Military Families Speak Out
July 2021
Troops Home Now!

Editorials from MFSO members:
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“After 20 years... I will not send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan with no reasonable expectation of achieving a different outcome.” ... “How many more- how many thousands more of American’s daughters and sons are you willing to risk? How long would you have them stay?” Already we have members of our military whose parents fought in Afghanistan 20 years ago. Would you send their children and their grandchildren as well? Would you send you own son or daughter?” “We did not go into Afghanistan to nation-build. And it’s the right and the responsibility of the Afghan people alone to decide their future and how they want to run their country”... “Just one more year of fighting in Afghanistan is not a solution”... “moving the withdrawal timeline “would be a recipe for being there indefinitely.” – President Joe Biden

Do these words sound familiar? They are almost the same words and persuasive arguments MFSO members have been saying for years to voice our opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Time after time, place after place, and year after year, military families across the country courageously spoke out and made these same discerning and salient points. This time, however, the words are coming from the president of the United States and that’s a stark change from statements made by earlier presidents.

If only these words had come from any of the earlier presidents- Bush, Obama and Trump! Countless lives and an incalculable amount of suffering could have been prevented. But as war-weary and devastated as we are by these wars, we are glad to hear them- finally. We can now recognize that something different is happening and that this is a major turning point that deserves recognition. The price has been too great, but it seems that we are getting close to ending this terrible chapter in US and Afghan history at last.

Although President Biden was quick to point out that the 300,000 Afghan troops are capable of defeating the 75,000 Taliban, we are not naïve about the possibility of a Taliban takeover. Whether they do or not, we will always believe that we have nothing to gain by continuing to put our troops in harm’s way by keeping them there any longer. We have been saying for years, that every day we stay, we just make more enemies. Nothing will bring any of our loved ones back that died, or ease the immeasurable amount of suffering our families have have endured, and still do. Yes, anything can happen at this point, but we should not allow ourselves to get stuck in the trap of thinking “nothing’s changed” and close our eyes to the reality of the large de-escalation and the push back that is happening at this very moment. This “push back” is coming from those who don’t care about us or our troops and want to keep them there forever and with no different mission.

With 90% of troops withdrawals already complete, (including from the iconic Bagram Air Base hub), and a publically announced exit date of Aug. 31st, we can easily track the large US exodus. Sadly, it’s apparently not a big headline to the general public who, in the past few years shrugged off that war entirely, or worse yet, would tell us that they thought that war had already ended! We never “forgot” or stopped pushing to bring them home, but we also know that even when all troops leave it will be far from over for military families. This will only be the beginning of the healing process. The war will not end for us at home, but it’s a milestone and we need to be at the forefront of conversations about what’s next.

Now is not the time to get caught up in unsupported claims that we are not really leaving Afghanistan and that nothing’s changed really, or that there’s hidden troop numbers, troops left to protect the embassy is nothing more than a cover for mercenaries to stay, that contractors or secret black ops will remain or that we’re abandoning our allies. I understand and can relate to why even some of our members are responding to the news of withdrawal with such skepticism. Clearly, we are used to being disappointed and find it hard to believe that the US is really pulling out of Afghanistan albeit only ground troops at this point. Let’s just accept this major step as an important milestone, take a moment to take credit, along with our allies, for helping change the course of these disastrous wars and internalize the fact that our mantra- that we should bring them home now- is the popular and right view and we can now visualize itWe’ve got to keep our eye on the ball while the situation
on the ground changes quickly. We need to focus and put our energy into speaking out against the big push back that is happening in full swing from many voices who are painting the withdrawals as the US “turning tail” and that leaving means losing. We also need to speak out against the foreboding and continued US airstrikes* and prepare for the huge humanitarian and refugee crisis that is sure to follow. We must also give our full attention to getting our loved ones out of Iraq and Syria and to making sure wars of aggression that lead to “forever wars” like Afghanistan never happens again.

**WHAT CAN MFSO MEMBERS DO?**

MFSO members can play a critical role in counteracting this narrative by making sure our unique voice is heard and amplified. The opportunity to mark the final withdrawal of US troops out of Afghanistan has been announced for Aug. 31, and we will all have an opportunity to reach out to the media at a time when people will want to hear what military families and veterans have to say about the true cost of war. We are the ones the media will want to interview because we have been directly impacted by war, even if you don’t have a loved one who served in Afghanistan. We are the voice of authority and people do listen to us. Please help by planning your own event on this day to mark the occasion any way you deem appropriate. Once President Biden makes his announcement (Aug. 31st?) we are asking you to join other military families and veterans and to spring into action by having an event in your neighborhood. So far we have five families that will be hosting a Welcome Back event, which can take place outdoors or indoors. Your board has prepared up-to-date talking points, a flyer you can personalize, a press release, assistance getting the media to your event, and tech support from our intern Sebastian.

We can’t afford to let this moment pass us by. While many cast doubts about the reality of us actually leaving Afghanistan, we can show that we are not going to be caught unawares, that our stories are relevant and that we are moving forward to ensure this exit is completed and especially that wars like these never happen again. Yes, the wars aren’t over yet, but we are compelled to plan now because we know we are the best ones to tell the whole story in a way no one else can. Please, MFSO members- let’s own this moment and step up- this golden opportunity is right before us.

To hold an event in your area please contact Pat Alviso, Rossana Cambron (562-833-8035 or email at mfsoc@earthlink.net) West Coast, Diane Picotte- -Haberdank (mstwobyfour@yahoo.com) Midwest, Don Kimball (don.kimball@yahoo.com) East Coast. Our intern, Sebastian will also help with any technology requests

*The President has been using the phrase "over-the-horizon capacity that we can be value added.” He is referring to a plan, that appears might cost $10 billion, to fly drones and manned attack aircraft from bases as far away as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait to “assist the current Afghan central government in defending itself against the Taliban”.

**In the News:**

**Biden administration formally launches effort to return deported veterans to U.S.** Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement. “We are committed to bringing back military service members, veterans, and their immediate family members who were unjustly removed and ensuring they receive the benefits to which they may be entitled.” Good news but we still need to keep the pressure on to return all deported veterans and family members. [Link](#)

**Most European troops exit Afghanistan quietly after 20 years** The majority of European troops have now left with little ceremony — a stark contrast to the dramatic and public show of force and unity when NATO allies lined up to back the U.S. invasion to rid the country of al-Qaida after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. [Link](#)

**U.S. military vacates main air base in Afghanistan but slows withdrawal plan** U.S. officials discussed keeping Bagram open longer, as the Taliban continues an offensive, but the Biden administration decided to go ahead with its withdrawal plan. Nightmares of ramp ceremonies and torture remain at the base. [Link](#)

**Pentagon chiefs insist flat defense budget is enough** Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told the House Armed Services Committee the requested 2022 Military budget of 1.6% increase and 16% non-defense budget is “just right”. Unfunded requirements, trade-offs for which weapon system to buy and considering the “threat” of China as the reason we need to increase the military budget are debated on Capitol Hill- details here [Link](#)
Cotton, Pentagon chief tangle over diversity training in military  Austin has made tackling extremism a priority after a number of individuals arrested in connection with the Jan. 6 Capitol attack were found to have military backgrounds.  Link

Turkey is in discussions to operate and secure Afghanistan's International Airport- Kabul airport is Afghanistan's only gateway to the world and vital for diplomatic missions in the country to continue. Taliban spokesperson says Turkey’s presence as NATO member would be perceived the same as the US remaining there. Link

The cost of the Afghanistan war, in lives and dollars  A good article with great data and talking points from Linda Bilmes of Harvard University's Kennedy School and from the Brown University’s Costs of War Project on Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Link

News from the MFSO Board:

- One piece of our campaign to keep the pressure on so that we can ensure that all of our troops leave Afghanistan, MFSO approved writing a letter to President Biden thanking him for making the call to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by Aug. 31 and also pressing him stop to airstrikes and protect our allies that helped our troops.

- Welcome Back from Afghanistan Campaign- The MFSO board asks you to be part of the plan to make sure our troops are recognized as they withdraw from Afghanistan. Please host an event to mark this important milestone that recognizes the end of our presence so you can share your own stories about the true cost of war. We will help you get the media there. MFSO has organized many support materials and campaign coordinators to make your event easy. mfsoc@earthlink.net

- VFP Convention- Please join us for this year’s Veterans for Peace online convention with this year’s theme “Rising to the Moment”. Look for our ad in this year’s convention booklet. Spread the word link

- Please welcome our new part-time intern, Sebastian Munoz-McDonald from Dartmouth College. In addition to having many skills in the area of organizing, Sebastian interested in counter recruitment and gender equity. He is also an intern for On Earth Peace(link). On Earth Peace, under the leadership of MFSO board member Bill Scherer, has been a great ally and fiscal manager for our interns and we are grateful for their steadfast support over the years.

From Jeff’s desk
Leaving Afghanistan is great news which I have looked forward to for a long time. I’m sad about the current state of the country, but as my stepdad was known for saying, we need to move forward and not look back sometimes. Sadly, I think that Afghanistan with its corrupt government will probably fail and the Taliban will re-impose Islamic fundamentalist rule, including its oppressive treatment of women. The last 20 years have been painful for military families, Afghan civilians and American foreign policy, but at least we been shown some useful lessons about nation building. I just hope we can learn from them. Now that we are a more experienced nation, I hope we will STOP saying we are the best and stop believing we need to make all nations like ourselves. I don’t believe that we can or should fix the world. Welcome Back, US Troops- Let’s get all the rest of your brothers and sisters home from Iraq and Syria next.

Note: The opinions above and in future editorials do not reflect any official stance approved by the MFSO board, which meets monthly and posts official positions decided by the board on our website. Your responses and opinions are welcome. If you would like to send your own editorial on any MFSO related issue, please send to mfsoc@earthlink.net

Contributions & editing by: Jeff Merrick & Pat Alviso

4,586 American Troops killed in Iraq; 2,452 American Troops killed in Afghanistan