

When You Realize You've Been Had

By John Leake

On understanding that you have been deceived

[Reproduced directly from an email received today]

In Dante's *Inferno*, the 9th and final circle of hell, "the lowest, blackest, and farthest from heaven," is reserved those guilty of treachery against those in whom they have cultivated a bond of trust.

I often thought about this in 2013, when I was living in Menlo Park, California and became friends with a man of who was a benefactor of the VA hospitals in Menlo Park and in Palo Alto. He was especially concerned about young soldiers who'd suffered traumatic brain injuries in Afghanistan and Iraq.

On a few occasions we made the rounds and visited patients who'd sustained this kind of injury. The strangest were those who had retained motor skills and seemed to recognize us, but who also seemed completely indifferent to us. Some had suffered from speech impairment and seemed frightened of us. A nurse told me that it was common for this kind of patient to have developed a passionate interest in Facebook and to spend most of his waking hours scrolling through it.

In 2013, it was hard for me to fathom that hundreds of thousands of young men in the United States—many with wives and small children—had sustained Traumatic Brain Injuries. Many could still function in their day to day lives, but suffered irritability, frequent headaches, and a feeling of disconnection from their family and friends. On the extreme end of the scale were the completely disabled, doomed to spend the rest of their lives in VA hospitals.

In 2017, Lindquist, Love, et al. published **Traumatic Brain Injury in Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans: New Results from a National Random Sample Study**. As the opening of the report states:

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) has been called a "signature injury" of Iraq and Afghanistan Conflicts. The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC) reports nearly 350,000 incident diagnoses of TBI in the U.S. military since 2000. Among those deployed, estimated rates of probable TBI range from 11–23%.

I thought it notable that the U.S. military was, apparently, completely unprepared for roadside bombs constructed to focus the blast on particular sections of road as a convoy is passing by. It wasn't some much shrapnel and other missiles striking the head as the supersonic, explosive shockwave that does the brain damage.

I got to be pals with a psychiatrist who worked at the VA. In public, around his colleagues, he tried to put on an optimistic face on it. In private, over our occasional dinners, he seemed very despondent that anything could be done for these guys.

“No one really knows what to do about these injuries,” he told me. “A lot of doctors who work at the VA will talk to you about promising new therapies, but most of them are more interested in getting grant money for their pet projects than in doing anything for their patients.”

I wondered how many of these young men ultimately realized that the United States government had lied to them—that their mission in Iraq had never been about protecting the American people from a hostile foreign dictator and his alleged terrorist network—but rather to pursue the mad dreams of insane old men in Washington.

This morning I thought about my VA experiences in a decade ago when I saw that the same cabal of old hawks in Washington are now beating the drums of war again Iran—a nation three times the size and with twice the population of Iraq.

I wonder if Joe Biden or Lindsay Graham or Jake Sullivan were even aware of the 350,000 men who suffered Traumatic Brain Injuries in the course of Washington’s disastrous military adventures in the Middle East twenty years ago. I sort of doubt it.

Understanding the one has been deceived is one of the most painful experiences in life. It brings with an uneasy feeling of cognitive dissonance—a sinking feeling that someone you have trusted has not been honest about an important matter. Later it dawns on you that you’ve been had. It’s a traumatic experience, and the greater the deception, the harder it is to recover from it. At root of the trauma, I suppose, is the feeling that you put your faith, heart and soul into something that wasn’t real.

Because most Americans have been insulated from the disastrous consequences of its government’s Forever War policy, they are apparently slow to recognize that they are constantly being conned by the terrible men and women who run the U.S. government—selfish, ambitious, power-hungry men and women who do not care at all about the citizenry they are supposed to represent and serve.