PRIMER ON FOREIGN POLICY

FOR U.S. CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES AND FOR THE VOTING PUBLIC

Presidents and congressional leaders maintain that U.S. foreign policy is aimed at furthering peace, stability, human rights and democracy. Furthering such goals would be widely popular with the U.S. public. But, as this primer shows, U.S. foreign policy typically undermines those noble goals and diverts billions (over half the discretionary budget that Congress funds each year) from pressing human and environmental needs — while promoting war, weapons proliferation, and corporate interests.

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PRIMER ON FOREIGN POLICY
FOR U.S. CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES

Voters are too often told that candidates for the U.S. Congress lack any foreign policy platform because they don't know enough about the topic and don't plan to focus on it. The following is meant to quickly remedy that situation. Below is information on:

Trump 2.0

A few lessons can be drawn from the 2024 election and the first year of Donald Trump's second presidential term. One — not new, but reinforcing lessons from the past — is that voters will vote out war supporters. A poll published in May 2024 suggested that voters in swing states would be significantly more likely to vote for then-candidate Joe Biden were he to embargo arms to Israel. A second poll from August showed the same (for the Democratic presidential nominee). A third poll from September showed the same (for Kamala Harris). Among the 19 million people who voted for Biden in 2020 but did not vote in 2024, nearly a third named Israel's U.S.-backed war on Gaza as a top reason for staying home.

There is a case to be made for accepting Trump's restoration of the non-Orwellian name "Department of War," while opposing his shifting of yet more resources into militarism, his badgering of other nations to do the same, his arming of brutal dictatorships, his colonial plan for ethnic cleansing in Gaza, his support for nuclear weapons, his use of the misnamed National Guard in U.S. cities, and his bombings of boats and his attack on Venezuela kidnapping its president in what was already an unpopular war, upon which he threatened military attacks on Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba. As this primer may help to explain, it is a crime to threaten war, to overthrow governments, or to kill people whether or not you call that killing "war," and voters will oppose such actions if given a chance.

Israel / Palestine

We are often trained in the United States to think of ourselves as outside bystanders, and to believe that any atrocity by one party justifies unlimited horrors by another party. These ways of thinking, as we will see throughout this primer, fail us miserably.

During the current crisis and in recent years, the U.S. has vetoed 52 resolutions on Israel in the United Nations Security Council, 40 of them efforts by the world's governments to make peace or to hold the Israeli government to the rule of law. About 80 percent of Israel's weapons imports come from the United States, a significant portion of them paid for by U.S. taxpayers. During the current crisis and traditionally for many years, the U.S. government has promoted both factual and baseless claims put forth by the Israeli government, giving a major communications boost to a perspective that centers Israeli concerns and marginalizes or dehumanizes Palestinians. The Israeli government could not do much of what it does without the U.S. government's involvement. Washington is not a bystander, but an active participant on one side of the conflict.

When media outlets give more sympathetic coverage to dozens of Israeli victims than to thousands of Palestinian victims, and omit the brutal history of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, this can put one at a disadvantage in understanding the perspective of much of the world for whom mass slaughter — accompanied by explicitly genocidal statements from top Israeli officials — cannot be justified by horrific but smaller atrocities inflicted by Hamas.

One might not know it from U.S. corporate media, but Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Israeli human rights groups B'Tzelem and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, and the International Association of Genocide Scholars all concluded that Israel committed genocide in Gaza.

U.S. public opinion has moved to a place very far removed from how it is depicted in major media outlets and the actions of the U.S. government. As of late 2025, 77 percent of self-identified Democrats told pollsters that Israel was committing genocide, while a House resolution to recognize the long-running genocide of Palestinians had only 10 percent of House Democrats as co-sponsors. A strong majority in the U.S. opposes sending weapons to Israel. The 2025 New York mayoral election also reflected this sentiment.

War in Ukraine

Russia's 2022 escalation and invasion — like the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — should be understood as mass slaughter and a crime. How can the war be ended? Beginning soon after this invasion, informed observers, including within the U.S. military — especially if you read what is leaked rather than what is announced — have acknowledged that neither side can win, that we will either have a negotiation of peace or long-term war with an increasing risk of nuclear war. While Biden was president, the State Department discouraged negotiations while the U.S. and allies reportedly helped to derail negotiations. Trump promised to end the war in one day and failed to in his first year. Biden, Trump, and Congress have provided increasingly advanced weapons to continue and escalate the war. Negotiating peace will require compromise and verifiable steps by both sides. Russia warned that it would invade unless not-unreasonable demands were met. These warnings were ignored.

"Nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy — or of a collective death-wish for the world." — President John F. Kennedy

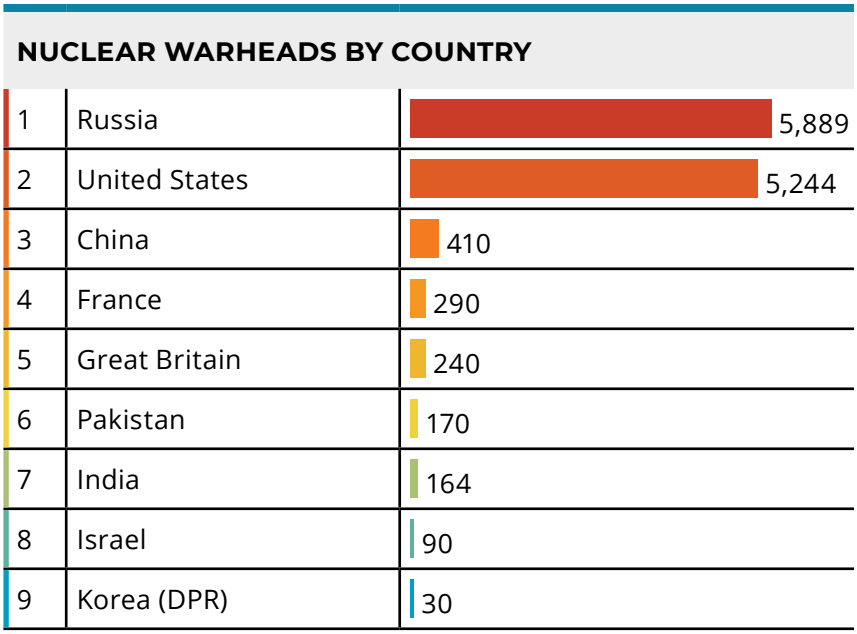
The immediate cause of this disastrous war in Ukraine is Russia's invasion. Yet the plans and actions to expand NATO to Russia's borders served to provoke Russian fears. So did repeated broken promises from U.S. and Western officials. Russian leaders and U.S. diplomats made this point for 30 years. Warnings came from Robert Gates, William Perry, George Kennan, Jack Matlock, Henry Kissinger, Williams Burns, and 50 senior U.S. foreign policy experts who urged President Bill Clinton in 1997 not to expand NATO. For years Congress was heavily lobbied by military weapons corporations to support NATO expansion. A sustainable peace will likely need to include self-determination for Crimea and Donbas, meaning more or less what was in the Minsk 2 agreement that was negotiated between Russia and Ukraine in 2015, with the purported support of France and Germany. Peace and democracy may come, not through more war, but through a compromise that neither side wants but both can accept in order to put an end to the killing. After so much devastation, an agreement may have to be reached on some issues while delaying others for a period of time.

Nuclear Threat

Ways to reduce the risk:

- **Support a ceasefire in Ukraine and talks.**

- **Rejoin treaties the U.S. pulled out of.** The U.S. withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019. It should rejoin these and the Open Skies Treaty, and work with Russia to be sure New START doesn't expire in 2026.



In addition to this count of nuclear warheads, the U.S. — arguably in violation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons — keeps nuclear weapons in Turkey, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK, while Russia has followed suit, putting nuclear weapons into Belarus.

- **End the policy of "first use."** By refusing to announce a no-first-use policy, the U.S. reserves "the right" to be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict.

- **Take U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert.** The United States has roughly 1,700 deployed nuclear weapons and another several thousand in reserve. Four hundred of these are on missiles in underground silos, ready to be launched within minutes of a presidential order. This alert status increases the chance of a launch in response to a false alarm.

- **Get rid of ICBMs.** These land-based nuclear missiles are at risk of being hurriedly launched upon belief that the other side has begun an attack, because their locations are known and vulnerable, unlike those of submarines and airplanes. A great deal of good could be done with the $264 billion now budgeted for "modernizing" ICBMs, when we would all be safer if they did not exist at all.

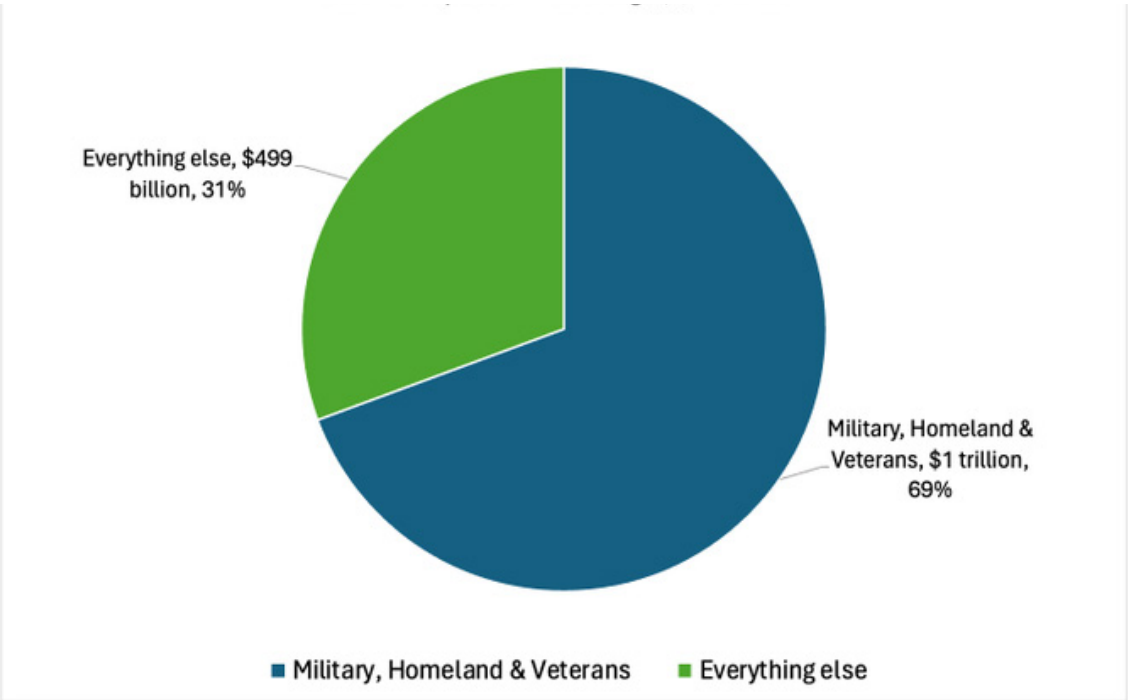
- **Remove U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany, Italy, Turkey, Netherlands, Belgium, and the UK, and support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.** It's time to make nuclear disarmament the centerpiece of U.S. national security policy.

Federal Budget

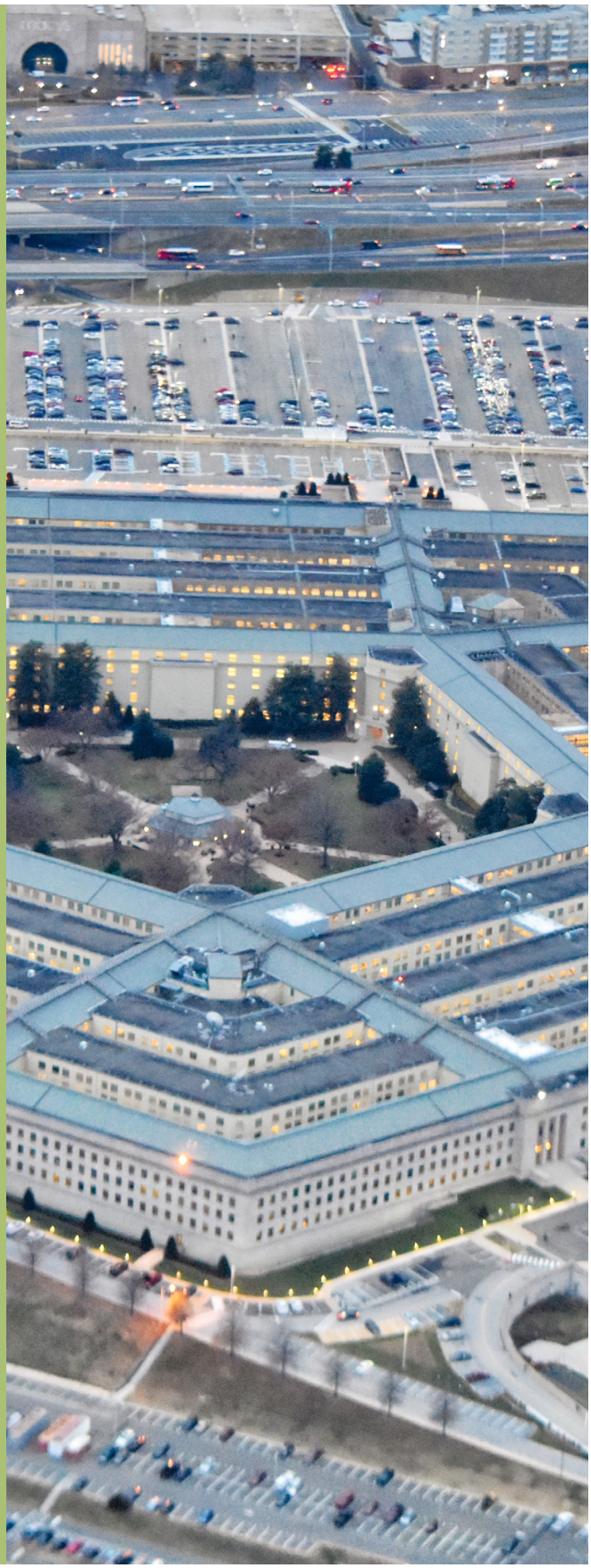
Setting aside mandatory spending (Social Security, Medicare, and other spending that Congress does not address annually) as well as payments on debts, and looking only at discretionary spending (the money Congress spends each year at its discretion), over half in recent years has gone to military spending, and over 60 percent to militarized programs. For FY2025, Biden proposed 69 percent for military, homeland, and veterans, with 31 percent for everything else. Military spending (discretionary and otherwise) includes a budget of more than three-quarters of a trillion dollars for the Pentagon, plus hundreds of billions more for nuclear weapons in the Energy Department, military activities of other departments including Homeland Security, the budgets of 17 secretive agencies, debt for past wars, and the Veterans Affairs budget.

FEDERAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING, FY 2025

(AS PROPOSED BY PRESIDENT)



Source: OMB, National Priorities Project



U.S. military spending dwarfs the cost of most infrastructure and social needs spending legislation, the cost of any other item (or dozen items) of discretionary spending, and the military spending of any other nation. Of 230 other countries, the U.S. spends more than 227 of them combined. Russia and China spend a combined 21% of what the U.S. and its allies spend on war.

MILITARY SPENDING OF OTHER NATIONS AS A PERCENTAGE OF U.S. MILITARY SPENDING:	
China	31.5%
Russia	14.9%
Iran	0.8%

In 2024 military spending per capita, the U.S. government trailed only Israel. All of the top 18 nations in per capita military spending were U.S. weapons customers.

Militarization of Other Nations

In 2024 the United States led the world in weapons exports. Of 230 other countries, the U.S. exports more weaponry than 228 of them combined. Most nations in which wars are happening do not manufacture any weapons of their own.

ARMS EXPORTS BY COUNTRY

Ten largests arms exporters in 2024

Country	Billions of Dollars
United States	13.51
France	2.27
Germany	2.05
Italy	1.38
Russia	1.34
China	1.13
Israel	1.03
South Korea	0.96
Great Britain	0.76
Norway	0.71

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

Using a U.S.-funded listing (by Freedom House) of the 50 most oppressive governments, one finds that the U.S. government approves U.S. weapons shipments to 82% of them, provides military training to 88% of them, funds the militaries of 66% of them, and assists in at least one of these ways 96% of them.

Few war-torn regions manufacture significant weapons. Few wars fail to have U.S.-made weapons on both sides. Examples of wars with U.S.-made weapons on both sides are: Syria, Iraq, Libya, the Iran-Iraq war, the Mexican drug war, World War II. In short, the proliferation of weapons out of the United States is devastating to people, peace, and global stability, but beneficial for the profits of powerful U.S. weapons manufacturers.

Foreign Aid

It is sometimes imagined that foreign aid makes up 15% or 25% of the federal budget. In reality it is far less than 1 percent. It is routinely claimed that the U.S. government gives the most aid to the world of any government on Earth, though less than Europe as a single whole. If this were true, it would be nowhere close to true as a percentage of gross national income or per capita. In fact, as a percentage of GNI, the U.S. trails behind most wealthy nations, and that was the case before Trump's cuts in 2025. It's even further from the truth because as much as 30% of what it calls foreign aid is actually military spending, that is to say, primarily U.S. tax dollars being funneled through foreign governments and into U.S. weapons companies.

$80 Billion

U.S. military bases abroad cost taxpayers an estimated $80 billion annually.

70%

The U.S. military maintains at least 70% of the military bases in the world that are on foreign soil.

U.S. Bases

The U.S. military maintains at least 70% of the military bases in the world that are on foreign soil. The United States has nearly three times as many bases abroad (877) as U.S. embassies, consulates, and missions. While there are approximately half as many installations as at the Cold War's end, U.S. bases have spread geographically — to twice as many countries and colonies (from 40 to 80), with large concentrations of facilities in the Middle East, East Asia, parts of Europe, and Africa. U.S. bases abroad cost taxpayers an estimated $80 billion annually. Bases abroad have helped the United States launch wars and other combat operations in at least 25 countries between 2001 and 2025. Bases, like military spending, have an established record of making wars more, not less, likely. U.S. installations are found in at least 38 non-democratic countries and colonies.

Rule of Law

- Since 1907, all parties to the Hague Convention of 1907 have been obliged to "use their best efforts to ensure the pacific settlement of international differences," to appeal to other nations to mediate, to accept offers of mediation from other nations, to create if needed "an International Commission of Inquiry, to facilitate a solution of these disputes by elucidating the facts by means of an impartial and conscientious investigation" and to appeal if needed to the permanent court at the Hague for arbitration.

- Since 1928, all parties to the Kellogg-Briand Pact have been legally required to "condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies, and renounce it, as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another," and to "agree that the settlement or solution of all disputes or conflicts of whatever nature or of whatever origin they may be, which may arise among them, shall never be sought except by pacific means."

- Since 1945, all parties to the UN Charter have been compelled to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state," albeit with loopholes added for UN-authorized wars and "self-defense" wars — loopholes that do not apply to any recent wars (including various U.S. invasions in recent decades), but loopholes the existence of which create in some minds the idea that wars are legal.

- Since 1949, all parties to NATO have agreed to a restatement of the ban on threatening or using force found in the UN Charter, even while agreeing to prepare for wars and to join in the allegedly defensive wars of other members of NATO.

- Since 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has required its parties to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

- Since 2017, where it has jurisdiction, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has had the ability to prosecute the crime of aggression.

The U.S. government has not only refused to join the ICC but sought to punish other nations for doing so. The U.S. government is the top user of the veto at the UN Security Council, a leading holdout on human rights and disarmament treaties, the only nation not to have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and one of four not to have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The U.S. government is a lonely holdout, with limited and often rather disreputable company, on the . . .

- International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights optional protocols
- Convention Against Torture optional protocol
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities
- International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries
- Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
- Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity
- Principles of International Cooperation in the Detection, Arrest, Extradition, and Punishment of Persons Guilty of War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity
- Convention on Cluster Munitions
- Land Mines Convention
- Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

War or threat of war, or economic sanctions that inflict collective punishment, violate the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in some cases the Genocide Convention.

War Powers

The U.S. Constitution makes treaties the supreme law of the land, including treaties that forbid war. But as long as war was legal, or as long as it is effectively treated as legal, the Constitution also very clearly gives Congress the power to begin and end wars. The War Powers Resolution of 1973 arguably has many flaws. Bills have been introduced repeatedly in Congress that would weaken and strengthen it in various ways. But the chief failure is that of not using it. On various occasions, a single Congress Member has been able to compel a debate and vote on whether to end a war, but only in the case of two wars during the first term of Donald Trump (Yemen and Iran) has such a vote succeeded in both houses. Both times a veto by Trump was not overridden.

Wars

Since WWII, the U.S. government has overthrown at least 36 governments, interfered in at least 88 foreign elections (including, quite openly, in Argentina and Honduras in 2025), attempted to assassinate over 50 foreign leaders, and dropped bombs on people in over 30 countries. Its wars have tended to be very one-sided, with U.S. casualties making up a tiny fraction, and the leading cause of U.S. death in 21st-century wars being suicide by U.S. soldiers or former soldiers.

There has never been a major U.S. war without documentation of Congress being lied to by the White House and/or the Department of War / Defense. Congress has been falsely told that Canada would welcome U.S. troops in 1812, that Mexicans invaded the United States in the 1840s, that Spain blew up a ship in Havana in 1898, that U.S. ships sunk by Germany (the *Lusitania* in 1915, and the *Kearny* and the *Greer* in 1941) were not taking part in wars, that Germany had drafted plans in 1941 to divide up the Americas and rid the world of religion, that Vietnam had fired on U.S. ships in an unprovoked attack in 1964, that invading Iraqi soldiers were taking infants out

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of incubators in Kuwait in 1990, that Iraq was working with Al Qaeda and stockpiling vast quantities of weapons of mass destruction in 2002, and on and on.

Congress Members have far more often regretted their actions (and lack of actions) that created wars than their actions that prevented them. Senate votes in 2002 in favor of war on Iraq were famously stumbling blocks in the failed presidential campaigns of John Kerry, John Edwards, and Hillary Clinton.

***"Of course it's about oil, we can't really deny that."* — General John Abizaid, former head of U.S. Central Command and military operations in Iraq**

See Matt Corley, "Abizaid: We've Treated the Arab World as a Collection of Big Gas Stations," Think Progress, October 15, 2007.

Costs of "National Security"

In the name of "national security," Congress routinely funds weapons that the Pentagon does not want.

Not only is the motivation for military spending not purely defensive, while being uniquely unaccountable (the Pentagon being the one department never successfully audited), but in defensive terms it is often counterproductive. Terrorism increased from 2001 through 2014, principally as a predictable result of a war on terrorism. Some 95% of all suicide terrorist attacks are conducted to encourage foreign occupiers to leave some country or countries.

During the first 20 years of the war on terror, the number of terrorist groups threatening the U.S. and U.S. interests more than doubled, according to the U.S. State Department.

See Nick Turse, "A Blank Check for Endless War," TomDispatch, January 4, 2022.

On March 11, 2004, Al Qaeda bombs killed 191 people in Madrid, Spain, just before an election in which the opposition Socialist Party was campaigning against Spain's participation in the U.S.-led war on Iraq. The people of Spain voted the Socialists into power, and they removed all Spanish troops from Iraq by May. There were no more bombs in Spain. This history stands in strong contrast to that of Britain, the United States, and other nations that have responded to blowback with more war, generally producing more blowback.

A December 2014 Gallup poll of global public opinion across 65 nations found the United States to be far and away the country considered the largest threat to peace in the world, and a Pew poll in 30 countries in 2017 found majorities in most countries polled viewing the United States as a threat.

It has become almost routine for U.S. military commanders, usually just after retiring, to argue that various wars or tactics are creating more new enemies than the number of enemies they are killing.

War abroad increases hatred at home and the militarization of police. While wars are fought in the name of "supporting" those fighting in the wars, veterans are given little assistance in dealing with trauma, brain injury, moral guilt, and other hurdles in the way of adapting to nonviolent society. Those trained in mass killing by the U.S. military are disproportionately those who become mass shooters in the United States. And the U.S. military has lost or had stolen huge numbers of guns that are used in violent crimes that are not war.

The threat of nuclear apocalypse is currently higher than ever. The threat of climate apocalypse, greatly contributed to by militarism, is currently higher than ever.

Sanctions

Boycotts of a government that are supported by and led by a huge section of its own population and which effectively target a government rather than a population (such as the boycott against Apartheid South Africa) can sometimes be justified as legal and moral.

But sanctions that the United States unilaterally imposes on numerous nations, sometimes explicitly intended to harm, and often effectively harming, broad populations (imposing what the Geneva Conventions call "collective punishment" and what President Richard Nixon called "make the economy scream") tend to be illegal, immoral, and counterproductive of the purported goal of generating a popular overthrow of the targeted government. To cite one example: the nearly 60-year U.S. blockade of Cuba, which has caused great hardship to the Cuban population. Sanctions of this type kill as many people as wars do.

Sanctions have been used to weaken nations as a form of warfare, and as a prelude to or continuation of traditional warfare — as in their use on Iraq between the Gulf War and the Iraq War, or their use on Afghanistan following the 2021 withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found that many thousands of Iraqi children had died due to sanctions. We should carefully question the acceptance of U.S. sanctions as an alternative to war, and propose less hostile and harmful alternatives.

Global Cooperation

Actual defense and security would require globally addressing the threats of environmental collapse, nuclear war or accident, disease pandemics, poverty, unsafe or exploitative working conditions, and lack of adequate healthcare. But nations' working together on disarmament, environmental protection, and health is greatly hindered by the hostility, secrecy, and distrust generated by militarism.

Studies over the past century have found that nonviolent tools are often more effective in resisting tyranny and oppression and resolving conflicts and achieving security than violence is.

Intersectionality

Addressing numerous public policy issues without a comprehensive plan that addresses militarism and military spending can make as much sense as serving tea while ignoring the presence of a gorilla in the room. A budget is a life-saving or life-eliminating document. Militarism kills far more through the expenditure of resources and diversion of funds than the use of weapons.

$30 billion

It would cost about $30 billion per year to end starvation around the world.

$11 billion

It would cost about $11 billion per year to provide the world with clean water.

It would cost about $30 billion per year to end starvation around the world. It would cost about $11 billion per year to provide the world with clean water. About $70 billion per year would help eliminate poverty in the United States. Christian Sorensen writes in *Understanding the War Industry*, "The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that 5.7 million very poor families with children would need, on average, $11,400 more to live above the poverty line (as of 2016). The total money needed . . . would be roughly $69.4 billion/year."

Military spending diverts public funds into increasingly privatized industries through the least accountable public enterprise, the Pentagon. It is hugely profitable for the owners and directors of the corporations involved. As a result, war spending works to concentrate wealth in a smaller number of hands, from which a portion of it can be used to corrupt government and further increase military spending.

War and war propaganda have often fueled and been fueled by racism, xenophobia, religious hatred, and other types of bigotry. Historian Kathleen Belew reported in 2018 that there has always been a correlation in the United States between the aftermath of war and the rise of white supremacist violence: "If you look, for instance, at the surges in Ku Klux Klan membership, they align more consistently with the return of veterans from combat and the aftermath of war than they do with anti-immigration, populism, economic hardship, or any of

the other factors that historians have typically used to explain them." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said that we would need to tackle three interlocking problems together: racism, militarism, and extreme materialism.

Between 2001 and 2017, the U.S. military emitted 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases, equivalent to the annual emissions of 257 million cars on the road. The U.S. Department of Defense is the largest institutional consumer of oil ($17B/year) in the world, and the largest global landholder with 750 foreign military bases in 80 countries. A major motivation behind some wars is the desire to control resources that poison the earth, especially oil and gas. In fact, the launching of wars by wealthy nations in poor ones does not correlate with lack of democracy or human rights violations or threats of terrorism, but does strongly correlate with the presence of oil.

War does most of its environmental damage where it happens, but also devastates the natural environment of military bases in foreign and home nations. The U.S. military is the third-largest polluter of U.S. waterways. Yet militarism is omitted from climate agreements. As the environmental crisis worsens, thinking of war as a tool with which to address it threatens us with the ultimate vicious cycle.

We're often told that wars are fought for "freedom." But, predictably and consistently, what wars bring is just the reverse. It is the idea of the wartime enemy that allows government secrecy, and allows liberties to first be taken away from devalued people, later predictably expanded to taking them away from valued people as well.

The moral and cultural impact of investing in an enterprise of mass killing is not easily quantified, but clearly significant.

Jobs

It is common to think that, because many people have jobs in the war industry, spending on war and preparations for war benefits an economy. In reaklity, spending those same dollars on peaceful industries, on education, on infrastructure, or even on tax cuts for working people would produce more jobs and in most cases better-paying jobs — with enough savings to help everyone make the transition from war work to peaceful work. Many presidents — including Trump and Biden — have made the false argument that war-spending is good for job-creation.

"Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed" —**President Dwight Eisenhower, 1953**

"Leading the World"

The relationship commonly proposed for the U.S. government with the rest of the world is to "lead the world." This mode of thinking can seem out-of-touch, arrogant, and misdirected in areas where a sensible relationship with some other parts of the world would include learning rather than leading. In relations between nations, Martin Luther King Jr. criticized "the Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them."

The United States does not lead, and often trails at least the rest of the wealthy world, in such matters as freedom (by all kinds of measures), education, environmental damage, incarceration, health coverage, parental leave, life expectancy, elimination of poverty, and maintenance of infrastructure of various sorts. The alternatives to "leading the world" are not limited to following the world. There exists also the option of joining the world. (It's a mistake to describe the United States as the world's wealthiest country joining the world, since per capita the United States is not the world's wealthiest country.)

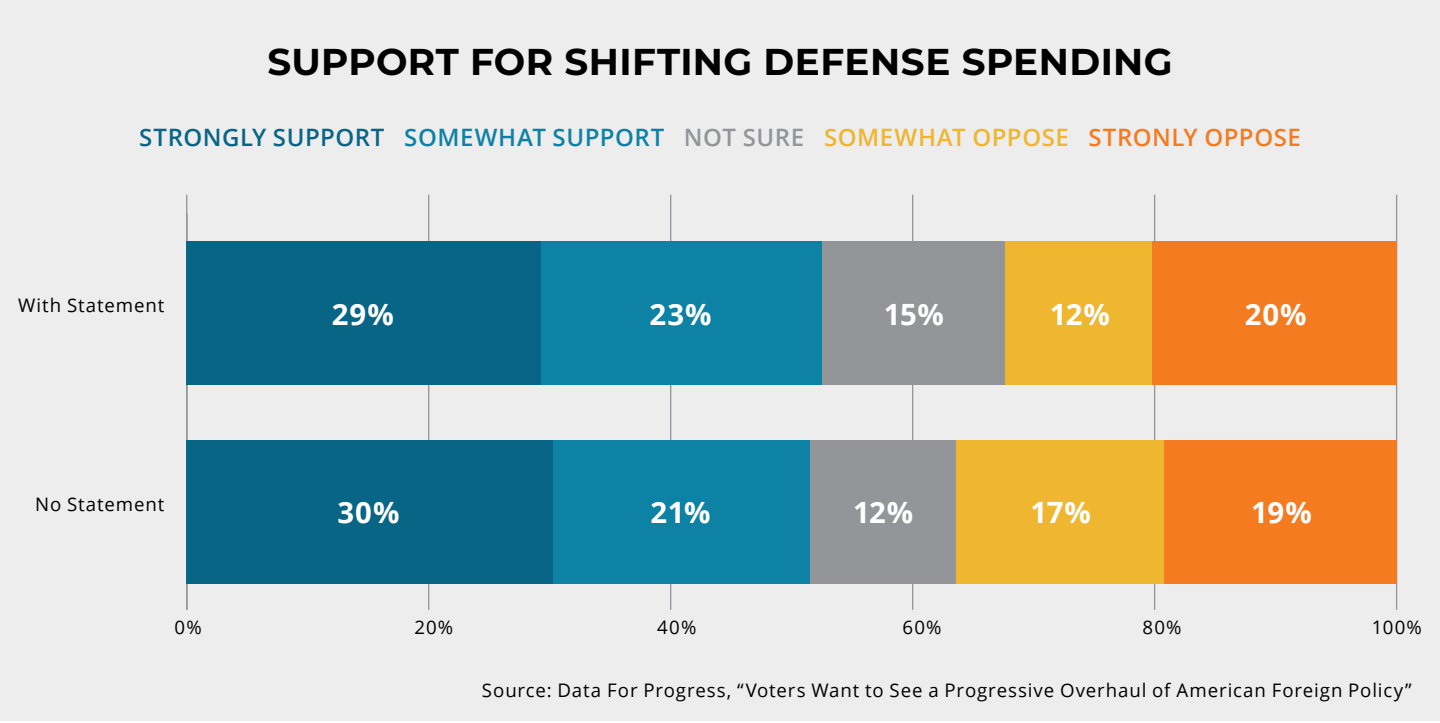
U.S. Public Opinion

U.S. public opinion tends to favor a progressive overhaul of foreign policy. Pollsters at Data for Progress asked this question in 2021:

Q "According to the Congressional Budget Office, the United States is expected to spend $738 billion on its military in 2020. That's more than the next seven countries combined and more than the U.S. budget for education, federal courts, affordable housing, local economic development, and the State Department combined. Some say that maintaining a dominant global military footprint is necessary to keep us safe, and is worth the cost. Others say that money could be better spent on domestic needs like health care, education, or protecting the environment. Based on what you've just read, would you support or oppose reallocating money from the Pentagon budget to other priorities?"

They got this answer:

A A majority of 52% supported or "strongly supported" that idea (29% strongly supported it), while 32% opposed (20% strongly). If the sentence beginning "That's more than . . . " was left out, 51% supported the idea (30% strongly), while 36% opposed (19% strongly).



Source: Data For Progress, "Voters Want to See a Progressive Overhaul of American Foreign Policy"

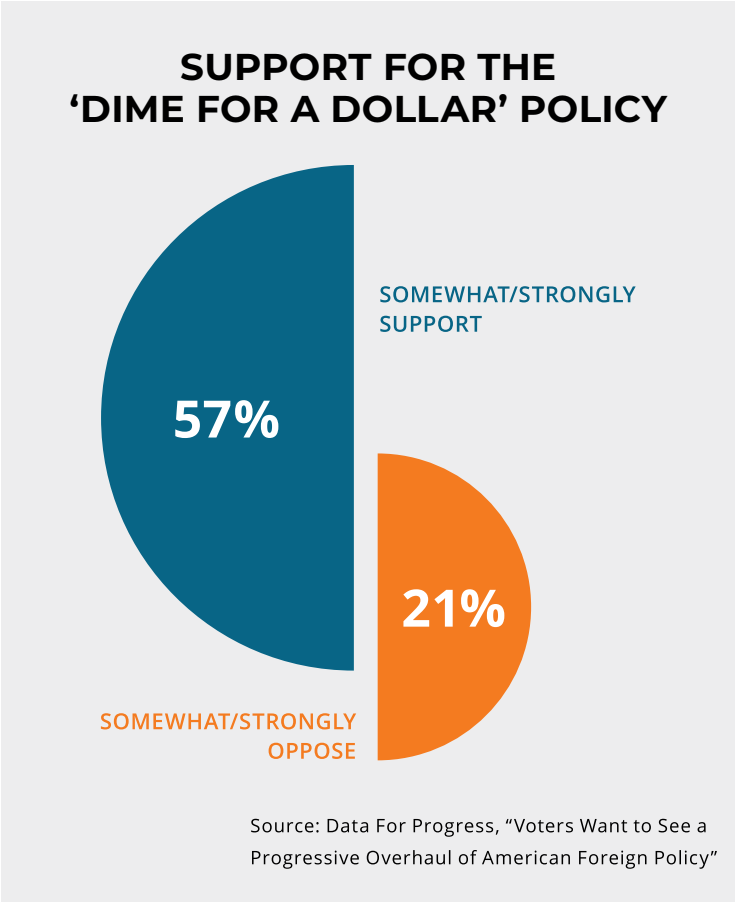
When University of Maryland researchers sat people down in 2012 and showed them the federal budget in a pie chart, the results were dramatic — with a strong majority wanting to move serious money out of militarism and toward human and environmental needs. Among other details revealed, the U.S. public would cut foreign aid to dictatorships but increase humanitarian assistance abroad.

Data for Progress also asked this question:

Q "The United States currently spends more than half of its discretionary budget on military spending, which is considerably more than it spends on other foreign policy tools such as diplomacy and economic development programs. Some argue that maintaining U.S. military superiority should be the top foreign policy goal, and we should continue spending levels as they are. Others argue that rather than pouring money into war we should invest in preventing wars before they happen. Do you support or oppose a proposal to spend at least ten cents on non-military war prevention tools for every dollar we spend on the Pentagon?"

The answer:

A "A clear majority of voters support the 'dime for a dollar' policy, with 57 percent somewhat or strongly supporting and just 21 percent opposing the policy. This includes a plurality of Republican voters, 49 percent of whom support and just 30 percent of whom oppose the policy. The dime for a dollar policy is overwhelmingly popular among Independents and Democrats. A net +28 percent of Independents and a net +57 percent of Democrats support the dime for a dollar policy."



Data for Progress also found that a plurality (and a strong majority among Democrats) wanted to withhold weapons from Israel in order to curb its human rights abuses against Palestinians. A strong majority wanted a no-first-use nuclear policy. A strong majority wanted more humanitarian aid to Latin America. A strong majority wanted to ban all use of torture. (We should properly say "re-ban," given how many times torture has been banned and re-banned by law or treaty.) Notably, the U.S. public, by a significant majority, wants a peace agreement with North Korea, but the group that wanted it the most was Republicans (possibly merely because President Trump was in office when the poll was taken).

Data for Progress also found that huge majorities wanted to end the endless U.S. wars in Afghanistan and across the Middle East. Those who supported continuing these wars were a tiny fringe group, something one might never have guessed from media coverage. Overall we're talking about 16% of the U.S. public. Among Democrats it was 7%.

Data for Progress also found a strong majority against allowing U.S. weapons sales to governments that abuse human rights.

Successful U.S. presidential candidates after George W. Bush (himself against "nation building") have sought to be depicted as in favor of peace (although their policy details have not always fully matched their rhetoric). According to one analysis, Hillary Clinton might have won several key states and the presidency in 2016 if not for the perception that she was too eager for war. George H.W. Bush thought a war might get him reelected in 1992; it did not. Lyndon Johnson chose not to run for reelection in 1968 because of his unpopularity, driven by his warmaking in Vietnam. In that same year candidate Richard Nixon claimed to have a secret plan for peace that we're still waiting to see, and many of his predecessors presented themselves as antiwar, including FDR in the election of 1940 and Woodrow Wilson in 1916. Peace, as a general rule, is popular — and when it becomes an election issue, as in the Congressional elections of 2006, it can lead all the exit polls as the top motivation for voters. It's a good idea to be on the right side of peace when such moments arise.

Examples of Successful Candidates' Platforms

The following are all quotes from the websites, social media feeds, and statements of successful candidates for Congress, some made prior to their first election victories. Some comments are dated, but most are still relevant:

Ayanna Pressley (2020 campaign website):

"The United States spends more on its military than the next seven countries with the largest military budgets combined, and over the last 21 months Donald Trump and a Republican-controlled Congress have increased military spending by more than $200 billion dollars. The administration's policy to significantly increase military spending while pushing forward massive tax cuts will have a devastating impact on America's ability to fund domestic priorities like healthcare, infrastructure, education, and housing. In Congress, I will:

- Support cutting the US defense budget by 25 percent, resulting in nearly $180 billion in savings that could be used to better support our domestic priorities.
- Prioritize spending on updated training protocols and equipment, including investments in a hardened election and cyber defense system, and expanded intelligence and information sharing capabilities with our allies.
- Advocate for greater oversight and accountability of how defense funding is distributed across the military and in active conflict zones.
- Significantly increase our spending on foreign aid, with a particular emphasis on programs that benefit women and girls, who are essential to the health of communities around the world. Increasing foreign aid will not only benefit the international community, but help ensure the long-term security of the United States.

"I believe our involvement in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan – like Vietnam before them – have taught us devastating lessons about the commitment of American military resources without sufficient forethought, planning, or international support. Thousands of lost and wounded American service members, and civilians tell the story of the consequences of our decisions to go to war. I would strongly support any efforts to quickly end U.S. military involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. It's time to end the wars and the monetary incentives that perpetuate them.

"I also think it is essential to engage our international partners before making any long-term decision about our approach to conflict overseas. Unilateral U.S. military support should only be used as a last resort to defend the nation. It is important that Congress have significant oversight of U.S. involvement in international conflicts; I would support repealing the 2001 AUMF that gave the Executive wide ranging authority to commit military resources in the War on Terror, and I believe that Congress must have final approval on any commitment of US military resources overseas.

"It's time to end the wars and the monetary incentives that perpetuate them."

– Ayanna Pressley

"Climate change is clearly a matter of national security. Despite the current administration's attempts to say otherwise, scientists around the world agree that the earth is getting warmer, sea levels are rising, weather patterns are changing, and our countries are becoming increasingly susceptible to flooding and natural disasters. Responding appropriately to the threat of climate change will require partnership with the international community – like that enshrined by the Paris Climate Accords. In Congress, I will push for America to rejoin the accords and reverse our current policy of withdrawing from the international community on issues of climate change, while simultaneously advocating for domestic policies that will decrease our carbon footprint."

Rashida Tlaib (2020 public statement):

"I don't support military operations. If you go to the Department of Defense website, every day, Monday through Friday, there is an area called 'contracts.' Go there. You want to pay for college? Medicare for All? Pay to take care of Americans dying from famine to basic human rights abuses? Look at those contracts. I'm floored at how much money [they're spending]."

When asked "Do you want to divert the DOD budget into social services?" Tlaib replied: "Yes. We can build safer and more vibrant communities. I am tired of the earmarks for corporations. They aren't going to Americans. They're going to private companies. Not only have we made prisons into private corporations, wars are a for-profit industry. The [DoD is] a cesspool for corporations to make money."

Ilhan Omar (2020 campaign website):

"Promote Peace & Prosperity
"We must end the state of continuous war, as these wars have made us less safe. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed, entire countries have been destabilized, and we are currently in the midst of an extreme global migration crisis. Meanwhile at home, there have been increasingly cuts to spending on healthcare, infrastructure, education, and housing. We must scale back U.S. military activities, and reinvest our expansive military budget back into our communities. Once this happens, we can begin to repair the harm done, repair America's broken image, and invest in diplomatic relationships.

- We spend by far the most on our military budget, and more than the next seven countries on the list of top spenders combined
- In 2017, the United States spent over $700 billion dollars—well over half the country's discretionary budget
- The Pentagon has spent $400 billion dollars on the F-35 fighter jet program,

and will eventually spend over 1 trillion dollars in costs and maintenance

- American intervention in democratically-elected governments has contributed to the migration crisis
- The executive branch has escalated U.S. involvement in Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, with no authorization from Congress

"Vision and Policy Priorities: End funding for perpetual war and military aggression

> ***"End sanctions and embargoes against countries, which ultimately only hurt the working families of those countries"***
>
> *– Ilhan Omar*

"We are currently engaged in a number of wars that have no end in sight—Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia. These wars have destabilized regions, created massive humanitarian crises, and continue to hurt our image across the world. We must end these wars . . . .

- Reduce total spending on the military from its projected FY 2019 levels of $886 billion and reinvest that money into healthcare, education, housing, jobs, clean energy, and infrastructure
- Cut the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) that has been called the Pentagon's 'slush fund'. In 2017, the OCO budget increased by 41% to $82.4 billion.
- Eliminate wasteful military programs like the F-35 fighter jet program, saving taxpayers $1 trillion dollars total
- Scale back the number of US military bases across the world

"Repeal harmful sanctions and oppose all U.S. intervention into democratically-elected governments

"Sanctions and economic blockades have been used to hurt the economies of countries outside of the U.S. sphere of influence. These measures hurt working

people in other countries and foster animosity towards our government.

- End sanctions and embargoes against countries, which ultimately only hurt the working families of those countries
- Support diplomatic solutions to the conflicts in both North Korea and Iran, and avoid military conflict at all costs
- Support the JCPOA, and advocate for a deal that does not disproportionately impose economic sanctions on the people of Iran.

"Fully fund programs to care for our veteran population
"We must ensure that veterans who have returned home from conflict-zones are taken care of. It is unacceptable that politicians have send soldiers to fight in wars, and refuse to fund the programs they need when returning home. We must ensure that all veterans are housed, have access to healthcare, and mental health care services.

- Eliminate homelessness among veterans by expanding the HUD-VASH program and Supportive Services for Veterans Families
- Oppose the privatization of the Veterans Affairs healthcare system and expand funding for physical and mental healthcare for veterans

"Support a peace that affirms the safety and rights of both Palestinians and Israelis
"Stability in the Middle East depends on the establishment of a lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis. But without justice, there will never be peace. The United States must work with the international community, and not unilaterally, to work towards a solution. I will use my voice in Congress and work with communities on the ground to center the ultimate goal of self-determination and peace.

- Fight against efforts from the Trump administration to undermine the peace process, and support the autonomy for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to define what a solution looks like
- Uplift the voices of Palestinians demanding an end to the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and end the siege of Gaza
- Oppose the killing of civilians in Gaza and the expansion of settlements into the West Bank"

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (2020 campaign website):

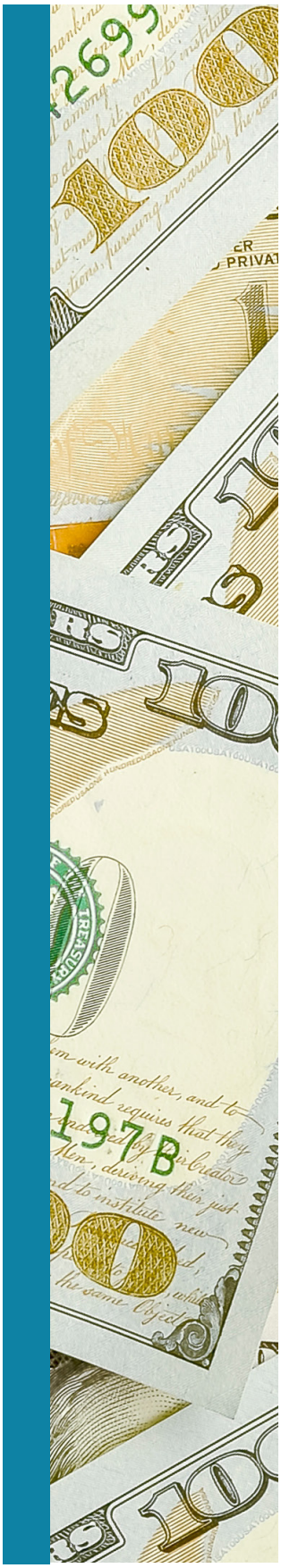
"Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the United States has entangled itself in war and occupation throughout the Middle East and North Africa. As of 2018, we are currently involved in military action in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia. Hundreds of thousands of civilians in these countries have been killed either as collateral damage from American strikes or from the instability caused by U.S. interventions. Millions more have fled their broken countries, contributing to the global refugee crisis.

"This continued action damages America's legitimacy as a force for good, creates new generations of potential terrorists, and erodes American prosperity. In times when we're told that there's not enough money, Republicans and corporate Democrats seem to find the cash to fund a $1.1 trillion fighter jet program or a $1.7 trillion-dollar nuclear weapon 'modernization' program. The costs are extreme: the Pentagon's budget for 2018 is $700 billion dollars: to continue fighting an endless War on Terror and refighting the Cold War with a new arms race that nobody can win.

"According to the Constitution, the right to declare war belongs to the legislative body, and yet many of these global acts of aggression have never once been voted on by Congress. In some cases, we've even acted unilaterally, without the backing of the United Nations.

"America should not be in the business of destabilizing countries. While we may see ourselves as liberators, the world increasingly views us as occupiers and aggressors. Alexandria believes that we must end the 'forever war' by bringing our troops home, and ending the air strikes that perpetuate the cycle of terrorism throughout the world.

"By bringing our troops home, we can begin to heal the wounds we're opening by continuing military engagement. We can begin to repair our image. We can reunite military families, separated by repeated deployments. We can become stronger by building stronger diplomatic and economic ties, and by saving our armed forces only for when they're truly needed."



Unwarranted Influence

President Dwight Eisenhower, in his 10-minute farewell address, January 1961: “We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations. This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. … In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of **unwarranted influence**, whether sought or unsought, by the **military-industrial complex**. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

The unwarranted influence comes in the form of

- financial investments in weapons companies by Congress Members (both direct stock holdings and investments through investment funds),
- campaign “contributions” (researchers can often show the correlation between this funding and the legislative actions of those funded),
- prior employment or future job offers to Congress Members or staffers by war contractors or by the U.S. military,
- the jobs in states or districts created by military funding and used as leverage even though decreasing the military funding would increase job creation,
- free trips to militarily-allied countries such as Israel and Qatar,

That’s a lot to guard against, but guarding against it is a key part of the job of Congress Member.

RootsAction Education Fund

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