

To the Editor August 3, 2020

Cut the Defense Department funding

Did you know that the Pentagon operates 170 golf courses?

Did you know that the US Has Military Bases in 80 Countries?

Did you know that the US is at war in 7 countries?

Did you know that almost one million civilians have been killed in these wars since Sept. 11, 2001?

Did you know that the United States spends more on military spending than the **next ten nations combined**: an estimated \$700 plus billion annually?

But this is only part of what is being spent on defense. There are hundreds of billions more spread out across various government agencies. That makes it larger than ExxonMobil's budget of \$482 billion or that of Wal-Mart's \$443 billion.

On January 17, 1961, former General Dwight D. Eisenhower ends his presidential term by warning the nation about the increasing power of the military-industrial complex.

I propose here that our government will use the military that they have, so more money and more equipment ultimately means more and longer wars.

Cutting the defense budget in half could fund many things including:

1. Medicare for All, no deductibles, no copays, includes vision, hearing and mental health
2. Fund the Green New deal to try to save the planet
3. Expand Social Security, and expand benefits
4. Make college tuition-free, just like public elementary and secondary education is now
5. Invest in alternative energy sources
6. Provide low cost daycare for all children

“The current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have degenerated into grinding, slow motion defeats that show the mismatch between American military strategy and real combat. “These low-intensity, piss-ant wars now cost so much that they have stretched the supposedly mighty US military to the snapping point,” says Chuck Spinney. “Today the cost of the so-called War on Terror in inflation-adjusted dollars exceeds any war in US history except for World War II. I hate to think what would happen in a real war.” Waste and fraud are rampant. Already in 2011, the bipartisan Commission on Wartime Contracting estimated that somewhere between \$31 billion and \$60 billion had been misspent or stolen by defense contractors and the military itself in Afghanistan and Iraq, largely because, the commissioners stated, the US government “had no effective way of overseeing contractor spending” in these countries. (The Costs of War project at Brown University has put the price tag of conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria at \$5.9 trillion, with an additional \$8 trillion in interest costs over the next forty years.) The fraud, bad enough in itself, also causes failure: according to a September 2016 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, the endless billions of US dollars poured into the country fueled unprecedented corruption in the Afghan ruling class, degraded military performance, discredited American forces, and even helped to fund anti-US insurgents. But the biggest scams are back home, in the heart of the Pentagon. In the latest in a series of accounting scandals that have run for decades, in August 2016 the DOD’s inspector general revealed that Army accountants had intentionally misstated their 2015 accounts by \$6.5 trillion, inventing tens of thousands of false line items in order to close their year-end books, a practice so common that the Army has a name for it: “the grand plug.” “They don’t know where all that money goes,” says Chuck Spinney, “and if they don’t know, the Congress and the American people sure as hell don’t. The accounting scandal is a direct assault on the basic requirements of a

representative republic enshrined in the Accountability and Appropriations clauses of the Constitution—yet every member of the military has taken a sacred oath to protect and defend the Constitution.”

After a series of consolidations in the 1990s urged and facilitated by Bill Clinton, defense giants like Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman now exert more power than ever over the government. Lockheed, Ernie Fitzgerald’s old nemesis, is the world’s leading arms maker, with revenue of \$39 billion from government contracts in 2018 alone—70 percent of the firm’s sales. (The top five contractors consumed about 110 billion tax dollars in 2018.) Defense conglomerates have a sleek new media image: their planes, helicopters, and submarines star in Hollywood films and in television ads during Super Bowls, and they sponsor college football championships. But many of the dodges that Ernie Fitzgerald described fifty years ago remain unchanged. Cost overruns and cost-plus contracts (which Fitzgerald called “blank check contracts”) are widespread. Once, a \$640 toilet seat constituted a scandal; today the toilet seat of the Boeing C-17 costs \$10,000. Congressional engineering, or the distribution of contract work across numerous districts to insulate a weapons program from cancellation, has grown so effective that programs like the C-17 and the M1 Abrams tank march ahead, zombielike, for many years after the DOD itself says it no longer wants them. In return, contractors spend uncounted millions a year on Congress, for their political campaigns.

In his slim, brilliant book *On Tyranny*, historian Tim Snyder observes that the Nazis rose to power by “manufacturing a general conviction that the present moment is exceptional, and then transforming that state of exception into a permanent emergency. Citizens then trade real freedom for fake safety.” The Reichstag fire gave Hitler the exception he needed, what James Madison had called “some favorable emergency,” to suspend the basic legal rights of all Germans, including habeas corpus, search warrants, freedom of expression and of the press, freedom of assembly, and privacy of the post and telecommunications. “When politicians today invoke terrorism they are speaking, of course, of an actual danger,” Snyder writes. “But when they try to train us to surrender freedom in the name of safety, we should be on our guard. People who assure you that you can only gain security at the price of liberty usually want to deny you both. You can certainly concede freedom without becoming more secure.”

How many wars have we won in the Middle East lately? How well did our intelligence establishment protect us from 9/11? How successfully have the trillions we’ve poured into intelligence since then been at preventing subsequent terror attacks in San Bernardino, Orlando, and Fort Hood; the shoe bomber, the underwear bomber, and the Boston Marathon bombers; not to mention Paris, Nice, Berlin, Barcelona? The national security sages foster a deep sense of dependence, a conviction that we need them for their vast expertise, though the conflicting public and private interests this expertise entails help explain why we are in so much trouble to begin with.” From Tom Mueller’s book *Crisis of Conscience*

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, and the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some fifty miles of concrete pavement. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.” From *The Chance for Peace* speech, given by Republican U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower on April 16, 1953

Did you know that the latest Trump **increase** of 120 billion dollars in Defense spending alone could alternately pay for free college tuition and daycare for all citizens?

We could and should cut our military spending and provide for the needs of American citizens. With our planet on fire, our infrastructure crumbling, 40 million of us in poverty, schools failing, suicide rates and infant mortality increasing, life expectancy and hope decreasing there is much we could do.

We should be deeply ashamed of our priorities, and more concerned about how our grandchildren will remember us.

“A country without a conscience is a country without a soul, and a country without a soul is a country that cannot survive.” Winston Churchill