

First off, I want to thank Senator Kerry for giving me the inspiration of being here today. I sit here 38 years after you were in this same position, testifying,

And similarly want to express my opinions about this occupation. I also want to thank the members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for having me here, I also want to say that I love my country and that is why I'm here today.

My name is Rick Reyes and a veteran of both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I served with the United States Marine Corps as an Infantry Rifle Man.

We took an oath to defend this country **and that doesn't stop when we check in our rifles into the armory.**

We keep our country safe by telling people the truth, **and doing that is just as scary as any ambush or mortar attack.**

I come from very humble beginnings and a son to both an **immigrant** father and mother from Mexico.

I grew up in East Los Angeles in one of the roughest parts of town known as Boyle Heights.

Later, my family moved to South East Los Angeles to escape the violence but that wasn't far enough.

As a kid, I always envisioned myself of one day fighting for my country and ensuring justice.

Like most my peers, when I was younger, I got involved with the wrong crowd.

After escaping a serious tragedy in my life, I knew the Marine Corps would provide me the opportunity to not only serve my country, but to also straighten out my life by doing something honorable.

On the night of the September 11 attacks, my battalion sat in port in Australia. It was sometime around mid night and we were enjoying our off time at the local bars, **when all the sudden the music stopped and over the PR system and an announcement heard that the US was being under attack.** We were all ordered to head back and aboard the ships.

That night we were told we were going to War with Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. The next morning we pulled out of port and for the next month, **while the administration formulated a plan, we prepared to go to war with the conviction of fighting for justice and the American way.**

Our mission was to locate and capture suspected members of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces.

Through my experience as in Infantry Rifle Man, implementing past and current policy have found it almost impossible to locate and capture the Taliban **because there isn't any effective way to separate them from the innocent civilian population.**

Patrols were conducted through populated neighborhoods; **the populations on those neighborhood streets weren't any different from the population on my street.**

There were kids running around and playing while we occupied their streets. Mothers running behind after those kids making sure they stay out of trouble and out of our way, and fathers trying to make a living for the little that they have.

US-hired translators would tell us where suspected Taliban or Al-Qaeda would be found. We would follow their lead, **often planning attacks and breaking into people's homes.**

Due to our training in fighting wars and killing enemy, we wouldn't enter into these homes or situations quietly, **but instead trained to fight with the vigilance of encountering death at every turn.**

Although we were on the hunt for suspected Taliban forces, at the end of it we found that these **dangerous missions** resulted with very poor consequences by destroying innocent lives.

We weren't fulfilling our objective of capturing terrorist, **but instead creating enemies out of civilians.** As a Marine trying to ensure justice, **I began losing sight of why I was there and the conviction began to fade.**

Because our mission was to capture suspected Taliban and had no successful way of being able to distinguish them, we had no other choice but to suspect the entire civilian population, **innocent or not.**

One day we stopped at gun point, detained, beaten and nearly killing an innocent man only to find out he was **just** traveling down a road to deliver milk to his children. Because of us, that day those kids went without father. **There were hundreds of incidents like this one.**

Almost 100% of the time we would find that suspected terrorist turned out to be innocent civilians. **I began to feel we were chasing ghosts, fighting an enemy that we could not see or that didn't allow itself to be seen.** How can you tell the difference between the Taliban and Afghan civilians? The answer is that you can't. It all stopped making sense.

Later I found out that these translators were being compensated on the amount of intelligence they were able to provide.

So it was their incentive to be able to provide as much intelligence as possible **without any way to know if the information being provided was false**. It was such a flawed system, but who was I to question authority?

When I returned home, I felt that occupying Afghanistan and Iraq was a mistake. I strongly feel that military occupation and intervention is not the answer. If it didn't work back in 2001, **when we had all the energy, all our resources, but most important, a very high troop morale**, I ask myself, **how could it work now?**

A lot of these men and women serving our country in the armed forces have been **desperately worn and stretched out too thin** by having them serve in up to 4 tours overseas. If we aren't killing them on the ground due to a flawed policy, **we are definitely killing them in spirit and that also has a very serious and indirect consequence when the fight is brought back home**.

I love my country and never once while serving did I feel I was protecting America.

But instead **we were harboring the worst of sentiments in these foreign Middle Eastern countries**, we were creating more enemies.

As a kid I envisioned myself serving my country and fighting for freedom, but when the opportunity presented itself, **it was stripped from me** and instead was forced to become a **tyrant**. As I have experienced, **our troops are also experiencing a very low morale**, which often times translates into high suicide rates.

These are just a few of the issues, there is a huge array of reasons why, **at the minimum**, this occupation needs to be **rethought**. We should not be sending any more troops into Afghanistan.

As a combat troop we are trained to isolate and destroy the enemy, and cut off its resources. **As an indirect consequence** we impose our western views and alienate their culture and traditions. In some respects this entire occupation has become **counterproductive**.

As a Marine, **I was willing to give my life for my country**, and still am. But invading and occupying Afghanistan, sending more troops to solve what is a political problem is not the answer.

I urge the senators to rethink Afghanistan while there is still time. I can almost guarantee that sending more troops will mean more civilian and US troop casualties, **not for war but for occupation**. Sending more troops will not make the US safer; it will only build more opposition against us. I urge you on behalf of truth and patriotism to consider carefully and rethink Afghanistan. More troops, more occupation is not the answer.

Thank you.

