

Casualties of War: Military Veterans Have Become America's Walking Wounded

by [John W. Whitehead](#)

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[Source](#)

Come you masters of war / You that build the big guns

You that build the death planes / You that build all the bombs

You that hide behind walls / You that hide behind desks

I just want you to know / I can see through your masks...

You fasten all the triggers / For the others to fire

Then you sit back and watch / When the death count gets higher

You hide in your mansion / While the young people's blood

Flows out of their bodies / And is buried in the mud.

– Bob Dylan, "Masters of War"

War drives the American police state.

The military-industrial complex is the [world's largest employer](#).

War sustains our way of life while killing us at the same

time. As Pulitzer Prize-winning war correspondent and author Chris Hedges observes:

War is like a poison. And just as a cancer patient must at times ingest a poison to fight off a disease, so there are times in a society when we must ingest the poison of war to survive. But what we must understand is that just as the disease can kill us, so can the poison. If we don't understand what war is, how it perverts us, how it corrupts us, how it dehumanizes us, how it ultimately invites us to our own self-annihilation, then we can become the victim of war itself.

War also entertains us with its carnage, its killing fields, its thrills and chills and bloodied battles set to music and memorialized in books, on television, in video games, and in superhero films and blockbuster Hollywood movies financed in part by the military.

Americans are fed a steady diet of pro-war propaganda that keeps them content to wave flags with patriotic fervor and less inclined to look too closely at the mounting body counts, the ruined lives, the ravaged countries, the blowback arising from ill-advised targeted-drone killings and bombing campaigns in foreign lands, or the transformation of our own homeland into a warzone.

Nowhere is this double-edged irony more apparent than during military holidays, when we get treated to a generous serving of praise and grandstanding by politicians, corporations and others with similarly self-serving motives eager to go on record as being pro-military.

Yet war is a grisly business, a horror of epic proportions.

In terms of human carnage alone, war's devastation is staggering. For example, it is estimated that approximately 231 million people died worldwide during the wars of the 20th

century. This figure does not take into account the walking wounded—both physically and psychologically—who “survive” war.

Many of those who have served in the military are among America’s walking wounded.

Despite the fact that the U.S. boasts [more than 20 million veterans](#) who have served in World War II through the present day, the plight of veterans today has become America’s badge of shame, with large numbers of veterans impoverished, unemployed, traumatized mentally and physically, struggling with depression, [suicide](#), and marital stress, homeless, subjected to sub-par treatment at clinics and hospitals, and left to molder while their [paperwork piles up within Veterans Administration offices](#).

According to a recent report by the Department of Veterans Affairs, [at least 60,000 veterans died by suicide](#) between 2008 and 2017.

On average, [6,000 veterans kill themselves every year](#), and the numbers are on the rise.

As Brené Brown, research professor at the University of Houston, observed, [“For soldiers serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, coming home is more lethal than being in combat.”](#)

Unfortunately, it’s the U.S. government that poses the greater threat to America’s military veterans, especially if they are among that portion of the population that exercises their First Amendment right to speak out against government wrongdoing.

Consider: we raise our young people on a steady diet of militarism and war, sell them on the idea that defending freedom abroad by serving in the military is their patriotic duty, then when they return home, bruised and battle-scarred and committed to defending their freedoms at home, we often treat them like criminals *merely for exercising those rights*

they risked their lives to defend.

The government even has a name for its war on America's veterans: [Operation Vigilant Eagle](#).

As first reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, this Department of Homeland Security (DHS) program tracks military veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and characterizes them as extremists and potential domestic terrorist threats because they may be "disgruntled, disillusioned or suffering from the psychological effects of war."

Coupled with the DHS' dual reports on [Rightwing and Leftwing "Extremism,"](#) which broadly define extremists as individuals, military veterans and groups "that are mainly antigovernment, rejecting federal authority in favor of state or local authority, or rejecting government authority entirely," these tactics bode ill for anyone seen as opposing the government.

Yet the government is not merely targeting individuals who are voicing their discontent so much as it is taking aim at *individuals trained in military warfare*.

Don't be fooled by the fact that the DHS has gone extremely quiet about Operation Vigilant Eagle.

Where there's smoke, there's bound to be fire.

And the government's efforts to target military veterans whose views may be perceived as "anti-government" make clear that something is afoot.

In recent years, military servicemen and women have found themselves increasingly targeted for [surveillance](#), censorship, threatened with incarceration or involuntary commitment, labeled as [extremists](#) and/or mentally ill, and [stripped of their Second Amendment rights](#).

An important point to consider, however, is that under the guise of mental health treatment and with the complicity of

government psychiatrists and law enforcement officials, these veterans are increasingly being portrayed as threats to national security.

In light of the government's efforts to lay the groundwork to weaponize the public's biomedical data and [predict who might pose a threat to public safety based on mental health sensor data](#) (a convenient means by which to penalize certain "unacceptable" social behaviors), encounters with the police could get even more deadly, especially if those involved have a mental illness or disability coupled with a military background.

Incredibly, as part of a proposal being considered by the Trump Administration, a new government agency HARPA (a healthcare counterpart to the Pentagon's research and development arm DARPA) will take the lead in [identifying and targeting "signs" of mental illness or violent inclinations among the populace](#) by using artificial intelligence to collect data from Apple Watches, Fitbits, Amazon Echo and Google Home.

These tactics are not really new.

Many times throughout history in totalitarian regimes, such governments have declared dissidents mentally ill and unfit for society as a means of disempowering them.

As Pulitzer Prize-winning author Anne Applebaum observes in *Gulag: A History*: "The exile of prisoners to a distant place, where they can 'pay their debt to society,' make themselves useful, and not contaminate others with their ideas or their criminal acts, is a practice as old as civilization itself. [The rulers of ancient Rome and Greece sent their dissidents off to distant colonies.](#) Socrates chose death over the torment of exile from Athens. The poet Ovid was exiled to a fetid port on the Black Sea."

For example, government officials in the Cold War-era Soviet Union often used psychiatric hospitals as prisons in order to

isolate political prisoners from the rest of society, discredit their ideas, and break them physically and mentally through the use of electric shocks, drugs and various medical procedures.

Insisting that "[ideas about a struggle for truth and justice are formed by personalities with a paranoid structure,](#)" the psychiatric community actually went so far as to provide the government with a diagnosis suitable for locking up such freedom-oriented activists.

In addition to declaring political dissidents mentally unsound, Russian officials also made use of an administrative process for dealing with individuals who were considered a bad influence on others or troublemakers.

Author George Kennan describes a process in which:

The obnoxious person may not be guilty of any crime . . . but if, in the opinion of the local authorities, his presence in a particular place is "prejudicial to public order" or "incompatible with public tranquility," he may be arrested without warrant, may be held from two weeks to two years in prison, and may then be removed by force to any other place within the limits of the empire and there be put under police surveillance for a period of from one to ten years. Administrative exile—which required no trial and no sentencing procedure—was an [ideal punishment not only for troublemakers as such, but also for political opponents of the regime.](#)

Sound familiar?

This age-old practice by which despotic regimes eliminate their critics or potential adversaries by declaring them mentally ill and locking them up in psychiatric wards for extended periods of time is a common practice in present-day China.

What is particularly unnerving, however, is how this practice of eliminating or undermining potential critics, including military veterans, is happening with increasing frequency in the United States.

Remember, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) opened the door for the government to detain as a threat to national security anyone viewed as a troublemaker. According to government guidelines for identifying domestic extremists—a word used interchangeably with terrorists—technically, anyone exercising their First Amendment rights in order to criticize the government qualifies.

It doesn't take much anymore to be flagged as potentially anti-government in a government database somewhere—[Main Core](#), for example—that identifies and tracks individuals who aren't inclined to march in lockstep to the government's dictates.

In fact, as the *Washington Post* reports, communities are being mapped and residents assigned a [color-coded threat score](#)—green, yellow or red—so police are forewarned about a person's potential inclination to be a troublemaker depending on whether they've had a career in the military, posted a comment perceived as threatening on Facebook, suffer from a particular medical condition, or know someone who knows someone who might have committed a crime.

The case of [Brandon Raub](#) is a prime example of Operation Vigilant Eagle in action.

Raub, a 26-year-old decorated Marine, actually found himself interrogated by government agents about his views on government corruption, arrested with no warning, labeled mentally ill for subscribing to so-called “conspiratorial” views about the government, detained against his will in a psych ward for standing by his views, and isolated from his family, friends and attorneys.

On August 16, 2012, a swarm of local police, Secret Service

and FBI agents arrived at Raub's Virginia home, asking to speak with him about posts he had made on his Facebook page made up of song lyrics, political opinions and dialogue used in a political thriller virtual card game.

Among the posts cited as troublesome were lyrics to a song by a rap group and Raub's views, shared increasingly by a number of Americans, that the 9/11 terrorist attacks were an inside job.

After a brief conversation and without providing any explanation, levying any charges against Raub or reading him his rights, [Raub was then handcuffed and transported to police headquarters](#), then to a medical center, where he was held against his will due to alleged concerns that his Facebook posts were "terrorist in nature."

Outraged onlookers filmed the arrest and posted the footage to YouTube, where it quickly went viral. Meanwhile, in a kangaroo court hearing that turned a deaf ear to Raub's explanations about the fact that his Facebook posts were being read out of context, Raub was sentenced to up to 30 days' further confinement in a psychiatric ward.

Thankfully, [The Rutherford Institute came to Raub's assistance](#), which combined with heightened media attention, brought about his release and may have helped prevent Raub from being successfully "disappeared" by the government.

Even so, within days of Raub being seized and forcibly held in a VA psych ward, news reports started surfacing of other veterans having similar experiences.

["Oppositional defiance disorder"](#) (ODD) is another diagnosis being used against veterans who challenge the status quo. As journalist Anthony Martin explains, an ODD diagnosis

"denotes that the person exhibits 'symptoms' such as the questioning of authority, the refusal to follow directions,

stubbornness, the unwillingness to go along with the crowd, and the practice of disobeying or ignoring orders. Persons may also receive such a label if they are considered free thinkers, nonconformists, or individuals who are suspicious of large, centralized government... At one time the accepted protocol among mental health professionals was to reserve the diagnosis of oppositional defiance disorder for children or adolescents who exhibited uncontrollable defiance toward their parents and teachers."

Frankly, based on how well my personality and my military service in the U.S. Armed Forces fit with this description of "oppositional defiance disorder," I'm sure there's a file somewhere with my name on it.

That the government is using the charge of mental illness as the means by which to immobilize (and disarm) these veterans is diabolical. With one stroke of a magistrate's pen, these veterans are being declared mentally ill, locked away against their will, and stripped of their constitutional rights.

If it were just being classified as "anti-government," that would be one thing.

Unfortunately, anyone with a military background and training is also now being viewed as a heightened security threat by police who are trained to shoot first and ask questions later.

Feeding this perception of veterans as ticking time bombs in need of intervention, the Justice Department launched a pilot program in 2012 aimed at training SWAT teams to deal with confrontations involving highly trained and often heavily armed combat veterans.

The result?

Police encounters with military veterans often escalate very quickly into an explosive and deadly situation, especially

when SWAT teams are involved.

For example, Jose Guerena, a Marine who served in two tours in Iraq, was [killed after an Arizona SWAT team kicked open the door of his home during a mistaken drug raid](#) and opened fire. Thinking his home was being invaded by criminals, Guerena told his wife and child to hide in a closet, grabbed a gun and waited in the hallway to confront the intruders. He never fired his weapon. In fact, the safety was still on his gun when he was killed. The SWAT officers, however, not as restrained, fired 70 rounds of ammunition at Guerena—23 of those bullets made contact. Apart from his military background, Guerena had had no prior criminal record, and the police found nothing illegal in his home.

John Edward Chesney, a 62-year-old Vietnam veteran, was [killed by a SWAT team](#) allegedly responding to a call that the Army veteran was standing in his San Diego apartment window waving what looked like a semi-automatic rifle. SWAT officers locked down Chesney's street, took up positions around his home, and fired 12 rounds into Chesney's apartment window. It turned out that the gun Chesney reportedly pointed at police from three stories up was a "realistic-looking mock assault rifle."

[Ramon Hooks' encounter with a Houston SWAT team did not end as tragically, but it very easily could have.](#) Hooks, a 25-year-old Iraq war veteran, was using an air rifle gun for target practice outside when a Homeland Security Agent, allegedly house shopping in the area, reported him as an active shooter. It wasn't long before the quiet neighborhood was transformed into a war zone, with dozens of cop cars, an armored vehicle and heavily armed police. Hooks was arrested, his air rifle pellets and toy gun confiscated, and charges filed against him for "criminal mischief."

Given the government's increasing view of veterans as potential domestic terrorists, it makes one think twice about [government programs encouraging veterans to include a](#)

[veterans designation on their drivers' licenses and ID cards.](#)

Hailed by politicians as a way to "[make it easier for military veterans to access discounts from retailers, restaurants, hotels and vendors across the state,](#)" it will also make it that much easier for the government to identify and target veterans who dare to challenge the status quo.

After all, no one is spared in a police state.

Eventually, as I make clear in my book [*Battlefield America: The War on the American People*](#), we all suffer the same fate.

It stands to reason that if the government can't be bothered to abide by its constitutional mandate to respect the citizenry's rights—whether it's the right to be free from government surveillance and censorship, the right to due process and fair hearings, the right to be free from roadside strip searches and militarized police, or the right to peacefully assemble and protest and exercise our right to free speech—then why should anyone expect the government to treat our nation's veterans with respect and dignity?

Here's a suggestion: if you really want to do something to show your respect and appreciation for the nation's veterans, why not skip the parades and the flag-waving and instead go exercise your rights—the freedoms that those veterans swore to protect—by pushing back against the government's tyranny.

It's time the rest of the nation did its part to safeguard the freedoms we too often take for granted.

Freedom is not free.