

PROTESTS

Despite protests, Israeli government still ignores citizens

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"They have a booming economy, so of course prices are going to go up; that's one of the downsides of being prosperous," said Carter. "Palestinians, however, are suffering. They're under military occupation, they can't travel, their kids don't have a secure future. So part of me says, 'Oh, give me a break. You're earning 20 times per capita what Palestinians are, you're living on Palestinian land ... isn't that a sign of privilege?'"

BBC News reports that, while other countries "look enviously at Israel's growing economy," those who live there do not feel so lucky. The protesters, who are mostly middle-class Israeli citizens, feel as though they are the ones that have to "bear a hefty tax burden."

Ken Gilmore, associate professor of political science at Guilford, finds the Israeli protests to be a justified cause, but agrees with Carter about the stench of hypocrisy in the air.

"In the articles I've read, I haven't seen people actually raising this issue about the Palestinian side or the Palestinian causes," said Gilmore. "But people have a right to make a statement about what their society stands for. We have a right to go out into the streets and say, 'Everyone should be able to afford a house. Everyone should be able to put food on the table.' I think people need to be doing more of this stuff."

According to The New York Times, this huge protest has been "carnival-like and nonviolent," and, surprisingly, not even one display window has been broken. With such a large group of angry citizens, this is certainly a shock.

"It is admirable that 400,000 people protest and there is no violence, no shop windows broken," said Carter. "But remember, these were all Israeli Jewish citizens. Yes, it's a great example of peaceful protest and nonviolence, but compare that with how Israel deals with demonstrations by its Arab

citizens in the occupied territories, and that's a whole different ball game."

Many people feel that how the Israeli government has responded to these protests proves that the government and its citizens are not seeing eye to eye. According to the Haaretz Newspaper, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has



Thousands of Israeli citizens rally into the night to partake in protests in hopes that they can send a message to their government.

tried to quiet the protests, rather than respond to his citizens' problems that are being addressed in these protests.

Junior Tim Leisman, who accompanied Carter on the trip to Israel and the occupied territories this summer, agrees that the government does not seem to be responding appropriately to the protests.

"It seems like the Israeli government's priorities are off,"

said Leisman. "To appease the protesters, Netanyahu said, 'Well, we're going to build more settlements.' And the Israelis are thinking, 'There are thousands of us with no homes and you're proposing to build 400 more homes in Palestine. For what? That doesn't benefit us at all.' The government is focusing on building these settlements when actually the economic conditions in Israel are not ideal, and that's what people are protesting about, but the government is not actually addressing these problems."

Indeed there does seem to be a huge gap between the Israeli people and its government. At the core of these protests is the outrage over the government's indifference to the citizens' suffering, reported The New York Times.

Gilmore finds this to be a popular pattern found in countries all over the world today.

"The Israelis don't like the policies of the government because they believe that these policies are controlled by people who don't have their best interest at heart, which is really common," said Gilmore. "People show up to topple the government in England, in Egypt, in Syria, in Yemen, it's not just Israel. It's happening in a lot of places."

While government corruption and citizen unrest appears to be everywhere in the world, Gilmore raised the point that these massive protests aren't present in the U.S.

"In the U.S., unemployment is extremely high, the government is paralyzed to doing anything about it, inequality in terms of wealth is higher than it has ever been, and yet, there's nothing," said Gilmore. "Why these protests in Israel and not here? Why is there not a revolution in this country? I don't get it. Are we just happy to have a TV set so we can watch 'Sports Center' and 'Jersey Shore'? These people are actually saying, 'You know what, I'm pissed off.' And in this country, we get nothing."

Proposed overhaul of military pensions sparks debate

By Casey Horgan
STAFF WRITER

The U.S. military has been an all-volunteer institution for almost 40 years. Voluntary service is driven by its benefits — the armed services provide steady employment, housing, medical coverage and stability.

However, due to the current state of the economy, even the military is under fire.

A proposed overhaul of military retirement benefits is underway, with a Pentagon advisory panel recommending a switch from a pension system to a defined contribution plan.

Under the current system, a retired soldier gets 50 percent of their salary for life, provided they gave the military 20 years of service. According to military records, less than a quarter of military personnel stay in long enough to qualify for retirement benefits.

By changing to a defined contribution plan, in essence a 401k, all soldiers would collect yearly contributions in a retirement savings account.

"Most major corporations have made the switch already," Professor of Economics Bob Williams said.

"Defined benefit pensions are low-risk to the employee," said Williams. "The retiree is assured a certain income for the rest of his life. The problem for the military is that it doesn't know how much it's going to pay each soldier because that depends on life expectancy. And people live longer these days, so the cost to the military increases."

This growing cost is forcing the govern-

ment to seek out alternate plans for military retirement. If the proposal is passed, the Department of Defense will save \$250 billion in the next 20 years, according to a Pentagon advisory panel.

Opponents consider military pensions to be an untouchable benefit. President Obama has been quoted as saying: "we cannot, will not, and we must not, balance the budget on the backs of our veterans." And Williams points out that there is a reason that the armed services have not made the switch to 401k's like most corporations have.

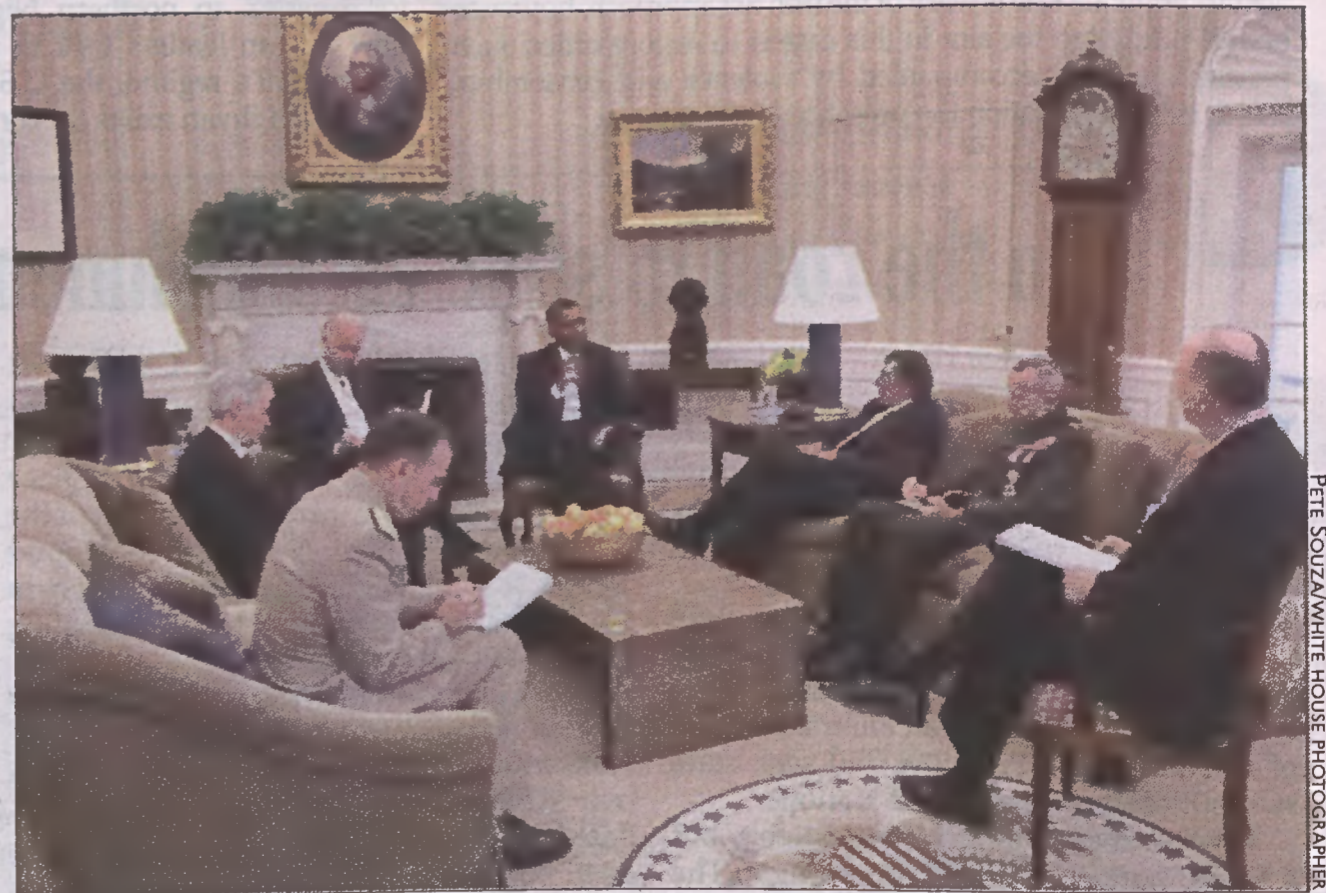
"If they switch it over, the military will see a significant decline in retention, unless they compensate with much higher salaries," Williams said. "It's a very tricky situation."

Specialist Ben Miller, a soldier currently serving in Afghanistan, is not sure he'll remain in the Army long enough to receive a pension. He would, however, benefit from the switch to a defined contribution plan, and would receive a higher monthly contribution due to his high-risk job.

"I don't know of anyone joining nowadays thinking about retirement," Miller said in an email interview. "They all want the enlistment bonuses and monthly pay. I don't know when I'm getting out, but it would be nice to get something."

At the same time, he said, there are soldiers who have served 19 years and are depending on a pension to live on when they get out in a year.

"It wouldn't be fair if they didn't get anything," Miller added. "If (the military) does plan to change it, I would hope they take



Pentagon advisors meet with President **Barack Obama** to discuss military retirement benefits. The advisory panel is recommending a switch from a pension system to a defined contribution plan.

that into consideration. It's not fair to tell soldiers one thing, then switch it just before they reach 20 years."

Miller is also concerned that the armed forces will see a reduction in the quality and quantity of experienced soldiers.

"The military has been changing a lot," said Miller. "It's getting looser, and the discipline is fading. I wish it would tighten up."

The unfortunate thing is that, according to Williams, "it doesn't really matter what the soldier thinks. They don't have the power. It's going to come down to what the dynamics with Congress are. That's the real issue. I suspect it will pass. I guess the argument is that this is the kind of change happening throughout our economy, and it's catching up to the military."