

Remembering the soldiers on the Fourth of July

ANOTHER OPINION

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The temperature in Baghdad on the Fourth of July will exceed 105 degrees. The intense heat of summer turns skin to leather and leaves a scorched hostile landscape in its wake.

In the western and southern regions of Afghanistan a northerly wind, known as "The Wind of 120 Days," blows throughout the summer months. The Wind of 120 Days is accompanied by intense heat, drought, sand storms and winds over 100 miles per hour. Sand and dust storms can be a mile high and wide.

The sound of small weapons fire will pierce the air as the sun descends on the horizon; even the sunset is ugly here. Dusk is always dangerous, especially when the day's death quota has yet to be reached. Hopefully the mortar fire won't spill dirt on the tent tonight signaling that it is so dangerously close that it's time to don the body armor.

One good night's rest and the promise of tomorrow being one less day in this hellhole is often all our soldiers ask. War exposes the best and worst of the human condition.

Americans can celebrate their freedom in peace with parades, picnics and fireworks on the Fourth of July because "rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm," as Churchill stated. At great personal and financial sacrifice, our new army of citizen soldiers leaves their good paying jobs at the hospitals, factories, banks, and local schools because duty calls. They sacrifice their safety and security for our safety and security. So as you watch the night sky explode with fireworks in celebration of the birth of our nation through the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, pause for a second to appreciate the heroism and wisdom of our citizen soldiers.

Viewed through the lens of 200 years of hindsight, the decision in the summer of 1776 to declare independence from England may now seem obvious and even inevitable, but much like the debate today, the rhetoric was heated, the risks were high, and the future of democracy was uncertain. Failure would result in charges of treason and almost certain death.

The Declaration of Independence was written principally by merchants and lawyers who would become our first citizen soldiers. It is a tribute to them that the Declaration's enduring promise continues to drive American dreams and aspirations. Thirteen years later those Founding Fathers adopted our Constitution and emblazoned, for all to read, the democratic principles that continue to guide our country. Because of those affirmative actions, all Americans are guaranteed the right to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and self-government, even if those guarantees are sometimes as imper-



fect as democracy itself.

As we celebrate that independence and rejoice in our freedom and prosperity, take a moment to reflect on our hard-won status as the most democratic nation in the world. Let us also remember the men and women who are in service of our country in 2010, just as they were in 1776: our soldiers, teachers, farmers, doctors, merchants, and lawyers.

Our fathers were called to defend the freedom we cherish; thankfully, none of us was required to do the same. The time our families lost because of the scars our soldiers carry or because duty called one weekend a month and then again during our kids summer vacations was the price we all pay for freedom, we learned. What was true at our founding - and what remains true today - is that our citizen soldiers are people of courage, integrity, and honor.

Unfortunately, America does not do enough to care for these modern-day heroes. Without question, America must start to do more for our returning wounded men and women. Women now, too, fight our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a record number return badly wounded in need of promised medical care. No citizen soldier should serve his or her country and return in futile search for appropriate care for their wounds. Having sacrificed their safety and security for our safety and security, we owe those that return the security and medical care that they expect - and deserve.

So let us celebrate the Fourth of July in the comfort won for us through the blood and sweat of others. Take the time to remember our citizen soldiers, past and present - and ask whether we are doing right by them.

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