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## *Militarism, Corruption, and the Need for Impolite Direct Activism: a Q&A with Andrew Feinstein*



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

Paul Cochrane and Eric Maddox interviewed Andrew Feinstein about the devastating impact of the global arms trade, how militarism feeds corruption and undermines democracy, how the arms trade supports occupation, and why the military's carbon boot print should not be excluded from climate change talks.

Feinstein, a former African National Congress (ANC) member of South Africa's parliament, is the author of Shadow World – Inside the Global Arms Trade and is a researcher at Shadow World Investigations. A documentary was also made about his book, which can be found online. This is an abridged transcript of the interview broadcast on the Latitude Adjustment Podcast website.

## **The Global North's systemic corruption**

**Eric Maddox:** *As someone who's been involved in politics in both South Africa and the UK, how well does South African corruption compete with UK corruption? How is corruption in the Global North and Global South discussed in the Global North, and how does implicit racism inform the disparities?*

**Andrew Feinstein:** I had a very interesting personal experience. I was an African National Congress (ANC) member of parliament in South Africa, and worked on the financial accountability side in parliament. I was the ranking ANC member on the Public Accounts Committee, and we investigated a \$10 billion arms deal that my own party and government took just a few years after we became a democracy. For South Africa, the sums of bribes were quite large, we are talking about a total of \$350 million of bribes paid to senior politicians, senior officials, senior corporate executives and of course intermediaries. The incredible thing is South Africa was immediately named this deeply corrupt country – “typical of Africa”, “didn't take long to become like the rest of Africa”, was the sort of discourse one heard.

When I started investigating the global arms trade and moved to the UK, I discovered that (former UK prime minister) Tony Blair and Prince Andrew, and his mate Jeffery Epstein – I am not sure if he is involved, but he was involved in a lot of arms deals and corruption related to arms deals – had paid £115 million (\$150 m) of bribes in South Africa for BAE Systems (British Aerospace) to win a contract that they weren't even shortlisted for. They were doing the same thing in seven or eight countries at the same moment, and they were paying over £1 billion (\$1.31 bn) of bribes, at that particular moment in history.

One of South Africa's former presidents, Jacob Zuma, is on trial with a French arms company, but the reality is Zuma received what is worth today around £25,000 (\$32,775) in bribes, and he should suffer the consequences of that, because he had no right to take bribes as a senior politician and government official – in my opinion he betrayed the South African people and South Africa by so doing – but what about Tony Blair? What about BAE Systems, the most corrupt company on the planet, who continue to this day to bribe and corrupt people around the world shamelessly, and Britain doesn't see itself as a corrupt country. It sees the corruption as elsewhere, completely ignoring the fact that the corruption has its source in London, and in fact I would argue that a huge amount of the world's corruption has its source in Washington D.C., London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Rome etcetera.

Countries of the Global North who effectively corrupt both other countries in the Global North and the Global South, and the discourse around it, is a completely subversive one. When we look at the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, what Transparency International does is ask people in a country whether they think their country is corrupt, and shock and horror, in the Global North people say no our country is not corrupt, and in the Global South the responses are, our country is corrupt. The reason for that is low level corruption is more common in the Global South on a daily basis when trying to access basic services, whereas in the Global North the corruption is at such a systemic level that people are virtually unaware of it.

Look for instance at the UK during the COVID pandemic, and the fact that (former Prime Minister) Boris Johnson, probably one of the most corrupt individuals to hold office anywhere in the world at any time, gave friends of his, and donors to his political party, contracts worth tens of billions of pounds, that they simply didn't deliver on, and there have been no consequences, either for Johnson, or for the recipients of public money.

Then there is another level, and that is the way in which anti-corruption activities are used selectively. In the case of the South African arms deal I mentioned, (former President) Thabo Mbeki was the president who really oversaw the deal and ensured that the ANC benefitted from the bribes. He allowed law enforcement authorities and prosecutors to investigate his opponent Jacob Zuma but told them absolutely explicitly that they couldn't investigate any of his political allies, and so they didn't. This is a carry over from the reality that in the Global North this sort of corruption is seldom ever investigated.

We have the case of (former Chancellor) Helmut Kohl in Germany, a Chancellor who unified East and West Germany, who funded his political party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) – I have written extensively about all of these things I am raising here with thousands and thousands of footnotes, so if people are interested, I would strongly recommend they look at the Shadow World book and can see the sourcing of the evidence for all of these statements I am making – and Kohl financed his CDU primarily off licit and illicit arms deals, and I actually describe in particular how arms dealer Karl Hans Schreiber would actually meet with Kohl's party treasurer and personal accountant just across the border in Switzerland, and would literally move briefcases of cash from the boot of his car into the boot of the car of the party treasurer or personal accountant. Literally until the day he died Helmut Kohl was indignant, threatening to sue anybody who accused him of corruption.

His successor, Angela Merkel, a politician who is quite respected in Western Europe and the Global North generally, she did it more cleverly than her predecessor and political mentor Kohl, in that she got Germany's arms companies to give an exponential number of gifts to local party officers, of which there are thousands across Germany, all in the amount of Euro 1,000 (\$1,122). The reason she did that is German prosecutors don't regard payments of Euro 1,000 or less as corruption so they don't even bother to look into the issue.

I think political systems around the world have become deeply corrupted by the intertwining of business and politics that was an inevitable consequence of neoliberal capitalism. I think the way we decide to attack it depends entirely on the political hat we wear. The hypocrisy of the Global North in the way it talks about corruption in the Global South, ignoring the systemic corruption that is intrinsic to each and every form of governance in the Global North, is devastating and I find it deeply disturbing.

Even when corruption is blatantly used and undermines democracy, as it was in Brazil, and I would recommend a brilliant documentary called [The Edge of Democracy](#), where prosecutors conspired to put the current, then former President Lula (da Silva) in jail for corruption, but were doing so on behalf of the far right wing in Brazil, who then came to power because Lula was in prison, and because his political protege (former President) Dilma (Rousseff) was forced from office. She was probably the least corrupt politician in Brazil at the time, and the prosecutor who led all these charges then became (now former President Jair) Bolsonaro's justice minister.

Even after emails and Whatsapp messages between the prosecutors explicitly conspiring to remove Lula from public life in Brazil, even after those became public, anti-corruption organisations in the Global North still speak about those prosecutors as if they were some sort of anti-corruption heroes rather than political operatives who ensured that a far more damaging and reactionary, and corrupt group of people, came to power in a country like Brazil.

**“What is their competitive advantage? They pay bribes”**

**Cochrane:** *You have argued for years that the arms industry is one of the world's most corrupt sectors, accounting for around 40 percent of all corruption in world trade, and that European manufacturers can be considered more corrupt versus the US arms industry, which is the largest in the world – why is this the case?*

**Feinstein:** I think originally, in the post World War II world, it was the most corrupt on the planet. The US has for decades manufactured around 40 percent of all weaponry that is

made in the world, so you can't talk about the trade without talking about the US, and I am not in any way saying the US arms industry isn't corrupt, in fact the domestic industry, the way in which the big defence companies sell to the US government, which is obviously the majority of their business, is a form of what I describe as legalised bribery.

It is actually legal in American law for a company like Lockheed Martin to fund a whole lot of politicians' campaigns and political careers, and once in office to ensure that those politicians, quite explicitly, will vote for billion dollar contracts to go back to Lockheed Martin and at the same time, defence contractors do like the latest revelation, they charge the American taxpayer \$52,000 for a trash can that costs them about \$200. In that sense, the domestic US arms trade is entirely and fundamentally corrupt.

The involvement of US defence companies in foreign corruption has decreased over time with the advent of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) and particularly the tightening of the Act in the mid to late 1980s. Before then US companies would pay bribes wherever they were trying to sell arms, very explicitly. There was this wonderful incidence of the husband of the Queen of the Netherlands, Prince Bernhard, and Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman, two of the biggest defence contractors in the world, who were vying for a contract to produce a jet fighter for the Dutch military. Without realising they were both bribing Prince Bernhard to covertly act as their agent on the deal, they didn't realise he was taking about \$1 million from each of them, and they were competitors for this contract. Obviously when they found out they were less than thrilled, although he was very proud of himself.

The Americans used to be at the forefront of corruption in the arms trade, but the FCPA has made a significant difference, and the Americans now dominate the arms trade because one, economies of scale, they produce so much for the Pentagon that adding on for the international market is relatively cheap to do, and it means their prices are very competitive and their equipment is very competitive, but in addition to that, what they use as leverage is their power. By buying weapons from the USA you are consolidating an alliance with that country, so poodles of the US like the UK continue to buy huge amounts of weaponry from the US and it sort of guarantees their poodle status.

Other allies like Saudi Arabia would be a great example, who have an appalling human rights history at home and abroad, completely undemocratic, but are seen as flawless by the US who will sell them any arms they want. For many decades they were buying this weaponry and leaving it, they weren't using it, they didn't have the capacity to use it. I managed to find this photograph while I was researching the Shadow World book of over

70 jet fighters parked in the deserts of Saudi Arabia that have never been flown, they were just left to rust, but this is how Saudi ensured that their reliance on the US remained strong. Given that people are benefitting from these deals materially just adds to the force of that alliance.

When NATO expanded Eastwards this was a huge boondoggle for defence contractors as well. There was this committee created called the Committee to Expand NATO, very creatively named, and it was chaired by a senior vice president for international operations of Lockheed Martin, a guy called Bruce Jackson. Jackson basically went from Western European capital to Eastern European capital and said to them quite explicitly, when you join NATO you are going to have to increase your defence spending to 2 percent of GDP, you are going to have to modernise all of your equipment as follows, and here's the deal: if you spend the \$20 billion or whatever you need to modernise with Lockheed Martin I will guarantee you that the US will support your accession to full NATO membership. And that is what they did, and made tens of billions upon tens of billions of dollars in that way. But then, in the case of the Europeans, no European country has anything equivalent to the FCPA, in fact foreign corruption from most European countries and the UK is virtually ignored by law enforcement.

We have taken literally dozens of cases to the UK Serious Fraud Office (SFO). The ones they have even bothered to look into, at all, I don't even need one hand to count them, I just need a couple of fingers, because it literally is just a couple of cases. There is no interest and it is politically unpopular to do. Don't forget prosecutors come under enormous political influence, and often get their job because they are very political players, Keir Starmer (head of the UK Labour party, former Director of Public Prosecutions and head of the Crown *Prosecution* Service) being a case in point. Their desire to investigate corruption that is at the same time corrupting foreign ministers and officials is creating what we call the feedback principle, it is also paying off politicians at home, and the families of political parties at home. That sort of stuff just doesn't get investigated.

The Europeans, they don't have the economies of scale that the US have, they don't have the same international diplomatic kudos that the US can bring to bear on its arms sales, so what is their competitive advantage? They pay bribes. All of the European countries and the UK, until today, continue to pay massive bribes on virtually every arms deal that they do, and those bribes are built into the economic structure of the industry.

**“We are living in an insane world”**

**Maddox:** *Speaking as an American, I notice that the US discourse around “gun control” is almost entirely limited to the domestic sphere, while most of our arms sales take place internationally. In what ways does the US role in the global arms industry impact the way Americans discuss and deal with gun violence at home? What connections should Americans start making?*

**Feinstein:** The important thing is that America is the biggest military player globally, it is not just that they produce the most weapons. America, since WW2, has been involved in more conflicts and more invasions, and military activity, outside the USA than any other country on the planet. In fact, many of the next biggest countries combined don't come anywhere near this sort of military impact the US has had on the world.

One of the prime reasons the US is not what I would describe as at the forefront of peace efforts globally is because it is economically and materially advantageous to America to have conflict and instability around the world, pretty much all the time. So how does this work? To give you one example, in the work we are doing on the conflict on Yemen, in which America, Western Europe, the UK and to a much less extent China and Iran have effectively weaponised, the Americans have been so ubiquitous in selling or giving weapons to various dictatorial, human rights abusing regimes in the Middle East, and to a wide range of militia groups across the region, that there are a number of battles that have taken place since 2015 in Yemen where we have been able to identify that all of the protagonists in those battles, and this includes tribal groups within Yemen – it includes a whole range of political factions, it includes groups supported by Saudi Arabia, by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), groups supported by Iran – there are some battles where all of the weaponry used is American made. That is the extent of the ubiquity of America's role in arming conflict around the world.

We see this most obviously in a very simple statistic – the US government employs more people to maintain and run one aircraft carrier than they have diplomats across the entire world. Today, the US has 12 aircraft carriers. What America lives with is what the sociologist C. Wright Mills calls a military mindset, a military metaphysics where everything is seen through the lens of conflict and war. It is in America's founding myths, it is in the absurd approach to gun control that costs so many Americans lives domestically every year, and that causes such conflict around the world. How do these two things combine? We tend to think that the domestic gun lobby, the National Rifle Association (NRA), particularly, and all the politicians they buy, and that is what they do, they buy them. I think Americans need to understand that, your politicians are all bought. The thing

is, it is easier in America to identify who, it is more difficult in Europe and the UK, because it is legal to buy politicians, as we described in the relationships between defence contractors and politicians.

What the NRA does is basically ensure that politicians cannot even have an adult conversation about meaningful gun control in the US yet alone actually doing something about it. They are creating the environment in which its defence sector plays such an incredibly important role globally it can only flourish. This is seen in the fact that in major sporting events in the US, the military is front and centre. In fact, when you board a plane in the US, military personnel are invited onto the plane even before families with young kids and babies. There is a psychological connection to weaponry, big and small, to the US military role in the world that I think is incomprehensible to most people outside of the US and everywhere else in the world.

I think it is really important that Americans be aware of the impact of this focus on a military metaphysic both at home and abroad, as what it is doing is taking a huge proportion of your tax contributions. A brilliant colleague of mine called Bill Hartung, he is now at the Quincy Institute, writing about the American arms trade for decades and decades, he has written a brilliant biography of Lockheed Martin (Prophets of War), describes the Pentagon as a self-licking ice cream, which is the best analogy of the Pentagon I have ever heard. Bill calculated that for every dollar paid to the US tax authorities, 30 cents pretty much goes to the defence contractors.

Let us think about the state of the world. What are the challenges facing us as human beings? Clearly climate catastrophe, global pandemics, and extreme and increasing inequality. That means people in America have to work three jobs to be able to feed their family if they are lucky enough to find a job, and it means that food bank use in countries like the UK is at its highest level since WW2.

We are living in an insane world at the moment, but we are still spending, in the case of the US, well over \$1 trillion a year on what we euphemistically describe as defence. Now this is money that should be going into helping Americans with the current cost of living crisis, helping Americans with healthcare, with education, dealing with the climate emergency, ensuring that we are far better prepared for inevitable future pandemics than we were for COVID. So it infuses every aspect of American life, and the NRA's constant pitch for no gun control feeds into the same sort of laissez faire attitude to American arms exports to the rest of the world, that fuels conflicts everywhere they are sold.

**The Military Industrial Complex and the Ukraine-Russia conflict**



**Cochrane:** *Why has the White House been resistant to negotiations and instead emphasizing armed intervention in Ukraine?*

**Feinstein:** It follows the pattern the US follows all over the world where you resolve issues by conflict rather than diplomacy because that is incredibly lucrative to the US, and it ensures the US continues to play a dominant role in the world. I think that is starting to change. For instance, if we look before I get to the Ukraine at the Yemen conflict, a very interesting development has happened, where China has brokered a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, that has effectively made it possible to in practice, even if not in theory, maintain a cease fire in Yemen for a good while now.

Since 2015, the US and its Western allies have made absolutely no effort whatsoever to bring any sort of peace to Yemen because they are all making far too much money out of the conflict and the fact that tens of thousands of innocent civilians were being killed, a massive violation of international humanitarian law and in war crimes incidental to them, it is not their concern. In fact we see the complete weakness of any controls over who America and Europe and the UK sells arms to by the fact that they continue to sell arms to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who are primarily responsible for the killing of those tens of thousands of innocent civilians, showing that the domestic arms export controls are basically voluntary, that regional and international agreements on arms exports control are pretty much ignorable, and allowing the US, Western Europe and the UK to do what they want. That is the first reason why they have very little interest in peace in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

I should be clear on this as to where I stand on the matter. I believe that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a brutal, illegal invasion. I don't believe there is any justification for it. At the same time I believe that the West has over a number of years contributed to an environment that led to that illegal invasion by, for instance, its zeal in expanding NATO Eastwards. You can actually understand whatever your thoughts on Vladimir Putin are, and I should say he has murdered at least two people I have worked on arms trade matters in Russia over the years, so I would hardly describe myself as a fan, and I think to be critical of the West and Ukraine does not in any way imply that one is in any way in favour of what Vladimir Putin has done, is doing and is likely to do.

I think the West contributed to a very febrile atmosphere, whether its approach to the Eastwards expansion of NATO, and the idea of Ukraine joining NATO, which would effectively mean that there would be American missiles on the border with Ukraine. Now there have always been contested territories between the two countries, there are

significant ethnic Russians living in Ukraine, so the situation has been a very febrile one for many years.

What is America's interest in all of this? Well, as we know the Biden family has a variety of interests in Ukraine that have never been properly explained. One of Biden's sons seems to have had business interests in the country for quite a long while now. And I do think these material interests, we should not rule out their importance in geopolitical decisions, as unfortunately politicians across the world, be it Vladimir Putin, be it Joe Biden, they make a hell of a lot of money out of being politicians, and anybody who can't see that is simply being incredibly naive and myopic. So, there is a history of some sort of financial engagement and relationship but I haven't investigated it, I don't understand it, and I am not sure what exactly it is.

I think the Biden administration decided that it wanted to see Putin from office. Now regime change is something that the US in the post WW2 world has engaged actively around the world. Eric, where you are sitting in Latin America has probably seen the brunt of it. The carnage that has gone on in the Middle East for decades is primarily a consequence of the US desire for regime change, particularly in Iran. So I think that they saw an opportunity to weaken Putin, perhaps to defeat him. But as any student of conflict, of war, is aware, very few wars are won and lost. Most wars are resolved in some sort of highly unsatisfactory manner to everybody involved, and usually at an enormous cost to the lives of innocent civilians, and unfortunately I think this is what we are seeing playing out in Ukraine.

It has more to do with the US' geopolitical view than it has to do with anything particularly germane to Ukraine, and very sadly, I think that conflict will be brought to an end when it is no longer in the material interests of the main protagonists, and by that I mean Russia and Putin. I estimate that Putin has probably made in excess of \$40 billion from his personal cut in arms deals over the time that he has been the key figure in Russian politics.

The so called Military Industrial Complex (MIC) in the US is, as I have tried to explain, absolutely central to the financing of the American political process, and to the personal finances of an enormous number of senior American politicians. But there will come a time when the costs of the war, even to these people, outweighs the benefits. And that time sadly, it will not be the people of Ukraine who are foremost in anybody's mind, it is not going to be the people in the disputed territories that are at the forefront of anybody's minds, it is going to be the then short term interests of the Americans and the Russians. I

think the primary reason why the Americans haven't been interested in any sort of peace initiative thus far is because it is serving their purposes of loosening Putin's grasp on power and making an enormous amount of money for America's MIC who have seen their share prices increase by on average 35-40 percent since the invasion.

### **Capitalism and the global international security elite**

**Maddox:** *What are your thoughts on the following statement: We don't have an institutionalized corruption problem, we have a capitalism problem. Until we remove the profit incentives for violence, exploitation, and the hoarding of resources nothing will fundamentally change because corruption is inevitable under the system we have.*

**Feinstein:** I would endorse that statement 100 percent. I spend a lot of my life trying to deal with the immediate consequences of the arms trade, be that in Yemen, be that in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, be that in Ukraine. That is the Band-Aid, that is the palliative for the immediate problem because you can't ignore the suffering of human beings in the here and now in the appalling political and economic system that we have. The reality is that, for the nature and functioning of the global arms trade to change, for the primacy of conflict over diplomacy and development, what we need is a profound change in our political and economic system because it is rotten to the core.

In the US the manufacturing of weaponry has always been in private company hands, but those private companies are completely subsidised by the state, so in what America describes as its extraordinary model of free market capitalism, there are in fact certain sectors – arms amongst them, healthcare, finance, pharmaceuticals – wouldn't exist without the backing of the state, what I call State Corporate Welfare. An enormous amount of money goes into these companies. The defence companies in particular are such badly run companies that none of them would survive if there was actually a free market in the US defence sector.

In Europe and the UK the function of manufacturing weapons was for a long time in state hands and then with the advent of a particularly aggressive form of neoliberal capitalism, and the wave of privatisations in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a lot of them became privatised and private companies. All that has done is create an incentive for conflict especially because of the incredibly close, symbiotic relationship between these companies, the state, the political actors in that state, senior military and intelligence leaders within that state, so that the very people that should be properly regulating this sort of trade are the people who benefit from it politically and materially.

It is what Lawrence Wilkerson, who was (US Secretary of State) Colin Powell's chief of staff for many years, described as the global international security elite. They all personally make a substantial amount of money out of warfare and out of the arms business, and it means we live in a world where we are prepared to spend huge proportions of our GDP on so called defence, it should be called offence, but it is defence, ridiculously. And where we require conflict to be able to continue to justify this enormous expense. We also have to keep our populations fearful because otherwise they will start asking too many questions about why we are spending all this money on defence, and why so much of it ends up with the political parties and politicians, especially once they leave office.

To change this system, and there is no political will in our current political system to change it, requires a fundamental change in the nature and structure of our politics and economics. I believe we are in what the philosopher Karl Popper would describe as the classical interregnum, at the moment. The paradigm of late neoliberal capitalism is clearly failing except for a very tiny proportion, the one percent. For the vast majority of people the system is so obviously failing but we don't know what comes next. We don't know what replaces it, and that is why we are in this moment of interregnum and I think it is incredibly, for us, and I would describe myself, not only as a researcher but an activist and campaigner as much as a researcher, to be thinking about how we use the technological advances that have taken place in our societies, good and bad, to actually advance our political system. I think we have to ask ourselves huge questions.

The intertwining of business and politics has meant, in my opinion, that liberal representative democracy has totally failed. I can count on my hands the number of so called elected representatives around the world who I think actually represent the people that got them there. The vast majority of them represent themselves, their own narrow interests, and the interests of an elite that put them in power and that is what needs changing. I even ask myself the question, if with the technology we have today, is our current system of representative democracy of party politics, where parties are really just factions of people trying to force greater and greater space at the trough from which they feed, whether this form of politics even has a place in what would be a more democratic, more self organising system of how human beings manage our lives going forward.

**The military's carbon boot print should be front and centre at any discussion of climate issues**

**Cochrane:** *To confront climate change, environment degradation and the ravaging of our planet, we need now more than ever to divert the immense resources militarism uses for more ecological purposes. With global military spending at \$2.24 trillion in 2022, nearly double that of 2000, we are going in the wrong direction. A key part of this is that at the Kyoto climate talks in 1997, the US and others made sure that the military was exempt from climate change talks, yet the US military is the single largest institutional polluter on earth, while the UK military's carbon emissions is the same as Uganda's, a country of 50 million people, roughly that of England's 56 million. Do you think the military should be part of discussions at climate change talks?*

**Feinstein:** Of course the military's carbon boot print, as someone has called it, should be on the agenda at any discussion of climate change. It comes back to the matter of political will. I think the reasons that the military has been excluded, and it is not just from any sort of accountability around their carbon emissions, the defence sector is excluded from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) banning the use of offsets as a criteria in large scale public procurements. Why? Because offsets together with intermediation are key mechanisms through which bribes are paid for arms deals, so the WTO puts in place this exemption. Politicians are all thrilled with it, because they benefit from these bribes in exactly the same way in which you have a world that is dominated by conflict and the military metaphysics of which we spoke of earlier.

You can't have the reality of the impact of that militarism available to people to comprehend, so they can actually make informed decisions about whether they want such a huge proportion of their tax dollars, pounds or euros to be used for military purposes, so it is part of an entire process of obfuscation, of education/entertainment in which militarism is presented as heroic, in which those who oppose militarism, who are actually more concerned about the maintenance of human life rather than its destruction, are painted as these villainous people who are both communist and nazis all rolled into one.

The sort of level of discourse and public discourse about these sorts of matters is so appalling that if we actually made the military tell us the extent of its contribution to the climate catastrophe, far more people across the world would be saying, hold on a moment, here are the costs, what are the benefits? Unfortunately the benefits column is pretty damn empty. It is part of a process of ensuring that we don't have informed public discourse about the role of the military in our societies and in our world.

We are also presented with these completely fallacious arguments about how the defence sectors are good for our economies. I have a number of degrees in economics, and from

multiple studies in various parts of the world, it is absolutely clear that the defence sector is probably the most expensive and least effective ways to create jobs that there is in the world. For instance, for the amount of our tax money that goes to create a job in the defence sector in the US, we could create three to seven similar level jobs in far more socially productive sectors, but also sectors that are far more economically productive like renewable energy.

Diversification from defence into renewable energy would have a whole lot of obvious economic effects that would be far better for our local economies and for our global economy, and far less damaging to them. So yes of course the military's carbon boot print should be front and centre at any discussion of climate issues, but for the political reasons I've outlined it is absolutely not going to be.

### **The cultural hegemony of militarism**

**Maddox:** *Arms manufacturers not only put money into the campaign coffers of US elected officials, they also create jobs in their Congressional districts, jobs that politicians are loath to threaten or remove. So what exactly is our play here, as concerned citizens? How can we re-assert our leverage over our politicians? Or how can we go around them to seek an end to the military industrial complex despite them?*

**Feinstein:** The defence sector is a really economically inefficient way of creating jobs but it is used as a political stick by the defence contractors and their political sponsors. Lockheed Martin on the F-35 jet fighter programme ensured that there were jobs in every single Congressional district. Now some of those jobs are just two people sitting in a rented office with very old computers doing absolutely nothing but it enabled Lockheed Martin and all the defence lobbyists to be able to say anybody running for Congress in that district, support the F-35 programme or otherwise we will fund the campaign against you, that you have consciously undermined job creation in your district.

So it is used for electoral purposes quite as directly as I have made out. If you are a politician in our current system thinking I don't necessarily want the entire defence lobby, which is probably one of the best funded lobbies on the planet, ganging up on me in my Congressional fight in that district, what do you do? You go along with it, which is why you have literally a handful of representatives who even criticise a project like the F-35.

The F-35 has cost the American taxpayer \$2 trillion thus far. Less than two years ago a US inspector general reported that the brains of the F-35, the most expensive weapons system ever built, supposedly the smartest weapons system ever built, the brains of the system, the combat suite, doesn't work properly and they've got to go back to the drawing board.

This is the same jet fighter that failed its first fourteen test flights. This is the same jet fighter that when it was due to appear at an airshow in the UK for its European debut caught fire on the runway of its American base as it was leaving for the airshow. This is the same jet fighter that Pierre Sprey, a Pentagon veteran who was involved in the design of the F-16 jet fighter, said is the most expensive, biggest – excusing his language – piece of crap that Lockheed Martin, a company that specialises in expensive pieces of crap, has ever built. He said the only good thing about the F-35 is that the only people it is going to endanger is the test pilots.

What we have got to do first of all is find ways to communicate as widely as possible just how much of our money is being wasted. Just how much that waste of money is not just creating opportunity costs when it comes to fighting climate issues, to fighting global pandemics, but is actually making us less safe even if you accept a very narrow national security paradigm, which I don't.

For example, after the tragedy of September 11 2001, it was identified that the Coast Guard was a particular weakness in US Homeland Security, so Lockheed Martin – a company we have mentioned a few times today – was given a \$11 billion contract to effectively repurpose and re-equip the US Coast Guard.

After ten years of that contract, and this is work done by Bill Hartung who I have mentioned previously, what Lockheed Martin had to show for the \$11 billion was one vessel. A vessel that when they first put it in the water, saw its hull crack, so it was useless. The contract was reviewed, Lockheed Martin were then given additional billions to continue its remarkable re-equipping of the US Coast Guard, so this money is being poured down a proverbial black hole, it is being spent on equipment that when it does get produced many years later, in almost every case, doesn't work properly or isn't fit for purpose.

Even the trillions of dollars that are being spent supposedly on the safety and security of American citizens is actually fundamentally undermining that very safety and security. I think we all have a responsibility to figure out how we communicate better about this, and it is a huge challenge because as the academic James Der Derian described Hollywood, it is the Military Industrial Entertainment Complex where everything that comes out of Hollywood presents anything to do with the military as heroic.

It is where we even have that Tom Hanks film Captain Phillips, where this brave captain fought off these two undernourished Somalian pirates, each equipped with a very rusty old AK-47, required an aircraft carrier and two frigates from the US Navy to do so. This was

somehow turned into a hero narrative in spite of the fact that the rest of the crew in the incident on which the film was supposedly based, were incredibly angry at the real Captain Phillips because when these two scrawny individuals made their way onto the ship, the captain of the ship hid himself in a cupboard. We have to overcome these sorts of narratives.

We have to overcome the sort of cultural hegemony that militarism has on the US and on the world at the moment. How do we do that? By more and better engagement in cleverer ways. I am beginning to think more and more that the most effective way to oppose this militarism is through direct action. You look at what quite a few thousand American military veterans do now, is when they pay their tax, they deduct 30 percent, the so-called Lockheed Martin tax, the 30 cents in every tax dollar that goes to the defence contractors. They pay the tax authorities the 70 percent of tax that they owe, and put the 30 percent into a peace and development fund. Far more of us should be doing that sort of thing.

Far more of us should be saying to our representatives, if you want our votes, let us stop the corrupt boondoggle that is the American arms industry, that is the American gun industry, and actually stop voting for these bloody people who are making fortunes at our expense, and those fortunes are our tax dollars. I think we have to improve our communication, we have to improve our strategy and tactics, but we also at the same time have to focus on changing our political system, because none of these major questions are going to change if we have the corrupted, self-serving political system we currently do.

**Impolite direct action should be at the forefront of campaigning and activism against militarism**

**Cochrane:** *In environmental activism circles, there are increasing debates around tactics, that democratic and peaceful means are not working, and there is a need for more radical action – [monkey-wrenching](#) to destructively immobilize machines, adopting the tactics of the [Plowshares movement](#) against nuclear weapons, to Andreas Malm's recent book [How to Blow up a Pipeline](#). Countering militarism is part of such activism. What is your message to activists?*

**Feinstein:** Many of us have grown up in an environment where our activism or campaigning has been fairly polite. When I was involved in the struggle against [apartheid](#) in South Africa, which was ultimately a successful struggle even if our democracy has only been partially successful, that struggle was not a polite struggle. The ANC waged armed struggle against a racist oligarchy, people on the ground made the



country ungovernable because what was being understood by being governed, was being brutally oppressed by a very powerful military apartheid state.

As activists and campaigners we have to ask ourselves, if people aren't getting angry about our forms of activism and campaigning, are they having any impact? Because, especially in so-called Western countries and the Global North, polite activism and campaigning is important for our governments to be able to hail the freedom of the press, of opinion, freedom of political activity that they trumpet. The fact that they do this at the same time as imprisoning a man (Julian Assange) who through the practice of journalism exposed their war crimes, and hope to imprison him for at least 176 years, suggests that when the provision of information, when campaigning and activism becomes impolite, and actually having an impact, then our liberal democracies are far less keen on it.

The forces of power that control our societies are a combination of economic and political power that has become completely intertwined and inseparable, are remarkably powerful, they control the media, they control public discourse, they control our political processes. They are not going to give up that power because someone politely asks them to. They are not going to give up that power if the vast majority of people ask them politely to. They are only going to cede power if forced to do so.

I have seen that both in the environmental movement and I've seen that in a small example of it in the arms trade, on the environmental side – a variety of environmental groups have over a period of time been sort of bringing the main business district of London, known as the City of London, to a halt, by occupying bridges and other key thoroughfares into and out of the city. This has caused outrage, obviously on the Right, and among liberal commentators, and it has caused outrage as actually having an impact on the bottom line. So now we are actually threatening that power.

The traditional media, the established media, is demanding that these activists and campaigners re-think the politeness of their campaigning because it is actually having some form of effect. Let me give you the arms trade equivalent. There is a small group in the UK called Palestine Action. They decided that all the campaigning and activism they had been involved in on the issue of Israeli apartheid and the occupation of Palestine as well as the global military's role in that, have fallen on deaf ears, and the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories has actually been getting worse and worse. We have seen over the past two days, at least 14 people murdered in Jenin by Israeli occupying forces. Our governments dare not even mildly rebuke Israel for its actions in the Occupied

Territories, for the pogroms that are being carried out by settler movements which have the support of the fascist Israeli government and of the Israeli occupation forces.

With all this in mind the group Palestine Action says, well, how can we show solidarity with Palestine in a meaningful way? They identify the fact that the Israeli arms company Elbit Systems, which is the pioneer of drone technology, that continues to manufacture drones that are used in the Yemen conflict, that are used in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, but most notably are used in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. They started occupying Elbit factories in the UK, of which there are ten, producing parts and components for drones that actively enabling violations of international humanitarian law and committing war crimes, and these people are saying this is unacceptable.

They occupy those factories, and over a period of less than a year and a half, they have caused the permanent closure of two of those Elbit factories in the UK. The biggest remaining factory in Leicester is currently under siege, and has been since the beginning of May (2023) not been able to operate. Elbit Systems lost a £280 million (\$366 m) contract with the UK Ministry of Defence as a direct consequence of the actions of Palestine Action. Hundreds of people have been arrested, but most of the cases were dropped before they ever came to court because Elbit Systems didn't actually want the reality of what they do and what their factories produce to be raised in court case after court case. Both the Crown Prosecution Services and Elbit Systems itself, British law enforcement and British intelligence, do not know how to react to this direct action by Palestine Action.

It is probably the most effective campaign against a specific arms trade entity that has committed huge atrocities around the world. I am beginning to think more and more that it is this sort of impolite direct action that should be at the forefront of our campaigning and activism against militarism, against the despoliation of our environment, and against the political-economic system that requires both militarism and climate catastrophe to continue its profits.

### **Rejecting the Occupation Industry**

**Maddox:** *What do you have to say about Israel's occupation as a commodity for export?*

**Feinstein:** I do a lot of work on Israel, as I do on Saudi Arabia, the US, the UK, and Europe, because Israel plays an incredibly important role in the global arms trade. It effectively acts as both a research and development centre and a shop window for the US arms industry and for the European and UK arms industries.

Not only does the US government provide the Israeli government with around \$4 billion a year, money which interestingly never leaves the US, as it is used on Israel's involvement in R&D for American defence companies. How is that R&D done? It is done in the Occupied Territories and on the Palestinian people. Some of the stuff that is tested in the Occupied Territories is explicitly banned by international treaty, but Israel still uses it, and often the US, (as they) are not signatory to those treaties. Sometimes even the US uses cluster munitions, and Israel still uses cluster munitions constantly in the Occupied Territories.

Whenever there is a major incursion into the Occupied Territories, Israel will hold an arms fair in the immediate aftermath and often what happens is there will be special invitees, you don't get to say I will come to one of your arms fairs, you need to be invited, and it is key military personnel, key procurement officers, from all the world's countries, particularly the least democratic most oppressive countries in the world.

I have been to one of them, before I started publishing on this stuff, and they actually show footage of what has just happened in the Occupied Territories and they have people telling you as you sit there, individually, exactly how effective the weaponry has been and how it has worked in eliminating targets. They lie pathologically about how such hi-tech equipment does not affect civilians, whereas exactly the opposite is the case.

Jeff Halper has done some extraordinary work on occupation as an economic commodity. Israel sells aspects of its occupation philosophy, equipment and methodology to the rest of the world, and especially to that part of the world that buys in to the sort of ethno-nationalist project of which Israel itself is a part. You have this extraordinary circumstance in the world today where somebody like Viktor Orban, the prime minister of Hungary, who is an out-and-out anti-Semite, who uses anti-Semitism, caricatures of George Soros and other Jews to win election after election in Hungary, is greeted with adulation in Israel every year. How the current Indian prime minister (Narendra Modi), who himself is conducting an ethno-nationalist project, is a great friend of Israel. How the president of the Ukraine (Volodymyr Zelenskyy) can describe wanting to turn his country into the Israel of Eastern Europe, with nobody asking the question, what do you mean? A racist occupying state? And where criticism of Israel is now seen as anti-Semitic even when it comes from life long anti-racist Jews, many of us the sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors who understand exactly what anti-Semitism is.

Jeff Halper's work shows Israel very cleverly markets itself as a sort of all-in-one solution. We will do everything, if you are an aspiring politician in an African country, we will

come and help you develop a political party, we will develop your election materials for you, we will keep you secure, and once we have got you into power, you will then buy all your military, homeland security, and torture and surveillance equipment from us, because we use it all, we make it all and we know what will be good for you. The Israelis did this in the case of a politician called Mrs (Joyce) Banda in Malawi, an extraordinary story I won't go into here, but it is worth looking at.

Israel effectively markets itself on the very worst of what it does in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and any of us who oppose not just anti-Semitism, but Islamophobia, anti-Black discrimination, racism and discrimination of any sort, have a responsibility to call this out. At a time when our governments in the Global North are trying to make it illegal to protest against Israel, to criticise Israel, to boycott Israel, because the reality is that the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which I regard as a form of direct action, which was absolutely central to bringing about the end of apartheid in South Africa, will do the same thing in Israel.

I think for those of us that are anti-militarist and anti-racist, we have got to take this entire complex, and I think the word Occupation Industry is probably appropriate here, and we have got to reject it at a human rights level and also reject it because of the impact it is having around the world where Israeli spyware is being used by the world's worst intelligence agencies to oppress and repress entire populations and extraordinary activists around the world.

*Paul Cochrane is an independent journalist covering the Middle East and Africa. He lived in Bilad Al Sham (Cyprus, Palestine and Lebanon) for 24 years, mainly in Beirut. He is also the co-director of a documentary on the political-economy of water in Lebanon, "We Made Every Living Thing from Water".*

*Eric Maddox is the host and lead producer of Latitude Adjustment Podcast and the founder and director of the Palestine Podcast Academy, an initiative that aims to connect Palestinians from across Gaza, Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank to learn the mechanics and philosophy of podcasting, and to put the tools of independent media production back in the hands of the people.*

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