

New Report: \$1.1 Trillion - or 62% - of the Federal Discretionary Budget Was Spent on Militarism and War Last Year

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On May 24, the National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies released a critical new analysis of the militarized budget in the United States, “[The Warfare State: How Funding for Militarism Compromises our Welfare](#).”

The new [report](#) found that this past year, out of a \$1.8 trillion federal discretionary budget, the U.S. spent a staggering **\$1.1 trillion - or 62%** - of that budget on militarism and war.

Threats to cut spending for vital domestic programs have featured prominently in the debt ceiling debate in recent weeks, but spending on militarism has been almost entirely exempt from the discussion. Meanwhile, clawing back failed military, homeland security and law enforcement spending could instead fund programs and measures to address the true needs of American communities.

[Read the full analysis](#).

Key findings:

- In FY 2023, out of a \$1.8 trillion federal discretionary budget, **\$1.1 trillion - or 62%** - was for militarized programs that use violence or the threat of violence or imprisonment, including war and weapons, law enforcement and mass incarceration, and detention and deportation.
- **Less than \$2 out of every \$5 in federal discretionary spending** was available to fund investment in people and communities, including primary and

secondary public education, housing programs, child care programs, federal disaster relief, environmental programs, and scientific research.

- The U.S. spent **\$16** on the military and war for **every \$1** that was spent on diplomacy and humanitarian foreign aid. The vast majority of militarized spending was for weapons, war and the Pentagon, at **\$920 billion**. Only **\$56 billion** was spent for international affairs, diplomacy, and humanitarian foreign aid.
- The U.S. federal budget allocated **twice as much for federal law enforcement** (\$31 billion) as for child care and early childhood education programs.
- Federal spending on **nuclear weapons** (\$32 billion) was **four times spending on substance abuse and mental health programs** (\$7.5 billion), even as opioid use remains a major cause of death.
- The U.S. spent **\$51.1 billion** for homeland security, approximately half of which goes to ICE (\$8.8 billion) and CBP (\$17.4 billion), two punitive border enforcement agencies that separate families and terrorize immigrant communities.

“When we invest so heavily in militarism at home and abroad, we deprive our own communities and people of solutions to problems that pose immediate security threats,” said co-author **Lindsay Koshgarian, Program Director of the National Priorities Project**. “We underfund programs to end poverty, provide affordable housing, bolster public education, and protect clean air and water at our peril. Spending on militarism takes up the majority of the federal discretionary budget, and it has grown faster than all other spending. If we keep up these patterns, we are hurtling toward a future where we can’t afford the basics of a civilized society.

“We keep hearing that our government can’t afford nice things — or necessary things — for everyone. And yet militarized spending in the US has almost doubled over the past two decades, and the military budget is now approaching its highest point since World War II,” said co-author **Ashik Siddique, Research Analyst at the National Priorities Project**.

“All this serves the profits of a wealthy few war profiteers, at everyone else’s expense. Meanwhile, public goods that benefit all of us are under attack. For a fraction of the cost of U.S. militarism since 2001, we could have instead ended homelessness in this country, or invested in a fully renewable national electric grid to help address the climate crisis. A better world is possible, if we build the power we need to make it happen.”

“Our leaders need to stop putting immigration on the back burner. Tens of billions of dollars is funneled into ICE and CBP every year in an effort to militarize the border, separate families, and detain and deport immigrants and people seeking asylum. People’s lives and well being are at stake here. Immigrant communities are a large makeup of the richness of culture, diversity and the economy of the U.S. and we need to invest in care-based approaches to these communities, such as in rehabilitation and resettlement services and legal pathways to residence and citizenship, instead of turning them away,” said co-author **Alliyah Lusuegro, Outreach Coordinator of the National Priorities Project**.

Recommendations:

- **Immediately reduce the budget for the Pentagon and nuclear weapons**

by \$100 billion or more, and reinvest the savings in non-militarized discretionary priorities.

- **Make any future Pentagon spending increases contingent on the Department of Defense passing an audit.**
- **Increase congressional oversight to make it harder for the U.S. to go to war.**
- **Restructure the country's immigration system to support robust legal immigration and current undocumented residents**, and cut spending for structures that are built to deter immigration and deport immigrants, including Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.
- **End federal support for racist and counterproductive carceral and policing practices, including the war on drugs.**

[Read the full report.](#)

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