



FALL, 2015

**Support our troops,
bring them home now,
and take care of them
when they get here.**

MFSO STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT

October was an especially discouraging month for military families and our troops. Early in the month we learned that the Taliban had taken control of the Afghan city of Kunduz. Most of us feared an increase in US military action, but no one expected what was to happen next. The tragic bombing of the well-publicized location of the Doctors Without Borders hospital was devastating news. MFSO went right to work convening a steering committee so we could come out with an official response from our national organization. See the MFSO statement after this article.

After months of speculation and Pentagon “leaks”, we had to bear more bad news. Our troops would not be leaving Afghanistan by the end of President Obama’s term as he had promised. And so, after almost two years of constant lobbying, demonstrating, and two MFSO meetings with White House staff, our hopes were dashed with one swift announcement from the White House.

Being told our troop levels could be cut in half by 2017 was small comfort. President Obama is handling the decision to finally get our troops out of Afghanistan just like President Bush had handled it- “kick the can down the road” for what the U.S. must inevitably do - get out of Afghanistan completely. It’s “slippery slope” time, as we all know first-hand. Does anyone really think that we could accomplish anything in Afghanistan with half the troops in one more year if we haven’t been able to do that with thousands more in over 14 years?

A raid by Iraqi and US forces to free ISIS prisoners, (authorized by Secretary of Defense Secretary Ashton Carter), resulted in the death of Master Sgt. Joshua Wheeler who had been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan 11 times!!! We mourn the loss of another life of our troops. The public heard it was a “successful mission”; we heard “**mission creep**”. Why were half of the troops in the raid US

troops, if we were only advising the Iraqis? This was “boots on the ground” combat.

And now, the same is happening in Syria. As easy as it would be to give up after a full month of major disappointments, military families can’t afford to do that. ***Instead, we must double down on our efforts and will not let these setbacks get us down.*** We cannot let our legislators or the Obama administration rest. In the next few months our representatives in Congress will be on break. If you hear comments like, “We can’t just get out right away.” point out that, yes, we don’t know what will happen if we leave, but after 14 years with nothing good to show for it, we know what will happen if we stay - more needless death and destruction. Call your representative and tell them to bring all of our troops from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria now! Stop the bombing! We can’t begin to take care of all our returning troops now, so don’t create any more wounded troops by Pat Alviso, MFSO Chairperson

Senate and House Vacation Schedules

Nov.5-16: House recess

Nov. 20-30. Senate and House recesses

Dec.19-end of the year: Senate and House recesses. Members of Congress have time for visits every month. Take advantage of these times to meet in person or at town hall events. Call (202)224-3121

MFSO Statement about Hospital Bombing

Military Families Speak Out condemns the tragic bombing by the United States of the Doctors without Borders (Mèdecins Sans Frontières) hospital in Afghanistan where medical staff and Afghan civilians were killed and injured. We call for an investigation by the International Humanitarian Fact Finding Commission. We call on the U.S. government to rebuild this hospital so urgently needed by the people of Afghanistan.

MFSO repeats our call for the U.S. government to end all bombing in Afghanistan, bring all our troops home and take care of them when they return.

SFC Tyler Milam Westbrook

MFSO members were extremely saddened to learn that Marcia Westbrook's youngest son, Tyler, died by suicide on August 28. Tyler Milam Westbrook, a member of the Special Forces in the Army, was stationed at Ft. Carson, CO. Although we are always aware of the possibility of this happening to each one of us, this news has been devastating to all of us in Military Families Speak Out.

Marcia has been working steadily on the MFSO Steering Committee and has had three sons in the military since 9-11. Contributions can be made to the SFC Tyler Westbrook Scholarship Fund for Tyler's 3 year-old son, Milam. c/o Will Westbrook. 814 Victoria Ave. Williamstown, WV 26187



Tyler Westbrook's memorial cross

The WV is for West Virginia University. The rank is Sgt. 1st class. The heart is to show he was loved by his family. His mother is MFSO Steering Committee member, Marcia Westbrook. The upside down US flag is to show he was in distress. The flag's

stars are hidden on the side just as the symptoms are hidden by those with PTSD. The insignia is for Tyler's unit the 2nd Battalion 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) from Fort Carson, Colorado. The center part of this insignia is an eagle.

I represent Tyler as this eagle on the back side of the cross within a red teardrop shape of blood labeled PTSD to illustrate that he paid the ultimate price of having PTSD. No one, especially one in active duty service in our military, should suffer ever from PTSD's most dire consequence of suicide.

This cross was presented by the Long Beach/Orange County, CA MFSO chapter to Veterans for Peace's Arlington West Memorial on Nov.1, 2015 at the Huntington Beach Pier in Huntington Beach, CA.

by Lorna Farnum, artist/writer and a long time MFSO member. Photo by Skip Farnum

What do you think of this?

Within 12 hours of our meeting at the White House, we were informed that Tyler Milam Westbrook died by suicide. When informed the WH reps from the Office of Public Engagement of his death, they asked for the address of Tyler's family so they could send a letter of condolence. Two days before the funeral, the OPE called to inform us that the Department of Defense ***does not allow letters of condolence if the service member died by suicide State-side***. If they died by suicide while deployed, a letter can be sent. Once again, the DOD continues to stigmatize our service members who need mental health support. MFSO WILL DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO FIGHT TO CHANGE THIS HORRENDOUS POLICY!

MFSO members from around the country interviewed by major media

After President Obama announced that troops would remain in Afghanistan past 2016 the media contacted MFSO. Our voices are being heard!

Here is an excerpt from Reuters' article which included an interview of MFSO member Larry Severson.

"Military families on edge as U.S. delays Afghanistan troop withdrawal

by Joseph Ax, Reuters. October 15

"I do not send you into harm's way lightly," he (President Obama) said. That was little comfort to Larry Severson of Richmond, Virginia, whose four sons all served in the military, including two who remain on active duty with the Army.

"It's never-ending," said Severson, a member of Military Families Speak Out, which opposes both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. "I feel very betrayed."

Severson expressed concern that the next president would find it easier to maintain, or even expand, the U.S. presence in Afghanistan as long as troops remain on the ground. His youngest son, Bryce, a staff sergeant, has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder following three deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I'm just disgusted that he's keeping troops there," Severson said....." excerpted from Reuters



Delegation for the White House meeting

Front, left to right: Michael McPhearson (VFP and MFSO), Paula Rogovin, Mary Hladky, Pat Alviso, Nancy Lessin, and Joyce Lucey (MFSO), Susan Schnall (VFP),
Back: Matt Howard and Brock McIntosh (IVAW), Jan Barry (VFP), Kevin Lucey (MFSO)

Report from the White House meeting - August 27, 2015

A delegation of representatives from MFSO, Veterans For Peace, and Iraq Veterans Against the War met in the Roosevelt Room next to the Oval Office. It was chaired by Julie Chavez Rodriguez Director of the Office of Public Engagement. Other White House representatives included a member of the National Security Council (NSC) and several members of the Joining Forces set up by the Obama administration.

Our delegation presented these recommendations for foreign policy:

1. Immediate cessation of all U.S. air strikes in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in neighboring nations.
2. Withdrawal of all troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.
3. No further involvement in military action in Iraq and Afghanistan.
4. Increase diplomatic efforts to work with regional and international stakeholders to reduce hostilities in Iraq and Afghanistan. Make diplomacy, by the government and civic organizations, the major tools to address these conflicts.
5. Massively increase humanitarian efforts for the millions of refugees and internally displaced people inside and fleeing from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

We requested a meeting with the NSC and are following up by working on a brief for that.

We presented a number of recommendations for improvements in Veteran care. Our organizations

have been provided a contact with the Veterans Administration who will follow-up with our recommendations about Veteran care.

We represent three activist organizations. We are under no illusions about the White House meeting. It will take lots of demonstrations, vigils, petitions and meetings with elected officials to bring about changes in policy.

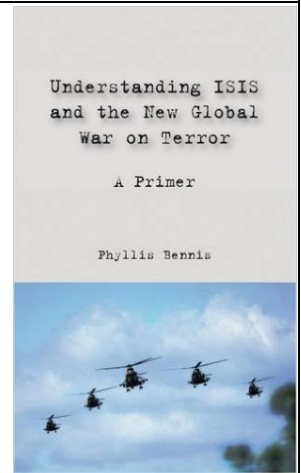
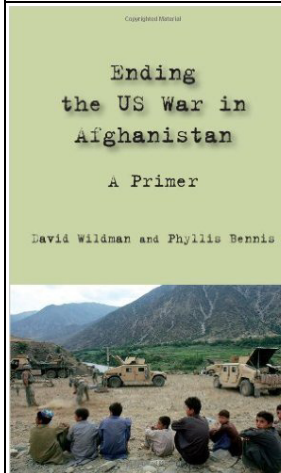
By Paula Rogovin, MFSO Steering Committee, MFSO Bergen County NJ.

Debriefing

After the White House meeting we met with Phyllis Bennis, a foreign policy expert, author and Fellow for the Institute of Policy Studies, where we had a good debriefing and listened to her suggestions for follow up.



Michael McPhearson and Matt Howard at the debriefing with Phyllis Bennis at the Institute For Policy Studies after the White House meeting



Two important books to read and share.

Weekly Demonstration

Huntington Beach Pier, Orange County, CA
Organized by "Enough" campaign, supported by MFSO and Cypress College students.



Commentary from Michael McPhearson

Director, Veterans For Peace, Member, MFSO

I'm listening to Iraq#TheRoadtoHell, a CNN documentary. It is providing motivation to work longer and harder to change U.S. foreign policy and end our wars. Why? Because the absurdity of the actions of my nation and the outcome of that absurdity. Because our President sent my brothers and sisters in arms to invade a nation that should not have been invaded. Because the U.S. turned a stable nation, though run by a thug, into HELL. Once people could walk down the street. Now according to this documentary a bomb goes off in Baghdad an average of once every 12 hours. The nation is in chaos. Fareed Zakaria just said what I/we said when I visited Iraq in December 2003. Bremer's order, debaathification/criminalization of all Baath Party members and dismantling of the Iraqi army are most responsible for the current state in Iraq including ISIL. Of course we had no idea that ISIL was going to happen, but it did not take a genius to know those two actions were foolish and would lead to alienated and disenfranchised Sunnis. Our leaders continue to show there is no lack of stupidity, arrogance and bloodlust in Washington and greed among the war profiteers.

Book Release - April, 2016

"*Tomas Young's War* is a heart-warming and heart-breaking story of a courageous soldier and his family. Few books reveal the graphic details of how families deal with the catastrophic war injuries of their loved ones-Mark Wilkerson's *Tomas Young's War* does just that in a sympathetic and at times humorous way."

Statement by Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army Reserve (Ret)

Tomas' mother, Cathy Smith, member of MFSO. Please contact the Jim Plank, publicity director from Haymarket books to arrange book signings. jim@haymarket books.org. 773-583-7884



Mission Statement

The mission of Military Families Speak Out is to advocate for all U.S. troops to leave Iraq and Afghanistan now and to speak out against unjust military interventions. MFSO supports policies that utilize diplomacy over military force. We support the troops and work hard to ensure that their needs are met while deployed and when they return home.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Do outreach to bring in new members, especially those whose loved ones are active duty. Form a new chapter, no matter how small or large. Let us know about your chapter: location, contact person e-mail and phone, activities.
- Work on on-going MFSO efforts – calls or meetings with members of Congress, getting signatures on petitions, forums or speak-outs, film-showings, working as part of a coalition in your area, etc. The Steering Committee can provide support for you.
- Participate in a local vigil against U.S. participation in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. Or, start your own weekly or monthly vigil. Find a busy corner, or a spot with some symbolism (a congressional office, a Federal building, any high traffic area). Develop a list of contacts at your local press so you can spread the word about your vigil.

If you have a loved one serving in the military, please join MFSO. Every one of you has a story to tell and a role to play in ending these wars and the policies that continue to threaten the lives of our families and millions of innocent civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Syria.

Write to: Contact Pat Alviso at mfso@mfso.org.

Please Donate to MFSO.

If you believe in our efforts, we need your help. Please support us by donating today.

Donate by check to: Military Families Speak Out. Send to: 1716 Clark Ave PMB 122, Long Beach, CA 90815 Online donations can be made by going to: www.militaryfamiliespeakout.com Everyone who contributes will receive a lovely thank you card.