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Speak Out Now

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Memorial Day: Let's Make Their System a Memory by Overturning It

Memorial Day weekend is approaching and we can guess what it will be like. The politicians and the media will give speeches praising veterans. They will cry crocodile tears for the soldiers who have died in current and past wars. They pretend to pay tribute to lost lives, but really their words just serve to glorify and support their wars.

The reality of war is nothing but horror and loss. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost the lives of over a million Iraqi people, mostly civilians including children, and tens of thousands of uncounted Afghans. The wars have devastated the people of these countries, who now lack adequate food, water, sanitation, electricity and safety.

The soldiers that the U.S. government has sent to fight these wars have returned with their bodies and minds shattered. Since 2001, 2.4 million people have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly 7,000 have been killed, and another 50,000 have suffered injuries including amputations and brain injuries. Meanwhile 50,000 veterans are homeless, ten percent of the homeless population. This government uses soldiers and throws them away.

The psychological wounds soldiers bring home from war can be more damaging than the physical ones. Today more U.S. soldiers die by committing suicide than in combat. An estimated 20 U.S. veterans commit suicide every day.

U.S. troops bring the violence of war home with them as well. How could anyone commit atrocities overseas, and then leave the violence behind? Since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began, domestic violence among military families has doubled. Sexual violence including rape has increased by 90 percent. Today there is nearly one violent sexual assault committed by a soldier every hour.

Are the soldiers who have been wounded in these wars taken care of? Not at all. Veterans Affairs has routinely failed to meet the needs of returned soldiers. The Trump administration has only increased this poor treatment. Veterans who rely on services like Meals on Wheels suffer as the programs they rely on are slashed.

The federal hiring freeze has shut veterans out of

jobs they rely upon. One third of the federal workforce is composed of veterans. The freeze has also meant that veterans' services, including suicide hotlines, have been shut down. Trump's health care proposals will also cut funding for mental health that was guaranteed under the Affordable Care Act. Words of praise on Memorial Day are no substitute.

Today the majority of U.S. troops have been withdrawn from direct combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the U.S. military continues a reign of terror using drone-strikes and targeted assassinations in these countries, as well as a recent escalation of air strikes in Yemen and Syria. U.S. officials have claimed that these strikes only hit people they call "enemy combatants" and present a minimal risk for civilians. This is a lie. In the month of March alone, 1,000 people were killed in Syria and Iraq in conflicts involving U.S. Air strikes. Who were these people? What gives the U.S. government the right to attack the people of these countries just because the U.S. government decides they are terrorists?

This violence is not an accident. It is not carried out to help or defend people, or for any of the other excuses which the politicians make. This violence is the normal functioning of a system of military domination that ensures the corporations and the wealthy elite receive their profits. The U.S. government maintains 900 military bases in 150 countries around the world. Meanwhile this government deepens the exploitation of people here in the United States by cutting education, health care, services, and making our lives worse.

While the politicians shed their fake tears for the people they have sent to fight their wars, we should remember the real cause of this violence – their system. For ordinary people war is violence, horror, and waste. We are the ones who fight their wars. And we are the ones who suffer the consequences. Their system of exploitation and military domination is not worth one more life or one more penny from us. The only war worth celebrating is the struggle to overturn their system.