

Unconditional Withdrawal from Iraq

Throughout the history of mankind there have been murderers and tyrants; and while it may seem momentarily that they have the upper hand, they have always fallen.

Mahatma Gandhi

These words by Gandhi, leader of the non-violent movement, were expressed in relation to the struggle against the British occupation in India. They nonetheless vividly describe the illegal occupation of Iraq, where the tyrants, who initially have the upper hand, are now being challenged by a popular resistance movement.

Mahatma Gandhi had once demanded, in a meeting with the British appointed Governor of India, the unconditional withdrawal of Britain's colonial occupation. A high ranking British official who was present at the meeting retorted: **"Do you expect Her Majesty's Government just to get up and leave India."** **"Yes, I do", Gandhi replied. "One day you will just leave."** And not too many years later, that is exactly what happened. (See Father Shay Cullen, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 August 1991.)

What are the lessons for Iraq? Gandhi had carefully defined the context and circumstances of non-violent resistance. In 1938, in relation to the Palestinian question, he said:

I wish they had chosen the way of non-violence in resisting what they rightly regard as an unacceptable encroachment upon their country. But, according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, nothing can be said against the Arab resistance in the face of overwhelming odds.

In the Iraqi context, armed popular resistance "in the face of overwhelming odds" against the daily killings of civilians by occupation forces, using machine-gun fire, tanks and helicopters, is an understandable response to the brutality of the US-led occupation. (See James Petras p. 21). Moreover, as revealed in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, military intelligence, on orders emanating from the Pentagon, had instructed the routine torture of POWs, in blatant violation of the Geneva Convention.

This war is criminal. Gandhi's call for non-violent resistance constitutes a powerful message to enlisted American, British and Coalition servicemen and women in Iraq. Abandon the battlefield! Refuse to fight in a war, which blatantly violates international law and the US Constitution!

Non-violent 'non-cooperation' of all sectors of Iraqi society in a massive civil disobedience campaign is already underway, including systematic boycotts, with a view to ultimately paralyzing the US colonial administration, not to mention the corporations involved in the plunder of Iraq's oil wealth.

Similarly, across the land, throughout America and around the world, the US war agenda must be challenged through non-violent actions.

The anti-war movement must encourage coalition troops to abandon the battlefield. This will not be an easy process. Committees at local levels must be set up across

the United States, Britain, Italy, Japan and other countries, which have troops in Iraq. These committees should provide protection, support and legal council to soldiers who refuse to fight and who face the possibility of prison sentences for desertion. (See Camiljo Mejia article p. 24)

We call upon veterans' associations and local communities to support this process. The Bush administration must learn the lessons of history. The Iraqi people are waging a struggle to oust the US invaders. That resistance is winning. Ultimately, the only solution is for the American and British occupiers to pick up their gear and walk out of Iraq.

Coalition nations should follow the example of the Spanish government of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, which has withdrawn its troops from Iraq. The anti-war movement must question the legitimacy not only of the Bush administration and its indefectible British ally, but also of all those governments, which directly support or pay lip service to the US-led military occupation.

Washington's New 'Ambassador' to Iraq

Honduras also decided to withdraw its troops, in response to the appointment of John Negroponte as US 'Ambassador' to Iraq.

Negroponte served as US Ambassador to Honduras during the Reagan administration and played a key role in supporting and supervising the Nicaraguan Contra mercenaries based in Honduras. The cross border Contra attacks into Nicaragua claimed some 50,000 civilian lives. During the same period, Negroponte was also instrumental in setting up the Honduran military death squads, "operating with Washington's support, [they] assassinated hundreds of opponents of the US-backed regime". Ironically, the Bush administration has appointed a bona fide 'terrorist' to wage its "war on terrorism" in Iraq.

In the words of *Human Rights Watch*, "There are serious unanswered questions about his [Negroponte's] complicity with the atrocities in Honduras and the war in Nicaragua."

But 'atrocities' – including the torture and killing of POWs – are part of the Bush administration's agenda in Iraq. The 'Ambassador' will report back to the Pentagon rather than to the State Department. The hidden agenda is to replicate in Iraq, the Central American death squadrons. Negroponte has been given the mandate to recruit loyal collaborators from within the ranks of the former Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. Under this scenario, part of the repressive apparatus, including the torture chambers (under US supervision), could be handed back to officials of the former Baathist police and intelligence apparatus. In all likelihood, a new wave of covert civilian killings and targeted assassinations is envisaged to weed out civilian support for the insurgency. (See John Stanton p. 26). ■