

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Throwing \$\$\$ at the War Machine

The Takeaway:

- Today, President Biden released his request for the Fiscal Year 2022 Pentagon budget. At an eye-popping \$753 billion, that's an increase on even Trump's highest levels.
- This week, we take a look at just a few of the worst uses of that three-quarters of a trillion dollars — from faulty aircraft carriers to weapons for human rights abusers.
- From these egregious cases of waste and beyond, one thing is clear: continuing to throw money at the war machine while neglecting *real* security threats like climate change and inequality is a recipe for disaster. It's time for a change.

Where Our Money Goes: 5 Cases of Pentagon Waste (And How We *Could* Have Used That \$ Instead*)

\$753 billion. Three quarters of a *trillion* dollars. That's what President Biden wants to spend on war next year. Released just today, Biden's Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 budget request calls for even more money for the Pentagon than under Trump... by \$12.5 billion. Faced with multiple existential threats like the climate crisis, global inequality, and ethnonationalism, continuing to throw such egregious sums at the war machine is, simply put, a reckless injustice. This week, we take a look at just five of the many sources of gross misspending at the Pentagon — and all the ways that that money could, *instead*, actually be used to keep us, and the world, safe.

1. The F-35: the most expensive, faulty combat plane in history

We've invented a plane that [shoots itself](#). You read that right: and it only cost [\\$1.727](#) trillion. ([Just how many is a trillion?](#)) The F-35 fighter jet is the Pentagon's largest ever weapons development program, and after two decades of development, it's still non-functional. Even the Air Force itself now [admits](#) that the program is a failure — yet military contractors continue to lobby to produce more, and so far, Congress has complied. (For more “wildly expensive and totally failed military vehicle programs” see the \$13 billion [Ford Class aircraft carrier](#) that the Navy admits still has key vulnerabilities, or the pricey [Littoral Combat Ships](#) that had to be decommissioned after only a few years in operation.)

\$1.727 trillion spent on a faulty jet could instead buy: 20 million public housing units for a decade.

2. Redundant and dangerous new weapons of mass destruction

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Nuclear weapons are, perhaps more than anything, the epitome of wanton global militarism endangering human life. The fate of all of humanity rests on our ability *not* to use them. And yet, over the next thirty years, the United States plans to spend upwards of [\\$1.7 trillion](#) on its nuclear arsenal. That includes a plan to build an excessive new intercontinental ballistic missile called the [Ground Based Strategic Deterrent](#) (GBSD). The Pentagon's rationale for building the GBSD is, simply put, absurd, based on a "threat" that experts [call](#) "vanishingly small." The United States should be looking for ways to eliminate these weapons of mass death, not increase their likelihood of use for generations to come.

\$1.7 trillion for nuclear weapons for thirty years could instead pay for: 700,000 clean energy jobs for the same period.

3. Mismanagement and profiteering

The Pentagon has [never passed an audit](#). Never. For most institutions, that would be enough to at least raise eyebrows when it came time to give it billions of more dollars — but not for the Pentagon. Without accountability for its spending habits, the Pentagon is a virtual black hole for U.S. resources, many of which go toward overpriced items (like the famed [\\$640 toilet seat](#)) from price-gouging contractors. This is not a case of the Pentagon being taken for a ride though. Desperate for ever more ways to justify their budget, and chummy with the profitable contracting industry, the Pentagon has made little effort to push back on the out-of-control prices.

In 2016, the Pentagon was discovered [trying to bury](#) an internal investigation that found \$125 billion in bureaucratic waste. \$125 billion could have instead bought 3.2 billion Covid-19 vaccines.

4. Enriching weapons contractor CEOs

Speaking of the profitable contracting industry, [more than half](#) of the entire Pentagon budget goes to private contractors — companies that are rarely held accountable for mismanaging the services they provide. These contractors, in turn, use their federal funds to enrich their top executives with [multi-million dollar](#) salaries and — surprise — [lobby](#) for more money, more weapons, and more war.

The top five contractors alone took in [\\$150 billion](#) in Pentagon contracts in 2020. That could have instead provided 25 million households with wind power for a decade.

5. Weapons and training for human rights abusers

Funded by both the Pentagon and State Department, the United States provides ["security assistance"](#) and sells weapons to foreign militaries all over the world. To put it charitably, this assistance comes with little assurance that it won't be used against civilians or abused by corrupt elites. To put it more realistically, policymakers are widely aware of the consequences of their support for governments like the Philippines', Colombia's, Israel's, Saudi Arabia's, the UAE's, Egypt's, and others — they just do it anyway.

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Between 2006 and 2016, U.S. security assistance [totaled](#) \$204.6 billion. If, [conservatively](#), only one third went to human rights abusers, that instead could have provided [healthcare to 1.9 million low-income adults for the same period](#).

Bonus: Endless War

Okay, we said five, but let's make something clear: even if it wasn't buying faulty airplanes or unnecessary new missiles, the Pentagon would *still* have far too much money. The problem isn't simply "waste" — it's a vast, overpowered global military empire. Right-sizing the Pentagon budget will require more than just trimming the fat; it will require ending endless war, closing much of the sprawling empire of 800+ military bases, and addressing U.S. militarism and imperialism at their very roots.

Budgets, it is often said, are moral documents. If that's the case, then our national morals are dangerously out of whack. After 2020 of all years — in which the true threats of global pandemics, worsening inequality, stagnant poverty, and climate change were all too clear — it is utterly shameful to continue throwing money at the war machine while profoundly underinvesting in real human needs. Fortunately, there's still time to make a change. While the President's request informally sets the standard, the budget's final form will be determined by Congress. Over the coming months, it will be up to us to ensure that Congress rejects Biden's budget and ultimately, in the years ahead, finally fixes our broken national spending to put people over the Pentagon.

*All alternative spending statistics provided by the National Priorities Project [trade-offs tool](#).

Memorial Day: A Day of Remembrance

This Monday is Memorial Day in the United States. While the holiday is often used as an excuse for expressions of jingoism, we prefer to see it as a moment to reflect on the true costs of war — on the lives lost and the pain felt by those touched by violent conflict, here and abroad.

In 2019, Win Without War team member Amy Frame shared a personal story about what Memorial Day means to her. On your long weekend, we invite you to [read that story](#) once again.

BURIED LEDES

While the U.S. is withdrawing from Afghanistan, for many, the war and its devastating effects don't end. **The U.S. now has a [responsibility to war victims](#): push for a peace process that centers their experiences and enables them to seek justice and accountability.**

Unsurprisingly, international research shows that **weapons sales are [the least popular form of U.S. influence around the world](#)**. Hey Washington: we heard that all the popular kids don't arm foreign militaries, dictators, and human rights abusers. Maybe give that a try?

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President Biden is steering left on a number of domestic issues. But **it's time for Biden to realize that [progressives are right about foreign policy](#) too**. Because it feels good to be right.

Bell-bottoms, lava lamps, the U.S. embargo on Cuba — all trends that should have been left in the 60s. **Six decades later, the Cuban people are still fighting for their right to live without a blockade**. Women in Cuba have been [especially harmed](#) by the ongoing sanctions.

The Biden administration might be **having [second thoughts](#) about selling F-35s and Reaper drones to the UAE**. Why? They think the UAE might be making closer ties with China. Not, oh... you know, because the UAE is using U.S. weapons to kill civilians in Yemen, or anything.

Unhappy with the company's approach to climate, ExxonMobil shareholders just voted to appoint independent directors to its board. Meanwhile, Chevron and [Shell](#) are both being made to cut their emissions faster. **So... Big Oil is having [a bad week](#)**. We're playing the world's smallest violin.

If even oil and gas companies are being forced to reckon with the climate crisis, you'd think the U.S. would be planning for climate resiliency across all sectors. **But while the U.S. is prioritizing [climate readiness for the military](#), it's neglecting schools, prisons, and public housing**.

Ring video doorbells, owned by Amazon, have a creepy secondary use. **They are becoming the biggest [private surveillance network](#) in the U.S., since Amazon allows police to acquire footage without a warrant**. Big Brother — I mean, Amazon is always watching.

And finally, **Bhangra dance... [from the wilderness](#) of the Yukon**.