

Active-duty US troops voice opposition to the Iraq war

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More than 100 serving members of the US military have to date sent “Appeals for Redress” to members of Congress, urging “the prompt withdrawal of all American military forces and bases from Iraq.”

Under the Military Whistle-Blower Protection Act, active-duty military, National Guard and reservists are allowed to file and send a protected communication to a member of Congress on any subject without reprisal.

The action represents the first time that serving military personnel are petitioning Congress to end the Iraq war. The organizations sponsoring the effort are Iraq Veterans Against the War, Military Families Speak Out and Veterans for Peace.

Until a few days ago, some 65 servicemen and servicewomen had sent appeals to Congress. The number of petitioners has now reached nearly 350, with more than 125 of them on active duty.

Under military regulations, service members can speak out only while off duty and out of uniform, making clear that they are not speaking for the military. In addition, they cannot say anything disrespectful about their commanders or the president.

Two active-duty servicemen have taken the risky step of publicly representing the campaign: Jonathan Hutto, a Navy seaman stationed in Norfolk, Virginia, and Liam Madden, a Marine Corps sergeant in Quantico, Virginia. Madden spent six months in Iraq.

Hutto and Madden, as well as a female member of the military who remained anonymous, spoke at a media teleconference yesterday.

Hutto told the media that he had come up with the idea for the appeals drive in January 2006. While deployed in a ship off the coast of Iraq he read a copy of David Cortright’s *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War*.

The GI movement, explained Hutto, was comprised of “active-duty, sailors, marines and soldiers in the military

during the Vietnam War who advocated and fought to end that war and bring the troops home.... By 1971, over 250,000 of these active-duty service people” had petitioned their political leaders.

Today’s appeal, said the sailor, states “that the Iraq war should come to an end and that we should end the occupation and bring the troops home.” He believes that the resources being spent on the war should be redirected to solving the economic and social problems at home.

Madden, 22, added: “I oppose the war in Iraq and I feel it is my duty not as a Marine but as an informed citizen to tell other service members that there’s a powerful tool available to them.... The real grievances are: why are we in Iraq if the weapons of mass destruction are not found, if the links to Al Qaeda are not substantiated?

“If democracy is our goal, I believe we’re going about it all wrong and the occupation is perpetuating more violence. I think it’s the biggest destabilizing thing we can do in the Middle East. Furthermore, it’s costing way too many Iraqi civilian and service members’ lives.... The only people who benefit in my eyes—visibly see the benefit—are corporations, such as Halliburton....

“If people want to support the troops, then they should support our coming home.”

Commenting on the tremendous stress faced by military families over multiple redeployments, Madden asserted, “The real deal is that it’s an economic situation. People are staying [in the military] despite the hardship of getting deployed over and over and over again because it’s what’s best for their families and until there’s another viable source of income, they’re going to stay in the military.” He stated that fundamental to the appeal is that “people are getting harmed and lives are getting severely damaged because of this war.”

The servicewoman explained that “the reason I am calling anonymously is because of fear of reprisal for my involvement even though it is legal. Anyone who’s been

involved in the military does know that there are informal means of punitive actions that circumvent the legal system, which are often used in different means to intimidate soldiers.”

Having recently returned from a year in Iraq, she described some of her experiences. “I’ve seen friends injured and I’ve been affected by the deaths within my brigade and unit.” Being in the crossfire of a civil war, she said, further added to the frustration that soldiers felt from risking their lives on a daily basis without really understanding the reason for the risk or possessing the ability to “question what’s going on in the [political and military] upper echelons.”

All three spoke about the pervasive opposition to the war within the ranks of the military. “I don’t think the American public realizes just how many soldiers and service members in general really do have reservations about the actions going on over there,” said the servicewoman. “Obviously fear is one of the main reasons that people are not stepping forward, but that does not preclude them from having these feelings. I start seeing momentum going forward and more and more soldiers coming out....

“Military service people are not supposed to organize groups so this [campaign] is just word of mouth. We’re not talking about mass phone calls or mass mailings. It’s one person talking to another—the snowball effect.”

Hutto revealed that of the 20 sailors he approached, all but one gave their support. This despite the fact that, as Madden asserted, “You’re told from the day you come into [the military] that you don’t have any rights. That the Constitution that you’re defending does not apply to you. It’s a culture [which stresses] that you don’t get engaged in the process, that you’re there to receive orders and get those orders done, that you don’t get engaged and don’t raise any views at all.”

He ended by stating that “what we’re doing is untraditional, unorthodox and unprecedented.”



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