



Washington's Wars and Occupations **Month in Review #28**

by Max Elbaum, War Times/Tiempo de Guerras

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URGENT MOMENT IN A LONG HAUL

It's not easy to maintain a sense of urgency and outrage at the same time as a long-haul strategic view. Still, that's what's demanded of antiwar activists right now.

Regarding reasons to be outraged, even George Bush's spin machine can't hide the blood-soaked list:

- The Iraq war is already lost, but still the President promises permanent occupation and endless war: "It is clear that Mr. Bush refuses to recognize the truth of his failure in Iraq and envisions a military commitment that has no end," *The New York Times* editorialized Sept. 14.
- This policy is bound up with imperial ambitions to control the oil-rich Middle East: "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil," wrote former head of the Federal Reserve Board and conservative Republican Alan Greenspan in his just-released memoir.
- The result is a human disaster. The U.S. war and occupation has already led to a million or more Iraqi deaths, and 3,000-plus deaths among U.S. troops. Over two million Iraqis have been driven from their homes. The latest horror is an outbreak of cholera as Iraq's water purification system has all but totally broken down. Even if a best-case scenario of peace, independence, and reconstruction miraculously started tomorrow, the destruction wrought would leave scars for generations.

MILITARISM AND RACISM, MERCENARIES AND TORTURE

There's more:

- Iraq is the centerpiece of a much broader U.S. posture of militarism and occupation. Every day the U.S. stays in Iraq heightens the danger of attacking Iran or otherwise engulfing the entire region in armed conflict. The "war on terror" serves as cover for Washington's blank-check support for Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.
- The Iraq/"war on terror" mantra has normalized practices that previously were suppressed or at least had to be hidden. The U.S. government now brazenly practices

torture. It employs mercenaries accountable to no law whatsoever. It has relegated 800 years of *habeas corpus* rights to the dustbin.

- Reinforcement of racism is integral to the whole enterprise. Demonization of Arabs and Muslims along with institutionalization of a racially coded “us” vs. “them” framework are the battering rams. And this is a county where racism hardly needs further reinforcement to entrench inequality: witness many pundits and politicians thinking it’s acceptable (even a potential vote-getter!) to excuse the hanging of a noose on a “white tree” in Jena Louisiana as simply a “teen-age prank.”
- The war/racism/fear-mongering package is used as a wedge against all social movements at home: “illegal immigrants bring crime and terrorism!... we need more prisons to keep us safe!... blah blah blah!”

ELITE NOT READY TO BITE THE BULLET

Other than Bush’s die-hard supporters, almost the entire U.S. policy-making elite recognizes “there can be no military solution” to the disaster they are facing in Iraq. Still, no substantial sector is yet willing to bite the bullet and commit to complete withdrawal. They are too scared of the negative impact such a retreat would have on U.S. power generally, and of the domestic political consequences of being blamed for “losing Iraq.” So no serious Republican presidential candidate, and none of the three top-tier Democratic contenders, promises to end the war in the only way it is possible to do so: getting out.

The majority of U.S. people now think the war was a mistake and have lost confidence in a U.S. “victory.” But many have been intimidated or confused by misinformation and fear-mongering. Millions are vulnerable to Bush’s demagogic argument that dire consequences for both Iraq and the U.S. would flow from immediate and total withdrawal. So the antiwar movement has an uphill struggle to translate broad antiwar sentiment into sustained, large-scale and militant protest.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THIS MONTH

With a whole country being destroyed, and Washington’s Iraq policy at the pivot of threats to the entire world, a groundswell of outrage and urgency is more than warranted. So is reminding ourselves that a great lesson of the Vietnam War era is that every act of protest actually DOES make a difference – no matter how much the powers-that-be work to convince us otherwise.

Yet a hard-nosed assessment simultaneously tells us that:

1. It will take **another level of crisis and resistance** – in Iraq and/or here – before Washington’s power-brokers are forced to admit defeat;
2. It will take time for that to happen, indeed, the likelihood is for quite **a long haul**; and
3. **Constant protest** along the way is necessary even to prevent the diehard neocon faction centered in Dick Cheney’s office from expanding the Iraq war to Iran and the entire Middle East.

In combining our urgent outrage and long-haul vision, the month right ahead of us offers some special opportunities.

September’s All-Hail-General-Petraeus-Show on Capitol Hill bought Bush some time with wavering members of his own party. But it didn’t make a dent in public opinion. Since the

war-makers' best shot fizzled this way, the time is ripe for counter-attack: for the antiwar movement to show that our determination and capacity to protest in the streets and via the net and everywhere in between is undeterred.

And there is a clear target, in that the congressional vote on Bush's "supplemental request" for funding the Iraq war has been postponed from its original September date. A bloc of Congress members has pledged to vote no funds for anything but organizing a U.S. military withdrawal. Popular pressure can expand their ranks and remind every member of Congress that there will be consequences for allowing this war to continue.

Vehicles for mass actions along these lines are already planned for October. The Iraq Moratorium – www.iraqmoratorium.org – that kicked off September 21 will continue with Moratorium Day No. 2 on October 19. Regional mobilizations October 27 sponsored by United for Peace and Justice are planned for 11 cities – for more information go to www.unitedforpeace.org. A range of other actions by veterans, in support of military resisters, on campuses, and elsewhere – many confronting the war-makers with civil disobedience – are also in motion.

What happens this month sets the stage for the long stretch from New Year's Day through the 2008 election. The challenge during that period will be to launch and sustain a level of independent antiwar activism that – in its breadth, creativity and tactics – insists to all candidates and the public at large that as long as the occupation continues there will be No Campaigning As Usual and No New Administration As Usual.

This is also a moment when antiwar activists can "make the connections" on the ground as well as in literature and educational work. Across the country local immigrant rights groups are mobilizing against the new wave of government intimidation raids. The struggle to support the Jena 6 is galvanizing a new wave of anti-racist activism anchored in the African American community. Swinging its muscle behind these vital battles would mark an important step toward constructing a durable and more deeply rooted antiwar movement. Likewise, the "No War, No Warming" offensive – for information about October 21–23 actions in particular see www.nowarnowarming.org – makes the vital links between oil, global warming and U.S. militarism, and taps into the concern that many polls say is number one among the country's youth.

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