Some Things Having Been Considered

Professor Judith Hicks Stiehm asked students and political scientists to consider some things about our military in her introduction (453–6) to the July 2007 *PS* symposium. The deliberations on my end as a student are over. Here are the results.

I would imagine that Professor Michael Walzer does not enjoy being compared in print to Osama bin Laden in any way, shape, or form. But he can respond to this matter himself. Beyond any possible backhanded digs at Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977), Stiehm proposes that political scientists "have a responsibility to prepare students to make sound judgments about what elected authorities decide about and do with our military" (453). This is all well and good, but when millions of people around the world gathered in the streets to protest the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the "coalition" countries—elected authorities did not flinch. What do we do then?

The military is described as "un-American" because it pursues "honor" through the "taking and sacrifice of life" as opposed to society at large which is supposedly committed to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (453). Equality, whatever Jefferson meant by that and whatever we take that to mean, has apparently become either "self-evident" or not important enough to mention. I'm glad the Declaration of Independence was brought up because it can help us answer Stiehm's perennial questions, even if they need to be modified slightly.

Instead of asking if our civilian officials are "giving the military wise direction" (453), we might ask: how can our civilian officials give the military *any* direction with a president that demands that he is perpetually a military official as commander-in-chief? Jefferson says something in the Declaration which sounds familiar and needs to be noted here. "He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them." Changing Governors to legislators, call to mind George W. Bush's flat rejection of "timetables" or "exit strategies" and the signing statement to continue the practice of torture during interrogations, *inter alia*.

As to the second question, we should rather ask not if "citizens [are] responsibly weighing the quality of that direction" (453), but does citizen input matter one iota in the minds of civilian legislators or the "War President" (MSNBC 2004)? We can see from the first question that our civilian representatives have been ignored with impunity by the executive and it renders them unimportant on this second question. As for Bush, we again turn to Jefferson: "We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury." Every "Petition" from the opposition of the war to begin with, to the firing of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, to the opposition to the "surge" was met with a stonewall. We the people were not "the decider" (CNN 2006) after all. Further, those persons, representatives or not, who would now want to end the military occupation have been demonized in the press by the Bush administration and by some of our civilian "representatives."

The rest of the article will be addressed in the following brief paragraphs. The most pressing concern is not Stiehm's queries but her description of what the "military can do." She says, "Our military can destroy anything, anywhere" (453). That is the kind of statement at which even a Roman imperator would balk. I have a question of my own: Can our military destroy human dignity?

Stiehm asks, "What does a citizen need to know?" (454). We concur on a couple of points. I agree that getting information about the military is not always the easiest task. I also acknowledge that the populace's willful ignorance of the military is a problem. However, saying that we "lack routine access to foreign media apart from the BBC" is absurd. If professors are going to "help students navigate data bases and web sites" (454) to try to obtain information on the military, what is it but sloth not to do the same about access to foreign media? Al Jazeera English, The Australian, Der Spiegel, The Asahi Shimbun (Japan), The Mail and Guardian (South Africa), Le Monde, and El Universal (Mexico) are just a few of the news web sites that I read online daily for free. Also, they are all available in English and savable as "favorites" on your web browser.

Calling Aristotle's *Politics* "muddled" (455) irks me to no end, but I do not have the space to refute this here. However, if you are going to quote Hobbes, please get the man right (455). If you do, he cannot be bent to your purposes of using "Reason" as a weapon. Hobbes' intent was specific. It is not life in general, but life in the war of "every man against every man" that life becomes not only "poor, nasty, brutish and short," but also "solitary" and accompanied by "continual fear and danger of violent death" (1994, 76). This is not our situation in the United States, but it can be used to describe the lives of those who face the "astonishing capacity" (454) of our military.

Patrick Johnston
University of Hawaii at Manoa

References

CNN. 2006. "Bush: 'I'm the decider' on Rumsfeld." Available at: www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/04/18/rumsfeld/. (Accessed April 2006).

Hobbes, Thomas. 1994. *Leviathan, with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1688*, ed. Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett.

MSNBC. 2004. *NBC's Meet the Press with Tim Russert*. Transcript available at, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4179618/. (Accessed July 2007).

Stiehm, Judith Hicks. 2007. "Things Students and Political Scientists Might Consider about our Military." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 40 (July): 453–6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096507221274 Published online by Cambridge University Press