MARCH 19 ANNIVERSARY OF US INVASION OF IRAQ 2003

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Nos. 10 & 11 at end.

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Google References

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LOOKING BACK
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Falluja Massacre
Miller, Blood Money
IVAW Trauma Posters
Wikileaks
Schwartz, War Without End
Powell’s New Book: No Debate by Bush Admin.
New Film on Cheney, War Criminal
Suicides
NEW NOVEL ABOUT IRAQ WAR

> Ran across this story / interview a couple of weeks ago in the Sunday supplement Parade magazine. Most normal people have problems adjusting to the "new normal."

> Especially when only a small percentage of the entire population has been involved in a prolonged conflict. Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War. It takes a long time for the indifferent general population to get a clue. How so many people can be concerned with their "safety" but unaware of the walking wounded among them puts a severe strain on the survivors of war, their loved ones and, inevitably, the nation itself.

> Below is an excerpt from an interview with Iraq veteran Kevin Powers, author of a novel, The Yellow Birds, about a combat veteran. Lynn Sheer is the writer/interviewer.

> Army veteran Kevin Powers has written what some are calling the first great novel of the Iraq war. Here, Powers shares his own experiences as a returning soldier—and what he sees as the challenges facing this new generation of vets.

> In the past decade, more than a million troops have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, with many thousands more still to come. Kevin Powers is one of them.

> For Powers, 32, who spent 13 months as a combat engineer in Iraq before returning to the States in 2005, "The question you always get
is, 'What's it like over there?" His searing debut novel, *The Yellow Birds*, tries to answer that question, by capturing the casual brutality and emotional isolation of the war as well as the disquietude of returning home when it no longer feels like home. The book—which centers on two young soldiers, Bartle and Murph, and the promise that binds them together—has been called the first great novel to come out of the Iraq war, earning comparisons to classics like Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

PARADE: In the book, you talk a lot about the dehumanizing effect of war, the numbness. How does that affect your ability to reenter civilian life?

Kevin Powers: As human beings, we have the blessing and the curse that we're able to adapt to almost anything. No matter how extreme the circumstances you're in, they become normal. Then there's a sense that coming home is a letdown—because you've been in this kind of heightened state for so long, just the ordinary nature of everyday life can be confusing and frustrating.

What jarred you?

In Iraq, everything mattered: Your survival, your friends' survival, everything that you did was life or death. And we were very often surrounded by civilians we felt an obligation to, being that our job was to try to locate these IEDs and help to remove that danger for them. So there's this sense that, right or wrong, what you're doing is important, and it has an immediate effect on dozens, if not hundreds, of lives. And when you come back, it just doesn't feel like life matters in the same way. No decision that you make feels like it has any impact.

You feel helpless?

There was a really strong sense that my presence was not necessary. Overseas, I was part of a team; people relied on me. When you return, there's this feeling of being isolated in your powerlessness.

Is it common for returning vets to feel that they don't fit in?

Yes. It's hard to find people to connect with. [Our peers] share the experiences of growing up, going to high school, first loves. But then there's that compressed life experience you get from being in an extreme situation. We know about fear in a way that few people know. And you immediately recognize that very few people understand what that's like.

In the book, you write that on the way home, some soldiers say, "Well, what now?"

I felt that very strongly. There can be a profound feeling of aimlessness and purposelessness. You can get back into life or, sadly, you can be lost. Suicides are rampant. A lot of [returning vets] turn
> to alcohol and drugs. There's a huge amount of pain.
>
> You describe Bartle [the main character in The Yellow Birds] as having turned into "a kind of cripple" when he returns home.
> Part of that is feeling that somehow you’re unequipped to participate fully in life, because some percentage of your attention, your being, your inner life is dedicated to dealing with the residue of your experience.

> And your experience has been killing, in many cases.
> Yeah, or witnessing killing, or dealing with the aftermath of killing.
> I mean, we’re talking about the worst thing that human beings can do to each other, and having that be normal. So when you come back, it doesn't stay distant the way that other memories do. And even the kind of physical responses that you develop to what’s happening around you …

> For instance?
> Noises and smells, those can bring back powerful memories. I remember when I was going to school one Fourth of July, and there were a lot of fireworks going off. I knew that I was in Richmond. I knew that I was a college student. But I thought people were shooting at me. It took a little while to recognize that things were okay.
>
> That it wasn't somebody trying to kill you. Right. And there's a certain kind of smell—it's like a diesel engine smell. Something about that would immediately put me—you know, like I was back there. If I'm walking down the street and a city bus goes by, I'll catch a whiff and just kind of take a second.
>
> There are so many choices to make when you get home. Is that overwhelming, too?
> Absolutely. Just on a functional level of going from an experience where you knew exactly what you had to do.
>
> Because somebody told you?
> Because somebody told you. And it may be the most difficult thing that you ever had to do in your life, but you knew what you were supposed to do. And then coming home, [you have] essentially no direction. I think "rudderless" is probably an appropriate way of describing it.
> You see the world; you see all these directions that you could go. How do you possibly begin to decide? Particularly if you're feeling emotionally numbed.
>
> When you returned to civilian life, you had no college degree. But you were lucky: You got a job. And you went back to school.
> I spent the summer after I got back framing houses with my brother. And then I got a job at a credit card company here in [Richmond], answering phones. I'd been writing since I was a kid, but I had more or less stopped. At VCU, I really started to remember how much I
enjoyed writing and reading, having discussions.
What about those who don't find work? Unemployment for returning vets is a huge problem. How much does it affect a returning vet if he or she can't find a job?
I can't imagine having that added anxiety, trying to reintegrate, trying to adjust, if I didn't know where I was going to live, if I didn't know how I was going to eat. And, you know, I'm not sure how [that anxiety] influences an employer's decision to hire a vet or not.
After I had been at one job for a couple months, the person who hired me said he had worried about hiring a vet, because he thought I might have lots of problems. But I think the reverse can also be true. I mean, I think the difficulty of entering back into the world, not only does that apply to personal relationships and relationships with family, it can make it difficult to reach out to potential employers.
It's, "How am I going to interact with these people if I get a job? They're not going to understand me."

Bartle doesn't seem to be able to fit in when he comes back. Was that your experience?
It can be hard to make friends. Even basic things [get in the way], like wondering why people are late. They're showing up 10 minutes late and they don't care. And you're thinking, "Do these people know how lucky they are?"

Meaning that they didn't see what you saw over there?
No. It's more a realization that life is precious and fragile, and taking it for granted just seems kind of baffling.

What about the attitude of this country toward the war in which you served? In the book, Bartle refers to "the dull world that ignored our little pest of a war."
It's complicated. I understand that it's incredibly difficult to watch what's happening on the news every day and not become inured to it. I've fallen victim to that myself, wanting to look away. But I also felt powerful resentment that it seemed like nobody cared that we had gotten into this thing without thinking what the consequences would be.

And does that in your mind diminish what you've just done with your life for a couple years?
It's a disconnect. You might think of your experience and then say, "Nobody even knows or cares."

We're in the middle of a presidential race. What are the larger issues you'd like to see discussed? What's missing from the dialogue?
In some ways, the dialogue itself is missing. It seems the public conversation has disappeared. There are still soldiers in Afghanistan right now. There might be a wounded soldier as we speak who is feeling his life slipping away from him. And it doesn't warrant a mention in
some venues. I think that's tragic.

Veterans Day is coming up. What should Americans think about? I think making sure that there are opportunities in place, knowing what some veterans have given, parts of their lives that they'll never get back, parts of their bodies that they'll never get back. Having some sort of safety net in place, to me, seems like it should be a key feature of any sort of political discussion. I know there are exceptions, but in my experience, to a man, every person that I served with wanted to contribute to our country, felt that it was something that they could do on behalf of their fellow citizens.

Toward the end of The Yellow Birds, Bartle says, "I don't want desert. I don't want prairie. I don't want plains. I don't want anything unbroken. I'd rather look at the mountains, something manageable and finite that could break up and fix the earth into parcels small enough that they could be contended with."

He wants a life he feels he has some, maybe not control over, but some agency in. He wants to have a life that's manageable, that he doesn't feel overwhelmed by.

Because coming home can be so overwhelming? Because the entirety of the experience is overwhelming, the fighting, the coming home, the readjusting. So, I think, in his case, he has a desire to live simply, to just be ordinary.

Is that what you've seen in other returning vets?

I do. And I think a lot of the guys I know and a lot of people I've talked to, what they want is very often what most people want, a kind of simple life, a livelihood, a family, people who care about them, people they can care about. I think vets on the whole want the same things that everybody else does.

> vvawnet mailing list
> vvawnet@vvaw.org
> http://lists.shout.net/mailman/listinfo/vvawnet
> ************************************************************
> Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
> (773) 569-3520
> vvaw@vvaw.org
> www.vvaw.org

Showings of Opera, FALLUJAH, to Benefit Iraq Hospital

The Justice for Fallujah project encourages VFP Chapters to sponsor screenings of its

Proceeds from these screenings will be used to support research on congenital malformations at the Fallujah General Hospital.

To request a DVD, send an email to justiceforfallujah@gmail.com or larryvfp@gmail.com

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Mesopotamia is a capitalist’s dreamscape. As one put it, “If the United States was going to the trouble of invading Iraq, shouldn’t American companies reap the rewards?”

The Bush administration has answered affirmatively, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Miller tells us. First came the tanks, then the suits looking to clean up in what promised to be very lucrative times—for Americans, that is, who always won out over local suppliers, who, with a little cash, might actually have turned into friends rather than insurgents. Consider the children’s hospital that Laura Bush so dearly wanted for feel-good purposes. The Republican head of foreign operations for the House Appropriations Committee asked, “Why should we build a hospital for kids first when kids in Iraq need clean water?” Right, but the politico shelved his objections after NSC staffers came calling to make it clear that the First Lady really wanted the legacy. The American builder made out, though the hospital is a shell and the kids still don’t have clean water—to say nothing of electricity, vaccinations, food and other niceties.

Part of the problem, by Miller’s account, is that there was “never any single [American] agency that took control of the reconstruction effort”; another is that big corporations such as Bechtel and the notorious Halliburton were offered uncompetitive-bid, secret-contract agreements to carve up the reconstruction economy for themselves; yet another is that vultures such as the aptly named principals of the security firm Custer Battles were given free rein to rip off Americans and Iraqis alike. In the face of this officially sponsored looting, absence of accountability and shameless profiteering—all ongoing—one ethical hero of Miller’s tale commits suicide, while hundreds of GIs and Iraqis die.

Another epitaph for Mr. Bush’s War, and a book sure to fascinate—and anger—its readers.

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Download free *War is Trauma* posters here  [http://www.ivaw.org/war-is-trauma](http://www.ivaw.org/war-is-trauma)
Dear James,

Today is the ninth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. The military occupation of Iraq is over, but the war continues in the untold pains and traumas of the Iraqi people and in the hearts and minds of those service members and veterans that have survived it. It is often here in the unseen trauma that war is most devastating.

With that in mind Iraq Veterans Against the War and Justseeds are proud to release War is Trauma: a portfolio that highlights the unseen traumas of war. We invite everyone to go to the new War is Trauma website to download, print, and post these graphics everywhere and anywhere to help highlight the too often hidden psychological tolls on the Iraqi people and veterans.

In this military climate that continues to stigmatise service members who come forward about their unseen trauma, outbursts of destruction will continue to happen. Last week’s tragedy in Afghanistan where sixteen more innocent civilians were massacred is just one of the most recent examples. Robert Bales, the Army Staff Sergeant named in the Afghanistan murders was reportedly on his fourth deployment, had TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury), had been wounded twice, and had seen a fellow soldier lose a leg the day before.

Like Robert Bales whose three previous deployments were in Iraq, many of the troops now in Afghanistan have previously served in Iraq. Many arrive already suffering from Military Sexual Trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and/or Traumatic Brain Injury. The military is in the midst of a suicide epidemic. Active duty service members are committing suicide at a rate of one every 36 hours. There have been at least 2,129 military suicides since 2001 and a least 4,194 veterans have died of self destructive and reckless behaviors. The trauma we and our fellow service members and veterans have experienced is often connected with the trauma that we have inflicted upon civilians.

On this anniversary please take a moment to:

Reflect upon those Iraqi civilians suffering from the trauma we have inflicted, the unknown number of dead and wounded Iraqis#, and the Iraqi refugees and internally displaced.

Reflect upon the lives of the 4,457 service members who died over the course of the war, the 2,333,973 service members who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan over the last ten years, the 1,002,106 service members that deployed twice or more, and the 385,711 veterans that are now suffering from mental health conditions.

IVAW members in chapters across the country, in San Francisco, Olympia, WA, Chicago, and Washington DC to name a few, will be observing the Anniversary in various ways and one thing is certain, the events of this last week have cast a pall over an already somber occasion.

In Solidarity,

IVAW Field Organizing Team,

Aaron Hughes, Maggie Martin, and Andrew Wright
The reality behind the *civilian* death count; al-Qaeda's fictitious presence; torture, torture and more torture. ..... a *bill* that no matter what is discovered about the *war* in Iraq and Afghanistan, ...... Independent investigators like Jim Hoffman, David Ray *Griffin*, David .... If Iraq did not have oil, they would have escaped this *fate*.

**War Without End: The Iraq War in Context**

*By Michael Schwartz*

- **Globalization & Imperialism**
- **Middle East**

In this razor-sharp analysis, TomDispatch.com commentator Michael Schwartz demolishes the myths used to sell the U.S. public the idea of an endless “war on terror” centered in Iraq.

He demonstrates how the U.S. occupation is fueling rather than restraining civil war in Iraq, and how U.S. officials systematically dismantled the Iraqi state and economy, helping to destroy rather than rebuild the country.

In a popular style, reminiscent of the best writing against the Vietnam war, he shows how the real U.S. interests in Iraq have been rooted in the geopolitics of oil and the expansion of a neoliberal economic model in the Middle East—and around the globe—at gunpoint.

War Without End also reveals how the failure of the United States in Iraq has forced U.S. planners to fundamentally rethink the imperial fantasies driving recent foreign policy.

**About the author**

Michael Schwartz, professor of sociology and faculty director of the Undergraduate College of Global Studies at Stony Brook University, has written extensively on the war in Iraq at sites including TomDispatch, ZNet, Asia Times, and Mother Jones, and in numerous magazines, including Contexts, Against the Current, and Z.

**Video**

Michael Schwartz discusses the neoliberal occupation of Iraq:

**Reviews**

“Americans have all along needed a sociologist, not a general, to help them understand Iraq. They need to know about social movements, not just militias, and about oil politics, not just personalities in the news. We have the incredible good fortune that the perspicacious Michael Schwartz boldly stepped forward to cast floods of illumination on the Iraq War and its tragic social costs.”

—Juan Cole, Informed Comment

“The best history of the U.S. occupation of Iraq that I've seen…. This book puts incidents of violence
we hear about in the context of the massive violence we don't hear much about, and puts all of it in the context of the economic and social devastation imposed on Iraq…. Schwartz also helps to make the complex clearer and simpler by framing his account in terms of the actual oily motivations of our government, rather than any of the pretended rationales.”
—David Swanson, Global Research

"War Without End is a brilliant and readable introduction to the destruction wrought by America’s lust for oil and an insightful look at 21st century colonialism."
—Eleanor J. Bader

A. Colin Powell Admits In His New Book That The Decision To Go To War In Iraq Was ‘Never Debated’ May 9, 2012 By Michael Hayne

So you remember that pretend war for democracy in Iraq that cost us trillions of dollars and took the lives of thousands of US soldiers, not to mention ravaged an entire nation and created even more enemies for the United States all to better Haliburton’s bottom line? Well, it seems that not even a nanosecond of debate took place among the ranks of the Bush Administration.

Former Secretary of State and one of the very few sane Republicans left, Colin Powell, recently penned a book where he gives one of the most startling and equally nauseating accounts yet as it pertains to the Bush Administration’s horrible misadventure in the Middle East. According to Powell, key members of Bush’s cabinet never once debated about whether going to war in Iraq was a good idea. In other words, they might as well said because it was cloudy out or Bush was bored.

In a chapter discussing what he calls his “infamous” February 2003 speech to the United Nations where he authoritatively presented what was later exposed as gross misinformation about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, Powell notes that by that time, war “was approaching,” according to the Huffington Post.

"By then, the President did not think war could be avoided,” Powell writes. “He had crossed the line in his own mind, even though the NSC [National Security Council] had never met — and never would meet — to discuss the decision.” (Source: Huffington Post)

The findings in Colin Powell’s book, It Worked For Me: In Life and Leadership, which is largely just a compilation of motivational parables, directly runs counter to George Bush’s account as illustrated in his memoir, Decision Points. In his memoir, Bush claimed that his decision to go to war came after a long and deliberative process. Perhaps by long and deliberative, he meant during an episode of Spongebob Squarepants since we now have even further proof that not only wasn’t the cynical decision to wage war on Iraq a decision point, but there was virtually no decision-making process involved. Thus, a more befitting title for Bush’s memoir should’ve been Because they are brown, have oil, my daddy didn’t like them, and I didn’t want Cheney to think I was Gay for not going to War.

This "undebated” war in which there wasn’t a modicum ideological fervor or study groups to justify its launching, which President Obama officially brought to an end Dec 31st, has cost taxpayers around $3 trillion, left 4,487 U.S. service members dead and killed more than 100,000 Iraqis. Nevermind, let’s get back to screaming about vaginas and gay people wanting basic rights and how college kids are running up our deficit.

Michael is a comedian/VO artist/Columnist extraordinaire, who co-wrote an award-nominated comedy, produces a chapter of Laughing Liberally, wrote for NY Times Laugh Lines, guest blogged for Joe
The Pen  theteam@peaceteam.net
June 1, 2012
Dear Friends and Activists,
We just got back from Cannes in France, where we premiered the now completed *The Last War Crime* movie at Marche Du Film. We attracted a lot of attention, including a major on camera interview by the BBC. It's about indicting Cheney for torture . . . and isn't that something billions of people want to see?

And while we are working on putting together a real distribution deal, we are making available the special promotional DVDs for the film we put together for the occasion. And while they last you can have one for no charge, not even shipping, just by submitting the page below.

*The Last War Crime* promo DVD:
http://www.peaceteam.net/trailer_dvd.php


**Post-War Suicides May Exceed Combat Deaths, U.S. Says (Update1)**
By Avram Goldstein - May 5, 2008

**Photojournalists on War:** The Untold Stories from Iraq
Except for the most famous conflict photographers, such as W. Eugene Smith and David Douglas Duncan, there are few interviews published that offer an extended view of the craft of conflict photography. . . . The interviews in Photojournalists on War give the experience a full voice, and I know of no other comparable collection for any post-Vietnam conflict. . . . Nothing approaches the depth of Kamber's book.”

— Anne Wilkes Tucker, Gus and Lyndall Wortham Curator of Photography, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

With previously unpublished photographs by an incredibly diverse group of the world's top news photographers, Photojournalists on War presents a groundbreaking new visual and oral history of America's nine-year conflict in the Middle East. Michael Kamber interviewed photojournalists from many leading news organizations, including Agence France-Presse, the Associated Press, the Guardian, the Los Angeles Times, Magnum, Newsweek, the New York Times, Paris Match, Reuters, Time, the Times of London, VII Photo Agency, and the Washington Post, to create the most comprehensive collection of eyewitness accounts of the Iraq War yet published. These in-depth interviews offer first-person, frontline reports of the war as it unfolded, including key moments such as the battle for Fallujah, the toppling of Saddam's statue, and the Haditha massacre. The photographers also vividly describe the often shocking and sometimes heroic actions that journalists undertook in trying to cover the war, as they discuss the role of the media and issues of censorship. These hard-hitting accounts and photographs, rare in the annals of any war, reveal the inside and untold stories behind the headlines in Iraq.

Michael Kamber has worked as a photojournalist for more than twenty-five years. He covered the war in Iraq as a writer and photographer for the New York Times between 2003 and 2012. Kamber was the Times's principal photographer in Baghdad in 2007, the bloodiest year of the war. He is the recipient of a World Press Photo Award.
Reviewing Marjorie Cohn and Kathleen Gilberd's "Rules of Disengagement"


Marjorie Cohn is a Distinguished Law Professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law in San Diego where she's taught since 1991 and is the current President of the National Lawyers Guild. She's also been a criminal defense attorney at the trial and appellate levels, is an author, and writes many articles for professional journals, other publications, and numerous popular web sites.

Her record of achievements, distinctions, and awards are many and varied - for her teaching, writing, and her work as a lawyer and activist for peace, social and economic justice, and respect for the rule of law. Cohn's previous books include "Cameras in the Courtroom: Television and the Pursuit of Justice" and "Cowboy Republic: Six Ways the Bush Gang Has Defied the Law."

Her newest book just out, co-authored with Kathleen Gilberd (a recognized expert on military administrative law), is titled "Rules of Disengagement: The Politics and Honor of Military Dissent." It explores why US military personnel disobey orders and refuse to participate in two illegal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also explains that US and international law obligate them to do so.

Cohn and Gilberd write:

"Rules of Engagement limit forms of combat, levels of force, and legitimate enemy targets, defining what is legal in warfare and what is not. (They're also) defined by an established body of international (and US) law" that leave no ambiguity.

Nonetheless, in past and current US wars, virtually no "Rules" whatever are followed. Soldiers are trained to fire at "anything that moves," place no value on enemy lives, and often treat civilians no differently from combatants. It results in massive civilian casualties, dismissively called "collateral damage." It also gets growing numbers in the ranks to resist - to challenge so-called "Rules" they believe are illegal and immoral.

"Rules of Disengagement" "discuss(es) the laws and regulations governing military dissent and resistance - the legal rules of disengagement (and offers) practical
guidelines (that include) political protest to requesting discharge from the service."

Today, growing **Iraq and Afghanistan** casualty counts are enormous as well as the disturbing toll on the GIs involved - including long and repeated deployments, often leaving permanent debilitating effects, physical and/or psychological.

US soldiers have a right and duty to dissent and resist, and today it's easier than ever through all the modern ways of communicating, including blogging, sharing stories, photos, videos, and "developing new ways to speak out to fellow soldiers and civilians online and in the media."

"Rules of Disengagement" goes into courtrooms where military personnel "have spoken out, arguing that (today's) wars are illegal (and immoral) under international (and US) law." It's a "practical guide" providing "specific discussion(s) of applicable regulations and laws" for readers "to form their own conclusions and consider their own options." Above all, it's a way for honorable young men and women to dissent, resist, and disengage from two illegal, immoral wars, in hopes many others will follow their example.

Resisting Illegal Wars

Every US war since WW II has been illegal. Article 51 of the UN Charter only permits the "right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member....until the Security Council has taken measures to maintain international peace and security."

In addition, Article I, Section 8, Clause 11 (the war powers clause) authorizes only both houses of Congress, not the president, to declare war. Nonetheless, that process was followed only five times in our history and last used on December 8, 1941 after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

Yet many judges won't apply "the law to the wars, and then to service members' refusal to take part" in them. They say it's "not their role, not a matter under their jurisdiction, or not 'relevant.' " In case studies the authors use, court-martial judges, juries, and the public increasingly accept these arguments but also recognize that "men and women of conscience have put their futures on the line for their opinions and actions against illegal wars (and) orders."

It hasn't shown up in court-martial decisions except in more lenient sentences, indicating growing respect for those brave enough to resist on matters of conscience and their opinions regarding the law. Pablo Paredes for one.
The Navy petty officer third class and weapons-control technician refused duty on the USS Bonhomme Richard as it deployed to the Persian Gulf on December 6, 2004 to take part in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was charged with unauthorized absence and willfully missing his ship's deployment. On May 10, 2005, Paredes avoided jail and a dishonorable or bad conduct discharge when the court-martial judge dismissed the former charge, convicted him on the latter one, sentenced him to two months restriction, three months of hard labor without confinement, and reduction in rank from E-4 to E-1.

Lt. Cdr. Robert Klant denied expert testimony on the war's illegality, but let Cohn testify as an expert witness, at the sentencing hearing. At its conclusion, Klant astonished attending spectators by saying:

"I believe the government has successfully demonstrated a reasonable belief for every service member to decide that the wars in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq were illegal to fight in." Paredes benefitted from that view. Others have as well, but not often or easily.

Modern Conscientious Objectors (COs)

They're persons who refuse to perform military service, and request noncombatant status or discharge on grounds of religious, moral, ethical, or philosophical beliefs with regard to wars and killing. Objecting on the basis of conscience is 'a long and honorable" tradition going back to the beginning of the republic. It was used frequently during the Vietnam war.

Objectors help others by expanding the right to resist and dissent. Under DOD regulations, "the military must grant CO status to any service member who (consciously opposes all) war(s) in any form, whose opposition is founded on religious training and beliefs, and whose position is sincere and deeply held." This position "must have developed or become central to the CO's beliefs after entry into the military," and applicants must provide "clear and convincing evidence that he or she is a CO."

US Army Reserve Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia was the first Iraq War veteran to refuse further involvement on matters of conscience after serving in it earlier from April - October 2003. Following leave, he failed to rejoin his National Guard unit and filed for discharge as a CO on grounds that the invasion and occupation were illegal and immoral. The Army then charged him with desertion to send a strong message to others who resist.

His May 2004 court-martial was a kangaroo-court show trial, widely broadcast to all
military personnel worldwide on internal Pentagon television, radio and newspaper outlets. At trial, the military judge disallowed prepared defense testimony under Army Field Manual 27-10, the Constitution, and established international law.

Mejia was found guilty of desertion with intent to avoid hazardous duty. He was sentenced to a year in prison, reduction in rank to E-1, one year's forfeiture of pay, and a bad conduct discharge after which Amnesty International declared him a prisoner of conscience, its highest honor.

After the verdict, international law expert Francis Boyle was allowed to testify during the sentencing phase - but under strict limitations imposed by the judge. He cited relevant domestic, international, and military law, reviewed crimes of war and against humanity under them, and explained the culpability of commanders and government officials to the highest levels for abusing and torturing prisoners.

Mejia served nine months in prison and in August 2007 was elected chairman of the board of Iraq Veterans Against the War. Hundreds of others have filed for CO status while many more go AWOL or refuse deployment to combat zones. The military never makes it easy, yet the illegitimacy of two illegal wars and the immense hardships on young GIs and their families makes growing numbers resist and dissent. Still many others aren't aware that they qualify for CO status.

Current CO stereotypes stem from the Vietnam era when they were viewed as subversives and cowards. Other myths are that wars must be ongoing for those in the military to apply, the process is lengthy, discharges, if granted, won't be honorable, and federal benefits will be lost as well as eligibility for government jobs. "Needless to say, these myths are not true," but exist to discourage applicants and impede the process.

Various civilian organizations provide good information on CO rights, regulations on them, and procedures on how to apply. Also, the "CO process is one of the most legally protected of discharge proceedings - COs have greater rights than those who seek discharge for family hardship or similar reasons." Yet command hostility exists and rights are often denied. "Success rates vary among the services." Some COs are discharged for other reasons. Many applications are rejected. Some go AWOL as a result, and others do or don't succeed through court intervention. Imperial America doesn't make it easy, so applicants have to persist all the harder.


NEW
WASHINGTON -- In the run-up to the war in Iraq, neoconservative hawks in and out of the Bush administration promised that the U.S. invasion would quickly transform that country into a strong ally, a model Arab democracy and a major oil producer that would lower world prices, even while paying for its own reconstruction.

"A new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region," President George W. Bush told a crowd at the American Enterprise Institute in 2003, a few weeks before he launched the attack.

Ten bloody and grueling years later, Iraq is finally emerging from its ruins and establishing itself as a geopolitical player in the Middle East -- but not the way the neocons envisioned.

Though technically a democracy, Iraq's floundering government has degenerated into a tottering quasi-dictatorship. The costs of the war (more than $800 billion) and reconstruction (more than $50 billion) have been staggeringly high. And while Iraq is finally producing oil at pre-war levels, it is trying its best to drive oil prices as high as possible.

Most disturbing to many American foreign policy experts, however, is Iraq's extremely close relationship with Iran. Today, the country that was formerly Iran's deadliest rival is its strongest ally.

"These are the wonderful consequences of our intervention -- and the brilliance of it really is mindboggling," said Chas Freeman, a Middle East scholar and critic of the neoconservatives. "The extent to which Iraq has become an active collaborator with Iran ... is really very striking."

The U.S. is leading an intense international effort to pressure Iran to rein in its nuclear program. In January, the European Union agreed to join the U.S. embargo on Iranian oil, which went into effect this month.

Rather than help the U.S. in these endeavors, however, Iraq is doing quite the opposite. Iraq has been critical of the U.S. sanctions against Iran, and some fear it will help its neighbor avoid the penalty's sting by ferrying goods across their shared border.

Another top Obama administration goal in the Middle East is to push Bashar al-Assad's oppressive regime out of Syria. "For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside," President Barack Obama said last August.

But again, Iraq is working at cross-purposes to the U.S., decrying efforts to oust Assad and letting Iran use its airspace to ship weapons to Assad's government.

In fact, some Middle East scholars predict the rise of a Shiite Iran-Iraq-Syria axis, which could
challenge Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Persian Gulf states for control of the region.

**WANING U.S. INFLUENCE**

Neoconservatives with the Bush administration imagined that post-invasion Iraq would serve as a staging ground for American military power in the region. The U.S. built about a dozen huge air bases, at a cost of around $2.4 billion, complete with long landing strips, massive fortifications and all the comforts of home. They clearly meant to stay.

They also intended to retain U.S. influence. The gargantuan U.S. embassy in Baghdad -- a heavily fortified compound the size of Vatican City -- is by far the largest the world has ever seen, and, at a cost of nearly three quarters of a billion dollars to build, the most expensive.

But even before the end of George Bush's presidency, the Iraqis insisted on setting a deadline for the departure of U.S. troops. And when Obama met that deadline in late 2011, the Department of Defense also had to turn over to the Iraqis all of those elaborate military bases.

The State Department has finally acknowledged that it needs to downsize its diplomatic presence in Iraq. Brett McGurk -- whose nomination to be the next U.S. ambassador to Baghdad was derailed by the release of some racy emails -- spoke bluntly in his confirmation hearing in June.

"Quite frankly, our presence in Iraq right now is too large," he said. "There's no proportionality also between our size and our influence. In fact, we spend a lot of diplomatic capital simply to sustain our presence."

**The primary beneficiary of this colossal loss of U.S. influence in Iraq has been Iran.**

The two countries share a long and sometimes tortured history. Their strongest bond comes from populations that are largely members of the Shia branch of Islam, rather than the Sunni branch, which is more common in the other Arab countries. The Shia clerics who are so influential in both countries frequently travel back and forth between the two, as well as sharing similar backgrounds and often being related by blood.

But the two countries' ethnic divisions -- Iranians are Persian, while most Iraqis are Arab -- and their fierce nationalism were exploited by Saddam Hussein, a Sunni, who turned Iraq into a bulwark against Iran, even going so far as to launch an eight-year war against Iran in 1980 that cost the lives of as many as a million soldiers.

When the U.S. toppled Saddam and purged his party's loyalists from the government and the military, Iran stepped in, providing support for both the Shia leaders working with the U.S. to form a new government and for the Shia militias that were fighting against the U.S. during its occupation.

Iraq's current president, Nouri al-Maliki, is particularly dependent on Iran because of the political, religious and commercial influence it has exerted in his favor -- most recently in June, when Maliki's ruling coalition nearly fell apart yet again.

**To the extent that the internal political struggle in the Middle East is fundamentally between Shiite Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia, it's clear to the Saudis where the Iraqis' allegiance lies. "He's an Iranian agent," Saudi King Abdullah said of Maliki in a March 2009 conversation with U.S. officials documented in a cable obtained by Wikileaks.**

Maliki has "opened the door for Iranian influence in Iraq" since taking power, the king said.

Maliki still has some incentives to keep the relationship with the U.S. from going entirely cold. The State Department is still planning to spend nearly $5 billion in fiscal year 2013 on Iraq, half of it on maintaining its embassy. Iraq will also need the U.S.'s help operating the 36 heavily armed F-16s they recently bought, and it has designs on buying other modern weaponry as well.
But Maliki and other Iraqi leaders "understand that the U.S. will come and the U.S. will go," said Jamsheed Choksy, a professor of Iranian studies at Indiana University.

"People in the region know they can't count on the U.S. in the long term," he said. "If you're a Shia politician, you need Iran."

**THE COIN OF THE REALM**

*Iraqi oil production is* **booming**, at long last making it a major world supplier again. All that additional oil on the market is *widely seen* as being a blow to Iran, because it will help fill any shortfall caused by a boycott of Iranian oil.

But short of limiting its own production, Iraq is backing Iran as much as it can in the oil area as well. Historically, there has been a split in the oil producer group OPEC between price hawks like Venezuela and Algeria, who want to drive the cost of oil as high as possible, and Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, who want to keep prices moderate.

At the *most recent OPEC meeting*, Iraq used its new clout to try to drive the prices up -- siding with Iran against the Saudis. It also backed a *proposal* that OPEC officially protest the new sanctions against Iran.

Both attempts failed, but some observers think Iraq could help Iran defy the sanctions in other ways.

"It remains to be seen whether the U.S. has enough leverage in Iraq to prevent Iraq from serving as a conduit for Iran for oil," Choksy said.

"They could, if they wanted to -- and they would never publicize this -- take Iranian oil across the border in tanker trucks, mix it with Iraqi oil, and send it out into the market as Iraqi oil," said Gary Sick, senior research scholar at Columbia University's Middle East Institute. (Iran recently *did just that* for Syria, when Syria faced an embargo of its oil exports but needed the money.)

Iraq's vast, unpatrolled border with Iran could also be a major conduit for illicit goods, *making other sanctions ineffective*.

**FRIENDSHIP HAS ITS LIMITS**

As significant as the alliance between Iraq and Iran is, however, it also might not last.

"Iran is far better off today with Iraq than it ever was with Saddam -- there's no comparison; but that doesn't mean that Iraq is a client state and takes its orders from Iran," Sick said.

"You have a government [in Baghdad] whose worldview is generally aligned with that of Tehran," said Michael Eisenstadt, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. But he said Iraqi leaders are adamantly opposed to the sort of clerical rule they see in Iran.

"Iran cannot dictate to Iraq," said Reidar Visser, a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs who runs an *Iraqi politics website*. "Iraqi Shiites still see their interests as being quite distinct from Iranian Shiites."

Sick thinks the Iran-Iraq alliance could fracture over oil, especially if the embargo hurts Iran badly. "Iran's national interest would be to take oil off the market" in order to send prices up and hurt Western economies, Sick said. "But Iraq is really getting ready to play the oil game. I see this as a potential clash of direct national interests."

The neoconservatives, meanwhile, continue to hold out hope. Over at the new headquarters of the Foreign Policy Initiative, executive director Jamie Fly says "it's not clear yet" where Iraq will end up.

"I don't think it's a complete perversion of what was promised," he said. "I think it's probably a mixed
bag at this point, in terms of how Iraq has developed as a regional player."

Fly also blamed many of Iraq's failings on the Obama administration's troop pullout. "The problem is that the current administration has dropped the ball, and we've undermined our own ability to help ensure that Iraq stays on a positive trajectory," he said.

"My concern about some of the Iranian influence and the role that Iraq may or may not be playing vis-à-vis Syria is in large part because we don't have a military presence there anymore, and that has weakened our hand and limited our ability to make sure that they don't get drawn further into Tehran's orbit," Fly said.

Predicting what's next in Iraq is next to impossible. In virtually no scenario, however, do things turn out how the neocons intended.

"Whatever [the war] was about, which was never entirely explained, it hasn't worked out terribly well," said Freeman, "and in fact Iraq continues to evolve in ways that are, if not fatal to American interests, certainly negative."

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Dan Froomkin is senior Washington correspondent for The Huffington Post. You can send him an email, bookmark his page, subscribe to his RSS feed, follow him on Twitter or on Facebook, and/or become a fan and get email alerts when he writes

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