

Global military spending at record \$1.7 trillion

Niles Niemuth
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Global military spending hit a record of more than \$1.7 trillion in 2017, the highest level since the Cold War, according to figures published Thursday by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

The report gives some idea of the scale of the squandering of resources for destructive ends. According to SIPRI, just 13 percent of annual world military spending would be enough to end world poverty and hunger; four percent would guarantee food security for the world's population; five percent would meet health needs; 12 percent would provide everyone with an education; three percent would provide clean water and proper sanitation.

Feeding its vast military machine with more than \$610 billion in 2017, the United States remains by far the world's biggest military spender, dedicating a greater amount to military spending than the next seven countries combined. The 2018 defense budget recently signed by President Donald Trump will push this figure to \$700 billion.

The US has been at war continuously for the past quarter-century, beginning with the 1991 invasion of Iraq, followed in the course of that decade by military interventions and strikes in Haiti, Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq and the air war against Yugoslavia. The 2000s saw the launching of the global "war on terror," beginning with the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in 2001. That was followed by the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the extension of the Afghanistan war into Pakistan with the launching of drone attacks in 2004, the war for regime-change in Libya in 2011 and the beginning that same year of the continuing CIA-fomented civil war in Syria, followed by a third war in Iraq.

The war in Syria, which began as a regime-change operation by US-armed and funded Islamist proxy forces fighting to overthrow the pro-Russian and pro-Iranian government of Bashar al-Assad, has evolved into a

confrontation between US forces and those of Russia and Iran, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo boasting that the US has killed scores of Russians, the Israelis carrying out missile attacks on Iranian targets in Syria, and the US, Britain and France launching a joint missile strike against Syrian government facilities.

After the dissolution of the USSR by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1991, the apologists for capitalism proclaimed the "end of history"—the final triumph of capitalism and defeat of socialism. They hailed the dawn of a new era of liberal democracy, peace and prosperity.

But more than a quarter-century later, capitalism has produced a nightmare world of feverish rearmament and war, millions of refugees confronting militarized borders and racist witch hunts, soaring inequality combined with brutal austerity, the growth of far-right and fascistic parties and a universal turn by governments to authoritarian rule.

Now the regional wars are metastasizing into a third world war to redivide the globe. Every major power is rearming, pushing international military spending up by nearly 10 percent since the global economic crisis of 2008.

The particularly sharp rise in military spending over the last decade in Central Europe (20 percent) and Eastern Europe (33 percent) reflects the preparations by the US and the NATO alliance for war with Russia. The 29 members of NATO now account for more than half of the world's military spending.

Under Obama and now Trump, Washington has pressured its European allies to push their military spending even higher. Germany's new grand coalition government has pledged to nearly double military spending to two percent of gross domestic product by 2024, while French President Emmanuel Macron plans to increase military spending by 35 percent and has called for a revival of the military draft. In all of these countries,

rearmament has been accompanied by an onslaught on social programs and workers' living standards.

Despite incessant US propaganda proclaiming Russia to be a military juggernaut menacing its neighbors, the country had one of the largest annual declines in military spending, falling 20 percent from 2016. The Kremlin spent \$66.3 billion on its military in 2017, little more than one tenth what the US spends.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, a key ally of the US in the Middle East, took the number three position from Russia, spending \$69.4 billion in 2017. The oil-rich kingdom on the Arabian Peninsula expends 10 percent of its annual economic output on its military, the second highest percentage in the world. Much of Saudi Arabia's military equipment, purchased from the US, has been dedicated to its slaughter in neighboring Yemen, but that is only a prelude to war against its main target, Iran.

Asia and Oceania have seen military spending increase for an unparalleled 29 successive years. The region witnessed a major military buildup under Obama's so-called "pivot to Asia," which is being continued under Trump. The arms race in the region is guaranteed to accelerate with India, under the government of Narendra Modi, initiating plans to expand and modernize the country's military forces to prepare for war with China and Pakistan.

The US sees its war preparations against Russia as the prelude to a military confrontation with China, deemed to be Washington's most dangerous rival. The US is rapidly building up its naval forces in the region and setting up missile defense systems and other military installations in the region to encircle China, which is responding with its own military buildup.

Japan is well on the way to casting aside all post-World War II pretensions to pacifism and remilitarizing.

As US military spending has grown to historic heights, the Pentagon has established ever closer ties with the technology giants, creating a special unit, the Defense Innovation Unit Experimental, based in Silicon Valley. Amazon has contracts with both the CIA and the Pentagon and Google has partnered with the Pentagon to expand the drone murder program.

Record levels of military spending have been accompanied by ever greater concentrations of wealth in the hands of billionaires, the integration of the corporations they control with the state apparatus, an assault on the living standards of the working class, and the erosion of democratic rights, including censorship of socialist and anti-war voices on the Internet.

The root cause of war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights is the decrepit and obsolete capitalist system, which subordinates every social need to the enrichment of the financial oligarchy that dominates society.

In 2016, the International Committee of the Fourth International spelled out the following principles for building an international movement of the working class and youth against imperialist war:

- * The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.

- * The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

- * The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

- * The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism. The permanent war of the bourgeoisie must be answered with the perspective of permanent revolution by the working class, the strategic goal of which is the abolition of the nation-state system and the establishment of a world socialist federation. This will make possible the rational, planned development of global resources and, on this basis, the eradication of poverty and the raising of human culture to new heights.

This Saturday, May 5, at 5:30 pm EDT, on the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth, the ICFI is holding its annual International May Day Online Rally, which will be broadcast live throughout the world at wsws.org/mayday. We urge all our readers and all workers throughout the world to register and attend May Day 2018.



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