

Mass Shooting Indicates Breakdown of Military

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Global Research, November 06, 2009

[Truthout](#) 6 November 2009

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

At approximately 1:30 p.m. CST today, a soldier went on a shooting rampage at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas, killing 11 people and wounding at least 31 others, according to base commander Lieutenant-General Bob Cone.

Truthout spoke with an Army Specialist who is an active-duty Iraq war veteran currently stationed at the base. The soldier spoke on condition of anonymity since the base is now on “lockdown,” and all “non-authorized” military personnel on the base have been ordered not to speak to the press.

“A soldier entered the ‘Soldier Readiness Processing Center (SRP)’ with two handguns and opened fire,” the soldier, who is currently getting treatment for traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) explained. “That facility is where you go just before you deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan.”

The soldier named the gunman as Major Malik Nadal Hasan, and said he was about 40 years old. According to the soldier, Hasan was a member of the base’s Medical Evaluation Board, and worked there as a counselor.

“I can confirm Major Hasan was the gunman, and I actually saw him this morning,” the soldier explained. “I was over in the area doing some paperwork, and saw him at the facility. He seemed fine to me, and I spoke with one of my friends who had an appointment with him this morning. They said Major Hasan seemed OK to them too.”

The soldier believes that at least one Killeen Police Department officer was killed before the gunman was shot. Two other soldiers with suspected involvement in the mass shooting were also taken into custody by a SWAT team, according to the soldier.

Fort Hood, located in central Texas, is the largest US military base in the world and contains up to 50,000 soldiers. It is one of the most heavily deployed bases to both Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, the shooter himself was facing an impending deployment to Iraq.

The soldier says that the mood on the base is “very grim,” and that even before this incident, troop morale has been very low.

“I’d say it’s at an all-time low – mostly because of Afghanistan now,” he explained. “Nobody knows why we are at either place, and I believe the troops need to know why they are there, or we should pull out, and this is a unanimous feeling, even for folks who are pro-war.”

In a strikingly similar incident on May 11, 2009, a US soldier gunned down five fellow soldiers at a stress-counseling center at a US base in Baghdad. Adm. Mike Mullen, the

chairman of the US military's Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters at a news conference at the Pentagon that the shootings occurred in a place where "individuals were seeking help."

"It does speak to me, though, about the need for us to redouble our efforts, the concern in terms of dealing with the stress," Admiral Mullen said. "It also speaks to the issue of multiple deployments."

Commenting on that incident in nearly parallel terms, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that the Pentagon needs to redouble its efforts to relieve stress caused by repeated deployments in war zones; stress that is further exacerbated by limited time at home in between deployments.

The condition described by Mullen and Gates is what veteran health experts often refer to as PTSD.

While soldiers returning home are routinely involved in shootings, suicide and other forms of self-destructive violent behavior as a direct result of their experiences in Iraq, we had yet to see an event of this magnitude take place in Iraq until last May.

Prior to the May incident, the last reported incident of this kind happened in 2005, when an Army captain and lieutenant were killed when an anti-personnel mine detonated in the window of their room at a US base in Tikrit. In that case, National Guard Staff Sgt. Alberto Martinez was acquitted.

The shocking story of a soldier killing five of his comrades does not come as a surprise when we consider that the military has, for years now, been sending troops with untreated PTSD back into the US occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

According to an Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center analysis, [reported in the Denver Post](#) in August 2008, more than "43,000 service members — two-thirds of them in the Army or Army Reserve — were classified as nondeployable for medical reasons three months before they deployed" to Iraq.

Mark Thompson also has reported in Time magazine, "Data contained in the Army's fifth Mental Health Advisory Team report indicate that, according to an anonymous survey of US troops taken last fall, about 12 percent of combat troops in Iraq and 17 percent of those in Afghanistan are taking prescription antidepressants or sleeping pills to help them cope."

In April 2008, the RAND Corporation released a stunning report revealing, "Nearly 20 percent of military service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan — 300,000 in all — report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression, yet only slightly more than half have sought treatment."

President Barack Obama, speaking during an event at the Department of the Interior in Washington, said that the mass shooting at Fort Hood was a "horrific outburst of violence". He added, "It is horrifying that they should come under fire at an army base on American soil."

Victor Agosto, an Iraq war veteran who was discharged from the military after publicly refusing to deploy to Afghanistan, has had firsthand experience with the SRP at Fort Hood, where he too was based.

“I knew there would be a confrontation when I was there, because the only reason to do that process is to deploy,” Agosto explained, speaking to Truthout near Fort Hood . “So the shooter clearly intended to stop people from deploying.”

Agosto was court-martialed for refusing an order to go to the SRP to prepare to deploy to Afghanistan.

“I was court-martialed for refusing the order to SRP in that very same building. I didn’t enter the building, but I didn’t go in because I was refusing the process,” Agosto continued. “It’s a pretty important place in my life, so it’s interesting to me that this happened there.”

Dahr Jamail, is one of the first and few unembedded Western journalists to report the truth about how the United States has destroyed, not liberated, Iraqi society in his book [Beyond the Green Zone](#), Jamail now investigates the under-reported but growing antiwar resistance of American GIs. Gathering the stories of these courageous men and women, Jamail shows us that far from “supporting our troops,” politicians have betrayed them at every turn. Finally, Jamail shows us that the true heroes of the criminal tragedy of the Iraq War are those brave enough to say no.

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