

Rules of war

Absurd regulations hamstringing American troops

By Elan Jouno
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Americans rightly admire our troops for their bravery, dedication and integrity.

The Marines, for instance, are renowned for abiding by an honorable code — as warriors and as individuals in civilian life.

They epitomize the rectitude of America's soldiers.

But a recently disclosed Pentagon study — little noted in the media — has

seemingly cast a shadow over our troops. The study of U.S. combat troops in Iraq finds that less than half the soldiers and Marines surveyed would report a team member for breaches of the military's ethics rules.

Military and civilian observers have concluded from the study that more and stricter training in combat ethics is urgently needed.

But instead of reinforcing the military's ethics, we must challenge them.

The Pentagon study provides evidence for a searing indictment not of our soldiers but of Washington's rules of engagement.

Consider the waking nightmare of being a U. S. combat troop in Iraq. Imagine you are thrust into a battlefield, but purposely hamstrung by absurd restrictions.

Iraqis throw Molotov cocktails (i.e. gasoline-filled bottles) at your vehicle — but you are prohibited from responding with force.

Iraqis, to quote the study, “drop large chunks of concrete

blocks from second story buildings or overpasses” as you drive by — but you are not allowed to respond.

“Every group of soldiers and Marines interviewed,” the Pentagon study summarizes, “reported that they felt the existing ROE (rules of engagement) tied their hands, preventing them from doing what needed to be done to win the war.

“And the soldiers are right.”
In Iraq, Washington's rules

have systematically prevented our brave and capable troops from using all necessary force to win, to crush the insurgency — and even to protect themselves.

As noted in news articles since the start of the war, American forces are ordered not to bomb key targets, such as power plants, and to avoid firing into mosques (where insurgents hide) lest they offend Muslim sensibilities.

Having to follow such self-effacing rules of engagement while confronting sniper fire and ambushes and bombs from every direction, day in and day out, must be utterly demoralizing and unbearable.

No one should be surprised at the newly reported willingness of combat troops to defy military ethics, because such defiance is understandable as the natural reaction of warriors made to follow suicidal rules.

When being “ethical” on Washington's terms means martyring yourself and your comrades for the sake of murderous Iraqis, it is understandable troops are disinclined to report “unethical” behavior.

It is understandable troops should feel anger and anxiety (as

many do), because it is horrifically unjust for America to send its personnel into combat, deliberately prevent them from achieving victory — and expect them to die for the sake of the enemy.

It would be natural for an individual thrust into the line of fire as a sacrificial offering to rebel with indignation at such a fate.

How can we do this to our soldiers? The death and misery caused by Washington's self-crippling rules of engagement — rules endorsed by liberals and conservatives alike — are part of the inevitable destruction flowing from a broader evil: the philosophy of “compassionate” war.

This perverse view of war holds that fighting selfishly to defend your own freedom by defeating enemies is wrong; but fighting to selflessly serve the needs of others is virtuous.

It was on this premise U. S. troops were sent to Iraq: Washington's goal was not to defend America against whatever threat Saddam's hostile regime posed to us, as a first step toward defeating our enemies in the region — principally Iran, the arch-sponsor of Islamic

totalitarianism.

Instead, the troops were sent (as President Bush explained) to “sacrifice for the liberty of strangers” — spilling American blood and spending endless resources on the “compassionate” goal of lifting the hostile and primitive Iraqi people out of poverty, feeding their hungry, unclogging their sewers.

The result of this “compassionate” war is thousands of unnecessary American deaths, and the preservation and emboldening of the enemies we most need to defeat: Iran and Saudi Arabia.

We must put an end to the barbarous sacrifice of American troops, now.

It is past time to abandon Washington's self-sacrificial rules of engagement, and its broader policy of “compassionate,” self-sacrificial warfare.

Instead of subjecting troops to more intensive “ethics” training, we should unleash them from the suicidal militarily ethics of self-sacrifice.

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