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## Column: Replace wasteful wars with diplomacy

By David Strand • Aug. 29, 2021

I am deeply appreciative and grateful that our president has shown the courage and fortitude to finally end our military involvement in Afghanistan. I am distressed that he has been subject to criticism from across the political spectrum by Monday-morning quarterbacks who profess to know better how to bring peace. It is estimated that approximately 170,000 people have been killed during the last 20 years of conflict, almost one-third of them civilians.

Withdrawal will certainly entail some fatalities, but America's contribution to the carnage, thankfully, is almost done.

Hopefully our withdrawal will lead to a diminution of our military presence throughout the world, and an increase in utilizing diplomacy in our foreign affairs. I believe that our reliance on the military is not in our national interest and generally harmful to the world for the following reasons:

1. The results of our military interventions during the last 70 years have generally been counterproductive. They have exacerbated unrest in the the Middle East and elsewhere and diminished our international reputation and standing.
2. Bombing in particular and war in general always result in bringing death, serious injury, and dislocation to innocent people. A substantial proportion of victims are innocent noncombatants, including children and the elderly. While it is always possible that military action will do at least some good, we know for certain that it will always bring absolute evil to the innocent victims of "collateral damage." American manufactured arms proliferate, enhancing the lethality of combatants.
3. War destabilizes the world. Refugees proliferate, resulting in suffering to the refugees themselves as well as often chaos to the societies where they seek refuge, diverting government priorities and encouraging xenophobia among the population of the host societies.
4. War diverts our attention and resources from dealing with domestic issues, from climate change to homelessness, from schools and education to our crumbling infrastructure, to economic development. Non-military public service options, such as the Peace Corps and AmeriCorps, suffer.
5. War increases the power and respectability and influence of the military and military leadership. We are encouraged to believe that it is desirable to reallocate our priorities so that the financial requirements of the military overshadow domestic needs. We more readily accept curtailment of our civil liberties. We become accustomed to multiple problems resulting from military activity: sexual assault within the armed services, homeless veterans, PTSD, environmental degradation, and militarization of police with excess military hardware, to name a few.

I fear that the current positive media spin on significant ongoing military build up in Hawaii suggests that we have not changed. China has moved into position as our seemingly necessary perpetual enemy. We spend more on our military than the next few countries combined. We have a great many military bases around the world and troops stationed in more than 100 countries. China has only one base in a foreign country. We fail to understand that China's Belt and Road initiative and other non-military international development efforts are where the Chinese are outpacing us. I wish that our competition would focus on spreading prosperity throughout the world.

Unfortunately war profiteering by arms manufacturers and others contribute to our emphasis on the military, just as weapons manufacturers inhibit domestic gun control.

I wish I knew an effective strategy to influence our government to pursue peace with the energy with which we prepare for war.

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