

The Ruinously Expensive American Military

Pay and benefits are out of control

By [Philip Giraldi](#)

Global Research, May 18, 2018

[The Unz Review](#) 15 May 2018

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)

America's Republican politicians complain that "entitlements," by which they mean pensions and medical care, are leading the country to bankruptcy even as they fatten the spending on the Pentagon, which now takes 12 percent of the overall budget. And it should be noted that while workers contribute to the social programs during all their years of employment, the money that goes to the military comes straight out of the pockets of taxpayers before being wasted in ways that scarcely benefit the average citizen unless one seriously thinks that folks over in Syria, Iran and Afghanistan actually do threaten the survival of the United States of America.

I was in a Virginia supermarket the other day checking out when the woman behind the cash register in a perky voice asked me "Will you give \$5 to support our troops?" I responded "No. Our troops already get way too much of our money." She replied, "Hee, hee that's a funny joke" and I said "It's not a joke." Her face dropped and she signaled to her boss over in customer service and asked her to take over, saying that I had been rude.

If there is any group in the United States that exceeds the sheer greed of our politicians it is the military, which believes itself to be "entitled" as a consequence of its role in the global war on terror. I am a veteran who began service in a largely draftee army in which we were paid "twenty-one dollars a day once a month" as the old World War 2 song goes. When we got out, the GI Bill gave us \$175 a month to go back to college, which did not cover much.

Today's United States has 2,083,000 soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen on active duty plus reserves. Now that the military is an all-volunteer rather than a conscript force, it is understandable that pay and benefits should be close to or equivalent to civilian pay scales. Currently, a sergeant first class with 10 years in service gets paid \$3968 a month. A captain with ten years gets \$6271. That amounts to \$47,616 and \$75,252 a year respectively plus healthcare, food, housing, cost of living increases and bonuses to include combat pay.

Though there are several options for retirement, generally speaking a soldier, sailor Marine or airman can retire after 20 years with half of his or her final "high three" pay as a pension, which means an 18-year-old who enlists right out of high school will be 38 and if he or she makes sergeant first class (E-7) he or she will be collecting \$2338 a month or more for a rest of his or her life adjusted for cost of living,

Many Americans would be astonished at the pensions that general officers and admirals receive, particularly since 80% of them also land in "retirement" generously remunerated positions with defense contractors either in active positions soliciting new contracts from their former peers or sitting on boards. General David Petraeus, whom [The Nation describes](#)

as the “general who lost two wars,” pulls in a pension of \$220,000 even though he was forced to resign as CIA Director due to passing classified information to his mistress. He is also chairman of a New York City based company KKR Global, which is part of a private equity firm Kohlberg, Kravis Roberts. He reportedly is paid in six figures plus bonuses for “oversee[ing] the institute’s thought leadership platform focused on geopolitical and macro-economic trends, as well as environmental, social, and governance issues.”

It apparently is difficult to take money away from general and flag officers. An Air Force four-star general named Arthur Lichte was [reduced in rank](#) to a two-star in 2017 after he was found guilty of having raped a lower ranking woman officer. His pension went down from \$216,000 to \$156,000 due to the reduction. Normally, however, America’s 1,000 general and flag officers can look forward to comfortable retirements.

But on top of that rather generous bit of cash there are the considerable other benefits, as the old recruiting sergeants would put it, the “bennies.” Military retirees can receive full tuition and expenses at a college or technical school if they choose to go back to school. This is why one sees so many ads for online universities on television – they are trolling for soldier dollars knowing that it’s free money. The retiree will also have access to heavily subsidized medical care for him or herself plus family. The medical care is a significant bonus under the Tricare system, which describes itself on its website as “the gold standard for medical coverage, [that] is government managed health insurance.” A friend who is retired recently had a hip replacement operation that would have cost \$39,000 for only a few hundred dollars through Tricare.

What is significant is that even enlisted military personnel can start a second career on top of their pension, given that many of them are still in their thirties. Some that have security clearances can jump into highly paid jobs with defense contractors immediately while others also find places in the bureaucracy with the Department of Homeland Security. Working for the government twice is called “double dipping.”

Some would argue that military personnel deserve what they get because the jobs are by their very nature dangerous, sometimes fatal. Indeed, the number of maimed and PTSD-afflicted soldiers returning from the endless wars is a national tragedy and caring for them should be a top priority. But the truth is that only a very small fraction, by some estimates far less than 20% of Army and Marine personnel in so-called “combat arms,” ever are in danger. Air Force and Navy personnel rarely experience combat at all apart from bombing targets far below or launching cruise missiles against Syrians. It is true that given the volatile nature of war against insurgents in places like Afghanistan many soldiers in support roles can come under fire, but it is far from normal and most men and women in service never experience a gun fired in anger.

Some numbers-crunchers in the Pentagon have already raised the alarm that the current pay, benefits and retirement levels for military personnel is unsustainable if the United States continues its worldwide mission against terrorists and allegedly rogue regimes. And it is also unsustainable if the U.S. seeks to return to a constitutional arrangement whereby the nation is actually defended by its military, not subordinated to it and being bankrupted by its costs.

*

Featured image is from the author.

The original source of this article is [The Unz Review](#)
Copyright © [Philip Girdi](#), [The Unz Review](#), 2018

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Philip Girdi](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca