



I Should Not Be Allowed To Say The Following Things About America

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As Americans, we have a right to question our government and its actions. However, while there is a time to criticize, there is also a time to follow in complacent silence. And that time is now.

It's one thing to question our leaders in the days leading up to a war. But it is another thing entirely to do it *during* a war. Once the blood of young men starts to spill, it is our duty as citizens not to challenge those responsible for spilling that blood. We must remove the boxing gloves and put on the kid gloves. That is why, in this moment of crisis, I should not be allowed to say the following things about America:

Why do we purport to be fighting in the name of liberating the Iraqi people when we have no interest in violations of human rights—as evidenced by our habit of looking the other way when they occur in China, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Syria, Burma, Libya, and countless other countries? Why, of all the brutal regimes that regularly violate human rights, do we only intervene militarily in Iraq? Because the violation of human rights is not our true interest here. We just say it is as a convenient means of manipulating world opinion and making our cause seem more just.

That is exactly the sort of thing I should not say right now.

This also is not the time to ask whether diplomacy was ever given a chance. Or why, for the last 10 years, Iraq has been our sworn archenemy, when during the 15 years preceding it we traded freely in armaments and military aircraft with the evil and despotic Saddam Hussein. This is the kind of question that, while utterly valid, should not be posed right now.

And I certainly will not point out our rapid loss of interest in the establishment of democracy in Afghanistan once our fighting in that country was over. We sure got out of that place in a hurry once it became clear that the problems were too complex to solve with cruise missiles.

That sort of remark will simply have to wait until our boys are safely back home.

Here's another question I won't ask right now: Could this entire situation have been avoided in the early 1990s had then-U.S. ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie not been given sub rosa instructions by the Bush Administration to soft-pedal a cruel dictator? Such a question would be tantamount to sedition while our country engages in bloody conflict. Just think how hurtful that would be to our military morale. I know I couldn't fight a war knowing that was the talk back home.

Is this, then, the appropriate time for me to ask if Operation Iraqi Freedom is an elaborate double-blind, sleight-of-hand misdirection ploy to con us out of inconvenient civil rights through Patriot Acts I and II? Should I wonder whether this war is an elaborate means of distracting the country while its economy bucks and lurches toward the brink of a full-blown depression? No and no.

True patriots know that a price of freedom is periodic submission to the will of our leaders—especially when the liberties granted us by the Constitution are at stake. What good is our right to free speech if our soldiers are too demoralized to defend that right, thanks to disparaging remarks made about their commander-in-chief by the Dixie Chicks?

When the Founding Fathers authored the Constitution that sets forth our nation's guiding principles, they made certain to guarantee us individual rights

and freedoms. How dare we selfishly lay claim to those liberties at the very moment when our nation is in crisis, when it needs us to be our most selfless? We shame the memory of Thomas Jefferson by daring to mention Bush's outright lies about satellite photos that supposedly prove Iraq is developing nuclear weapons.

At this difficult time, President Bush needs my support. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld needs my support. General Tommy Franks needs my support. It is not my function as a citizen in a participatory democracy to question our leaders. And to exercise my constitutional right—nay, duty—to do so would be un-American.

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