

COSTS NOT FORGOTTEN

Written by Harvey M. Sapolsky

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HARVEY M. SAPOLSKY, JUL 20 2011

In the past I have complained about the fecklessness of America's allies, citing most especially their failure to carry a fair share of the global security burden. More recently, I have softened my complaints somewhat, recognizing that the allies are merely pursuing the most attractive political option available to them. When America provides free security to its allies, it should not be surprising or disappointing to Americans that many allies will happily invest less in their militaries. Why not spend limited government resources on other needs when your security is being subsidized by an accommodating big friend. We get much of what we ask for from our allies, and usually ask for little. There is no point in complaining about their choices.

But I must admit that some allies have actually done a lot to aid America in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars which were hardly wars of their choosing. The UK has lost over 550 service personnel in both these wars, and that toll keeps rising. Although most other allies kept away from the Iraq war, their involvement in the Afghanistan war through a NATO pathway has been quite significant. Over 35 percent of the coalition deaths in the Afghanistan war to date are those of America's allies. In addition to the British, Canadian, French, German, Danish, Italian, Dutch and other allied soldiers have lost their lives in this difficult conflict. Their sacrifices are no less devastating to family and friends than American sacrifices.

The outcomes of both wars are uncertain. We do not know whether or not Iraq's deep ethnic conflicts can be overcome. We do not know whether or not the extensive governmental corruption and tribal fears that riddle Afghanistan can be shaken. We do not know whether or not the interventions will ultimately be judged to have done more harm than good. What we do know is that many good men and women have gone in the uniform of their countries to both places in the belief that they were helping the people there lead better, more secure lives. The wars are slowly coming to an end as the interveners, including the prime one, the United States, tire of the burdens. We should never forget how terrible the costs were.

In memory of French Army LTN Thomas Gauvin who was killed in Afghanistan on July 13, 2011. LTN Gauvin was a visiting fellow at MIT while a student at St- Cyr, the French military academy.

About the author:

Harvey M. Sapolsky is Professor of Public Policy and Organization, Emeritus, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and former Director of the MIT Security Studies Program. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Michigan and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In the defense field he has served as a consultant or panel member for a number of government commissions and study groups. His most recent books are *US Defense Politics* written with Eugene Gholz and Caitlin Talmadge and *US Military Innovation Since the Cold War* edited with Benjamin Friedman and Brendan Green, both published by Routledge.