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The Failed Logic of Supporting the Troops

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In the United States, a growing number of leftists are voicing their opposition to the Israeli occupation. They condemn the demolition of homes, the jailing of Palestinians without charge, and the confiscation of Palestinian land for settlements. They don't support the Israeli troops or their mission, nor do they give a free pass to those who are just "doing what they are told."

Nonetheless, many of these same individuals support the US troops in Iraq. Dangerously, most Americans put forth the notion that the troops' intrinsic heroism provides them with the impunity to destroy any bogeymen who stand in their way, cultivating a code of silence that strongly discourages dissent. It is under this premise that we support our "brave" and "noble" soldiers: we know their stories well, they miss their families, they are "just like us," and we should respect their service.

While one may comprehend the mindset of the troops, this understanding does not validate support for them. If the invasion of Iraq, the mission, and the occupation as stated policy are all wrong, then support for the armed forces carrying out the mission must also be wrong.

US soldiers are not a monolith and nearly everyone would argue that the majority of the troops are "good people." Yet, our emotional inclinations and the societal norm that tells us troops are good like bumper sticker slogans shouldn't serve as justification for supporting them and, by extension, the mission they are carrying out. We are led to believe that a soldier can either serve out the rest of his tour or be branded a disgrace and imprisoned for becoming a conscientious objector. In reality the choice is much starker: a soldier can refuse to serve or contribute to the death of a million Iraqis.

When people invoke the hardships our troops face, I think of the dead Iraqi mother, the splattered torsos painting the pavement, and the .50 caliber bullets that have hollowed out the bodies of Iraqi children. Each American has a distinct face and a tale that chokes us up, but our government and media have systematically dehumanized another people, whittling their presence in the world down to a nuisance that drains our budget, as though Iraq is a welfare state that strips our society of health care, education, and gas for cross country vacations.

Iraq is not Lehman Brothers pillaging our economy. Yet, even many self-described progressives deride the Iraqi people for their $79 billion surplus but make no mention of the fact that they lack proper access to electricity; Baghdad is still one of the most dangerous city in the world, and stability is nowhere in sight. Furthermore, a growing number among the mainstream left discuss Iraq in terms of "our" interests, criticizing the so-called ineptness of Iraqis and their unwillingness to embrace democracy (democracy that was

never truly offered), all while five million have been made refugees, Baghdad has been cleansed of Sunnis, and each child, father, and mother live with horror stories we wouldn't wish upon our worst enemies. This is the result and reality of US occupation.

The assertion that troops are "just following orders" and that it is impossible to refuse once enlisted rings hollow. The US has not implemented a draft; on the contrary, each soldier chooses to fight in Iraq on behalf of the American government. This should not be applauded, nor should it be respected. *Real* courage would be abandoning this war—against orders, against the US administration—as a number of US soldiers have done (a phenomenon ignored by the mainstream media).

Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia is a well known conscientious objector who served nine months in prison for refusing to return to Iraq. In a 2005 article on *AlterNet,* Mejia wrote:

"I say without any pride that I did my job as a soldier. I commanded an infantry squad in combat and we never failed to accomplish our mission. But those who called me a coward, without knowing it, are also right. I was a coward not for leaving the war, but for having been a part of it in the first place. Refusing and resisting this war was my moral duty, a moral duty that called me to take a principled action. I failed to fulfill my moral duty as a human being and instead I chose to fulfill my duty as a soldier."

Perhaps most importantly, many people fail to make the connection that supporting the troops enables the war and presents people who are against the occupation with a false reality: the ability to support the troops while rejecting the mission. Standing in solidarity with the troops facilitates funding for the occupation; it redresses the "intrinsic nobility" of the soldier, which further weakens congressmen who rhetorically reject the war, but support it through their votes. Occupation *is* dirty, and so too are the people who employ it. Following orders should not replace humanitarian law, and the excuse shouldn't serve to satisfy our consciences.

We are asked to support US troops when logic is absent. We look at the troops as victims who are forced to do things they would not otherwise do; we give them immunity and their crimes become unseen collateral damage. Yet, Iraqis are not monsters; they are the victims that face the gun's barrel. We should only support the troops as much as we support this war. Anything less supports the victimizer and not the victim.

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