

# GI Resistance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## Soldiers Refute Rumsfeld and Refuse War

Fifth Estate Collective

2003

“Welcome to the Republic of Darkness and Unemployment”

— Baghdad graffiti

It's hard to be gleeful about the deteriorating situation in Iraq even when realizing that everything the anti-war movement predicted about Bush's invasion for oil and empire has come true. Even mainstream publications are using the word “quagmire” to describe the situation while seventy percent of American's in a recent Newsweek poll think the US will be bogged down in its \$1 billion a month occupation efforts for years.

Worse for the Bush gang and their generals is the fear of what is already occurring—widespread GI dissatisfaction with their extended duty in the blistering 110+ degree weather with the word “Vietnam” on everyone's lips.

Eight years ago, this paper published the historical piece “Mutiny at the Outposts of Empire: GI Resistance in the Vietnam Era” (FE #346, Summer, 1995). There, we detailed the “low morale” and “outright rebellion” among US troops that led to the empire's protracted defeat. Emerging from a chaotic mix of botched policy and seditious counterculture, the organized GI resistance in the Vietnam War helped an entire generation of soldiers see the United States government as the real enemy of their freedom.

Only months into the invasion and occupation of Iraq, some of the most outspoken opponents of US foreign policy have emerged among the military rank and file and their families. Extended tours, unbearable heat, abominable food, inadequate training, guerrilla enemies, reduced salaries, and incompetent leaders have all contributed to the dissatisfaction of today's disillusioned soldier. This in a context where young women and men have been forced into a situation that has resulted in their killing children and journalists who Rumsfeld tells them might be “Saddam loyalists.”

The similarities between this situation, and Vietnam are eerie, but not shocking. Writing online, anti-war veteran Jack Blackwill explains, “Viet Cong were identified in corporate media as communists, even though many of those in the NLF were not communists. Every American is bombarded from birth with the viewpoint that communism is evil, so it played well to demonize the NLF. Iraqis who oppose the U.S. occupation are now called agents of Saddam or foreign Arabs by corporate media, for a similar demonization.”

Soldiers who question their mission in Iraq are increasingly aware of the growing solidarity from their families and anti-war veterans. Despite the threat of punishment, they are speaking out.

“If Donald Rumsfeld was here, I'd ask him for his resignation,” Spec. Clinton Deitz of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry's 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade told ABC News in July.

“I've got my own ‘Most Wanted’ list,” said a 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade sergeant. “The aces in my deck are Paul Bremer, Donald Rumsfeld, George Bush, and Paul Wolfowitz.”

"I can guarantee you they've never stood out in a checkpoint in the heat of the day, day after day, full battle rattle, always wondering if today's the day somebody's going to shoot me. Do they even care?" one soldier told a Knight Ridder reporter.

This fierce articulation of frustrations prompted a swift warning from the nervous brass.

"None of us that wear this uniform are free to say anything disparaging about the secretary of defense or the President of the United States," said Gen. John Abizaid, head of Central Command. "We're not free to do that. It's our professional code. Whatever action may be taken, whether it's a verbal reprimand or something more stringent, is up to the commanders on the scene."

The troops understand the price for being outspoken. One soldier who hopes not to be deployed writes: "If overheard by the wrong person, I could get court-martialed because of my beliefs. There is no freedom of speech for the freedom keepers. I am not a coward. I would give my life willingly to save my friends, family, or even a perfect stranger. My life is worth no more than the next person's, wherever they might live. But I will not fight in a war of such low integrity. I will not fight to fill rich American's pockets. Call me unpatriotic or what you will, but at least I still have my morals."

Sometimes soldiers speak up anonymously, and online communities are providing electronic safe-houses for virtual deserters. Some objectors are not hiding refusal on blogs or in chatrooms.

Last spring, US Marine Stephen Funk of Seattle refused orders to join the American jihad. He took an "unauthorized leave" from the forces, and faced a military tribunal as we were going to press.

Funk declares, "I had figured out that war itself was immoral and could not be justified. Yet everyone told me it was futile to try to get out. We were trained to be subordinate in our thoughts, words, and actions. It's hard to go up against all that, even when you know you are right. In February, my San Jose-based unit was called up to support the attack on Iraq. I could no longer just obey." An articulate, queer, radical youth of Filipino, Irish, Native American, and Chinese descent, Funk and his struggle represent what we hope will become contagious: conscientious and courageous objection.

In case you missed it, May 1 was "Loyalty Day" in the US (a sick and slick theft of Beltane and International Workers Day). This year, the President's Loyalty Day proclamation emphasized the "sacrifices" of those serving in the US armed forces. "Today, America's men and women in uniform are protecting our Nation, defending the peace of the world, and advancing the cause of liberty."

In the meantime, an editorial in the conservative *Army Times* newspaper denounced Bush and the Republican-controlled Congress as "mean-spirited and hypocritical" for slashing pay and benefit packages for those in the military and their families, calling such cuts "a troubling pattern that eventually will hurt morale." Email messages from US troops in Iraq that have been posted on a number of websites (including the one run by the highly-decorated ex-colonel and Pentagon consultant David Hackworth, who has publicly reported that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is "an arrogant asshole") that blast the government, the brass, and the war. "We are exhausted. We are in over our heads. And the President says, 'Bring 'em on,'" one soldier bitterly wrote. But the families say "Bring them home."

Organizations such as Military Families Speak Out, Veterans for Common Sense, and the National Gulf War Resource Center are also providing a forum for US troops in Iraq who grow increasingly restless with serving the oil industry.

Judging from some of these email messages, the soldiers are furious about the listless, contradictory directives that they receive from their commanders; obsolete and inadequate equipment; and the severe shortages of daily necessities for the desert climate like drinking water, sun-block lotion, and insect repellent. Many complain that the civilian population in Iraq is growing alarmingly hostile, a point driven home by daily attacks on soldiers.

There are collectives and affinity groups in the US and Britain in contact with disgruntled military family members, hoping to arrange opportunities for open discussions on the subject of getting the US out of Iraq. Others are trying to contact some of the soldiers based in Iraq (especially the "one weekend a month" reservists) in order to alert them to the broad public sympathy for ending the occupation that exists back in the US and to urge the "men and women in uniform who are protecting our Nation" to refuse orders, desert, and mutiny.

Facing a deteriorating situation in both Iraq and Afghanistan and needing more cannon-fodder, the government is exploiting the economic downturn and teenage unemployment to amplify its recruiting tactics aimed at

poor youth. MTV-style recruitment teasers make the military an appealing option for many working-class youth without hope of civilian jobs.

Unfortunately, the economic recovery has begun only for Bush's richest buddies. "Iraq was a very nice boost," one analyst told *The Wall Street Journal*. Halliburton, the Houston oil company once run by Vice President Dick Cheney, announced a profit of \$26 million in the second quarter of 2003. Cheney's friends get a bounty while civilians get brutality. In 2002, the company lost \$498 million. It helps that Halliburton got the majority of the work to rebuild Iraq's oil fields because of a good ol' boy, no-bid contract. Outrage forced a reopening of the bidding, but not before Halliburton racked up \$641 million in work. Halliburton is also the sole provider of troop support services in Iraq and Afghanistan. For those services the company has already received \$529 million in a 10-year contract that has no ceiling.

During the Vietnam era, radical anti-war organizers hoped that GI resistance in the battlefield, combined with mass demonstrations at home would bring about the defeat of the empire, and that is essentially what happened. Mutinies among the troops, assassinations of gung-ho field commanders, and a general malaise among the troops, convinced the military that they weren't much in danger of losing the war as losing their arum. Today, the volunteer army (whose existence is a direct response to the anti-draft movement of the '60s) is stretched thin and showing signs of fatigue. Once again, we must encourage resistance and provide solidarity to the resisters in the armed forces. A corner is presently being turned by many Americans who previously supported the war because they bought the Bush lies about weapons of mass destruction and "liberating" Iraq.

Mary Kewatt, an aunt of a U.S. soldier killed in Iraq, told the media: "President Bush made a comment ... he said 'bring it on.' Well, they brought it on, and now my nephew is dead."

It's time for us to bring something else on for the Mary Kewatts of this country, but particularly for the families of Iraqis, Afghans, and others living in regions targeted in the Empire's war against everything: the revolution that will render America's imperial war machine obsolete.

The website [www.BringThemHomeNow.org](http://www.BringThemHomeNow.org) is published by Military Families Speak Out and provides daily updates, letters from soldiers and families, and an extensive links page. They want to mobilize military families, veterans, and GIs themselves to demand: an end to the occupation of Iraq and other misguided military adventures; and an immediate return of all US troops to their home duty stations.

They can be contacted at: [BTHN@mfsso.org](mailto:BTHN@mfsso.org)

Or, send regular mail:

Bring Them Home Now

P.O. Box 91233

Raleigh, NC 27675

You can support their efforts: Send monetary donations to: Bring Them Home Now! c/o Veterans for Peace 438 N Skinker Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63130. Make checks payable to: VFP/BTHN.

Not one more troop killed in action. Not one more troop wounded in action. Not one more troop psychologically damaged by the act of terrifying, humiliating, injuring or killing innocent people. Not one more troop spending one more day ingesting depleted uranium. Not one more troop separated from spouse and children.

Bush says "Bring 'em on." We say "BRING THEM HOME NOW!"

# fifth Estate

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