Americans who were listening in the first weeks after September 11th were told 4 reasons for some of the anger in the Middle East towards the U.S.: 

• The deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children due to US/UN sanctions
• The permanent stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia
• The U.S. support for Arab dictators (including Saddam Hussein)
• The anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab bias of our foreign policy

For a few weeks – until the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan began – the U.S. media was open to listening to what others had to tell us about our foreign policy. Then, once the war began, the attitudes needed to justify our violence stopped us from listening.

What would a nonviolent response to 9-11 look like? (continued from front)

What would a nonviolent response to 9-11 look like? (continued on back)

2 It’s remarkable to read in this article how precisely the U.S. was warned against a unilateral war on terrorism. A U.S.-educated Yemeni lawyer says “if violence escalates, you bring seeds and water for terrorism. You kill someone’s brother or mother, and you will just get more crazy people.” The Prime Minister of Lebanon warned, “launching a war is in the hands of the Americans, but winning it needs everybody.” The Gallup Poll attached to the article shows only 3 of 15 countries supporting an attack on a country where terrorists are based vs. trying to extradite the terrorists. In Mexico 2% supported attack.

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The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) commissioned a poll in six Iraqi cities over May 14-23, 2004; the poll results were kept secret until released to the press. When Iraqis were asked how do you view Coalition Forces, 92% said “as occupiers” and only 2% said “as liberators.” The poll is on the Associated Press web site at http://wid.ap.org/documents/iraq/cpapoll_files/frame.htm with these results on slide #35.

And this stopped us from cultivating the understanding needed to create more successful, nonviolent responses.

Successful nonviolent action is anything but passive – and that depends crucially on the attitudes behind the actions of those practicing it. A key element of practical nonviolence is empathy. If we listen, deeply and honestly – especially to those seen as “the enemy” – then we are much more likely to develop skillful and successful nonviolent responses. Even if we don’t win an “enemy” over, our action based on listening and understanding needs to be called competent nonviolence. It may fail to capture those responsible for police responses to capture those responsible for police responses to capture those responsible for police responses (e.g., a legal, political and police response to capture those responsible for police responses) – and is often judged solely by those responses.

Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. both believed that nonviolent practitioners of nonviolence are more successful than those who aren’t. If we learn from this, build the physical action involved, but great.

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