

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: War Is A Racket

### The Takeaway:

- Endless war is not just the result of bad policy *ideas*, it's a question of who has power: the rich too much, and the working class too little. This Labor Day weekend, we take a close look at war as a *labor issue*.
- A military budget designed by arms manufacturers, the post-invasion privatization of the Iraqi economy, "taking the oil" in Syria, regime change campaigns against left-wing governments: wars are waged in the interests of the few. And fought by the many.
- To take on the powers of militarism and build a more peaceful, progressive foreign policy, the anti-war movement must be rooted in the working class.

## To End Endless War, Empower the Labor Movement

Knee-jerk militarism, disastrous interventionism, and aspirations of global military hegemony have long been the defining features of U.S. foreign policy. Often, this penchant for war is treated as if it's purely the result of bad ideas: poor planning, misunderstandings, and flawed ideologies. It is certainly that, but it's also much more; U.S. foreign policy is a question of who has power and who doesn't. **War is a class issue.**

As we head into Labor Day weekend, we take a look at the connection between war and the labor movement — and why building a more peaceful, progressive U.S. foreign policy means rooting the anti-war movement in working class power.

### War Is A Racket

Of the eye-popping \$740 billion annual Pentagon budget, about [half](#) goes directly to for-profit military contractors. These corporations — like Lockheed Martin, whose [profits](#) exceeded \$6.2 billion last year, while everyday people around the world pinch pennies to survive — then use their wealth and influence in the halls of power to demand even more. For the military contracting industry, arms sales, proxy wars, military provocations, all-out invasions — these are all profit-making opportunities. Tellingly, in the 24 hours after the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani that brought the United States and Iran to the brink of war, the stocks of the world's largest weapons manufacturers [jumped](#) by \$13 billion. As decorated war hero turned peace activist Smedley Butler famously put it: [war is a racket](#).

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## Saying the “I” Word

The direct profits of the military-industrial complex aren't the only economic incentives for war. U.S. military ventures are often undertaken with the goal of enriching the corporate class more broadly. Jockeying for access to cheap oil in the Middle East, invading Iraq with the explicit intent to privatize state resources and [restructure](#) the economy on neoliberal lines, destabilizing and overthrowing left-leaning governments from Southeast Asia to Central America — these are not mere policy mistakes, **these are wars waged in the national interest, when the “national interest” is defined by the wealthy few.** Even when the link to corporate interests is less clear, the broader impulse toward global hegemony — the bipartisan [consensus](#) that the United States must be the most powerful country on earth many times over — is driven by a desire to *wield* that power, and to do so in service of a world that is profitable for those in charge. In other words, U.S. militarism is motivated by something that has become a taboo word in D.C. policy circles: imperialism.

## “[Rich Man’s War, Poor Man’s Fight](#)”

While war is waged in the interests of the few, it is fought by the many. At this point it's almost trite to observe that the working class bears the brunt of the suffering of war, but it remains integral to the ongoing functioning of U.S. militarism. With an economy that funnels wealth to the few and leaves the rest in need, the military is seen as one of the few reliable [paths](#) to a career, an education, and stability. This “[poverty draft](#),” which targets the working class and particularly people of color, ensures that the all-volunteer military maintains a steady stream of new recruits without alienating those who wield political power. And this is to say nothing of the suffering borne by the working class populations in whose lands our wars are waged.

## “[A theft from those who hunger...](#)”

According to the Brown University [Costs of War](#) project, since 2001 “the U.S. federal government has spent or obligated \$6.4 trillion dollars on the wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq” alone. At the same time as we're spending trillions on misbegotten wars, we're told that there isn't enough money to create an economy that works for the many: to provide quality education, to repair crumbling infrastructure, to provide healthcare for all, to invest in exploited communities of color, or to confront the climate crisis. In the words of President Dwight Eisenhower: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”

## Pro-Labor, Anti-War

If the U.S. war machine is a class issue, the only way to stop it is to build an intersectional anti-war movement rooted in working class power. Fortunately, U.S. history is rife with examples to learn from. From [World War I](#), to [Vietnam](#), to [Iraq](#), labor has long played a prominent role of resistance to U.S. militarism. While there *have* been major [exceptions](#), whenever the more

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conservative elements of the labor movement compromised with power, there were [others](#) who [refused to](#). If the anti-war movement is to succeed, it must draw from, and build on, their examples. To win the struggle for a more peaceful, progressive U.S. foreign policy, we must build a movement that is based in, and strengthens, the power of workers.

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## More Than Class Alone

In honor of Labor Day, we've focused here on why war is a class issue. But that's not to say that war is a class issue *alone*. U.S. militarism emerges from many, interlocking systems of oppression. Here are a few readings to bring our analysis further:

- [“The Racist Foundation Of The American War Machine”](#)
- [“Ending Militarized U.S. Foreign Policy Is A Gender Justice Issue”](#)
- [“How the Mainstream Media’s Islamophobia Fuels Endless War”](#)
- [“Justice and Liberation for Indigenous Peoples are Imperative for Progressive U.S. Foreign Policy”](#) (Debrief)

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## BURIED LEDES

War isn't the only place where labor and foreign policy intersect. **Read [our Debrief](#) from this year's International Workers' Day (AKA May Day) on why the labor movement must be internationalist.**

Your weekly reminder that we're in a climate emergency: A new study finds that **ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica are [melting](#) at “worst-case scenario” rates.**

**The United States [announced](#) that it won't be taking part in a WHO-linked effort to coordinate COVID-19 vaccine development and production efforts.** Trump's reflexive nationalism continues to have a deadly cost, particularly for the most vulnerable.

In a victory for privacy rights, **a federal appeals court [ruled](#) that the NSA's bulk collection of Americans' phone records, revealed by *still* exiled whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013, was illegal.**

Bringing the U.S. aversion to accountability to a new extreme, **the Trump administration [announced sanctions](#) on International Criminal Court prosecutor Fatou Bensouda** and her staff for investigating alleged U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan.

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Last week, **the World Bank announced a temporary suspension of its Doing Business Report – which rates countries according to a controversial set of neoliberal economic criteria – as a result of data irregularities.** Here's a [suggestion](#): make the suspension permanent.

**Petrochemical companies are [lobbying](#) for a potential U.S. trade agreement with Kenya to include provisions that would weaken Kenya's domestic environmental regulations.** Another reminder that confronting the climate crisis will [require](#) a new system of trade – one that benefits people and the planet, not corporate interests.

Even before last month's explosion, **Lebanon was already in the midst of a dire economic crisis – one that was made much worse by U.S. sanctions.** But you won't [hear](#) about it in most U.S. media.

And finally, **when you're passionate about an issue, you should fight for it... even if the issue is correcting [culinary misnomers](#).**