

U.S. Mainstream Media: American Airstrikes against Iraq “Are Wonderful”

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Every week, the **PBS NewsHour** gives viewers its version of a left/right debate segment. On the right is well-known conservative pundit [David Brooks](#). On the left is Mark Shields, who is not especially well-known outside of the **NewsHour**, and certainly has no meaningful connection to leftish politics. As FAIR (**Extra!**, [7/98](#)) has noted, Shields’ publicity materials used to proclaim that he was “free of any political tilt.”

On the most recent installment (**NewsHour**, [9/12/14](#)), Shields was making the point that Congress should weigh in on any decision to launch military strikes against ISIS:

Here’s the one power that is defined, delineated by the Constitution, that resides with the Congress, to declare war. And they have abdicated that responsibility.

Shields was clear: Going to war needs a serious discussion.

JUDY WOODRUFF: You said it needs a healthy debate. Is it getting that kind of debate right now?

MARK SHIELDS: No, it isn’t.

Most people would agree that a debate over war sounds good. As someone who is paid to play the left on public television, what does Shields think about going to war? Well, something like this:

The United States military... has shown its ability, its capacity to come in and dominate the battlefield. But the idea of establishing order, security and peaceful government in its wake after that has eluded us.

Who are the troops who are going to be there to guarantee stability, order and some sense of justice in the areas?

You can’t do that with airstrikes. I mean, airstrikes are wonderful. They’re antiseptic. They’re at a distance. The possibility of your own casualties is finite. But they don’t occupy. You can’t occupy a nation or bring order and stability by airstrikes. So who are people on the ground? Who is the coalition? Where are the troops coming from?

So the left view of Obama’s war plan is that airstrikes “are wonderful,” but that in order to really win there needs to be a ground invasion? Or is Shields’ point that a ground invasion is necessary and therefore untenable? It’s hard to tell. During an earlier discussion (**NewsHour**, [8/8/14](#)), when he was asked if Obama had “a choice but to go back in militarily,” Shields replied, “I don’t think he did.”

If Shields—and **PBS**, for that matter—believe in having a full debate about this war, they will need to find a more forceful critic of Obama’s latest war.

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