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Subject: Soldiers in Fantasyland

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by Laurence M. Vance

Disney World in central Florida recently opened a large expansion and renovation of its Fantasyland area. Kids can ride Dumbo the Flying Elephant, the Mad Tea Party, the Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh, and Peter Pan's Flight. Although adults can ride too, the difference is that they know these things are all fantasy or at least they are supposed to.

Some American adults have not only ridden the rides at Fantasyland, they live in Fantasyland. Their conception of what the U.S. military accomplished in Iraq and Afghanistan belongs in a ride in Fantasyland. It is wishful thinking. It is pure fantasy.

It is bad enough when civilian American adults live their lives in Fantasyland; it is even worse when soldiers do.

I recently responded to a former soldier who had written to me concerning my article, "Marines, Why Do You Do This To Your Families?" I quoted this paragraph from his letter:

So was it worth it? Ask the women who now have fundamental human rights for the first time. Ask the children who can now attend school and get an education (schools that groups of insurgents haven't hidden a cache of weapons and explosives underneath). Ask the farmer who can now grow crops to feed his family, and his village, rather than poppy fields to create opium to line Al Qaeda's pocket (because if he didn't, they would systematically kill his family until he complied). Ask the people of Iraq who no longer have to worry about Saddam Hussein's regime of terror.

For the sake of argument, I did not dispute the soldier's claims. Instead, I pointed out that for many, many others besides these women, children, farmers, and Iraqis, the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan was not worth it at all. I did the same thing in my article about the end of the Iraq War, "Was It Worth It?":

Okay, suppose it's all true and then some. Suppose it's even better than anyone could have imagined. What if Iraq is now a model democracy for the rest of the world? What if Iraq now has a constitution that rivals our own? What if there is now no more sectarian violence in Iraq? What if Iraq now has a free market? What if Iraq is now an American ally? What if Iraq is now a friend of Israel? What if Iraqis now have freedom of speech and freedom of religion? What if Iraq now respects the rights of women and minorities? What if all Iraqi children are now in school? What if Baghdad is really the best city on earth instead of the worst?

Would it now be worth the life of your son? Can you look your son in the face and tell him that you would have sacrificed him to bring about these changes in Iraq? And if your son had the misfortune of dying in Iraq, how do you think he would feel if he could now hear you say that his death was worth it?

So, this time, let's take an interactive ride through the Fantasyland that some soldiers (and their supporters) live in.

In the soldiers' Fantasyland, they see women who now have fundamental human rights for the first time. In reality things are otherwise. According to "Women in Afghanistan: A Human Rights Tragedy a Decade after September 11," published by the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA):

Over a decade after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States and the military campaign in Afghanistan, there is some good news, but still much bad news pertaining to women in Afghanistan. The patterns of politics, military operations, religious fanaticism, patriarchal structures and practices, and insurgent violence continue to threaten girls and women in the most insidious ways. Although women's rights and freedoms in Afghanistan have finally entered the radar of the international community's consciousness, they still linger in the margins in many respects. Overall, the situation for girls and women in Afghanistan remains bleak.

The situation for Afghan girls and women remains deplorable, despite concerted efforts to improve their freedoms, rights, and quality of life. In a June 2011 global survey, Afghanistan was named as the "world's most dangerous country in which to be born a woman."

In the soldiers' Fantasyland, they see children who can now attend school and get an education. In reality things are otherwise. According to a recent NPR story:

In Afghanistan, girls are required by law to go to school. However, many of them never do. Death threats, acid attacks and bombings by Taliban militants and other extremists lead many parents who support female education to keep their daughters at home. Sometimes, it's the families themselves who stand in the way. School officials in conservative communities say relatives are often more interested in marrying off their daughters or sisters than in helping them get an education.

According to the UN's Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit, in Iraq "one in three girls aged 12-14 is not enrolled in school, while one in ten of the same age group has never attended school, according to the Iraq Knowledge Network Survey. Traditional cultural and social factors often remain obstacles to improvements in girls' access to education."

In the soldiers' Fantasyland, they see farmers who can now grow crops to feed their families and their villages rather than poppy fields to create opium. In reality things are otherwise. Heroin production by Afghan farmers rose between 2001 and 2011 from just 185 tons to 5,800 tons. It increased by 61 per cent last year alone. But that's not the worst of it:

Some 15 per cent of Afghanistan's Gross National Product now comes from drug-related exports.

The UN says there are now 17 provinces in Afghanistan affected by poppy cultivation, up from 14 a year ago. Experts say the Taliban's involvement in the drugs trade ranges from direct assistance such as providing farmers with seed, fertiliser and cash advances to distribution and protection.

Ironically, the Taliban had overseen a significant fall in heroin production in the months before the invasion. Their leader Mullah Mohammed Omar collaborating with the UN had decreed that growing poppies was un-Islamic, resulting in one of the world's most successful anti-drug campaigns. As a result of this ban, opium poppy cultivation was reduced by 91 per cent from the

previous year's estimate of 82,172 hectares. The ban was so effective that Helmand Province, which had accounted for more than half of this production, recorded no poppy cultivation during the 2001 season. However, with the overthrow of the Taliban opium fields returned, despite the destruction of crops by coalition forces and initiatives to persuade farmers to switch to other produce.

In the soldiers' Fantasyland, they see Iraqis who no longer have to worry about Saddam Hussein's regime of terror. In reality things are otherwise. Iraqis now have to worry about a despotic Islamic state under Sharia law instead of the secular government that existed under former U.S. subcontractor Saddam Hussein. Article 2 of the Iraqi constitution reads:

Islam is the official religion of the State and it is a foundation source of legislation.

No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam.

And then there are the first three articles of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:

Afghanistan shall be an Islamic Republic, independent, unitary and indivisible state.

The sacred religion of Islam is the religion of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan.

Iraq and Afghanistan were invaded and occupied by U.S. troops who killed hundreds of thousands and died by the thousands to install militant Islamist governments with new constitutions that formally enshrine Sharia Law.

U.S. soldiers (and their supporters) are living in Fantasyland if they think that their actions did any "real and permanent good" in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The question, then, is why do so many U.S. soldiers (and their supporters) continue to live in Fantasyland? It is time that they begin to face reality. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are not just wars; they are monstrous evils. U.S. soldiers were not and are not defending anyone's freedoms, keeping Americans safe from terrorists, fighting "over there" so we don't have to fight "over here," or defending the country in any way. U.S. soldiers are attackers, invaders, trespassers, occupiers, aggressors, and, yes, killers.

It is time to leave Fantasyland. As Jacob Hornberger, president of the Future of Freedom Foundation puts it: "After 10 years of invasion, occupation, torture, killings, incarcerations, renditions, assassinations, death, destruction, anger, hatred, and the constant threat of terrorist retaliation, it's time to admit that the military invasion of Afghanistan, like that of Iraq, was horribly wrong."

<http://lewrockwell.com/vance/vance317.html>

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