



HERALD PHOTOS BY DOMINICK REUTER
IT'S TIME: Al Johnson, above left, of Veterans for Peace and Joan Livingston protest yesterday on the Common to bring U.S. troops in Afghanistan home. 'Our war is making our soldiers so traumatized,' said Susan McLucas, below.

After Afghanistan tragedy, Hub protesters demand: Bring them home!

By RICHARD WEIR

The slaughter of 16 Afghan civilians reportedly at the hands of a rogue Army staff sergeant on his fourth combat mission serves as a clarion call to bring U.S. troops home and end the decade-long military operation, anti-war protesters said yesterday during a rally on the Common.

Staff Sgt. Robert Bales, 38, an 11-year military veteran said by his lawyer to have been reluctantly serving his fourth tour of duty after three tours in Iraq, is suspected of slipping out of his base in Southern Afghanistan early last Sunday and slaughtering sleeping villagers — including nine children — before burning many of their bodies.

"I don't want to let him off the hook. He did a really terrible thing," said Susan McLucas, 62, of Somerville, holding a sign that read, "War makes people crazy." "But I'm sure if he had never gone to Afghanistan and he had never gone to Iraq three

times, he wouldn't have been going around house to house killing people. Our war is making our soldiers so traumatized that they are going out of their minds, to say nothing of those that are getting killed and to say nothing of the Afghans who are being killed."

Lyn Meza, 60, of Chelsea said Afghan backlash to the massacre and inadvertent Quran burnings by U.S. soldiers "should make it very clear to the people of the United States that the people of Afghanistan do not want U.S. troops there."

Polls have shown up to 60 percent of Americans believe it is time to end the war, a point not lost on the Obama administration.

"The Afghan people are tired of war," Defense Sec-



retary Leon Panetta said Friday, after returning from Afghanistan. "The American people share some of that tiredness after 10 years of war as well."

Still, the administration has bucked demands by Afghan President Hamid Kar-

zai for U.S. forces to withdraw from rural areas and let Afghan security forces take the lead next year.

Bales, of Lake Tapps, Wash., who played high school football in suburban Cincinnati, had been wounded several times in combat, including one injury that required the surgical removal of part of a foot. A lawyer for Bales, John Henry Browne, said the "normally mild mannered," married serviceman had been training to be an Army recruiter last year and was disappointed

to learn he was being dispatched to Afghanistan. "He wasn't thrilled about going on another deployment," Browne said, noting that last Saturday, a day before the shooting rampage, the soldier saw his friend's leg blown off.