

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: War Aid for Dictators

The Takeaway:

- Every year, the United States spends well over \$15 billion training and equipping foreign militaries and police. This so-called “security” assistance is anything but.
- U.S. war aid is given with few restrictions, and even less accountability. The United States is currently arming some of the world’s most egregious human rights violators — all in the name of a “security” that more militarization could never bring.
- Rep. Ilhan Omar’s Stop Arming Human Rights Abusers Act would be a great step toward fixing this disastrous practice. And in the long run, we must stop relying on military solutions altogether. Only peaceful tools yield peaceful results.

(In)Security Assistance

A military dictator known for wantonly imprisoning his political opponents, an authoritarian who regularly orders the extrajudicial killings of labor and environmental activists, an ethno-nationalist government carrying out apartheid — what do these three have in common? They’re all top recipients of free weapons and military assistance from the United States.

This week, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing to discuss U.S. security assistance to the Middle East. Some, like Senator Chris Murphy, used the moment to [ask](#) critical questions about the costs and benefits of the practice, while others took it as a chance to [complain](#) that even the few regulations in place are too burdensome. 😏 At the very time that this hearing was taking place, the government of Afghanistan, the single largest recipient of U.S. security assistance, with tens of billions of dollars worth of weapons having been pumped into it, was rapidly losing territory to Taliban control (more on that from us in the near future).

For this week’s Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, we take our own look at U.S. “security assistance” — what it is, why it’s a misnomer, and what we can do to change it.

An Introduction to ~~Security Assistance~~ War Aid

U.S. security assistance and cooperation are broad terms for a number of programs that bolster the warmaking powers of other countries, including by directly arming foreign militaries and police, giving financial grants to be used to purchase U.S.-made weapons, providing trainings (as we explored in [a previous week](#)), and more. These programs are largely housed under the

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State and Defense Departments. State Department “security assistance” programs for foreign militaries total [~\\$9 billion](#). Pentagon “security cooperation” programs are far more opaque and difficult to measure, including everything from “train and equip” to “advise and assist” programs. These totaled at least [\\$7.5 billion](#) in Fiscal Year 2019. And Congress [continues to expand](#) these programs that ultimately amount to [slush funds](#) for war.

In short? As if the hundreds of billions of dollars spent fueling the U.S. war machine every year weren’t enough, the United States spends billions more militarizing the rest of the world too. Let us remind you that training others to wage endless war is *not* an alternative to endless war.

Dictators, Rights-Abuses, and Apartheid

Of course, if you’re going to arm foreign militaries and police forces to the tune of billions of dollars per year, you’re going to be careful about who gets those weapons and how they use them, right? ... right? Tragically, as with much of U.S. foreign policy, decisions about who receives U.S. war aid are typically based on maximizing the projection of U.S. power in that moment in time, rather than the long-term security, wellbeing, or human rights of people around the world. The end result? Some of the top recipients of war aid include the governments of:

- **Egypt (\$1.3 billion):** a military dictatorship that is [widely criticized](#) for its wanton [imprisonment](#) of human rights defenders and democracy activists, and once used a U.S.-provided helicopter to [gun down](#) a U.S. tourist. Oh, and the current president was installed by a coup that massacred thousands of peaceful demonstrators, meaning that under U.S. law all aid should be cut off. BUT the Obama administration [refused](#) to call a coup a coup so that the money, and weapons, could keep flowing.
- **Israel (\$3.3 billion):** an ethno-nationalist state responsible for the [killing of Palestinian children](#), illegal [occupation](#) of Palestinian land, and a policy of [apartheid](#).
- **Colombia (\$240 million):** a right-wing government that systematically (and often [violently](#)) [oppresses](#) its workers, peasants, and Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in favor of the wealthy and foreign corporations. Oh, and the United States trained the former members of its military who assassinated the president of Haiti last month.
- **The Philippines,** an authoritarian regime known for the extrajudicial killings of [labor activists](#), [peasants](#), and [Indigenous leaders](#) under the guise of a U.S.-inspired “war on drugs.”

And that’s just to name a few. Of course, the United States, and its military and police forces especially, could credibly be accused of many of these abuses itself. But that’s no reason to go and arm these supposed allies with little oversight or accountability.

More Weapons ≠ Peace

Well, at least if the United States is arming human rights abusers, it’s doing so in order to accomplish a larger goal... right? Well, if the objective of U.S. security assistance and cooperation is to empower governments that are friendly to the interests of U.S. corporations

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and military empire, and make big bucks for the weapons industry in the process — rights, justice, and peace be damned — then it has been a stunning success. If however, the goal is to actually build lasting peace, then... not so much. (BTW based on the accounts of former officials, the U.S. government does not have any consistent metrics of success for these programs, except undefined “stability” and “capacity.”)

Just as U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have mostly led to harm and destruction for those countries, exporting our endless wars to abusive governments around the world is not a successful tactic for creating peace. **In fact, academic studies have shown that U.S. training and assistance is [negatively](#) correlated with future cooperative behavior, and countries receiving U.S. foreign military training programs are [twice](#) as likely to experience a military coup in the future.** Simply put: militarization is not the answer, not our own, and not that of other countries.

The Case of the Sahel

For definitive proof of that failure, one need only look at the ongoing crisis in the Sahel. Following 9/11, the countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, Chad, and Mali) became yet another front in the global “war on terror.” Since then, the United States has spent billions of dollars on “train and equip” counterterror programs for the local police and militaries across the region. The result? Corrupt elites have [profited](#) by siphoning off U.S. resources, the region has been flooded with weapons, local militaries have committed egregious human rights abuses, including the [murder or abduction](#) of 199 civilians in a three month period of 2020 alone, and Mali has experienced three coups in a single decade — every last one [led](#) by U.S.-trained military officials. Meanwhile, violence has only *increased* in recent years, [skyrocketing](#) by 44% from 2019 to 2020 alone. That’s a hell of a “security” program. For more, read our Policy Associate Amisha Parikh-Friese’s excellent article [here](#).

Stop Arming Human Rights Abusers

We spend billions of dollars arming and training repressive governments, and the end result is a total failure to build lasting peace. This must change. Building on years of grassroots activism shedding light on the disaster that is U.S. war aid, last month, Rep. Ilhan Omar introduced the [Stop Arming Human Rights Abusers Act](#) (SAHRAA). Among other things, this critical legislation would create an independent commission to ensure the U.S. government halts and no longer provides U.S. security assistance or cooperation — or *sells* weapons, a distinct but related issue — to governments that have committed gross violations of international human rights or humanitarian law.

Click [here](#) to send a tweet thanking Rep. Omar for her leadership.

Passing the SAHRAA would be a huge step toward fixing the broken U.S. security assistance and cooperation programs. But we can’t stop there. Ultimately, we need a foreign policy that

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recognizes that the path to peace will never be forged by war. We must stop relying on false military “solutions” *altogether*, and instead prioritize the proven, effective [tools of peacebuilding, diplomacy, and development](#) as we build a world of security, justice, and human rights for all.

BURIED LEDES

As the Taliban advances in Afghanistan, **a new series of articles [highlights](#) stories of, and by, Afghan women journalists.**

As our Policy Director Kate Kizer [reminds](#) us in the New York Times, **this devastating advance is the *direct result of the failures of war*.** Twenty years of war did not bring peace. Withdrawing was the right choice and the public is unlikely to waver.

🎉 Major victory 🎉 **This week, a bipartisan majority in the Senate [rejected](#) an attempt to boost the Pentagon budget by \$50 billion.** This [would not have been possible](#) without years of movement pressure. Let’s keep it up!

The climate crisis is here. The climate crisis is here. **The climate crisis [is here](#). And we can’t address it without [ending](#) U.S. militarism...**

... and changing our approach to U.S.-China relations. **When it comes to China, there is [no tradeoff](#) between human rights and climate action** — we can, and must, fight for both.

But the Cold War approach to China doesn’t just undermine climate action and human rights *in China*. **It also [fuels](#) anti-Asian racism and hate crimes at home.** Who is this policy supposed to protect again?

This week, Win Without War joined over 90 other organizations in [calling on](#) the Biden administration to **recognize the Burmese government’s acts of violence against the Rohingya in 2017 for what they are: crimes against humanity and genocide.**

A new study from Oxfam International [finds](#) that “**85% of the 107 COVID-19 loans negotiated between the IMF and 85 governments indicate plans to undertake austerity** once the health crisis abates.” Despite its improved rhetoric, it looks like the IMF is still the IMF.

So if the IMF is so bad, why are **activists asking it to use a tool called Special Drawing Rights to help the Global South?** A new interview with economist Mark Weisbrot [explains](#).

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And finally, I wonder if he [counted](#) humans to fall asleep.