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## VETERANS BRING A CLEAR MESSAGE TO CONGRESS – BRING OUR TROOPS HOME

By Nicholas Trandahl  
Army veteran, journalist, and author

When 19 al-Qaeda terrorists (15 of which were from Saudi Arabia) attacked the United States of America on September 11th, 2001, and took thousands of American lives, we Americans were filled with sorrow and anger.

Days later, the U.S. Congress passed their first Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) instead of a formal declaration of war by Congress, as had always been done in the past and is required in Article 1 of the Constitution.

In the passing of the 2001 AUMF, the legislative branch handed their Constitutional duty of declaring war over to the executive branch to deploy the U.S. military against those responsible for the 9–11 attacks and any “associated forces.”

The nebulous nature of the 2001 AUMF, and the following AUMF against Iraq in 2002, gave the executive branch the authority to wage war against whomever it wishes, and for however long.

Eighteen years later, U.S. forces operating under these AUMFs are still in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and 73 other countries around the world. The United States has poured \$6 trillion of its dollars and thousands of American lives into wars in the Middle East, wars that Congress has never declared.

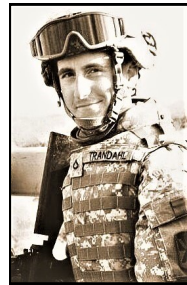
Past wars that America has fought have had a definite conclusion, an endgame—the defeat of an opposing military.

Against the Global War on Terror-

ism, there is no path to victory—there is no opposing army to defeat. There is only a pervasive ideology that spreads from individual to individual, ignoring national origin, skin color, or uniform.

I was a senior in high school when 9–11 happened and began meeting with an Army recruiter, but I delayed enlisting until much later, in early 2008.

I deployed to the Middle East in Operation Forward Presence II, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and my life would never be the same.



PFC Trandahl  
circa 2008

When I was finally discharged from the Army, I was broken and depressed. It has taken me years to climb back out of that darkness, but every day other veterans and active duty service members lose that fight against it.

The morale of the American service member has been broken, in large part due to fighting in these Middle East conflicts with no resolution or endgame—with no way to “win.”

One can’t help but to feel the echoes of the Vietnam War in the current quagmires the U.S. military is currently embroiled in.

I have a teenage daughter, born in 2005, who intends to enlist in the Army when she graduates high school. My daughter could deploy to the Middle East under these same AUMFs



Republican Wyoming state Representative, Majority Whip, and Navy veteran Tyler Lindholm, left, and Democratic Wyoming state Representative Andi Clifford

that were passed to answer for 9–11, a terrorist attack she wasn't even alive to witness.

So, when Tyler Lindholm, fellow veteran and state Representative of Wyoming House District 1, reached out to me, wondering if I wanted to join him in Washington, D.C., to bring the message of the organization Bring Our Troops Home to Congress and the national media, my answer, without hesitation, was “yes.”

Bring Our Troops Home, and its state affiliates including Wyoming Bring Our Troops Home, is a veteran-run, non-partisan, grassroots organization dedicated to ending the endless wars in the Middle East.

It was begun by Idaho veteran Dan McKnight.

The organization urges Congress to repeal the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs and believes a “sunset provision” should be mandatory on an AUMF so that wars don't drag on in perpetuity with no end goal.

Bring Our Troops Home, which receives no government or corporate money, seeks a full review of U.S. military overseas deployments, with an eye toward an “America First” policy, in lieu of our forces serving as the global police.

The mission and goals of Bring Our Troops Home are supported by President Trump, the majority of Americans, and the majority of veterans.

On November 12th, veterans and state politicians from around the nation, representing Bring Our Troops Home, descended on Washington, D.C. to bring our message to Congress and the media.

Representing Wyoming, I joined state Representative Lindholm, state Representative of House District 33 Andi Clifford and her Marine veteran husband Don, and Bethany Baldes of Riverton, a former Libertarian candidate for the state legislature and a Wyoming National Guard veteran.

The first evening, we had a private dinner on Capitol Hill so we all could meet one another, and we listened to Janice McGeachin, Lieutenant Governor of Idaho, and retired Brigadier General Donald Bolduc give impassioned speeches.

The socializing didn't end there, as several of us ended up around a table back at our hotel debating politics, forging friendships, and discussing U.S. foreign policy late into the night.



**Left to right: Trandahl, U.S. Senator John Barrasso, and Bethany Baldes.**

The next morning, as D.C. was embroiled in chaos with the impeachment hearings at the Capitol, a visit from the president of Turkey, and protests at the Supreme Court, Bring Our Troops Home convened at the National Press Club where we each gave on-camera interviews and testimonials, and I was also interviewed by a reporter from *The National Interest*.

At the Press Club, several panels of politicians and veterans spoke to the membership of Bring Our Troops Home about the effects and troubles posed by the U.S. engaging in endless nebulous war in the Middle East.

Suitably fired up and impassioned, we went to Capitol Hill to discuss the organization and the problems imposed by our current Middle East strategy with members of Congress.

I was joined by Bethany Baldes of Riverton in scheduled meetings with Wyoming Senators Mike Enzi and John Barrasso.

Unfortunately, as we waited for our scheduled appointment with Senator Enzi, we were eventually informed by his staff that he was busy and wouldn't meet with us. Instead we met with one of his staffers, who took notes of the goals of concerns of Bring Our Troops Home.

Baldes and I were a little let down that Senator Enzi couldn't meet with two of his constituents, both military veterans, that had come to D.C. for a scheduled meeting with him.

However, Senator Barrasso met with us at Capitol Hill office, and he listened attentively to our concerns and the goals of our organization. It was a good back-and-forth dialogue with the senator, though he did support U.S. efforts in the Global War on Terror. I urged Senator Barrasso to repeal the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs, and explained the negative mental health effects these endless wars and their unclear goals are having on U.S. service members and the veterans that have served like myself and Baldes.

We also expressed our support of Wyoming legislation that would allow Wyoming National Guard troops to be deployed overseas only with an Article 1 declaration of war, not with a never-ending AUMF. I'm not sure if we swayed Senator Barrasso's stance on U.S. military policy in the Middle East, but it was a good respectful conversation nonetheless.

On Thursday morning, all of us from Bring Our Troops Home flew home to our respective communities throughout the country.

We left D.C. proud and satisfied with the work we'd done, the awareness we'd raised, and the conversations we'd had. And I, for one, look forward to what's next in this cause — this effort to support our troops by bringing them back home from war, after 18 years of courageously fighting it despite the lack of a clear overall objective for victory.