



AP: Retired generals to visit N.H., speak against Iraq war and Bush

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MANCHESTER, N.H. --Retired generals against the Iraq war are bringing their message to New Hampshire, first primary state and home to vulnerable Republican U.S. Sen. John Sununu.

Gen. Robert Gard and Brig. Gen. John Johns, both retired, are teaming up with Win Without War, a group pushing for American withdrawal from Iraq within one year, and are scheduled to speak at a town hall-style meeting Thursday in Manchester. Win Without War was founded in 2002 and counts left-leaning groups MoveOn.org, NAACP, Sierra Club, National Organization for Women and several church groups among its coalition members.

Former Maine U.S. Rep. Tom Andrews is the chairman of Win Without War. He said the group is focusing on New Hampshire to press the state's congressional delegation to stand up to President Bush on the war. Win Without War also staged a war protest in Maine in April to criticize votes by the state's moderate Republican senators.

Andrews acknowledged the group is targeting New Hampshire Sens. Judd Gregg and John Sununu -- both Republican -- more than freshman Reps. Carol Shea-Porter and Paul Hodes, Democrats who were swept into office last November on a tide of anti-Iraq sentiment.

"The key now to ending this debacle is really the United States Congress and particularly the United States Senate," Andrews said Wednesday in a telephone interview with the generals.

"For those who live in states like New Hampshire and Maine where their representatives to the Senate ... are standing in the way of ending this debacle and not representing the views of their constituents on this issue ... we think we have a special responsibility to stand up and have our voices be heard," he said.

Sununu faces a tough re-election fight in 2008. Recently his Manchester office has become a popular protest spot of peace activists and other interest groups. Peace protesters also have demonstrated at Gregg's Concord office.

Johns, 79, said he is an independent who voted for Democrats Al Gore in 2000 and John Kerry in 2004. But he said his opinion of President Bush did not sour until 2002, when talk surfaced of invading Iraq.

"It was one of the great blunders of history to go in the way that we did," said Johns, who retired from the military in 1978.

"I was indifferent until 2002 when it became clear that he planned to go unilaterally into Iraq ... at that point I became an activist."

Gard said he voted for Bush in 2000. "That was a bad mistake on my part and I knew it as early as 2002," Gard said, echoing Johns' comments.

He said increasing U.S. troops in Iraq now is not a solution that can lead to a military victory or stabilizing the country.

"It's not winnable with military force. We are exacerbating, not solving the problem," Gard said.

Thursday's event is Win Without War's launch of its New Hampshire anti-war campaign. Another town hall-style event is scheduled for Friday in Keene.

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Generals campaign against war

'It's time for us to get the hell out of there'

By Joelle Farrell

Monitor staff

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Two retired Army generals toured New Hampshire last week, hoping to pressure New Hampshire's congressional delegation to stand up to President Bush and put an end to the war in Iraq.

Republican Sen. John Sununu is up for re-election in 2008, and some believe he could fall prey to a similar antiwar sentiment that helped oust two incumbent congressmen in favor of Democratic Reps. Paul Hodes and Carol Shea-Porter in 2006.

Lt. Gen. Robert Gard worked as executive assistant to Robert McNamara, secretary of defense during the Vietnam War. He believes Iraq, like Vietnam, is a failure, and the only responsible solution is to bring American troops home, he said.

"These troops are not expendable commodities to fulfill the pipe-dream vision of a group of people trying to remake the world in our image," Gard said. "It's time for us to get the hell out of there."

Gard and retired Brig. Gen. John Johns teamed up with Win Without War, a group that formed in 2002 in response to the buildup to the invasion of Iraq. Led by former Maine congressman Tom Andrews, the group lists 40 coalition members including Greenpeace, Peace Action and MoveOn.org.

Andrews, Gard and Johns held town hall meetings in Manchester and Keene last week and met with the Monitor's editorial board Thursday.

Terrorism threatens the United States, but the war in Iraq is exacerbating the problem, not solving it, the generals said.

Gard, a graduate of West Point and Harvard who served 31 years in the Army, said the idea that "fighting them over there so we don't have to fight them over here" is empty rhetoric used to keep Americans scared so they don't question the administration's foreign policy. Fighting in Iraq will not stop someone who wants to blow up a dirty bomb in New York.

"These people are mobile," Gard said. "If they want to come in here, they'll come."

Johns said the military can't fight terrorism on its own. The United States must also look for political solutions, he said.

"It's a war of ideas, it's not a military war," Johns said. "Raw military force is more limited in its usefulness than ever in the history of mankind."

Johns served as a combat arms officer for 26 years and taught leadership and ethics at the U.S. Military Academy before he retired from active duty in 1978. He then worked at the Department of Defense, serving four years as deputy assistant secretary of defense before becoming a political science professor at the National Defense University at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C.

Gard, who served combat tours in Korea and Vietnam, said the situation in Iraq is "hauntingly similar" to the spring of 1968, when 25,000 troops were sent to Vietnam to bolster forces there.

"At that point in time, we had lost 24,000 U.S. killed in action," he said. "Five years later, we had 34,000 more killed in action, a total of 58,000. And I would assert that we got no better settlement five years later than we could have had at the time of the surge in Vietnam."

The generals briefly recounted mistakes made early in the Iraq war that allowed a culture of lawlessness to spread and promoted a vigorous insurgency - invading with too few troops, turning a blind eye to looting and disbanding the Iraqi army.

But the time for more troops is over, Johns said. And using the military to fight an insurgent war never seems to work out, as was illustrated in Vietnam, Johns said.

"I don't even think you could've done it if we'd gone in with 300,000 troops," he said. "They will always be seen as colonial occupiers, and you will alienate the population. You have to keep it as advisory duty, and if the indigenous military and police forces can't do it, then you just can't do it."

There is no good answer to Iraq, the generals said. But the least-worst option is to disengage major combat forces from Iraq and call for a multilateral solution that involves neighboring countries, including Iran, Turkey and Syria.

Gard thinks Iraq's neighbors will want to help because "it is not in any of their interest for that war to spill over into their countries," he said.

The generals also think the United States should renew efforts to broker a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "the main bone of contention that gets support for al-Qaida, Osama bin Laden and the terrorists," Johns said.

Johns said it will take the all-volunteer military years to recover from Iraq. The military raised age limits and lowered standards for education (and in some cases crime records and mental health) in order to meet recruiting goals, Johns said.

"They're wrecking the Army," Johns said. "It took us a long time to recuperate from the hollow army that we created in Vietnam. It's going to take longer for this one, in my view."

Gard said the military is losing some of its best people. West Point graduates are required to serve five years after they finish school. But more than half of the last class to finish that five-year commitment chose to resign rather than continue in the service, he said.

The generals plan to tour other states they see as political battlegrounds where their anti-Iraq war message may carry the most weight.