

# What's the best way to support the troops?

**NEW YORK, AUGUST 14, 2005** – When John and Yoko sang “war is over,” they added “if you want it.” It was a plea for peace, a call to “stop all the fighting.” It was written in 1972. That war did not end for three years.

Frank Rich wrote eloquently in Sunday's New York Times that this war, the one in Iraq, is also over, “Like the Japanese soldier marooned on an island for years after V-J Day, President Bush may be the last person in the country to learn that for Americans, if not Iraqis, the war in Iraq is over. ‘We will stay the course, he insistently tells us from his Texas ranch. What do you mean we, white man?’ ”

He offers an optimistic scenario even as he does not go the next step and appeal as John and Yoko did on the public to act. Perhaps he doesn't think it necessary, concluding. “The country has already made the decision for Mr. Bush. We're outta there. “

Not so fast.

His write-on prognosis and analysis might be emotionally heartening but this Administration is not on the verge of giving up or withdrawing the US military. Despite Gold Star Mom Cindy Sheehan's most valiant efforts and the fall off of public support, and even the voices of Generals and Republicans who finally recognize the war is unwinnable, the blood letting will continue – partially in the name of “supporting our troops,” who two years on still don't even have adequate body armor.

There's a lot more dying to come because decisions in Washington are made on the basis of ideology, not rationality. Just as the administration is mobilizing new “public diplomacy” projects to win over Muslims overseas, it is, legal or not, escalating a hearts and minds propaganda effort right here in the USA,

Out in Brookhaven, Long Island, signs saying “Support Our Troops” line Old Country Road. In Washington, the Defense Department is planning to stage a freedom march of its own on September 11th, led by none other than that militant freedom fighter DefSec Donald Rumsfeld. He will be leading a

government-supported national walk not far from where Dr. King led the March on Washington in 1963, and just a few weeks before anti-war activists converge on Washington for their fall offensive.

It is all part of a new Defense Department plan to goose public support called “America Supports You” which spotlights what Americans are doing all across the land to back the military and encourages others to join. It is a successor program to an earlier official project “Send Your Thanks to the US Military” campaign which began in May 2002. There are a gaggle of websites backing this effort including:

[www.americasupportsyou.mil/](http://www.americasupportsyou.mil/)  
[www.anyservicemember.navy.mil](http://www.anyservicemember.navy.mil)  
[www.adoptaplatoon.org/](http://www.adoptaplatoon.org/)  
[www.anysoldier.com/](http://www.anysoldier.com/)

What is also offensive is that the once liberal Washington Post whose own ombudsman admitted that his newspaper had “underreported and downplayed anti-war protests” in Washington in the run-up to the war was, until public pressure helped changed its mind, endorsing the official mobilization. (The Post also gave \$125,000 to help fund the Bush inaugural galas last January.) Shouldn’t our media be investigating this taxpayer-supported Nuremberg on the Mall and not embracing it. How much taxpayer money and how many DOD employees have been assigned to win the war on the homefront?

“Support our troops” is a stealthy and deceptive slogan. It’s the slogan du jour of demagogues and those that deny that it’s the duty of Americans to question their government especially when it is lying to them. It’s a way of depoliticizing the war and personalizing a crusade. The Defense Department, military recruiters, veterans groups and right-wing media outlets use this patriotically correct mantra shamelessly in a change the subject maneuver for sympathy, and to bait critics and bolster misguided patriotism.

Who among us is not saddened when American soldiers die or by under-reported accounts of the mounting wounded in Veterans hospitals and the walking wounded starting to turn up in our streets from this war like they did after the Vietnam War?

Veteran John Crawford writes in the Times: “One of my buddies got locked up in an institution by the police for being a danger to himself. Another woke up in the hospital with no memory of the beating he received from those same

police – not for being a danger to himself, but to everyone else. One guy got a brain infection and wakes up every morning expecting to be in Iraq. Two more are in Afghanistan, having re-upped rather than deal with being home. Five more went back to Baghdad as private security guards. Their consensus on how it is a second time around: still hot and nasty....

“War stories end when the battle is over or when the soldier comes home. That’s one way to tell it’s a story. In real life, there are no moments amid smoldering hilltops for tranquil introspection. When the war is over, you pick up your gear, walk down the hill and back into the world, where people smile, congratulate you, and secretly hope you won’t be a burden on society now that you’ve done the dirty work they shun.”

But don’t just feel sorry for these soldiers who, unlike their Vietnam War counterparts, volunteered, and in some cases, are living on bases in imported luxury compared to the Iraqis they are ostensibly there to defend.

All Iraq veterans should be shown the Winter Soldier film, just released after 34 years in the wilderness in which the soldiers we supported then (including a younger and less politically circumspect John Kerry) confess in graphic detail to the crimes they committed in another unjust war. Few then wanted to really hear what they went through and in some cases are still going through. Thus, it was not surprising when a global World Tribunal on Iraq, well covered internationally, received no attention in the US media.

The poet Mike Sharpe, in a new book “Thou Shall Not Kill (Unless Otherwise Instructed)” (North Castle Books) supports our soldiers with an elegy for those killed in Iraq. He lists a few of their names and writes

Let us make another wall.

We need a wall where we can go and contemplate what we have done.

Go to this wall to read the names.

Leave Space on the Wall.

*News Dissector Danny Schechter is “blogger-in-chief” of Mediachannel.org. His forthcoming book on the media coverage of the war, “When News Lies” will include his film WMD (Weapons of Mass Deception) See: [wmdthefilm.com](http://wmdthefilm.com).*