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ADVOCATING FOR GLOBAL PEACE

Young Adults Speak Out

The U.S. military budget is nearly equal to that of all other nations.

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Militarism: A False Idol

BY THEO SITHTER

“Military glory—that attractive rainbow, that rises in showers of blood—that serpent’s eye, that charms to destroy . . .”
—Abraham Lincoln

The statement of principles for the Project of the New American Century says, “a Reaganite policy of military strength . . . may not be fashionable today. But it is necessary if the United States is to build on the successes of this past century and to ensure our security and our greatness in the next.” The signatories of this statement include Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and other politicians. They believe that the greatness and glory of the United States is achieved through an aggressive foreign policy, which includes preemptive war and deadly force.

The prophet Jeremiah (16:20) spoke about false gods: “Can mortals make for themselves gods? Such are no gods!” When 50 percent of our tax dollars go to feeding the military machine, and we use that machine to export death and destruction to all parts of the world, we have created a god—a “false idol.”

Since its beginning, the United States has used military might to gain access and power in every region of the world, including the genocidal wars against the Native Americans. The United States now has the largest, most powerful and sophisticated military the world has ever seen. It is a

deadly fighting force that is often used by presidents and lawmakers to threaten and coerce our neighbors. The United States is also the largest exporter of conventional weapons, and its military budget is nearly equal to that of all other nations. Death and destruction was our most valuable export in the 20th century, and the 21st century ushered in a new era of global war on terror, which many claim could go on for generations.

In this issue of the *Memo*, we look at specific topics regarding U.S. global militarism. Daryl Byler reflects on Israeli occupation and mustard seed faith in his “Other Side of the Hill” column (p. 2); Theo Sittler writes on cluster bombs (p. 3); Hosein Sharif, a young adult from Iran, offers an Iranian perspective (p. 4); Amandus Reimer, a young adult from Paraguay, talks about conscientious objection (p. 5); Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, incoming Washington Office director, reflects on her recent trip to Palestine/Israel (p. 6); and Krista Zimmerman writes about the impact of militarism on Native Americans (p. 7).

The Washington Office will continue to advocate for an end to this country’s idolatrous allegiance to military power. True peace and security can only be achieved when people around the world experience a life without poverty, hunger and violence. ■

BY J. DARYL BYLER

Do I believe that, in God's kingdom, small acts of faithfulness do make a difference?

Military Occupation and Mustard Seeds

In May, I traveled with a group of Mennonite leaders to the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories to view the work of various Mennonite agencies in the region and discuss ways we can collaborate for peace.

One day, we visited Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) workers in the hill country south of Hebron. Outside the tiny village of At-Tuwani, CPTers stand vigil each day with Palestinian shepherds who are trying to protect their land against further encroachment from Israeli settlers who have destroyed neighboring villages and threatened Palestinian children.

“Are you ever afraid?” one of our group asked a CPT volunteer from Mississippi. “Of course,” he responded. But the fears have not kept him from “getting in the way,” as CPT describes it.

Since occupying East Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967, Israel—in clear violation of international law—has built more than 200 settlements on Palestinian land, providing housing for nearly half a million Israeli settlers.

The Israeli government heavily subsidizes settlers who choose to build their homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israeli soldiers provide protection for the settlers, and the government has constructed a network of “settler only” by-pass roads so settlers can pass safely through Palestinian lands.

Additionally, the Israeli government is constructing a 436-mile long separation wall/barrier—much of it on Palestinian land—to keep Palestinians “in their place.” It is part of what Israeli peace activist Jeff Halper calls a “matrix of control.”

These “facts on the ground”—settlements, by-pass roads, and walls—do not plant the seeds for a just and secure peace for Palestinians or Israelis. Indeed, they make it virtually impossible to create a viable Palestinian state.

Palestinians reminded our delegation that this occupation could not survive without support from the U.S. government.

In the face of an overpowering Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, CPT's act of solidarity with a few Palestinian villagers seemed small and insignificant. Why not do something a bit more flashy and visible?

I came away from our trip wondering whether I really believe in the power of mustard seeds. Do I believe that, in God's kingdom, small acts of faithfulness do make a difference? It's a question I ask on Capitol Hill as well. Our witness often seems paltry in the face of principalities and powers.

Jesus saw the value of mustard seeds. “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field,” he said in one parable. “It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matthew 13:31–32).

On another occasion Jesus challenged his disciples: “For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20–21).

May God grant us such mustard seed faith! ■

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Bombies: A Deadly Aftermath of War

“From the fields of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, through the streets of Kosovo and Iraq, to the arid hills of Afghanistan and the playgrounds of Lebanon, these lethal relics of war continue to endanger the lives and limbs of innocent men, women and children long after conflict has ended.”
—Sen. Dianne Feinstein

The people of Laos, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon all have at least one thing in common: they have all experienced the deadly effects of unexploded cluster bombs, also known as “bombies.” From the secret war in Laos in the 1960s and 1970s to the war in Lebanon in 2006, cluster bombs have been killing and maiming innocent civilians long after the wars are over.

Cluster bombs are generally dropped from the air or fired through on-the-ground artillery weapons. Upon firing, the larger rocket dispenses hundreds of small bomblets the size of a tennis ball or soda can, which are supposed to explode on contact. However, many do not initially explode, effectively turning them into latent anti-personnel landmines.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the United States dropped more than 260 million bombies in its secret war with Laos. Some estimates claim that more than 30 percent of the bombs dropped did not explode on contact. The bombies now inflict havoc on innocent Lao villagers. Thousands were killed or injured in the first 25 years after the war. Innocent men, women and children continue to die.

The United States continues to use cluster bombs. It dropped them in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003.

Israel used them against Lebanon in the summer of 2006 and the United Nations estimates that more than 100,000 bomblets failed to explode. Now they cause at least three casualties a day.

According to a report by Handicap International, more than 90 percent of those killed by cluster bombs in the last three decades are civilians and over a third are children. They do not discriminate against targets and their effects are felt long after combat.

In February Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), along with Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), introduced the Cluster Munitions Civilian Protection Act of 2007 (S. 594). The bill will: (1) prohibit funds in the use, sale or transfer of U.S. cluster bombs with a failure rate of more than one percent; (2) prevent funds in the sale, use or transfer unless the rules of engagement or the agreement applicable to the sale or transfer specifies that the cluster munitions will only be used against clearly defined military targets or that they will not be used near civilians; (3) and require a report from the president regarding the clean-up efforts of unexploded cluster munitions. An identical bill (H.R. 1755) was introduced in the House by Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.).

Sen. Dianne Feinstein said, “Simply put, this legislation will save lives—civilians and soldiers alike—and will help save the reputation of the United States.” It is crucial to stop the use of cluster bombs, which have clearly destroyed many lives.

The prophet Isaiah laid out a vision for peace when he said, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (2:4). When production and use of cluster bombs are banned we will be one step closer to Isaiah’s vision of peace. ■

BY THEO SITTHER

According to a report by Handicap International, more than 90 percent of those killed by cluster bombs in the last three decades are civilians.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CLUSTER BOMBS

Mennonite Central Committee: mcc.org/clusterbombs/

Handicap International: handicap-international.org.uk/page_709.php

They Called It Friendship

BY HOSEIN SHARIF

Hosein Sharif is a student at Tehran University in Iran. He is also a freelance journalist. You can contact Hosein at dearenemy.blogspot.com.

My idea for a more constructive U.S. approach starts with this: quit bullying.

Now in his eighties, my grandfather is still a funny man. This makes him my favorite person to spend time with. Though we both enjoy our time together, almost every time we go out, we fight over the simplest thing possible—which roads to take. He never drives on a highway! Most of the time, this means we waste at least an hour in traffic jams.

After a few years, I stopped being surprised that he cannot see the benefits of using a shorter, clearer road! Most of Tehran's highway system was built in the early 1990s. By that time my grandfather was already 60 years old, which means years of driving through old streets.

Unfortunately, it is not just my grandfather. We all get stuck in our old, overused habits and don't let them go.

For centuries, Americans got stuck in a system of slave labor. Despite its inarguable injustice, slavery "worked" for slave owners; that's why they didn't want to change it. By freeing their workers and paying them, slave owners could still have managed to make a living or even to be wealthy. But, of course, just as with my grandfather, it would be more difficult to try something new.

King George III made the same mistake. He could have let Americans be free and still benefitted from an equal relationship with them. It was just that he hadn't done it before. He didn't know if an equal relationship would work. He didn't want to take any risks at all. So instead of letting Americans be Americans and decide for themselves, he tried to decide for them. In the end, he decided to interfere, just to make sure nothing went wrong. That was the very moment when everything went wrong.

Now at the beginning of the 21st century, America is rewriting history, though not with a very different theme. It is afraid of letting the people of the Middle East decide for ourselves. It is not that American politicians are fools or evil. Neither was King George III. Rather, they are so worried about their own interests that they forget about others. They cannot see that, exactly by trying too hard to make everything right, they mess things up. They simply forget about us, about our rights and our will over our lives. They are too worried to let go. They are too afraid to trust.

My idea for a more constructive U.S. approach starts with this: if you really care about your giant company's share prices, if you really want to be sure of a safe, constant oil flow out of the Middle East, if you really want faraway markets to sell your products, and customers who don't hate you and want to boycott your brands, if you really want to take any benefit out of this at all, then you have to quit bullying. You have to get used to communicating instead of ordering, negotiating instead of interfering. You have to learn to let us decide for ourselves. You have to get realistic enough to realize that an unequal and unfair relationship may work today and maybe even tomorrow, but it won't work the day after tomorrow.

This way, my fantasy highway starts with building an equal relationship in which neither of the parties will selfishly hurt the other's interest. Instead, both of them will have to compromise sometimes. In the olden days, they had a name for this: they called it friendship. ■

Conscientious Objection Unites Anabaptists Across Nations

Wherever in the world Anabaptists are found, nonviolence is central to their faith. In the 1920s a group of Mennonites left Canada in search of a country that would allow them to express their pacifist views as conscientious objectors to war. Their only condition was that, as a matter of conscience, they would be exempted from any form of military service.

First they attempted to immigrate to Argentina, but were rejected because of their views. The group finally settled in Paraguay. Even though military service was obligatory for all Paraguayan men at that time, Mennonites received a special exemption. Instead, the young men of the Mennonite colony organized alternative service projects.

Through the constant witness of Mennonites and revision of the Paraguayan Magna Carta in 1992, conscientious objection is now an option available to all citizens of Paraguay. Military service remains obligatory, but anyone can elect otherwise. The country plans to open projects for one year of alternative service for these young people, working within the education, public health or infrastructure systems.

Young people at the Anabaptist-Mennonite Southern Cone conference in January 2007 discussed the issue of conscientious objection at length. Many countries still have obligatory military service, including Chile, Bolivia, Colombia and Brazil. Most countries have stories about numerous cases of abuse and death during military training.

In Paraguay and Bolivia, commanders were known to carry the recruits far into the interior of the country, harass them and force them to do hard labor—cutting cane and digging trenches. In both countries, these negative experiences make many young people today feel insecure about signing up for the military. Instead, they want to become conscientious objectors. However, many of these young people still sign up because military service is one of the few ways to obtain a good job.

Bolivia is one of the most difficult situations. In order to enter university, one must have completed a term of military service. In order to be exempted from this requirement, one can pay about \$1,500. This means that persons without economic fortune are much more likely to serve.

The impulse to join the military because of economic incentives is one of the strongest commonalities between the military situation in South America and that in the United States. As the most powerful military in the world, it provides many jobs for citizens. However, conscientious objectors around the world challenge the United States to reallocate some of its military money to civilian jobs for people in lower socioeconomic classes who feel “forced to join the military” in order to get an education and a good job.

Since many of the world’s countries look to the United States as an example of a democratic nation, it is important that it set an example of respecting the rights of conscientious objectors. This means ensuring that ample information is available to potential recruits about their rights regarding conscientious objection. Since the law allows soldiers to be discharged as conscientious objectors at any time during service, it is deplorable that this exit process is so difficult and pressurized. Conscientious objectors who complete alternative service have shown that they are an incredible benefit to society. For example, in the United States, COs have fought forest fires and have greatly improved the mental health care system. ■

BY AMANDUS REIMER

Amandus Reimer is the Latin American Representative to Amigos, the Youth and Young Adult Committee of Mennonite World Conference. He lives in the German Colony in the Chaco, Paraguay.

Conscientious objectors around the world challenge the United States to reallocate some of its military money to civilian jobs for people who feel “forced to join the military.”

Under Occupation

BY RACHELLE LYNDAKER
SCHLABACH

U.S. military support for Israel enables the occupation to continue and steers attention away from the root causes of the conflict.

The Jewish people, of course, were living under Roman occupation.”

Our delegation was standing in front of the remains of a palace built by Herod the Great when our guide made this statement. The palace is located just outside Bethlehem, part of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Immediately my mind began to draw parallels between the biblical times we were hearing about and the current situation in Palestine.

Life under military occupation is a constant struggle. The simple tasks of daily life are no longer so simple. We heard this again and again from Palestinians and from Israeli human rights groups.

Under the current Israeli occupation, for example, getting from one place to the next, to go to work or to receive medical care, is a chore. Military checkpoints make it difficult for Palestinians to go from one town to the next, or even from one part of town to another.

In addition, many Palestinian farmers can no longer get to their farmland due to the separation barrier that Israel is building in the West Bank. Israeli restrictions on exporting Palestinian products add further frustration.

Reflecting on these modern-day stories, I began to understand a bit more how the Jews of the first century must have felt under Roman occupation. It is little wonder the followers of Jesus kept asking him if he was the one who would finally free them from the grip of the Romans.

At the same time, I couldn't escape the irony that the people who had once experienced oppression at the hands of the Romans are descendants of those who are now the occupying power in the same land.

“Both Israelis and Palestinians are hostages to trauma, for different reasons,” Zoughbi Zoughbi of the Wi'am Palestinian Centre for Conflict Resolution, an MCC partner, told our delegation. Both peoples have experienced bloodshed, and fear that more is on the way.

For this reason, Zoughbi's organization is working to break the cycle of violence—to ensure that those who are now oppressed do not become oppressors. Although difficult to do, it is critical work.

It is, after all, the direction in which Jesus pointed his followers, who longed for a strong military leader. Jesus resisted the typical route to power (Matthew 4:1–11) and refused efforts to make him king (John 6:15). Instead, he showed the way to a different kind of freedom—one that goes beyond fear and violence to a true justice where security for all can flourish.

But as U.S. Americans, we must confess that our tax dollars are working in the opposite direction. Our government gives the Israeli military roughly \$3 billion each year. This support enables the occupation to continue and steers attention away from the root causes of the conflict.

Getting to the roots of the conflict will, no doubt, be tedious and sticky. But we must support those who courageously do so, if we are serious about working toward a lasting peace in Palestine/Israel. ■

Pontius' Puddle



Apologizing for Military Actions and Oppressive Policies

BY KRISTA J. ZIMMERMAN

During the early years of the United States, a series of conflicts referred to as the “Indian Wars” occurred between the new country and the Native Nations who first inhabited its territories. Eventually the U.S. armies defeated the Native Nations, but the abuses the government perpetrated against the Native Peoples did not end. The United States proceeded to force the Native Americans to assimilate or relocate to reservations, where misguided government policies continue until today.

During the wars, many Native Americans suffered and perished at the hands of the U.S. military. At the Wounded Knee Massacre, U.S. soldiers were implicated in a mass killing of the Dakota Sioux. During the “Long Walk” the U.S. army forced the Navajo to traverse 450 miles in frigid winter temperatures and intense summer heat. An estimated 2,380 Navajo died.

In an effort to recognize the abuses of Native Peoples by the U.S. government, the Senate is now considering S.J. Res. 4 — to acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the U.S. government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States.

S.J. Res. 4 (“The Apology Resolution”) outlines the important role Native Americans played in the founding of the United States. It acknowledges their special political and legal relationship with the United States and apologizes for the “instances of violence, maltreatment and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States.” It also expresses a commitment toward building positive relationships with Native Americans in the future.

The concept of an official apology garners mixed reactions however, even from Native Americans. Some are concerned that an apology is premature in light of ongoing governmental policies that harm Indian communities and that the resolution does not explicitly recognize continuing abuses.

But Joe Shirley Jr., President of the Navajo Nation, supports such a resolution. “Sometimes a metaphorical clean slate is needed to build a better foundation for the future of relations between Native Nations and the United States,” he says.

In January of 2007, Mennonite Church USA Executive Board members also sent letters to their senators asking them to co-sponsor the resolution.

Native Americans who wish to receive an apology should not have to lobby for one themselves. If you feel apologies can be starting points for healing relationships destroyed by violence and aggression, contact your legislators to express your views on the subject. Talk with them about the essential elements of meaningful apologies. At the same time, tell them that ill treatment and unfairness towards Native Americans should not continue today. ■

S.J. Res. 4 apologizes for the “instances of violence, maltreatment and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States.”

CAPITAL QUOTES

“Setting a deadline for withdrawal [from Iraq] is setting a date for failure, and that would be irresponsible.”

—President George W. Bush, speaking earlier this year on the war

“I think it’s also important for the president to lay out a timetable as to how long [U.S. troops] will be involved and when they will be withdrawn.”

—Then-Governor George W. Bush, referring to President Clinton’s handling of the conflict in Kosovo, in 1999

“There will be no Christians in the birthplace of Christ in another 20 years.”

—Gregory Khalil, Legal Advisor for the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, reflecting on the dramatic decline of Christians in the West Bank due to the effects of occupation



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
SUPPORT INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN COLOMBIA	On May 22, Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) and Rep. Joe Pitts (R-Pa.) introduced House Resolution 426, which will recognize 2007 as the year of the rights of internally displaced persons in Colombia. When it was introduced the resolution had 29 co-sponsors.	Contact your representative and ask that s/he co-sponsor H.Res. 426. Go to thomas.loc.gov to see if your member is already a sponsor. If so, thank him/her.
CLUSTER BOMBS	On Feb. 14, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) introduced S. 594, which will limit the use, sale and transfer of cluster bombs. Passing this bill is crucial to saving many lives.	Contact your senators and ask them to co-sponsor S. 594. Go to thomas.loc.gov to see if your senators are already sponsors. If they are, thank them for their support.
PEACE TAX FUND	Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) introduced the Peace Tax Fund bill, to ensure that taxes from conscientious objectors are not used for military spending or foreign military aid. The bill has 21 co-sponsors and is under review by the House Ways and Means Committee.	Please ask your representative to support this legislation (H.R. 1921) and ask the committee to hold a hearing on it.

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