

April 6, 2019

COLUMNS

Rep. Lindholm: Risch disavows “nation building,” Cheney should follow

As a Navy veteran, I'm familiar with the heavy responsibilities and costs of making war. As an elected official sworn to uphold the U.S. Constitution, I'm also mindful that our Founding Fathers constitutionally authorized Congress to declare war, and Congress alone.

Unfortunately, our federal government has strayed from that founding model during the interminable “War on Terror” in which we've been mired for nearly two decades, during which Congress has ceded its war-making authority to the executive branch. As a result, our military has been dispatched by multiple administrations to bleed and die on foreign missions that lack popular support, clear and compelling national interests or anything resembling a moral imperative.

Legitimate aims such as suppressing specific threats to America's homeland or safeguarding essential national interests abroad are no longer the objective of our self-sacrificing military. Instead, Congress passes nebulous “use of force authorizations” that assign our troops the dubious and undefined task of “making the world safe for democracy,” an obligation that doesn't fall to the United States, its military or its taxpayers.

In pursuit of this malleable objective, American military personnel are stationed in 80 nations on six continents. Such interventionism is unsustainable for a country drowning under \$22 trillion in federal debt.

That's why – after someone directed me to a website based next door in Idaho, BringOurTroopsHome.US – I was im-

mensely encouraged to see a recent video in which U.S. Senator Jim Risch, R-Idaho, chairman of the powerful U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, voiced his opposition to the concept of perpetual war.

In Boise in February, in response to former Sgt. Dan McKnight, an Idaho Army National Guard veteran of Afghanistan, Risch announced that he was “through with nation-building.”

“We've spent \$2 trillion in Afghanistan, and we've shed lots of American blood there,” Risch told McKnight. “I'm with you. I am through trying to do nation-building with countries that don't want it! They've got to show some type of an appreciation, some type of an embracement of it, and they simply don't.”

Personally, I believe U.S. troops should be “through with nation-building” whether other countries appreciate it or not, but Sen. Risch's comments nonetheless represent the possibility of a dramatic reversal of direction in U.S. foreign policy.

Given his preeminent influence on foreign policy in our nation's capital, Sen. Risch's recognition of the futility of endless wars stands in stark contrast to the interventionist urges of many of his colleagues in Washington, perhaps none more prominently than our own Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyoming.

More importantly, it signals a renewed appreciation for the underlying rationale behind Congressional authorization for the use of military force, namely entrusting the people's representatives to implement the will of the people when it comes



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to the most important decision a government can make.

The will of the people seems to be reflected in a Politico poll in January which found that 56 percent of Americans supported President Trump's proposed troop withdrawal from Syria, including 71 percent of Republicans. It's also supported by every Democratic U.S. senator currently running for President. Notwithstanding our toxic partisan divisions, “bring our troops home” is a clarion call that's bringing Americans of both parties together.

Our people, especially my fellow veterans and their families, are tired of endless wars. It's past time we bring our troops home from foreign entanglements in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere around the globe. It's past time that Congress reclaim the war powers wrested from it nearly two decades ago when our current endless wars began. It's past time Rep. Cheney join Sen. Risch in disavowing a policy that's come at too high a cost in American blood and treasure.

Rep. Tyler Lindholm, R-Sundance, is a father of four with his wife Charity, vice president of his family's cattle business, and a volunteer firefighter. He served five years in the U.S. Navy and is the Majority Whip of the Wyoming House of Representatives.

Rep. Lindholm's commentary was also published in the Cheyenne, Kemmerer, Laramie, Moorcroft, and Sundance newspapers, as well as by the student newspaper at the University of Wyoming.