



CONCERNED  
VETERANS  
FOR AMERICA

**Statement of Peter B. Hegseth  
CEO, Concerned Veterans for America**

*before the*

**Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere,  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

*concerning*

**Sergeant Andrew Tahmooressi:  
Our Marine in Mexican Custody**

October 1, 2014

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Chairman Ed Royce, Chairman Matt Salmon, and Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

Chairman Royce, thank you for making Sergeant Tahmooressi a focus of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. And Chairman Salmon, thank you for convening this subcommittee hearing and for your forward-leaning and ongoing support of veterans. Your efforts, from this august body, demonstrate how much you and your fellow committee members care about our nation's warriors.

I also want to thank my fellow witnesses. Mrs. Tahmooressi, your courageous advocacy on behalf of your son is an inspiration to us all. It's an honor to be here with you. Sergeant Buchanan, thank you for your service to this nation, and for your willingness to continue to have the back of your fellow Marine. Finally, Lieutenant Commander Williams, thank you for using your substantial platform to advocate for Sergeant Tahmooressi, and all veterans—it makes a difference, and is appreciated.

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My name is Pete Hegseth and I am the CEO for Concerned Veterans for America, an organization of veterans and military families dedicated to advocating and fighting for the well-being of our nation's veterans, specifically by pushing for reforms to the way the VA—and other governmental agencies—deliver benefits, services, and health care to our nation's heroes.

Our organization represents a growing number of veterans and military families who refuse to accept the status quo in Washington. Like so many of my generation, and like our Marine in Mexican custody, I've served multiple tours since 9/11—first at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, second in Iraq, and most recently in Afghanistan.

Our organization has fought like hell—aggressively and professionally—to ensure that America's veterans are no longer treated like second-class citizens in their own system, and by the country we proudly serve. We have made some progress, but as evidenced by today's hearing, there is still so much work to be done.

The ongoing situation with Sergeant Tahmooressi, a decorated combat veteran now held for 184 days by the Mexican government, is yet another example of our federal government failing this nation's veterans. A core military value is “leave no man behind”—yet in his case, as is the case for so many seeking physical and mental health care from our government, he has been left behind.

Marine Sergeant Tahmooressi is a United State Marine. He is a non-commissioned officer. He is a machine gunner, an infantryman. He is a decorated combat veteran who deployed twice to Afghanistan, meeting the enemy in fierce combat. During that combat, amidst IED attacks and ambushes, Sergeant Tahmooressi literally saved the lives of fellow Marines. He was so good that he received a meritorious battlefield promotion to Sergeant, a prestigious honor in the Marine Corps. His Gunnery Sergeant calls him “an outstanding Marine and a stand out guy.” By any definition, Sergeant Tahmooressi is a hero. Plain and simple.

But this service did not come without a human, and psychological, cost.

Let me assure you, Post Traumatic Stress—or PTS—is real. And, left untreated—especially for those who partook in the horrors of war—it *can* be debilitating, and *can* develop into a life-long disorder. And it can also be deadly. Twenty-two veterans each day in America take their life—and countless more struggle in silence.

As has been reported widely already, Sergeant Tahmooressi was diagnosed with PTS before he was arrested and attempted to take his own life in a crowded Tijuana prison—his condition exacerbated through improper treatment in Mexico, and a lack of treatment in the United States. He does not face PTS because he is weak. Nor because he is a coward. Nor because he is a victim. He simply faces the wounds and scars of war—and right now, he faces them alone.

Some hidden wounds heal, others do not. Left un-treated, these hidden wounds—and resulting scars—can lead to the bottle, to reckless behavior, and to societal withdrawal. Following my tour in Iraq, I can attest to all three. But much worse, these scars can end in suicide. Unless, of course, there is a lifeline.

Seeking care for PTS—either through peer-to-peer counseling, alternative therapy, family support, or proper care from the VA—literally saves lives. Those who manage PTS are not ticking-time-bombs, and certainly not victims. With the right treatment—at the right time and from the right source—most soldiers and Marines like Sergeant Tahmooressi

can, and do, move on with their lives. Once their invisible scars heal, they move on with their lives—to be the leaders, and pillars, America’s communities need so desperately today.

My bottom line to this committee and the Mexican government is this: Sergeant Tahmooressi needs, and deserves, immediate treatment for his Post Traumatic Stress so that he can move on with his life. Shame on anyone, at home or abroad, who does not move heaven and earth to ensure that those who given so much, receive the care they deserve. In combat, men like Sergeant Tahmooressi never had enough troops or enough air support, enough ammunition or enough time—but they still got the job done. The same should be expected from the United States Government. No excuse for inaction, or a lack of results, is good enough. He should be released immediately. Full. Stop.

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Before leaving home for this testimony, I kissed my two young sons on the forehead. I am willing, as a soldier, citizen, and patriot, to someday lend them to the cause of freedom’s fight. But in doing so, I ask only that my government do everything possible to fight for them before, during, and after their service. Mrs. Tahmooressi expected the very same thing. Will she not receive it?

The paradox before this committee, this Congress—and especially this White House—could not be more stark: this administration negotiated with the Taliban, and exchanged five terrorist killers with American blood on their hands, for the release of Army Sergeant Bowe Bergdahl—a soldier who deserted his unit on the front lines less than 2 months into his first tour of duty. Yet this administration has invested little-to-no effort negotiating the return, from a neighboring country, of a highly-decorated Marine with two combat tours? Sgt. Bergdahl cost American lives. Sgt. Tahmooressi saved them. Does this not matter? Will we not fight to bring him home?

It is time to bring our Marine home, and give him the care he has earned.

Thank you for this opportunity, and I welcome your questions.