

If War Was Funded Like College Tuition

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Are you as tired as I am of news stories about college tuition costs rising? I've been out of college for many years, and you'd have to pay me to go back, but this is ridiculous.

To see how ridiculous, try a little thought experiment. Imagine opening your newspaper and reading this:

"War and War Preparations Costs to U.S. Households Rose Again This Year

"Continuing a decades-long trend, the cost each U.S. resident pays for his or her wars and war preparations rose 5.3 percent this year.

"With all costs of the U.S. military, across numerous government departments, reaching \$1.2 trillion annually, according to Chris Hellman of the National Priorities Project, and with a U.S. population of 314 million people, bills to those opting for war-making as their foreign policy choice this year came to \$3,822 each — not counting room, board, and books."

Of course, that bill is for anyone who supports the U.S. government's spending priorities and anyone who doesn't, and it's a bill for every person, from disabled senior citizen to new-born infant.

It's a bill that might strike some as a bit high. So, here's one way this imaginary news story might develop:

"In an expanding trend, thousands of Americans opted for a smaller military investment this year. Choosing to pay their share of a military the size of China's — \$188 billion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute — some war consumers bought the \$599 war plan this year.

"Others opted for the Russian model at a cost of \$280. But with polls showing that Americans believe Iran to be the greatest threat to peace, the Iranian-sized military has become this year's most rapid climber in the rankings; of course, the \$20 price tag doesn't hurt.

"Buddy Beaverton of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, remarked at the post office as he mailed a check: 'If we could have Canada's annual supply of wars for \$59 each, why should I have to pay \$3,822? It's bad enough they've got cheaper prescription drugs that we're not allowed to buy!'"

Mr. Beaverton would have a point. Some other nations that don't invest in wars and war preparations the way the United States does also make college education free or affordable

— and still have plenty of money to spare for frivolous luxuries like healthcare or energy systems that don't render the planet unlivable.

What would our lives be like if college were as free and unquestionable as military spending is now, but military spending arrived as an optional bill?

Those who didn't want it could choose not to pay. Those who wanted a coast guard, a national guard, and some anti-aircraft weapons could chip in a few bucks. Those who wanted a bit more than that could pay a bit more.

And those who wanted troops in 175 nations, aircraft carriers in every sea, enough nuclear weapons to destroy life on several planets, and fleets of drones with which to traumatize and antagonize several nations at once — well, they could pay their \$3,822, plus of course another \$3,822 for anybody opting out.

What a naive proposal! Left to individual choice, the commons would be destroyed, and our national defense would crumble!

Really? People in the United States give over \$300 billion to charity each year. Nobody forces them to. If they believed weapons and wars were the most important cause to donate their dollars to, they'd do it. No nation on earth spends \$300 billion or anywhere close to it on its military, other than the United States.

And with the government no longer funding the military in its socialistic manner, it might choose instead to fund many of the humanitarian causes to which private charity is now largely devoted. Private giving could take care of the Pentagon.

But if wisdom about the counter-productive results of militarism spread, if nonviolent alternatives were learned, if free college had a positive impact on our collective intellect, and if the fact that we could end global poverty or halt global warming for a fraction of current military spending leaked out, who knows? Maybe militarism would fail in the free market.

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