

[ICYMI: CNN: "We Need a New National Conversation About War"](#)

NEW YORK, NY (August 25, 2017) – Yesterday *CNN Opinion* published an op-ed by Allison Jaslow, a two tour Iraq War veteran and the Executive Director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), entitled ["We Need a New National Conversation About War"](#).

After President Trump's speech on the path forward in Afghanistan Monday night, Jaslow writes:

"As a soldier there's only one question you have when your country asks you to go to war: Is the mission worth your life? But talk of troops was more about "numbers" and commentary on Afghanistan, colored by journalists and pundits, most of whom have never had to confront their own mortality the way soldiers must.

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Full text of the op-ed can be seen below and online [here](#).

"We Need a New National Conversation About War"

On Monday night, President Donald Trump spoke about the way forward in Afghanistan. I watched his remarks on TV, and then watched the reactions on the news and social media. I was shocked, not by what the President said, but by what everyone else did not say.

The discussion Monday night whizzed past the war and went straight to politics. Was this a win for H.R. McMaster? Will the President's decision prompt Steve Bannon to go nuclear? Was this a deliberate attempt to shift the

conversation away from Charlottesville, Virginia?

I know it's hard to resist the "Trump angle," but when it comes to discussion of what's at stake in Afghanistan, I wish we spent as much time talking about the human consequences of the President's strategic decisions as the political ramifications.

As a soldier there's only one question you have when your country asks you to go to war: Is the mission worth your life? But talk of troops was more about "numbers" and commentary on Afghanistan, colored by journalists and pundits, most of whom have never had to confront their own mortality the way soldiers must. Sitting in somber silence in front of a TV somewhere was a brother who was reminded of his sister's death by enemy fire, and a woman who's now convinced that the most recent time her husband came home from war is no longer the last time.

Too quickly left out of the public debate these days are the lives impacted by our national security decisions. The soldiers asked to dodge bullets, their families forced to spend sleepless nights worrying, and their spouses who have to learn to be single parents. We owe it to them to have a substantive conversation about whether their sacrifice in Afghanistan is worth it, not just when we decide to go to war, but as conditions change and especially when we find ourselves in what is now being called ["America's longest war."](#)

When I pledged an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, I knew war was a possibility. But I never expected that ultimately going to war would put me in a special and shrinking class of Americans. Nearly 16 years after 9/11, I'm still blown away that less than 1% of United States citizens have fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. And, while in a volunteer military, we certainly made a choice to serve, the fact that so few of us have, has over time had a devastating impact on our country.

The [civilian-military divide](#) means that most Americans, and most of the media, only have an abstract understanding of the human cost of policy decisions. But we can start to fix that. Troops have died in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria this year, but those headlines have become overlooked blurbs on news sites. We seldom learn about who they are, who they left behind and, most importantly, we rarely ask ourselves if the cause they were fighting was worth their life. I guarantee their families and friends are certainly asking that question. Their stories should be front page news.

We need to hear more from veterans who inventoried and packed up their buddy's belongings 24 hours after a car bomb blew him up, then picked up a ruck and continued on with the mission, like I did in Iraq. We need to hear from children of the fallen who know their mom loved her country, but struggle to articulate the mission she was fighting for. And we need to hear from the wife of the special forces soldier who is still alive but, after six deployments, is no longer the fun-loving guy she married a decade ago.

This is an incredibly challenging time domestically, but our nation's wars overseas are not weighing on the public's consciousness as they should be. Even when we have a rare national opportunity to reconnect the American people with those who are fighting, as we did Monday night, we missed the mark and focused on politics. And the lack of public discussion about the lives affected not only dangerously desensitizes us to the cost of war, but it allows politicians to avoid their duty to debate and authorize the commander in chief's decision to wage it.

Those who step up to serve and their families who sacrifice alongside them deserve to be considered more intentionally as we flex our might against terrorism, even if they are too humble to ask for recognition. As a nation that depends on a fraction of the population to sacrifice for all of us, let's push ourselves to do better next time.