



## ***Washington's Wars and Occupations*** **Month in Review #63**

*by Francesca Fiorentini, War Times/Tiempo de Guerras*

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### **MAKING MONSTERS OF NATIONS, MAKING A MONSTER MESS**

It has been a cruel, cruel summer. With the record-breaking heat that has hit the U.S. come other record breakers:

- June and July have seen the highest number of U.S. casualties in Afghanistan since the war's beginning in 2001.
- The Army reported 32 soldier suicides in June, the most for a single month since January 2009.
- In July the total of immigrant deaths along the Arizona-Mexico border reached an all-time monthly high.
- The full tally of damage from the biggest oil spill in U.S. history has yet to be compiled.
- And with soaring incarceration rates of Blacks and Latinos there was the minimal but still double-edged verdict of "involuntary manslaughter" for the BART police officer who shot the unarmed 22-year-old Oscar Grant point blank in the back. (Double-edged because popular outcry did create the context for a first-ever Bay Area conviction of a police officer for murdering a Black man.)

Then – despite the WikiLeaks document release with on-the-ground evidence that the war in Afghanistan is indeed the nightmare we believed it to be – Congress closed out the month by passing the "war funding supplemental" providing another \$37 billion for military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. This brings the total spent on these wars to over \$1 trillion (just about the estimated cost of a true universal public health-care system). The bill's passage – while 102 Democrats and 12 Republicans voted no – gave another green light to conflicts skittering further from Washington's control. It is a stinging reminder of just how out of touch Congress is with the citizens it claims to represent, 56% of whom believe the war in Afghanistan is "not worth fighting" according to a June *Washington Post/ABC News* poll.

In moments like these the U.S. no longer appears like a functional country but a large, unwieldy monster chomping at its own tail: funneling billions to unpopular, unwinnable, and morally disgraceful wars while its population is strapped with economic crisis. And monsters beget monsters. The government the U.S. created and now backs in Afghanistan, the devastation the U.S. has wrought in Iraq, Washington's version of a "peace process" between Israel and the

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Palestinians: these projects are turning out to be just as monstrous and deformed as the U.S.'s own dwindling democracy.

### **NATION-BULLDOZING IN AFGHANISTAN**

With the pace of U.S. deaths in 2010 double that of 2009 and one incident after another of NATO troops killing Afghan soldiers and civilians, it is clear that there is a more chaos than order to U.S. "nation-building" in Afghanistan. And if any more evidence of the war's senselessness was needed, WikiLeaks just supplied it with 90,000 damning documents straight from the source. Written by soldiers and intelligence officers, the documents confirm what the antiwar movement has argued for years: this war is horrific, mismanaged, and futile. The documents also add new details and expose the cover-ups and under-reporting of civilian deaths that have become common military practice. For Phyllis Bennis' assessment of the significance of the WikiLeaks revelations, go to:

[www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/pentagon-papers-2.0-afghanistan](http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/pentagon-papers-2.0-afghanistan)

The most significant short-term reaction to the leaked documents is likely to be in European countries whose populations are massively opposed to the war. It was no accident that WikiLeaks sent the documents to Germany's *Der Spiegel* and *The Guardian* UK in addition to *The New York Times*. And no accident that those papers' coverage stressed revelations about Afghan civilian casualties rather than the main thing emphasized by the *Times* – the role of Pakistan's intelligence agencies in assisting the Taliban (and implicitly the need for Washington to "get its ally into line.")

An antiwar surge in U.S. public opinion may take longer. But the WikiLeaks documents stand as a semi-official validation of previous criticisms of the "counterinsurgency" strategy adopted by the Obama administration. WikiLeaks provides important back-up, for instance, to the memo from U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry that was leaked back in January. Eikenberry warned that an increase in troops will "increase Afghan dependency... and will deepen the military involvement in a mission that most agree cannot be won solely by military means." He expressed concerns that the longer-term goal of a secure and sovereign Afghan nation will be undermined, and went on to say that President Hamid Karzai is "not an adequate strategic partner" who seems to "shun responsibility for any sovereign burden" and who would be glad to see the U.S. dig in deeper into the country. He pointed to the rampant corruption (including Karzai's fraudulent re-election), and the lack of a "political ruling class" that can provide a "national identity."

Eikenberry's observations earned him a *New York Times* editorial suggesting that the White House fire him as part of a "wider housecleaning" after giving Gen. Stanley McChrystal the boot. The *Times* described Eikenberry as having a "lack of enthusiasm for the counterinsurgency strategy."

But the main point is that the counter-insurgency strategy – which war reporter Ann Jones describes as a process by which soldiers kill civilians and then apologize over tea – deserves no enthusiastic support. It is a rolling set of war crimes and needs to be abandoned, period.

### **AFGHANS WANT THE U.S. OUT**

Instead of "winning hearts and minds," the U.S. has turned more Afghans toward the Taliban. As former U.S. State Department official in Afghanistan Matthew Hoh who resigned in 2009 told *Democracy Now!*, the Taliban is "a very large organization that's not monolithic" but "composed of separate groups that have joined together, basically to repel foreign occupation...and resist a central government that is very corrupt." He clarifies that Afghans joining the Taliban don't do so

out of “kinship with Al Qaeda or because they’re terrorists, but because they do not want to be occupied.”

The results of a recent poll by the International Council on Security and Development in Afghanistan are therefore both staggering and unsurprising. They show:

- 75% of Afghans believe foreigners disrespect their religions and traditions.
- 74% believe that working with foreign forces is wrong
- 55% believe that foreign troops are in Afghanistan for their own benefit, to destroy or occupy the country, or to destroy Islam.

This evidence – which cries as loud as World Cup *vuvuzelas* – has fallen upon deaf ears. The Obama administration and others seem to have put their faith in General David Petraeus, the last sailor deranged enough to swear he can conquer the stormy waves of Afghanistan by brute force. In his latest move of insanity, Petraeus decided to go forward with a NATO plan to arm Afghan villagers to fight the Taliban. This despite protests from Karzai himself against a tactic that has a history of failure – creating anti-government militias and building dependence on fighting as employment. These are not the sustainable jobs Afghans sorely need, no more than Karzai is a democratically-elected president.

One year from now, the 100,000 US troops will supposedly begin to leave Afghanistan. But the White House itself admits the date will be almost assuredly be pushed back. Even one more year – one more day – in Afghanistan mean more lives lost and a society further divided and uprooted. Withdrawal cannot wait. Commitment to total U.S./NATO withdrawal has always been the pre-condition to peace in Afghanistan, key to national reconciliation backed by a regional agreement, and a pledge by Washington to finance rebuilding the infrastructure of a country battered by decades of war.

### **THE FRANKEN-STATE OF IRAQ**

*"I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart."*

–Dr. Victor Frankenstein

Upon realizing he had created what he considered a monster, the infamous Dr. Frankenstein was horrified and abandoned the creature to fend for itself. Kind of like the U.S. and the U.S. media when looking (or not looking) at Iraq. Political stalemate, continued violence, and a gaping lack of infrastructure describe the nation many in Washington have the nerve to refer to as a democracy, while a Senator John McCain can say with a straight face that it is the welcome fruit of U.S. “victory”!

Since parliamentary elections nearly five months ago, politicians have been unable to form a government. Power is largely suspended between Ayad Allawi and Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, essentially seen as “expats” out touch with the average Iraqi. The standstill reveals among other things that Iraqis are wholly disenchanted with the current politicians, who have not been able to keep them safe, give them jobs, nor provide basic infrastructure. In the lead-up to the parliamentary elections, 57% of Iraqis in Baghdad said they felt conditions for peace in the country had worsened. Since the elections, the country has seen a spike in bombings and targeted killings of politicians, police, and members of The Awakening, a Sunni militia paid directly by the U.S.

Iraqi police and military reports show that just from July 1 to 18, 189 Iraqis (including women and children) had died in various attacks, with close to another 700 wounded. A plan for parliament should come with broader national reconciliation if Iraqis are to ever go a week without violent loss of life. The U.S. – which was happy to fund and utilize ethnic conflict as part of its “defeat the insurgency” campaign from 2004-2008 – now issues patronizing calls to Iraqis to “get it together.” Iraq’s failure to form a government will ultimately be blamed on Iraqis themselves, seen through a twisted and racist lens about Arabs and their “endless sectarianism,” as if the U.S. invasion and occupation were not at the heart of today’s problems.

Add to this the lack of basic services like roads, water, and electricity. This month riots broke out across the country demanding more than the few hours of electricity Iraqis receive per day. Back in 2008, Siemens and General Electric signed a \$7–8 billion-dollar agreement with the Iraqi government to upgrade the country’s power grid. Iraqis have yet to see the fruits of that contract. Earlier this month, the *Times* reported that U.S.-led projects have either been scaled back or abandoned altogether, like a \$102 million sewage system in Fallujah waiting to be completed after six years of work.

But Washington says “not our problem” like the mad scientist deserting his creation. The U.S. wants it both ways: preserve influence (in part by “renegotiating” an agreement so U.S. troops can stay indefinitely), but take no responsibility for the destruction and displacement (several million refugees) that the U.S. war caused. Iraq is rarely on the front pages now, but the antiwar movement must fight to make sure Washington does not slink away from responsibility to help heal the country it ravaged.

### **ISRAEL: THE DIPLOMACY OF FORGIVING AND FORGETTING**

The outrageous attack on the flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza in May seemed to shift a few pebbles beneath Washington’s Israeli policy. It ruffled the feathers of many who are afraid Israel has become a liability for the U.S. and called into question blanket support for its every land-grab and military adventure. Among Israeli politicians and Israel’s many cheerleaders within the U.S., there is growing worry that Israel’s next military outburst could lead to serious consequences. As *The New York Times*’ pet pundit Thomas Friedman put it in a recent op-ed, Israel must “buy its next [military] timeout with diplomacy” or it “could be forced to kill even more civilians.” This way of treating Israel as a forever justified victim with anger management problems is replicated in Washington.

At the White House meeting between Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu early this month, there was no mention of the flotilla or Israel’s defiance of Washington’s demand for a moratorium on settlement-building. Instead, it was all smiles and warm handshakes along with a White House endorsement of Israel being exempted from what is required of all other countries when it comes to nuclear weapons possession. Conversation focused on re-starting peace negotiations, a pitiful process on an ever-uneven playing field: the State of Israel with a nuclear arsenal estimated at 200–300 warheads vs. Palestinian population fragmented by occupation. That same week the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem released a new study showing that there are currently Israeli settlements on 43% of the West Bank.

Numerous commentators attributed Obama’s royal treatment of Netanyahu to Democratic worries about the 2010 mid-term elections and maintaining the favor of the “pro-Israel” lobby and vote. But as proves the recently released video from 2001 of Netanyahu bragging about manipulating and ultimately scuttling the Oslo Accords – politically out-maneuvering the so-called “pro-Palestinian” Clinton administration – Israel is also quite adept at playing U.S. politics.

What Netanyahu said then summed up the Israeli right's attitude about its relationship with the U.S.:

"America is a thing you can move very easily," he said, "move it in the right direction. They won't get their way."

But Israel's attack on the Gaza aid flotilla and the spike in media coverage about the real impact of the Gaza siege has opened the door to changes in U.S. public opinion. Palestine solidarity activists within the U.S. will need to harness the energy of this moment in their favor and hammer away at the point that the main obstacles to peace are Israeli policies of settlement expansion, collective punishment and occupation.

This week's declaration by British Prime Minister David Cameron – a conservative! – that the attack on the Gaza flotilla was "completely unacceptable" and that Gaza is a "prison camp" is the kind of statement that can provide a lever for getting our viewpoint into the mainstream. The Presbyterian Church USA's vote this month to support a proposal that calls for an end to U.S. aid to Israel as long as settlements expand is also a heartening and important step in broadening the justice movement for Palestine.

### **A MOVEMENT MOMENT**

In these troublesome times, it is critical to rescue our anti-war activism from cynicism and isolation. Now is the moment to show what action really looks like beyond Facebook. Now is the moment to wake up from the stupor many fell into after the new administration did not make the changes much of his voting base hoped for. Grassroots change-makers – antiwar, economic, and racial justice, and environmental activists – must connect the dots that outline the monster of empire and the monster mess it is making in Central Asia and the Middle East. There is a dormant majority against Washington's wars and its backwards priorities. With some hard work and smart campaigns, that majority can be galvanized to act and make its power felt.

*Francesca Fiorentini, a member of **War Times'** new "Month in Review" writing team, is also an editor of **Left Turn** magazine and an independent journalist based in Argentina.*

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