



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on December 17, 2009

Veterans Group Calls for Refusal to Deploy to Afghanistan and Iraq

In what is sure to be a controversial call to action or inaction, the organization March Forward, a group of patriotic retired and active-duty servicemen, has recommended that soldiers refuse orders to deploy to Afghanistan and Iraq.

“We offer our unconditional support and solidarity,” reads a press release written by the organization dated December 3: “Join us in the fight to ensure that no more soldiers or civilians lose their lives in these criminal wars,” it continues. While noble in its message, March Forward is incorrect in its nomenclature, as only Congress is constitutionally-empowered (Article I, Section 8) to declare war and it has done so against neither Iraq nor Afghanistan. Therefore, the term “unconstitutional” would be more accurate than “criminal.”



There are those sympathetic with March Forward’s cause, but who nonetheless believes a soldier’s duty is to follow orders, regardless of his personal assessment of the order’s moral correctness. Michael Prysner, veteran of the occupation of Iraq answered this charge in a comment he made to truthout.org, “Yes, people do sign a contract to follow orders, but those orders are wrong and unlawful. We want to educate people to the fact that these are immoral orders.”

Particularly perverse, in Prysner’s estimation, is the fact that the men and women dying in Iraq and Afghanistan are not sacrificing their lives for their country as is so often repeated by media and mourner alike. Rather, these well-meaning members of the United States Armed Forces are spilling blood on the altar of empire and will be receive no recompense of safety for family or country in exchange for their ultimate sacrifice. “These soldiers,” warns Prysner, “are being used...to colonize the developing world and it’s not legitimate... and defense of the US is not what we [the armed forces] are being used for today.”

The realization of the unconstitutional and immoral ends for which he and his comrades were being used as a means, prompted Prysner and fellow veteran James Circello to found March Forward in 2008. The group’s literature proclaims its purpose to be “to unite all those who have served and who currently serve in the US military, and who want to stand up for our rights and for that which is right.”

The message is attracting followers. Prysner reports consistent and remarkable growth in the two years since the movement’s inception. Prysner points to a noticeable spike in interest among currently enlisted military men and women ever since President Obama’s recent announcement of his intention to deploy 30,000 additional troops to fight in Afghanistan. “For many more years, we will be sent to kill, to



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die, to be maimed and wounded, in a war where ‘victory’ is impossible, against a people who are not our enemies,” reads the December 1 statement from March Forward.

Not all veterans agree with March Forward’s stalwart stance against acceptance of deployment to overseas theaters of conflict. The American Legion, for example, cites the fact that the modern military is an “all volunteer” force and that they are bound by an oath to “obey the orders of the command-in-chief.” John Raughter, spokesman for the American Legion disagrees with Prysner and company and argues that if a soldier is morally or ethically opposed to the use of force in Iraq or Afghanistan then they never should have enlisted in the first place. Raughter reckons that most of the soldiers being sent to battle enlisted after the initiation of armed conflict, therefore they should have known better and should have taken more time to weigh all the relevant considerations in the balance before signing on the dotted line.

Prysner considers such responses to be the demonization of good and patriotic soldiers and he flatly rejects them. He avers that the refusal to obey unlawful orders is the soul of American patriotism, as patriotism is defined as fealty to one’s country, not one’s president. As Teddy Roosevelt said, “To announce that there must be no criticism of the president, or that we are to stand by the president, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public.”

No matter one’s personal evaluation of the legality of the refusal of soldiers, whether individually or *en masse*, to obey orders to serve in combat zones they view as illegitimate and unconstitutional, there are thousands of men, women, children throughout our grand republic that have paid dearly for their leaders’ (Republicans and Democrats without distinction) quest for empire. There are fathers without sons and daughters, women without husbands, and children without parents because of the flag-draped coffins evincing a decades-old dedication in Washington to the expansion of American colonial enterprise.

Photo of Iraq war veteran and March Forward member James Circello: AP Images



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