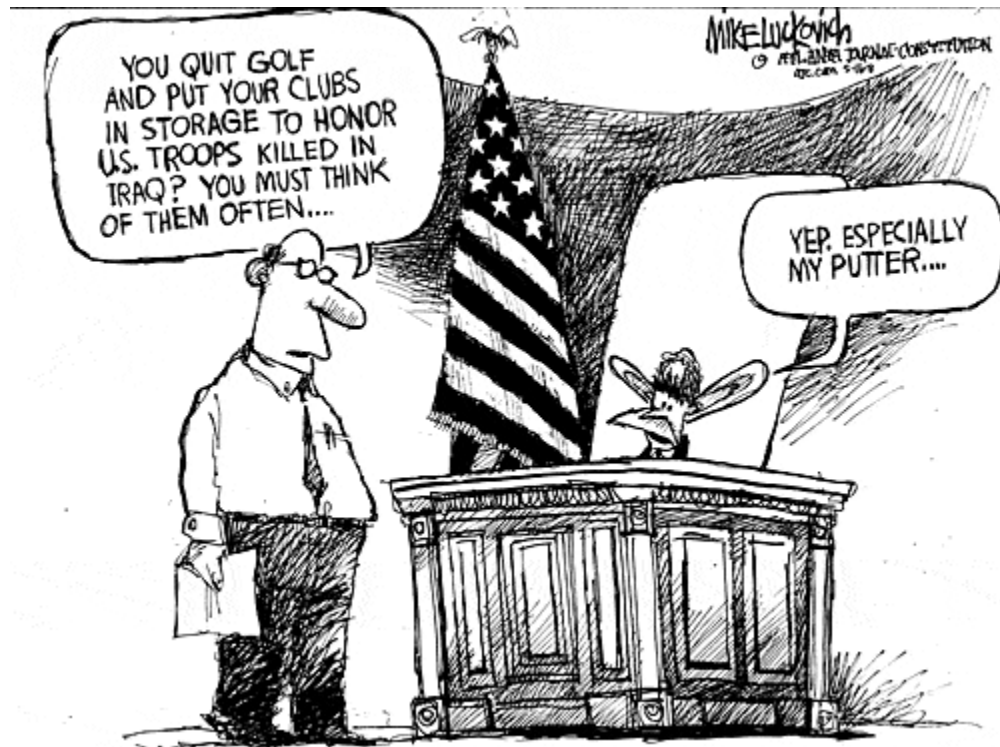


## GI SPECIAL 6E13:



**“The Platoon Was  
Supposed To Stay Just  
96 Hours. Now There’s  
No End In Sight”  
“I Guess We Didn’t Expect This  
Much Resistance For Their  
Cause”**

# **“Before His Stint Here, He’d Sympathized With Iraqis Who Lived In Misery And Detested Foreign Occupation”**

## **“It’s Always The Poor And Lower Middle Class That Fight. Look At Us”**

[Thanks to Ward Reilly, Veterans For Peace, who sent this in.]

April 18, 2008 By Leila Fadel, McClatchy Newspapers [Excerpts]

Three weeks after U.S. troops were ordered into the sprawling Shiite Muslim slum of Sadr City to stop rockets from raining down on the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad’s Green Zone, they’re caught in crossfire between Shiite militiamen and the mostly Shiite Iraqi army.

American soldiers who try to move around this urban area, even in the U.S. Army’s state-of-the-art Stryker armored vehicles, risk being ambushed.

**The soldiers in a platoon from the 25th Infantry Division quickly learned that holding a position puts them in the line of fire from both the Mahdi Army militia and the U.S.-backed Iraqi forces.**

The American soldiers can’t go on the offensive from the run-down two-story house they commandeered in south Sadr City, but must hunker down and wait to get shot at.

An Iraqi family evacuated the house just before the fighting started. It has rats and clogged toilets but no electricity or hot water, and no air conditioning or heating. The American soldiers have had one shower and barely a change of clothes since they got here.

Things got a lot worse last weekend, when bullets started flying at the house, targeting soldiers on the rooftop and in the rooms on the second floor.

“Where’s it coming from?” the soldiers on the roof shouted to one another.

“I think it’s coming from the north and west,” one soldier said over the radio. “Is the Iraqi army shooting at us?”

**Three times that day, the Iraqi army unit just up the road from the house was told to hold its fire because its erratic shots were hitting the house that its American allies occupied.**

### **Three times, the Iraqis kept right on shooting.**

“They told them to stop shooting,” Lt. Adam Bowen, the platoon leader, told his men of the 3rd platoon, Bravo Company, 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team of the 25th Infantry Division, from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

More shots rang out.

“Well, that lasted,” said Sgt. David Stine, 28, of Iowa, Ill., laughing.

One floor below, in a green pastel living room decorated with a picture of a Japanese garden and a bouquet of plastic roses, Spc. Matthew Fisher of Evansville, Ill., pointed his weapon out the window, searching for snipers on the rooftops.

His buddies call him “I Spy” because of his knack for spotting things and sometimes seeing things that aren’t there.

Bullets slammed into the green pastel door with a small window at the top, where Sgt. Jared Hicks, 23, of Three Rivers, Mich., stood guard behind a pile of bricks taken from the roof of the house, the muzzle of his rifle poking through the broken glass.

Just before 4 p.m., Bravo Company’s commander went to the Iraqi army checkpoints up the road to demand that the Iraqis stop shooting.

Fisher looked out his window at the rooftops and saw a military-age man running on the roof across from him.

“Is that IA or JAM?” he asked, using the initials for the Iraqi army and for Jaysh al Mahdi, the Arabic name of anti-American Shiite cleric Muqtada al Sadr’s Mahdi Army militia.

The Americans couldn’t shoot until they were sure who was on the roof.

**Fisher looked at the sky and saw a flock of pigeons flying back and forth, following the directions of a man waving a flag. It appeared that militia groups were signaling each other.**

Three weeks ago, Bowen’s 3rd platoon was doing what it regarded as peacekeeping patrols, meeting local officials and tribal leaders in a relatively peaceful area north of Taji, which is about 12 miles north of Baghdad, checking out suspicious vehicles and searching for weapons caches.

Bowen’s 3rd platoon soldiers liked what they were doing in Taji, but in Sadr City, residents view U.S. soldiers as occupiers and worry that wherever the Americans are, trouble will follow.

“Before we came out here, I considered us peacekeepers, but now we’re considered the bad guys,” said Staff Sgt. Travis Evans, 33, of Seattle.

**The platoon was supposed to stay just 96 hours. Now there’s no end in sight.**

**“I guess we didn’t expect this much resistance for their cause,” Evans said.**

Amid the shooting at the roof and the second floor, Bowen was fighting his own battle against the stopped-up toilets on the ground floor. His weapons were duct tape and a pipe. Closing off the top of the pipe with the tape, he used the makeshift plunger to unclog the Eastern-style toilets, porcelain holes in the floor.

"It's times like this I realize the duality of war," he said. "The guys upstairs are shooting at people, and we're trying to figure out how to shove poop down a hole."

Bowen went to work pushing the human waste of his soldiers.

For the men of the 3rd platoon, life in Sadr City has been predictable boredom pierced by moments of sheer terror. In the 16 days they'd been in the district, they'd had one 12-hour break and suffered through an ambush by the Mahdi Army that destroyed one of their vehicles and nearly killed some of their men.

They lie on the uncomfortable sofas in the heat and talk about home, real toilets, hot meals and girlfriends, their wives and their children.

Over the radio, the soldiers heard that Sadr's brother-in-law had been killed, and that the assassination could increase the violence.

**They were told not to refer to the enemy as JAM but as insurgents or special groups.**

**"That's retarded," Bowen said. They were caught in a political crossfire as well as a real one.**

"I hate Sadr City," Bowen said.

**Before his stint here, he'd sympathized with Iraqis who lived in misery and detested foreign occupation.**

**"It's always the poor and lower middle class that fight. Look at us."**

**Now he finds it hard to sympathize, with bullets flying at his men.**

**Over the radio, a soldier reworked the words to Gloria Gaynor's song "I will survive."**

**"There once was a man, he was petrified," he sang. "He was scared every time he heard a ricochet off his vehicle."**

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## **IRAQ WAR REPORTS**

### **IED Kills U.S. Soldier In Salah ad-Din;**

## Another Wounded

May 18, 2008 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE  
No. 20080518-13

TIKRIT, Iraq – One Multi-National Division – North Soldier was killed in an improvised explosive device attack in the Salah ad-Din Province when the Soldiers' vehicle was struck by an IED, May 18.

One MND-N Soldiers was also wounded in the attack.

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### **FUTILE EXERCISE: ONLY 5 MILLION MORE TO GO: ALL HOME NOW!**



A U.S. army soldier from 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, blindfolds a detainee during a night raid on the outskirts of Muqadiyah, Diyala province, about 90 kilometers (60 miles) north of Baghdad, Iraq. (AP Photo/Marko Drobnjakovic)

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## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**

**Foreign Occupation Soldier Killed,  
Another Seriously Wounded In Zabul;  
Nationality Not Announced**

May 18 Associated Press

Sunday, a roadside bomb hit a U.S. military vehicle in the southern Zabul province, killing one coalition service member and an Afghan civilian.

A statement from the U.S.-led coalition said another service member was seriously injured in the attack.

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## **UNREMITTING HELL ON EARTH; ALL HOME NOW**



A US Marine narrowly avoids death near Garmser in Helmand Province. The soldier ducks just in time as insurgent gunfire blasts away rock from the top of his trench, just inches from his face. By Matthew Moore, REUTERS 5.19.08

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## **Resistance Action**

May 18 Associated Press & May 19 (KUNA)

A bomber blew himself up next to a police convoy in southern Afghanistan on Sunday. Five policemen were wounded

In eastern Nangarhar province, suspected Taliban militants shot and killed two police officers Sunday in Khogyani district, said Mohammad Hashim Ghamsharik, spokesman for the provincial governor. He said the two men had just been dispatched to Nangarhar on Saturday as reinforcements from Kabul. They walked outside their police post and were attacked by insurgents from a nearby village, Ghamsharik said.

Four Afghan soldiers and a civilian translator with the coalition troops were injured in an attack in southeastern Afghanistan on Monday, local officials said. The attack was carried out in Paktika province.

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

## **TROOP NEWS**

# **2nd Annual Memorial Week Demonstration**

**Wednesday, May 28, 2008  
4:30 – 6:00 PM**

**National Guard Armory  
Liberty Road and Teaneck Road, Teaneck NJ 07666**

**Honor The War Dead By Demanding All Troops  
Home NOW!**

NJ Transit buses stop at armory.  
Parking available on streets and at Foster Village parking lot, not at the armory.

May 18, 2008 New Jersey Veterans For Peace

Keep the money here for people's needs: housing, health care, education, jobs, and care for returning veterans

On Wednesday of Memorial Week, hundreds of military families, veterans, students, and neighbors will join together to hold a nearly 4000 foot-long banner with the names of all of the U.S. troops and many Iraqi people who have been killed in the illegal and immoral occupation of Iraq.

Please join us as we remember the dead and call on the government to stop funding the occupation and to bring all of the troops home NOW. Bring the contractor army of 180,000 home, too.

We need to keep the funds here to take care of the troops when they get home and to take care of people's needs. See the American Friends Service Committee's COST OF WAR exhibit at the demonstration.

Over 350 volunteers are needed to hold the 20 foot long segments of the banner. Sign up to participate at [www.bergenjustice.net](http://www.bergenjustice.net) or call: (201) 808-6004.

**Please bring canned and boxed food and baby supplies directly to the Family Assistance Center at the National Guard Armory to help the families of the NJ National Guard.**

Use the Ward Plaza entrance.

Sponsors:

Military Families Speak Out (Bergen County) [www.mfsobergencounty.org](http://www.mfsobergencounty.org),  
Veterans for Peace, Chapter 21, NJ. [www.veteransforpeace.org](http://www.veteransforpeace.org),  
Iraq Veterans Against the War – New Jersey. [Newark@IVAW.org](mailto:Newark@IVAW.org),  
Bergen Peace and Justice Coalition. [www.bergenjustice.net](http://www.bergenjustice.net),  
Teaneck Peace and Justice Coalition.  
NJ Peace Action. [www.njpeaceaction.org](http://www.njpeaceaction.org)  
NJ Coalition to Bring Troops Home NOW! [www.bringtroopshomenj.org](http://www.bringtroopshomenj.org)  
NJ, People's Organization for Progress – Bergen County  
American Muslim Union  
WITS – World Improvement by Tenafly Students  
Ft. Lee Peace Vigil  
Codepink-Madison NJ  
Bergen Grassroots. [www.bergengrassroots.org](http://www.bergengrassroots.org)  
Bergen County Green Party  
Central Unitarian Church Social Responsibility Committee  
North Jersey Socialist Party  
NJ Citizen Action. [www.njcitizenaction.org](http://www.njcitizenaction.org)  
Rockland Coalition for Peace and Justice  
Additional sponsoring groups are welcome.

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**“There Sure As Hell Is A Draft  
Going On”**

**“I Didn't Sign Up For The Navy To Be  
In The Army”**

**With Six Weeks Combat Training,  
“Here We Are Being Shipped Off To Iraq**



# To Basically Serve In The Infantry. It's Ridiculous"

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

April 8, 2008 by Joshua Frank, Anti-war.com [Excerpts]

"There sure as hell is a draft going on," the passenger sitting next to me said grudgingly as the flight attendant handed him a ginger ale on our way into Los Angeles last week.

"I signed up to be in the Navy, not the damn Army."

It will be his third deployment to Iraq in four years but his first to be served on shore.

Thousands of Navy and Air Force personnel are now serving nontraditional roles in Iraq – posts they never signed up for.

**Steven, who asked that I not use his last name in print, said he's to receive six weeks of weapons training at a California Army base before being flown over to Iraq for a year-long deployment.**

"We've all heard of the stop-loss policy, there's even a new movie about it, but few know about what else is happening in our armed forces right now," Steven explained.

**"The backdoor draft is real, for sure, but here we are being shipped off to Iraq to basically serve in the infantry. It's ridiculous."**

The Department of Defense reports that sailors and Air Force members are carrying out many different missions in Iraq, from traditional duties in the air and sea to construction jobs, medical operations, civil affairs, customs inspection, security, and detention operations.

Most are promised non-combat roles in Iraq, but many have found themselves to be in harm's way once they arrive.

In 2007 the Navy sent roughly 2,200 "individual augmentees," as the service calls them, to handle combat-related duties with Marine and Army units stationed in Iraq.

As of early April 2008, 92 Navy and 46 Air Force personnel had been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, with those numbers sure to rise as the U.S. troop surge continues into its second year.

On March 31, 400 Navy reservists who had received training at military bases in Virginia were shipped back to Iraq.

Such a trend has increased over the past several years. In 2006, for example, there were 4,000 Air Force members in Iraq, but that number has jumped significantly. Now the Pentagon reports that over 6,000 are to serve in the country by year's end.

“Technically, these combat-related assignments do not violate service members’ contracts,” said Lawrence Korb, who handled manpower as assistant secretary of defense during the Reagan administration. “But many ... are not volunteering for these jobs – they’re being told to do them.”

Aside from combat-related roles, however, sailors and Air Force members have been deployed in order to protect U.S. economic interests in the region – from oil pipelines to Halliburton’s numerous reconstruction projects.

And that’s what seems to have sailors like Steven irked at the troop surge and his new job in Iraq.

**“It’s a draft, plain and simple. I don’t care what they call it,” Steven told me as our plane landed at LAX.**

**“I didn’t sign up for the Navy to be in the Army. But I’m going because I don’t feel I have a choice. I have children to feed and a mortgage to pay.”**

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## **Iraq Veterans Against The War Speaker Tells Gathering Near Fort Drum That “Anti-War People Are No Longer A Minority Fighting For Legitimacy. We’re The Majority”**



**An African American veteran spoke and read a poem dedicated to his wife, who has been called up for a second tour of duty in Iraq.**

**As she sat in the audience holding their 18-month-old son, his poem expressed the anguish he felt on her last tour, as he worried that a pair of soldiers would show up at his door at 6am with heartbreaking news.**

To: GI Special

From: Dee Knight, Military Project

Sent: May 18, 2008

Subject: Different Drummer Café Stars at Armed Forces Day near Fort Drum, NY

The Different Drummer Internet Café – perhaps the first GI resistance “coffeehouse” of the Iraq war era – was the “star” of a Fort Drum Spring Festival in Watertown, NY on May 17, Armed Forces Day. The Drummer was bursting at the seams, as festival participants spilled on to the mall walkway outside while over 50 danced and celebrated inside. The Drummer is located in an old fashioned arcade in the center of Watertown – very convenient to GIs at Fort Drum.

It sports several computers with Internet access, loads of snacks, access to a bar and coffee shop just feet away in the weather-protected arcade, and a well stocked literature rack with complete sets of IVAW’s “Sit-Rep” newsletter, the Military Project’s “Traveling Soldier,” and other items of interest.

The festival was organized by a coalition called New York State Direct Action for Peace, together with Iraq Veterans Against the War and Citizen Soldier. It was the culmination of a ten-day march for peace that originated in three distant points – Itaca in the south (125 miles away), Rochester in the west (150 miles), and Utica in the east (115 miles) – and converged in Syracuse for the final march to Watertown. Participants also came from New York City, over 300 miles away.

Organizers said “we were walking to support the soldiers at Fort Drum. Fort Drum deploys more soldiers to Iraq than any other base in the country. As IVAW grows in number we want to support their call to end the occupation of Iraq and end the deployment of their fellow soldiers to Iraq. Their testimony at Winter Soldier urges all of us to reach out to soldiers to show our support and end the carnage of soldiers and Iraqi citizens.”

“We will offer our support to the soldiers as they make the hard decision whether or how to resist participating in an unjust and illegal war,” the organizers said.

**An IVAW speaker kicked off celebration of the successful “long march,” noting the very strong support from residents along the way.**

**He reported a sign one observer held saying “bring my sweetheart home,” and another from the father of two GIs who fought in Iraq who said “I used to be against you people, but now I’m completely with you!”**

**The speaker also recalled that a local American Legion chapter hosted the marchers for dinner and let them stay in their hall for the night.**

**He said “anti-war people are no longer a minority fighting for legitimacy. We’re the majority, and the Bush administration is fighting a losing battle for legitimacy over its discredited war policies.”**

One march participant, a veteran of the Korean War, told us he was shocked at the treatment today’s Iraq vets receive from the government, noting that both he and his wife went to college through the GI Bill. He said his generation of soldiers suffered many of the same problems of combat stress and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He

expressed dismay at the way the Bush administration has ignored the needs of today's vets – leading to more than 1,000 suicides per month last year among Iraq veterans.

A local member of Veterans for Peace distributed copies of a letter to the editor of the Watertown Times, signed by veterans of World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Bush senior's "Desert Storm," calling for support for GI's at Fort Drum and local Iraq war veterans who need help with PTSD. The letter told of the group's encounter with the Ft. Drum commander at the official Armed Forces Day parade in Watertown, in which they expressed their concerns but were brushed off.

**An African American veteran spoke and read a poem dedicated to his wife, who has been called up for a second tour of duty in Iraq.**

**As she sat in the audience holding their 18-month-old son, his poem expressed the anguish he felt on her last tour, as he worried that a pair of soldiers would show up at his door at 6am with heartbreaking news.**

The couple received a tremendous out-pouring of sympathy, including assurances that whatever decisions they need to make would have strong support – legal, moral and practical. The day's activities, and the ten-day march that preceded them, demonstrated that a sea change has happened in public sentiment about the war among the general public in upstate New York.

It also showed that the strategy of galvanizing civilian anti-war forces in alliance with IVAW and Veterans for Peace is generating a crescendo of support for GI's in their struggle for the right to resist, and to defend their rights.



U.S. Army soldier patrols Beijia village, Iraq Feb. 4, 2008. (AP Photo/Maya Alleruzzo)

## **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. Phone: 917.677.8057

## **FORWARD OBSERVATIONS**

# **Winter Soldier II Investigation**



From: Mike Hastie  
To: GI Special  
Sent: May 18, 2008  
Subject: Winter Soldier II Investigation

**Winter Soldier II Investigation**  
**Silver Spring, Maryland**  
**March 13-16, 2008**

**This picture of Jon Turner was taken two seconds after he ripped his medals off of**

his shirt, and threw them into the audience.  
The hair on my back stood up,  
as he received a standing ovation.  
As a Vietnam veteran, I was emotionally  
vindicated, and felt proud to be in the room.

Mike Hastie  
U.S. Army Medic

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)

## OCCUPATION REPORT

***So Much For Those Silly Lies  
About “Iraqi Sovereignty”  
U.S. Military Dictatorship Ignores  
Iraqi Court Orders To Release  
Prisoners Found Guilty Of Nothing  
At All;  
Bush’s Whores Say “Local Law And  
Court Rulings Do Not Apply”  
“They Think They Can Do Whatever They  
Like Because They Have The Upper  
Hand In This Country”***

May. 18, 2008 The Associated Press

BAGHDAD - In the eyes of Iraqi justice, Yahya Ali Humadi is a free man.

To the U.S. military, he’s another of the detainees in yellow jumpsuits held at the sprawling Camp Bucca in southern Iraq.

Humadi — ordered released nine months ago after an Iraqi judge dropped all charges — now spends his days in a legal limbo.

It's one that has confronted and confounded thousands of other Iraqis since 2003 who have been freed by their nation's courts but remained in U.S. custody.

"I don't know why the U.S. army brought him to an Iraqi court, if they intend to keep him for an unlimited time," said Humadi's lawyer, Samiya al-Baghdadi.

The American military, however, sees no contradiction.

Local law and court rulings do not apply, they add.

**These dual realities — freedom granted by Iraqi courts but continued detention by the Americans — have been faced by about 3,000 Iraqis since 2003 and stand as a sharp contrast between U.S. policies on the battlefield and Washington's appeals for Iraqis to build credible civic institutions.**

The case of Humadi — accused of attacking American forces and other alleged acts — offers a brush with the bewildering gray area for Iraqis questioning why local rulings extend only as far as the gates of U.S. detention facilities.

**"The U.S. army's refusal to release my husband shows that the Americans do not care about how Iraqis suffer," Sundis Nimaa, Humadi's 34-year-old wife said between sobs.**

**"They have brought my family down and they have separated the children from their father," she told The Associated Press. "They think they can do whatever they like because they have the upper hand in this country."**

Humadi's lawyer, al-Baghdadi, accuses Washington of rejecting the very legal system it helped forge.

"The trial was fair and the judge followed the right legal procedure and even the appeal court approved the ruling," al-Baghdadi said.

"There are basic issues of access to judicial review and access to due process rights that are not being met," said Joseph Logan, a researcher who specializes on Iraq for Human Rights Watch.

**U.S. troops burst into Humadi's home in Baghdad in April 2007, tossing stun grenades, searching the building and immediately arresting him.**

**He was charged with illegally possessing weapons and attacking U.S. forces, though only one rifle was found in the home, al-Baghdadi said. Iraq law allows every home to have one assault rifle.**

U.S. military lawyers provided evidence to an investigating judge, who recommended a trial. But the three-judge tribunal that heard the case, and an appeals court, both ruled in July 2007 that the evidence did not support the charges.

The military asserts that it is on solid footing under international law. But the wide-ranging authority claimed by the Pentagon is not in the U.N. resolution itself, and instead is included in a side letter from then Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Meanwhile, Humadi remains in Camp Bucca indefinitely, and his wife, Nimaa, says: "I pray to God to save my husband and put an end to our long misery."

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

### DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



#### 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. Phone: 917.677.8057

## CLASS WAR REPORTS



**Welcome To The Occupied USA:  
"The NYPD's Stop And Frisk Program  
Is On Pace To Stop More Than  
600,000 People This Year"  
"More Than 85% Of Them Will Be Black  
Or Latino, And More Than 90% Of Those  
Stopped Have Done Nothing Wrong"**

May 19, 2008 NYC-Justice [Excerpts]

The NYPD's stop and frisk program is on pace to stop more than 600,000 people this year.

More than 85% of them will be Black or Latino, and more than 90% of those stopped have done nothing wrong.

Last week tv cameras caught cops in Philly pulling 3 unarmed Black men out of a car and brutally beating them down.

A few days ago, cops in LA killed an unarmed Black man and wounded another when they shot up their car so bad that witnesses described it as looking like "Swiss Cheese."

All this must stop--a line must be drawn right here, right now.

The verdict in the Sean Bell case cannot be considered acceptable by anyone and it cannot be allowed to go down without being met with powerful mass resistance.

Already hundreds have been arrested in civil disobedience, determined that business as usual should not continue.

And hundreds of Black youth have repeatedly taken to the streets in Queens in militant protest.

Much more of this is needed, and many more people of all ages, backgrounds and races and nationalities must join the youth. It matters what we do in the face of this outrage.

Powerful resistance can change the equation in a society where too many accept the unacceptable.

It can give heart to those put under a constant death sentence by this verdict and it can call forth many more people to join in taking this on.

**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.org/](http://www.ivaw.org/))

**Welcome To The Occupied USA #2:**

# Photos From The 11 Week Strike By 3.650 Members Of The United Auto Workers At Axle & Manufacturing Holdings, Detroit



24 Apr 2008 via Dennis Serdel, Vietnam 1967-68 (one tour) Light Infantry, Americal Div.  
11th Brigade, Purple Heart & United Auto Workers GM Retiree, in Perry, Michigan

\*\*\*\*\*

From Jolyn Gismonde

I went to another American Axle rally for Rich today. It was a great success through most of it.

I was astounded and appalled by this site right before us.

This woman, an AAM employee [wearing a United Auto Workers t-shirt, above], asked to 'jay walk' along with other women.

As she did a Detroit officer put her in a 'chokehold' and literally dragged her backwards to his cop car and arrested her. I was completely amazed.

This woman is an older lady - I am told she is 65 with a heart condition - and she didn't do ANYTHING!

Now, ya all know me. I am not one to keep quiet and I told Officer McGain this (the officer who did this to her). I am writing papers, tv stations and any parties connected with the Detroit Police force.

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## **Life After Fidel: “A Number Of Events Have Occurred That Confirm That Something New Is Brewing In The Country”**

**The army's economic activities have created a significant stratum of army technicians and managers, "businessmen in uniform," who, together with their equivalents in the civilian joint ventures with foreign capital, constitute the principal social base for the possible emergence of a Sino-Vietnamese type model in Cuba.**

**At that point, the island leaders are likely to invite the south Florida Cuban-American capitalists to come, invest, and enrich themselves in Cuba provided they stay out of politics.**

May 7, 2008 By Samuel Farber, Foreign Policy In Focus

Samuel Farber was born and raised in Cuba. His most recent book is *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (University of North Carolina Press). He is a contributor to *Foreign Policy In Focus* ([www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)).

\*\*\*\*\*

Fidel Castro's official resignation as head of the Cuban state, although expected, was a turning point that has raised major questions concerning Cuba's future.

His younger brother Raúl, who now officially assumed the highest position in the country, had already "temporarily" replaced the commander in chief on July 31, 2006 after Fidel Castro stepped aside due to a serious illness, the nature of which was declared a state secret.

The decision of Cuba's rulers to appoint 77-year-old José Ramón Machado Ventura as Raúl Castro's successor, was surprising but revealing.

Most observers, including this writer, expected the appointment of Carlos Lage, a medical doctor still in his fifties, who is reputed to be a moderate and who, for several years, has had a major role in the conduct of the Cuban economy.

Instead, the Cuban rulers appointed a political hard liner who has been dedicated to preserving the ideological purity of the system.

He also helped to further consolidate the power of the military in the top echelons of the government, thus allowing a status-quo succession to ensure the greatest possible continuity of the system.

There are political differences in the leadership and intelligentsia on the question of political and economic change that pose questions regarding their future relations with the dominant military circles.

At the same time, there have been recent signs of new protests emerging from below that may confound elite plans. And there is pressure from the outside, particularly the United States, that will undoubtedly have an important impact on any political transition in the island.

## **Social Decay**

The political discussions on Cuba's future are taking place against the backdrop of considerable social decay.

In an important speech delivered at the University of Havana in November of 2005, Fidel Castro had already pointed out that corruption had become so widespread that he feared that it could destroy the revolution from within.

Much of this corruption is the outcome of great economic hardship. Although there have been significant material improvements, particularly in the delivery of electricity (blackouts have almost disappeared) and most recently in Havana's urban transport, the

country has not fully recovered from the severe economic crisis brought about by the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

Health and education, the areas that witnessed the greatest progress since the early years of the revolution, were very hard hit by the crisis.

There has been an ongoing serious shortage of teachers primarily due to the low salaries prevailing in that sector. Among the results of the crisis in Cuba's educational system has been the replacement of teachers by televised classes and the growing importance of privately paid tutoring, a trend that was noted with concern by the newspaper Juventud Rebelde on March 30.

**There are major shortages of medicines and medical supplies in clinics and hospitals serving the general population (as distinct from the medical facilities available to the political elite and in the system of medical tourism).**

The medical crisis has become aggravated by the oil-for-doctors exchange with Venezuela, which created a shortage of general practitioners in the otherwise highly regarded family doctor program, as well as among the specialists to which these patients are referred.

In addition, the official ration book covers no more than half of peoples' food needs.

The rest must be obtained in the expensive free market priced in convertible pesos (that are even more expensive than the dollar.)

The UN's Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) has estimated that 62% of Cubans have access to hard currency (in greatly varying amounts) while 20% of the island's urban population is at risk of not being able to cover its minimal basic needs (Cuba is currently 75% urban).

**It is then no wonder that theft, particularly of state property (including even parts of power transmission lines) and all kinds of hustling have become a way of life for large numbers of Cubans.**

**Lately, the Cuban press has reported on a growing number of incidents that suggest a more generalized social breakdown beyond utilitarian law breaking and corruption.**

These range from school truancy, alcoholism, and the decline of public civility to more dangerous incidents such as unprovoked attacks on urban buses traveling through poor neighborhoods and unprecedented instances of "hooliganism" at sports events.

## **Raul's Reforms**

In the short term Raúl Castro is trying to increase his popular support and legitimacy by granting liberalizing reforms to remove current restrictions, particularly on the economic life of the country, while maintaining a tight political rein to prevent any degree of democratization of Cuban society.

This seems to be his highly discretionary and selective response to the popular demands that were made after he called for an open and frank national discussion in his speech of July 26, 2007.

This is not the first time that such a call has been made in the island.

Something similar happened in the period preceding the Fourth Communist Party Congress in 1991. In that instance, however, the official press frequently published the proposals made at workplace and community meetings, although with little or no practical effect.

Some Cubans have described this type of institutionalized venting as the “culture of the elevator” – proposals are sent up to the authorities and their answers come down without people being able to act laterally.

In other words, people are forbidden from organizing independently with each other outside of official channels to prevent them from directly confronting and demanding solutions to their problems from the people in power.

Thus, Raúl Castro has already removed the ban on the purchase of cell phones, computers, and other domestic electrical appliances and agricultural implements and supplies. He also removed the ban on Cubans staying in tourist hotels and renting automobiles.

However, these concessions only benefit those Cubans who have access to hard currency.

Raúl Castro has removed the cap in state salaries and is also likely to ease requirements to allow more Cubans to become self-employed in the service sector in the cities. He has also begun to distribute to individual peasants some of the large amounts of unused state lands, a good part of which became available with the dramatic shrinkage of the sugar industry. Such a measure, if it were to be considerably extended, may open a Pandora’s Box with important political consequences.

He is expected, in the near future, to relax the harsh restrictions on traveling abroad, and reduce if not eliminate the exorbitant amounts of money, homes, and personal property that Cubans have to give up in order to be allowed to emigrate.

Overall, he will maintain his own style of rule limiting the frequency of political demonstrations that interrupt work routines, delegating instead of micro managing, and curtailing the sudden and arbitrary improvisations in the economy.

In other words, Raúl will try to establish “normal” ruling class bureaucratic rationality to replace Bonapartist and charismatic chaos and disorder.

**Should Raúl survive his older brother, or if the military continues to maintain its current supremacy after the death of Fidel, the Cuban rulers will likely adopt a variant of the Vietnamese and Chinese model that Raúl so greatly admires.**

**This model would entail an opening to the capitalist market economy under the rule of an autocratic one-party state mostly controlled by the military.**

The material basis for such a model already exists with the dominant economic role that the Cuban Armed Forces, often in conjunction with foreign capital, have been playing at least since the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The army has been coordinating its economic activities through a corporation called GAESA; one of its holdings, Gaviota, is probably the single biggest tourism enterprise in Cuba.

High-level army officers have been running other major sectors of the economy such as the sugar industry.

It is significant that Raúl Castro recently promoted another old timer, Major General Julio Casas Regueiro, to minister of defense. Casas oversaw the perfeccionamiento empresarial (enterprise improvement), an efficiency drive based on capitalist organizational methods, in companies run by the military (the same methods have also been used in many civilian enterprises).

**The army's economic activities have created a significant stratum of army technicians and managers, "businessmen in uniform," who together with their equivalents in the civilian joint ventures with foreign capital, constitute the principal social base for the possible emergence of a Sino-Vietnamese type model in Cuba.**

## **Liberal Communists vs. Talibanes**

For some time, a liberal Communist tendency supported by the majority of intellectuals, academics, and artists on the island has been functioning in a very careful fashion and is likely to continue to play a role in the foreseeable future.

Recently, this group made its presence felt at the congress of the UNEAC – Artists and Writers Union – that took place in early April. This tendency tends to favor an opening to the market, not along neo-liberal lines but more like the moderate market reforms tried in Eastern Europe before the collapse of Communism in the 1980s and even earlier.

In addition to these economic reforms, the liberal Communists would also like to see a number of democratic reforms and a more pluralist Cuba, perhaps even including open political tendencies within the Cuban Communist Party. These views are published and predominate in venues of relatively small circulation such as La Gaceta de Cuba, Temas, Revolución, and Cultura.

Although these democratic reforms would not be acceptable to a future "Sino-Vietnamese" ruling group, the market liberals and the market autocrats may cement at least a temporary alliance, as the introduction of the market is bound to bring about liberalization in the social realm.



This might include reforms that are under active consideration and might soon be announced such as fewer restrictions on traveling abroad, greater freedom for small businesses, the right to rent, buy, and sell one's home, and greater access to the Internet even if limited by censorship.

Any material concessions that such a regime is able to give to the educated groups (the social basis for the liberal Communist currents) will prolong the life of such an alliance.

To be sure, the hard-line Fidelistas are bound to resist further liberalizing changes in the economy, and will fight against any effort to democratize the polity. In Cuba they are called the Talibanes, and include people like Felipe Pérez Roque, the former chief of staff for Fidel Castro, who is now foreign minister.

The main centers of Taliban power have been the Grupo de Apoyo (Support Staff) for Fidel Castro and among sectors of the Communist Party apparatus, particularly in the provinces, involving individuals that were personally cultivated by the commander in chief.

The Grupo de Apoyo, constituted by such figures as Carlos Valenciaga, Fidel Castro's personal secretary, has been marginalized by Raúl Castro.

Jokingly referred to as the huerfanitos or little orphans, they played a key role in Fidel Castro's "Battle of Ideas."

This "battle" involved not just political and ideological struggles accompanied by massive demonstrations, but also the implementation of economic projects that often deviated from pre-established plans and usurped the powers and functions of the government's departments and ministries.

The Talibanes have no political future as long as the army under the leadership of Raúl Castro, or whoever eventually succeeds him, remains united and is able to deliver important economic reforms over the short term that can increase its legitimacy and popularity among the population at large.

China's transition is a good example against which to compare the role of the Talibanes: their equivalents were the "Gang of Four" types who stood for the old Stalinist system.

They were no match for Deng and what he promised: an improved standard of living and relief from Mao's endless mobilizations and arbitrariness.

## **Political Trends**

Like in many of the post-Communist transitions that have taken place since the late 1980s, there is little significant political support in Cuba today for a collectivist economy and society popularly controlled from below in an open democratic polity.

The political landscape seems to be limited to three main views: two of these support the rule of the one-party state while differing on whether and how much Cuba should open itself to a market economy.

A third view, influential among intellectuals and academics, does support the liberalization and democratization of society but within the context of a turn toward the market short of neoliberalism.

**Nevertheless, the public mood in Cuba is such that even though growing numbers of people might think that capitalism is the best system to produce goods and services, they will ferociously defend the free public health, education, and other social services they won in the early years of the revolution.**

The ample histories of transitions to capitalism suggest that a capitalist transition in Cuba is highly unlikely to take even a relatively benign form.

Instead, we are highly likely to witness “shock therapies” and sharp reductions of “welfare state” institutions and spending enforced by the dictatorial rule of the army in partnership with foreign and nascent domestic capital.

We can also expect a substantial U.S. role in the internal affairs of the island with its IMF-type structural adjustment, privatization, and austerity policies and its devastating effect particularly on black Cubans and the poor.

**The possibilities of a fourth view, that of democratic anti-capitalist politics, lie in the popular opposition to such a type of transition.**

Recent events in the island suggest the emergence of a trend in that direction.

The year 2007 may have witnessed the beginning of a transition from the politics of individual complaint – that gained particular currency with the crisis provoked by the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s – to the politics of collective resistance.

The year began with the protest of many Cuban intellectuals and artists against the public reappearance of three individuals associated with the most repressive cultural policies that purged numerous prominent intellectuals and artists in the darkest period of the 1970: Luis Pavón Tamayo, Armando Quesada, and Jorge “Papito” Sergueras.

The protest was politically limited since it never challenged current censorship nor raised questions about who had given orders to these repressive cultural functionaries back in the 1970s. But the protest was quite unusual for Cuba since it started spontaneously through email and allowed artists and intellectuals to flex their political muscles independently of the control of the one-party state.

The government managed to contain the protest, but the protesters succeeded in obtaining an official reaffirmation of the current relatively tolerant cultural policies.

**Since then, a number of events have occurred that confirm that something new is brewing in the country.**

**In September 2007, several hundred students openly demonstrated at the University of Oriente in Santiago de Cuba to protest poor living and educational conditions as well as lack of security for women students.**

**The student protest must have been quite serious since the government found it necessary to hold a large official counter-demonstration in Santiago de Cuba, in early October, reaffirming support for the regime.**

**There are unconfirmed reports that many protesters were expelled from the university but the government-controlled media has maintained total silence on the matter.**

**In January 2008, a near-riot broke up a meeting at which government officials informed employees of foreign companies that they would be taxed for the under-the-table hard-currency salary supplements that they received from their foreign employers.**

**The workers were particularly indignant because the Cuban government was already collecting their hard-currency salaries from these companies and then paying them in pesos.**

In early February, on a video widely distributed through the Internet, students at the elite Information Science University, located at what used to be the Soviet listening post at Lourdes, were shown confronting Ricardo Alarcón, the president of Cuba's National Assembly.

They were protesting travel restrictions, their inability to visit tourist facilities in Cuba, the inequitable effects of the dual currency system, a lack of information about the candidates for the official parliamentary elections and their positions, and the censorship preventing access to search engines such as Yahoo.

The students were raising libertarian democratic demands from an explicitly revolutionary standpoint. In his disingenuous response, Alarcón argued that most people in the world lacked the means to travel and if everyone could travel there would not be enough resources to accommodate all this demand. He deliberately confused the issue of the legal and political right to travel with whether people could afford to do so.

He also omitted the fact that in Cuba, for exclusively political reasons, some people had more right to travel than others.

## **The U.S. Role**

**For almost 50 years, U.S. imperialism has enforced an economic blockade that has violated Cuba's right to self-determination and made life considerably worse for the Cuban people.**

The blockade has also provided an anti-imperialist rationale to the regime that has helped to insure its survival.

The end of the Cold War vastly reduced Cuba's importance to American foreign policy, as witnessed by the virtual absence of Cuba from practically all strategic analyses of the international threats and challenges facing the U.S. government.

Nevertheless, the Castro regime has stoked invasion fears whenever it has found it convenient for domestic and foreign consumption to divert attention from domestic scandals, as when he imposed heavy prison sentences on 75 peaceful dissidents in the spring of 2003.

Several decades have passed since the United States seriously contemplated an invasion of the island.

Nevertheless, the U.S. government, and the Bush administration in particular, has continued to follow a bullying policy of ever-growing harassment with the goal of worsening conditions in the island, thereby hastening the collapse of the regime from within and obviating the need for a U.S. invasion.

At the same time, it has harbored terrorists such as Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch -- responsible for the death of 73 innocent civilians in the bombing of a Cubana airplane near Barbados in 1976 -- and attempted to buy itself political support inside the island.

Current U.S. government strategy toward Cuba seems to be based on the notion that individuals and groups on the island who support U.S. policies and interests would come to power with the aid of the U.S. government and their Cuban-American associates in south Florida.

These people would then implement a “democratic” capitalist transition in Cuba.

**Aside from the fact that such a transition would actually require a vicious dictatorship, it belongs to the quite discredited political fiction genre that predicted that U.S. troops would be greeted as liberators in Baghdad.**

Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the policy of economic blockade and political harassment has been primarily maintained for electoral and political considerations rather than by the will and desires of the American corporate class, which in fact has been showing increasing interest in doing business with Cuba.

Numerous corporate leaders and important politicians - particularly those from the midwestern and western farm states already selling hundreds of millions of dollars a year in food and processed goods to Cuba under the “humanitarian” exceptions to the blockade granted in November 2001 - have visited the island in recent years.

This increased interest has been reflected in Congress. During the younger Bush’s years in office, Congress came close to approving legislation with Republican support that would have dealt serious blows to the blockade, and Bush successfully lobbied to get it off the agenda. Some of these legislative proposals are likely to be approved by the new Congress that will be elected in November 2008. Whether or not they will end up being vetoed by whoever becomes the new President, remains an open question.

**Meanwhile, a “Sino-Vietnamese” style transition in Cuba, especially if it is eventually headed by a leader with a last name other than Castro, is likely to split the Cuban right-wing in Florida, and thereby undermine the principal political support for the U.S. blockade.**

**At that point, the island leaders are likely to invite the south Florida Cuban-American capitalists to come, invest, and enrich themselves in Cuba provided they stay out of politics.**

**This would replicate what the Chinese government has done with the overseas Chinese businessmen and the order that Putin has imposed on the Russian business oligarchy.**

The prospects for a post-Castro Cuba are worrisome, whether it turns towards a “Sino-Vietnamese” model or toward the continuation of the present order (even with liberalizing changes).

**Progressive Americans can help to improve the possibility of a democratic, humane, and socialist transition in Cuba by demanding the immediate restoration of full U.S. economic and political relations with the island republic.**

**To do this, it is not necessary to create illusions about the nature of the Cuban regime. In fact, it would be counterproductive because it would undermine the credibility of the forces struggling for a change in U.S. policy.**

**The normalization of relations with Cuba would advance the cause of self-determination of nations and would also be a good, practical alternative to an almost fifty-year old failed policy of economic blockade and political harassment. There cannot be a better time to bring up and press for this change than the election year of 2008.**

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