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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: 3 Stories You Might Have Missed

The Takeaway:

- Last week, we brought you three of the biggest stories in U.S. foreign policy. This week, we look at three stories that may not be making major headlines, but that make clear the ongoing costs of a military-first U.S. foreign policy:
 - **Landmines** – This week, the Biden administration announced it would maintain a destructive Trump-era policy of producing anti-personnel landmines.
 - **U.S. Bases** – U.S. military bases harm communities around the world. Right now, a new base is under construction on sacred Indigenous land in Okinawa.
 - **Arms Flows** – The Mexican police who committed a massacre earlier this year did so using U.S.-provided weapons. The U.S. continues to be a leading global purveyor of weapons and violence.

The Costs of Militarism: What's Not In The News

“U.S. militarism continues to wreak global destruction” is not a headline you’re likely to see in a major news outlet anytime soon. Following decades of catastrophic, fruitless, and endless wars, the tragic day-to-day impact of U.S. foreign policy just doesn’t bring the clicks. Last week, we [discussed](#) three stories in foreign policy news that were making national headlines. This week, we bring you something a little different: three stories of the ongoing fallout of a war-first foreign policy that likely aren’t on the everyday U.S.-American’s radar — but that deserve to be front page news.

The New Status Quo on Indiscriminate Weapons

This week, the Biden administration made a confusing [announcement](#) that its policy on landmines is consistent with Trump’s widely-condemned approach — even though, when Trump created the current policy, then-candidate Biden pledged to [roll it back](#). While a Defense Department spokesperson later stated that a formal review has not [been undertaken](#), it remains deeply troubling that, as of yet, the policy has not been changed, and that President Biden hasn’t announced his intention to accede to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.

“Anti-personnel” landmines are indiscriminate weapons that continue to kill and maim civilians, especially children, for decades after a war has ended. Over 60 countries around the world are

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still contaminated by landmines, and on average, over 20 people [lose a life or limb](#) to landmines and other remnants of war *every day*. Recognizing the terrible human toll of these weapons, 164 countries around the world have ratified an agreement, known as the Ottawa treaty, to prohibit the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines. While the United States has obstinately refused to join this treaty, President Obama *did* take [major steps](#) toward abiding by its rules. In 2020, much to the pleasure of the weapons industry, Trump reversed these restrictions, laughably claiming that *landmines* are necessary for U.S. national security. Now, President Biden has so far stood by Trump's decision, and, thanks to a powerful arms industry and a military-first mindset, the use of weapons designed to indiscriminately maim and kill continues on.

Learn more from, and take action with, the [United States Campaign to Ban Landmines](#) and the [Friends Committee on National Legislation](#).

Okinawans Versus Empire

Over 20% of the main island of Okinawa is [occupied](#) by the U.S. military. And as you read this, concrete is currently being dumped into the ocean to construct yet another military base — this time on sacred Indigenous land that “[contains remnants of the war dead](#).” On top of that gross injustice, the base is both “structurally unsafe” and an environmental threat to the nearby coral reefs. But so far, under Secretary of Defense Austin, the construction continues.

The United States has over 800 military bases in about 80 countries around the world — that's nearly 90% of *all* foreign military bases combined. Not only does this vast network of military bases extend U.S. empire throughout the globe and put the United States on a permanent war footing, they also [wreak havoc](#) on local communities (whose lands they often occupy without permission). U.S. military presence [brings with it](#) military accidents, crimes by (often [unnaccountable](#)) military personnel, economic underdevelopment, and pollution that impacts humans and the environment alike. These consequences of U.S. militarism may not make U.S. headlines, but to those like the Okinawans who bear the brutal costs, they're impossible to ignore.

Okinawans are fighting for the wellbeing of their communities against U.S. empire. Join them by supporting the [Global Uchinanchu Alliance](#).

A Global Weapons Flood

The United States is the largest [supplier](#) of weapons in the world — exporting more than Russia, France, and Germany together, or the entire rest of the world combined. While this may be a boon for the salaries of arms industry executives, it's a source of little but violence and misery for everyday people. Just last week, it was [revealed](#) that the Mexican police officers who massacred 16 Guatemalan migrants and three Mexicans earlier this year did so using guns that came from the United States. And the flow of deadly arms isn't limited to foreign forces. The

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transfers of weapons from the U.S. military to domestic U.S. police forces — which more than two dozen members of Congress recently [called on](#) President Biden to put and end to — has actually [increased](#) in the first quarter of 2021.

It turns out that funneling endless trillions of dollars into corporations that profit from the production of weapons of war creates a massive flow of weapons that floods the world with violence. Add to that a culture of impunity for the rich and powerful and you get another piece of recent news: Blackwater founder and military-industrial-complex incarnate Erik Prince was found plotting to violate a UN arms embargo and [supply](#) weapons and troops-for-hire to a militia commander seeking to overthrow the internationally-recognized Libyan government. How's that sentence for a microcosm of U.S. foreign policy — and the unintended but predictable consequences of U.S. militarism.

Help stop the flow of weapons with the [Forum on the Arms Trade](#) and [Stop US Arms to Mexico](#) (and support our action to hold Erik Prince accountable for his actions [here](#)).

The Full Costs of Militarism

These are just three stories are far from the only cases of under-discussed U.S. foreign policy. But together, they embody an important lesson: around the world, the destructive impact of U.S. militarism manifests in countless ways, big and small. While the big news items are critical, we must not forget the whole picture. While the world looks the other way, it's our duty to pay attention — and to fight back.

BURIED LEDES

Last week, we warned that the Biden administration's Pentagon budget request appeared likely to be the same as Trump's. We called this outrageous. Well, the numbers are out, and **not only did Biden [match](#) Trump's Pentagon spending spree — he outdid it... by \$12.5 billion.**

The U.S. military has [begun](#) training Mozambican security forces to combat an insurgency in their country. It seems twenty years of failure of the military-first "counterterrorism" strategy won't stop us from exporting it to others.

The Biden administration has [indicated](#) that it is unlikely to rejoin the Open Skies Treaty — a crucial transparency agreement with Russia that Trump [withdrew](#) from last year. Looks like a trend: Trump makes bad policy. Candidate Biden condemns it. President Biden upholds it.

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So how has that policy of tearing up diplomatic agreements with Russia turned out? **It looks like Russia is dialing up both its [space](#) and [Arctic](#) ambitions.** The question is: will the U.S. respond by further fueling the arms race, or with the diplomacy that is actually proven to work?

The World Bank and IMF meet this week as the world continues to face combined public health, climate, and economic crises. Will they take the road to a [just, green recovery](#)? Or settle for [minor tweaks](#) to the same failed status quo?

Assange, Manning, Snowden, Winner — and Hale. **Daniel Hale, a whistleblower of the U.S. drone program, [pleaded](#) guilty to violating the Espionage Act.** Yet again, the U.S. proves more willing to punish those who *reveal* foreign policy abuses than those who commit them.

International action is needed to address the plight of the Uyghurs. But that **action will [only be effective](#) if there's a “credible case that western opposition... reflects a commitment to justice for all,** not geopolitical manoeuvring.” So far, the U.S. record there does not look good.

Following his adaptation of Guantánamo Bay prisoner Mohamedou Ould Slahi's memoir, **Benedict Cumberbatch has [called on](#) President Biden to close the prison.** Never thought I'd agree with the judgment of someone involved in *The Hobbit* (2013) but here we are.

And finally, nuclear disaster, wild boars, and 60+ cats: [here's](#) a little reminder that sometimes, **humans can be very, very good.**