

## **GI SPECIAL 6B9:**

# **WE'RE HERE FOR YOU: ALL HOME NOW**



U.S. Army soldier wears a peace sign on his helmet as he patrols in Beijia village in Arab Jabour, south of Baghdad, Feb. 4, 2008. (AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo)

**From: J.D. Englehart, Iraq Veterans Against The War & The Military Project**

**To: GI Special**

**Sent: February 11, 2008 12:38 AM**

**Subject: Re: Helmet with peace sign**

**Thanks for the photo. This is a very powerful photo here.**

**A sure sign that the tide is beginning to turn.**

**And I don't think I'm being idealistic about this.**

**Even while I was in [Iraq], you would not have made it 5 feet in public with a peace sign on your kevlar, especially one this size and so obvious.**

**It speaks volumes that so many of his peers and superiors allowed it for so long.**

**Very reminiscent of another time and another war, eh?**

**This is truly exciting.**

**-Jeff**

**MORE:**

**“Marines At The Forward Bases  
Sometimes Put Oil In The Power  
Steering System, Or Brake Fluid In  
The Radiator”**

**“One Time I Had To Drain The Gas Tank  
And I Found Anti-Freeze”**

January 11, 2008 By Christian Lowe, Fromthefront.military.com [Excerpts]

It all seemed to be going so smoothly. Sure, the unit was an hour late to pick me up. But you gotta be ready for that when traveling in a war zone. They don't work on your schedule over here.

I made it down to the command post for 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines -- a Hawaii-based unit that's been here since August. The plan was to head out with them in a town called Karmah for a couple days to see how security has improved since some tough fighting this past summer.

Then I asked them how their Humvees had been holding up.

“Pretty good,” one of the Marines replied.

No sooner had we left the back gate on our way to Combat Outpost Delta, where 3/3's Lima Company is based, than the vehicle commander radioed his team leader: “Gunny, you know your Humvee is smoking?”

Though we tried for another 100 or so yards, pushing on for the rest of the five-mile trip was not an option.

We had to tow it back to Camp Fallujah for repair or a switch of Humvee.

I was wishing I hadn't asked anything about the jeeps...

A blown radiator, a screwy Chameleon anti-IED system and a Blue Force Tracker on the fritz, kept us at Fallujah for eight more hours.

Each time we thought we were free to go, a new problem cropped up.

The maintenance guys told me many of the earlier problems with the Humvee had been fixed.

With new suspensions, more powerful engines and a rebuilt power steering system, major problems are kept at bay.

Problem is, it's the minor ones that'll keep you from getting to your destination most of the time.

**They told me Marines at the forward bases sometimes put oil in the power steering system, or brake fluid in the radiator.**

**“One time I had to drain the gas tank and I found anti-freeze,” one of them said.**



**MORE:**

# **DID IT BEFORE; CAN DO IT AGAIN**



**Vietnam Soldiers: Their Resistance Stopped An Imperial War**

## **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, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657

**Quit Whining And Pissing On Everybody In Sight  
With Your Condescending, Finger-Pointing  
Bullshit About How Stupid & Apathetic Americans  
Are:**

**If You Don't Spend Time In The Real World Reaching  
Out To Real Troops, You Have Nothing Whatsoever To  
Sneer About. Just Shut The Fuck Up And Get The Fuck  
Out Of The Way**

**“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**

**“The military are the final, essential weak point of Bush and Cheney.” David McReynolds 9.29.07**

## **IRAQ WAR REPORTS**

### **Family Remembers Upstate NY Soldier Killed In Iraq Bomb Explosion**

2/12/2008 ALEXANDRIA BAY, N.Y. (AP)

A 10th Mountain Division soldier from upstate New York was killed in Iraq when his vehicle was hit with a roadside bomb, according to the soldier's family

Pfc. Jack Sweet, 19, of Alexandria Bay, was killed Friday, said his father, Glenn Sweet.

Sweet was a Humvee driver with the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry. Glenn Sweet said his son had always wanted to join the military and planned for a career in the Army.

When he was younger, Sweet was a member of the Jefferson County Young Marines. “He loved what he was doing,” Sweet told The Watertown Daily Times.

Sweet went through basic training last April and was later stationed at Fort Drum. His unit was sent to Kirkuk province in September. “He was so happy to finally get a chance to do his part,” Sweet said.

The younger Sweet was home for Christmas and spent the time visiting with family and friends, telling stories about his time in Iraq. Sweet said he liked hearing about what his son was doing and was proud of all of his accomplishments.

“He's my hero,” Sweet said.

The younger Sweet attended Alexandria Central School and earned a general equivalency diploma.

Alexandria High School Principal Ronald Hochmuth said he had known Sweet since the seventh grade and that he was full of life.

“He always had a twinkle in his eye,” Hochmuth said.

The principal said the school held a moment of silence for Sweet and the flag was at half-staff Monday. He said counselors were on hand to help students deal with the death. In addition, students were collecting stories and pictures of Sweet for a eulogy.

Sweet's family said funeral arrangements would be made in the next few days.

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## **400 Rocket Attacks On British Basra Base In 2007**

12 Feb 2008 PA News

British troops at Basra Air Station were attacked 400 times by rockets last year, Defence Secretary Des Browne said. Mr Browne, who released the figures in a written parliamentary answer, said the total number of attacks on the base in southern Iraq was 406 in 2007.

The numbers peaked in April, May, June and July in which there were at least two rocket attacks a day on average, at 64, 77, 76 and 74 respectively.

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### **REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE: ALL HOME NOW**



U.S. soldiers patrol in the Jurf al-Sakhir area south of Baghdad, January 21, 2008.  
(Stringer/Reuters)

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## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**

### **Car Bomb Wounds Foreign Occupation Soldier In Delaram; Nationality Not Announced**

1.12.08 (AP) & AFP

A car bomber detonated his explosives next to a NATO convoy, wounding a soldier, officials said Tuesday. The police spokesman for western Afghanistan, Abdul Raof Ahmadi, said the attack took place on the main highway from the southern city of Kandahar to the main western city of Herat.

The bomb attack in the Delaram district of Farah province wounded one soldier and damaged a NATO vehicle, said Maj. Richelle Dowdell of NATO's International Security Assistance Force. She did not identify the nationality of the wounded soldier.

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### **Pakistani Ambassador To Afghanistan Missing**

Feb. 11 (Xinhua) -- Pakistani ambassador to Afghanistan Tariq Azizuddin went missing in the tribal region while on way to Afghanistan on Monday, Foreign Office spokesman Muhammad Sadiq said.

The ambassador left Peshawar for Kabul on road at 11 a.m. local time (0600 GMT), but did not reach the border town of Torkham, according to local TV channel ARY One World. Local authorities of Khyber agency have also confirmed that the ambassador has gone missing.

Reports said that Tariq Azizuddin was last seen at Ali Masjid check post on the main road linking Kabul and Peshawar, capital city of North West Frontier Province in Pakistan. Then there has been no contact with the ambassador, his guard and driver, said the TV channel reports.

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## **TROOP NEWS**

# **IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR**

**Brooklyn, New York:  
Winter Soldier II Fundraiser**



From: Ben Chitty, Vietnam Veterans Against The War  
Sent: February 06, 2008  
Subject: Brooklyn Sunday 2/17 5pm IVAW Winter Soldier fundraiser

## **Film And Talk**

**Feb 17, Sunday  
5-7PM**

**Vox Pop**

**1022 Cortelyou Road, Brooklyn NY 11218**

**Subway: Q to Cortelyou or F to Ditmas**

**[www.voxpopnet.net](http://www.voxpopnet.net)**

**Telephone: 718 940 2084**

From Jose Vasquez, Iraq Veterans Against The War

Join us to raise funds for the NYC Chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) in support of their historic Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan event in March 2008. We will screen an excerpt of the 1971 film Winter Soldier followed by speakers from IVAW and Vietnam Veterans Against the War. There will also be a raffle for prizes. Tell a friend and bring a veteran!

co-sponsored by Brooklyn for Peace  
<http://www.brooklynpeace.org>



Iraq Veterans Against the War NYC Chapter email:  
nyc@ivaw.org: web: www.myspace.com/ivawnyc

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# **IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR**

## **New York City Winter Soldier II Fundraiser**



**Thurs. Feb. 21st 7-9 PM (Doors Open 6:30)**

**NYC Society for Ethical Culture  
2 W. 64th St (at Central Park West)**

**Iraq & Afghanistan Vets FREE**

**Students \$5**

**Adult members of the peace Community \$20**

A Greeting From Pete Seeger (Tape)

Panels will include:

Vietnam Veterans with/a segment of the original Winter Soldier (Detroit 1971)  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans (looking forward to WSII in D.C. March 2008)  
IVAW members in Canada (they refused to go back to Iraq)

**MUSIC BY MEETLIAH**

Reserve your tkts through your local peace group (reserve a block of seats) or call: 212-228-0450 ext. 104 (IVAW)

Lv Message at: 845-358-5709 or 212-678-7311  
<http://www.veteransforpeace.org/vfpnyevents.htm>

All \$\$ goes to Winter Soldier II in D.C. Mar. 13-15.

<http://ivaw.org/wintersoldier>

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## Winter Soldier Film And Discussion



From: Joe Urgo

Subject: Winter Soldier film and discussion

Date: 12 Feb 2008

**WHEN: Sunday February 17th, 1:15pm**

**WHERE: Community Church NYC, Assembly Hall, 40  
east 35th St. @ Park Ave., New York City**

**ADMISSION: Free, donations appreciated**

## **SPECIAL GUEST: Joe Urgo – Organizer Winter Soldier 1970-1972**

Aria-aperta.org [Excerpt]

We are extremely pleased to be able to present another very special film this month.

“WINTER SOLDIER” is an historically important film. It is a collectors item that powerfully captures an event organized over 35 years ago by Vietnam Vets Against The War that proved to be a watershed in the course of the war in Vietnam. Next month a similar event is being planned in Washington D.C. by Iraq Vets Against The War.

**A Vietnam Vet, an organizer of that original meeting and lifelong anti war activist Joe Urgo will be our guest speaker after the film.**

In February 1971, one month after the revelations of the My Lai massacre, an astonishing public inquiry into war crimes committed by American forces in Vietnam was held at a Howard Johnson motel in Detroit.

The Vietnam Veterans Against the War organized this event called the Winter Soldier Investigation.

More than 125 veterans spoke of atrocities they had witnessed and committed.

Though the event was attended by press and television news crews, almost nothing was reported to the American public. Yet, this unprecedented forum marked a turning point in the anti-war movement.

Sponsor: Resistance Cinema.

Info: <http://www.aria-aperta.org/AriaAperta/Projects/resistanceCinema.html>

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**“I Wish (The Enemy) Would Just  
Blow Mine Up So I Could Be Done  
With It”**

**[Stryker Combat Vehicle Reviewed  
By U.S. Soldiers In Iraq]**

# **“It’s A Piece,” Another MGS Platoon Member Chimed In. “Nothing Works On It”**

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

January 30, 2008 By Christian Lowe, Military.com

**BAQUBAH, Iraq - The newest version of the Army’s popular Stryker combat vehicle is garnering poor reviews here from Soldiers assigned to man its tank-like hull.**

The General Dynamics Corp.-built Mobile Gun System looks like a typical eight-wheeled Stryker, except for a massive 105mm gun mounted on its roof. The gun fires three different types of projectiles, including explosive rounds, tank-busters and a “canister round” that ejects hundreds of steel pellets similar to a shotgun shell.

But while the system looks good on paper and the Army’s all for it, Soldiers with the 4th Battalion of the 9th Infantry Regiment -- one of the first units to receive the new vehicle for their deployment to Iraq -- don’t have a lot of good things to say about it.

**“I wish (the enemy) would just blow mine up so I could be done with it,” said Spec. Kyle Handrahan, 22, of Anaheim, Calif., a tanker assigned to Alpha Company, 4/9’s MGS platoon.**

**“It’s a piece,” another MGS platoon member chimed in. “Nothing works on it.”**

The gripes stem from a litany of problems, including a computer system that constantly locks up, extremely high heat in the crew compartment and a shortage of spare parts.

**In one case, a key part was held up in customs on its way to Iraq, a problem one Soldier recognizes is a result of a new system being pushed into service before it’s ready.**

“The concept is good, but they still have a lot of issues to work out on it,” said Sgt. 1st Class Nathan Teimeier, Alpha, 4/9’s MGS platoon sergeant and a tanker by trade.

According to a Jan. 28 report by Bloomberg News, the 2008 Pentagon Authorization bill included language limiting funds for the MGS pending an Army report on fixes to the vehicle’s growing list of problems.

**The Pentagon’s director of Operational Test and Evaluation said in his annual report the vehicle was “not operationally effective,” Bloomberg reported.**

Soldiers here say the searing heat in the vehicles -- especially during Iraq’s blazing summer -- forces them to wear a complicated cooling suit that circulates cold water through tubing under their armor.

Ironically, Soldiers often complain the suit makes them cold, Teimeier said, adding to their vehicular woes.

Despite the poor review from DoD auditors, the Army is standing by its vehicle, Bloomberg reported.

“The Army has determined that the MGS is suitable and operationally effective,” Army spokesman, Lt. Col. Martin Downie, told the financial news service.

Where there is no debate is in the lethality of the vehicle’s firepower.

But Soldiers in the middle of a tough counterinsurgency fight here in Diyala province say commanders are reluctant to use the vehicle’s lethal gun on enemy strongholds out of concern of killing or wounding civilians.

As a result, many of the dozens of MGS vehicles go unused while precision air strikes have become increasingly prevalent -- along with the usual Soldier-driven raids.

That’s got MGS drivers here frustrated.

Not only do they have to deal with a complex system that gives them fits, but when it is working, they’re not allowed to employ the vehicle in combat.

“You can kick down doors and risk losing our guys,” Handrahan said. “Or I can just knock down the building from a (kilometer) away and call it a day.”

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## GET THE MESSAGE?



Citizens protesting against the Iraq war in Berkeley, California, February 12, 2008.  
REUTERS/Robert Galbraith

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# **IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP**

## **Resistance Action**



An insurgent attack on a gas pipeline transporting unrefined gas from Kirkuk's oil fields' largest refinery in Baiji, in the Laqlaq area about 15 km (10 miles) northeast of Baiji February 11, 2008. Along with a second attack, 25% of Iraqis electricity supply was shut down when fuel to produce electricity was cut. REUTERS/Sabah al-Bazee

Feb. 11, 2008 AP & Reuters & 12 Feb 2008 Reuters

A couple claiming to be journalists was stopped by police at the checkpoint Sunday and who detonated the car after police demanded to search it. Three policemen were killed and five were wounded, police in Fallujah said.

One policeman and seven insurgents were killed in clashes in Shirqat, 300 km (190 miles) north of Baghdad, police said. Three neighbourhood patrol policemen were wounded.

A car bomb wounded three policemen and two civilians on Monday when it exploded near a police station in the Doura district of southern Baghdad, police said.

A member of the U.S.-funded Anbar awakening council, Ahmed Mahmoud al-Nattah, survived an assassination attempt when guerrillas opened fire and wounded two of his guards near Ramadi, 110 km (68 miles) west of Baghdad, police said.

One Iraqi soldier was wounded in clashes in western Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, a military spokesman in Nineveh province said.

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE  
END THE OCCUPATION**

## FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

### Arrested At The White House



From: Richard Hastie  
To: GI Special  
Sent: February 11, 2008  
Subject: Arrested At The White House

**“In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.”**

George Orwell

Photo and caption from the I-R-A-Q (I Remember Another Quagmire) 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)

***Iraq Veteran Comments On News Story:  
Story: "Defective Helmets Killing U.S. Troops:  
War Profiteer Scum Manufactured 2.2 Million Helmets  
But Cheated On Kevlar Content To Boost Profits:  
Pentagon "Just Downplaying This. They're Embarrassed And  
Want It To Go Away And Would Not Admit To Anybody's Getting  
Hurt Or Even Killed"***

**From:** Alex R [Iraq Veterans Against The War]  
**To:** GI Special  
**Sent:** February 08, 2008  
**Subject:** Re: GI Special 6B5: Death By Kevlar

If I remember correctly, didn't you have info in GI Special on the new helmets when they were just coming out ?

If I remember correctly, I think there was a picture comparison between the old and new helmets, showing that the new ones were exposing more of the head/neck.

And now this.

It's just unbelievable. It's clear that the people in our government are truly insane. And it's OUR taxes paying for this..

**REPLY:**

Your memory is perfect.

There was an article some time ago that reported exactly what you write below, about cutting down on safety by cutting down on helmet size.

And now the cut down pieces of shit get manufactured with defective kevlar.

Criminals at work both times.

One might almost conclude that the government is in the hands of politicians for whom maintaining their own wealth and power, and the U.S. Empire, comes before anything else, and who couldn't care less how many honorable troops are betrayed, maimed and killed by and for their endless greed.



Respect

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**Troops Invited:**

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send email [contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org):. Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Replies confidential. Same address to unsubscribe.

**OCCUPATION REPORT**

***Good News For The Iraqi  
Resistance!!***

**U.S. Occupation Commands'  
Stupid Tactics Recruit Even More  
Fighters To Kill U.S. Troops**



Iraqi citizens warm their hands while a foreign occupation soldier from the U.S. Army confines them in their cooking area and others search their personal belongings during a

home invasion in the Azamiyah neighborhood in north Baghdad Feb. 10, 2008. (AP Photo/Anja Niedringhaus)

Iraqi citizens have no right to resist home invasions by occupation soldiers from the USA. If they do, they may be arrested, wounded, or killed.

**[There's nothing quite like invading somebody else's country and busting into their houses by force to arouse an intense desire to kill you in the patriotic, self-respecting civilians who live there.**

**[But your commanders know that, don't they? Don't they?]**

**"My sons and wife were very terrified," complained Muhannad Mihbas, 30, who said his brother and six cousins were taken in the sweeps. "Does the security plan mean arresting innocent people and scaring civilians at night?" BRIAN MURPHY, AP, Feb. 27, 2007**

**"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."**

## **U.S. Funded Militia Members On Strike; Also Refusing To Use New Iraqi Occupation Flags**



Strikers from the U.S. funded "Awakening Councils" demonstrate in Baquba February 11, 2008. Thousands took to the streets to demand that the town's police chief be sacked for alleged crimes, including supporting sectarian death squads. They carry the

Iraqi flag design from before the U.S. invasion, not the new one manufactured for the occupation. REUTERS/Stringer

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# **Wow!**

## **Here's A Ringing Vote Of Confidence In U.S.-Funded Militias: "But For The Time Being, U.S. Commanders Are Confident The Neighborhood Groups Won't Turn Against Them"**

February 12, 2008 By Michael Holden, Reuters [Excerpts]

About 80,000 men -- including former insurgents -- have been recruited, with most paid about \$300 a month by the military.

But while Tarmiya shows how effective the U.S.-backed units can be, it highlights both the strains on a program the Shi'ite-led government appears wary of embracing and the growing frustration among some guards over their long-term future.

In Tarmiya, mistrust was heightened when police detained Jassim's father, a local tribal sheikh who set up the unit, over accusations he was involved in violence.

He remains in Defence Ministry custody, U.S. military officials said, even though he had been cleared of any charges.

Officials have said most of the volunteers would be on the government's payroll by mid-2008.

That has not appeased suspicions on the ground in Tarmiya, where the volunteers man checkpoints in civilian clothing.

With AK-47 rifles dangling at their side, the only thing distinguishing them from militants is a pink ID card worn around their necks or reflective clothing so they can be identified by U.S. soldiers at night.

An end to cooperation could jeopardize hard-won security gains. But for the time being, U.S. commanders are confident the neighborhood groups won't turn against them.

An end to cooperation could jeopardize hard-won security gains.

But for the time being, U.S. commanders are confident the neighborhood groups won't turn against them.

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## **THIS IS WHO YOU'RE DYING FOR: BUSH'S DOG EATS WELL, DOESN'T IT?**



Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari in Moscow February 12, 2008.  
REUTERS/Alexander Natruskin

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

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

**HAPPY IRAQIS RECEIVE EDUCATIONAL  
BENEFITS THANKS TO THE KIND**

# **BENEVOLENCE OF THE U.S. OCCUPATION**



**Prisoners at the U.S. Interment Facility in western Baghdad participate in adult education classes taught by Iraqi educators**

**The prisoners are offered instruction in Arabic, English, mathematics and also information about the goodness of the U.S. government.**

**They are so eager to learn, and so thankful to the U.S. occupation regime that has provided them with this amazing opportunity to improve themselves, that a fence had to be built to keep them from overwhelming their kind teachers with gratitude.**

**All of these students promise enthusiastically that after they are free again, they will look up the U.S. occupation employees seen in this photo, and find a way to express their thanks up close and personal, no matter how long it takes, or where the students may have to go to find them.**

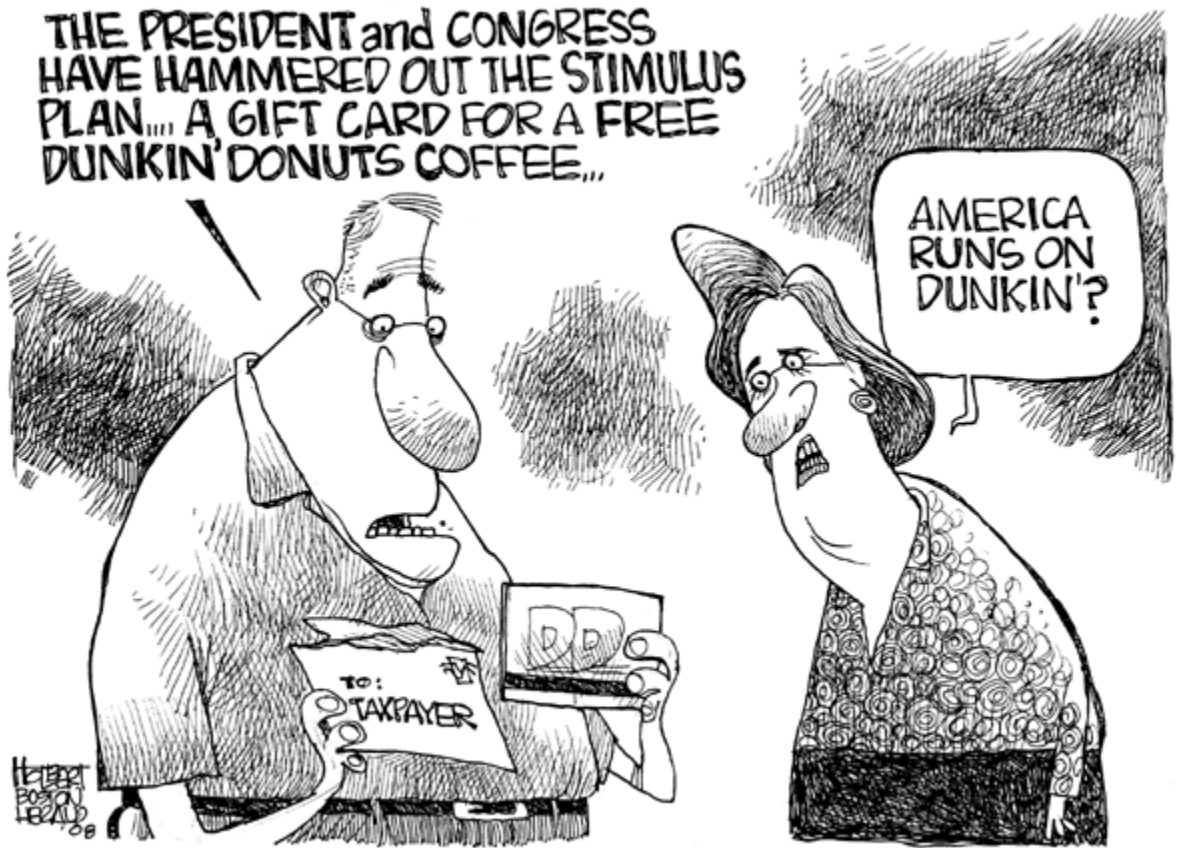
**People unaware of the quaint customs of the childlike, backward Iraqi people might think from this photo that the teachers are being ignored, or treated with contempt by the prisoners.**

**On the contrary, the detainees are so grateful for this opportunity to improve themselves that they are overwhelmed with emotion, and turn away because they are shy and do not wish the teachers and guards to see their tears of joy.**

**[REUTERS/Department of Defense/photo by U.S. Army Spc. Michael V. May]**

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## DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



© Boston Herald. Dist. by NEA, Inc.

## CLASS WAR REPORTS

**“I’m Not Frightened Of Him Any  
More. None Of Us Is”  
Chinese Sweatshop Workers Rise  
Up In Mutiny:**

**“The Working Class In China Will Get Stronger And Bring About Some Major Changes,” Says Ms Chan:  
“In The Past, Workers Would Just Swallow All The Insults And Humiliation They Suffered. Now They Resist And There Are A Lot Of Innovative Ways For Them To Fight Back”**



The wrecked Dingfu factory after it was destroyed by the workers.

[Thanks to NB, who sent this in. He writes: **This makes me think of Henry Ford’s comment on his workers: “...The immigrant is a good worker, but he has only one problem - he learns too quickly!...”**]

**Its factory owners are mostly privileged children of party officials – 90 per cent of China’s billionaires are the children of senior cadres – who have a reputation for spending more time in karaoke lounges than boardrooms.**

9th February 2008 By SIMON PARRY, The Daily Mail [Excerpts]

For years they toiled in appalling conditions, making cheap shoes for Western shoppers.

Then the workers at the Dingfu factory rose up in an unprecedented mutiny .....

The lone security guard could only stand aside helplessly, cowering as an angry crowd of 400 surged forward, smashing down the steel barricades outside the factory in southern China and forcing their way inside.

Some yelling, some crying tears of frustration, they fanned out across the deserted concrete complex, aiming kicks at their boss's abandoned 4x4. Then they ran through the workshops, offices and dormitories seeking some kind of retribution.

Thirty minutes later, their fury spent, they drifted back out across the trampled barricades, leaving for the last time the place where many of them had spent years of their working lives, carrying the only thing they could plunder: armfuls of shoes.

"What could I do? I was just one old man against a mob," recalls 66-year-old security guard Can Don Yi. "Of course I didn't try to stop them. In any case, they had a right to be angry. I felt sorry for them."

Two days before, the workers had been busy on the production lines of Dingfu factory in the town of Houjie, making brand-name shoes for British High Street shops such as Zara, Nine West and Sam & Libby.

Then local government officials marched in and announced that the company was bankrupt.

Penniless and cut off from their homes and families, the migrant workers – owed an average of four months' wages – found themselves shut out as the factory doors were sealed and court notices put up saying the Taiwanese owners were hundreds of thousands of pounds in debt.

At first they waited patiently at the factory gates.

Then, when it was clear there would be no jobs to return to and no one to help them get back the money they were owed, they took matters into their own hands.

Minutes after storming the factory gates, it became clear that anything of value at Dingfu had gone. The boss had fled China on the day the factory was forced to close, leaving his 4x4 on the factory forecourt.

On the front seat were a staff roster, a pile of lunch receipts and a business magazine.

But the factory closure is a scenario that has been repeated across southern China, where more than 1,000 shoe factories, around a fifth of the total, have closed down in the past year. Half of them have shut in the past three months and the majority of these were in Houjie, a concrete sprawl known as China's "Shoe Town".

Suddenly the nation's astonishing growth, which over the past decade and a half has been based on its ability to provide the world with cheap labour, is under threat and experts are questioning whether China will become the 21st Century superpower everyone predicted.

"Peer beneath the surface, and there is a weak China; one that is in long-term decline and even on the verge of collapse," says Gordon Chang, an economic analyst and



author of *The Coming Collapse Of China*. "The symptoms of decay are to be seen everywhere."

The principal reason for the decline is a simple refusal by migrant workers to put up with China's notorious sweatshop conditions any longer.

**Jenny Chan is chief co-ordinator of the pressure group Students and Scholars against Corporate Misbehaviour, which investigates factory conditions in southern China.**

**She says: "In the past, workers would just swallow all the insults and humiliation they suffered. Now they resist and there are a lot of innovative ways for them to fight back.**

"They collect money and they gather signatures. They use the shop floors and the dormitories to gather the collective forces to put themselves in better negotiating positions with factory owners and managers.

"They're also more mobile today. They have a network of contacts and they tend to hop from one job to another. They may not have high education levels but they have more knowledge. They have new horizons and far more possibilities in life than their parents had."

She adds: "They are able to use their mobile phones to receive news and send messages. Internet cafes are very important, too. They exchange news about which cities or which factories are recruiting and what they are offering, and that news spreads very quickly."

As a result, Ms Chan says, factories are seeing huge turnover rates.

"One electronics factory I visited had 36,000 workers and was experiencing a six per cent monthly turnover rate. That means about 2,000 workers leaving every month."

The contrast to the meek, submissive migrant worker of the Nineties could not be more pronounced.

In Houjie, scene of the uprising last November, some factories have tripled workers' salaries but there are still more than 100,000 vacancies.

At one factory a woman sits alone at a small wooden table on the pavement. Behind her is a large red banner announcing: "Workers wanted. Good rates of pay. Generous overtime allowances." It's already 2pm and she admits: "It's been a slow day. No one has stopped by so far."

The factory makes baby shoes for export to Europe. General manager Todd Cseng admits that the shortage of labour has become so acute and the cost of operating so high, due to a strengthened Chinese currency and EU tariffs on Chinese shoe imports, that his company is facing closure.

"They used to queue up outside for jobs but now we have to advertise in the street for employees," says Cseng.

“We have 500 workers here and we have vacancies for 700 more, but I don’t see any way we are going to be able to fill them. The migrant workers simply aren’t here any more.”

As he leads us around the half-empty factory floor, it is clear that even when they do find workers, they are not the ones who would have been recruited five years ago. Then, young women were preferred because they would work harder, learn faster and cause less trouble than older workers.

Now, the production lines are staffed by men in their 30s and 40s.

“My daughter used to come here to work and leave her baby son with me and my wife,” one 43-year-old male worker from Hunan province tells us. “Now I have a job here and she has been able to return home.”

Other factories in southern China are offering workers family rooms to allow them to bring their spouses and children from rural provinces to live with them.

But it has failed to stop the rot as workers vote with their feet against the prospect of life in a sweatshop.

At last year’s Chinese New Year holiday, an estimated 1.7million people went home from southern China to their families and never returned. Shoe factory owners expect the numbers to be even higher after this New Year, which was last week.

“Our workforce is getting older and production costs are getting higher,” says Cseng with a shrug. “We used to pay 500 yuan a month (£34.50). Now even if we offer three times that, with guaranteed overtime, we can’t get the people we need to fill the vacancies.”

He says the solution will be for his company to leave the increasingly expensive factory belt in southern China, where the first phase of the country’s extraordinary industrial revolution was forged.

“We will have to move either inland or out of China altogether,” he says. “It’s not political, it’s economic. A lot of Taiwanese companies are moving to inner provinces because the land is cheap, the labour is cheap and the local governments don’t insist on expensive anti-pollution measures as they do here. It’s just too expensive to operate in southern China today.”

The impact of the exodus has already been devastating for Houjie. The town is littered with empty factories, and shop owners whose livelihoods used to depend on customers from the factories are now struggling to survive.

“It’s frightening how quiet it’s suddenly become,” says Li Xiao, who runs a small shop opposite one deserted plant. “We used to have so many customers from the factory. They would come out and buy cigarettes and food and drinks, especially in the evenings.

“Now there are no customers. They’ve all gone away. We’re waiting for another factory to move in and for workers to come back so we can get some business back. But it’s been two months now and no one has even come to look at the place.”

Until October last year, the factory turned out sports shoes at the rate of almost one million pairs a month.

Today, the four-storey complex looks as if a bomb has been detonated inside it. Most of the windows are smashed and the old factory floors are covered in rubble, broken glass, shoe soles and empty boxes.

“When it closed, the owner sold everything inside and then rubbish collectors plundered the place,” explains Li Xiao. “Anything they didn’t take, they smashed. That’s why it looks the way it does.”

Houjie and other towns like it across southern China face becoming vast wastelands of concrete where no one lives. At the same time, Western firms, including companies such as Marks & Spencer and Primark, must consider relocating production to countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, India and Bangladesh, where labour costs are in some cases lower.

And with the foundation of its economic success in decline, China’s future as a global superpower is in question. The country’s leaders have acknowledged the looming crisis and are belatedly trying to encourage high-tech industries.

But unlike Japan and India, which have built their success largely on technology industries, China lacks both the skilled workers to step up to the challenge and the captains of industry to oversee the necessary change.

**Its factory owners are mostly privileged children of party officials – 90 per cent of China’s billionaires are the children of senior cadres – who have a reputation for spending more time in karaoke lounges than boardrooms.**

They are ill-equipped to act as innovators and entrepreneurs.

Experts fear this lack of imagination and flair, combined with the country’s widespread corruption and abuse of power, could soon bring about a calamity in the world’s fastest-growing economy.

Of course, the end of China’s sweatshop conditions is to be welcomed, and many observers are looking forward to the emergence of a politically influential labour movement similar to the ones that shaped so much of post-war politics in the United States and Britain.

**“The working class in China will get stronger and bring about some major changes,” says Ms Chan.**

“These forces from the bottom up are very important in making a better China; a China that is more democratic and participatory.”

Meanwhile, time stands stubbornly still at the Dingfu factory complex in Houjie. Behind the sealed iron doors, shoe boxes lie in untidy piles, dusty racks of unwanted clothes hang outside deserted dormitories and half-finished shoes sit on the production line waiting for an army of workers who will never return.

**Fearing more unrest, the local government paid token compensation out of its own funds to the workers who were shut out of the factory, and all but a handful have taken jobs at other firms or returned home.**

Some of those left behind continue to stop by every day, however, to watch for the return of their runaway boss, whose 4x4 stands, coated in dust, on deflating tyres in the factory forecourt.

“Is he here? Have you seen him?” a 40-year-old man asks in hope rather than expectation as he watches us emerge from the factory. “I just want the money he owes me and I’ll keep coming back.

**“I’m not frightened of him any more. None of us is.”**

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