

Mr. President: Turn Away From War



Dear Mr. President:

According to press reports, you intend to decide between November 7 and November 11 whether or not to send tens of thousands of American soldiers to Afghanistan. We are writing in advance of that decision to add our voice to those of Sen. Feingold, many House Democrats, and of a clear majority of Americans in urging you not to escalate this war, but rather to announce an immediate cease-fire followed by a withdrawal of all US troops in the fastest way consistent with the safety of our forces. We urge you to end the policy of using Predator drones to assassinate Pakistani civilians on the territory of their own country, in defiance of all concepts of international law. We also call upon you to cease all covert CIA and Pentagon operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran.

No vital American interest is at stake in Afghanistan. Former Marine and State Department official Matthew Hoh is right: the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan have come to be viewed as invaders and occupiers, and the resistance they encounter has nothing to do with international terrorism. This war is futile, and now doomed to failure. There is no military solution to the problems that beset Afghanistan. Afghanistan and the rest of this tragically war-torn region need a Marshall Plan of peaceful economic development, through which some of the 15 million unemployed workers in our own country could find productive jobs. We have no confidence in the advice being given to you by military leaders like Gen. McChrystal, who has been implicated in torture in Iraq.

We supported your candidacy because we viewed you as the best chance for ending the wars of the Bush era. We applauded your rejection of the rhetoric of fear and division that was the stock in trade of Bush and Cheney. We are alarmed by the way that rhetoric has crept into your public pronouncements since your August address in Phoenix.

Your decision on Afghanistan will represent the decisive turning point of your presidency. If you turn away from war, you will provide a profile in courage that will solidify your support and open up a new perspective for progressive reforms in our country. You will honor the spirit of John F. Kennedy, who was searching for an exit

strategy from the Vietnam war. If you opt for a wider war, the resulting heavy casualties will destroy confidence in your leadership among your own most devoted advocates. Hundreds of billions of dollars will be poured down a rat hole, and will no longer be available for any reform and renovation of American society, which will increasingly fall behind the economic strength of other countries. Your domestic agenda will be halted, in the same way your predecessor Lyndon B. Johnson was crippled by the Vietnam war. Escalation of the Afghan war, in short, would be an act of political suicide for you, and of national suicide for our country.

We are keenly aware of the difficulties and animosities you face, and we have long done everything possible to give your administration the benefit of the doubt, even in the face of repeated disappointments. But we now approach the moment of truth: will you be a great progressive president, or will you prove too weak to turn away from the bankrupt policies institutionalized and entrenched under Bush and Cheney. Therefore, we want you to know our attitude before you decide on the proposed Afghan escalation. If you choose to escalate, we will oppose this policy with all the energy we possess. We will act to mobilize the largest possible anti-war demonstration in Washington DC and other cities before the end of 2009, and continuously thereafter. We will support anti-war candidates of any party in the 2010 elections. If you are still waging the Afghan war in 2011, we will be forced to seriously consider backing an explicitly anti-war primary candidate to challenge you during the Democratic primaries.

We therefore respectfully urge you to act in the spirit of your 2008 campaign – the spirit of hope and change, neither of which can survive the continuation or expansion of the hopeless Afghan war.

Cynthia McKinney, DIGNITY