

How to Reduce Military Spending

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It ought to be easy. Open bank vault, remove weapons dealers, close bank vault. In reality, we need a ton of tools, work, and luck.

In constant dollar terms, after Korea, Vietnam, Reagan's second term, and Obama's first term U.S. military spending went down, just never as much as it had gone up. So, ending wars, including Cold Wars, may help.

We now have a war underway in which the U.S. participation is understood as primarily spending money. Ending that spending could be expanded into reducing military spending more broadly.

With Afghanistan and Iraq it took a year-and-a-half each to get good U.S. majorities in polls saying the wars never should have been started. The war in Ukraine appears to be on the same trajectory. Of course, those who believed the wars shouldn't have been started did not, for the most part, believe they should be ended. The wars had to be continued for the sake of the troops, even if the actual troops were telling pollsters they wanted the wars ended. My hope is that U.S. opposition to the war in Ukraine may grow in the absence of troopist propaganda, as U.S. troops are not involved in large numbers and not supposed to be involved at all.

We also have the U.S. media looking back, with some glimmers of honesty here and there, at 20 or so years of disastrous war spending. Some of those wars have already been ended without the appropriate reductions in military spending. We can point out that U.S. military spending is now about double what it was in 2000.

We can also point out that the Democratic Party Platform of 2020 promised what we're demanding, and that once elected Biden and the Democrats did the opposite of what they'd promised. That platform tied reducing military spending to ending the wars on Afghanistan and Yemen. They've actually ended one of those and pretended to end the other, while increasing military spending. Actually ending the war in Yemen via the War Powers Resolution might help us cut military spending — not that ending that war is any easier. But

there is an active movement working on it, and a zoom call this Saturday about it with several Congress Members expected to take part.

People have generally caught on that when a bank or a corporation or a disease epidemic that impacts rich people needs money, somebody simply invents unlimited money out of nowhere. So our constant demand that military spending go down so that human and environmental spending can go up may be less persuasive. We may be giving ourselves two incredibly difficult tasks rather than making one of them easier. If the U.S. government were willing to fund education or housing or the environment, it would simply do so. Reducing military spending wouldn't compel it to do so. I conclude that we should not shy away from all the usual comparisons of what we could get for what is spent on militarism, nor from comparing the U.S. military with those of other countries, but that there may be something else that's more important.

I mean the evil of war. The moral case against war, and against the spending that generates more wars. Looking back at our efforts to end the war on Iraq, we never did even really try to teach the public that modern wars are one-sided slaughters. The fact that well over 90% of the deaths were Iraqis never got through, nor the fact that they were disproportionately the very old and young, nor even the fact that wars are fought in people's towns and not on 19th century battlefields. Today the very best Congress Members will tell you the war was a mistake and cost money and so forth. But just image on a smaller scale murdering a bunch of your neighbors and then saying it was a mistake and you're sorry the bullets cost so much, even while buying twice as many bullets every day. The point of teaching people the immorality of war is not to feel good or to make someone feel bad, but to mobilize action. People care. People will act and fund efforts to help distant strangers if someone tells them about the need.

Here's how military spending has gone the past few times through. Biden proposes a massive increase in military spending — above and beyond both what he proposed the year before and what the Congress increased that to.

The corporate media reports on the budget proposal mostly as if the single item that takes up more than half of it doesn't even exist. Nobody is asked for a preferable budget proposal, just as no presidential or congressional candidates ever are. The basic facts discoverable from a simple pie-chart are kept secret from most people.

Zero Democrats object or encourage No votes or vote-withholding threats or even state that they will personally vote No. (But the Congressional "Progressive" Caucus publishes a so-called ["explainer"](#) with three sentences at the end vaguely objecting.)

Congress, with Republicans in the lead, proposes a massive increase over and above Biden's massive increase.

"Progressive" Democrats whimper about the Republican increase, suggesting through omission that it was the only increase.

But, zero Democrats object or encourage No votes or vote-withholding threats or even state that they will personally vote No (the one exception I know of was in the Senate one year, and not exactly a Democrat: Bernie Sanders once said he would vote No).

The bill passes both houses and is signed into law.

“Progressive” Democrats tell people they voted No, and moreover they’ve cosponsored the People Over the Pentagon Act.

But that’s a bill to reduce a bit the military spending that has gone through the roof during the years they’ve been proposing that bill, a bill that won’t pass the House but if it did would have to pass the Senate and the President, and then military spending could simply be increased by the \$100b that bill reduced it by.

If a Congress Member or a caucus thereof were serious, they would do what the Progressive Caucus did to oppose the Manchin dirty oil deal. They withheld their votes from a Democrats-only procedural vote to bring a bill to the floor unless that deal was left out. They got what they wanted. But that bill was last year’s military authorization act. Never once have they organized and withheld their votes to reduce military spending. This should be our primary demand to them:

Will you speak out about the need for your colleagues to join you in voting No on military spending unless it is significantly reduced — doing so on every relevant vote, whether or not you expect to succeed, but even if you might?

A caucus of Congress Members in a single House can change policy by withholding votes — depending how many of them there are, how many are in on the vote, and what other members are voting with them for their own reasons — and I don’t think many Congress Members believe that many of their constituents know that.

Might they risk making it worse? Worse than the current course of destroying all life on Earth? Perhaps. But they’d make an actual effort and we’d see who did, and who didn’t and needed pressure.

A single Congress Member can force a swift debate and vote on ending a war, such as Yemen or Syria. I know that most Congress Members are confident their constituents have never heard of that. Not one Democrats spoke in support of a recent resolution to end U.S. warmaking in Syria. How many of them have heard from us that we want that war ended, troops brought home, troops brought home from everywhere, foreign bases closed, and military spending slashed?

The media’s biggest lie on military spending is that of omission. Our job is to make it a story.

The media’s biggest lie overall is that of powerlessness. The reason the government spies on and disrupts and constrains activism is not that its pretense of paying no attention to activism is real, just the opposite. Governments pay very close attention. They know damn well that they cannot continue if we withhold our consent. The constant media push to sit still or cry or shop or wait for an election is there for a reason. The reason is that people have far more power than the individually powerful would like them to know. But we only have it if we exercise it.

Here’s the video:

[Video](#) by CODEPINK

President Biden has proposed a record \$886 billion military budget for 2024. This budget includes \$170 billion for new bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and ballistic missile

submarines; \$30 billion for missile defense, \$11 billion for hypersonic weapons and long range missiles; \$13.5 billion for cyber activities, etc. –and this doesn't even include \$\$\$ to fund the war in Ukraine! Join us as we break down the military budget and explore opportunities to oppose these weapons systems. In addition to examining the budget as a moral document, we will also learn about CODEPINK's Ground the F-35 campaign and how the F-35 Coalition is building the anti-war movement as it plans for protests. CODEPINK will host Ground the F-35 actions in New York City, Chicago, Nova Scotia, Washington DC, Madison, Philadelphia, Burlington, the Bay Area, Massachusetts and Seattle to demand Congress defund the F-35 fighter jet, capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear weapons.

Featuring

David Swanson is an author, activist, journalist, and radio host of Talk World Radio. He is Executive Director of World BEYOND War and campaign coordinator for RootsAction.org. David's books on war and peace include *Leaving World War II Behind* (an argument against the use of WWII as reason for more wars) and *War Is A Lie* (a catalog of the types of falsehoods regularly told about wars). David Swanson was awarded the 2018 Peace Prize by the U.S. Peace Memorial Foundation. David Swanson is on the advisory boards of: Nobel Peace Prize Watch, Veterans For Peace, Assange Defense, BPUR, and Military Families Speak Out.

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Lindsay Koshgarian is the Program Director for the National Priorities Project. Lindsay's work and commentary on the federal budget and military spending has appeared on NPR, the BBC, CNN, The Nation, U.S. News and World Report, and others. At NPP, her work is at the intersection of military and domestic federal spending.

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This article was originally published on WorldBeyondWar.Org.

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