

Who Are the Real Friends of the Troops?

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Ever since the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, it has been an article of faith that Americans should thank the troops for their service in those two countries.

Yet, with the exception of libertarians and few leftists, the fact is that during the two decades of death, injury, suffering, destruction, and out of control federal spending and debt that threatens to send the government into bankruptcy, the overwhelming majority of Americans never openly demanded that the U.S. government bring the troops home from Afghanistan and Iraq.

There certainly haven't been any massive antiwar protests, like there was with the Vietnam War. Instead, this time around there has been a mindset of deference to the authority of the Pentagon and the CIA to protect national security, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Through it all there has been this incessant desire to thank the troops for their service. You see it airports, where people go out of their way to thank the troops for their service. You see it at baseball games, where the public-address announcer asks people to stand and thank the troops for their service. You see it in churches all across America, where ministers exhort their congregations to pray for the brave troops who are serving our nation overseas.

This all seems very strange to me because the people who feel the need to thank the troops for their service never seem to ask what the service consists of? It's almost like it doesn't matter. One gets the distinct feeling that so long as an American thanks the troops for their service, their duty is done. Leave it to U.S. officials to decide what the service is and whether the service should continue. All that matters is that we thank the troops for their service.

Service in Iraq

Let's examine Iraq. What exactly was the service that the troops performed in Iraq for which people thank them? Was it a meritorious service? For some reason, many people who thank the troops for their service never ask those questions. They consider them irrelevant. Those are matters for the Pentagon and the CIA to determine, they say. Regardless, we just need to keep thanking the troops for their service.

Nonetheless, there are two reasonable possibilities for what the service consisted of in Iraq: one, the troops were sacrificing themselves to protect the freedom of the American people, and, two, they were sacrificing themselves to bring freedom to the Iraqi people. I think most Americans who go out of their way to thank the troops for their service in Iraq subconsciously settle on one or both of these two rationales for thanking them.

Yet, both rationales for invading and occupying Iraq and wreaking death and destruction across the country have always false and fallacious, which is perhaps why people don't like thinking about them.

It was undisputed that Iraq never attacked the United States or even threatened to do so. That made the United States the aggressor power in the conflict, and it meant that Iraq was the defending nation. Under international law and the principles set forth at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, the United States was the nation that was involved in criminal conduct when it invaded and occupied Iraq, killing and injuring thousands of Iraqis in the process, none of whom had ever attacked the United States.

The illegality of the invasion was aggravated by the fact that President George W. Bush, who ordered the troops to invade Iraq, never secured the constitutionally required congressional declaration of war on Iraq. That made the war illegal not only under international law but also under our own system of government.

Thus, the service the troops performed in Iraq never had anything to do with protecting our freedoms here at home because our freedoms were never threatened by one single Iraqi or by the Iraqi government. Under international law and the law of the U.S. Constitution, the service in which the president had his troops engaged in Iraq was criminal in nature.

The Pentagon called its invasion and occupation of Iraq "Operation Iraqi Freedom," which implied the second rationale for thanking the troops for their service — that they were bringing freedom to the Iraqi people. Once again, it needs to be pointed out that international law and the U.S. Constitution do not authorize the U.S. government to invade and occupy a country with the aim of bringing freedom to the citizenry, especially when lots of the citizenry are going to have to be killed and maimed in the process of bringing freedom to them.

Moreover, there was never a chance that the Iraqi people were going to be freed, given that the particular governmental structure that the Pentagon and the CIA were going to establish in Iraq after overthrowing Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime. The type of government that the Pentagon and the CIA established was never going to be a limited-government republic, which is a type of governmental structure that is consistent with freedom. Instead, the plan was to establish a national-security state type of government, which is a totalitarian type of governmental structure. That necessary meant another crooked and corrupt dictatorial regime in Iraq, no different in principle from that of Saddam Hussein.

In other words, the U.S. government, operating through the troops, ousted one dictatorial regime and simply replaced it with another. The idea though was that since the new one would supposedly be pro-U.S., that would mean, by definition, that the Iraqi people would then be free — well, at least those who survived the invasion and occupation.

As we are now seeing in Iraq today, the Iraqi government is killing Iraqi citizens for protesting the crookedness and corruption of the dictatorial regime that the Pentagon and the CIA installed into power. That is not exactly the model for free society. Quite the contrary! The Iraqi government that the Pentagon and the CIA installed into power is nothing more than Saddam Hussein type of dictatorial regime.

Read this article, entitled [Love and War](#), that appeared in the October 3, 2019, issue of the *Washington Post*. It's a moving and emotional account by a widow whose husband lost in leg

in Iraq owing to a bomb that exploded near him. He returned to the United States, got addicted to painkillers, suffered from PTSD, and later died of a drug overdose. His widow thinks, however, that what he really died of was “isolation and loneliness.” The article points out that since the start of the Iraq War in 2001, 52,000 American servicemen have been wounded in action, many of whom are too disabled to work.

What was their sacrifice for? For “freedom”? Don’t make me laugh. No matter how much people thank that widow and those 52,000 troops for their service, it cannot cover up the fact that their sacrifice was for nothing. That’s why we libertarians, who opposed the war from the start and continually demanded that the U.S. exit Iraq and bring the troops home, were always much better friends to the troops than those who mindlessly thanked them for their service while doing nothing to bring them home from the U.S. government’s deadly and destructive imperialist venture in Iraq.

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