COLONIALISM 2.0

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The relationship between India and England in the early 20th century was the textbook example of what old-school colonialism looks like... one nation usurps the land and resources of another for its own use, making the people subject to laws determined by outsiders.

Today, in the 21st century, colonialism still exists, but in disguise. It is disguised by trade agreements, that are written by outsiders to ensure dominance over land, resources and trade routes. And it is cloaked by so called “strategic partnership” treaties, such as the DTTI, which stands for Defense Technology and Trade Initiative. This involves huge sums of American money pumped into India’s largest industrial corporations for the development and manufacture of war machines. The DTTI effectively shifts India’s power from the people to a domestic elite complicit with U.S. interests. The elite in India is Tata, Reliance Industries, Mahindra, and other corporations. They are poised to join with global war industrialists like Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Boeing, to bring down India’s democracy, and at the same time, make the world a lot more dangerous. This is how the U.S. tactic of strategic partnerships is used routinely in Asia. It destroys democracy and nearly all possibility for world peace.
I call the new style of colonialism “Colonialism 2.0.” Another term for it could be “military globalization.”

The goal of Britain’s traditional colonialism was direct access to cheap labor and resources at the expense of democracy. These days, it’s the U.S. that wants it all, including hegemony over the entire hemisphere. Off the coast of Asia, it is martial law. U.S. warships and their allies patrol sea lanes 24-7. They are there to ensure that the flow of oil to Asia and of consumer goods from Asia to the U.S. is never interrupted. That’s because the entirety of U.S. superpower culture depends upon continually filling the shelves of the big box stores like WalMart and Costco -- at all costs.

In order to maintain the uninterrupted flow of commerce, the U.S. seeks to isolate China. China is viewed as its biggest threat and competitor for the planet’s remaining resources. In fact, most, if not all, of the U.S. efforts in the Asia-Pacific have this singular goal in mind, whether it be through trade agreements, defense partnerships, the denial of Okinawan democracy, or even the creation of national marine monuments throughout the Pacific to supposedly protect nature. All of these actions relate, directly or indirectly, to isolating China.

China is such a perceived threat to U.S. dominance, that all peoples and communities of our region are facing unprecedented levels of militarization as the two powers
engage in a race for hegemony. There is a Korean saying, "When the whales fight, the shrimp get crushed." This is what is now happening in the Asia-Pacific region.

The U.S.-vs.-China clash of hegemons is best expressed at the trade choke-points of the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. The Malacca Strait is the gateway through which all Middle-Eastern oil passes to get to Asia. The strait is 900 kilometers long. At its narrowest, it is a mere 65 kilometers wide. Through this choke point passes 24% of the world’s trade worth $5 trillion and 80% of China’s crude oil. Whoever controls this passageway effectively controls all the trade in Asia, and in turn, the world. This is why the U.S. has been encircling China with military installations for the past decade, and why China responded by building artificial islands in the South China Sea last year, with military bases on them. Swarms of military ships, helicopters and jets from China, Singapore, Japan, India, the Philippines and the U.S. continually patrol these choke-points in a grand display of macho posturing. With the South China Sea as “Ground Zero,” our entire region has become a giant police state. Lately, however, the new president of the Philippines is withdrawing partnership with the U.S. He has announced, “I am no American puppet.”

While the U.S. easily dominates the Pacific from California westward to the Malacca Strait, its dominion stops at the Bay of Bengal. That’s where India is needed. India is now being groomed to be the proxy military of the U.S. in southern Asia. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter calls the new partnership the “handshake” between Modi’s
“Look East” and Obama’s “Pacific Pivot.”

The idea of a strategic relationship between the U.S. and India was first introduced by George W. Bush, in a 2006 Strategic Partnership Agreement signed with Manmohan Singh. But widespread domestic opposition kept it from going anywhere. There was a justified fear that it would carve a foothold for the U.S. on Indian soil and also rile China to the north. So, although a strategic agreement was signed, there was no political will to move it forward. Notwithstanding, the slow start of India-U.S. strategic relations was a start. That year, arms sales from the U.S. to India was $300 million. Today, ten years later, it is a whopping $14 billion. “There is every reason to expect it to rise further,” said Mukesh Aghi, president of the U.S.-India Business Council.

Over half of India’s traded goods pass through the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea. India is now an up and coming capitalist country. It has got to secure those sea lanes. But as Chinese and Pakistani submarines proliferate in the Bay of Bengal, India is feeling uneasy about the continued security of its supply of oil and goods. So now, India is ramping up its militarism to protect these trade routes. Part of the plan is to institute anti-submarine sonar technology in the Bay of Bengal, which by the way, will decimate whale and dolphin populations in the entire Indian Ocean. For its part, the Bay of Bengal is considered by marine biologists as effectively a “dead zone,” with insufficient oxygen to sustain life.
It is unsettling that the waters of the Asia-Pacific have never been so militarized, as forces vie for control of the most economically dynamic region of the world. We are told that this military will help us in the event of a natural disaster like a typhoon or tidal wave. But don’t be fooled. This is not motivated by benevolence. It is motivated – again -- by the need to ensure that goods will flow uninterrupted from Asia to the U.S. A typhoon or an earthquake or a flood can be just as threatening to the supply chain as a labor uprising, or a Chinese blockade. Humanitarian disaster relief is not only great public relations, it’s essential for keeping goods moving smoothly in the world economy.

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A.K. Antony, the UPA government defence minister from 2006-2014, opposes India's signing of any of the four agreements that comprise the strategic partnership with the U.S. In an interview with the Indian Express, he said he “believed that signing the agreements would grant the US military unencumbered access to Indian military installations and compromise sensitive data.” So far, two of the four agreements have been signed.

The first agreement is the LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memo of Agreement). This was signed last August and will enable the U.S. to use all of India’s land facilities, air bases and ports. This means that the U.S. gets all the advantages of having overseas bases in India, with none of the expense or community blowback that come with
managing its own bases overseas.

And, though it is not readily evident, the LEMOA also opens India to an unforeseen result, which is relentless pressure from the U.S. in the future to build more bases -- to the expense of India. This we see time and time again in South Korea. Tax dollars that could pay for the health and education of the people instead go to the continual construction of military bases that contaminate the environment, destroy traditional culture, and displace farmers and other citizens. Despite constant protests by thousands of Korean citizens, militarization marches forward in South Korea, because the Korean government signed away its democracy to the global defense industry.

The second agreement that India signed is the DTTI, which I mentioned earlier. This locks India into co-developing and co-designing military hardware as well as software for U.S. use. Currently, it involves a ten-year contract to manufacture aircraft carriers and jet engines. Ten years. This is a long-term commitment toward war. This is how Modi intends to lift 1.3 billion Indians to a middle-class living standard similar to China's. Yes, this partnership with the U.S. will bring more money and jobs to India. But to root India's economy in militarism cannot be sustained without cataclysmic consequences. We are setting up an economic infrastructure in which war is a necessary ingredient to prosperity. And in which world peace will collapse the economy – and not just India's economy, but the global economy as well.
We in the U.S. know all too well how dangerous the world becomes when an economy is rooted in war. In the U.S., over 50% of all our taxes go to war. Both private and public sectors are fully invested in business of war. As a result, any movements toward peace lead to economic recession. Given this reality, you can imagine how difficult it is to motivate the American people to detach from their iPhones and to instead storm the streets demanding that the government divest from the defense industry in the name of world peace. World peace would destroy our comfortable lifestyle. This is why an economy based on defense manufacturing makes world peace a near-impossible dream. The military-industrial complex is a nightmare. We must not allow India to fall into this trap, but to instead root its economy in goods and services that are truly beneficial to society.

The two agreements that have not been signed are the

1) CISMOA, or Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement. The supposed purpose of this agreement is to enhance high-level communications between the U.S. and India. At its core is the mandate that India buys only proprietary communications products from the U.S. This would obviously impose further restrictions on India’s free will as a nation. It would also expose all of India’s security operations to the U.S., and very likely would add data on all of India’s citizens to the notorious NSA database, made famous by whistle-blower Edward Snowden.
2) The second agreement that India has been unwilling to sign is the BECA, or Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation. This has to do with sharing drone and satellite technology. Incidentally, on Defence Minister Parrikar’s last visit to the U.S. a deal was secured for India to get armed drone technology.

Many in India’s government have been understandably wary of these last two agreements, especially after a Pentagon official admitted in the Chennai-based Hindu, that the strategic partnership would involve “giving the US access to India’s encrypted systems.”

However, US officials have warned that if India does not eventually sign the agreements, it would ultimately be an obstacle to execution of the DTTI agreement that covers manufacturing. And because there are so many billions of dollars profit involved, there is undoubtedly enormous pressure coming from the global defense industry to sign.

All these agreements serve to merge the Indian economy, into a subordinate position, with the U.S. defense economy in a way that will soon be nearly impossible to extricate. And just to show how serious the U.S. is about this, it has opened up an office at the Pentagon devoted to developing India’s defense economy as quickly as possible. This is the first such office of its kind. A Pentagon official recently bragged
that the office accomplished in one month what normally would have taken a year and a half.

Modi celebrates the revived defense partnership for its potential to create a majority middle class. His “Make in India” slogan sounds like a mantra for self-reliance. Nothing about Modi’s agenda could be further from the truth. “Make in India” will inextricably merge India with the U.S. military industrial complex.

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It’s funny how the topic of sovereignty often arises when it doesn’t exist, and when it is being used to tantalize former colonies. South Korea is one example of that. South Koreans are told by their government and media that they are citizens of a sovereign nation. The government says they are sovereign because they have their own military and their own bases. But it is really a “mock military.” Few citizens are aware that treaties between the U.S. and South Korea stipulate that the South Korean military is subordinate to the U.S. military. This condition is the antithesis of sovereign. Likewise, if India thinks it can sign the DTTI, the LEMOA, the CISMOA or the BECA, and still retain any shreds of sovereignty and democratic freedoms, it is fooling itself. These agreements strip India of the very defining qualities of sovereignty.
The great nation of Gandhi sadly seems willing to sacrifice its sovereignty for economic growth. It is a trap to which former colonies easily succumb.

It is instructive to examine how South Korea succumbed to this trap. During the 1960s, South Korea was listed by the United Nations as the second most impoverished nation on Earth, after Ghana. In 1961, the average salary per year was only $72 -- less than 5,000 rupees. This abject level of poverty is characteristic of former colonies in recovery from the pillaging of their riches and their sense of self-worth.

It was at this time that South Korea’s Park Chung Hee agreed that it was necessary to take the U.S. up on an offer. The U.S. said it would infuse Korean industry with money if Park governed with an iron fist to put down any uprisings that would obstruct with capitalist and military expansion. Park’s agreement gave the U.S. a foothold on Asian soil, as well as trade markets for U.S. companies. Park assigned several families the responsibility to run South Korea’s seminal companies. You might recognize the names of these companies: Hyundai, Samsung, Daewoo, LG. Park’s deal with the U.S. gave birth to South Korea’s now robust economy, but there was a steep price. During the time of rapid economic growth, there was martial law, and an autocratic regime which put many political protesters to death.

Now, a half century after Park Chung-hee’s iron-fisted economic “miracle,” the big Korean companies have ventured into the arms industry. The Korean companies
like Samsung learned well from their U.S. masters that war is big business. This was a lesson that played out before them every day, living in the most militarized nation on Earth, which is only the size of West Bengal, yet home to 100 U.S. military bases.

In fact, the South Korean government has stated a goal of becoming one of the world's major arms suppliers. Samsung already owns at least four arms divisions. It is clearly not in the interest of Samsung to work for peace. What makes this a serious problem for the Korean people is that Samsung comprises 40% of the Gross Domestic Product. This is why the government, led by Park Chung Hee's daughter Park Geun Hye, pushed for construction of the terrible Aegis missile navy base built on Jeju Island despite passionate protests that have taken place every day for over a decade. Samsung was the main contractor on the base construction which they built for almost one billion dollars.

In order to maintain the masquerade of so-called “sovereignty,” the South Korean government claims that the Jeju navy base is a Korean base. However, its true purpose is in service to Obama's Pacific Pivot, to encircle China with missiles. Anyone who protested the base in order to protect the clean air, soil and water was arrested and fined, and accused of being a “North Korean sympathizer.”

As a result, democracy has been sacrificed for the Pentagon's Pacific Pivot. A rare coral reef has been sacrificed. Korea's last pod of dolphins has been sacrificed. Clean drinking water has been contaminated. Fertile farmland has been covered with
concrete. And Jeju Island, known as the Island of Peace, is now a first-strike target for China.

This is the nightmare scenario of what happens when a nation, like South Korea, allows its industrial base to merge with the U.S. defense industry, and allows agreements subordinate the South Korean military to the Pentagon.

The global military industry has now set its sights on the South Korean farming village of Gimcheon. This is where Lockheed-Martin would like to deploy THAAD missiles. Thousands of citizens turn out regularly to boldly say NO! to the missile deployment. Because the deployment is taking place in the service of its strategic partner, the U.S., the South Korean government is deaf to the opposition. This is living proof how there is no place for sovereignty in strategic partnerships. Welcome to Colonialism 2.0.

All this begs the question, What, then, is the path to real security? I believe the first step is to not get caught up with the clash between the U.S. and China. The media and other forces want us to believe it’s all about competing hegemons. This is a narrative that makes the people invisible. It is a narrative that disempowers the people. It is a narrative that leaves us with no action but to take sides. But taking sides will not lead to peace. And that’s what the people of all nations want – peace. Even though the minority ruling elites of China and of the U.S. – and of India -- want to profit from war, the people of all nations want peace.
Our power will come when we join with people everywhere to call for an Asia-Pacific for the people. That is what we are doing here today, and I am proud to join you in our solidarity for peace. The power elite has globalized, so we, the people, must also join hands across national borders, to thwart the juggernaut of military globalization.