Our new call to resist illegal war and illegitimate authority


Courage to Resist calls on all United States military personnel to resist any effort to pursue a new military attack on Iraq via troops, bombs, drones or any other means. In keeping with our Mission Statement, we affirm that just as there was never any legitimate reason for the US to send military forces to Iraq in the past, there is not now any reason for the US to participate militarily in the affairs of the people of Iraq. The refugees created every day by the wars in Iraq need humanitarian aid. The solution to the problems in Iraq lies in the nations and parties involved talking it out.

The US destroyed Iraq. Sending US troops and/or weapons again cannot improve the situation. It can only cause more unnecessary death and destruction. Troops, bullets, bombs, mines, and other weapons will continue to kill, maim, and breed hatred in the people of Iraq. More warfare cannot do anything positive for the men, women, and children of Iraq.

Every US service person has a conscience. Every member of every branch of the US military service is bound to obey that conscience, and the oath secrecy make it impossible for Americans to grasp fully what is happening in the wars we finance.

If you were following the news during the March 2010 elections in Iraq, you might remember that the American press was flooded with stories declaring the elections a success, complete with upbeat anecdotes and photographs of Iraqi women proudly displaying their ink-stained fingers. The subtext was that United States military operations had succeeded in creating a stable and democratic Iraq.

Those of us stationed there were acutely aware of a more complicated reality.

Military and diplomatic reports coming across my desk detailed a brutal crackdown against political dissidents by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and federal police, on behalf of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. Detainees were often tortured, or even killed.

Early that year, I received orders to investigate 15 individuals whom the federal police had arrested on suspicion of printing “anti-Iraqi literature.” I learned that these individuals had absolutely no ties to terrorism; they were publishing a scholarly critique of Mr. Maliki’s administration. I forwarded this finding to the officer in command in eastern Baghdad. He responded that he didn’t need this information; instead, I should assist the federal police in locating more “anti-Iraqi” print shops.

I was shocked by our military’s complicity in the corruption of that election. Yet these deeply troubling details flew under the American media’s radar.

It was not the first (or the last) time I felt compelled to question the way we conducted our mission in Iraq. We intelligence analysts, and the officers to whom we reported, had access to a comprehensive overview of the war that few others had. How could top-level decision makers say that the American public, or even Congress, supported the conflict when they didn’t have half the story?

Among the many daily reports I received via email while working in Iraq in 2009 and 2010 was an internal public affairs briefing that listed recently continued on back continued on inside
published news articles about the American mission in Iraq. One of my regular tasks was to provide, for the public affairs summary read by the command in eastern Baghdad, a single-sentence description of each issue covered, complementing our analysis with local intelligence.

The more I made these daily comparisons between the news back in the States and the military and diplomatic reports available to me as an analyst, the more aware I became of the disparity. In contrast to the solid, nuanced briefings we created on the ground, the news available to the public was flooded with foggy speculation and simplifications.

One clue to this disjunction lay in the public affairs reports. Near the top of each briefing was the number of embedded journalists attached to American military units in a combat zone. Throughout my deployment, I never saw that tally go above 12. In other words, in all of Iraq, which contained 31 million people and 117,000 United States troops, no more than a dozen American journalists were covering military operations.

The process of limiting press access to a conflict begins when a reporter applies for embed status. All reporters are carefully vetted by military public affairs officials. This system is far from unbiased. Unsurprisingly, reporters who have established relationships with the military are more likely to be granted access.

Less well known is that journalists whom military contractors rate as likely to produce “favorable” coverage, based on their past reporting, also get preference. This outsourced “favorability” rating assigned to each applicant is used to screen out those judged likely to produce critical coverage.

Reporters who succeeded in obtaining embed status in Iraq were then required to sign a media “ground rules” agreement. Army public affairs officials said this was to protect operational security, but it also allowed them to terminate a reporter’s embed without appeal.

There have been numerous cases of reporters’ having their access terminated following controversial reporting. In 2010, the late Rolling Stone reporter Michael Hastings had his access pulled after reporting criticism of the Obama administration by Gen. Stanley A McChrystal and his staff in Afghanistan. A Pentagon spokesman said, “Embeds are a privilege, not a right.”

If a reporter’s embed status is terminated, typically she or he is blacklisted. This program of limiting press access was challenged in court in 2013 by a freelance reporter, Wayne Anderson, who claimed to have followed his agreement but to have been terminated after publishing adverse reports about the conflict in Afghanistan. The ruling on his case upheld the military’s position that there was no constitutionally protected right to be an embedded journalist.

The embedded reporter program, which continues in Afghanistan and wherever the United States sends troops, is deeply informed by the military’s experience of how media coverage shifted public opinion during the Vietnam War. The gatekeepers in public affairs have too much power: Reporters naturally fear having their access terminated, so they tend to avoid controversial reporting that could raise red flags.

The existing program forces journalists to compete against one another for “special access” to vital matters of foreign and domestic policy. Too often, this creates reporting that flatters senior decision makers. A result is that the American public’s access to the facts is gutted, which leaves them with no way to evaluate the conduct of American officials.

Journalists have an important role to play in calling for reforms to the embedding system. The favorability of a journalist’s previous reporting should not be a factor. Transparency, guaranteed by a body not under the control of public affairs officials, should govern the credentialing process. An independent board made up of military staff members, veterans, Pentagon civilians and journalists could balance the public’s need for information with the military’s need for

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Veterans welcome home Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl

By Gerry Condon, on behalf of Veterans for Peace, at the National Press Club and The White House. June 10, 2014

Five more US soldiers were killed in Afghanistan yesterday. They were killed by a NATO airstrike, so-called “friendly fire.” Who is to blame for these deaths? Certainly not Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who did not order US troops into an endless and pointless war in Afghanistan.

Veterans For Peace has had few opportunities to applaud the actions of President Obama. We are profoundly disappointed that the president has continued the aggressive foreign policies of the Bush Administration. But today we can thank President Obama for a couple steps in the right direction.

President Obama did the right thing when he brought home a US prisoner of war from Afghanistan.

President Obama did the right thing when he released five Afghan prisoners of war from the U.S. prison at Guantanamo. But President Obama did the wrong thing when he decided that US troops will remain in Afghanistan for another 2-1/2 years, and then some. The deaths of five US soldiers, yesterday, is the kind of bad news we can expect, as long as US troops are in harm’s way.

As Vietnam veteran John Kerry once famously said, “How do we ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake.”

Veterans For Peace wants to speak directly to Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl:

We love you, Sgt. Bergdahl. We have great respect for you and your wonderful family. We are happy that you will be reunited soon!

Veterans For Peace also has a message for President Obama:

Mr. President, I am speaking for thousands of veterans from too many wars. We want you to bring ALL the troops home from Afghanistan! Bring them home now, and take good care of them when they get here.

And Mr. President, it is time to release all the prisoners of war from Guantanamo. End the torture, shut down Guantanamo now!

The American people are tired of war. We are ready to live in peace.

GI Resister André Shepherd at European Court of Justice

By Connection e.V. June 10, 2014

37-year-old André Shepherd (photo right) was deployed to Iraq for six months as an Apache helicopter mechanic. After returning from leave to his unit, stationed in Katterbach, Bavaria, he seriously deliberated the effects of US military action on the civilian population in Iraq. After some time, he went AWOL and sought refuge in Germany. He based his application for political asylum on the European Union Qualification Directive, which is intended to protect those who refuse to participate in a war or other activities that violate international law, and who may expect persecution as a consequence.

André’s lawyer Reinhard Marx noted that this is the first AWOL US soldier to be heard by the highest European court.

“It is good to see that there is progress in the case”, noted André Shepherd. “We hope that the European Court not only has the will, but the courage to take a stand for the right to freedom of conscience. Other soldiers should feel assured that their decision, to refuse participation in wars or crimes, in violation of international law, will be supported.”

A decision by the European Court is expected in 2015. A lower court will then rule, based on that verdict, on André’s asylum application.
Our new call to resist illegal war cont.

Service members we have had the honor of collaborating with include:

- Army Lt. Ehren Watada, the first military officer to articulate the illegal nature of the Iraq War and refuse orders to deploy.
- Marine L/Cpl Stephen Funk, the first military service member to publicly refuse to deploy.
- Scores of service members who have formally applied for discharge as Conscientious Objectors.
- Marines, Sailors, Soldiers and Airpersons who have taken refuge in Canada, and have publicly fought for the right to remain there. We’ve also supported those who have returned to the US to face US military injustice.
- Nearly 50 service members who have required assistance with legal fees, and related support, for fighting military court-martials for having gone AWOL/UA.
- Hundreds of Individual Ready Reservists (IRR) who have refused involuntary activations.

Soldier, Sailor, Marine, Airperson, you are strong enough to resist illegal and immoral war. We’d be honored to support your refusal to deploy to Iraq. US troops are not the cops of the world. There is no legitimate mission for you or any US service members in Iraq. Don’t be fooled by more lies from the President, the Congress, the media or anyone else.

Courage to Resist exists to support service members who resist illegal and immoral war and occupation. Since 2006, Courage to Resist has provided moral and material support to GI objectors, including legal aid when needed.

Mission Statement

COURAGE TO RESIST is a group of concerned community members, veterans and military families that supports military objectors to illegal war and occupation and the policies of empire. Our People Power strategy weakens the pillars that maintain war and occupation in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere by supporting GI resistance, counter-recruitment and draft resistance, which cuts off the supply of troops. We are autonomous from and independent of any political organization, party or group.

“Today the US is sending a few hundred military advisers, backed by an additional group of mercenaries, to prop up the Iraqi regime. Some of these individuals may well be the last US service members to die for the Iraq War lie, to paraphrase John Kerry regarding the end of the Vietnam War. What happens if the neocons have their way and the US “surges” back into Iraq to save the al-Maliki government? Courage to Resist wants service members to know that they have options, including doing the right thing—resistance.”

- Jeff Paterson, Courage to Resist Project Director

“The fog machine of war” by Chelsea Manning cont.

Opinion polls indicate that Americans’ confidence in their elected representatives is at a record low. Improving media access to this crucial aspect of our national life—where America has committed the men and women of its armed services—would be a powerful step toward re-establishing trust between voters and officials.

Manning's article reached nearly 2.5 million readers and was reported on by many other media outlets. To support Chelsea, fund her legal appeals team, maximize her voice behind bars, and continue public education efforts, we need your continued support.