

GI SPECIAL 5B19:



All Out March 17
Stand In Solidarity With
The Troops At The
Fayetteville NC Peace
Rally:

Home To Fort Bragg

We Won't Be Speaking TO The Troops This Time We'll Be Saying It WITH Them: End The Iraq War Now! Bring Us Home!

From: **Fayetteville Peace Rally**

The headline in the January 8 issue of "Army Times" was stark:

"About Face On The War. After Three Years of Support, Troops Sour on Iraq."

It's not the first such declaration.

Almost a year ago, a Zogby poll published by the military paper "Stars & Stripes" reported that more than seventy per cent of the troops on the ground wanted the U.S. to be out of Iraq within a year.

More than twenty per cent wanted to be out of there tomorrow.

This year, on March 17, when the annual peace march and rally take place in Fayetteville, we will gather in an atmosphere very different from that of earlier years.

On this fourth anniversary of the Iraq invasion, only a small and diminishing minority even of those in uniform believe that the war is anything but a travesty and a waste of our blood and treasure.

Yet these same troops and their families now face a stupid and cynical "surge," that is gambling their lives and the lives of their loved ones for nothing more than an effort by a twisted leadership to avoid facing the truth of the fiasco that their war has been.

More than a thousand active duty soldiers and sailors have signed an Appeal for Redress, asking Congress to end the war and bring them home.

It is difficult and dangerous for those in uniform to speak their opposition openly in public.

On March 17, let's gather in Fayetteville to add our voices to their chorus: End this war Bring Us Home!

This will be the fourth time voices for peace have gathered in Fayetteville to demand an end to this immoral war.

But on March 17, 2007, we won't be speaking TO the troops this time we'll be saying it WITH them.

Program

(Watch for Updates!)

Friday Night (March 16)

5PM: Hospitality Center opens at The Clarion Prince Charles Hotel, 405 Hay St.

Saturday (March 17)

10AM: Pre-Rally Show at Health Dept. Parking Lot

Noon: The March! (3/4-mile route up Hay Street to Rowan Park)

1PM-4PM: The Rally!

Featuring Holly Near, Fruit of Labor, Dan Speller, Dave Lippman, Speakers, Kids Program, Peace Fair & More!

Sunday (March 18)

Activists Conference (TBA)

Check out the website for the Fayetteville Peace Rally: www.fayetteville-peace-rally.org.

MORE:

Veterans For Peace “Will Concentrate Our Efforts At The Regional Demo In Fayetteville, NC Home Of Fort Bragg” VFP Will Gather As Many Veterans And Military Families As Possible

To Stand In Solidarity With The Troops

Veteransforpeace.org [Excerpts]

Veterans For Peace will gather in Fayetteville, North Carolina for their 4th peace march and rally.

Regional and local actions are being planned to call attention to the beginning of the 5th year of the illegal war on and occupation of Iraq.

VFP will concentrate our efforts at the regional demo in Fayetteville, NC home of Fort Bragg.

VFP will gather as many veterans and military families as possible to stand in solidarity with the troops and demand Real Support, Bring Them Home Now and Take Care of Them When They Get Back.

JOIN us in Fayetteville, North Carolina, on March 17th.

MORE:

“After Spending A Year In Iraq, I Have Found That The Iraqis Are Not A Threat Or The Enemy”
“We Do Not Know What We Are Fighting For Anymore; We Do Not Know What Our Mission Is”

[From GI SPECIAL 4D24, 4.24.06]

Army Times
April 24, 2006
Letters To The Editor

I am a soldier about to embark on my second tour in Iraq.

My first tour started in November 2003. When we arrived, Saddam Hussein was on the loose. In December, he was caught.

When I came into the military, I signed a contract that said I would defend this country against all threats, foreign and domestic.

After spending a year in Iraq, I have found that the Iraqis are not a threat or the enemy. I did find that we are the threat and the enemy to them.

They acted as we would if someone came into America and said we are going to change your ways.

I feel this war is no longer about taking out a threat. But I believe it is about securing oil commerce for the future.

Securing this country and stabilizing it would mean oil contracts and people lining their pockets with money from the oil that my friends have been wounded for and have died for.

I hear the president speak with the press and tell them things to appease them and to divert them to a different subject.

What I don't see is the president having a conference with the soldiers who have fought on the ground in Iraq.

We do not know what we are fighting for anymore; we do not know what our mission is.

I am not alone in this thought. My boys need to know what they may possibly die for.

Is it for a few extra bucks for Halliburton subsidiary KBR?

Is it about the oil?

Is it for America?

How will this war help my family in the future?

**Staff Sgt. Christopher Galka
Rainier, Wash.**

[Someday, when the history of the movement in the armed forces that stopped this evil Imperial war is written, this letter, for its courage and clarity, will be well remembered, and the writer honored down through the corridors of time. He is true to his oath and his duty. T]

MORE:

Build “On The Grassroots Opposition To The War, Especially Within The Military Itself” “The Real Challenge To The U.S. War On Iraq Won’t Come From Inside Washington”

February 9, 2007 Editorial, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

THE DEMOCRATS may be talking tougher. But when it comes to doing something concrete to stop the U.S. war on Iraq--or even George W. Bush's surge of more than 20,000 soldiers to Iraq--they're falling far short of the expectations millions of people placed in them.

The hope that the Democrats would put the brakes on Bush's escalation and begin a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq is running smack into the reality that both mainstream parties, whatever their disagreement on tactics, are united on the goal of defending and projecting U.S. power abroad.

After Senate Republicans blocked debate on resolutions opposing Bush's troop surge, the Democrats could point fingers and continue to portray themselves as the opposition to Bush's "new way forward" in Iraq.

But the vast majority of Democrats had sought only a nonbinding resolution criticizing Bush's war plans, not a real effort to stop them.

They promise to take a tougher stand when Bush demands an expected \$100 billion more in funding for the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. But this only pushes the confrontation further down the road, after many of the new troops will be in place in Iraq anyway.

Meanwhile, at the end of last month, Senate Democrats voted unanimously to confirm Bush's nomination of Gen. David Petraeus--the leading booster of the administration's surge plan in the Pentagon--to be commander of U.S. forces in Iraq.

IF THE Democrats sound antiwar themes now, it's because of pressure from the antiwar majority that expressed itself in the November elections--as well as the worsening crisis in Iraq.

Now, among the 10 Democrats already declared or likely to run for the presidential nomination in 2008, every one at least claims to be against the war. Even the most conservative, Hillary Clinton, went further than John Kerry in saying that, "knowing what she knows now," she would have voted against a resolution giving Bush authorization for the invasion.

But in a situation where even fellow Republicans are turning on the White House, talk is cheap.

The Democrats should be held responsible for what they do.

That's why no one should accept the fawning liberal praise for the other early frontrunner for the nomination, Sen. Barack Obama -- from, for example, Sam Graham-Felsen of the Nation, who believes Obama, because of his recent proposal on Iraq, "can now be considered the major antiwar candidate."

He is nothing of the sort.

Obama is sponsoring legislation that sets a timetable for withdrawal, but with an exit date more than a year away, in March 2008.

If that date sounds familiar, it is probably because it matches the recommendations--or, to use the Nation's words, "murky consensus" and "half measures"--of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group in its report last December.

Then there are the conditions in Obama's proposal. His bill would keep a certain level of U.S. troops in place to "conduct anti-terrorism activities and train Iraqi forces." And it includes provisions for the not-so-immediate withdrawal to be suspended or otherwise delayed if the Bush administration decides the Iraqi government has met certain "benchmarks."

Other early contenders for the nomination are little better. Secure in the fact that he'll never cast a vote on the issue, John Edwards has called on his former Senate colleagues to get tough over Iraq. But he's every bit as belligerent as Bush when it comes to threatening Iran with being the next stop on the war on terror--or defending Israel's war on the Palestinians.

These "antiwar" Democrats are mouthpieces for sections of the ruling establishment to express a vote of no confidence in the Bush administration and its failure in Iraq.

But it's crucial to recognize that this opposition to Bush represents the American ruling class' concern with saving, rather than burying, the U.S. imperial project.

As a party, the Democrats are every bit as committed to that aim as the Republicans.

The real challenge to the U.S. war on Iraq won't come from inside Washington.

That fact presents a challenge to the antiwar movement--to focus on its real source of power in building on the grassroots opposition to the war, especially within the military itself.

“The single largest failure of the anti-war movement at this point is the lack of outreach to the troops.” Tim Goodrich, Iraq Veterans Against The War

**NOT ANOTHER DEATH! NOT ANOTHER
DOLLAR!
NOT ANOTHER DAY!**

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward GI Special along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and inside the armed services. Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

Navy Paramedic From Maryland Dies In CH-46 Helicopter Crash In Iraq



February 08, 2007 By SCOTT SHEWFELT, Capital News Service

WASHINGTON - On Wednesday, Jacob Ruiz, 13, tore open a package from his big brother, Manuel.

Inside he found a baseball cap from his favorite team, the Seattle Seahawks, and a jersey of his favorite player, Shaun Alexander, said family friend Adam Lusk.

The last thing Navy Corpsman Manuel Ruiz (pictured top-left), 21, did before heading back to Iraq, was mail his younger brother a birthday present, Lusk said.

Manuel Ruiz of Federalsburg was one of seven killed Wednesday when a CH-46 Sea Knight, a Marine transport helicopter, crashed in al-Anbar province, northwest of Baghdad, his mother, Lisa, confirmed.

Affectionately known by family and friends as "Little Manuel," after his father Manuel, Ruiz was constantly in touch with friends and family via e-mail, especially brothers Jacob and Josh, 16, Lusk said.

"He always put a happy smile on everyone's face," Lusk said.

As a senior at Col. William Richardson High School in Federalsburg, Manuel Ruiz decided he wanted to pursue a medical career, but didn't want to be stuck working in a hospital, Lusk said.

Being a Navy paramedic was a perfect fit.

Straight out of high school, Ruiz joined the Navy and had already done one tour of duty in Iraq before demanding to go back for a second. He left just over a week ago, Lusk said.

"He loved what he was doing," Lusk said. "He had nothing but good intentions."

Ruiz had a talent for dancing, Lusk said.

"Michael Jackson-like," Lusk said. "He did it to make people laugh, but he was also very good at it."

A member of the Second Medical Battalion based out of Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, N.C., Ruiz had won several medals including the Humanitarian Service Medal, his mother said.

Funeral arrangements are pending.

Streetsboro Sailor Killed In Iraq War

February 03, 2007 Akron Beacon Journal

The story of a life too short is played out in message after message on the Web site MySpace.

'Matthew, you're the best Corpsman ever....

'Seems like just yesterday you were putting the Spiderman Band-aid on my eyebrow. Thanks for taking me into the platoon and i'll never forget the times we had. Keep watch over us and I look forward to seeing you soon... but not too soon. Love ya man. -- Johnny.'

'Conte, I can't believe you're gone; even with your death you helped us save 2 Marines lives with the knowledge you passed to us. I'll never forget you man. -- Ray.'

'To the many nights of being woken up... to hear your voice on the other end of the phone. I know it was only suppose to be a 7 minute phone call but somehow we always managed to talk for about A1 2 hour. To the one who always accepted me for who I was,... who continued to encourage me to be what I want to be, to the one who had the patience to teach me how to properly skip rocks at the lake... I want to thank you for your love, encouragement and kindness. I love you. -- Danita.

The language from the Department of Defense was decidedly different:

The Pentagon on Friday announced the death of a sailor who was supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. Hospitalman Matthew G. Conte, 22, of Streetsboro died Thursday while his unit was conducting combat operations in Iraq's Sunni-dominated Anbar province west of Baghdad.

Conte was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force, Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, as a hospital corpsman in Iraq under the command of I Marine Expeditionary Force.

A notice on the MySpace Web site from a family member said Matthew was killed instantly while wearing all his body armor.

On MySpace, Conte is just a kid, a young man in civvies -- single, athletic, 5-foot-11, Aries -- who says he hopes to have children someday.

'Only a few people reading this will know who he is, but even if you don't, please say a prayer for him and also for gunnery sergeant Elliot (Terry J. Elliott, 34, Middleton, Tenn.) who also passed in the explosion. Watch over us Conte and I love you man! -- Johnny.'

Services will be held at Dunn-Quigley Ciriello & Carr funeral home in Stow, with details to come in newspaper notices, according to a posting by the family on the Web site.

A spokesman at the Navy-Marine Corps Reserve Center on Dan Street in Akron said Friday night that Conte's family moved out of Ohio last year.

'Matt planned on working in a hospital when he got out,' sister Lora wrote on MySpace.

'Please feel free to send any pictures and post any comments, stories or memories.'

Crash In Iraq Kills Marine From Tri-Cities

February 8th, 2007 By Sara Schilling, Herald staff writer

A Marine from the Tri-Cities died Wednesday in a helicopter crash 20 miles northwest of Baghdad.

Sgt. Travis Pfister, 27, who loved a good joke and worked for months on the perfect recipe for barbecued ribs, was due home from his third tour in Iraq next month.

He graduated in 1997 from Hanford High School in Richland, where he wrestled and played defensive end on the football team.

"On the surface, he was a very happy-go-lucky guy. But he was very aware of how people were feeling around him," said his uncle, Blaine Hulse of Pasco. "He was one of the guys that kept tabs on everybody, made sure they were motivated and happy."

Pfister was stationed at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and served as a helicopter crew chief. His wife, Jessica, also is a Marine.

His mother and stepfather, Lorrie and Loron Tallett, live in Kennewick; his father and stepmother, Richard and Jackie Pfister, live in Richland.

Many in Pfister's family gathered Wednesday at his mother's house in Kennewick.

They laughed and told stories of his childhood antics with his older brother, Josh Pfister, 29. They also talked about how he loved to fish, hunt and ski, and how he lived life to the fullest.

"He carried himself with confidence and pride, and without (bravado)," said Hulse.

"Travis was a tough little nut," added his former Hanford High football coach, Greg Sevigny, in a phone interview. "He always had a smile on his face. And he was tenacious. He was a tough kid, but he always had a smile on his face."

Pfister enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1998, though he'd long been fascinated with the military. As a boy, he was a regular customer at a local military surplus store, remembered his dad, Richard Pfister.

"He loved all that stuff. I saw (when he was) 7 that he'd be in the service for life," said his stepmother, Jackie Pfister.

In Iraq, he helped transport the sick and wounded, and often volunteered for extra flights. He liked the discipline and camaraderie of the Marine Corps, and he believed in what he was doing, his family said.

In an e-mail to his mom last week, Pfister wrote that he'd taken more than 20 people to the hospital for urgent medical care this month alone.

"Things are going well, though just waiting to come home," he wrote. "I love you guys and will see you all soon."

A memorial service hasn't yet been arranged.

Notes From A Lost War:

“American Soldiers Have Been Setting Up New Joint Security Stations Or Mini-Forts” “They Are Already Being Called The Alamo”

Feb 11, 2007 by Sarah Baxter, Washington and Hamoudi Saffar, Baghdad; The Times of London [Excerpts]

American soldiers have been setting up new joint security stations or mini-forts, where they will live around the clock with members of the Iraqi army and police.

According to Major-General William Caldwell, the US military spokesman, 10 such stations are "up and running and there will be at least double if not triple that number that will eventually be out there".

They are already being called the Alamo after the Texan fort where US troops were besieged by Mexican insurgents in 1836 (and were ultimately overwhelmed).

Some are based in Iraqi police stations, others in fortified clusters of houses surrounded by concrete barriers with room for parking tanks and Humvees. Most lack running water and the troops use oil drums as lavatories. The windows are blocked by sandbags.

Vehicles on patrol attract roadside bombs with such regularity that US soldiers suspect there are informants in their midst.

Captain Ramiro Roldan from the 1st Cavalry in east Baghdad said: "We can't for sure say that all of the Iraqi elements on the compound are completely on our side." [What mealy mouth bullshit. Not "completely" on our side? Oh yeah, we know what that means. "We can't for sure say that all of the Indians are completely on our side," General Custer said.]

At a new joint security station in Al-Doura, a mixed Sunni and Shi'ite trouble spot, Sergeant Doug Maddi expressed confidence that, "when people see us together with the Iraqi security forces, it's a good thing, and as the word spreads through the community that this is here, we'll start to get calls on the tip lines".

Yet securing Al-Doura was a key objective in last August's battle for Baghdad, which failed after a spluttering few months.

The new surge has got off to an equally uncertain start. Six American helicopters have been downed in the last three weeks and the crackdown could not begin last Monday because too few Iraqi troops turned up -- the same problem that bedevilled last summer's push.

Raids against Shi'ite militia leaders and Sunni insurgents have been taking place across the city, but many rebels have gone to ground. Supporters of the Shi'ite Mahdi army of Moqtada al-Sadr, the radical cleric, were warned last week by Nasser al-Rubaie, the head of his parliamentary group, not to resist troops.

"Our instructions are to melt away and disappear," said a member of the Mahdi militia.

Temporary checkpoints that have been set up across the city are failing to quell the violence.

In Yarmouk, an eyewitness saw two Iraqis in a minibus murdered within 30 metres of a check-point.

"Nobody did anything about it," he said.

UNREMITTING HELL ON EARTH; BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



US soldiers engage in a sustained gunfight with insurgents in Baghdad, 10 February.
(AFP/David Furst)

TROOP NEWS

**THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME:
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE**



The casket of U.S. Army Sgt. James Regan is carried out of St. Mary's Church in Manhasset, New York, February 16, 2007. Sgt. Regan was killed by a roadside bomb while serving with the 3rd Battalion of the 75th Ranger Regiment in Baqubah, Iraq .
REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton

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. Frederick Douglas, 1852

Who Is Muqtada Al-Sadr?

**“He Opposed The Occupation
From The Beginning”**

**“Muqtada Represented Those Who
Hated Saddam, And Were Grateful That
He Was Deposed, But Did Not Want To
Replace Him With A Foreign
Occupation”**



Moqtada al-Sadr, 2006. (AFP/File/Qassem Zein)

16 February 2007 Patrick Cockburn, Independent News and Media Limited [Excerpts]

As Iraq dissolves into civil war, few men wield more power on its bloodstained streets than Muqtada al-Sadr. In just four years, his potent blend of Shia nationalism, enforced by the 70,000-strong Mehdi Army, has made him a hero to millions - and put him top of America's hit list.

Whatever else the US intended when it invaded Iraq in 2003 it was not to hand power to an Islamic militant in a black turban with dark staring eyes who denounces Washington and Israel in the same breath.

Allegations by US officials in Baghdad have little credibility after almost four years in which they have been repeatedly exposed as untrue. Supporters of Muqtada

immediately denied that he was in Iran and either refused to say where he was or asserted that he was in the Shia holy city of Najaf.

He has every reason to keep his location a secret, since in the past the US military has said it will either kill or capture him if it can. Two of his most important aides have been killed in mysterious circumstances in the past week.

We may be close to a final confrontation between the US and Muqtada, perhaps the most important political figure in Iraq. The US and Iraqi governments are starting their much-heralded campaign to regain control of Baghdad from the Sunni insurgents and Shia militias, of which the most important is Muqtada's 70,000-strong Mehdi Army.

He has been trying to avoid becoming a US target. He plays down his own strength. Asked about claims that the army and police are infiltrated by his men, Muqtada said the reverse was true and "it is our militias [that] are swarming with spies. It doesn't take much to infiltrate the army of the people."

He denies that the death squads killing Sunni are really members of the Mehdi Army.

Probably, Muqtada and the men around him believe that if he can avoid a direct clash with the US army then he will win in the end. His popularity among the Shia is great.

In the past few weeks his men have stopped carrying their weapons so openly in the streets and have closed a number of their offices in Baghdad. But the militiamen are seldom far away. In Sadr City they have only retreated deeper into the vast shanty town of two million people that is the greatest bastion of Sadrist support.

The rise of Muqtada has been one of the surprises of the four years since the US invaded.

Had Saddam realised the potential of this strange, enigmatic young man before the invasion then he would doubtless have killed him, as he did Muqtada's father and two of his brothers eight years ago.

His Mehdi Army militiamen control not only Sadr City but much of the capital and southern Iraq. He is an essential prop to the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, in which six ministers belong to his movement.

Yet the source of his power has remained a mystery to the US and many Iraqi politicians. Few men have been so consistently underestimated. He is not a great orator, nor does he have huge charisma.

His movement has limited resources. Until recently, his militiamen were unpaid and provided their own weapons. He does not have a powerful foreign backer.

In spite of US efforts to link him to Iran and claim that he has fled there, he and his movement have traditionally been suspicious of the Iranians, and they of him.

The real source of his vast influence among the Shia of Iraq - the Sunni see him as orchestrating the death squads that have killed so many of them - is that he promulgates a blend of religion and nationalism that they find deeply attractive.

He comes from the deeply revered Sadr clerical family that provided so many martyrs under Saddam Hussein.

Some American commanders may wonder if it is wise for the US to pick a fight with a religious leader regarded with cult-like devotion by millions of Shias.

They may also reflect that he is not just popular with the poor masses of Shia Iraq - his picture also hangs on the wall in many Iraqi police stations and army barracks. Some of these will be the very people on whom US and Iraqi commanders will rely in order to regain control of Baghdad.

It is impossible to explain Iraq today without understanding the reasons behind the astonishing rise of Muqtada al-Sadr and his movement in less than four years.

Muqtada appears to have come from nowhere. In reality, he is heir to a social and political movement with a history that stretches back almost half a century. In addition, he could not have become so powerful so fast had he not come from a family that provided some of the most revered leaders of the Shiah clergy in their long and bitter struggle with Saddam Hussein.

The most common poster of the Sadrist movement shows three men in black clerical garb with an Iraqi flag behind them. The first figure is Muqtada himself. The second is of his father, Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, assassinated along with two of his sons on the orders of Saddam outside Najaf in January 1999.

The third is of Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr, a distant cousin and father-in-law of Muqtada, a revolutionary Shia who was executed together with his sister in 1980. The poster perfectly illustrates the blend of religion and nationalism that has made Sadrist so potent.

The Sadrist movement, of which Muqtada is the current leader, was founded by Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr. It was he who sought to interpret Shia Islam and organise its adherents in the 1950s and 1960s in order to oppose the powerful Iraqi Communist Party and the nationalist Baath Party. He helped to establish the Shia religious party al-Dawa to counter secularism.

At first, Baqir seemed to be leading a doomed attempt to revive Shia Islam to struggle with the problems of the modern age. He moved away from the traditional political quietism of the Hawza, the Shia religious hierarchy in Iraq, towards finding answers to the central questions of political and economic life.

Like so many other Shia religious leaders, he did not lack courage. Even when the Baathists were at the height of their power and notorious for their cruelty, Baqir refused to bow to them. In a famous saying he vowed that: "If my little finger were Baathist I would cut it off." Saddam Hussein, particularly frightened of insurgent Islam after the

triumph of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, struck back. In 1980 he killed Baqir, his sister and hundreds of his followers.

But the Sadrist movement did not die. Iraq's Shia community, 60 per cent of Iraq's population, became increasingly conscious of their identity as Saddam Hussein blundered into the war with Iran and then invaded Kuwait. In 1991 he crushed the great Shia uprising and began to look for a Shia religious leader whom he could co-opt. In a move he would come to regret, he chose Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, a pupil and cousin of Baqir and father of Muqtada, for this role.

Paradoxically, given the US allegations yesterday, Saddam's regime was attracted by Sadiq because he was anti-American and distant from Iran.

But it swiftly became alarmed when he launched a mass movement aimed at addressing the immediate concerns of the impoverished Shia masses that criticised the old religious hierarchy as remote and cut off from day-to-day life.

A famous story is told of Sadiq illustrating his concern for ordinary Iraqis.

A man looking for a religious leader to follow asked each of them the price of tomatoes. Some, more accustomed to being queried about esoteric religious matters, were offended by such a mundane question. The exception was Sadiq, who gave a full response, detailing the prices of different types of tomato. The man departed satisfied, saying he had at last found a religious leader who knew about life as it was really lived by Iraqis.

He said: "I choose the one who knows my suffering, who is close to the poor and the disinherited." The latter class of Iraqis was more numerous in Iraq in the 1990s as the economy suffered under the weight of sanctions.

Secularism, discredited by Saddam's failures, was on the retreat and Islam was resurgent. Sadiq spoke for the newly impoverished Shia masses.

But his discourse was also patriotic, opposed to foreign interference in Iraq, whether it came from the US or Iran. He called for Sunni and Shia unity. He would often begin his sermons with the refrain: "No, no to America; no, no, to Israel; no, no to the Devil."

His strength was - and this is also true of his son Muqtada - that he expressed the feelings of the Shia poor.

A study of Muqtada by the Brussels-based International Crisis Group says: "The relatively well-to-do, urbanised, educated or commercial classes eyed him wearily, viewing his plebeian, militant Shiism as a source of instability and a threat to their interests."

Sadiq even called on Saddam himself to repent. He wore the shroud of those who expect to die, and with reason. It became clear to the Iraqi leader that he was a nurturing an increasingly dangerous enemy. He reacted violently, as he invariably did against opponents, and ordered his security men to ambush Sadiq and his sons in their

car as they drove through the holy city of Najaf. As news of their death spread, it sparked the most serious riots seen in Iraq between the uprising of 1991 and the invasion of 2003.

Muqtada was not necessarily the natural political and religious heir to Sadiq. He was his father's fourth son, and 25 years old when Sadiq was killed (assuming that Muqtada's official birth date of 1974 is correct). He was under surveillance by Saddam's security men - perhaps the most suspicious men on earth - but they concluded he was harmless.

Muqtada had hidden strengths. Most importantly, there was a large constituency of Iraqis waiting to embrace him.

In April 2003, as Baghdad fell, he instantly stepped forward to fill a vacuum. Nobody else was offering to lead the young, poorly educated, violent but devout Shia masses.

Their ferocious looting of Baghdad was a sign of their rage towards the powers that be. They, like him, were suspicious of the conciliatory Shia religious hierarchy in Najaf and the Iraqi exiles returning from London and New York courtesy of the US army.

Muqtada represented those who hated Saddam, and were grateful that he was deposed, but did not want to replace him with a foreign occupation.

Muqtada's influence quickly became apparent. On 11 April, in his first Friday prayer sermon, he called on the faithful to walk as pilgrims to Karbala to commemorate Arba'in, the ritual commemorating 40 days' mourning for the death of Imam Hussein. Absorbed by the fall of Saddam, few observers noted the significance of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis walking for days to Karbala waving their black and green flags.

The policy of the Shia hierarchy, notably Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, and of the previously exiled religious parties, al-Dawa and SCIRI, was not to oppose the US occupation but to use it to enable the Shia to take power. They pressed the US envoy Paul Bremer to hold elections that the Shia were bound to win.

Muqtada's line was different.

He opposed the occupation from the beginning.

His father, Sadiq, had blamed the US for sanctions that had brought the Iraqi poor to the edge of starvation. His son was no less hostile. He denounced the members of the Iraqi Governing Council, which the Shia religious parties joined, as pawns of America.

Not all was plain sailing. The Mehdi Army, his militia, was only a shadowy force. The first Sadrist demonstration I attended in October 2003 in the heart of Sadr City was well organised, but only 3,000 people took part.

It was easy to underestimate the potential of his movement, which Paul Bremer, the head of the ruling Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), blindly proceeded to do. He toyed with the idea of arresting Muqtada.

Meanwhile, the occupation was becoming ever more unpopular. It failed to provide security, economic reconstruction or democratic elections. The 70 per cent of Iraqis who were unemployed before the invasion still had no jobs.

The confrontation with the CPA happened almost by accident. Muqtada delivered a sermon describing the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York as "a miracle and a blessing from God". This was reprinted in the Sadrist newspaper al Hawza. Bremer told one of his staff: "Close down the rag."

Within days, Sadr City and the whole of southern Iraq was in flames as the Mehdi Army - armed, enthusiastic but untrained young men - took over the streets.

One of the cities seized by the militiamen was Kufa, on the Euphrates and a short distance from Najaf. Soon Muqtada and his militiamen were being besieged by 2,500 US soldiers.

In a military sense, Muqtada and his militiamen lost their confrontations with the US army in April and again in August 2004. Many Iraqis blamed them for the destruction in Najaf. But at the same time the Sadrists had survived and shown their strength. Muqtada demonstrated he was one of the central figures in Iraqi politics and he had also learned to avoid, if at all possible, direct military conflict with the US.

The following year Muqtada showed his political muscle. While still denouncing the occupation, he took part in the political process. He joined the Shia political front, the United Iraqi Alliance, which triumphed in the general elections in January and December 2005. In the second election he won 32 out of 275 seats in parliament, thus giving him veto power over the choice of prime minister. There are six Sadrist ministers running departments including health and transport. All were soon stocked with supporters of Muqtada.

In 2006, the Mehdi Army extended its grip into most Shia areas in Baghdad. Shia who did not like the Mehdi Army welcomed them because they were desperate for armed men from their own community to protect them from death squads and suicide bombers.

By now, all Shia gunmen were being called Mehdi Army by the Sunni. Muqtada said, defensively, that many of them were not under his control.

Probably it would be wiser for the US to include Muqtada in the political process. He has far more legitimacy among the Shia masses than many of the former exiles whom the US would like to see in power.

Accommodating and controlling Muqtada and the great numbers of Iraqis he represents is essential to stabilising Iraq, but instead the US seems intent on trying to marginalise or eliminate him.

Even if they succeed it will do them little good.

The Sadrist movement has survived many years of adversity before under Saddam.

The Shia masses are not going to allow themselves to be robbed of power which they believe rightly belongs to them.

President Bush shows no sign of learning from his failures in Iraq since 2003.

For almost four years he has been fighting the Sunni community.

Now, by confronting Muqtada, he is moving towards armed conflict with the Shia as well.

SENIOR CALL-UP APPROVED: Bring The Yougin's Home, NOW!



[picture by Mundo of Independents]

1/8/2007 Veterans For Peace Discussion

A number of us Old Foggie 'Nam Vets have tried to Re-Enlist, not to mention the 'Raging Grannies.' Now with the escalation we can save the little chimps butt, before we indict the whole bunch!

OCCUPATION REPORT

U.S. OCCUPATION RECRUITING DRIVE IN HIGH GEAR; RECRUITING FOR THE ARMED RESISTANCE THAT IS



A foreign occupation soldier from the 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment of the Second Infantry Division searches the home of an Iraqi citizen in the Shaab neighborhood in Baghdad, Iraq, Feb. 15, 2007. (AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo)

[Fair is fair. Let's bring 150,000 Iraqi troops over here to the USA. They can kill people at checkpoints, bust into their houses with force and violence, butcher their families, overthrow the government, put a new one in office they like better and call it "sovereign," and "detain" anybody who doesn't like it in some prison without any charges being filed against them, or any trial.]

[Those Iraqis are sure a bunch of backward primitives. They actually resent this help, have the absurd notion that it's bad their country is occupied by a foreign military dictatorship, and consider it their patriotic duty to fight and kill the soldiers sent to grab their country. What a bunch of silly people. How fortunate they are to live under a military dictatorship run by George Bush. Why, how could anybody not love that? You'd want that in your home town, right?]

"In the States, if police burst into your house, kicking down doors and swearing at you, you would call your lawyer and file a lawsuit," said Wood, 42, from Iowa, who did not accompany Halladay's Charlie Company, from his battalion, on Thursday's raid. "Here, there are no lawyers. Their resources are limited, so they plant IEDs (improvised explosive devices) instead."

**OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION
BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!**

**As U.S. Troops Died, DoD And
State Dept. Officials Helped War
Profiteers Loot \$10 Billion From
Iraq;
Cheney's Business Got \$2.7 Billion
"In Overpriced Contracts Or
Undocumented Costs"**

[Thanks to Alberto Jaccoma, Vietnam Veteran, who sent this in.]

An audit by Bowen last month found tens of millions of dollars wasted on a DynCorp International contract to build an Olympic-size swimming pool for a police academy in Baghdad that has yet to be used. The pool as well as VIP trailers were ordered by Iraqi officials but never authorized by the State Department.

Feb 15, 2007 The Associated Press

WASHINGTON - The U.S. government is at risk of squandering significantly more money in an Iraq war and reconstruction effort that has already wasted or otherwise overcharged taxpayers billions of dollars, federal investigators said Thursday.

The three top auditors overseeing contract work in Iraq told a House committee of \$10 billion in spending that was wasteful or poorly tracked. They pointed to numerous instances in which Defense and State department officials condoned or otherwise allowed poor accounting, repeated work delays, bloated expenses and payments for work shoddily or never done by U.S. contractors.

Also testifying Thursday were Stuart Bowen, the special inspector general for Iraq reconstruction, and William Reed, director of the Defense Contract Audit Agency.

According to their testimony, the investigators:

Found overpricing and waste in Iraq contracts amounting to \$4.9 billion since the Defense Contract Audit Agency began its work in 2003, although some of that money has since been recovered.

Another \$5.1 billion in expenses were charged without proper documentation.

Of the \$10 billion in overpriced contracts or undocumented costs, more than \$2.7 billion were charged by Halliburton Co., the oil-field services firm once headed by Vice President Dick Cheney.

"According to the Pentagon auditors, more than one in six dollars they have audited in Iraq is suspect," Waxman said. "It's no wonder taxpayers across the country are fed up and demanding real oversight."

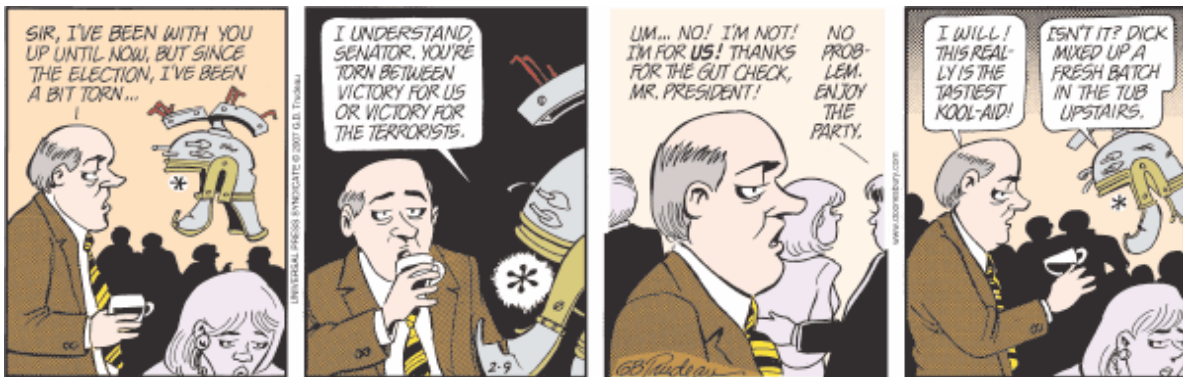
Bowen said his office had expanded an investigation of police training contracts awarded by the State Department.

An audit by Bowen last month found tens of millions of dollars wasted on a DynCorp International contract to build an Olympic-size swimming pool for a police academy in Baghdad that has yet to be used.

The pool as well as VIP trailers were ordered by Iraqi officials but never authorized by the State Department.

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send to contact@militaryproject.org:. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential. Same to unsubscribe.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



[Thanks to Phil G, who sent this in.]

Bush's "Dog-And-Pony Show On Iranian Meddling In Iraq Not Only Didn't Scare Anyone, It Caused Guffaws Of Laughter And Ridicule"

February 15, 2007 By Robert Dreyfuss, TomPaine.com [Excerpts]

It was, President Bush must have been thinking, a heck of a lot easier five years ago.

Back in 2002, the president had a smoothly running lie factory humming along in the Pentagon, producing reams of fake intelligence about Iraq, led by Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Doug Feith and his Office of Special Plans. And he had a chorus of yes-men in the Republican-controlled Congress ready to echo the party line.

In 2007, Bush stands nearly alone, and he never looked lonelier than during a bumbling, awkward news conference on the Iraq-Iran tangle Wednesday.

Without his Orwellian apparatus behind him, the president spent most of his hour-long news conference yesterday shrugging and smirking, jutting his jaw out with false bravado, joshing inappropriately with reporters asking deadly serious questions and stumbling over his words.

It was painful to listen to him trying to justify the nonsensical claims that Iran and its paramilitary "Quds Force" are somehow responsible for the chaos in Iraq:

"What we do know is that the Quds force was instrumental in providing these deadly IEDs to networks inside of Iraq. We know that. And we also know that the Quds force is a part of the Iranian government. That's a known. What we don't know is whether or not the head leaders of Iran ordered the Quds force to do what they did."

Pressed about what the "head leaders" are doing, he went on:

"Either they knew or didn't know, and what matters is, is that they're there. What's worse, that the government knew or that the government didn't know? ... What's worse, them ordering it and it happening, or them not ordering it and it happening?"

If that makes no sense to you, well, that's because the whole thing makes no sense.

It's a farcical replay of Iraq 2002, when the White House demonized Saddam Hussein with fake intelligence, turning him into a menacing al-Qaida backer armed with weapons of mass destruction.

This time, however, the lie factory has been dismantled.

All by himself, the president is trying to turn Iran into a scary, al-Qaida-allied, nuke-wielding menace. But he's not fooling anyone.

The potent "war president" of 2002-2003 is now an incoherent, mewling Wizard of Oz-like figure, and people are paying attention to the man behind the curtain.

Unlike 2002, when the White House fired salvo after salvo of fake intelligence about Iraq, today it can't even stage its lies properly.

Like the incompetents who couldn't organize a two-car funeral, the remaining Iran war hawks in the administration held a briefing in Baghdad on Sunday to present alleged evidence that Iran is masterminding the insurgency in Iraq.

But it was a comedy of errors that convinced no one.

Twice, at least, the administration had earlier postponed or canceled the much-promoted event, designed to reveal the supposed secrets behind Iran's actions in Iraq.

When it was finally held, it was not in Washington, but in Baghdad, with not a single White House official, no U.S. diplomat, no State Department official, no CIA official and no one from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Instead, a couple of anonymous military officers held a background-only briefing, barring cameras and tape recorders, to present some blurry photographs of bomb-looking things -- and not a shred of evidence of Iranian government involvement.

It was as if Adlai Stevenson had gotten up at the United Nations during the missile crisis in Cuba and, rather than showing detailed U-2 photographs of missile emplacements, had simply said, "Ladies and gentleman, some Cuban guy we talked to said the Russians are putting missiles in Cuba."

According to The Washington Times, the effort to blame Iran was directly torpedoed by the U.S. intelligence community, through the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The ODNI, said the Times, "sought to play down the intelligence on Iranian involvement, fearing that the report will be used as a basis to launch an attack on Iran."

Many earlier reports noted that both the State Department and the U.S. intelligence community were strongly opposed to any attempt to demonize Iran.

There's nothing like a bureaucracy scorned to conduct passive-aggressive sabotage of misguided policies, and in this case the bureaucracy apparently succeeded.

The dog-and-pony show on Iranian meddling in Iraq not only didn't scare anyone, it caused guffaws of laughter and ridicule.

And there is no basis -- "not supported by underlying intelligence," as the Pentagon I.G. said about Doug Feith's 2002 work -- to argue that Iran is responsible for a significant part of American deaths in Iraq.

Those prone to believe, along with the president, that Iran is fomenting the violence in Iraq have already drunk deep of the neocon Kool-Aid.

The rest of us can only shake our heads in wonder that the president thinks he can get away with this.

Even The Times Can't Hack Murtha's Bullshit

February 17, 2007 New York Times Editorial [Excerpts]

We fear that clever maneuvers like the one proposed by Representative John Murtha, reportedly with the backing of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to dress up a reduction in troop strength as a "support the troops" measure won't help contain the war or make American troops safer.

Mr. Murtha would link this year's war financing to the Pentagon's adoption of new deployment rules, including longer stretches from the battlefield for returning troops, more specialized training and better defensive equipment.

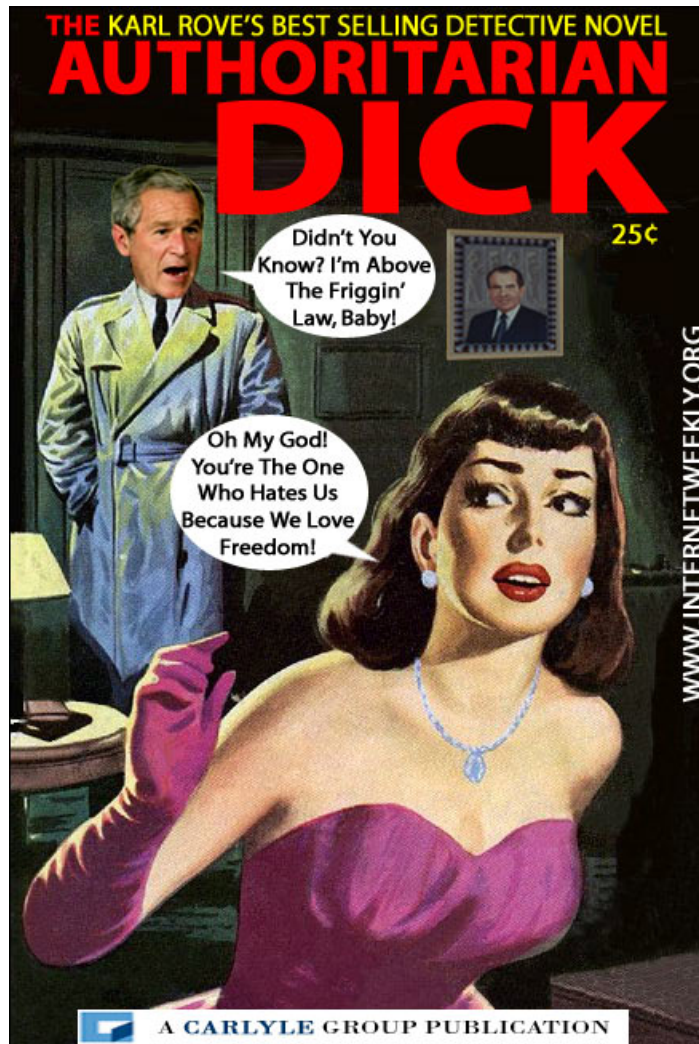
That would let representatives cast a politically safe vote for financing the war, while forcing the Pentagon to gradually reduce the number of active duty troops available to serve in Iraq.

This page has advocated many of the same reforms - but not as a back-door way of forcing lower troop numbers in Iraq.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)



[Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier, who sent this in.]

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