



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

The Troops Don't Defend Our Freedoms

by Jacob G. Hornberger

How often do we hear the claim that American troops “defend our freedoms”? The claim is made often by U.S. officials and is echoed far and wide across the land by television commentators, newspaper columnists, public-school teachers, and many others. It’s even a common assertion that emanates on Sundays from many church pulpits.

Unfortunately, it just isn’t so. In fact, the situation is the exact opposite — the troops serve as the primary instrument by which both our freedoms and well-being are threatened.

Let’s examine the three potential threats to our freedoms and the role that the troops play in them:

1. Foreign regimes

Every competent military analyst would tell us that the threat of a foreign invasion and conquest of America is nonexistent. No nation has the military capability of invading and conquering the United States. Not China, not Russia, not Iran, not North Korea, not Syria. Not anyone. To invade the United States with sufficient forces to conquer and “pacify” the entire nation would take millions of foreign troops and tens of thousands of ships and planes to transport them across the Atlantic or Pacific ocean. No foreign nation has such resources or military capabilities and no nation will have them for the foreseeable future.

After all, think about it: the U.S. army, the most powerful military force in all of history, has not been able to fully conquer such a small country as Iraq because of the level of domestic resistance to a foreign invasion. Imagine the level of military forces that would be needed to conquer and “pacify” a country as large and well-armed as the United States.

I repeat: No foreign nation has the military capability to invade the United States, conquer our country, subjugate our people, and take away our freedoms. Therefore, the troops are not needed to protect our freedoms from this nonexistent threat.

2. Terrorists

Despite widespread fears to the contrary, there is no possibility that terrorists will conquer the United States, take over the government, and take away our freedoms. At most, they are able to kill thousands of people, with, say, suicide bombs but they lack the military forces to subjugate the entire nation or any part of it.

Equally important, while the troops claim that they are protecting us from “the terrorists,” it is the troops themselves — or, more precisely, the presidential orders they have loyally carried out — that have engendered the very terrorist threats against which the troops say they are now needed to protect us.

Think back to 1989 and the years following — when the Berlin Wall fell, East and West Germany were united, Soviet troops withdrew from Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union was dismantled. The Pentagon didn’t know what to do. Unexpectedly, its 50-year-old “official enemy” was gone. (The Soviet Union had previously been America’s “ally” that had “liberated” Eastern Europe from Nazi Germany.) With the fall of the Soviet empire (and, actually, before the fall), the obvious question arose: Why should the United States continue to have an enormous standing army and spend billions of dollars in taxpayer money to keep it in existence?

The Pentagon was in desperate search for a new mission. “We can be a big help in the war on drugs,” the Pentagon said. To prove it, U.S. military forces even [shot to death](#) 18-year-old American citizen Esequiel Hernandez in 1997, as he tended his goats along the U.S.-Mexican border. “We’ll help American businesses compete in the world.” “We’ll readjust NATO’s mission to protect Europe from non-Soviet threats.” “We’ll protect us from an unsafe world.”

Then along came the Pentagon’s old ally, Saddam Hussein, to whom the United States had even [entrusted weapons of mass destruction](#) to use against the Iranian people, and gave America’s standing army a new raison d’être. Invading Kuwait over an oil-drilling dispute, Saddam provided the Pentagon with a new official enemy, one that would last for more than 10 continuous years.

Obeying presidential orders to attack Iraq in 1991, without the constitutionally required congressional declaration of war, the troops ended up killing tens of thousands of Iraqis. Obeying Pentagon orders to attack Iraq’s water and sewage facilities, the troops accomplished exactly what [Pentagon planners had anticipated](#) — spreading deadly infections and disease among the Iraqi people. Continuing to obey presidential orders in the years that followed, the troops enforced what was possibly the most [brutal embargo in history](#), which ended up contributing to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, deaths that U.S. officials said were “[worth it](#).” Obeying presidential orders, the troops enforced the [illegal “no-fly zones”](#) over Iraq, which killed even more Iraqis, [including children](#). Obeying presidential orders, the troops established themselves on Islamic holy lands with full knowledge of the anger and resentment that that would produce among devout Muslims. Obeying presidential orders, the troops invaded and

occupied Iraq without the constitutionally required congressional declaration of war, killing and maiming tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis — that is, people whose worst “crime” was to resist the unlawful invasion of their homeland by a foreign power.

All that death and destruction — both pre-9/11 and post-9/11 — have given rise to terrible anger and hatred against the United States, which inspired the pre-9/11 attacks, such as the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, the attack on the USS *Cole*, and the attacks on overseas U.S. embassies, the 9/11 attacks, and the terrorist threats our nation faces today.

Through it all, the Pentagon simply echoed the claims of the president — that all the death and destruction and humiliation that the U.S. government had wreaked on people in the Middle East, as well as its unconditional military and financial foreign aid to the Israeli government, had not engendered any adverse feelings in the Middle East against the United States. Instead, the president and the Pentagon claimed, the problem was that the terrorists simply hated America for its “freedom and values.”

If the American people had dismantled the nation’s standing army when the Soviet empire was dismantled, the federal government would have lacked the military means to meddle and intervene in the Middle East with unconstitutional military operations, sanctions, no-fly zones, bases, invasions, and occupations. Therefore, there never would have been the terrorists attacks against the United States and a “war on terrorism” for the troops to fight, not to mention the USA PATRIOT Act, secret search warrants and secret courts, the [Padilla doctrine](#), and other federal infringements on our rights and freedoms.

Finally, but certainly important, despite being the most powerful standing army in the world, the U.S. troops were not even able to protect Americans from terrorist acts, as best evidenced by two terrorist attacks on the same target — the World Trade Center, first in 1993 and then again in 2001.

3. The federal government

As our Founding Fathers understood so well, the primary threat to our freedom lies with our own government. That’s in fact why we have the Constitution and the Bill of Rights — to protect us and our freedoms from federal officials. If the federal government did not constitute such an enormous threat to our freedoms, there would be no reason to have the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Yet, what is the primary means by which a government takes away the freedoms of its citizenry? Our American ancestors gave us the answer: its military forces. That is in fact why many of our Founding Fathers opposed a standing, professional military force in America — they knew not only that such a force would be used to involve the nation in costly, senseless, and destructive wars abroad but also that government officials would inevitably use the troops to ensure a compliant and obedient citizenry at home.

Consider the words of James Madison:

A standing military force, with an overgrown Executive will not long be safe companions to liberty. The means of defense against foreign danger, have been always the instruments of tyranny at home. Among the Romans it was a standing maxim to excite a war, whenever a revolt was apprehended. Throughout all Europe, the armies kept up under the pretext of defending, have enslaved the people.

Here's how Patrick Henry put it:

A standing army we shall have, also, to execute the execrable commands of tyranny; and how are you to punish them? Will you order them to be punished? Who shall obey these orders? Will your mace-bearer be a match for a disciplined regiment?

Would U.S. troops obey presidential orders to deploy against the American people and take away our freedoms?

There is no doubt about it. Of course they would, especially if the president told them that our "freedom and national security" depended on it, which he would.

As I suggested in my article, "[The Troops Don't Support the Constitution](#)," in the United States the loyalty of the troops is to the president as their supreme commander in chief, not to the Constitution. Recent evidence of this point, as I observed in my article, was the willingness of the troops to obey presidential orders to deploy to Iraq despite the fact that the president had failed to secure the constitutionally required congressional declaration of war.

What if the president ordered the troops to deploy across the United States and to round up "terrorists" and incarcerate them in military camps, both here and in Cuba? Again, there can be no doubt that most of the troops would willingly obey the president's orders, especially in the middle of a "crisis" or "emergency" because they view themselves as professional soldiers whose job is to serve the president and not to question why but simply to do or die.

Another good example of the allegiance that the troops have toward the president involves the case of U.S. citizen Jose Padilla. Labeling Padilla a "terrorist," the president ordered the troops to take him into military custody, deny him access to an attorney, and punish him without a trial and due process of law. The troops obeyed without question. Do you know any troops who have publicly protested the Padilla incarceration or who have resigned from the army in protest? How many have publicly announced, "I refuse to participate in the Padilla incarceration because I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution"?

Indeed, how many of the troops resigned in protest at the president's orders to set up a prisoner camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, knowing that the reason he and the Pentagon chose Cuba, rather than the United States, was precisely to [avoid the constraints](#) of the Constitution?

If the troops didn't protest with respect to Iraq or Padilla or Gitmo, what is the likelihood they would protest when their commander in chief ordered them to arrest 100 other Americans "terrorists," or 1,000?

I repeat: The troops, from the Pentagon on down, would not disobey orders of the president to disarm and arrest American "terrorists," especially in the midst of a "crisis" or "emergency."

And even if some were to protest, they would be quickly shunted aside (probably punished as well) and replaced with those troops whose allegiance and loyalty to the president would be unquestioned.

Now it's true that soldiers are supposed to disobey unlawful orders, but as a practical matter most of the troops are not going to overrule the judgment of their commander in chief as to what is legal or not. After all, how many troops involved in the torture and sex-abuse scandal refused to participate in the wrongdoing, especially since they thought that it was approved by the higher-ups? Again, how many refused orders to deploy to Iraq despite the fact that there was no constitutionally required congressional declaration of war?

Imagine that the president issues the following grave announcement on national television during prime time: "Our nation has come under another terrorist attack. Our freedoms and our national security are at stake. I have issued orders to the Joint Chiefs of Staff to immediately take into custody some 1,000 American terrorists who have been identified by the FBI as having conspired to commit this dastardly attack or who have given aid and comfort to the enemy. I have also ordered the JCS to take all necessary steps to temporarily confiscate weapons in the areas where these terrorists are believed to be hiding. These weapons will be returned to the owners once the terrorist threat has subsided. I am calling on all Americans to support the troops in these endeavors, just as you are supporting them in their fight against terrorism in Iraq. We will survive. We will prevail. God bless America."

Now ask yourself: How many of the troops would disobey the orders of the president given those circumstances, especially if panicked and terrified Americans and the mainstream press were endorsing his martial-law orders?

The answer: Almost none would disobey. They would not consider it their job to determine the constitutionality of the president's orders. They would leave that for the courts to decide. Their professional allegiance and loyalty to their supreme commander in chief would trump all other considerations, including their oath to "support and defend the Constitution."

Therefore, if the federal government is the primary threat to our freedom, then so are the troops: their unswerving loyalty to their commander in chief makes them the primary instrument by which the federal government is able to destroy or infringe the rights and freedoms of the citizenry.

The solution

No one can deny that we now live in a nation in which the president wields, albeit unconstitutionally, the omnipotent power to send the entire nation into war against another nation — and that he has the means — a loyal and obedient army — to exercise that power. President Bush made his position clear prior to his invasion of Iraq, when he emphasized that while he welcomed the support of Congress in the event he decided to wage war on Iraq, he didn't need its approval. His position was reconfirmed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who [informed Congress](#) on October 19, 2005, that the commander in chief's position was that he did not need the consent of Congress to send the nation into another war, this time against Syria.

No one can deny that we now live in a nation in which the president claims the omnipotent power to jail and punish any American citizen whom the president labels a “terrorist,” denying him due process of law, trial by jury, and other constitutional guarantees — and that he has the means — a loyal and obedient army — to exercise that power.

Thus, as a practical matter the troops serve not as a defender of our freedoms but instead simply as a loyal and obedient personal army of the president, ready and prepared to serve him and obey his commands. It is an army that stands ready to obey the president's orders to deploy to any country in the world for any reason he deems fit and attack, kill, and maim any “terrorist” who dares to resist the U.S. invasion of his own country. It is also an army that stands ready to obey the president's orders to take into custody any American whom the commander in chief deems a “terrorist” and to punish him accordingly.

There is one — and only one — solution to this threat to our freedoms and well-being: for the American people to heed the warning of our Founding Fathers against standing armies before it is too late, and to do what should have been done at least 15 years ago: dismantle the U.S. military empire, close all overseas bases, and bring all the troops home, discharging them into the private sector, where they would effectively become “citizen-soldiers” — well-trained citizens prepared to rally to the defense of our nation in the unlikely event of a foreign invasion of our country. And for the American people to heed the warning of [President Eisenhower](#) against the military-industrial complex, by shutting down the Pentagon's enormous domestic military empire, closing domestic bases, and discharging those troops into the private sector.

“Oh, my gosh, if we did all that, how would our freedoms be protected?”

Protected from what? Again, there is no threat of a foreign invasion. And again, terrorism is not a threat to our freedom. Moreover, dismantling the standing army would remove the primary means by which presidents have succeeded in engendering so much anger and hatred against our nation — anger and hatred that in turn have given rise to the threat of terrorism against our nation. And finally, the worst threat to our freedom is our own government, and by dismantling the standing army we would reduce that threat significantly.

What would happen if a foreign nation ever began constructing thousands of ships and planes and mobilizing millions of people to invade the United States? The answer to that threat was also provided by our Founding Fathers: the foreign nation in question would be met by a nation of free well-armed citizens who would be prepared and willing to rally quickly to oppose any invasion and conquest of our nation. Invading a United States filled with well-trained, free men and women would be much like invading Switzerland — like swallowing a porcupine. Don't forget that the men and women who currently serve in the U.S. armed services wouldn't disappear; instead they would join the rest of us as citizen-soldiers, people whose fighting skills could be depended on in the unlikely event our nation were ever threatened by invasion by a foreign power.

We should also keep in mind the tremendous economic prosperity that would result from the dismantling of America's enormous standing army. Not only would all the taxpayer money that is being used to fund the standing army be left in the hands of the citizenry for savings and capital, but all those new people in the private sector would be producing as well, instead of living off the IRS-provided fruits of other people's earnings. Thus, the economic effect would be doubly positive, and, while weakening the federal government, it would make our nation stronger.

What about foreign monsters, tyrants, oppressors, and conquerors? The answer to that was also provided by our Founding Fathers: Our government would no longer go abroad [in search of monsters to destroy](#), but foreigners suffering oppression and tyranny would know that there would always be at least one nation that would accept them — the United States of America. Rather than police the world, Americans would focus on producing the freest and most prosperous society in history as a model for the world and to which those who escaped tyranny and oppression could freely come.

Of course, those Americans who would nonetheless wish to leave their families and jobs to help oppressed people overseas would still be free to do so.

We should also bear in mind the [perverse results](#) of the federal government's military empire and overseas interventions. World War I brought World War II, which brought the Soviet communist occupation of Eastern Europe, which brought the Cold War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, along with an enormous standing army in our country. The Middle East interventions and meddling have brought us terrorism, the war on terrorism, the USA PATRIOT Act, the Padilla doctrine, military torture and sex abuse, and CIA kidnappings and "renditions" to foreign countries for the purpose of proxy torture.

By their fruits, you shall know them.

One vision — the vision of [militarism](#) and [empire](#) — will bring America more violence, death, destruction, impoverishment, and loss of freedom. The other vision — the vision of a

limited-government, constitutional republic with citizen-soldiers — would put our nation back on the right road of peace, prosperity, harmony, and freedom.

Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

This article was originally published in October 2005.