

# Why Support the Troops?

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by Jacob G. Hornberger

*One of the most fascinating phenomena of our time is the extreme reverence that the American people have been taught to have for the military. Wherever you go — airports, sports events, church — there is a god-like worship of the military.*

*“Let us all stand and express our sincerest thanks to our troops for the wonderful service they perform for our country,” declare the sports broadcasters.*

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“Let us pray for the troops, especially those in harm’s way,” church ministers exhort their parishioners.

“Let us give a big hand to our troops who are traveling with us today,” exclaim airline officials.

Every time I see this reverence for the military being expressed, I wonder if people ever give any thought to what exactly the troops are doing. No one seems to ask that question. It just doesn’t seem to matter. The assumption is that whatever the troops are doing, they are protecting our “rights and freedoms.” As one sports broadcaster I recently heard put it, “We wouldn’t be here playing this game if it weren’t for the troops.”

There is at least one big problem with this phenomenon, however: The troops are engaged in actions that are harmful to the American people, including most of the people who have a reverential attitude toward them.

Consider the following hypothetical. Suppose a family lives out in the country on a 50-acre spread in the middle of a wooded area. In the trees are dozens of hornets’ nests. The hornets leave the family alone because the family leaves the hornets’ nests alone.

One day U.S. troops arrive, come on to the property, and begin poking every hornets’ nest they can find. For the next several days, the members of the family and their friends and visitors are stung by the hornets.

The following week, the troops arrive and do the same thing, with the same results. This goes on indefinitely.

Suppose we were to encounter the family and ask them how they feel about the troops. We could easily imagine them saying, “Oh, we love the troops and we support them. Without them, we wouldn’t have this nice property. Thank goodness for the troops because they are keeping us free.”

What about all weekly stings from the hornets? We could easily imagine the family responding, "Oh, that's not the troops' fault. For some reason, the hornets are just mad these days, but it has nothing to do with the fact that the troops are poking their nests. Anyway, the troops are just following orders. It's not their fault. We love the troops."

Does that make any sense? It seems to me that when people are doing the right thing, they are entitled to be supported. But when they're engaged in wrongful or harmful conduct, then they shouldn't be supported. Why should the military be exempt from normal moral and ethical principles?

Consider the threat of terrorism, which Americans have lived under now for some 11 years. Did you ever think that 9/11 would change our country so fundamentally? There wasn't any "war on terrorism" before 9/11. Torture and assassination weren't official policy. There was no detention center at Guantanamo Bay. There were no official kidnappings, rendition, and torture partnerships with brutal dictatorial regimes. There was no indefinite incarceration without trial.

So, why must everything be different just because of 9/11? Why can't we live in a normally functioning society, one in which people are not living under the constant fear of terrorism and one in which the government isn't adopting and employing permanent "emergency" powers that constitute severe infringements on the freedoms of the people.

What was it that produced the anger and rage that brought on 9/11? Was it hatred for America's "freedom and values," as U.S. officials maintain? Or was it anger and rage arising from what the troops and other U.S. officials were doing to people in the months and years leading up to 9/11?

That obviously gets us into U.S. foreign policy, an area that makes many people who support the troops very uncomfortable. Why? Because if they conclude that the troops are doing things to people overseas that are producing the anti-American anger and rage that culminates in anti-American terrorism, then that presents a problem for them. How do they in good conscience continue supporting the people who are causing their problems?

Yet, the reality is that the troops are doing things to people overseas that are making people angry at the United States. Examples include the invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and ever-increasing drone assassinations. As everyone knows, such actions have succeeded in killing and maiming hundreds of thousands of people, including women and children. On top of that has been the torture, the kidnappings, Gitmo, the support of brutal dictatorships and the Israeli government, the U.S. troops on Islamic holy lands, the illegal no-fly zone over Iraq, the sanctions that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, and the current sanctions on Iran. It's the troops who enforce many of those programs.

Now, it might be said that the troops aren't at fault because they're just following orders. Even if that's true, is that any reason to support them? For one thing, no one forced them to join an organization that would require them to do whatever they were ordered to do. They did that on their own volition.

Moreover, even though they're following orders, the fact remains that what they're doing is nonetheless counterproductive to the best interests of the American people. That is, for those of us who want a normally functioning society, rather than the aberrant post-911 society in which we now live, what the troops are doing is an obstacle to the achievement of

our goal, whether they are doing it willingly or simply on orders of their commanders.

For those Americans who like the direction our country has been taking for the past 11 years and would like things to continue as they are, the best thing they can do is simply continue supporting the troops.

But for people who are sick and tired of all this, for them it's necessary to confront the root causes of America's problems. And like it or not, one of the root causes of America's woes is the U.S. military establishment and the entire national-security state, not only with respect to the anti-American anger and hatred they produce by their actions overseas but also by contributing to the out-of-control spending and debt that now constitute a grave threat to the economic well-being of our nation.

Why would anyone want to support people who are doing things that are detrimental to us and our country?

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