

# THE CASE FOR IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL



A Working Paper from  
the Solidarity Anti-War Working Group

October 2007  
\$1

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>The Spreading Crisis</b> by David Finkel	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>The Case for Staying</b> By Kale Baldock	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>The Urgency of Withdrawal</b> By Michael Schwartz	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>Reply: The Need to Stay in Iraq</b> By Kale Baldock	<b>Page 10</b>
<b>"Strategic Redeployment" vs. "Out Now"</b> By Gilbert Achcar and Steve Shalom	<b>Page 12</b>
<b>War and the Culture of Violence</b> By Dianne Feeley	<b>Page 15</b>
<b>Black America and the Iraq War</b> By Malik Miah	<b>Page 19</b>
<b>A Military Resister and Conscientious Objector</b> Interview with Camilo Mejia	<b>Page 21</b>
<b>Socialist Feminist Perspectives on Terrorism, Security and War</b> By Johanna Brenner and Nancy Holmstrom	<b>Page 23</b>
<b>Interview with Gilbert Achcar</b> By Susan Weissman	<b>Page 28</b>
<b>Follies of the War</b> By David Finkel	<b>Page 30</b>
<b>An Anti-Imperialist War Resister</b> Interview with Carl Webb	<b>Page 34</b>

## INTRODUCTION

FOR THE GREAT majority of the U.S. population, the question is not whether to get out of Iraq, but “how quickly can we be gone?” That’s why the voters elected Democratic-majority houses of Congress in November 2006. A year later, there are 30,000 more U.S. troops in Iraq. According to the Bush administration’s plans, a year from now there will still be as many U.S. troops in Iraq as there were before the “surge” -- and many years from now, U.S. forces will remain to “maintain stability” (oh yes, and free access to oil) in Iraq, on the model of the Korean peninsula where American soldiers remain in place after a war that ended over 50 years ago!

The amazing thing is that practically nobody really believes that the war or the “surge” have worked. With U.S. combat deaths closing in on 4000, every month means a further human sacrifice of Iraqi and American lives on the altar of a disastrous failure. That’s not the view only of those on the anti-imperialist left, or of hard-core antiwar activists. It’s the view of the great majority of military analysts not on Washington’s payroll, of commentators across the political spectrum, and above all the view of the majority of the U.S. public.

Tragically, while people don’t expect this war to “succeed,” they’re also losing hope that anything can

be done to end it. The Democratic leadership in Congress engages in all kinds of noisy anti-Bush rhetoric. But all that's needed to cut off money for the war is simply for either the House or Senate to refuse passage of Bush's twice-yearly demands for hundreds of billions in off-budget "supplemental funds." This wouldn't require any veto-proof or filibuster-proof super-majority – but the Democrats absolutely refuse to do it. If that weren't enough, the leading Democratic presidential candidates refuse to promise they'll end the occupation by the year 2013.

Seeing little or no hope of action from Congress, the antiwar anger of the public tends to give way to "what's-the-use?" apathy and resignation. Following the presentation of the carefully scripted and utterly fraudulent Petraeus-Crocker "progress" report, polls even show a blip of support for "giving the surge time to work" – not because people really believe it but because nothing else is on the table.

All this raises two urgent questions. First, what IS the way to get out of Iraq? Second, how can the antiwar movement regain its momentum and the attention of a war-weary U.S. population? We in Solidarity think that both these questions have the same answer: The viable demand for the antiwar movement, and the only way out of Iraq for U.S. troops and the American people, is OUT OF IRAQ – NOW.

That's why we present here a Working Paper, developed by the Anti-War Working Group of the socialist-feminist group Solidarity, dedicated to the struggle for immediate U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Through this struggle, we believe, the antiwar movement can not only help to end this dirty war – which has already destroyed too many lives and eats tens of billions of dollars a month while at home bridges fall down, children lose health care, New Orleans remains a disaster, and soldiers return home with untreated post-traumatic stress disorders leading to suicide, domestic violence and inability to cope with daily life. It's also how we can assist the peoples of the Middle East, above all the Palestinian nation, in achieving their self-determination and freedom from occupation.

Most of the articles in this collection previously

appeared in *Against the Current* in 2005 and 2006. We invite readers to look on this website at ATC issues for 2007 which include additional editorial statements and coverage. Also posted on this website is a statement from Solidarity on immediate withdrawal, written for the regional antiwar mobilizations called for October 27.

We particularly want to call attention to the exchange here between Kale Baldock and Michael Schwartz on whether the United States' moral responsibilities to the people of Iraq – given the U.S. invasion and occupation that destroyed their country – imply the need for U.S. troops to stay, or get out now. Subsequent events have thrown further light on the issues raised in this debate. Also included are a review essay of three books on the Iraq war; Malik Miah's discussion of African Americans and traditional

antiwar mobilizations; Dianne Feeley on what war does to society in general and women in particular; an insightful contribution by Nancy Holmstrom and Johanna Brenner on a feminist view of "security" in the post-9/11 world; and Gilbert Achcar and Steve Shalom on the logic of withdrawal.

For us these contributions are not only analytical, but part of the political work of antiwar movement-building and mobilizing in 2007 and 2008 – and let's be honest, probably beyond. This is an urgent moment for an antiwar movement that now represents the sentiments of a clear majority of the American people, yet needs to regain some of the energy and power that it showed before the war began.

It is more important now than ever to convince the public of the proper conclusions to be drawn from the facts that people now know – the facts that this war, based on lies, was illegal and moral from the beginning. OUT NOW More Than Ever! It won't be Congress under Pelosi and Reid that forces the Bush gang to accept defeat. To borrow a phrase from the obscene lexicon of the warmakers: The U.S. war machine will stand down when the movement, and the American people, stand up.

— *David Finkel, Solidarity Anti-War Working Group*

*September 25, 2007*

# BEYOND IRAQ: The Spreading Crisis

by David Finkel (*Against the Current*, 122 May/June 2006)

**The disaster and carnage of the Iraq occupation is the center of a crisis now spreading through the region—to Iran, to Afghanistan and the India-Pakistan subcontinent, and especially to Israel-Palestine — with implications far beyond.**

The immediate question is whether the military adventurism of the Bush regime toward Iran will push the Middle East and the world toward an unimaginable catastrophe. In the long run, a set of deep contradictions confront any strategy for global management — in other words, imperialism — whatever political faction reigns in Washington, D.C. Those imperial contradictions also underlie the United States' slide toward a police state at home, and for that matter, the enormous political eruption over "illegal immigration" discussed elsewhere in this issue of *Against the Current*.

Iraq itself is proceeding toward full meltdown. Even worse than a conventional civil war among defined political factions, Iraqi society is virtually dividing into communal and tribal fractions as people, mostly against their will, retreat into religious or ethnic "identity" for some hope of shelter from competing government and insurgent death squads.

But the argument in the United States about "whether Iraq is in civil war" is less about Iraq's politics than about our own. The domestic discussion of Iraq has a surreal quality: While Bush and Cheney stage their "Strategy for Victory" traveling show, hardly anyone among the U.S. elites or the general population believes it any more. Even among Republicans, active defenders of Donald Rumsfeld are as elusive as the ivory-billed woodpecker. Reading between the lines, the debate seems to be whether and when to say out loud what the commentators know — the United States has lost the Iraq war.

The uncertainty over admitting defeat is mainly because neither conservatives nor liberals have much

to say about what would come next, in Iraq or at home. The administration's implicit political defense is this: To say openly "Iraq is in a civil war" is to admit that the war has failed and U.S. troops should leave. Further, combined with the debacles of Katrina, the budget deficit and illegal domestic spying, it's to imply that the entire Bush regime is a disaster and that its top officials ought to resign in disgrace, beginning with Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld. These are consequences that the U.S. political establishment can't honestly confront.

What's the reality behind the mushrooming revelations of killings of Iraqi civilians by United States military forces? These aren't isolated incidents; every week now we learn of families slaughtered by U.S. troops in their homes, of a massacre in a mosque, of wild firing in all directions after a roadside bombing. In part, they reflect simple fear among soldiers under fire who can't identify insurgents from civilians, but they also present a warning sign — just as in the Vietnam war four decades ago — of military spirit, discipline and "rational" objectives being displaced by the revenge lust of soldiers sensing they're in a war they can't win, or even define what "winning" would be.

This is horrific enough, but it looks like it's getting worse. Start with Afghanistan, parts of which were never "stabilized" following the 2001-02 invasion because the Bush administration was consumed with mobilizing resources for the conquest of Iraq and parts beyond. A revived Taliban insurgency in southern Afghanistan will occupy the NATO expeditionary force for years to come (the government of Canada, currying favor with Washington, has foolishly dragged its military into commanding this mess). As the Taliban forces enjoy support within Pakistan's military intelligence service, this will feed into the permanent political crisis of that country.

Beyond this, Bush has signed an agreement with the government of India allowing it to continue its nuclear weapons program free of inspection, while gaining access to U.S. technology for nuclear power. The motive is to gain India's backing for Washington's gang-bang against "the Iranian threat" of nuclear weapons—a hypothetical possibility at least a decade away, while the most concrete and immediate risk of a nuclear showdown is between the two really-existing nuclear — armed states of the subcontinent, India and Pakistan — and to forestall an Indian orientation toward China.

## The Next War

To top this off, the Bush administration has made explicit its threat of war with Iran. We discussed this in the editorial in our previous issue (*ATC* 121, March-April 2006), but we now know that factions in the White House — not the generals, who know insanity when they see it — are pushing for a "tactical nuclear option" against Iranian targets.

It's not just the repetition by Cheney and Ambassador John Bolton of the formula "we are not taking any options off the table" which indicates the clear intention to go to war; it's also Rumsfeld's accusation that Iran is the "source" of IED ... bombing and "regime change" (roadside bomb) materials that in Iran is the clear direction that are killing U.S. troops in Iraq. the administration has staked out None of these explosives, in either the long or short run. we're supposed to believe, had been lying around in the looted Iraqi armories that U.S. commanders neglected to guard after the "liberation."

But this accusation, however grotesque on its face, creates a pretext for future U.S. military action against Iran on grounds of "self-defense" without the need for a United Nations cover, in case the UN fails to obey imperial orders to isolate and ultimately punish Iran for its impudence.

For its part, the government of Iran — and no doubt the forces competing for supremacy in the Tehran regime's murky internal factional life — are deeply involved in "the internal affairs" of Iraq, from the Shia militias to the political parties and perhaps some insurgent elements. Iran's internal conflicts aside, how could any state fail to "meddle" in a neighboring country, a recent deadly enemy no less, on the verge of disintegration under a foreign occupation?

The Iranian regime's first choice since 2003 has been to cooperate with The Great Satan in establishing a semi-theocratic Shia-controlled government in Iraq. But if the occupier's intention is to use "liberated" Iraq as the springboard to destroy the Iranian regime, then it makes perfect sense to turn that springboard into a quicksand for the Americans, especially as assorted U.S. blunders and brutalities have accomplished much of this already.

The immediate likelihood of war with Iran remains low, at least before the November election. The Bush gang's instinct for political survival will make it think twice about the prospects for \$100-a-barrel oil and \$5.00-per-gallon gasoline. The president's political base is smaller than it was just before 9/11, and the confidence he enjoys among U.S. elites has never

been weaker.

Bush's relations with Russia, moreover, which were strong in the buildup to the Iraq war (despite Moscow's diplomatic opposition to the invasion), have also turned somewhat sour. Nonetheless, the United States has been unexpectedly successful in enlisting European support for its anti-Iran campaign — whether because European governments want to follow the American lead, or think that joining this diplomatic front will forestall an early recourse to military strikes.

In any case, even if the insane "tactical nuclear option" disappears, bombing and "regime change" in Iran is the clear direction that the administration has staked out in either the long or short run. All of which poses the question: With the unbelievable mess the Bush regime has made for itself and the world in Iraq, how can the U.S. political establishment allow this largely discredited administration to march toward an even more dangerous debacle?

Why in particular does the Democratic Party, whose Congressional representatives are sniping at the administration's "incompetent" handling of the current war, raise no opposition to the next one while it can be stopped? Why, after admitting they fell for the phony "Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction," would these fools, including most of the liberal politicians and editorialists among them, accept or actively promote the fraudulent pretext for attacking Iran?

One reason is plain political cowardice, a fear of being attacked as traitors by the right wing's attack dogs for "deserting" the cause and the troops in time of war. But at a deeper level, two fundamental factors are at work. First, most of the opposition to the Bush gang in bourgeois politics actually supports the administration's war aims in Iraq and wants to see them more "competently" pursued (don't ask how) — and especially, crushing any independent economic and political course for a large oil-rich country like Iran.

Second, as much as they may dislike the Bush administration, these elite opponents are even more fearful of a major defeat for U.S. power. To bring down the Bush regime at the expense of weakening U.S. imperialism would be too great a price in their view. They would not choose that risk, except under pressure from a powerful popular movement that threatened more fundamental change — a threat that the antiwar movement so far, regrettably, hasn't been able to pose.

## Israel's "Withdrawal" to Apartheid

Over the past year, considerable speculation has focused on the possibility of Israel participating in, even initiating, a military attack on Iran. In immediate terms, the Israeli election outcome doesn't appear to lead in this direction. Israel's parliamentary politics are highly fractured: The newly-hatched governing Kadima party has fewer seats than expected; its leader Ehud Olmert doesn't carry the military weight and doesn't have the grandiose ambitions of the defunct Ariel Sharon; the long-dead Labor Party has been partly resurrected as a social-democratic force under its Moroccan-born trade unionist leader Amir Peretz, reflecting the potential for the re-emergence of class politics within the Israeli state; and the Israeli electorate showed if anything that it wants a period of quiet to deal with the country's wracking social crises.

What may look like "peace and quiet" to inward-looking Israeli voters, however, is chaos and disaster for the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The parameters of Olmert's program for "unilateral disengagement" and "fixing Israel's final borders by 2010," backed by the Bush regime and the Democrats in the United States, are fixed in practice by Israel's Annexation Wall. This so-called "security barrier" carves the West Bank into cantons, cuts villages from their lands and from Jerusalem, and destroys the possibility of any semblance of a viable independent Palestinian state.

In the name of "two states" and "preserving the Jewish and democratic character of Israel," the Israeli state is on the road towards "withdrawal" to apartheid on the model of the failed South African Bantustans. This is not only an obscenity but also a formula for permanent conflict, as even the most servile pro-American dictatorships in the Arab world will find it difficult to accept in the face of their own populations.

For Israel's 1.5 million Arab citizens, the rise to third place of Avigdor Lieberman's fascistic "Israel Our Homeland" party — displacing the collapsing traditional right-wing Likud, and advocating that Arabs be stripped of Israeli citizenship and the regions where they live "transferred" to the Palestinian Bantustan in exchange for Israel's annexation of the settlement blocs — doesn't mean "peace and quiet" either.

This extreme "demographic solution" is not on the short-term political agenda, for reasons of international politics (and because traditional Zionism would hardly be eager to "sacrifice" the territory of the Galilee). But it represents the kind of permanent threat that Israeli Arab citizens, sometimes called "1948 Palestinians," face under the imperative of "pre-

serving Israel's strong Jewish majority." It also naturally accompanies the sick logic of establishing "peace and final borders" by annexing as much of the West Bank as the Israeli state thinks it can digest, which represents close to a consensus among Jewish voters.

Israel's pretext for "unilateral disengagement," of course, is that there is "no Palestinian partner for peace." Translated, this means that the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected Israel's demand that he launch a civil war against the Islamist movement, and then that the population in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem refused to vote for surrender. As the new Palestinian Authority government organized by Hamas was installed, the United States along with Canada joined Israel in cutting off aid and relations with the PA and attempting to starve the population into submission.

## Imperial Chaos

To sum it up: the glorious imperial conquest of Iraq has become U.S. imperialism's very own suicide bomb, blowing up the region along with the invader. Now the circle of chaos threatens to close. The Palestinians cannot accept the Israeli-American demand of surrender to apartheid. They must look for allies simply in order to survive, and it certainly does not look like the European Union intends to defy the United States on this issue by replacing the lifeline that Washington and Israel have cut off.

Suppose now that the Iranian regime, as it has promised, steps up to do so — because Iran too needs allies in the face of the imperialist threat. To protect Palestinians from starvation would no doubt confirm Condoleezza Rice's proclamation that Iran is "the central banker of international terrorism" — as if any country other than the United States of America could claim that title. Would Iranian aid to the Palestinian Authority propel Israel toward joining a U.S. attack on Iran? Would this bring about a resumption of the Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah's war with Israel — and what would that mean for a fragile Lebanese state and society, and for Syria?

The worst-case scenarios aren't inevitable. But sooner than anyone would like, a cascade of new disasters may tie together the multiple crises that U.S. imperialism has sharpened in its drive to "transform the Middle East."

— *David Finkel is an editor of ATC and Detroit activist in support of Palestinian rights.*

# The Case for Staying in Iraq

by Kale Baldock

(Against the Current, 122 May/June 2006)

**I don't support an immediate U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, because I think it would probably make an already bad situation much worse. Of course, there's no guarantee that continuing the occupation will succeed in allowing some form of stability to take hold—particularly if our military forces simply "stay the course" of brutality evidenced in Fallujah, Abu Ghraib, and the training of Iraqi death squads. However, I believe it offers the best chance for the chaotic forces now at work in Iraq to settle, over time, into some type of a coherent nation.**

Such a view does not discount the lies and criminality of the Bush Administration, which is of course the party responsible for the disaster in Iraq. But to make the crimes of the American executive the point of departure for current and future policy in Iraq is to lose track of the reality on the ground as it promises to affect the Iraqi people themselves. In that regard, it strikes me that many in the current antiwar camp are tempted into a knee-jerk identification with the Vietnam-era antiwar movement.

As I describe in my book *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* there are similarities between the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, but also important differences. One of the key differences is that Vietnam had been engaged in a struggle for national liberation against France's colonial occupation decades before significant American involvement began. That struggle produced a popular, viable political movement instigated by the revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh, who became president of North Vietnam.

After the war with the French ended, Vietnam was scheduled to hold nation-unifying elections in 1956, which the U.S.'s South Vietnamese puppet president Ngo Dinh Diem canceled when it became obvious that Ho Chi Minh would win in a landslide. But that didn't stop the popular movement in the South, which grew into the guerrilla army of the National Liberation Front, better known as the Vietcong.

Well-organized, highly motivated, and increasingly well-supplied by the North, those forces held out against overwhelming American firepower and technological superiority until American forces withdrew. In that setting, America's antiwar movement was perfectly correct in demanding an immediate withdrawal from Vietnam, where our government's ruthless aggression pointlessly killed millions and destroyed much of the country. (Moreover, a number of leading anti-Vietnam War activists are currently cautioning against immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, recognizing the key differences between the two situations.)

## Fractured Iraq

By contrast, Iraq is a socio-political basket case, with a democratically-elected but ineffectual government and a hopelessly fractured insurgency that lacks any common focus beyond wanting the Americans to leave.

Iraq was dominated by its Sunni Muslim minority from the time of the Ottoman invasion in the 17th century up through Saddam Hussein's brutal reign. Indeed, only ongoing institutionalized repression could keep simmering Shi'ite Muslim resentment at bay. Hundreds of years of discrimination, imprisonment, torture and mass murder are not easily forgotten, especially amidst the turmoil of American sanctions and wars that have torn Iraq's social fabric to shreds. (Add to this a large Kurdish minority, and various others, whose fates were similar.)

On the flip-side are the Sunnis, who are angry at losing their dominant status and fearful of the Shi'ite majority's potential reprisals. These various social-ethnic-religious forces threaten to overwhelm Iraq if left unchecked.

Most of those who are calling for a U.S. withdrawal point out that the occupation is fueling the Iraqi insurgency. They are correct. But what gets lost in this view is that the occupation is simultaneously holding an all-out civil war in check.

Proponents of withdrawal also often claim that a civil war is already going on. And again, they are correct. Nir Rosen's article in the December 2005 *Atlantic*, which focuses on this fact and the idea that the occupation is inciting the insurgency, is an authoritative example of this argumentative line. But what I would urge those holding such opinions to consider is the degree to which what is happening now compares to what would likely happen if the mediocre framework of security now in place were to dissolve.

Twenty or thirty bodies of tortured and executed Sunnis or Shi'ites turning up in a ditch every few days is horrible enough. But the thousands upon thousands of dead that would quickly mount from an all-out civil war, and the concomitant destruction of what's left of Iraq's physical and cultural reality, would make the current level of violence pale in comparison. Nir Rosen contends that no such conflict would break out if the current occupation ended, a claim of which I am skeptical.

## Regional War

Beyond those concerns, let's consider Iraq in the wider context of the Middle East. A civil war in Iraq will likely prompt surrounding countries to militarily aid their respective Sunni and Shi'ite brethren, exacerbating the long-standing Sunni/Shi'ite rift in the Muslim world. The various dynamics of opposition also include Arabs vs. Persians (Iranians), fundamentalist Muslims vs. governments friendly with the West, and so on in an unpredictable set of potentials for chaos.

Dilip Hiro addresses this in his book *Secrets and Lies: Operation "Iraqi Freedom" and After*: "Currently, the presence of an alien occupation force and the desire to get rid of it is providing Iraqis of diverse political hues with a common objective. Once that state ends, the deep-seated ethnic and sectarian differences and rivalries are likely to come to the fore, paving the way for a likely civil war, which will suck in all six of Iraq's neighbors."

We know that Muslim fundamentalists have often been inspired by foreign examples, as when Iran's 1979 revolution provided the incentive for "the worst of the worst" to emerge from the periphery of Muslim societies and step into the role of "freedom fighters" against the Soviets in Afghanistan — the whole thing a CIA operation aimed at re-establishing U.S. control over the region. Likewise, they are responding in high numbers to serve in Iraq, where they make up the bulk of suicide bombers, who are so effective at indiscriminately killing anyone they choose, especially innocent

civilians. In light of this very real potential for chaos, we should consider Dilip Hiro's description of "the scenario most feared by the U.S. policy makers: Iraq, possessing the world's second-largest oil reserves, consumed by a civil strife, that would suck in all its six immediate neighbors, three of them oil-rich, and have a devastating effect on oil prices. The last major civil war in the region was in Lebanon, which does not have oil; it lasted more than fifteen years ... and consumed 150,000 lives.... [I]t sucked in not only neighboring Israel and Syria, but also Egypt, Iraq, Libya, France, the United States, Britain, and Italy."

Thus, what if, in the ensuing mayhem of Iraq, extremists in Saudi Arabia attracted enough popular support to overthrow the despised royal family? Our initial sense of satisfaction might quickly turn to fright as the world economy ground to a halt without its precious petroleum fix.

And how long, do you suppose, it would take the Hindu nation of India to preemptively strike its neighboring Muslim enemy Pakistan with nuclear weapons if fundamentalists there finally succeeded in overthrowing Pakistan's secular government and got their hands on nukes?

These scenarios may seem far-fetched and alarmist. However, I would suggest that the Middle East is a more volatile place today than it was before the current Iraq War, and indeed before the previous two decades of increasingly direct American involvement there in pursuit of controlling the region's oil supplies.

Ironically, the Iraq War is so far the U.S.'s most successful venture in fueling the terrorism it claims to be fighting in the Middle East. More numerous than ever, those who opt for tactics of terror are the likely catalyst in setting off wider conflicts in the region, not to mention beyond. In this vein, even the stodgy ruling class organ *Foreign Affairs* recently allowed Peter Bergen and Alec Reynolds the space to observe that "the Iraq war has expanded the terrorists' ranks: the year 2003 saw the highest incidence of significant terrorist attacks in two decades, and then, in 2004, astonishingly, that number tripled."

Likewise, Roger Spiller, professor emeritus of military history at the Army Command General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, recently told *The Kansas City Star*, "I'm simply worried about the degree to which this [Iraqi] insurgency can turn into a global insurgency.... You have the Philippines. You have Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran."



## Toward Stability and Amnesty

In 2006, we can expect a bevy of politicians running for re-election to call for withdrawing U.S. forces from Iraq. Of course, most will have voted for the war, and only now that their own measly political skins are at stake will they pretend to do penance for their initial irresponsibility.

True opponents of wars for oil should stand above the convenient posturing of such self-serving hacks and insist that the U.S. do its utmost to secure some form of stability in Iraq. In my opinion, this effort would revolve around an attempt to achieve a general cease-fire based on amnesty for all combatants. However repugnant, even the murderers of children would be included. Let us not forget that gruesome circumstances in South Africa, Rwanda and Northern Ireland have been successfully mitigated by similar approaches.

In *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* I posited that "As long as the current [U.S.] military force remains in Iraq, prospects for peace there, and for stability in the Middle East generally, are questionable." But I directly followed up that statement by insisting:

A U.S. withdrawal must be backed up with intense negotiations by all Iraqi parties and factions. Unconditional cease-fire and amnesty should be the goals. A coalition of world powers should be involved,

to save the process from the taint of appearing to be a purely American project imposed on Iraq.

Since then, no such international effort at broad-based negotiations has emerged. In fact, most of the world is keeping its distance, leaving the U.S. to deal with Iraq's quagmire in the same "go it alone" fashion it pursued in opting for war. Alas, if that's where we're at, it's where we must start over from.

For all the reasons cited above, I maintain that it is best not to let our desire to see the Bush Administration defeated and humiliated overcome our concern for the fate of the Iraqi people. If I thought they were best served by leaving them to their fate within the turmoil created from outside, I too would demand that the U.S. quit Iraq, and fast. But like it or not, support the war or not, we have as a nation inherited the consequences of our leaders' actions.

If we on the Left are forced to practice our own version of realpolitik, and in doing so find ourselves ironically supporting the desperate attempts of a criminal leadership to salvage the remnants of a terrible mistake, let us not lose sight of those whose futures are most directly on the line in this ongoing tragedy: the people of Iraq.

— *Kale Baldock is the author of **Is Iraq Another Vietnam?** ([www.isiraqanothervietnam.com](http://www.isiraqanothervietnam.com)) He lives in Kansas City, Missouri.*

# Response to Kale Baldock: URGENCY OF WITHDRAWAL

By Michael Schwartz

(*Against the Current*, 123 July/August 2006)

**I appreciate Kale Baldock's thoughtful argument ("The Case for Staying in Iraq," *ATC* 122) that "continuing the occupation" is necessary because "it offers the best chance for the chaotic forces now at work in Iraq to settle, over time, into some type of coherent nation."**

His argument does not rest on the unconvincing premises so often offered for this position: that Bush's invasion was justified; and/or that we must "stay the course" to insure against a humiliating U.S. defeat; and/or that steady progress is being made toward creating a democracy in Iraq.

Instead he rests his case on a Realpolitik argument that the American presence is needed to protect the

Iraqi people from the horrors of what would "likely happen if the mediocre framework of security now in place were to dissolve."

But in perfecting the "we must stay" position, Kale Baldock reveals its fatal weakness. By inspecting his argument, we can see the absolute urgency of an American withdrawal.

Baldock makes his case by chronicling the indubitable horrors that could occur if the current internecine warfare matures into a full-fledged civil war. His scenario is vivid. The current stream of bodies found in ditches could become "thousands upon thousands of dead;" the current tension the war has created in the Middle East could mature into a regional war that would, in Dilip Hiro's words, "suck in all six of Iraq's neighbors;" the already spreading terrorism could topple the Saudi monarchy, and bring the "world economy to a halt without its precious petroleum fix;" and the ongoing chaos could trigger a collapse of the Pakistani government and allow Islamist terrorists to get "their hands on nukes."

All this is part of the terrible legacy that escalation of the conflict in Iraq might create. But what Baldock fails to acknowledge is that the U.S. presence is not preventing disaster; it is, instead, the principal engine driving the Middle East toward each of these catastrophes.

Taking each of these nightmares very briefly:

1. The occupation has been a key factor in generating the ethno-religious warfare that has been building since the invasion. Three examples. First, the horrific annihilation of the city of Falluja led — as state terror so often does — to the raft of suicide car bombings last year; desperate Sunnis were won over to the idea that the United States and its Shia allies understood nothing but profound violence.

Second, the United States organized the death squads that Baldock mentions as so dangerous; this was done (as it was in El Salvador 20 years ago) in a desperate attempt to use terror to demoralize the anti-occupation resistance. Third, the U.S. uses Shia troops against Sunnis and Sunnis against Shia; this cynical ethnic exploitation is inflaming the hatred that fuels ethnic warfare and providing the opportunity for all manner of gratuitous brutality.

If the United States were to leave, most (but not all) of the provocation generating the violence would dissolve. If the U.S. stays long enough, the hatred may become self-sustaining.

2. The U.S. presence has been the key factor in rising Middle East tensions. Threats of attacks on Iran and Syria have made each country more belligerent and undermined efforts to bring stability to regional relations. The political chaos in Iraq has created tensions between Turkey and several of its neighbors, and intermittent threats by the Turkish to militarily intrude into Iraqi Kurdistan.

The threatened division of Iraq has set in motion destabilizing shockwaves around the region. As long as the U.S. occupation remains, these forces will continue to escalate and heighten the risk of war erupting among two or more of Iraq's neighbors.

3. The violence and brutality of the U.S. occupation has resulted in an exponential increase in terrorist attacks outside of Iraq and throughout the region. As the United States continues its air attacks in Iraq, it also creates more and more revolutionaries and fundamentalist jihadists, not only in Iraq, but also in all the neighboring countries. Saudi Arabia is particularly vulnerable, and will become more vulnerable for as long as the U.S. presence extends. The best way to protect against a regional war is to remove the U.S. military from the region.

4. The Pakistani government's alliance with the United States is the single most important reason for its shaky condition. So long as the U.S. presence remains in Iraq, the more vulnerable the regime in Pakistan becomes. The best way to prevent the replacement of Musharraf in favor of Islamist fundamentalists is for the United States to promptly withdraw from Iraq.

In short, Baldock rightly argues that the chaos in Iraq contains the seeds of a much larger catastrophe. To stop these seeds from germinating, we must remove the key nutrient of chaos: the American occupation.

— *Michael Schwartz is Director, Undergraduate College of Global Studies and Professor of Sociology, State University at Stony Brook, New York.*

David Finkel's comments (ATC 122) about my book *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?*, and about my position against immediately withdrawing the U.S. military from Iraq, were well-informed and fair. So were the judgments of Gilbert Achcar in his interview with Susan Weissman, though his focus was on the withdrawal issue in general and not on my essay specifically. Likewise, Michael Schwartz's current ATC response reflects an impressive familiarity with Iraq and the Middle East, and his critique of my analysis is well-taken.

All these commentators share a genuine desire to see the best outcome for the people of Iraq amid the current crisis.

None agrees with my position that the U.S. military presence in Iraq is keeping a lid on all-out civil war, and that a strategy of negotiations with insurgent groups toward cease-fire and amnesty offers a logical next step to resolving the conflict. David Finkel graciously accepts these differences and pleads for "a spirit of inclusion and mutual respect" among those of us who all stand aghast at the Bush administration's stupid, arrogant, misguided venture in Iraq.

However, I think the judgment of whether this war was right or wrong has been superseded by the more pressing concerns of how to get U.S. forces home, without sacrificing the stability of Iraq in the process. Certainly, we should continue to tell the truth about the distortions and lies which created this disaster. That it was wrong (or at least a mistake) to launch the war in the first place has become evident to the majority of Americans. But now we are faced with a moral dilemma, the qualities of which have become, beyond our wishes, unexpectedly complex.

The question now is: In the face of a crisis which threatens the future of an entire nation that has unwillingly fallen hostage to American neoconservative insanity, should we uncritically allow our emotional response to override our reason?

After the Shiite Golden Dome mosque was blown up last February, the inter-sectarian war escalated tremendously — not attacks on U.S. forces. Referring

to an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, the May 8 edition of Democracy Now! radio reported that

"(A)t least 4,100 civilians were killed in Baghdad during the first three months of the year. Many of the dead were found hog-tied and shot execution style. Many bore signs of torture such as bruises, drill holes, burn marks, gouged eyes or severed limbs. Execution-style killings are now claiming nine times more lives than car bombings."

Is it reasonable to conclude that the presence of U.S. forces is "causing" this inter-sectarian bloodbath, and that it would just go away if the occupation just went away?

Michael Schwartz makes a very good point that Washington has to some degree been pitting Sunnis and Shiites against one another. (This despicable tactic is endorsed by esteemed theorists of our elite political

think-tanks.) He contends that "If the U.S. were to leave, most (but not all) of the provocation generating the violence would dissolve. If the U.S. stays long enough, the hatred may be self-sustaining."

I believe the hatred has already become self-sustaining. So does journalist Nir Rosen, who in the winter of 2005 argued that if U.S. forces left Iraq, the motivation for insurgent violence would collapse. Most recently, however, he dourly informed his national television audience that he holds out no hope whatsoever for the insurgent forces in Iraq to step back from the brink of an all-out civil war.

I freely admit, the most we can hope for from a well-intentioned but poorly prepared (and consistently lied to) American military force in Iraq is to provide a barely adequate lid on the bubbling strife which threatens to engulf that beleaguered nation — and perhaps the region.

Another question: How can one interpret the suicide bombings against Iraqi civilian as being "aimed at" U.S. forces? Only indirectly, for such acts are geared to give Iraqis the impression that coalition forces can't protect them, and that they would be better off with them gone. Those who commit such acts — by most accounts foreigners (though Schwartz adds

# A Response to Critics

By Kale Baldock  
(Against the Current, 123 July/August 2006)

that Sunnis are often targeting Shiites) — obviously consider Iraqi lives as cheap sacrifices to some other motive.

## Dynamics of Rage

I think these are signs that a complex dynamic of rage and reaction are afoot in Iraq, not simply focused on the foreign occupation, and won't likely be resolved by that occupation's prompt exit. So far, the civil war is largely taking place surreptitiously, underground, through raids on buses, kidnappings and the like, not openly in the streets. I believe that situation would quickly change in the absence of the imperfect security apparatus now in place.

Finkel suggested that "No antiwar movement ever won by demanding pseudo-realist 'intense negotiations for national unity' or nostrums of that sort." And if the goal is simply to get the US out of Iraq, then the straight-line "Out Now!" approach is the obvious answer. But shouldn't we also be asking some more nuanced questions, like what — or even if — the antiwar movement and the Left in general will "win" if withdrawal doesn't work? Shouldn't we be considering the Left's own liability as a political movement?

If indeed a U.S. withdrawal does precipitate a cataclysm in Iraq, the Washington spin-meisters with total access to the mass media will almost certainly paint the antiwar movement as the guilty party. In that case, our credibility will suffer and our struggle to confront power will be severely set back.

True, if we support the prolonged presence of U.S. forces in Iraq and some type of normalcy is achieved, the Bushites may be vindicated and the Left still hung out to dry. The difference: thousands of more innocent Iraqi lives will have been saved.

I realize that many readers will probably consider

my judgments paternalistic, detached, or worse. I often question myself as well, particularly in light of polls showing 80% of Iraqis in favor of withdrawal, and 72% of U.S. troops wishing to be home by the end of the year. I understand that both of those parties, victimized by U.S. governmental power, are exhausted, desperate and sick of the whole thing.

They just want it all to end; and I would likely echo their opinions if in their shoes. But we should also keep in mind that desperate people often make irrational choices. Who can blame them? Yet, isn't it also the responsibility of those who have the luxury of security to put their minds to work in the spirit of well-intentioned reason — doing so in the service of what they think will most likely benefit the victims of this tragedy?

Of course, if a unified Iraqi government demands the exit of foreign forces, then exit they must. Hopefully it will speak with enough authority and cohesion to merit the respect of the various insurgent groups who are currently putting Iraq on a fast-track to national suicide.

It may be utterly naïve for me to demand that the U.S. change course in Iraq, and become focused on peace-making rather than body counts. Washington's war machine never managed to do so in Vietnam. Why now? After all, the latest news from our most recent international foray is nothing but more bleakness reflecting, in Robert Bly's words, "the insanity of empire."

In the end, we're all striving for the same basic goals, whether or not we agree in our conclusions. I think that the complexity of the situation demands we recognize our own opinions to be, necessarily, incomplete and to varying degrees inaccurate. Nevertheless, let's keep on responding, each in our own way, to the current conflict as we believe best serves all involved — especially, of course, the Iraqis, whose predicament is the outcome of criminal statecraft practiced by butchers in Baghdad and Washington alike.



# "Strategic Redeployment" vs. "Out Now"

International Viewpoint 373 ([www.internationalviewpoint.org](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org))  
by Gilbert Achcar and Steve Shalom

**Whatever the limitations of Rep. Murtha's call to redeploy U.S. troops from Iraq that we have already emphasized ("On John Murtha's Position," ZNet, Nov. 21), he went much too far for most Democrats or for the Bush administration. Nevertheless, there have been others who have urged the redeploying of some of the U.S. forces in Iraq.**

In October, Lawrence Korb and Brian Katulis, writing for the Center for American Progress, a liberal organization headed by Clinton's former chief of staff John Podesta, issued a report calling for what they termed "strategic redeployment." (Lawrence J. Korb and Brian Katulis, *Strategic Redeployment: A Progressive Plan for Iraq and the Struggle Against Violent Extremists*, Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, October 2005.)

Like Murtha, Korb and Katulis (who served in the Reagan and Clinton administrations, respectively) make telling observations. For example, they note that: "most Iraqis do not want us there and they do not feel our presence makes them safer. One half says they support insurgent attacks on coalition forces and a majority says they feel less safe when foreign troops patrol their neighborhoods, according to polling of Iraqi citizens sponsored by the US government earlier this year."

They conclude, however, that what is needed is a "strategic redeployment," specifically rejecting "calls for an immediate and complete withdrawal." Under their proposal, during 2006, 46,000 national guard and reserves would be returned to the United States, 20,000 troops would be sent to other theaters (18,000 to Afghanistan, 1,000 to Southeast Asia, and 1,000 to Africa), and 14,000 troops would be stationed in

Kuwait and off-shore in the Persian Gulf.

The 60,000 U.S. troops remaining in Iraq would be redeployed away from urban areas to minimize inflaming Iraqi opinion. By the end of 2007, most of these troops would be withdrawn (to unspecified locations), leaving only "counterterrorist units."

"This presence, along with the forces in Kuwait and at sea in the Persian Gulf area will be sufficient to conduct strikes coordinated with Iraqi forces against any terrorist camps and enclaves that may emerge and deal with any major external threats to Iraq."

Some analysts (for example, *Slate's* Fred Kaplan) have suggested that Murtha got his plan from Korb and Katulis, though he speeds up their timetable and moves his entire residual force out of Iraq. But the same reasons given in our original essay for why the anti-war movement should avoid confusing Murtha's position with its own apply with even greater force to the Korb-Katulis position.

Korb and Katulis wisely point out that to enhance U.S. security President Bush should announce that the United States "will not build permanent military bases in Iraq, counteracting arguments made in recruitment pitches by militants and Iraqi insurgents." But where are the U.S. counterterrorist units in Iraq going to be housed if not at bases?

In any event, it's not just designs on military bases that need to be disavowed, but plans to dominate Iraqi oil too, which are proceeding apace. (See Greg Muttitt, *Crude Designs: The Rip-Off of Iraq's Oil Wealth*, London: PLATFORM with Global Policy Forum, Institute for Policy Studies [New Internationalism Project], New Economics Foundation, Oil Change International and War on Want, November 2005.) And

a two-year timetable is unacceptable.

As we noted earlier, two to three months is plenty of time to remove all U.S. troops, if that is one's genuine interest. Protracted "timetables" only make sense if one is trying to secure a continuing dominance over Iraqi politics and resources before leaving.

In the *Washington Post* of November 26, Joe Biden of Delaware, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and an aspiring presidential candidate, wrote an op-ed column entitled "Time for An Iraq Timetable." Biden declared that in 2006 U.S. troops "will begin to leave in large numbers. By the end of the year, we will have redeployed about 50,000. In 2007, a significant number of the remaining 100,000 will follow. A small force will stay behind — in Iraq or across the border — to strike at any concentration of terrorists."

Biden's language is interesting — he doesn't quite call for this, but essentially predicts it. His prediction seems to be based on the fact that the Senate by a vote of 79-19 and over the objections of the White House adopted an amendment requiring the President to provide quarterly reports on the progress of U.S. policy and military operations in Iraq. (This vote took place after the Senate defeated a Democratic-sponsored amendment asking the President to prepare an estimated timetable for withdrawal from Iraq.) Given that the successful amendment has no teeth at all, it's hard to see why it presages much of anything.

Nevertheless, Biden's comment is consistent with various hints from the Bush Administration itself. Obviously the Republicans don't want to go into the 2006 elections, let alone the 2008 elections with an increasingly unpopular and seemingly endless occupation of Iraq on display.

In part this leads them to make optimistic comments about how soon Washington will be able to reduce the number of troops in Iraq (glossing over the fact that several thousand troops were added before the October 15 referendum, so a withdrawal of these would indicate no progress at all). During the Vietnam War there were countless optimistic predictions of when the troops would come home, only to have the president send more troops when the situation deteriorated further. And we've been hearing similar optimistic comments from the Bush Administration for more than two years; for example, on October 19, 2003, the *Washington Post* reported on its front page:

"There are now 130,000 U.S. troops in Iraq. The plan to cut that number is well advanced.... and has been described in broad outline to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld but has not yet been approved by

him. It would begin to draw down forces next spring, cutting the number of troops to fewer than 100,000 by next summer and then to 50,000 by mid-2005, officers involved in the planning said."

True, in 2003 Iraq was nowhere near the political liability for the Bush administration that it is now, so we shouldn't discount the prospect of a real policy shift. Clearly the Bush administration has scaled back its more grandiose goals in Iraq, but it's unlikely that it would choose to withdraw its forces without being confident that it could secure its more basic goal — domination of the oil resources of the region — unless, of course, this were made untenable.

It is possible that the U.S. will fall back on a strategy of trying to replace its troops with air power, hoping that the reduction in U.S. casualties will make the war more palatable to the American public. In late August, the head of the air force told the *New York Times* that after any withdrawal of U.S. ground troops, "we will continue with a rotational presence of some type in that area more or less indefinitely," adding "We have interests in that part of the world...." (Eric Schmitt, "U.S. General Says Iraqis Will Need Longtime Support From Air Force," Aug. 30) To support these interests Washington is upgrading 16 different bases in the Middle East and Southwest Asia (*New York Times*, Sept. 18, 2005).

According to Seymour Hersh in the Dec. 5 *New Yorker*, plans are being drawn up precisely to replace U.S. ground troops in Iraq with warplanes. Hersh reports that some Pentagon officials are worried about what it would mean to have Iraqis calling in bombing targets to the U.S. air force, but no matter who calls in the coordinates, white phosphorus, cluster munitions, and 500-pound bombs are not going to address the problem of the insurgency; indeed, they are going to generate more recruits for both the insurgency and terrorism.

For the antiwar movement, it is critical to insist on the complete withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces, from Iraq and from the region, because retaining any of them — whether counterinsurgency units ready to intervene or air power to level further Iraqi cities — will violate Iraqi sovereignty and continue to fuel insurgency and hatred. And the antiwar movement must insist as well on immediate withdrawal, because the Bush Administration itself will soon be talking of future drawdowns — and indeed it already is.

We should bear in mind that the mere fact that the antiwar movement raises the "Out Now" slogan does not mean that U.S. forces are going to leave Iraq overnight. During the Vietnam War, a much more pow-

erful movement than anything we have seen in the U.S. in the last few decades demanded that U.S. troops get "Out Now."

This did not lead — even when the U.S. power elite reached the conclusion that the war should be terminated — to a "precipitous" withdrawal, but to a withdrawal that was completed only after the Paris Accords were concluded with the three main Vietnamese parties involved. Nevertheless, the pressure of the antiwar movement in the U.S. was decisive in compelling Washington to opt for this withdrawal.

The issue with "Out Now" is therefore not about the logistical details of withdrawal, but about how to be most effective in countering Washington's imperial aims. "Out Now" is a slogan around which one can build a large coalition of forces, from those who only care about "our boys" to those who care about the Iraqi people's freedom, whereas any dilution of the "responsible exit strategy" kind — aside from the fact that it would be extremely difficult even to agree on what the "conditions" for the withdrawal should be — would only provide the Bush Administration, along with pro-war Democrats, an argument for justifying the protracted presence of U.S. troops.

We are not calling for a "cut and run" withdrawal, abandoning Iraq to its fate (like in the "selfish" nationalist rhetoric of the isolationist Right). We are perfectly aware that, given what the United States has been doing in Iraq, tragically disrupting the situation in that country, if the U.S. troops were just to leave Iraq suddenly, say in 48 hours, without prior notice, that would definitely create a dangerous chaotic situation. But this is not what we are demanding.

The demand for the immediate withdrawal of the troops is, first of all, a demand for an immediate political decision to withdraw the troops. Once the political decision is taken and proclaimed publicly, it becomes possible, in fact indispensable, to prepare the best conditions for its implementation in the shortest possible timeframe, while starting without delay to bring troops back home. To be sure, the modalities through which this should be completed in a way not to harm the Iraqi people must be worked out with their elected representatives.

If Washington were to make clear that it wants to complete the withdrawal of its troops within a timetable stretching over weeks, or very few months, this would

provide a very powerful incentive for the Iraqis to reach an agreement among themselves on a way to run their country together peacefully and start to concentrate their efforts on the huge task of its reconstruction.

The consensus reached at the recent Cairo conference is an important step in that direction and proves that it is perfectly possible, and much easier indeed, to reach such agreements when U.S. representatives are not there constantly interfering and calling the shots.

Finally, those who accuse the antiwar movement of wanting to "cut and run" and pretend that they care more for the interests of the Iraqis — whereas most of them are actually worried about U.S. imperial interests — would be better advised to demand that the

U.S. respect Iraqi sovereignty over Iraqi natural resources and reconstruction.

For our part, we believe that there is a moral obligation for the U.S. government to pay reparations to the Iraqi people for all that they have suffered as a consequence of U.S. criminal policies — from the deliberate destruction of Iraq's infrastructure in the 1991 war to the devastation brought by the present invasion and occupation, through the green light given to the Ba'athist regime to crush the mass insurrections of March 1991 and, above all, the murderous embargo inflicted on the Iraqi population from 1991 to 2003.

The withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces, the end of U.S. economic domination, and the payment of reparations: this is the way to truly serve the principles of justice, as well as the best interests of the people of Iraq and the U.S. population.

— *Stephen R Shalom is a member of the New Politics editorial board.*

— *Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon and teaches political science at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. His best-selling book **The Clash of Barbarisms** came out in a second expanded edition in 2006, alongside a book of his dialogues with Noam Chomsky on the Middle East, **Perilous Power**. He is co-author of **The 33-Day War: Israel's War on Hezbollah in Lebanon and It's Consequences**.*

# War and the Culture of Violence

By Dianne Feeley

(*Against the Current*, 124 November/December 2006)

**Last year I had the opportunity to see "Winter Soldier," a rarely shown 1971 documentary based on the testimony of over 100 soldiers recently back from Vietnam. It was filmed during a three-day hearing on war crimes that Vietnam Vets against the War organized in Detroit. Young soldiers spoke about atrocities they had committed in the name of freedom and democracy: throwing suspects out of planes, torching villages, raping women, killing civilians. Of course the Nixon administration attempted to discredit the soldiers and their stories.**

For me, one scene stands out vividly: a soldier talking about what he had done while his wife and young child were in the background. I kept thinking: How had he been able to overcome his guilt and develop a loving relationship with his family? Or had he?

The My Lai massacre of 347 civilians occurred in 1968. Seymour Hersh broke the story in a *New Yorker* article the following year. During this same time period General William Westmoreland, commander of the U.S. forces in Vietnam, set up a task force to monitor war crimes allegations. Amounting to 9,000 pages, the files were declassified twenty years later and placed in the National Archives.

Documentation includes witness statements and reports by military officers substantiating 320 atrocities, and reporting another 500 allegations. At the time government spokespeople maintained that war crimes were committed by a few rogue units, but the testimony implicates just about every military unit in Vietnam. The files detail:

\* Seven massacres in which at least 137 civilians died.

\* Seventy-eight other attacks on civilians, of whom at least 57 were murdered, 56 wounded and 15 sexually assaulted.

\* One hundred and forty-one cases in which U.S. soldiers tortured civilian detainees or prisoners of war, using fists, sticks, bats, water or electric shock.

\* Only 57 soldiers were court-martialed, resulting in 23 convictions. A military intelligence interrogator received the stiffest sentence, 20 years. He was

convicted of committing indecent acts on a 13-year-old girl while she was being interrogated in a hut. He served a total of seven months.

Of course these cases did not constitute a comprehensive review. Only those reported to the military were investigated. And even in the 203 cases where the evidence reviewed by the military was strong enough to warrant charges, most resulted in no action being taken.

This year reporters from the *New York Times* examined about a third of the documents before the government snatched them away, saying that they contained "personal information" and therefore were exempt from the Freedom of Information Act.

Just as corporations don't want to cost out the environmental damage that results from their manufacturing processes, the government doesn't figure in the real cost of warfare. In fact, whether the woman who is sexually assaulted is a civilian, a military woman, or the soldier's wife or girlfriend, the perpetrator can almost always count on the military unit to remain silent.

Even when there is an investigation, the military prefers to maintain discretion by handling the case administratively. This results in a letter of reprimand, or dropping the charges. Even in the face of laws against sexual assault, the system finds a way to cover up or minimize the crime.

Violence becomes the method with which governments and individuals in positions of power (relative to the "other") impose their will. Violence isn't something that only happens out there, to the "others" while "we" come back to our safe homes.



## War, Colonialism and Torture

Training for war is learning to dominate the enemy. One is taught to destroy "targets" from afar or "control" a civilian population closer at hand. But in either case enemies — and anyone seen to be helping them — are to be tamed or eliminated. The enemy must quickly learn that they are powerless in the face of a superior force.

This dynamic provides the soldier with a powerful sense that whatever he/she does is necessary and good. In dehumanizing others, the aggressor perceives the enemy as less than human, and therefore "deserving" of mistreatment. Just as the battered spouse learns she was abused "for her own good" and therefore abuse is a sign of "love," so too the enemy is supposed to give up any possibility of resistance.

This, in fact, is the story of America. The colonists came and subdued the Native Peoples, thus "proving" that they were the chosen ones. The Native Americans, once defeated, were herded onto reservations. In many cases, their children were forced to go to boarding schools where they were not allowed to speak their language or dress in their fashion. Torn from their families and culture, the children were often physically and sexually abused by those who were in charge of them. Of course, this brutality was carried out as an exercise in western civilization.

Today we hear, as a justification for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, that the people whose government was overthrown need Washington's "help." If U.S. troops pulled out, the story line goes, chaos would ensue. Policing the world is hard work and, by definition, only the good and brave apply.

In the war against terrorism, President George W. Bush has set the stage for a permanent engagement in which the forces of democracy and freedom square off against the forces of "Islamic fascism."

After 9/11 the administration announced, "You are with us or you are with the terrorists." In this war, although Bush has reassured the world that Americans don't torture, torture is permitted.

How is this seeming contradiction resolved? A March 2003 memo on torture crafted by John Yoo, White House lawyer at the time, provided the escape hatch: Torture isn't torture when it doesn't permanently injure or murder. Under this definition it's pretty clear that threatening or humiliating prisoners isn't torture.

According to administration spokespeople, furthermore, torture isn't torture when extracting information from a terrorist could prevent a catastrophe. The *Christian Science Monitor*, reporting on Bush's

acknowledgement of secret CIA prisons and methods of interrogations, explained that was how the government received information that Jose Padilla was plotting to detonate a bomb:

"We knew that [Zayn Abu] Zubaydah had more information that could save innocent lives, but he stopped talking," the president said in a speech on Sept. 6. "So the CIA used an alternative set of procedures."

The CSM reporter, Warren Richey, noted that Bush insisted that torture was not used, but declined to identify specific practices. However, Richey pointed out that Padilla's defense lawyers discovered that Binyam Mohammed, a source for the warrant against Padilla, was being held in Pakistan where U.S. agents wanted him to provide incriminating information about Padilla.

Pakistani agents hung Mohammed on a wall with a leather strap around his wrists for a week. Later he was beaten with a leather strap and questioned while a loaded gun was pressed into his chest.

Unhappy with his "level of cooperation," U.S. agents had Mohammed sent to Morocco where interrogators used a razor blade to make 20-30 small cuts on his genitals. Today he is in Guantanamo. Aside from the horrible "procedures" used, one might wonder about the quality of the information. ("Alternative CIA Tactics Complicate Padilla Case," CSM, 9/15/06)

## Training for Masculinism

As someone who defines herself as a socialist feminist, I've tried to think about how gendered categories work. In our society we can't even talk about a newborn without knowing the baby's gender! We assign nurturing tasks to women and security and protection to men. This is then reinforced in myriad ways throughout our childhood, youth and adult lives. It is this masculinist role that the military builds on, even today when 15-20% of the army is female.

In Tod Ensign's study *America's Military Today*, the chapter on "Women in the Military," written by Linda Bird Francke, is subtitled "The Military Culture of Harassment." Francke examines how the culture is driven by a group dynamic centered on affirmation of masculinity. Anything despicable is female. She notes "If the Freudian observation is true that the tenets of masculinity demand man's self-measure against other men, military service offers the quintessential paradigm."

Francke also quotes Tod Ensign, director of *Citizen Soldier*: "To be called 'STRAC' (Straight, Tough and

## The Facts of War

Of course we don't know the full extent of current atrocities in Iraq, Afghanistan and in the prisons where "suspected terrorists" are being interrogated. But we do know abuse is built into a situation where soldiers are expected to force the population to submit to their own powerlessness. Here are a half dozen reports of abuse:

\* In November 2005 a squad of U.S. Marines killed 24 civilians at Haditha after a roadside bomb killed one of their fellow Marines. The sergeant who led the squad claims they followed the "military rules of engagement" and did not intentionally target civilians. On the other hand, neighbors recounted that some of the executed begged for their lives before being shot, refuting the military's version.

\* 14-year old girl, Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janabi. One of the soldiers had been harassing her so much that her mother was planning to have her stay with another relative. The four raped and murdered her, torching her body in an attempt to destroy the evidence, and then killed her parents and younger sister.

\* Six Marines and a navy medic have been charged with assaulting civilians in order to extract intelligence. Three kidnapped and killed an Iraqi man, placing an AK-47 rifle and a shovel next to his body to make it look as if he was an insurgent planting a roadside bomb.

\* In May 2006, on an island in Tharthar Lake, four soldiers killed three Iraqi detainees bound with plastic handcuffs. At a military hearing in August, investigators suggested that the brigade's commanders created an "atmosphere of excessive violence by encouraging 'kill counts.'" (*LA Times*, 8/3/06)

Ready for Action) is a great compliment. That means you're ready to jump out this window, rappel down the side of the building and kill someone with a pencil." (136)

With this as the training, it's easy to see how an occupying army, pumped up on the arrogance of power, commits atrocities against those perceived to be enemy. So too is the group's willingness to remain silent or even participate in the cover up of a crime committed by one or more of its members.

Those who do confront the criminals directly, as army medic Jamie Henry did in Vietnam, are told "if I wanted to live very long, I should shut my mouth." ("Vietnam, The War Crimes Files," by Nick Turse and Deborah Nelson, *LA Times*, 8/6/06)

After the Abu Ghraib photographs many wondered how women in the military could participate in these atrocities. But this is not the first time American women

\* Also in May, two women on their way to a hospital in Samarra were shot in the back of the head by U.S. snipers, who then attempted to hide the evidence. One of the women was pregnant.

\* According to the military's investigation of Abu Ghraib, there were 44 accounts of sodomizing detainees, stripping prisoners naked and leading them around on leashes, or attached electrical probes to their genitals.

In military training, soldiers learn they act as guardians of freedom and the American way of life. Their task is to be a "warrior" who never accepts defeat. Physically and mentally "tough," the soldier stands ready "to engage and destroy" the country's enemies in close combat. (Quotes from the U.S. Army's Soldiers Creed) No wonder we get so many military personnel who act as macho men.

Soldiers, trained and equipped, are put into harm's way. Their friends get killed, they face a rather undefined enemy, and they are plopped down into a completely different culture. Their stay has been extended beyond the standard year of duty. Many are on their second or third tour in Iraq or Afghanistan. Under these pressures it becomes relatively easy to use excessive force, realize you want something and grab it, or intimidate, humiliate or torture a prisoner.

Upon reflection, the pictures of soldiers torturing and humiliating prisoners at Abu Ghraib don't seem as shocking. The temptations to humiliate, intimidate and murder are built into the hierarchical and powerful military machine, reinforced by the president's aggressive rhetoric.

have been caught on camera as participants.

Examine the pictures of lynchings and you will discover women — and children — part of the smiling crowds. The nurturing role women have been assigned has been suppressed by their group identification with the strong and powerful.

## Sexual Assault within the Armed Forces

Women in the military are trained to drive out their female "softness," although not so much that they become men and therefore compete with the "real" guys. In fact even in today's volunteer army they are almost always assigned to support roles, not combat ones.

Given the military's strict gender imagery, the strong male identity and the centrality of male readiness for combat, sexual assault on women in the mili-

tary is a frequent occurrence. Some estimates suggest perhaps one out of every three military women faces sexual violence. But we know for sure that at least 500 sexual assaults involving U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan were reported.

A 2005 Pentagon report noted a 25% increase between 2003 and 2004 in the number of reported cases in which military men had sexually assaulted military women. The escalation could not be explained by a greater number of women serving in the military, or being mobilized into combat zones, or by better reporting of crimes. For the first time, too, the report listed 425 civilian victims of assaults.

The most recent case of a woman soldier reporting sexual assault is that of Suzanne Swift. She was 19 when she was first sent to Iraq. Her squad leader pressured her into a relationship that she broke off after a few months, after which she was repeatedly harassed by him.

Lory Manning, director of the Women in the Military Project, pointed out that such a sexual liaison is not considered consensual even when the victim goes along. What made it even more difficult for Swift is while she stationed in Iraq the person in charge of her was her harasser and she failed to file a complaint.

Swift encountered two other instances of harassment. Back in Ft. Lewis she asked a sergeant in her chain of command where she should report for duty. He replied, "In my bed, naked." When, in front of others, he sexually harassed her she filed charges. He was given a letter of admonishment and reassigned to another unit.

After eight months of being back in the United States, Swift was ordered back to Iraq for a second tour. She did not report but sought therapy for post-traumatic stress and a discharge. The army said it did not negotiate with deserters and arrested her. After an investigation, the army has charged her with being AWOL. (See <http://suzanneswift.org> particularly "From Victim to Accused Army Deserter, Donna St. George, *Washington Post*, 9/19/06)

## Bringing the War Home

Few studies have compared military domestic violence with the civilian world, but one study done in the 1990s suggests that it is twice the rate of the civilian population. Military records reveal that between 1997 and 2001 there were an average of more than 10,000 substantiated cases a year.

Over the last several years we have heard of returning soldiers killing their spouses or girl friends in

Ft. Bragg, Ft. Hood and Ft. Lewis. During the summer of 2002 four soldiers from elite units in Ft. Bragg, North Carolina killed their wives; two then killed themselves. Three of the four had recently returned from Afghanistan.

In comparing post-traumatic stress disorders soldiers have suffered in various wars, it seems to range somewhere between 15-30% who sought medical help for their condition. Studies indicate that those with the highest symptoms were front-line soldiers — it is more traumatic to be on the front lines than in prison.

A recent Veterans Health Administration report pointed out that more than one-third of the soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan sought help for post-traumatic stress, drug abuse or other mental disorders, a tenfold increase over the last 18 months.

Factors that might contribute to the higher levels of stress include roadside bombings, unpredictable daily attacks and the fact that tours of duty are spaced too close together. Soldiers are already returning to Iraq and Afghanistan for second or third tours of duty.

The soldier returning from battle has learned to live with violence. And because of that, he's got a greater chance, over the course of his life, to turn the violence he's learned against himself, his family or others.

But the problem is larger than post-traumatic stress. It's really about how our society forces human beings to adopt a competitive, aggressive and stressful stance that can lead to violence, particularly against those perceived to be weak.

The institutional, masculinist mindset gives an inordinate amount of power and self-justification to soldiers, whether in war or in recruiting others for war. An Associated Press investigation found that in 2005 more than 80 military recruiters were disciplined for sexual misconduct with women who had come to them seeking advice.

Misconduct ranged from groping to rape, but once again the military's response was administrative, with the recruiter suffering a reduction in rank or a fine. How many more went unreported?

It's time to say, once and for all, that this hierarchical and gendered violence is antithetical to developing the full capacities of human beings.

— *Dianne Feeley is an editor of **Against the Current***

# Black America and the Iraq War

By Malik Miah

(*Against the Current*, 104 May/June 2003)

**One of the contradictions of the peace/antiwar movement to date is the following: The main ethnic group that opposed the U.S. war on Iraq was largely invisible in the protest marches and rallies.**

**An overwhelmingly majority of whites (some 90 percent of white males) supported the unprovoked invasion of Iraq. African Americans by a small majority (according to all polls) didn't.**

What explains this contradiction?

## Behind A Seeming Contradiction

It's not because the antiwar coalitions have failed to reach out to the African-American communities. International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) in particular, which was formed soon after 9/11, has included issues of anti-racism and discrimination — the war at home on the working poor — in its slogans.

African Americans have been prominent on the speakers' platform in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., New York City and at other protests.

There have been demonstrations organized in predominantly Black communities in Harlem and Oakland. The turnouts have been modest as well, none reflecting the higher antiwar sentiments.

The lack of active participation is not new. During the anti-Vietnam war movement some 30 years ago a similar low Black participation took place.

Muhammad Ali said it best about racism at home as the primary concern, when he declared while refusing the draft: "No Vietnamese ever called me Nigger!"

I remember organizing a coalition of Blacks against the war in my hometown of Detroit in 1970. In contrast to the main antiwar mobilizations and protests organized against racism after the 1967 "riots," our actions were modest.

During a high school walkout in my senior year in 1969 against a racist campaign against a Black judge

(George Crockett) and an antiwar protest occurring the same day, most Black students joined the antiracist protest. Few went to the antiwar demonstration even though most Black students opposed the war.

We never saw it as a "problem," since we knew we were against the racist war. Our number one concern was showing support for a "brother judge" under attack. Few white students understood this.

## Why Whites Don't Get It

I for one always found it odd that the issue for white progressives was always, "Why aren't more Blacks joining the antiwar protests?" Instead I thought, "Why haven't more whites understood the centrality of racism in society?"

Even though I did see the Vietnam War as central and later made it a priority in my political work, I understood why most militant Blacks didn't see it as a "big problem" to focus on issues of racism.

I know from my own discussions with Black co-workers at United Airlines the discussions are still the same. Most opposed Bush's war but few joined the demonstrations in San Francisco or Oakland. When I asked why, they simply said they had other things to do.

Pushed further, many said they were more concerned about our jobs at United, the declining economy and racism at home. One woman mechanic specif-

ically mentioned the Michigan affirmative action case and the backwardness of white co-workers on issues of racial discrimination.

## Where Was the Peace Movement?

Consider what happened on April 1 as the bombs were dropping on Iraq. A big pro-affirmative action protest occurred in Washington, D.C., overwhelmingly of Black and Latino students. The Black students, including from Howard University, went to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of affirmative action. Many carried signs linking the war and racism.

But where were the antiwar coalitions at the protest? Why hadn't they mobilized for the actions? Weeks earlier hundreds of thousands (mostly white) had marched in the city.

The reality for most Blacks is because racism is very much alive, their efforts tend to focus on immediate issues that affect the broader Black population, even though they are also antiwar. The limited active response by whites to attacks on affirmative action seems to confirm that approach.

The liberal Black leaders of the traditional civil rights groups including the NAACP sense this consciousness too. Most opposed the war on Iraq. Many spoke at the protests. But their focus is on issues of double-digit unemployment, segregated schools and poor health care for the Black population.

African leaders also see the double standard of U.S. policy. Nelson Mandela, the historic and moral leader of Africa, called the U.S. war on Iraq an act of aggression. South Africa's current president Thabo Mbeki raised concern that countries in Africa could be put on Bush's rogue states hit list.

Many African Americans are well aware that the U.S. government's foreign policy is hypocritical too, as it gives billions in aid to the state of Israel, blatantly financing illegal settlements and occupation, while attacking Palestinians and Arab countries as "terrorists" and failed states.

The distrust among Blacks also reflects a history as victims of American democracy first as slaves (85 years) and then victims of Jim Crow (90 years). Can gains won 35 years ago be reversed? It happened after the Civil War, codified in the infamous Supreme Court Jim Crow decision (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896) upholding the legality of "separate but equal."

## King's Legacy

Recalling the experience and legacy of the most famous African American in U.S. history — Martin

Luther King, Jr. — proves how gains can be eroded.

While King is known (especially among whites) for his steadfast opposition to legal segregation by building a massive nonviolent civil disobedience movement for Black equality, his last year of life indicated a political evolution that began threatening the status quo of entrenched white power.

He was becoming a leader against U.S. foreign policy that supported neocolonialism and oppression abroad, and institutional racial and class oppression at home.

Every April 4 in Memphis, where King was assassinated in 1968, a celebration of his life takes place. Here, unlike official Washington's celebration that is sanitized for white America, the real King is observed — the antiwar and antiracist King.

At a speech at the Riverside Church in New York in 1967 King said the Vietnam War was wrong, adding, "There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right."

The FBI targeted King so that he was not just worried about being smeared by pro-war supporters but feared for his life.

King also launched the interracial poor people's movement that year, arguing that the government must not just end legal discrimination but take steps to end the poverty of all working people, especially African Americans.

He went to Memphis to support sanitation workers. Opposition to the Vietnam War and his campaign against poverty were flipsides of the same fight, he said.

Today's antiwar organizers must follow King's example. Institutional racism and neocolonial wars are evils that must be fought hand and hand.

The attacks on civil liberties by the Bush government (epitomized by the USA Patriot Act) make it even more urgent, since Attorney General Ashcroft clearly sees the antiwar and antiracist activists in the same way Hoover viewed King: as unpatriotic critics.

The challenge for the antiwar movement is to deepen its working-class connections and its support among the African-American communities by better understanding how Blacks see the issue of war and racism as integrally linked.

— *Malik Miah is an editor of **Against the Current***

# A Military Resister and Conscientious Objector

## ATC Interviews Camilo Mejia

(*Against the Current*, 116 May/June 2005)

Sgt. Camilo Mejia, the first active-duty U.S. military resister to be imprisoned for refusing re-deployment to Iraq, spoke at a Detroit antiwar rally Friday, March 18, the day before attending the founding convention of Iraq Veterans Against the War in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Sgt. Mejia, who spent more than seven years in the U.S. military and eight months fighting in Iraq, wrote a statement of conscientious objection, "Regaining My Humanity" (full text at [www.codepink4peace.org/National\\_Actions\\_Camilo.shtml](http://www.codepink4peace.org/National_Actions_Camilo.shtml)). Of his experience in Iraq and decision not to return after a two-week leave, he said in part:

"We weren't preventing terrorism or making Americans safer. I couldn't find a single good reason for having been there, for having shot a people and been shot at.

"Coming home gave me the clarity to see the line between military duty and moral obligation. By putting my weapon down, I chose to reassert myself as a human being. I have not deserted the military or been disloyal to the men and women of the military. I have not been disloyal to a country. I have only been loyal to my principles.

"When I turned myself in, with all my fears and doubts, I did it not only for myself. I did it for the people of Iraq, even for those who fired upon me — they were just on the other side of a battleground where war itself was the only enemy."

Camilo Mejia was interviewed by David Finkel from the *ATC* editorial board, shortly after receiving an award from Detroit City Council for his courageous stand.

"We weren't preventing terrorism or making Americans safer. I couldn't find a single good reason for having been there, for having shot a people and been shot at."

**Against the Current:** Tell us when you were deployed in Iraq, and where; and although you've been out for some time now, what are your perceptions of the situation in Iraq as compared with what the media are portraying?

**Camilo Mejia:** I was in Iraq between April and October, 2003. After a short time in Baghdad, our longest stay was in the Ramadi area.

I know it's unpopular to say this, but I don't really buy the election in Iraq. It's a measure of improvement and progress as far as the U.S. and coalition's alleged purpose; but with an insurgency going on and 150,000 foreign troops occupying a country, you can't say you held a "free election."

To the issue of democracy, I find it impossible to establish a true democracy when a nation is occupied and the "democracy" is imposed. It can only come from within. We are imposing a way of life that we wish we had here—for example, asking the Iraqi Congress to have one-third women, when we don't have anything like that here—and this after a totalitarian regime under Saddam Hussein.

To me it's fictitious, part of a bigger scheme to justify our presence — by "our" I mean of course the United States government — and to exploit and privatize their natural resources, which I think is the bottom line.

**ATC:** Presumably you didn't feel this way when you first went over to Iraq. What caused your perspective to change?

**CM:** I wouldn't necessarily say it changed. Yes, it

evolved, but not to the opposite direction. When I first went to the Middle East where we ran a secret mission for two months before the war started, already I disagreed with the reasons the government was giving for war. I didn't think they had made the case for claiming Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction — in fact, as soon as we arrived in Iraq we put away our chemical protection gear — and we were going to war without a UN Mandate.

Hans Blix [chief UN weapons inspector — ed.] was saying we didn't know that there were WMDs in Iraq. Actually I don't think he ever believed there were any. On top of that, you had huge antiwar demonstrations around the United States and the whole world.

In some way I was part of this huge opposition. But these are all political reasons. I deployed anyway, partly because I was naive enough to believe there might not be a war, just a show of force, that maybe it would all end without major human loss.

After seven years of being in the military, and being an infantryman pretty much my entire career and being a squad leader, I was afraid to say I disagreed with the war on moral grounds. First of all, my squad members might see me as a coward. Also, I was afraid that making my position against the war known to my commanders would result in a court martial and going to prison, as I did later anyway. I tell you this, because it's all separate from what turned me into a Conscientious Objector. At the time I had no problem with being an infantryman and shooting my weapon. I was a vegetarian and a nonviolent person, but not against war entirely.

But when I went to Iraq and especially Ramadi, I came face to face with the reality of war. So what if there were or weren't WMDs? You could care less when you're actually over there. But in combat, I began to develop a rejection of all war because you see how innocent people die, regardless of whether you mean for them to die.

When I criticize the attitudes of soldiers, I don't really mean those in my unit, but the leaders. You see the personal agendas at play in war of commanders who go to any length at the expense of human lives — soldiers and civilians.

It has nothing to do with rebuilding a country — after we'd destroyed it in the first place — or self-government, or providing clean running water. It was all about personal ambitions. Even if all the commanders had behaved in an altruistic way, the inescapable reality is the loss of civilian life. You see the insurgents and soldiers get away, then all the bodies in the streets. I am now a Conscientious Objector. I reject all forms of war.

**ATC:** Obviously you haven't done a scientific survey, but can you offer your impressions of the feelings within the military?

**CM:** I haven't done a survey and of course I've been incarcerated [for nine months of a one-year sentence — ed.]. When you have opposition to the war or dissatisfaction within the ranks, it's not usual for soldiers to actually express that — because they are afraid, just as I had been.



But when they've been through the court martial and branded as criminals or deserters or whatever, they've gone through those emotions and are in a position of freedom to express themselves. When I went to prison, I was with 120 other military inmates. Not one person in my prison criticized my stand, said "you should have gone back," or supported the war — not one of those 120 inmates.

I think that's a pretty significant measure. Also, at the time I surfaced and presented myself, the Pentagon admitted to 500 cases of AWOL. Now there are 5500 — that's what they admit to, according to information from my attorney and that's the number that's been going around.

I'm part of an organization called Iraq Veterans Against the War, and one of the guys who founded it told me how 15% of his unit went AWOL before being deployed. One of the guys who rejoined the unit was quietly discharged. We see a pattern of military authority trying to disguise the extent of the dissent. I think there's great dissatisfaction and growing opposition to the war within the ranks. One of the main goals of IVAW will be to help soldiers in opposition to the war in any way we can. And we want to help returning soldiers, who are suffering all kinds of psychological and emotional problems, to find proper care and to hold the military responsible.

# After 9/11: WHOSE SECURITY?

## Socialist Feminist Perspectives on Terrorism, Security and War

By Johanna Brenner and Nancy Holmstrom  
(*Against the Current*, 115 March/April 2005)

Since 9/11 the United States has been obsessed with "security" in a very particular sense — protection from intentional threats to our safety and well being, as in "Office of Homeland



Security," "our national security," "the conflict between civil liberties and security considerations," "security was tightened," or, more mundanely, "security guards."

In the 1980's and '90s the racist "culture of fear" that fueled the rise of the U.S. prison-industrial complex amplified crime into an ever-present threat. Now, it is "terrorists" and "rogue nations" that justify the expansion of a new arena for profit-making, the security industry — a major growth business here and in many other parts of the world, and an increasingly high-tech one.

Our daily lives have been transformed as people have to carry, even to wear ID cards, big concrete blocks line the sidewalks of many of our streets, and our access to countless public buildings is tightly controlled by phalanxes of security guards and video monitors. But most of us pay little attention: the possibility of terrorist attacks has been normalized.

Yet protection against intentional threats to our

safety is not the only way "security" is understood. We have "security blankets" when we're babies and "social security" when we are elderly—things that protect our safety and well being both in material and emotional ways. This is security in the broader sense—safety and well being, both of an objective material and a subjective emotional kind.

Threats to security, in this broader sense of the word, are understood to go far beyond intentional acts by individuals or groups. Generally speaking, however, most Americans' concern today that is posed in terms of the word "security" is about intentional threats from people — the narrower sense of the concept.

These two very different understandings of the word "security" and threats to security are highly gendered. When we talk of security in the narrow sense, as in "our national security interests," we know that it is men who will be defending us against other men who are attacking us — and it is men who will be deciding when, where and how to attack or defend us. Although the sexual division of labor is amazingly variable through human history, one thing that does not vary is that men are responsible for warfare. Even though women are now soldiers in the United States, on the ground and piloting planes, the pattern is basically unchanged.

In photo after photo of ordinary soldiers, military leaders, "experts" and politicians, women are out of sight — except for the occasional photogenic exceptions, like the good girl Jessica Lynch and her bad sister of Abu Ghraib.

The higher up you go, the more male it is. The civil-



ian militarists of the arms industry and politicians are even more overwhelmingly male. And today's warfare is a very high tech affair, another masculine domain.

On the other hand, if we think of "security" in the broader sense of security blankets and social security, then women immediately enter the picture. The other invariable piece of the sexual division of labor is that women do the bulk of caretaking — of the young, the old and other dependents, so that women around the world are providing the bulk of the ongoing material and emotional security that everyone needs.

This is not high-tech but simply caring labor, usually on top of other labor. When the market threatens this security by not providing enough for a family's needs, women pick up the slack; when public goods are cut back, women's burden increases.

In general, we could say that far more people are harmed by threats to their security in this second sense. Far, far more people die from lack of health care, from poverty-caused malnutrition, from government inaction to prevent the spread of deadly disease, from pollution of the environment by industry, than from acts by individuals or groups who intend harm.

Yet in the face of this clear truth, it is the threats to security from intentional acts that capture attention and drive political action. What might explain this focus on intentional acts rather than the really widespread and pervasive threats to our lives, health and well-being that are not intentional?

One answer might be that it's because intentional acts do more harm—but that's definitely not true. So our focus on the narrow kind of security can't be justified on these objective grounds. To take just one example: around 8.5 million people were killed during the four years of World War I, but more than twice that many — 20 million people — died from the flu pandemic in 1918-19.

Perhaps, then, the focus on intentionality has moral roots? All societies have laws against harming people — and these reflect our moral judgment that harm done intentionally is the worst kind (except when the government does it in wars or in capital punishment — "state terrorism" doesn't count).

Despite opposition from the United States, we are moving closer to having international laws and courts that can judge and punish these acts. So perhaps we focus on intentional threats to security because we think that there are already, or will be, effective deterrents to prevent intentional acts of terrorism as well as judicial institutions to deal with them if they do occur.

Perhaps we could extend this explanation and say

that we focus on threats to our security from human acts for practical reasons, because they are potentially under our control, whereas other threats to our security, like natural catastrophes, are out of our control. This sounds reasonable; what is the point of focusing on threats that we can do nothing about?

Well, it is true that some natural catastrophes are out of our control — but only some, and certainly not all. The human causes of global warming are well documented and now obvious. But many other apparently natural threats to security are also products of human action. The recent cholera epidemic in South Africa, called a natural disaster by the government, was in reality due to the privatization of water that forced people to get their water from polluted rivers. Or consider the drought in many parts of Africa, or the sand storm that came over Beijing a couple of years ago, both caused by cutting down too many trees.

Moreover, even natural threats that are not caused by human action might nevertheless be controllable by human intervention — as diseases are controlled in the richer parts of the world. Thus some natural threats, like global warming or drought, which are clearly side effects of our economic system—collateral damage, one could say — are potentially under our control.

But we are all too prone to see the economic system as being like nature rather than constituted by human relations and countless human acts. We listen to the stock market report in the same way we listen to the weather report, as something that happens to us, that we're powerless to affect, rather than something we do. This distorted way of looking at the world is related to what Marx called "commodity fetishism," the appearance of relations among people as if they were relations among things — which he saw as a very central aspect of the ideology of capitalism.

So long as we believe that something is out of our control, then it is. The focus on intentional acts has the effect of shielding the economic system of capitalism from scrutiny, and from being exposed as the major cause of insecurity for people around the world.

Why doesn't this suffering and insecurity become a focus of concern? Is it because it appears to be the result of acts that do not intend to do harm?

Yet in most people's thinking about morality, doing harm unintentionally but with reckless disregard for the harmful consequences is considered almost as bad as it is to do harm intentionally. This conviction is embedded in our legal system — a drunk driver who kills may be charged with manslaughter rather than murder, but still punished heavily.

Certainly doing harm "unintentionally but with reckless disregard" would apply to the ordinary workings of global corporate capitalism. So there is little basis for saying that the focus on threats to our security from intentional acts is due to their being so much worse, from a moral point of view, than threats to our security from acts done with willful disregard for their impact on the vast majority of the people of the globe.

Perhaps also we're more afraid of intentional threats to our security for psychological reasons. Perhaps we are afraid, most basically, of someone trying to hurt us; this is more hurtful psychologically because it is a conscious deliberate rejection of who we are. Also, with intentional acts, the danger tends to be sudden, to hit all at once, so there is no time to get used to it; the fear of the surprise also intensifies the fear of the harm and so when it occurs we experience shock. Some researchers have suggested that the stress of waiting for the blow to fall explains why sometimes victims of domestic violence seem to provoke the violence.

The shock of the totally unexpected blow was multiplied many thousand times in the attack on the World Trade Center where so many people were killed all at once. In contrast, the damage done by the absence of goods to satisfy basic needs tends to hit far more slowly; people suffer and die from malnutrition little by little over a very long time.

This makes slow starvation quite unsurprising; in fact, it just seems "natural." As Amartya Sen points out, in some contexts women suffering malnutrition seem not even aware that they are hungry.

Or, finally, perhaps the crucial issue explaining the focus on threats to our security from intentional acts is that when we speak about security, we have to ask "whose security?"

Perhaps it is mainly those of us who are fortunate enough not to have to worry about catastrophic threats to our safety and well being from nature, or from the everyday workings of the economic system, who focus on the dangers of people intentionally trying to hurt us, whether they be ordinary criminals or terrorists.

Thus it is especially North Americans, Europeans and the elites of the developing world who focus on security in the narrow sense. Of course, people in war anywhere have to focus on those dangers; if they're not alive, they won't have to worry about clean water. But ordinarily, poor people have more basic worries such as "food security."

Whatever explains our narrowness in thinking about threats to our security — perhaps all of the above factors contribute — the effect is the same: We

miss the most crucial threats to global security in the long run, and the best way to defend ourselves. The focus on intentional acts is simply too narrow to provide genuine security, certainly for poor people everywhere in the world, but increasingly for the rest of us as well.

Everyone knows the rough figures on the deaths from the WTC attack: upwards of 3000 people were killed. Some of us know that at least the same number, perhaps more, civilians have been killed in Afghanistan by our forces (to say nothing of tens of thousands of Iraqis).

But few people are aware of the effects of the economic downturn brought on or exacerbated by the attack. According to the World Bank, in countries without a social safety net, the downturn is estimated to be responsible for increased disease and malnutrition among children to the extent of causing an additional 40,000 more children to die than would have died otherwise.

More attention has been paid to how the economic and political forces of capitalist globalization create global insecurity than to the ways that patriarchal social institutions and cultural norms are also responsible for the threats to our security.

In the Global South, structural adjustment programs, including the privatization of formerly public services (health care, education, water, etc.) have the largest impact on the lives of women, who as family caretakers are most reliant on the state for security.

Patriarchal gender norms that encourage men to pursue sexual encounters outside of marriage, while loading onto women all the responsibilities for caregiving, undermine men's ties to their wives and children. When forced to migrate to look for work men find new sexual partners, creating new liaisons, even new families, and abandoning wives and children.

The ranks of single mothers are growing all over the world. Meanwhile, without opportunities to earn money to support their families, many of these single mothers themselves migrate to seek work, sending back money to their own mothers and other women kin who care for their children. In the Philippines, for example, remittances from women working abroad are the largest source of foreign currency, far surpassing exports.

Since 1995, women have outnumbered men among new immigrants to the United States; they come to work as caregivers not only for children but also for the ill, the disabled and the elderly. Even with all this inexpensive immigrant caring labor, threats to well-being, security in the broader sense, are building

here too. Women in the United States want and need to work for wages — and are doing so for more hours a week and more years of their lives than ever before.

At a time when women need more help than ever with the caring responsibilities that patriarchal social arrangements place primarily on their shoulders, the neoliberal ("free market" and privatizing) assault on public services is reducing that help, making their lives more difficult and the lives of their families more insecure. The more insecure people become, the more they have to rely primarily on themselves, then the more vulnerable they are to sexist, heterosexist and racist ideas about who is the cause of their problems, who is a threat to their well-being.

So the real, but relatively small, threat that terrorism represents gets magnified as it carries all of the insecurity that people are experiencing. It is far easier to imagine military solutions to external threats than to imagine challenging the power of the corporate system. This displacement of everyday fears onto an external enemy is also encouraged by the pervasive racist "Americanism" that regards non-European cultures as less civilized, even barbaric.

Left to their own resources, without being able to rely on government or on their own communities, people feel that they have to compete with others to survive. This sense of isolation is made worse as fewer people, in fact, participate in any kind of collective political activism — in unions, or community or neighborhood organizing projects, for example — where they could see themselves as connected to other people and having the power to challenge the corporate agenda, to change things for the better.

Thus their response to rising insecurity is not to join with others, to protect themselves through collective action, but rather to look elsewhere for a powerful force that can protect them. They look for a strong leader — a powerful father — who can take care of them—not least by harnessing the awesome violence of the U.S. military. This desperate search for a protector pulls people away from the new ideals of masculinity that had begun to emerge out of feminism's critique of patriarchal culture, and instead reinforces the hyper-masculinity that underlies super-patriotism and nationalism.

It also fuels opposition to LGBT rights, because the LGBT movement challenges narrow definitions of gender, requires us to value "feminine men" and "masculine women," even begins to force people to acknowledge that gender is somewhat fluid and in some sense unstable. This is a frightening recognition if you feel that your safety and security depends on men who are

hypermasculine, powerful figures who will protect you.

Conservative sexual politics joined with nativist anti-immigrant sentiment increases political support for the strategy of all-out militarism and preemptive war that is the centerpiece of U.S. response to terrorism. Even in terms of providing security in the most narrow sense — protection from intentional threats — this policy can only have the opposite effect, to make us less secure.

Militarism, of course, has been part of U.S. history since our country's inception, and a powerful military-industrial complex has been a driving force in politics since the 1950s. But there seems to have been a significant quantitative and qualitative change in the past few years — the development of what Chalmers Johnson describes as an empire of bases (rather than the old empires of territory).

It is difficult to get an accurate count of U.S. bases, since many are secret, or not official ("informal leases," etc.). But the official count is 725 bases in 38 countries. Whom do these bases protect?

In the Persian/Arabian Gulf the bases have two main functions — surveillance and guarding the oil. The oil companies that raced into the new independent countries around the Caspian Sea were quickly followed by the construction of military bases to protect their installations. (Chalmers Johnson, 2004, *Sorrows of Empire*, 156-169, 216)

So oil company profits are made more secure by our empire of bases, but what about people? Well, there are certainly groups who do benefit from military bases, which is one reason there are huge vested interests in preserving and expanding them. But most people around the world of course do not benefit — since the U.S. military presence protects the corporate interests and supports the policies that have increased the global gap between rich and poor.

And contrary to the rhetoric of security that views the arms budget as simply the price "we" have to pay to defend ourselves against intentional threats, the government's all-out aggressive militarism creates more enemies by the day. It gives thousands of people real grievances against us — and our arms industry supplies them with the means, including small nuclear weapons, to do us great damage, though 9/11 showed what could be done simply with box cutters.

The growing antiwar movement, protesting preemptive war, the occupation of Iraq, the state terrorism unleashed on the people of Afghanistan and other militaristic policies, does argue that the Bush administration's strategies are making us less, rather than more, secure. But we think it is also important to extend this

challenge, to insist that security means much more than protection from intentional acts. We propose to bring feminist politics into antiwar politics by arguing not only against militarism and empire, but also for government policies that secure our well-being by valuing caring work and supporting those who do it.

Too often, when people talk about the link between the global neoliberal corporate agenda and terrorism they focus on men. They argue that unemployed and underemployed men are the terrorists, the organizers of fundamentalist movements, the social base for anti-Americanism.

If men had jobs and roles of authority in their communities, they would take care of women instead of being rootless and violent. In other words, to reduce terrorism, the government should pursue economic development that would restore men to the patriarchal positions in family and community that capitalist globalization has undermined.

We would make the link in a different way. The exploitation of women's labor globally, their forced migration to provide cheap labor in the developed countries, may not threaten us physically, but does call upon us to act. The struggle against "sweat shop" labor urges working people in the United States to join with workers in other countries to improve pay and working conditions.

Similar bonds of solidarity can be built in the global justice movement by organizing to challenge the neoliberal policies that are so harmful to women and children in the global south. We can support efforts by women in the global south to improve the conditions under which they do unpaid caregiving labor and struggle to meet the needs of their families and communities.

We can demand an end to the structural adjustment policies that force governments there to dismantle the welfare state and public services, and argue for abolition of the crushing debt burden that requires deep cuts in government spending. The same neoliberal policies that are undermining the conditions of women's work as caregivers around the globe are increasing the insecurity of our own lives. Here at home, the

sweeping attack on government and public programs are aimed at forcing everyone to depend on the market, to make us all ever more desperate so we'll work for less, demand less, expect less.

By forcing us to rely on the market for help with our caregiving responsibilities (and by contracting out public services to non-profits and for-profit companies), these policies have created a vast market demand for cheap labor — a demand filled by women working for low wages, without health benefits and pensions.

These women workers — immigrant and native-born — as well as the vast majority of women who use the services that they provide as individual care givers or as workers in the service sector, deserve well-being instead of the increasing economic insecurity that now defines our lives.

Real homeland security requires a reversal of spending on the military and the tax giveaways to the rich, investment in public education and in a whole range of new public institutions — day care centers with high paid workers who are respected for their skills; a home care system for elderly people that is well-funded and pays home care workers a living wage, paid parental and family leave so we can spend time with those we love and care for.

Until people realize that the sense of security with which we are so obsessed is an extremely narrow one, supported by hyper-masculine ideology and capitalist interests, the majority of the world's people will day by day continue to become radically insecure, in both definitions of that term.



# Interview with Gilbert Achcar

(ATC May/June 2006)

Susan Weissman

On the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, Susan Weissman interviewed Gilbert Achcar for her program, "Beneath the Surface," on KPFC, Pacifica radio in Los Angeles. In the following excerpt, Achcar discusses the questions of immediate withdrawal and civil war in Iraq.

**Susan Weissman:** Gilbert Achcar teaches political science at the University of Paris and also works in Berlin. He contributes to various publications including *Le Monde Diplomatique* and *Monthly Review*. His recent books are *The Clash of Barbarisms*, with a new edition coming out this year from Saqi books and Boulder Paradigm Publishers; *Eastern Cauldron* and *The Israeli Dilemma*. He has also published (with Stephen R. Shalom), in the current *New Politics*, an article on withdrawal from Iraq, which reacts to Representative John Murtha's position that called for immediate withdrawal but actually was about "redeployment." Gilbert, have you updated your position since then?

**Gilbert Achcar:** The longer the U.S. troops stay in Iraq, the worse the situation becomes. The situation is continuously deteriorating: In the last weeks we have seen again new stages in this deterioration, which are really very worrying. For people to say "Well, the U.S. troops should stay to prevent a civil war" is completely absurd.

On the one hand, we are steadily moving toward that kind of civil war because of the presence of the U.S. troops, and the timeline here is quite, quite clear. On the other hand, Rumsfeld himself said, "Well, if there is a civil war we won't intervene" — so what are U.S. troops for in that country?

**SW:** In effect the Bush Administration has been saying there's not yet a civil war, while [former Prime Minister Ayad] Allawi has said there is a civil war —

can you just tell us, is there a semantic fine line here? Is there a civil war going on, or something building up?

**GA:** I've been saying for quite a long while now that in Iraq you've got low-intensity civil war. Recently the same formula has been used by the present prime minister of Iraq, Jaafari, whom the United States is trying to kick out. Yes, this formula's accurate: What you've got there is not a full-fledged civil war — fortunately, because that would really be an absolute disaster. But there is a low-intensity civil war, and it's increasing in intensity. The presence of U.S. troops doesn't prevent it from unfolding, but is actually a main factor in fueling it.

The way the U.S. representative on the ground, Ambassador Khalilzad, has been behaving in the last year or so, is also very much part of what I am saying. He has been throwing oil on the fire continuously, trying to play one community against another, trying to get alliances and counter-alliances, trying to break other factions. He is interfering very, very heavily in the political situation, and not as some kind of honest broker, but as someone applying a very classical recipe of divide and rule.

That's what Washington has been left with as the means to keep its control over the situation in Iraq ever since it lost the electoral battles.

**SW:** President Bush went on the road to try to sell his message on the war and rather than what I guess was expected — announcing a timed withdrawal to appease public opinion — he said "We're going to stay the course," and "We'll still be in Iraq after I leave office in 2008,." Does this announcement by Bush surprise you? Is there any alternative?

**GA:** First of all, it's not surprising that Bush says that. He means that U.S. troops won't leave Iraq as long as he's the president. And well, that's quite logical because he hasn't invaded that country just to withdraw from it after what has happened, after everything that has been spent there — not to mention of course the human cost, and here I'm speaking only of the American human cost. Of course the Iraqi human cost is much much higher.

If George W. Bush has led this invasion of Iraq it was to get control of the country and to stay there in the long run. That's why they are building bases, which are not built for the short time, but built and conceived as if they would be bases for a very long period. They went into Iraq quoting the examples of Germany and Japan after 1945. And that was the idea — to stay there for a very long time, let's say, at least until there is no more oil underground; getting control of that country for obvious economic and strategic reasons. Control

over oil is an absolutely key weapon for world hegemony, and that's what this administration is very much obsessed with.

**SW:** I know that the Bush administration has scaled back from some of its most grandiose goals in the region, given the situation on the ground, but Seymour Hersh has written an article in the *New Yorker* a couple of



months ago, saying we're going to switch to more of an air war, presumably to ease U.S. opposition so that fewer troops come home maimed and killed. Will Washington come up with some kind of plan to redeploy or pull out temporarily?

**GA:** Pulling out temporarily is not something likely to happen.

**SW:** Could they redeploy to the borders as Congressman John Murtha suggested?

**GA:** No, the idea of some Democrats and others is that the United States should redeploy and keep intervening militarily in the situation, mainly through air bases. On the one hand that wouldn't improve the situation in Iraq; and on the other hand air wars, as you know, lead to the largest number of civilian casualties. That would be an even more selfish way of trying to control the area than what is happening now. And in a sense, it's even worse than what is happening.

**SW:** There's this sense that if the United States were to leave — now that the Ba'athists and Shi'ite militants are more organized than they were before, and that there's even splits within them with more radical elements within each sector, including the jihadists — that if there were even just redeployment or planned withdrawal, it would encourage them and all hell would break loose. And there's even the notion that maybe Turkey would invade, maybe Kuwait would try to reclaim...can you give us a kind of scenario of what you think could happen?

**GA:** One could imagine and draw all kinds of apocalyptic scenarios, but there is apocalypse now, we are in the midst of it. And of course, it could get worse...but it is getting worse. It is getting worse day after day. And it has been proved very very obviously, very factually, that the longer the U.S. troops stay in that country the worse it is getting.

No one can dispute that since day one of the invasion up until now the situation has steadily worsened — look at all the figures, it's absolutely terrible. The

idea that the United States should stay there even longer to prevent it from deteriorating is completely absurd. It's clear, it has been tried and tried and over-tried, and the conclusion is clear, the U.S. troops should get out of that country if that country is ever to recover.

Now, I'm not saying that it'll be paradise as soon as U.S. troops get out, that's not the point. We, the anti-war movement, were the people who were saying that if the invasion took place, it would lead to chaos. We were saying that during all the long period before the invasion. The invasion took place, and exactly what we predicted happened. It led to a chaotic situation, a very dangerous situation.

So now, the same people who were telling us "No, there won't be chaos, it'll be wonderful, U.S. troops will be welcomed with wreaths of flowers," and you would have some kind of new Switzerland in Iraq in a matter of a couple of years — the same people now say "Oh, the U.S. troops should not leave, because otherwise there will be chaos." This is ridiculous.

**SW:** There's also the position within the movement that the United States should provide a kind of Marshall Plan to repay for all of the damage, including the damage from the sanctions. What do you think is a viable position for the antiwar movement?

**GA:** The antiwar movement should, in my view, be organized, as it has been until now, around the central demand of "Out Now." This is more and more striking a real chord in public opinion. What we could call the "passive antiwar movement" that is reflected in the polls has increased tremendously in the recent period—you know that better than I do. But the organized antiwar movement has not been up to the task since the peak we reached on February 15, 2003.

After this huge, unprecedented, international, really truly mass mobilization, the movement lost impetus, you had a lot of confusion, and that of course was not helped by the kind of images coming from Iraq.

During the war in Vietnam, one factor in the mobilizations was how the images of oppressed Vietnamese, victims of the U.S. aggression, touched people's hearts. Antiwar demonstrators carried those pictures in the demonstrations.

The dominant images sent out from Iraq were images [of the resistance] the media chose to highlight — decapitation and other barbaric acts. This did not help to organize antiwar sentiment.

There was also the very complex situation on the ground. It is true that it's not such an easy situation to understand and to grasp.

# FOLLIES OF THE WAR

An ATC Book Review (May/June 2006)

David Finkel

THREE YEARS LATER, it is hard to believe that a gloating and triumphant Christopher Hitchens could write this (April 18, 2003):

"So it turns out that the slogans of the antiwar movement were right after all. And their demands were just. "No War on Iraq," they said — and there wasn't a war on Iraq. Indeed, there was barely a "war" at all. "No Blood for Oil," they cried, and the oil wealth of Iraq has been duly rescued from attempted sabotage with scarcely a drop spilled...."Stop the War" was the call. And the "war" is indeed stopping. That's not such a bad record. An earlier antiwar demand — "Give the Inspectors More Time" — was also very prescient and is also about to be fulfilled in exquisite detail." (*A Long Short War*, 83)

A "long short" war indeed. Its real-world consequences are summed up today by Anthony Arnove:

"The invasion of Iraq in March 2003 and the subsequent occupation of the country have already had profound consequences for world politics, and will do so for years to come. The United States has made the world a more dangerous place, has fueled reactionary political currents in Iraq and beyond, has increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks at home and in the countries of visible U.S. allies, and has undermined the potential for democratic developments in the Middle East — contrary to all the claims of President Bush and his apologists

Arnove also observes, in relation to Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo:

"Politicians (around the world) who are accused of human rights abuses openly protest that they are merely protecting themselves against terrorism, like the United States, when they assassinate Palestinians, Chechens, or domestic dissidents." (*Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal*, xix-xx)

For many of us, it must be said, these consequences are unsurprising. What's harder today is to

recall the euphoria of the "long short war," as bitter as that phrase now seems. In this regard Christopher Hitchens' book, although appalling, is instructive.

Contrary to the antiwar doomsayers and quagmire-mongers, Hitchens observed, the war had been short, overwhelmingly suc-

cessful and welcomed by the liberated Iraqi population: "Oh yes, the Arab street did finally detonate, just as the peace movement said it would. You can see the Baghdad and Basra and Karbala streets filling up like anything, just by snapping on your television." (*A Long Short War*, 83)

Any residual doubts, Hitchens was certain, would be swept away in the aftermath: Weapons of mass destruction would turn up, as would the irrefutable links between al-Qaeda and the overthrown Saddam Hussein tyranny. As for Arab-Americans, on April 9

"(T)he streets of Dearborn, Michigan were *en fete*. Crowds of Iraqi-American exiles displayed the Stars and Stripes, honked horns, shouted praise for the United States and Britain, and defaced pictures of Saddam Hussein. Their action was a sort of echo and replay of what could be seen in Baghdad...where the crowd enlisted American know-how to pull down the colossus of Saddam Hussein and later to drag its severed head through the streets, showered in kicks and spittle." (89)

Come to Dearborn today, let alone Baghdad, and see what those Iraqi-Americans and the Iraqi population think about the liberation. But even then, perceptive journalists and even some on-the-ground U.S. military commanders noticed that Iraqis' joy over the destruction of that statue was embittered by the fact that they hadn't pulled it down themselves — the Americans had done the job, after draping the U.S. flag over it.

## Bloody Illusions

The exuberance of the moment was nonetheless understandable. The Iraqis thought they were getting their country back. The American troops thought they were going home. That's what both had been promised, after all.

The antiwar movement, which Christopher Hitchens hilariously ridiculed to entertain his new right-wing readership (most of his book first appeared as columns in the months before and during the war in the online magazine *Slate*), with all its contradictions and weaknesses, did understand what Hitchens — who is not ignorant of Middle Eastern and Iraqi realities — should have known better than most. Yet even those of us who knew then that the short glorious war was the beginning of a long gory occupation of Iraq hardly envisioned how ghastly it would actually get.

I'll come back to what the three books reviewed here have to say regarding the antiwar movement — Anthony Arnove and Kale Baldock address their message to the movement, whereas Hitchens was completing his separation from it — but first it's worth briefly discussing how Iraq became such an imperial disaster.

We now know many of the details. The *New York Times* correspondents Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, in their new book *Cobra 2*, have chronicled the bloody illusions and incompetence of political leadership on both sides.

Saddam Hussein, more concerned about another Shia uprising and convinced that the Americans weren't coming to Baghdad, forbade his generals to destroy the bridges to the capital city. The Iraqi generals were stunned to learn that no chemical weapons stockpiles still existed — although Saddam wanted the Americans to think they did! Meanwhile, U.S. military commanders who requested more troops and time to suppress the guerilla insurgency (initiated by "Saddam Fedayeen" originally created to crush the Shia!) were peremptorily overruled and threatened with dismissal.

We also know, thanks to the reporting of *New Yorker* writer George Packer (*The Assassins' Gate: America In Iraq*), how the crucial first postwar period in Iraq was botched by the arrogant and ignorant L. Paul Bremer, the Michael Brown of the occupation. Seymour Hersh has uncovered how the U.S. military and CIA not only took over Saddam's torture center at Abu Ghraib but improved upon the previous management's techniques.

Most important and underreported was the U.S.-imposed "economic reconstruction" policy of sweeping privatization and opening to multinational capital, which amounted to the deconstruction of Iraq's national economy, detailed by Michael Schwartz.

As Schwartz cogently observes, this crippling denationalization both deepened the insurgency and prolonged the looting that crippled major institutions. (See "Does the Media Have It Right on the War?" Tom

Dispatch, March 28, 2006.)

Miscalculations and blunders aside, what happened is that the U.S. occupation not only overthrew the hideous Saddam regime but also destroyed the Iraqi state. It's not clear whether this was consciously planned, but it was the combined effect of dissolving the Baath party which was so closely tied to the state, the Iraqi army and the national economy. Nor was there the semblance of a plan for a new state structure beyond the fantasy of economic liberalization on the ruins of a shattered one.

One might have thought that a Marxist-educated writer like Hitchens would have foreseen such a problem, and the crucial distinction between the overthrow of a brutal and yes, genocidal party-state by an internal revolution and its destruction by an outside colonialist occupying power. But while he refers briefly to his long-ago editorship of the British journal *International Socialism* and opposition to the Vietnam war, Hitchens shows little memory of what he once knew about imperialism.

His longstanding dislike of religion intact, Hitchens describes himself on the eve of the war as "a member of Atheists for Regime Change" and derides the broad range of religious leadership speaking out against it.

"The Almighty seems, if anything, to have smiled on

## **Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal.**

By Anthony Arnove

Foreword and afterword by Howard Zinn. New York: The New Press, 2006. 184 pp with notes and index. \$19.95 paperback.

## **Is Iraq Another Vietnam?**

By Kale Baldock

96 pages with notes. Kansas City, MO: North Kensington Manor Press, 2005. \$9.95 paperback, available online at [www.isiraqanothervietnam.com](http://www.isiraqanothervietnam.com).

## **A Long Short War: The Postponed Liberation of Iraq.**

By Christopher Hitchens

New York, New York: Penguin Group (USA), 2003, 104 pages, \$8.99 paperback.



Saddam Hussein for a quarter of a century. If we want to assure ourselves of a true "coalition of the willing," we might consider making a pact with the devil." (79)

In essence, that's the pact he made — along with his Iraqi friends Kanan Makiya and Ahmad Chalabi — in calling for Iraq's liberation by the American regime most heavily influenced in our nation's history by a coalition of the Christian religious right, secular and religious neoconservatives, and crony capitalists.

Makiya, who like Hitchens is a former Marxist and revolutionary internationalist, proposed an Iraqi constitution that would enshrine citizenship separate from ethnicity or religion, not an Arab or Muslim state but a secular democracy. If implemented, this would have transformed Iraq in one giant leap into the most advanced democracy in the Middle East (much superior to the Israeli "Jewish state," certainly).

Yet however seductive such a vision might have been, this was not Christopher Hitchens' or Kanan Makiya's or even Thomas Friedman's war. It was and it remains Bush's and Cheney's and Rumsfeld's and corporate America's war, waged under the leadership of a messianic-imperial presidency that is flushing the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights down the Guantanamo toilet along with the Koran.

The destruction of the Iraqi state by imperialism, not by its own population, led inevitably to the atrocities that we now know by the names of Fallujah, Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, and many more still unnamed. Those American or Iraqi liberals who advocated war in the name of a fantastically advanced "democratic republic" imposed from the outside bear some moral responsibility for consequences that they may abhor but were readily predictable.

## Facing the Facts

I've spent considerable space (and would devote more if there were room) to Hitchens' book, not only because the political death of a brilliant and principled leftwing polemicist was a terrible loss but because his argument illustrates the powerful pull of "humanitarian imperialism" and the absolute imperative need to resist it.

Here is where Chapter 3 of Anthony Arno's *Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal* is so important. Drawing upon the work of Sid Lens (*The Forging of the American Empire*) as well as historian Clifford Kuhn and the writings of Mark Twain, Arno reminds us that the more brutal the practice of American imperialism abroad and the internal genocide of the Native American peoples,

the more it has been wrapped in the language of moral rectitude and altruism.

Throughout this book, Arno elegantly draws together the work of observers and analysts of the failed and disastrous Iraqi occupation with its historical antecedents. The work is explicitly patterned on Howard Zinn's influential *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* first published in 1967, and as Zinn himself writes here:

"(A)t that time I heard the same arguments against withdrawal that we are hearing now. The United States did not pull out its troops for six [actually eight] more years. In those years at least a million more Vietnamese, and perhaps thirty thousand U.S. military, were killed...

"[In Iraq] There is no certainty as to what would happen in our absence, but there is absolute certainty about the result of our presence: escalating deaths on both sides. Mostly, the loss of life is among Iraqi civilians, many of them children. But even the smaller casualty toll on the U.S. side includes thousands of maimed soldiers, some losing limbs, others blinded. And tens of thousands face psychological damage in the aftermath." (xii)

Arno himself reviews (89-90) the factors of resistance and domestic and international opposition that ultimately forced U.S. elites to accept defeat and withdrawal from Vietnam. He also notes, "In Iraq, the United States and its allies have run up against the limits of empire." (xx) It might be added, however, that Vietnam in material terms (oil and strategic position) never had the importance for imperialism of Iraq today, a point made effectively by Kale Baldock. (*Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* 65)

In any case, for those who remember the Vietnam war, the argument still echoes. Indeed little if anything in *Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal* claims to be original. But that's the point — the American propaganda machine and education system act to suppress history. It's not only Vietnam that's ancient history — not to mention the genocidal conquest and occupation of the Philippines, the long military occupations of Haiti and Nicaragua, the sponsorship of dictatorship and extermination of the Indian peasants of Guatemala — but the memory that Saddam Hussein and for that matter Osama bin Laden were American clients and friends in the glory days of the Reagan presidency is mostly lost.

That's why Zinn's book was such a powerful statement in 1967 and why Arno's is an essential text for the movement now. One thing that's true today that wasn't in 1967 (although it would become true a year or so later) is that "a clear majority of people in the

United States now believes the invasion was not worth the consequences and never should have been undertaken." (Arrove, 65)

In these circumstances, the antiwar movement has the awesome challenge of speaking for, and organizing, that majority. The contradiction we face is that the movement is less visible and vocal today than it was just before the war, on February 15, 2003, when millions were in the streets in the most magnificent antiwar mobilization in history — at a point where opposition to the war was only a minority, though significant, sentiment.

That's part of the reason why *Against the Current*, beginning in this issue, is publishing viewpoints on the question of immediate withdrawal from Iraq.

## Vietnam Then and Now

Kale Baldock knows the history of the Vietnam war, and if you or a friend aren't familiar with it, you can use *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* as a primer on the subject, along with the chilling parallels of how the war was sold to the American public and its realities, the nature of the insurgency, and who suffered.

The distinctions between the highly coherent and disciplined Communist-dominated and Soviet-backed Vietnamese resistance, compared to the highly disunited Iraqi insurgency with its nationalist, Sunni and Shia, and jihadist-terrorist components engaged in a civil war as well as a resistance struggle, are obvious. Yet the results eerily converge.

In Vietnam, a series of U.S.-installed puppet governments, sometimes dictators of the week, disintegrated for lack of a base. In Iraq, the United States is unable to manipulate contending political forces into a fraudulent "national unity government," precisely because they do each have their own base — and militias, especially after the national army was abolished by Bremer's fiat! The end product is essentially U.S. political impotence despite overwhelming firepower.

While giving a powerful picture of the agony the Vietnam war created there and at home, Baldock loses much of his coherence when trying to lay out what to do about Iraq:

"It would be equally wrong to simply pull out and let the country devolve into civil war among its various religious and ethnic groups...A U.S. withdrawal must be backed up with intense negotiations by all Iraqi parties and factions. Unconditional cease-fire and amnesty must be the goals. A coalition of world powers should be involved...The major point of contention

will of course be between the Sunnis and Shiites. But steps are already being taken to bring the Sunnis into the political process most of them have boycotted up to now..." (72-73)

This sounds like the kind of we-shouldn't-have-gone-in-but-can't-leave-now posture of *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, combined with the "intense negotiations" being conducted at this point by U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad. At this writing, there are also ominous signs of another tilt in U.S. policy, this time toward targeting Shia militia forces rather than "Sunni insurgents," perhaps in tandem with the American campaign against Iran.

Not only is this kind of maneuvering murky and dangerous, it rests on political quicksand and in no way, shape or form can the antiwar movement afford to endorse it. The problem is certainly not that the United States will withdraw "too quickly." Rather, it's that the U.S. occupation every day produces bloodier chaos. Not only that: Any serious proposal for the United States to "prevent chaos" by its military presence would require doubling the troop numbers on the ground.

There is another point, policy-wonking pretenses aside: The antiwar movement can win only by convincing the American people, who have come to hate this war, that there IS a "logic of withdrawal" and that withdrawal is indeed the only logic.

No antiwar movement ever won by demanding pseudo-realist "intense negotiations for national unity" or nostrums of that sort. When Bush preaches about a "strategy for victory," the only effective answer is that there was one way in, and one way out: Bring the Troops Home Now!

Today's antiwar struggle may greatly influence future events far beyond Iraq. It's important that the U.S. government be forced to leave Iraq under the pressure of mass revulsion at home. That's necessary in order to make it politically impossible for the Bush gang, or the next administration, to make withdrawal from Iraq a springboard for the next piece of criminal mischief — like a war against Iran, or, perhaps, military intervention in Venezuela.

## The Voice for Sanity

A couple more things need to be said about the antiwar movement. Grotesquely, Christopher Hitchens makes fun of "potluck peaceniks," as if \$1000 a plate dinners to hear Paul Wolfowitz or Dick Cheney praise "regime change" were morally far superior. It's worse yet when Hitchens lectures that he could instantly spot

the "obvious phony" — that is, anyone who got up at a meeting to denounce Saddam Hussein and then oppose the war. (*A Long Short War*, 54, 85)

Unlike those who wish to ridicule and demoralize the antiwar movement, Anthony Arno and Kale Baldock wish to build and strengthen it. While my sympathies in the argument over immediate withdrawal will be clear, it's important within the movement to treat our differences over this and other questions (how to speak about Palestine, linkages to other issues and

struggles, dealing with Iraqi trade unionists, the sensitivities that exist among military families, etc.) in a spirit of inclusion and mutual respect.

The antiwar movement doesn't have vast sums of money, instant media access or any perquisites of power. What it has, first and foremost, is the integrity and clarity of its message. That's what we must preserve and build upon in our role as the voices of sanity against this insane war and the larger imperial "mission" it serves.

# An Anti-Imperialist War Resister:

## An Interview with Carl Webb

ATC #117 July/August 2005 (Web Edition)

**Military resister Carl Webb, 39, is Absent Without Leave from the Texas National Guard, after his service was involuntarily extended in July, 2004 through the military Stop-Loss program. He tells his story on his website [www.carlwebb.net](http://www.carlwebb.net) and blogspot [carlwebb.blogspot.com](http://carlwebb.blogspot.com) and has been speaking out at antiwar meetings. His explicit anti-imperialist views have made him a somewhat controversial figure within the peace movement.**

During his first period of active military service beginning in 1982, Webb was deployed in Korea and Germany where he was a field and electrical systems maintenance worker (repairing trucks and tanks). His most recent work in the National Guard was as a combat medic.

On June 1 Carl Webb spoke with David Finkel, from the *ATC* editorial board, while on a speaking tour of several southeast Michigan towns and campuses. He was also interviewed by Ric Urrutia in the March, 2005 issue of *Solidarity News*. An interview with resister Camilo Mejia, whose case helped inspire Webb's decision, appears in our previous issue (*ATC* 116, May-June 2005).

**Against the Current:** You've spoken in a number of different places: big cities like New York and Detroit, campus towns like Ann Arbor, and conservative places like Hillsdale, Michigan. What kind of responses are you getting?

**Carl Webb:** In general the audiences everywhere have been very open. As to some of the groups that I've encountered — their response has been problematic.

Initially when I left Texas, my intent was just to refuse to go to Iraq, turn myself in and request a discharge. When that didn't happen, I decided step by step to become more outspoken and radical in my public message. That's when I became aware of this big schism within the antiwar movement, which I sort of knew was there

but hadn't personally encountered — the conflict among national antiwar coalitions was something I wasn't aware of until I arrived in New York.

I guess the first time the problem came up was when I tried to contact a progressive student group at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. After several attempts I finally went to a meeting and heard later that this group, which is affiliated with United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), didn't want to have anything to do with me. While they said they "supported" my stance, they thought it was a little too extreme...

**ATC:** "Extreme" meaning not your refusal to serve, but your anti-imperialist politics?

**CW:** Yes, and I had come out as a Marxist; so my refusal to serve in Iraq was overtly political and leftist. So I might "scare away," as they put it, some of the mainstream folks they were trying to attract. This Knoxville group rented a van for the Fayetteville march (March 19) and didn't even invite me.

Another incident developed after the big March 19 protests with some members of Military Families Speak Out (MFSO) on the West Coast, who had invited me to speak at some events in solidarity with a soldier who was protesting his "Stop Loss" order. We had corresponded for weeks, they had sent me an e-ticket and detailed itinerary.

Just a few days before my departure they sent an

email expressing "concern" about my speaking and about some groups I was associating with. I guess they had finally taken a look at my website and thought I was some kind of leftist sectarian — which I'm not, but I do say I oppose U.S. imperialism and support the Iraqi people's right to struggle for self-determination.

Anyway, they asked me "not to speak about certain things" and remove some content from my website (as if that would make everyone who'd seen it forget it was there!). Of course I said no. So they canceled my appearances in Seattle and Portland. I do believe this soldier lost his case and was ordered to go to Iraq.

I was also supposed to speak in Los Angeles, in support of Pablo Paredes. Unfortunately one of the founders of Gold Star Families — a mother whose son was killed in Iraq, and I certainly don't want to have a conflict with her — objected to my presence at that event. So I got a call from an organization I belong to, Iraq Veterans Against the War, saying in essence "we support you but we don't want to alienate those who don't share this point of view."

I thought about compromising my message, but I concluded that once I started doing that it would never end. So I called them back and said I would bow out of that event — in this case it was my decision.

**ATC:** So there's an element of self-censorship among organized antiwar forces. But what about the



response of people who actually come to hear you?

**CW:** It's been much more positive than what some of the organizers are thinking. Even the mainstream press now says that the majority is against the war. From my interaction with audiences, I feel that a lot of those who engage in this type of self-censorship are underestimating the mass sentiment.

I'm not a pacifist, and I want to emphasize the overt political nature of my resistance. It's not as if I've been assaulted or spat on, and I've been speaking in Tennessee and in places like Hillsdale here in Michigan. Of course there will always be people in the audience who object to the message, but that's OK.

**ATC:** Let's get to that. What do people ask you?

**CW:** "Why aren't you arrested and in jail?" "Why didn't you apply for CO (Conscientious Objector) status?"

As a matter of fact, it's hard to believe that the U.S. government isn't really cracking down on folks. When I tell audiences that six thousand military personnel (this includes National Guard and reserves) have deserted, it's not that the number is so large but the military is trying to avoid any publicity about the problems they have.

They try to present it as a minor problem with meeting recruitment targets — but because of the coverup we don't really know how big it is. They're obviously afraid of too much negative press.

When it became evident — as I learned after several encounters with city and campus police — that I hadn't been reported as a military deserter, I called the GI Hotline and was told this is common practice. They could only theorize that the military either doesn't have the resources to round up people, especially when they're sending the MPs (Military Police) to the war and when anyone arrested would need military lawyers, or else just wants to avoid publicity.

Most of the resisters I know — including Camilo Mejia, who inspired me — aren't caught. They turn themselves in. There's not a dragnet to capture this supposed small trickle of deserters. The press that Camilo and others have gotten has caused concern. The military will try to avoid admitting that there's a problem.

**ATC:** Do people ask you whether you think there will be a draft? And I'll ask you myself.

**CW:** I don't know! But I would guess they can't sustain their present military operations. I tell people the government is stuck between Iraq and a hard place — sorry about the pun. This backdoor draft, as many people refer to the mobilizing of reserves and National

Guard, has skewed the military's demographics upward by a decade.

I'm going to be 40. Most of the people in my medical unit are over 30. You're talking about doctors, radiologists, technical and professional people who are physically over the hill and have kids and jobs and businesses, which they have to leave. This is of concern to middle age, middle-class people and a lot of the resisters you see in the media are older servicemen.

Military propaganda partly justifies the Stop-Loss policy by claiming it preserves "unit cohesion" with older people who have trained together, in the same community. In my case, the unit I was assigned to — after I received my Stop Loss order as an individual — which has been in Iraq since January, is made up of people I never met. I was transferred from my unit in Austin to this other unit based in Dallas.

Some soldiers have even had their job classifications changed from noncombat to combat occupations. People are being prevented from leaving as their contracts specified, then reassigned to different units to fill deficiencies that already existed for years.

It's theorized that this is another coverup: Although we see the coverage about the lack of equipment and body armor and even ammunition, we haven't known the shortages of personnel which obviously had been a problem for years before now. (Just google "ghost soldiers" to find out more.)

In Hillsdale, there was a sergeant in the audience who pretty much confirmed the stories journalists have been writing about the over-reporting of personnel in many units. This happens for bureaucratic reasons, officers making themselves look good.

It's hard for people to believe this — we're the superpower, how could we not have the best of everything? That goes along with the story we used to hear about the government spending money on high-tech and high-priced equipment to the detriment of the common soldier.

This sergeant I mentioned isn't leftist, but already he's seeing the lies. He's serving in a unit that isn't his own, from Texas when he's from Michigan; he knows about the issue of ghost reporting, about the mixing of units and even soldiers from foreign "coalition" armies serving with them. I hadn't heard about that, which brings to light even more the shortage of personnel and how far they have to stretch to deal with that.

**ATC:** Have you had any surprising responses?

**CW:** Not from the audiences. I never had this misjudgment that the population is pro-war. There are



Jim West/www.jimwestphoto.com

**What does democratic and radical socialist politics mean today? Try reading *AGAINST THE CURRENT*, a bi-monthly publishing articles to stimulate dialogue among activists, organizers and serious scholars of the left.**

Recent articles include Nativo V. Lopez on Strategy and Tactics for Immigrant Rights in 2007 ▲ Kim Moody on U.S. Immigrant Workers ▲ Heather Ann Thompson on The Attica Rebellion ▲ Christian Roselund on the Drowning of New Orleans' Schools ▲ Malik Miah on "Colorblind" Society ▲ Dianne Feeley on U.S. Reproductive Rights ▲ Nancy Holmstrom on Does

Historical Materialism Need an Ethics? ▲ Dan LaBotz on the Continuing Crisis in Mexico ▲ Au Loong-Yu on The China Advantage ▲ interviews with Stephanie Coontz, author of *Marriage, A History: from Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* and Samuel Farber, author of *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* ▲ Gilbert Achcar, Uri Avnery and Michael Schwartz on the Crises in the Middle East ▲ Jeffery Webber on Bolivia's Upheaval ▲ Robert Brenner on Economic Crisis

*Subscribe to ATC:* One year's subscription is US\$25, two years, \$45. Supporting and institutional subscriptions are \$30 a year. Go to [www.solidarity-us.org](http://www.solidarity-us.org) to view *ATC* articles or to subscribe. For information, email [cfc@igc.org](mailto:cfc@igc.org), or write to *ATC*, 7012 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, MI 48210.

many different motivations. There were people in Hillsdale who were against the war, but from a libertarian perspective. Then there are folks who are basically pacifist, for religious or other reasons, and opposed to war in general — which isn't my own view.

I've been surprised as I said before at the leadership in the antiwar movement. But I've actually been impressed by the real solidarity among those of us on the left, who are always accused of too much sectarian infighting.

At the March 19 protest I saw everybody together, from all the socialist to anarchist groups. It's been the liberals who are supposedly interacting with "the middle," who have been most sectarian. None of the groups I've encountered in the left — and I've been open about my past affiliations, although these were largely dormant while I've been in the military — have acted in a sectarian way.

However much infighting there is on the left, the polarization in the antiwar movement has made many of us more willing to work together. You find out who your friends are.

**ATC:** How do you see resistance developing from here?

**CW:** I'm trying to figure out why there has been so much underestimation of the so-called masses that some people feel we have to go "antiwar lite," like "you can't go on stage and tell people to do something illegal. You can't say something crazy like telling all these guys they should just refuse to go."

Well, it's illegal to go AWOL. That's why Camilo Mejia went to jail. Why are we going backward? In the 1960s the action and theory that moved us forward — if only temporarily — came from the so-called "extreme" that moved "the middle" toward the left. Why would we put ourselves in the box of working only within the system's

rules?

As a war resister I am telling people to work outside the system. I appreciate all the advice and help from lawyers and my Quaker friends, but most Conscientious Objector applications are going to get turned down. I purposely didn't go to Canada, because I was told those refugees might lose their cases.

The movement is going to have to go back 30 years and see what really was done then to assist resistance. It may happen — there may be a draft. Maybe not: Perhaps we'll force them to withdraw from Iraq. But what if they don't? If the antiwar movement rejects resisters who are "too radical" it will make a huge mistake.

**ATC:** Any final thoughts on your own experience?

**CW:** Another question people come up with: "If you were already so politically conscious, how did you wind up in the military in the first place?"

**ATC:** Let me guess: This question comes from people who haven't been in or near the military, and don't understand who ends up there and why?

**CW:** Right — it's a matter of not having a frame of reference. And I say, yes, to a certain degree I sold out. People have done that for hundreds of years. Look at the history of the left, people vacillate all the time. A lot of that has to do with life. Sometimes it's hard to combine principles and practice, and I'm not purer or holier than others.

Why would, let's say, a lesbian or someone politically conscious enlist in the military? It goes to show how bad things are that people resort to such lengths for survival. What inspired me in Camilo Mejia's story was that he's the son of a leading Sandinista militant (Carlos Mejia Godoy); so for him to be in the U.S. military shows how awful this system is, when they can get people like that.

In my case, I was on the left politically when I was 15. Unfortunately I dropped out of high school the next year, and ideology wasn't going to pay my bills.

But when the revolution comes, who can say they were pure? The holier-than-thou leaders in China and Cambodia attacked their opponents' background or even their parents' background. That's just nonsense.

Unless you pronounced yourself a radical in your baby crib, everyone has gone through a process of political evolution — either in school, the work place, or oddly the military, which was my direct lesson in U.S. imperialism. And some of us will backslide. My question is: Is it ever too late for someone to redeem themselves?

**SOLIDARITY is a revolutionary, socialist, democratic, feminist, anti-racist organization.**

We stand for "socialism from below," the self-organization of the working-class and oppressed peoples. Within our group we try to foster a culture of diversity, flexible practice and straightforward socialist politics. If you agree with our principles, are committed to social movements, and willing to contribute to building our organization, please join us!

WORKING PAPERS of SOLIDARITY are intended as contributions to discussions of strategic questions we face. They reflect the general politics and orientation of SOLIDARITY, but the details of analysis, historical interpretation, and formulations represent the views of the authors.

**SOLIDARITY - [www.solidarity-us.org](http://www.solidarity-us.org)  
[solidarity@igc.org](mailto:solidarity@igc.org)  
7012 Michigan Ave. Detroit MI 48210  
313-841-0160**