The cost of military domination

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Every passing year in America brings news of cutbacks to essential social programs, from food stamps and home heating assistance to research and infrastructure. The public is told there is no choice because "there is no money" for such programs. What is never questioned in the political establishment is how a country with crumbling bridges and mass poverty can afford to spend hundreds of billions of dollars each year on the military.

The officially budgeted military spending of the United States in 2014 was $610 billion, nearly 35 percent of global military spending and greater than the *combined* spending of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, the UK, India and Germany.

Real annual military spending by the United States is even higher, once nuclear weapons funding, interest payments on foreign wars, and the cost of veteran care is included. With these items, the annual amount is closer to $1 trillion.

Between 2000 and 2006, the US Department of Defense budget rose from $300 billion to over $530 billion, and it continues at those levels, despite the sequester federal budget cuts. For 2016, the President has proposed a total spending amount of $613 billion that would put Pentagon spending higher than any point during the presidency of Ronald Reagan.

The proposed $613 billion in funding is more than eight times larger than the federal education budget. It is over 22 times the amount proposed in the discretionary budget for transportation, $27.4 billion, even as the American Society of Civil Engineers rates the state of US infrastructure as a "D," requiring trillions of dollars in repairs. At current rates, military and intelligence spending between 2015-2020 will exceed $4 trillion.

The largest portion of the defense budget goes towards operations and maintenance of the military's vast inventory of weapons and equipment. The category of Military Personnel received $142.9 billion, while procurement—new equipment—received $99.5 billion. Research, Development, Test & Engineering (RDT&E) received $62 billion, while construction and other assorted items took up the rest of the budget.

Between the branches of the armed forces, 2014 funding was relatively equal: the Army received $167.4 billion, the Navy (including the Marines), $162.1 billion and the Air Force, $144.3 billion. The Army's costs have the largest connection to personnel, operations, and construction, and as US troop levels have been drawn down in Iraq and Afghanistan the Army's share of funding has dropped significantly. Despite this, the overall military budget has not mirrored the drop as more money has been plowed into the incredibly expensive, high-tech weapons systems of the Navy and Air Force.

Within the president's proposed Pentagon budget for fiscal year 2016 there is a proposed 12 percent increase in procurement and RDT&E spending to $177 billion, and much of it goes towards big-budget weapons programs designed to maintain total global military dominance.

The US military, across all its branches, has 13,900 planes. The entire commercial aircraft fleet in America—including all the major airlines and freight carriers like FedEx and UPS—is less than half that amount, at 6,788 aircraft.

Compared to other militaries worldwide, the US operates more planes in every type of category (combat, transport, helicopter, training, etc.) than any other nation. This includes a whopping 78 percent share of the global aerial refueling tanker fleet, the means by which combat aircraft can extend their flight range, allowing the US to more easily bomb anywhere in the world.

This vast fleet of aircraft includes some of the most expensive weapons ever created, and current weapons programs that will cost even more. The most recent cost estimate of the notoriously failure-prone F-35 fighter-bomber is $400 billion for procurement of 2,400 planes, while the lifetime operational cost will be $1 trillion.

In 2001, the per-plane estimated cost was $81 million, and the costs continue to rise as the plane is now seven years past its anticipated service date. In 2016, the White House is requesting $11 billion in funding for another year of research, development, and procurement. Including all of these costs, each of the 57 planes requested will cost $193 million.

The deficit of the City of Detroit, which was the nominal cause for the city's bankruptcy and the gutting of city workers' pensions, was $327 million in 2013—less than the cost of one Navy F-35C. The city has announced plans to shut off water service to more than 20,000 households to collect a debt that amounts to about one-eighth the cost of one such aircraft.

Yet the F-35 is just one of many programs with equally staggering costs. In the 2016 procurement budget, over twelve separate drone, plane, and helicopter programs each have budgets of $1-3 billion dollars. Five E2-D Hawkeye command and control aircraft are requested for fiscal year 2016 at a cost

of $263 million each. Adding the 2014 and 2015 budgets, nearly $4 billion has been spent for just 15 of these aircraft.

The White House is requesting $1.7 billion in 2016 for research and development on what is likely the next aircraft boondoggle, the Long Range Strike Bomber (LRS-B.) This new, undisclosed "high tech, long range" bomber will replace the B-52, which has rained down death across the world for over 60 years; the B-1; and the B-2, the most expensive aircraft in history at $2 billion per plane. Northrup Grumman made the B-2 and is in fierce competition for the lucrative LRS-B contract.

The purchase cost of military systems is really just a fraction of their ultimate cost. The F-22 Raptor, the military's latest air superiority fighter, is consuming upwards of $500 million per year just for upgrades and modifications. The B-2 has an ongoing annual cost of $300-$400 million for the last five years. Dozens of other planes require tens or hundreds of millions annually.

Yet nothing costs more money than an aircraft carrier, and the Navy has 10 of them in operation. Russia, China and France each field just one. The US Navy is constructing replacements of their fleet; the first Gerald R. Ford-class carrier was launched in 2015 and cost $12.8 billion.

When planes, bombs, missiles, crew, fuel, and supplies are added, the cost becomes unimaginably high. The Ford-class carrier is meant to feature the F-35C, which is the most expensive variant of the plane, at an estimated $337 million each. The carrier can hold up to 90 aircraft, but even just 40 F-35Cs would represent $13.4 billion dollars, more than the already gargantuan cost of the carrier itself. Each aircraft would carry millions of dollars worth of bombs and missiles. The total cost of all the items on the ship is therefore only comparable to entire federal budget items like science, which has a proposed budget of $31 billion for 2016.

Operating a carrier strike group has an estimated *daily* cost of $6.5 million, which is the cost of a new high-speed passenger rail locomotive. Amtrak, the national passenger rail system, only has a total of 355 locomotives to haul passengers across the entire country, nearly all of which are over 20 years old and in need of rebuilding or replacement. Replacing every single locomotive of Amtrak would cost less than operating one aircraft carrier for one year.

Aircraft carriers are just one aspect of several multi-billion-dollar ship programs. In the FY2016 proposal, another $22 billion would go towards the construction of submarines, destroyers, littoral combat ships, and a fuel tanker. Tomahawk cruise missiles, the notorious weapon of choice for the "shock and awe" bombardment of Iraq in 2003, now cost $2.1 million each. In the first three days of the 2011 assault on Libya, at least 161 such missiles were fired; in present-day prices that would cost $338 million, the same cost as the 2,800-foot long six-lane Stan Musial Veteran's Memorial Bridge across the Mississippi River that recently opened.

A largely hidden, yet massive, military cost is the operation, maintenance and replacement of the so-called "Nuclear Triad." This is the system of nuclear warheads ready for deployment on long range bombers, submarines, and land-based installations, and each of the three elements are up for replacement during the 2020s. Already in 2015, research on these replacements is consuming billions per year, before designs have even been finalized and contracts secured. A January 2014 report from the James R. Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies is simply titled "The Trillion Dollar Nuclear Triad," pointing to its estimate that $1 trillion will be spent on nuclear systems by the US in the next 30 years. It also notes that Congress has no accurate measure of the actual current spending on nuclear programs.

The destructive power of these nuclear forces is almost incomprehensible and greater than anything the world has ever known. The 14 current Ohio-class submarines in the Navy's fleet each contain up to 24 nuclear-armed Trident II ballistic missiles. Each missile has a range of over 5,000 nautical miles and upon reentry into the earth's atmosphere can release eight W88 "multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles." Each W88 can travel to a separate target and yield a blast more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Thus, each Ohio class submarine carries nearly 200 nuclear warheads that can simultaneously attack every major city of an entire region of the world—from just one submarine. Given the provocative nature of the US's activity in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region, the possibility of any escalation is an absolutely harrowing prospect.

The terrifying destructive potential of the US military, whether conventional or nuclear weapons, is a very profitable business. In September, when the US began bombing ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the stocks of four of the five largest weapons makers—Lockheed Martin, Northrup Grumman, General Dynamics and Raytheon—soared to all time highs.