

Anarchist Accidentally Asked to Lecture at Army Base

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I teach world history classes at a small, third-tier state college. After the start of the US drive-by massacres of Afghanistan in the late fall of 2001, I completely changed the content of my history courses in order to emphasize the history of Islamic civilizations and the interactions of cultures in Central Asia and the Middle East with those of Europe. After the invasion of Iraq, I decided to focus especially on Western military incursions in that region since the Crusades. My course descriptions explain all this very plainly and are posted with all the other class listings on the college's web page.

Recently, I came home to a message on my telephone answering machine from a lieutenant-colonel at the nearby army base who was looking for someone to come and speak to some soldiers that were being sent to Iraq, about the history and culture of that country. He said that he couldn't pay me for "helping out our troops," but he would see to it that I was reimbursed for gas and travel mileage for my efforts.

I took the next couple days to think it over. As an educator, I couldn't really resist the chance to speak to soldiers about things in a way that was different from all that gung-ho "making the world safe for democracy" idiocy that they had been told during training by their commanding officers. I could explain to them why soldiers were not re-enlisting for duty in Iraq, and why it was that ordinary Iraqis-not "terrorists" or "foreign fighters"-were joining the resistance movement there against their "liberators."

But on the other hand, wouldn't I be contributing to the war effort by participating in an education program for the Army? I really didn't want to help make the job of military occupation easier for some clueless reservist, instead of explaining the historical differences between Shi'ites and Sunnis to US soldiers. Shouldn't I be avoiding being complicit with the military in any way at all, and doing what I could to confuse and not clarify soldiers' understanding of the mission in Iraq?

I posed this quandary to friends and comrades, and most (to my surprise, about 3 to 1) told me that I should go to the base and teach, that I needed to be a radical educator instead of an over-educated radical. A lot of the arguments that I heard made good sense. But before I called the lieutenant-colonel to accept the job, I spent about an hour doing some Internet searches about the particular unit that I was supposed to speak to, and I learned very quickly that this was not a bunch of rural National Guard reservists as I had originally thought. In truth, this was a unit of Army intelligence specializing in "psychological operations" and "civil administration." These were low-level paper-shufflers analyzing intel for the US military occupation force's snitches, propagandists, and prisoner interrogators. I didn't think that there was anything that I could say to sway the attitudes of Army spies, so I called the base and told the commander that I refused to speak there.

The real lesson behind my invitation to speak to Iraq-bound troops is that it indicates that degree to which the US military is disorganized, ill-equipped, and poorly-trained-so much so that it desperately picked a name out of the faculty directory phonebook and hoped for the best. After all, by just Googling my name (my real name, not the pseudonym that I am using for this article), you could clearly see a list of my writings, my talks, and my work against war, empire, militarism, and the authority of the State. My course descriptions from the college catalogue spell out my attitudes towards Western military invasions in the Middle East. Presumably, a colonel in US Army

intelligence would know how to use the Internet to do a fifteen-minute background check on the person that he was asking to come and speak to his unit. But he couldn't be bothered.

Things are so slapdash and haphazard now in terms of shrinking troop strength, and so utterly out of control in terms of military operations, that the Army lacks the time, energy or resources to do something even so basic as to see whether or not the local expert could do more harm than good to young, unprepared intelligence analysts hurriedly rounded up for work in Operation Iraqi Freedom. It reinforced my hunch that the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq had become so disordered and despairing that even I could be considered for the Army's feeble attempts to train their soldiers to adapt to the dangers of military occupation.

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