



Washington's Wars and Occupations **Month in Review #42**

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HARD TIMES ADDED TO WAR TIMES: ARE WE READY?

Six years ago it was Mission Accomplished, the World's Sole Superpower, Free Market Reigns Supreme, and Karl Rove salivating over the prospect of one-party Republican rule for a generation.

Today Mission Accomplished is a joke punch line, Multipolar World is the reality of the globe, Free Market Fundamentalism has crashed spectacularly, and the right-wing is scrambling desperately to avoid a huge beating November 4.

We're also entering an economic downturn likely to be longer and deeper than any since the early 1970s if not the Great Depression of the 1930s.

As these hard times take hold, the Sarah Palin wing of U.S. politics says it's all because of an unholy alliance of Eastern elites, Blacks, immigrants and Muslim terrorists who are out to destroy all that hard-working (white) Americans have earned by the sweat of their own brows.

On the other side, a much wider but not-yet-coherent array of constituencies are exploring ideas about a "New New Deal/Green New Deal/21st Century New Deal." These would shift national priorities, rebuild the infrastructure, tackle both economic problems and the environmental crisis, and step back at least somewhat from the most disastrous U.S. wars abroad.

In short, it's dramatically changed terrain. And if today's surge of popular energy gives McCain-Palin a drubbing on Election Day, it will change even more.

The antiwar movement and the popular left more generally have played determined roles in bringing this change about. But it will require a major leap of analysis, energy, strategic clarity, political unity and organizational clout for us to keep up with – much less seize the opportunity to help shape – the new period of acute social conflict that lies ahead.

FREE MARKET FUNDAMENTALISM: "SHOCK OF DISBELIEF"

There's no need to rely on radical sources to indicate how big a change has taken place or what a disaster the Bush presidency (and the whole Reagan era) have caused. Those who have held power, or who had the ear of those in power, are indicted now by their own words.

Regarding today's financial mess, here is Free Market Guru Alan Greenspan, who headed the Federal Reserve for 18 years, testifying before Congress on October 23. Greenspan said that he

and others who believed lending institutions would do a good job of protecting their shareholders (and sustaining the economy) are in a "state of shocked disbelief."

Greenspan admitted that his own stance on government regulation (against it all the way) had been mistaken.

Questioned on his basic ideology, this cheerleader for neoliberalism went even further: "I have found a flaw. I don't know how significant or permanent it is. But I have been very distressed by that fact." Pressed further by Rep. Henry Waxman who said, "In other words, you found that your view of the world was not working," Greenspan replied: "Absolutely. That's precisely the reason I was shocked, because I have been going for 40 years or more with very considerable evidence that it was working exceptionally well."

So Greenspan is shocked – shocked! – to find out his fantasy economy guided by the market's "invisible hand" is really a gambling casino where the house has just gone bankrupt leaving millions of ordinary players in the lurch.

And what words of solace did Greenspan have for those workers and poor people left holding the bag for his "mistake"? "Given the financial damage to date, I cannot see how we can avoid a significant rise in layoffs and unemployment."

Power-brokers in Europe are even more blunt. The conservative French Premier, Nicolas Sarkozy, declared October 15: "This crisis is one too many. The system must be completely overhauled, an overhaul that must be global. A new form of capitalism is needed, based on values which put finance at the service of business and citizens, and not vice versa."

So we're in for tough times, and even the high priests of neoliberalism are no longer preaching their gospel. Change is coming. But no one yet knows what kind.

"WAR ON TERROR": "GOT US OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT"

What about that other pillar of the last eight years, the "war on terror"? Since that infamous Mission Accomplished phrase started popping up on more TV comedy shows than Republican Party ads, more and more insiders are bailing on previous gospel there too.

The bluntest words have come from top British officials. Early this month a Paris newspaper leaked the text of the British Ambassador to Afghanistan's assessment of how Washington's "good war" was going. The British envoy, Sherard Cowper-Coles, was quoted as saying the war is being lost: "The current situation is bad, the security situation is getting worse, so is corruption, and the government has lost all trust."

A huge embarrassment to Washington, Cowper-Coles went even further to target the foreign military presence itself: "The presence of the coalition, in particular its military presence, is part of the problem, not part of its solution. Foreign forces are the lifeline of a regime that would rapidly collapse without them. As such, they slow down and complicate a possible emergence from the crisis."

Cowper-Coles criticized both John McCain and Barack Obama's plans for Afghanistan: "It is the American presidential candidates who must be dissuaded from getting further bogged down in Afghanistan."

Then on October 22 two top British anti-terrorist officials called into question the basic framework of the "war on terror." Stella Rimington, a former director of Britain's domestic

intelligence agency, said she hoped the next U.S. president “would stop using the phrase ‘war on terror’.” She added that there had been a “huge overreaction” to the Sept. 11 attacks and that “labeling the response a war on terror got us off on the wrong foot because it made people think terrorism was something you could deal with by force of arms primarily.”

The other official, Ken Macdonald, a former head of British intelligence who has overseen terrorism trials for the past several years, laced into the denial of civil liberties that the Bush administration has seen as an integral part of its “war on terror.” British trials, he said, have been “absolutely grounded in due process.” In contrast, “you can have the Guantánamo model which says that we cannot afford to give people their rights, that rights are too expensive because of the nature of the threats. Or you can say, as I prefer to, that our rights are priceless. That the best way to face down those threats is to strengthen our institutions rather than to degrade them.”

ISRAEL: “I WAS UNWILLING TO LOOK REALITY IN THE EYE.”

And what about the policies of a government that in many respects pioneered the “war on terror” framework? It’s no accident that in the weeks after 9/11 many U.S. officials looked to Israel for lessons on how to proceed. After all, for decades Israel had promoted the view that the root cause of all conflict in the Middle East was “Arab terrorism”; that Western colonialism, military occupations, systematic discrimination against Arabs and Muslims, and U.S.-Israeli support for corrupt dictatorships were non-issues.

Well, Israel’s lame duck right-wing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert now repudiates this mythological outlook. In a stunning interview with Israel’s *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper, Olmert said that if Israel wanted peace it would have to withdraw its soldiers and settlers from the Golan Heights and nearly all of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Olmert also dismissed the idea of a unilateral Israeli strike to destroy Iran’s nuclear program. Though the idea is routinely floated by Israel’s security establishment, Olmert said such talk is an example of Israel’s “delusions of grandeur.”

“I have not come here to justify my actions over the past 35 years,” Olmert added. “For a large portion of that period, I was unwilling to look reality in the eye.”

Despite Olmert’s blunt words, apparently unwillingness to look reality in the eye still runs deep both in Israel and the U.S. The Prime Minister’s interview was a one-day story in the mainstream U.S. media: then silence. And in Israel, within weeks of Olmert’s remarks the city of Acre, often hailed as a model of Jewish-Arab co-existence, was rocked by violence. *The New York Times* reported that Jewish mobs rampaged through the streets crying “Death to Arabs” and ultra-nationalist groups handed out leaflets saying Jews are “sons of princes” while Arabs are “sons of dogs.” The Associated Press reported Oct. 24:

Arabs make up about 20% of Israel’s population, but own only 3% percent of its land, mainly due to confiscation.... Right-wing Jewish parties in some towns are campaigning on keeping Arabs out.

Perhaps Olmert’s denial runs even deeper than he admits? Perhaps he ought to take a hard, honest look at longstanding Israeli policies of ethnic cleansing? Is there any possible way peace can come to a region when these kinds of policies are pursued by the region’s strongest military power with total backing from the U.S.?

“IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH BEING A MUSLIM?”

Racist mobs haven't rampaged through U.S. streets the past month. But Muslim-baiting and whipping up of racist venom have become daily mainstream phenomena. It's just the tip of a Big White Iceberg when Sarah Palin accuses Barack Obama of “palling around with terrorists” and thus provokes physical threats on his life at Republican campaign rallies.

This level of hatred spurred Colin Powell – one of the power-figures behind the invasion of Iraq (regarded by most of the world's Muslim's as a new anti-Muslim crusade) – to call for a halt. In his endorsement of Barack Obama (Oct. 19) Powell said:

I'm also troubled by, not what Sen. McCain says, but what members of the party say. Such things as, 'Well, you that know Mr. Obama is a Muslim.' Well, the correct answer is, he is not a Muslim, he's a Christian. But the really right answer is: What if he is? Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country? The answer's no, that's not America. Is there something wrong with some 7-year-old Muslim American kid believing that he or she could be president? Yet I have heard senior members of my own party drop the suggestion, 'He's a Muslim and he might be associated with terrorists.'

As if any more evidence of what a pretty pass we've come to was needed, a big chunk of the far right ignored every word Powell had to say about anti-Muslim bias. Instead they offered talking-point arguments that Powell endorsed Obama because both of them are Black.

PEOPLE GET READY

Greenspan, British ambassadors and counter-terrorism experts, Ehud Olmert and Colin Powell: this is not exactly a roster of luminaries for peace and justice. It tells us something about the dramatically changed political realities and the challenges before the world that such figures are expressing the sentiments noted above.

Special challenges – and new opportunities – are put before antiwar activists and the left. Millions of people are feeling the pinch. Longstanding accepted wisdom is up for grabs. Large numbers are exploring new ideas. U.S. politics are opening up. The ruling elite is scrambling to keep the options as narrow as possible, and a bloated military budget holds national priorities hostage. There is a strong likelihood of some retreat/retrenchment abroad but bitter resistance to ending imperial occupations. Racist demagoguery is making its bid for influence. Progressive constituencies are in motion and have high hopes but are not yet gathered into a united and durable coalition.

Much can be accomplished if we move with clarity and vigor. We have our work cut out for us in the last few days before November 4, and then beyond.

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Month in Review #42 — October 28, 2008 / 4