

Carr Center Leads Human Rights Groups to Visit the U.S. Military's National Training Center

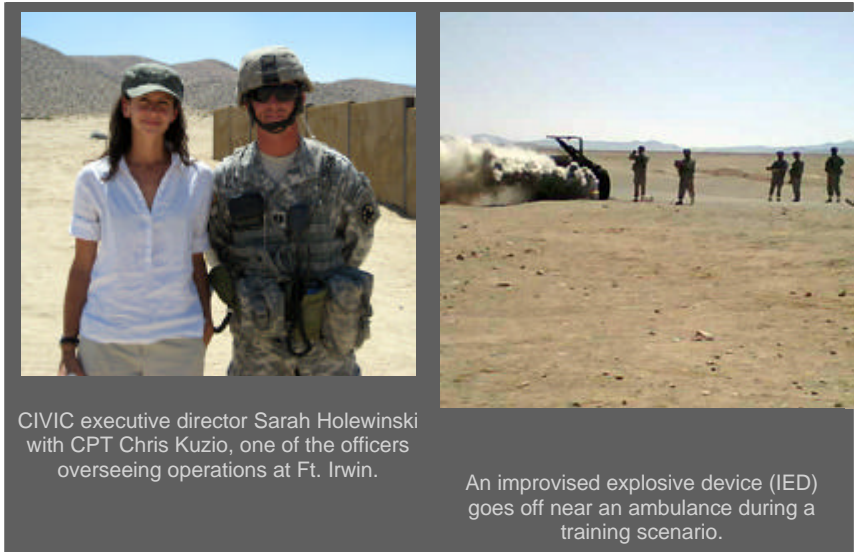
On August 22, 2007 the Carr Center's National Security and Human Rights Program led human rights representatives to visit Fort Irwin's National Training Center located near Barstow, CA. The NTC is the military's premier training center for counterinsurgency operations and irregular warfare. Nearly one third of all troops who deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan receive training at the NTC.



In October, the Carr Center will publish a report by Bonnie Docherty that will review and make recommendations to improve the training commensurate with human rights issues such as mitigating civilian harm, compliance with legal standards, and cultural and political dimensions. The report will also address EOF and TCP procedures. For more information on this topic, see the NSHR's recent publication on EOF and TCP procedures by Tyler Moselle.



The Carr Center's National Security and Human Rights Program sponsored multiple visits to the NTC in the past and will continue to work with the Commanding Officers. As a result of the trip, the International Committee for the Red Cross will consult with the NTC to integrate one of their representatives into a rotation of training. The Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC) and Human Rights Watch were also represented during the visit. For information on CIVIC's involvement, please see below.



CIVIC executive director Sarah Holewinski with CPT Chris Kuzio, one of the officers overseeing operations at Ft. Irwin.

An improvised explosive device (IED) goes off near an ambulance during a training scenario.

Dear friend,

I just returned from visiting one of America's most critical military bases out at Ft. Irwin, California and wanted to tell you about what I saw.

You'll notice from the photo here that the landscape looks remarkably like Iraq or Afghanistan. That's no mistake. It is clear from the program that, though late into both conflicts, the US military has accepted the realities of counter insurgency warfare. ***That includes avoiding civilians and treating them with respect -- exactly what CIVIC and other groups have been calling for since the beginning of the conflicts.***

When can soldiers shoot? When should they hold their fire and try something else? How do they avoid doing harm to civilians when an IED blasts through a convoy?

To help answer those questions, commanders have designed the National Training Center at Ft. Irwin to mirror the battlefield, with fake Iraqi towns and over 200 Iraqi-Americans living on site in the high Mojave Desert. Decked out in Kevlar, contending with 115-degree heat, every soldier headed to war first comes through here for two weeks of training on non-lethal weapons, how to be an American ambassador and the Laws of War. The strategic importance of winning hearts and minds is, finally, a priority.

The Iraqi role players in particular show soldiers the other -- distinctly human -- side of their fight. In many cases, their families were killed in the first years of fighting in Iraq. I asked the Iraqi "Mayor," of the "town" why he was there. He answered, "Because I want to help my American brothers be better."

And they are getting better. I was impressed by efforts to train the soldiers on Iraqi culture and civilian needs. But I couldn't help also being a bit skeptical of how effectively the soldiers headed into combat will carry that knowledge across the ocean and use it in the confusing, unpredictable, sometimes lethal setting of war.

As always, CIVIC will be there to speak for Iraqi and Afghan war victims. We are now writing training materials for Ft. Irwin soldiers on what to do for civilians after they have been inadvertently harmed.

Thank you for your continued support,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SAH', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sarah Holewinski