

What does it mean to “Support our Troops?”

Those yellow banners on car bumpers have me stumped. What exactly does it mean to “Support our Troops?” Is that a coded slogan for “Support the War in ...?”

Or is it possible to support the troops while opposing the war they are fighting? This is not an easy question, but my answer is yes. I think it is possible both to support the troops and to oppose the war.

A lot of people would say no. How can you support someone and yet be against the very thing that person is working to achieve every day? Can a Red Sox fan show up at Fenway Park wearing a Yankees baseball cap? Would anyone ever suppose that he was actually supporting the *Red Sox* players?

Well, no, but that’s not a fair analogy, because it assumes that if you are not supporting the Red Sox you must be supporting the Yankees. A valid analogy would be supporting the Red Sox players on the field even though you oppose the fact that the game is being played at all. Suppose, for example, the league refused to postpone the game even though two of the players were killed that morning in a plane crash. Wouldn’t it be reasonable for even strong Red Sox fans to think it better to reschedule the game? Would they be thought to be somehow disloyal to the players by holding up a sign saying “Honor the Dead” or “Stop the Game”? Of course not.

And yet that’s the implied – and sometimes outward – criticism leveled at those demonstrating for peace. Many people *assume* that those against the current war are really rooting for the enemy. But that’s not what they are doing, and they are not being disloyal to the United States.

In fact, I would argue that they are showing a higher loyalty than those who merely fall in step with whatever war we find ourselves in, regardless of its merits. It’s a little bit like parents rushing to stick up for a child embroiled in a neighborhood fight without stopping to find out which kid

was really at fault. Rather than really helping their child, or assuring peace in the neighborhood, they are more likely to be stirring up future battles and perhaps even shaping a bully.

Yes, you may say, but it is different at the national level. We live in a dangerous world, with enemies who would love to destroy us. We simply cannot afford to lose this war, and by opposing the war, you are giving aid to the enemy whether you intend to or not. Look what happened with Vietnam – all those protests and demonstrations made us lose the war.

That's not the way I see it. I agree that the massive protests against the war in Vietnam helped bring it to an end, but that was a good thing, in my mind. First, there never was a valid reason for the United States to intervene in Vietnam, a former French colony. Many people today realize that our intervention in that country was a hopelessly quixotic adventure, but only the war protesters saw it at the time.

Second, the war in Vietnam didn't end until 55,000 Americans were killed. Maybe if the protests had come earlier, and were joined by more citizens, the end would have come sooner and only 20,000 or 30,000 Americans would have died. Shouldn't we be asking, who *really* supported the troops in Vietnam? Was it those who were in favor of the war, or those who actively opposed it? By now you know my answer. And they may not admit it, but I think all the unknown troops who did *not* bleed to death in the Vietnamese jungles because the war ended early owe a debt of thanks to their real supporters – those who wrote letters and marched in the streets to protest the war.

Furthermore, the value of winning and losing – which is the whole point of most sporting events – is greatly overrated when it comes to such a horrible activity as killing human beings. No doubt the use of military force is sometimes necessary. But before pressing on toward victory, in fact, before even getting involved in a war, we should make sure that the end justifies the means; that there is some critically important reason why it is necessary to send young American men and wo-

men into battle in far-off lands.

That's why I believe that Americans who care about their country should raise serious questions about the wisdom and justice of sending troops to war. And if we believe that is the wrong course of action, then we have the right and maybe even the duty to speak against it.

That may be the very best thing we can do to support our troops.