

Resistance to Iraq inside the military

Q&A with Dahr Jamail

Dahr Jamail
Seth Kershner

2010

The U.S. defeat in the Vietnam war can be attributed to many things including the American military's inability to vanquish the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese Army on the battlefield despite killing three million Indochinese and destroying the country's infrastructure, and the enormous and unprecedented domestic opposition to the war.

Perhaps as great as the other two factors combined, resistance to the point of mutinies within the services—in the field, aboard ships, and at military bases during the war sealed the fate of the almost ten year conflict.

At home, rather than the completely right wing myth, fabricated years after the conflict ended, of vets being spat upon, many became activists in the militant anti-war movement and formed the organization, Vietnam Vets Against the War (VVAW). The group often was the lead contingent in mass anti-war marches, and famously, and dramatically, rallied at the White House and the 1972 Republican Party convention where they returned medals they had been awarded for valor and wounds.

It is generally assumed, with the draft no longer a feature, that the men and women who now comprise the military are in political agreement with the U.S. invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. As the interview below demonstrates, the kernel of resistance is present. Whether it will take on the significance of the VVAW is an open question and depends in part on whether the civilian anti-war movement can reconstitute itself now that the illusions about the Obama administration have been shattered.

The war in Afghanistan, now as much Obama's as it was Bush's, has become the longest conflict in U.S. history and its cost, when added to that of Iraq, has passed the \$1 trillion mark. Ending the war with another American defeat in Asia also depends on the material and political support we give organizations such as Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), which like its predecessor of a generation ago, is organizing among those who have experienced the imperial adventure first hand.

The IVAW can be found on line at www.ivaw.org and welcome ex-military personnel who have served since 2001.

The interview below was conducted with author Dahr Jamail by Seth Kershner. In the summer of 2003, Jamail was guiding climbers and running rescue missions on Mt. McKinley.

For years he had written a climbing column for an Anchorage, Alaska weekly newspaper, applying knowledge gleaned from climbs across the globe. That December, Jamail traveled to Iraq, determined to report on the Iraqi resistance to the U.S. invasion and occupation.

Since then, his dispatches have been picked up by the Guardian (UK), the Nation magazine, and Le Monde Diplomatique, among others. As one of the only American reporters never to be "embedded" with U.S. troops, his reporting offers an unfiltered look at the lives of ordinary Iraqis affected by the occupation.

Seth Kershner: As you discuss in your new book, *The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse To Fight In Iraq and Afghanistan*, more and more American GIs have been openly opposing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Could you talk a bit about what military resisters are doing?

Dahr Jamail: There is a substantial amount of resistance in the military today. The main reason we don't have as broad a movement as we did in Vietnam is the lack of a draft. But what I've found through interviewing dozens and dozens of soldiers is that even in Iraq there have been many instances of overt resistance.

For example, similar to Vietnam, soldiers have really low morale. They've become completely disgruntled by the situation. And, they're doing things called search and avoid missions.

They realize their patrols are not serving any purpose whatsoever, so they go out and do fake patrols. They go out and park in fields, radio in every hour at scheduled times telling their base that they're searching for weapons caches, etc., and then go back home after their shift is done.

I've talked with countless soldiers who've participated in this themselves and have buddies over in Iraq right now that say this is ongoing. And, it's been going on since the very beginning of the occupation.

Other things that are happening, both in Iraq and back home, is that there are more and more instances of soldiers standing up against parts of the system that they don't agree with. There are many women who are standing up and speaking out about being sexually assaulted in the military. I think one of the most cogent points of the book is the chapter I have about what's happening to women in the military today. It's really astounding. I think any woman who had access to this information would never in her right mind join the military.

fifth Estate

Dahr Jamail
Seth Kershner
Resistance to Iraq inside the military
Q&A with Dahr Jamail
2010

<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/383-summer-2010/resistance-iraq-inside-military>
Fifth Estate #383, Summer, 2010

[fiftheestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fiftheestate.org)