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## About Face: Soldiers Call for Iraq Withdrawal

Marc Cooper

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For the first time since Vietnam, an organized, robust movement of active-duty US military personnel has publicly surfaced to oppose a war in which they are serving. Those involved plan to petition Congress to withdraw American troops from Iraq. (Note: A complete version of this report will appear next week in the print and online editions of *The Nation*.)

After appearing only seven weeks ago on the Internet, the [Appeal for Redress](#), brainchild of 29-year-old Navy seaman Jonathan Hutto, has already been signed by nearly 1,000 US soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen, including dozens of officers--most of whom are on active duty. Not since 1969, when some 1,300 active-duty military personnel signed an open letter in the *New York Times* opposing the war in Vietnam, has there been such a dramatic barometer of rising military dissent.

Interviews with two dozen signers of the Appeal reveal a mix of motives for opposing the war: ideological, practical, strategic and moral. But all those interviewed agree that it is time to start withdrawing the troops. Coming from an all-volunteer military, the Appeal was called "unprecedented" by Eugene Fidell, president of the [National Institute of Military Justice](#).

CONTINUED

*The Nation* spoke with rank-and-file personnel as well as high-ranking officers--some on the Iraqi front lines, others at domestic and offshore US military bases--who have signed the Appeal. All of their names

about

Marc Cooper

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His books include *Pinochet and Me: A Chilean Anti-Memoir and Roll Over Che Guevara: Travels of a Radical Reporter*. His work has been recognized by the Society of Professional Journalists, PEN America and the California Associated Press TV and Radio Association.

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will be made available to Congress when the Appeal is presented in mid-January. Signers have been assured they are sending a communication to Congress protected under the Military Whistleblower Protection Act. The Pentagon is powerless to take official reprisals and has said that as long as active-duty personnel are not in uniform or on duty, they are free to express their views to Congress.

There are of course other, subtler risks involved. The military command exercises enormous power through individual reviews, promotions and assignments. But that hasn't kept a number of signers from going public with their dissent.

Navy Lieut. Cmdr. Mark Dearden of San Diego, for example, enlisted in 1997 and is still pondering the possibility of a lifetime career. "So this was a very difficult decision for me to come to. I don't take this decision lightly," he says. But after two "tough" deployments in Iraq, Dearden says signing the Appeal was not only the right thing to do but also gave him personal "closure."

"I'm expressing a right of people in the military to contact their elected representatives, and I have done nothing illegal or disrespectful," Dearden adds.

Other interviews with active-duty soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen who have signed the Appeal for Redress reveal an array of motivations. Here are excerpts:

**"Lisa"--20 years old, E-4, USAF, Stationed at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii:**

*I joined up two weeks after I turned 17 because I wanted to save American lives. I wanted to be a hero like any American child.*

*I supported the war when I joined because I thought it was justified. Only after my own research and the truth coming out did I learn how wrong I was, how--for lack of a better word--how brainwashed I was.*

*Now I know the war is illegal, unjustified and that our troops have no reason for being there.*

*When I saw an article about the Appeal in the Air Force Times I went online right away and signed it and have encouraged others to do the same.*

**"Sgt. Gary"--21 years old. US Army. Deployed with 20th Infantry Regiment, near Mosul, Iraq:**

*I joined up in 2001, still a junior in high school. I felt very patriotic at the end of my US History class. My idea of the Army was that you signed up, they gave you a rifle and you ran off into battle like in some 1950s war movie. The whole idea of boot camp never really entered my head.*

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*I supported the war in the beginning. I bought everything Bush said about how Saddam had WMDs, how he was working with Al Qaeda, how he was a threat to America. Of course, this all turned out to be false.*

*This is my second tour, and as of a few days ago it's half-over. Before I deployed with my unit for the second time I already had feelings of not wanting to go. When in late September a buddy in my platoon died from a bullet in the head, I really took a long hard look at this war, this Administration, and the reasons why.*

*After months of research on the Internet, I came to the conclusion that this war was based on lies and deception. I started to break free of all the propaganda that the Bush Administration and the Army puts out on a daily basis.*

*So far in three years we have succeeded in toppling a dictator and replacing him with puppets. Outlawing the old government and its standing army and replacing them with an unreliable and poorly trained crew of paycheck collectors. The well is so poisoned by what we have done here that nothing can fix it.*

**"Lt. Smith"--24 years old, 1st Lieutenant, US Army. Deployed near Baghdad:**

*I cannot, from Iraq, attend an antiwar protest. Nor could I attend one in the States and represent myself as a soldier. What I can do is send a protest communication to my Congressional delegate outlining grievances I feel I have suffered. Appeal for Redress gives me that outlet.*

*I am encouraged by the November elections, but still wary. We rushed into the war on false assumptions, and now we might rush out just as falsely. What troops need now is a light at the end of the tunnel, not just for this deployment but for all deployments. Bringing everyone out this summer is too fast to be supported by our Army's infrastructure. We would hemorrhage lives if we do so. But so would we if we stay the course.*

*I am encouraged by politicians who call for a withdrawal by the conclusion of President Bush's term in office. That seems a realistic timetable for me.*

**Mark Mackoviak--24 years old. US Army. Recently returned from Iraq. Stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina:**

*I joined the Army on September 23, 2001. I had been out of school for a year when September 11 came*

*around, and I was supportive of our action in Afghanistan. I wound up there a year later, and it was pretty eye-opening to see how people live.*

*I was also in Iraq for about a year, deployed near the International Airport, west of Baghdad. I was never that supportive of the invasion. I thought the media coverage of it was horrendous, really disgusting.*

*Just about everything I saw in Iraq reinforced my views that it was wrong. The point that really hit me was when the Asmara Mosque got blown up. I said, Wow, this is really a civil war.*

*I really enjoy being in the Army, enjoy the experience. I just happen to not support this war. I'm very open about that. My buddies either disagree with me or just pay no attention. But I get absolutely no hostility. None.*

**"Rebecca"--26 years old. 101st Airborne, US Army. Just returned from Iraq. Stationed at Fort Hood, Texas:**

*I joined in 2004. I was trying to go into the human rights field, but it was very competitive. I was in need of health insurance, and the Army seemed feasible. Now it looks like I will be stop-lossed until 2010.*

*I had strong feelings about the war, against it, but I'm the type of person that wants to fully understand both sides of the argument.*

*My experience in Iraq confirmed my views, but it also gave me a more multifaceted view of things. I did see some of the good things being done, but it seemed like a Band-Aid on a gushing wound. Mostly I saw the frivolity of the missions, the lack of direction, the absurdity of the mission. You go out in your Humvee, you drive around, and you wait to be blown up and get killed by an IED.*

*About 40 percent of my unit were stop-lossed. Their first mission was to take down Saddam and his regime, and they seemed to understand that and agree with the mission to take down a ruthless dictator. Now they can't seem to understand why they are there, caught in the cross hairs of a civil war.*

*I think it is safe to say that the majority of soldiers are wondering what this grand scheme is that we keep hearing about from those above us but that is never translating down to the ground level.*

*Some politicians are starting to see that not only a majority of Americans oppose to this war. Now they see this very powerful statement of soldiers who have already been on the front line and who are still in uniform and are also opposed. None of them have been where we have been, none of them have*

*seen what we have seen. It's time they do.*

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