

The “Exceptional Character” of America’s Armed Forces

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Few American chief executives have lavished as much praise upon the U.S. military as President Barack Obama. Yet day after day reports appear in the mass media about war crimes, atrocities, and abuses attributed to that same armed forces and its leadership — mostly on foreign battlefields but also back home.

“Good morning, everybody,” the president intoned cheerily during a Jan. 5 visit to the Pentagon to explain Washington’s latest war policy. “The United States of America is the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known. And in no small measure, that’s because we’ve built the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history — and as Commander-in-Chief, I’m going to keep it that way.”

Obama was even more effusive during his State of the Union Address Jan. 25, declaring of the military that “this generation of heroes has made the United States safer and more respected around the world....

“These achievements are a testament to the courage, selflessness, and teamwork of America’s armed forces. At a time when too many of our institutions have let us down, they exceed all expectations. They’re not consumed with personal ambition. They don’t obsess over their differences. They focus on the mission at hand. They work together. Imagine what we could accomplish if we followed their example.”

Yes, just imagine! Within days and weeks of these tributes this took place:

- A video of U.S. Marines urinating on the corpses of Taliban suspects became public, obliging the American secretaries of Defense and State to issue apologies to the Afghan government and people.
- The Pentagon reported the rate of violent sexual crime within the armed forces increased 64% since 2006, noting that “rape, sexual assault, and forcible sodomy were the most frequent violent sex crimes committed in 2011.” There were 3,191 reports of sexual assault throughout the military last year but Secretary of Defense Panetta acknowledged in January that a more realistic estimate for such assaults “actually is closer to 19,000.” Active-duty female soldiers ages 18 to 21 account for more than half of the victims. Women are 14% of the military ranks but account for 95% of sex crime victims.
- A just discovered photograph emerged in February of another group of Marines posing with the exact replica of the Nazi SS flag. Outrage over the photo, the press reported, “threatened to snowball into the latest war-zone scandal for the Marine Corps.” The Marine commander declared, most improbably, that they didn’t know what the flag stood for. The

murderous black uniformed Waffen-SS was a military wing of the Nazi Party.

- The retired commander of Special Operations forces, Lt. Gen William G. Boykin, known for his harshly anti-Muslim remarks, withdrew from speaking at West Point's Feb. 8 National Prayer Breakfast after protests. Following the 9/11 attacks, the general "described the fight against terrorism as a Christian battle against Satan," reports the New York Times. "Since his retirement in 2007 and a new career as a popular conservative Christian speaker, Boykin has described Islam as 'a totalitarian way of life' and said that Islam should not be protected under the First Amendment."

- The last and most responsible of the Marines charged in the 2005 Haditha massacre of 24 Iraqi civilians, Staff Sgt. Frank Wuterich, received no jail time after he pleaded guilty to dereliction of duty in order to avoid charges of involuntary manslaughter, Democracy Now! reported. "Under his sentencing, Wuterich now faces a maximum penalty of a demotion to the rank of private."

- USA Today reported Jan. 26 that "The Justice Department is funding an unusual national training program to help police deal with an increasing number of volatile confrontations involving highly trained and often heavily armed combat veterans. Developers of the pilot program, to be launched at 15 U.S. sites this year, said there is an 'urgent need' to de-escalate crises in which even SWAT teams may be facing tactical disadvantages against mentally ill suspects who also happen to be trained in modern warfare."

- Lance Cpl. Jacob Jacoby, 21, a Hawaii-based Marine accused of viciously hazing a Chinese American fellow Marine in Afghanistan — who later killed himself — pleaded guilty Jan. 30 to assault and was sentenced to 30 days in jail. He had repeatedly punched, kicked and publicly humiliated Lance Cpl. Harry Lew, also 21, who committed suicide with a machine gun April 3 shortly after the abuse. Two other Marines accused of hazing Lew will have separate courts-martial later.

- A retired Navy SEAL sniper, Chris Kyle, has just published a book titled "American Sniper — The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History." He racked up 160 officially confirmed "kills" in the Iraq War from 2003 to 2009. "The number [of kills] is not important to me," he writes. "I only wish I had killed more. Not for bragging rights, but because I believe the world is a better place without savages out there taking American lives."

- The military pre-trial of Bradley Manning at Fort Meade, Md., adjourned March 16 and will resume in late April. Manning is the 24-year-old Army intelligence analyst and whistle blower accused of leaking documents known as the Afghan War Diary and the Iraq War Logs, as well as embarrassing U.S. diplomatic cables, to the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks. His "crime" includes circulating a video showing the avoidable killing of Afghan civilians and two Reuters journalists by a U.S. Apache helicopter crew in Iraq.

- President Obama had little choice but to apologize to President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan people Feb. 22, after Army troops, following orders, were observed burning of copies of the Muslim holy book the Koran on a U.S. base in Afghanistan. The incident, following the earlier desecration of corpses, touched off a number of protest demonstrations resulting in the deaths of about 40 civilians and several U.S. soldiers. Speaking before the House Armed Services Committee, March 20, Gen. John Allen declared

that since January 1, “the coalition has lost 60 brave troops in action, from six different nations. Thirteen of them were killed at the hands of what appear to have been Afghan security forces, some of whom were motivated, we believe, in part by the mishandling of religious materials.”

- President Obama was obliged to once again apologize for the actions of a U.S. Army soldier, or several soldiers as eyewitnesses insist, who on March 11 murdered 16 Afghan men, women, and nine children, aged two to 12. The incident took place in two small, poor nearby villages, in the darkness of late night when the military usually makes its raids in search of alleged opponents of the 10-year American war and occupation.

In his statement deploring the murders as “tragic and shocking” President Obama also said he “will bring the full weight of the law down upon anyone involved.” Several commentators have noted that those also “involved” included the White House and Congress that have been conducting and funding this cruel war for a decade at a terrible cost to the Afghan people.

The Bush and Obama governments have invested nearly \$500 billion in the war, but two-thirds of Afghanistan’s 30 million people are living below the poverty line, and unemployment is over 50%. Afghan children, according to a World Bank report this month, suffer one of the highest levels of chronic malnutrition in the world. Over 50% under the age of five are chronically malnourished. Hundreds of small kids die daily from hunger.

The U.S. government has never apologized or assumed any responsibility for the wretched conditions it has imposed upon the people — and be assured that the reported instances of war crimes, atrocities, and abuses attributed to the Pentagon’s foreign legion are but a small portion of the horrors that take place repeatedly but are never observed, or photographed or written about.

It is worth remarking upon the fact that when President Obama had to apologize a second time in March for the reprehensible conduct of the “best-trained, best-led” military in history he made sure in his statement to declare that the mass murder “does not represent the exceptional character of our military.”

Exceptional indeed. As the president said, “Imagine what we could accomplish if we followed their example.”

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MICHEL CHOSSUDOVSKY

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