

The Real Costs of War

by Janet Jagan

The costs of war are far beyond what most may imagine who live outside of the war zones. Today, there are several wars on our planet – some big, some relatively small. The main ones, however, in Iraq, Afghanistan and parts of Africa, specifically Somalia, are central areas of death, hunger, displacement, migration, poverty and a host of ills.

In Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, the death tolls are high, as well as serious injuries and loss of structures and services, like water and electricity. Civilian death tolls are generally much higher than in the military. Iraq is an example of this where the death toll of US soldiers is well above the 2,000 mark whereas there are no specific numbers for civilians - but the estimates place figures well above a quarter million. Also, the migration rate is extremely high – some two million have fled to bordering countries and about one million to areas away from the war zones within Iraq.

But there are many other features of war that are almost as serious as death, injuries and migration. There are the loss of homes, schools, hospitals and the services so necessary to

modern life – water, electricity, garbage disposal, education, healthcare and so on.

Employment is more difficult to find and in most war zones, people lose their belongings. The most essential things that are needed are not available or there is no money to purchase them.

War has many dimensions and it is not hard to see that the Bush administration containing some of the most dangerous war hawks in history, has not only destroyed the lives of thousands of Americans and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans but has led to the world financial crisis that may take years to overcome.

In the past two weeks a financial crisis, the proportions of which have never before been encountered, began in the USA and spread to Europe and Asia. Some say it is the worst since the great depression of the 1930's, but others say it is much greater because this time it is global.

Former US President Jimmy Carter put it succinctly when he said the causes were the "atrocious economic policies" of the Bush regime. "The profligate

spending, massive borrowing and dramatic tax cuts", Carter said, were behind the market turmoil and economic crisis.

Most of the "profligate spending" has had to do with the two wars President Bush led his country into. The military spending has

been phenomenal – way into the billions; in fact, billions every month with no end in sight, except, hopefully, a new government in office after the November elections.

Carter reminds us that President Clinton left office with a budget surplus, low inflation and a stable, strong economy. Bush wrecked that healthy state of affairs and today the USA is in debt well into the fantasy world of trillions of dollars.

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So much has been wasted in Iraq! According to a BBC investigation of funds to rebuild Iraq, as much as \$23 billion (US) allocated to contractors working in Iraq may have been lost, stolen or not properly accounted for. "The money that's gone into waste, fraud and abuse under these contracts is just so outrageous" commented Henry Waxman, Chairman of the US House Committee on Oversight Government



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Reform. He suggested that this "may well turn out to be the largest war profiteering in history." (The New York Review, July 17, 2008).

This column has made repeated references to the links between the US Vice President who was once CEO for the firm of Halliburton and the contracts in billions of US dollars granted to that firm during the Iraq war and present occupation.

Another fall out of the war was observed by the UK Guardian Weekly (September 5, 2008). This article entitled "More soldiers in Jail as Combat Stress Soars" shows a new development in the lives of returned British soldiers who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. A report estimates that at least 8,500 former soldiers are in prison – 9% of the UK prison population and nearly doubling the estimate of a previous

study by the UK Home office in 2004 which put the figure at 5%.

The report states that the Defence Ministry recently carried out its own assessment and a pilot study concluded that almost 17% of the inmates of Dartmouth prison had been members of the armed forces. Many of the former soldiers in prison were found guilty of drug-taking, use of excess alcohol and violence as a result. Adapting to civilian life and burdened by their war experiences, many former soldiers have problems they cannot resolve. The war has affected thousands of soldiers, both physically and mentally and has made the return to civilian life difficult and in some cases impossible.

War has so many dire consequences! No wonder peace is an urgent task for everyone. Countries need leaders who are aware of the many dangers of war. Some, as did Bush, side step the services of the United Nations and rush into military conflicts. As the date of the US elections gets closer, world attention focuses on this momentous event and hopes prevail that the war-mongers in Washington will suffer defeat.