

Our Troops versus Our Eco-System

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Since I've already told you about the importance of repetition, let me recite some numbers I've shouted out a few hundred times or so:

80% of the world's forests are gone 90% of the large fish in the ocean are gone
80% of the planet's rivers can no longer sustain sustain life

200,000 acres of rain forest are destroyed each day 200 animal and plant
species go extinct every 24 hours

If these statistics make you (at least) squirm, you might be interested to know something I've also repeated till I'm hoarse: The US Department of Defense (DoD)—the interventionist institution formerly known as the War Department—is the biggest polluter on Planet Earth, for example, releasing more hazardous waste than the five largest US chemical companies combined.

To add insult to injury, the world's worst polluter—the entity wrecking havoc upon the landbase that makes all life possible—also gobbles up 54% of US taxpayer dollars. But it takes more than obscene amounts of money to keep this criminal enterprise afloat. It also takes more than the volunteers willing to be paid to wage illegal, immoral, and eco-system destroying wars. The DoD will be able to maintain its crime spree as long as most of us continue to unconditionally support (sic) those troops.

As long as the yellow ribbons fly, our shared heritage/future is doomed.

For some, the phrase "support our troops" is merely a euphemism for: support the policies that put the troops there in the first place. For others—sadly, including many activists—the mantra is a safe way to avoid taking an unqualified, uncompromising stand against this war (and all war). Many who identify themselves as "anti-war" still vigorously defend the troops...no questions asked.

The excuse-making typically falls into two broad categories. The first being: "Our troops are just following orders."

If you activate the google function on your interwebs machines, you'll easily find many reasons why this concept has no legal basis. For example, Principle IV of Nuremberg Tribunal (1950) states: "The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him."

(Besides this, I hope I don't have to explain that "only following orders" also has no moral footing.)

The second common excuse: "It's a poverty draft. The poor have to enlist because they have no economic options." America is certainly an unjust economic society and this would be a compelling argument...if it were true. However, studies found that wartime recruits since 1999 are "on average a bit wealthier, much more likely to have graduated from high school, and more rural than their civilian peers." It seems youths "from wealthy American ZIP codes are volunteering in ever higher numbers" while "enlistees from the poorest fifth of American neighborhoods fell nearly a full percentage point over the last two years, to 13.7 percent. In 1999, that number was exactly 18 percent."

Did some of the soldiers enlist primarily for economic reasons? Sure. Did others sign up for a chance to shoot some "ragheads"? Probably. After factoring out these two relatively small groups and rejecting the illegal, immoral, and reactionary "only following orders" defense, I ask this of anti-war, pro-green activists: Exactly how are the men and women who willingly signed up to be paid to wage war immune from any and all scrutiny and/or blame?

They are also not immune from profound irony.

While most American citizens—even if they're anti-war—are manipulated, harassed, coerced, and guilted into hanging yellow ribbons, from Shay's Rebellion in 1787 to Coxey's Army to the Bonus Army to the Gulf War Syndrome, generation after generation of US military personnel has suffered a distinct lack of support from their own government (and the corporations that own it). "Our troops" are just as controlled and exploited as the US citizens that worship them.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the number of suicides among people serving in the armed forces has jumped more than 25% since 2005. In 2010 alone, 454 service members killed themselves in combat zones.

Life doesn't get easier for those who make it home. About one-third of the adult homeless population is veterans and, according to the VA, is 95% male.

The majority of homeless vets are...

single come from urban areas suffer from mental illness, alcohol and/or substance abuse, or co-occurring disorders

People of all ethnicities may sign up to defend (sic) the land of the free (sic) but 56% of all homeless vets are African American or Hispanic (despite only accounting for 12.8 percent and 15.4 percent of the US population respectively).

More VA stats:

107,000 veterans are homeless on any given night Over the course of a year, approximately twice that many experience homelessness Only 8% of the general population can claim veteran status, but nearly 20% of the homeless population is made up of veterans

Another 1.5 million veterans, says the VA, are considered at risk of homelessness due to "poverty and lack of support networks."

Yes, you read that correctly: “lack of support networks.”

Yellow ribbons, flag-waving, repressive laws, peer pressure, and loud chants of “USA” don’t qualify as support. Rather, this is self-policed obedience manipulated by a corporate-dominated state. As long as so many of us conform, our tax dollars will be stolen to fund endless foreign wars and interventions launched by the most egregious polluter on Planet Earth...and the lost souls volunteering for this global terror campaign will learn too late that no one gives a shit about them.

Support? Our eco-system needs it most. What our citizens could use is some assistance rediscovering the capacities of critical and independent thought.

One more thing: Let’s stop with the “our troops” charade. You and I may foot the bill, but “we” have no say in how that money is spent.

If those truly were “my” men and women, I’d bring them right home and put them to work doing something useful...like turning the Long Island Expressway into the world’s longest organic farm.

Mickey Z. is the author of 11 books, most recently the novel Darker Shade of Green. Until the laws are changed or the power runs out, he can be found on an obscure website called Facebook.

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