9 Bases bring the risk of life-threatening accidents

Military accidents can kill and injure people. The most dangerous accidents involve nuclear weapons. In 1960, an attack aircraft rolled off the U.S. aircraft carrier Ticonderoga 80 miles off the coast of Okinawa, embedding its hydrogen bomb in the sea bed two miles below. More common are accidents like the Marine pilot whose low-flying jet severed a ski lift cable in Italy, killing 20 people; bombs that missed their practice targets, killing a civilian in Vieques, Puerto Rico, and destroying homes in the Korean village of Maehyangri; and the stray bullets and shells used in live-fire exercises that strike people’s homes and property in Kin Town, Okinawa.

10 Military bases are expensive and divert funding from addressing urgent human needs at home and abroad

The Pentagon squanders tens of billions of dollars on foreign military bases. In addition to war-fighting capabilities, expenses include housing for families of U.S. soldiers, commissaries where U.S. troops and their families enjoy special discounts, and pristine golf courses. Meanwhile, human needs of both U.S. and host nation people go unmet. In Japan and other host nations, anger is building as their tax dollars are used to help pay for the intrusive military bases and their luxury accommodations, while local people go without adequate housing and social services.
The U.S. maintains an unprecedented infrastructure of more than 700 U.S. foreign military bases. In recent years such bases have been essential to the U.S. wars against Iraq, the 1998 war against Serbia, the U.S. invasion of Panama, and the current wars within Colombia and the Philippines. The 200-plus U.S. military bases and installations in Japan and South Korea increase the likelihood of future U.S. wars against North Korea and China.

In many ways, the U.S. first-strike nuclear doctrine is made possible by the forward deployment of nuclear weapons in Belgium, Britain, Greece, Germany, Holland, and Turkey. U.S. communications bases in Britain, Japan, Australia, and other nations are essential for communicating orders to initiate nuclear war and for targeting nuclear and other high-tech weapons.

The U.S. has supported or imposed dictators and other repressive governments to gain or preserve access to military bases. For more than a decade, Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan supported the brutal Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines to preserve the U.S. hold on strategically located air and naval bases. In Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the U.S. has defended repressive monarchies to secure its military bases as well as privileged access to oil reserves. The presence of U.S. military bases contributes to the cultural genocide of indigenous peoples in Hawai‘i and Guam.

Foreign military bases threaten women and children in host communities, in poor countries, female troops, and the family members of U.S. service men. The use of communities near bases for “Rest and Relaxation” makes local children and women, especially sex workers, vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, beatings, and murder. Levels of sexual violence can be a function of the relative power of host nations. Last year, U.S. Marines involved in the rape of a Filipina were shielded by provisions of the Visiting Forces Agreement in the Philippines. In contrast, comparable agreements between the U.S. and oil-rich Gulf states have at least partly shielded local women from sexual aggression by U.S. troops. Some service men return home to the U.S. and commit domestic violence within their homes. In addition, female service members risk being raped by their male counterparts, a situation that is often exacerbated by long-term deployments.

Most GIs are law-abiding, but many alienated and drunken troops do commit a disproportionate number of crimes. Worse, they are often protected by the provisions of unequal treaties which give the U.S. military “primary right to exercise jurisdiction over members of the U.S. armed forces.” In Korea, a deep wound was the killing of two schoolgirls who were run over by a U.S. tank; no one was held accountable. In 2006 in the Philippines, after a U.S. Marine was convicted of rape in a Philippines court, the U.S. exerted diplomatic pressure at the highest level to effect his removal, during the appeal process, to the U.S. Embassy (rather than the Philippines jail to which the judge had consigned him). However, the service men are not only perpetrators, but they also struggle in their circumstances, as they are sent abroad with little preparation or understanding of the local culture, language, and social conditions, which brings about anger and fear against their surroundings and often drives them to commit crimes.

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