

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: How to properly budget for a diplomacy-first foreign policy

[REIMAGINING U.S. SECURITY SPENDING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY](#)

Despite the fact that Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed responsibility for the attack on a Saudi Arabian oil installation last week, almost immediately after the incident, Trump administration officials were eager to pin blame (without much in the way of solid evidence) on Iran. This focus on Iran in turn [fueled constant and widespread media speculation about a potential](#) U.S. military response—not *how* the U.S. would respond, but *whether* the U.S. would respond by bombing Iran.

This trajectory—an international security challenge that in part resulted from the United States' own policies turning into debate about how are we going to use war to solve it—isn't unusual, of course, and there are many factors that play into how easily we go from crisis to talk of military action (and not, say, how are we going to actually solve the problem?).

But as we argue in a [new report](#) released this week, a major reason our collective consciousness reflexively turns to military solutions to complex international challenges is because of the gargantuan amount of money we give to the Pentagon in the name of a false belief in “military supremacy.”

Indeed, the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act—the final details of which are currently being hashed out by House and Senate conferees—will likely approve a whopping \$738 billion for the Pentagon and defense-related programs at other agencies. That's nearly \$20 billion more than what Congress allocated last year, and piles on to an already bloated defense budget that far outpaces what we spent on our military during the height of the Korean and Vietnam wars. And, in fact, that's only a portion of U.S. security spending. As we note in our report, U.S. security spending now totals over one trillion dollars per year.

It's not just about how much we're throwing at the Pentagon and other security-related programs, it's also how much taxpayer dollars the Pentagon lights on fire in waste, fraud, and abuse. For example, we [learned](#) a few years ago that the Pentagon tried to hide \$125 billion in bureaucratic waste. More recently we found out that it didn't even spend [upwards of \\$80 billion](#) between FY2013 and FY2018 (a conundrum that also leads to end-of-year “use it or lose it” spending sprees like [paying \\$5 million on crab and lobster feasts](#)). And don't get us started on [the F-35](#). Unsurprisingly, the Pentagon [failed](#) its first ever financial audit late last year.

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The Pentagon having more money than it knows what to do with has helped maintain a militarized status quo that jeopardizes the safety of people at home and abroad. So what's the alternative?

REIMAGINING U.S. SECURITY SPENDING

As outlined in our new report, real security means that policymakers must embrace the reality that the military alone does not safeguard the United States and invest in nonmilitary tools. This requires “reorienting security spending toward the solutions to today’s and tomorrow’s major security challenges, rather than continuing to buy the weapons of yesterday’s wars.” To construct a budget that truly keeps Americans and all people secure, the United States must re-conceptualize national security to be based on “human security” that addresses the “widespread and cross-cutting challenges” to the “survival, livelihood, and dignity” of all people.

In doing so, U.S. security spending should be focusing on four key priorities:

1. **Combatting the climate crisis:** How many times do we have to be reminded that the climate crisis is among our greatest human security threats? The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Changes [says](#) we now have 11 years before some of the worst case scenarios are irreversible. Spending more money on tanks, bombs, nuclear weapons, aircraft carriers and fighter jets will do nothing to solve this problem (and indeed helps contribute to it). (See [here](#) for news and updates about on climate strikes taking place around the world this week.) To combat the crisis, the U.S. should instead invest in:
 - a. the Green Climate Fund, which helps developing countries respond to climate change, by paying the remaining \$2 billion the United States pledged to the fund in 2014;
 - b. Green New Deal initiatives, like building green infrastructure to reform the U.S.’ own economy to be based on renewable energy; closing many of the 800 U.S. military bases around the world that cost the U.S. taxpayer billions of dollars to maintain and operate each year, foment conflict abroad, and harm local environments; and invest in a just transition for workers in the defense industries;
 - c. climate programs at agencies from the Department of Energy to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that the Trump administration has sought to cut; and
 - d. creating an interagency task force to prioritize and coordinate initiatives at the agency-level to develop a whole-of-government approach to the climate crisis.

2. **Work toward reversing the march of global authoritarianism:** From Europe and the Americas to the Middle East and the East Asia, authoritarianism is on the rise, which has

WIN WITHOUT WAR



more recently been fueled and enabled by Donald Trump. Despotism, human rights violations, xenophobia and use of political violence threatens the security of people around the world. Their repression sparks civil unrest and stymies economic growth. Meanwhile, their use of disinformation and corruption around the world undermines democratic norms and the nature of truth, while increasing polarization and mass inequality. To respond and combat, the U.S. should invest in:

- a. cybersecurity and education in the United States to protect U.S. infrastructure, government, and nongovernmental institutions;
 - b. strengthening U.S. and international anti-corruption laws (including creating a beneficial ownership registry in the United States), closing money laundering loopholes in existing anti-corruption legal regimes, and eliminating tax havens; and
 - c. soft power and public diplomacy by fully funding educational and cultural exchange programs, as well as localized economic development through the State Department, USAID, US International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC), and international organizations.
3. **Reducing mass inequality:** Those countries experiencing the highest levels of violence are most often the most unequal and polarized, with lack of economic opportunity or political power leading to insecurity and disenfranchisement that increases the appeal of violent groups. The U.S. should invest in progressive priorities that level the playing field, such as, but not limited to:
- a. human needs at home, like Medicare for all, \$15 minimum wage, and free or reduced public college tuition;
 - b. sustainable, international and domestic development and peacebuilding initiatives that prioritize local actors through initiatives like community foundations;
 - c. international organizations that work to end global hunger and poverty, and further education like UNICEF and the UN World Food Program;
 - d. U.S.-based legal initiatives and blockchain technologies to combat corrupt practices like trade-based money laundering;
 - e. and inter-governmental bodies, like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), that strengthen and enforce international standards for combating of money laundering and the financing of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

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4. **Repudiating militarism:** Military-first approaches to U.S. foreign policy have been tested and failed. Instead of spending billions on military equipment that does little to make us more secure, the U.S. should instead invest in:
 - a. diplomacy, peacebuilding, and development by doubling the State Department's budget;
 - b. community policing initiatives that bring communities together rather than divide them;
 - c. limiting the influence of defense contractors and other war profiteers by passing laws that close the revolving door, limit the influence of lobbyists, and cut the Pentagon's budget;
 - d. fully enforcing human rights protections in U.S. law for the provision of U.S. security assistance and weapons sales;
 - e. establishing a Department of Peacebuilding to target the root causes of domestic and international violence, and promote policies to create a sustainable, peaceful world;
 - f. and foreign assistance to rebuild areas impacted by the militarization of U.S. foreign policy, like reconstruction funding for Raqqa and Mosul.

Without addressing these various facets of security, the United States cannot help to protect the safety and well-being of individuals and communities at home and abroad. While [there have been signs](#) that there is growing interest to rein in wasteful Pentagon spending, more needs to be done to reverse this continuing trend of prioritizing the military. We must first re-conceptualize our notion of security to begin the process of realigning our security spending to invest in nonmilitary tools that will help build human security both at home and abroad.

BURIED LEDES

If someone claims to be an [Iran expert](#) in #ThisTown, **chances are they a) are not Iranian, b) do not speak Persian, and c) have never been to Iran.**

There is good news somewhere: The University of California system announced this week that **it will be divesting from the fossil fuel industry**, largely [because](#) “there are more attractive investment opportunities in new energy sources than in old fossil fuels.”

[Responding militarily](#) to the attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure **is not popular.**

ENDLESS: [A U.S. drone](#) meant to be targeting an ISIS hideout instead **hit a group of pine nut farmers and laborers killing 30 and wounding 40 more.**

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The U.S. Department of Education exposed its Islamophobic tendencies when it **ordered Duke University and the University of North Carolina this week to remake a joint Middle East studies program** falsely [claiming](#) bias against Christians and Jews.

Trump apparently wants to steal billions of dollars more from the military next year to [build his border wall](#).

The Trump administration produced [and then ignored](#) its own study finding that **climate change is fueling migration from Central America**.

And finally, we all know Trump has a thing for authoritarians but we never thought he'd just blurt it out. Apparently while awaiting a meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi during the G7 Summit in France last month, Trump [quipped](#), **"Where's my favorite dictator?!"**