



INDIGENEITY AND MILITARISM: ALOHA AINA CONTRA EMPIRE

Aloha aina kakou.

Mahalo – gracias – to the International and Organizing Committees. It is an honor to be part of this historic gathering of forces, for what I believe is the leading edge of the peace movement, i.e., contesting the very machinery and mechanics of imperial militarism. My name is Ikaika Hussey, and I am here to speak on behalf of DMZ Hawaii/Aloha Aina, a network of communities and organizations in Hawaii which oppose the ongoing occupation of Hawaii, and are opposing the expansion of military forces in Hawaii.

I'd like to lead off by saying that for us in the Pacific Ocean, U.S. empire started not with Bush, but with William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. The jingoistic tendencies of the 19th century in the Pacific are similar to what we see occurring in the 21st century, particularly in terms of the capitulation of the American public, which was misled by yellow journalism and impelled by its own notion of white supremacy.

From the perspective of the peoples who are indigeneous to North America, however, both McKinley and Teddy Roosevelt are too recent – for them, militarism and empire date back to the very genesis of European and Euro-American civilization in North America. The legacies of Andrew Jackson, the Indian Wars, Custer – all these are early formulations of imperialism and militarism in the U.S. experience.

In his book “Imperial Grunts,” a veritable celebration of US wars abroad, U.S. conservative writer Robert Kaplan notes the historic interrelationship between the US wars with the first nations of North America and the modern US imperial experience

from Indochina to the present: “Injun Country” is the term which he hears from soldiers abroad in Afghanistan and Iraq, a reference to the undomesticated world which the US aims to tame.

The term is important in two respects. First, it signals the American tendency to see the world outside of North America as subject to its assimilating tendencies, just as it attempted to do with Turtle Island. In this manner, the anti-Indian wars of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries are the template for the new Indian wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and possibly Iran, North Korea, the Mindanao, and China. From this perspective, the unique identities and sovereignties of the world’s peoples are just open spaces for the projection of US military force, to make way for WalMart, McDonalds, and MTV.

But in another way, the term is important, for it a sign of the resilience and resistance of the world’s peoples against US expansion. In North America, Indian Country has become a way of talking about the places where the US assumes it has control and domination, but the first peoples do not agree. Indian Country is free country – under the jurisdiction of the gun, but still fighting. And so I derive both a sobering appreciation for the power of military power from this term, but also a deeply-rooted faith in the ability for the first peoples of this world, the peoples of the eagle, the condor, and the frigate bird, to sustain our fight against empire, and be victorious in time.

The experiences of indigenous peoples vis-à-vis the militarized empire are multiple and unique. That is, in fact, one of the foundational ideas that indigenous peoples bring to the world: we are not singular, but plural; we obtain our life and very existence from the specificities of our particular ancestors, our particular gods, our named and worshipped sacred sites. As a indigenous person of Hawaii, I can really only speak for myself and my immediate ancestors; I couldn’t casually speak for my next-door neighbors, let alone the peoples of other Oceanic nations, or of the Americas. So in making these remarks, I will try to speak from our own experience in Hawaii, and only by extension refer to other indigenous experiences.

Hawaii

My country, Hawaii, has been under US occupation since the end of the 19th century. US interest in Hawaii is primarily geostrategic. We have the dubious distinction of being used as the headquarters of the Pacific Command, the largest of the U.S. unified commands. In the 161 military installations throughout Hawaii, every aspect of U.S. military activity takes place, including ocean, land, air, and space operations; training; storage; command & control; research; housing; and even specialized rest & recreation facilities for the military. The military-connected population is 17% of the population; by comparison, Native Hawaiians comprise barely 20% of the island population.

On my home island of O‘ahu, the metropolitan island of Hawaii, the US military controls one-quarter of the land in terms of base territory and formal military jurisdiction. Much of the remaining three-quarters is also injected with militarization, with federal highways connecting the bases, discounts for servicepersons in restaurants and theatres, military bases used as place names, military service projects in public schools, and servicepersons living in our communities because of a cost-of-living-adjustment which allows them to outprice local people from the rental market. Oahu is one of the most militarized places in the world, together with fellow Pacific nations such as Guam.

By contrast, to bring out the impact of the military presence on the indigeneous economy and culture of Hawaii, let us focus on a place that we have all heard of: Ke Awalau o Puuloa. Many know this place as Pearl Harbor. In our history, Puuloa is known as the food-basket of our islands, with a remarkable series of 36 stone and coral fishponds built along the shore, allowing our people to maintain and replenish a steady supply of fish protein, all within walking distance. In the traditional land apportionment system, each district along the shore of Ke Awalau o Puuloa had access to this incredible resource, because we recognized that this wealth should be shared. Puuloa is also known as the dwelling for our spiritual protector Kaahupahau, a benevolent shark who protected the people of the surrounding Ewa district from other predators.

Juxtaposed against the current (mis)use of Puuloa, we can see how native subsistence wealth has been damaged to make way for US imperial ambitions. Today, Puuloa is a Superfund site, meaning that the Environmental Protection Agency has declared it one of the most polluted areas in the United States. The shared access to the economy of the oceanic resource has also been interrupted, with barbed walls and military police preventing entry to our fishponds.

This story isn't unique to Puuloa, nor is it unique to Hawaii. At the most recent meeting of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the indigenous delegates considered the impact of militarism on their territories and peoples. Certain themes ran throughout the conference: the pollution and destruction of ancestral and sacred lands; the dumping of nuclear and other toxic wastes on their lands; the use of militarization as a pretext to gain control over natural resources in indigenous lands; rape and sexual abuse by the military; and the ongoing military recruitment of indigenous youth to fight, not dissimilar to the poverty draft in the United States.

Fluidity & Unity

In our oceanic continent, it has been our experience that the empire is very fluid. When it is compressed in one region, it expands in another, and vice versa. The situation in terms of Guam and Okinawa, and Guam and Hawaii are particularly salient. The incredible successes of the Okinawa anti-bases movement has prompted a transfer of forces to Guam. Likewise, Hawaii and Guam are being targeted as prospective locations for a US carrier strike force. Predictably, the pro-military business organizations and pro-military politicians are fighting over the carrier strike force, while many of us in the communities that deal with the impact of militarization are saying no. Because of the fluid nature of the network-centric US military, we must treat solidarity not a secondary concern, but as a primary mode of operation. Demilitarization of Hawaii requires the demilitarization of Guam, Okinawa, the Philippines, Korea, etc. For this end, one of our primary strategies is to advance the philosophy of the Nuclear Free & Independent Pacific movement, which is for the demilitarization of the Pacific as a whole. In pursuing this goal, we hope to

make the Pacific unavailable for the use of any imperial power – whether under an American, Chinese, or European Union flag.

Aloha Aina

In closing, I'd like to share our indigenous term for describing our movement in Hawaii. We use the words "aloha aina," literally "love of land," but also meaning patriotism. It is a word that was born out of the late-19th century struggle against annexation, and was also reinvigorated with meaning in the 1970s movement to stop the bombing of Kahoolawe island. The term also incorporates a vision for ecological sustainability, for community, and shared responsibility for our island homeland. We could never accept the harming of the land which have so much "aloha" for. Nor could we countenance the use of our land, which is the source of all life, to perpetrate violence on others. Our vision is for an independent Hawaii and a demilitarized Pacific that opposes all empires.

Mahalo nui, aloha aina.