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We Ignore War Crimes at Our Own Risk

Posted By Rick Fisk

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When one sees an obviously grotesque action by the agents of one's government and speaks out about it, one can count on being immediately labeled with whatever epithet is convenient to prevent any scrutiny of the state's activities.

On Monday, April 5, 2010, WikiLeaks published a classified Apache helicopter gunsight [video](#) of a shooting incident in which two Reuters reporters and several unarmed civilians were killed. The shooting occurred in 2007.

Shortly after the reporters were killed, the military claimed it had no knowledge of how it had happened or how two children in a car being used to bring survivors to safety were injured. Reuters attempted to get the video via FOIA requests, which were denied for "national security" reasons. WikiLeaks somehow obtained a copy of this video through one of its sources. The Army has put WikiLeaks on its personal enemies list and calls it a "threat to national security." While the video is extremely disturbing, the people at WikiLeaks have done the American people a great service.

The video makes it clear that the military blatantly lied about facts and evidence it possessed even when it was claiming it had none. It opens with a shot of eight to 10 men (alleged by a voice on the tape to be 40 men) casually walking along a neighborhood street in Baghdad, Iraq.

It appears as if there are two men in the group carrying rifles by their straps. As the main body of the group crosses the street, these two men hang back as if they might be security personnel. Hired by the reporters perhaps? Thus, the initial claim we hear on the video soundtrack, that there are men with AK-47s, can be debated. Maybe those are rifles, maybe they are not. What isn't debatable is the posture of the men carrying them. They do not threaten, brandish, or even look up at the helicopter(s) flying overhead, nor do they act as if they are doing something which requires disguising. They aren't engaging in "suspicious" behavior at all. It is broad daylight, a military helicopter is overhead, and they do not attempt to hide or keep their weapons, if that is in fact what they were carrying, out of view.

Somebody in the aircraft at this point requests permission to "engage," and it is almost immediately given based only on the information that has been relayed, some of which is clearly false. One of the most illuminating elements of the recording is that no follow-up questions by superior officers are asked at all – nothing like "Are they threatening anyone?," which would seem to be a pertinent question given the superiority of firepower and armor the Apache helicopter and its crew enjoy compared to what appear to be a couple of civilians with AK-47 rifles.

When the helicopter passes behind a building, in front of which gathers the victims, a person communicating from the helicopter claims that somebody has just let loose with an RPG. Yet when the helicopter comes back around to the front of the building, not only do we not see any of the telltale smoke one would expect from such a launch, but the eight or so men milling around on the sidewalk aren't even looking up at the aircraft. Nor are they looking toward the "shooter," wherever he may have been. Nobody is ducking behind buildings or even looking at the helicopter at all, in spite of the fact that it is obviously just overhead.

And within moments, as soon as the gunner on the Apache can get a clear shot, he lets loose with a burst from the Apache's 30mm chain gun, which shoots some 10 rounds per second. For those who aren't aware, the 30mm is not designed as an anti-personnel weapon but as an armor-piercing weapon. The diameter of the round is over an inch. Whereas a .50 caliber machine gun round will take off a limb, the 30mm round will obliterate an entire body.

After the initial hail of canon fire, the lone survivor can be seen struggling to get up, and a discussion ensues over whether there will be any attempt to reach for a weapon. The general consensus is a desire that he do this so another salvo can be launched. But the man in question has no weapon at all.

Sometime later a dark van approaches the survivor, and a few men get out and attempt to place the man in the van. This appears to enrage the soldiers, and in spite of the fact that this activity poses no threat to our beleaguered pilots, they beg once again for authorization and receive it, no questions asked. When the rounds are let loose, we get a spectacular view of their utility as the van is visibly moved sideways by the force of the rounds striking it.

The video also shows us without a doubt that the military knew within minutes how the two children were injured in spite of the lies it issued later. Soldiers arriving on the ground can be

heard reacting to the discovery of the two injured children in the van by remarking, "Well, it's their fault for bringing their kids into a battle." The response: "That's right!"

It would be very easy to allow oneself to resort to hatred after seeing a one-sided fish-in-a-barrel shooting spree described as a "battle" by soldiers surveying the scene, but I am not sure this is an appropriate reaction for somebody sitting on this side of the conflict. Instead, I'm led to question how it is that soldiers can act in this way with complete confidence that they are justified.

When this nation was founded, the architects were terribly suspicious of standing armies. They had good reason. Standing armies are nothing more than bureaucracies to administer death and destruction. Their sole purpose is to indoctrinate and train soldiers to kill, without question, anyone in their path. Whereas the citizen militia member spends most of his time in productive endeavors and is called upon only when the situation is dire enough to warrant it, a soldier in the standing army is idle most of the time and itches to go and act upon all of that training and indoctrination.

To compound this problem, the legislature and executive will, without strenuous restraint, find some way to scratch that itch, justified or not. It is exactly the situation in which we find ourselves at this moment, engaged in two open wars that have no objective moral or legal justification but are rationalized by pundits, politicians, and citizens alike. So what do we expect soldiers to do when they're deployed overseas while being told that the killing they perform is, in spite of what their conscience might whisper, the liberation of the nations they have invaded, conquered, and occupied?

What are they to think when at every furlough, they are treated to a hero's welcome and told that anyone who opposes what they do is un-American or even traitorous? They are told, and often tell others because many of them actually believe it, that they are fighting for the freedoms of all Americans. However, they provide misery and death to Iraqis and Afghans, two things which cannot possibly promote freedom.

Case in point. Since the official Iraq "war" was declared "mission accomplished," U.S. soldiers have been systematically disarming the Iraqi people by executing house-to-house warrantless searches and seizures. This is, by definition, tyranny. Prior to the arrival of U.S. forces, Saddam Hussein and his government allowed Iraqi citizens to own, possess, and carry fully automatic weapons. The U.S. government decided that in order to provide "security" (for whom?) it must confiscate these citizen's firearms, leaving them defenseless against criminals of every stripe.

There are a plethora of war supporters who have openly stated that such activity, if performed in their neighborhood, would provoke open, armed rebellion by themselves and those who think like them. But these same war supporters haven't even blinked in protest over the same behavior by the so-called heroes and liberators of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Do we think that the soldiers who are carrying out such orders aren't damaged in very significant ways by this obvious contradiction? What person who left our shores with any knowledge of our Second Amendment and its necessity could engage in the behavior such a protection was designed to prevent without being profoundly, morally damaged by the experience? What would

a person have to do to reconcile the obvious moral dilemma this creates? How does one take an oath to defend the Constitution, disarm innocent people by force, and then convince himself he has fulfilled his oath?

Some simply [can't](#). While there isn't a great deal of information on the details (the military bureaucrats are busy covering up as much about it as they can), the number of active-duty U.S. military personnel committing suicide is alarming. [Over 400](#) have done so since 2003.

But there is another thing we must consider: the effect upon our society of these [returning troops](#). While one cannot broad-brush the entire military by the actions of the soldiers captured on this video, a large number of them have been involved in the occupation of countries that posed no credible threat to the United States. Many have been involved in the house-to-house gun-confiscation program in Iraq. If there has been any mass objection within the ranks to this blatant program of tyranny, I certainly haven't caught wind of it.

Even if we could get them home and out of harm's way, what sort of citizens have we [created](#)? If one were to judge by the number of news stories relating violent crimes involving Iraq war veterans, our ability to reintegrate them back into society looks pretty bleak. Nearly [1 in 5](#) suffer from PTSD, and many are crippled or suffer from serious brain injuries.

The common thread among war supporters in the media can be charitably described as insincere. It is easy to boast that U.S. soldiers are [blameless](#), unerring freedom fighters who have again defended our freedoms. It is much harder to drop the sickening patronization and face the damage that will be felt by veterans and civilians alike for the next generation.

When many come home to jobs in our towns and cities as law enforcement agents, how will they [treat](#) the citizens in their jurisdiction? Will every civilian be viewed with the same amount of suspicion, distrust, and callousness shown the Iraqi civilians? Will the veterans escalate to [violence](#) at the slightest hint of protest because they have been encouraged to do this in Iraq?

There is a certain "conservative" slogan I often see and hear when morality and politics are argued: "Hate the sin, love the sinner."

If those who claim to do so really loved our soldiers and really loved liberty, they'd bring the troops home immediately, providing each and every one mental health support, deprogramming, and heartfelt apologies. It has been the American people who praised the troops for behavior we would never tolerate here. The troops' superiors demanded they [follow orders](#) without question and then covered up when some of them engaged in criminal behavior, in direct contradiction to the oaths they swore to uphold.

There are still criminals who need to be brought to justice. This isn't just for our own protection – our society can't afford to have cold-blooded murderers lionized and taught that their behavior is acceptable – but also to ease the suffering of those in Iraq who deserve justice for the crimes committed against them. Perhaps, if we finally did the right thing, we would create friends rather than enemies.

For these reasons, we need to not only prosecute the soldiers and officers involved in this incident, but also the criminal politicians who lied to the world about the reasons we attacked Iraq. If they were tried by citizens of this country, it would send the most authentic message to the world that the citizens of the U.S. are serious about the principles we claim to hold dear. However, an extradition to the Hague would be an acceptable alternative. If we let what has occurred stand without any justice, we will reap what we have sown.