

# A “Humanitarian War” Is an Oxymoron

By [John Robles](#) and [Kathy Kelly](#)

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In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

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One hundred billion dollars has been spent on Afghan reconstruction by the United States, yet nothing has improved for the Afghan people. Two billion dollars a week has been spent for over a decade to fight 55 Al-Qaeda operatives. The US continues to slaughter civilians on a regular basis, yet Hamid Karzai has done nothing. Nobel Peace Prize winner Barack Obama says he will “... get the heart of Al-Qaeda”, yet few people in Afghanistan know anything about Al-Qaeda, and yes, the U.S. did torture people in Afghanistan. After close to a dozen extended trips to Afghanistan, 3 time Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Kathy Kelly, the co-coordinator for Voices for Creative Nonviolence spoke to the VOR’s John Robles about all of the above and more, painting a horrendously grim picture of the U.S. “success” in Afghanistan.

Robles: You’ve been to Afghanistan almost a dozen times, right? How has life changed for the common Afghan people?

Kelly: One of the main changes I think is that the corruption has gone viral. You know, the SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction) report, the special investigative report on Afghan reconstruction was issued and it said that the amount of money the United States has spent on development aid now approaches \$100 billion.

But \$100 billion has not gone into repairing the infrastructure or enabling healthcare delivery, or improving education, not by a long shot which just brings about a tremendous weariness, because people can’t get their basic needs met and the economy isn’t functioning properly at all.

Many people lay blame for that on the United States for not having had any shred of wisdom about how to help form an entrepreneurial class that could give people a stake in their economy. And of course \$2 billion was spent every single week on maintaining the United States military, while starvation, disease and unemployment were on the rise.

Robles: How has the US managed, or how have they attempted to sell their occupation of Afghanistan to the Afghan people?

Kelly: The United States Government has become adept at selling their wars, marketing their wars to the US public as “humanitarian wars”. Now, that’s an oxymoron. How could there be a humanitarian war? But they try to make it sound as if the US has been protecting and looking after women and children, protecting them from the Taliban, looking after their needs.

And both of those statements just simply don't pan out when you look at statistics and when you talk with everyday ordinary people.

One out of every eleven Afghan women dies in childbirth – that's a torturous way to die. One out of five children doesn't make it beyond their fifth birthday. In places like Bamyán, a relatively peaceful province, the only hours when you can get any electricity at all are between 1 and 3 in the morning.

Afghanistan is a country that has an alarming rate of acute malnutrition according to the United Nations, particularly in the south, and they say one million children suffer from acute malnutrition.

There are 400 new refugees every day driven into the Afghan cities by the war. And you can see sprawling camps where people in the snow during this harsh cold are living in lean-to's and poorly constructed tents. So, the idea that somehow the United States is engaged in something humanitarian is just outlandish.

Robles: Ok, I understand that and I understand all of the propaganda in the West, but what kind of propaganda do they feed the "Afghan people" to get them to somehow accept the occupation?

Kelly: One of the most fearsome intelligence secret police agencies in the world is the NDS, the National Directorate of Security. And we should also note that the latest UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan) report said that over half of the Afghan people in jail were tortured. So, no one wants to be identified as someone who in any way is subverting the Government's aims.

And President Hamid Karzai will try to appease and mollify the public after, say ten civilians are killed, which just happened the night of Obama's State of the Union Address. A United States aerial attack killed ten people, there were four little girls and a little boy and five women, and one man and they were all civilians. And this sort of thing happens again and again and again, and then President Hamid Karzai will say: "Well, I won't tolerate this and the United States has to stop this and this is unacceptable."

And it just seems as though he issues these statements to try to appease public anger. You know, sometimes people are burning effigies of US leaders. But he hasn't been able to stop the United States from engaging in the despicable night raids and in drone bombardments.

People are very afraid to speak up and with a good reason, because the Afghan secret police could do them grievous-grievous harm.

Reminder

Robles: Who is doing all that torturing, in your opinion?

Kelly: Sometimes the United States will put people in prison and then turn them over to the Afghan authorities. And if the United States hadn't imprisoned them in the first place, and sometimes they are held without charge for months, then they wouldn't have been vulnerable to being tortured by the Afghan authorities.

In the Bagram prison and in secret sites within the Bagram prison there have been

complaints about the United States engaging in torture. I think in more recent years the United States has been turning over more and more of its prison authorities and facilities to the Afghan people.

Robles: I'd like to ask you a hypothetical: what if, for example; China invaded the United States and they started killing people left and right, and anyone who fought against them was thrown into a prison for being a criminal, I mean: How would Americans feel?

Kelly: I think if the shoe were on the other foot and the Golden Rule were invoked, people all across this country would understand why it is that people start to join fighting forces.

There is a very interesting quote from a staff sergeant who is fictitiously named by an embedded reporter, in an article in The American Prospect John Frey embedded himself with a group doing night raids.

And after a week of these night raids, which are just horrendous invasions of other people's homes... He said they tornadoed through houses, they broke people's dishes and deliberately destroyed their furniture, shot the dog that was sleeping, hog-tied the householders. They didn't do things that you could accuse as being war crimes but they create a huge antagonism.

At the end of that week the staff sergeant said: "You could say we just did a week long recruiting drive for the Taliban." And then he continued, " ...and you know what; we had fun doing it! I like recruiting for the Taliban, you could call it job security for us." And that's the end of the quote...

Robles: In Obama's State of the Union address, he quite proudly said they: "... would get the heart of Al Qaeda". He said that with great pride, to a standing ovation. I wanted to ask you; how many Al-Qaeda "operatives or fighters or terrorists" are operating in Afghanistan? And are the Afghan people, or the Taliban: is that the heart of Al Qaeda in your opinion?

Kelly: When Leon Panetta was asked that question in December of 2011, I was shocked by his answer, you know (How many Al Qaeda operatives are there in Afghanistan?) He said: "Oh, about 55".

Robles: 55!?!

Kelly: 55. \$2 billion a week the United States is spending to maintain a full military presence and there might be as many as 55 Al Qaeda figures in the country?

I don't think that that's the reason why the United States' war has been perpetuated in Afghanistan. I think that Al Qaeda has been used and that there are many different kinds of Taliban fighters, that some of them wouldn't have even heard of the aims of Al Qaeda, and what's more, I think, that the US insisting that the solution to every problem has to be a military solution; using threat and force, is in a sense endorsing the same aims as the Al Qaeda figures.

Parting

End of Part 1

You were listening to an interview with Kathy Kelly - the co-coordinator for Voices for

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