Democratic Social Movements against Militarization

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For the panel Social Movements and Transnational Democracy: Politics, Culture, Identity at the United Nations Development Program Global Forum on Human Development, January 17-19, 2005, Paris.

Ideally, it would go without saying that militarization is one of the most significant impediments to human development and to democratic aspiration. Officially recorded global spending by governments stood at $956 billion in 2003, with an 18 percent surge in spending over just the two years previous.[1] Nearly half (47 percent) of the overall total is accounted for by the US, the next largest contributors to the global total being Japan at 5 percent, and England, France and China at 4 percent each. The US also accounts for about half of the increase for its wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and other sites tagged as components of "the war on terror." The costs of militarization can be read not only in spreadsheet language, but on the bodies of people around the world. The most visible signs are fields of graves of the war dead and the surviving maimed and disabled, but equally attributable to this militarization are the malnutrition, illiteracy, and unchecked epidemic disease that are both direct result of misplaced spending priorities and common symptoms of elite interests being privileged in the budgetary process. The growth of national security states, moreover, has been simultaneous with a decline in the possibilities for democratic action, although military force has often been declared the tool of democracy. Militarization, however, can also be seen in the much more positive phenomenon of the remarkable growth of democratic social movements which have arisen in response to it. My talk today will suggest that these processes – of militarization and empire and of social movement robustness -- are connected in a variety of ways, and will go on to discuss what has made those movements more or less successful in altering and truncating the processes of militarization.

The roots of contemporary militarization are many, but it will help, I think, to begin by reviewing some of the more significant ones, as it is these which provide the challenges to transnational movement activists. Those roots centrally include the capitalist organization of the production of weaponry and the profits to be made through their sale and the war-related profits to be made in armament resale and through the provision of services to militaries and to suffering post-war communities, including humanitarian aid, reconstruction contracts, and the shadow economies of prostitution, food, and so on. The roots of militarization also lie in the widespread belief in the inevitability and efficacy of violence as a route to power; elite political use of fear and narrow security rhetorics to control populations and extract wealth internal to states and transnationally; masculinist nationalism and militarized religious fundamentalisms that purport to justify violence in defense of group ideals; the global inequality of consumption that creates incentives to attempt military capture of resources and resource access; the rebordering of states to maintain that inequality, particularly as it increases; the dualism of shadow and licit economies and the fictions that accompany it;[2] and the rise of neoliberal rhetoric and practices that suggest that the state's military arm is the only governmental function that should not be turned over to market mechanisms.

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[1] Elisabeth Skoens, * Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. The $956 billion represented 2.7 percent of the world's gross domestic product. That was equivalent to the Cold War peak in 1987.

[2] Carolyn Nordstrom, Shadow of War. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

The historical vicissitudes of global militarization and demilitarization, especially in the last 60 years, have been remarkable. The colonial landgrabs of the European powers, the U.S., and Japan in the late 19th and early 20th century established some of the territorial claims and foreign military bases with which World War II opened from Guam and the Philippines to Korea, India, and Kenya. Since the U.S. emerged the only relatively unscathed victor from that war, it was able to both take control of hundreds of former military bases from Japan, Germany, and Italy as well as from allies, and to continue to intervene and reap the spoils of war, especially in Korea, the Gulf, and the Balkans. It used these bases and the new unequal security agreements it was able to coerce from the decimated areas of the world to accomplish a number of goals: deterring encroachment on its interests around the world, surveillance of other militaries, training its own military on diverse terrain, and marketing of its weaponry to other militaries.

Most importantly, the U.S. government used its post-World War II wealth to invest heavily in military research and development, and was able to both *appear* capable of prevailing over any other force as well as to dominate the global market in the military (and other) commodities it developed. The "unipolar" world of the 1990s resulted in a temporary diminution of militarization as it became more difficult to legitimate the tremendous economic and social costs. On the other hand, the U.S. share of the global arms trade ballooned after the end of the Cold War, with more than 150 countries worldwide buying U.S. weapons. At $10.5 billion in 2002, US arms deliveries constituted over 40 percent of the official world total.[3] The great majority of the governments to which the U.S. sold weapons have been unelected ones, and most are or have been identified, even by the U.S.' own State Department, as violators of their citizens' human rights. The antidemocratic effect of militarization on both the imperial center and the countries which are the setting for overseas military presence have been well documented (*refs, Johnson, Schirmer, Schultz); this occurs directly through the enhanced power of militarized states over their populations, and indirectly through both the enhanced power of the military industries whose fortunes become inseperable from those of the state and the anti-democratic ethos promoted by national security rhetoric and practice.

The neo-conservative ascendancy in the U.S. government since George Bush took office in January 2001 has rapidly accelerated the global use and legitimation of an imperial role for the US military. Despite the frequent assumption that the attacks of 9-11 on New York and Washington uniquely spurred this expansion, those attacks only added accelerant and cover for the fires already burning. There are now new US bases in a striking number of places, including Ecuador, Aruba, Curacao, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as well as Kuwait, Qatar, Kosovo, Turkey and Bulgaria. US bases have been announced for closing in Germany and Korea, on the other hand, and there is a new emphasis on access agreements in lieu of permanent, stand-alone basing for US troops. The great majority of US citizens are unaware of the extent and nature of these bases, and when bases come up for individual mention in the media, they are normalized as forward defense of the US mainland: that defense is achieved, it is widely believed in the United States, through both the alliances the bases are thought to represent and the efficient and rapid delivery of military power they allow for. On the other hand, US military presence overseas is also seen by the US public as a form of benevolent foreign aid, in which the US "provides free defense" for other countries.

Non-governmental attempts to curb militarization have a long history. Rooted in religious communities around the world prior to the nineteenth century, secular organizations grew up, particularly among European and US elites in the form of local peace societies and Peace Congresses, culminating in the Hague Conference in 1899 and the Hague Convention which codified and regulated conduct in war. Major peace organizations founded in the wake of World War I developed more broad based membership, and they succeeded in helping get recognition of conscientious objector status, restricting

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[3] International Arms Sales Total $30 Billion a Year. Progressive Policy Institute, April 21, 2004. http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/intervention/2004/0421weapons.htm. Accessed January 13, 2005.

the conduct of war, and developing international humanitarian law.[4] Mass mobilizations against nuclear weaponry were also pivotal in spurring early arms control agreements and the détente and anti-nuclear activism of the 1970s and 1980s. Peace activism in Japan after World War II also became an important force, with anti-militarism institutionalized as state policy in the 1947 Japanese Constitution. A significant, if belated, organized effort grew up around the question of recognition both of Japanese war guilt and of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Other peace movement organizations, [most notably three formed in the early 1980s — European Nuclear Disarmament (END), the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and the Freeze Movement —] arguably helped to end the Cold War by promoting human rights activism and pushing governments to engage in arms control (Kaldor 1989, Kaldor 1991, Knopf 1998, Meyer 1992, Rochon and Meyer 1997).

The history of the anti-bases movement coincides with the post-World War II history of US overseas basing. Individuals and groups have campaigned for recognition of the damage caused by particular bases from the beginning of this period. That damage includes loss of land and livelihood (only replaced in some cases by jobs on the base or related to its presence). There are particularly dramatic cases of land seizures, such as the eviction of 5000 Chagossian people from their Diego Garcia home beginning in 1965 to build a US Navy base, the internment of thousands of Chamoru landowners on Guam in camps in 1944 after liberation from the Japanese and refusal to allow them to return to large parts of the island confiscated for US military use, and the eviction of hundreds of people from Kwajelein atoll in the Marshall Islands to build a missile tracking station, people who now live in degraded conditions on a much smaller neighboring islet. In virtually every case, however, the land on which the hundreds of US bases sit was land with local owners and uses that are often vividly remembered today.

The movements also focus on the environmental and health damage from military activity and toxins, crimes committed against locals, and especially local girls and women, and the less visible but equally important forms of racism and supremacist belief that have sometimes done the work of creating compliance and undermining self-respect. Some of the more sustained and effective campaigns around US military facilities have been those in Spain and Greece, of fishermen in Vieques, Puerto Rico, the broad coalition of forces in the Philippines, the residents of Okinawa, Japan, and, since democratization, a coalition of groups in South Korea. Local resistance to land takings by the US military have been ongoing from the beginning. So one Okinawan landowner campaigned for years against the US Marine's Futenma Air Base. The Marines eventually returned a very small parcel of his family's land that had been taken in the US invasion in 1945. On that patch of ground, cheek by jowl with the fence of the military base, he built an anti-war museum with astounding dark and bloody panels depicting the Battle of Okinawa and, when I visited, a traveling exhibit of photographs of Iraq. Visitors are able to walk up a long clean line of steps to the museum's roof, there to be greeted by a panoramic view of the airfield and its military jets. There have been small flotillas of fishing boats that have ridden in front of US destroyers in their waters, innumerable fence cuttings to return to the land to farm, hunt, or to directly confront the base purposes by clambering onto tanks on the base. These groups have, as Dr. Simbulan notes, been especially energized and their ranks increased by the US invasion of Iraq. The 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai, India brought together 125 participants from 34 countries who developed a set of goals and strategies for the network. There will be an inaugural stand-alone meeting of the network in the fall.

The forces pushing forward the extensive work of the nousbases coalition include the noxious conditions created by the bases, and their accumulated weight over time (*number of crimes in Korea), and, most importantly, the great similarity of conditions – from particular forms of prostitution and

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[4] These include the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (1915), the American Friends Service Committee (1917), and the War Resisters International (1921). Each of these organizations have remained active up through the present (Chatfield and Van den Dungen 1988, Cooper 1991, Laity 2001, Wallis 1991).

violence surrounding the bases to the specific types of toxins such as perchlorate that the military uses to the cultural ideas of US soldiers about who their hosts are and the role of their own country in the world. This similarity of impact has facilitated transnational networking despite the great variety of local histories and ideas in base communities. Added to these prompts has been the renewed visibility of the network of bases brought about by both their mobilization for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and their recently announced reorganization. These wars, in particular, have highlighted the imperial rather than defensive or mutual security purposes of military bases.

The anti-bases movement is not just responsive or reactive to the imperial and transnational networks of military power, however. It also draws on the increasingly widespread enthusiasm or acceptance of the notion of global citizenship; as Crawford has pointed out, "a sense of global identity is emerging in political theory, international law, political institutions, elite intellectual culture, and in the wider political culture."[5] Identification with global humanity more than, in addition to, or instead of local, regional and state identifications facilitates the backgrounding of national differences in experience with U.S. military bases. Those different national histories are crucial, however, in dictating the current shape and goals of the local movements. Guam, for example, has not yet achieved decolonization and so its first commitment has been to assert the necessity that the Chamoru people be allowed to vote on their political status: the Chamoru specifically note that the bases themselves and US colonial holdings and neocolonial power made for the importation of labor from the Philippines and South Korea, something which today has made the Chamoru a minority population on their island. On the other hand, the movement in Korea must contend with a strong continuing climate of anti-communism and the complex vicissitudes of aspirations for reunification combined with fears of North Korean government aggression. So many parts of the anti-bases campaign in that country focuses on the repopulation of US bases with local soldiers. In some of these contexts, claims for an ethnically based sovereignty potentially but do not have to challenge that sense of global citizenship.

An important question to ask is why the campaign has not been larger, more visible, and more effective earlier? One answer is certainly that the countries with US bases have often been authoritarian, with the support of the military alliance, training and equipment that accompanies, sometimes as quid pro quo, the US presence. So in Korea, the anti-bases movement only took off, and then in an explosion of activity, after democracy activists had succeeded in 1987.

The dilemmas of the movement include questions of culture and identity. How much should it prioritize the drawing of links with the movement to end corporate globalization? Should the goal be to eliminate all US bases, all foreign bases (e.g. including NATO bases or the limited number of other foreign bases), or bases as a whole, i.e. to work for the abolition of war itself? While most peace movements have also been anti-imperialist, and the motivation behind much of the no bases network is to eliminate international inequality and exploitation as represented by the imperial underpinnings of the network of US bases (as underpinned the network of English, Dutch, Spanish, Japanese, and Soviet bases before them), there have clearly been many successes and much interest in eliminating foreign bases that are not anti-US or anti-imperial per se.[6] As with most social movements of the last decade, there is great interest in achieving a democratic network, one with maximal autonomy for those involved with it, while using the devices of institutionalization that serve the common goals. Contemporary peace movements are much less centralized, however, than in the 19th and 20th century, and in this they presage and perhaps even produce the changes we now see in US basing strategy. Change is from an emphasis on elaborate, large bases commanded in a standard hierarchical way (the concept of the "islands of US society") to a more access and place-based approach and more emphasis on small groups of special operations troops

[5] Neta Crawford. Emergent global identity, ms. 2004.
[6] Teresa McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest*. New Brunswick: Rutger University Press, 2002.

than infantry divisions. The choice between hardening the target and dispersing and disguising it will, I would guess, be more likely to fall in favor of the latter, not just because of the experience of Iraq, but also because of the sustained and successful movements against the bases. However briefly, I have tried to suggest in this talk that the network of US bases is both one of the central challenges to human development, the assertion of cultural superiority and assault on principles of equity, and the incentive for the development of a remarkable and robust and now transnationally networked democratic social movement.