

We've come here today to mark the 99th anniversary of the end of The War to End All Wars by saying NO MORE WAR. As a veteran and a socialist, I would like to share some thoughts about my experience in the United States Marine Corps, the American way of war in the 21st century, and the urgent situation we now find ourselves in the Western Pacific.

Before I can tell you about my time in the Marine Corps I first have to relate how I wound up enlisting in the first place. Like perhaps some of you here, I come from a military family. My grandfather served as a Seabee in the South Pacific during the Second World War. My dad was a Marine in the Vietnam conflict. My older brother served in the Marine Corps in the mid '90s and my older sister was in the Army National Guard in the 2000's. So, growing up in a family that had served their country in the armed forces, there was an implicit understanding that I should pursue military service.

As a youngster I told my family that when I grew up I would be a Marine. From the moment I saw my older brother's picture from boot-camp on the refrigerator at home, I knew I had to one day claim the title of a United States Marine.

Then, when I was a few years older, the 9/11 attacks happened. I was a senior in high school at the time, and we suspended most classes that day so we could surround the TV's in the cafeteria and watch the devastation on repeat. When I got home from school that day, I called my best friend at the time. My first question to him was, "have you enlisted yet?" He said no, but that he was giving it strong consideration. At the time I was in the process of getting approved for a federal Naval ROTC scholarship

to attend the University of Illinois. It was my intention to become an officer in the Marines.

Not long after 9/11, the opening phase of the War on Terror was launched with the invasion of Afghanistan. In the fall of 2002 the Bush administration began the propaganda campaign for the invasion of Iraq. At that point in time, I was in the process of flunking out of my first semester of college and NROTC training. By the time spring of 2003 arrived I had been arrested for a DUI, officially dropped out of the University of Illinois and the NROTC program, and was handed a plea bargain for said DUI that stated if I enlisted in the US Marine Corps within 30 days the charges would be deferred.

The invasion of Iraq took place on March 20th, 2003 and I recited the oath of enlistment on March 22nd, 2003. I departed for USMC Recruit Depot, San Diego, CA October 14th, 2003. The following May I graduated from MOS school as an Engineer Equipment Operator and was stationed at USMC Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) Twentynine Palms, CA with Marine Wing Support Squadron (MWSS) 374. The unit I was with supported the expeditionary airfield at Twentynine Palms, which is one of the Marine Corps' premier training areas.

Within months of my arrival at my first duty station I began to understand that service in the Marine Corps was perhaps not as glamorous and exciting as I had been led to believe. It was also around this time that I started to question the official motive of the Bush administration in regards to our invasion in Iraq. The primary justification for our invasion of Iraq was to locate and apprehend weapons of mass destruction possessed by Saddam

Hussein and the Iraqi government. We had yet to find these weapons, and by the middle of 2004 it was clear that it was just an excuse to secure US access to key resources in the region.

Unfortunately, the Marine Corps is not an institution that is receptive to independent, critical thought. So, while I had strong doubts about the benevolence of our mission in the Middle East, I kept such thoughts mainly to myself.

In due time, I was deployed to Iraq. And, though I questioned the merits of the US invasion, part of me still hoped against hope that what we were doing was right. By the time I made it to Iraq, August of 2005, the US had established a full-fledged military occupation of the country. After a seven month tour at Al Taqaddum Airbase, Habbiniya, Iraq I understood that our mission had little to do with protecting anyone from Saddam's regime or the promotion of democracy, and a lot to do with maintaining US access to strategic resources, namely oil, and enriching multi-national corporations like Halliburton.

Thankfully, unlike some unfortunate souls, I was not physically or emotionally traumatized by my time in Iraq. I returned to Twentynine Palms, in mostly the same condition as I left, in March 2006.

I will forever have to reconcile with the fact that, in spite of my previously held opinions of the valor of service to one's country, there was little honor in my service to the Empire. In an effort to relieve my guilt I am here today to say NO MORE WAR.

While the Iraq invasion of 2003 is probably the greatest crime of the 21st century, it stands atop a list of several great crimes that

are a direct result of US foreign policy post-9/11. The invasion and military occupation of Afghanistan, which began just over sixteen years ago, now stands as the longest war in US history - and there seems to be no end in sight.

The 2011 US/NATO led invasion of Libya that removed Muammar Gaddafi from power has left that country in ruins. The US currently has 4,000 troops in Syria fighting ISIS, although it's rarely mentioned that Syria is a sovereign state which has never invited the US military onto its territory.

We still have 5,000 troops in Iraq to fight ISIS. The fact that ISIS didn't even exist at the time the Authorization for the Use of Military Force was drafted hasn't stopped the current and past presidential administrations from citing it as the source of legal authority to carry out permanent warfare around the globe. In fact, Mad Dog Mattis and Rexxon Tillerson recently informed a Senate panel that there was no need to update the authorization, and both indicated the administration is concerned about new laws inhibiting the military's ability to target terrorists anywhere in the world.

The methods for targeting terrorists anywhere in the world have evolved in the brief time that has passed since the Bush administration first embarked on the War on Terror. Not only have we engaged in direct invasions and military occupations but we've pioneered the use of drone warfare. Nobel Peace Prize winner Barack Obama enthusiastically embraced the use of drones in the prosecution of what Noam Chomsky called "the most extreme terrorist campaign of modern times."

Under Obama the use of drones increased dramatically in Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan and Somalia. Obama also has the distinction of being the first president to order the killing of an American citizen via drone strike. Anwar al-Awlaki was killed September 30th, 2011 by a hellfire missile in Yemen. Two weeks later his 16 year old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, would face the same fate. There are certainly more atrocities to point out, but these are among the more notable crimes of Empire post 9/11.

This brings us to our present moment, 99 years on from humanity's first foray into large scale mechanized warfare. The death toll from WWI was over 40 million people. The Second World War sent over 60 million people to their graves. It was understood by the 1960's that a third rendition of war between, now nuclear superpowers, the US and the USSR, would result in Mutually Assured Destruction. Over half a century ago President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev narrowly averted the threat of nuclear holocaust. It's with that in mind that I must address our current situation in North Korea.

Trump recently threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea on the floor of the U.N. General Assembly. Currently, the US Navy has three aircraft carrier strike groups in the Western Pacific Ocean accompanied by two nuclear powered submarines. This armada joins the ever present forces of 50,000+ troops in Japan, 35,000+ troops in South Korea and 4,000 troops on the island of Guam, which functions as a permanent aircraft carrier in the Pacific. Trump has repeatedly insinuated that the only way to deal with North Korea is through military force, possibly nuclear weapons. At the same time, members of both parties recently approved a 700

billion dollar defense budget, which is even more than the already outrageous amount of 654 billion dollars which Trump had requested. Where does this end? Is there a reasonable expectation that a continued military buildup in the Western Pacific will have a peaceful resolution? I suspect not.

It is also unreasonable to expect that a military conflict between North Korea and the US will not involve China, another nuclear armed state. Military conflict with another nuclear power now, just like a half century ago, would mean Mutually Assured Destruction.

So, it is of utmost importance that we, the people, move unambiguously to disrupt the momentum building towards a catastrophe. We must convey to our so-called representatives that we don't support the drive for regime-change in North Korea. Representative John Conyers and Senator Ed Markey have brought the No Unconstitutional Strike Against North Korea Act before congress. In the short term this is probably the only avenue of deterring Trump and the generals from launching what would, at best, be a disaster and, at worst, a fate too grim to contemplate.

But, in order to prevent World War III, we must broaden our scope. The most dangerous situation may be in North Korea this week, but conditions in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, to again mention a few other areas of active hostilities, threaten to rapidly deteriorate.

Our only choice is to educate, agitate and organize amongst our fellow workers, family, and friends for an immediate end to all of these wars, an immediate return of all US troops to the US, and the beginning of the process of closure of all military installations not

currently located within the territorial United States. It is an urgent, yet simple demand: NO MORE WAR!