US gears up for World War III with largest defense contract in history

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The Pentagon announced Monday the single largest arms purchase in its history, agreeing to buy nearly 500 F-35 fighter aircraft at a total cost of $34 billion.

This purchase is only a down payment on the Pentagon's acquisition of the notoriously wasteful and failure-prone aircraft, whose design is based on two overarching priorities: fighting a war with a "great power" such as Russia and China and lining the pockets of Lockheed Martin and the horde of former congressmen and retired generals on its payroll.

The agreement covers the 12th, 13th and 14th batches of F-35s ordered by the Pentagon, which eventually plans to field thousands of the aircraft. Billed in 2001 as a program to save money, each plane eventually ended up costing four times the initial estimate.

At a projected total program cost of $1.5 trillion, this one weapons system alone would finance the US Department of Education for a quarter-century.

The F-35 has no greater advocate than President Donald Trump, who promotes it like one of his golfing properties. Trump turned a Wednesday afternoon joint press conference with Polish President Andrzej Duda into a photo-op to promote the war plane. As an F-35 carried out a low-speed flyover of the White House, he praised Poland for its agreement to purchase 32 of the aircraft.

At speeches before military audiences, Trump routinely brags about the massive military budgets he has pushed through Congress, touting in particular the Pentagon's vast spending on the F-35. Speaking at the Air Force Academy commencement ceremony last month, the American president responded to resounding applause from the graduating officers by declaring, "You just like all those brand new, beautiful airplanes that we're buying."

Trump continued: "Last year… we secured $700 billion to support our war fighters, followed by another $716 billion—not million—billion. That's with a 'B.'"

Both of these Pentagon budgets, entailing the largest increases in defense spending since the end of the Cold War, were passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. Eighty-nine percent of Senate Democrats voted to pass the most recent defense budget, whose explicit aim is to prepare the US military for "great power" conflict with Russia and China.

This year the White House is aiming even higher. Next Monday, the administration plans to submit a $750 billion Defense Department budget proposal, a figure $18 billion higher than the amount requested by the Pentagon.

A small army of defense industry executives, former generals serving as "consultants" and congressmen turned lobbyists for the military-industrial complex is salivating at the infusion of cash into a military notorious for paying $7,622 for coffee makers and $640 for toilet seats.

Even by the normal standards of US war profiteering, the F-35 program takes the cake for sheer corruption—so much so that the warmonger and military yes man John McCain called it a "poster child for acquisition malpractice," a "scandal" and a "tragedy."

According to the Project on Government Oversight, "By design, the [US military] services can't independently perform many of the most basic functions needed to properly employ the most expensive weapon system in history." It added that Lockheed Martin "keeps the government from even knowing the costs of any of the spare parts it has to buy from the company."

The hundreds of aircraft already delivered are plagued with failures that make them largely inoperable. As *Defense News* recently reported, "F-35B

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and F-35C pilots [are] compelled to observe limitations on airspeed to avoid damage to the F-35's airframe or stealth coating," while the aircraft remains prone to "cockpit pressure spikes" that cause "excruciating ear and sinus pain."

But the graft, incompetence and corruption that mark the F-35 program should not distract from its fundamental purpose: to fight a "near-peer" competitor in the form of Russia or China.

Earlier this month, Vice President Mike Pence, addressing the graduating class at West Point, predicted war in the Pacific, Europe and the Americas within the graduates' lifetimes.

"It is a virtual certainty that you will fight on a battlefield for America at some point in your life," he declared. "Some of you will join the fight on the Korean Peninsula and in the Indo-Pacific, where North Korea continues to threaten the peace and an increasingly militarized China challenges our presence in the region. Some of you will join the fight in Europe, where an aggressive Russia seeks to redraw international boundaries by force. And some of you may even be called upon to serve in this hemisphere.

"And when that day comes, I know you will move to the sound of the guns and do your duty, and you will fight, and you will win."

These blood-curdling sentiments, far from being unique to the Trump administration, are broadly shared on a bipartisan basis. Speaking in Iowa on Tuesday, former naval intelligence officer-turned-Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg said: "Our military capabilities exist for a reason… we stand ready to use force." He added that the US must prepare for the "wars of the future."

Even as Trump rips up fundamental constitutional protections, imprisoning immigrant children on military bases and ruling by executive fiat, the Democrats hail the value of an external enemy to enforce political unity at home, with Buttigieg declaring: "The new China challenge provides us with an opportunity to come together across the political divide." This is essential, he suggests, since, "At least half the battle is at home."

Some three decades after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the proclamation of a "unipolar moment" of US dominance, America's efforts to preserve its global hegemony through military means have produced a debacle. In the lead article in the current edition of *Foreign Affairs*, Fareed Zakaria writes of "The Self-Destruction of American Power," concluding that, "Sometime in the last two years, American hegemony died."

But every failure, setback and disaster has only led the United States to double down on its economic bullying and military aggression. After the debacles of the "war on terror," including the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the wars in Libya and Syria, Washington has set its sights on a conflict with Russia and China. The results of such wars will be a disaster on an incomparably greater scale than the bloodletting in the Middle East, threatening a nuclear Third World War.

The homicidal eruption of American militarism that began with the first Gulf War, coinciding with the Stalinist regime's dissolution of the Soviet Union, will not simply peter out. Unless halted by the emergence of a mass socialist movement of the working class, it will only intensify.

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