

## **Voice**



# Decision to Return Magsaysay Award and US Degrees on the Role of the US in War in Gaza



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"The Writer is General Secretary of the Socialist Party (India).

When I received the Magsaysay Award in 2002, a little controversy was created due to my decision to participate in a protest outside the United States embassy in Manila against the impending attack on Iraq, immediately a day after the award ceremony in which the award was presented by the Philippines President. The then Chairperson of Magsaysay Foundation had tried to dissuade me from participating in the protest on the pretext that it would harm the reputation of the foundation. I contended that the award mentioned my participation in a peace march in India for global nuclear disarmament from Pokhran to Sarnath in 1999, and hence, my anti-war position was well known. I had to honor the decision taken at a peace conference at a University in Manila which, coincidentally, concluded on 31 August, the day Magsaysay Awards were handed over, to stage a protest at the US embassy as I was invited to the conference as well. After the protest on 1 September, a Manila newspaper published an editorial challenging me. They said that if I was a man of principles, that I would like them to believe, then I should return the award to the US embassy before returning to India. This suggestion made my decision easier. I returned the cash component of the award from the airport which came from the Ford Foundation of the US but in a letter to the Chairperson of the Magsaysay Foundation, I said that for the time being I was keeping the award as it was named after a former popular Philippines President and had been given in my country to personalities like Jayaprakash Narayan, Vinoba Bhave, and Baba Amte, whom I considered as my ideals. I had mentioned in that letter that if the Magsaysay Foundation ever thought that I was harming their reputation too much, I would be happy to return the award as well.

I think that the time has come. Magsaysay Award is primarily funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the category in which I received the award is funded

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by the Ford Foundation, both American foundations. Given the role of the US in blatantly supporting Israel in the current offensive against Palestinian citizens, more than 35,000 of whom are dead, and continuing to sell arms to Israel, it has become unbearable for me to keep the award. I, therefore, am deciding to finally return the award too. I would like to apologize to the people of the Philippines if they feel hurt because of President Ramon Magsaysay's name associated with this award. My protest is only because of the American connection with the award.

As I return the Magsaysay award, I also feel that I should relieve myself of the degrees I have obtained in the US. Hence, I am also deciding to return my dual MS degrees in Manufacturing and Computer Engineering to Syracuse University in upstate New York and my PhD degree in Mechanical Engineering to the University of California at Berkeley. Incidentally, I was made conscious of the involvement of US academic institutions, especially their engineering and science departments, in defense projects during the protest on the Berkeley campus in 1991 against the US war on Iraq launched by senior President Bush. Professor Pravin Varaiya of Electrical Engineering, whose research area, Control Systems, was the same as mine, and who was also a participant in the anti-war protests, made me realize that I was also unknowingly part of the war machine of the United States. Thus began my disillusionment with my research area and I decided to change my research area once I take up teaching at the Indian Institute of Technology at Kanpur in 1992.

Again, let me make it clear that I am not against the American people or even the country. I think the US is one country which respects human rights the most and offers the best freedom of expression, but sadly it is true only within the country. Outside the US, it seems to have little regard for human rights, especially in the third-world countries. If it respects justice then it should stand with the side facing oppression in any war. It took the correct position in the Russian war on Ukraine but when it comes to Israel against Palestine it is inexplicable why the US chooses to turn a blind eye to the misfortunes and sufferings of the Palestinians and overlooks the crimes of Israeli defense forces. Had it been any other country, it would have imposed sanctions against it, as it did along with the rest of the world against South Africa, when apartheid was still practiced there.

I have to take the hard decision because I think the US is singularly responsible for encouraging Israel to continue its aggression against Palestinians contrary to popular world opinion. It could have played the role of mediator, like it once did, and tried to negotiate peace between Israel and Palestine. The creation of the sovereign state of Palestine and its recognition by the United Nations as a full member is essential toward the solution of the problem. But it is strange that the US, which not very long back handed over Afghanistan, much bigger in area, to the Taliban on a silver platter knowing very well that it was jeopardizing the civil liberties of common Afghans, especially the women, parrots the Israeli position about Hamas being a terrorist organization ignoring the fact that Hamas has won an election in Palestine, unlike the Taliban. I feel that it is time to call out the double standards of the US government.