

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

DATE: 02/28/2020

SL: Have we tried bombing the coronavirus?

The Coronavirus Outbreak Reveals the Failures of the Foreign Policy Status Quo

The greatest human security challenges of the 21st century have no military solution. Climate change, right-wing authoritarianism, mass displacement, inequality, and, yes, global pandemics — these are the true threats happening now and looming on our horizon. The foreign policy status quo has left us utterly unprepared to face them. The coronavirus outbreak proves it.

The Pentagon vs. Public Health

The U.S. foreign policy establishment approaches global problems, and their solutions, through an exclusively combative, militaristic lens. Nowhere is this clearer than in the federal budget. In endless pursuit of military might, the United States has spent the past few decades funneling trillions of dollars into the overstuffed coffers of the Pentagon and defense contractors while severely underfunding public health, diplomacy, and other human needs, at home and abroad.

Earlier this month, Trump [proposed](#) a Fiscal Year 2021 budget that would *halve* U.S. funding for the World Health Organization, cutting a total of \$3 billion from global health programs. For comparison, last year's Pentagon budget was \$740 billion. Meanwhile, Centers for Disease Control funding has [dropped](#) by 10% since Trump took office. So far, the Trump administration has requested a \$2.5 billion budget supplemental to combat the coronavirus — almost exactly as much as the Pentagon spent on the newest model of aircraft carrier... [in cost overages alone](#). As the cherry on top, Trump's supplemental proposes to be paid for by [drawing](#) from home heating aid for the poor and programs to combat an ongoing Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At the same time as we spend eye-popping sums waging fruitless and catastrophic wars abroad, lack of [affordable, accessible healthcare](#) for all and the inability of many working people to take [sick leave](#) leaves the United States vulnerable to the effects of pandemics. This

WIN WITHOUT WAR



perversion of priorities has dramatically undermined our ability to address public health crises like the coronavirus. This militarized approach to foreign policy, and corresponding orgy of Pentagon spending has left us, and the rest of the world, less, not more, safe.

Competition vs. Cooperation

In the decades of fearmongering that have accompanied China's growth in influence, our countries' ability to work together to confront shared challenges has been severely undermined. As two Carnegie Endowment China experts recently [wrote](#), the coronavirus outbreak "has demonstrated just how low bilateral ties have sunk." Many have even seized on the outbreak itself as an opportunity to [push](#) their jingoist anti-China agenda. While much of the Chinese government's behavior – from its Uyghur concentration camps to systematic labor abuses – runs directly contrary progressive values, we can't allow these challenges to become militarized or used to close the door on much-needed cooperation to address the transnational threats we all face.

Meanwhile, the United States' combative approach to [Iran](#) and [North Korea](#) – in which the Trump administration has used expansive economic sanctions to try to strongarm the governments into subservience – has only exacerbated the threat posed by the coronavirus. In both cases, U.S. antagonism has frustrated attempts at cooperation, while inhumane blanket economic sanctions have made adequate medical care harder to obtain, deepening public health vulnerabilities. From the climate crisis to the coronavirus, the greatest human security threats of the 21st century require multilateral cooperation. The foreign policy status quo makes that impossible.

An Epidemic of Xenophobia

One of the most disturbing outcomes of the coronavirus outbreak has been the depth of xenophobia, particularly anti-Chinese [hatred](#), that it has revealed. In some cases, this racism has been interpersonal and direct: the [bullying](#) or [assault](#) of Asian Americans. Others have been subtler, but no less insidious: a [drop](#) in visits to Chinese restaurants, [insinuations](#) that China, or Chinese people, are inherently less sanitary, or the unnecessary dubbing of the disease as the "[Wuhan coronavirus](#)," so as to blame its first victims and those most disproportionately impacted.

Decades of waging war against countries with predominately non-white populations, bipartisan [anti-China rhetoric](#), and dehumanizing treatment of migrants and refugees have fed this xenophobic response. And the effect runs in both directions — racism is no doubt one of the factors behind the establishment insistence on treating China as an enemy, or the complete disregard for the impacts of sanctions on the Iranian and North Korean people.

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Toward a New Approach

The foreign policy status quo has spent trillions of dollars on endless war, while claiming not to have the resources for global or domestic public health initiatives. It has marked China as an enemy to be contained, rather than a country of 1.4 billion people with a shared interest in not dying from a pandemic or an unlivable planet. It has imposed violent sanctions on multiple countries, impeding vital access to healthcare. It has responded to a global health crisis not with care and cooperation, but with xenophobia, division, and disinformation. It has, on top of all this, devastated public health care throughout the Global South through [trade and investment agreements](#), [loan conditions](#), and a global system that enables [illicit financial flows](#).

Fault for the devastating human toll of the coronavirus cannot be laid solely at the feet of any one country or actor. But there is no doubt: the dominant paradigm of U.S. foreign policy has both contributed to, and left us utterly unprepared to confront, global health crises such as this.

This needs to change.

We need a foreign policy that prioritizes human needs and dignity over endless war and the bottom lines of defense contractors; that believes in cooperation over competition; that considers the human impact of punitive policies like sanctions; that upends, rather than fuels, long-standing systems of racial oppression; and that builds a global economy where public health needs and the environment are put before profits. To confront the dire human security threats of the 21st century, we need a new approach to foreign policy. The coronavirus crisis only shows how urgent this need is.

BURIED LEDES

ANNOUNCING: Win Without War has [partnered](#) with Fellow Travelers Blog in a new project to help democratize foreign policy. Stay tuned over the next few months for new perspectives on progressive foreign policy from activists across the progressive movement!

Trump's visit to India was marked by a pogrom. **Over 30 have [died](#) in the anti-Muslim violence** that has wracked the country, enabled by India's ruling party and police.

Unfazed by the anti-Muslim violence, **Trump finalized a \$3 billion [military deal](#) with India's President Modi**, continuing Trump's track record of arming human rights abusers.

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Not only is Trump fueling human rights abuses but he's pretty darn good at committing them himself. Last year **more than 10,000 civilians were [injured](#) or killed in Afghanistan in part thanks to U.S. military and drone strikes.**

[Connecting](#) nuclear issues with issues like climate change, corruption, and healthcare may be the key to mobilizing millennials to push for smart nuclear policies.

One of the [worst humanitarian crises](#) of the Syrian conflict is happening right now. And no one seems to care. **Plummeting temperatures, attacks from Turkish, Russian, and Syrian government forces, and zero access to basic necessities** like shelter and heat are causing untold suffering and death in Idlib. Click here [to help](#).

Locusts have [descended](#) upon much of East and the Horn of Africa in Biblical proportions. **Kenya is facing the worst Locust swarm in over 70 years, as the insects exacerbate food insecurity** in an already food-insecure climate.

A [feminist foreign policy](#) is the change we need to put impacted communities at the forefront of U.S. policymaking.

A new plan to drill for oil in the Congo could [release](#) greenhouse gas emissions equal to all of Japan. But the conflict-ridden, low-income country could use the money — all the more reason that any plan to confront the climate crisis must be based in justice for the Global South.

The expansion of the Muslim Ban has far-reaching consequences, including putting the Rohingya, the victims and survivors of genocide, at risk of [even more violence](#).

And finally, we've all been there. **Wildlife officers responded to a report of an injured eagle who was not in fact injured, but simply [too full](#) to fly** after eating a large meal.