

Trump Gets His Unpopular Veterans Day Military Parade, Countermarch Planned

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The Trump administration is moving ahead with the president's plan for a massive military parade to be held in Washington, DC on Veterans Day, November 11. But a chorus of voices strongly oppose the parade from within the establishment, including Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, and military top brass. Antiwar and social justice groups are planning a huge protest rally in the capital to coincide with the parade. Veterans groups have been some of the loudest opponents of the planned military parade.

President Donald Trump got the idea for a gargantuan military parade last July in Paris after attending the annual French military parade celebrating Bastille Day. He ordered the Pentagon to start planning for a military extravaganza, with the aim of outdoing the French event. Trump's plan for a monster parade marching down Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House—complete with tanks, soldiers, jets, howitzers, assault vehicles, and rocket launchers, and reminiscent of pageants staged by tyrants in dictatorships—had an estimated price tag of up to \$50 million. [1] Critics have panned the parade as a massive waste of taxpayers' money, a glorification of military might, a violation of democratic traditions, and a tribute to Trump's oversized ego.

On March 9 the Pentagon unveiled a somewhat scaled-down version of the military parade. Tanks are excluded, to minimize damage to roads. Wheeled vehicles are allowed, and jets will fly overhead, with a "heavy air component at the end of the parade." The procession will be folded into the city's annual Veterans Day parade, and it will highlight the contributions of U.S. military veterans from the American Revolutionary War onward, with period uniforms and re-enactments. Trump will watch the troops roll by from the reviewing stand. The latest cost estimate is \$10 to \$30 million.

A coalition of anti-war, peace and justice groups is organizing to oppose the parade [2]. Their goal is to bring hundreds of thousands of people to Washington, DC around Veterans Day weekend in November to protest the parade—and to call for solidarity actions around the world. November 11 marks the 100th anniversary of the armistice that ended World War I, and one of the coalition's goals is to reclaim Veterans Day as Armistice Day, with emphasis on demilitarization and transforming the U.S. permanent war economy to one that serves human needs.

Despite the Pentagon's slightly trimmed-down blueprint for the parade, the protestors are not backing down. According to Dr. Margaret Flowers, one of the countermarch organizers,

"We are going ahead with our organizing to protest the military parade, no matter what form it takes. We would like to stop the glorification of war and the expensive and polluting flyovers. We will have a strong response to oppose

militarism and expose the cost of wars, and the impacts of the war economy abroad and at home.” [3]

Dr. Flowers is a pediatrician, Green Party activist, and co-founder of the news website Popular Resistance.

“Veterans, active duty GI’s and their families are paying a high price for these endless U.S. wars,” explained Gerry Condon, president of Veterans For Peace, a member of the #NoTrumpMilitaryParade coalition. “We are inviting our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters in the U.S. military to march with us in Washington, DC on November 11, Armistice Day.”

Brian Becker, national director of the ANSWER Coalition adds,

“The War Parade is aimed at stimulating a new war drive that will bring death and destruction to one (or more) of the countries on the Pentagon hit list, potentially Iran, North Korea, or Venezuela. The over-the-top celebrations of the war machine—in the false guise of ‘patriotism’—also serve to stifle dissent at home, as Trump has repeatedly shown with his racist attacks on #BlackLivesMatter protesters.” [4]

The U.S. military machine

While lawmakers and media outlets are uneasy with Trump’s exorbitant military plans, the U.S. Congress recently voted through a budget bill approving an extra \$160 billion expenditure on the military. Both Democrats and Republicans in Congress voted—nearly unanimously—to increase military spending by \$40 billion more than what Trump had asked for. Both Democrat and Republican members of Congress are funded and bribed (“lobbied”) by the weapons manufacturers and the other components of the military-industrial complex.

The U.S. military budget comes to some \$700 billion and represents over half of total annual federal spending. It now eats up 57% of our discretionary spending, leaving only 43% for education, transportation, health, housing, and all other human needs. And when one factors in military outlays that are concealed in other parts of the budget (eg, Energy, Transportation) as well as secret black-box projects, the actual amount spent on military and war is much greater than 57%.

The current level of military and war-related expenditure is the highest level ever, exceeding even the heights of the Cold War. This gargantuan year-on-year allocation of economic resources by the United States is greater than the combined military spending of the world’s next 10 biggest military powers, including Russia and China.

The people of the Earth see the United States as the leading threat to peace on the planet. The U.S. was voted top threat by a wide margin, in a global survey of 66,000 people conducted in 68 countries by Gallup International and the Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research at the end of 2013.

“There is nothing surprising about that vote,” as independent journalist Paul Street notes. “By far and away world history’s most extensive empire, the U.S. has at least 800 military bases spread across more than 80 foreign countries

and 'troops or other military personnel in about 160 foreign countries and territories.' The U.S. accounts for more than 40 percent of the planet's military spending and has more than 5,500 strategic nuclear weapons, enough to blow the world up 5 to 50 times over. Last year it increased its "defense" (military empire) spending, which was already three times higher than China's, and nine times higher than Russia's." [5]

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of the peace group CodePink, and one of the organizers of the countermarch, observes,

"In 2017, the United States spent \$794 billion dollars on foreign and domestic militarism while over 40 million people in this country lived in poverty. We need a transformation of American priorities away from hyper-militarism, and toward serving and healing our people at home and spreading peace and justice in the world."

On both sides of the aisle

In a Military Times survey of their readers, 89% of the 51,000 respondents were overwhelmingly opposed to the parade, calling it "a waste of money" or objecting because "our troops are too busy" to participate in such a large-scale spectacle. The other 11 percent responded "Yes, it's a great opportunity to show off U.S. military might." [6]

The American public is widely opposed to Trump's plan to stage a military parade. A recent Quinnipiac University poll found that nearly two-thirds of American voters disapprove of President Trump's plan, 61% vs. 26%. The partisan divide is telling: Every listed party, gender, education, age, and racial group disapproves except Republicans, who approve 58% to 24%. [7]

Nevertheless, Republican and Democrat politicians alike have heaped scorn on Trump's gaudy military parade.

Republican Senator John Kennedy of Louisiana declared, "When you're the most powerful nation in all of human history, you don't have to show it off, like Russia does, and North Korea, and China." Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, a hawk who usually supports militarist foreign policy, said: "I'm not looking for a Soviet-style hardware display. That's not who we are. It's kind of cheesy. I think it shows weakness, quite frankly."

Senator Dick Durbin (Democrat, Illinois) said Trump's parade would be a "fantastic waste of money to amuse the president."

"A military parade of this kind would be a departure from the values of our constitutional democracy," said Rep. Adam Smith, the top House Armed Services Committee Democrat. "We are a nation of laws, not of one person.... A military parade like this—one that is unduly focused on a single person—is what authoritarian regimes do, not democracies." [8]

Many veterans are raining on Donald Trump's extravagant military parade plan.

"We don't need to hold parades like some Third World dictator," Tammy Duckworth told National Public Radio. An Iraq War veteran and retired Army

lieutenant colonel, she had both legs blown off while piloting her helicopter there in 2004. She is now a Democratic U.S. senator from Illinois. “This parade would not only waste millions of taxpayer dollars, it would also cost our military precious time and resources,” Duckworth said in a statement. [9]

Another Iraq war veteran, Rep. Anthony Brown (Democrat, Maryland), tweeted,

“American taxpayers should not pay millions of dollars to throw Trump a parade. Our men and women in uniform work tirelessly to accomplish the mission every day. They don’t have any time to feed Trump’s ego.”

Blistering criticism of Trump’s parade plan also comes from an unexpected quarter: retired generals. Several retired high-ranking military officials have voiced their strong objections, noting that military parades have traditionally been the hallmark of totalitarian regimes, with others viewing the spectacle as a Trump gambit to call attention to himself as commander in chief.

“Donald Trump has continually shown himself to have authoritarian tendencies and this is just another worrisome example,” said Retired Major General Paul Eaton, a Senior Adviser for VoteVets, an organization devoted to electing veterans to office. “For someone who just declared that it was ‘treasonous’ to not applaud him, and for someone who has, in the past, admired the tactics of everyone from Saddam Hussein to Vladimir Putin, it is clear that a military parade isn’t about saluting the military—it is about making a display of the military saluting him.” [10]

Global event

Trump’s military parade could conceivably backfire. The countermarch organizers intend to reach out to activists around the world, urging them to protest U.S. militarism in demonstrations coinciding with the Trump War Parade. U.S. embassies and other locations may become focal points of opposition to U.S. hegemony. While this parade is intended to show off high-tech U.S. weapons to intimidate other countries, the protesters see it as an opportunity for the world to take action against U.S. militarism and threats of war.

* * *

March For Peace

No more military parades!
No more shows of violent strength!
No more souped-up patriotism that tramples on the rights of others.
No more missiles strutting down the boulevard,
missiles that could blow up the planet.
No more wars to solve problems.
No more mass murders sanctioned in the name of state goals.
No more goose-stepping-like displays, arms and legs waving in syncopation.

It’s time for disarmament—nuclear disarmament and conventional disarmament.
It’s time to solve all problems peacefully through negotiation and compromise.
It’s time for peace.

It's time to disband the military-industrial complex,
time to convert the gargantuan military budgets to peacetime needs—
schools, hospitals, environment, housing
conquering disease
pulverizing poverty
wiping out hunger
defeating homelessness
obliterating slavery.

It's time to stop giving military aid to dictators.
It's time to shut down all the nuclear power plants.
It's time for the people to get a bit noisy,
time to challenge all authoritarian rulers.
It's time for peace.

No more military parades!
Instead, let's have a Peace March, several million people for starters.

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This article was originally published on OpEdNews.

Walt Gelles has published articles and political verse at Global Research, Countercurrents.org, OpEdNews, and other websites.

Notes

[1] Trump's Military Parade Could Cost As Much As \$50 Million. Tamara Keith and Tom Bowman. Feb. 15, 2018.

NPR.org <https://www.npr.org/2018/02/15/585924807/trumps-military-parade-could-cost-as-much-as-50-million>

[2] Stop Trump's Military Parade! <http://notrumpmilitaryparade.us/?r=popres>

[3] Margaret Flowers, email to author, 3/10/2018.

[4] <http://notrumpmilitaryparade.us/?r=popres>

[5] The World Will Not Mourn the Decline of U.S. Hegemony. Paul Street. Truthdig, Feb. 20, 2018. <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/world-will-not-mourn-decline-u-s-hegemony/>

[6] We asked, you voted: 89 percent said no to Trump's military parade. Tara Copp. Military Times, Feb 8, 2018. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/02/08/89-of-readers-say-no-parade/>

[7] Most Oppose Trump's Military Parade. Taegan Goddard. Political Wire Feb. 20, 2018. <https://politicalwire.com/2018/02/20/oppose-trumps-military-parade/>

[8] Trump's military parade draws bipartisan rebuke. Bryan Bender. Politico Feb 7, 2018 <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/07/trump-military-parade-defense-328962>

[9] Duckworth mocks Trump's military parade: Troops 'don't need a show of bravado'. Josh Delk. The Hill, Feb. 7,

2018 <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/372801-veteran-dem-senator-on-trumps-military-parade-troops-overseas-dont/>

[10] 'Put Me Down as a No.' These Retired Generals Are Not Happy About President Trump's Military Parade. Alana Abramson. Feb 7, 2018.

Time Magazine <http://time.com/5137317/donald-trump-military-parade-officers/>

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