



**CONSIDERING KING IN CRITICAL TIMES:
DARING TO OPPOSE WAR AND PRACTICE PEACE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

AS WE WEAVE OUR WAY THROUGH THE daily dose of lies and illusions, hype, hatred and hypocrisy from the *White House*, we must constantly question and be actively concerned about the relative sanity and real danger of those who continuously fake “imminent threats” and cry wolf to make war, and then try to wash away their sins of savagery with the dishonest indictment and blood of others. We live in a world with dangerous, destructive and deceptive people who feed on falsehood, vampire on the vulnerable and mask resource robbery and imperialist wars of choice as humanitarian missions and measures of national security and self-defense for themselves and their allied dictators and associate so-called democracies.

This deception and the persistent masking and mendacity it requires, involves a large cast of characters, not simply those in the alternate reality and groveling zone of the White House and Congress. It clearly involves a committed, compliant and pretentiously critical corporate media with its accommodating intellectuals and experts. It involves too social media space claimed by various trolls and heavily populated by those unconcerned about life beyond shameless self-exposure, fake friends, dog loving and human hating of the most perverse and petty kind. And, of course, this systemic deception and deceptiveness involves a public too much in accord, too little in resistance, and too often deeply complicit in what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. calls the unconscionable and unworthy *betrayal of silence*.

In this critical time of wars and rumors of wars and threats of wars of annihilation and in the context of the celebration and commemoration of the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, his teachings on war and peace offer us an important path forward. For we know we are not really saved or made safe by the assassination or savaging of others or by wars, invasions and occupations. And we are reminded by Dr. King that there is no real peace without justice and by Min. Malcolm that the winds of injustice blow

back in righteous resistance, and the chickens will inevitably come back home to roost.

Here I want to especially draw from Dr. King’s decisive speech opposing the war on Vietnam, referencing other relevant sources as is appropriate. King begins stating that he embraces the concept that “there comes a time when silence is betrayal.” As I read him, a silence in the face of unchecked evil, injustice and oppression is a betrayal not only of the victims, but also of ourselves as moral beings, sensitive to human suffering and a betrayal of the principles we claim to hold dear and sacred. And thus, speaking up in resistance in a context of the urging and waging of war is vital, not only to the victims, but also to the well-being of the world.

King knows and states that to act and even speak against government policy is a difficult decision. For “Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men (and women) do not easily assume the task of opposing their government’s policy, especially in times of war.” Moreover, he notes there is also the tendencies of apathy, conformity and confusion to contend with and overcome. But he says in spite of all this, we must speak up and act in resistance to evil, injustice and oppression in the world. And we must begin by questioning America’s behavior in the world, especially the injustice and violence it imposes on the vulnerable peoples around the world.

In addition, he tells us we must see the linkage between the struggle we are waging for freedom and justice in this country with wars the government is waging abroad and recognize how these wars draw resources, skills and energies from social programs, especially for the poor “like some demonic destructive suction tube.” Indeed, he states, he “was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.” Moreover, he wants the American people to recognize that their government “is the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today” and to abandon its belief that it must use “massive doses of vio-

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lence to solve its problems (and) to bring about the changes it want(s).”

King also speaks against demonizing the designated enemy of the day. He rejects human hatred and narrow national, racial and religious allegiances that foster and sustain hostility and war, limit our concept of our humanity, and reduce our moral sensitivity to irrational and immoral claims of racial, religious and national superiority. And he asks the haters and howlers for blood to recognize the humanity of our designated enemies and their having the same human needs we have for respect, justice, freedom and security, and control of their own destiny and daily lives. Indeed, he says, there can be no real peace or “meaningful solution until some attempt is made to know them,” to hear and respect them and to be sensitive to their suffering under “the curse of war,” especially that which America has caused.

King tells us that key also to this cultivated and strengthened sense of shared humanity and shared aspirations for good in the world is our commitment to stand up, act and “to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers (and sisters).” Therefore, King today would tell his fellow Americans to be *morally sensitive* and *rightfully responsive* to the suffering of the peoples of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and yes, Palestine. And he would also include in his call to human responsiveness to the peoples of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Zimbabwe and especially Haiti, whose suffering and resistance to two centuries of American intervention, occupation and suppression is written in large blood red letters of lost and mangled lives.

It is this demonstration of human sensitivity to the suffering of others, especially concern with the suffering that we ourselves have caused

and are causing, Dr. King says, that “helps us to see the enemy’s point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves.” Then, “From his view, we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own position, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from brothers (and sisters) who are called the opposition” and enemy. For “somehow this madness must stop,” Dr. King says. Therefore, we must dare to oppose war and pursue and practice peace. “We must find new ways to speak for peace . . . and justice” throughout the world. Otherwise, America will be “dragged down the long dark corridor of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight.”

Dr. King would say now as then, “The great initiative in this war is ours.” And thus, “the initiative to stop it is ours.” It is clearly the country’s obligation as a whole, but it is our responsibility as a people to be in the vanguard and rearguard of this struggle. Indeed, Dr. King tells us at the beginning of his accepting the invitation of leadership in 1955, we must struggle in such a way that future generations and “historians will have to say ‘there lived a great people – a Black people – who injected new meaning and dignity in the veins of civilization’. This is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility.”

LET US, IN ALLIANCE AND COALITION, then, honor this call and challenge, and dare struggle to oppose war and practice peace, demanding: *no war on Iran; no troops in Iraq and Afghanistan; no more money for war; end sanctions against Iran; no sanctions against Iraq; end empire, imperialist interventions and occupations everywhere; and respect the right of self-determination, justice, security and the shared good and goods of the world for everyone.* ▲

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