



Lest We Forget Vietnam

We were wrong. Perhaps we're wrong again...

I am a Vietnam Veteran not marching today.

I here to pay my respects to the dead, my lost mates. But, as a member of the Australian-based veterans group **Stand Fast**, I'm calling on people this ANZAC Day to seriously question Australia's on-going support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Do this for me. Step back from the flag and the speeches for just two minutes to consider the impact on our people fighting in those countries, to acknowledge the human price being paid by all foreign forces, and the physical and psychological harm being done to Australian military personnel involved in these undeclared wars- wars we started for false reasons and continue for false patriotism and misdirected fear.

Because I care about our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and because I remember Vietnam all too well, I know that I can best support my fellow servicemen by calling for their immediate withdrawal back to Australia. This call back to Australia came too late for many of my mates in 'Nam, and every day in which we silently support these new unjust wars means more dead, and many more suffering.

That's reason enough to stop and think, but what we don't see on our TV screens every night are the worst affected by these wars- ordinary Iraqi and Afghan citizens. Think about it- are these people really our enemies? Are we supposed to seriously believe that the tens of thousands of unarmed civilians already killed in these occupations ever had the capability, or even the desire, to attack countries like Australia?

Then what is our aim? Fighting terrorism? Claims that Afghanistan is a base for global terrorism have proven false. And all those weapons of mass destruction in Iraq? They did not exist. Another war based on a lie, yet we are still there.

But we're bringing democracy to these poor people, right? Isn't that what this is about? Unfortunately not. Last year's fraudulent elections in Afghanistan proved that. If the people of Afghanistan were able to freely express their views, the majority would be in favor of the foreign troops leaving their country.

A poll in Afghanistan last year revealed only 37% of Afghans said they supported the presence of the U.S.-led military forces in their area. In 2007 a nation-wide survey in Iraq found that almost 80% oppose the presence of Coalition forces in their country.

So why are our men and women still over there- facing death and injury and constant trauma, away from their loved ones in a strange land? Believe me, we asked ourselves that question over and over again in Vietnam and, as it turned out, we were right to ask it. **And we are right to ask it again.**

I ask this question on behalf of those kids fighting in those foreign lands today, and on behalf of the innocent citizens caught up in this misguided aim. At least 889,795 people have been killed in Afghanistan and Iraq since the U.S. and coalition attacks, based on lowest credible estimates. The Iraq war alone costs \$435 million a day.

Sadly, once again, there is nothing noble in this cause. Sadly, the most reasonable and logical explanations for these wars is potential big business profits and strategic real estate for the United States military in this oil and gas rich region of the world.

While our men and the innocent die, the Karzai government in Afghanistan, with Washington's approval, provides government positions, business deals and cash to the same people who are supposed to pose a terrorist threat to ordinary Australians. Like civilian deaths and injuries, this hypocrisy doesn't make the headlines but it's true.

Just as they once backed Saddam Hussein, last year the U.S. funded an Afghan government department to offer sweeteners to people like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who is supposedly on Washington's Most Wanted Terrorist list. Hekmatyar leads Hezb-i-Islami, a group which has been fighting our troops alongside the Taliban. Along with civilians caught in the middle, our troops are paying dearly for wars waged for economic and military global domination. Right now, people are being tortured on our behalf.

But everyone involved in violence suffers as a result. Prior to 2001, the suicide rate in the U.S. military was lower than the general US population. Now, it is nearly double the national average. It is estimated that the suicide rate among veterans returning from combat in Afghanistan and Iraq is as high as four times the national average.

Here, as many as one in three men return home with severe psychological injuries. Currently they are hidden away, but they will emerge to struggle on, to try to cope for decades with the mixed messages of an unjust conflict among an unwilling populace for unsound reasons. Sound familiar? Did we remember Vietnam? Seems we don't learn. Seems best we forget. And today, unlike Vietnam, the lack of fair and accurate media coverage makes forgetting the other guy pretty easy.

The Department of Veteran Affairs in Australia doesn't release certain statistics these days, but more and more reports sneak into the media and onto the web about individual Australian soldiers damaged for life by these wars. As I know well, war not only affects us veterans, but all those we return home to- children, grandchildren- indelible social damage, darkening millions of ordinary lives over the last century.

So, yes, this ANZAC Day acknowledge the sacrifices made in the past- of course we must. Salute the bravery we've had to show over the years and remember the lost- I do, lest we forget. But also never forget that we poor bastards have so often been in the wrong place at the wrong time, with the wrong people telling us what to do for the wrong reasons. It shouldn't still be happening.

But it is, because of the stupidity and heartlessness of governments of both persuasions which continue to put U.S. before us, put kids in danger, kill civilians in the chaos, hide bad policy behind bad patriotism and, in the dark of night, sneak psychologically bruised men back to their damaged families. It has always been so- more names in the granite wall. For a 'necessary' war- maybe. For yet another foolish war- not worth it.

Today, for one day, we give thanks, we remember. Fair enough, appreciate the past. But, for a minute or so, also think about right now. Support Australian soldiers- stop any more names appearing on these hallowed walls by telling the government to stop sending troops to unjust and unwinnable wars.

Many years ago, someone did that for me. Someone stopped to think- and asked 'why'. I'm here today because of that person, and this is my version of passing it on. Thanks for reading.

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For further information and facts contact www.Stand-fast.webs.com