

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: 20 Years of Endless War. Not One More.

The Takeaway:

- Tomorrow marks the 20th anniversary of the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) being signed into law — in many ways the beginning of the era of endless war.
- Passed through Congress in the post-9/11 rush to war, four presidents have used the 2001 AUMF as a blank check for global war ever since.
- If the failed war in Afghanistan should teach us anything, it's that endless war was never the answer. It's past time to repeal the 2001 AUMF and put in its place a new paradigm of U.S. foreign policy: one dedicated to accountability, justice, and building a positive peace.

The 2001 AUMF: 20 Years of Endless War. Not One More.

20 years ago tomorrow, George W. Bush signed the 2001 AUMF into law. In the stroke of a pen, the era of post-9/11 endless wars began. This week, we take a closer look at the notorious 2001 AUMF: what it is, how it's been twisted to justify decades of disastrous militarism, and why, *especially* following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, it's time to repeal it.

A Blank Check

In the wake of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, many were hungry for retaliation. As we explored [last week](#), rather than taking time to mourn, analyze what happened, and consider how best to use the range of foreign policy tools available to ensure the safety of the public and justice for the victims and survivors, Congress plunged headlong into the rush for maximal military action. A mere three days after the attacks, Congress passed the [2001 AUMF](#), authorizing the President to “use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks.” With few specifics, fewer constraints, and no time limits, the 2001 AUMF was, and remains, a blank check for global, endless war.

A Lonely Fight for Peace

The 2001 AUMF passed both chambers of Congress on the same day with hardly a word of debate — the final vote in the Senate: 98-0; in the House: 420-1. But against the onrush to war, one leader stood alone: Representative Barbara Lee of California made the sole dissenting

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vote, [stating](#): “I’m convinced that military action will not prevent further acts of international terrorism against the United States... Let’s pause, just for a minute, and think through the implications of our actions today so that this does not spiral out of control.” Unfortunately, these words would prove prescient as she [continues her charge](#) for investing in diplomacy and peacebuilding instead of weapons and war.

20 Years of Endless War in Afghanistan...

The 2001 AUMF was intended, at least nominally, to authorize the invasion of Afghanistan to eliminate Al Qaeda and topple the Taliban government that harbored Osama bin Laden. As the last few months have made all too clear: this war was a mistake from the start – especially considering there were [multiple alternatives](#) to endless war. Tens of thousands of Afghan civilians and thousands of U.S. service-members killed, millions displaced, a generation raised knowing nothing but a country at war — all of this for a war that, as we now know all too well, had no clear objectives, no exit strategy, and no real path to success.

... and Around the World

But while the primary focus of the 2001 AUMF was initially Afghanistan, it has, since its passage, been stretched beyond recognition and [invoked](#) to justify military actions, from all-out invasions to deadly drone strikes, in: the Philippines, Georgia, Yemen, Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia, and more. Under the Trump administration, the endless wars got even worse: from a new front in the drone wars in [Niger](#), to [weakened](#) accountability, to [skyrocketing](#) civilian casualties. But abuse of the 2001 AUMF has a long, bipartisan tradition, and President Biden, despite his rightful choice to withdraw from Afghanistan, is [no exception](#). Imperialism, interventionism, and militarism were defining features of U.S. foreign policy long before 2001. But at the heart of the modern, post-9/11 paradigm of global, endless war and U.S. unilateralism lies the 2001 AUMF.

Repeal...

The U.S. occupation of Afghanistan is over. The 2001 AUMF should end with it. If there is any lesson from the past 20 years in Afghanistan, it should be that endless war was never the answer. Heeding that lesson means repealing the blank check that enables it. Rep. Lee, continuing the courageous fight she began all those years ago, has consistently put forth [legislation](#) to do just that. But while repeal of the 2001 AUMF has [passed](#) the House before, it has never made it through the Senate. It’s time for that to change. As more and more of both the [U.S. public](#) and [members of Congress](#) grow to recognize that endless war is a losing strategy — as we reckon with the fallout of twenty years of war in Afghanistan — the time is now: we must repeal the 2001 AUMF.

...Don’t Replace

Many who support repealing the 2001 AUMF have adopted a mantra of “repeal and replace,” advocating re-authorization for war under stricter conditions and a bound timeline. While it might

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seem like an improvement over the status quo, after 20 years, we must not limit our vision to “narrowing the scope of endless wars.” Instead we must critically – and publicly – assess whether counterterrorism even works. Drone bombings, covert military operations, all-out invasions — the wanton destruction of the post-9/11 war machine has had a catastrophic toll, while utterly failing to ensure security, here or abroad. If anything, the United States’ endless wars have helped fuel support for, and the expansion of, the very groups these wars were supposed to eradicate. If there is to be a real reckoning with the last two decades of warfare, and accountability for its harms, in Afghanistan and beyond, then our goal must be unequivocal: end endless war. The U.S. government and public cannot skip a step, once again rushing to pass a law for more war as the answer. Rather than a new war authorization, we must debate whether more military force and the corollary U.S. policy of backing dictators in the name of counterterrorism (or, cough, gReAt PoWeR cOmPeTiTiOn) can produce anything other than more harm at this point.

Positive Peace

Repealing the 2001 AUMF is necessary for peace — but it alone is not enough. Ending warmaking must also be met with active peacebuilding. We need a new approach to foreign policy, one that reasserts Congressional power over war-making, eschews militarism, upholds human rights, and seeks to help local changemakers address violent conflict at its [roots](#). At the same time, we must reckon with the deadly costs of world-spanning, endless war. That means investigations into how we got here, criminal accountability for those responsible, and reparations for those impacted. 20 years on, the endless war doctrine has clearly failed. But we can still build a more peaceful, a more just, a more secure U.S. foreign policy. Repealing the 2001 AUMF is the start.

Not To Be Confused With...

While we’ve focused here on the 2001 AUMF, we must not forget the other authorization that has become another tool for endless war: the 2002 AUMF. Intended specifically to authorize the U.S. invasion of Iraq (which was built on lies), the 2002 AUMF has, like its earlier counterpart, if to a lesser degree, been [stretched](#) beyond recognition — invoked by the Obama campaign for its military operations in Iraq in 2014, and later by the Trump administration to justify actions in Syria, and even the [assassination](#) of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani. Our take: it must also be repealed.

BURIED LEDES

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It's a simple choice: arms dealers, or the Afghan people? This week, **five senators [called on President Biden to ensure that the billions of dollars allocated for the now-defunct Afghan security forces be spent on helping the Afghan people](#)**, not more weapons and war.

When we say “endless war,” that includes the so-called “war on drugs.” [It's time](#) to end that failed war too.

Biden may talk a big talk about U.S. leadership on Covid. But he doesn't always walk the walk. **Despite declared support, the United States has been [dragging its feet](#) on the proposal to waive intellectual property laws for Covid vaccines and supplies.**

That's not the only way we're failing the Global South on Covid. A new UNCTAD report warns that **while wealthier nations are starting to move on, countries around the world are still [suffering](#) through an immense economic storm with little help in sight.**

A little less focus on Rep. AOC's sartorial decisions, a little more on **her, Rep. Tlaib, and Rep. Pocan's renewed [effort](#) to stop arming the government of Israel** please.

North and South Korea both tested missiles this week, ratcheting up tensions on the peninsula. There's only one way to defuse this ticking time bomb: [diplomacy](#).

With the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, **the foreign policy [blob](#) is down, but not out.** (It's up to people like us to finish the job).

“Up to half of the \$14 trillion spent by the Pentagon since 9/11 went to for-profit defense contractors,” finds [a new report](#) by Brown University's Costs of War project and the Center for International Policy. Put another way: war is a racket.

A U.S. drone strike [targets](#) the wrong person, kills multiple bystanders, and the government tries to cover it up — par for the course for U.S. airstrikes in Afghanistan, and around the world. When we say end endless war, we mean drone warfare too.

And finally, **all we need is a gerbil with a washboard and we've got ourselves [a band](#).**