

America's War Economy: Support Killing People or Lose Your Job

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Theme: [Global Economy](#)

"Ban the bombers are afraid of a fight
"Peace hurts business and that ain't right
"How do I know? I read it in the Daily News"
-Tom Paxton

PBS (the P stands for "Pure" I think) is [concerned that](#) if the U.S. government stops funding the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. economy will crash:

"An executive at a small defense contractor recently joked to me, 'Afghanistan is our business plan.' I asked him what he would do if the war ended. He stared at me for a moment and said, 'Well, then I hope we invade Libya.'"

I've passed this story around on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to a general response of complete bewilderment. It seems that not many people are aware that the U.S. economy depends heavily on massive government investment. The investment is through the military, and through the militaries of foreign governments running the full gamut from quasi-democracy to total dictatorship. Making the materials of war is what we do; it is our major industry, and it is funded with about half of our income taxes every year. This helps explain why President Obama was willing to de-escalate in Iraq only as he escalated in Afghanistan, and why he escalated in Afghanistan prior to forming any plan for Afghanistan. War is business. The trick for this business is how to de-escalate in both Iraq and Afghanistan without a major escalation somewhere else.

Now, our government could take the same money that it invests in wars, and the much larger pile of money that it invests in the base military budget, and instead invest it elsewhere. We could cut the military by 85% and still have the world's largest. We could take some or all of that saved money and put it into infrastructure or green energy or education, each of which would produce [more jobs and better paying jobs](#) than the military. But there's a problem. Investing public money in a massive jobs program that doesn't slaughter lots of innocent human beings is Socialism. Slaughtering innocent human beings is something our politicians can stomach, but Socialism is simply beyond the pale. So it's [kill people or crash the economy](#); pick your poison. You can hurt others or yourselves.

Or . . .

Or . . .

Or we can go with what Americans tell pollsters they want to do: end the wars, tax the rich, tax and disempower the corporations, create single-payer healthcare, and invest in

education, green energy, and non-violent jobs.

I'm kidding. I'm kidding. Relax.

Like my FaceBook friends, I too am properly concerned that even if we run out of enemies on earth, we ought to be properly prepared to annihilate space aliens when and if they show their faces (assuming they have faces). But in the back of my head I have to wonder if killing people is necessarily part of space aliens' "human nature" (or "alien nature"). It seems to me that aliens who survived their cultural adolescence and made it here would have learned to stop killing. They would also have learned to steer clear of suicidal killing machines like homo sapiens, meaning we won't actually be seeing any aliens any time soon.

If we develop a nonkilling society, we may or may not be visited by aliens, but at least we'll survive. However, this may be difficult given our murderous "human nature." Between 1 million BCE and 2000 CE, an estimated 91 billion people have lived, of whom an estimated 3 billion have ever killed another person, in war or anywhere else. If we ignore the other 88 billion people as extreme and unusual cases, then it is simply a demonstrated fact that "human nature" involves killing. There's just nothing to be done about it.

Unless, of course, we decided to think for ourselves rather than through pro-killing propaganda, for about five seconds. As Glenn D. Paige points out in an excellent book called "Nonkilling Global Political Science," ([PDF](#)) (where you'll find an explanation of those estimates above) most people do not kill. You've probably read Shirley Jackson's classic short story, "[The Lottery](#)". It's a jarring story, because the twist at the end transforms human beings, normal and believable human beings, into killers. Change the ending, and the story would become a more typical depiction of what most people are like.

For virtually all of the existence of modern homo sapiens our ancestors evolved in bands of hunters and gatherers, living as prey far more than as predators, never knowing war. We now live outside of the world we evolved in. We have unlimited access to things like sugar, salt, petroleum, and weapons of mass destruction. We aren't easily inclined to handle such access with restraint. We get fat. We change the earth's climate. We kill. But most of us don't want to do these things. We just haven't learned to place sufficient restraints on those who gain great immediate satisfaction by endangering us all.

Learning is the solution. Douglas Fry studied two Mexican villages of similar socioeconomic characteristics but different beliefs about how humans are or should be. One viewed people as peaceful and was peaceful. The other viewed people as killers and saw a lot of killing. The difference was in outlook, not systemic forces. People behaved as they thought people should behave.

Political science, Paige laments, although this is changing, views killing as inevitable. It therefore does not seek to understand it. A political science that views a nonkilling society as possible must carefully study the causes and remedies of killing. Paige hopes to see universities take up the task of eliminating wars and killing. One problem with that proposal is the extent to which U.S. universities profit from killing. Here in Charlottesville, Va., the University of Virginia lives off the military jobs program. We learn very little about this from the local newspaper, the Daily Progress, which ran full-page color ads all this week promoting a military jobs fair. So, it was interesting to watch how [Russian TV](#) covered our local military-industrial-academic complex.

I guess it's comforting to know that someone is paying attention to our self-destruction, even if it isn't us.

David Swanson is the author of "War Is A Lie"

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