



**OBAMA OVERBOARD:  
FOUNDERING IN THE WATERS OF WAR**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

And so, peace must be postponed, Affordable housing and healthcare delayed, clean air and renewable energy assigned a less important place on the agenda, and a serious public and private employment initiative is reduced to searching for relief in periodic reports, and the old Reagan irrationality of rising tides and raising all-boats, even the scuttled and sunken ones. The military and their corporate and congressional allies have moved us on to an escalated, unjustifiable and unwinnable war, outmaneuvering and upstaging President Obama, pressing him to take the leap or look weak and unworthy of the title “Commander-in-Chief”. Indeed, generals feigned fear of defeat and disgrace in the war without escalation, threatened to resign if the President did not comply, leaked information to the press and gave unauthorized media interviews which pushed Obama overboard into the waters of an escalated war for fear of losing warrior credibility with the American public and seeming to betray the troops already committed.

There was a kind of cocky confidence exhibited by Obama’s generals who, after all, have been elevated to such public veneration that Presidents have turned to declaring they will make their decisions based on what the military says is necessary. It is a concession in strategic policy that no serious democracy should make and that it goes on without concern or adequate attention speaks to how strong the military-industrial complex has become.

It is no doubt to be expected of imperial, invading and occupying powers to leave out of their discussion of war and waste, the damage and destruction-done and continuing to be done- to the oppressed and preyed-upon peoples. These people appear as mere collateral considerations in the decision to

withdraw, expand the war, support the collaborating elite or offer varied versions of carrot and stick, gift and gun, bread and bombs. Indeed, it is some of the enduring signature signs of the pathology of an oppressor or imperial power to lie to itself about what it’s doing to the lives and lands of the people it invades, conquers and occupies; to pretend its predation is progressive, if not salvational; and in one last expression of moral and mental disorientation, to claim they would withdraw, if the people they attacked would stop counterattacking and resisting them.

So let us unfurl the flag, piously put on our flag pin, sing the U.S. national anthem with due solemnity, force and fervor, and declare with conviction our need for security, resources and respect of various earned and extracted kinds. But let us not lie to ourselves about what we are doing in this war, how we got into it and how it not only affects the lives and lands in which the war unfolds, but also the effect these wars will have on this country and the world for coming generations.

It is easy to focus on the failure of Pres. Obama to decide in the interest of peace and social good, but it’s important to place his announced decision in context, realize it wasn’t his alone, and that the problems that produced this fateful decision and which confront all progressives and the country, have a longer and more ominous history. Indeed, it is a context of interrelated factors and forces which not only produced the decision, but made it predictable.

The first factor is the steady rise of the power and prestige of the military-industrial complex, that even outgoing President Eisenhower, a former general, warned about concerning its continued rise and its political, economic, social and even spiritual impact on the country and its people. It is the same

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problem Dr. Martin L. King warned about in his Vietnam War speeches when he posed as the fundamental and enduring problems of the U.S. racism, militarism and materialism.

The military industrial complex has grown incredibly larger and more powerful than in Eisenhower's or King's time. It has attained an untouchable status as the defender against all our real, imagined and anticipated enemies, a shield against cultivated fear and falling from a position of world dominance. Thus, it is given unlimited resources, even in an era when all other programs are told to accept sacrifice and cuts, given enhanced space in the media, and employed in both developmental and diplomatic initiatives. And especially ominous is the tendency to conceptualize and approach much, if not most, of U.S. foreign policy as an issue of national security with a military option. Also, politicians play into this ever-expanding role and elevated status of the military because of the political and economic benefit to them and their districts.

A second and interrelated problem is strong public support for the military and military solutions. Much of this is due to the volunteer character of the army, the lack of shared sacrifice and fantasy conceptions of the awesome toll war actually takes. Moreover, the horrors of war are hidden from the American public and also Americans share addictive illusions about their exceptionalism and self-assigned role as police and pro-consuls of the world. Obama said in his call to war that "we can't count on military might

alone", but here, he has given no alternative. Finally, we have to concede that the problem also lies with the progressives—liberals, leftists, radicals and "robust reformers" who have not made serious moves to build a progressive movement capable of helping to shape U.S. policy. Internet activism is easy, but it is no substitute for on-the-ground activism, engaging the people in the process and practice of transforming their lives and forging a good future.

In his critique of U.S. society during the Vietnam War, Dr. King called on the country to look soberly and honestly at what we are doing at home and abroad in prosecuting an immoral and unjust war and letting critical problems at home go unsolved. "If we look at the realities of our national life", he said, "It is clear that we are not moving forward; we are groping and stumbling; we are divided and confused". He praised the Black Freedom struggle as more than simply a struggle for Black rights, but equally important also a struggle to radically reconstruct society. He said, our struggle "is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws, racism, poverty, militarism and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced." This was our charge and challenge then; and it is even more pertinent and pressing now at this critical juncture where peace-and-justice is the only rightful and rewarding way forward.

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