

Dying US army veteran denounces “illegal” Iraq War

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Iraq War veteran Tomas Young, currently under hospice care at his home in Kansas City, Missouri, has written a scathing “last letter,” published at *Truthdig.com*, addressed to former President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney.

Young, the subject of the 2007 documentary film *Body of War*, explains that he is writing his letter “on the 10th anniversary of the Iraq War on behalf of my fellow Iraq War veterans. I write this letter on behalf of the 4,488 soldiers and Marines who died in Iraq. I write this letter on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of veterans who have been wounded and on behalf of those whose wounds, physical and psychological, have destroyed their lives. I am one of those gravely wounded. I was paralyzed in an insurgent ambush in 2004 in Sadr City. My life is coming to an end.”

Young goes on: “I write this letter on behalf of those veterans whose trauma and self-revulsion for what they have witnessed, endured and done in Iraq have led to suicide and on behalf of the active-duty soldiers and Marines who commit, on average, a suicide a day. I write this letter on behalf of the some 1 million Iraqi dead and on behalf of the countless Iraqi wounded. I write this letter on behalf of us all—the human detritus your war has left behind, those who will spend their lives in unending pain and grief.”

Addressing Bush and Cheney, Young writes: “I write not because I think you grasp the terrible human and moral consequences of your lies, manipulation and thirst for wealth and power. I write this letter because, before my own death, I want to make it clear that I, and hundreds of thousands of my fellow veterans, along with millions of my fellow citizens, along with hundreds of millions more in Iraq and the Middle East, know fully who you are and what you have done.” *Body of War*, co-directed by Phil Donahue and Ellen

Spiro, recounted Young’s story, his horrendous medical condition and his ongoing opposition to the Iraq War. Young enlisted in the US Army after the September 11, 2001 attacks, because, as he explains in his recent letter, “our country had been attacked.”

Only five days into his first deployment in Iraq in April 2004, while riding in a Humvee in Baghdad’s Sadr City, the young soldier was shot by an insurgent from above. The bullet severed Young’s spinal column. At the time of the making of *Body of War*, as the WSWS reported, he was “not only confined to a wheelchair but suffers severe attendant disabilities, including an inability to cough, trouble regulating his body temperature, dizzy spells, urinary tract infections and sexual dysfunction.”

After an anoxic brain injury in 2008, Young, now 33, explained to *Truthdig*’s Chris Hedges, “I lost a lot of dexterity and strength in my upper body. So I wouldn’t be able to shoot myself or even open the pill bottle to give myself an overdose.” He told Hedges, “I felt at the end of my rope ... I made the decision to go on hospice care, to stop feeding and fade away.”

The Donahue-Spiro documentary included a number of moving sequences of Young participating in anti-war activities where he encountered other disabled veterans, as well as family members of soldiers who had died in Iraq. In August 2005, along with his wife at the time, Young traveled to Camp Casey, Cindy Sheehan’s protest encampment outside George W. Bush’s ranch in Crawford, Texas.

Unfortunately, the directors’ motives for making the film were hardly pure. *Body of War* ends up as a disgraceful pitch for the Democratic Party and its supposed anti-war credentials. The implicit hero of the film is former Sen. Robert Byrd, Democrat from West Virginia, who features in the film’s final scene.

Ironically, the official anti-war movement, which included figures such as Donahue, the former television talk show host, was in the process of dissolving itself at the time of *Body of War*'s making and release. The Democrats' electoral victory in November 2006, followed immediately by assurances from leading figures in that party that there would be no impeachment of Bush and that funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would continue, seriously began the process. The coming to power of Barack Obama completed it.

Young himself subscribes to the view that the Iraq War was "the largest strategic blunder in US history" and asserts in his letter he would not feel the same despair if he had been wounded in Afghanistan "fighting in Afghanistan against those forces that carried out the attacks of 9/11."

Be that as it may, no figure in the Democratic Party, an imperialist party dripping in blood, would utter heartfelt and truthful words such as these: "I did not join the Army to 'liberate' Iraqis or to shut down mythical weapons-of-mass-destruction facilities or to implant what you cynically called 'democracy' in Baghdad and the Middle East. I did not join the Army to rebuild Iraq, which at the time you told us could be paid for by Iraq's oil revenues. Instead, this war has cost the United States over \$3 trillion. I especially did not join the Army to carry out pre-emptive war. Pre-emptive war is illegal under international law. And as a soldier in Iraq I was, I now know, abetting your idiocy and your crimes."

Young describes his body "filled with painkillers, my life ebbing away," dealing with the fact "that hundreds of thousands of human beings, including children, including myself, were sacrificed by you for little more than the greed of oil companies, for your alliance with the oil sheiks in Saudi Arabia, and your insane visions of empire."

Toward the end of his letter, Young writes, "I have, like many other disabled veterans, suffered from the inadequate and often inept care provided by the Veterans Administration. I have, like many other disabled veterans, come to realize that our mental and physical wounds are of no interest to you, perhaps of no interest to any politician. We were used. We were betrayed. And we have been abandoned. ... My day of reckoning is upon me. Yours will come. I hope you will

be put on trial."

Young's letter and condition speak to the appalling tragedy of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the waste and destruction of hundreds of thousands—perhaps millions—of lives, all sacrificed in the pursuit of US imperialist dominance of the globe. The American ruling elite's "day of reckoning" is indeed coming.



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