

## After Vietnam: Afghan, Iraqi...Iranian Syndromes?

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An article published on the “Huffington Post” news website says that every 80 minutes, one US serviceman or war veteran commits suicide.

This data was taken from a report by the Center for a New American Security. The report says that since the beginning of the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the number of suicides or suicidal attempts in the army or among war veterans has grown considerably. In 2009 alone, as many as 1,868 veterans of the Iraq and Afghan operations attempted to kill themselves. In 2010, the number of US servicemen who committed suicides in Iraq and Afghanistan exceeded the number of those killed in combat in these countries.

The reasons for these suicides are varied, but most of them were committed either due to a mental illness developed during the war or the inability to adapt to a peaceful life after the war.

The authors of the report, Margaret C. Harrel and Nancy Berglass, have come to the conclusion that “America is losing its battle against suicide by veterans and service members. And as more troops return from deployment, the risk will only grow.”

This, of course, causes concern to the Pentagon. Nevertheless, the US authorities seem to be pretending that this “epidemic” of suicides is no more terrible than, say, a flu epidemic, and that it can even be cured with very similar methods. A high-ranking US military official has said that suicides can be prevented... with the help of blood tests. Apparently, the chemical composition of the blood of a potential suicide is different from that of a normal person, and this can be determined by a lab test.

Well, thank God if it is really that simple. However, what disturbingly comes to mind here are the events which already seem a distant memory – the Vietnam war of the 1960s and 1970s. In some respects, that war cannot be compared with the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan – the former lasted a lot longer and took the lives of a lot more people. However, the Vietnam war brought to life what is known as “the Vietnam syndrome” – an “epidemic” of cases when the veterans of that war committed suicides after becoming disillusioned with the much-vaunted American democracy or after failing to adapt to a peaceful life after the war. It is, to a big extent, thanks to the “Vietnam syndrome” that the “beat generation” set off revolutions all over the world in 1968.

There is a saying that history sometimes repeats itself. Now, unfortunately, it would probably be correct to speak of an “Afghan” or an “Iraqi syndrome”. As for the Vietnam war, one must note that every cloud has a silver lining – “the Vietnam syndrome” stopped then US authorities from involving America in similar wars for quite a long time. However, it looks like today’s American authorities have forgotten about that. They haven’t even learned any

lessons from dubious “success” in the Afghan and Iraq operations, and, now, they seem to be falling into the same trap in Libya. Currently, the US government is mulling over the possibility of launching a military operation against Iran. The recent anti-Iranian rhetoric of some Israeli officials seems to indicate that this time, the US won’t itself start the war, in order to avoid looking like an aggressor, but will wait for Israel to start the war instead. However, if the war does start, the US will most probably interfere, whether sooner or later. Aren’t the US authorities worried about an “Iranian syndrome”, in addition to the Afghan, Iraq and Libya ones?

While the authorities are trying to play down the problem, claiming that suicides can be easily prevented by testing the blood, the veterans are coming to realize that no one will stand for their interests but themselves. Mass anti-government protests, known as “Occupy Wall Street!”, which recently engulfed the USA, are now gripping almost the whole world. In some respects, this resembles the “youth revolutions” of 1968. And, in the US, many of those taking part in these riots are veterans of the Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya conflicts. It is worth noting that they are taking to the streets in their military uniforms, in an apparent attempt to draw a parallel between the conflicts they have been involved in and the current protests.

One of the slogans the protesters in New York are chanting is “We are the 99%!” Recently, a new slogan has been added to that: “We are veterans of the United States of America!”.

“Soldiers are bleeding while corporations are multiplying their riches,” – this is how the veterans are explaining why they are taking to the streets.

Andrew Johnson, the head of the New York branch of “Iraq Veterans against the War” says: “Veterans have a unique opportunity to continue serving here at home through our participation in this civic movement for change.”

On November 11, the US will celebrate Veterans Day. It would be interesting to listen to what President Obama will have to say to those who have spilled their blood for the ideals of much-vaunted American democracy and who now seem to be neglected by the American state.

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