

# FOCUS

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From Blase Bonpane, Director, Office of the Americas:



## ENDLESS WARS ARE DESTROYING THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The election of a competent, intelligent, empathetic, President Barack Obama has revealed something we have long suspected: the government of the United States does not primarily represent the people of the United States.

Here is an order of preference which helps to clarify why the vast majority of our citizens are not being represented:

- The military industrial, prison and arms merchant complex.
- The insurance companies, banks, financial markets and corporations.
- Billionaires and their lobbies.
- Millionaires.
- Upper middle class.
- Declining middle class (which pay the highest percentage of income in taxes).
- Lower classes (highly recruited as cannon fodder).
- The homeless (these people simply do not exist on government radar).

### How do we know this?

The United States is currently dedicated to perpetual war. Our citizens want peace. They are told they can't have it. The official state story is a jumble of disgraceful lies, for example, "We are fighting for democracy." And this Democracy is achieved by torture, fragmentation bombs, white phosphorus, smashing into private homes, indiscriminately arresting people, traumatizing and killing children? And not to mention the mindless drones which we read about daily as "suspected US weapons" killing "suspected Taliban."

The hopelessly non-critical commercial media continues to showcase generals who appear to be psychotic and who are living in a Disneyland of denial and a fantasy world of "winning." Exactly what do they intend to win? Will that be the victory they won in Vietnam? Will that be the victory they won in Central America? Will that be the victory they want to win in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Pakistan?

In short we have reached the Biblical curse of "iniquity lying to itself." And this includes a substantial lunatic fringe of military leaders who identify our behavior as "religious." How touching! Killing children for Jesus! (And they talk about the Taliban?) The "popular" new drones personify our militarism. They are mindless. They are deadly. They create international resistance to our policy. They primarily massacre innocent people. And, oh yes, they say we are protecting the United States of America. Friends, there is no possible behavior that can recklessly endanger the people of the United States any more than our current international military madness.

### Health Care

Our people want health care as a right. The government is telling them they can't have it. This is by order of the insurance companies who insist on taking 33% of the national health care funds for their own bloated "administration" (read profit, while Medicare has proven it can administer the system at 2% of the fund). Over 70% of our citizens want a functional national health care system for everyone. But our commercial media behaves as if France, which has the world's best health care, did not exist. Yes, it is a national program with similar programs throughout Europe and Canada. But the insurance for profit industry continues to win out against the will of American people. This is not democracy.

### Education

Our people want education. The government is telling us that they can't have it. We must use our money to feed our criminally insane military "goals." Yes, this includes 800 unnecessary overseas military bases.

### Gun Control

Our people want gun control. The government is telling us we can't have it because the National Rifle Association has control of the Congress.

### We Finally Got What We Want In Iraq?

Just this month our puppet government in Iraq put the development rights of some of its largest oil fields up for auction. The privatizing of Iraqi oil has been the goal of Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell, British Petroleum, and Chevron since 1972 when Saddam Hussein nationalized the Iraqi oil industry. Because the oil industry has far more representation in government than do the people of the United States, our leadership made friends with Saddam Hussein. We retained that friendship as Iraq's ally

during the deadly Iraq/Iran war of the 1980s. And after that bloody conflict Washington was certain that our trusted ally would privatize the oil of Iraq. Saddam Hussein refused, and at that moment we suddenly decided he was really Adolf Hitler. Thus began the unnecessary, immoral and illegal massacre of Iraq in January of 1991. That massacre has continued unabated for almost 19 years! Iraq, "The Cradle of Civilization," has been destroyed. Over a million have been killed, tens of millions of children who remain alive are traumatized for life. Hundreds of thousands of our troops and their families have had their hopes of a decent life devastated as they return physically and mentally damaged.

### **Oil**

While the oil companies are not quite satisfied with the conditions of privatization, it appears that our troops will remain until the contracts are even more beneficial. But they might have to remain forever because Iraqi resentment is strong. "The service contracts will put the Iraqi economy in chains and shackle its independence for the next twenty years," said Fayad al-Nema, director of the South Oil Company that produces most of Iraq's crude oil.

### **The Embassy of the United States**

As our military/industrial government congratulates itself for this "achievement" of privatization, it continues to build a United States embassy in Iraq that will be the size of Vatican City. That monument is constructed to remind Iraqis of who will be in charge for decades to come. By the way, privatization (Enronization) was key in the international economic meltdown. Why are the current bombings in Iraq at a high point? Simply because people who consider the Iraqi government to be puppets and traitors to their country are fighting against that imposed regime. They are called insurgents but would be better listed as resistance fighters.

### **Iran**

And the people of Iran are to be commended for their resistance to their government. Please observe carefully that the very people in the United States and Israel, who were promoting the bombing of Iran, are now, in their hypocrisy, feigning alligator tears for the demonstrators in Iran. But if they had their way, they would have killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians. Yes, this is a self-condemning situation.

### **Latin America Is the Vanguard of a Progressive Future: Honduras**

The old fashioned coup in Honduras was universally condemned by the countries of Latin America, by the Organization of American States and even, somewhat weakly, by the United States. We are proud of the exemplary work of Father Miguel d'Escoto, as president of the General Assembly of the United Nations, for having the elected President of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, speak to the nations of the world and express his gratitude for the massive international support for his return to his rightful post.

### **A Double Coup?**

During the International March for Peace in Central America in 1985-1986 our 350 peace marchers were restrained at gunpoint from crossing the border of Nicaragua into Honduras by the Honduran military, "Cobras." This standoff lasted seven days. At one point the Honduran commander ordered me to come to his perch just across the borderline on the Pan American Highway. I complied and quickly stated to the officer, "The Foreign Minister of Honduras has authorized our march to go through Honduras into El Salvador on the Pan American Highway. We have documents." A free translation of the commander's response, "We don't give a damn what the Foreign Minister said! You will not cross this border."

And the recent coup in Honduras brought this memory back to me for many reasons. Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador had long been de jure democracies with de facto military dictatorships. We see this same scenario in Honduras today. Manuel Zelaya is the democratically elected president. The Honduran military is telling him that they don't give a damn about the law. And the figurehead for the military is Roberto Micheletti, who will do what the oligarchy and the military want or be tossed out of office.

But friends, it gets worse! Obama and his administration have denounced the coup. Why then has nothing substantial been done to oppose the Honduran military and its puppets? Is our military also saying what the Honduran military was saying on that hot day when I was ordered across the border during the Peace March in 1986?

### **THE CLOSET LIBERAL: RECYCLE FOR PEACE!**

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### **OOA IN ACTION**

\*Office of the Americas is a participant in THE WORLD MARCH FOR PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE taking place October 2, 2009 to January 2, 2010. This is the first World March to circle the earth calling for an end of war and nuclear arms. Marchers will reach Los Angeles on December 2, 2009. See [www.TheWorldMarch.org](http://www.TheWorldMarch.org).

\*The University of California at Irvine issued a campus wide invitation for students to attend our presentation on Liberation Theology.

\* Radio Arbitron ratings for Pacifica's KPFK lists OOA's WORLD FOCUS among the top four programs aired by the station. These include: DEMOCRACY NOW, BACKGROUND BRIEFING, CONNECT THE DOTS AND WORLD FOCUS. Listen to WORLD FOCUS at 10:00 AM on Sunday mornings, KPFK, Los Angeles, 90.7 fm, 98.7fm Santa Barbara.

\* Our friend and companero of some forty years, Marine Corps Veteran Ron Kovic, BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY, is entering GAZA by way of Egypt with \$10 million in medical aid. British Member of Parliament George Galloway is leading this VIVA PALESTINA delegation.

\*OOA was a Presenter at the University of California, Riverside colloquium on ENDING THE U.S. EMBARGO ON CUBA.

\* And we also gave a presentation to the students at Santiago Canyon College on THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS which took place recently in Trinidad and Tobago.

\* OOA has been seeking the end of the unjust imprisonment of Lori Berenson for almost fourteen years. This included a personal visit to her prison in Peru. We were overjoyed with the birth of her baby, Salvador Anespori Apari Berenson. He will enjoy both US and Peruvian citizenship. Peruvian law permits the baby to be raised in prison by the mother until age three. Please see her website: [www.freelori.org](http://www.freelori.org). OOA remains in close contact with Lori and her parents. Our latest appeal on her behalf was sent to Senator Barbara Boxer.

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We at the Office of the Americas remain with high hopes. It would be impossible for us to deny the destruction of our country by militarism and the international havoc we are creating. We believe that things can be turned around. We believe that small groups of dedicated people can create a participatory democracy in the United States. We simply cannot ignore what is currently taking place in our name! To ignore what is going on in our names would be unforgivable.



### **GAZA – “ OUR SECOND HOME” Shae Popovich, Associate Director, Office of the Americas**

I traveled to Gaza last month and I have been forever changed. I am not a politician. I am not a journalist or filmmaker. I am a regular citizen/activist who decided to make a trip to the Middle East to witness first-hand the destruction and devastation I had read and heard about. During my stay I made several new friends in Gaza, but the chances of their ever visiting me in the US are remote. That is because my friends in Gaza are in prison. Any attempt by them to evade their captors or come within 300 meters of these borders could very well result in their death.

#### **Our Delegation**

Wherever I moved in Gaza, from the north to the south, from the luscious Mediterranean Sea over to the west, I heard stories from Palestinian people who simply wanted to live their lives: to farm (agriculture and labor being the main economic industries in Gaza), to go to school, to be able to move freely from one border to the next. Our delegation of 66, composed of journalists, teachers, students, filmmakers, activists and more, was mainly from the US but delegates from Canada, Italy, Portugal, and Australia also joined us. The delegation was organized by the anti-war activist group Codepink, and we were joined by noted political activist and author Norman Finkelstein as well as Colonel Ann Wright and the co-founder of Codepink, Medea Benjamin.

#### **The Children of Gaza**

This was the second Codepink delegation in a matter of months. The first, in February, brought supplies to the women of Gaza. Our delegation was to focus on the children. Nearly 60% of Gaza's population is under 15. Our delegation hoped to bring some smiles to the children by delivering toys and building some playgrounds. I was fortunate enough to help build one in Beit Hanoun. My fondest memory of that day was having hundreds of children eagerly crowding me, asking my name, where I was from, wanting to shake my hand, dance for me, help carry a piece of the playground. At times it got chaotic, but I quickly realized that these children simply wanted and needed some form of human contact and interaction.

#### **The Women of Gaza**

Each day we had meetings with representatives of various NGOs, schools, and youth institutions. Some days there were unscheduled events such as our impromptu meeting with Hamas female and male members of parliament. Many of the women in government started their careers as students involved in their universities' political and student unions. Others were involved in the community. I asked the female Hamas leader, Rajaa Alhalabi, what we as a delegation should tell the citizens of the US about them. She replied, "Show the world we are trying to change the culture as women of Hamas. We do not support violence to achieve our goals. The media has a misconception about us. Take the evidence of what you as a delegation have seen and show the role of women in society and how significant it is." She also stressed the importance of keeping the media informed of the dire conditions in Gaza and that lifting the siege and aid to

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the people was paramount.

### Conditions in Gaza

What struck me the most during the course of my time in Gaza was the unbelievable spirit of the Palestinian people and their unwavering commitment to stay strong. "We will survive" was something I heard uttered time and time again from school-age children to grown adults. It was part of the Palestinian culture to welcome you into their homes and their hearts despite their situation. By the end of a conversation over peppermint tea, you felt as if you had a lifelong friend. They would tell us that Gaza was now "our second home." Codepinker Joanne and I stayed with a young family in Gaza City, Abeer, Hazem, and their 4 children. The first evening we arrived, Abeer apologized repeatedly that the electricity had been out for several hours and that we would have to eat by candlelight. To me it seemed slightly enticing. Dinner by candlelight on the roof of their home? How lovely. I quickly realized that power outages, some scheduled and others not, were a great hindrance to daily life in Gaza. That included, of course, businesses and hospitals. The largest hospital we visited, Al Shifa, would often go 6-12 hours with no electricity. Power plants couldn't keep up with the demand due to the lack of fuel blocked by Israel. Water is another major concern. A good deal of Gaza's drinking water is contaminated. Water and electricity. Could those of us here in the US imagine being inconvenienced like that on a daily basis?

### Images of Gaza

There are several images of Gaza that float through my mind, but I seem to come back to 2 or 3 that I cannot shake. One is Saib Samih El Sheik, the son of an ambulance driver who was standing amid the ruins of his home at Jabalia Camp in south Gaza. Straight ahead I could see the Israeli border and all around the camp were homes and structures in rubble. To the left of Saib's house were the remains of an ambulance and a paramedic uniform that had been crushed beneath another home. Saib's father, a paramedic, was trying to rescue 2 young girls. He was ordered out of the ambulance and asked to disrobe from his uniform. The structure was bombed. The girls were never rescued. Down the road from Saib's former home were a Palestinian and a UN flag perched atop two destroyed buildings. Two small semblances of a community that vowed to keep going.

### Remembering Rachel Corrie

A second powerful image that I cannot forget is when our UNWRA guides took us to a large refugee camp in Rafah, on the border with Egypt. We witnessed the place where Rachel Corrie, a Jewish peace activist from Seattle, WA, was killed by an Israeli Caterpillar bulldozer in 2003 while defending the home of a Palestinian doctor. Most everything here was destroyed. In a remote small, sandy area that consists of two goalposts is the Rachel Corrie Peace Park. I couldn't imagine nor could I see any children playing here since it is far too dangerous and very close to the Rafah tunnels. I stood there for a moment, alone, imagining the inconceivable: what this brave young woman went through and recalling what she uttered in a documentary I saw before I left for Gaza, that "you cannot begin to imagine what it is like here until you witness it first-hand for yourself."

### The American International School in Gaza

And yet a 3rd image is a K-12 school in the north part of Gaza called The American International School in Gaza. I was not prepared for the magnitude of devastation that I witnessed: beams, wires and structures completely ripped apart. The scattered compositions and graded papers that littered the landscape in front of me were one of the few indicators that this was indeed a school. Several former students, aged 9-15, immediately greeted our delegation. As they walked us around what was left of the school, I knelt down and picked up a piece of what was once perhaps part of a wall or a ceiling. As I held the piece in my hand, I fought back tears as the children responded to my question, "What do you want to be when you get older?" "Engineer, designer, architect, computer expert," they said so very enthusiastically. I carried 35 handmade cards from a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class in Sherman Oaks, Ca. I couldn't pass them out fast enough. As our bus signaled for me to get on with the others, I reluctantly pulled myself away, the children still clamoring for a piece of paper from strangers halfway across the world. I waved goodbye and then I walked without turning around, tears streaming down my cheeks.

### We Refuse To Remain Silent!

All 66 of our Codepink delegation could fill a book with our stories, stories that ranged from utter despair to mild hopefulness. We promised the incredible people of Gaza that we would tell their stories, that we would tell the world, that we would refuse to remain silent. We write. We speak. We draw pictures. We do what we must to keep the flame burning. We will not forget.

As I hugged my home stay family and said my goodbyes, I couldn't help but burst into tears once again. This time, I couldn't hide them. I knew I was leaving this so-called "prison." I was free. Who knows when they will be released? As I climbed into my host's car to meet up with our delegation and head to the border and back to North America, I thought to myself... Two continents. Two languages. One common vision...peace.

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