

A Legacy of Resistance

By Linda J. Hoover



While the United States keeps its oversized military in operation, the rest of the world is not sitting back waiting to see the outcome of U.S. efforts to achieve world domination. The peace community here and worldwide has grown out of a legacy of resistance to war. It is gratifying to claim this history.

The first recorded instance of an individual's struggle against war was in the 3rd century CE. A Christian, Maximilian, was executed for refusing to join the Roman army. Centuries later some European peasants refused to fight in the Crusades, disobeying the orders of their emperor or the Pope.

In America, early pamphlets calling for an organized anti-war movement were distributed in 1814. Between 1815 and 1828 peace societies were founded across America and Europe.¹

The first four presidents of the U.S. (Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison) were unable to force a conscription upon the population. Congress did authorize President Monroe, the fifth president, to organize a regular army and to call up 100,000 state militia for the British and American War of 1812-1815. Some states refused to send men.

Resistance to Congress passing the Selective Service Act in 1917 was strong: "During the first drawing, 50,000 men apply for exemptions and over 250,000 fail to register at all." Following WWI, efforts in Congress to pass regular military training for young men were defeated.²

Fast forward to the middle to late 1960s (when the U.S. had a military draft) and hundreds of thousands of people around the world marched and protested the U.S. war against the Vietnamese people. By 1965 activists were calling for military draft reform and/or for an elimination of the draft. Troop mutinies were widespread in Vietnam. Vietnam Veterans Against the War was founded in 1967.³ It became obvious to the U.S. Administration that the working-class draftees were no longer a reliable source of cannon fodder, and conscription ended in 1973.

Fast forward again to the era following the dissolution of the Soviet Union—the era in which the U.S. is attempting to use military power to dominate the world. Militarists continue to promote concepts that justify war, such as “creative chaos,” the “war on terror” and “humanitarian intervention.” But many people, including world political and religious leaders, and others, are not buying the propaganda. We in the peace community can claim some credit for putting U.S. warmongers and their allies on the run.

Resistance to military aggressions has been local, national, and international. In 2003, the United Nations would not back a U.S. plan to invade Iraq. The African Union, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the African Southern Development Community, among other organizations, opposed U.S. military action. Millions of people around the world demonstrated against the planned U.S. invasion.

But Washington was determined, moving forward with a military attack on Iraq. It called the dropping of over 30,000 bombs and over 20,000 precision-guided cruise missiles on Iraq a campaign of “shock and awe” (technically termed “rapid dominance”).

Ordinary people in the U.S. and around the world did not back the war. French academic Dominique Reynié estimated that “between 3 January and 12 April 2003, 36 million people across the globe took part in almost 3,000 protests against the Iraq war.”⁴ On September 16, 2004, Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, speaking of the invasion, said: “I have indicated it was not in conformity with the UN Charter. From our point of view, from the charter point of view, it was illegal.”⁵

U.S. decision-makers turned to soldiers for hire. In 2011, Foreign Policy magazine reported that “the largest customer for the services of private warriors is, without a doubt, the United States, which now employs more military contractors than troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.”⁶ And in 2015, “the number of mercenaries in Iraq and Afghanistan alone exceeds half the number of enlistees in the U.S. Army. In previous times, particularly during the Vietnam War, the ratio was about 1-to-55.”⁷

Soldiers for hire are not a reliable military force. They fight not for a principle or belief, but for the highest bidder. In 2016, perhaps half of the troops fighting for the U.S. military are mercenaries from countries impoverished by U.S. foreign policies—countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, and Pakistan. Mainstream media do not report resistance to the U.S. recruitment of mercenaries in other countries, but such information can be found in other sources. As early as 2005 a Colombian daily reported that the hiring of former Colombian soldiers as mercenaries by a firm run by Jeffrey Shippy, a U.S. national, “has sparked strong condemnation here.”⁸

Because of strong resistance to U.S. wars of aggression (by U.S. troops, international peace communities, foreign governments, the Pope, and even at times the United

Nations), the U.S. has begun to rely on technology such as drones to fight wars. Demonstrations against drone warfare have taken place in many countries (e.g., Afghanistan, Germany, Pakistan, the U.K., and the U.S.).

The struggle to force the U.S., NATO, and allied countries to end wars of aggression continues. Masses of people are countering one way or another their government's lies about wars. For example, on February 25, 2016, following a citizens' petition signed by 750,000 people, the European Parliament approved an EU-wide arms embargo against Saudi Arabia, "until alleged breaches of international humanitarian law in Yemen have been fully investigated. The vote was convincing, with 449 MEPs voting in favour, 36 against, and 78 abstaining."⁹

We in the peace movement believe we have a responsibility to take history into our hands and that our allies outnumber our opponents. Our work today leaves a legacy of resistance for those who follow.

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Endnotes

1. "Anti-War History." wearemany.com <http://tinyurl.com/goxrhvg>
2. "Chronology of Conscription in the U.S. – Colonial Era to 1999." teachervision.com <http://tinyurl.com/owwfp6r>
3. Steve. [FULL NAME?](2006, September 3). GI resistance in the Vietnam war." libcom.org <http://tinyurl.com/q9pcvhz>
4. Callinicos, Alex. (2005, March 19). "Anti-war protests do make a difference." Message posted to Socialistworkeronline. Archived at <http://tinyurl.com/gwslhd4>
5. "Iraq war illegal, says Annan." (2004, September 16). BBC News. <http://tinyurl.com/5pl2v>
6. Keating, Joshua E. (2011, February 23). "How Do You Hire Mercenaries?" Foreignpolicy.com <http://tinyurl.com/jbsq68y>
7. Platov, Vladimir. (2015, November 16). "American Mercenaries: Who Are They?" New Eastern Outlook. <http://tinyurl.com/qh6tob8>
8. "Ecuador Against Recruiting Mercenaries." (2005, August 16) Information Clearing House. <http://tinyurl.com/hw8ofel>
9. Bell, Stephen. (2016, March 4). "Implement the European Parliament call for an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia." StoptheWarcoalition. <http://tinyurl.com/jfp3tmz>