REPEALING THE AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE

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REPEALING THE AUMF

For 18 years, a destructive post-9/11 policy has been used as a “blank check” for unjust US wars worldwide: the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF). From bombings in Afghanistan and Syria to detentions in Guantanamo Bay, the 2001 AUMF has served as a political cover for endless US war.

And now, the US stands at the brink of launching an armed attack on Iran. This follows months of tactics by the US to escalate tension, including its withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, deployment of an additional 1,000 US troops to the Middle East, and the imposition of sweeping sanctions, including a new round just this week. These sanctions, which already impact 80% of the Iranian economy according to the Trump administration, are deeply harming the Iranian people — pricing basics like food and fuel out of the reach of ordinary families. In essence, the US has already declared war.

The Trump administration is now looking to use the AUMF to justify a military attack on Iran. Trump officials have even tried to build their case by making claims to Congress about purported ties between Iran and Al Qaeda.

On June 19, progressive policymakers in Congress dealt a blow to this damaging policy doctrine, with the US House of Representatives voting to sunset the AUMF in eight months. This vote, which was part of a broader Department of Defense appropriations bill addressing military and foreign policy spending, marks the first time the House has successfully passed a repeal of the 2001 AUMF — and offers one way to limit the possibility of a catastrophic war with Iran.

The next step will be a vote in the Senate. As we gear up for that, here’s what you need to know to explain just what the AUMF is — and what damage it has already done.
WHAT IS THE AUMF?

On September 18, 2001, President Bush signed the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) into law in response to the 9/11 attacks. The law gave the President the authority to use all "necessary and appropriate force" against those whom he determines "planned, authorized, committed or aided" the attacks, or who "harbored such organizations or persons" in order to prevent future acts of international terrorism against the US.

The 2001 AUMF went far beyond authorizing action against those responsible for the September 11th terrorist attacks. Without time limits, it has continuously been used to support the expansion of the “war on terror” without Congressional approval.

For the past 18 years, Presidents Bush, Obama, and now Trump have used the 2001 AUMF to justify military operations in 14 countries. For instance, the AUMF has been used as a basis for the longest running war in US history in Afghanistan, cited by Obama as backing for a military campaign in Syria to target ISIS, and interpreted even more broadly by the Trump administration to include force to defend the US and its partners in their fight against ISIS. In Syria, Trump has launched military strikes that only deepened the violence that communities face.

This sweeping doctrine has further been used as a tenuous legal basis for military training and assistance in the Philippines, Georgia, and Yemen; deployments to Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Turkey; detention at Guantanamo Bay; and even military action against Al Shabaab in Somalia.

THE 2001 AUMF HAS BEEN USED IN...

AFGHANISTAN
SYRIA
PHILIPPINES
GEORGIA
YEMEN
DJIBOUTI

KENYA
ETHIOPIA
ERITREA
TURKEY
GUANTANAMO BAY
SOMALIA
THE IMPACT OF ENDLESS US WARS ON WOMEN

War has particular impacts on women and girls, driven by deeply rooted gender inequality and discrimination. Here is a glimpse into some of the gendered effects of armed conflict:

▪ Women trapped in war zones are frequently targeted with sexual violence as a weapon of war to inflict trauma and terrorize communities. When forced by violence to flee their homes or to live in refugee camps, they also become vulnerable to sexual exploitation. We’ve seen these threats in Syria, Iraq, Somalia, and many other countries where the AUMF was used. Refugee and migrant women also struggle to access basic health services, including reproductive healthcare, made even more difficult by the Trump administration’s expanded global gag rule and its direct denials of sexual and reproductive health assistance for survivors of rape in wartime.

▪ Conflict also sickens and starves people, and women are disproportionately affected due to gender inequality. For instance, where gender norms dictate that women eat only after the men and boys in the family, this makes them more likely to become malnourished when war makes food and water scarce.

▪ Not only that, women are usually responsible for sourcing food, water, and fuel for the household. War makes it more dangerous for women to collect these resources. In just one of countless instances of women caught in the crossfire, Randa Almuqbili, a 25-year old mother, was killed by a mine explosion while on her way to collect water for her family in Yemen.

▪ Rates of child marriage often increase during conflict. Bombing, blockades and economic collapse worsened by war put food out of reach and push communities into poverty. In such times, struggling families may turn to early marriage to cope with economic hardship. They resort to pulling their daughters out of school and having them married; the dowries offered can mean the difference between their starvation and survival. UNICEF estimates that 72% of Yemeni girls are now married before age 18, compared to 50% before the crisis.
WOMEN’S SOLUTIONS FOR PEACE

Women are not only victims of war but sources of powerful solutions for peace. Not only must the US repeal the AUMF and end its wars, it owes a debt to the communities affected by the destruction wrought by US policy. It can begin to repay that debt by ramping up support for the women leaders and movements organizing tirelessly in their communities, risking their lives to provide needed humanitarian aid and to demand peace. For instance:

▪ Women peace activists of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) provide crucial food, water, medical care, and safe shelter to women in danger of sexual slavery and extremist violence. They run an underground railroad for women in danger, sustaining safe passage for women and LGBTIQ people fleeing extremist violence through a network of local activists, and have launched a rape crisis center for survivors.

▪ In Syria, grassroots women have negotiated local ceasefires, brokered prisoner releases and set up humanitarian aid corridors in areas beyond the reach of international agencies — offering a vital, peaceful alternative to extremist groups like ISIS. Syrian women are offering counseling to refugee women and girls, and health responders are providing care for survivors of violence, including reproductive health and family planning services.

▪ Syrian women human rights defenders are advocating for justice and accountability, documenting rights violations and pushing for the prosecution of rape as a weapon of war.

▪ In Yemen, women are brokering local peace agreements, reintegrating child combatants and defending detainees. They are providing crucial humanitarian aid and health care to besieged communities. Women-led group Food4Humanity, for example, brought two communities feuding over scarce water resources together and repaired the community’s water station, bringing life-saving water to war-weary families. The organization set the stage for a longer-term localized peace by leading a mediation process, forging a peace agreement between community leaders, and creating a local council to prevent future disputes.

Women like these are often the first responders in crisis and experts in peacebuilding, but have long been excluded from peace processes. They are seeking leadership at the negotiating table, which results in more sustainable, inclusive and longer-lasting peace. The US owes them concrete support after decades of bombing their communities and worsening threats to women.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Repeal the AUMF.
It’s high time to repeal the AUMF, which has been used to justify endless US military intervention abroad for 18 years.

2. Turn from war to peace.
Instead of its “military first” strategy, the US must shift to a feminist foreign policy that emphasizes diplomacy, cooperative approaches to conflict resolution, and support for struggling communities and grassroots women-led movements. In Iran, for instance, rather than escalating towards war, the US must recommit to the Iran nuclear deal, which had shown concrete gains.

3. Support women’s solutions.
Women at the grassroots are mobilizing for an end to conflict locally, nationally, and globally; creating humanitarian aid corridors to feed families in warzones; seeking justice for victims of sexual violence; and pushing for the safety of refugees and vulnerable communities. The US must lift up women’s solutions, which address the root causes of conflict, enhance community economic and social resilience, and advance human rights.

4. Elevate the role of women at the negotiating table.
The evidence is clear: broadened peace processes that are inclusive of women and civil society groups are 35% more likely to last at least fifteen years than those that include only armed actors and political parties. Yet, women represent only 4% of major peace accord signatories in the last 20 years. Despite releasing a Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security, the Trump administration has excluded women from Afghanistan’s peace process. Justice demands that the US dedicate tangible resources to ensuring that women are at the negotiating table, especially to end the wars it has fueled in countries like Afghanistan, Yemen, and Syria.