

It's Time To End Our Costly Afghanistan War

President Obama addressed the nation on June 22 to explain his strategy for troop withdrawal in Afghanistan. Of the 100,000 U.S. troops currently deployed there, the announced drawdown of 10,000 soldiers by year's end and another 23,000 by September 2012 does little to end the longest war in U.S. history. Under this plan, approximately 70,000 troops will remain in the country, roughly twice as many as when Mr. Obama took office in January 2009. According to the president, these troops will be removed "at a steady pace" through 2014. In the meantime, the human and financial costs of this war will continue to grow.

There is no military solution to the complex and long-standing sociopolitical problems facing Afghanistan and the region. As long as a U.S. policy of large-scale military aggression continues, Afghans will resist what they perceive as another foreign invasion and occupation of their country. We need a new vision and approach in Afghanistan. This starts with a cease-fire and a full withdrawal of U.S. combat forces. To lay the groundwork for domestic stability and security, Afghanistan needs an Afghan-led,

VETERANS FOR PEACE

Brian J. Trautman

Afghan-owned reconciliation process and the diplomatic and humanitarian support of a broad-based international coalition.

Since 2001, 1,657 U.S. soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan. Nearly 11,200 American soldiers have been wounded. The exact number of Afghans and Pakistanis killed and maimed due to this war is unknown, but a Brown University study put the figure at tens of thousands. A large proportion of these casualties are the result of strikes by unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), which many in the international community argue are illegal. The deadliest month for Afghan civilians since the war began occurred last May. Just this month the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan admitted to killing innocent women and children during an airstrike on insurgents, and indicated that they are investigating a separate case of civilian casualties. These are common and unpreventable occurrences in any war, and the war in Afghanistan is no different. Since

World War I, there have been far more civilian casualties than military casualties in the major wars involving the U.S., and the ratio gets greater with each new war.

Support among Americans for the war in Afghanistan has dropped considerably since last year. A new survey from the Pew Research Center shows that a

majority (56%) of Americans want troops pulled from Afghanistan as soon as possible. The U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a resolution on June 20 that called on leaders in Washington to "bring war dollars home to meet vital human needs." Veterans For Peace recently signed on to a letter urging members of Congress to support an amendment to the FY12 Defense Appropriations Bill that would eliminate the funding need-

ed to continue the war. The letter also calls on the Congress "to redirect our national priorities away from militarism and towards social justice here at home." According to National Priorities Project, the cost of the war in Afghanistan since 2001 is now more than \$432 billion, and rising at a rate of about \$2.3 billion a

tributed to a massive national debt and record budget deficits at the federal, state and local levels. The economic crisis has some lawmakers advocating for austerity measures that would slash funding for essential public social services, which would further damage our economy and hurt Americans already struggling to make ends meet.

The Obama administration must refocus its priorities and strengthen its commitment to the American people. The President touched on this subject briefly in his speech, stating that "We must invest in America's greatest resource—our people. We must unleash innovation that creates new jobs and industries." However, a shift from rhetoric to reality will require Mr. Obama and the Congress to move a significant amount of federal spending away from the military and toward the urgent needs of American communities. Bringing the war in Afghanistan to an immediate end is a good start.

Brian J. Trautman is a U.S. Army veteran, peace educator and activist, and member of Veterans For Peace. He resides in Albany, N.Y.

End the War, Not Just the Surge
As long as a US policy of military aggression continues, Afghans will resist what they perceive as another foreign invasion

majority (56%) of Americans want troops pulled from Afghanistan as soon as possible. The U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a resolution on June 20 that called on leaders in Washington to "bring war dollars home to meet vital human needs." Veterans For Peace recently signed on to a letter urging members of Congress to support an amendment to the FY12 Defense Appropriations Bill that would eliminate the funding need-

week. A total of \$459.8 billion has been appropriated for the war through the end of the current fiscal year (Sept. 30). For the same amount of U.S. taxpayer money, the following could have been provided: 7.0 million elementary school teachers for one year, or; 94.6 million people receiving low-income healthcare for one year, or; 82.8 million students receiving Pell Grants of \$5,550. Over the past decade war spending has con-

Give America a Jobs Program That Works



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

While a Department of Education program embraces "a race to the top", our nation's current stance toward our 14 million officially unemployed people represents nothing less than a race to the bottom. We are content to report, month after month, unemployment rates in excess of nine percent, to use questionable language to describe tepid performance, and to assuage ourselves with myths that the economy is in recovery because GDP growth is up. Imagine that one of our children came home from school with a report card that showed a drop from a C- to a D, and she reported her grades as "substantially unchanged". She would, substantially, find her allowance cut, her study hours increased, her privileges restricted. But when high unemployment continues month after month, an unsatisfactory outcome in and of itself, we hear non-sense and platitudes.

Fourteen million people are just the tip of the iceberg. When we look at those who are discouraged, dropped out of the labor market, and all of that, we are looking at something

closer to 20 million people. Among African Americans we are looking at more than one in four without work, and in inner cities, we are looking at nearly one in two men who do not work. Employers won't create jobs, government won't create jobs, and rhetoric won't put people back to work.

Then, what are we to do? If traditional job creation will not fill the void, we must consider the possibility of encouraging entrepreneurship so that people can be trained to create jobs for themselves. Enslaved people were some of our nation's original entrepreneurs. What kind of job creation ability did it take for some of us to purchase ourselves. Throughout our history, there are people who never joined the Fortune 500, but who created jobs and opportunities for themselves and for others through entrepreneurship.

Elizabeth Keckley, the seamstress who bought her freedom and worked for Mary Todd Lincoln, and others in Washington, is an example of the kind of entrepreneurial ability so many of the formerly enslaved exhibited. Thomas Day built a furniture manufacturing company in North Carolina in 1837. Elijah McCoy, "the real McCoy" invented the lubricating cup that became an essential part of locomotive manufacturing in 1872, and made millions from that

invention. AG Gaston was an entrepreneur with interests in insurance, funeral homes, broadcasting, public relations, banking, and the hospitality industry. And the list goes on. All these folk are African American, many are little know, and each of them is a story of inspiration for someone

who is out of work.

Entrepreneurship will not replace traditional employment; indeed, entrepreneurs create employment opportunities for those who do not have them. Even as this administration grapples with our tepid economy, it seems that there ought to be some conversation about

encouraging entrepreneurs to create value in an economy that seems to devalue the lives, and efforts of at least 20 million of our citizens, those who want to work but can find nothing. It is interesting that some banks were described as "too big to fail", but we have easily tolerated failure

in the labor market.

Julianne Malveaux is President of Bennett College for Women. Her book, Surviving and Thriving: 365 Facts in Black Economic History, is available at www.lastword-prod.com.

We honor the many accomplishments of African Americans.



It is our primary goal as a labor union to better the lives of all people working in the building trades through advocacy, civil demonstration, and the long-held belief that workers deserve a "family wage" – fair pay for an honest day's work.

A family wage, and the benefits that go with it, not only strengthens families, but also allows our communities to become stronger, more cohesive, and more responsive to their citizens' needs.

Our family wage agenda reflects our commitment to people working in the building trades, and to workers everywhere. In this small way, we are doing our part to help people achieve the American Dream. This dream that workers can hold dear regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, creed, or religious beliefs.



The Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters

Representing more than 5,000 construction workers in Oregon state.

Do you want to know more about becoming a Union carpenter?
Go to our website at www.nwcarpenters.org

Offices in Portland
1636 East Burnside
Portland, OR 97214
503.261.1862 • 800.974.9052

Headquarters in Kent, WA
25120 Pacific Hwy S, Ste 200
Kent, WA 98032
253.945.8800 • 800.573.8333