

BY MARTIN HART-LANDSBERG
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Republicans and Democrats like to claim they are on opposite sides of important issues. Of course, depending on which way the wind blows, they sometimes change sides, like over support for free trade and federal deficits. Tragically, however, there is no division when it comes to militarism.

For example, the federal budget for fiscal year 2019 will include \$30 billion more for the military than even President Trump requested. The House and Senate both recently approved the fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act which authorizes military spending of \$717 billion; the vote was 359-54 in the House and 87-10 in the Senate.

This bipartisan embrace of militarism comes at enormous cost for working people. This cost includes offsetting cuts in federal programs which support public housing, health care and education; the rebuilding of our infrastructure; basic research and development; and efforts to mitigate climate change. The cost also includes the militarization of our police, since the military happily transfers its excess or outdated equipment to willing local police departments. And it also includes a belligerent foreign policy and a heightened danger of war.

In brief, the U.S. military industrial complex, including the bipartisan consensus that helps to promote militarism's popular legitimacy, is one of the most important and powerful foes we must overcome if we are to seriously tackle our ever-growing social, economic and ecological problems.

The U.S. military is everywhere

The U.S. has approximately 800 formal military bases in 80 countries, with 170,000 soldiers stationed abroad. Only 11 other countries have bases in foreign countries, some 70 altogether.

U.S. special forces are deployed in even more countries. According to the investigative journalist Nick Turse, as of 2015, these forces were operating in 135 countries, an 80 percent increase over the previous five years. "That's roughly 70 percent of the countries on the planet. Every day, in fact, America's most elite troops are carrying out missions in 80 to 90 nations practicing night raids or sometimes conducting them for real, engaging in sniper training or sometimes actually gunning down enemies from afar."

The U.S. military is well funded

It is no simple matter to estimate how much we spend on military-related activities. The starting point is the "base" military budget. It represents the amount of the discretionary federal budget allocated to the Department of Defense. Then there is the overseas contingency operations fund, which is a separate pool of money that sits outside any budgetary restrictions, that the military



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The price we pay for MILITARISM



Martin Hart-Landsberg is a professor emeritus of economics at Lewis & Clark College. Street Smart Economics is a periodic series written for Street Roots by professors emeriti in economics. Read more at news.streetroots.org

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receives yearly from the Congress to pay for the costs of ongoing warfare. The \$717 billion approved by Congress covers both the base budget and overseas contingency operations fund.

Using this combined measure, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute finds that the United States spends more on its military than the next seven largest military spenders combined, which are China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, France, the UK and Japan. And our spending keeps going up. It is now higher, adjusted for inflation, than at any time other than during the height of the Iraq war.

Moreover, this combined measure grossly understates what we actually spend on defense-related activities. William Hartung, an expert on military spending, went agency by agency to expose all the various military-related expenses hidden in different parts of the budget. Hartung's grand total, which also includes Energy Department obligations for our nuclear weapons program, Homeland Security, foreign military aid, intelligence services, the Veterans Administration and the interest on the debt generated by past spending on the military, is \$1.09 trillion. In short, our political leaders are far from

forthcoming about the true size of our military spending.

Adding insult to injury, the military cannot accurately account for how it spends much of the money it is given. The Defense Department's Inspector General routinely finds that the military's financial statements are "materially misstated," and unsupported by receipts and invoices.

As a result, as Reuter's reports: For years, the Inspector General – the Defense Department's official auditor – has inserted a disclaimer on all military annual reports. The accounting is so unreliable that "the basic financial statements may have undetected misstatements that are both material and pervasive."

Military spending is big business

Almost half of the U.S. military budget goes to private military contractors. These military contracts are the lifeblood for many of our largest corporations. Not surprisingly, given how lucrative these contracts are, private contractors work hard to ensure the generosity of Congress. In 2017, for example, 208 defense companies spent almost \$100 million to deploy 728 reported lobbyists. Lobbying is made far easier by the fact that more than 80 percent of top Pentagon officials have worked for the defense industry at some point in their careers, and many will go back to work in the defense industry.

And then there are arms sales to foreign governments. A study by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute found that sales of weapons and military services by the world's largest 100 corporate military suppliers totaled \$375 billion in 2016. U.S. corporations had a 58 percent share of the market, supplying weapons to at least 100 nations.

More for the military and less for everything else

The federal budget is divided into three categories: discretionary spending, mandatory spending (primarily Social Security and Medicare), and interest on the national debt. Two trends in discretionary spending, the component of the budget set each year at the discretion of Congress, offer a window on how militarism is squeezing out funding for programs that serve the majority's social needs.

The first noteworthy trend is the change in the allocation of funds between defense (the base military budget) and non-defense programs. As recently as 2001, the majority of discretionary funds went to non-defense programs. However, the weighting soon began to shift in favor of the military thanks to the "war on terror." The base military budget received 54 percent of discretionary funds in fiscal year 2018 and will receive 61 percent in fiscal year 2019. If we add veterans' benefits, which are also included in the discretionary budget, the military will receive 68 percent of all discretionary funds in fiscal year 2019.

The second revealing trend is the decline in non-defense discretionary spending relative to GDP. The ratio has a long-term average of approximately 3.7 percent. It is now heading to a record low of less than 3 percent. Thus, not only is the military base budget growing more rapidly than the budget for non-defense programs, spending on discretionary non-defense programs is not even keeping up with the growth of the economy. This translates into a declining capacity to meet growing public needs for housing, education, health and safety, disaster response, as well as public research and development and infrastructure modernization.

The challenge ahead

Fighting militarism is not easy. Powerful political and business forces have made great strides in converting the United States into a "warrior culture" society. For example, a recent Gallup poll found that 39 percent of Americans support increasing our national defense while 46 percent think it is just about right.

Polls, of course, just reveal individual responses at a moment in time to questions that, in isolation, often provide respondents with no meaningful context or alternatives and thus reveal little about people's true thoughts. At the same time, results like this show just how important it is for us to work to create space for community conversations that are informed by accurate information on the extent and aims of U.S. militarism and its enormous political, social, economic and ecological costs for the great majority of people.