



Empire Update w/ Abby Martin: Arctic War, Aid to Israel Challenge, Army VR Money Pit

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Abby Martin (AB): This is Abby Martin with your Empire Update, wrapping up the last few weeks in U.S. imperialism.

The Pentagon announced it's conducting a review of a 2020 attack at the Manda Bay military base in Kenya. It was a highly successful operation by the militant group al-Shabab, where three U.S. soldiers were killed, as well as six American aircraft totally destroyed. In Manda Bay the U.S. military's focus is cross-border combat and its decades-long intervention in neighboring Somalia, which has caused chaos in the country, and a political power vacuum that is in large part been filled by reactionary armed organizations. The thing to watch will be the outcome of the Pentagon review and if it will be used to increase U.S. military buildup and operations in the region even more. As General William Gayler, who serves as AFRICOM director of operations, said, the Kenya attack, quote, "solidifies the fact that what we're doing in Somalia is important." Pretty twisted logic there, given that the rise of al-Shabab has only been made possible as a result of U.S. military intervention in the first place.

Last month, the U.S. Army announced its focus on a whole new theater of war; the North Pole. That's right. As climate change rapidly melts the Arctic, the Pentagon sees this newly opened up area where the empire needs to plant its flag and maybe even fight a war over it. The Army isn't even trying to hide its imperial nature. They actually titled this new strategy, "Regaining Arctic Dominance." According to the Army's strategy guide, "The Arctic has the potential to become a contested space where United States great power rivals Russia and China seek to use military and economic power to gain and maintain access to the region at the expense of U.S. interests." So the entire northern cap of the earth, which actually borders, even touches Russia, the U.S. Army is on a mission to make sure they cannot access it at all. U.S. Special Forces and a big network of conventional forces will be stepping up training military exercises and patrols in the name of Arctic dominance. So here you have the U.S. military fueling climate change. Then climate change fueling U.S. military expansion.

President Biden has called for a significant increase in military spending for next year,

amounting to 753 billion dollars. That's 13 billion more dollars than the Pentagon received from Trump last year. The U.S. empire already spends more on its military than the next 13 countries combined. Blowing one million dollars on the war machine every single minute. Doesn't matter that we're living in a failed state during a pandemic with no guaranteed healthcare, the military industrial complex just gets richer year after year with bipartisan approval. Check out how crazy this is. During the last four years alone, Pentagon spending increased 133 billion dollars. So if you were to cut the budget only 10 percent to 2017 levels, you could address some of the most urgent needs in society. "Code Pink" broke it down: 75 billion dollars could pay for one million infrastructure jobs, higher almost a million new teachers and effectively end homelessness in the U.S.. The government estimates that homelessness could be fully eradicated at 20 billion dollars per year. So what kind of things does this war chest pay for that are supposedly so vital? Well, here's just one example. Less than a month ago, the Army awarded Microsoft a contract to develop some ridiculous augmented reality headsets for soldiers, which look mostly like a big joke. The price tag? How about 21 billion dollars or 1 billion dollars more than would end homelessness? Countless contracts for weird tech experiments like this funnel so much defense spending into corporate buoyants like Microsoft. While 50 Democrats signed a letter to urge Biden to cut the budget, but that call has fallen on deaf ears. Plans for military posturing towards China and buildup in Africa, as well as being surrounded by war hawks that he appointed, Biden continues the old fashioned American legacy of bloodthirsty imperialism while giving a blank check to military contractors.

This week, the Biden administration announced it would not be reversing course on any of Trump's regime change policies in Cuba. For over 60 years, the U.S. has imposed a debilitating economic blockade on the island nation for no other reason than that they have a socialist government. Pretty much every other country in the world other than Israel opposes this blockade and votes unanimously to end it every year at the UN General Assembly. But President Obama opened up a new phase of U.S. policy. In 2014, he started a process of normalizing relations, removing Cuba from the U.S. list of states sponsors of terror. Lifted the longstanding travel restrictions from U.S. soil and even gave a pardon to Cuba's most treasured heroes and political prisoners held for years in U.S. jails. The Cuban Five. But Trump came in and reversed it all. Readded Cuba as a sponsor of terrorism, reimposed travel restrictions and dumped even more sanctions on the country. So wasn't the whole campaign of Joe Biden basically about turning the page from Trump and going back to the golden Obama years? Despite the Cuba thaw being a hallmark accomplishment for Obama, one that Trump made a point to rip apart, you would think that Biden would want to restore it. Instead, they've officially adopted the Trump policy.

Two activists with the Yemeni liberation movement began a hunger strike on March 29th to demand an end to the genocidal Saudi led and U.S. supported blockade of Yemen. Iman Saleh and Moonah Saleh are based in Michigan but are currently conducting their hunger strike in Washington D.C., which is now on its 25th day. Their hunger strike, a tactic chosen

to highlight the widespread starvation imposed on the people of Yemen, has drawn substantial support around the world. The United Nations has called the situation in Yemen, "the world's worst humanitarian disaster." And in February, four UN agencies estimated that 400,000 Yemeni children were at risk of dying from starvation. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and their junior partners have systematically bombed civilian targets in addition to imposing the blockade. Despite Biden recently declaring an end to U.S. support of the war, he just approved a 23 billion dollar weapons shipment to the UAE. We salute this heroic stand by activists Iman and Moonah, and we hope all of our viewers rally to their cause. This kind of dramatic action is absolutely necessary to end the U.S. backed Yemen genocide.

In positive news, what's called the boldest effort ever by Congress for Palestinian rights is making headlines. Minnesota Congresswoman Betty McCollum introduced the "Defending the human rights of Palestinian children and families living under Israeli Military Occupation Act", which would actually do the unthinkable condition U.S. military aid to Israel on international law. The legislation would prohibit Israel from using U.S. taxpayer dollars in the occupied territories for anything that violates international law, such as home demolitions, detention of children and annexation of Palestinian land. We know that all of those things are core to Israel's daily operations. That's pretty much what the military does all day, every day. McCollum has tried in previous years to push legislation like this, but this year it's getting more attention. Most notably, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez joined as an early co-sponsor with all of the other members of the squad following suit. The Israeli lobby powerhouse AIPAC is pretty angry about the bill. They've launched a public campaign against it, joined by most of Congress. Just on April 22nd, a bipartisan letter was signed by 330 members of Congress. That's 75 percent of the House of Representatives condemning the bill and asserting that Israel should be able to use U.S. taxpayer dollars to arrest and torture children. AIPAC doesn't really expect this bill to pass. Nobody does. But here's why I think this is something to feel optimistic about. Of course, Palestine won't be freed by a bill in Congress. While the bill itself is a good step, it's still restrained enough to be embraced by liberal Zionists. But that's not the point. The point is that any effort to raise the banner of Palestinian human rights, especially on a large stage, has value. And a clear shift in support by high profile progressive Democrats is more reflection of an overall change in the U.S. population on the issue. According to Gallup's (polling agency) 2021 annual poll of Americans' views on Israel Palestine, the majority of Democratic voters now believe that more pressure should be placed on Israel than on Palestine to resolve the conflict. That's up 53 percent from just 38 percent a decade ago. This sea change is only due to pressure from the mass movement that's been fighting to build solidarity for the Palestinian cause. The more the movement is successful in moving the needle, the more we'll see actions like this, which in turn will bring more people on the side of justice.

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