

Why Are Indigenous (American Indian) Soldiers Serving in Iraq?

By

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Open Letter to all Indigenous Peoples:

As the United States prepares for its annual Independence Day celebrations, I strongly urge all of our nations to hold critical and independent discussions on why we are committing our young people to serve the U.S. military in its occupation of Iraq.

The recent reporting (including revelations of a cover-up) of the murders, executions, and massacres of innocent Iraqi citizens by United States troops prompts me to ask, "Why are Indigenous (American Indian) soldiers serving in Iraq?" I wonder why our tribal communities have not had critical debates on the immorality of this war, on the lies of the present Bush Administration that got us into this war, and on the spiritual, economic, social, and psychological costs that both our people and the Iraqi people will pay for this war. It is clear from the history of many of our tribes that our people understood the grave costs of war and so took this act very seriously. Before engaging in war, many of our tribes initiated peace councils and sent emissaries to negotiate goodwill and friendship with the "enemy" in order to avoid war. As sovereign Indigenous nations, we did not do this before or during the invasion of Iraq. We instead let the United States make the decision for us as to whether we should or should not enter into this war. I wonder when was the last time that the United States asked our people for our opinion about war and its costs.

Our history tells us that because war was so destructive on many different levels, many of our tribal nations – before committing to war against another tribe – consulted our elders, peacemakers, women, youth, philosophers, intellectuals, spiritual leaders, children, warriors, and veterans to weigh the costs of war. This is something that many of our nations have not done for some time. Many of us have “**outsourced-our-thinking**” to the United States with respect to when and why we should or should not go to war. We are sovereign nations with very intelligent and moral people who do not need to rely on this country to interpret for us the meaning and the costs that war will bring to our communities. Most of us already know the answer to this. And we know that we should decide for ourselves, after careful, deliberate, and intelligent discussions, whether we must commit our people and resources to the wars of the United States.

Along with the U.S. invasion of the lands of our respective nations, the last two major conflicts of the United States, Vietnam and now Iraq, were based on lies created by the U.S. government. Their track record makes it even more imperative that we rely upon our own thinking, experiences, and morality when we enter into discussions on why our tribal nations should compel our people to go to war. The Vietnam lie was very expensive and horrific; it was responsible for the deaths of 58,191 American soldiers and 153,303

wounded. One million Vietnamese combatants and four million civilians were killed for this American lie. The missing in this war includes approximately 2,300 American soldiers and 200,000 Vietnamese. In Iraq, over 100,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed since 2003. After so many lies told to our people by the United States, do we trust this nation to be honest with us? Do we trust it to care about life as much as we do?

If we are to have discussions about this war, topics must include:

- Our belief that all people and beings are related to us so what does it mean to make war on our relatives;
- The fact that we value all life so, therefore, war truly must be a last resort;
- The fact that we value Mother Earth as a living being and the fact that the United States military is contaminating the lands, waters, trees, plants and people in Iraq through the use of biowarfare, landmines, and depleted uranium which will kill innocent people and will poison much of their territory for many years;
- The fact that we believe in the great circle of life (e.g., what goes around comes around and what we are doing to the Iraqi people is what the U.S. did to our ancestors);
- What are the effects that all of the killing, maiming, poisoning, and torturing will have upon our people, especially on the psychic and cosmological levels;
- How the U.S. has treated us in the past and the present, and how it has conscripted our minds and hearts so that we are participating in their same oppressive behavior of another group/race of humans;
- What other nations has the United States overthrown for its own interests? How many innocent non-U.S. peoples have been killed by this country's covert operations, and who is it planning to attack in the future? Why?
- Who benefits most from war and who are the biggest losers?
- Finally, there are many other reasons that we can discuss and analyze.

It seems that we cannot rely on corporate media or the U.S. government to tell us the truth or to give us the facts about why we should go to war or who we should consider our enemy. John Stockwell, the highest-ranking CIA official to leave the agency and go public with information about CIA-sponsored activities, once said that the U.S. neither does "bloody, gory operations" in Europe nor does it spend its time attacking these countries. Rather it performs such operations in countries that are filled with people of color who do not have the military strength and resources to protect themselves from U.S. invasions. I am convinced that Stockwell is suggesting that the U.S. government has a clear racist war

ideology and readily employs it against people or races that are not white. So, we must use all the available evidence to independently decide for ourselves if and when we should go to war and who is our enemy. An enemy should not be invented because of the color of its skin or religious beliefs.

I believe that it is time for us to demand that our tribal governments call for critical and independent discussions, and we need to tell the United States to immediately call for withdrawal of its military forces from Iraq. Most importantly – and independently of their decision or indecision – we must immediately pull our people out of this quagmire. Countries such as Japan, Honduras, Tonga, Nicaragua, Spain, Dominican Republic, Philippines, Thailand, New Zealand, Portugal, and Moldova already have pulled out their troops and many other nations are planning to reduce their troop commitment in the near future. So why are we still in Iraq fighting the U.S.'s illegal war? It also is time for our tribal leaders and communities to impose a moratorium upon any further enlistments of our young men and women into the U.S. military. The United States has abused our trust and has coerced us to fight its illegal, immoral wars long enough.

Many things about this war trouble me to the very core. One of the most disturbing questions is why does it seem that of all the countries that have been, or continue to be, in this war, it is only U.S. soldiers who are committing the murders of, and atrocities against, innocent Iraqi citizens (the unarmed, the disabled, the defenseless elders, the women, and the children)? Is it because the U.S. is serving in larger numbers? Is it because the U.S. is serving in more hazardous situations? Is it because the U.S. is more trigger happy? Is it because of poor oversight and supervision by the upper ranks of the military? Is it because U.S. troops are a more violent group and enjoy killing more than do other soldiers? Is it because the architects of this war, including President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, care more about profit than "just war" principles? Is it all of the above?

As I write this, two national guardsmen are being investigated for killing an innocent Iraqi man earlier this year; seven Marines and one Navy corpsman were charged with the shooting death of an Iraqi man, whom they had kidnapped from his home, forced into a hole, and shot to death – they then left a stolen AK-47 near his body to make it look like he was firing at them; three soldiers and one non-commissioned officer were charged with killing (in May 2006) three unarmed Iraqis who were in military custody. And many more Iraqi people have been abused and tortured to death in U.S. custody (especially in the military prisons). Many of these atrocities have been covered up or are "under investigation."

The story currently receiving the most press is the November 2005 massacre of the twenty-four innocent civilians (including women and children) in Haditha by U.S. Marines. This mass killing is being compared to the 1968 My Lai massacre in Vietnam. A "Washington Post" article reported that "Aws Fahmi, a Haditha resident [...] said he watched and listened from his home as Marines went from house to house killing members of three

families, recalled hearing his neighbor across the street, Younis Salim Khafif, plead in English for his life and the lives of his family members. 'I heard Younis speaking to the Americans, saying: "I am a friend. I am good,"' Fahmi said. 'But they killed him, and his wife and daughters.' The girls killed inside Khafif's house were ages 14, 10, 5, 3 and 1" (Saturday, May 17, 2006).

Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), a former Marine who maintains close ties with senior Marine officers despite his opposition to the war stated, "Marines overreacted . . . and killed innocent civilians in cold blood." Murtha already has called for the withdrawal of the U.S. military from Iraq and has called the war "a flawed policy wrapped in illusion" (Larry Downing, Reuters, Nov 18, 2005).

There are many reasons why we must immediately get our people out of this war:

1. War is not a moral act. The occupation, torture, mutilation, killing, and murder of innocent Iraqi people are acts of immorality. Our people should not be complicit in atrocities.
2. The invasion of Iraq was based on lies. Iraq was accused of having weapons of mass destruction by the Bush administration; it did not. Iraq was accused of having ties with Osama Bin Laden; it did not. Our people should not be complicit in lies.
3. The war against Iraq does not meet the standards of a "Just War" that evolved among "civilized" societies. Our people have enough struggles and battles, and should not be complicit in unjust global activities on behalf of the United States.
4. The war on Iraq was for "regime change" which is not legal under international law, Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. Our people should not be complicit in lawlessness.
5. After two decades of wars, invasions, and sanctions, Iraq did not have the military power to pose a clear and present danger to the U.S. before or after being invaded in 2003. Our people should not be complicit in oppressing and occupying a nation that never attacked us.
6. Many people in the U.S. and throughout the world oppose this war. Our nations should exercise their right to voice their opposition to U.S. military operations, conflicts, wars, and occupations.
7. The U.S. soldiers who have murdered Iraqi civilians must now stand trial. Several of them could receive the death penalty. Will more death and life sentences follow or will the deaths of innocent Iraqis be ignored or covered up? Do we want our men and women involved in situations that might conclude in such trials or cover ups? Our people should mentor their young into just and moral activities that benefit their nations, while encouraging conflict-resolution when possible.

8. This war is creating new "terrorism" and retribution that will be directed at the U.S. for its invasion of Iraq and its torturing and killing of innocent people. Our people should not contribute to U.S. creation of hatred.
9. There is no end in sight for a U.S. military exit out of Iraq. Many sources report that the U.S. is establishing permanent military bases in Iraq which would keep troops in Iraq for many years. Our people should not contribute to the expansion and maintenance of U.S. militarization, colonization, and occupation.
10. Invading Iraq is extremely financially costly and takes resources away from many badly needed priorities at home. At present, it costs nearly one billion dollars a week to wage this "War on Terrorism." Our people should not be complicit in U.S. activities that waste money.
11. Billions of dollars have been authorized by the U.S. congress to be used for occupation and reconstruction. There is evidence that billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars have been lost through waste, abuse, and fraudulent billing. In a June 8, 2006, article published in "The Baltimore Chronicle," Dave Lindorff reported that twenty-one billion dollars "has gone missing without a trace in Iraq." Who is responsible for this? I am reminded that our people are fighting for, in part, accountability of billions of lost dollars in the *Eloise Pepion Cobell, et al. v. Gale Norton, Secretary of the Interior* lawsuit in the United States. Our people should never be complicit in U.S. theft, fraud, and dishonesty.
12. The U.S. is supposed to be rebuilding Afghanistan but it is not; rather, it is targeting most of its focus and resources on Iraq. Our people should not contribute to unilateral U.S. policy and doctrines.
13. Despite billions of U.S. dollars spent in Iraq after its invasion, very little promised rebuilding of the Iraqi infrastructure has been accomplished. Our people – who are familiar with broken promises and treaties – should never be complicit in the lies of the United States.
14. The rebuilding of Iraq is not happening. Many U.S. firms that went to Iraq to perform reconstruction services have been accused of "bilking" funds intended for reconstruction. In an April 16, 2006 news story, the "Boston Globe" reported that "American contractors swindled hundreds of millions of dollars in Iraqi funds." For instance, in March 2006, a Rhode Island-based company called, The Custer Battles, was found "liable for \$3 million in fraudulent billings in Iraq." Stories such as this are outrageous and numerous. Many of these companies had/have ties to the current Bush administration, especially Dick Cheney, the current Vice President of the United States. Cheney was the CEO of Halliburton from 1995 to 2000. Halliburton has made hundreds of millions of dollars from this war and occupation. Our people should not be complicit in helping the rich, like Cheney, get richer.

We must no longer allow our nations to remain in the fog of war, participating in the U.S. continued colonization and destruction of the world. What this country has done – and continues to do – to the Iraqi people is unconscionable and must stop. The U.S.-led war in Iraq is wrong, immoral, illegal, unjust, a lie; it is about profiteering for a very small, corrupt, elite sector of the U.S. population. Our people, many of whom occupy some of the lowest levels of decision-making in the U.S. military, are considered expendable and are being used for cannon fodder so that the rich, especially in the United States, can become richer.

We must realize that many of the people in the highest levels of the United States government suffer from an addiction to war, power, and colonization. Many, but not all, Indigenous Peoples have become co-dependent in this addiction as demonstrated by not holding public meetings and councils that question the U.S. invasion, and by allowing our people to participate in this unjust, illegal war that is creating suffering for untold numbers of innocent Iraqi people. In the Fall of 2004, the academic journal *Wicazo Sa Review* published a paper I wrote entitled "Cowboys and Indians: Toys of Genocide, Icons of American Colonialism." In that article, I stated that "it took me some years to understand that colonialism is a sickness, an addiction to greed, power, and exploitation....Colonialism has taught many Indigenous Peoples to be silent, passive, compliant victims who participate in, excuse, enable, or ignore the colonizer's addictive behaviors. Left unchecked, colonialism has continued to flourish, devastate, and suppress Indigenous Peoples, keeping them in a the perpetual role of 'the Indian,' causing many to say, do and think things they never would if their minds and hearts were free from American colonial rule." Today this addictive behavior or the drug of choice of this country is its illegal, dishonest, and brutal invasion of Iraq. I urgently ask each and every Indigenous Person to quit enabling the addictive behavior of the U.S.

In this same article, I also wrote that there are "antidotes to colonialism that Indigenous Peoples can and must employ: courage, intelligent resistance, development of a counterconsciousness and discourse, and a fierce critical interrogation of American colonial ideology." It is incumbent upon our peoples to employ these antidotes in order to condemn and get our people out of this war. We must commit all of our intellectual and truth-seeking energies to this objective and not let any one, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, hijack our need for such critical and independent discussions. A key democratic principle of our peoples was our willingness to allow our people dissent from popular opinion so that we might consider all of our options. We must not let accusations that our "honor and courage as warriors is on the line" prevent us from deciding to leave Iraq – and the U.S. military. After generations of service in the U.S. military – and its numerous wars – our people have repeatedly proven that we are brave and courageous beyond compare. However, our ability to think morally, critically, and independently about our participation in this war is another matter that we now must undertake ever so seriously.

Maybe, just maybe, if we act using our traditional Indigenous forms of morality that value truth, intelligence, honesty, life, and dignity – and refuse to be an enabler to the

U.S. addiction to greed, war, power, and colonization – we can help it overcome its unhealthy, destructive obsession for war, conquest, and killing of others. And, as it recovers from this addiction, maybe we also can help it overcome its two greatest phobias: dikephobia (the fear of justice) and hypegiaphobia (the fear of responsibility). I pray that that you will take this open letter (or a statement of your own) to your tribal leaders and communities and immediately begin the important critical and independent discussions that will promote and act upon the well-being of all of our people.

All the best, Michael

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