



Washington's Wars and Occupations **Month in Review #52**

by Max Elbaum, War Times/Tiempo de Guerras

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LONG PEACE MOVEMENT NEEDS A NOISY NEXT PHASE

As the peace movement digs in for long-haul opposition to continuing U.S. wars, we simultaneously face urgent immediate challenges. Policy fights that may well determine Washington's course for many years ahead regarding Afghanistan, Israel-Palestine and Honduras (and Latin America in general) are at important junctures. It will take more noise – in the streets and elsewhere – from our side than we've been able to generate in the last few months to tilt them in a positive direction.

In the previous phase of struggle, under George Bush, the Neocon strategy of "everything via military force" failed. What was supposed to be a "cakewalk" in Iraq turned into a debacle. Instead of increasing U.S. clout and intimidating all opposition into surrender under threat of "regime change," it strengthened the hand of Washington's opponents. At home, public disgust with Bush's war and the lies, torture and decline of U.S. "global standing" that went with it – as well as the tireless work of the antiwar movement – drove down the right's popularity and was a main factor in the Neocons' 2008 electoral defeat.

But the U.S. defeat in Iraq, and related loss of influence world-wide, was not so severe that Washington was forced to withdraw completely or immediately from that country, much less the entire region. And U.S. opinion, though shifting from a pro-war majority to skepticism about anything positive coming from these bloody interventions, did not reach the point where millions constantly get in politicians' faces with the boisterous demand "Out of the Middle East Now."

All this against a background of global economic downturn, mounting ecological crisis, and an underlying long-term trend toward the decline of U.S. economic clout relative to other countries, especially China.

The result is a new, complicated and fluid balance of forces, and a new administration in strategy adjustment mode. Washington's new team of heavyweights (which includes all too many carryovers from the previous team) recognizes the terrain has shifted. They are looking for a new mix of military, diplomatic and other means to retain maximum U.S. influence within an increasingly multi-polar world. Exactly what that mix will be – where Washington will make concessions to other powers and to progressive social movements vs. where the U.S. will dig in its heels – is determined only in part by grand ideological conceptions or think-tank "gaming" blueprints. To a much greater degree, it is determined by power and pressure. Where global opponents and domestic resistance make the price of U.S. war-making too high, Washington's pragmatic "realists" can be forced to back off. On issues where the forces invested in militarism

and bullying (present within the current administration as well hammering from the Republican and populist/racist right) are given even an inch, they will push to take a yard and more.

ISRAELI COLONIALISM GRINDS ON

In the Israel-Palestine conflict, there is what's happening on the ground and what's happening in the diplomatic arena. The U.S. media portray the second as the bigger and more decisive drama. It is indeed a vital site of battle. But where it fits into the overall conflict can only be evaluated against the day-to-day realities existing on the ground. In that regard, Juan Cole's August 27 report lays out some harsh truths that are constantly obscured in U.S. mainstream debate. Visit www.juancole.com, where each of Cole's points is backed up with a citation:

Israel is strangling the Palestinian economy. The Israelis are restricting Palestinians' water supply and essentially using their water at a rate 4 times that of the Palestinians. Dozens of Palestinians in East Jerusalem have been pushed out of their property by Israeli squatters and are now forced to sleep in the streets. Israeli illegal immigrants into the Palestinian West Bank routinely act like thugs, beating up on Palestinians and stealing from them. Israel has 11,000 Palestinians behind bars, and has repeatedly blocked family visits to prisoners, which the Red Cross has called a violation of the Geneva Conventions and international law more generally. The Israeli military justified the attack on an unarmed American peace protester as a 'justifiable act of war.' (He is in a perhaps permanent coma).

Much of the U.S. press, as usual, is ignoring the belligerent statements of Likudniks in the Israeli government and misrepresenting the Palestinians, whose statelessness (and consequent lack of human and legal rights) is imposed on them by a brutal Israeli military occupation and/or perpetual siege and blockade...

The Obama administration's public opposition to any new Israeli settlements remains an important marker. But it cannot last as a "stand alone." Sooner or later – and right now it looks like sooner – Obama will have to go further to put real pressure on Israel or follow in the footsteps of previous U.S. administrations and let Tel Aviv have its way. Signals as of this writing are not positive. The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported August 28 that, "The Obama administration has agreed to Israel's request to remove East Jerusalem from negotiations on the impending settlement freeze. According to both Israeli officials and Western diplomats... the U.S. will not endorse new construction there, but would not demand Jerusalem publicly announce a freeze." If this is in fact the case, it is a terrible sign that in the Obama-Netanyahu stand-off, it is Obama who is blinking first.

That outcome would not be surprising given the longstanding "special relationship" between the U.S. and Israel and the entrenched power of pro-Israel hawks at every level of the U.S. government. It is also the most likely as long as negotiations take place at "high levels" behind closed doors. But it is not inevitable. Given enough noise and protest from below, a spotlight can be cast on the underlying realities of brutal occupation. And pressure can move U.S. policy toward the position taken by most of the world: that not just a "settlement freeze" but complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories is a pre-condition for any just settlement of this region-threatening conflict.

Just how frightened Israeli leaders and apologists are of such noise is indicated by their reaction to the recent *Los Angeles Times* Op-Ed supporting the call for boycotting Israel by Israeli Jewish peace activist (and Israeli Army veteran) Neve Gordon. As Gideon Levy put it in the aftermath of the outpouring of hate directed at Levy, "If Israel were convinced that Gordon's call for a boycott and his description of Israel as an apartheid state are unjust, we

would not be so abusive... It is not just a question of intolerance for different opinions... It is also a manifestation of edginess and aggressiveness that prove what Gordon and others like him want so much to show in Israel and abroad: that something very basic and very deep is flawed in the third kingdom of Israel."

Full text can be found at: www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/22455.

Even London's *Financial Times* "gets it," editorializing August 25: "Netanyahu has always argued that the Palestinians cannot expect a nation, only some sort of supra-municipal government... his emotive insistence on "natural" settlement growth is equally bogus. With vast subsidies, these colonies are growing at more than three times the rate of population in Israel proper... Netanyahu turned the drive for peace into pure process: piling up unresolved disputes to be parked in "final status" negotiations he never intended to begin."

If Britain's premier business-class paper can write such things, certainly the U.S. peace movement can be as blunt and even more boisterous. Resources for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaigns are at: www.endtheoccupation.org/article.php?list=type&type=28 And you can get information about the campaign to defend Neve Gordon and academic freedom at: www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org.

MORE ESCALATION IN AFGHANISTAN?

As for Afghanistan, it's like watching the rerun of a movie that already flopped the first time around. Foreign troops invading and occupying a county under the banner of freedom and democracy. An insurgency that grows with each civilian killed in the occupiers "keep-U.S.-casualties-down" bombing runs. A corrupt government, full of human rights violators and drug traffickers. U.S. generals saying "the war is in danger of being lost" and what we need is "more troops."

(It's true that in the case of Afghanistan the ideological outlook and political program of the insurgent core – the Taliban – is quite different from the mostly progressive perspectives that have fueled the majority of anti-colonial resistance movements. As a result, most of Afghanistan's neighbors, and many Afghans, are determined to resist a Taliban return to power. But that does not alter the fact that foreign occupation is a recipe for endless bloodshed and that no solution can be achieved by military means. It only means that the final shape of a political settlement will likely be different, and involve regional powers differently, than those that ended or accompanied other colonial/anti-colonial wars.)

The immediate point is that another decision-making moment is at hand. *The New York Times* reported August 24 that U.S. military commanders are on the verge of a formal request for more troops and adds: "The possibility that more troops will be needed in Afghanistan presents the Obama administration with another problem in dealing with a nearly eight-year war that has lost popularity at home, compounded by new questions over the credibility of the Afghan government, which has just held an as-yet inconclusive presidential election beset by complaints of fraud."

What *The Times* considers a problem is in fact an opportunity for the administration to change course toward de-escalation, negotiation and withdrawal. The potential to mount pressure to do exactly that exists. The latest polls show a majority of the U.S. public thinks the war is a mistake. Sen. Russell Feingold has just broken what the mainstream press calls a "Washington taboo" by calling for a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan. And grassroots antiwar groups have begun preparing for a new round of mass demonstrations in October. Building on each of these components – expanding antiwar public opinion, amplifying "time to get out" voices on Capitol Hill, and filling the streets with antiwar chants –

can create the climate where the administration can put into practice its “there is no military solution” rhetoric rather than its “we must be in a position of strength” recipe for disaster.

Among the websites where you can get action information about ending the war in Afghanistan are www.unitedforpeace.org and www.peace-action.org/Afghanistan/sign_on_letter.html.

AS GOES HONDURAS...

Once again the coup-makers in Honduras have refused to accept an already watered down compromise that would restore ousted President Manuel Zelaya. They turned down the latest version of this compromise, offered during a late-August visit to Tegucigalpa by a delegation from the Organization of American States. Under mounting pressure from throughout Latin America, the Obama administration signaled that in response to this latest stonewalling it might go beyond the slap-on-the-wrist steps it has taken so far against the coup makers. A State Department spokesperson told reporters: “Given the de facto regime’s refusal this week to meet the demands of the O.A.S. delegation, we will make some judgments based on that, and we’ll announce them very shortly.”

But with most of the Washington establishment mouthing the coup-makers “justifications” for their actions, it will take counter-pressure to get U.S. sanctions with any teeth. New York University Professor Greg Gandin laid out the stakes in *The Nation* magazine:

Failure to restore Zelaya to power will send a clear message to Latin American conservatives that Washington will tolerate coups, provided they are carried out under a democratic guise... they already sense that Honduras might be a turning point. A conservative businessman recently won the presidency in Panama. In June in Argentina, Cristina Fernandez’s center-left Peronist party suffered a midterm electoral defeat and lost control of Congress. Polls show that presidential elections coming up in Chile and Brazil will be close, possibly dealing further losses to the left.

In the meantime, Zelaya is rallying supporters from abroad to press for his return. In Honduras, protests continue and the body count climbs. At least eleven Zelaya supporters have been killed since the coup took place. [Coup leader] Micheletti, for his part, is hunkered down in Tegucigalpa, betting he can leverage international support to last until regularly scheduled presidential elections in November. The future course of Latin American politics may hang in the balance.

Information about solidarity efforts with the Honduran people are at: <http://quixote.org>.

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