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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: The Migrant Displacement Crisis

In Remembrance.

Today, people across the country, and the world, remember the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The many lives lost on that day, those who suffered from the backlash of fear and [hatred](#), and the ongoing tragedies of the wars that came next — we hold these in our minds and hearts.

Next week, we will explore the disastrous foreign policy legacy of the 9/11 aftermath in detail.

But for today, we simply acknowledge, we remember, and we mourn.

The Takeaway:

- Almost 80 million people around the world are currently displaced from their homes. Rather than a crisis of migrants, this should be treated as a crisis of *displacement*.
- Disastrous military adventurism, destabilizing hybrid wars, profit-first trade policy, and an abject failure to confront the climate crisis — U.S. foreign policy, in its many forms, is a major driver of global displacement.
- To confront this displacement crisis, we must do more than welcome those seeking refuge — we must end our role in the displacement in the first place. That means breaking with the failed status quo and ensuring that U.S. foreign policy puts the wellbeing of people *first*.

Behind the Displacement Crisis: U.S. Foreign Policy

Greece's largest refugee camp [burned](#) to the ground this week, leaving almost 13,000 people without shelter. An unmitigated tragedy in its own right, the fire at Moria is also a solemn reminder: though it has largely faded from the headlines, the global “migrant crisis” is ongoing.

The phrase “migrant crisis,” however, is misleading. Defined largely from the perspective of those in the United States and Europe, “migrant crisis” implies a crisis *of* migrants — that the problem is the influx of people itself. Rather, this is a crisis *for* migrants. The suffering is theirs, the tragedy that they were forced to leave their homes in the first place. What we face is a displacement crisis — one that is currently impacting almost [80 million](#) people around the world. **And one of the major causes of this crisis is U.S. foreign policy.**

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The True Costs of War

This week, the Costs of War project at Brown University [released](#) a new report finding that at least 37 million people have been displaced as a result of U.S.-involved wars since 2001. *Thirty-seven million*. This appalling statistic is the “conservative estimate,” including only displacement from U.S. military actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya and Syria, but not the many smaller operations in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Niger, and elsewhere. While the report [doesn't claim](#) that the United States is directly responsible for the entire figure, the United States *has*, in each case, significantly fanned the flames of conflict with its wanton militarism. Whatever the exact number displaced, one thing is clear: our endless wars have a terrible human cost, not only in lives lost, but also in *homes* lost.

Sanctions, Coups, and Proxy Warfare

Hybrid wars — disinformation campaigns, sanctions, intelligence-backed coups and assassinations, proxy wars, and more — are regular weapons in the arsenal of U.S. foreign policy, used to punish, and in many cases induce regime change of, any foreign government deemed a threat. Though less overt than full-scale invasions, they can be just as destructive. Central America, for example, is one of the [greatest](#) sources of migration to the United States. It's no coincidence that this is a region marred by decades of deadly U.S. interventions, from financing [death squads](#) in Nicaragua, to [backing](#) a [genocidal](#) right-wing government in Guatemala, to supporting a [coup](#) in Honduras in 2002. Right now, one of Latin America's greatest displacement crises is in Venezuela, where over [4 million](#) people have fled their homes as a result of the economic collapse — a collapse that U.S. sanctions have greatly [exacerbated](#).

A Profit-First Global Economy

Many of the world's displaced millions are forced from their homes not by bombs but by economic necessity. Here, too, U.S. foreign policy has played a leading [role](#): the neoliberal global economic order that emerged from the economic crises of the 1970s, an order designed to benefit the few at the expense of the many, was built largely by the United States. From [Structural Adjustment Programs](#) to trade regulations [obstructing](#) economic development, the rules of the global economy systematically impoverish. On top of this, institutions like the [World Bank](#) and trade agreements like [NAFTA](#) have incentivized the dispossession of peasant and Indigenous Peoples from their lands to make room for large-scale agribusiness, [displacing](#) millions. Those who leave their homes in search of economic opportunity are rarely considered refugees, but they should be. As much as those fleeing war, economic refugees are victims of circumstances beyond their control — circumstances often created by U.S. policy decisions.

Climate Refugees

On top of this all is the immediate and unprecedented threat of the climate crisis. Natural disasters from hurricanes to wildfires, previously fertile lands rendered arid by changing

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temperatures, wars over increasingly scarce resources, cities flooded by rising sea levels, the fascist resurgence that thrives off of the instability of crisis — all of these, and more, are ways that the climate crisis is already multiplying global displacement. One new report [finds](#) that 1.2 billion people could be displaced by the climate crisis within 30 years. And once again, the United States stands at the center: responsible for [40%](#) of global CO₂ emissions, and utterly failing to do the [bare minimum](#) to confront the crisis.

Fighting Displacement at the Roots

Militarized U.S. foreign policies create the conditions that force millions around the world to flee from their homes in search of a better life. But when the survivors seek refuge within U.S. borders, they are either met with cruel indifference — Trump is now [considering](#) suspending all refugee admissions for the coming fiscal year — or [brutality](#). Meanwhile, the lucky few who are able to enter are held up as an example of humanitarian generosity. This is not enough. Justice for migrants means welcoming the displaced with open arms, not *just* because they are in need, but as reparation for the United States' role in their harm. More than that, we must seek to change the conditions that force people from their homes in the first place. A first step is ending endless war. To ultimately end the displacement crisis, we need a new U.S. foreign policy — one rooted in peace, shared prosperity, and justice for all.

BURIED LEDES

For many, today's anniversary is a reminder of the wave of anti-Muslim discrimination that followed the September 11 attacks — a wave that continues on today. [Here are some resources to help recognize, confront, and dismantle Islamophobia.](#)

Deadly wildfires are [raging](#) across the western United States. We are in a climate emergency and we need action *now*.

Yes, Donald Trump is withdrawing some troops from Iraq. His recent announcement would [bring](#) U.S. troop levels all the way down to... where they were five years ago. [Hardly](#) an end to endless war.

This limited troop drawdown came soon after **Trump (rightfully) [criticized](#) the influence of the war industry.** But don't be fooled: his actions and his words could hardly be more different. **Trump is [no friend](#) of progressive foreign policy.**

Africa has long been forced to suffer under a failed, Western-imposed model of development. Enough is enough. **Over 600 academics have [signed](#) a letter calling for a restoration of African monetary sovereignty in response to the pandemic.**

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The militarization of domestic policing and the militarization of U.S. foreign policy are [linked](#). [Here's](#) how local police came to look like U.S. special forces.

bUt HoW wILL yOu PaY fOr It?! **Arms manufacturer Northrop Grumman has [received](#) the first contract in a new \$85 billion missile program.** That's right, in the middle of a combined pandemic, police violence crisis, and climate collapse, we're still spending billions on unnecessary, new weapons of war.

Rep. Joaquin Castro's bid for House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair is [part and parcel](#) of the energy around progressive foreign policy that has been building over the last several years.

And finally, **the Smithsonian National Zoo's new addition is unbearably [cute](#).**