The US in 2016: No money for social programs, cash to burn for the military

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The US Navy's "goals and objectives" outline for 2016, released last week, does not mince words: the first goal listed in the second subhead reads: "Buy more ships."

And that is exactly what the world's most powerful navy is doing. On Wednesday, the Defense Department announced it was moving forward with plans to replace its Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines, the most lethal killing machines in the history of mankind, with a completely new design beginning in 2021.

Each Ohio-class ballistic submarine is, by itself, the fifth most powerful military in the world. The Navy operates 14 of them. Each submarine carries 24 Trident II missiles, with each missile carrying eight warheads with a yield six times greater than the "little boy" bomb that killed over a hundred thousand people in the US bombing of Nagasaki, Japan, in 1945.

With an effective range of more than 7,456 miles, a single Ohio-class submarine in the waters outside of San Diego could obliterate 192 cities in western China, with a combined population of 400 million people, if the commander-in-chief were so inclined.

But the Ohio class is apparently in need of an upgrade, and the White House gave the Pentagon the go-ahead last Monday to send a "Request for Proposal" to the ship's contractor, General Dynamics Electric Boat, approving funds for the building of a prototype. Each submarine, of which there will be 12, will cost an estimated $6-8 billion—not including research and development costs, the price of each submarine's nearly 200 nuclear warheads, and associated operating costs—up from $2 billion for the Ohio class.

The day after the White House gave the go-ahead for replacing the Ohio-class submarines, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) reported Monday that up to a million people will lose food stamp benefits in 2016.

Twenty-three states are expected this year to lift a moratorium on one of the harshest austerity measures imposed by the Clinton administration's 1996 "welfare reform" program, which caps the amount of time many people are eligible for food stamps at three months. The time limits were halted during the recession, but under the pretense that there is "no money," to pay for food stamps, states all over the country are re-imposing the time limits.

"The loss of this food assistance, which averages approximately $150 to $170 per person per month for this group, will cause serious hardship among many," reported the organization. The CBPP notes, "USDA data show that the individuals likely to be cut off by the three-month limit have average monthly income of approximately 17 percent of the poverty line, and they typically qualify for no other income support."

In announcing the food stamp cuts, Bill Clinton pledged to "spend the taxpayers' money wisely and with discipline, that we can spend more money on the future." If he had been telling the truth, he would have declared that he was proposing the cuts so that the Navy could "Buy more ships."

After all, the money has to come from somewhere. And it's easiest to take from those who are the least capable of defending themselves. In addition to the poor people who depend on food stamps to survive, working class children have been targeted.

The same day that the White House gave the go-ahead for the design of the new submarines, the CBPP released a report showing that funding for schools has been slashed in most states since 2008, and in 15 states by more than 10 percent. Arizona has cut education spending by 23.3 percent, Alabama by 21.4 percent, Idaho by 16.9 percent, and Georgia by 16.5 percent.

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While there is, of course, no money for children and the poor, defense contractors are licking their chops over the expected uptick in global military spending resulting from the wars flaring out of control in the Middle East and the growing standoff in Eastern Europe and the Pacific.

Defense industry analyst Deloitte gleefully declared earlier this month that military spending is “poised for a rebound” as a result of “heightened tensions” around the world.

It notes, “2015 was a pivotal year that saw heightened tensions between China, its neighbors and the US over ‘island building’ in the South and East China Seas, and the related claims of sovereign ocean territory rights by China. In addition, Russia and the Ukraine are at odds related to Russia’s takeover of Crimea and their military actions in Eastern Ukraine,” while “The recent tragic bombings in Paris, Beirut, Mali, the Sinai Peninsula, and other places have emboldened nations to join in the fight against terrorism.”

The report notes that “improved profitability” will result from “renewed interest from buyers” in acquiring “armored ground vehicles, ground attack munitions, light air support aircraft” and “maritime patrol ships and aircraft,” as “the military operations tempo is likely to increase and more missions are executed.”

The global uptick in military spending coincides with a major new shopping spree by the United States, which spends as much money on its military as the next seven countries—China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, the UK, India and Germany—combined. The US expends $609.9 billion out of the $1.7 trillion spent worldwide by all countries each year on war.

But this figure is slated to surge as “Many large, mainly US [Department of Defense] programs representing billions of US dollars, are likely to start soon, enter the engineering manufacturing design phase, and reach low-rate or full-scale production over the next few years. These programs include Ohio Class Submarine replacement, F-35 fighter jet, KC-46A aerial refueling tanker, and Long Range Strike Bomber.”

Just one of these programs, the F-35 “Lightning II,” plagued with delays and cost-overruns, will cost $1.45 trillion over its lifecycle, more than twice the amount that state, federal, and local governments spend educating 50 million children each year.

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