

The Continuing Occupation Function of U.S. Military Bases in Hawai'i **Zoltán Grossman, The Evergreen State College**

U.S. military bases in Hawai'i are usually depicted merely as installations on sovereign U.S. territory, used to project military force into the Pacific and Asia. David Vine's recent book *Base Nation* did an excellent job documenting "How U. S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World." I gave the book a glowing review, but it bothered me how Hawaii was described as simple one of the 50 states, which just happened to have a concentration of U.S. military forces, without much discussion of the context of Hawai'i as itself colonized space, with the bases still playing a role in blocking Kanaka Maoli self-determination.

Hawaiian movements critique the bases for contaminating the environment, distorting the economy, and desecrating sacred sites. Only rarely studied is the bases' continuing role in hosting a foreign military force occupying Hawai'i, and a major landholder of Crown and Government properties illegally seized from the independent country of Hawai'i. The bases serve the continuing colonization of Hawai'i itself. The Pentagon controls 24% of the land on O'ahu. 17% of the population are military or dependents, compared to 6% who identify themselves in the Census as Native Hawaiian, and 15% who identify as part Hawaiian.

In Spring 2016, I conducted research on the effects of U.S. military bases on Kānaka Maoli communities, homeland, and culture, and on the history of Native-led opposition movement to the bases. The UH Department of Geography hosted me as a visiting scholar. My research was for a chapter in a forthcoming book *A People's Geography of American Empire*, co-authored with Vassar Geography Professor Joseph Nevins. The book will focus on U.S. expansion—as this 1898 imperialist cartoon showed, from the colonization of Native American nations, extended to overseas imperialism in the Pacific, Caribbean, and Middle East. I'm also teaching a course at Evergreen this coming year with the same title.

My research focused on the related effects of colonization and militarization on O'ahu, Maui, Kaho'olawe, and Hawai'i. I was mentored by Kyle Kajihiro and Terri Keko'olani of Hawaii Peace & Justice, who are conducting Decolonial Tours of the militarized geography of O'ahu. The U.S. Pacific Command, headquartered at Pearl Harbor, encompasses more than half the earth's surface, including 73 countries or possessions, holding 60 percent of the world's population.

CEDED LANDS SACRED SITES

Militarization is not merely a side effect of the colonization of Hawai'i, but was one of the original goals in controlling the islands, in a strategic position for the China Trade. As Secretary of State Blaine stated in 1881, Hawaii was the "key to the dominion of the American Pacific." Six years later, American plantation elites intimidated King Kalakaua into accepting the Bayonet Constitution, trading access for Hawaiian sugar to U.S. markets in return for U.S. naval access to Pearl Harbor. The 1893 overthrow of the monarchy, backed by the landing of U.S. troops, may have been carried out at least partly because the exclusive use deal for Pearl Harbor was due to expire the following year (Beamer, 194).

Settler elites declared an illegal Republic of Hawaii, which seized Government lands that had belonged to the Kingdom of Hawai'i, and Crown Lands that had belonged to the monarchy. These 1.8 million acres (about 45% of the land) had been inalienable, but when the U.S. took over Hawaii in 1898, during the Spanish-American War, the Republic simply transferred or "ceded" the lands to the federal government. Hawaii was never legally annexed, because of overwhelming Hawaiian and U.S. opposition to an annexation treaty, but Congress simply passed a resolution declaring U.S. sovereignty, including ownership of the so-called "Ceded Lands."

As Terri Keko'olani asserts, "These Government lands were seized, not ceded." In 1920, a small fraction of these Ceded Lands were set aside for Kanaka Maoli as "Hawaiian Home Lands." Because the overwhelming majority of the so-called Ceded Lands were now federally owned, and included the most favorable sites, they became the easiest places to build military bases. As Kyle Kajihiro pointed out, "the guns didn't just go away. They morphed into the bases that we have here." During the martial law period of World War II, the military vastly expanded these bases, almost completely on the former Hawaiian Crown and Government Lands. When Statehood was declared in 1959, the remaining portions of these Ceded Lands were transferred to state control. They included large numbers of sacred cultural sites and burial grounds, which have been repeatedly desecrated. For example, the film *Noho Hewa* describes how the golf course on the Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station displaced hundreds of ancestors.

I visited the former naval bombing range island of Kaho'olawe, in a class hosted by Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana, which had stopped the bombings through direct actions. The island was transferred to state control in 1994 to be reserved for a future sovereign entity. The PKO and Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission are attempting to restore sacred sites and the bombarded, eroded landscape, but the Navy only cleared 9% of the island from unexploded ordnance to a depth of four feet. Kanaka are trying to heal the island from the scars of militarization, because returning to the sacred island can be key in healing the people from the scars of colonization.

After the Navy surrendered the island, Kanaka activists pushed for more Crown and Government lands to be returned, or at least for the federal government to protect Native interests on them. Senator Abercrombie backed the return of Bellows Air Base, which instead became a beach R&R base and Marine landing area. It was (and remains) impossible to find a map delineating Crown and Government Lands now under military control,

but to help defuse Native claims, Senator Inouye reluctantly conceded that the military should conduct an inventory of the so-called Ceded Lands under its domain. In the 1995 Hawaii Military Land Use Master Plan, the Pacific Command admitted that about 112,000 acres, or *80% of the land the Pentagon directly controls in Hawaii, is on Hawaiian Crown and Government lands*. The report concludes that there was "no legal basis for [Hawaiian] claims under existing law," because the Government owns the so-called Ceded Lands in fee simple. The 80% figure changes to 53% when it includes lands that the military leases from other owners.

There have been no such studies since, but in 2009, the DoD successfully had itself excluded from the provisions of the proposed Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act (known as the “Akaka Bill”) presumably so it would be exempt from more land returns to any possible future Hawaiian sovereign entity.

As legal expert Poka Laenui asserts, “The occupation is not only by military force...it’s full-out colonization....They claim that they are the ones who take over national security. The real question is then who protects us against them in terms of national security.”

DISTORTION OF ECONOMY

Left out of the “paradise” image of a secure Hawai’i is how the military has created intense economic *insecurity* for Native Hawaiians, despite the \$14 billion it brings in. The U.S. military bases have contributed to the displacement and impoverishment of Kanaka Maoli, first *directly* by evicting families from the original military lands and blocking their economic growth and physical and spiritual connections from developing in an unhindered way. Before the Pearl Harbor naval base was built in 1919, Pu’uloa was an area rich in fishponds and taro patches, and sacred space that was the home of a shark goddess. The construction paved over and later contaminated the sacred site with oil and other toxins. I visited the *USS Arizona* Memorial, which the U.S. treats as its own sacred place. The ship continues to leak oil as a sign of “weeping” for the sailors who perished in the Japanese attack.

Second, the military distorts the economy *indirectly* through undercutting local businesses and inflating the housing market. Pearl Harbor is now a giant complex of installations, with its own gargantuan PX, the size of a shopping center. Military families don’t have to spend money in civilian stores. When their children go to public schools, the military reimburses only about 9% of the cost of their education, so they are actually a drain on the taxpayers.

Military housing spills outside the base gates, and is much more upscale than neighboring working-class dwellings of Hawaiian residents. The officer corps has the most opulent homes, in gated communities on hilltops with beautiful views, and their golf courses and beach clubs take up the choicest real estate.

Much like Silicon Valley in the Bay Area, or Amazon in Seattle, the military inflates housing costs on O’ahu. Because there is not enough housing on base, the military subsidizes off-base housing costs with a monthly allowance of \$2000 to \$4000, depending on rank. No landlord is going to turn down this lucrative market, resulting in evictions of resident tenants. Due to this militarized colonial economy, many Kānaka Maoli are houseless in their own homeland.

Right outside the Pacific Command gates, just as I saw at other bases in Hawaii, were houseless people. *Up to 42% of the houseless population are Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders.* Their families were evicted from their traditional ahupua’a lands by the plantations, military, and tourist real estate, and end up in tarp communities on the beach, on the streets, or emigrating to the mainland. When they try to form communities on the beach, to live off the land and sea like their ancestors, they are evicted again,

criminalized, and arrested.

The western leeward side of O'ahu, or the Wai'anae Coast, has much of its land and water under military control, including the former Mākuā Valley training area and Lualualei naval transmitters. It is also the lowest-income region of the island, where many former Honolulu residents are refugees from jacked-up rents, or having to compete with military spouses for jobs. As Malama Mākuā organizer Sparky Rodrigues observes of the military, "because the cost of living out here is so high, they get the advantage of getting that balance in income that our community members do not."

When the NAISA was in Honolulu, the KAHEA Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance and Concerned Elders of Waianae led a tour of the area. We heard from scholar-activist Kalani Young about a self-governed community that enables Kanaka and others to stay on the beach. They persevere, and fight to remain in their homeland.

TERROR EXERCISES

Tourism is obviously the main culprit, but rarely is militarization discussed as a cause of Indigenous houselessness, and of intensified Hawaiian nationalism, as seen here at Wai'anae. The unease that U.S. military and intelligence agencies hold toward activism for Hawaiian nationhood is starkly revealed from time to time.

In 1977, some Marines at Kaneohe wore shirts proclaiming "Bomb Kaho'olawe 'Ohana." Activist Jim Albertini recalled a 1979 rally next to the nuclear weapons storage area at Pearl Harbor. Kanaka women carried baby taro plants to symbolize the power of life, and the military staged an "enormous response of troops lining up several miles of fences, maybe 50 yards were machine guns they set up... such an overreaction from the military [against] Hawaiian peace-loving people."

In 1985, one of the Navy's battle scripts for military exercises identified as the enemy a fictional communist insurgent group called the "Alliance for an Independent Kaho'olawe." And in 1999, an exercise at Hickham Air Force Base identified a fictional "Hawaiian Sovereignty Group" as a terrorist threat in an internal exercise. The military was forced to apologize.

But I'm assuming that U.S. intelligence agencies are keeping track of Hawaiian sovereignty and anti-militarization activists, much as Canadian agencies have been tracking Indigenous groups as "extremist threats," or how the National Guard and private security were involved at Standing Rock, the subject of my presentation last year.

I've submitted Freedom of Information Act requests to the Pacific Command, Departments of Defense and Homeland Security, Army, Navy, Marines, and FBI to acquire more documentation on their stances toward the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. I want to see if the Pentagon continues to view Kānaka self-determination as a threat to its property assets, or the security of the vast network of Pacific bases centered in Hawaii.

HALEAKALA

UH-Maui College assistant professor of Hawaiian studies Kaleikoa Ka'eo views the Pacific Command as the head of a *he'e* (octopus) whose tentacles extend to the bases throughout the vast region, but whose head remains in Hawai'i-- even if it loses a tentacle or two. He describes the brain of the *he'e* as supercomputers and fiber optic networks, the ears as NSA surveillance systems (where Edward Snowden worked), and the eyes as radar and satellite systems, including those in mountaintop telescopes. We could view secrecy and pro-military media as akin to the ink that a *he'e* excretes to mask its movements.

Ka'eo recalls that after 9 11, the only place on the island where the local sheriffs were told to go was the Maui High Performance Computing Center in Kihei, so as he says: 'The sheriffs went and they surrounded the tech park. That tells you something. The only place that matters in Maui was the brain.'

Global attention has focused on the movement to stop the desecration of sacred Mauna a Wakea, the piko (navel) of Hawai'i Island, through mountaintop removal for giant telescopes. In 2015 the movement blockaded the only road to oppose the planned Thirty-Meter Telescope (or TMT), led by the positive, restraining values of *kapu aloha*.

But lesser known is the movement in East Maui against the desecration of the sacred piko of Haleakala (or "House of the Sun") by similar telescopes and proposed observatories. The Maui Space Surveillance System on the mountain is a military facility for tracking satellites, under constant armed guard. Inspired by the TMT blockade, Maui *kia'i* (or guardians) blockaded construction equipment on the road up Haleakala in 2015.

But unlike the muted and shamed police response to the TMT blockades, police in full riot gear came down much harder on Maui. Ka'eo was among the arrestees, recently acquitted, and another man was seriously injured. Ka'eo recalled, "They already had planned out how they were going to do....I was shocked, honestly, at the immensity and intensity of the police presence It was almost like a military mentality of 'No matter what this machinery is going to make it to the top of Haleakala.' ... Even if it meant they had to use riot police on a peaceful people."

POHUKALOA

As anti-TMT actions on Mauna a Wakea continue, a smaller movement has opposed the Army's enormous Pōhakuoa Training Area on the slope of the same sacred mountain, on confiscated Hawaiian Crown and Government Lands.

The 133,000-acre bombing range is the largest base in the archipelago, five times larger than Kaho'olawe. It contains more endangered species than any other U.S. military base on Earth. The lava area was traditionally used for bird hunting (Peralto), and contains ceremonial trails and sacred sites that the Army has made difficult to document (Flores).

Unexploded ordnance is found throughout the area, and the traces of exploded Depleted Uranium rounds can be detected, even near a public playground. When a brush fire burned a large area in 2016, the State did not monitor the smoke for radioactive particles. A county resolution urged the Army to address the hazards of DU.

Kanaka elders “Ku” Ching and Maxine Kahaulelio brought suit against the state Department of Land and Natural Resources for failing to uphold its trust duty to protect the environment on state lands it had leased to the Army for Pōhakuloa, only inspecting the land once in 50 years. Last month, the U.S. Circuit Court issued a “bombshell ruling” that ordered the state to comply with the lease terms.

Hawaiian kia’i want the area closed and cleaned-up. Instead, the base’s role in joint Pacific Rim (or RIMPAC) military exercises keeps expanding. Peace rallies are regularly countered by a Kona pro-military group.

The anti-militarization group Malu ‘Aina has documented at least 58 military sites on the island, some dating to World War II. Many of the sites have reverted to public or private ownership, but without adequate clearance or disclosure of toxins and unexploded ordnance. In the former Waikoloa Training Area, at least four hand grenades were found next to the Waimea Middle School, and a rocket was found during an upscale home renovation. Some of the old firing range has become expensive resort property, without the tourists being given any notice of the hazards.

A Hawaiian Homes estate was built on the former Popoki Impact Area, near Makuu in Puna. When lava flowed from Kilauea volcano in 2015 (as it has done again), Malu ‘Aina activist Jim Albertini recalled, “the Red Cross and Civil Defense were asking me do I have ideas of what kind of ordnance was there, because we’ll have to evacuate. When the lava goes through an area with unexploded bombs, it’s a hell of a thing when the Red Cross has to ask the peace groups, ‘what are the potential hazards?’” He adds, “Nobody wants to question [the military] because of its powerful political and economic influence here in Hawaii. It rules.”

Cultural resources expert Kalani Flores agrees “What happened in Iraq is the same thing that happened in Hawaii...and the war is still going on. ”

As cultural worker and scholar Leon Peralto explains, “The military presence and occupation here is intrinsically tied to the maintenance of occupation or colonization...as an ongoing structure... without the military's presence... things would be very different in terms of our resurgence and our movement to restore independence.”

Ka’eo believes that the concept of Aloha ‘Aina is “not just a counter-narrative, it's a counter-ideology against U.S. imperialism. That is something that is open to everyone. It has certain kinds of principles of loving the land, loving truth, cultural integrity. That everyone and anyone can participate ...and that's why I think it's so dangerous to the U.S. military.”