

# **CPC Peace and Security Task Force and House Liberty Caucus Ad-Hoc Hearing on AUMF Testimony**

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My name is Michael McPhearson. I am the Executive Director of Veterans For Peace. I served in the U.S. Army as a field artillery captain in the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division. I am here today to give you my perspective on the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force.

The AUMF must be repealed immediately. It would be the best policy for global security and our democracy.

I will never forget September 11, 2001. I was working in New York City. Watching our office TV, I saw the first tower fall. I ran outside and heard people in the street screaming in horror as the second tower fell. I witnessed the fear people felt. But I must tell you that my greatest concern at that moment was not my own safety. I was most concerned with the heart and soul of my country. As part of the 1991 invasion of Iraq, I had seen firsthand and participated in the destruction and violence our military can unleash. I knew that my nation's response had the potential to be just as horrible and more damaging to the world than anything a group of terrorists could ever do. I also knew that there would be loud calls for revenge. I got down on my knees and prayed that the nation's response would be measured and contemplative rather than vengeful and selfish.

The cost of war to people should compel us to rethink U.S. foreign policy and specifically these current wars. We claim to do this to save lives and protect people, but that is not what is happening. For example, the issue of suicide really stands out for me. I assume that you have all heard the number 21 or 22 veterans dying by suicide a day. That is 7,600 veterans a year and families directly impacted by war. I know a mother whose son used a shotgun to commit suicide. She was of course utterly devastated by it and it haunts her every day.

Many times, there is a profound guilt felt by those left behind after a suicide. I know this because I felt it after a soldier I talked to died. I did not really know him nor had the opportunity to spend much time talking to him, yet I asked myself, could I have done more or said something different?

Studies and real-life experiences like that of Second Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment show that suicide can become a kind of contagion. At least 14 Marines from that unit have died by suicide.

We also know that today the number of veterans with multiple tours of combat duty is the largest in modern U.S. history with more than 90,000 fighters who deployed four

or more times. Studies show that their risk of committing suicide after they return soars because they have a much harder time than other service members adjusting to everyday life back home.

And suicide does not end in military families with service members. Perhaps you heard about Carlos Arredondo, a father who in 2004 after being informed that his 20-year-old son, Lance Corporal Alexander Scott Arredondo was killed while serving in Iraq, doused a U.S. government van with gasoline and set it on fire while sitting inside. Fortunately, the Marines who informed him of his son's death were able to pull him out of the vehicle.

Carlos and his wife Melida are two of the kindest people I know. The unintended consequences of U.S. foreign policy were not done with the Arredondo family. On December 19, 2011, Arredondo's surviving son, Brian, died by suicide after battling depression and drug addiction ever since his brother's death. Though he never saw the battlefield, the pain of war killed Brian.

Having spent real time with Gold Star families, I am blessed not to know their pain, but I have felt it. I have cried with them. Fernando del Solar is another parent I know. I met him not long after his son Marine Lance Corporal Jesus Suarez del Solar was killed in March 2003 when he stepped on a U.S. cluster bomb during the Iraq invasion. Fernando and I participated in a peace delegation to Iraq in December 2003 with military family members, U.S. veterans and other U.S. peace activists. Fernando was able to visit the site where his son died. I believe it provided some solace, but not closure.

Thousands of U.S. families are going through this pain. There are thousands of more service members and families facing mental and physical wounds.

I have also cried with Iraqis whose children were killed by U.S. forces. I can tell you the pain is the same. Families love each other. Parents love their children. Their children were not insurgents or enemies of the Iraqi government. They were innocent casualties caught in the crossfire of war. One father was simply driving home with his son from their family business. Suddenly, the rear window shattered. He looked back at his son sitting in the backseat and saw he was shot. Medical help did not arrive in time. He watched his son die.

I visited the home of a Sunni leader. One of his sons had been trying to work with U.S. forces and his community. According to another son, his brother met with U.S. forces several times. One day a misunderstanding took place and he was shot and killed. They were not sure why, but they told us they wanted justice. And if there was not justice from the U.S. they would have justice themselves.

While there, we heard stories of torture and family members not sure where their loved ones had been taken. As a result, we visited Abu Ghraib. Of course, we could

not get in, but there were dozens of people waiting outside to hear word of loved ones. They came every day. The scene both sadden and enraged me. The early part of my childhood was during the Vietnam War. Growing up in Fayetteville, NC home of the 82nd Airborne and Special Forces HQ, I was taught that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong tortured our troops. We don't do things like that. Months later it became clear the reports we received were true. I had been standing outside a facility where U.S. personnel were mistreating and torturing Iraqis.

Lastly, I want to talk about Rafaat. He was a 12 or 14-year-old boy I met in Iraq who had been struck by shrapnel during the U.S. invasion. His family welcomed us into their home. They treated us with no malice as they explained what happened. The shrapnel blinded him in his right eye and mangled one of his legs. Doctors did the best they could to save it, but unless he received a higher level of care, he probably lost his leg. It was another heartbreaking moment.

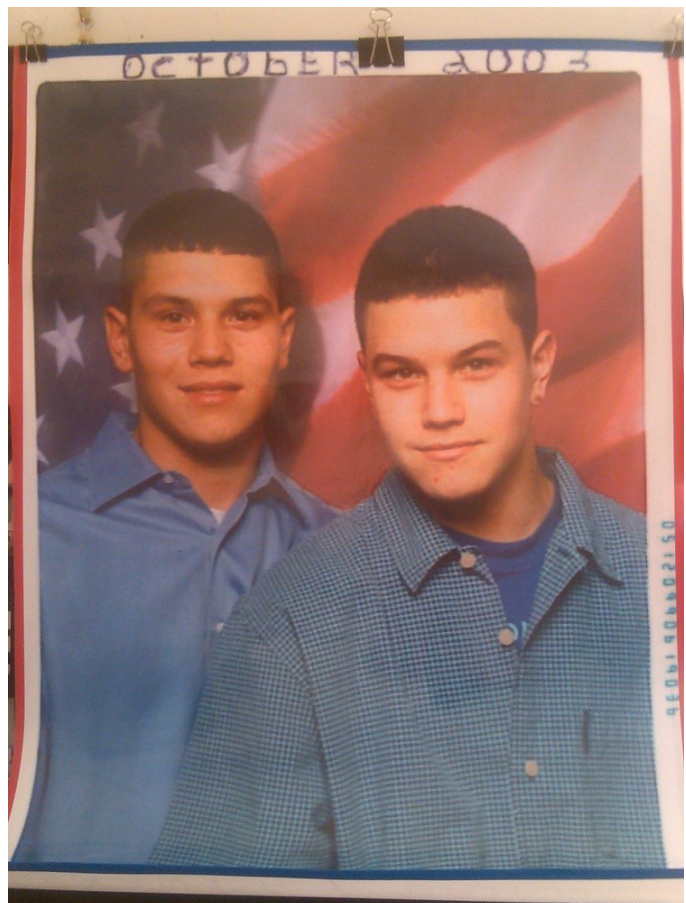
All the stories I heard and the pain I witnessed are small examples of the thousands of stories that have and are happening as a result of U.S. wars in countries around the world. I do not see how this can be contributing to U.S. security and it is clearly immoral. Everything good I have been taught as a child, as an enlisted man and officer about our country is torn to shreds by these wars.

I sit here speaking to you today because I am fighting for the soul of my country. Is it too late to address the fears I had on September 11? Have we lost our soul? Have we distorted our democracy beyond repair? I don't know. I pray not. But I do know that a solid step in the right direction is to repeal the AMUF. History will remember this Congress in a more positive light if it does.

## Carlos and Melida Arrendondo



Their sons Brian and Alex. Alex a Lance Corporal in the Marines, was killed in Iraq in 2004. Brian died by suicide after battling depression and drug addiction ever since his brother's death.





Jesus del Solar died in Iraq in March 2003.

Jesus' father Fernando del Solar traveled to Iraq in December 2003 in hopes of finding answers to his child's death. Fernando is pictured with children he met on the trip.



**Iraqis waiting outside Abu Ghraib to learn about the status of their loved ones.** While there, we heard stories of torture and family members not sure where their loved ones had been taken. As a result, we visited Abu Ghraib. Of course, we could not get in, but there were dozens of people waiting outside to hear word of loved ones. They came every day. Months later it became clear the reports we received were correct. I had been standing outside a facility where U.S. personnel were mistreating and torturing Iraqis.



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Injuries sustained from the U.S. attack .

