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Counterpunch

From Panama to Afghanistan

Selling a "Just" War

By RON JACOBS

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December 20, 1989. The US military attacked Panama. At the time I was living in Olympia, WA. I was a member of a group that worked to oppose the US wars in Central America and helped refugees find sanctuary called the Central American Action Committee. Once I heard about the invasion--which was called Operation Just Cause--I began calling members to organize some kind of protest. I was surprised to discover when my suggestion was met with a lukewarm response by at least half of the members. This had something to do with Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega's identity in the US media as a cocaine trafficker. In the world we inhabit many of the folks must have figured that opposing the murder of several thousand Panamanians was the same as supporting the cocaine trade. Of course, as several news stories since then have related (and just as consistently been denied by the US government), the US has its own history of complicity in the illegal drug trade.

We did mount a protest of thirty in front of the Federal Building the next day. When compared to the protest by hundreds that included the closing down of the Federal Building a little more than a month before in protest of US actions in El Salvador, the action against the Panama attack was barely visible. This lackluster response was repeated around the United States as many forces against the US wars in Central America refused to protest the invasion of Panama. George Bush the Elder's ploy characterizing Panamanian leader Noriega as a drug trafficker and

his government as corrupt seemed to have silenced a good portion of the antiwar movement. In addition, by playing up an attack on a US officer's wife by a member of the Panamanian security forces, the elder Bush was also able to play on US concerns about the treatment of women. This was, as Noam Chomsky pointed out in his work 1991 book *Deterring Democracy*, despite the fact that US nuns in El Salvador and Nicaragua had been killed by forces supported by Washington with no repercussions from Washington.

Let's jump ahead twenty years. It's now December 2009. US forces forcibly occupy two nations--Iraq and Afghanistan. While the casualty figures in the former are minimal nowadays, it was only a year or two ago that US military men and women were dying at the rate of one hundred a month. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the casualty figures are double what they were a year ago and tens of thousands more US soldiers and Marines are getting ready to deploy there. They have been told by their commander-in-chief that their cause is just. Once again, the protest is muted. The government in Afghanistan is a creation of Washington and would not exist without the foreign military presence there. It is also one of the most corrupt governments in the world. Women in Afghanistan suffer some of the worst human rights abuses in the world. Many of those abuses derive from the male supremacist interpretation of the Muslim religion by forces on all sides of the conflict. Many more of the abuses are the result of the ongoing conflict in that country. From displacement and hunger to death and maiming caused by US and resistance forces, the military conflict is probably the greatest violator of women's rights. Yet, the people of the United States have been told over and over again that one of the reasons for the US military presence in Afghanistan is to free the Afghan women.

So, why is there so little protest? Is it because many liberals and progressives who opposed the war in Iraq somehow see this misadventure in Afghanistan as righteous? Or do they believe that Barack Obama really does have a plan that will guarantee peace through the waging of war? If the latter is true, than these folks have truly succumbed to the wiles of imperial thought. There is no promise to end the war in any particular year, much less a specific date. If history tells us anything, the only way to stop a war is to make it difficult for the government waging it to continue to do so. This scenario will not occur within the walls of Congress. Nor will it take place inside the White House or the Pentagon. It can only occur in the streets of the United States. As long as the US government is convinced it has at least tacit support for its adventures overseas, it will continue them. As the recent escalation proves, it will not only continue them but will expand them.

Now, there are many folks who say they oppose the war but will argue that there is no point in mounting any protest against it. Their arguments will include the caveat that protests make no difference or that they will never reach the so-called regular people. I disagree. It seems to me that if the connection between the increasing failure of the government to fund essential services like schools, health care, infrastructure and even job creation can be connected to the ridiculously high cost of the wars and occupations, then the antiwar movement can reach the American people. Currently, it seems that there is a disconnect in most people's minds between the cutting of services and the ongoing wars and occupations. That disconnect must be terminated and the connections between the expanding price of imperial war and the decreasing quality of our services must be made. In addition, the profits of war must be exposed for what they are--theft of taxpayer's money by a small number of citizens. It is a theft on a scale so huge very few can

even imagine it. It is also a theft that does not benefit the majority of the American people and certainly not most of the people of Iraq or Afghanistan in any meaningful way. Although they claim to be protecting us, the only thing these corporations and their uniformed cohorts are protecting is their bank accounts.

That does not have to continue. In fact, there is already an effort being organized by the [National Assembly to End the Wars and Occupations](#) to hold a massive antiwar protest on March 20, 2010 in Washington, DC and San Francisco. It is their intention (no, *our intention*) to make the connection between the self-serving and pointless costs of the wars and the continuing failure of the United States' economy to employ all those who desire employments and to take care of its people. In order to draw the largest number of people into the movement, the demand is simple: *No Escalation • End the Wars • Bring Our Troops Home.*

It is time to take a stand.