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Resistance in the US Military to the War on Iraq

Ann Wright, t r u t h o u t

June 25, 2006

As a 29-year Army and Army Reserves veteran, I am horrified to see the politicization of the US military under the Bush administration. The "ethics and professionalism" of the US military has been targeted for destruction by the civilian appointees of this administration. They want "yes" men and women who do not question the legality of the policies of the administration. Tragically, from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on down, Rumsfeld and crew have been successful in stifling professional discussion within the military, with the exception of former Army Chief of Staff Shinseki and now six retired generals. Under the Bush administration, there is no accountability or responsibility for criminal actions; privates and sergeants are court-martialed, while senior civilian and military leaders responsible for the criminal policies are free.

Despite the "yes, sir" attitude of senior military officers toward the Bush administration's illegal policies, there is resistance within the US military to the war on Iraq. Military personnel know they have the right and duty to refuse illegal orders, including the order to deploy to an illegal war. They know the United States executed German and Japanese military officers and civilians for their participation in wars of aggression in World War II. They know that the Nuremberg principles adopted by the international community after World War II require civilians and military personnel to stop their government from committing illegal acts. Those in the military who dissent and resist what they know are illegal actions of the Bush administration are persons of the highest courage and conscience.

Resistance to the war on Iraq within the US military community is growing. Over eight thousand American soldiers are absent without leave (AWOL), most living underground in the United States. Many now refer to AWOL as "Against War of Lies" instead of Absent Without Leave. Individual non-public resistance in the military generally results in an administrative discharge without publicity. Thousands have turned themselves in to military authorities and have been administratively discharged from the military. US military bases discharge dozens of war resisters each week.

Public resistance by military personnel to the war on Iraq results in court-martial to make an example of the resister. Some military personnel have applied for conscience objector (CO) status. Most have been denied CO status and ten have been court-martialed and imprisoned for publicly refusing to obey orders to deploy to Iraq to commit criminal acts there, including murder by bombing innocent civilians, shooting innocent civilians, and torture. Those who refuse to deploy to Iraq and kill for the Bush administration generally receive more punishment than those who commit criminal acts of murder and torture.

Four women who had served in the military were honored last week at the annual War Resisters meeting in New York City. Three had applied for CO status and had been refused by the military. One is now imprisoned at Fort Lewis, Washington, for refusing weapons training and deployment. One completed her assignment in Iraq and returned to become a co-founder of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW).

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Hundreds of US military have chosen to resist the war by living in Canada, most under the radar of the now-conservative Canadian government. Twenty-four US military have publicly moved to Canada and are seeking political refugee status. They are supported by an incredible network of Canadians citizens and American war resisters from the Vietnam era who are now Canadian citizens, who assist the next generation of US military who resist illegal wars of aggression.

This weekend Iraq Veterans Against the War, Veterans for Peace and Gold Star Families for Peace, including Cindy Sheehan and myself, participated in Buffalo, New York, fundraisers for US war resisters living in Canada. We met seven of the twenty-four brave men and their families who have said that the Bush administration's war on Iraq is a war crime and that their participation in the war would mean that they too are war criminals. While they are volunteers for the defense of our country, they are not "yes" men to the administration; they are "yes" men to the Constitution of the United States. They are persons of conscience who see the war for what it really is and are resisting the pressures to dutifully comply to military orders to conduct illegal actions.

Their decisions to live in Canada underscore the right of military personnel to challenge an illegal order and to live with the consequences of that challenge. They have chosen live in Canada with their families rather than being imprisoned for saying no to killing for the Bush administration's goals. Should the security of the United States truly be threatened, they would defend it.

They live free of guilt of killing innocent Iraqis. But the decision to live in Canada comes with its own penalties. These brave soldiers and marines leave the support network of friends and buddies in the military. These persons of courage endure family divisions when family members do not agree with their decision to leave the military and go to Canada. These honorable men undertake the daily struggles of suddenly caring for their families in a new country. These honorable soldiers are unable to return to the United States until an amnesty is offered by a future president. But the consequences of this act of conscience mean these soldiers and marines will not have the lifelong guilt of murdering innocent civilians, nor the nightmares of seeing their friends blown up in a war whose purpose they believe is illegal and a war crime.

This week Army First Lieutenant Ehren Watada will become the first officer to refuse to deploy with his unit to Iraq. He will be the first officer of this war who refuses to participate in military actions guaranteed to destroy his future emotional, if not physical, life - and impact his family for decades to come. This week also marks the first time in this war that a church is offering sanctuary to war resisters. The membership of First United Methodist Church of Tacoma, Washington, just outside of Fort Lewis, where Lieutenant Watada is stationed, has said that they will resist the Bush administration's illegal war by sheltering any who refuse to participate in the war.

Another aspect of resistance within the military community comes from retired generals who are now publicly questioning the military operational plans that have put US troops in jeopardy in Iraq and the impact of the war on Iraq on the military and its ability to respond to genuine threats to US national security.

For the twenty-nine years I was in the military, either on active duty or in the Reserves, my worst nightmare was that an administration would get the United States into a military conflict that I knew was illegal. Today, if I were recalled from the US Army's Retired Ready Reserves, I would have to say, "I will not serve the Bush administration's war on Iraq. I will not agree to be recalled. You will have to court-martial me as I will not participate in this illegal war of aggression, this war crime."

Acts of resistance, big and small, recognized nationally or never heard of by most, by military and civilians are all important elements of ending the illegal war, the war crime, committed by the Bush administration. People of conscience all over the country are refusing to be silent and are taking courageous steps to end the illegal war on Iraq.

What will you do to stop this illegal war?

Ann Wright

Ann Wright is a retired Colonel with 29 years in the US Army and Army Reserves and as a US diplomat for 16 years, and resisted the war on Iraq by resigning in March 2003 from her position as Deputy Chief of Mission, or Deputy Ambassador from the US Embassy in Mongolia.



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Ann served in the diplomatic corps in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia and Mongolia and helped reopen the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, in December, 2001. As a US military officer, she participated in post-conflict reconstruction in Grenada, Panama and Somalia. She received the State Department's Award for Heroism as the acting US Ambassador during the evacuation of the international community during the brutal rebel takeover of Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1997.

With her service in both the US military and the US State Department in areas of conflict all over the world, she felt the US invasion and occupation of an oil-rich Moslem country that had done nothing to the United States and was no threat to US national security would make the world more dangerous and place the United States in greater jeopardy. She believed the act of invading Iraq would be an act of aggression, a war crime.

Two others from the US diplomat corps also believed the Bush administration's war on Iraq was illegal and resisted by resigning from the US government. As civilian US government employees, there was no penalty to their resistance to the war except giving up their careers.

Links:

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[War Resisters Support Campaign-Canada](#)
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Ordinario di Diritto internazionale all'Università Teramo*

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