Uniformed U.S. Army Officers lunch with students in elementary school cafeterias. Army training programs including rifle and pistol instruction replace physical education in middle schools. Like never before, military recruiters are entering the halls of U.S. schools with unchecked access in an attempt to bolster a military in crisis.

However, even as these destructive efforts to militarize youth accelerate, so do the creative and powerful efforts of students, community members, and veterans to challenge them. Today, the counterrecruitment movement—from counseling to poetry slams to citywide lobbying efforts—has become one of the most practical ways to tangibly resist U.S. policy that cuts funding for education and social programs while promoting war and occupation. Without enough soldiers, the U.S. cannot sustain its empire.

Army of None exposes the real story behind the “military recruitment complex,” and offers guides, tools, and resources for education and action, and “people power” strategies to win.

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Photo: Camera Operator: LCPL NICHOLAS J. GALVIN, USMC, 2004
We believe that a hundred thousand marching one day every six months is not as effective as one thousand people talking to students every day.

In January 2006 The National Security Advisory Group, which includes former Secretary of Defense William Perry and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, issued a report entitled The U.S. Military: Under Strain and at Risk. The report predicted a major recruiting crisis, pointing out that fewer than needed recruits, as well as first time enlistees, could result in a “hollowing” and imbalance in the Army. The fact is, at the end of 2005, the active Army fell 6,627 recruits short of its annual goal of 80,000. In addition, the Army Reserve fell 16 percent behind its recruiting target for the year, and the National Guard 20 percent short of its annual goal.³

Today approximately 9,000 soldiers are not permitted to leave the service because of “stop-loss” orders, which retain soldiers on active duty involuntarily after their period of enlistment is complete. Another 2,000 soldiers have been involuntarily recalled after leaving active Army service. Despite this compulsory service, the Army Reserve has trouble achieving its target numbers.

After the 2005 recruiting disaster, the military pulled out all stops in an effort to “make quota” in 2006. Army brass replaced Army Recruiting Command’s top officer in October 2005 with Stanford-educated Major General Thomas Bostick. “A lot of concerns, I think, that the parents and applicants have are about Iraq and Afghanistan,” Bostick told the Tampa Tribune in October 2006.⁴ They also replaced Leo Burnett, their lead public relations agency who created the “Army of One” campaign, with Mcair Erickson who after a 200 million dollar contract and year of research came up with “Army Strong” as the new recruiting slogan.

**COUNTERRECRUITMENT FOR A BETTER WORLD**

*If you are a big tree, we are a small axe.*
— Jamaican proverb

Ready to create a truly grassroots, people powered movement? Antiwar activism is changing. The familiar sights and sounds of large protests are giving way to quieter, but far more resonating, one-on-one work in classrooms, career centers, and communities. Whenever you hear people decry the lack of large-scale protest in the United States, even as the latest polls show more than 60 percent of people are opposed to the current war in Iraq, remember that the model for effectively challenging war is taking a different shape.

People from all walks of life are finding inspiration and success in working locally to educate students and mobilize against military recruitment where it happens. We can see counterrecruitment asserting itself as a viable movement as independently organized actions in Seattle, Austin, and Los Angeles contribute to a national context in which public schools around the country limit military recruiter access, a huge success by any measure. Schools and communities are now considering deeper questions about the increasing militarization of our culture and recognizing the need for schools to teach and weave peace into the minds and aspirations of our children.
In their comprehensive new strategy, the military added 1,200 new recruiters and spent millions on a public relations blitz that included TV ads, video games, Web sites, cell phone text messages, helicopter simulators in the back of 18-wheelers, internet chat rooms, sports and public event sponsorships, and even ads on the ticket envelopes for Greyhound Bus lines (“This ticket will take you to where you are going, but the National Guard will take you to where you want to be”). The Army also increased its relationship with NASCAR, the National Hot Rod Association, and the Professional Bull Riders Association. The plan calls for recruiters to visit schools and malls a few days before an event, offering free tickets and the chance to meet famous drivers or bull riders.\(^5\)

In addition, the military dramatically lowered their educational and test standards and other qualifications. The U.S. Army recruited more than 2,600 soldiers under new lower aptitude test standards in 2006. They allowed neck and hand tattoos, increased the allowable age to 42, increased the enlistment bonus up to $40,000 and offered $1,000 to soldiers who persuaded friends to sign up. They have granted an unprecedented number of “moral character” waivers; around 17 percent of the first-time recruits, or about 13,600, were accepted under waivers for various medical, moral or criminal problems, including misdemeanor arrests and drunk driving. But even that was not enough to “meet quota.”\(^6\)

So, they also lied. From 2004 to 2005 the Government Accounting Office found 6,600 allegations of recruiter crimes.\(^7\) Incidents included concealing medical information that would disqualify a recruit; making false promises and helping recruits get around test requirements. In 2006 the pressure was even greater, and seen in an ABC television investigation from November 2, 2006, that sent undercover students into ten recruiters’ offices in New York and New Jersey. The program reported that more than half of the recruiters were “stretching the truth or even worse, lying.” They found, “nearly half of the recruiters who talked to our undercover students compared everyday risks here at home to being in Iraq.” A Patchogue recruiter was caught saying, “You have a 10-times greater chance of dying out here on the roads than you do dying in Iraq.”

It also reported that, “some recruiters told our students if they enlisted there was little chance they’d go to war. One recruiter told a student his chances of going to war were “slim to none.”\(^8\)

After all this, the military claims to have met it’s 2005-2006 goals of recruiting 80,000 people to fill it’s ranks. They have provided no independent verification of their alleged statistics, but they have launched major public relation effort to counter the bleak news from the year before.

The Armed Forces Journal reported in March, 2006, that recruiters “face an increasingly reluctant pool of potential recruits, opposition from antiwar protesters and perennial bureaucratic inefficiency in the recruitment system.”\(^9\) Scrambling in all of these ways to meet their numbers, the Army, more than ever before, needs fresh blood—recruits straight out of high school.

**Is Counterrecruitment Just a Way to End the War in Iraq and Afghanistan?**

Counterrecruitment is not simply a tactic to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a broad-based, strategic approach to challenging the roots of unending war and militarization. The full potential of a progressive peace and justice movement will only be realized when there is an observable link between efforts to stop war and efforts
to address inequality in class, race, ethnicity, immigration status, and other socioeconomic factors that determine who ends up being sacrificed in our government’s wars. As recent statistics demonstrate, there are limits to how far Bush and the neocons can go with their plan for global hegemony when the resources for it are running dangerously low. Fortunately, the peace movement is in a position to further diminish those resources.

If we apply ourselves to countering military recruitment, it is in our power to both limit the government’s capacity to wage new wars and build a stronger base to challenge the nation’s spending priorities. Simply put, counterrecruitment is a strategic and effective way to challenge the prowar, antieducation priorities of our government.

Wouldn’t a Draft Create the Movement We Need?

Practicing effective self-government and democracy requires that we instil in individuals a propensity for critical, creative thinking and a willingness to challenge the “chain of command” when institutions are not serving their needs. Bringing back the draft is the opposite of what we should do to achieve those goals.
—Rick Jahnkow, counterrecruitment leader.  

Some people concerned about military recruitment and the war think only a draft will get average Americans involved in stopping the wars in the Middle East.

Contrary to common belief, there are three types of military drafts in the United States. The first type includes “stop loss” measures, often referred to as a backdoor draft, that keep military members in the service involuntarily after their contract is up. Then there is the poverty draft, whereby the poorest in the country are drafted into war via aggressive and underhanded recruitment and a lack of alternatives.

While the standard draft of the Vietnam War does not exist at this moment, eighteen-year old young men have been required to register for selective service since the 1980s. The standard draft can be implemented in seventy-five days.

It was certainly true during the Vietnam War that this kind of draft mobilized the resistance. “In many ways,” says Vietnam-era student activist Dan Siegel, “the antidraft movement overcame the anti-Vietnam War movement. People were concerned about their own skins but didn’t work to stop the U.S. war machine longer term.”

Vietnam-era activists often decry the fact that forty years after their work, the United States is in the same violent cycle as before. The anti-draft movement didn’t result in the sustained change necessary.

To achieve this kind of sustained change, we must do more than say no to the draft, regardless of its form. We must say no to all the adverse effects war has on our communities. We must make connections between injustice abroad and at home, and tie in local struggles with global ones. The counterrecruitment movement is convincing more and more Americans that the war in Iraq is not supportable and certainly not the answer for young people looking for educations and jobs. The movement is convincing more and more Americans that young people looking for educations and jobs are better beneficiaries of our tax dollars than those who profit from unjust war. To the extent that counterrecruitment can enhance and expand the types of alternatives available to young people, the downward trend for military recruiters will continue. It is only in creating something new than we may dismantle the old.
Reaping Seeds Sown During Vietnam Era

Of course there were more sustainable antiwar strategies developed during the Vietnam era that inspired modern counterrecruitment. Their strength lies in making connections between the social struggles for equality at home and the war. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., eloquently spoke to the relationship between peace and civil rights:

Then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched [the poverty] program broken and eviscerated, as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So, I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.13

The same year of Dr. King’s speech, student and community activists organized the country’s first counterrecruitment actions, called Stop the Draft Week. According to organizer Dan Siegel, its purpose was, “To cut off the supply of recruits to the military in Vietnam . . . to raise awareness of the draft and its impact on working class communities and particularly working class communities of color.” They adopted the theme, “From Protest to Resistance.” If being in the streets couldn’t stop the war, staying out of uniform certainly could.

A convergence of antiwar and social-justice organizations challenged the system that used people of color and the poor as cannon fodder. It created a coalition of directly impacted ethnic minority groups. In fact, the Black Panthers had a large membership of returning Vietnam Vets who were angry at having supposedly fought for Vietnamese civil rights while being denied their own back home. Likewise, the Chicano Moratorium was the largest antiwar group in Southern California and consisted largely of veterans and civil rights workers. At its heart the roots of the counterrecruitment movement are ethnically diverse, focused on the poor and disenfranchised, driven by veterans and military families, and organized to affect systemic change both locally and globally.

The government responded with stepped-up police repression, violence, and surveillance. In California, Stop the Draft Week organizers led three thousand marchers to the Oakland induction center on October 16, 1967. When demonstrators refused orders to leave, police attacked them with nightsticks, injuring twenty. On the second day demonstrators returned, and ninety-seven were arrested. On the third, ten thousand arrived, this time retreating from the police, successfully blocking streets as they departed. Then, as now, dismantling the mechanisms that turn people into soldiers was deeply threatening to the system.

War and Empire

As U.S. Marine Corps Major General Smedley Butler put it in 1933, “There are only two things we should fight for. One is the defense of our homes and the other is the Bill of Rights. War for any other reason is simply a racket.”14 Racket is one term, empire is another to describe why the U.S. government spends $441 billion a year,15 on a military of over two and a half million soldiers (2,685,713 with reserves)16 and why it has more than 700 military bases spread across 130 countries with another 6000 bases in the United States and its ‘territories.’18 Understanding what military recruits are
used for in the world, understanding war, and creating viable alternatives to both are essential if we want to break out of the deadlock of militarism.

Since the collapse of the “other superpower,” the Soviet Union, “empire” has become a common term among both critics and advocates referring to the unparalleled U.S. system of economic, political, cultural, and military domination of the world. The *New York Times Magazine* ran a 2003 cover story titled “The American Empire (Get Used to It)” describing the U.S. as a reluctant, but benevolent global empire. While Bush claimed in his 2004 State of the Union speech, “We have no ambitions of empire,” months later Karl Rove snapped at a *New York Times* reporter: “‘We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.’”

Some see the start of American empire in the wake of Second World War or after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. Others trace it back to the invasion and conquest of numerous indigenous nations in North America from the seventeenth century onward, the development of a slave economy with tentacles reaching into Africa, and the 1848 seizure of Mexico’s northern half that is now the Southwest. Another wave of aggression abroad began in the twentieth century. Smedley Butler describes the U.S. military’s role in this emerging empire, “I served in all commissioned ranks from Second Lieutenant to Major-General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high-class muscleman for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.”

The modern-day version of “war as a racket” and gangsterism for capitalism can be seen in the occupation of Iraq. Critics call the United States war in Iraq a failure, but behind the scenes it has established several permanent U.S. military bases, allowed corporations like Halliburton to make billions from unfulfilled contracts to reconstruct war-destroyed schools, hospitals, power systems, and infrastructure, and is in the final process of turning control of Iraq’s vast oil resources over to war profiteers such as Chevron. The U.S. occupation’s “Provisional Authority” under Paul Bremer also laid the legal groundwork for much of the Iraqi economy to be privatized and then taken over by U.S.-based corporations. Thus Butler’s racket and its toll abroad. What does it cost us at home?

The price of two and a half million soldiers, aircraft carriers and military bases across the planet, and a massive array of weapons of mass destruction is high. It saps resources for healthcare, education, and housing. It also requires keeping the domestic population in check through propaganda and the corrosion of civil liberties and human rights. Stifling domestic dissent, criminalizing immigrants, and torturing and illegally imprisoning citizens of other nations have all been stepped up under the guise of the so-called War on Terror. In his book, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed*, Ivan Eland writes, “intervention overseas is not needed for security against other nations and only leads to blowback from the one threat that is difficult to deter—terrorism. In short, the U.S. Empire lessens American prosperity, power, security and moral standing. It also erodes the founding principles of the American Constitution.” As we write this book (late 2006) nearly 3,000 US soldiers and over 200 soldiers from other occupying countries have been killed in Iraq, at least 20,895 U.S. troops have been wounded, and a new Johns Hopkins report puts the number of violent Iraqi civilian deaths since the 2003 invasion at more than 600,000. War’s side effects are bleak for the environment
and human society; its direct and intended effect is mass
death. Down the current road of imperial dominance and
warfare at will, the use of weapons of mass destruction is
nearly inevitable, with apocalyptic consequences.

But there are alternatives to the expense of maintaining
a military and the atrocity that is war. One that has
been developed over the last fifty years is called social
defense. Brian Martin, Australian scholar and author of
*Social Defense: Social Change,* describes social defense
as unarmed “community resistance to aggression as an
alternative to military defense. It is based on widespread
protest, persuasion, non-cooperation and intervention
in order to oppose military aggression or political re-
pression. There have been numerous nonviolent actions,
to be sure, some of them quite spectacular, such as the
Czechoslovak resistance to the 1968 Soviet invasion, the
topping of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines
in 1986, the Palestinian intifada from 1987–1993 and
the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe
in 1989.” Imagine if even a fraction of the resources
put into military defense were available for the general
population to organize social defense.

Replacing global empire with domestic democracy
and well-being requires re-defining democracy—purs-
uing ways to shift decision-making and power from
corporations and government to “we the people.” It’s not
enough just to oppose something. We need to envision,
educate about, and then actually organize alternatives to
the system of empire and war, to corporations, and to the
lack of democratic participation in decisions that shape
our lives and communities. What begin as pragmatic
actions, like keeping youth from joining the military,
are most effective when they have as their end the
transformation of the root causes of war, undemocratic
governance, and injustice. Every immediate action, when
understood and explained as part of a bigger picture, can
be another step toward this longer-term goal of getting to
the roots of our problems and building a better world.

**Today’s Movement**

*Counterrecruitment is not just “saying no” to the military. Students need support, affirmation, guidance, job skills, hope, and confidence that they can do it.*

—Arlene Inouye, Founder, Coalition Against Militarism in our Schools

Arlene Inouye, who began her activism during
Vietnam, continues her work today in the Los Angeles
Unified School District, where she founded the
Coalition Against Militarism in our Schools (CAMS).
Her support of a bright young student named Sal
illustrates how counterrecruitment works simultane-
ously to resist war and to build alternatives. Arlene says,
“Sal is a bright JROTC student who lacked support for
success in school and beyond. His father was deported
to Mexico about two years ago, and he was told by the
military-recruiter that if Sal enlisted, his father could
come back to the U.S. His father begged him to enlist
after high school. Sal later learned that the military was
lying and that he couldn’t help his father come home.”

During the spring of 2006 there were student walkouts
and marches supporting immigrant rights throughout Los
Angeles. Arlene explains, “The activism around immi-
grant rights helped Sal to see the hypocrisy of fighting
in a military that is being sent to the border and has
been reported to shoot down undocumented people who
try to cross.

“During a rally, Sal took off his JROTC uniform in
front of the press, encouraging other students to resist
war and drop out of JROTC. Unfortunately, most won’t
because of concerns about their grades. This student who is articulate and smart is failing school, and lacks the support he needs. I have mobilized help for him at the school and call him regularly. He just got back from a peace camp given by our partner organization, and that was a powerful experience for him.” Creating a supportive community to enable Sal’s dissent, and help him forge an alternative path, is at the heart of counterrecruitment. As demonstrated by Sal’s example, the best movement is as much about envisioning and building a new world as it is about resisting the injustices of this one.22