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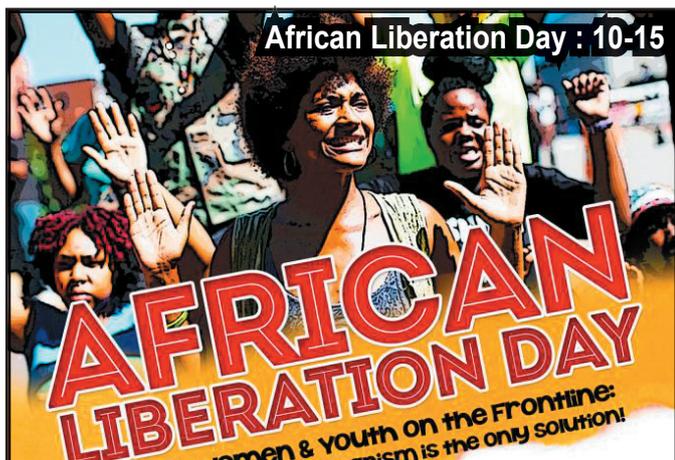
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**Fight for an Anti-War Government : 1-9**



**African Liberation Day : 10-15**



**Free Oscar López Rivera : 16-20**

AN AIM IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE

## Advance the Fight for an Anti-War Government

A main feature of the current campaign for president is the absence of discussion on the key issue of war and peace, and more specifically how candidates will implement the *anti-war* sentiment of the majority. This anti-war stand

has been expressed in numerous ways, including petitions, meetings and polls, all of which indicate the majority of people are demanding an end to U.S. wars. Yet the candidates are silent on this key

**Fight for Anti-War Government • 3**

## Salute African Liberation Day! U.S. Imperialism, Out of Africa

May 25 is celebrated worldwide as African Liberation Day (ALD). This year is the 53rd anniversary of this day to salute the liberation struggles, present and past of Africa, the various struggles for reparations from the U.S. and other

colonial powers, and the current fights for sovereignty against U.S. aggression, such as in Libya. It is a day when people gather to affirm their conviction that victory will belong to all African peoples.

**African Liberation Day • 10**

OBAMA MUST END 35 YEARS OF UNJUST IMPRISONMENT

## Broad Support to Free Oscar López Rivera Now

May 29, 2016 marks the 35th year of the unjust U.S. imprisonment of Puerto Rican independence fighter Oscar López Rivera. López Rivera was sentenced to 55 years in prison by the U.S. for his just and principled stands to defend the dignity and sovereignty of the

Puerto Rican people and end U.S. colonialism. He spent 12 years in solitary confinement for his political stand. He was repeatedly offered release if he would renounce the struggle for independence, and he has always stood firm

**Oscar López Rivera • 16**

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### I • Fight for an Anti-War Government

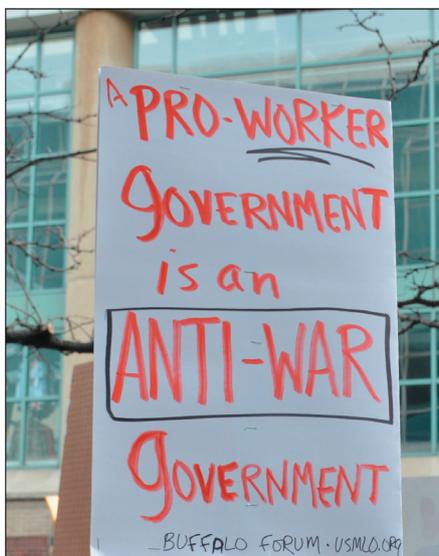
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question of the need for an anti-war government, or at least proposals that take as their starting point opposing U.S. wars.

Hillary Clinton in her speech June 2, for example, expressed her plan to be yet another war president. She will “intensifying the air campaign” against Syria and Iraq and step up “support for Arab and Kurdish forces on the ground.” She emphasized, “The world must understand that the United States will act decisively if necessary, including with military action, to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon. In particular, Israel’s security is non-negotiable.”

Clinton also presented the president not as a civilian responsible to society, but as commander-in-chief: “Americans aren’t just electing a President in November. We’re choosing our next commander-in-chief – the person we count on to decide questions of war and peace, life and death.” In this manner she makes clear her stand that it is the president, not the Congress, not the people, but the president who decides questions of war and peace. This is precisely one of the key problems of today — the vast powers concentrated in the hands of the president. Who, as Obama and Bush before him have shown, use these powers to conduct illegal aggressive wars, including expansion of the terrorism of drone warfare, all against the interests of the people.

Advancing the fight for an anti-war government is an important aim that serves the interests of the people, in the U.S. and abroad. It is an aim that provides a way forward, rather than the backward, destructive direction being pursued in the name of empire. It is particularly important for the people of the U.S. as we are the ones with the responsibility to block the U.S. aggressors here at home and support all those opposing U.S. imperialism



abroad. The anti-war demands to *Bring All Troops Home Now! Stop War Funding and Fund Our Rights*, serve the interests of the people at home and abroad.

Advancing the fight for an anti-war government is also linked to struggles to defend the environment and increase funding for social programs, like the rights to healthcare, housing and education. The Pentagon is the world’s single largest polluter and blocking this war machine helps block destruction of both the peoples and the environment. The war economy where about \$1 trillion goes yearly to the war machine, would also be positively impacted. An anti-war government would provide a new direction for the economy, a pro-social direction.

Advancing the fight for an anti-war government also serves to counter the dictate, as Clinton puts it, that the Commander-in-Chief decides questions of war and peace. These are questions that belong to the public and need to be decided in the public interest. This requires discussion, public debate and deliberation. It requires information and proposals for solutions from an anti-war standpoint. A public referendum, based on an informed public, would be a possible tool of an anti-war government. It is the people themselves that need to decide, and the president that needs to submit.

As people now prepare to protest at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland July 18-21 and at the Democratic National Convention July 25-28 in Philadelphia it is important to fight for the aims of the people. It is important to be pro-active and not simply reactive to Trump and Clinton. This means organizing to make the fight for an anti-war government an important part of the actions and on-going efforts.

### WARS WITHOUT AIMS

## A Multi-Trillion-Dollar Bridge to Nowhere in the Greater Middle East

*Andrew J. Bacevich, TomDispatch, May 31, 2016*

We have it on highest authority: the recent killing of Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour by a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan marks “an important milestone.” So the president of the United States has declared, with that claim duly echoed and implicitly endorsed by media commentary — *The New York Times* reporting, for example, that Mansour’s death leaves the Taliban leadership “shocked” and “shaken.”

But a question remains: A milestone toward what exactly?

Toward victory? Peace? Reconciliation? At the very least, toward the prospect of the violence abating? Merely posing the question is to imply that U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Islamic world serve some larger purpose.

Yet for years now that has not been the case. The assassination of Mansour instead joins a long list of previous milestones, turning points, and landmarks briefly heralded as significant achievements only to prove much less than advertised. One

imagines that Obama himself understands this situation perfectly well. Just shy of five years ago, he was urging Americans to “take comfort in knowing that the tide of war is receding.” In Iraq and Afghanistan, the president insisted, “the light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance.”

“These long wars,” he promised, were finally coming to a “responsible end.” We were, that is, finding a way out of Washington’s dead-end conflicts in the Greater Middle East. [...] Today, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that George W. Bush bequeathed to Obama show no sign of ending.

Like Bush, Obama will bequeath to his successor wars he failed to finish. Less remarked upon, he will also pass along to President Clinton or President Trump new wars that are his own handiwork. In Libya, Somalia, Yemen, and several other violence-wracked African nations, the Obama legacy is one of ever-deepening U.S. military involvement. [...]

### The Oldest (Also Latest) Solution: Bombs Away

Once upon a time, during the brief, if heady, interval between the end of the Cold War and 9/11 when the United States ostensibly reigned supreme as the world’s “sole superpower,” Pentagon field manuals credited U.S. forces with the ability to achieve “quick, decisive victory — on and off the battlefield — anywhere in the world and under virtually any conditions.” Bold indeed (if not utterly delusional) would be the staff officer willing to pen such words today. [...]

In their quest for a formula that might actually accomplish the mission, those charged with directing U.S. military efforts in the Greater Middle East have demonstrated notable flexibility. They have employed overwhelming force and “shock-and awe.” They have tried regime change (against Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, for example) and “decapitation” (assassinating Mansour and a host of other militant leaders, including Osama Bin Laden). They have invaded and occupied countries. They have experimented with counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention, retaliatory strikes and preventive war. They have operated overtly, covertly, and through proxies. They have equipped, trained, and advised — and when the beneficiaries of these exertions have folded, they have equipped, trained, and advised some more. They have converted American reservists into quasi-regulars, subject to repeated combat tours. In imitation of the corporate world, they have outsourced as well, handing over to profit-oriented “private security” firms functions traditionally performed by soldiers. In short, they have labored doggedly to translate American military power into desired political outcomes. [...]

As measured by outcomes, however, an endless parade of three- and four-star generals exercising command in various theaters over the past several decades fall well short of a passing grade. Strip away the light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel reassurances regularly heard at Pentagon press briefings or in testimony presented on Capitol Hill



and America’s War for the Greater Middle East proceeds on this unspoken assumption: if we kill enough people for a long enough period of time, the other side will eventually give in.

On that score, the prevailing Washington gripe directed at Commander-in-Chief Obama is that he has not been willing to kill enough. Take, for example, a recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed penned by that literary odd couple, retired General David Petraeus and Brookings Institution analyst Michael O’Hanlon, that appeared under the pugnacious headline “Take the Gloves Off Against the Taliban.” To turn around the longest war in American history, Petraeus and O’Hanlon argue, the United States just needs to drop more bombs.

The rules of engagement currently governing air operations in Afghanistan are, in their view, needlessly restrictive. Air power “represents an asymmetric Western advantage, relatively safe to apply, and very effective.” (The piece omits any mention of incidents such as the October 2015 destruction of a Doctors Without Borders hospital in the Afghan provincial capital of Kunduz by a U.S. Air Force gunship.) More ordnance will surely produce “some version of victory.” The path ahead is clear. “Simply waging the Afghanistan air-power campaign with the vigor we are employing in Iraq and Syria,” the authors write with easy assurance, should do the trick.

When generals cite the ongoing U.S. campaign in Iraq and Syria as a model of effectiveness, you know that things must be getting desperate.

Granted, Petraeus and O’Hanlon are on solid ground in noting that as the number of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan has decreased, so, too, has the number of air strikes targeting the Taliban. Back when more allied boots were on the ground, more allied planes were, of course, overhead. And yet the 100,000 close-air-support sorties flown between 2011 and 2015 — that is more than one sortie per Taliban fighter — did not, alas, yield “some version of victory.” In short, we have already tried the Petraeus-O’Hanlon take-the-gloves-off approach to defeating the Taliban. It did not work. With the Afghanistan War’s 15th anniversary now just around the corner, to suggest that we can bomb our way to victory there is towering nonsense.

Petraeus and O’Hanlon characterize Afghanistan as “the eastern bulwark in our broader Middle East fight.” Eastern sinkhole might

be a more apt description. Note, by the way, that they have nothing useful to say about the “broader fight” to which they allude. Yet that broader fight — undertaken out of the conviction, still firmly in place today, that American military assertiveness can somehow repair the Greater Middle East — is far more deserving of attention.

To be fair, in silently passing over the broader fight, Petraeus and O’Hanlon are hardly alone. On this subject no one has much to say — not other stalwarts of the onward-to-victory school, nor officials presently charged with formulating U.S. national security policy, nor members of the Washington commentariat eager to pontificate about almost anything. Worst of all, the subject is one on which each of the prospective candidates for the presidency is mum.

From Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford on down to the lowest blogger, opinions about how best to wage a particular campaign in that broader fight are readily available. Need a plan for rolling back the Islamic State? Glad you asked. Concerned about that new ISIS franchise in Libya? Got you covered. Boko Haram? Here is what you need to know. Losing sleep over Al-Shabab? Take heart — big thinkers are on the case.

As to the broader fight itself, however, no one has a clue. Indeed, it seems fair to say that merely defining our aims in that broader fight, much less specifying the means to achieve them, heads the list of issues that people in Washington studiously avoid. Instead,

they prattle endlessly about the Taliban and ISIS and Boko Haram and al-Shabab.

Here is the one thing you need to know about the broader fight: there is no strategy. None. Zilch. We are on a multi-trillion-dollar bridge to nowhere. [...]

What to do about the Taliban or ISIS is not a trivial question. Much the same can be said regarding the various other militant organizations with which U.S. forces are engaged in a variety of countries across the Greater Middle East.

But the question of how to take out organization X or put country Y back together pales in comparison with the other questions that should by now have come to the fore but have not. Among the most salient are these: Does waging war across a large swath of the Islamic world make sense? When will this broader fight end? What will it cost? Short of reducing large parts of the Middle East to rubble, is that fight winnable in any meaningful sense? Does the world’s most powerful nation have no other choice but to persist in pursuing a manifestly futile endeavor?

Try this thought experiment. Imagine the opposing candidates in a presidential campaign each refusing to accept war as the new normal. Imagine them actually taking stock of the broader fight that has been ongoing for decades now. Imagine them offering alternatives to armed conflicts that just drag on and on. Now that would be a milestone.

*(Andrew J. Bacevich is professor of history and international relations.)*

## U.S. is World’s Leading Manufacturer of War

*JP Sottile, June 3, 2016, antiwar.com*

Who says nothing is made in the U.S. anymore?

Certainly not the well-heeled denizens of the State Department’s diplomatic corps. And they should know. That is because they are stationed on the front lines of the ongoing battle to preserve Uncle Sam’s dominant market share of the global weapons trade. Luckily for the Military-Industrial Complex, it turns out that “Made In the USA” inspires a lot of brand loyalty, even if actual loyalty is often a harder sell (paging Saudi Arabia). To wit, not only was America the world’s leading arms dealer in 2014 with \$36.2 billion in sales, but it topped that 35 percent surge in sales over 2013 with yet another profitable spike to \$46.6 billion in 2015.

As Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) determined in its recent report on the global arms trade, the United States maintains a commanding “33 percent share of total arms exports” and is the world’s top seller for five years running. And its customer base includes “at least” 96 countries, which is nearly half of the world’s nations. A robust 40 percent of those exports end up in the Middle East.

A recent report in *Defense News* highlights the marketing push by “Commercial Officers” stationed at the U.S. embassy in Jordan. They worked the crowd at the kingdom’s eleventh bi-annual Special Operations Forces Exhibition and Conference (SOFEX). Like many of the nearly 100 military-themed “trade shows” held around the world this year alone, SOFEX offered the profiteers of doom an opportunity to display their merchandise. [...]

The presenters toiling behind the displays are not alone on the battlefield of commerce. That certainly was the case at SOFEX, where the U.S. Embassy deployed Senior Commercial Officer Geoffrey Bogart and Regional Safety and Security chief Cherine Maher to act as sale-force multipliers for America’s military moneymakers. As Jen Judson detailed, Bogart and Maher tracked down sales leads throughout a region gripped by chaos since America wantonly destroyed a bystander nation under false pretenses (a.k.a. Iraq). Here are Judson’s highlights from Bogart and Maher’s magical misery tour of the profitable market forces currently shaping America’s recently reshaped Middle East:

**JORDAN:** “We are very high on the safety and security market in Jordan,” Geoffrey Bogart, a commercial officer at the US Embassy said. Bogart said there is an abundance of market prospects for U.S. companies to do business in Jordan, including in border security, cyber security, command and control centers, telecommunications equipment, military vehicles, artillery, tactical equipment, bomb and metal detectors, and closed circuit television (CCTV) and access control.

**EGYPT:** “Egypt is facing a lot of challenges especially in terms of border control and whether it’s from the West or the East or the North or the South, so the main project that is going on is border and perimeter control,” Maher said, which means the country really wants bomb detection, jammers and improvised explosive device diffusers.

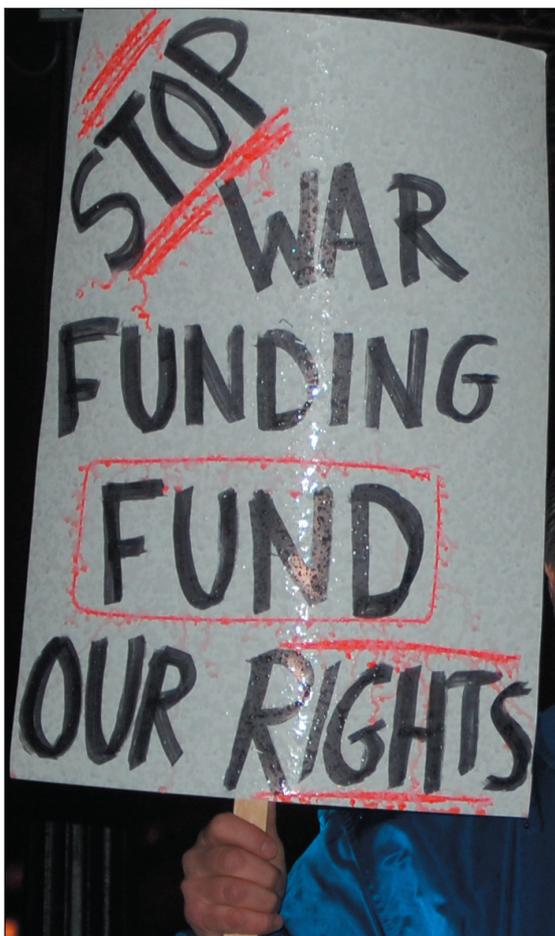
**LIBYA:** The current instability in Libya has led to challenges for U.S. firms, according to Maher; however, U.S. companies' products are in high demand there. "The trick is how to enter the market, who to sell to, and making sure of export license," she said. [...]

**IRAQ:** Maher said Iraq has a particularly "dynamic" market valued in 2014 at about \$7.6 billion, which is about 3.44 percent of its GDP. With the ongoing war against the Islamic State group, it is anticipated that Iraq will soon spend around \$19 billion, which would make up about 18 to 20 percent of its GDP. Like all the other countries in the region, Iraq is investing heavily in safety and security equipment, and also wants personal protective gear and security systems for residential and commercial buildings, according to Maher.

A "dynamic" market is right ... that is, if you are General Dynamics. Or Lockheed Martin. Or Boeing. Or any of the big six defense contractors who together took home \$90.29 billion of the over \$175 billion worth of taxpayer dollars doled out last year to the top 100 military contractors. Not coincidentally, seven of the top eight U.S. Government contractors are defense companies, with only health care services provider McKesson making it past a phalanx of defense wheelers and dealers.

It is a rarified world greased last year by \$127.39 million of lobbying largesse and another \$32.66 million spent so far this year, according to OpenSecrets.org. Of course, lobbying offers a great bang for the buck when it comes to stoking sales. A MapLight analysis earlier this year found that "major U.S. government contractors have received \$1,171 in taxpayer money for every \$1 invested in lobbying and political action committee contributions during the last decade."

Still, nothing quite compares to the breeder reactor effect that comes from using expensive military hardware to destroy regimes in a never-ending global war. Regime change touched off civil war in Iraq. That spread to Syria, which, in turn, sent over 660,000 refugees into Jordan and over one million refugees into Lebanon ... all of which explains why Bogart and Maher are so bullish on the sale of security-related products to those two nations and why



the entire region is in the midst of a military buying spree. [...]

Then there is the chaotic aftermath of regime change in Libya, which threatens to spill over to two more booming markets – Tunisia and Egypt. Of course, Egypt had its own U.S.-endorsed internal regime change at the hands of a loyal customer and longtime recipient of American "aid" – the Egyptian military. It was really a "coup," but U.S. law would have prevented selling Egypt's military junta tear gas canisters marked "Made In USA" (among other things) if it was officially a coup d'état, so the Obama Administration simply did not call it a coup. [...]

And so the dynamic market churns onward – with tax dollars paying the salaries of State Department "Commercial Officers" who work for the heavily-subsidized U.S. defense industry as salespeople in overseas markets destabilized by taxpayer-funded wars fought by taxpayer-supported American soldiers armed with weaponry purchased from that self-same defense industry with – you guessed it – more tax dollars.

The "diplomats" in the State Department act as important go-betweens in the process, helping "customers" navigate the military-industrial complexities of end-user certificates, export licenses, and human rights restrictions so they can spend taxpayer-funded U.S. "aid" that invariably ends up back in the coffers of Lockheed, Boeing, Raytheon, and so on.

Once the money makes it back home to the defense industry, those companies invest some of their windfalls into lobbying, into SuperPACS, into both political parties, and directly into campaigns of the Congressional cronies who dutifully rubberstamp the defense budget that enriches the defense industry. So far this year, they have poured over \$17 million into those efforts and, in turn, they have provided the fuel to run the "dynamic" perpetual machine in which the State Department is a vital cog.

And this is why the folks at the State Department know full-well that, in fact, America still actually makes something – it is the world's leading manufacturer of war.

*JP Sottile is a freelance journalist, radio co-host, documentary filmmaker, and former broadcast news producer.*

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# A Policy of Assassinations Is Being Conducted Using Drones

Jeremy Scahill

*The following excerpt is from The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program, published by Simon & Schuster*

\* \* \*

From his first days as commander in chief, the drone has been President Barack Obama's weapon of choice, used by the military and the CIA to hunt down and kill the people his administration has deemed — through secretive processes, without indictment or trial — deserving of execution. There has been intense focus on the technology of remote killing, but that often serves as a surrogate for what should be a broader examination of the state's power over life and death.

Drones are a tool, not a policy. The policy is assassination. While every president since Gerald Ford has upheld an executive order banning assassinations by US personnel, Congress has avoided legislating the issue or even defining the word "assassination." This has allowed proponents of the drone wars to rebrand assassinations with more palatable characterizations, such as the term du jour, "targeted killings."

When the Obama administration has discussed drone strikes publicly, it has offered assurances that such operations are a more precise alternative to boots on the ground and are authorized only when an "imminent" threat is present and there is "near certainty" that the intended target will be eliminated. Those terms, however, appear to have been bluntly redefined to bear almost no resemblance to their commonly understood meanings.

The first drone strike outside of a declared war zone was conducted in 2002, yet it was not until May 2013 that the White House released a set of standards and procedures for conducting such strikes. Those guidelines offered little specificity, asserting that the United States would conduct a lethal strike outside an "area of active hostilities" only if a target represents a "continuing, imminent threat to US persons," without providing any sense of the internal process used to determine whether a suspect should be killed without being indicted or tried. The implicit message on drone strikes from the Obama administration has been Trust, but do not verify.

On October 15, 2015, The Intercept published a cache of secret slides that provide a window into the inner workings of the U.S. military's kill/capture operations during a key period in the evolution of the drone wars: between 2011 and 2013. The documents, which also outline the internal views of special operations forces on the shortcomings and flaws of the drone program, were provided by a source within the intelligence community who worked on the types of operations and programs described in the slides. We granted the source's request for anonymity because the materials are classified and because



the U.S. government has engaged in aggressive prosecution of whistleblowers. Throughout this book, we will refer to this person simply as "the source."

The source said he decided to disclose these documents because he believes the public has a right to understand the process by which people are placed on kill lists and ultimately assassinated on orders from the highest echelons of the U.S. government: "This outrageous explosion of watchlisting, of monitoring people and racking and stacking them on lists, assigning them numbers, assigning them 'baseball cards,' assigning them death sentences without notice, on a worldwide battlefield, was, from the very first instance, wrong." [...]

## The CIA and the US military's Joint Special Operations Command

The CIA and the U.S. military's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) operate parallel drone-based assassination programs, and the secret documents should be viewed in the context of an intense turf war over which entity should have supremacy in those operations. Two sets of slides focus on the military's high-value targeting campaign in Somalia and Yemen as it existed between 2011 and 2013, specifically the operations of a secretive unit, Task Force 48-4. Additional documents on high-value kill/capture operations in Afghanistan buttress previous accounts of how the Obama administration masks the true number of civilians killed in drone strikes by categorizing unidentified people killed in a strike as enemies, even if they were not the intended targets. The slides also paint a picture of a campaign in Afghanistan aimed at eliminating not only al Qaeda and Taliban operatives but also members of other local armed groups.

**U.S. OUT OF PHILIPPINES**

# **Lakbay Lumad Solidarity Statement**

*Iraq Veterans Against the War, May 20, 2016*

As the members of the Lakbay Lumad delegation near the end of their time in the U.S., Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) stands in solidarity with the indigenous leaders from the Philippines here to expose U.S.-sponsored violence against their communities and to call on those in the U.S. to join them in speaking out against it.

We understand that the indigenous people of the southern island of Mindanao (known as the Lumad) have long been the targets of military occupation and of ecological exploitation. Thousands have been forcibly displaced to make way for mining and resource extraction, and the majority of the Philippine Army's forces are deployed in the region. We also understand that the Lumad people have long organized for their right to land and to self-determination, with at least 70 indigenous leaders in the Philippines killed over the past six years for their work against the national and multinational interests threatening them.

On April 1, 2016, thousands of farmers and indigenous Lumad people blockaded a national highway in Kidapawan, Mindanao, demanding the release of 15,000 bags of rice as part of an emergency response to severe El Niño-induced drought. As farmers faced the loss of 70 percent of their food crops – and thousands of families starved – the Philippine National Police opened fire on the protesters, killing 6 and leaving more than 100 wounded.

This was only the latest incident in a long legacy of state-sponsored repression, and we condemn this and every attack against the Lumad people. As U.S. veterans and service members, we further condemn the U.S. government's ongoing efforts to

strengthen its military relationship with the Philippines despite this and other violations. The Philippines receives at least \$50 million in military assistance from the U.S. each year, and in Mindanao, the U.S. has partnered directly with the Philippine National Police, offering equipment, training, and more to forces complicit in violence against civilians. We call on the U.S. government to end its support to forces shooting civilians as they assert their right to survive.

The Lumbia Air Base in Mindanao is one of five recently announced as a site for rotating access by U.S. troops – an expansion of military presence made possible by the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the U.S. and the Philippines. Knowing the history of abuses connected to U.S. military occupation, from the murder of Jennifer Laude to the Jolo Island drone strike that killed 15 villagers in 2012, we demand an end to EDCA and the removal of all U.S. troops from the Philippines.

As an organization that has members who have chosen to resist and refuse service in Iraq and other U.S. occupations, we acknowledge the history of U.S. soldiers choosing to defect from occupying forces in the Philippines. We are grateful to the Lakbay Lumad delegation for sharing their stories and their movement with those of us here in the U.S. With this in mind, we continue to call for support of Filipino people's movements as they organize against the U.S. violation of their sovereignty that began with the 1898 Philippine-American War and that continues to this day.



# Preparing for the Next Memorial Day

Medea Benjamin, CodePink, June 1, 2016

Memorial Day weekend was replete with parades, American flags, and tributes to our war dead, but little reflection on war, particularly the tragic fact that the United States has fallen into the death trap that President Eisenhower warned us about: the military-industrial complex.

Instead of defending our nation as the Constitution stipulates, since the 9/11 attacks the U.S. military, CIA, and military contractors have been waging aggressive wars or interfering by proxy in other nations' internal affairs.

Looking at our national budget, you can see the overwhelming power of the military. The \$600 billion price tag, way over \$1 billion a day, eats up 54 percent of all federal discretionary funds. That is almost as much money as the military budgets of the rest of the world combined. [...]

There have been a few great wins for diplomacy under President Obama, particularly the historic Iran nuclear deal and opening to Cuba. For the most part, however, President Obama has carried over many of the Bush policies. Fifteen years after 9/11, the U.S. military is still in Afghanistan (the longest U.S. war in history). U.S. soldiers are still in Iraq, where our invasion opened up the floodgates of sectarian violence that gave birth to the Islamic State. President Obama, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, has bombed seven countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Syria. He never made good on his promise to close the prison in Guantánamo. But he did do something unique: Instead of capturing prisoners and locking them up in Guantánamo, he decided instead to kill "suspected terrorists" through drone warfare.

The barbarism of targeting "suspects" by remote control from the comfort of an air-conditioned base in the United States, including in countries where we are not at war, should enrage all Americans who cherish the rule of law. As Army Chaplain and Unitarian Minister Christopher John Anton said last month when he resigned from the military: "The executive branch continues to claim the right to kill anyone, anywhere on Earth, at any time, for secret reasons, based on secret evidence, in a secret process, undertaken by unidentified officials. I refuse to support this policy of unaccountable killing." [...]

The problem is not just our frequent military interventions, but also the massive amounts of weapons sold by our merchants of war. The United States has become addicted to the lucrative business of war, with U.S. companies now accounting for 31 percent of global arms exports. While the manufacturing base of our nation has been gutted by globalization, the weapons industry is alive and thriving.

The country that is the number one purchaser of U.S. weapons is Saudi Arabia. U.S. arms dealers have sold the Saudis a record \$97 billion in weapons in the past 10 years, most of those deals made under President Obama. These transactions represent the largest weapons deals in the history of humankind, and they have been made to one of the more repressive regimes in the world. [...]

For the past year, the Saudis have been using U.S. weapons,



including internationally banned cluster bombs, to decimate neighboring Yemen, creating a severe humanitarian crisis. [...]

The anti-war movement was strong and vibrant under George Bush, inspiring hundreds of thousands of people to take to the streets in protest. When Obama became president, the movement [ebbed], with many people thinking Obama would end U.S. military adventurism.

There can be no illusion, however, about the next resident in the White House. Imagine the conflicts Donald Trump will stir up if he has the chance to insult all the world's heads of state. And let's remember that the Democratic presidential option, Hillary Clinton, supported the invasion of Iraq, the surge in Afghanistan, the overthrow of Qaddafi in Libya, the drone wars, and the military coups in Egypt and Honduras. She even talked about obliterating Iran.

In the aftermath of the Memorial Day military parades and with a new administration looming on the horizon, a critical task for the coming year is to build a renewed, more vibrant, interracial, and multi-generational peace movement. [...]

As Vietnam vet Dan Shea said when he reflected on the names etched and not etched on the Vietnam Memorial, including the missing names of the Vietnamese and all the victims of Agent Orange, including his own son: "Why Vietnam? Why Afghanistan? Why Iraq? Why any war? ....May the mighty roar of the victims of this violence silence the drums that beat for war."

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# SALUTE THE FIGHTING PEOPLES OF AFRICA

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## I • African Liberation Day

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Demonstrations took place in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean and the U.S., including those in Guinea-Bissau, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda; London, Portugal, Spain; St. Thomas, Dominica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago; Chicago, Philadelphia, Oakland, Medford, Long Island and Jackson, Mississippi.

African Liberation Day marks a historic convergence of the peoples of Africa to defend and advance their sovereign nation-building projects and to exercise decision-making based on their own experience and thought material. It is a time to review and further develop their common struggle to rid themselves once and for all of the enslavement, colonialism and imperialism of the U.S. and all foreign powers.

African Liberation Day was born out of the consciousness of the peoples of Africa that their liberation was their *own* act and part of the worldwide struggle against imperialism and of the united front of the working class and peoples to end the exploitation of persons by persons. It was initiated at the first Conference of Independent African States held in Accra, Ghana, on April 15, 1958, and attended by eight independent African heads of states. That day was declared “Africa Freedom Day” to mark the ongoing progress of the liberation movement.

In 1960, seventeen African states gained their sovereignty marking it as the “Year of Africa.”

On May 25, 1963, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was founded in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with more than 1,100 people representing 31 African states, 21 African liberation movements and hundreds of supporters and observers in attendance. The OAU (today known as the African Union) proclaimed that May 25 would from then on be celebrated annually as “African Liberation Day.” Up to the present, African Liberation Day is an occasion to highlight and carry forward the aspirations of the peoples of Africa for freedom, sovereignty and new societies.

Today, while nearly every country in Africa has nominally achieved its independence, the peoples’ fight to block imperialist dictate and ongoing exploitation of their countries’ human and natural resources continues. The U.S. has moved to establish its military presence and command structure, AFRICOM. The U.S. has at least 4,500 soldiers and at least six bases, including for drone warfare. It repeatedly interferes, including through drones and bombings in Somalia, the Sudan and elsewhere. It is vying with the old colonial powers, the French and British imperialists. France has more than 3,000 soldiers across five countries and five military bases. British troops are deployed in Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and most recently have been deployed again in Libya. All of these imperialists, first of all the U.S., must get out of Africa now!

This is most readily seen from U.S. aggression in Libya, whose government was overthrown by the U.S.-led military



alliance NATO and its proxy forces in 2011. This was in part revenge by the U.S. against the Libyan people and their leadership, which fought for African unity and to defend Libya’s interests and would not bow down to imperialism. Libya’s standard of living was among the highest in the region — while now there is chaos and civilian infrastructure destroyed.

One particular consequence of the NATO bombing campaign was the racist terror inflicted on Libyans of Sub-Saharan African origin, many of whom were killed brutally and whole towns such as Tawergha were emptied. The U.S. and their monopoly media went to great efforts to spread lies of “African mercenaries” specifically targeting Black Libyans for attack.

The aftermath of “regime change” in Libya has been widening instability, lawlessness and terrorism not only in that country but throughout north Africa and West Asia. The U.S. bears main responsibility, while all the old colonial powers are also playing a role against the people. Instead of more military interference and aggression, the U.S. must be held to account and reparations paid for all the crimes, present and past against African peoples.

In the countries of southern Africa, many of which waged the most glorious and heroic Liberation struggles throughout the 1960s to 1980s against the colonial powers and racist apartheid rule, the people are displaying the same heroism as they confront the problems of nation-building today. A major problem they are confronting is the continued control of important sectors of the economy by racist monopoly capital, whether foreign or coming from the legacy of racist minority rule. The peoples of countries such as Zimbabwe, South Africa and Angola which delivered strong blows against imperialism have worked staunchly to ensure that this legacy does not have the upper hand. The question of the land and its historic theft from the people remains of utmost importance and land reforms and redistribution have been an historic step to ensure the people have an economic base that can guarantee their livelihood and development.

African Americans are consistently in the forefront of the many struggles for rights, a militant section of the U.S. working class, which also includes many new sons and daughters of the peoples of Africa. As one the people of the U.S. have a responsibility to demand that all U.S. forces leave Africa now and to step up the fight for an anti-war government. Such a government would bring and keep U.S. troops home, end all U.S. aggression and interference, dismantle NATO, and develop foreign relations based on mutual respect and benefit with the countries of Africa.

*Voice of Revolution* condemns all U.S. aggression and interference in Africa and all the chauvinist notions that claim only the U.S. can decide and that the peoples of Africa are not fit to govern. As the struggles from the days of slavery to date readily

show, it is the peoples who are their own liberators and fit to govern in modern times, while the U.S. imperialists have shown themselves to have no solutions, no legitimacy and are unfit to govern. We urge our readers and supporters to oppose U.S. aggression against the countries of Africa, support the struggles of the peoples and become informed about the developments now taking place.

On the occasion of African Liberation Day, *Voice of Revolution* sends our red salute to all the peoples of Africa fighting against imperialism and to exercise control over their lives, countries and economies so as to guarantee a bright future for themselves and their children. We salute their many achievements and contributions to the worldwide movement for national liberation, which have uplifted all of humanity.

## **Pentagon and CIA Continue to Destabilize African Continent**

*Abayomi Azikiwe*

Today the African Union faces formidable development and security challenges

May 25, 2016 marks the 53rd anniversary of the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now known as the African Union (AU) since 2002.

The holiday commonly known as Africa Day or African Liberation Day, comes during a period of increasing interference from the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

At a summit in 1963 held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at least 32 African heads-of-state gathered to form the OAU in efforts to foster the rapid decolonization of the continent and to move towards greater cooperation among the various governments. From the onset the OAU encompassed diverse and conflicting views on how Africa should move towards unity.

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the then president of the Republic of Ghana and founder of the ruling Convention People's Party (CPP), called for the immediate formation of a continental government with integrated military, economic and social systems. Nkrumah believed that if Africa did not unite imperialists would reverse the minimal gains made by the national liberation movements and political parties.

Other more moderate and conservative states represented in the so-called Monrovia and Brazzaville Groups advocated a more gradualist approach. Others even within the progressive forces did not embody the militant commitment to unification and socialism [of] Nkrumah and Guinean leader President Ahmed Sekou Toure, who along with Modibo Kieta of Mali had formed the Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union in 1960.

Nkrumah stressed at the founding OAU Summit that "On this continent, it has not taken us long to discover that the struggle against colonialism does not end with the attainment of national independence. Independence is only the prelude to a new and more involved struggle for the right to conduct our own economic

and social affairs; to construct our society according to our aspirations, unhampered by crushing and humiliating neo-colonialist controls and interference." [1]

He went on, saying, "From the start we have been threatened with frustration where rapid change is imperative and with instability where sustained effort and ordered rule are indispensable. No sporadic act or pious resolution can resolve our present problems. Nothing will be of avail, except the united act of a united Africa. We have already reached the stage where we must unite or sink into that condition which has made Latin America the unwilling and distressed prey of imperialism after one-and-a-half centuries of political independence."

Nkrumah was overthrown three years later at the aegis of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the U.S. State Department and other imperialist entities. His ideas nonetheless are still relevant today in light of the growing militaristic and intelligence penetration of the African continent.

### **Some Examples of Imperialist Militarism Today**

#### *The DRC and Mercenary Interests*

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) a leading opposition figure was exposed for having hired mercenaries from the U.S. to provide security for his campaign.

Moise Katumbi, a former governor of Katanga Province, who is now a presidential candidate has faced allegations that he hired mercenaries to assist him in the bid to become leader of the mineral-rich state in Central Africa. On May 9, Katumbi was questioned by the authorities in DRC when he denied the accusations.

Reuters press agency said "The enquiry could lead to charges that carry a prison term and could also tie Katumbi in legal knots that could derail his campaign to succeed President Joseph Kabila at elections scheduled [in] November. Many Congolese people

say Katumbi is the strongest opposition candidate to succeed Kabila, given his personal wealth and popularity as the former governor of Congo's main copper-producing region. He also owns a soccer team."

### *Senegal Signs Defense Pact with Pentagon*

The Senegalese government in West Africa has signed a military agreement with the Pentagon giving Washington full access to the country.

Dakar participated in the Flintlock military exercises that are conducted annually by the Pentagon working in conjunction with other African and European states. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) coordinates these military maneuvers along with similar operations in various regions of the continent.

Relations between Senegal and neighboring Gambia have been strained for years. The U.S. escalation of military cooperation and economic assistance to Senegal are only fueling tensions in the region.

An article in Reuters reported, "The Defense Cooperation agreement 'will facilitate the continued presence of the U.S. military in Senegal,' said Senegal's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mankeur Ndiaye. The agreement 'will also help to enhance security cooperation and further strengthen defense relations to face common security challenges in the region.'"[2]

### **War Threatened in Western Sahara**

In the Western Sahara, Africa's last colony, there are threats of war from Morocco, a close ally of the U.S. Morocco occupies Western Sahara in contravention of the official policy of both the AU and the United Nations.[3]

Western Sahara is a former Spanish colony where Morocco took administrative control in the 1970s. A resistance movement known as the Polasario Front grew out of the demand for full national independence.

After years of fighting, a ceasefire agreement between Morocco and Polasario prompted the establishment of MINURSO in 1991, formally recognized as a United Nations mission. The UN will vote once again on whether to extend the mandate of MINURSO. The UN mandate provided for an internationally-monitored referendum in which the people of Western Sahara could choose whether to pursue independence from or integration with Morocco. This promised referendum has not been held.

The AU maintains official recognition of the Western Sahara people, which caused the Kingdom of Morocco to withdraw from the regional organization. Western Sahara has phosphates and other minerals, making it a source of potential wealth in northwest Africa.

### **CIA Trains Children as Spies in Somalia**

[I]n Somalia, where the CIA has a field station, the agency is providing training to children as spies who target members of Al-Shabaab in the ongoing counter-insurgency campaigns in the Horn of Africa. These training programs are carried out through the Somalia National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), which works closely with the CIA.



Western imperialist states such as the U.S. and those within the European Union (EU) fund and train the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) deploying 22,000 troops that work alongside the Somalia National Army.

*Sputnik News* reported on April 7 that, "In an interview with *The Washington Post*, the boys said that the country's National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) had been using them as 'finger-pointers.' They would be sent to dangerous neighborhoods where al-Shabaab insurgents were hiding and told to point out their former comrades. On many occasions their faces were not covered, although the agents concealed their own. It's scary because you know everyone can see you working with them. The children were used on other missions to collect intelligence and sometimes told to wear NISA uniforms. According to the boys, they were threatened if they refused to cooperate, and their parents didn't know where they were."

### **Africa Must Unite Against Imperialism**

Only an upsurge from the left and anti-imperialist forces can fulfill the visions of a true united Africa in line with the work of Nkrumah, Gaddafi and other revolutionary leaders. The worsening economic crisis due to the decline in commodity prices and western sponsored destabilization is reversing the advances made in regard to growth and development over the last decade.

Africa Liberation Day remains a vehicle to propagate the genuine liberation and unification of the continent under a socialist system. Africa Liberation Day demonstrations have been held annually in various cities across North America since 1972.

### **Notes**

1. May 24, 1963
2. May 2, 2016
3. AllAfrica.com, April 29

*Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of the Pan-African News Wire, an international electronic press service founded in 1998 to foster discussion on the affairs of African people throughout the continent and the world.*

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT:

# A Mechanism for Criminalizing Opposition to Foreign Intervention in Africa

*Stop Foreign Intervention in Africa*

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was established on 17 July 1998 when 120 states adopted the Rome Statute, which is the legal basis of this organization. The court, which is based in The Hague, Netherlands, should not be confused with the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The latter is part of the United Nations and deals with legal disputes between UN member states.

The ICC, on the other hand, is not part of the UN and has as its stated aims to “exercise its jurisdiction over persons for the most serious crimes of international concern” and “to put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes.” The Rome Statute identifies these crimes of concern as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. The Rome statute entered into force on 1 July 2002 and so only deals with crimes which took place after this date.

One striking feature about the establishment of the ICC was that the organization started life without an agreed legal definition of the crime of aggression and so could take no action against those who organized and carried out this crime. This was a rather striking omission, given that as far back as the Nuremberg Tribunals in 1950 crimes against peace were already clearly legally defined as:

(i) Planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances;

(ii) Participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the acts mentioned under (i) Furthermore, such was the clarity on these matters at the time, that the chief American prosecutor at the Nuremberg Tribunals,



Robert H. Jackson, described the crime of aggression thus: “To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

### **Failure to Charge U.S. War Criminals**

Notwithstanding the existing body of international law, the ICC, at its inception was unable to legally define the crime of aggression that Jackson had described some 50 years earlier as the “supreme international crime” which contained all the other war crimes within itself. Eventually, in 2010 at its meeting in Kampala, Uganda, the ICC established a legal definition for the crime of aggression and the conditions under which such a crime would fall within its jurisdiction after 1 January 2017 when this agreement enters into force. These conditions are essentially two. First, a crime of aggression only comes within the jurisdiction of the ICC if it is referred to it by the security council of the UN. Secondly, a state which is party to

the Rome Statute can refer a situation to the ICC if it thinks the crime of aggression has been committed.

However, before the ICC can act, it must approach the UN Security Council to find out if this body has determined that a crime of aggression has taken place. In addition, states which are party to the Rome statute can opt out of the court's jurisdiction with regard to crimes of aggression and those states that are not party to the Rome statute, such as the USA, are specifically excluded from the ICC's jurisdiction with regard to the crime of aggression. This contrasts strongly with the situation regarding the other crimes with which the court allegedly deals, namely genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The court's jurisdiction applies to all countries for these crimes, whether or not they are parties to the Rome Statute, as long as they are referred to it by the UN Security Council.

Through these mechanisms, the big powers which hold vetoes in the UN Security Council are able to carry out crimes of aggression and all the other war crimes that these entail with utmost impunity. This is why today when aggression, regime change and mass human right violations have become the preferred method for the big powers to secure their interests, the perpetrators of these crimes, like Blair, Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Sarkozy, Aznar, Obama, Hillary Clinton and others are walking around scot free. Therefore it is crystal clear that from its outset, the ICC was not set up to prosecute "serious crimes of international concern" nor "to put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes."

### **Africa Targeted, U.S. Ignored**

Notwithstanding its inability to bring to book the major war criminals of our time, the ICC has busied itself with Africa. Of its 10 cases which the ICC currently lists on its website, nine are in Africa. Observers note that of the 39 people who have been indicted by the ICC, 38 are Africans. This vigorous pursuit of Africans by the ICC is contrasted with its approach when it comes to others engaged in war crimes.

For example, on 5 July in 2013 the Comoros Islands referred a case for consideration to the ICC, since the boats which were in the peace flotilla to Gaza and which were attacked by the Israeli army were registered in the Comoros. On 6 November 2014, the ICC rejected the Comoros case on the grounds that it did not meet 'the legal requirements of the Rome Statute.'

In reality, the ICC in Africa operates as the legal arm of the USA/EU/NATO axis and its role is to criminalize any opposition to the interference of these forces in Africa. Currently, the former president of Ivory Coast, Laurent Gbagbo, is being "tried" by the ICC in The Hague. His crime relates to his opposition to the French and UN intervention into the affairs of Ivory Coast following the elections in that country in 2010. The contested results of the November election that year proved to be the trigger for massive French and UN interference in Ivory Coast for the purposes of propelling their preferred candidate into power and for overthrowing



the then government of Laurent Gbagbo which was viewed as unacceptable to the U.S., Britain and France. Working closely with the troops of the so-called United Nations Operations in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI), which has been active in that country since 2004, the French troops overthrew the government of Laurent Gbagbo and installed their preferred candidate, Alassane Ouattara, a former IMF employee.

### **Criminalizing Resistance in Africa**

Another case in point is that of Libya. In the lead-up to the NATO attack on Libya and in order to facilitate it, the ICC rushed out indictments against Muammar Gaddafi and other leading members of the existing Libyan government. In this way, the ICC plays a key role in legitimizing the attacks on Africa and criminalizing any opposition to these attacks. Not surprisingly, the real war crimes that NATO committed in Libya, including the aggression itself, the ethnic cleansing of places such as Tawergha and the racist pogroms against West African migrants who were living in Libya at the time are of no concern to the ICC.

Clearly recognizing the dangerous role that the ICC plays with regard to Africa, there are growing moves on the continent to disentangle Africa from this organization. In October 2015, South Africa withdrew from it and at the 26th annual assembly of the AU in Addis Ababa in January 2016, the organization agreed to create a road map for the withdrawal of the AU member states from this organization. This is a step to be applauded.

*Stop Foreign Intervention in Africa* is a website organized by activists opposed to foreign intervention in Africa on a military, economic, political and cultural level. It can be found at [stopforeigninterventionin africa.org](http://stopforeigninterventionin africa.org).

PAN-AFRICANISM AND COMMUNISM:

# The Communist International, Africa and Diaspora, 1919-1939 by Hakim Adi

## Book Review

This ground-breaking book, based on research undertaken in the archives of the Comintern in Moscow as well as archives in France, Britain, the US and West Africa, documents the activities of the Communist International in relation to Africa and the African diaspora. It focuses on a period when the world was in flux, with inter-imperialist rivalry at its height, when African and Caribbean countries, amongst others, were under colonial domination. Black people in Africa, the Caribbean and other western countries were officially considered inferior, had few rights and racism was at the level of open state policy from so-called "Jim Crow" laws and lynching in the US, to pass laws and segregation in South Africa and the color bar in Britain.

In these circumstances many were inspired by the creation of the Soviet Union, following the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, and the creation of the Communist International in 1919. From its founding under Lenin's leadership, the Comintern sought to inspire and support the oppressed black people throughout the world to organize and empower themselves and break the shackles of imperialism. The book points out that it was the Communists who were at the forefront of the struggle against colonial rule in this period.

The book plays an important role in chronicling the many African, Caribbean and African American Communists who took up the struggle at that time, in particular those connected with the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), established in 1928 under the auspices of the Comintern. The ITUCNW acted to strengthen the work of the Communist Parties to take up for solution the question of how the liberation of Africa and the African diaspora might be achieved. The book points out that in that period many key activists gravitated towards or organized in unity with the international communist movement, including Lamine Senghor in France, Isaac Wallace-Johnson in West Africa, Elma Francois in Trinidad and Jacques Romain in Haiti. In this period the Communists were often in the forefront of major international struggles, for example, to oppose fascist Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 or to demand the release of the nine African American youth arrested in Scottsboro, Alabama in 1931.

The book also examines several areas of controversy and disinformation about the role of the international communist movement in relation to African liberation. Significantly the information outlined in Dr. Adi's book highlights that disinformation has often become accepted wisdom and part of continuing efforts to undermine the crucial role of Communists of African descent and of the Soviet Union itself in this period. Using his extensively researched material the writer outlines the facts about the activity and demise of the ITUCNW, as well as the changing

tactics and analysis of the Comintern in the period leading to the outbreak of World War II, and leaves the reader to make an independent judgment.

This book makes an important contribution to an area of African and Caribbean, as well as Communist history that has long been neglected and which many people are unaware of. Its focus on the activities of African, African American and Caribbean Communists in the period 1919-1939 is to be welcomed. It is an area about which there remains a great deal of confusion not only with regard to the facts but also concerning the lessons to be drawn from this experience.

Dr. Adi focuses his attention on the efforts of ordinary African and Caribbean people who decided to take a stand and address the many problems that confronted them in their time. Problems such as Jim Crow in the USA, and racism and violation of human rights all over colonial Africa and the Caribbean disfigured the lives of millions of people. The Communists took up this struggle with the idea of finding a revolutionary solution to it and with an understanding that solving it would be bound up with the struggle of all oppressed people for their freedom. At great personal sacrifice, these activists made a significant contribution to the mass movements for African liberation, which were to burst out in the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement and the independence struggles in Africa and the Caribbean. The progress that has been achieved in the struggle for African liberation to date is due in no small part to the efforts of those individuals featured in this book. It shows what a significant impact we can have on changing the world in which we live when we take up the challenges facing us and try to find solutions to them.

This book has great significance for those who are today involved in trying to find a solution to the many problems that continue to confront Africans both on the continent and in the diaspora. The point is not that we should simply repeat what was done in 1919-39 when people were grappling with the problems of the world as it was then. Rather, it is that we should be inspired by their example to courageously take up the challenge of changing the world today and using the scientific approach which modern communism offers us.

*(Dr. Hakim Adi is Professor of the History of Africa and the African Diaspora at the University of Chichester. He is the author of West Africans in Britain 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism (London, 1998); joint author (with M. Sherwood) of The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited (London, 1995) and Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787 (London, 2003). on Africans in Britain. (Workers' Weekly, Britain, May 24, 2014)*

### I • Free Oscar López Rivera

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and undaunted, standing by his principles and the right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination. Today, freedom and justice-minded people across the Americas and all Puerto Rican patriots are uniting to step up the work for Oscar López Rivera's liberation. On the eve of the 35th anniversary of López Rivera's imprisonment all-sided efforts are underway to demand his immediate release. This includes petitions and letters to President Obama demanding he provide clemency. An International Day of Solidarity with Oscar López Rivera is set for June 20, 2016 with 35 countries expected to hold actions.

#### Mass Rally and March in San Juan, Puerto Rico

The Committee for Human Rights in Puerto Rico along with the women's group 33 en 33 x Oscar (now 35 x 35 for Oscar) organized a mass rally and march in San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico on May 29. Committee Spokesperson Eduardo Villanueva stated, "Every day that passes, there is a greater urgency to secure his release from prison and to redouble our efforts." Organizers are calling on the Puerto Rican nation to go all out to show their overwhelming support for bringing López Rivera back home. "The call is for all people, all organizations and institutions, public, and private, the people in general, to participate in the march at this critical time, marked by the proximity to the end of the mandate of U.S. President Barack Obama," Villanueva said. Many thousands participated.

#### Unanimous Call from Elected Officials

The leaders of all Puerto Rican political parties, Puerto Rican governor Alejandro García Padilla, the Puerto Rican legislature, and religious, civic and union leaders have united to call on President Obama to grant López Rivera clemency.

Puerto Ricans elected to office in the United States unanimously agreed on April 23 to request a meeting with President Obama to demand López Rivera's release. The 30 elected officials had their first meeting in October 2015 after the creation of the Caucus of Puerto Rican Elected Officials in the United States that includes Congressional representatives, state legislators and city council members. The National Puerto Rican Agenda, comprised of elected officials as well as 50 organizations of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and elsewhere also agreed to support the call for Rivera's freedom. The Hispanic Congressional Caucus in the U.S. likewise demands his release.

Democratic congressman Luis Gutiérrez (Illinois) declared to López Rivera's daughter as the elected officials met in April that "your father will be in your arms this year. He will walk the streets of San Sebastián and Chicago this year." Demanding the release of López Rivera was "the first concrete thing the caucus of elected officials agreed to," said Gutiérrez. Planning is underway for activities throughout the year including a Freedom Concert in Washington, D.C. and mobilizations in September.

#### Poets for Oscar Poetry Marathon



Thirty-five poets from three cities in the U.S. have united for a live-streamed poetry marathon, which began on Friday, May 27 and continued until the anniversary of López Rivera's imprisonment on May 29. The event was broadcast on the website of the National Boricua Human Rights Network at [boricuahumanrights.org](http://boricuahumanrights.org).

On Friday, May 27, five poets from Los Angeles County had a reading at Tia Chucha Cultural Center; On Saturday, May 28 another reading was held in New York City at La Marqueta Retoña; and on Sunday, May 29 at 2:00 pm 35 poets from Chicago held a reading at Casa de Oscar.

Coinciding with the May 29 event in Chicago, the group 35 Women for Oscar, Chicago gathered and rallied for 35 minutes. Similar rallies take place in Puerto Rico, Boston and New York City on the 29th of each month.

#### City Council Resolutions

The city council of Holyoke, Massachusetts unanimously adopted a resolution on April 5 urging President Obama "to exercise his Constitutional power to grant the immediate and unconditional release of Oscar López Rivera." The motion was introduced by city councilor Nelson Roman during his first day in office, and the vote followed a march through the city. City councilors also noted that 2016 marks the 100th anniversary of the Irish rebellion of 1916 and drew comparisons to the struggles of the Puerto Rican and Irish people against colonialism. On May 18, the city council of Springfield, Massachusetts unanimously supported a similar resolution calling

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## FREE OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA NOW

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for Rivera's immediate release. This follows resolutions passed in 2015 by New York City council and others.

### Efforts Will Continue Until López Rivera Is Free

Oscar López Rivera is the last remaining prisoner among those he was arrested with as part of the U.S. efforts to crush the movement for Puerto Rican freedom from U.S. colonial rule. In 1999 President Clinton offered clemency to 13 Puerto Rican political prisoners including López Rivera. López Rivera rejected this because two other co-defendants were not included in the offer and his conditions of parole were more punitive. Since then, all except Oscar have been released. There is widespread international support for his release, including from 10 Nobel Laureates, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and countless popular organizations throughout the Americas.

A most important quality of Oscar López Rivera is his refusal for 35 years and more to renounce his stands in support of the independence and sovereignty of Puerto Rico. This steadfastness and fidelity to the cause of the Puerto Rican people has

been recognized throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, the U.S. and around the world by all the forces who are fighting for dignity, justice and independence from U.S. imperialism. This is also the quality of the Puerto Rican people who in the face of the FBI massacres and other atrocities, police intrigues, plunder and colonial dictate continue to fight for their rights and their just cause of independence. The all-sided support for the liberation of López Rivera is an expression of the fighting unity of Puerto Ricans and their refusal to accept U.S. colonialism and dictate, including the current U.S. demands for debt payments. It is Puerto Rico that is owed reparations.

U.S. colonialism is a crime to be punished and Oscar is a firm and valiant fighter for Puerto Rican independence — a just struggle that strikes a blow against the U.S. war machine. On this occasion of 35 years of Oscar's unjust imprisonment, *Voice of Revolution* salutes Oscar López Rivera and his family and stands with the Puerto Rican people in demanding his immediate release and for the U.S. to withdraw all its troops and end all economic and political interference against Puerto Rico.

*Puerto Rico for the Puerto Ricans! Free Oscar Now!*



## Letter from Oscar López Rivera to his Daughter Clarisa

*On beginning his 35th year in U.S. prisons, May 29, 2016  
For the international Day of Solidarity with Oscar López Rivera, June 20, 2016 expected to take place in 35 countries around the world*

Dearest Clarisa:

What is freedom? Freedom, especially when politicians talk about it, is often stripped of its essence and meaning and is left as inane as the minds and hearts of those individuals who have the power to define it for their convenience. But for me freedom is the most important goal to be achieved by human beings who are victims of colonialism, neocolonialism and slavery because they have never had the opportunity to enjoy freedom and to exercise their inalienable and most fundamental right of self-

determination.

During the 73 years i've lived in this world i've been a subject of u.s. colonialism. The u.s. government has kept Puerto Rico under its colonial yoke and chains since it decided to invade and occupy PR militarily in 1898. From that moment on it has used every means at its disposal to make sure that Puerto Rico will not be an independent and sovereign nation. Any Puerto Rican who has dared to struggle to eradicate colonialism and to make Puerto Rico an independent and sovereign nation has been considered a mortal enemy of the u.s. government and treated as such. It has persecuted, criminalized, imprisoned, exiled and even assassinated them without any qualms or respect for their rights, their dignity and life. To see how true this is, every Puerto

Rican and every freedom and justice loving person should read the history of the courageous women and men who have come under the attacks of the u.s. government, especially of the ones who spent years in prison and lived to talk and write about their experiences.

i have never experienced freedom. But i yearn and hope for it. The yearning and hoping have been part of the energizing force that has kept me going and continuing to struggle and resist. i have been able to follow some of the struggles of colonized people, resisting and gaining independence for their country. i have images of some of them celebrating their victories. Two images that are most vivid in my mind are of Patrice Lumumba—one when he was struggling and delivering a speech as President of the Congo, and the other of his brutal and barbaric assassination. In his speech he criticized the Belgian King Baudouin and his people for the brutal and criminal practice of their colonialism

of the Congo. The King in 1961 couldn't take the criticism of an African man who dared to tell the truth, and with the aid of the u.s. government ordered the assassination of Pres. Patrice Lumumba. That horrific image of his assassination, all tied up and with the papers of his speech stuffed in his mouth, has always reminded me of how barbaric and criminal colonizers are.

Of course i would love to experience freedom. But if i don't, i hope that someday you, Karina and your generations will get to enjoy freedom and to exercise to the fullest the inalienable right of self-determination. Hopefully your generations will transform Puerto Rico into the nation it has the potential of being, an edenic garden in the Caribbean for the enjoyment of Puerto Ricans and of all humanity.

With much love, my little world, and in *RESISTENCIA Y LUCHA*,

Oscar López Rivera

## Why is Obama Ignoring Pleas to Release Political Prisoner Oscar López Rivera?

*Matt Peppe, Counterpunch*

Two and a half months ago, asked by award-winning playwright Lin-Manuel Miranda about imprisoned Puerto Rican patriot Oscar López Rivera – whose only crime, according to Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is “conspiracy to free his people from the shackles of imperial justice” – President Barack Obama told the Hamilton creator that he “had [the case] on his desk.” Miranda, whose parents hail from Puerto Rico, used his invitation to the White House to bring up the issue of López Rivera’s continued incarceration, which is of tremendous importance to Puerto Ricans. Both on the island and in the diaspora, freedom for the 73-year-old political prisoner enjoys overwhelming popular support and has united people across the political spectrum.

Sunday marked the 35th anniversary that López was imprisoned. He was convicted in 1981 of “seditious conspiracy” for trying to overthrow the U.S. government by force, as well as minor charges including possession of firearms and transporting stolen vehicles across state lines. López was accused of holding a leadership position in the FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña), a Puerto Rican organization, which he did not admit to but did not dispute. The group claimed responsibility for a series of bombings in Chicago and New York during the 1970s and 1980s, though as the *Chicago Tribune* noted the bombings were carried out “to damage property rather than persons” and the FALN “were out to call attention to their cause rather than to shed blood.”

López was never personally tied to any bombing or any other act of violence that resulted in the death or injury of any person. Undoubtedly, if the government possessed any evidence of his participation in, or organization of, a violent act they would have charged him with it in court. But they merely charged him with conspiracy to commit sedition, the same political charged used

by the apartheid South African government to convict Nelson Mandela two decades earlier. López has now served seven years in prison than Mandela did before being freed and becoming South Africa’s first post-apartheid President.

Thousands of people gathered May 29 in San Juan to mark the 35th anniversary of López’s imprisonment and demand his release. Marchers chanted “Obama, listen to me! We want Oscar free” and “We don’t want your board, we want to be free,” according to Fox News Latino.

The later slogan references the stipulation in the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability (PROMESAS) Act that would create a financial control board made up overwhelmingly of members from outside the island and not appointed by representatives elected by Puerto Ricans. The board would be vested with power over all fiscal decisions, effectively overriding Puerto Rico’s own elected representatives. The bill was passed by a House committee on Wednesday and is expected to draw a vote in the full chamber next month. It has the support of leadership in both the Republican and Democratic parties in Congress as well as the Obama administration.

But Puerto Rican Governor Alejandro García Padilla and much of the Puerto Rican public are opposed to what they see as an overt imposition of colonialism by allowing unelected technocrats not representative of – or accountable to – the Puerto Rican people to hold veto power over spending decisions, and even decrease the minimum wage.

López himself opposes the financial control board, telling *El Nuevo Día* in a phone interview (prison officials denied the newspaper’s request for an in person interview): “This is a problem created by Washington. The problem is in Washington and Wall Street. The people of Puerto Rico should not accept it. No Puerto Rican should doubt that we can solve our own

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## FREE OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA NOW

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problems... We need for them to respect our right to self-determination and not depend on the crumbs that Washington gives us.”

Obama’s answer to Miranda about whether he would grant López a pardon or commutation suggests a sense of urgency. If the matter is indeed “on his desk,” he presumably intends to take swift action on it. However, this is clearly not the case. Both Obama’s record as having issued fewer pardons than almost any President in history, and his years of refusing to attend to López’s case in particular, attest to Obama’s indifference to the unjust detention of prisoners by the government he leads.

Since being elected seven years ago, Obama has been directly presented with appeals to free López Rivera from three fellow Nobel Peace Laureates, Puerto Rico’s non-voting member of Congress, Puerto Rico’s current governor and foreign presidents. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro even publicly offered to release opposition leader Leopoldo López if Obama released López Rivera. Yet the Obama administration has maintained its silence.

Last week, three Puerto Rican American members of Congress – Luis Gutiérrez, Nydia Velázquez and José Serrano, along with Puerto Rico’s Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi – revealed that they had sent a letter to Obama in February calling on him to grant clemency to the man who has now spent nearly half his life behind bars without ever being charged with an act of violence.

After months without receiving a response, the legislators decided to go public to try to put pressure on Obama to recognize the will of virtually all of Puerto Rico and issue a pardon.

“You know how much this means to us, because we have personally expressed it to you. To our understanding, there is no legitimate criminological objective in continuing the imprisonment of this 73 year old Puerto Rican, when his country and others that value human rights clamor for his liberation,” they revealed that they wrote to the President.

Two and a half years ago, I argued that Obama’s refusal to free López was emblematic of the propensity of the U.S. government to ignore the political demands of the Puerto Rican people and solely use the colonial relationship to pursue the perceived economic and strategic interests of the ruling class:

“Without any representation in Congress or a vote in Presidential elections, Puerto Ricans have their political rights subjugated to the U.S. government. Even on an issue as popular among Puerto Ricans as the release of Oscar López, they have no recourse to participate in the political process at the federal level.

“There is no indication that Obama intends to even respond to López’s clemency plea, much less grant it. In his speech at Nelson Mandela’s funeral, Obama said that ‘around the world today, men and women are still imprisoned for their political beliefs.’ The overwhelming opinion among Puerto Ricans is that this description applies precisely to López.” [...]



The question of why Puerto Ricans would believe that anyone in the U.S. government respects their opinions or their political desires should be more urgent than ever. We are in the middle of another campaign season, which for many Americans is seen as an opportunity for them to participate in the political process by voting in elections. However, for Puerto Ricans it is another reminder that while they are American citizens, they are denied the right given to Americans in the states to select Congressional representatives and take part in the Presidential election.

The policies that will be decided after the election at the federal level will apply to Puerto Ricans, though they will have had no role in choosing those policies. [...]

The only way Puerto Rico can recover from its economic and debt crisis, as López Rivera said in his interview with *El Nuevo Día*, would be to achieve sovereignty and self-determination. This would grant them the ability to prioritize local business and the needs of the population, and free them from being merely a captive market for U.S. products and a source of cheap labor for U.S. corporations.

But any promise that the 2012 referendum, in which a 54 percent majority rejected the current colonial status, had of achieving this has disappeared. The U.S. Congress, which must approve any change in Puerto Rico’s political status, has not given any indication it will even consider doing anything to end the “Commonwealth” colonial status that Puerto Ricans voted against.

On the contrary, Puerto Ricans are being presented with the prospect of a financial control board that is a blatant affront to the idea that people should rule themselves. [...]

# Not a Single Day More of the Unjust Imprisonment of Oscar López Rivera!

*Network of Intellectuals, Actors and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity*

We demand Oscar's freedom!

The Executive Secretariat of the Network of Intellectuals, Actors and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity (REDH, for its Spanish acronym) demands the immediate release of Oscar López Rivera, the oldest political prisoner in the history of Puerto Rico and Latin America in a United States prison. Lopez Rivera was never accused of hurting anyone or taking part in any violent actions. He is imprisoned for fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico, a just cause that the Network in Defense of humanity is committed to support.

This year Oscar López turns 73 years old and 35 years of incarceration in U.S. federal prisons.

Twelve of his co-defendants were released in 1999 through a presidential pardon from then-President Bill Clinton. And two others were released in 2009 and 2010 respectively through the U.S. Parole Commission.

The only remaining prisoner is Oscar López Rivera. All of his co-defendants have proven to be productive members of their community; there is no reason to think otherwise about Oscar, who enjoys strong support from his family and his community. Also important personalities from Puerto Rico and the world are calling for his freedom.

It is necessary to take into account that Oscar López Rivera has endured the toughest of all possible conditions in prison during the past 35 years of confinement.

Oscar Lopez is a veteran of the Viet Nam war and received the Bronze Star Medal for his heroic act of saving the life of an American during one of the battles in which he participated. After Vietnam Oscar returned to his community in Chicago where he became a respected activist. Among other important actions, he helped found the Pedro Albizu Campos High School in the Puerto Rican community there and the Juan Antonio Corretjer Cultural Center, which currently, is still in operation providing services to youth and adults residing in



the area.

Thousands of people in Puerto Rico of different political spectrums, affiliations and ideologies have supported the commutation of his sentence. Among these political figures, is the former Governor of Puerto Rico Anibal Acevedo Vila, the current Governor Alejandro Garcia Padilla, who recently visited him in prison in the penitentiary in Terre Haute, and the current resident Commissioner Pedro Perluisi and Carmen Yulin Cruz, Mayor of San Juan.

Well-known personalities in the fight for

Human Rights including the Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Adolfo Perez Esquivel of Argentina, Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor, Mairead Corrigan Maguire of Ireland and tens of thousands of people have signed letters asking for his release.

For all the reasons expressed above and representing the feelings of thousands of intellectuals, artists, and social organizations, the Secretariat of the Network in Defense of Humanity asks President Obama to make use of the powers conferred to him by the Constitution of the United States and commute the sentence of the Puerto Rican Patriot Oscar López Rivera so he can return to his home and his family in Puerto Rico.

Executive Secretariat

Carmen Bohórquez, General Coordinator Alicia Jrapko (Network of Intellectuals, Actors and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity REDH, for its Spanish acronym, U.S.); Ángel Guerra (REDH-Cuba/México); Nayar López Castellanos (REDH-México); Ariana López (REDH-Cuba); Omar González (REDH-Cuba); David Comissiong (REDH-Caribbean); Atilio Boron (REDH-Argentina); Juan Manuel Karg (REDH-Argentina); Marilia Guimaraes (REDH-Brazil); Fredy Ñañez (REDH-Venezuela); Roger Landa (REDH-Venezuela); Hugo Moldiz (REDH-Bolivia); Katu Arkonada (REDH-Basque Country); Luciano Vasapollo (REDH-Italy)

GATES FOUNDATION

# Private Interests Cannot Provide Equal Right to Education

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has poured several billion dollars, over nearly twenty years, including more than \$1 billion on Common Core nationwide, into undermining — de-forming — the system of public education. The foundation represents private interests, most notably Microsoft, that, along with similar foundations like that of the Walton family (Walmart) and other monopolies have been interfering at the state and federal level to remove the public from public education. They have faced broad and increasing opposition, including the movement to refuse the Common Core tests and reject the Common Core curriculum and supposed standards. This was evident most recently in the many tens of thousands of parents and students across the country who refused to take state tests.

The Gates foundation, in their recently released annual letter, admitted their difficulties. “We’re facing the fact that it is a real struggle to make system-wide change,” wrote the foundation’s CEO, Sue Desmond-Hellman.

One of the Gates Foundation’s first significant efforts to de-form public education, in 1999, was a \$650 million investment to break up large high schools and turn them into small schools. After nine years of pushing the project, Gates, in the 2009 annual foundation letter, said it had not worked. The 2009 letter admitted, “Many of the small schools that we invested in did not improve students’ achievement in any significant way.” Districts however were left with increased funding for more smaller schools and the atmosphere of uncertainty and chaos created, remained.

Then the foundation targeted teachers and their unions and decided it would “improve teaching,” specifically through using student tests to evaluate teachers. Those they said were “good” teachers — meaning teachers who submitted to the Gates program, would get bonuses.

In 2009, the Foundation pledged a gift of up to \$100 million to the Hillsborough County, Florida, schools to revamp teacher evaluations and fund bonuses for “high-performing” teachers, and to simply fire the “lowest-performing” 5 percent. Current New York State Education Commissioner Elia was Superintendent at the time and a main supporter of the Gates plan. But, according to reports in the *Tampa Bay Times*, the Gates Foundation changed its mind about the bonuses and stopped short of giving the last \$20 million. Costs to the district ballooned beyond expectations. The program was dumped, but still caused great damage. And, despite the failure, continuing to be imposed with some changes as part of Common Core. The aim was not improving the quality of public schools, but securing the role of Gates and other private interests in dictating the content of education and its governance

This was further evident in Gates Foundation efforts to impose



the Common Core testing, curriculum and “standards.” It funded not just their development by people who were not teachers or educators, but also the political effort to have them quickly adopted and implemented by states. And to have testing requirements included as part of federal law and programs like Race to the Top. Federal and state funding was tied to acceptance of the Common Core testing and evaluation regime, and the increasingly undemocratic governance associated with it. Not only is curriculum being restricted, but both teachers and students are repeatedly forced to engage in activity, like the testing and all the testing preparations associated with it, they know to be harmful and wrong. This is a main aim of the private interests — not to improve the quality of education, but to improve the production of drones, not thinking human beings.

Desmond-Hellmann, in her May letter, admitted efforts to impose the Common Core are being met with resistance by the public, demanding that quality be raised and defending their right to have more control of their public schools, not less.

“Unfortunately, our foundation underestimated the level of resources and support required for our public education systems to be well-equipped to implement the standards,” Desmond-Hellmann wrote. “We missed an early opportunity to sufficiently

engage educators — particularly teachers — but also parents and communities, so that the benefits of the standards could take flight from the beginning.”

She here is repeating the claim by private interests and their government officials that the problem is with the rollout, not the whole Common Core testing, evaluation and curriculum regime. She also indicates that Gates is not going to stop the de-forming and wrecking of public education.

It is also the case that right alongside these efforts to impose Common Core and turn public schools into factories producing non-thinking, “do as you’re told” drones, is the great increase in use of suspensions and criminalizing of youth for “insubordina-

tion,” and similar issues. Students, and teachers, rejecting an education that does not serve their interests are to be punished.

It is increasingly clear that the Gates Foundation and similar private interests cannot provide the equal right to education for all, cannot provide the modern public education system, including modern governance of it, that is needed. These private monopoly interests are serving their own narrow interests, and must be blocked while public right to decide is strengthened. The various laws imposing state testing and undermining the quality of education need to be repealed and the efforts to refuse the testing and develop alternatives strengthened. Education is a right to be affirmed equally for all!

## **Students Get Police to Remove Military-Grade Weaponry from Their High Schools**

*By Sarah Lazare, AlterNet, June 1 2016*

After nearly two years of sit-ins and protests, Los Angeles high school students and grassroots organizers forced the police department for the second-largest public school district in the U.S. to remove grenade launchers, M-16 rifles, a mine-resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle and other military-grade weaponry from its arsenal.

But resistance did not stop there. Members took over a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) board meeting in February to call for proof that the arms had been returned to the Department of Defense (DoD) — a demand they eventually won in the form of an itemized invoice for every weapon sent back to the DoD.

Going further, organizers also pressed board members of the school district to apologize for greenlighting the policing of K-12 students with weapons of war.

“I now understand that especially in the context of the many conflicts between law enforcement and communities of color across the nation, our participation in this program may have created perceptions about the role of our district and our school police that my silence exacerbated,” Steve Zimmer, the president of the board of education, wrote in a May 19 letter to the groups Fight for the Soul of the Cities and Labor Community Strategy Center, which played a key role in the campaign. “Please accept my apology for any and all of my actions that contributed to feelings of betrayal and injury and interrupted our important collaborative efforts for equity and justice in all aspects of public education.”

The united resistance eventually persuaded the Los Angeles School Police Department to issue its own apology. “The LASPD recognizes the sensitive historical aspect of associating ‘military-like’ equipment and military presence within a civilian setting,” wrote Chief Steven Zipperman in a letter dated May 18. “We recognize that this sensitive historical component may not have been considered when originally procuring these type of logistics within a civilian or K-12 public school setting.”

The Los Angeles district has a vast majority of students that

are African American and Latino. In the era of Ferguson, they have seen images of young people who look like them being shot and killed by police. Amid mounting nationwide outrage over police use of weapons of war to patrol civilian neighborhoods, the win marks a step toward the demilitarization of public schools.

“I know that this will transcend my school district and state,” Bryan Cantero, a senior at Augustus F. Hawkins High School, said. “I feel like I was part of something that is bigger than me. I prevented something terrible from happening to someone’s brother, sister, friend or daughter. We prevented a tragedy. We prevented a war. When the police got those weapons it was a call to war. Am I viewed as a student or prey? What do they think I am? At the end of the day, something had to be done, and we took charge.”

### **“Not a War Zone”**

The Strategy Center describes itself as a movement-building think tank “rooted in working-class communities of color.” According to director Eric Mann, the organization first discovered that the Los Angeles Police Department possessed an arsenal of military-grade weapons two years ago. At the time, Mann and his colleagues had just returned from a solidarity delegation to Ferguson in 2014, where they witnessed the deployment of tanks and assault rifles against civilian protesters. Mann said the delegation “understood this was part of the war against Black people.”

The revelation that Los Angeles school cops were in possession of military arms immediately provoked an uproar. Yet, in September 2014, the school district and police department refused to return all of the weapons, agreeing to hand back grenade launchers but insisting they needed armored vehicles and rifles. “While we recognize, this armored vehicle is ‘military-grade,’ it is nevertheless a life-saving piece of equipment that the District would not otherwise have,” the school district stated.

The subsequent campaign “took a lot of work and time,”

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## EQUAL RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR ALL

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Ashley Franklin, lead organizer for the Strategy Center said. “We organized on each of the blocks we work in, organized in different high school campuses, going in and doing classroom presentations at the school about how this is rooted in institutional racism. We had phone call campaigns, turned in 3,000 petitions and made over 300 calls to school board members. It was a long campaign, and those were just the easy tactics.”

Taking Action clubs at multiple high schools in the district played a critical role. “Young people decided to put their bodies on the line, following after Malcolm X and Fannie Lou Hamer,” Franklin said. “They did multiple sit-ins at the school board and disrupted meetings.”

At the early February school board meeting takeover, students and activists refused to leave until their demands were heard, leading to a charged scene described in the *L.A. Times*. “Assistant Superintendent Earl Perkins hurried forward and motioned to camera operators, with a hand slashing across his throat, to cut the live video feed while meeting chairman and board member George McKenna tried to establish order,” wrote journalists Sonali Kohli and Howard Blume. When administrators eventually left the meeting, students and activists remained, declaring the gathering a ‘people’s school board.’”

Monique Jones, a junior at Augustus F. Hawkins High School, was one of the young people who took action. “I believe the campaign was important because every day somebody of color, Black or Latino, is being shot by police officers,” she said. “Why would you bring those types of weapons into school campuses? It’s not a war zone. You’re not going to war with your own citizens and people who are in kindergarten through 12th grade.”

Some board members appear chastened by the exchanges they have had with students like Jones. In an apology letter dated April 22, LAUSD school board member Monica Garcia declared, “The need for safety is a collective responsibility that must balance our lessons learned from history, our present challenges and our vision for the future. . . Together, with community partners, LAUSD has come a long way. And to use the words of the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., ‘we have a long way to go.’”

### “We Want Police Military Weapons Destroyed”

Despite the Los Angeles successes, police departments nationwide remain heavily militarized. This is largely because of the federal program that allows police agencies to acquire weapons of war. The current iteration of the initiative dates back to 1990 and was escalated by the 1997 *National Defense Authorization Act*, which established that, under the “1033 program,” Department of Defense may transfer “excess” military equipment to state and local law enforcement agencies. According to the Defense Logistics Agency, the program has transferred at least “\$5.4 billion worth of property” since its inception.

In 2014, the same year [many protests against police violence] gripped the country, “\$980 million worth of property (based on initial acquisition cost) was transferred to law enforcement agencies” the agency concludes, noting that more than 8,000 law enforcement agencies count themselves among the program’s



enrollees.

However, the actual amount of public dollars that have been funneled into this program is far higher. A report from the Center for Investigative Reporting in 2011 found that since 9/11, “\$34 billion in federal government grants” has gone toward the purchasing of military-grade weaponry for police departments. As in Los Angeles, many of these weapons have found their way into school police departments. The police department for San Diego’s public schools revealed in 2014 that it had also purchased its own MRAP, a piece of equipment that has become a fixture of the U.S. military’s occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The 1033 program is just one facet of the militarization of police departments nationwide, which also includes SWAT deployments for drug searchers and collaborations between police agencies, arms manufacturers and foreign militaries. An ACLU report released in 2014 found that the “use of hyper-aggressive tools and tactics results in tragedy for civilians and police officers, escalates the risk of needless violence, destroys property, and undermines individual liberties.” Poor people and communities of color disproportionately see their neighborhoods turned into war zones by police, the investigation determined.

Last year, President Obama issued an executive order placing some limits on the transfer of certain kinds of military weapons, referencing the demands of civil rights leaders and Ferguson protesters. However, he declined to eradicate the program or immediately recall all of the heavy arms that have been distributed to police departments across the country.

High school senior Cantero believes Obama’s order does not go nearly far enough. “The 1033 federal program still exists in the nation, and I think the next step is to abolish the program in its entirety,” he said. “No school should have military-grade weapons. We want police military weapons destroyed.”

“When you are a teen you feel like you have no control over anything,” he continued. “But what is amazing to me is that there were so many teenagers all over the city who felt the same way we did and stood up together. Power in numbers is an amazing thing. This is a national problem at the end of the day, because this is what the youth is going through. We’re not going to stop.”