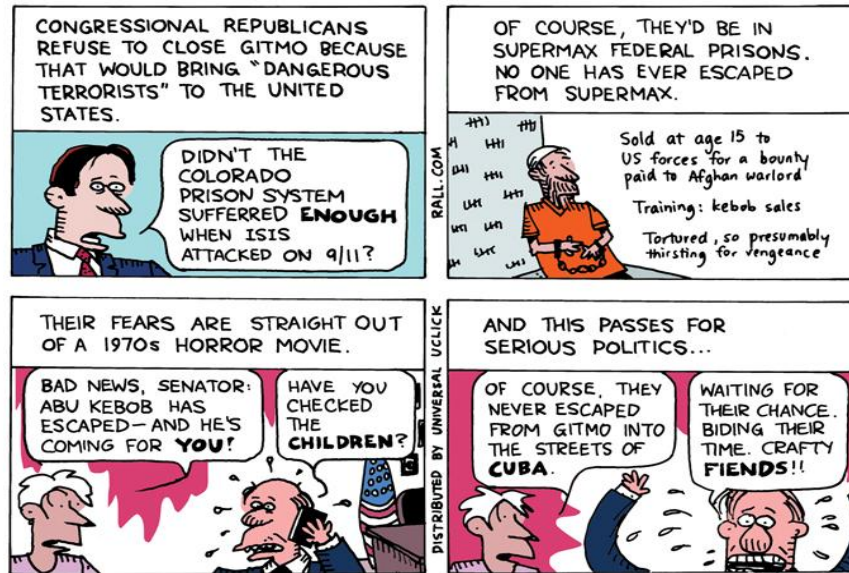


## Military Resistance 14C5



**More High-Ranking Military Officers Charged With Sex Crimes Against Subordinates: “Allegations Of Cringe-Worthy Behavior Increasingly Come To Light In Military Courtrooms And Public Records”**

**“People Are Reporting When They See The Officers Appointed Above (Committing A Crime), And They**

# Really Do Expect That Their Bosses Walk The Walk And Talk The Talk” “Even After Charges Have Been Filed Against Senior Officers, The Armed Forces Still Cling To Their Old Habit Of Trying To Shield Commanders From Public Embarrassment”

[Thanks to Michael Novick who sent this in. He writes: “Washington Post article on sex crimes by brass (finally being court martialled)”]

March 19 By Craig Whitlock and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, The Washington Post. Thomas Gibbons-Neff is a staff writer and a former Marine infantryman. Julie Tate contributed to this report.

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The U.S. military has stepped up investigations of high-ranking officers for sexual assault, records show, curtailing its traditional deference toward senior leaders as it cracks down on sex crimes.

Since September, the armed forces have court-martialed or filed sexual-assault charges against four colonels from the Air Force, Army and Marines. In addition, a Navy captain was found guilty of abusive sexual contact during an administrative hearing.

**Historically, it has been extremely rare for senior military officers to face courts-martial. Leaders suspected of wrongdoing are usually dealt with behind the scenes, with offenders receiving private reprimands or removal from command with a minimum of public explanation.**

“There’s not a lot of transparency when it comes to senior-officer misconduct,” said Don Christensen, a former chief prosecutor for the Air Force who now is president of Protect Our Defenders, a group that advocates for victims of sex crimes in the military. “They don’t like the American public knowing what’s going on, so they drag their heels in getting information out.”

That has gradually changed as the Defense Department — under pressure from Congress and the White House — has revamped its policies to prevent sexual assault and to hold perpetrators accountable.

During the federal fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, 116 officers of all stripes were court-martialed, discharged or received some sort of punishment after they were criminally investigated for sexual assault.

That was more than double the number from three years earlier, according to Defense Department figures.

Of last year's cases, eight were against senior officers holding a rank equivalent to colonel or Navy captain or higher. While that figure may seem small, it represented a fourfold increase from 2012.

Overall, the vast majority of troops investigated for sexual assault are enlisted personnel, who accounted for 94 percent of all cases last year. In the active-duty military, enlisted troops outnumber officers by a ratio of 4.6 to 1.

### **Military discipline in sexual-assault cases**

Although the numbers have risen in recent years, officers are rarely punished for sexual assault in comparison to enlisted personnel.



Note: Disciplinary actions include courts-martial, administrative punishments, reprimands and discharges from the military. Numbers are for federal fiscal years.

Source: Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office  
DENISE LU/THE WASHINGTON POST

But high-ranking leaders are finding they no are longer off-limits as allegations of cringe-worthy behavior increasingly come to light in military courtrooms and public records.

**This month, during a court-martial at Fort McNair in Washington, an Army colonel who worked for the Defense Intelligence Agency pleaded guilty to sexually abusing a 15-year-old girl and taking photos of her nude. He was sentenced to eight years in prison.**

**In February, the Marine Corps charged the commander of its Wounded Warrior Regiment with sexually assaulting a female corporal, violating protective orders and other misconduct.**

**In January, at a disciplinary hearing, the Navy found the former captain of a guided missile cruiser guilty of abusive sexual contact and sexual harassment. An investigative report chronicled in embarrassing detail how he got drunk with crew members at a Virginia bar and brazenly pressured a junior officer to have sex with him to advance her career.**

**In December, the Air Force charged a colonel at Schriever Air Force Base in Colorado with raping or assaulting four victims, committing adultery with four other women, and taking photographs of himself in uniform at his office — with his genitals exposed.**

Pentagon officials say the rash of cases is evidence that senior officers will be held to the same standards as everyone else in uniform.

“We’ve made it abundantly clear that this is not tolerable,” said Nathan Galbreath, senior executive adviser for the Pentagon’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. “The numbers suggest that people are reporting when they see the officers appointed above (committing a crime), and they really do expect that their bosses walk the walk and talk the talk.”

The unofficial taboo against putting senior leaders on trial in sex-abuse cases was shattered three years ago when the Army prosecuted Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Sinclair on charges of forcible sodomy, adultery and other offenses. It was only the third time in 60 years that the Army had court-martialed a general for any type of offense.

Prosecutors ended up dropping most of the charges and cutting a plea deal that spared Sinclair jail time. But the spectacle of a general sitting in the dock as witnesses testified about his volatile affair with a junior officer captivated the military.

Since then, the Defense Department has tried to reassure lawmakers, the public and its own troops that it takes sex-assault allegations seriously. It has expanded awareness training, bolstered support for victims and required command-level review of all investigations.

There are signs that the training is starting to pay off.

### **Capt. Sorenson: “Does Anal Interest You?”**

Crew members from the U.S.S. Anzio, a guided missile cruiser, blew the whistle on their commanding officer for sexual misconduct last year, leading to his removal from the ship and his probable ouster from the Navy.

According to a Navy investigative report, the Anzio’s captain, Brian K. Sorenson, got drunk Aug. 30 at a pub party in Yorktown, Va., and began to make advances toward a female sailor who needed his approval to become certified as a surface warfare officer.

The sailor told investigators that Sorenson asked her how many people she had slept with, whether she liked having sex with women and whether she would let him have anal sex with her.

Her account was buttressed by an eyewitness who said he overheard the captain saying, “Does anal interest you?”

At some point, he also grabbed the woman on the buttocks and told her to report to his quarters on the Anzio the next morning, where he again pressured her to have sex, the Navy investigation found.



Capt. Brian Sorenson, commanding officer of the guided-missile cruiser USS Anzio. (US NAVY PHOTO)

Crew members quickly intervened at the pub, with one telling investigators that the situation resembled a scene from “one of the Navy’s Sexual Assault Bystander Intervention Videos.” The ship’s executive officer grabbed the captain, and the party ended.

During the van ride back to the ship, however, an intoxicated Sorenson kept acting out and asked the male driver if he “liked anal,” according to the investigation.

**As rumors spread on the ship about the captain’s behavior, crew members revolted.**

Other officers confronted the captain in the ship’s wardroom and demanded an outside investigation.

Sorenson apologized to the officers for his conduct the night before, according to the Navy’s investigative report. But he also blamed them for not intervening sooner.

“He said it was our fault for letting him drink too much,” an unidentified officer told investigators.

After an administrative hearing in January, Sorenson was found guilty of sexual harassment, abusive sexual contact and conduct unbecoming an officer, Navy officials said. He faces discharge proceedings from the Navy.

In an interview with Navy investigators, Sorenson admitted to drinking that night but declined to answer questions about whether he pressured the female subordinate for sex.

His attorney, Greg McCormack of Virginia Beach, did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Other cases indicate that military investigators are pursuing evidence more aggressively

During a court-martial at Fort McNair last week, Army Col. James C. Laughrey, a career intelligence official, pleaded guilty to child pornography charges and abusive sexual contact with a 15-year-old girl.

According to court documents, his actions started in 2009 and came to light years later only by chance. The victim, then a young adult, took a polygraph test during a job interview with an intelligence agency and was asked if she had ever been the victim of a crime.

The woman divulged the abuse but didn't want to cooperate with an investigation or press charges against Laughrey, according to his defense attorney, Haytham Faraj. The intelligence agency nevertheless reported the matter to the Army, which found corroborating evidence on Laughrey's computer.

"Frankly, they harassed her," Faraj said, calling the case "an abusive government investigation."

Laughrey admitted to his actions in court. When asked by the judge why he did it, he replied: "Your honor, I cannot give you a good answer for that. I do not understand or defend why I did it."

Under the military justice system, senior officers are responsible for deciding whether individuals under their command should be prosecuted.

Some lawmakers and advocacy groups are pushing to strip commanders of that power and to give it instead to uniformed prosecutors. The Pentagon has resisted such proposals, saying they would undermine command authority.

When senior officers themselves are charged with sexual assault, it "makes it appear as if the fox was guarding the henhouse," said Christensen, the president of Protect Our Defenders, which has lobbied Congress to change the law.

**He cited the case of Col. Eugene Marcus Caughey, formerly the vice commander of the Air Force's 51st Space Wing. In December, Caughey was charged with rape, assault and other charges in a case involving four women in Colorado, where he served at Schriever Air Force Base.**

According to charging documents, Caughey raped one woman as he held her against the wall and floor, groped women on two other occasions, and violated an order from a two-star general to stay away from another victim.

In addition, the married colonel is charged with six counts of adultery — a crime in the military — for allegedly having consensual sex with four other women, according to the documents.

A preliminary hearing was held Friday to determine whether Caughey will face court-martial. A decision is pending. His attorney, Ryan Coward, declined to comment.



Col. Marcus Caughey was the key speaker at Schriever Air Force Base's 9/11 ceremony.  
(Christopher DeWitt /U.S. Air Force photo)

### **“The Armed Forces Still Cling To Their Old Habit Of Trying To Shield Commanders From Public Embarrassment”**

**In other cases, even after charges have been filed against senior officers, the armed forces still cling to their old habit of trying to shield commanders from public embarrassment.**

**In November, the Air Force announced in a news release that Col. David S. Cockrum, former commander of the 51st Medical Group at Osan Air Base in South Korea, had been charged with sexual assault. The Air Force said he had been previously relieved of command for “fraternization” and “unprofessional relationships” but gave no other details.**

**When The Washington Post requested public records in the case against Cockrum, the leadership of the 7th Air Force, which oversees operations in South Korea, at first refused, citing a need “to protect the rights of Col. Cockrum and the integrity of ongoing legal proceedings.”**

After repeated appeals, however, Air Force officials released documents showing that Cockrum had been charged with sexually assaulting men in two separate incidents in South Korea in 2014. He also had been charged with conduct unbecoming an officer.

Cockrum’s court-martial is scheduled for April 11. His military attorney did not respond to requests for comment placed through the Air Force.

**The Marine Corps filed criminal sex-abuse charges on Feb. 12 against Col. T. Shane Tomko, the former commander of its Wounded Warrior Regiment in Quantico, Va.**

**The Marines kept the charges a secret, making no public announcement about the case.**

**In response to a query from The Post last month, Marine officials at the Pentagon confirmed that Tomko had been charged with abusive sexual contact, obstruction of justice, illegal possession of steroids and other crimes.**

**Officials also revealed that Tomko had been relieved as commander a year earlier because of “a loss of confidence in his leadership.” But they would not provide other details or release public records in the case.**

According to a copy of Tomko’s charging documents, seen by a Post reporter, the colonel was accused of sexually assaulting a female Marine corporal in October 2014 by forcibly kissing her on the mouth. He later referred to her as “a hot intriguing dyke who makes me wish I were a woman,” according to the documents.

Tomko faces a preliminary hearing scheduled for March 23 to determine if he will be court-martialed.

His military defense attorney, Marine Col. Stephen Newman, declined to comment.

Documents filed in civilian court show that Tomko has also been investigated by the Marines on allegations of sexually assaulting other women after he took charge of the Wounded Warrior Regiment in July 2014. As commander, he was responsible for overseeing battalions across the country that care for wounded and injured Marines.

According to a lawsuit filed against him in Circuit Court in Prince William County, Va., Tomko allegedly got drunk during an official trip to London in September 2014 and assaulted a civilian woman who worked for him by “shov(ing) his face into her breasts.”

Tomko denied the allegation in court filings and noted that the woman had also filed an administrative discrimination complaint against him with the federal government. The woman withdrew the lawsuit in January.

In an interview, the woman said she dismissed the lawsuit because her discrimination complaint was subsequently upheld. (The Post has a policy of not identifying victims of sexual abuse.)

She also said that Tomko had been disciplined — but not charged criminally — by the Marines last year for sexually assaulting her in London, as well as for a separate incident involving another female civilian working for the Wounded Warrior Regiment.

**The Marines, she added, were slow to pursue her complaint against Tomko and dragged the case out.**

**“He’s the commander, that’s why it went on so long,” she said. “He’s the kind of guy everyone loves.”**



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## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**

### **Insurgents Kill Another Army General**

March 25, 2016 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Taliban militants have killed an army general in the southern province of Kandahar.

Samim Khapalwak, a spokesman for the provincial governor, said two insurgents opened fire on General Khan Agha late on March 24 in the Dand district.

Khapalwak said the general was on the way back home from a mosque.

The attackers were killed by Khan's bodyguards, while his 17-year-old son was injured in the incident, he added.

A Taliban spokesman said the group carried out the attack.

**Khan Agha is the second army general to be killed in southern Afghanistan since the beginning of February, according to the Khaama Press news website.**

It said General Atamir Agha (eds: no relation to Khan Agha) died in an explosion in Helmand Province last month.

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### **Taliban Return To Dande Ghori Villages: “Just Weeks After A Military Operation Reportedly Cleared The District Of The Taliban”**

24 March 2016 by Hamid Shirzai, TOLONews.com

Just weeks after a military operation reportedly cleared the Dande Ghori district in Baghlan province of the Taliban, residents claim the insurgents have returned.

According to them, clashes have resumed between Afghan security forces and the insurgents.

They say Taliban insurgents are preventing farmers in the area from working their land and that a number of residents have fled the area.

**One Dande Ghorri resident, Mir Dad, said: “Last night Taliban forced their way into our house and made us leave our home. The Taliban told people not to farm their land because they are fighting government forces in those areas.”**

**Another resident, Farid, said: “The Taliban has returned to Mangalha and Chang villages and are walking around.”**

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## **Policeman Kills 7 Kandahar Colleagues, Joins Taliban**

24 March 2016 TOLONews.com

A local policeman crossed to the Taliban this week after he opened fire on colleagues on Wednesday night in Kandahar, killing seven of them, a source told TOLONews.

The incident took place at an outpost in Arghandab district of the province, according to the source.

Samim Ikhpeiwak, a spokesman for the provincial governor has confirmed the incident and said that a delegation has been sent to the area to investigate the incident.

However, he did not provide further details about the incident.

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### **IRAQ WAR REPORTS**

**Iraq Regime Says It Has  
Launched “Operation  
Conquest” Offensive To  
Recapture ISIS-Held Mosul:  
Lying As Usual;**

# **“Some U.S. And Iraqi Officials Have Said It May Not Even Be Possible To Retake It This Year”**

## **“The Number Of Iraqi Troops Needed To Carry Out The Operation, Nearly Two Years After It Fell To ISIS, Is Not Yet In Place”**

March 24, 2016 by Sinan Salaheddin, The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — The Iraqi military backed by U.S.-led coalition aircraft launched a long-awaited operation Thursday to recapture the northern city of Mosul from Islamic State militants, a military spokesman said.

In the push, Iraqi forces retook several villages on the outskirts of the town of Makhmour, east of Mosul, early in the morning on Thursday and hoisted the Iraqi flag there, according to the spokesman for the Joint Military Command, Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasool.

It was not immediately clear how long such a complex and taxing offensive would take.

**Only recently, Iraqi and U.S. officials refrained to give a specific time on when the Mosul operation could begin, saying it would take many months to prepare Iraq's still struggling military for the long-anticipated task of retaking the key city.**

**Some U.S. and Iraqi officials have said it may not even be possible to retake it this year, despite repeated vows by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.**

Iraqi state-run TV interrupted its morning program Thursday with a series of news alerts announcing the operation and broadcasting patriotic songs and flag-waving video clips.

Rasool told The Associated Press that the U.S.-led international coalition was providing air support but would not divulge more details on the offensive, which he said was dubbed “Operation Conquest.”

According to an official at the military's provincial Nineveh Operations Command, the aim of the first phase of the Mosul offensive was to clear the areas between Makhmour and the adjacent Qayara area to the east of the Tigris River, and to cut one of the supply lines to the nearby Shirqat area.

Mosul — Iraq's second-largest city — fell to the Islamic State group during the militants' June 2014 onslaught that captured large swaths of northern and western Iraq and also neighboring Syria. Mosul, about 225 miles northwest of Baghdad, became also the largest city in ISIS' self-declared caliphate on territories the militants control.

Rasool's declaration came only few days after the United States announced that it has set up a small Marine artillery outpost in northern Iraq to protect a nearby Iraqi military base in Makhmour — the likely staging ground for a Mosul assault, located 40 miles southeast of the city. On Saturday, the militants fired two rockets at the base, killing a U.S. Marine and wounding several others.

Despite Thursday's announcement, the number of Iraqi troops needed to carry out the operation to retake Mosul, nearly two years after it fell to ISIS, is not yet in place, and training efforts by the U.S.-led coalition are still ongoing.

**Under political pressure to show victory, al-Abadi has repeatedly vowed to “liberate” Mosul, but U.S. Lt. Gen. Vincent Stewart, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told Congress last month that he is “not as optimistic.”**

**Coalition and Iraqi officials estimate that eight to 12 brigades, or an estimated 24,000 to 36,000 troops, will be needed for the Mosul operation.**

**So far, only 2,000 to 3,000 Iraqi troops have been deployed at Makhmour base.**

The Iraqi military must also clear ISIS fighters from more than 70 miles of territory to ensure reliable supply lines between Makhmour and Baghdad.

**One leg of the Iraqi military's efforts to clear some of that territory in Anbar has been put on hold.**

**A political crisis in Baghdad has prompted al-Abadi to pull some of Iraq's elite counterterrorism forces back from the front in the Euphrates River valley to secure the capital.**

The prime minister recalled the forces after influential Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr mobilized thousands and staged a sit-in outside Baghdad's highly fortified Green Zone last week in a show of force meant to put pressure on Iraq's political leadership.

## **YOUR INVITATION:**

**Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome.**

**Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or email [contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org): Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication.**

**Same address to unsubscribe.**

## FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



**“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation’s ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.**

**“For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.**

**“We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”**

**“The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.”**

**Frederick Douglass, 1852**

**What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms.  
-- Thomas Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 1787**

## **The New Class Warfare In America:**

**“Once Redundant, The Term  
“Working Class” Is Now Part Of  
Everyday Conversation”  
“In 2000, 33 Per Cent Of Americans  
Described Themselves As “Working  
Class”, According To Gallup. By 2015  
That Number Had Risen To 48 Per  
Cent”  
“It Should Be No Surprise That Many  
Americans Are Desperate For A Different  
Kind Of Politics”**

March 20, 2016 by Edward Luce, THE FINANCIAL TIMES LTD [London] [Excerpts]

Say what you like about Donald Trump, he knows his market.

“I love the poorly educated,” he said recently to cheers from those he loves.

The rest of America inhaled sharply.

Welcome to a very un-American debate.

Once redundant, the term “working class” is now part of everyday conversation.

In an age of stifling political correctness, the only people who are fair game in polite society are blue-collar whites.

How absurd these people are, we tell each other, and how ignorant. Don't they know Mr Trump was born rich? Can they really be so stupid as to fall for his con trick?

The derision is not limited to liberal elites.

Educated conservatives are just as scathing. Take the National Review, a flagship of thinking conservatives, that described Mr Trump as a “ridiculous buffoon with the worst taste since Caligula”. In January it pulled together 22 intellectuals to condemn Mr Trump's candidacy as an existential threat to conservatism.

Their efforts had no impact on Mr Trump's fan base. Now the magazine has switched to damning his supporters.

By declaring open season on blue-collar whites, Kevin Williamson's widely read essay on "white working class dysfunction" marks a turning point. Yet he is only putting into writing what many conservatives say. "The truth about these dysfunctional, downscale communities is that they deserve to die," Mr Williamson writes.

"Economically, they are negative assets. Morally, they are indefensible . . . the white American underclass is in thrall to a vicious, selfish culture whose main products are misery and used heroin needles. Donald Trump's speeches make them feel good. So does OxyContin."

Margaret Thatcher's acolyte, Norman Tebbit, once sparked fury by implying the jobless should get on their bikes to find work. Mr Williamson says America's benighted working classes should hire a U-Haul and move on.

As an exercise in condescension, Mr Williamson's words rival the most inbred hereditary peer. As an economic prescription, it is wide of the mark.

Millions of Americans are anchored to blighted neighbourhoods by negative equity, or other ties that bind.

Their life expectancy is falling. Their participation in the labour market is dropping. The numbers signing up to disability benefits is rising. Opioid prescription drugs are rife. Those that are white tend to vote for Mr Trump.

**On Super Tuesday this month, the counties with the highest rates of white mortality — whether to overdoses, suicide or other symptoms of community breakdown — came out heavily for Mr Trump. The correlation was almost exact, according to a Wonkblog study.**

None of these trends are new.

**It should be no surprise that many Americans are desperate for a different kind of politics. As Mr Williamson notes, what is happening to much of the country's white working class is eerily redolent of what befell its Russian counterpart after the collapse of the Soviet Union.**

There too, people yearned for a strongman — or a "father-führer"— to reclaim past certainties. There too, the gulf between the urban elites and the rest was an open cultural sore. It is no accident Mr Trump admires President Vladimir Putin so much, and vice versa. Their electoral bases share distinct traits, such as a taste for authoritarian flag wavers.

**In a recent poll of people serving in the US military, Mr Trump received the largest support at 27 per cent. It was followed by Bernie Sanders at 22 per cent. Hillary Clinton received 11 per cent.**

The class divisions within the Democratic Party are just as stark.

Mrs Clinton scoops up wealthier liberals and minorities. Mr Sanders takes the northern white working classes. It is a mirror image of the Republican field.

Both Mrs Clinton and Mr Trump have won their biggest majorities in the southern states, where non-white Democrats and poor white Republicans are most populous.

Most educated progressives believe Mrs Clinton's brand of liberalism has history on its side. The share of non-whites in the US electorate edges a little higher with each general election. By 2042, whites will be a minority. According to the Democratic strategists, the white working class is a dinosaur that is going slowly extinct.

Besides, most of them suffer from a false consciousness about their true interests. Why else would they vote Republican? Barely a third of the white working class vote went to Mr Obama in 2008.

Yet demography is not destiny. Here is a better explanation for what is happening.

**In 2000, 33 per cent of Americans described themselves as “working class”, according to Gallup. By 2015 that number had risen to 48 per cent. Far from dying out, the working class now accounts for almost half of America by people's self-perception.**

In some respects these measures are more revealing than statistics on median income, or income inequality. They express a feeling about being shut out from the benefits of growth. It is a very un-American state of mind.

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## “In 50 Years...”



Photo by Mike Hastie  
March 21, 2016



From: Mike Hastie  
To: Military Resistance Newsletter  
Sent: March 23, 2016  
Subject: Billboard sign in Portland, Oregon

Photo from the portfolio of Mike Hastie, US Army Medic, Vietnam 1970-71. (For more of his outstanding work, contact at: ([hastiemike@earthlink.net](mailto:hastiemike@earthlink.net)) T)

One day while I was in a bunker in Vietnam, a sniper round went over my head. The person who fired that weapon was not a terrorist, a rebel, an extremist, or a so-called insurgent. The Vietnamese individual who tried to kill me was a citizen of Vietnam, who did not want me in his country. This truth escapes millions.

Mike Hastie  
U.S. Army Medic  
Vietnam 1970-71  
December 13, 2004

**“Massive Popular Demonstrations  
Have Continued To Take Place  
Throughout The Liberated Areas  
Of Syria Under The Slogan ‘The  
Revolution Continues’”**  
**“Hundreds Of Protests On The  
‘Friday Of Dignity’ March 18, 2016  
From The North To The South Of The  
Country”**  
**“The Syrian Revolutionary Flag Was  
Waved Everywhere”**

22 March 2016 by Joseph Daher, Peace News

Dr. Joseph Daher is an assistant teacher in the university of Lausanne, Switzerland and has a PhD in Development of the university of (School of Oriental and African Studies), SOAS, London, UK. He is the founder of the blog Syria Freedom Forever. He is a Swiss/Syrian leftist activist.

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Massive popular demonstrations have continued to take place throughout the liberated areas of Syria for the past three weeks under the slogan “The revolution continues”.

Hundreds of protests were recorded on the “Friday of Dignity” on March 18, 2016 from the north to the south of the country. The Syrian revolutionary flag was waved everywhere, while Salafi jihadist forces and their symbols were still absent from these protests in recent weeks.

Some small rallies were also held in some towns and villages in the Kurdish majority regions with slogans promoting unity between Arabs and Kurds and solidarity with other cities and regions of Syria. A big demonstration was held in the city of Qamishli on March 12, 2016 which has a majority populated of Kurds but with also Arab and Assyrian populations, to commemorate the twelve years since the start of the Kurdish uprising in Syria in 2004, which included also slogans against the Assad regime.

In the town of Maaret al-Numan, near the city of Idlib, protesters continue to oppose the authoritarian practices of Jabhat al-Nusra (Al Qaeda in Syria).

Demonstrators also stormed and burned Jabhat Al-Nusra’s offices in the city and demanded the release of democratic activists and members of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) imprisoned by Jabhat Al-Nusra. The regions around the town have shown their solidarity with revolutionaries of Ma’aret al-Numan and their opposition to Jabhat Al-Nusra.

**The announcement of the withdrawal of the main Russian military forces in Syria by President Putin on March 14 has not yet prevented the continuation of the bombing campaign by Moscow’s military air forces in several regions of the country, in particular to support the army of the Assad regime, and the maintenance of Russian troops in some military bases.**

Hmeymim Air Base, southeast of the city of Latakia, for example continues to be used by the Russian air force as well as the naval base of Tartus. Putin has promised to protect these bases from land, sea and air. Russian helicopters, armor, long-range rocket batteries and most of the estimated 5,000 Russian personnel also appear to have remained in Syria.

Russia is also leaving behind its most advanced S-400 air defense system and Putin declared that Moscow would not hesitate to shoot down “any target” which violated Syrian air space.

The Russian military withdrawal remains therefore very partial and should be highly nuanced.

Besides Russian President Putin said on March 17 that Moscow could scale up its military presence in Syria again within hours and would still bomb “terrorist groups”. He added that Russia would also continue to strengthen the Syrian army with weapons, training and operational guidance.

Russian bombing has also killed 55 Syrian civilians, including 13 children, on the weekend of 19 and 20 March in the city Raqqa and its outskirts.

Moscow also supports Assad regime's army in its current offensive to take back the city of Palmyra occupied by Daech. Lieutenant General Sergei Rudskoi said Russian aircraft based in Syria were still conducting 20-25 sorties a day in support of the Palmyra offensive.

The announcement of Russian military withdrawal came mainly as a diplomatic gesture before the new round of "peace negotiations," which resumed in Geneva in mid-March with the participation of representatives of the Assad regime and the Syrian opposition of the Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (known as the Etilaf in arabic) dominated by right wing, liberal forces and the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The main Kurdish force in Syria, the PYD, was not invited to these new rounds of negotiations because of the Turkish government's opposition that holds the organization as a "terrorist" group.

Harsh skepticism around the negotiations is nevertheless the rule. The representatives of the Assad regime have for example submitted a document to the United Nation's mediator Staffan de Mistura as a basis for discussion of a political solution in which the official propaganda of the regime is repeated. You can actually find within this document the necessity of maintaining the secular nature of the state (while it is far from being the case currently or in the past under the Assad regime), maintaining Syria's territorial integrity and the importance of fighting terrorism, but it said nothing about a political transition.

Previously, the Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem had actually said that the Presidency was a red line and that this issue was not subject to discussion.

### **Establishment Of The "Federal Democratic System Of Rojava — Northern Syria"**

On March 17, 2017, the "federal democratic system of Rojava – Northern Syria" in areas controlled by the PYD in the north of the country was established officially. Following a meeting of more than 150 representatives of Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian parties in the city Rmeilane in north-eastern Syria, participants voted in favour of the union of three "cantons" in majority populated by Kurdish people (Afrin, Kobani, Jazireh).

The Assad regime and the Syrian National Coalition have both stated their opposition to this announcement, while Washington, despite its support for the PYD, and Turkey have both declared they would not recognize this federal entity. The Syrian Foreign Ministry said that "the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic warns anyone tempted to undermine the unity of the land and the people of Syria," and adding that "Any such announcement has no legal value and will not have any legal, political, social or economic impact as long as it does not reflect the will of the entire Syrian people".

The Syrian National Coalition called the PYD initiative as "illegitimate" and "unacceptable". 69 armed groups, including the Army of Islam, Islamist and FSA forces, also signed a statement opposing the Kurdish federalist project dominated by the PYD.

The demand for a federal system in Syria is a demand of the near quasi majority of Kurdish parties in the country, but other Kurdish parties gathered around the Kurdish National Congress have opposed this announcement because it has to be established, according to them, following discussions and explanations with actors of the Syrian Arab opposition, whom for a large majority see it as a step towards separatism and division as we have seen on many placards in demonstrations on Friday, March 18.

In addition to this, the policies of the PYD towards the Assad regime, which includes maintaining communication channels open since the uprising began in 2011, cohabiting with regime forces in the cities of Qamishli and Hassake, (despite occasional confrontations as recently when the YPG, PYD military force, has arrested more than 60 members of the Assad regime security services in Qamishli) and numerous abuses and violations of Human Rights against Syrian Arab civilians in areas dominated by the military forces of PYD, raise suspicions and opposition of a part of the Arab population of Syria.

**We also have to understand that the demand for a federal system by the Syrian Kurdish political parties is rooted in decades of state oppression on a national basis (policies of colonization in the framework of the “Arab belt” and cultural repression) and on socio-economic as well.**

The most impoverished areas of the country were the areas mostly populated by Kurds such as in the Jazireh.

The Jazireh is the region with the highest level of poverty, hosting 58% of the country's poor population before the occurrence of the 2004 drought, and illiteracy rate. In 2010, poverty increased considerably reaching 80 per cent of the Jazireh inhabitants according to the de Shutter report.

In addition to this, the Jazireh region for example produced two thirds of the country cereals (70 percent of wheat) and three quarters of its hydrocarbons. The industrial underdevelopment of the Jazireh, industrial installations were scarce in the region, comprising only 7% of the overall sector, was nevertheless important, for example 69 per cent of Syrian cotton was produced in the region, but only 10 per cent of cotton threads were spun there.

Of course all the populations, Arabs, Assyrians, and Kurds, of the regions suffered from the State lack of service and poverty.

**That said, I believe we must provide unconditional support to the self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and elsewhere, without meaning being uncritical of the policies of the leadership of the PYD or any other Kurdish political party, while stating very clearly that it is the unity of the Syrian people, including Arabs and Kurds, on the basis of a democratic and inclusive program that will allow their liberation and emancipation against the counter-revolutionary forces of the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces.**

**The international solidarity of democratic and progressive organizations around the world, which is still lacking to the Syrian people in struggle for freedom and dignity, is absolutely necessary and must be intensified.**

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# FTA!

**The Film Provides A Rare Glimpse Into The Revolt From Below That Ultimately Forced The Pentagon To Withdraw In Defeat From Vietnam: “Behind-The-Scenes Footage Of Soldiers Talking Candidly To The Troupe Members About Their Frustration And Anger At The Ongoing War”**



FTA Trailer

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HlkgPCgU7g&eurl=http://imgineaworldof.blogspot.com/&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HlkgPCgU7g&eurl=http://imgineaworldof.blogspot.com/&feature=player_embedded)

## FINALLY, AFTER 35-YEARS IN EXILE FTA IS BACK!

Ultra-Rare! F.T.A. (aka FREE THE ARMY aka FUN, TRAVEL, ADVENTURE), 1972, Displaced Films, 97 min. Dir. Francine Parker.

F.T.A. was originally released by American-International but pulled from distribution after only one week, with rumors of pressure from the Pentagon.

– Phil Hall, Film Threat

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## About The Film:



From Vietnam War Days

[Thanks to Michael Letwin, New York City Labor Against The War & Military Project, who sent this in.]

February 22, 2009 By Dennis Lim, Los Angeles Times [Excerpts]

A time capsule of the anti-Vietnam War movement, “FTA” is also a vivid flashback to a world-famous movie star’s stint as a political radical. At the peak of her celebrity, which coincided with the dawning of her political consciousness, Jane Fonda abdicated her Hollywood throne and remade herself as the face of the anti-establishment.

With government agents and the news media watching her every move, she led a vaudeville troupe on a tour of U.S. military bases in 1971 -- a trip chronicled in this

fascinating documentary, largely unseen since its brief, abortive release and finally available on DVD this week.

In the disc's only extra, a 20-minute interview, Fonda recounts how the project came about. She and Donald Sutherland, her costar in 1971's "Klute" (which won her an Oscar), were approached by Howard Levy, a doctor who had become an antiwar cause célèbre for refusing to train Green Beret medics.

He proposed that they put on a corrective to Bob Hope's gung-ho USO shows, giving voice not just to the growing peace movement but to antiwar sentiment within the ranks of the military.

The FTA troupe staged its first shows in the U.S., with Fonda and Sutherland (who had just played the irreverent Hawkeye in Robert Altman's "MASH") headlining a company that included Peter Boyle and Howard Hesseman. (The all-purpose acronym is short for "Free the Army" and a more profane variation.)

When it came time to embark on the two-week Pacific Rim tour, Fonda assembled a more politically correct lineup that stressed racial and gender parity -- equal numbers of black and white, and male and female, performers, including singer Holly Near and comedian Paul Mooney.

Fonda, Sutherland and company stopped off in Hawaii, the Philippines, Okinawa and Japan (where they were initially refused entry). Denied permission to perform on U.S. bases, they set up shop in nearby coffeehouses and other venues, although military officials apparently tried to minimize attendance by publicizing incorrect show times.

All told, the troupe played 21 shows, which were attended by some 64,000 servicemen and women. Many of the male GIs, as Fonda ruefully concedes in the interview, must have been anticipating the Space Age sex kitten from "Barbarella" and not the righteous radical who took the stage in jeans, no makeup and a raised fist.

The show mixes protest songs with broad and bawdy skits, taking potshots at military chauvinism and top-brass privilege. But what it lacks in finesse, it makes up for with a raucous energy.

Directed by Francine Parker (who died in 2007), the documentary alternates between the song-and-dance routines and behind-the-scenes footage of soldiers talking candidly to the troupe members about their frustration and anger at the ongoing war and the American presence in the region.

As fate would have it, "FTA" opened the same week in July 1972 that news broke of Fonda's trip to Hanoi, where she made radio broadcasts for the North Vietnamese regime and was photographed sitting on an anti-aircraft gun. Within a week, the distributor (youth-flick specialist American-International Pictures) had pulled the movie from theaters.

Fonda's career went into partial eclipse, and she remains to this day a favorite target of the right, but she recovered to win a second Oscar for the 1978 war-veteran drama "Coming Home." For years she quietly has distanced herself from her radical past,

which might explain why “FTA,” which she co-produced, has been out of circulation for more than three decades.

Its recent reemergence points to a change of heart and owes much to the efforts of filmmaker David Zeiger, who used footage from “FTA” in “Sir! No Sir!,” a 2005 documentary about antiwar resistance within the military.

**To Get Your Copy Of FTA:**

<http://www.sirnosir.com/FTA.html>

## **CLASS WAR REPORTS**

# **“Thousands Of Chinese Coal Miners Have Taken To The Streets In A City Near The Siberian Border To Protest Against Unpaid Wages” “We Want To Eat, We Want Our Wages”**

March 13, 2016 by Lucy Hornby in Beijing. Additional reporting by Luna Lin, Financial Times

Thousands of Chinese coal miners have taken to the streets in a city near the Siberian border to protest against unpaid wages, in the first direct challenge to Beijing’s plan for orderly downsizing and job cuts in the state-owned coal sector.

Beijing has said it would lay aside Rmb100bn (\$15.4bn) to “resettle” coal and steel workers as part of a plan to cut unproductive capacity in both sectors, but local governments and the companies themselves are supposed to bear a portion of the costs.

Slowing Chinese growth and the end of the commodities supercycle have turned overcapacity into a pressing economic issue for Beijing. Data published this weekend showed that in the first two months of this year, Chinese production of thermal coal and steel both fell 6 per cent while output of metallurgical, or coking, coal — the steel ingredient produced by the protesting miners — dropped 10 per cent.

**Miners at state-owned Shuangyashan Mine, one of four mines that make up ailing Longmay Coal, began a third day of protests holding banners that read “We want to eat, we want our wages” and “Lu Hao lies with his eyes open” referring Mr Lu, the provincial governor of Heilongjiang province.**



Last week Mr Lu said that Longmay had met all its salary obligations and criticised the company, which is rapidly becoming the poster child for lossmaking state-owned coal groups, for its lack of productivity.

**One protesting miner in Shuangyashan told the Financial Times: “He said during the National People’s Congress that Heilongjiang had not delayed payments to its 80,000 coal miners. Well, at the time he said that, we had not gotten our salaries for four months. That’s the key.”**

He did not give his name as Chinese authorities regularly imprison workers who lead protests or speak to foreign media.

Mr Lu then said he had been “misinformed” about Longmay’s wage arrears problem.

He is the youngest member of the Communist party’s Central Committee and was considered a rising star among China’s younger leaders during the previous administration of Hu Jintao.

**Chinese authorities had been loath to allow lossmaking state-owned groups to go bankrupt, in part because of the possibility of mass unrest of the type that paralysed the rust-belt north-east during the previous round of restructuring, in the late 1990s.**

Xiao Yaqing, the head of the State Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, told reporters on Saturday: “Those of us who lived through the 1990s know that it was very different”, in part because China’s economy was much smaller than it is today. He added: “More mergers mean less bankruptcies and can help us peacefully resolve any disputes. I don’t think we will see any return to the 1990s.”

Beijing’s plan involves trimming excess capacity across the board while allowing the companies themselves to survive or merge into even larger entities. However, the result can be large but weak state-owned companies such as Longmay, which was formed by merging four state-owned coal mines about a decade ago.

The Chinese coal sector is split between privately- or locally-owned smaller miners and enormous state-owned mines, many first developed before the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war. Many of the state-owned mines are lossmaking in part because they are contractually obliged to provide coal at below-market prices to the state-owned power and steel sectors while maintaining bloated work forces and social services as a legacy of their importance to the planned economy.

**MORE:**

## **Labor Protests Multiply In China, Worrying Leaders:**

**“Strikes And Labor Protests Have Erupted Across The Country”**  
**“Worried About Their Prospects In A Gloomy Job Market, Workers Are Fighting Back With Unusual Ferocity”**  
**“Factories, Mines And Other Businesses Are Withholding Wages And Benefits, Laying Off Staff Or Shutting Down Altogether”**



Wu Guijun, a labor activist, at his office in Shenzhen, China. Credit Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times

**China Labor Bulletin, a labor rights group based in Hong Kong, recorded more than 2,700 strikes and protests last year, more than double the number in 2014. The strife appears to have intensified in recent months, with more than 500 protests in January alone.**

MARCH 14, 2016 By JAVIER C. HERNÁNDEZ, New York Times

GUANGZHOU, China —

For nearly seven years, Li Wei rose before dawn seven days a week for his 10-hour shift at the steel plant, returning home each night soaked in sweat, the clank of heavy machinery still ringing in his ears.

But last month, the 31-year-old welder stood outside the plant with hundreds of co-workers, picketing against pay cuts and singing patriotic battle hymns.

Within a week, the authorities declared their strike illegal, threatening fines and imprisonment. T

he police descended on the plant by the hundreds, tearing down signs and ordering the protesters to go back to work. “I’ve sacrificed my life for this company,” Mr. Li told officers as they sought to disperse the workers. “How can you do this?”

As China’s economy slows after more than two decades of breakneck growth, strikes and labor protests have erupted across the country. Factories, mines and other businesses are withholding wages and benefits, laying off staff or shutting down altogether. Worried about their prospects in a gloomy job market, workers are fighting back with unusual ferocity.

Last week, hundreds if not thousands of angry employees of the state-owned Longmay Mining Group, the biggest coal company in northeastern China, staged one of the most politically daring protests over unpaid salaries yet, denouncing the provincial governor as he and other senior leaders gathered for an annual meeting in Beijing.

**China Labor Bulletin, a labor rights group based in Hong Kong, recorded more than 2,700 strikes and protests last year, more than double the number in 2014. The strife appears to have intensified in recent months, with more than 500 protests in January alone.**

Most demonstrations have refrained from political attacks and focused on grievances such as wage arrears, unpaid benefits like pension contributions and unsafe working conditions.

President Xi Jinping, concerned about challenges to the ruling Communist Party, has responded with a methodical crackdown, quashing protests, dismantling labor rights organizations and imprisoning activists.

But his government has also sought to placate workers, putting pressure on businesses to settle disputes and making billions of dollars available for welfare payments and retraining programs.

**The approach underlines the political dilemma that labor unrest poses for the Communist Party which has continued to portray itself as a socialist guardian of worker’s rights even as it has embraced capitalism and welcomed tycoons into its ranks.**

The tide of protests appears to be cresting as Mr. Xi contemplates an enormous downsizing of China's bloated state industries, which are producing much more steel, cement and other goods than the market needs.

According to a recent study, more than three million workers could lose their jobs in the next two years if the cuts go through. The government has already announced plans to lay off 1.8 million steel and coal workers.

China trimmed the state sector of more than 30 million workers during a wave of privatization and restructuring during the late 1990s and early 2000s. But the economy was booming then, creating millions of jobs in new industries. It is still growing today, but at its slowest pace in a quarter century.

### **“Rise, We Who Refuse To Be Slaves!”**

**At the same time, Mr. Xi is grappling with a labor force that is better informed and more easily organized because of social media, and also more assertive, in part because of grass-roots rights groups that have emerged.**

“This is probably the thing that keeps Xi Jinping up at night,” said Eli Friedman, a scholar at Cornell University who studies Chinese labor issues. “Governments are not swimming in money the way they used to be, and there's less room to compromise.”

**Here in the capital of Guangdong Province in southern China, several hundred workers at the state-owned Angang Lianzhong steel plant went on strike last month in response to a plan to decrease wages by as much as half and extend the workday to 12 hours for some employees.**

**“Toward the sun, toward freedom!” the workers chanted one morning as they demonstrated outside, reciting a World War II-era army song.**

**They used WeChat, a popular messaging app, to rally support and raise money to buy protest banners. In one widely shared post, they described how the authorities had tried to stop them from playing the national anthem on a loudspeaker. (Its first line is, “Rise, we who refuse to be slaves!”)**

After the police broke up the strike, the plant promised to delay its planned wage cuts. But several workers said they had returned to work only because they feared punishment.

“I lost hope that anything would change,” said Mr. Li, the welder, adding that he was anxious about finding a new job to support his wife and son. Officials at the steel plant did not respond to requests for comment.

Guangdong, which manufactures much of the world's toys, shoes, clothes and furniture, has been a hotbed of worker discontent.

In recent months, many foreign-invested factories here have relocated to central China or Southeast Asia. Some have moved without making severance or pension payments, in violation of Chinese law.

Last year, the province averaged more than one labor dispute a day, according to China Labor Bulletin.

**Protests have been reported in every part of the country, with the strife most pronounced in the manufacturing and construction industries, which accounted for two-thirds of the demonstrations.**

Most of the protests last year were against private employers.

**But the demonstrations last week in Shuangyashan, a mining town near the Russian border in Heilongjiang Province, suggest the unrest could spread to government-owned businesses if Mr. Xi pushes ahead with efforts to overhaul the economy by reining in state industries.**

Miners and others there took to the streets complaining of unpaid wages after the provincial governor held up their company, Longmay, as an example of how state firms could be restructured without hurting workers. He made his remarks at the annual session of China's legislature, the National People's Congress.

Longmay said in September that it planned to lay off 100,000 workers, eliminating about 40 percent of the work force at 42 mines.

Despite rising discontent, there have been few signs that a national labor movement might emerge. The authorities have worked assiduously to block workers from joining forces.

The government prohibits workers from establishing independent labor unions, instead requiring that they join only the party-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions. It is supposed to mediate labor disputes, but management usually chooses the workers who sit at the bargaining table.

The authorities have also clamped down on social media, shutting accounts of labor activists, deleting news reports on strikes and monitoring chat forums for signs of collective action.

In recent years, the nonprofit labor rights groups that have proliferated have sought to help workers negotiate contracts and maintain solidarity during strikes. The authorities had been mostly tolerant and sometimes treated them as allies in enforcing labor laws.

But as worker protests have become more frequent, bold and sophisticated, state security forces have tightened their grip.

In December, the authorities arrested Zeng Feiyang, one of China's most prominent labor organizers, accusing him of "gathering a crowd to disturb social order." Three other activists were detained as well.

Mr. Zeng, 41, had orchestrated successful campaigns against influential factories and state-owned firms in Guangdong and tutored a generation of labor activists. After his arrest, state news outlets began a smear campaign, accusing him of hiring prostitutes, stealing from workers and conspiring with hostile foreign forces.

In interviews, several activists said they had gone into hiding. Mr. Zeng's center here, once a bustling meeting place for workers, now sits empty with a new security camera above its front door.

Wu Guijun, a labor activist in nearby Shenzhen, said he had started warning workers against holding demonstrations, for fear that they might be arrested, too.

"The environment has changed," he said. "We need time to grow up. We can't just die in the cradle. We have to change our strategy."

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## DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



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