



Life Matters Journal

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

The Russo-Ukrainian War and the Nuclear Threat: How Did We Get Here, and What Do We Do Now?

Twice Abandoned: The Disabled and
Institutionalized in the Russo-Ukrainian War

A Defense Against Threats or a Cause of Them?
The United States' Global Military Presence

Help War's Victims: End the Economic
Punishment of Afghanistan

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

War is in the news lately in a way it has not been for years. Many have said they never thought war would come back to Europe. The truth is that the United States and many European countries have been engaged in wars nearly continually since the end of World War II. But since most of those wars have taken place in countries deemed less important, where the people affected can be seen as “less human,” many of us have been able to ignore them.



In this issue, our authors analyze the way war intersects with a variety of other Consistent Life Ethic issues. As Russia continues to wage war on Ukraine, Sophie Trist looks at the racial dimensions of European refugee policy, and Kristina Artuković discusses the plight of institutionalized children and the disability community more broadly. Samuel B. Parker considers the possibility of conflict between countries armed with nuclear weapons, and John Whitehead shows how overseas military bases have a variety of undesirable impacts on the environment, those who live nearby, and the peace and stability of their region.

As Kristina Artukovic notes in her piece this month, “In war, the existing modes of dehumanization... [are] amplified.” There is no country, no matter how far or little known by U.S. citizens, where those affected by war are not human beings with dignity and a right to life. Furthermore, we must be careful to regard all those waging war around the world as human beings rather than monsters, human beings who are fully responsible for their violent actions against other equally valuable human beings.

We at Rehumanize continue to stand in solidarity with all those harmed by war, and we advocate for nonviolent solutions to conflict, especially before a country goes to war.

For peace and life,

Sarah Slater

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether that violence is legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer

The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the Consistent Life Ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

CONTENTS

CURRENT EVENTS: The Russo-Ukrainian War and the Nuclear Threat: How Did We Get Here, and What Do We Do Now? 1

ESSAY: Twice Abandoned: The Disabled and Institutionalized in the Russo-Ukrainian War 3

ESSAY: Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right: Constructively Discussing Race in the Russo-Ukrainian War 5

ESSAY: Help War's Victims: End the Economic Punishment of Afghanistan 7

ESSAY: A Defense Against Threats or a Cause of Them? The United States' Global Military Presence 9

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The Russo-Ukrainian War and the Nuclear Threat: How Did We Get Here, and What Do We Do Now?

By Samuel B. Parker

On February 24th, Russian forces invaded Ukraine and initiated the first major conventional war on the European continent since 1945.¹ In the days since, horrifying images of airstrikes, gun battles, dead bodies, and demolished buildings have spread across the Internet: images reminiscent of World War II.

But this is not World War II. While an abundance of factors distinguishes this contemporary conflict from the most devastating military contest in history, one factor stands out among the rest: today, most of the powerful players in Europe, Asia, and North America are armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons.

In light of this, it is more important than ever to weigh the potential consequences of international reaction to the developing disaster in Eastern Europe.

Background

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine have persistently flared since the decline and ultimate dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the height of its dominance, the Kremlin had delimited vast swaths of Eastern European and Central Asian land, assigning partitioned territory and redrawing borders in order to form distinct national entities under centralized control.² But as entire nations in Europe and Asia regained their independence following the collapse of the empire, formal boundaries became somewhat unclear.³

Modern Russia has disputed the conditions of and, in some cases, the very premise of Ukrainian agency and autonomy ever since, basing its objections on two primary arguments:⁴ firstly, that several territories currently possessed by Ukraine are historically the rightful property of Russia, and secondly, that the very existence of Ukraine is both the result of and dependent upon coerced Russian concessions and altruistic Russian permission. In other words, Russian officials insist that Ukraine comprises stolen land, and has no legitimate right to exist outside of Russian influence. According to them, “there is no Ukraine.”⁵

Tensions between Russia and Ukraine have persistently flared since the decline and ultimate dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Against this backdrop, Russia implemented its superior military might to annex the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea⁶ and to interfere in the ongoing Ukrainian Civil War in Donbas,⁷ where pro-Russian separatists agitate and clash with the Ukrainian military in an effort to achieve both the secession of Eastern Ukrainian territories as well as their integration into Russian hegemony.

The breaking point came in 2020, when Ukraine announced its intentions to eventually join NATO: a military alliance organized in large part by the United States and created explicitly to counter Russian threats and balance power in Europe by unifying Western states and establishing coordinated collective defense.⁸ Membership under the NATO charter obligates all parties to protect one another from Russian aggression,⁹ Ukrainian membership would guarantee immediate military aid and assistance to the vulnerable country in the event of Russian incursion.

In response, Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded that Ukraine relinquish the contested regions and vow never to join NATO.^{10,11} When the Ukrainian government refused to acquiesce to these ultimatums, Russian hostilities commenced.

Now What?

Europe has not witnessed traditional ground warfare since World War II culminated in Allied victory over Axis powers. Now, combat roils the continent once again. And while World War II was incomprehensibly catastrophic on all counts, the stakes today are higher still.

Russia maintains more than 6,200 nuclear warheads in an arsenal that is distributed between numerous submarines and missile silos.¹² NATO, meanwhile, holds some combined 6,000, which are deployed across much of Europe.¹³ This aggregate firepower is sufficient to destroy human civilization, the climate, and the globe a dozen times over.¹⁴

Nuclear war is by no means imminent, but it would be naïve to pretend that there are no nuclear implications to the events in Ukraine. American troops stand guard across a tense Europe,¹⁵ even as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pleads for

NATO and European intervention and Russian President Vladimir Putin puts nuclear deterrence operatives on high alert.^{16,17} A wrong move, a fragment of bad intelligence, or a simple change of posture by abstaining NATO armies are the only difference between the present crisis and a total war that could rapidly engulf all of Europe. And as many foreign policy and international relations experts have ominously warned,¹⁸ the idea that a premier nuclear power would launch a nuclear attack after losing tactical advantage on the battlefield is not an unrealistic one. Some have gone so far as to argue that a nuclear strike under such circumstances would be likely or even inevitable. After all, Russian doctrine on the use of its nuclear weapons states that Russia “reserves the right to utilize nuclear weapons... in the event of aggression... involving the use of conventional weapons when the... existence of [Russia] is threatened”: a position that preemptively justifies a nuclear answer to traditional perils.¹⁹

In light of this situation, there are three imperatives.

Firstly, Russian violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and murder of civilians must be unanimously and universally condemned in the strongest possible terms.²⁰ Empathy and practical support must be lent to the people of Ukraine; allies must prioritize the evacuation of Ukrainian noncombatants and the expedited admission of Ukrainian refugees.

Secondly, the global community must exhaustively pursue every possible diplomatic recourse, averting escalation by availing itself of the international institutions that are in place for just such occasions. Russia must be held accountable for its war crimes and contravention of basic human rights, which entails expulsion from the United Nations Security Council and austere economic discipline in the form of concerted sanctions. NATO and the European Union must refrain from direct military action, but cannot afford neutrality, and thus, complicity. Nor can the world entirely isolate Russia, and ergo allow its rogue management of the largest stockpile of nuclear weapons on earth. In the nuclear world, it is international institutions, negotiation, and strategic economic cooperation that must take center stage.

And finally, the nations of the world must once again focus on nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament. No safety, stability, or peace can endure when billions of innocent lives serve as collateral in every geopolitical crisis. And there can be no justice or morality when all quarrels are settled under the looming specter of annihilation.

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Twice Abandoned: The Disabled and Institutionalized in the Russo-Ukrainian War

By Kristina Artuković

During the 2014 war in Ukraine, Disability Rights International (DRI) conducted an investigation into the situation with the institutionalized children of Ukraine.¹ What they found was extremely unsettling.²

Both Ukraine and Russia have some of the highest rates of child institutionalization in the world.

The deinstitutionalization reform that took off in the 1980s has been successful in most parts of Europe and North America, and in South Eastern Europe, this reform has been going on for the past 15 years.³ Nonetheless, high rates of institutionalization still persist in many other parts of the world, especially in those countries that implemented the Soviet doctrine of defectology — or more precisely, the way the Soviets (mis)understood it.⁴

UNICEF estimates that there are 82,000 children living in institutions in Ukraine.⁵ Some other NGOs and local advocacy groups quote numbers higher than 200,000. Many of the institutionalized children are vulnerable, coming from a minority group or from poverty.⁶ An alarmingly high number of these children are disabled. In these institutions, disabled children are often further segregated, relegated to separate rooms and given the least care. Five years ago, the Ukrainian government adopted an action plan to reform its institutional care system, but there really hasn't been a true opportunity to conduct it. The DRI's report has found that during the war, Ukraine's institutionalized children were at an *extremely high risk* of further neglect, physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, trafficking, sale of bodily organs, killing and disappearance. Today, when the extent and intensity of war are horribly amplified, these risks become infinitely higher. Furthermore, there are over 1.4 million people already internally displaced due to years of ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The current major escalation will result in even greater displacement, with many children facing an increased risk of institutionalization.

The Russian situation with institutionalization is similar to that in Ukraine and has been equally as grim prior to this war. It is estimated that there are more than 400,000 children living in Russian institutions;⁷ 45% of these children are disabled. 95% of all institutionalized children have at least one parent, and were placed there

because of similar reasons to those in Ukraine: cultural ableism and systemic pressure for segregation. The same horrible images described in the DRI's report for Ukraine might as well apply to Russian child residential programs. The sanctions imposed on Russia will almost certainly create serious shortages of food, hygiene products, utilities, medication and staff. These already marginalized and segregated children might be the first to experience the most gruesome effects of the sanctions.

War implies the logic of dehumanization. People caught in or sent into the conflict are reduced to resources, liabilities or depersonalized targets. There are 2.7 million persons with disabilities registered in Ukraine. Those deemed a liability who have been cut off from society, especially those with cognitive disabilities, might be further downgraded, being deemed totally disposable. All disabled people are extremely vulnerable in this current situation:⁸ they face a disproportionately high risk of being abandoned, abused, lost or killed, and they may experience a lack of access to safety, relief and emergency care. Safety and evacuation are often particularly hard to achieve, and evacuation centers are usually inaccessible.⁹ Some reports coming from the disability community indicate that the situation for disabled people has become appalling. People with intellectual disabilities are especially at risk of being left behind or excluded from government responses and international aid.¹⁰

In war, the existing modes of dehumanization and ableism become extremely amplified and may stay that way long after it ends. It is therefore imperative to provide targeted assistance and put more focus on the most vulnerable individuals caught in this situation.¹¹

The European Disability Forum has published an open letter addressed to the heads of European institutions, European, Russian and Ukrainian heads of state and NATO, urging them to ensure the protection and safety of all disabled persons, especially those in institutions.¹² Since then, many other organizations focusing on people with intellectual disabilities — like the European Down Syndrome Association and Inclusion International — have joined in and published a similar plea.^{13,14}

The UK's Down's Syndrome Association has set up a fundraising

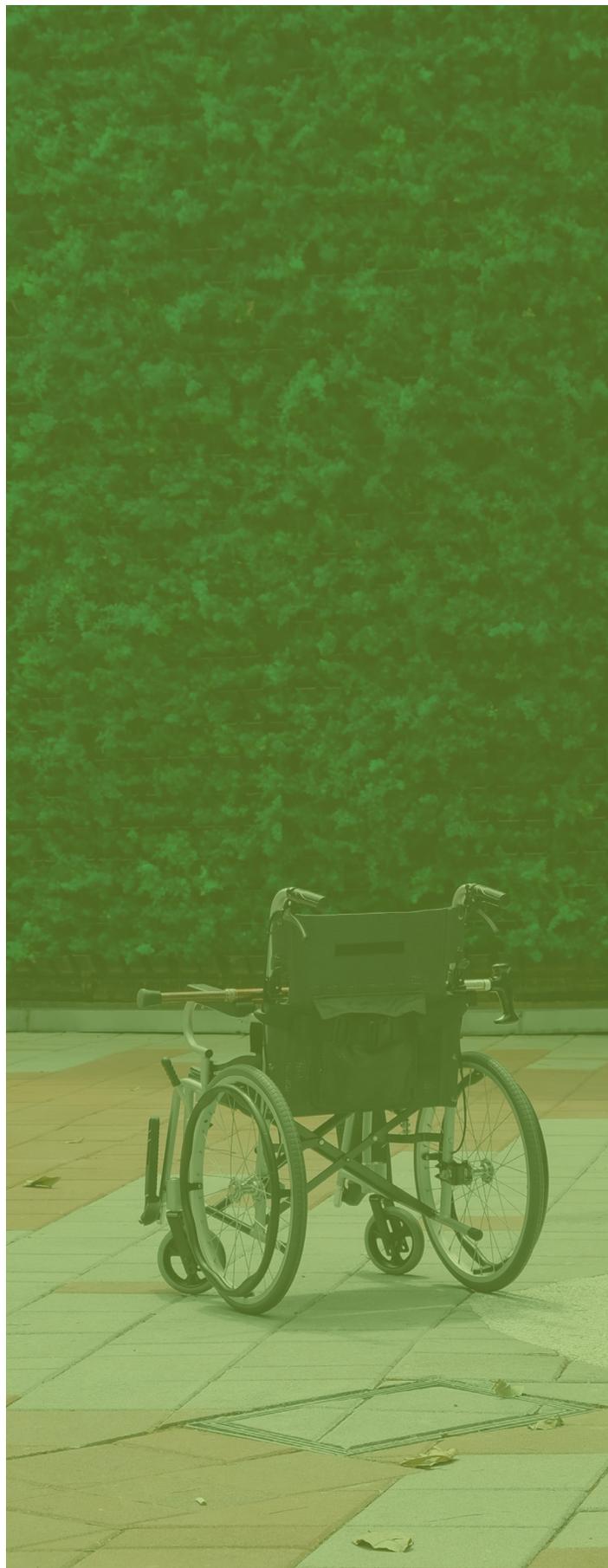
campaign to support children and adults with Down syndrome in Ukraine, the majority of whom are institutionalized and are now under an enormous risk of abandonment.¹⁵

International Committee of the Red Cross is currently in need of donations, and they have one of the best networks on the ground that can help coordinate other humanitarian organizations.¹⁶

Disabled people are marginalized even during times of peace, and it is very easy to erase them in wartime. The disability discrimination issue is nested within the concentric circles of countless other horrors happening right now — but how we treat the most vulnerable among us defines the true quality of our societies. This crisis calls for us to fully embrace our equal value, mutual dependency and universal interconnectedness. These three are directly opposite to the mentality that causes and reiterates wars.

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Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right: Constructively Discussing Race in the Russo-Ukrainian War

By Sophie Trist

Around ten P.M. on the night of February 23, a breaking news alert on my phone told me that Russia had just launched a brutal and unprovoked attack on its democratic neighbor Ukraine, using rhetoric straight out of Hitler's playbook by falsely claiming that Ukraine was committing genocide against Russians and was controlled by Neo-Nazis.¹ I turned off the music I'd been listening to and just sat on my bed in stunned horror for a while. Later that night, I wrote in my diary, "I feel like the world as I knew it, as I was taught to conceive of it in the twenty-first century, is breaking down and no longer makes sense. There isn't supposed to be war in Europe. Things just don't work this way."

But they do work this way in much of the world. Wars devastate many parts of Africa and the Middle East, often invisible to western audiences.

The U.S. contributed to the world's worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen.² As of March 2021, millions of Yemenis were on the verge of starvation, and every 10 minutes, a child died of malnutrition or preventable disease.³ During America's utterly pointless 20-year war in Afghanistan, around 71,000 civilians lost their lives, many of them due to U.S. and NATO airstrikes.⁴ After the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. troops and the rapid Taliban takeover, the government quickly abandoned its efforts to help Afghans in danger from the regime.⁵ European countries have done little to help Afghan refugees while certain politicians fall back on Islamophobic stereotypes.⁶ China continues to commit genocide against Uyghur Muslims with near impunity.⁷ None of these atrocities have received the same united condemnation or response as

Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Part of this is due to the fact that, as a developed country, Ukraine has more access to western media and social media. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has proven to be an immensely heroic and charismatic figure. From Star Wars to Harry Potter to The Hunger Games to World War II stories, we're immersed in books and films featuring snarky, outmatched, mostly white (although fortunately this last detail is beginning to change) protagonists resisting tyranny, and for many of us, Ukraine's struggle evokes these popular images.

But we would be remiss not to reflect on the racist dimensions, both explicit and implicit, of our reaction to Russia's invasion: we care a lot more about war when its victims are primarily white and Christian.

There have been numerous reports of people of color being segregated from white refugees, being pushed to the back of the line by Ukrainian soldiers and others fleeing the war, and being denied the same humanitarian services as their white counterparts.^{8,9} Some European leaders have plainly stated that white refugees are more desirable than people of color.

"These people are Europeans. These people are intelligent. They are educated people. ... This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists," Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov said shortly after Russia invaded.¹⁰ Far-right French presidential candidate Eric Zemmour supports giving some visas to Ukrainian refugees but says that Arabs are still unwelcome.¹¹

Advocates and writers from Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan are calling out western media for embracing double standards when it comes to refugees.¹² The racial politics of this war demonstrate who is seen as a full person, and thus worthy of sympathy, and who is dehumanized, marginalized, and ignored.

The Russo-Ukrainian war should be a call to action for everyone who believes that all refugees are people with inherent and infinite human dignity, and that everyone deserves to live free from aggressive violence. This should be a time for Americans to take a good long look in the mirror and examine both our attitudes toward war and its victims and the way that international systems insulate powerful nations from being held accountable for their actions.

However, racial double standards should never, under any circumstances, be used to justify Putin's war. I've seen a lot of whataboutism in online discourse about the war, comments to the effect that American and western European bellicosity and callousness toward Muslim refugees somehow justifies or minimizes Russia's unjustifiable actions.

Two wrongs absolutely do not make a right. The Ukrainian family fleeing shelling in Kyiv is just as precious and worthy as the child starving in Yemen or the family fleeing Syria. Conversations about racial double standards in war are critical, but only if those conversations are constructive and recognize the human dignity of every person affected, regardless of race, religion, nationality, or any other factor. War does its best to strip us of our common humanity; we must not let it.

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Help War's Victims: End the Economic Punishment of Afghanistan

By John Whitehead

Having already endured decades of civil war, Afghanistan's people now face economic collapse and abysmal poverty. The Taliban's victory in August 2021 over the U.S.-backed Afghan government led to a dramatic decrease in foreign support to Afghanistan. The United States has also placed economic sanctions on the country under Taliban rule. These events have contributed to a humanitarian crisis for the Afghan people. The United States must prevent any further suffering by ending Afghanistan's economic punishment.

Under Afghanistan's previous, American-supported regime, the country became heavily dependent on foreign financial support. Prior to the Taliban takeover, the United States and other Western nations funded about 80 percent of Afghan government expenses. Following the August takeover, the donor money flow stopped.¹ Meanwhile, the Biden administration and European banks froze the overseas funds of Afghanistan's Central Bank, an amount totaling roughly \$10 billion. The United States also designates the Taliban as a terrorist organization. This designation (along with other legal issues) restricts Taliban representatives' ability to receive Afghan government funds.² The terrorist designation also means U.S. people are prohibited from doing business with the Taliban.³

While these measures may be intended to keep money from the Taliban, their immediate practical effect has been inflicting suffering on the Afghan people.

Jan Egeland of the Norwegian Refugee Council, an aid organization, commented that freezing Afghanistan's overseas funds "sent shock waves through the banking system...leading to bank

closures and halting the economy." This situation restricts Afghan businesses' ability to operate.⁴ Egeland estimated that hundreds of thousands of public employees, including teachers, healthcare workers, electricity grid engineers, and others have gone without pay. Deborah Lyons, the United Nations' special representative for Afghanistan, commented that "Cash is severely limited. Traders cannot get credit," and many people "can't access their savings."⁵

These economic consequences have fallen on a nation already in dire need. A drought that began in 2020 hurt Afghan farmers, and over half a million people were internally displaced by conflict during roughly the first nine months of 2021.⁶ In October 2021, a global partnership of aid organizations estimated that almost 19 million Afghans were facing high levels of acute food insecurity and projected that this number would rise to over 22 million — more than half the population — by March 2022.⁷

The United Nations Development Programme further projected that by the middle of 2022 over 90 percent of Afghans could be living below the World Bank-defined international poverty line of \$1.90 a day.⁸ This past fall, UNICEF warned that some 1 million Afghan children under age five were at risk of dying from malnutrition by the end of 2021.⁹

Some humanitarian aid reaches Afghanistan. The U.S. Treasury Department allows for exceptions to sanctions for medicine and other aid.¹⁰ UN agencies, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), and other groups are providing assistance to Afghans.¹¹ However, current aid efforts, while important, are inadequate for two reasons.

First, businesses and individuals predictably want to avoid legal penalties for doing business with the Taliban. Faced with regulations and uncertainty over commercial activities in Afghanistan, many groups will likely avoid such activities altogether.¹²

Second, even expansive humanitarian aid cannot replace a normally functioning economy. Laurel Miller, who worked on Afghan issues for the U.S. State Department and currently works for the International Crisis Group, commented, “Restoring a minimally functioning public sector and stopping Afghanistan’s economic free-fall will require lifting restrictions on ordinary business and easing the prohibition on assistance to or through the government.”¹³

Miller urges the U.S. government to lift sanctions on the Taliban as a group, provide funds for vital public services, and help restore the operations of Afghanistan’s central bank.¹⁴ WFP director David Beasley calls on the Biden administration to unfreeze Afghanistan’s overseas funds: “If you unfreeze the money,” Beasley says, “then you can put liquidity back into the marketplace, and the economy will start to come back up.”¹⁵

Given the Taliban’s human rights record, any policy that seems to reward the group is decidedly unappealing. Nevertheless, economic punishments for Afghanistan are unlikely to change the Taliban’s behavior. Economic sanctions have a very mixed record of success in altering regimes’ policies.¹⁶ The Taliban in particular, which has spent over 20 years fighting for control of Afghanistan, is unlikely to be swayed by economic pressure. Current policies will probably not change Taliban rule of Afghanistan or prevent them from sheltering terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda. These policies will, however, increase the suffering of the Afghan people.

The United States should release Afghan funds and lift sanctions on the Taliban as a group. This repeal of general economic restrictions should be combined with targeted restrictions on selling weapons or other military equipment to the Taliban. The United States also should dramatically increase humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, as well as encouraging and helping other nations and international institutions to follow a similar approach to Afghanistan.

Please consider contacting the Biden administration by phone or email and contacting your representatives in the House and Senate to urge an end to the economic punishment of Afghanistan. You can also contact your representatives to urge support for the Afghan Adjustment Act, which would help Afghan refugees in the United States.

Lastly, consider donating money to aid organizations working to help Afghanistan, such as World Food Program U.S.A., Catholic Relief Services, or other organizations.

The Afghan people have suffered greatly from decades of war. We should not add to their suffering. Let’s provide Afghanistan with the help it needs.

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A Defense Against Threats or a Cause of Them? The United States' Global Military Presence

By John Whitehead

The United States' military presence extends across the earth. U.S. military personnel are located in hundreds of U.S. bases and outposts in dozens of countries around the globe. Like the U.S. military's enormous size (about 1.3 million troops) and enormous expense (over \$700 billion per year), American troops' international presence demonstrates the U.S. military establishment's immense power.¹ However, this power exacts a cost on the communities where American troops are stationed. Also, the far-flung U.S. military presence might be creating threats even as it supposedly protects against them.

The Defense Department reports that as of September 2021, over 170,000 military personnel (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines) are permanently assigned overseas.² The United States has more than 500 overseas sites under its jurisdiction which are associated with the U.S. military.³ These sites are located in 40 different countries.⁴ The U.S. military has an additional 111 sites located in U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico and Guam.⁵ These numbers were reported in 2018, the last year the Defense Department provided such information.⁶

Such numbers are probably underestimated. A Quincy Institute analysis of America's overseas military presence says Defense Department figures are incomplete: for example, the Pentagon claims to have only one military base in Africa, despite evidence of many more such installations.⁷ The Quincy analysis estimates that the United States has roughly 750 base sites across 80 foreign countries and U.S. territories.⁸

U.S. troops can also be present in other countries even when a U.S.-affiliated base or similar site is not. The Defense Department identifies overseas personnel as present in over 170 countries — far more than where acknowledged military sites are located.⁹ The base-independent troops may be performing tasks such as guarding U.S. embassies or assisting other nations' armed forces.¹⁰

U.S. military sites overseas come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Sites such as Ramstein Air Base in Germany, Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, or Camp Humphreys in South Korea are the equivalent of small cities, complete with hospitals, housing, and similar amenities. Sites can also be airfields, ports, warehouses, or housing for drones or surveillance aircraft.¹¹

The United States established its first permanent overseas base over 100 years ago at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.¹² World War II and the Cold War led to a vast expansion in the U.S. military presence overseas. After the Cold War, this presence diminished, but it remains significant.¹³ The United States still has far more overseas military sites than Russia, China, Britain, or France.¹⁴ Such an overseas military presence supposedly allows the United States to deter adversaries, reassure allies, and respond quickly to threats and crises.¹⁵ Yet the U.S. military presence fosters its own share of dangers.

Military facilities create environmental pollution. The U.S. military uses products, most notably fire-fighting foam, containing chemicals known as PFAS. These chemicals are linked to cancer, developmental delays in children (both inside and outside the womb), and other health problems.¹⁶ PFAS have contaminated communities around U.S. military sites; for example, in 2016, authorities in Okinawa detected high PFAS levels in the island's drinking water — water used by 450,000 Okinawans as well as U.S. service personnel and their families. Other military-related sites in Okinawa have been contaminated with lead, asbestos, and other toxins.¹⁷ Such contamination is not limited to overseas bases, either. Unacceptably high PFAS levels have been found in drinking water or groundwater on or close to 126 military sites within the United States.¹⁸

Military facilities also pose another danger to local communities: sexual assault by military personnel. Okinawa again provides a grim example. One infamous case is the 1995 rape of a

12-year-old girl by U.S. troops. The feminist group Okinawa Women Act Against Military Violence estimates hundreds of people have been rape victims since the U.S. military presence on the island began in 1945.¹⁹ Marine court-martial records show that 69 Marines were convicted in Okinawa during 2015-2020 for sexual offenses involving minors, including actual or attempted sexual assault (whether the targeted children were Okinawans or the children of other service personnel is unknown).²⁰

Further, U.S. military sites may endanger U.S. troops or other Americans by provoking hostility toward the United States. The U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia was one of the chief grievances that motivated al Qaeda's terrorism.²¹ The U.S. military presence in countries such as Japan and South Korea, while no doubt partly intended to defend against China, may be perceived by Chinese policymakers as a threat and thus increase U.S.-China hostilities.

The United States should consider limiting and reducing its military bases, just as specific weapons should be limited and reduced. Like traditional arms control, controlling military bases could be pursued in cooperation with rival nations such as China and Russia; the United States could reduce its bases in return for a limit on Chinese and Russian bases. A world with fewer military bases could prove a safer one.



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