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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: A Fork in the Road for U.S. Foreign Policy

The Well-Trodden Road of War, or the Pathway to PEACE

This week, two divergent paths were charted for the future of U.S. foreign policy.

In one direction, Donald Trump's Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 [budget request](#) deepens the militaristic status quo that abandons productive global engagement and the funding of critical human needs in order to feed an overpowered and counterproductive global military apparatus.

In the other direction is Congresswoman Ilhan Omar's [Pathway to PEACE](#) (Progressive, Equitable, and Constructive Engagement), a package of seven bills that lay the foundation for a bold, new, progressive approach to foreign policy. Let's explore the options.

Pathway to War

When Trump took office, military spending was [already](#) at historic highs. Over the last three years, it has shot up even further — by an astonishing \$115 billion. What do we have to show for this astronomical bill? A sprawling global war machine that creates, rather than prevents, instability, all to the profit of a few giant [corporations](#). Trump's FY 2021 budget, if approved, would continue this trend, boosting the \$738 billion Pentagon budget by billions of dollars. Inflating the Pentagon's already-overstuffed coffers only further fuels a system that turns military intervention into a hammer in search of a nail.

At the same time as it enables endless war, Trump's budget slashes spending on critical social spending, [cutting](#) "Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, [by] \$850 billion, \$270 billion, and \$30 billion respectively." On the international side, the proposed budget guts resources for diplomacy and development, and, in doing so, utterly fails to confront the global challenges to human security of the 21st century: climate change, mass inequality, mass displacement, and rising authoritarianism. None of these interrelated crises can be solved militarily. Trump's budget chooses futile and destructive militarism over the real, desperately needed solutions: diplomatic

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engagement, peacebuilding, development, and monumental multilateral public investment to address the climate crisis. Thankfully this is not the only way forward.

Pathway to PEACE

On Wednesday, Rep. Omar countered the Trumpian approach with a package of seven bills that (as our own Kate Kizer [argues](#)) offers a bold alternative to the foreign policy status quo. The package includes:

- **Congressional Oversight of Sanctions Act** — Blanket sanctions, unilaterally issued by the executive branch, have become the reflexive weapon of choice in foreign policymaking — with devastating consequences. Not only do blanket sanctions cause vast and indiscriminate [suffering](#), they are also [counterproductive](#) at achieving their stated aims. Rep. Omar’s first bill would require Congress affirmatively approve executive branch sanctions, strengthening oversight and helping curb their misuse.
- **Stop Arming Human Rights Abusers Act** — From selling weapons to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen to providing [training and assistance](#) to Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte’s murderous police force, the U.S. is complicit in human rights abuses around the world. Rep. Omar’s second bill would strengthen our ability to block weapons sales, security cooperation, and military assistance to countries violating human rights and international law.
- **Global Peacebuilding Act** — Embodying the idea that the U.S. should be spending less on failed military approaches and more to empower local actors to prevent and mitigate conflict, Rep. Omar’s third bill would transfer \$5 billion from the Pentagon’s Overseas Contingency Operations (a slush fund for war) to a new multilateral, public-private global peacebuilding fund.
- **YouthBuild International Act** — Recognizing the growing global problem of youth unemployment and disenfranchisement, Rep. Omar’s fourth bill would extend the successful domestic youth training and empowerment program [YouthBuild](#) internationally.
- **Resolution on the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child** — Rep. Omar’s fifth bill calls on the U.S. to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This international agreement, which lays out basic rights of children — education, healthcare, protection from labor abuse, and more — has been ratified by every single eligible country in the world, *except for the United States*.
- **Resolution on the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court (ICC)** — The United States’ adamant refusal to join the ICC (going so far as to pass a “[Hague Invasion Act](#)”) has undermined the multilateral approach to global justice since its inception. Rep. Omar’s sixth bill would express the House’s support for ratifying the Rome Statute and joining the ICC, righting this long-standing wrong.
- **Global Migration Agreement Act** — There is an unprecedented global mass displacement crisis. Rep. Omar’s final bill calls for the U.S. to join the [Global Compact on Migration](#), a non-binding agreement to uphold minimum standards of treatment of

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migrants. But it doesn't stop there. Rep. Omar also takes the bold step of calling for the U.S. to help lead the creation of a new, *binding* Global Migration Agreement.

Each of these bills is valuable individually. But collectively, they represent something more. Rep. Omar's Pathway to PEACE shows us what progressive foreign policymaking can look like in practice. It is not merely reactive, opposing new sanctions or another war, it is proactive, outlining concrete steps toward building a more just global system. These measures demonstrate what it looks like to root your foreign policy firmly in [progressive principles](#): that our values do not stop at the water's edge; that diplomacy and peacebuilding must be prioritized over militarism; that all countries, including the U.S., should be held to a shared set of standards; and that the U.S. has a responsibility to facilitate the realization of human rights, justice, and equality not just at home, but around the world.

A Fork in the Road

Funneling vast resources into an out-of-control war machine has failed to secure peace, prosperity, or justice for the people of the U.S., much less for people in the rest of the world. Trump's FY 2021 budget request is a continuation of this failed strategy. It should be rejected completely.

Instead, we must fight to cut military spending, and invest in meeting social needs at home and funding for real, *non-military* solutions to the actual 21st century security challenges we face around the world. But we can go even further, proposing not just an end to militarism, but an alternative road forward. Rep. Omar's Pathway to PEACE charts the way.

BURIED LEDES

The Senate [said](#) "We're not gonna take it!/No we ain't gonna take it!" **passing Senator Kaine's war powers resolution to rein in Trump from unilaterally starting a war with Iran.**

One million Guatemalans are going [hungry](#) as climate change fuels droughts and famine. Meanwhile, Trump continues to deny entry to thousands who head north in search of a chance at survival.

U.S. leaders have lied to us for years, as **the groundbreaking Afghanistan Papers [catalogued](#)**, but apart from a Senate [hearing](#) this week, little change or accountability is in sight.

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Show us the money! It's not enough to merely [promise](#) to cut the Pentagon budget — **Democratic candidates must commit to a specific number** to make the dream a reality.

The roots of U.S. [militarism](#) **run deep: to systems of racism, imperialism, and class conflict** (writes our own Michael Galant). To address the structural causes of endless war, we need to build people-powered movements.

We don't need a new start to nuclear negotiations with Russia — we just need to **renew New START, the last nuclear arms treaty between the U.S. and Russia, [say](#) Russia's and the United States' former top diplomats.**

The Trump administration is systematically attacking and deporting immigrants. In its latest move, **Attorney General Barr is [suing](#) states and counties that dare to exercise their legal rights to establish sanctuary cities.**

(Trump doesn't think traumatic brain injury is important, but we do.) **Over 100 service members in Iraq have been [diagnosed](#) with traumatic brain injuries** since the Iran missile strike in January.

Syrians are being forcibly [displaced](#) from their homes at the highest level since the war first broke out — 700,000 since December 1, 2019.

☀️**CLIMATE CRISIS ALERT!** Antarctica [experienced](#) its hottest temperature ever in history reaching almost 65 degrees fahrenheit.☀️

And finally, “Oh what the f***?!” — **a Russian prankster hung a portrait of President Putin in an elevator and recorded people's reactions.** We'd feel the same if we opened the door to a giant painting of... certain unnamed U.S. politicians.