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WINTER SOLDIER

US Veterans marked the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq by testifying at the 'Winter Soldier' hearings at the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland, just outside Washington DC, from 13 to 16 March 2008. Iraqi Veterans Against the War documented the sessions online (www.ivaw.org), including a report for In These Times (www.inthesetimes.com) by Jacob Wheeler, from which these excerpts are taken.

'... Iraqi Veterans Against the War's Winter Soldier hearings, held just days before the five-year anniversary of the invasion of Iraq on March 19, were inspired by the original Vietnam Winter Soldier hearings, which took place in the relative obscurity of a Howard Johnson motel in Detroit in 1971. (The phrase, "Winter Soldier" comes from a 1776 Revolutionary War quote by Thomas Paine: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.") The national media all but ignored those hearings, and the documentary *Winter Soldier*, produced by 18 filmmakers who attended, was left undistributed until Milestone Films picked it up in 2005 ...

IVAW was founded in July 2004 at the annual convention of Veterans for Peace in Boston to give voice to active-duty service people and veterans who oppose the war in Iraq but are under pressure to remain silent. IVAW calls for "the immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces in Iraq; reparations for the human and structural damages Iraq has suffered, and stopping the corporate pillaging of Iraq so that their people can control their own lives and future; and full benefits, adequate healthcare (including mental health) and other supports for returning service men and women."

The organization's goals are political in the sense that IVAW seeks to do what the Bush administration, anti-war activists and the Democrat-controlled Congress have been unwilling or unable to accomplish: end the war in Iraq. But the Winter Soldier hearings in Washington DC were as much a forum for individual testimonials and a therapeutic way to come clean with stories of unethical behaviour, and even war crimes ...

Jason Hurd, an Army National Guard medic who served in Baghdad in 2004-

05, said his unit regularly opened fire on civilians. After taking stray rounds from a nearby gunfight, a machine gunner fired 200 rounds into a nearby apartment building. "Things like that happened every day in Iraq," he said. "We reacted out of fear for our lives, and we reacted with total destruction."

"Over time, as the absurdity of war set in, individuals from my unit indiscriminately opened fire at vehicles driving down the wrong side of the road," Hurd continued. "People in my unit would later brag about it. I remember thinking how appalled I was that we were laughing at this, but that was the reality."

Vincent Emanuele, a rifleman during his second tour in Iraq in 2004, described facing no repercussions for shooting at cars or indiscriminately firing into towns, releasing prisoners out in the middle of the desert, punching, kicking and throwing softball-sized rocks at them. Emanuele says he saw decapitated corpses in the road and drove over them, as well as shooting men in the back of the head for allegedly planting Improvised Explosive Devices. "These are the consequences for sending young men and women into battle."

Sergio Kochergin described how the rules of engagement became more lenient as the war wore on and the casualties mounted. At first it was necessary to call the command post to report suspicious activity; later it was OK to "just take them out. ... anyone digging close to the road, we had to take them out." Kochergin's roommate shot himself in the shower in Iraq. Kochergin himself later came close to doing the same once he returned home.

Jason Washburn, who served three tours with the Marines, described opening fire "on anything we saw in town". He recalled a woman carrying a huge bag walking toward his unit. They killed her with a grenade launcher. It turned out she had groceries in the bag. Washburn also reported that his unit carried shovels (which would implicate someone digging IEDs) and weapons to plant on a body in case they shot an innocent civilian. He testified that the practice was encouraged behind closed doors ...'

THE COST OF TRIDENT AND NEW AIRCRAFT CARRIERS

In February 2007, Professor J Paul Dunne and Dr Samuel Perlo-Freeman of the University of the West of England published a report prepared for Greenpeace entitled 'The Opportunity Cost of Trident Replacement and the Aircraft Carriers'. We reprint here some excerpts about costs from the Executive Summary.

The United Kingdom Government has announced its intention to replace the UK's Trident ... The Government are also planning to procure two new aircraft carriers, along with up to 150 F35 Joint Combat Aircraft, which represents a major increase in Britain's global power projection capability. These purchases will dominate defence spending. They represent a major escalation of the trend in the UK's post-Cold War defence posture towards aggressive power projection and pre-emptive strikes alongside the United States. It could lock Britain into a highly aggressive

and militaristic course for decades to come ...

Using the Treasury's recommended real discount rate for evaluating future costs and benefits of 3.5 per cent gives a Net Present Value for a Trident replacement programme, including acquisition and operations/maintenance costs, of £40bn in 2006 prices. To get a better idea of the opportunity cost of Trident replacement, it is instructive to calculate an 'equivalent annual cost' associated with this Net Present Value figure; that is, how much would have to be spent over the service life of Trident replacement to generate the same Net Present Value? This allows us to consider what alternative spending could be afforded if Trident were not to be replaced.

Based on the Carriers and the aircraft beginning to enter service in 2014, and assuming that production expenditure peaks from around 2010, we calculate an estimated Net Present Value figure of around £17.75bn, and an Equivalent Annual Cost of around £1.1bn. Combining this with the cost of Trident gives a total Net Present Value of £48bn and an equivalent annual cost of around £5.3bn per annum.

The fact that the UK economy managed to weather this decline in defence spending without any particular economic problems and in fact saw relatively good economic performance, does suggest that there is no overall economic reason that Trident replacement and the carriers could not be cut from the budget. Model based studies provide further backing for the argument of no significant impact and suggest that, with military spending allocated to other forms of government expenditure, it is likely that economic performance would be improved.

If the two programmes were to be cancelled, or not initiated, the study suggests that savings of over £4.2 bn for every year of service life would be made for the Trident replacement and around £1.1bn for the carriers and accompanying aircraft. Using the total figure of £5.3bn for every year of the joint service life of those systems means that cancelling the programmes would allow the Government to:

- a. Take one and a quarter pence off the basic rate of income tax
- b. Pay the capital and running costs of around 200 new hospitals
- c. Pay the capital and running costs of around 1,130 new secondary schools in moderate/high cost areas, with 1,000 pupils each
- d. Pay £11 per week real increase in the basic state pension.

ALEX SALMOND – FAILED PLOT

The *Sunday Herald* has broken an extraordinary story about a failed plot between Sir Menzies Campbell and Gordon Brown to prevent Alex Salmond from taking office after the May elections in Scotland last year.

'Sir Ming Campbell last week spilled the beans on his and Gordon Brown's attempts to prevent the SNP taking office after the May election. Secret talks were held – over the

heads of their own Scottish Parties – about how to keep Alex Salmond's paws off the £30 billion Scottish Executive budget. Brown wanted a new Liberal-Labour coalition to seize power even if the SNP won, on the grounds that it would have a majority of seats in Parliament.

It may have come as no surprise to learn that Gordon Brown tried to fix the result of the Holyrood election. Do bears defecate in afforested areas? Nevertheless, it's rare in politics to have conspiracy theories confirmed so soon after the event ...

Meanwhile, Jack McConnell, the former First Minister, has emerged as an unlikely home-rule hero for having had the bottle to stand up to Brown. For we also learned last week that Brown wanted Labour MSPs to vote for "anyone but Salmond" for First Minister, even if that installed a Tory or Lib Dem in Bute House. McConnell refused and told Brown bluntly to get his tanks off his lawn.'

The *Sunday Herald* comments that this story suggests that Gordon Brown was 'Labour's own worst enemy in Scotland'. Certainly, he showed a very poor grasp of the procedures which apply in a consensus dominated Parliament, in contrast to one ruled by winner-takes-all conventions.

OBAMA ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The Russell Foundation circulated for comment some of Barack Obama's remarks about nuclear weapons. We reprint the Senator's remarks with the date they were made, followed by some of the responses we received.

2 March 2007 'The world must work to stop Iran's uranium enrichment programme and prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. It is far too dangerous to have nuclear weapons in the hands of a radical theocracy. And while we should take no option, including military action, off the table, sustained and aggressive diplomacy combined with tough sanctions should be our primary means to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons.'

23 April 2007 'Finally, if we want the world to de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons, the United States and Russia must lead by example. President Bush once said the United States should remove as many weapons as possible from high-alert, hair-trigger status – another unnecessary vestige of Cold War confrontation. Six years later, President Bush has not acted on this promise. I will. We cannot and should not accept the threat of accidental or unauthorized nuclear launch. We can maintain a strong nuclear deterrent to protect our security without rushing to produce a new generation of warheads.'

7 June 2007 'I will work to negotiate a verifiable global ban on the production of new nuclear weapons material.'

2 August 2007 Responding to a question from the Associated Press about whether there was any circumstance where he would be prepared or willing to use nuclear weapons to defeat terrorism and al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden: 'I think it would be a profound mistake for us to use nuclear weapons in any

circumstance involving civilians. Let me scratch that. There's been no discussion of nuclear weapons. That's not on the table.'

16 August 2007 'As President, I will make it my priority to build bipartisan consensus behind ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In the meantime, the least we can do is fully pay our contribution to the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization.'

16 August 2007 'Before we consider developing new nuclear weapons we need to consider what the role of these weapons should be in our national security policy. As I said in my speech before the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, I believe the United States should lead the international effort to de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons around the world. I also believe that our policy towards the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) affects this leadership position. We can maintain a strong nuclear deterrent to protect our security without rushing to produce a new generation of warheads. I do not support a premature decision to produce the Reliable Replacement Warhead.'

2 October 2007 'Here's what I'll say as President: America seeks a world in which there are no nuclear weapons. We will not pursue unilateral disarmament. As long as nuclear weapons exist, we'll retain a strong nuclear deterrent. But we'll keep our commitment under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on the long road towards eliminating nuclear weapons. We'll work with Russia to take US and Russian ballistic missiles off hair-trigger alert, and to dramatically reduce the stockpiles of our nuclear weapons and material. We'll start by seeking a global ban on the production of fissile material for weapons. And we'll set a goal to expand the US-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles so that the agreement is global.'

Comment by Kate Hudson, General Secretary, CND

Will the outcome of the US presidential race make a difference to prospects for nuclear abolition? For the first time in many years, I think the answer is: it might. Something is changing in US politics. How substantial that may be is uncertain, but potentially there is a shift which is more than just spin.

This was brought home to me in February, when CND had guests over from the United States for our Global Summit for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World. One of them – a Republican and longstanding senior advisor on nuclear weapons – told me his views on the election. 'I'm backing Obama', he said, 'They call us Obamericans'. As he explained it, a number of senior Republicans, who consider themselves to be 'Fordists', see Bush as an extremist whose Iraq war policy has been a disaster. They do not want more of the same, and so they are not supporting a Republican candidate. And they are supporting Obama, because they believe he can win, where Clinton cannot.

This is a real indication of the impact of Iraq on US politics. But what about nukes? In fact, nuclear weapons have been quite a feature in the current contest. There is a real interest in the issue – thanks in no small part to the work of the US anti-nuclear movement – and the internet is full of information about what the

different candidates say on this question. This is given more significance because there seems to be a shift in wider US society away from nukes – as evidenced by the ongoing Kissinger-Shultz initiative, which strongly advocates new multilateral initiatives on nuclear disarmament.

On balance, it appears that Obama is more open to pursuing global abolition, reaffirming the NPT goal of disarmament, and frequently reiterating the need for it. Clinton's angle appears to be support for a reduction in 'emphasis' on nukes and for cutbacks, whilst preserving US nuclear superiority. Of course, it is no secret that what is said in election campaigns doesn't necessarily happen. But this is an important one, and worth taking note of.

Comment by Helen Clark, Prime Minister of New Zealand

Thank you for your letter of 7 January 2008 regarding US Presidential candidate Barack Obama's views on nuclear disarmament. As you will be aware, New Zealand is a staunch advocate of efforts aimed at achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. We are committed to the principles of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and work with like-minded countries, such as those in the New Agenda Coalition, to strengthen the Treaty.

Achieving progress towards the total abolition of nuclear weapons remains difficult in the current international security environment. For tangible progress to be made, buy-in from all stakeholders, particularly those states with nuclear weapons, is vital. We therefore welcome all expressions of support for measures that would contribute to a nuclear weapon free world.

Comment by Maj Britt Theorin, formerly Sweden's Ambassador for Disarmament

On the question of de-alerting, the United States should take *all* nuclear weapons off alert, not as many as possible. Concerning new nuclear weapons, he is right that there is no need for new ones. He is vague on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. As regards a global ban on the production of nuclear weapons material, why is it confined to 'new' nuclear weapons material. The ban should be on all nuclear weapons material.

Concerning the role of nuclear weapons, by signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United States has promised to work to get rid of all nuclear weapons. There is no need for new nuclear weapons. With respect to disarmament, how is he going to reach his goal of no nuclear weapons in the world? He should read the Canberra Commission Report on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (1996), and also the commitment given by the United States at the NPT review conference in 2000, which is embodied in the 13 point action programme for total nuclear disarmament.

Yes, it would be a profound mistake to use nuclear weapons in hunting Osama bin Laden. Concerning Iran, please see my paper 'A nuclear-weapons-free world is achievable' (*Spokesman 98*). Of course, military action against Iran should be taken off the table. Who can defend another fire in the Middle East?