No Blank Checks

written by Staughton Lynd | March 8, 2010

BARRY FINGER, WADOOD HAMAD, and Glenn Perusek all appear to demand the immediate withdrawal of United States forces from Iraq. (Finger, 26: "we demand an immediate withdrawal of occupation forces"; Hamad, 34: "We must demand a timely schedule for the withdrawal of occupation forces from Iraq over a fixed, limited period").

However, they differ greatly in assessing the Iraqi resistance. Finger and Hamad take such a negative view of the Iraqi resistance that I fear, when push comes to shove, each might find some rationalization for the United States to stay in Iraq longer. If one really believes that the Iraqi resistance is nothing more than the "Michigan militia" (Hamad, 34), how can one in good conscience wish to expose the long-suffering population of Iraq to rule by such monsters?

Perusek offers a more complex view of the Iraqi resistance (Perusek, 39-43). He argues that "the resistance to occupation in Iraq is *multiform* — orientations from across the political spectrum are being drawn into action. The simplistic equation of the resistance with radical political Islam, or the wing that adopts terroristic tactics against civilians, flies in the face of the reality of the situation" (Perusek, 43; emphasis in original).

Events since these pieces were written offer important evidence supporting Perusek's view. In March 2005, on the second anniversary of the United States invasion, Muqtada Al-Sadr organized hundreds of thousands who nonviolently protested the occupation in Baghdad and elsewhere. The non- terrorist component of the resistance is also evident in the outlook of such an entity as the newly formed Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions. In an interview with the U.S. journalist David Bacon on March 24, 2005, Ghasib Hassan, a member of the IFTU executive committee, said among other things: 1. The ITFU supported the January 2005 elections; 2. "We oppose the occupation absolutely . . . The Iraqi people are calling today, not tomorrow, for removal of the occupation"; 3. "Iraqi publicly owned enterprises should stay publicly owned . . . Oil must remain in the hands of the public"; 4. "Unions should have autonomy, and make their own decisions. Workers should be free to organize. We believe in a real democracy, where workers should choose their own leaders" (www.truthout.org/issues_05/033105LA.shtml).

If one were to seek an analogy in United States history, it might be not to the Michigan militia, but to the activity of John Brown as one part of a much broader movement against slavery. In May 1856 Brown led four of his sons and two other men who seized five pro-slavery activists in Kansas and split open their skulls with broadswords. Yet it was this same Brown whose bravery when facing execution moved Thoreau and Emerson, and who was remembered by Union soldiers as they marched to battle singing, "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, but his soul goes marching on."

HAVING DISAGREED AT LENGTH with Finger and Hamad, let me emphasize one fundamental point of total agreement with them. Hamad rejects a viewpoint he attributes to Tariq Ali: "occupations are usually ugly. How then can resistance be pretty?" (Hamad, 27, quoting the *Guardian*, Feb. 14, 2004 and Ali's book *Bush in Babylon*). I agree with Hamad that such reasoning can "effectively dismiss universal norms." Let me share a personal experience.

In 1966 or 1967 I was asked to join the War Crimes Tribunal organized by Lord Bertrand Russell.

In conversation with the emissary who proffered the invitation, I urged that the alleged war crimes of any party to the conflict should come before the Tribunal. After all, I argued, a "crime" is an action that is wrong no matter who does it. Pressing my case, I asked, "What if it were shown that the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam tortures unarmed prisoners?" The answer, as I understood it, was, "Anything is justified that drives the imperialist aggressor into the sea." I declined the invitation to be a member of the Tribunal.

So I think: We should demand immediate withdrawal of United States forces, the dismantling of all United States bases, and an end to all attempts by United States corporations to penetrate the Iraqi oil industry, without "endorsing" (Finger, 26) the Iraqi resistance. After all, even the Vietnamese resistance that Hamad considers "heroic" (Hamad, 27) immediately upon its victory created reeducation camps in which all manner of persons were confined in indefinite administrative detention. Why write blank checks that we might come to regret? We will have fulfilled our historical task as United States citizens if we can bring about the end of the occupation of Iraq by the government of this country as soon as possible.

Footnotes