

The Cure For Cancer

The loss of any American soldier is a tragedy. The nature of the beast of war is that most casualties are young men with otherwise bright futures ahead of them. Our men in uniform are not empty-headed, drug-crazed, irresponsible youths. They are bright, courageous, and disciplined, and they represent the best any nation has to offer. Their love for liberty and country prompts them to take on the most difficult tasks one could imagine. They do it not to plunder or pillage, not to expand American territories, not to add another star to their revered flag. They do it not for glory or to be called heroes, but only because it is the right thing to do. And because of that, they are indeed glorious and heroic.

Critics of war point to the flag-draped coffins of American soldiers and reflect that “one of those young men who lost his life in this war would perhaps have been the one to find a cure for cancer.” There is no denying that tragic possibility. More than 70 million people lost their lives in World War II. The United States was “fortunate” in that it lost “only” about 400,000 lives during that conflict. Most were young and healthy, and it is impossible to know what mankind lost because those lives ended prematurely.

If those 4,000 or so lives had not been lost in Iraq since 2003, what might those men and women have lived to accomplish? Was a cure for diabetes delayed for decades because of the death of a young Marine? Was the invention of a great energy-saving device lost with the life of an Air Force pilot? Was a musical genius greater than Gershwin destroyed by a roadside bomb? Did an artillery attack kill the soldier who was otherwise meant to be the first woman President of the United States?

Of course we will never know. But while nations should resort to war only when all other reasonable alternatives have been tried, they should not allow evil to triumph by permanently removing war from the list of options. Avoiding the deaths of soldiers can certainly be achieved simply by never forming armies, but one is then only increasing the likelihood of a greater number of civilian deaths or civilian enslavement. Police officers would never be killed in the line of duty if they never left their desks at the stations, but criminals would then run rampant in the streets. A ship in the harbor is safe... but that's not what ships are for.

It is fair enough to ask the question, “What would those American soldiers have lived to accomplish had they not been killed in Iraq or Afghanistan?” But then one must also respect the corollary question, “What would those Taliban members or radical Islamist terrorists have lived to do had they not been killed by coalition troops?” Had those troops not killed 20,000 terrorists, would one or more of them have made it to New York City to detonate a nuclear bomb and kill tens of thousands? Would one of them have poisoned the water supply of Los Angeles and killed hundreds of thousands? Would one of them have released biological weapons in Chicago and killed millions?

The world will always have wars. But their likelihood is reduced by facing the evils of terrorist states directly and quickly, letting them know in no uncertain terms that the rest

of the civilized world will immediately stand up to them - with trade restrictions and embargoes at first, and military action if absolutely necessary. Working almost alone, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher stood up to the Soviet Union, saying it was time for that evil empire to fall. Had the entire civilized world stood together, that collapse could have occurred decades earlier. How many lives, in places like Czechoslovakia and Poland and Hungary and the prison camps in Siberia, were lost because the West did not stand up to the Soviet Union 40 or 50 years ago?

One can, and should, mourn the loss of 4,000 Americans and wonder what they might have accomplished had they lived. But one can, and should, also recognize and be thankful for what they accomplished with their deaths. That cure for cancer may come from a young medical student whose life was saved because those 4,000 brave Americans prevented New York City from being enveloped in a mushroom cloud.

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