

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: When Washington Forgets

### **The Takeaway:**

- With U.S. troops out of Afghanistan, U.S. media and policymakers seem to have lost interest in the people of Afghanistan's continued struggles. It's an all too familiar trend.
- Guatemala, Iran, the Congo, Laos, Indonesia, and many more — the United States has a long, bloody history of intervening in foreign countries, leaving behind misery that lasts for decades, while the United States quickly forgets that anything ever happened.
- This act of forgetting is part of what enables the U.S. foreign policy establishment to make the same, disastrous decisions again and again. It is up to us to remember — and resist.

## **Remembering What U.S. Interventions Leave Behind**

Though the U.S. occupation has rightly ended, the people of Afghanistan are still suffering — oppressed under Taliban rule, impoverished in part by [U.S. and international sanctions](#), and refused refuge by the country that waged war in their land. But this time, the cameras are nowhere to be found. The people of Afghanistan still need our solidarity. But with U.S. troops gone, the news cycle is moving on.

So, too, in Haiti. When an earthquake devastates the island, or political unrest makes for a good photo-op, Haiti grabs headlines. But when the Biden administration is deporting Haitian migrants and asylum-seekers, or the U.S. military has been found to have trained the foreign assassins of the country's president — just the latest in the United States' centuries-old role of fomenting political and economic crisis in Haiti — the country is suddenly forgotten.

Two different cases, but a similar process that is all too familiar in the world of U.S. foreign policy: the United States wreaks havoc in a foreign country, leaves, and then forgets anything ever happened. As the people of that country are left to endure the fallout for decades to come, the U.S. foreign policy establishment is freed to wage the next catastrophic war, protected by the fact that this collective amnesia means never having to learn its lesson. This week, we look back on, and remember, five of these cases of foreign policy forgetting:

### **Guatemala**

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In 1951, the people of Guatemala democratically elected a progressive reformer named Jacobo Árbenz. But within a few years, Árbenz's land reform programs had run afoul of the United Fruit Company — and its friends in Washington. In a plan orchestrated by Eisenhower's Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) [overthrew](#) Árbenz in 1954, and installed in his place a hardline anti-communist military government. Nearly four decades of brutal authoritarian rule and civil war followed, reaching their bloody zenith with a genocide of Maya and other Indigenous people in the 1980s that was at least [tacitly backed](#) by the United States. Yet for this entire deadly legacy, U.S. interventions in Guatemala, and the similar disastrous meddling in the neighboring countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, hold little space in the U.S. public consciousness. Even when these countries are discussed, typically in the context of [immigration debates](#), U.S. backed wars and genocides rarely get a passing mention. (Meanwhile, Dulles's name continues to grace Washington, DC's [largest airport](#).)

## Iran

Much like Árbenz, Iran's Mohammad Mosaddegh was a democratically elected reformer committed to building a more equitable country, even if it meant getting in the way of the profits of foreign corporations. And much like Árbenz, he would pay the price. In 1953, following Mossadegh's nationalization of the Iranian oil industry, the CIA and the United Kingdom's MI6 worked together to [overthrow](#) Mossadegh, and instead tighten the grip of the abusive monarch, the Shah. The Shah ruled for 16 more years until a revolution, fueled by discontent with the U.S.-backed authoritarian, replaced his regime with the Islamic Republic we know today. This is no excuse for the current government's own abuses, but amidst all of today's hawkish talk, threats of war, and deadly sanctions against people in Iran, it's worth remembering [how exactly we got here](#) — and the price the civilians have paid for it.

## The Congo

Patrice Lumumba was a Congolese independence leader, the first Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo, and a leading light in the movement for pan-African unity against imperialism. For this, [he was assassinated](#). In 1960, Belgian-backed separatists ignited a crisis that would fracture Lumumba's government. He was soon overthrown, captured, brutally murdered, and replaced by Joseph-Désiré Mobutu. While it's as yet unproven that the United States was involved in the murder itself, evidence suggests that the CIA [had a hand](#) in his capture — and the record shows that the United States had [attempted](#) to assassinate him before. Mobutu would go on to rule the country with an iron fist, with military and economic backing from the United States, for decades. The young nation's hopes of peace, prosperity, and sovereignty were snuffed out, and largely remain so to this day.

## Indonesia

In 1965, the U.S.-backed military of Indonesia used a failed uprising attempt [as a pretext](#) to seize control of the country from a leader who, while no communist himself, was a bit too independently-minded for Washington's liking. The military then proceeded to wage a brutal

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campaign of murder against the country's own citizens, killing approximately one million people in cold blood for having, or being accused of having, leftist sympathies — and it did so with the United States' help. This is no conspiracy theory: declassified State Department documents [prove](#) the United States aided and abetted the mass murder in Indonesia, providing material support, encouraging the killings and rewarding the perpetrators. One of the military leaders, Suharto, would go on to rule Indonesia as a dictator for over three decades, and millions of Indonesians continue to bear the scars, physical or psychological, of the mass killing.

## Laos

From 1964 to 1973, in the small landlocked Southeast Asian country of Laos, the United States dropped, on average, a planeload of bombs [every 8 minutes](#), 24 hours a day, for 9 years. In the name of “fighting communism,” bombs “[fell like rain](#),” killing tens of thousands and razing entire villages to the ground. By the end, Laos was the [most heavily bombed](#) country in history. But even then, the impacts of U.S. militarism continued to be felt. Over [20,000 people](#) — over 40% of whom were children — have been seriously injured or killed by the bombs that still litter the countryside to this day. Vast swathes of the country's land remain unusable, and the devastated country is still one of the poorest in the region. The U.S. war in Laos was kept secret at the time, but even after the extent of the destruction was exposed in the Pentagon Papers, this abominable chapter in U.S. foreign policy history remains ignored or unknown by much of the nation.

## Fighting Against Forgetting

The purpose of this is not simply to list the United States' wrongdoings (and if it were, it would be a much, much longer list). Nor is it to act like the United States is the only bad actor in history. The point is that the United States has a long history of disastrous interventions that immiserate entire countries for decades after the intervention itself has ended — and an equally long history of collectively forgetting that these things ever happened. Our job is to resist that forgetting. We can only learn the lesson of our deadly foreign policy if we first remember its consequences. From Afghanistan to Haiti, the news cycle may be starting to move on, but we must not. We owe it to the people of Afghanistan, Haiti, and beyond not only to continue to pay attention to their struggles, but to keep up the fight for the reparations and justice that they deserve.

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## **BURIED LEDES**

Just [one day](#) after leaving her post as a top global weapons purveyor at the Pentagon, longtime defense official Heidi Grant has taken a job at Boeing focused on... you guessed it... international arms sales.

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Last week, **140 countries and jurisdictions agreed to a new plan to confront corporate tax avoidance**. Sounds great. The catch? **The plan ends up benefitting the richest countries, at the expense of the poorest**. [Read more](#) from our Michael Galant.

**Afghanistan is on the brink of economic collapse – and the U.S. decision to freeze the Taliban government's access to billions of dollars is making things worse**. There's no easy solution, but we can't let the Afghan people starve in order to punish the Taliban.

Now that's how you do international solidarity: **Google and Amazon employees have joined together to condemn their employers' decision to sell technology to the Israeli military** for the purpose of upholding apartheid.

Yes, North Korea has been building up its weapons. But maybe the **United States' suffocating sanctions and constant threats of war are the cause, not the solution**. (And speaking of [abominable U.S. crimes](#) that everyone seems to have forgotten about.)

Can't believe we have to say this but: **no, President Biden should not be given the power to bypass Congress and start a war with China**.

This week, hundreds of Indigenous leaders and activists from around the country gathered in DC to [send a message](#): **the climate crisis is here. It's time we act like it...**

... and part of **treating climate change like the existential threat that it is must mean cancelling the onerous debt held by the poorest nations** (and paying climate reparations to them instead).

**California's rent relief program can be a lifesaver. But it's leaving behind immigrants and other vulnerable communities**. Everyone needs housing. Our housing solutions must be for *all*.

And finally, **a good sprinkle is hard to come by**. [Who can blame 'em?](#)