"It has been a mainstay of this book that successful antiwar movements are those that have been able to make direct links with those in the flight path of US aggression and to bring their struggles and concerns directly into the US political arena. Indeed, direct comprehension of their urgent struggles has often been a radicalizing factor in antiwar campaigns." Richard Seymour, *American Insurgents: A Brief History of American Anti-Imperialism* (2012).  p. 193.
An Afghan Peace Movement, Not a US Peace Jirga
by David Swanson | Truthout

Kabul, Afghanistan - The United States, on the verge of shutting down its own government for lack of funds, just forked over another $50 million for a peace jirga (or council) to negotiate peace in Afghanistan or at least sponsor an upcoming conference in the United Arab Emirates and - perhaps more so - bribe Taliban fighters to temporarily stop fighting.

Teck Young Wee, a medical doctor and native of Singapore who began working with Afghan refugees in Pakistan 11 years ago

Talking is always preferable to bombing, and anything with the name peace in it has at least that going for it. But this particular boondoggle may not have much else.

To almost all Afghans, the hard-core Taliban are vicious killers and the United States/NATO foreign occupiers have their own deceitful motives. Afghans who want independence, sovereignty and democratic self-rule want power over their country kept out of the hands of the United States, the Taliban, Pakistan, Iran, and anyone else who is not the Afghan people.

While many fear a Taliban takeover following a US withdrawal, they also resent the idea that a foreign power and its puppets should be negotiating the future of the country with its murderous criminals and offering those criminals a chance to share power with more US-friendly war lords and drug lords. Forgiveness and reconciliation is one thing, they say, but
power sharing is something else all together. Offering serious investment in infrastructure would be appropriate, many think, but offering power to criminals who are greatly feared is unacceptable.

A nonviolent movement that could take over power for the people of this war-torn land could take a decade to develop, development that would have to include reconciliation among the various ethnic groups of Afghanistan. That’s the view of Teck Young Wee, a medical doctor and native of Singapore who began working with Afghan refugees in Pakistan 11 years ago and moved to Bamiyan Province in Afghanistan nine years ago. He was taken in by an Afghan family and given the name Hakim.

The view of the Afghan youth with whom Hakim is now working to build a nonviolent movement for peace is that, while peace and democracy may be years away, the US military should leave immediately. Most Afghans oppose the Taliban, but most Afghans have family members who were horribly killed by the Taliban. The fear has to be overcome, Hakim says. Afghans drove out the Soviets and the British and others before them. They can block Taliban rule with nonviolent resistance and develop a stable, peaceful and just government. But, first, they will have to come to believe that peace - something they’ve never seen, and a name applied to a deal-making gathering of war lords (not to mention a Nobel Prize for someone dropping bombs on them) - is truly possible.

Hakim believes Afghans have the courage and ability to build a nonviolent movement for independence and peace. He has, therefore, been mentoring youth in Bamiyan and elsewhere, creating the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers (AYPV).

Health care, Hakim came to realize a few years ago, is not enough without peace. He led a college workshop on peace, and began bringing youth together. When death threats came, the people of Bamiyan created a warning system to protect him that involved plans to put their own bodies in the path of any violence.

The youth of Afghanistan have a couple of advantages, even if lacking some of what the youth in Egypt and Tunisia began working with years ago. In Afghanistan, 68% of the country are under age 25, so there is an advantage in numbers. And while some of the leading members of AYPV lost family members to the Taliban, it is the youth more than their elders who carry less weighty memories and resentments. Women, too, as they assert their rights, have the potential to lead this nation, in partnership with the youth.

There are a dozen core members of AYPV, boys and young men ranging from age 8 to 20. Girls and young women and members of multiple ethnic groups are members as well. On March 17, 40 members of AYPV held a march for peace, nonviolence and ethnic unity in Kabul that was covered by all of the local television stations as a startlingly new phenomenon. Peace? Who even dreams of such a thing, much less proposes a strategy to build it? Police surrounding the marchers with batons and riot gear were a less unusual sight.

While Hakim is their mentor, the young men are the leaders of this budding movement. They are thoughtful, experienced beyond their years and relentlessly energetic and up beat. Hakim early on asked Abdullah, now aged 15, whether he could stand up to 49 coalition countries, and Abdullah said he didn’t think so. But then he volunteered that he could stand up to one of them. Which one? Abdullah thought about that and replied: "The United States."
Abdullah, whose father was killed by the Taliban, recently explained his desire for peace and nonviolence from all sides to a defender of the US/NATO occupation. The icy response was that the Taliban ought to have killed him as well. Abdullah was told that he was too young to know real suffering. But the younger man was the wiser in this conversation, responding without anger or hatred and opposing the maintenance of a vicious cycle of violent force and vengeance.

Older Afghans, many of them traumatized by years of war and horrific incidents, often assert that an unbroken tradition of centuries of violence makes peace impossible. But that erases the memory of Pashtuns' nonviolent resistance to the British. And it overlooks the enthusiasm of the young who know less and, thereby, manage to know better. Crossing ethnic lines comes more easily for the young. The AYPV, who are mainly Hazara and Tajik, handmade cell-phone holders which they sent with messages of peace, love and friendship to Pashtun youth, who replied with overwhelming shock and gratitude. Older Afghans will tell you that overthrowing President Karzai will be the work of a few days, while resisting the Taliban will be impossible, even though Karzai has more support than the Taliban. Young active and informed members of AYPV will tell you that a group opposed by the vast majority will be defeated, but must be defeated by Afghans, not by foreigners.

The AYPV have issued statements in support of peace and delivered them to top US and UN officials. They've found allies and members around the country and abroad. They've held vigils. They've placed a lighted peace sign on the side of a mountain. And above all, they have educated and opened minds. They have a long way left to go.

On a recent morning, four members of AYPV spoke to a college class in Kabul. The professor with the loudest voice argued that the United States and NATO were here for the good of all people. Faiz, age 20, was among those who spoke up in response. Speaking to elders is not part of the tradition these young men have grown up in, but they believe it has become necessary. Some eyes were opened. About half the class seemed to believe peace might be possible.

"What is it with old people?" I asked some AYPV young men. The experience of the Taliban has crippled them with fear, said Abdullah. Some 60 percent of Afghans suffer post-traumatic stress disorder or other serious psychological damage. Faiz said that in fact the government works very hard to make people believe they are powerless. Ali said that as soon as people are able to all stand together, it would be that easy. Gulenai added that extreme distrust must first be overcome through relationships and friendships.

Last year, two of these young men went to the US embassy bearing an invitation letter from the Fellowship on Reconciliation. They had a terrible experience. The embassy waiting room television aired military propaganda interspersed in a movie about women in bikinis. There
were a lot of doors and guards to go past before speaking with someone. And the officials were rude and insulting. Before they could obtain visas, the young men had to explain what message they had for the American people. The questioner laughed and made fun of their answers. Their visas were rejected.

Former Afghan member of Parliament Malalai Joya recently had a visa to the United States accepted following intense public pressure. When these young men next apply to visit, I hope we will be able to provide the necessary support and pressure. Their stories could move the majority of Americans who oppose this war to take the necessary steps to end it. David Swanson

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 2010

The Afghan peace movement

As we saw in the previous blog entry, in December there were three disastrous nighttime raids carried out by (so it seems) US special forces and/or CIA in Afghanistan. Two of them involved ground troops allegedly killing civilians at close range, while the third involved a deadly airstrike called in by special forces. In total the incidents killed some 24 civilians.

The reaction among Afghans appears to be quite strong. In the wake of the first incident, the Dec 7/8 attack in Laghman province which killed 12 civilians, Afghan parliamentarians reacted bitterly, as reported on Afghanistan’s Tolo TV:

(Mawlawi Sayed Rahman, MP representing Laghman Province:) This is an aggression. This is an advanced way of occupying a country where a number of people are being killed or detained under several pretexts. In this way, they (foreigners) are insulting the people...

(Yunos Qanuni, lower house Speaker:) Basic principles of this country’s policies for the coming five years should be presented (to the lower house). This should include debate about country’s new policies about the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan. [BBC Foreign Service translation]

Note that the Laghman MP calls the western presence in his country an occupation and that Yunos Qanuni, a very important Afghan politician, calls into question the legitimacy of that occupation.
In the second incident, a Dec 27/28 nighttime operation by US special forces or CIA resulted in at least eight civilians killed by ground forces. Agence France-Presse reports that President Karzai "strongly condemned" the Kunar killings, which is I believe the strongest language he has ever used in incidents of this kind. There are, however, reports that Afghan army soldiers were involved in the Kunar incident, so Karzai's anger may be a ruse to deflect attention from his responsibility.

The Kunar incident sparked at least three major protests in Afghanistan. On Dec 30, protests attracting hundreds of demonstrators were held in Kabul and Jalalabad, the major eastern Afghan city and gateway to Pakistan and on Dec 31 some 1,500 protesters hit the streets of Asadabad, capital of Kunar province.

Afghans burn Obama effigy over civilian deaths

JALALABAD, Dec 30 (AFP) - Protesters took to the streets in Afghanistan on Wednesday, burning an effigy of the US president and shouting "death to Obama" to slam civilian deaths during Western military operations.

Hundreds of university students blocked main roads in Jalalabad, capital of eastern Nangarhar province, to protest the alleged deaths of 10 civilians, mostly school children, in a Western military operation on Saturday.

"The government must prevent such unilateral operations otherwise we will take guns instead of pens and fight against them (foreign forces)," students from the University of Nangarhar’s education faculty said in a statement.

Marching through the main street of Jalalabad, the students chanted "death to Obama" and "death to foreign forces", witnesses said.

The protesters torched a US flag and an effigy of US President Barack Obama in a public square in central Jalalabad, before dispersing.

“Our demonstration is against those foreigners who have come to our country,” Safiullah Aminzai, a student organiser, told AFP...

A similar protest was planned in Kabul against the "killing of civilians, especially the recent killing of students in Kunar by foreign forces," said organisers from the youth wing of Jamiat Eslah, or the Afghan Society for Social Reform and Development.

"The demonstration is to show our hatred, anger and sorrow about the current situation," said Sayed Khalid Rashid.
“Our main request is that the American and NATO forces must leave the country and Afghan people must have political autonomy,” he said, adding that he expected hundreds of people to turn out for the march through western Kabul... ([link](#))

The organisers of the Dec 30 Kabul protest, Jamiat Eslah’s youth section, issued this statement:

1. On behalf of the young generation of our country, we strongly condemn the recent killing of our innocent compatriots by US and NATO troops in the provinces of Kunar, Laghman, Baghlan and everywhere else. We condemn such operations by whatever name carried out, either it is called peacekeeping or enduring freedom, and want an end to cruelly massacring of our people.

2. We urge the Afghan government and law-enforcement agencies to seriously chase these killings and bring to justice the perpetrators.

3. The Afghan youth urge the United Nations, human rights watchdogs and the international community not to stay indifferent towards killing and massacre of civilian Afghans anymore. They must stop brutal killing of innocent Afghans via legal and legitimate ways.

4. The Afghan people believe that US and NATO must think about ending their war policies in Afghanistan, instead of sending out more troops to kill more innocent Afghans.

5. We urge the world community not to impose its mandate on the Afghan people. A nation that has lived together throughout the history can decide its own fate and can coexist as a sovereign nation with no need to foreign intervention.

6. We ask all Afghans to put away their factional and personal interests and work for higher national interests to make an independent, free and prosperous Afghanistan.

The Afghan youth will not allow foreign hands to exploit our disunity for carrying out their imperialistic agendas and destroy our country.

Long live Afghanistan ([link](#))

Note that the Kabul protest statement does not explicitly call for all foreign troops to be pulled out (only that occupying countries “must think about ending their war policies”), though the spokesperson at the protest asserts that their “main request is that the American and NATO forces must leave the country.”

On the other hand the Jalalabad students’ rhetoric is notable for its bravado, as their statement says that if
there is no change, students will take up arms.

One obvious question which arises is who is Jamiat Eslah's youth section, exactly? Information is scant but the parent organization Jamiat Eslah (Afghan Society for Social Reform and Development) appears to be a respected NGO, affiliated with ACBAR and the UN and recipient of international foundation money. Browsing through this flickr photo essay of the Kabul protest reveals a distinct blue headband motif. Can this be seen as a distinctly secular gesture? An echo of the so-called colour revolutions or Iran's green-adorned protesters, perhaps?

The current batch of peaceniks are not a lone voice in Afghanistan, as readers of this blog are no doubt aware. The recently well-publicized Malalai Joya has been calling for foreign troops to withdraw for some time now. And besides Joya and her supporters, the peace camp also includes RAWA and their supporters as well as the National Peace Jirga.

The current protests seem to be having no small effect, spurring the Karzai administration to strike out against the occupying powers over the explosive issue of civilian casualties:

Kabul demands foreign 'killers' handed over
by Sardar Ahmad Sardar Ahmad

KABUL, Dec 31 (AFP) - The Afghan government demanded Thursday to take into its custody foreigners wanted over the alleged killing of 10 civilians, sharply escalating a war of words with its powerful Western military backers... (link)

Posted by Dave Markland at 12:18 AM
71 comments:

Kevin Martin, Peace Action: ceasefire in Afghanistan?
"Amid all the grim news in Afghanistan, a new initiative called 2 Million Friends for Peace looks like a ray of hope. The campaign, launched by the youth-led Afghan Peace Volunteers, aims to find two million friends or supporters worldwide - the approximate number of Afghans killed in 40 years of war - and to deliver to the United Nations its call for a cease-fire and negotiated end to the war on December 10, International Human Rights Day."
http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/12355-afghanistan-the-who-cares-war?-not-exactly-but-it-fails-the-real-definition-of-a-just-war
This week, the U.S. war against the people of Afghanistan entered its 12th year. It's the longest war in our history, but you'd hardly know we've been at war or that we continue to kill Afghan civilians. But on top of this, few Americans realize Afghanistan has suffered almost continuous warfare for the last four decades. About 2 million Afghans have died over the last 40 years.

It's hard to imagine what the people of Afghanistan feel about this, because we are not permitted to hear their voices. We know so little about the Afghan people.

But a remarkable group of young people in Kabul who espouse nonviolence and call themselves the Afghan Peace Volunteers have decided to tell us what they think, how they feel and what they want us to do. Recently, they called upon the whole world to join their campaign for the end to the war on Afghanistan by signing their appeal, "Two Million Friends for Peace in Afghanistan."

Instead of anger or revenge for the ongoing killings, these young Afghan peacemakers want 2 million people around the world to sign their petition to the United Nations, calling for a ceasefire and an end to the U.S/NATO war on Afghanistan and to pledge their friendship to the people of Afghanistan. I urge you to visit their website, 2millionfriends.org, to sign on and join this historic campaign for peace.
FEATURED STORIES AND POEMS

Memories

When I became aware that you loved the moon more than me, I decided to forget you. But do you know? I saw the moon tonight and cannot. I cannot clean the moon's picture from my room's window. Come, please. Come!

Make your hands a bridge. Over that bridge, I will cross into

So Our Youth Will Stay

The other day, I was in my office thinking about Afghanistan and how the situation is improving. We are fortunate
that the international community is helping us rebuild our country. We have an elected president. Girls are going to school. Women are working outside the home. It is

Remapping
I want to make a map of the earth. No borders. No one will be rich because no one is poor. My father will be black. My mother will be white. I will be pink. I will not hate the color red anymore—Maybe I will be red. In my map the teachers will not teach negative words. The
The Massacre of the Hazara
February 25, 2013 By AWWP Leave a Comment
Hearing about the protests gives me hope. Knowing that people in London, Australia, Kabul, and hopefully in America are protesting to raise the Hazaras' voices makes me happy.
Filed Under: Fatima H., Latest Essays

My Early Life
February 21, 2013 By AWWP 3 Comments
A few months after we arrived, on a night filled with fear and gunfire, the Taliban reached Herat. From our house, we could see the hills where Ismail Khan’s forces were fighting the Taliban.
Filed Under: Latest Essays, Mahnaz

My Grandfather’s Gift
February 21, 2013 By AWWP 4 Comments
He would say to us, “Life is another name for love and fun.”
Filed Under: Latest Essays, Mahbooba

LATEST POEMS

I Am Alone
February 25, 2013 By AWWP 1 Comment
My life is listening to rules of the game they play with us.
Filed Under: Latest Poems, Seeta
If Love Took Over My Country
February 25, 2013 By AWWP Leave a Comment
What would happen…
If love took over my country?
Filed Under: Latest Poems, Yalda J.

Today I Want
February 21, 2013 By AWWP 3 Comments
Today I do not want to hear the word World, but Home. Today I want to bring the whole world together like one home.
Filed Under: Latest Poems, Seema K.

LATEST AWWP NEWS

Restoring Dignity: Afghanistan in Kyoto Journal
January 24, 2013 By AWWP Leave a Comment
Here’s a PDF of a beautiful feature Kyoto Journal (issue 76) published in the summer of 2011, according to their news page. The interviews were done in 2009.
Filed Under: AWWP News

Through Writing, Afghan Women Find Freedom
January 18, 2013 By AWWP 2 Comments
From Voice of America
Faiza Elmasry (January 16, 2013)
In the virtual space created by The Afghan Women’s Writing Project (AWWP), women have the freedom to write about whatever they want and they can receive mentoring by a volunteer team of teachers and authors.
Filed Under: AWWP News
What a Whirlwind Year!

December 31, 2012 By AWWP Leave a Comment

Dear Reader: What a whirlwind year! Two grant awards enabled us to realize our dreams of acquiring an office that would house our monthly workshops and our very own women’s only Internet café. Today, that café has six desktop computers for our women to use. More importantly, it’s a place where they can congregate safely and [...] 

Filed Under: AWWP News

The Afghan Women’s Writing Project has been recognized by The Women's National Book Association and the New York State Divis

See: Elizabeth Titus, “The Lives of Others.” The Humanist (March-April 2013). The author became a mentor to several of the women of AWWP.

END AFGHANISTAN PEACE MOVEMENT #2

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Dick Bennett
My blog: War Department/Peace Department
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/
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http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

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See INMOtion
jbennet@uark.edu
(479) 442-4600
2582 Jimmie Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72703