

After leaking of 2007 videotape

US soldiers issue apology over killings in Iraq

Bill Van Auken
23 April 2010

Two soldiers who served in an Army unit depicted in a shocking video recently released by WikiLeaks have issued a public apology to the people of Iraq for the carnage shown in the footage, which they say was routine during their deployment in the US-occupied country.

The “Open Letter of Reconciliation and Responsibility to the Iraqi People” was issued by former Army Specialists Josh Stieber and Ethan McCord, both of whom were members of Bravo Company in the Second Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment of the Army’s First Infantry Division in July 2007, when the video was taken from the gun camera of an Apache helicopter as it strafed Iraq civilians with machinegun fire. Over a dozen Iraqis were killed and several more wounded, including two young children. Among the dead was an Iraqi photographer and his assistant—Namir Noor-Eldeen and Saeed Chmagh—both employees of the international news agency Reuters.

The helicopter was providing air support to US soldiers as they conducted house-to-house raids in eastern Baghdad. The troops of Bravo Company were the first to reach the scene after the slaughter carried out by the attack helicopter above them.

The video, posted by WikiLeaks under the title “Collateral Murder,” has been viewed some 6 million times on the Internet. It has provided the American and world public with visceral images of the slaughter that has been carried out by the US military over the past decade in wars being fought in both Iraq and Afghanistan, images that are routinely censored from the coverage of the mainstream media.

The camera shows unarmed Iraqi civilians making a futile attempt to flee the 30-millimeter rounds pouring down from the sky. It also records the helicopter firing again on a van that stopped to give aid to the wounded,

killing the driver, as well as one of the wounded men, and seriously wounding two children sitting in the front seat of the vehicle.

Just as appalling is the radio chatter recorded between the helicopter crew members and their supervisors as the killings unfold. “Oh yeah, look at those dead bastards,” one of the crew members gloats after the first shootings. As the gun sight fixes on one of the wounded crawling along the ground, a member of the helicopter crew is heard urging the Iraqi to “pick up a weapon” so he can shoot him again. And finally, when informed that the attack has wounded two children, the crew members agree that it was the fault of the Iraqis for “bringing their kids into a battle.”

Ethan McCord was one of the soldiers on the scene, shown in the video picking up one of the wounded children and running to a US military vehicle. Commanders decided that the child was not to be taken to a US military field hospital, and McCord was reprimanded for his humane response.

Josh Stieber, while a member of the company, had not been taken on the mission because of an earlier run-in with his military superiors.

The letter stresses that the murderous acts of violence against civilians shown in the video were not an aberration, but rather “everyday occurrences” in Iraq.

The US military, which sought to suppress the video, has steadfastly defended the actions that it exposes. On April 13, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates used a press conference to lash out at WikiLeaks for making the tape public the week before. “These people can put anything out they want and are never held accountable for it,” he said.

He claimed that viewing the video was like looking at the war through “a soda straw” and charged that it lacked any “context or perspective.”

As the letter from the two Iraq war veterans makes clear, however, the real “context and perspective” are a dirty colonial war of aggression and rules of engagement that viewed the entire Iraqi population as a threat to occupation forces.

In an earlier interview on ABC News, Gates justified the killing, including the firing on the wounded and people attempting to aid them—a patent war crime—on the grounds that the US troops were operating in a “combat situation.”

For its part, the US Central Command, which oversees military operations in the region, announced that it has no intention of reopening an investigation into the 2007 killings. It released redacted copies of the military’s original findings on the bloody operation in east Baghdad, which excused the helicopter crew for mistaking the Reuters photographer’s camera for a rocket-propelled grenade launcher. It also blamed the murdered journalists for having “made no effort to visibly display their status as press.” How they were to identify themselves to a helicopter flying above them, the report did not specify.

“US Central Command has no current plans to reinvestigate or review this combat action,” said Rear Adm. Hal Pittman, the command’s director of communications.

In their letter, which has been posted on the Internet and cosigned by thousands of others, the two Iraq veterans identify themselves as “soldiers who occupied your neighborhood for 14 months.”

It continues: “Ethan McCord pulled your daughter and son from the van, and when doing so, saw the faces of his own children back home. Josh Stieber was in the same company but was not there that day, though he contributed to your pain, and the pain of your community on many other occasions.”

The two former soldiers insist that “what was shown in the WikiLeaks video only begins to depict the suffering we have created. From our own experiences, and the experiences of other veterans we have talked to, we know that the acts depicted in this video are everyday occurrences of this war: this is the nature of how U.S.-led wars are carried out in this region.”

Stieber and McCord go on to write: “We acknowledge our part in the deaths and injuries of your loved ones as we tell Americans what we were trained to do and what we carried out in the name of ‘god and

country’. The soldier in the video said that your husband shouldn’t have brought your children to battle, but we are acknowledging our responsibility for bringing the battle to your neighborhood, and to your family.”

Answering the statements of Robert Gates, the letter adds: “Our government may ignore you, concerned more with its public image. It has also ignored many veterans who have returned physically injured or mentally troubled by what they saw and did in your country. But the time is long overdue that we say that the value of our nation’s leaders no longer represent us. Our secretary of defense may say the US won’t lose its reputation over this, but we stand and say that our reputation’s importance pales in comparison to our common humanity.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact