

By David Swanson

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I want to thank Congressman Delahunt and Cape Codders for Peace. I opposed this war before it began, as did many of you, and I hope to explain why. But, Congressman Delahunt, you need not agree that it was always wrong in order to agree that it is wrong now. I support the immediate announcement of a swift withdrawal of all troops, mercenaries, and military contractors, and I hope to explain why. But you don't need to agree in order to oppose spending \$33 billion to escalate the war with 30,000 more troops. To vote to fund that escalation, you have to believe that this war is such a good thing that it should not only be continued but also expanded. Or you have to believe that the way to end it is to expand it AND that nothing more useful at home or abroad could be done with all that money. I expect that we can jointly establish here today that both of those last two ideas are mistaken.

In October, 2003, Congressman, you wisely voted against a bill to fund the wars and supposedly reconstruction in Afghanistan and Iraq. Had your vote prevailed, those wars would have had to end, despite the wishes of the President and the Pentagon. You were not committing treason or failing to support troops or endangering Americans. You were upholding the law, representing your constituents, striving to bring those troops safely home, and reducing global animosity toward our country. We applaud you.

Refusing to fund an escalation does not compel a war to end. It only maintains the war at the current level. So nonsensical claims about "abandoning the troops" become even more nonsensical. Last December, Congressman, you and most of your colleagues voted for a massive budget for wars and the military, but many who voted yes said they would vote no on an escalation, an escalation that was opposed by a majority of Americans and Afghans and Pakistanis and the people of nations around the world. It was universally maintained in Washington that the vote on the escalation money would not come until the spring. So the fact that the escalation has predictably already begun cannot be treated as a fait accompli unless we're going to tell the American public that we were all played for a bunch of fools. Are there troops on their way or already

arrived? Well, turn them around and bring them home!

Last summer, Congressman Delahunt, you and a majority of the Democrats in the House voted for an amendment to create an exit strategy for Afghanistan. Here's something that I take to be a simple fact that has been obscured by propaganda: you do not exit a war by escalating it. The president sent 21,000 more troops to Afghanistan last year, plus 5,000 more mercenaries, and tens of thousands of contractors, all without so much as a by-your-leave to the first branch of our government, the United States Congress. We have at least 68,000 troops and 121,000 contractors or mercenaries now in place, and violence, deaths, and misery escalated following the troop escalation. In fact the president said that he sent those troops prior to developing a strategy for the war, almost as if sending the troops was an end in itself, a possibility that is almost too grotesque to contemplate, a possibility I would hate to have to explain to the parents of all the soldiers who will die in the hell that will be the coming attack on the city of Kandahar. The military has recorded 78 wounded and 22 dead from Massachusetts prior to this onslaught.

Oh, but we escalated in Iraq in order to withdraw, didn't we? Did we? We have 198,000 troops, mercenaries, and contractors in Iraq. If you believe they're all coming home next year without Congress waking up from its slumber, I've got some yellowcake to sell you. Violence in Iraq is down, at least for the moment, for many reasons. One is simply the massive numbers of people killed, wounded, impoverished, and driven from their homes. Accomplishing that feat in Afghanistan would require several armies and what's left of our soul. Even pacifying Afghanistan according to plan, according to General Charles Krulak (retired), the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, would require several hundred thousand additional troops. This is not a war, but an occupation. When you attack in one place, people disperse. When you hand out cash it ends up being used to attack you. Several hundred thousand troops may be a conservative estimate. And what if that was only 20 percent of your force? General Petraeus's counterinsurgency manual says you should spend 80 percent on civilian operations. We currently spend 6 percent, and over half of what we've spent on reconstruction has gone to the U.S. military's training of Afghan military and police.

Violence is also down in Iraq because troops have in great measure withdrawn from urban areas. We saw this predictable cause and effect begin when violence in Basra dropped 90 percent because the British stopped patrolling Basra to control the violence. The British were quite surprised and amazed. And if you ask Iraqis, many will tell you that violence is down because a complete withdrawal has been promised and a date stated. Sending troops to Iraq has never done the United

States or Iraq any good, and the same is true and will remain true for Afghanistan. National Security Adviser James Jones says there is no guarantee that sending troops to Afghanistan would accomplish anything useful, and that they could just be "swallowed up".

Howard Hart, a 25-year CIA veteran who ran operations in Afghanistan for three-and-a-half years during the Cold War, like countless other experts, favors withdrawal. Hart says that the original goal was supposedly to destroy al Qaeda, which has long since left, and that creating a legitimate government (something that most people and history and the law tell us a foreign occupation can NEVER do) would require hundreds of thousands of troops, cost "umpteenth billion" dollars, and still be next to impossible. It is almost universally accepted in the United States that our own government is broken, and yet we are trying to impose a central government on people in a country we don't know, people who don't want it. The elections in Afghanistan and Pakistan are practically down to our own standards, and the puppet governments are not viewed as legitimate. In Afghanistan we are propping up and using a government of corrupt war lords and drug dealers, and our chief puppet has threatened to join the resistance against us, the Taliban. That's not because he's crazy or drugged, but because he hopes to win the support of the people of Afghanistan. Replacing him with a different puppet wouldn't solve this problem. But I suspect Americans are catching on to the outrage and hopelessness of pouring blood and treasure into an effort to fight the Taliban on behalf of a government that wants to join the Taliban.

WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

What about that original goal? Revenge is not a legal ground for war, or a morally acceptable motivation for anything, but does revenge even make sense here on its own terms? The 9-11 hijackers were not from Afghanistan. Most of the planning of 9-11 was done in hotels and apartments in Germany and Spain, and flight schools in the United States, and would be again even if al Qaeda was permitted to build camps in Afghanistan. Paul Pillar, former CIA deputy chief for counter-terrorism, says that an al Qaeda base in Afghanistan would not significantly increase threats to the United States. Richard Holbrooke, President Obama's representative in Afghanistan, says that if the Taliban had control it would likely not allow al Qaeda in anyway. And many observers treat with great skepticism the idea that a U.S. withdrawal would necessarily put the Taliban in control of all of Afghanistan. The Taliban is fueled by the occupation and would lose strength with its withdrawal. The fundamentalist Taliban, as opposed to those poor people just fighting for the pay and in defense of their homes, is not popular in Afghanistan. Neither are the war lords and the

current government, and there is no easy solution. But the idea that building a quagmire in Afghanistan will protect the United States from a small terrorist organization whose mastermind we now claim must be murdered in Yemen gets things backwards. Occupying and bombing Afghanistan is actually making us less safe. It is enraging people against the United States, and building the Taliban and other resistance forces.

Well, if we're not there for revenge against al Qaeda which is not there at all, and we're not there to keep al Qaeda out of that one particular country, what are we there for? For the benefit of the Afghan people? To fight the Taliban? The past 35 years should make us very suspicious of the notion that the United States government gives a damn about the Afghan people. Our government looked pretty favorably on the Taliban in the mid 90s when the Taliban favored building oil and gas pipelines. And, by the way, the Taliban offered to put bin Laden on trial, but our government chose instead to try to capture him by bombing the Afghan people.

OK. So let's let bygones be bygones. Let's ignore the many homes of suffering around the world that we do not feel compelled to bomb. Might it not be true that Afghanistan would be even worse off without the U.S. military? There's often a condescending colonialist perspective behind this sort of thinking, and I see it as missing some basic facts. One is that no matter how awful Afghanistan will be when the United States military leaves, it will never have a chance at becoming a decent place to live during a foreign occupation, because foreign occupations produce resistance. And the growing devastation will make the post-occupation struggle harder the longer the occupation goes on. Malalai Joya, a former member of the Afghan parliament, expelled for her opposition, puts it this way: "Some say that if foreign troops leave Afghanistan will descend into civil war. But what about the civil war and catastrophe of today? The longer this occupation continues, the worse the civil war will be."

Another fact is that, for much less money than the occupation requires, the United States could provide assistance to Afghans restoring their environment and agriculture, which is precisely what the current U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan advised the president to do. Our troops, who have plenty of bravery, could bravely clean the cluster bombs out of the fields rather than dropping more. A third fact is that illegal invasions and occupations damage the rule of law internationally as well as antagonizing sympathetic populations, which is why terrorism has increased around the world during the so-called global war on terror. And, most importantly, even when it has an American face on it, there is simply nothing worse than war with which war can be replaced.

When a local resident in the United States is kidnapped or raped or murdered and the media latches onto it, we talk about the horror of it with friends and strangers. But these stories exist by the thousands and hundreds of thousands for the victims of our wars. They are all real people with loved-ones, and a single one of their stories properly communicated by our corporate media cartel would end all of our wars forever. I'm sure many of us saw the recently released video of civilians being killed from a helicopter in Iraq. If you haven't you should also watch the interview of the family members of the dead. Wikileaks said it plans to release another video of 97 people being bombed in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan and Pakistan we have dramatically increased the use of drones, which are known to regularly kill what we call collateral damage. There is simply no way to kill the people whom you think, as prosecutor, judge, and executioner you have to kill without enraging more people against you than you started with. And sometimes those people come and blow themselves up to kill the CIA agents controlling the drones. And in this futile stupidity we are immorally killing human beings.

But General McChrystal has developed a new tool in Afghanistan that kills even more civilians than drone strikes. It's called night raids. We kick in doors at night and murder people, including family members who get in the way, including neighbors who come running to help, and -- in the worst sorts of incident -- including children with their hands cuffed behind their backs. We haven't given Afghan women civil rights, but at least we dig the bullets out of them with knives after we kill them in order to pretend someone else did it. And our media parrot the military's lies until the moment it's forced to recant them.

Again, this is not a war but an occupation. No U.S. soldier knows who the enemy is and who the people are he or she is supposedly protecting. They look the same. This means the innocent will die. If you think such incidents are aberrations, watch the confessions of our troops in the Winter Soldier testimony. Or listen to General McChrystal on the topic of another form of murder, road blocks. McChrystal said:

"To my knowledge, in the nine-plus months I've been here, not a single case where we have engaged in an escalation of force incident and hurt someone has it turned out that the vehicle had a suicide bomb or weapons in it and, in many cases, had families in it. . . . We've shot an amazing number of people and killed a number and, to my knowledge, none has proven to have been a real threat to the force."

You can't fix that with better rules of engagement. You have to disengage. You cannot win an occupation. You can only end it.

A POLICY OR A CRIME?

We are killing thousands of civilians per year, plus non-civilians, a distinction Afghans don't always see as a sharp one, plus over 1,000 U.S. troops killed and over 5,000 wounded, plus mercenaries, plus those diagnosed with brain and other injuries after leaving Afghanistan, plus suicides which are now higher than combat deaths, plus the violence to others that troops bring home. And anyone who suffers in the United States or anywhere else from heroin can thank our efforts in Afghanistan.

U.S. soldiers signed up to defend the United States, not to commit war crimes in distant lands. Our states' militias, the National Guard, is needed at home and cannot constitutionally be sent abroad to fight for empire. This enterprise is criminal from top to bottom and will be until it's ended. We currently use Afghanistan to lawlessly imprison human beings without process or rights or foreseeable end, and in such situations, prison guards torture. And when you refuse to prosecute torture, torturers do not end their torturing. Here's the Washington Post from this past November:

"Two Afghan teenagers held in U.S. detention north of Kabul this year said they were beaten by American guards, photographed naked, deprived of sleep and held in solitary confinement in concrete cells for at least two weeks while undergoing daily interrogation about their alleged links to the Taliban."

What if those were your kids? This is one example of many. These are not aberrations, but the heart of the war, and the heart of what drives the resistance. New York Times reporter David Rohde was held hostage for seven months by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and upon release reported on what motivates Afghans to engage in violence. The reasons he provided suggested that, as with most foreign occupations in any other time or place, the occupation was motivating the violent resistance to it rather than helping to ease unrelated tensions.

The senior U.S. civilian diplomat in Zabul province, a former Marine Corps captain with combat experience in Iraq named Matthew Hoh, resigned to protest what he sees as a hopeless quagmire. After more than eight years of the current war, the people of Afghanistan are no better off, and their environment is being destroyed by war and resulting deforestation. And we're supposed to believe we have a moral responsibility to keep this going? If I break into your house and smash up your furniture, do I have a moral responsibility to spend the night? No, in fact I have a duty to turn myself in to the police.

It is illegal to invade and occupy other nations. The United Nations did

not sanction this attack and it was not in self-defense. It is illegal to use weapons that you know will kill large numbers of civilians. It is illegal to target civilians. It is illegal to use depleted uranium. It is illegal to scatter the countryside with cluster bombs the same color as food packets. It is illegal to imprison people without charge or trial. It is illegal to torture. The United Nations has warned the United States about its ongoing illegal use of drones. The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg concluded that aggressive war is "not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." What we are doing now is what we had in mind back then. A former assistant secretary of state during Bush's presidency wrote in the Washington Post this April 2nd that if the International Criminal Court begins prosecuting crimes of aggressions this year, potential defendants will include members of congress who fund aggressive wars. Is that likely? It's likely enough for a Bush man and the Washington Post to be worried about it.

If we do not prosecute crimes or at least cease to commit them and make amends, then what is likely is repetition. As recently as February the White House press secretary said the President was open to attacking Iran. In fact, President Obama asserted his power to make war in a peace prize acceptance speech in Oslo. And this week he created a policy of never using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states, with the exception of Iran. And let's keep in mind that any powers a president seizes unchallenged will belong to all future presidents. If anyone is going to prevent a future of wars like the current ones, it's going to be members of Congress who remember that the Constitution places war powers in their hands for a very good reason.

HOW MUCH DO WE OWE YOU?

If you're still convinced that the way to exit Afghanistan is to escalate the war, there may still be hope, because in order to vote for the funding you have to also believe that nothing more useful could be done with it. I will leave this discussion to my colleague from the National Priorities Project, except to highlight a few points. First, 27 million gallons of gasoline were used by the U.S. military in Afghanistan last month at a cost of up to \$100 per gallon. The New York Times last week reported yet again on our money being given out to Afghans, among whom are members of the Taliban who turn around and use it against US troops. The semblance of a coalition in this war is created by giving hundreds of millions of dollars to other nations. For \$1 million per troop sent, we could have 20 well-paid green jobs right here, one for that former soldier and 19 more. Massachusetts alone has spent \$7.5 billion on Afghanistan, not counting interest, veterans care,

the economic impact, etc. According to the analysis on Iraq produced by Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes the number certainly needs to be tripled if not quintupled.

The military puts hundreds of millions of dollars into this district (you can see the details at fedspending.org). But every dollar we give the military is a dollar less for jobs. Research from the University of Massachusetts Amherst found that nothing produces fewer jobs than the military. Funding education, energy, infrastructure, and other industries produces more jobs. Even cutting taxes produces more jobs. So even though you see military and weapons industry jobs everywhere, you're not getting a bang for your buck. Some of those bucks go right back where they came from. If opensecrets.org is correct, Congressman Delahunt, Raytheon gave \$10,000 to your last campaign.

The military itself is the most wasteful and least accountable government agency we have, and our own people in Afghanistan, in their own way, give Karzai some stiff competition in the corruption contest. According to Sen. Claire McCaskill's Contract Oversight subcommittee, oversight is gravely lacking. "In May 2009, DCMA [Defense Contract Management Agency] Director Charlie Williams told the Commission on Wartime Contracting that as many as 362 positions for Contracting Officer's Representatives (CORs) in Afghanistan were currently vacant." A USAID official said the agency is "spending too much money, too fast with too few people looking over how it is spent" and does not "know ... where the money is going." Plus we're hiring contractors to oversee contractors, which allows us to waste even more money. The Defense Contract Audit Agency found more than 16 percent of Defense contracts in Afghanistan to be questioned and unsupported costs. One place we can't possibly spend money so wastefully is right here at home where we can see it. And the most likely people to be able to manage money in Afghanistan are, in fact, Afghans.

HOW DOES IT END?

So, we're trudging along in the fog of war, either engaged in a crime or heroically pursuing glory, but how does it end? What does victory look like? If we've been through over eight years of this and not been able to even devise a rough description of what a "success" would look like, what are the chances that it will be identified and achieved in year number nine? The only possibility, I think, is if we identify a useful approach that involves tools other than the military. We need to announce a withdrawal date and a handover of bases. We need to negotiate peace, as President Karzai wants to do. And we need to assist people in pursuing a livelihood through non-drug farming.

Congressman Delahunt, you have opposed permanent U.S. bases in Iraq, and I assume you might be willing to oppose them in Afghanistan as well. Two years ago you introduced the "Protect Our Troops and Our Constitution Act" which would have banned permanent bases in Iraq, among other things. We have nearly 400 bases in Afghanistan now, and counting. Escalating the war will mean more bases, not fewer.

Zbigniew Brzezinski (whose history with Afghanistan goes back to the 1970s when he knowingly provoked a Russian invasion of what was then a much healthier nation) last October spoke in a Senate caucus room and said that one of the main reasons to occupy Afghanistan was to build a north-south pipeline to the Indian ocean. Nobody questioned this assertion. And yet, the RAND Corporation, at whose forum he was speaking, has put out a report finding that there is no military solution in Afghanistan. So we're going to send troops to build a pipeline in a place where troops cannot possibly halt the violence? Mikhail Gorbachev has some experience with occupations of Afghanistan. He advises withdrawal. Even the late former Congressman Charlie Wilson said Get out of Afghanistan. Whom will we listen to?

Increasingly, U.S. military veterans are advocating for withdrawal, and -- in small but rapidly growing numbers -- active duty soldiers (in the UK as well as the US) are refusing to comply with the illegal order to participate, and in some cases going to prison. Will we honor their sacrifice?

WHAT DO WE WANT?

Congressman Delahunt, we ask you to vote No on the \$33 billion escalation. But we would like you to do something much more serious: Commit now, ahead of time, to voting No and urge your colleagues to do the same. If a bill is destined to pass, and some dozens of members vote No against no resistance from their parties, that doesn't build the movement for peace. Committing ahead of time to vote No, and publicly making the case for it, is much more meaningful, because there is always the chance that your vote will actually matter and you will face the wrath of your party's leaders and other war supporters.

But you have announced your retirement. So you have no need to listen to your constituents, but you also have no need to listen to a party or to any campaign donors. And if the media doesn't like your decision to stand with us against the military industrial complex, we will have your back. Senator Kennedy said his most important vote was his vote against the Iraq War. Who knows, looking back, what you will tell your grandchildren your most important vote was.

We're asking for an unusual commitment, but less than those soldiers are making who refuse to go, and less than so many activists are making who routinely protest this war and, in many cases, face imprisonment. Whistleblowers have sacrificed their careers. We're asking you only to put a positive exclamation point on yours.

A year ago the President said that last year's war supplemental would be the very last one, and many congress members actually used that as a reason to vote for it. I think it's safe to assume that even Charlie Brown wouldn't kick that football this time around.

Lipstick is being applied to this pigskin however. \$2.8 billion for aid to Haiti will be put into this bill. And yet everyone knows that the Haiti aid can be passed separately. Nobody in Congress doubts that we know that they know that we know that they know it can be passed separately. So "I voted for a war in Afghanistan to help the Haitians" is unlikely to justify the wrong vote here.

Congressman McGovern is introducing bills requesting "flexible timetables" and unspecified exit plans. But passing such things in the House would mean having to pass them through the Senate and getting the president to sign them. And then nothing would necessarily change. Such things are not meaningless, but they are talk, rather than action. Obviously we can all talk. We want our congress members to govern. Congressman Obey's war tax bill is just as rhetorical, but signing onto it might stiffen his important spine.

Bruce Taub of Progressive Democrats of America gave me a report on a meeting with you, Congressman Delahunt, at which you said you had two concerns. One was the safety of our country. I hope to have addressed that one. The other was this, quoting Bruce quoting you: "President Obama is my leader. I respect him and trust him. I think he is earnest, someone who wants to genuinely do the best he can for the country, someone who considers all the options and is a thoughtful intelligent man. And if he thinks a supplemental is needed, I give that great deference."

But you seem like a thoughtful intelligent man yourself. And we elected you to the first branch of our government, the one that takes up the first 60 percent of our Constitution, the one to which our founders gave every power they'd seen King George abuse, the one whose laws and wars are to be faithfully executed by the executive. It was by giving war powers to a president that congress got us into this disaster in the first place. The House of Representatives has the power of the purse for precisely the purpose now at hand. To choose not to use it because you approve of the war would be one thing. To defer to a party not

sanctioned by the Constitution to make these decisions would be to undo our own revolution. For the people of this district to be represented by someone who simply obeys the president would be to grievously wound representative government in this land. I implore you, whatever you decide, to decide it yourself.

You will have to live with it. Your colleagues will have to face reelection on it this year. The president will not. And your colleagues may misinterpret the political winds. In your recent senate race as in our gubernatorial race down in Virginia, Democratic voters stayed home because nobody inspired them to turn out. Independent candidate and peace activist Peter White may inspire people in this district, but will the Democrats?

Republicans are turning against this war. The death count is about to jump. We have a financial crisis and an environmental crisis. Is this the time to be the party of reckless spending on foreign quagmire building? Did it work well for Lyndon Johnson?

We don't expect you to stand alone against this escalation. Others are already speaking out and whipping against it, and 65 congress members just voted to end the war entirely.

We don't expect you to stand against troops. The Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee has already committed to voting No on behalf of the troops.

We believe you can have an impact whether the bill goes down or not in building a caucus that will eventually end these wars and in sending a signal to the world that will make it harder for our government to keep resisting peace negotiations.

There came a time when Martin Luther King Jr. said "My conscience leaves me no other choice. . . A time comes when silence is betrayal."

Let's break the silence.