

Senator Risch, please bring our warriors home

By Dan McKnight | Guest columnist Feb 3, 2019

Reenlisting in the Idaho National Guard to deploy to Afghanistan to fight terrorists was a source of pride for me and my family. I sacrificed a lot, leaving my children behind in Boise and trading in my financially comfortable mortgage and home building career for combat boots and a dusty tent surrounded by razor wire.

When difficulty getting vital supplies proved life-threatening, I reached out through friends back home to Governor Jim Risch, commander in chief of the Idaho Guard. We got our supplies, for which I thanked him face to face when I returned.

Today, I ask him to help my brothers and sisters in uniform again, this time as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Supporting our troops, I've learned from experience, isn't the same as supporting a foreign policy of endless intervention in other people's civil wars.

My fellow soldiers were trained to fight, obey and execute regardless of our personal opinions. We did. We fought, killed and destroyed; then built roads, hospitals, schools and water treatment plants, only to see them claimed by warlords and the Taliban. Our allies on Monday were often enemies on Friday. Our mission became confusing, frustrating, unclear.

Returning home, news of the Taliban's rise, fall and rise again made me question my sacrifice.

We killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan eight years ago. Why are we still in Afghanistan?

When I see another story about Americans dying there, I feel visceral anger I can't describe. Our primary area of operation was Korengal Valley, now again under Taliban control. Why did we fight and lose so many lives there, only to leave? Why still fight at all in a country so remote from our own?

I'm disgusted to see my brave brothers and sisters dispatched to Afghanistan and Iraq again and again, or now to Somalia, Syria or Yemen. The silent question — "why?" — is never answered.

Despite warnings throughout American history against "entangling alliances" — from President George Washington to former U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, Sen. William Borah of Idaho — we've transformed into a nation entangled in endless wars and commitments to countries where we have no understandable national interest and no formal authorization from Congress.

The last time Congress formally declared war — supposedly required by the Constitution to commit U.S. troops — was December 11, 1941, yet today we sacrifice our finest for despots, dictators, warlords and cartels all over the globe, all at the direction of a few. Our soldiers' mission is simply to "do."



I eagerly volunteered to deploy and fight, believing my cause was righteous and just. I'm no longer naïve and believe it's time America brings our warriors home.

Senator Risch, please support President Trump's plan to withdraw our troops from Syria — and then, hopefully, Afghanistan, and then, however long it takes, from all the places we bleed American blood and treasure into the soil with no clear mission or vote by those whom We The People elect to represent us.

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