

750 U.S. Military Bases Globally, \$7.2 Trillion US Nuclear Weapons Expenditure Since Hiroshima, Nagasaki

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Statistics provided by the US Department of Defense, in 2003, outlined that there were around 725 American military bases positioned that year overseas in 38 countries, including the presence of 100,000 American soldiers in Europe.

A decade later, by 2012 there was an increase to 750 US military bases in existence globally, including 1.4 million American troops on active duty, figures which are reported through to today. Other estimates suggest the Americans have owned, or maintain authority over, more than 1,000 military installations abroad. The network of bases is so expansive that even the Pentagon may not be sure of the exact number.

In Europe, some of the US military facilities currently in operation date to the Cold War era. Much has changed over the past generation, as many European states have joined the Washington-dominated NATO, an increasingly aggressive military association. NATO enlargement of course continues, despite the fact that membership leads inevitably to significant erosion of sovereignty and independence, especially for the smaller countries which have chosen to join NATO.

Since 2004 NATO-operated spy planes (Airborne Warning and Control System) have been patrolling the Baltic Sea nations and NATO states such as Estonia and Latvia, at the actual borders of Russia, a nuclear superpower. Such actions by NATO as these have resulted in a clear potential for nuclear war erupting, a threat which is increasing as tensions escalate in the Ukraine crisis.

From 1940 to 1996, Washington spent about \$5.5 trillion on its nuclear program. This figure

does not include the \$320 billion, pertaining to the annual storage and removal costs of more than 50 years worth of accumulated radioactive waste, and the \$20 billion needed for the dismantling of nuclear weapons systems and removal of surplus nuclear material.

A study by the Brookings Institution in Washington calculated that, from the World War II years until 2007, US governments spent in total \$7.2 trillion on nuclear weapons. Washington's overall military expenditure in the same 6 decade period, taking into account conventional weaponry, amounted to \$22.8 trillion. Since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, America has produced around 70,000 nuclear weapons. When the Cold War was said to have officially ended in 1991, Washington had an arsenal that year of 23,000 nuclear warheads.

The Americans, in the Cold War era, stationed their nuclear bombs in 27 different nations and territories including Greenland, Germany, Turkey and Japan. In spite of the major decline of communism in the early 1990s, the Pentagon in 2006 still possessed 9,962 intact nuclear warheads, including 5,736 warheads believed to be active and operational. The plan has been to maintain between 150 to 200 nuclear bombs in Europe; but one of the final initiatives, of president Bill Clinton (1993-2001), was to sign into law on 29 November 2000 the Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-74, which authorised the Department of Defense to stockpile 480 nuclear warheads in Europe, a substantial amount of them in US-run bases in Germany.

Brazilian historian Moniz Bandeira asked,

“What could be the purpose of keeping 480 nuclear warheads in Europe after the end of the Cold War? Fighting terrorism? President George W. Bush didn't reduce this level of armament, and all President Barack Obama did was replace antiquated and obsolete nuclear bombs of the free fall variety by other, more sophisticated precision guided systems that could be transported by modern planes at a cost of US\$ 6 billion”.

Washington planned to construct infrastructure for the Ballistic Missile Defense System, in NATO countries Poland and the Czech Republic, relating to nuclear weapons, moves which were opposed by the bulk of populations in both states.

According to the US Department of Defense's 2010 Base Structure Report, the Pentagon altogether maintained 4,999 military installations within America itself, in 7 of the country's territorial possessions, and in 38 foreign countries. The facilities comprise of bases relating to its army, navy, air force, Marine Corps and Washington Headquarters Services. The US military installations are most densely located in Germany (218), Japan (115) and South Korea (86). Germany has harboured a particularly large number of American troops stationed abroad at any one time at 53,766, with Japan accommodating 39,222 American troops, and South Korea next with 28,500.

As we see, Germany and Japan have lacked true independence, and continue paying a price for their defeats in the Second World War. Though the Americans with British assistance undoubtedly defeated the Japanese, Westerners are rarely informed that the Germans were in fact beaten by the Russians, not by the Western allies; as the war in Europe had effectively been won by Soviet Russia beside Moscow and then confirmed at Stalingrad, many months before the D-Day landings of June 1944 in northern France.

Part of the reason for NATO's establishment in 1949, and ongoing existence and expansion,

is to ensure that Europe, and especially Germany, remains dependent upon America and also obedient. One can witness top level German backing for America's conflicts on the other side of the world, with future chancellor Angela Merkel publicly supporting the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, even ignoring opposition from within her own party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Merkel said before the offensive had begun that military action against Iraq had "become unavoidable. Not acting would have caused more damage".

No American government since the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration (1953-61) has managed to reduce the nation's arms budget. Regardless of president Eisenhower's warnings, the military-industrial complex has long since embedded itself in the American economy. Cuts in US weapons spending would, it is true, negatively affect the economies of various American states, particularly those like Texas, California, New York and Florida. After 1980, California became more reliant than any other US state on Pentagon military expenditure. By 1986, the Pentagon contractors in California were receiving 20% of the US Department of Defense's budget, while New York, Texas and Massachusetts were granted another 21% of the budget.

Much of the US military outlay has gone towards producing highly advanced military hardware, like the B-1 heavy bomber (introduced in 1986) and B-2 heavy bomber (introduced in 1997), along with the Trident I and II missiles, the MX missiles, the Strategic Defense Initiative Program, and the Milstar (Military Strategic and Tactical Relay Satellites). The B-1 and B-2 heavy bombers, to provide examples, remain in service in the US military today.

In the same period, as neoliberal policies were introduced from the early 1980s under president Ronald Reagan (1981-89), inequality was spreading across America. In 1982 the highest earning 1% of Americans received 10.8% of national income, while the bottom 90% received 64.7% of national income. Three decades later, in 2012 the highest earning 1% of Americans received 22.5% of national income, having more than doubled their share, while the remaining 90%'s total had dropped to 49.6%.

At this stage, it would take a very considerable effort for the American public to address the unequal nature of their country's society; where billionaires, of which America now has 735 of them and more than any other country, can influence politicians with little restraint.

A similar scenario unfolded in Britain under Reagan's close ally, prime minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-90), another strong advocate of neoliberalism, which equates to rampant capitalism. Thatcher's most telling legacy was the prodigious increase in social and economic inequality, which occurred in Britain under her leadership, particularly from 1985.

US governments have relied on their armed forces, and in waging successive military offensives, so as to maintain its economy, to avoid the collapse of its war industry and production chain; to prevent the bankruptcy of American states, including some of its largest like Texas and California which, as mentioned, depend on weapons production for their revenues.

The US military budget currently accounts for at least 40% of the world's total expenditure on arms. This shows Washington's unabated ambition for global hegemony, despite the fact that American power has continued to gradually decline from its peak in the mid-1940s - with US regression beginning in 1949 with the "loss of China" to communism that year, the failure to obtain its maximum goals in the Korean War, resulting in the northern half of

Korea forever exiting Washington's control, failure to obtain its maximum goals in the Vietnam War, Russia's return this century as a powerful country, China's continuing rise, along with military defeats suffered in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The US weapons industry wants to try out its military technology in warfare; so that the Pentagon can promote its armaments, sell them to other countries, and then place new orders to replenish the depleted arsenals and generate commissions. The cash accrued from the arms deals has influenced the electoral campaigns of America's two political organisations, the Democrats and Republicans. The military-industrial complex also holds sway over the US Congress and Western mainstream media.

Washington's military arm has been facing economic limits, as a result of fiscal mismanagement, high budget deficits and high foreign debt, a permanent trade balance deficit and unrestrained public spending. America's national public debt had reached \$10 trillion in 2008 and, were it not for foreign loans which could not be paid back, Washington would have been unable to continue its military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, let alone its other expensive foreign and domestic policies.

One of the factors behind the decline of America's great ally, England, was London's policy of assuming debts to sustain its colonial empire and wars. British regression can probably be traced to around 1870, as America overtook Britain as the world's largest economy in the early 1870s; but the British Empire was clearly in trouble by 1895.

England's unnecessary involvement in the First World War (1914-18), through which she squandered vast quantities of money and men, sped up her decline. By 1933 Britain had dropped to become the planet's 6th wealthiest nation, and during the Second World War (1939-45) London used up what was left of its reserves in gold and cash.

In 1945 Britain, which similar to Japan had always been a resource-poor island, was on the verge of bankruptcy. Prime minister Winston Churchill, rather than seeking closer ties to the Soviet Union, pledged most of his country's remaining sovereignty to America in a junior partnership role, which has remained the case to the present.

In return the British received from Washington food, raw materials, industrial equipment and arms, the sorts of commodities which Britain could easily have received from resource-rich Russia without giving up its independence. Moniz Bandeira wrote that Churchill "didn't realize that the main threat to British interests came not from Russia, but from the United States".

By this century, America was facing problems which had similarly hindered Britain before. The US has become an indebted superpower, especially in its relationship to China, and America consumes more than it produces. Washington can only sustain its growth pattern through debt, issuing treasury bonds without guarantees, and so in the space of a few decades has gone from being the main creditor nation to the main debtor nation.

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Featured image: The USS John Warner, a nuclear-powered submarine of the type Australia will soon be developing. Source: US Navy

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