

David Vine Militarization at Home and Abroad

Anthropologist David Vine, professor at American University, studies U.S. militarization and its impact on people around the world and in the United States. His book *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World* (2015) documents the effect of the more than 800 U.S. military bases operating outside the United States. Their global footprint shapes not only U.S. military interventions, but the lives of local people, U.S. military families, indigenous populations, and the environment. The cost to the U.S. national budget alone, Vine estimates, is around \$100 billion a year.

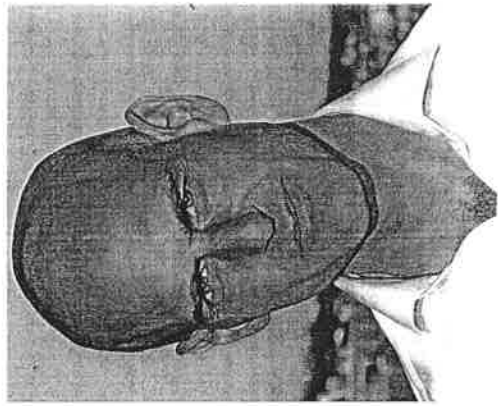
Vine became interested in militarization in graduate school while conducting research for a group of exiles from the island Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. "In the late 1960s, the U.S. and British governments forcibly removed this entire indigenous people, the Chagossians, from Diego Garcia to create a major U.S. military base. They were simply dumped in exile, deported to the islands of Mauritius and the Seychelles with no resettlement assistance. Unsurprisingly, they became deeply impoverished, and despite that, over the last almost fifty years now, they've been struggling to get back to their homeland and get proper compensation for what they've suffered. That opened my eyes to the world of U.S. military bases overseas and the damaging effects of so many of them.

"Ethnographic skills were very helpful in allowing me to live with the Chagossians, participate and research their daily lives, and see the ways in which their lives have been deeply damaged by living in exile. But I was also interested in not just looking at the ways the Chagossians have suffered but understanding why my government, the U.S. government, decided it needed a military base in the middle of the Indian Ocean and why it was appropriate to exile the entire people. I became part of a growing group of anthropologists who have studied U.S. foreign policy, U.S. military policy and policy makers, and done so

with ethnographic methods." Vine's research became his book *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia* (2009).

But what of the impact of U.S. militarization on the United States itself? "I don't think people understand how much tax-payer money we are pouring into the military. By some estimates it's around a trillion dollars annually—at least half the discretionary budget of the government. I think the Pentagon today—the U.S. military—has become a fourth branch of government. It controls such a large portion of the budget in this country and has so much power—easily as much as the legislative or judicial branches.

"President Eisenhower coined the term 'military-industrial complex.' I think it's a useful way of under-



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standing the combined power of the military, the military services, and the military contractors that build weaponry. Members of Congress are also part of this system that has exerted tremendous power in our daily lives and shapes, in often invisible but powerful ways, our political lives, economic lives, even our spiritual and cultural lives."

Vine warns about the ways even students have become militarized—embedded in this system of militarization. "I think Eisenhower's military-industrial complex speech should be required reading. He pointed out

that every billion dollars spent on a bomber is money that is being taken from someone who's unclothed, who's going hungry or is poorly educated. Today, the reason undergraduates are going into so much debt—one reason college costs so much and secondary schools are in such poor shape—is because we've poured so much of our tax money, our national wealth, into the military and not into schools, hospitals, housing, and infrastructure.

"In the post-9/11 era, we're spending money at a rate like we were at the height of the Cold War when we were faced with another superpower with nuclear arms. Now we face no such enemy and our military spending in many ways has become counter-productive. It has actually inflamed tensions in many cases. This is where bases come in. They've outraged local populations who—not surprisingly and understandably—don't want their lands occupied by U.S. bases and U.S. troops. All that money is not, generally speaking, making us safer. In many ways, it's actually making us less safe."

Students can take steps to de-militarize themselves, Vine suggests, "first by starting to become aware of the influence of the military and the glorification of war in your lives. Perhaps even with the clothes you wear, like the camouflage that's pervasive in our fashion. And then

in the media you consume. Perhaps ask yourself why war games involving mass killing are so popular and how that's shaping our lives and how we think about the world and even shaping our brains. Another dimension of militarization of popular culture is Hollywood. Look at how popular violence is in media, including movies and TV. Begin to become aware of how war and violence are celebrated. And certainly begin to pay attention to money that's being invested in war and the military and begin to talk with friends and neighbors and family about the choices that our political leaders are making with our tax dollars, taking money from our schools, hospitals, infrastructure, and housing.

"There are other direct actions that people can take, beginning with opposing any future wars or military interventions. Research has shown time and again that military solutions, military responses are not effective ways to solve international problems. They're certainly not effective solutions to terrorism. And get involved in efforts to move money from the military budget to the civilian side of the budget. Research has shown that money invested in health care and education and infrastructure creates many more jobs than the equivalent amount of spending in the military."

Vine has actively worked to resist efforts to militarize anthropology as a co-founder of the Network of Concerned Anthropologists. "We created this group in response to efforts by the military and CIA to recruit anthropologists into the War on Terror and to serve in Afghanistan and Iraq. They became in some cases armed anthropologists. This is a direct violation of our professional code of ethics to do no harm to the people and other animals with whom we do research. Anthropologists organized to oppose this effort to recruit other anthropologists and we were quite successful."

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