

ENDLESS PERMISSION FOR WAR

THE BEST AUTHORIZATIONS THE MILITARY —INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX CAN BUY

In both 2001 and 2002, via large majorities, the Congress passed authorizations for war. While not declarations of war, these mandates, each titled an **Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF)** provided the legal framework in 2001 for attacks against al-Qaeda and in 2002 for the invasion of Iraq. Since 2001, the first **AUMF** has far exceeded its original purpose and has been used to justify military strikes and operations in close to twenty countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, often against nations, organizations, and individuals who had nothing to do with 9/11. It was even cited by President Obama, and then President Trump, as the authority to extra-constitutionally execute an American citizen and his teenage children, without trial, by drones and commandos. President Trump, as the 2001 is still operative, can seemingly do what he pleases with the military overseas. With regards to the 2002 **AUMF**, I think most Americans would find it a shock to know it is still in effect, that **the congressional blessing given to the Bush Administration to launch the Iraq War, based on the lies of Iraq's nonexistent weapons of mass destruction and ties to al-Qaeda, has never been revoked.**

Within the latest National Defense Appropriations Act, passed 12/20/19, were amendments, that called for the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs to be repealed- These amendments were stripped out by Republican Senators that reject any curb on the presidents ability to go to war.

The arguments offered against repeal by politicians and pundits in the service of the war machine refer to the worldwide presence of terror groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS); appeal to the sunk cost of US lives and treasure in the post-9/11 wars; or point to the requirement for the Pentagon's leadership abroad, somehow claiming that US military, and CIA, presence and activity over the last two decades has brought about stability and peace. It doesn't take very much to belie such excuses and reasons, simply having paid attention to the news of endless war for the last couple of decades or by speaking to a war veteran will guide most people to an understanding that these wars have not just been failures, but never-ending catastrophes of counter-production and suffering, proving with clear certainty both the old adages of war as hell and as a breeding ground for unintended consequences.

What Have the AUMFs Accomplished?

Based on FBI and journalist investigations, al Qaeda's strength was between 200 and 400 members worldwide in September of 2001. Al Qaeda now has affiliates in every corner of the world, their forces measure in the tens of thousands of fighters, and they control territory in Yemen, Syria and Africa. Per Brett McGurk, the former US envoy for combating al Qaeda and ISIS, Idlib Province in Syria is the largest single location of al Qaeda fighters ever assembled in the world. In Afghanistan, the Taliban are stronger than at any point since 2001, and, with regards to international terrorism, where there was one international terror group in Afghanistan in 2001, now the Pentagon reports twenty groups, the largest gathering of such groups in the world.

It is important to remember ISIS is the former al Qaeda in Iraq, an organization that came into being due to the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States. While apologists for the United States' wars and militarized foreign policy will argue this was an unforeseeable and regrettable accident, it seems beyond dispute, as understood through leaked US intelligence documents, comments by American and foreign officials, and multiple journalist and academic reports, that ISIS' success in Syria and Iraq in the first half of this decade was due to the direct and indirect military, logistic and financial support to ISIS by the US and its allies. This same support occurred for al Qaeda and their associated forces in Syria. At times the US found itself providing air cover for al Qaeda forces in Syria and even air strikes in support of ISIS. Such use of US warplanes resulted in accusations that the US was serving as al Qaeda and ISIS' Air Force in Syria. In response US active duty soldiers protested via social media, angered at being on the same side as the people they saw as responsible for 9/11.



While much of the counterproductive results of the AUMFs are correctly described as blowback, the outcome of incompetent and nefariousness US meddling overseas, whether it be through Reagan-era support for Islamic militants in Afghanistan or Obama's use of "smart power" in Libya, I certainly do not want to take away from the agency of those people who have spent decades fighting against the US Empire and its allies. The 9/11 hijackers, the murderers who give reason for these AUMFs, offered the following three motives for their attack:

- the US sanctions and bombings of Iraq through the 1990s,
- the US support for Israel against the Palestinians,
- the stationing of the US military in Saudi Arabia.

The 9/11 hijackers did not murder thousands of Americans because they hated our freedoms, but because they saw the US as engaging in an ongoing war against Muslim people and lands. Not forgetting the terrible and criminal nature of 9/11, I don't think it extreme to say the hijackers' grievances were legitimate, regardless of whether you agree with them.

Rather than executing a response to that act of terror which would directly pursue the perpetrators while ameliorating the conditions that gave rise to the attacks, the US chose a path that inflamed anti-US sentiments and assisted terrorist recruiting by opening wars against Muslims across the world, including in the US. The result should not be surprising: US military, intelligence agencies, journalists and other international organizations continually report the reasons people join such groups is not out of ideology or religious devotion, but out of resistance to invasion and occupation, and in response to the death of family, friends and neighbors by foreign and corrupt government forces. Anywhere from 70-90% of the people who are fighting our soldiers in Africa, Asia and across the Greater Middle East are doing so simply because our soldiers are occupying them or are backing predatory and kleptocratic local government forces.

Often, when I ask those in the US who possess the loudest desire for overseas intervention, occupation and war what they would do if their own home towns and cities were occupied by a foreign army I usually receive a quiet non-reply or an answer so intellectually and morally dissonant that I have to catch my breath. Yet, it is such silence and dissonance that allows for these wars to continue and disallows any consideration that without the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs we may not today have a worldwide network of al Qaeda fighters and, most certainly, we would not have ISIS. The AUMFs, and the wars they have enabled, have worsened terrorism, not defeated it.

What Have the AUMFs Cost?

More than 7,000 US service members have been killed and more than 50,000 wounded in the wars since 9/11. Of the 2.5 million troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan it is estimated as many as 20% are afflicted with PTSD, while 20% more may have traumatic brain injury. Based on US Veterans Administration (VA) data, Afghan and Iraq veterans have rates of suicide 4-10 times higher than their civilian peers, adjusted for age and sex. This translates to almost two Afghan and Iraq veterans dying by suicide each day. Do the math and it is clear more Afghan and Iraq veterans are being lost to suicide than to combat. The cost to the people overseas to whom we have brought these wars is hard to realize. Between one and four million people have been killed, directly and indirectly, while tens of millions have been wounded or psychologically traumatized, and tens of millions more made homeless – the cause

of our planet's worst refugee crisis since World War Two.

Financially, the cost of these wars is immense: more than \$6 trillion dollars. The cost of these wars is just one element of the \$1.2 trillion the US government spends annually on wars and war making. Half of each dollar paid in federal income tax goes towards some form or consequence of war. While the results of such spending are not hard to foresee or understand: a cyclical and dependent relationship between the Pentagon, weapons industry and Congress, the creation of a whole new class of worker and wealth distribution is not so understood or noticed, but exists and is especially malignant.

Where the manufacturing, oil, financial and tech centers of the US were once the most affluent regions of the country, for more than a decade now Washington, DC's counties have composed the wealthiest section of the United States. In 2016, 4 of the wealthiest 6 counties in the US were Washington, DC suburbs. As discretionary federal spending, aside from that going to defense, intelligence and homeland security agencies, has remained flat or fallen in the last two decades, in relation to inflation and GDP, that household wealth amassed in and around Washington, DC has come primarily from year after year of trillion dollar aggregate spending in support of war making (with the exception of President Obama's 2009 bank bailout). The sustainment of this war wealth class in and around Washington, DC, seems set for permanence as predicted by future congressional spending priorities, while non-war making classes of Americans, such as scientists, educators and environmentalists, will continue to see reduced support from the federal government.

This is a ghastly redistribution of wealth, perhaps unlike any known in modern human history, certainly not in American history. As taxpayers send trillions to Washington, DC, that money flows to the men and women that remotely oversee, manage and staff the wars that kill and destroy millions of lives overseas and at home. Hundreds of thousands of federal employees and civilian contractors servicing the wars take home six figure annual salaries allowing them second homes, luxury cars and plastic surgery, while veterans put guns in their mouths, refugees die in capsized boats and as many as four million nameless souls scream silently in death.

In 2004 Osama bin Laden said:

"All that we have to do is to send two mujahidin to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al-Qaida, in order to make the generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses without their achieving for it anything of note other than some benefits for their private companies."

It is not hard to imagine bin Laden smiling at his accomplishments from his oceanic grave.

These AUMFs and the wars have provided tens of thousands of recruits to international terror groups; mass profits to the weapons industry and those that service it; promotions to generals and admirals, with corporate board seats upon retirement; and a perpetual and endless supply of bloody shirts for politicians to wave via an unquestioning and obsequious corporate media to stoke compliant anger and malleable fear. What is hard to imagine, impossible even, is anyone else who has benefited from these wars.

Brutality, Stupidity, Futility

The wars since 9/11 have been brutal, stupid and futile. The majority of Americans, including Afghan and Iraq war veterans, believe the wars to have not been worth fighting. Cravenly, with some notable exceptions by progressives and libertarians, there has not been a concerted effort within Congress to put an end to these wars, gain some control over the American war machine and cripple its ability to deliver mass suffering and death.

Thanks to Matthew Hoh

a member of the advisory boards of exposefacts.org, veteransforpeace.org and worldbeyondwar.org. In 2009 he resigned his position with the State Department in Afghanistan in protest of the escalation of the Afghan War by the Obama Administration. He previously had been in Iraq with a State Department team and with the U.S. Marines.
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