

# America: The garrison state

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This week, America witnessed a scene that has become all too familiar in recent years: facing record-breaking floods, tens of thousands of men, women, and children in some of the poorest areas of the country were left with inadequate food, shelter and water, waiting for hours for gasoline and turned away from over-filled shelters as they fled toxic flood waters.

As the waters recede, they will return to their damaged or destroyed homes needing tens of thousands of dollars in repairs—in a country where the average household cannot cover an unforeseen \$500 expense. When they ask why the government will do next to nothing to help them cover the expenses, they will be told: there is no money. When they ask why the government cannot build adequate flood-prevention mechanisms, they will be told: there is no money.

But as the television news breathlessly reported every step of the catastrophe, the US Senate gave a very different answer to demands by the Trump Administration and the Pentagon for a major expansion of military spending.

The Senate, by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 93-7, passed a bill to fund almost the entire US federal government for the coming year. And 80 percent of that bill—\$675 out of \$854 billion—consisted of military spending, a \$60 billion increase over last year's military budget.

Given that the passage of the bill was neither mentioned on any of the national evening news programs, nor appeared on the front pages of any major newspaper, it would be surprising if one in a hundred Americans knew about its passage. And this is exactly as intended.

In a revealing statement, Republican Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby hailed the passage of the bill, declaring, “We are going to make the appropriations trains run again.” It was, to say the least, a peculiar metaphor. A Google search for

the phrase “make the trains run” brings up only references to the Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, who, as the saying goes, “made the trains run on time” by trampling democratic procedures underfoot.

In an equally revealing statement, Patrick Leahy, the top Democrat on the Senate appropriations panel, declared: “We did our job and focused on what we should be doing—making responsible, thoughtful decisions about how to fund these federal agencies and leaving controversial policy issues out of it.”

In other words, for the “opposition” Democratic party—whose members in the Senate voted unanimously for the bill—one of the largest military spending buildups in American history is not a “controversial policy issue,” but is accepted without question.

Among the expenditures included in the bill are nearly \$150 billion for new and upgraded military hardware. This includes some \$24.2 billion for the construction of 13 new navy ships, including two brand new nuclear-powered Virginia-class submarines, costing \$2.4 billion apiece.

This massive figure does not include the costs for the construction of America's two new Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers, costing \$13 billion apiece, which is currently underway.

Another \$9.3 billion is set aside for military contractor Lockheed Martin for the purchase of 93 new F-35 fighters, arguably the most over-priced, incompetently managed project in the history of war profiteering. The funding of this program is, according to the Democrats, not a “controversial policy issue.”

The massive expansion in military spending expressed in the passage of the bill represents the practical implementation of the Pentagon's National Defense Strategy, which declared that “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security.”

The various branches of the military have concluded from this document that they must be prepared to fight a war with either Russia or China or both as soon as 2025. On Monday, the Air Force presented its proposal for meeting this goal.

Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson told the Air Force Association's conference in Maryland this week that the US Air Force would need to grow by 25 percent, adding roughly 1,500 aircraft to its current active fleet of about 6,000.

"We must see the world as it is," said Wilson. "That is why the National Defense Strategy explicitly recognizes that we have returned to an era of great power competition. We must prepare," she said, to "win against a major power."

"The Air Force is too small for what the nation expects of us," she said.

The Air Force "needs five more bomber squadrons... and seven additional space squadrons so that we can dominate in space, where we have not been threatened in the past.... we'll need 14 more tanker squadrons... 22 squadrons need to be added to our command and control, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance," and so on and so forth.

She made clear to the assembled defense contractors in the audience that there is money to be made as the Air Force begins "buying things faster." She teased them with the prospect of "one-day contract awards" for contractors, who would be invited to "give their pitch, and if the program manager likes it, the company walks out that day with funding, and a one-day signed contract."

In other words, with tens of billions of dollars of cash in hand, the Air Force will be doling it out hand over fist to the war profiteers, all but throwing it out the window.

Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, will be there to catch it. Speaking at the same Air Force Association conference as Wilson, Bezos, who has all but clinched the largest technology contract in the Pentagon's history, worth some \$10 billion, declared, "It's so important for the DoD, for the Air Force, for every government institution—when they can—to use commercial solutions," like the one he came to peddle.

Wilson capped her speech with the declaration, "Our dominance as a global power is not a birthright. It is a choice."

A listener might ask: who's doing the choosing? No one has asked the American people whether they want to rush into a war with one—or even two—nuclear powers, a war that would inevitably entail the use of nuclear weapons, killing millions, or billions, of people.

Wilson added ominously, "It is an obligation to our countrymen, to tell them... what should be done, what must be done" to make the Air Force, which she referred to as America's "clenched fist," more "lethal."

The use of language reminiscent of fascism—"making the trains run," the "clenched fist," the military telling the public "what must be done"—expresses something essential about the Pentagon's plan for "great-power conflict."

It is not compatible with democracy. Indeed, the Pentagon's strategy paper makes this clear, declaring the "homeland" a battleground, vulnerable to "political subversion" by "non-state actors"—a euphemism for political dissidents.

And, true to this prescription, the military buildup is accompanied by the construction of a regime of state censorship by the technology companies, all of whom have lined up at the Pentagon's trough for lucrative contracts.

One conclusion is inescapable: Capitalism and war are incompatible with democracy. The struggle against war, and against political censorship, requires a socialist program.



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