

Obama's *Rules of Engagement*

by Earl P. Holt III

You'd have to be soulless not to be moved by the tragically disfigured combat veterans seen in TV ads for charities such as *The Wounded Warrior Project*, *Tunnels to Towers*, or the *Disabled American Veterans*. Most are heroes who sustained life-altering disfigurement in combat, and must now face life with equal courage.

One particularly tragic aspect of their sacrifice is that many of those permanently injured and disfigured should never have been wounded in combat in the first place. The vast majority were victims of the Obama Administration's novel and radical *Rules of Engagement* (ROE) as surely as they were victims of the *Improvised Explosive Devices* used by *Taliban* and *Al-Qaeda* terrorists.

Prior to the Obama Regime assuming office in 2009, U.S. combat forces in the Middle East operated under decades-old *Rules of Engagement* (ROE) that observed the *Geneva Convention*, but did not subject U.S. forces to unnecessary risk while in combat. After 2009, the Obama Administration imposed new and dangerously radical ROE for U.S. combat forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. These immediately and dramatically increased the number of U.S. servicemen *Killed in Action* (KIA) and *Wounded in Action* (WIA.)

In the seven years from 2001 to 2008, 630 U.S. military personnel were *Killed in Action* under the traditional ROE. After Obama's new and dangerous ROE were imposed in 2009, over the next seven years 2,292 U.S. military personnel were *KIA*. Thus, U.S. combat fatalities increased from 90 per year before Obama, to 327 per year after Obama's new ROE. This was a 380 percent increase.

Similar statistics apply to U.S. servicemembers *Wounded in Action* (WIA.) In the seven years prior to Obama -- in which the traditional ROE were observed -- those WIA averaged **736 per year**. In just the first FIVE years under Obama's new ROE, those WIA increased to **2,785 per year**. Thus, the annual rate for servicemembers WIA **increased 360 percent**, largely as a result of Obama's new ROE.



Exposing Ourselves to the Enemy

Obama's *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, had never participated in ground combat operations in his career, and either lacked the insight or the courage to resist Obama's new ROE. He should have resigned in protest. Likewise, among Obama's "*brain trust*" that imposed the new ROE, few had ever worn the uniform except perhaps on *Halloween* or to a costume ball. They were oblivious to how badly they would subvert combat effectiveness, with dire consequences for our most elite warriors serving as "*boots on the ground.*"

One example of how Obama's ROE increased the risk to combat soldiers was illustrated in the movie *Lone Survivor*, based on actual events. An important operation ended in catastrophe due to the fear among the four Navy SEALs on that mission that their actions might cause them to be charged with war crimes by the Pentagon. A hostile Afghani -- armed only with a *walkie-talkie* -- was alerting enemy forces to their presence, but they declined to shoot and silence him for fear of being prosecuted. Their hesitation resulted in the death of three of the four SEALs on that mission after they became the hunted.

A second example is the catastrophic mission known as "*Extortion 17*" that resulted in the death of 41 U.S. military servicemen, including 16 members of *Seal Team SIX*, 20 *Special Operations* warriors, and five members of the *Chinook-47* helicopter crew. When the helicopter crew transporting these elite soldiers requested fire suppression around their intended "*hot landing zone*," their routine request was **REJECTED** by Senior Command out of fear of violating the new Obama ROE. As a result, their *Chinook-47* was shot down and everyone on board was killed in the largest one-day loss of life in 13 years of combat operations in Afghanistan.

A good example of the decline in morale following Obama's new ROE was the attitude of one Navy SEAL who left the service only a few years short of full retirement. He made the following statement in regard to the new ROE: "*I got out because I couldn't take it anymore. We tried to explain how much reckless danger we were being exposed to and they told us we were being illogical.*"

These examples sound eerily similar to testimony recently given by Marine Sergeant Tyler Vargas-Andrews before the **House Foreign Affairs Committee** on March 8th of 2023. Vargas-Andrews was a Marine sniper, whose mission was to protect the Kabul airport from terrorist attacks. He

testified to the events preceding the August 6, 2021 suicide bombing at the *Abby Gate* entrance to the Kabul Airport that killed 13 U.S. servicemembers and injured dozens of Afghan civilians during Biden's humiliating retreat from Afghanistan.

That day, he and his partner received intelligence that a suicide bomber was nearing the *Abby Gate*, so when they spotted the likely terrorist, who was wearing a "suicide vest," they immediately requested authorization from their supervisors to shoot him, **but their request was denied**. He testified that the individual they targeted was the eventual suicide bomber responsible for killing 13 U.S. servicemembers and many more Afghans, and stated emphatically that, "*Plain and simple, we were ignored.*" Clearly, the Biden Administration had returned to the ROE imposed by the Obama Administration.

Thousands of U.S. combat casualties could have been avoided if the conventional ROE had been retained, and if Barack Hussein Obama and Joe Biden had not imposed new and radical ROE that were FAR more solicitous of the safety of hostile Afghans, than with the safety of U.S. combat personnel.

Also contributing to unnecessary U.S. casualties was the military's new strategy of *Counter-Insurgency* (COIN,) intended to "*win the hearts and minds*" of the civilian Afghan population. It required combat soldiers to go out among the Afghan population -- whose hearts and minds they were supposed to "*win*" -- dramatically increasing their exposure to the enemy and elevating their risk of death or dismemberment.

COIN was a foolish strategy, probably adopted by civilians who never served in combat, and assumed COIN would be like politicians in democracies venturing out to "*press the flesh*" while campaigning for office. Once COIN was adopted as official policy, the enemy no longer had to attack our servicemen, they could patiently wait for us to come to

them and expose ourselves to the enemy's *Improvised Explosive Devices* set as traps to kill and maim.



Winning Hearts & Minds?

The U.S. Constitution is correctly based on the principle of civilian control of the military. Yet, in previous wars, the *Rules of Engagement* for combat forces were made by men who had actually experienced combat, and understood it. However, beginning in the 1990s under Bill Clinton, those policies were increasingly made by men and women who never wore the uniform and -- more often than not -- were former anti-war protestors who had previously given morale support to our enemies during time of war.

It has often been reported that Clinton was a draft dodger who was paid by the Soviet KGB to travel across Europe and criticize the War in Viet Nam. Many of the same people who shared the Clinton Administration's leftist politics were later recycled by the Obama Administration. These

were often *dilettantes* who concocted absurd missions and rules for those combat soldiers who risked their lives every day in an increasingly dangerous theater of operations. These policies created a growing lack of confidence in senior military leadership among our combat warriors.

Heroic combat soldiers who are willing to put their lives on the line deserve to fight without unreasonable restrictions that give an advantage to our enemies. Sadly, today's military often has the misfortune of serving buffoonish "Democrats" who elevate the virtues of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) over combat readiness, and prefer diplomacy to force in dealing with mortal enemies. Where would we be if George S. Patton had felt the same way during the *Battle of the Bulge*?