

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

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Nov 1, 2012 - Issue 492

Cover Story **This Election Is Not A** **Pathway To Accomplishment** **Nafsi ya Jamii** **By Wilson Riles** **BC Columnist**

This election – like most elections in the U.S. – is not a pathway to **accomplish** very much. At best it is an opportunity for a defensive action such as to prevent bad Supreme Court nominations or to prevent the presentation of somewhat worst government budget offerings as a starting point for Congress' deliberations and for welfare to corporate pigs. Whoever wins, progressive activists must know that it takes concerted action from the bottom to make sustainable change happen! Remembering President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's example is useful here. After his election in 1932, FDR met with labor leaders, many of them active socialists with whom he had worked over the previous decade or more. These leaders arrived with plans they wanted the new President to implement. Roosevelt told them: "I agree with you, I want to do it, now make me do it."

The lesson of Roosevelt's example could not be truer than of the change that is needed in regards to U.S. policy in the Middle East and the avoidance of war with Iran. Regardless of political Party, no U.S. President will change course unless made to do so from the grassroots. Like South African Apartheid, the issue of Middle East peace is "touching" enough folks whereby a spurt in bottom up organizing could produce the necessary shift in direction. You name it – gas prices, nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, religious fundamentalism, "Defense" spending, racism and antisemitism and anti-Islamism, colonialism and "exceptionalism," wars and the potential of wars – all these issues and more are all entangled in the dynamics around the

Middle East. And there is already a rising tide of organizing happening. Combine this with an up and coming December event and we progressives are presented with a unique opportunity for worldwide joint organizing that is historic!

For thirty years, the United Nations has called for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East. The 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference unanimously called for an international conference to begin discussing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. The proposed Conference is scheduled for mid- December, 2012, in Helsinki, Finland.

Black "Americans" and indigenous peoples around the world have a major responsibility and the moral standing as sufferers, prophetic leaders, and speakers for fairness and justice to speak out and be heard on all of the relevant questions. **We are the voices that you will hear little of in most elections – even Barack Obama (by his own admission) does not speak with an African American voice.** President Obama, despite his continuation of the **\$3 billion of annual subsidy and his addition of \$200 million for Iron Dome** – of dubious military value – to Israel, is not liked by Israeli's leadership because he dared to take a more nuanced position in regards to the Middle East. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has made clear, despite his recent efforts to camouflage it, that he prefers Romney. Paul Craig Roberts said, "The closest the campaign has come to this political issue is which candidate can grovel the lowest at the feet of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Romney won that contest. But for the rest, well, it is like two elementary school children sticking their tongues out at one another."

Instead, on the questions of the Middle East, blacks have the courageous voices of **Alice Walker, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and Angela Davis.** And let's not forget our beautiful black sister, **Cynthia McKinney.** She was elected in 1992 as the first African-American woman to represent Georgia in the House. She lost her Congressional re-election effort in 2002, I believe, due to her controversial profile, which included support for Arab causes. McKinney was reelected in 2004 where she supported anti-Iraqi-war legislation and introduced articles of impeachment against President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. McKinney lost re-election, again, in 2006. Cynthia stated that "The Anti-Defamation League wanted me out of Congress and filed an amicus brief in the Supreme Court case to dismantle the District that sent me to Washington, D.C."

Quixotically speaking for himself, Obama (in 2010) supported the idea of the December IAEA Conference on a nuclear-free Middle East, The idea of a nuclear-free Middle East had been kicking around for years, but gained a major boost when the US endorsed the idea. Having endorsed the plan, it took less than 24 hours for the US State Department to express "deep regrets" over the signing, saying it was unfair. President Obama followed up by calling the signing a mistake and insisted Israel has a "right" to nuclear weapons. **This brother definitely does not speak for me.**

Polls have consistently shown strong support **among Israelis** for a nuclear-free zone in the region, but the hawkish government in power in Israel has blasted every proposal to even discuss the subject, saying it "unfairly singles out" Israel by virtue of the fact that Israel is the only nation with a nuclear weapons program in the first place, as well as the only non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty in the region. So, the Israeli government leadership – with its many illogical pronouncements – **does not speak for the Israeli people, either.**

Shibley Telhami (a professor of government at the University of Maryland) and **Steven Kull** (director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes) published a report in January of 2012 that laid out the Israeli government's fallacious argument. "The debate over how to handle Iran's nuclear program is notable for its gloom and doom. Many people assume that Israel must choose between letting Iran develop nuclear weapons or attacking before it gets the bomb. But this is a false choice. There is a third option: working toward a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East. And it is more feasible than most assume...Most important, when asked whether it would be better for both Israel and Iran to have the bomb, or for neither to have it, 65 percent of Israeli Jews said neither. And a remarkable 64 percent favored the idea of a nuclear-free zone, even when it was explained that this would mean Israel giving up its nuclear weapons."

In response to Netanyahu's "red line" performance at the UN, the national organization [United for Peace and Justice](#) concluded that the threat of war now has been extended into spring 2013. Madness has stopped for the moment. "Instead of war, the United Nations is offering a logical solution to the crisis: establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction." The importance of the attendance and diplomatic participation of the United States and Israel in this Conference is crucial and cannot be overstated. It could prove to be a venue for a regional security dialogue. The United States' lack of visibility in promoting this

conference is unacceptable. What alternative is there towards securing a peaceful Middle East if not through the doors of diplomacy? The roles that Israel and the U.S. play are pivotal in establishing security policies of all Middle Eastern countries. This Helsinki Conference provides an opportunity for a Middle East without nuclear weapons. It can lead to further discussions for securing a lasting peace in the Middle East.

Progressive forces are stirring all over the planet. There are now billboards which state "\$8 million a day to Israel just doesn't make sense!" that can be viewed from US-50 westbound, just before it meets with I-80, southwest of Sacramento. The billboards were put up by the Free Palestine Movement (to support click [here](#) to donate on line). On Wednesday, October 24, 2012, Richard Falk, the U.N. special investigator on human rights in the Palestinian territories, called for a boycott of all companies that have dealings with Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem until they adhere to international rights standards and practices. In the report presented to the U.N. General Assembly, Falk said a number of Israeli-owned and multinational corporations headquartered in the U.S. [Caterpillar Inc., Hewlett Packard, and Motorola], Europe [Volvo] and Mexico appear to be violating international human rights and humanitarian laws by exploiting Palestinian resources and helping Israel construct illegal settlements and provide security for them. The U.S. and Israel protested the report but the new Egyptian government supported it.

Lots of people are on the move and the time is ripe. Pressuring the U.S. and Israel (by way of the U.S.) to participate in the talks on a Nuclear Free Middle East in the IAEA Conference in December in Helsinki provides the path. Using the lessons learned around the world through the boycott and divestment from South Africa to end Apartheid and other creative acts is the means. Following the moral leadership of such luminaries as Alice Walker, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Angela Davis, and Cynthia McKinney is the inspiration. Regardless of who is elected President, this must be done.

Note: This would be a perfect time for President Obama to GIVE BACK his undeserved Nobel Peace Prize – like Le Doc Tho did because of continued unrest in Vietnam – unless he is able to bring these talks about and carry them to completion.

[Nafsi ya Jamii is the Swahili phrase that translates in English to "The Soul Community"]

BlackCommentator.com Columnist, *Wilson Riles*, is a former Oakland, CA City Council Member. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Riles.



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