects of atmospheric warming do not remain within the borders of industrialized nations, but instead have the greatest impact on countries that are least responsible for climate change. In the most danger are countries with high poverty levels, countries that depend directly on local food production or whose fragile ecosystems are highly susceptible to changes in sea and weather patterns. It will be necessary to find—and fund—ways to help countries that will be most affected adapt to the effects of climate change, for even if we change our fossil-fuel based economy immediately, the compounding effects of current global warming will continue to heat the planet

For example, the melting of the polar ice caps significantly affects small Pacific islands where rising sea waters have already substantially eroded coastlines, devastated mangrove and other essential habitats, salted wells and other freshwater sources, and in some cases swallowed whole villages,

forcing displaced communities into crowded population centers or out of their island homes altogether. If sea levels continue to rise as predicted, low-lying countries such as Bangladesh will lose most of their land mass, islands in the Pacific will disappear, and coastal marshes such as the Everglades in South Florida will be under sea water. Global warming means many plants and animals, unable to adjust, will become extinct.

Because affected nations are often poor, impacted populations are also likely to be less able to adjust to the effects of a warming planet. Many people will lose their homes or be unable to grow food for their families. Communities will face increasing natural disasters like flooding, stronger hurricanes and changes in rainfall patterns. Climate refugees—those displaced due to climate change—will add stress to already overcrowded urban centers and exacerbate the global food crisis.

Climate damage cuts across borders. An international problem will require an international strategy and mechanisms for international financing to assist affected countries. Unfortunately, however, in an effort to cut the U.S. federal budget, the 112th Congress has proposed deep cuts to international aid programs including those aimed at reducing climate change and helping the world's peoples adapt to its effects. Such budget cuts today will cost far more in the future when disasters are cataclysmic and an even greater number of nations are in need of emergency assistance.

It is only fair that those who have benefitted most from using the earth's resources now take responsibility for ensuring the planet remains livable; the U.S. must provide international leadership. As a faithful advocate, please:

- Learn more about climate change, calculate your own carbon footprint, and make energy-saving choices. Buy less and buy local at home, at work, and in your congregation. Drive less; fly less.
- Tell local, state, and federal elected officials that preserving God's creation and doing justice require smart public policies to reduce carbon pollution and to help communities around the world adapt to a world made warmer and wetter by climate change.

For more information, contact Rev. Jim Deming, (216-736-3722) demingj@ucc.org, or Derek Duncan (216-736-3220) duncand@ucc.org, or see our websites: <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/>; Global Ministries: <http://www.globalministries.org/get-involved/justice-and-advocacy/climate-change/>.

Congo: U.S. Policy Must Honor the Sovereignty



The Democratic Republic of Congo, home of 62 protestant denominations united under the ecumenical umbrella of the Church of Christ in the Congo, continues to suffer brutal and unmitigated exploitation of its people and immense resources after 125 years since the creation of the Congo Free State as a colony of King Leopold II of Belgium.

Although Congo achieved independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960, the continued greed of global corporations for precious and strategic raw materials from the Democratic Republic of Congo and the hypocrisy of the international community on the plight of African victims, has led to the failure of the Congo state. Corruption of and by politicians has become endemic, with kleptocracy the norm since the CIA-supported regime of the late President Mobutu Sese Seko from 1965-1997.

Rwanda and Uganda commenced a series of invasions of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1996 to replace Mobutu with Joseph Desiré Kabila. The additional goal of these invasions was opening unfettered access to Congolese natural resources by international corporations and their Congolese collaborators. These invasions have not only undermined severely the democratic advancements made at the National Sovereign Conference of 1992, but have also cost the lives of an estimated 6,000,000 Congolese.

Up to a half million Congolese women and girls have been subjected to violent rape, including sexual mutilation by multiple armies from Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi. Attacks on women and girls have increased dramatically the incidence of HIV/AIDS among women and girls, thus creating a time bomb with dire consequences for Congo.

An estimated 1,250 Congolese reportedly perish daily in Eastern Congo, especially in the Oriental, North Kivu, and South Kivu, as a direct or indirect result of the militarization of mineral extraction. Mines are patrolled by elite networks of militia supported by business interests in the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, and the industrialized world. Militia activities are orchestrated to ensure unfettered access to Congolese strategic natural resources such as coltan, cobalt, tungsten, cassiterite, niobium, diamonds, gold, copper, uranium, oil, and timber. , Mineral interests have subjugated the Congolese people to abject poverty, suffering, slave labor, and human trafficking to benefit the West and other industrialized nations.

Faithful advocates need to support non-governmental organizations, including the United Nations, seeking to ensure that mineral extraction ceases to violate the sovereignty of the government of Congo and ceases to violate the rights of the people of Congo. Ask Congress and the Department of State to support recovery of democracy in Congo through legislation and international diplomacy.

For more information, contact LaMarco Cable (317) 713-2574, lcable@dom.disciples.org, or visit our web page: <http://globalministries.org/africa/>.

Cuba: Time for a New Policy



The United States has enforced an economic embargo of Cuba since the Kennedy Administration. The United Nations General Assembly has passed resolutions condemning this embargo eighteen times. It is believed that this economic embargo has contributed to some of the severe shortages of basic food and other hardships endured by the Cuban people. Additionally, twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Americans remain the only people in the world forbidden to visit their island neighbor, only 90 miles

away from Key West. During the last Bush Administration, further restrictions were implemented, curtailing most travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens.

In January 2011, President Obama issued an Executive Order easing some of the regulations to close to what they had been before the Bush travel restrictions. This new policy allows for “purposeful travel” such as formal religious visits to churches or ecclesiastical bodies in the island, academic travel, and visits by journalists. The Order also makes it easier for U.S. citizens to make modest cash remittances to Cubans on the island on a quarterly basis.

The new Cuba travel regulations announced by the Obama White House are welcomed by all who believe in people-to-people diplomacy and the things that bring humans together rather than those that keep us apart. These reforms are welcome and widely supported by the Cuban American community and the general public as well. However, they fall short of what is needed to restore the historical ties between the peoples of Cuba and the United States.

In 1993, General Synod 19 called for “Shalom in Cuba” including full economic and travel normalization between our two nations. This is the vision that we strive for and encourage our policy makers to make a reality.

In 1989 President Reagan challenged President Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall. The world has never been the same since. As a faithful advocate, please call on President Obama to tear down the wall of the embargo and begin to rebuild our relationship with our Cuban neighbors.

For more information, contact LaMarco Cable (317) 713-2574, lcable@dom.disciples.org, or visit our web page: <http://globalministries.org/lac/>.

Globalization: Pass Fair (not Free) Trade Agreements



President Obama has made expanding U.S. exports (goods and services produced in the U.S. and sold to other countries) a focus of his economic recovery plan. An increase in exports would create badly needed jobs and shrink our huge trade deficit (the amount by which our imports exceed our exports). But how to do this is hotly debated, especially the role of free trade agreements (FTAs) that govern international trade and investment. Some people argue these agreements create jobs by increasing exports more than they boost imports and broadly benefit the nation. But others maintain

they have the opposite effect: boosting imports more than exports, destroying jobs, increasing the trade deficit, and, for the most part, benefiting a very small group of elites. Experts also disagree over the impact of FTAs on workers in the global South. These disagreements will surface in the months ahead as Congress debates whether to adopt FTAs with South Korea, Colombia, and Panama.

Each of these agreements is modeled on the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Under NAFTA, U.S. exports to Mexico rose but imports climbed even more. The net effect was a large increase in the trade deficit and a million jobs lost. The treaty also failed to help Mexican workers. As Mexico struggled to attract foreign investment, wages for most workers stagnated or were driven down. At the same time international firms moved in, putting many Mexican companies out of business. Only some of the largest Mexican firms and a small group of wealthy businesspeople benefited.

These are typical outcomes of trade agreements based on the NAFTA model. In the U.S., small and mid-sized firms have been driven out of business by larger U.S. and foreign firms, and wages for most workers have been stagnant or falling for years. The winners in this era of free trade globalization are the largest U.S. firms and a small number of people who have become extremely wealthy.

There is every reason to believe the FTAs currently awaiting Congressional approval will have similar effects. Estimates show that seven years after ratification, the FTAs with South Korea and Colombia will have increased our trade deficit by \$16.7 billion annually and eliminated 214,000 U.S. jobs. Congress must oppose these agreements as currently written.

Another bill that will likely be re-introduced in the current Congress is the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment Act (TRADE Act). It calls for a comprehensive review of existing trade agreements and modifications that would make these and future agreements fairer. Congress should pass this bill.

What the nation needs is not free trade but fair trade.

For more information, contact Edith Rasell, Ph.D., (216-736-3709) raselle@ucc.org, or see our website. <http://www.ucc.org/justice/globalization/>.

¹Faux, Jeff, Carlos Salas, and Robert E. Scott, "Revisiting NAFTA: Still not working for North America's workers," Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper #173, Washington, DC:EPI, September 28, 2006 <http://www.epi.org/publications/entry/bp173/>

²Scott, Robert E., "Trade Policy and Job Loss," Economic Policy Institute Working Paper #289, Washington DC: EPI, 2010. http://epi.3cdn.net/2ed5ba48430c9667bd_xgm6bndi6.pdf

Global Security: Invest in Diplomacy and Development, Not Increased Military Spending



In 2009, the U.S. State Department undertook the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, modeled after the Department of Defense's Quadrennial Defense Review. Secretary of State Clinton wants to promote the role of diplomacy and development as equal to the U.S. armed forces in "advancing America's core interests: security, prosperity, universal values—especially democracy and human rights—and a just international order."

Like a three-legged stool, diplomacy, development and defense must be balanced for global stability. Yet two decades after the Cold War, U.S. military spending remains \$700 billion a year, amounting to half of global military spending and as much as the next fifteen countries combined. In contrast, the 2011 State Department budget request was increased to \$58 billion, which is still not one-tenth of military investment.

Foreign military assistance, while far less than defense spending, has also nearly tripled in the last decade. But structuring U.S. foreign policy primarily around military spending is questionable. Most military aid is given to the Middle East. In 2007, 60 percent of military assistance supported Iraq and Afghanistan, nearly half of the rest went to Israel (18 percent), while 10 percent was given to Egypt and the remaining 10 percent to all other recipients—including other Middle East allies. While this strategy has created a precarious and highly militarized balance of power in the region, has it advanced democracy, human rights or reconciliation among even our Middle East allies?

Regional patterns of military spending raise similar questions. For instance, the four largest militaries—the U.S., China, Russia and Japan—concentrate a disproportionate amount of global force in North East Asia. The countries participating in the Six-Party Talks regarding North Korean disarmament account for 65 percent of world military expenditures. Is this heightened military posture the most effective path to ending hostilities or eventually unifying the Peninsula? Not surprisingly, there is growing pressure from close allies in the Pacific for the U.S. to reduce its sizeable military footprint in places like South Korea and Okinawa, Japan.

In an age when global threats are more likely to come from non-state actors and asymmetric tactics, global security relies heavily on strategies that create shared social and economic opportunities, and on what Secretary Clinton calls "smart" diplomacy—initiatives beyond the embassy walls that strengthen inter-cultural engagement and civil society.

U.S. diplomacy and development capacity are at risk, however, in this new Congress. In 2010, a bipartisan commission recommended cuts in military spending, but the recommendation has been ignored. Instead today some in Congress now propose cutting spending to 2008 levels in every government program deemed "non-security." In January 2011 House leaders introduced the Spending Reduction Act that would reduce budgets for the Department of State and for U.S. AID as part of domestic program cuts. Passage of this bill would mean \$16 billion less for State Department programs. Some programs that have grown significantly since 2008 would help build secure and sustainable communities by addressing climate change, food insecurity, by strengthening maternal and child health and by fighting human trafficking.

Tell Congress and the Administration that a strategy of overspending for war and short-changing peace does not advance real human security. Smart approaches are needed to create strong communities not just powerful weapons, and to encourage states to invest in their people as much as their militaries. Tell Congress you oppose cuts in State Department and international aid programs. Express opposition to military assistance and military spending programs that promote militarization in already volatile regions but do little to advance democracy and human rights.

For more information contact Derek Duncan (216-736-3220) at duncand@ucc.org, or visit <http://globalministries.org/get-involved/justice-and-advocacy/>.

Israel/Palestine: U.S. Should Work for a Just Resolution



The year 2010 witnessed a standoff between the United States and Israel over a proposed settlement freeze extension designed to create a climate conducive to negotiations. The U.S. hoped to help achieve a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians within one year. When settlement construction recommenced, the two principal parties stepped back from the hoped-for engagement, putting U.S. prospects for realizing an agreement in question.

Time is of the essence. Every day that peace is not realized, the more a viable two-state solution is impeded by violence and anger, continuing confiscation of land and property, destruction of homes, and restrictions on access to natural and cultural resources, including religious sites.

Palestinian Christian partners have been concerned about the impact of the continuing conflict on Christian presence for some time; the conflict spawns emigration among the Palestinian community. The consequences of the conflict and occupation are felt by all Palestinians—Christians and Muslims alike. Since the Palestinian Christian community is a mere 2% of the Palestinian population, emigration is a reality that disproportionately affects the Christian population. The impact of even a small number of Christians leaving is significant as it diminishes the size of the Christian community.

The United Church of Christ has long advocated for peace in the Middle East, calling for a two-state solution: a sovereign and viable Palestinian state neighboring Israel, resulting in safety and security for citizens of both, with Jerusalem as the shared capital for each. Such a result is what Global Ministries' partners in the Middle East have hoped for and called for. The UCC continues to encourage the U.S. to play a fair and active role in helping to bring about such a solution. The Administration and Congress must cooperate to make such an approach possible; while the White House and State Department conduct foreign policy, Congress allocates financial resources.

What you can do:

- Call or e-mail your Senators, Representative, and the White House expressing your support, as a Christian concerned for peace and justice and for U.S. involvement in a negotiated peace in the Middle East. Be sure to point out that lasting peace in the Middle East—and a positive U.S. role in brokering it—are in the interest of the United States, as well as Israel and Palestinians.
- Let officials know that you oppose Israeli settlement expansion—illegal according to international law and officially opposed by successive U.S. Administrations—in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem; and that you support a peace agreement based on borders established by international law and U.N. Security Council resolutions.
- Support Congressional efforts to offer foreign aid to those countries demonstrating tangible evidence of promoting and moving toward peace in the Middle East; and oppose Congressional aid packages that reward intransigence. Congressional purse strings are incentives and can be used as such in productive peacemaking.
- Make clear your opposition to U.S. military aid to parties of the conflict. Such grants are inconsistent with the United States' stated goal of creating an environment conducive to a stable peace.

For more information, contact Dr. Peter Makari (216-736-3227) makarip@ucc.org, or see our website: www.globalministries.org/mee.

The Middle East and North Africa: Ask Congress to Find the Right Tool



There's a saying: "If your only tool is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail." The U.S. has many tools at its disposal, but too often reaches for the hammer.

Since early 2011 the world has witnessed massive demonstrations for change across the Middle East and North Africa. Starting in Tunisia and Egypt, protests have spread to other countries across the region, including Jordan, Algeria, Libya, Yemen, Iran, and Bahrain. Thousands of people have come out to demand political, economic, and social change. Each case has seen different governmental responses, ranging from acquiescence to violent war between government forces and opposition demonstrators.

While international media has focused on the events themselves, much of the discourse in our media has been on the proper U.S. response and implications for U.S. interests. While many aspects of these reform movements are important for long-term peace and security, the nature of U.S. engagement is something about which we as people of faith should be concerned.

At their core, the protest movements are authentically local. While there have been attempts to paint them as influenced by foreign actors, it is important that they develop and act without international interference, including that of the U.S.

If the protests are successful, the U.S. should reach out to offer support and partnership, to listen closely to the hopes and wishes of new governments, and to respond only when asked. An approach based on mutual respect supports the stated U.S. goal of bolstering diplomacy.

In cases like Libya, where the uprisings have turned violent, there is an international responsibility to protect people, and this responsibility should be upheld—through cooperation and not unilateral action. The opportunity to engage new governments in Libya’s neighbors—Tunisia and Egypt—to respond to the refugee and humanitarian crisis should be seized, without meddling in Tunisian and Egyptian efforts to continue to develop new mechanisms of governance.

In 2003, the General Synod adopted a resolution entitled, “U.S. Policy in the Middle East.” General Synod called on the U.S. to “base its Middle East policy on principles of human rights and human justice and to refrain from narrowly acting with U.S. economic interests in mind.” The resolution goes on to “Call upon the U.S. government to...work diligently to mend broken fences with countries of the region and the world in order to reduce feelings of animosity and distrust.”

The tools at hand include diplomacy, cooperation and support—with the people of the Middle East and North Africa, and the international community—of the emerging democratic governments. In order to avoid additional entanglements in the Middle East and North Africa and resist further antagonism against U.S. presence, the U.S. should avoid any imposition of policy and meddling for U.S. interests. Importantly, military intervention should be considered only in an international context and only as a last resort in response to requests from those directly involved, for the purpose of protecting civilians. Military intervention should be employed sparingly for limited and specific missions, in order to avoid long-term international presence, financial investment, and loss of life.

The right tools are in the toolbox, they sometimes just need to be moved to the top.

For more information, contact Dr. Peter Makari (216-736-3227) makarip@ucc.org, or see our website: www.globalministries.org/mee.