

- [NEWS](#) [VED](#)

- [BIG NEWS:](#)
- [Gingrich 2012](#)

- |
- [Health Care Law](#)
- |
- [Rick Perry](#)
- |
- [White House](#)
- |
- [Jon Huntsman](#)
- |

[Smarter Ideas More](#)
[Log in](#) | [Sign Up](#)

HUFFPOST POLITICS

Search News and Topics

SEARCH >

[Like](#)

307K

[This is the print preview: Back to normal view »](#)



[Doug Bandow](#)

Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute

GET UPDATES FROM Doug Bandow

[Like](#)

108

Memorial Day Tribute: Keep the Troops at Home

Posted: 05/28/11 10:20 AM ET

Follow

[Barack Obama](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Iraq](#), [Libya](#), [War](#), [Korean War](#), [Memorial Day](#), [U.S. Military](#), [Vietnam War](#), [Constitution](#), [Memorial Day 2011](#), [Memorial Day Heros](#), [Memorial Day History](#), [Memorial Day Veterans](#), [Peace](#), [Politics News](#)

Another Memorial Day, another holiday filled with rhapsodies by politicians and citizens alike about the sacrifices of American military

personnel. But if these summer patriots really cared about their neighbors in uniform, they would stop putting servicemen and women at risk for frivolous reasons.

America was born in war. The existence of evil means that war may always be an ugly necessity. But these days most of Washington's conflicts are wars of choice, military interventions for almost any reason other than protecting vital American interests. Indeed, wars initiated by the U.S. are more likely to threaten than protect U.S. liberty and security.

This weekend individuals and families will hoist flags, watch parades, whisper prayers, and visit cemeteries across the nation. People will forward emails celebrating the bravery of those who have fought and died. Politicians will host ceremonies and issue platitudes. The uniform mantra will be that Americans owe their liberties to those who have served and often died.

Actually, dying for freedom is more the exception than the rule. In most cases, those dying are dying for Washington, not America. They certainly are not dying for liberty.

The fault obviously is not of those in uniform. Rather, the blame falls on politicians who believe that American military personnel are little more than gambit pawns in a permanent global chess game. Also responsible are the American people, who elect and reelect politicians who believe that war is just another program, kind of like a violent foreign earmark.

The buck truly stops in every home across America.

Consider Washington's most recent battles. It is hard to keep a straight face while arguing an [alleged national interest involving Libya](#). Why intervene in this one of many civil wars?

Contra claims at the time, [there was no evidence](#) of likely massacres in Benghazi or elsewhere. The Western powers still don't really know who runs the opposition and, more important, who likely would rule if it triumphed. If anyone should take responsibility for conflict in North Africa, [it is Europe](#). If any American is unfortunate enough to die in this war, it will not be for Americans' liberty, security, or any other benefit of note. Libya is a dumb war which also happens to be [an illegal war](#), since the Obama administration failed to get congressional assent.

In Afghanistan [Americans are dying](#) for no good reason. The U.S. has been at war for a decade, long after achieving its initial aims of disrupting al Qaeda, which managed the September 11 terrorist attacks, and ousting the Taliban government, which hosted al Qaeda.

Alas, sticking around to create a Western-style liberal democratic state in Afghanistan [has proved to be a fool's errand](#). Only the Afghans can determine their future. Moreover, the war may be the greatest force destabilizing next door Pakistan, in which al Qaeda settled. Pakistan also possesses nuclear weapons, making it far more dangerous than Iran, upon which most people focus.

[Iraq was deadlier and less justified](#) than Afghanistan. Every major Bush administration claim about Iraq proved to be false. In blowing up this artificial nation Washington triggered a brutal internal conflict which consumed 200,000 or more Iraqi lives while dramatically increasing Iran's influence in the region. The war will end up costing \$2 or \$3 trillion as well as [4,500](#) American lives. The conflict yet again simultaneously exhibited the bravery of U.S. personnel and the foolishness of U.S. policymakers.

The war against Serbia over Kosovo was even more frivolous, akin to that in Libya. Kosovo was wracked by a common-variety guerrilla conflict with brutality on both sides. An American diplomat even called the insurgents "terrorists." But the Clinton administration [was determined](#) to try a little foreign social engineering by launching a war in which America had no discernible interests. The U.S. even solicited the military assistance of Turkey, a NATO ally which had behaved far more brutally in suppressing a similar rebellion by Kurds, killing tens of thousands with American-supplied weapons.

After the conflict ended Washington's new friends kicked out a quarter million Serbs and other ethnic and religious minorities while allied soldiers stood by. The U.S. dismissed the security concerns of the Serbs who remained while supporting a declaration of independence for the territory -- [governed by gangster elites](#) recently accused of having engaged in organ-trafficking of Serb prisoners. The new "nation" remains unacknowledged by a majority of the world's states and the United Nations, thereby continuing to destabilize the Balkans. Why did Washington go to war?

Many of America's big wars, in which casualties hit the tens or hundreds of thousands, were no more justifiable. Looking back a half century it is hard to understand what the Vietnam War was about. France had turned Indochina into a colony. For some people, colonialism retains an aura of gentility, even nobility. But in practice it meant foreigners showing up with guns demanding obedience -- essentially national slavery.

World War II loosened France's hold over its colonies, and Paris lacked both the means and will to reestablish control. Unfortunately, the U.S. stepped into France's shoes, attempting to protect the decrepit and corrupt South Vietnamese dictatorship from the far more disciplined, competent, and ruthless nationalistic Communists in the north.

America had nothing directly at stake warranting intervention. And the celebrated "domino" theory -- that one communist victory would turn the entire region into a communist preserve -- proved to be a bust. Fifteen years after South Vietnam was overwhelmed the Berlin Wall had fallen, the Soviet Union was coming apart, and China had embraced the market. Today Vietnam looks to the U.S. to balance against Beijing. So precisely what did 58,000 Americans die for? The precious lives of U.S. military personnel were needlessly

squandered by foolish presidents, generals, and legislators.

At least the Korean War occurred in the midst of worsening Cold War competition with the Soviet Union. However, it was one cause of the worsening competition.

The Korean peninsula was of no particular strategic importance to America -- the U.S. never had a lodgment on the Asian mainland. Washington only haphazardly ended up occupying the southern half of the peninsula after the defeat of Japan, which had turned Korea into a colony. Then the U.S. helped set the stage for war by embracing an irascible, brutal, and aggressive dictator in the south who favored launching a war against the Communist north. Because of his threats, Washington refused to provide heavy weapons to its client state, leaving it vulnerable to attack.

The war may have preserved freedom in the South -- kind of, anyway, since that nation languished under civilian and military dictatorships for nearly four decades -- but the conflict reinforced America's national security state, reducing liberty at home. And the U.S. ended up much less secure. The war triggered a massive militarization of the Cold War, making the draft permanent and sending military outlays skyward. The conflict diverted resources from Europe and turned the People's Republic of China into a bitter military enemy. Last but not least, nearly 54,000 Americans died.

World War II remains the "good war" insofar as the conflict was initiated by others and America was fighting great evil. But this conflict, history's worst, did not begin in isolation. Rather, it was the logical, perhaps even inevitable, outgrowth of World War I. [And the latter may be the dumbest which the U.S. ever fought.](#)

The conflict involved two contending imperial blocs. The "bad guys" included Wilhelmine Germany, which had a constitution, elected Reichstag, and broader franchise than Great Britain. Austro-Hungary was a somewhat ramshackle and messy liberal autocracy with elected legislative bodies. Not democrats by today's standards, but not totalitarians either.

The "good guys" included Imperial Russia, the anti-Semitic despotism of the Tsar. Little Belgium committed big atrocities in the Belgian Congo, a heritage which continues to afflict the same tormented African territory. Italy came into the war to claim promised territorial booty -- that is, the opportunity to force its rule on unwilling Austrians. France was intent on exacting revenge for its territorial losses in the Franco-Prussian War -- after spending several hundred years ravaging all of its neighbors, including the German states. And Great Britain was a democracy which used brute force to rule over hundreds of millions of subject peoples around the globe.

An ocean away, the U.S. had no reason to get involved in this foolish war. Woodrow Wilson cited navigation rights. In practice, that meant Americans booking passage on British passenger liners, which acted as reserve cruisers and carried munitions through a war zone. Only in President Wilson's fevered imagination -- he also wanted to make it illegal to criticize the president -- could mixing cargoes of babies and bullets be considered a basic right to be protected by American force of arms. In fact, President Wilson took the U.S. into war because he was a megalomaniac who wanted to remake the globe. For his ambitious fantasies hundreds of thousands of Americans were killed or wounded.

The 19th century was little better. Protecting Americans' liberty was rarely the objective or consequence of America's wars. Such conflicts rarely advanced Americans' security. Then as now, war was mostly a tool of U.S. policymakers for who cared little for the human losses inflicted, even as they extolled the sacrifice of the troops.

We should use Memorial Day to honor those who have served and especially those who have died. But the knowledge that so many of them have died unnecessarily, even in vain, should anger free people in a republic -- and redouble their determination to hold public officials accountable.

Instead of piously circulating patriotic emails to their friends, people should act. [They should insist that presidents stop initiating foolish](#), unnecessary conflicts and that Congresses stop allowing presidents to unilaterally conduct foolish, unnecessary wars. People should protest against dumb conflicts and vote against politicians willing to risk American lives for frivolous purposes.

America's military cemeteries are filled because of the decisions of political leaders elected by citizens across the nation. The best way to honor the fallen is to say "never again." Never again will American lives be wasted in ambitious foreign crusades which leave America less free and secure.

Sponsored Links

Truth About Annuities?

Don't Buy Any Annuity Until You Watch This Special Video Report!
SeniorAnnuityAlert.com

Hot iPhone Stock - GSLO

Volt Solar charger for iPhone is New Solar Alternative! View Stock.
www.GoSolarUSA.com

New Policy In Virginia

Homeowners in Virginia may be eligible for \$4.25/wk Full Coverage Home Warranty Program.
www.life-stylechoices.com

Can \$47 Turn Into \$5,130?

Local Residents: If you could turn \$47 into \$5130, how many times would you do it?
ConsumerFinanceReviews.com

[Buy a link here](#)

PHOTO GALLERIES



- [The Rich Online, Facebook Profanity, And More Must-See Stats](#)



- [Memorial Day Photos From Around The Country](#)



- [The 9 Best Kinect Hacks](#)



- [Tech's Talent Buying-Spree: The Top 15 'Acqui-Hires'](#)

FOLLOW US

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Connect with your friends
Check out stories you might like,
and see what your friends are sharing!



[Most Popular on HuffPost](#)

jqLjrKKXC3WRQeSnEKmrlgPuBxnrRDy%2FvhUtzg4OgEqaKkW6uiusM7eQpHjI4n9w5VScXlpsFgHgm6pi9sKgJcIHQuXyiTo
GHZOkjF5J%2FWrwU0gMTn%2BeChFtSX7UpXByCrFmq25ie0E4ayhjBdTWU52eOVZ03D7I2A8nZu17Mj0ta%2BCsl08kinJ9oVV5zrB
1 of 2



[Sean Kingston In Critical Condition](#)

[Recommend](#)

4K



[McCain Signals Who Would Win In Hypothetical Obama-Palin 2012 Match-Up](#)

[Like](#)

11K



[Taliban Executes New Tactic](#)

[Recommend](#)

584



[Daily Finance: Higher Food Costs Will Eat Into McDonald's Profit Margins](#)

[Like](#)

699



[Daily Finance: Walmart's How Big? What the Huge Numbers Really Mean](#)

[Like](#)

3K



[Does Porn Cause Divorce?](#)

[Like](#)

526



[A 3-Step Plan To Successful Weight Loss](#)

[Like](#)

116



[Daily Finance: Beware of Business Credit Cards: A Consumer Protection Loophole](#)

[Like](#)

500



[AOL TV: Lauren Alaina Tells Piers Morgan 'America's Got Talent' Turned Her Down Twice \(VIDEO\)](#)

[Like](#)

1K

HuffPost Reporters

wYh2TOvhG89IDoFjrdqKziL3QyST3VGJ xV%2FneKsTbw9vCSXn3dDMMNrkbCtSb1%2Fw

1 of 2



[Jordan Schultz: NBA Finals Preview: Heat-Mavericks](#)
[Comments \(0\)](#)



[Jason Linkins: White House Scandal On The Way, Says...](#)
[Comments \(0\)](#)



[Marcus Baram: Mariner Energy's Oil Rig Fire In Gulf...](#)
[Comments \(0\)](#)

Don't Miss HuffPost Bloggers

1 of 5



Sam Harris
[Morality Without "Free Will"](#)



Jim Wallis
[Zero Tolerance: Trump, Schwarzenegger, and Strauss-Kahn](#)



[Reading While Eating for May 31: Gadgets and Gizmos](#)



[Save the Frogs: California High School Bans Dissections](#)



[Food Safety Violators Could Face Death Penalty in China](#)

[Time - Politics](#)

TOP VIDEO PICKS

1 of 13



[Gen. Dempsey known to sing "New York, New York"](#)



[Federal charges for John Edwards this week?](#)



[Sarah Palin's Bus Tour: Going to New Hampshire?](#)



MOST DISCUSSED RIGHT NOW

2RgnQXLokElFimSGDV8i8a43pip0bdKP iJKomeBLqmM3QvAVQ0trgKQA9zRBn5c9

1 of 2



[Obama Back In The Saddle](#)



[Mitt Romney Blasts Obama: 'One Of The Most Ineffective Presidents' Ever](#)

HOT ON FACEBOOK

2RgnQXLokElFimSGDV8i8TKPvBq8xPkmgYINREC4w8w%3D iJKomeBLqmM3QvAVQ0trgPTAYkCdRanfpr%2BnvSQA9QM%3D jpeKJKgSs0bJPiRX0pV4Fss35VaaM%2Fhsd5ArrOAFlyA%3D V5kN2RRfcKY7OMKl%2FU2fKg%3D%3D

1 of 3



[Police Arrest 5 People At Jefferson Memorial -- For Dancing](#)

[Like](#)

7K



[Arizona Cops Kill Former Marine In Botched Pot Raid](#)

[Recommend](#)

48K

HOT ON TWITTER

2RgnQXLokElFimSGDV8i8f8ym0hHXtuf iJKomeBLqmM3QvAVQ0trgDrc%2BaNUFZ3B

1 of 2



retweet

[breakingnews](#)

Saudi activist: Woman driver freed from detention - AP <http://huff.to/kKXlf0>



retweet

[thenewschick](#)

Hacked PBS Spreads 'Tupac Alive' Rumor <http://huff.to/jBeQOK>

Sponsored Links

\$39/mo Car Insurance?

Most pay \$700 twice a year. Do you pay too much? Compare Quotes now! <http://www.1minuteautoinsurance.com>

Hot Stock Pick - GTSO

Desperate Search For Rare Earth Minerals Solved. Rare Opportunity www.RareEarthExporters.com

Trade Free for 60 Days.

Plus get up to \$500. Apply at E*TRADE Securities. www.etrade.com/tradefree

[Buy a link here](#)

[HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES](#)



[Angelina Jolie: Cleopatra Misunderstood, Not A Sex Symbol](#)

[Elizabeth Taylor](#)



[Rick Perry's Legislative Scorecard Contains Six Bills Designated 'Emergency' Items](#)

[Rick Perry](#)



[Food Prices Spike As Demand Soars](#)

[Climate Change](#)



[Badminton Skirts-Only Rule Abandoned in Face of Criticism](#)

[The Playing Field](#)



[Daniel Koellerer Banned For Life: Austrian Tennis Player Banned For Match-Fixing](#)

[Tennis](#)



[NBA Finals Preview: Heat-Mavericks](#)

[LeBron James](#)



[Keith Olbermann Names David Sarosi Executive Producer Of 'Countdown'](#)

[Keith Olbermann](#)



[Sri Lanka Video Said To Show Military Executing Prisoners And Abusing Corpses](#)

[Civil Rights](#)



[April 2011 Tornadoes: Satellite Shows 625 Twisters \(VIDEO\)](#)

[Video](#)

[more big news pages »](#)



- [FRONT PAGE](#)
- [POLITICS](#)
- [BUSINESS](#)
- [ENTERTAINMENT](#)
- [MEDIA](#)
- [TECH](#)
- [COMEDY](#)
- [STYLE](#)
- [WORLD](#)
- [FOOD](#)
- [HEALTHY LIVING](#)
- [IMPACT](#)
- [MORE](#)
- [LOCAL](#)

[POLITICS](#)

- [Advertise](#) |
- [Log In](#) |
- [Make HuffPost your Home Page](#) |
- [RSS](#) |
- [Careers](#) |
- [FAQ](#)

- [User Agreement](#) |
- [Privacy](#) |
- [Comment Policy](#) |
- [About Us](#) |
- [Contact Us](#)

- [Copyright © 2011 TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc.](#) |
- ["The Huffington Post" is a registered trademark of TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc. All rights reserved.](#)

- Part of **HuffPost News**