

Peace is not yours to give, Mr. President

But hope is certainly yours to take away

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As I listened to a friend and colleague in Afghanistan a few days ago, the difference I discerned in his voice from previous conversations was visceral. That he unswervingly and joyfully dedicates his every thought, word and deed to advocating for peace in Afghanistan through peaceful means made his tone and tenor all the more heart-wrenching. Our phone connection was not clear, but I thought I heard him say something akin to: I never thought I would hear myself say that the Afghan people need hope now more than they need peace. What I know I did hear him say distinctly, however, was: "The people have nothing to lose now. They are being killed anyway."

That you, Mr. Obama, are now singularly responsible for stealing the hope of the ordinary People of Afghanistan is an abomination. That you continue to steal it in the way that you do, however, is a crime of the deepest shame. I have come to know my friend well enough to know that he does not "hurt" for himself because of the hopelessness and pain you inflict, but rather for each and every individual person who makes up the "ordinary" People of Afghanistan: the infants and small children, the youth a few years older, the elders, the women who care for all, and the men who now find themselves having to protect their families against you. Such is the legacy you have created for yourself.

For his safety, my friend's name shall remain anonymous, but his sentiments shall not, if I have anything to say about it, Mr. President, which I do. (See, First Amendment to the United States Constitution: Right to Petition government for Redress of Grievances.)

As you may or may not recall, you based your campaign to be the president of this nation on the premise and promise of "hope." The ironies here abound. The ironies here are sickening. I am not unaware that you inherited a "war" already in progress in Afghanistan on your first day in office. But such inheritance is not a defense to any concern of mine. And nor was it, nor is it, apparently, any concern of yours. You were eager to utilize this war and you championed it. You campaigned to be the supreme military commander of it. You criticized your predecessor for not paying enough attention to it. You committed to send more troops to it even before having the elected authority to do so, and you touted it as the "good war", in juxtaposition to Iraq, the ostensible "bad war."

More ironies abound. More ironies sicken. You are not a man of peace, as my friend in Afghanistan is, Mr. President, and your award last year would have made Alfred Nobel throw up. That you claim to have been "shaped" by the peaceful non-violence practiced, not just preached, by Gandhi and Dr. King is hypocrisy of the highest order. A man of peace would be wise enough to know that peace cannot be imposed where there are no enemies except for the enemies one creates trying to impose peace. Peace cannot be dictated from afar, it

cannot be lectured, it cannot be strategized, it cannot be politicized, it cannot be threatened, it cannot be bought, and it certainly cannot be bombed into existence.

Peace is not yours to give to Afghanistan, Mr. Obama, and it never will be, no matter if you stay there until kingdom comes. Peace is a choice and it is a choice you have no standing to make in that place. Peace will come, or not, to Afghanistan and to every Afghan, from within, by and through their own choices, not by the erstwhile beneficence of whether you choose to war there on any given day in their name. Your only possible contribution to peace in Afghanistan can be to get out of the way of the only people capable of creating peace there. Simply get out of the way, for peace can never come...choices can never be made...non-violence can never be "practiced", Mr. President, while you murder and maim, while you occupy, destroy and desecrate a people whose hope you have stolen.

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