



Iraq Veterans Against the War's Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan March 13-16, 2008

To mark 5 years of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) will gather at the National Labor College near Washington, D.C. March 13 thru 16 to disclose the realities of U.S. war policy in a public investigation called Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans and civilian survivors of both conflicts will give public testimony and share the eyewitness stories that have been censored from the American public about the true human cost of these occupations. This testimony also will reveal how the Iraq occupation is tactically un-winnable, morally wrong, and has brought our military to its breaking point.

Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan aims to:

- 1) Motivate veterans and active duty service members to get involved in today's growing GI resistance movement;
- 2) Awaken America to the real human costs of war that have not been exposed sufficiently by the American media; and
- 3) Hold both Democrats and Republicans accountable for the illegal Iraq occupation they have jointly kept going.

The term, Winter Soldier, is a play on the words of Thomas Paine who wrote in "The Crisis" (1776) that summer soldiers 'shrink from the service of their country' in times of crisis. In contrast, Winter Soldiers are those who stand up for the soul of their nation in its darkest hours. America's democracy is in crisis today, motivated by an economic addiction to oil and empire, engaged in ongoing illegal occupation that has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands, and stymied by a political process that values moneyed interests more than the majority of the American people. Over 35 years after the first Winter Soldier investigation conducted by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, America needs Winter Soldiers again.¹ Continuing in this tradition, IVAW's Winter Soldiers are performing a difficult but essential service to our country.

For the past five years, Americans have heard from generals, pundits, and politicians about the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but they haven't heard

¹ In 1971, over 125 veterans gathered at a Howard Johnson motel in Detroit to testify about atrocities they had witnessed or committed during their service in Vietnam. Vietnam Veterans Against the War organized this event, called the Winter Soldier investigation. The testimony revealed that many of these acts were not isolated incidents, but were, in fact, committed routinely as war policy they had been ordered to carry out by their commanding officers.



enough from those who have first-hand experience. IVAW believes that for our democracy to truly function, Americans must understand the reality of the wars our government is waging in our names. We know that veterans are most qualified to expose the true face of the Iraq and Afghanistan occupations because we are the ones who fought on the ground. And Iraqi and Afghan civilians who have survived these violent occupations have important stories to tell about whether or not they are better off with U.S. military intervention.

Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan testifiers will share their first-hand accounts of:

- Killing and injuring of innocent civilians, including children and women;
- Destruction of property, infrastructure, and natural resources;
- Racist dehumanization, torture, and abuse of civilians;
- Injured soldiers being forced back into combat before full recovery;
- Denial of medical treatment and health benefits for active duty troops and veterans;
- Waste, fraud, and abuse of private military contractors;
- Policies of discrimination against women, gays, and service members of different ethnic and religious backgrounds within the military; and
- The breakdown of the U.S. military due to prolonged occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

From incidents like Fallujah and Abu Ghraib to the awarding of no-bid contracts, Winter Soldier will show that wrongdoings and failures in Iraq and Afghanistan are part and parcel of war policy set at the highest levels of power. Troops are being ordered to do things that violate their conscience and the rules of war. Civilians whom the U.S. purports to be helping are being violated causing anger and resentment. The U.S. military is being broken from the institutional level down to individual service members. And large companies are profiting greatly. Winter Soldier will place the blame of this failed war policy where it belongs – on our political leaders.

Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan will be the largest gathering of IVAW members to date and is the largest project IVAW has organized in its young three-and-a-half year history. IVAW members and leaders are working diligently with thousands of allies around the country to prepare for this historic event. We are reaching out to our over 800 members to get them involved, and expect more than 200 of them to attend. Teams of interviewers are taking testimony from over 100 veterans about their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their testimony is being vetted and corroborated for accuracy and truth. Volunteer lawyers from the National Lawyers Guild are counseling testifiers, and mental health professionals have been made available around the country for emotional support before, during, and after the event.



IRAQ VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR ★ IVAW.ORG

As hundreds gather to hear the Winter Soldier testimony in Silver Spring, Maryland, thousands will gather simultaneously in their homes, houses of worship, on college campuses, and on military bases around the globe to bear witness to these stories via live broadcast. The Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan proceedings will be carried via satellite on the Deep Dish network, Free Speech and Link T.V., public access television stations, the Pacifica Radio network, and via web streaming on www.ivaw.org. This unprecedented live broadcast provides the American public with a valuable opportunity for the kind of grassroots civic engagement required in any public debate and policy decisions about the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

IVAW's national Winter Soldier media team has developed a media strategy for the event, has trained spokespeople with talking points, and is registering the press to attend. We have already received commitments to cover Winter Soldier from CBS Evening News, *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, Associated Press, *The Chicago Tribune*, Cox Broadcasting, Gannett and several international outlets. Winter Soldier ads will be running in the military publications, *Military Times* and *Stars and Stripes*.

The Winter Soldier event in March will launch a yearlong public awareness and outreach effort by Iraq Veterans Against the War. No longer will public debate on the "Global War on Terror" be framed solely by politicians and pundits. Winter Soldier will inject a realism into the discussion of the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan that only the voices of veterans and civilian survivors can bring. Winter Soldier will directly engage the American public, making them informed actors in our democracy. IVAW will use ongoing Winter Soldier events throughout the year to spread awareness of GI resistance among veterans and active duty troops and build strategic alliances with the labor and student movements to broaden and strengthen our strategy to end the Iraq occupation.

Significant financial support still is needed to make Winter Soldier a success. With less than four weeks until the event, we continue to try and raise the funds required to reach our goals. Please consider making a donation. On the eve of the 6th year of U.S. troops in Iraq, Winter Soldier: Iraq & Afghanistan represents a major expansion of IVAW's critical work build a GI resistance movement. And it will be the turning point in a movement that will end the U.S. occupation of Iraq.