The Campus Antiwar Network (CAN) is an independent, democratic, grassroots network of campus and school-based antiwar committees. The points of unity of CAN are:

1. We stand opposed to all US wars of aggression
2. We stand opposed to the occupation of Iraq
3. We support the right of the Iraqi people to self-determination
4. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all troops from Iraq
5. We demand that the US government pay reparations to the Iraqi people
6. We stand opposed to the oppression of the Palestinian people and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip
7. We stand opposed to racist scapegoating and all attacks on civil liberties
8. We demand money for education, jobs and healthcare, not war and occupation

Campus Antiwar Network

For more information

On anti-war activism and military resistance:
Bring Them Home Now campaign: www.bringthemhomenow.org
Military Families Speak Out: www.mfso.org
Traveling Soldier: www.traveling-soldier.org
GI Special: www.notinourname.net/gi-special

Non-corporate media:
Common Dreams: www.commondreams.org
Indymedia: www.indymedia.org
International Socialist Review: www.isreview.org
Occupation Watch: www.occupationwatch.org
Z-Net: www.zmag.org

Campus Antiwar Network
www.campusantiwar.net

The Growing Discontent:
Why Troops Are Turning Against the Occupation

by Pham Binh, Hunter College

"I just want to get out of this country, which, by the way, the Iraqis can have." **— Sergeant Michael Baroni, 3rd Infantry Division, Fallujah, Iraq.**[1]

"I missed Vietnam. I thought about retiring after Desert Storm. I should have. [Iraq is] classic FUBAR[2] ... A mission without a goal. An engagement without rules. The intel was pure FUBAR. No exit strategy. We're going to be there for a long, long time. Maybe people are right. Maybe it is another Vietnam. We were in Vietnam for 10 years. ... I've been a professional soldier most of my adult life. I've been proud to serve my country even when I thought we might be wrong. But I'm not proud now. And that makes me want to puke." **— Anonymous reservist after returning home from Iraq.**[3]

These are the words of soldiers stationed in Iraq who are becoming more and more disillusioned with the war. Morale in the armed forces is at historic lows. Not since the Vietnam-era have so many men and women in uniform been dissatisfied, and many are turning against the war because of their experiences on the ground. In a *Stars and Stripes* poll taken of troops in Iraq in August of 2003, almost fifty percent said it was unlikely or "very unlikely" that they would re-enlist in the military once their terms were up, and described their unit's morale as "low" or "very low."[4]

Bush lies, who dies?

"The gravity of this moment is matched by the gravity of the threat that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose to the world. ... There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons ... Saddam Hussein has chemical weapons. ... Saddam Hussein already possesses two out of the three key components needed to build a nuclear bomb." – **Secretary of State Colin Powell in a presentation to the United Nations Security Council, February 5, 2003.**[5]

For those whose bodies are on the line, the fact that every stated reason for the war was a lie is infuriating. As Specialist Juan Castillo put it to the *New York Times* while on leave:

In the beginning I was into this; we all were. [But] we haven't found anything, no weapons of mass destruction, no Saddam, no nothing. And the people there hate us. If we were rolling through a town and they were cheering, hell yeah, it would make us feel better. But when they're not cooperating and throwing rocks and giving us evil looks, we don't want to be there. We're conquerors to them. It wasn't supposed to be like that. ... I hate it over there, I hate it.[6]

There were basically two lies the Bush regime told before the war on Iraq.

The first lie was about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The U.S. government sent a team made up of over a thousand specialists to scour

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33. News briefing, United States Department of Defense, June 30, 2003. <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030630-secdef0321.html>34. Dexter Filkins, "Tough new tactics by U.S. tighten grip on Iraq towns," *New York Times*, December 7, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/07/international/middleeast/07TACT.html>

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the country for the famed WMD to no avail. Not a single chemical, biological, or nuclear weapon has turned up, despite a six month $300 million search by 1,200 experts hired by the Central Intelligence Agency.[7]

After Baghdad fell to U.S. forces in April, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz admitted in an interview with *Vanity Fair* magazine: "The truth is that, for reasons that have a lot to do with U.S. government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on, which was weapons of mass destruction."[8] They "settled" on WMD not because Iraq was a threat, or because it was the ***truth*** – but because they needed a way to scare Americans into supporting their war for oil and empire.

If there was any doubt about the U.S. government's motives for invading and occupying Iraq, during the looting that swept much of the country in the initial stages of the Iraqi regime's collapse, the U.S. military did nothing to protect the museums, libraries or hospitals. But it did send a company of marines and at least a half-dozen amphibious assault vehicles to guard the Ministry of Oil.[9]

The second lie was that the U.S. was going to war to free the Iraqi people from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein and that the Iraqis would welcome U.S. and U.K. soldiers as liberators.

The truth is that the U.S. invasion had absolutely nothing to do with democracy. When it was suggested that the Iraqis might choose an Islamic government, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explained bluntly: "If you're suggesting, how would we feel about an Iranian-type government with a few clerics running everything in the country, the answer is: That isn't going to happen."[10]

The military that ousted Hussein's tyrannical regime has replaced it with one even more lethal. Today, more Iraqis are being killed per week by their "liberators" than during Hussein's dictatorship.[11] To add insult to injury, the U.S. installed ***its*** dictator, Paul Bremer, in Saddam Hussein's luxurious, air-conditioned Presidential Palace in Baghdad.

> "... we will be greeted as liberators. ... The read we get on the people of Iraq is there's no question but that they want to get rid of Saddam Hussein and they will welcome as liberators the United States when we come to do that." – **Vice President Dick Cheney on NBC's *Meet the Press*, March 16, 2003**.[12]

British journalist Robert Fisk described the response of U.S. military commanders to Iraqis who believed they had been liberated:

> They protest in the streets, especially against the aggressive American military raids, and they protest in the press. Much

good it does to do them. When ex-Iraqi soldiers demonstrated outside Bremer's office at the former Presidential Palace, US troops shot two of them dead. When Fallujah residents staged a protest as long ago as April, the American military shot 16 dead. Another 11 were later gunned down in Mosul. During two demonstrations against the presence of US soldiers near the shrine of Imam Hussein at Karbala last weekend, US soldiers shot dead another three. "What a wonderful thing it is to speak your own minds," Lt. General Sanchez said of the demonstrations in Iraq last week. Maybe he was exhibiting a black sense of humor.[13]

The American military has surrounded entire villages, like Abu Hishma, with razor wire and issued identification cards printed **in English** to control civilian traffic. Captain Todd Brown, a company commander with the 4th Infantry Division defended this, saying, "You have to understand the Arab mind. The only thing they understand is force – force, pride and saving face." A village resident named Tariq muttered in anger, "I see no difference between us and the Palestinians. We didn't expect anything like this after Saddam fell."[14] It is not freedom or democracy that the U.S. has brought to Iraq by gunpoint, but colonialism.

Foreign occupation, Iraqi resistance, anger in the ranks

The oppression and humiliation that the occupation inflicts on Iraqis – everything from bulldozing farmers' homes to early morning home invasions[15] – and the fact that almost all peaceful protests against the occupation have been met with a hail of bullets have led growing numbers of Iraqis to support the armed resistance movement. As Lieutenant Tom Garner of the 4th Infantry Division remarked to his superior, Captain Dave Gray, in Tikrit: "I think our welcome's worn out. We don't even get that fake wave anymore. They just stare."[16]

Washington politicians have almost unanimously dismissed the opposition to the occupation as being made up of a hodge-podge of Saddam loyalists, criminals, and foreign terrorists coming from outside Iraq. But these

> "If somebody invaded Texas, we'd do the same thing." – **Lieutenant Colonel Kim Keslung, 21st Combat Hospital, Balad, Iraq.**[17]

explanations do not add up when compared with the facts on the ground and the real life experience of soldiers in Iraq. A captain in the 82nd Airborne stationed in Fallujah told British journalist Robert Fisk that his men were being attacked by "Iraqi freedom-fighters."[18]

A recent classified report by the Central Intelligence Agency contradicted official explanations of the resistance. An intelligence source in Washington described the report as a "bleak assessment that the resistance is broad, strong and getting stronger. It says we are going to lose the situation unless there is a rapid and

sitting on our butts wasting taxpayers' money and wasting our time."[38] Undoubtedly, many others feel the same way Mendez does, but have not had the opportunity to go to demonstrations or the luck of coming into contact with anti-war activists.

What we can do

As long as there are foreign troops on Iraqi soil, there will be resistance; the more troops there are, the greater the resistance there will be; the more resistance there is, the more force the occupation will have to use to crush it, and so on.

Here at home, our schools are falling apart, tens of millions lack basic health care coverage, veterans benefits are being slashed, and the cost of living is rising. At the same time, the U.S. government is spending between one and two **billion** dollars **a week** on occupying Iraq. The invasion of Iraq was not about making ordinary Americans safer or freeing the Iraqi people – it was about making the rich richer and the power-brokers in Washington more powerful by controlling the world's second largest oil reserves and establishing permanent military bases in the Middle East. "Strategic oil resources and waterways make the area of paramount importance," according to Central Command, which is in charge of the American military presence in the Middle East.[39]

The Campus Antiwar Network has an important role to play in building the anti-war movement on campuses throughout the country by educating fellow students about the real war aims, who stands to profit and who stands to lose from the war, and by organizing protests and other actions against the occupation. In the 1960s and 1970s, students were at the forefront of struggles to end the Jim Crow system and the war in Vietnam – and today, we are at the forefront of the movement to get the U.S. out of Iraq and the fight for social justice here at home.

Yet in order to be successful, the student anti-war movement must not only organize on campuses, it must reach out and connect with ordinary people and especially military communities. What it took to bring the Vietnam war to a halt was the convergence of three movements: the resistance in Vietnam itself, the anti-war movement in the United States, and most crucially, the growth of an anti-war movement within the military. And that is what it will take today to end the war in Iraq and bring the troops home now.

ENDNOTES:
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2. FUBAR is a common term within the military that stands for "F***** Up Beyond All Recognition."

At home, massive anti-war protests shook the country and at its height, anti-war sentiment spread into the armed forces to such an extent that the U.S. government had no choice but to withdraw from Vietnam since its military could no longer be relied upon to defend the status quo. The official journal of the U.S. Army at the time described it well:

> Our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and noncommissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near-mutinous. [C]onditions [exist] among American forces in Vietnam that have only been exceeded in this century by...the collapse of the Tsarist armies in 1916 and 1917.[35]

This is the reason that the U.S. government has been reluctant to send large numbers of troops abroad since Vietnam – a phenomenon dubbed "Vietnam syndrome." Today, there are the beginnings of the kind of revolt within the ranks of the armed forces which could end the war in Iraq and bring the troops home. Tom Barton, former East Coast organizer for *Vietnam GI*, a Vietnam-era soldiers' newspaper with a circulation in the tens of thousands, observed:

> The Bush crowd like to repeat a new mantra: "Iraq Is Not Vietnam." They're right. It certainly isn't. It took years for resistance to an Imperial war to grow in the army in Vietnam. It has taken only months in Iraq. There was no military families' movement during the Vietnam war, because most troops were single men who had no immediate families. Today husbands, wives, and even children of troops are organizing and beginning to raise hell right alongside their loved ones in Iraq and elsewhere in the service. The ironic joke is that the "professional, all-volunteer army" was supposed to be a cure for the kind of rebellion that broke out during Vietnam. Instead, the resistance now has a home base.[36]

The formation of groups like Military Families Speak Out and the Bring Them Home Now campaign are an important sign of the growing resistance *within* military communities, in addition to the active-duty soldiers who have joined the anti-war movement. Army reservist Frank Mendez from New Jersey organized a demonstration against the occupation while on his two-week leave from Iraq. As he explained: "I had no problem going into this. I knew the mission going in: We were going to find weapons of mass destruction. Only there weren't any, then the mission became bringing democracy to Iraq. But now we're just in the country

> "There is no real reason for us to be out here!!! We're protecting oil is all, and as far as the supposed war ending, it hasn't." – **Private First Class Mary Yahne, 4th Infantry Division, Iraq.**[37]

dramatic change of course. ... There are thousands in the resistance – not just a core of Ba'athists. They are in the thousands, and growing every day. Not all those people are actually firing, but providing support, shelter and all that."[19]

The armed resistance is a reaction to the brutality of the American occupation, not a longing to return to the tyranny of the Hussein era. That's why the capture of former dictator Saddam Hussein has had no impact on the strength of the Iraqi resistance. In October, 2003, about 1.3 Americans died per day in Iraq, and in December, 2003 when Saddam Hussein was captured, about 1.2 died per day.[20] Since May 1st, when President Bush declared the end of major combat operations, the number of troops killed in action each month has held steady varying between 29 and 46.[21] As of this writing, 1.6 soldiers are dying each day.[22]

The growth of the Iraqi resistance has had an enormous impact on the hearts and minds of the soldiers serving in Iraq. When soldiers who were told that they would be welcomed by Iraqis throwing flowers are instead met by Iraqis firing rocket-propelled grenades, planting road-side bombs, and even children throwing stones, they are forced by their own experience to re-examine what they were told. As one soldier who was in a tank during an intense fire-fight in Samara put it:

> I even saw Iraqi people throwing stones at us. I told my soldiers to hold their fire unless they could identify a real weapon, but I still can't understand why somebody would throw a stone at a tank, in the middle of a firefight. ... I am very concerned in the coming days we will find we killed many civilians as well as Iraqi irregular fighters. I would feel great if all the people we killed were all enemy guerillas, but I can't say that. We are probably turning many Iraqis against us and I am afraid instead of climbing out of the hole, we are digging ourselves in deeper.[23]

"But these people volunteered to join the military"

Whenever soldiers complain about anything, the response of the military brass and Washington politicians is always the same: "they signed up for the military, not the Peace Corps. They knew what they were getting into so they have no right to complain." But as retired Special Forces Master Sergeant Stan Goff and founder of the Bring Them Home Now campaign put it:

> They made a conscious decision alright, but not in a vacuum. The decision was to join the military. But they were weighing their real options in the real world when they made that decision, working off of limited information, limited experience,

Madison Avenue 'Army of One' sales pitches, and an economy that offers most people a glorious career in serial shit retail jobs. That's the reason rich frat boys like George Bush often don't do military service. They have more options. The lack of options is a real thing that can't be erased with a lot of abstracted, two-dimensional, libertarian, we-are-all-free-agents nonsense.

And joining the military is a contractual agreement that is circumscribed by law, not some holy vow to surrender your brain. How is occupying Iraq 'serving' the United States? Unless we can define what the United States is, it's pure demagogy. They were not ordered to Iraq by the United States. They were ordered to Iraq by the Bush administration. That's why this volunteer military thing is a red herring. The decision didn't come from the troops. It came from the political establishment. Whether they are 'volunteer' or conscript doesn't change that.[24]

While the draft was officially abolished in 1973, the poverty draft lived on. People with bleak economic futures are far more likely to join the military, which is why Army recruiting offices in Puerto Rico, where the unemployment rate is about 40%, garner four times the amount of recruits that U.S. mainland offices average in a year.[25] In addition to targeting the poor, the military also targets minorities to fill its ranks. According to *Time* magazine, the Army is 26.3% black – double the percentage that blacks make up of the total U.S. population.[26] As a result, 20 percent of U.S. casualties from the invasion of Iraq until the fall of Baghdad were black.[27] A recent Pew study showed that while Latinos comprise 9.49% of enlisted personnel, they make up 17.74% of those in combat.[28]

Everyone who joined the military understood that it is an instrument of war and that they risked losing their lives when they signed on the dotted line, but no one signed up to be lied to and betrayed by the Commander-in-Chief; no one signed up to die for Halliburton's oil contracts; no one was told that they would die to maintain the U.S. government's position of biggest bully on the world block; and no one signed up to die for Bush's re-election campaign.

If anyone has a right to criticize and oppose U.S. foreign policy, it's the sailors, soldiers, airmen, Marines, National Guardsmen and Reservists whose lives are on the line.

Is the antiwar movement hurting the military's morale?

When the U.S. began the war, politicians and the media said that the anti-war movement had to stop protesting and "support the troops." By "support the troops" they meant "support the war" that was going to get the troops killed. The

idea that criticizing the war is hurting troops' morale and betraying them is complete and utter nonsense.

It was not the anti-war movement but the Commander-in-Chief George W. Bush *who invited attacks on U.S. soldiers* in July, 2003: "There are some who feel like the conditions are such that they can attack us there [in Iraq]. My answer is, bring 'em on."[29] The reason *a quarter* of troops serving in Iraq don't have ceramic plates for their bullet proof vests is because Pentagon bureaucrats and top brass didn't make getting the troops adequate combat gear a priority, not because the anti-war movement sabotaged the supply chain.[30]

The ones betraying the troops are the war-makers in the Pentagon and in the White House. They are the ones who decided to sacrifice the blood of American soldiers for control of Iraqi oil. They are the ones who lied about the reasons for the war in the first place, and say that every single one of the 503 dead and 2,893 wounded soldiers is "necessary".[31] As one soldier put it: "We all knew what we were getting into initially, but the lies and deceit have taken their toll on the morale of everyone. I'm not pissed because I'm here. I'm pissed about being lied to. Lied to by a command group that I placed my confidence in."[32]

The anti-war movement wants not one more soldier or Iraqi to be killed or maimed because the U.S. government wants to control Iraq's oil. The U.S. had no right to invade Iraq, and has no business occupying it. We say: bring all the troops home now!

Vietnam and Iraq

The nationalist resistance in Iraq has stoked memories of another war thirty years ago – in Vietnam. The initial reason for the war – a North

> "There are so many cartoons where people, press people are saying, 'Is it Vietnam yet?' – hoping it is and wondering if it is. And it isn't. It's a different time. It's a different era. It's a different place." – **Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, news briefing at the Department of Defense, June 30, 2003.**[33]

Vietnamese attack on an American gunboat – turned out to be a lie. The U.S. and its allies in South Vietnam had almost no popular support while the resistance had the support of the vast majority of Vietnamese peasants. When the U.S. military attacked the South Vietnamese city of Ben Tre in 1968, a commander on the ground said, "It became necessary to destroy the city in order to save it." Today the same twisted logic is at work in Iraq, where Lieutenant Colonel Sassaman said, "With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them."[34]