

A Sign of Empire Pathology

More US military personnel have taken their OWN lives than have died in action

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Global Research, January 12, 2010

[Gulf Daily News](#) 12 January 2010

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Here is a shocking statistic that you won't hear in most western news media: over the past nine years, more US military personnel have taken their own lives than have died in action in either the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. These are official figures from the US Department of Defence, yet somehow they have not been deemed newsworthy to report. Last year alone, more than 330 serving members of the US armed forces committed suicide - more than the 320 killed in Afghanistan and the 150 who fell in Iraq (see [wsws.org](#)).

Since 2001, when Washington launched its so-called war on terror, there has been a dramatic year-on-year increase in US military suicides, particularly in the army, which has borne the brunt of fighting abroad. Last year saw the highest total number since such records began in 1980. Prior to 2001, the suicide rate in the US military was lower than that for the general US population; now, it is nearly double the national average.

A growing number of these victims have been deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan. What these figures should tell us is that there is something fundamentally deranged about Washington's "war on terror" - which is probably why western news media prefer to ignore the issue. How damning is it about such military campaigns that the number of US soldiers who take their own lives outnumber those killed by enemy combatants.

What is even more disturbing is that the official figures only count victims of suicide among serving personnel. Not included are the many more veterans - officially classed as civilians - who take their own lives.

Most likely, these deaths are reported in some small-town newspaper in "a brief" news item with no context or background as to what drove these individuals to take their own lives. It is estimated that the suicide rate among veterans demobbed from fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq is as high as four times the national average. The US Department of Veteran Affairs calculates that over 6,000 former service personnel commit suicide every year.

Many of these men have come home to a country they have fought for only to find no jobs, their homes repossessed by banks that have enjoyed trillion-dollar bailouts and broken relationships.

Meanwhile, President Obama - the erstwhile peace candidate - has taken on the role of Commander in Chief with gusto, telling his countrymen and women that they are fighting a "just war" to "defend American lives". Only a year ago, he was campaigning for the presidency on a ticket to end such wars. Now, more than his predecessor, George W Bush,

Obama is committing to wars without end. How soul-destroying is that for a grunt holed up in a bunker, with his young family back home probably telling him that they have just signed up for food stamps? In their guts, these US soldiers must know – as many other ordinary people around the world do – that these wars are nothing but a desperate, pathological bid by a dying power to salvage its crumbling empire – an empire that enriches a tiny elite and impoverishes the majority. Is it any wonder that many of them simply lose the will to live?

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