

# THE WEEKLY LEAF

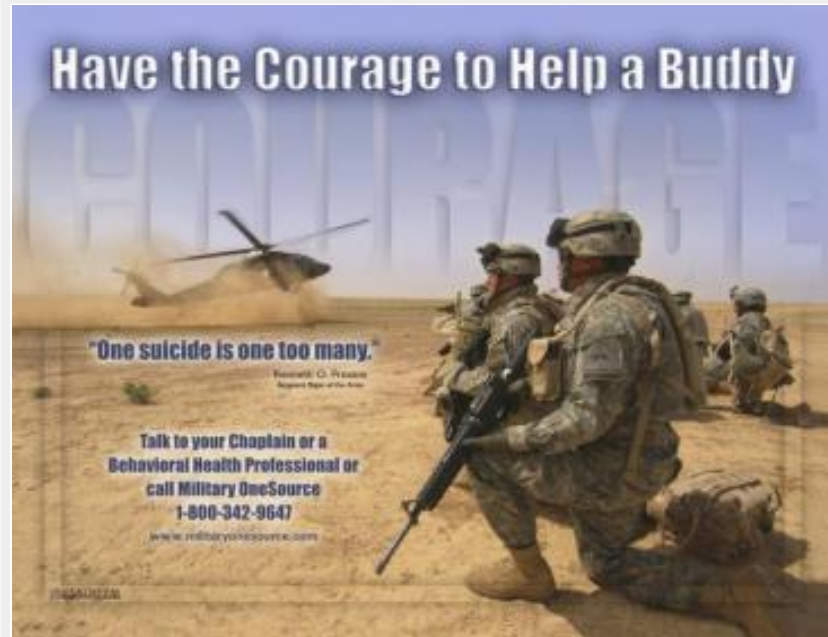
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JANUARY 8, 2015

## Has suicide become a permanent feature of U.S. military service?

 November 5, 2014 by [stevenyoder](#)  [Leave a Comment](#)



*United States Army Suicide Prevention Poster Sept 18, 2011  
Courtesy Wikimedia Commons*

### FEATURED VIDEO

[Vernā Myers – How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them](#)

When Susan Selke went before a House committee this summer to talk about her son, listeners were riveted to their seats. Clay Hunt was the picture of a soldier. Enlisting in the Marines in 2005, he went to serve in Iraq's Anbar Province. In January 2007, he was shot through the wrist by a sniper. After coming back home to heal, he started having symptoms of post-traumatic stress—he'd lost several friends in battle. But a little more than a year later, he was redeployed to southern Afghanistan for another six months, earning numerous awards.

Once back home, he got little attention from Veterans Administration psychiatrists, who prescribed drugs but did little else, Selke testified. In March 2011, at age 28, he shot himself.

Buried in the back of a [study](#) released last month by the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center is a startling set of statistics. As of 2012, suicide began outpacing combat in the Armed Forces as a cause of death—that year suicides comprised 28 percent of all military deaths and combat just 19. In 2013, the proportion got even more lopsided—there were almost triple the number of suicides as combat deaths.

And that's not just because deaths in battle have dropped as U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has ended—the suicide rate among active-duty soldiers tripled from 2004 to 2012. Among active-duty service members, three soldiers commit suicide every four days, and more than 2 a day attempt it. The suicide rate among active-duty soldiers is twice the rate for civilians.

Those figures are just the tip of the iceberg—soldiers are at even more risk of killing themselves once they're back home. Fully 22 veterans a day killed themselves from 2009 to 2011, according to data released in January by the department of Veterans Affairs. In all, from 1999 to 2010 more than 27,000 veterans took their own lives, quadruple the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan combined—and that figure represents only the 21 states who reported data. Veterans accounted for

## Anastasia Taylor-Lind: Fighters and mourners of the Ukrainian revolution

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distribute the strain of combat—or reducing overseas military commitments.

U.S. leaders aren't likely to change foreign policy decisions to lower the chances that soldiers will hurt themselves. Failing that, some are taking steps to give veterans like Hunt a better chance once they've served. A bipartisan group of House members has introduced an eponymous bill—the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act. It proposes requiring more careful review of those who are discharged from the military with PTSD diagnoses, recruitment of more psychiatrists into the VA, and an independent third-party's annual review of the mental health practices and programs at the VA and Department of Defense.

And the military itself appears to be changing its culture to better support active-duty troops through prevention programs. For example, the risk of suicide is now discussed openly in Marine Corps boot camp, and leaders have been trained on supporting, instead of punishing, Marines who come forward to seek help, [according to](#) Bonnie Carroll, who co-chaired a Pentagon suicide prevention task force.

Efforts like that may be starting to pay off—in 2013, suicides among active-duty troops actually dropped across the four services for the first time in more than 10 years. Now the challenge is the National Guard and Reserves—their numbers went the opposite direction, climbing 9 percent last year.

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**Commentary: International community must address Myanmar's mistreatment of Rohingya minority at East Asian summit**



October 31, 2014

As Myanmar, a country with an incipient democracy and alarming human rights record, prepares to host a prestigious regional issues summit in coming weeks, the Southeast Asian nation's galling treatment of its ethnic minority populations is receiving renewed attention. It's an inopportune



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time for the country’s president, Thein Sein, for these issues to be resurfacing in [...]

### Commentary: Bandwagon outrage over Brunei’s strict Islamic criminal code all but gone



October 18, 2014

When Brunei became the first Southeast Asian country to nationally adopt a strict Islamic penal code known as Sharia earlier this year, the world was outraged. News and social media told us so in such headlines as “Brunei adopts sharia law amid international outcry” and “Ellen DeGeneres backs boycott of Brunei-owned hotels over ‘stone the [...]”

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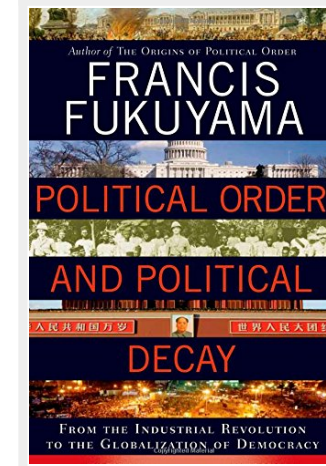


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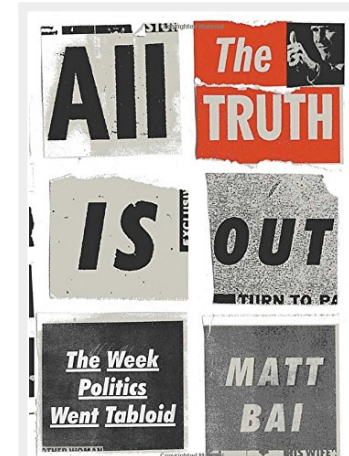
### Book recommendation: Political Order and Political Decay

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