

## **Military Resistance 9/15**

**“After A Decade At War,  
Army Sgt. Julio Pinedo  
Is Tired”**

**“He’s Tired Of The War In  
Afghanistan, Which He Says He  
Thinks The U.S. Can’t Win  
Alone”**

**An Army Reserve Sergeant Said  
“Low Morale Plagues Her Unit”  
“Everyone Kind Of Competes For  
Who Can Slack Off The Best”  
They “Think There’s No Purpose To  
Anything That We’re Doing”**

September 19, 2011 By Cid Standifer, Army Times [Excerpts]

After a decade at war, Army Sgt. Julio Pinedo is tired.

Pinedo, a health care specialist with the 144th Minimal Care Detachment in San Diego who has served for 12 years, is tired of the high operational tempo driving the Army, and tired of the instability it creates in his life.

**He’s tired of the war in Afghanistan, which he says he thinks the U.S. can’t win alone.**

“You don’t know when you’re going to go back, when you’re going to get deployed again,” he said.

Pinedo is part of a military that is showing signs of wear and tear from a decade of grueling combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the Military Times annual survey, active-duty members on the whole were less satisfied than previous years’ respondents with a range of quality-of-life and morale measures, from health care to whether they felt military leaders were concerned with their welfare.

One of the biggest drops was in ratings of military pay and allowances.

**Last year, 88 percent of active-duty and mobilized reserve respondents described their compensation as “good” or “excellent.”**

**This year, that figure is down to 60 percent. Eighteen percent rate it as “poor,” up from 2 percent last year.**

Overall military quality of life also took a hit. Although 90 percent of respondents called it “good” or “excellent” in 2010, only 68 percent did this year.

Army respondents gave their quality of life the lowest rating among the services this year.

Sixty-three percent of soldiers gave an above-average rating, compared with 89 percent in 2010.

An Army Reserve sergeant who asked to remain anonymous said low morale plagues her unit, now undergoing training.

That leads to performance erosion, she said.

“Everyone kind of competes for who can slack off the best,” she said, “(because they) think there’s no purpose to anything that we’re doing.”

**Marines were the second-most likely, next to airmen, to rate their quality of life as above average, with 68 percent calling it “good” or “excellent.”**

**Still, that represents the largest drop among the services between 2010 and 2011. Last year, 95 percent of Marines said their quality of life was above average.**

McLaughlin acknowledged how the high operational tempo could start to wear on some troops.

On top of “7th-century living conditions” in Afghanistan, he said he knows that many troops face pressures from home while deployed.

**“I think, especially, the married guys (have trouble),” he said. “I know wives and girlfriends and family members do have quite a bit of criticism (of the war).”**

Respondents' rating of military pay and benefits dropped significantly compared with last year, but the Marine sergeant said that may reflect trepidation about future cuts more than their current compensation.

"I would say it's the fear of instability," she added.

That squares with what Joseph Barnes, national executive director of the Fleet Reserve Association, has seen.

"Personnel-related programs and benefits are among the first to be targeted when there's significant pressure to reduce spending," Barnes said.

"We're also coming off a significant period, since 2000, with major pay and benefit enhancements. ...

"That period has certainly ended, and I think there's a realization that looking ahead, there are going to be major challenges with keeping these enhancements fully funded."

Combined with high operational tempos, Barnes said uncertainty about the near future is putting high stress on the force, which is reflected in increased rates of suicide, drug use and divorce.

Although the Army and Marine Corps have experienced the brunt of ground fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past decade, the high operational tempo also has affected the other services.

Personnel Specialist 2nd Class LaTrina Flemons said she has deployed to Kuwait, Iraq, Cuba and for Operation Enduring Freedom, in addition to her service aboard ships, since she joined the Navy.

On her last deployment on the carrier Enterprise, she said the ship would sometimes go more than two months without putting into port.

Flemons said she still loves the Navy, but she noted that such long deployments at sea can become difficult.

"You're stressed, you're like, 'I'm sick of seeing this person,'" she said.

"Sometimes I feel like I spend more time with military people than with my own family."

Flemons said she has also been disheartened recently by the lack of respect she feels enlisted sailors get from their superiors.

"I feel like the Navy is changing, especially E-7s and above," she said.

"The (noncommissioned officers) are not as caring as when I came in 10 years ago."

**MORE:**

## BEEN ON THE JOB WAY TOO LONG: HOME, NOW:



Aug. 27, 2011: A U.S. Marine, 3/4 Marines, after an exchange of fire with Taliban militants in the Gesresk Valley, Helmand province, southern Afghanistan. Militants regularly attack the base from multiple directions using launched grenades, sniper rifles, and AK-47s. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)



Aug. 25, 2011: A U.S. Marine, 3/4 Marines, at Patrol Base 302, Gesresk Valley, Helmand province, southern Afghanistan. The Marines living under the austere conditions at PB-302, which can only be reached by foot, face Taliban militants who regularly attack the men at the base from multiple directions using launched grenades, sniper rifles, and AK-47s. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley)



A U.S. soldier from Alpha Company 2nd battalion 27th infantry (the Wolfhounds), Task Force NO FEAR at Observing Post Mace in eastern Afghanistan's Kunar province near the border with Pakistan August 28, 2011. REUTERS/Nikola Solic





SHINWAR, AFGHANISTAN - AUGUST 29: A U.S. soldier with the 307th MP Company in the shade of his armored vehicle on August 29, 2011 in Shinwar, Afghanistan. (Photo by John Moore/Getty Images)...



A U.S. soldier from Task Force Bronco, HHC 2-27 Infantry Battalion inside a transit billeting tent in Forward Operating Base Fenty in Jalalabad, September 4, 2011. REUTERS/Erik de Castro



A U.S. soldier from HHC 2-27 Infantry Battalion inside a transit billeting tent at Forward Operating Base Fenty in Jalalabad, September 4, 2011. Reuters/Erik de Castro



U.S. soldiers based in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, Sept. 6, 2011 at Combat Outpost Monti in Kunar province, Afghanistan. (AP Photo/David Goldman)...

**“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**

## **AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS**

### **Foreign Occupation “Servicemember” Killed Somewhere Or Other In Afghanistan: Nationality Not Announced**

September 24, 2011 AP

A foreign servicemember died following an insurgent attack in southern Afghanistan today.

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### **Wife Of Fallen Soldier Remembers Her Husband**

9/12 Newport Television LLC

**For the second time, Oklahoma loses three soldiers in a single day.**

The Department of Defense confirming three more Oklahoma Army National Guardsmen have died in Afghanistan.

Sergeant Bret Isenhower of Lamar, Specialist Christopher Horton of Collinsville, and Private First Class Tony Potter of Okmulgee were killed when their unit came under attack.

Horton’s wife Jane just returned from viewing Christopher’s dignified transfer at Dover Air Force Base, along with Horton’s parents and best friend.

“He deserves to be honored. He’s a true hero,” says Jane Horton. Horton had a deep passion to serve his country, and his family says he was one of the most driven and patriotic people you would ever meet.

Horton enlisted in the Oklahoma Army National Guard in 2008, and his basic training took place at Fort Benning in Georgia. He later became sniper qualified. The Army says this was his first deployment.

“He wanted to go so bad for so long. He was so excited to finally get over there and use the skills that he had been taught,” says Horton.

Christopher also loved to fish and spent time before leaving for Afghanistan fishing with his wife.



“There was a beach within a two mile walk and he wanted to fish the entire time, 12 hours a day,” she says.

The Army says enemy forces attacked their unit with small arms fire, and Horton along with Isenhower and Potter were killed.

“I was actually making cakes for his birthday package. His birthday is October 1st and I got a knock at the door, and then they told me my husband had passed away,” says Horton.

All three men were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 279th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Brigade Combat team.

**This is the same brigade that seven other soldiers were killed in the last two months.**

Two other soldiers were wounded in that same attack, but are expected to recover.

Right now, funeral arrangements are still pending.

The family of Christopher Horton is asking everyone to honor his memory by lighting a candle on Tuesday evening between 7:30 and 10:30pm. They ask that you say a prayer for him and the many other soldiers who have given their lives for our freedom.

**POLITICIANS CAN'T BE COUNTED ON TO HALT  
THE BLOODSHED**

**THE TROOPS HAVE THE POWER TO STOP THE  
WARS**

## **MILITARY NEWS**

**“Two Days After Repeal Of The ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’, Obama Administration In Court Opposing A Lawsuit Seeking Full Severance Pay For Those Dismissed Under The Law”**

September 23, 2011 By Nedra Pickler, The Associated Press [Excerpts]

**Two days after repeal of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy against gays serving openly in the military, the Obama administration was in court Thursday opposing a lawsuit seeking full severance pay for those dismissed under the law.**

The American Civil Liberties Union is seeking class action status for 142 people who only got half pay after their discharge because of being gay.

But the Justice Department asked the U.S. Court of Federal Claims to dismiss the case.

Judge Christine Odell Cook Miller said she probably will let the case continue and questioned why the government wouldn’t pay now that the law has changed.

**“Your timing is exquisite — two days after the policy goes into effect eliminating ‘don’t ask, don’t tell,’ here we are,” she said as she took the bench.**

**“I would consider this to be an unenviable argument to have at this time,” she told the government’s attorney later.**

The case was filed by the ACLU on behalf of former Air Force Staff Sgt. Richard Collins of Clovis, N.M.

He was honorably discharged in 2006 after nine years of service when two civilians who worked with him at Cannon Air Force Base reported they saw him kiss his boyfriend in a car about 10 miles from the base. The decorated sergeant was off-duty and not in uniform at the time, according to the lawsuit.

In an interview Thursday, Collins said he and his partner, who are still together, always have been discreet about showing affection in public. “That one time I just happened to lean over and kiss him on the cheek,” he recalled. “He said something sweet.”

The Air Force paid Collins \$12,351 instead of the \$25,702 he expected after his discharge.

Separation pay is granted to military personnel who served at least six years but were involuntarily discharged, part of an effort to ease their transition into civilian life.

But the Defense Department has a list of conditions that trigger an automatic reduction in that pay, including homosexuality, unsuccessful drug or alcohol treatment or discharge in the interests of national security.

That policy went into effect in 1991, two years before “don’t ask, don’t tell” became law.

The suit argues it is unconstitutional for the Defense Department to unilaterally cut the amount for people discharged for homosexuality.

Miller said she would issue a ruling on the government’s motion to dismiss by Oct. 15 after full review of the Justice Department’s arguments, but her preliminary decision was to deny the motion.

**She warned Preheim and a uniformed Air Force attorney also at the defense table that they should be prepared for the case to move forward. She said it's probably appropriate to certify it for class action status, if the government really thinks it's worth it to continue fighting the case.**

Joshua Block, attorney with the ACLU lesbian gay bisexual and transgender project, said class action would cover 142 people who got half pay for being discharged for homosexuality in the past six years — the time period covered by the statute of limitations — for a total payment of \$2.1 million.

Miller, first appointed by President Ronald Reagan and reappointed by President Bill Clinton, questioned why for that amount of money the government would want to wade back into the “don't ask, don't tell” debate.

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## **FORWARD OBSERVATIONS**



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

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

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

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

**Frederick Douglass, 1852**

**Hope for change doesn't cut it when you're still losing buddies.  
-- J.D. Englehart, Iraq Veterans Against The War**

## **Political Incest-- The Mother Load**



From: Mike Hastie  
To: Military Resistance Newsletter  
Sent: September 23, 2011  
Subject: Political Incest-- the mother load

### **Political Incest-- the mother load**

**When a government uses its own people as sacrificial pawns in a time of war for the sole purpose of reaping the spoils of war. This deceit is always cloaked in the frenzy of patriotism and moral high ground. It is the ultimate form of betrayal by one's own government for the cause of nationalistic war profiteering and global dominance.**

Lying is the most powerful weapon in war.

Mike Hastie  
Army Medic Vietnam  
September 22, 2011

All photographs by Mike Hastie:  
Medevac helicopter taken in An Khe, Vietnam 1970  
Welcome Home empty chair 1988  
Soldier is Army medic in Vietnam 1970  
Betrayal pill bottle is on going...

The truth was obscure, too profound and  
too pure--to live it you have to explode.  
Bob Dylan

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)

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

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

**NEED SOME TRUTH?  
CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER**  
<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

Traveling Soldier is the publication of the Military Resistance Organization.

Telling the truth - about the occupations 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 to Imperial wars and all other forms of injustice inside the armed forces.

Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties enlisted troops inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help organize resistance within the armed forces.

We hope that you'll build a network of active duty organizers.



## STUCK ON STUPID

**“I Am Troy Davis” --- Not!**



Comment: T

1. No, you're not Troy Davis. He's dead. You're not dead. What was done to him by the government of Georgia was about him, not about you and who you are or are not.
2. No, you're not Troy Davis. He spent over 10 years in prison wondering when the government was going to carry out the death sentence imposed on him by the State of Georgia. You have no idea whatever what that's like, all your moralistic posturing to the contrary.
3. Every time you argued he should not be executed "because he's innocent," you gave the world your approval for government, state or national, killing people who don't meet your qualification of "innocent."

That's disgusting, despicable hypocrisy.

"Innocent" or "guilty" has nothing whatever to do with it.

No government in the USA today can be trusted to kill anybody for any reason, ever.

End of discussion unless you, personally, wish to give some government permission to execute you.

As you get dragged into the death chamber and they strap you down, then you will have certainly earned to right to say "I am Troy Davis."

4. The same day Troy Davis was executed, a racist murderer was killed by the government of Texas. Lawrence Brewer, convicted of dragging a black man to death in 1998, was executed by order of Texas Governor Rick Perry.

You may have heard of Perry.

Was that OK with you?

Of course it was, since you didn't lift a finger to object to that one.

So, you have no objection to a reactionary piece of shit like Texas Governor Perry executing people, provided he kills somebody you don't like.

That's a priceless illustration of stuck on stupid.

Or worse.

## **DO YOU HAVE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE IN THE MILITARY?**

**Forward Military Resistance along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly.**

**Whether in Afghanistan, 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 wars and economic injustice, inside the armed services and at home.**

**Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Resistance, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657. Phone: 888.711.2550**

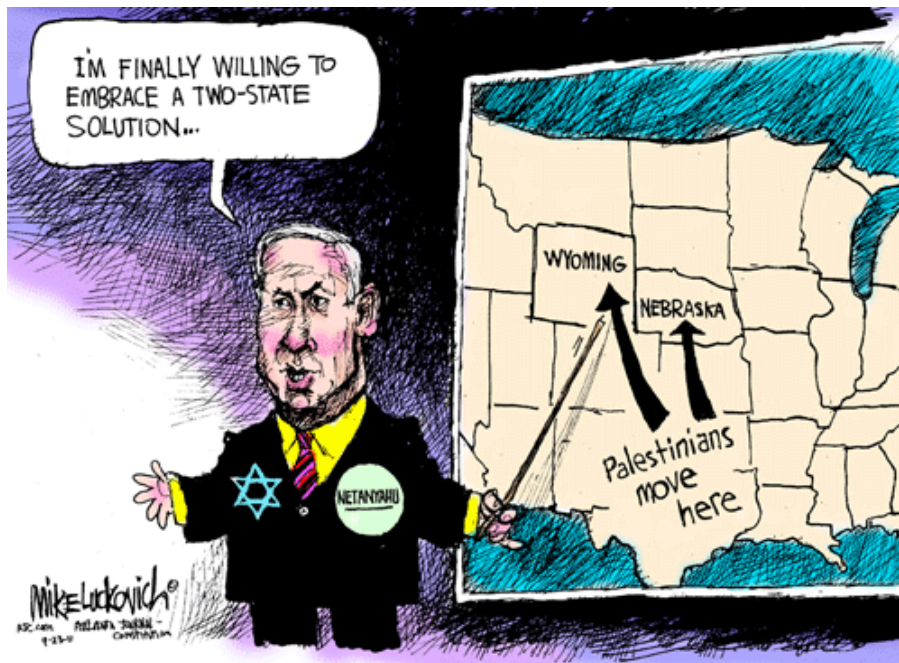
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## OCCUPATION PALESTINE



[To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation commanded by foreign terrorists, go to: [www.rafahtoday.org](http://www.rafahtoday.org) The occupied nation is Palestine. The foreign terrorists call themselves "Israeli."]

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## DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

**Pissing On The Dead:  
“A Lot Of People And A Lot Of  
Companies Are Making A Lot Of  
Money Out Of 9/11”  
“It’s Back At Ground Zero That The  
Real Money’s Being Made”**

# **“Who Would Have Thought It--That Goldman Sachs Would Make \$1 Billion From Al-Qaeda Murdering 3,000 New Yorkers?”**

**Retired fire captain Jim Riches, who lost a son on 9/11 and then lost his health from laboring in the dust on the site for months afterwards, is quoted also: “This is a place for reverence and remembrance, not a revenue-generating tourist attraction. This is obscene. This is the same as people selling stuff on the streets.”**

September 22, 2011 By Eamonn McCann, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

LOIS GRIFFIN knew she was losing it when the audience started to laugh.

The killer question had been: “If elected, what will you do about replacing the old boiler?” It was obvious from the look on her face that Lois hadn’t given adequate thought to the old boiler issue.

As the audience hooted and hugged itself, Lois realized she’d have to do something desperate if she was to fulfill her dream of being elected to the board of James Wood High.

Then, suddenly, came a thrilling flash of inspiration. “9/11!” she declared. The crowd roared. “I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again,” she continued, banging her fist on the podium, “9/11!” Pandemonium.

Her opponent, husband Peter Griffin, sighed as he contemplated inevitable defeat. “There’s no answer to that.”

Peter is the Family Guy on the television program of the same name, considered the greatest show on earth by those of us who would rather not watch anything on TV which isn’t preceded by a warning that viewers might find the next program offensive.

In real life, things are more serious.

But it’s back at Ground Zero that the real money’s being made.

The National September 11 Memorial and Museum will cost \$700 million to build and will have an annual operating budget of \$60 million.

America’s Second World War memorial cost \$175 million; the Korean War memorial \$18 million; the Vietnam memorial \$8 million. These are all publicly owned.

But the 9/11 memorial is a private affair--apart from being publicly funded, of course.

“Nobody asked for this enormously expensive memorial,” says Glenn Corbett, professor of fire science at New York’s John Jay College, seen as an expert on most 9/11 matters. “A lot of people and a lot of companies are making a lot of money out of 9/11.”

The memorial isn’t open for business yet, but its gift shop is fully operational--with stones from the World Trade Centre for \$100 to \$1,000, and necklaces saying “No day shall erase you from the memory of time” at around \$125 a pop.

**Meanwhile, major corporations have been gifted billions to stay or move into the area around Ground Zero, and the bonanza is by no means over.**

**The recent issue of the Village Voice cites a couple of startling figures: \$1 billion to Goldman Sachs for its plush building across from the site, \$764 million for a Durst Tower in midtown Manhattan and a Bruce Ratner office tower in Brooklyn.**

**In other words, some of the biggest and most profitable companies in the U.S. are being paid vast sums of public money to operate in districts vaguely relevant to 9/11 in which they’d very likely have chosen to operate anyway.**

Who would have thought it--that Goldman Sachs would make \$1 billion from al-Qaeda murdering 3,000 New Yorkers?

Apart from Goldman Sachs, that is.

“When we were eating and sleeping post-9/11 stuff, the powers-that-be insisted that these subsidies would rescue lower Manhattan,” Bettina Damiani of the watchdog group Good Jobs New York told the Voice. “Ten years and billions of dollars later...we need to do some rethinking.”

**Retired fire captain Jim Riches, who lost a son on 9/11 and then lost his health from laboring in the dust on the site for months afterwards, is quoted also: “This is a place for reverence and remembrance, not a revenue-generating tourist attraction. This is obscene. This is the same as people selling stuff on the streets.”**

That’s the thing about *The Family Guy*.

Seen in context, it isn’t really offensive at all.

## **Spread The Word: Copies Of Military Resistance Newsletter Free On Request**

If you have some good use in mind for a package of Military Resistance newsletters, email [CONTACT@MILITARYPROJECT.ORG](mailto:CONTACT@MILITARYPROJECT.ORG) with a mailing address, an indication of how many you need, and how they will be used.





## CLASS WAR REPORTS



**“In The End We Cannot Be Free  
Without Weapons”**

**“It’s Necessary, But Not By The  
People, By The Army; We Need  
Defections”**

**“The Most Organised And  
Professional Armed Opposition  
Members Are Those Who Are  
Deserters From The Army”**

**“They Saw There Is No Justice In The  
Army, That They Cannot Advance In The  
Army, And What Was Happening To The  
People, Who Are Their Family”**

[Thanks to Sandy Kelson, Veteran & Military Resistance Organization, who sent this in.]

23 Sep 2011 By Nir Rosen, Al Jazeera [Excerpts]

Editor’s note: Al Jazeera special correspondent Nir Rosen spent seven weeks travelling throughout Syria with unique access to all sides.

He visited Daraa, Damascus, Homs, Hama, Latakia and Aleppo to explore the uprising and growing internal conflict.

**In the first article of his series he meets with leaders of the armed opposition in Homs.**

Names of some of the individuals quoted have been changed to protect their identities.

\*\*\*\*\*

Homs - On August 31, I met up with a trusted acquaintance called Abu Omar (not his real name). I had been waiting for this meeting with anticipation, as the people involved were extremely hard to reach. They were constantly evading the regime.

Abu Omar called the night before to let me know it was going to happen. The next morning I awoke excited. Adding to my nervous energy, the mobile network in town was shut off. Unable to call Abu Omar, I decided to go to the café near where we had last met, hoping he would find me.

Concurrently, he was sitting in the car near where he had last dropped me off, hoping I would find him. Two hours after the pre-arranged time, he pulled up to the café. He asked me what devices I had and instructed me to remove the batteries from my mobile phone.

We drove north to Rastan, a city with a strong opposition presence.

The last time I was there, several weeks earlier, I had counted 50 tanks along the perimeter of the town.

As we drove toward the town, the scene was wholly different, not a single tank in sight. Rastan felt liberated.

Abu Omar was a senior coordinator in the country's six-month-old uprising and was involved in opposition activities since 2007. He lamented that to date, the revolution had only succeeded in costing the lives of three thousand people.

"After Libya, many people said it was a mistake to have a peaceful revolution and if they had done it like the Libyans they would be free by now," he said.

As I spent more time in Syria, I could see a clear theme developing in the discourse of the opposition: A call for an organised armed response to the government crackdown, mainly from the opposition within Syria.

### **"Many Realised The Regime Was Too Powerful To Be Overthrown Peacefully"**

Demonstrators had hoped the holy month of Ramadan would be the turning point in their revolution, but as it came to an end - six months into the Syrian uprising - many realised the regime was too powerful to be overthrown peacefully.

Previously, on August 25, I met with a senior opposition leader in Damascus' large suburb of Harasta, an anti-regime stronghold. The government had cracked down harshly on demonstrations there, though the armed opposition had been able to kill many members of the security forces.

"In the end we cannot be free without weapons," the leader said. "It's necessary, but not by the people, by the army; we need defections."

A few days later, on August 28, I attended an anti-regime demonstration in the Bab Assiba neighbourhood of Homs.

Along with the army, the country has several intelligence and security services tasked with preserving order.

Protesters correctly surmise that any defections will come from the heavily Sunni army and not various security forces, which are primarily staffed by Alawites, the heterodox sect of President Bashar al-Assad.

The opposition is loath to admit it but they are effectively all Sunni. The diverse ethnic makeup of Syria makes for a complicated map of allegiances within the country. Christians, by and large, support the regime out of fear of the unknown realities of a post-Assad Syria, while the Druze are sitting in the wings, waiting to see which side will emerge victorious. The Kurds, however, secretly hope for the regime to collapse.

In the propaganda war being waged between opponents and supporters of the Syrian regime, the nature and make up of the opposition has been a key point. Opponents of the regime insist that the opposition is entirely peaceful and if any security forces have been killed it is only at the hands of other security forces in order to blame the opposition. Defenders of the regime describe the opposition as Salafi terrorists, arms dealers, drug smugglers, mercenaries or criminals.

The overwhelming majority of the opposition is peaceful and unarmed.

For some it is a question of principal or strategy; for many it is simply because they do not have access to weapons that would be useful against the powerful Syrian security forces.

There are various different armed opposition actors in Syria. Together they have killed around 700 hundred members of the Syrian security forces in various clashes and ambushes.

The most organised and professional armed opposition members are those who are deserters from the army.

However, it is important to point out they have not deserted with their weapons and it is not entire units that are deserting, currently just individuals. In much of the country young men arm themselves or are provided weapons by wealthier people to protect themselves from the onslaught of security forces.

There are also local self-defence militias and armed civilians throughout various villages and slums. Though many are socially and religiously conservative, they do not appear to consider themselves mujahedin or otherwise fit the stereotype of Islamic extremists. Accordingly, individuals have told me that Islam does provide them with inspiration and strength but they do not fight for Islam and their goals are generally secular.

Abu Omar is a senior opposition leader in Homs who coordinates with the defecting military personnel.

These defectors are not very religious, Abu Omar told me. "They drink, they have girlfriends," he said.

"They are mostly young. They are free thinking. They don't believe Dunya TV (a pro-regime channel). They saw there is no justice in the army, that they cannot advance in the army, and what was happening to the people, who are their family."

## **“We Are Free Officers Rejecting The Oppression Of People And We Are Protecting The Innocent People”**

We were told to drive to a certain corner at a certain time. We arrived and saw a car on the opposite corner. Inside were three men each with an equally stern gaze.

I was worried that they were with the regime and we had been set up. Another car was parked on the corner diagonal to us. Abu Omar got out, walked to it and spoke to the men inside. We followed a lead car while being tailgated by another.

Abu Omar told me that several other cars were watching us. We drove towards the outskirts of town past some orchards and stopped by a house under construction.

A man got out of the car in front, and headed towards the car I was sitting in.

He was tall and wore the uniform of a first lieutenant in the Syrian army with a patch from the 5th Special Forces unit, a pistol in his belt and his pants tucked into black military boots.

As he came over he gestured that I follow him, without much recourse I hesitantly complied.

He took me to a stairwell and handed me a tracksuit and a pair of sneakers and told me to change. I undressed down to my underwear. We were clearly both a bit uncomfortable.

They did not give me a shirt, so I put on the track jacket that was a couple of sizes too small for me. It was also inappropriately warm for the summer. The training pants weren't much better either - I felt nervous, uncomfortable and to top it off very sweaty. He asked me to open my mouth and looked up and down it and then in my ears and felt my scalp.

We left my clothes in Abu Omar's car and entered the lead car.

Inside was a Kalashnikov. Adding to my physical discomfort, they gave me a thin ski mask and asked me to put it on in reverse so it covered my eyes. However, once it was stretched out on my face I could just about see through it. It was hot and uncomfortable.

I felt claustrophobic and trapped. I could hear my own breathing louder than usual as we bounced around on a rough road.

In eight years of working in conflict zones with armed groups I had never been told to put a mask on. Abu Omar told me it was also for my protection so people outside would not recognise me. “Do you trust these people?” I whispered to Abu Omar.

“Its too late now,” he laughed at me.

The driver communicated with some people on his walkie talkie, informing them of his whereabouts and asking them what was happening where they were. We drove around for a few minutes and pulled up to another orchard.



I took off the mask.

We continued to walk behind a house, and proceeded to sit on some plastic chairs that sunk into the soft dirt, under the shade of some fruit trees.

Someone brought us coffee and water; my hands trembled as I drank. Suddenly the silence was broken by a couple of gunshots. Immediately my mind flashed images of being ambushed by security forces. The man got on his radio to inquire about the shots but he didn't seem too phased.

**“We are free officers rejecting the oppression of people and we are protecting the innocent people,” first lieutenant Muhamad Abdelaziz Tlass of the 5th special forces told me.**

**I was with a leader of the Khalid bin al Walid brigade of the Free Officers' Battalion.**

**The other unit of deserters in Homs was called the Salahedin Victory brigade.**

Homs was the centre of armed opposition in Syria.

Rastan was the centre for the armed opposition in Homs.

There were also deserters operating in Jabal Azzawiya in the north and Daraa in the south. Most of them had deserted from different units on May 30.

Tlass estimated the number of deserters in and around Homs at 500, however many defectors did not have rifles and only stocked with a few rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). Most of the men were originally from Homs, he said.

They were mostly from the army because the regime controlled the security units.

“After the year 2000 they recruited Alawites to the security services,” he said. “The regime is Alawite and security forces are the ones doing the killing. The government has convinced Alawites that this is an existential battle for them but this is not true.”

Tlass claimed their first operation occurred on June 20 when they defended a demonstration. Military security ordered an armoured personnel vehicle belonging to the army to shoot at a demonstration. Four children were killed and he claimed security forces killed an army general for refusing to shoot.

But it was more likely that the deserting soldiers had killed the general.

“Our people tried to defend the demonstration,” he said. “We stopped the security forces from killing more and battled with them.” He claimed they killed six security force members. “It hurts us when they get killed,” Abu Omar said, “they don't know why they are fighting.”

**In Homs, the resistance was commanded by a major but the highest ranking deserting officer was a colonel, they told me. They were mostly young because young officers were less restricted in their thought.**

The older officers have a strong historical memory of the harsh suppression of the Hama armed uprising in 1982.

“The army is not loyal to the government,” he told me, “but they control media so they don’t know the real situation on the ground. One of my soldiers saw a big demonstration on Al Jazeera and asked me ‘sir is it possible this is in Syria and they are really asking for the fall of the regime?’”

He told me that the personal mobile phones of soldiers were taken away and even officers were denied access to satellite television so they would only be able to watch state controlled television.

The daily reports the government gave the army were written by security forces, he said, and helped motivate soldiers to kill civilians and convince them that civilian demonstrators were terrorists, provocateurs, traitors, foreign agents and Salafi extremists.

According to Tlass, in 2004 the defense ministry became overwhelmed by Alawites and fell under their control, with all senior positions allocated for the minority sect. He explained that this was the reason the army remained strong behind the regime.

Though these officers controlled the army, “the army is with the people”, he said.

The officer in civilian clothes told me they lacked the ability to initiate large operations.

“Our revolution is peaceful still and we don’t have weapons,” he said, “but it is time to arm the revolution, especially after Libya. Six months without results, and the number of dead ...” He trailed off, but estimated the dead were five thousand, double the official number.

Daraa, by the southern border, is 45 minutes away from Damascus, the capital. Idlib by the northern border is 45 minutes away from Aleppo, the country’s commercial hub. Syrian towns are too close to each other and the terrain is more mountainous and full of trees.

There is no indigenous Syrian force that can seize control of a city, yet. The armed opposition fighters had not even succeeded in holding on to rebellious Hama. They could not properly defend slums like Ramel in Latakia and Bab Assiba in Homs even though the urban terrain favored defenders.

The men I was meeting claimed to operate in all of Syria and indeed up to 700 members of the Syrian security forces had been killed since the start of the uprising, though most had been killed in clashes with unorganised but armed locals of villages and poor neighbourhoods.

They had recently ambushed and killed an Alawite battalion commander on the road from Hama to Homs.

“He had given orders to kill many civilians,” Tlass said. I interjected that they (opposition) must have had good intelligence. “We have many eyes,” the officer in civilian clothes said.

In the middle of our conversation he got a call on his radio. “We have to go,” he stood up.

Everybody unceremoniously and quickly got in their vehicles and drove away. I started to panic that we were going to be attacked and again I imagined being gunned down in a hail of bullets. Fortunately for all concerned, this was not the case and I got up and returned to the same stairwell where I changed clothes. The two cars led us out a bit and then turned away.

Two days later I was watching Al Jazeera in Damascus when I saw the same first lieutenant Tlass with several soldiers standing behind him formally declaring that he was deserting and joining the Khalid bin al Walid brigade.

Within the ranks of the opposition’s civilian leadership there is a debate over which course to take. A repeat of the Libya scenario and international military intervention is unlikely. Mostly peaceful demonstrations have failed to shake the foundations of the regime. But an openly armed rebellion would support the regime’s narrative and might also lead to a harsher crackdown.

Until now the regime’s response has actually been relatively restrained compared to the violence it is capable of unleashing.

“We did not decide to declare this revolution armed yet,” Abu Omar told me.

The civilian opposition within Syria was debating whether it was appropriate to declare an armed revolution, he said, explaining why they had not yet broadcast videos of their operations even though on the street in Homs everybody knew about them.

“They say they resigned from the military to defend the civilians but most of their operations involve attacking checkpoints,” he said. “They say ‘we attack the ones who attack us; this is our way of defending civilians.’”

### **Troops Invited:**

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

# **“General Motors And The United Auto Worker (UAW) Announced A Tentative Contract”**

**“Felt More Like Dropping A Fifty Pound Air Gun On My Toe Than A Reward For Working Hard And Keeping My Mouth Shut”**

**“Perhaps I Am Too Skeptical, But Every Time I Think We Are Nearing The Bottom...Another Trap Door Opens”**

September 21, 2011 By Gregg Shotwell, Socialist Worker

General Motors and the United Auto Worker (UAW) announced a tentative contract agreement September 17 that contains a signing bonus instead of a raise for long-term workers and leaves lower-paid new hires at substandard wages.

The UAW had vowed to close the wage gap between top- and second-tier workers, who make just half the top union wage of around \$28.

But the difference won't be narrowed much under the new deal--and if new hires gain ground at all, it's because higher-paid workers don't get any base pay increase, but rather a lump-sum signing bonus. Plus, workers are still waiting for the fine print on the contract, which may contain still more concessions.

**Gregg Shotwell, a retired 29-year veteran of General Motors and Delphi and a UAW activist, is the author of the forthcoming Autoworkers Under the Gun: Live Bait & Ammo from Haymarket Books, a collection of shop-floor newsletters he produced while at GM and Delphi.**

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A \$5000 signing bonus is less than \$25 per week over a four-year contract.

Can't even fill up the tank on my 4-cylinder, and that's before taxes and UAW dues are deducted.

This is hardly the type of negotiating that would impress my non-union friends at Honda, where the profit-sharing plan is already a well-known scam. They call it the "Profit-screwing plan."

Second-tier workers looking at three bucks tops over four years can count on 75 cents a year.

Ouch.

Not the big boost workers expected.

"Felt more like dropping a fifty pound air gun on my toe than a reward for working hard and keeping my mouth shut," said one source close to the talk on the shop floor, who "didn't want to be identified because details of the contract have not been released to union members."

Second-tier workers need a big raise now, not later.

What's more, if there is no path to equality for second-tier workers, it can only mean more tiers in future contracts and wage cut by deflation for top-tier workers, who may never see another raise.

UAW officials have kept this contract under tighter wraps than any contract I remember. Apparently, they have very little to brag about. But I am more concerned with what they aren't telling us than what they are publicizing through unidentified sources--aka, bartenders, cab drivers and escorts.

Health care is always an easy target for takeaways which may be concealed in convoluted language or introduced next January as in, "Oh, by the way..." Or, like they say on the shop floor, "We won't know what's in the contract until next year when they reopen it and change it."

### **"Perhaps I Am Too Skeptical, But Every Time I Think We Are Nearing The Bottom...Another Trap Door Opens"**

Perhaps I am too skeptical, but every time I think we are nearing the bottom...another trap door opens.

GM needs to replace legacy workers with new hires in order to gain any benefit from the second-tier wage.

Without a carrot and a stick, workers aren't ready to jump ship in a tanking economy.

A lot of workers are assisting unemployed family members, or they are underwater on their mortgage, or they simply feel insecure since they last checked the balance in their 401(k).

So where's the shake and bake?

Where's the clue to GM's turnaround plan? Why isn't Wall Street doing handstands like they did in 2007? Is the silence a tell or an omen?

UAW President Bob King said he held the line on pensions.

By which he could mean that he helped reel in the suckers who took the bait, or that he stopped the offense from making any gains.

Perhaps I have grown too cynical in my old age, but there's something suspicious about a deal that doesn't address an urgent financial issue like pensions.

In June, GM reported that its pension system was underfunded by \$10.8 billion. GM Vice President Stephen Girsky, who is also a UAW-VEBA (Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association) trustee (that's right, he negotiates with himself, which is why he doesn't experience any conflicts of interest) told investors, "We want to take the pension risk off the table."

**Investors are concerned that GM's pension is so far underfunded that it looks like sunken treasure.**

**This is not intended as a metaphor.**

**It really is treasure in the eyes of investors, who recognize that when a debt is taken off the books, it turns into a credit.**

**Easy money, if you have the right tackle and a captain with a patch over one eye.**

Ellen E. Schultz, in her book *Retirement Heist: How Companies Plunder and Profit from the Nest Eggs of American Workers*, explains:

"Because the benefits are recorded as debts on a company's books, reducing the debt generates paper gains, which are added to operating income, right along with income from selling hardware or trucks.

"Thanks to these accounting rules, which all companies adopted in the late 1980s, retiree plans have become cookie jars of potential earnings enhancements: Essentially every dollar owed to current and future retirees--for pensions, health care, dental, death benefits or disability--is a potential dollar of income to a company."

GM can't take pension risk "off the table" without (1) revisiting bankruptcy court, a common practice, but probably not a good option for GM; or (2) switching to a cash balance plan and/or buying out future retirees; or (3) shoveling \$10 billion cash overboard to fill the sunken treasure chest (okay, now it is a pirate metaphor), which would plunge GM stock and the UAW-VEBA with it.

So what's it going to be?

If I am way off base, I wish someone would do the math for me and put a sock in Girsky's mouth, because the Social Security Age Creep is stalking my sleep.

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## **Military Resistance** [www.militaryproject.org](http://www.militaryproject.org)

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BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE.*



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**“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**

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