

Iraq War Syndrome: Implications of Veterans and PeaceAware
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In last week's PeaceAware strategy meeting, we heard from several Las Cruces New Mexico veterans who are not getting their health or retirement benefits. It is likely that the same fate will befall the Iraq War veterans. The Vietnam veterans of PeaceAware are Veterans' Advocates - see <http://peaceaware.com/documents/VVAW.htm> I would like to see veterans of the Iraq & Gulf wars get their health and pension benefits. If you know of New Mexico Iraq War veterans who are experienced Iraq War Syndrome, please contact me at dboje@nmsu.edu Here is a summary of the Iraq War Syndrome.

First, it is apparent that the Veterans Affairs (VA) and Pentagon is covering their tracks, not implementing required medical screening of the troops, or maintaining medical records data bases of vaccinations or uses of Depleted Uranium (DU). The General Accounting Office (GAO) [just-released report](#) says:

"The percentage of Army and Air Force service members missing one or both of their pre- and post-deployment health assessments ranged from 38 to 98 percent of our samples," the GAO, Congress' investigative arm, found. "Moreover, when health assessments were conducted, as many as 45 percent of them were not done within the required time frames." - See article "Deserting Our Troops" by Steven Rosenfeld, editor for *TomPaine.com*. <http://www.tompaine.com/feature2.cfm/ID/8995>

In addition to missing assessments and records, the VA is not living up to sworn Congressional testimony:

"VA Secretary Anthony Principi recently concluded, "Much of the controversy over the health problems of veterans who fought in the 1991 war could have been avoided had more extensive surveillance data been collected." We agree. There should be no mysterious "Iraq War Syndrome" after this victory. Veterans of this era should not go empty handed into the battle to prove deployment exposures caused or contributed to their post-war illnesses." Source <http://reform.house.gov/UploadedFiles/Shays%20Statement.pdf>

Despite the VA Secretary's remarks, no such deployment exposure tests have been conducted. New Mexico and other sons and daughters did go into the Iraq War theatre empty handed.

With the VA and Pentagon refusal to baseline screen its own troops, veterans are facing the prospect of the **2003 Iraq War Syndrome**, being even more severe than the 1990-91 Gulf War Syndrome. When the Department of Defense fails to screen troops going to and from a war theatre, and fails to maintain database of immunizations and medical tests, then we can assume that the DOD is protecting itself from lawsuits. It appears that very few soldiers are getting pre and post medical assessment exams.

Last week the DOD announced more National Guard deployments to Iraq. President Bush also extended the stay for Reservists and Guard from 12 months to 16, and can by executive decree, make it 24 months. This means that many Reservists will not be reenlisting, and many Iraq War veterans will be joining the Peace Movement. It is time to dispel the myth of a divide between veteran and PeaceAware. We support the troops, bring them home, give them health screening, and their just benefits.

Will our New Mexico sons and daughters being sent to Iraq receive legally mandated health examinations? So far the DOD only gives soldiers short surveys to fill out. This is not adequate military screening and is does not establish baseline medial records that can assess impacts of anthrax vaccines and exposure to depleted uranium (DU). American can do better.

The families of Iraq War soldiers and veterans are beginning to speak out across America. It is time for Iraq War veterans and their families in New Mexico to speak out. These are excerpts from "Deserting Our Troops," an essay by Steven Rosenfeld, and contain the voices we need to hear in New Mexico:

"My husband [an Army Reservist]'s physical was waived before he left," wrote one member of [Military Families Speak Out](#) (MFSO), an activist group of families with relatives in the military in Iraq. Those contacted requested their names not be used.

"Myself and my wife were given the anthrax and small pox vaccines and were not given a choice in the matter," wrote a soldier. "No screening was done before these vaccines were given to see if there might be complications from a genetic or health standpoint. No blood work was done on us besides a few general questions from a colonel."

"My son has returned home and as far as I know no one has made any mention of medical testing," wrote another member of MFSO. "They arrived back the first week in August... [They] gave him a questionnaire to look over. There are three sections, but he said [questions] in the last section, more current symptoms didn't seem relative for now."

These anecdotes corroborate the GAO's findings: that the pre- and post-deployment medical exams were largely an after-thought, not a policy priority. Among the soldiers contacted, several said they were aware there could be health consequences of their military services. What they and their family members most frequently cited was exposure to byproducts of depleted uranium (DU) munitions. DU is a slightly radioactive metal that's denser than lead and burns at very high temperatures. It is used in bullets and artillery pieces. Upon impact, it burns and vaporizes. Particles from the smoke are very tiny and can be breathed in and become embedded in lung tissue.

"My daughter told me that as they rolled into Baghdad from Kuwait, right after the end of the big bombing, in mid-April, there were Iraqi tanks on the sides of the roads, that still had the dead Iraqi soldiers in them," wrote another MFSO member. "She asked why the tanks were not cleared off or the bodies taken out, and she was told that no one wanted the duty because the tanks had been hit with DU shells.

"She said they all assumed the dust in the road was full of DU dust, and she said she felt she would now be at an increased risk of cancer, as did all of her unit. She was manning the 50-caliber on top of the truck, and said she breathed in the dust for many miles."

We in New Mexico need to be advocates for health and justice for Gulf and Iraq War veterans (and Vietnam Vets). It appears that the DOD is repeating the mistakes of Vietnam War and how this country treated its Vietnam veterans.

I encourage everyone to reach out to Iraq War veterans, so that can join with the Peace Movement. Deplete Uranium expose and anthrax and other secret vaccinations is part of the Iraq War Syndrome. Since the DOD is not keeping records of pre and post deployment medical assessments (or not doing them), the returning veterans will find it difficult to claim their health is the result of being in the Iraq War theatre. No medical records, means no lawsuits or claims by veterans.



Source BBC News Photo

In the UK, it is a different story. Four UK soldiers are threatening to sue the Ministry of Defense, claiming they are suffering from Iraq War Syndrome; they blame depression, eczema and breathing problems on vaccinations they received. See BCC 27 May 2003 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2939354.stm>

PeaceAware has been an advocate for studies of Depleted Uranium (DU) and effects of exposure on Gulf, Kosovo, and Iraq War veterans and civilians. For more information, consult, http://www.peaceaware.com/documents/depleted_uranium.htm The use of DU weapons of indiscriminate and mass destruction is forbidden by the Geneva Convention. We know from Gulf War I, that DU has had massive health effects on soldiers and civilians. The stories reported above from the families of Iraq War soldiers confirm that once again DU nuclear weaponry is contributing to long term health problems.

If you know of a story of New Mexico Iraq War veteran who has been exposed to DU or vaccinations, please contact David Boje dboje@nmsu.edu