

Stop guns crossing borders, not migrants

The Headline

Last week, the United States, Panama, and Colombia [announced](#) a 60-day campaign to stop migration through the Darién Gap, a dangerous, forested area separating Panama and Colombia. [According to the UN](#), 400,000 migrants are expected to cross the Darién Gap in 2023 - a significant increase from the 250,000 estimated to have crossed last year. Most of those expected to attempt to cross the Gap this year are fleeing deteriorating socio-economic conditions in [Venezuela](#), [Haiti](#), and [Ecuador](#).

The announcement was short on details, but U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas confirmed that the campaign will rely on the threat of state violence to deter migration, [saying](#) that migrants would be “turned back” if they tried to cross the Gap. The Haitian Bridge Alliance [called](#) the prospect of such a securitized approach “terrifying,” as it only adds to the myriad dangers already faced by vulnerable people. While the official [statement](#) announcing the campaign claims it includes a plan to “reduce poverty, improve public service delivery, create jobs, and promote economic and sustainable opportunities,” no explanation about the particulars of that plan have been forthcoming. Even if such a plan does exist, it does not address the U.S. role in driving violence in Latin America, whether in the form of crushing [sanctions](#) against Venezuela or U.S. guns flooding the region. The Mexican government [estimates](#) that half a million guns are smuggled from the U.S. into Mexico each year - with [70-90%](#) of guns in crime scenes in Mexico can be traced back to the U.S. In El Salvador, the United States is the [number one source](#) of semi-automatic firearms.

This campaign – and any attempt to deter migration through violence – is inhumane and unacceptable. The U.S. can and should fix its broken immigration system and welcome people who seek refuge here. What’s more, the campaign also ignores the many steps the U.S. government can take to actually address the violence and economic insecurity that causes people to leave their homes and brave horrific dangers to come to the U.S.

Ending our national addiction to sanctions and guns would do more for people who are contemplating crossing the Darien Gap than any 60-day effort could. Sanctions rollback for humanitarian purposes, a national assault weapons ban, and reversing the Trump policy of putting international gun sale regulation in the hands of the Commerce Department would be the beginnings of a humane U.S. response to insecurity in Latin America. Threatening vulnerable migrants has no role to play.

What’s next: Thankfully, the 60-day campaign has not started yet. Win Without War will closely follow its development and you can contact your representative to speak up about the barely-covered Darién Gap campaign. Exporting violence was the strategy of the last president - let’s be a bit more creative and humane in our response to migrants desperately searching for a better life.

The Happenings

April 26th, 6:30-7:30 PM EDT: “Interrupting Gun Violence for Peaceful Communities,” [Friends Committee on National Legislation \(FCNL\)](#)

May 2nd, 8:30-9:30 AM EDT: “Nicholas Burns, U.S. Ambassador to China: An in-depth discussion of U.S.-China relations,” [Stimson Center](#)

The Spotlight

In today's spotlight, we interview [Matt Korda](#), Senior Research Associate and Project Manager at the Federation of American Scientists' Nuclear Information Project. You can follow him on Twitter [here](#).

1): What was the first moment you realized you were interested in working on nuclear weapons issues? Do you have any lessons learned for students or those just starting in a similar career path?

During my undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto, I focused mostly on genocide and war crimes. During that time, I stumbled upon a copy of John Hersey's "[Hiroshima](#)" and was both horrified and mesmerized by the various survivor accounts of the US atomic bombings in 1945. From then on, I became fascinated by the national myths that countries have told their populations about the role that nuclear weapons play in supposedly keeping them safe. In reality, the story is much more complex, and the risks are much greater than people might realize. For folks who might want to learn more about nuclear weapons, I'd encourage you to simply reach out to researchers, scholars, and experts that you think are interesting—never underestimate the power of a cold email! In my experience, the people working in this field are incredibly passionate and incredibly nerdy, meaning that they'll almost certainly jump at any chance to tell you about what they're working on. So in all likelihood, sending that first message will open up a fascinating door for you to walk through.

2): What is one thing you wish was better or more widely understood about nuclear weapons abolition?

There are many factors standing in the way of progress on disarmament, but certainly one of the most significant is the financial connection between big business and nuclear weapons. It's no secret that the arms race is tremendously fueled by the significant influence that weapons contractors and lobbyists have on government decisions; indeed, sometimes nuclear decisions seem to be driven as much—if not more—by corporate interests than by national security

concerns. There are countless examples demonstrating the fact that the cozy financial relationships between US lawmakers, the defense industry, and the Pentagon have fostered a system that generally rewards ever-increasing—and often redundant—military investment that is not backed up by most realistic threat assessments. The unfortunate result of decisions like these is that for many nuclear-armed states, much of nuclear policy has been subsumed by business interests—and business is certainly booming. It's important for everyone to understand that it will be incredibly challenging to achieve true progress on nuclear reductions without simultaneously addressing some of the key drivers of US nuclear policy decisions: money and corporate influence.

3): With the structure of U.S.-Russia nuclear arms control weakening since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there has been increased discussion of the need for expanded nuclear arms control agreements elsewhere, especially between the U.S. and China. What are the prospects for U.S.-China nuclear arms control, and are there issues that the Biden administration should prioritize when engaging Beijing on arms control?

The idea of engaging China on nuclear arms control is both timely and constructive, but we need to make sure that we tailor our expectations appropriately. It took the United States and the Soviet Union *decades* to agree upon their first verifiable arms control treaty, and China has never seriously engaged in nuclear arms control talks before. Moreover, China would have to accept some degree of transparency to join a verifiable arms control regime, and it has traditionally preferred to rely on opacity to safeguard its smaller nuclear arsenal. To that end, the United States should focus on baby steps, rather than expecting or demanding that China suddenly reverse course and agree to place limits on its own nuclear forces. These small steps could include working-level engagement between US and Chinese academics, scientists, and arms control experts, perhaps at more informal track 1.5 or track 2 dialogues. This would help the two sides gradually work out shared definitions of potential treaty terms, a shared scope for negotiations, and acceptable levels of transparency—all in service of figuring out which specific elements can eventually be placed on the negotiating table. Without laying this crucial groundwork in advance, the prospect of US-China arms control will remain highly unlikely.

Buried Ledes

Qatar and Bahrain recently [announced](#) that they would restore diplomatic ties following a meeting in Saudi Arabia. It has been two years since several Middle Eastern countries including Bahrain ended a three-year embargo on Qatar. **In a similar diplomatic push, Saudi and Syrian foreign ministers [welcomed](#) steps to restart ties between their countries, which included a path to resume consular services and flights, and an agreement to**

cooperate to fight drug trafficking. This resumption of Saudi-Syrian ties is one of the most significant developments in Arab nations' moves to normalize relations with Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad.

Similarly, after Omani and Saudi delegations arrived in Yemen to negotiate a permanent ceasefire deal with the Houthis, more than 800 detainees from both sides of the conflict were released last week. Facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross, this [exchange included](#) 181 members of the UN-recognized government and 706 Houthi prisoners, and boosts the potential for a negotiated settlement to the war on Yemen. Today, [around 80%](#) of the Yemeni population relies on humanitarian aid and protection.

The Environmental Research Group at Imperial College London published a [report](#) showing that air pollution impacts every stage of human life including fetal development, health of teenagers' cognitive abilities, and adult mental wellness. The review [synthesizes](#) the findings of more than 35,000 studies from around the world and announces: "The most important new finding is evidence related to both the impact of air pollution on brain health, including mental health and dementia, and early life impacts that could lead to future health burdens within the population."

For five years, the Department of Justice [has been quietly investigating](#) the murder of American aid worker Layla Shweikani and has recently convened a grand jury to hear evidence. Shweikani was brutally tortured and executed in Syria in 2016, but the U.S. government seemed silent on the matter at the time, outraging politicians and human rights workers. The U.S. inquiry aims to bring to account top Syrian officials considered "key architects of a ruthless system of detention and torture that has and continues to flourish under President Bashar al-Assad."

[More than a billion](#) Muslims observing Ramadan will be celebrating Eid al-Fitr today. But this Ramadan feels different for many around the world. In Turkey, survivors of the recent earthquake [reflect on](#) faith, gratitude, and family amid recent loss, trauma, and devastation. "This Ramadan is the hardest for us so far," one mother in Syria says in reference to [the country's financial crisis and the recent earthquake](#). For tens of thousands of Palestinians, the journey to pray at the al-Aqsa mosque – a "centerpiece of Ramadan" – begins [through a military checkpoint](#). In Pakistan, too, Ramadan celebrations are "muted" by an economic crisis. Since the holiday began, [at least 22 people have been killed and dozens injured in stampedes](#) and long lines to receive Pakistani government- and charity-distributed food. And amid violent clashes between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, Sudanese civilians are [increasingly cut off](#) from food, healthcare, and power — "I believe this Ramadan is like hell for people living in Sudan" said one aid worker.

Alibaba, the Chinese tech giant, will [launch](#) its own AI chatbot, rival ChatGPT, named Tongyi Qianwen, which translates (roughly) to "seeking an answer by asking a thousand questions." Alibaba claims that Tongyi Qianwen will work in English as well as Chinese and will perform many tasks including writing emails, drafting business proposals, and transcribing

meeting conversations.

A Taiwanese designer recently [created an embroidered badge](#) showing a Formosan black bear indigenous to Taiwan punching Winnie the Pooh, who is holding a honey pot engraved with the five stars of the Chinese flag. Internet memes have long joked about the supposed resemblance of Pooh to Xi Jinping — and all references to Pooh are being [censored](#) on the Chinese internet.

Mike Check!

A new GOP-led House means a Congress in which Congressmen named Michael [outnumber](#) women as committee chairs. Here's Mike Check, an occasional series dedicated to keeping track of what the Mikes are doing with all that power.

Mike McCaul, chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, chose tough talk over diplomatic prudence during a visit to Taiwan. According to [Politico](#), Chair McCaul “shrugged off ‘talk about ambiguity’” while speaking publicly next to Taiwanese VP Lai Ching-te, saying, “the U.S. stands with you and will protect you” – a statement that caused “some of the members and aides sitting nearby to exchange wide-eyed looks.” He also compared Chinese President Xi Jinping to Adolf Hitler and even predicted that the Chinese government would invade Taiwan if Taiwanese elections didn’t go its way.

In making these statements, Chair McCaul walked all over the longstanding U.S. policy of “strategic ambiguity” – the idea that the U.S. never clarifies whether it would go to war with China to protect Taiwan. This “ambiguity,” exists for a reason: it protects Taiwan from what would be a devastating war. Maintaining this policy has helped Taiwan become a thriving democracy with a robust economy, but Chair McCaul appears happy to undermine it to score political points. We hope the chair and other hawks come to understand that protecting Taiwan means making calculated diplomatic statements and decisions to uphold the peace, not chest thumping over a devastating war that should never come.