

US squanders billions on new aircraft carrier

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25 July 2017

In yet another massive squandering of public resources, the United States on Saturday commissioned the USS Gerald Ford, the country's 11th supercarrier, at the cost of some \$13 billion.

The combined price tag of the ship and its air wing of F-35c fighters, at \$30 billion, is roughly equivalent to what the United Nations estimate for the annual cost of ending world hunger.

No doubt many defense contractor executives assembled to watch the ship's christening had their private jets and country club memberships paid for with this monstrosity, which came in some \$3 billion above budget. How many politicians got seven-figure jobs in the private sector after having pushed the project along? No one will ever know.

The Gerald Ford is just part of a major expansion of the US Navy, which was underway even before Trump announced his plans to increase US military spending by \$54 billion each year and expand the size of the Navy by 75 ships. Over the next decade, the US military plans to field not only a new set of carriers, but a brand new class of ballistic missile submarines, destroyers, fighters, long-range bombers and nuclear missiles.

This expansion of military spending, under both Obama and Trump, has been met, on the part of the media, with either enthusiastic approval or silence.

By the time the carrier is operational in some three to four years, it will already be obsolete. When the United Kingdom commissioned its latest aircraft carrier, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, the Royal United Services Institute noted that the vast ship was largely defenseless against the current generation of anti-ship cruise missiles fielded by Russia, China and other countries.

"Missiles costing (much) less than half a million pounds a unit could at least disable a British aircraft carrier that costs more than £3 billion," it said.

Commenting on the report, the Russian Defense Ministry joked that the British aircraft carrier was "merely a large convenient naval target." The same epithet could be applied to the Gerald Ford. This steel bathtub, housing some 4,300 sailors, airmen and officers, could be sunk within minutes if it wandered within 400 miles of the coast of Kaliningrad,

Syria or, for that matter, China.

And yet, America has eleven of these dinosaurs, together with eight helicopter carriers that are as big as the aircraft carriers of other countries. With 5 percent of the world's population, the US fields three quarters of the world's carrier tonnage.

At Saturday's commissioning ceremony, US President Donald Trump delivered a blustering, delusional speech, full of wild threats, in which he presented a picture of the United States arming itself to the teeth. He called the ship a "message to the world" that "American might is second to none, and we're getting bigger, and better, and stronger every day."

"Our enemies will shake with fear because everyone will know that America is coming," he declared. Who these enemies are (one assumes they are not Islamists armed with Kalashnikovs) was never specified.

Trump added, "This ship also ensures that if a fight does come, it will always end the same way: we will win, win, win. We will never lose. We will win."

In a clear breach of the principle of civilian rule over the military, he appealed to the sailors and officers gathered at the event to demand that the government expand military spending.

Summing up, the former real estate speculator said, "When it comes to battle, we don't want a fair fight. We want just the opposite. We demand victory, and we will have total victory."

Trump's speech, showing the influence of his fascist-minded advisors Stephen Bannon and Stephen Miller, did not invoke the word "democracy," or even the principle of "self-defense," within which the operations of US imperialism have traditionally been couched. All that was left was naked military force, threats and coercion.

While there exist significant differences between Trump and elements of the US military/intelligence apparatus, the US president, in his belief in violence as a solution to historical problems, exemplifies the thinking that pervades American policy circles, which seek to maintain US global dominance through the expansion of military power.

The USS Gerald Ford is the physical embodiment of the

idea that the long-term historical decline of American capitalism can be offset by more guns, more ships, more wars and more deaths.

The “American Century” has been characterized by the overwhelming superiority of US air power. Despite the fact that the United States has been continuously at war since 1991, not a single US soldier has been attacked by enemy aircraft for over six decades.

And yet, as the US moves into increasingly sharp conflict with Russia, China and even its European allies, it is becoming increasingly clear that its most advanced weapons systems, including aircraft carriers and “stealth” aircraft such as the F-22, F-35 and B-2, would see substantial losses in the event of a shooting war with Russia, China or even some lesser, regional power such as Iran.

In recognition of this reality, Gen. Mark A. Milley noted that the US needs to prepare for conflicts in which “the levels of violence... would be immense and it would be the likes of what the world hasn’t seen since the Second World War.”

Despite the vast scale of US arms spending and the breathtaking scope of its military operations all over the world, it is increasingly undeniable that the period of US military, economic and geopolitical hegemony is coming to an end.

This was the conclusion of a study published by the US Army War College late last month, which asserts that American political hegemony is “not merely fraying,” but “collapsing.”

The report goes on to state that the order that “first emerged from World War II” was “transformed to a unipolar system with the collapse of the Soviet Union.” It continues: “The 17-year period after the Cold War... was a unique time when American power was essentially unchallenged,” but “we have been moving into a new era.”

With the rise of “revisionist” powers like China and Russia, the United States has been so weakened that “it no longer can—as in the past—automatically generate consistent and sustained local military superiority at range.”

This is in line with an assessment by historian Alfred W. McCoy, who declares in a soon-to-be released book: “All available economic, educational, technological data indicate that when it comes to US global power, negative trends are likely to aggregate rapidly by 2020, and could reach a critical mass no later than 2030. The American Century, proclaimed so triumphantly at the start of World War II, may already be tattered and fading by 2025, and, except for the finger pointing, could be over by 2030.”

But the relative decline of the United States is, in some ways, the least of the US military’s worries. The Army War College report notes that, beyond the collapse of the US-

dominated world order, “[A]ll states and traditional political authority structures are under increasing pressure.” It adds, “The fracturing of the post-Cold War global system is accompanied by the internal fraying in the political, social and economic fabric of practically all states.”

It cites an earlier report that warned of the “increasing chasm between governments and their governed over the basic right to rule.” It adds, “Today, all states are experiencing a precipitous decline in their authority, influence, reach and common attraction,” as populations are presented with “myriad alternative sources of political alignment or allegiance.”

It concludes that states “now all wrestle with one another over competing interests while standing on quicksand—threatened” not only by national rivals, but “the fragile and restive social order they themselves rest on.” In this case, the quicksand is a metaphor for the growth of popular opposition to war, social inequality and capitalism itself.

Confronting crisis at home and abroad, the US is lashing out everywhere simultaneously: against Russia, China, Iran, and now even its NATO allies. The same weekend that Trump commissioned his aircraft carrier, the House of Representatives reached a deal on a bill that would sanction European companies for economic dealings with Russia, a move that, according to a leaked EU memo, would bring retaliatory measures by the EU “within days.”

All of this presents a warning to the working class: The US ruling elite, faced with economic stagnation, geopolitical decline and a crisis of legitimacy at home, sees war, no matter how bloody and disastrous, as the solution to its problems. Nothing can prevent the eruption of another great world military conflagration, this time instigated by the United States, outside of the building of a new internationalist and socialist movement against war.



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