

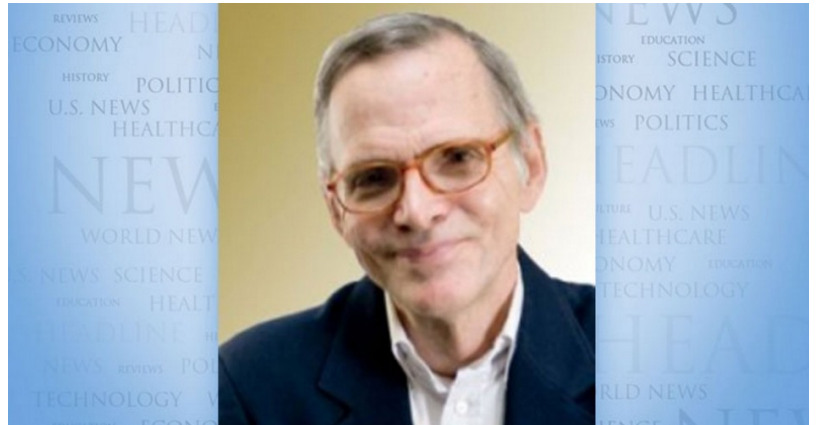


Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 27, 2013

An Empire of Graves “Around the Globe”

“Ask him about the cemeteries, Dean!”

The speaker, if the story is true, was President Lyndon B. Johnson [instructing](#) Secretary of State Dean Rusk on what to say to French President Charles DeGaulle. The year was 1966 and DeGaulle had announced he wanted all U.S. troops out of France. Johnson thought it appropriate to ask if that included the ones in the ground. Rusk was reluctant, feeling perhaps that it would be impolitic to pose that question to the French president. But Johnson was insistent.



“Ask him about the cemeteries, Dean!”

That made it a presidential order. So dutifully, Rusk asked DeGaulle if his order to evacuate American troops from France included the more than 60,000 buried there as casualties of World Wars I and II. An embarrassed DeGaulle reportedly left the meeting without answering.

At ballparks throughout the nation this Memorial Day, fans will pause for a moment of tribute to the men and women serving in our armed forces around the globe, defending “freedom and our way of life.” We rightly, and almost instinctively, honor those who serve, but as Robert Kagan noted in his book, *The World America Made*, there is also “an unmistakable glint of pride in the nation’s role ‘around the globe.’ ”

Indeed, few, if any, had a second thought about the pride President Kennedy expressed in the men who not only served in lands far from home, but died there. France is not the only nation with Americans in the ground.

“The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe,” Kennedy said in his [Inaugural Address](#). A grateful nation remembers and honors their courage and their sacrifice. But is it really a cause for pride that our nation has sent so many of its youth to fight and die in far-off lands, often for unclear purposes in wars that had little or nothing to do with defending the United States, or our “vital national interests,” or “our way of life”?

“Americans may be ‘imperialists’ in the eyes of many,” Kagan wrote, “but if so, they are reluctant, conscience-ridden, distracted, halfhearted imperialists.” Or so we believe, anyway. Our leaders always speak of going to war “if war is forced upon us.” Our nation “never goes to war because we want to,” Senator John Kerry [said](#) in accepting the Democratic Party’s nomination for President in 2004. “We only go to war because we have to.”

Yet Kerry had less than two years earlier voted with the vast majority of his Senate colleagues to authorize what was clearly a war of choice. In what way did we “have to” go to war with Iraq? Even if Saddam Hussein had been in possession of “weapons of mass destruction,” the primary justification given for the war, he could not have used them against the United States or our allies without bringing about his own destruction and his nation’s devastation.

In August of 2004, Kerry, a decorated Vietnam veteran, said that even if he had known no weapons of



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mass destruction would be found after (by then) nearly a year and a half of U.S. occupation, [he would still have voted](#) to give the president the authority to wage war on Iraq. "I believe it is the right authority for a president to have, but I would have used that authority effectively," Kerry said.

That may be what Kerry believed, and may yet believe, about the authority a president should have, but it is not what the Framers believed, nor what the Constitution requires. The power vested in Congress to declare is not the mere privilege of announcing to the world what the president has decided. That's a job for a press secretary, not a Congress. The Constitutional Convention left to the commander in the authority, inherent in the office, to repel a sudden attack, not to start a war. It left to the Congress the awesome responsibility of deciding whether to commit the nation to an all-out war, a responsibility Congress pretends to fulfill by passing weasel-worded resolutions "authorizing" the president to decide.

During a Senate hearing in 2005, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), an early and enthusiastic supporter of the war with Iraq, [confronted](#) Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld over the growing disenchantment of the American public with the ongoing carnage, more than two years after President Bush had declared the end of combat operations.

"And I'm here to tell you, sir, in the most patriotic state I can imagine, people are beginning to question," said Graham. "And I don't think it's a blip on the radar screen. I think we have a chronic problem on our hands."

Many of the bodies buried in those cemeteries in France are the remains of young men who fought in the First World War, the war to "make the world safe for democracy." Maybe we could make the world a little safer for those who risk their lives to defend us if we begin to question the reasons for going to war before they are sent halfway around the world to fight people who have neither threatened nor attacked us. Maybe we should question the rationale for the next war, before our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are two years into another "chronic problem," otherwise known as chaos. Maybe it would be nice if those who represent our states in the U.S. House and Senate did the same.

We could start our questioning when the temptation is to cheer on the next war in another patriotic frenzy, believing we are "supporting the troops" by waving the flag or singing "God Bless America" in the seventh-inning stretch. We might think instead of our countrymen who will come home with sightless eyes or missing limbs or other wounds to mind and body from which many will never recover. We need to ask ourselves about those who won't come back alive and remember all those graves that "surround the globe." We should ask ourselves about the cemeteries and the rush to fill them.



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