18 years later, America needs out of long wars

By Eric Oliver

Eighteen years ago this week, America began its war on terror. I was 11 years old.

I didn't know what the 9/11 attacks meant, who attacked us, or what it might look like to fight back.

I definitely didn't know that my entire journey to adulthood would unfold in the shadow of our war on terror --ever present, but so distant that it's become an afterthought, a footnote in our busy lives.

A lot has changed since 2001.

I grew up. That 11 year old now owns a home, has a college degree, and is engaged.

Along with the rest of us, I've weathered a financial crisis, three presidents, and many months of making ends meet.

But in the background of my very American journey to adulthood, one thing has stayed the same: America has been at war.

That America's war on terror is now our longest war means that for the first time in our history, soldiers today are fighting in a war that began before they were born.

While I saved up for my first car, worked through college, and set aside money for a down payment, America spent $5.9 trillion (trillion!) on war.

While I struggled to watch my closest enlisted friend work through PTSD and alcoholism, I knew thousands of other Americans, like me, were trying to find the right words to say.

And on the night when I woke up to a phone call with the news that my high school buddy had been murdered in Afghanistan, I felt for the first time what thousands of Americans have had to feel: the pain of losing someone far, far too soon.

When I come across a picture of us together, or the anniversary of his death comes around, I picture him, frozen in time, goofy, a kid really.

Would he also be engaged today? Would he have his own home? Kids?

These are thoughts no one should have to think.

More than 7,000 American service members have been killed since 9/11, and in 2019, the Costs of War project estimates 480,000 people have died as a result of the ongoing conflict -- that's every single person in Boise dying, twice.

Millions of lives have been damaged. Is this the best America can do?

Eighteen years later, people are speaking out.

Former generals, families, peace activists, fiscal watchdogs, and many others are recognizing that winning this war may never happen; that success may not even be able to be defined.

Veterans groups of all stripes -- including Bring Our Troops Home, here in Idaho -- are speaking out against what's come to be an endless war.

Please know that I hold those who have served in the highest regard.

Our armed forces have the courage to go where we send them, and now America needs the courage to ask if it's worth it.

There are ways out of this quagmire.

Congress can repeal "authorizations for the use of military force" that have allowed three presidents to continue to wage war without the Constitutionally-mandated approval of Congress.

Three of Idaho's four congressmen weren't even in Congress when these authorizations were passed.

Senator Risch, as the chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, is one of the most powerful influencers of foreign policy in our country, and he reports only to Idahoans. He needs to hear from us.

Eighteen years from today, I hope I can tell my children that yes, the war went on far too long, but Americans had finally had enough.

We spoke out, politicians listened, and now yours is a world without war.

Eric Oliver works in conservation and lives in Boise.

Sign our petition at www.BringOurTroopsHome.US