

More guns, less butter: Biden's World War III budget

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With the proxy war between US/NATO and Russia over Ukraine now in its second month, the social consequences of the conflict are coming into sharper focus.

All over the world, governments are massively increasing military spending. The German government has tripled its military budget with the aim of making the German army the largest in Europe. France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Australia are all implementing or planning major increases in expenditures on war.

However, nowhere is this process clearer than in the United States, the center of world imperialism. On Monday, the White House announced the largest US military budget in American history, focused overwhelmingly on preparations to fight a war with Russia and China.

The budget proposes spending \$813 billion on the US military, up from \$782 billion in 2022. When the costs of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the cost of debt from previous defense spending is added in, the figure rises to over \$1 trillion. And that is not to mention the hundreds of billions spent on federal, state, and local police forces and the United States' intelligence apparatus.

The US spends more on its military than the next 10 countries combined. Writing in *Newsweek*, Lindsay Koshgarian of the Institute for Policy Studies noted, "The U.S. alone already spends 12 times more on its military than Russia. When combined with Europe's biggest military spenders, the U.S. and its allies on the continent outspend Russia by at least 15 to 1."

Announcing the budget proposal, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said, "We are requesting ... more than \$40.8 billion for sea power, to include nine more battle force ships, and nearly \$12.6 billion to modernize Army and Marine Corps fighting vehicles. We are

requesting more than \$130.1 billion for research and development in this budget—an all-time high."

The budget proposes to upgrade and modernize every single aspect of the US nuclear arsenal, from nuclear submarines to bombers and missiles. It includes \$35.4 billion to "develop, procure, and modernize" the United States' nuclear weapons, including:

- \$6.3 billion for the Columbia-class Ballistic Missile Submarine;
- \$5 billion for the B-21 Long Range Strike Bomber;
- \$3.6 billion for the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent, a new class of intercontinental ballistic missiles; and
- \$1 billion for the Long-Range Stand-Off (LRSO) Missile, a new generation of nuclear cruise missiles.

In addition, the budget allocates \$56.5 billion for "Lethal Air Forces," including the purchase of 61 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters at the price of \$11 billion. It allocates another \$25 billion for missile defense, \$7.2 billion for "long-range fires," including hypersonic missiles, and \$27 billion for the "Space Force" created under former President Trump.

The 2017 defense budget, the last budget prepared by the Obama administration, amounted to \$583 billion. In every year of his presidency, Donald Trump increased the military budget, despite presiding over a drawdown of US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2018, under the supervision of Secretary of Defense James Mattis, the US declared in its national security strategy that "Great power competition—not terrorism—is now the primary focus of US national security."

The document codified what had in fact for years been the dominant concept in Pentagon planning: that the US military should focus on preparations to fight a war with Russia and China. To this end, the Obama

administration had already initiated a more than one trillion-dollar expansion of the US nuclear arsenal, a plan continued and intensified under Trump and now Biden.

Even Biden's proposal is only the starting point. The actual budget as passed by Congress will likely be even larger than that proposed by Biden and the Pentagon.

On Wednesday, Republican Senator Jim Inhofe said that the budget does "not request the real growth we need," calling on Congress to "do our due diligence and our constitutional duty" and provide even more funding.

This theme was echoed in an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, which complained that "defense spending will still be about 3.1% of the economy" under Biden's budget. The aim, according to the *Journal*, should be to increase military spending to at least 5 percent of the economy—that is, an increase of nearly two-thirds.

"NATO Needs More Guns and Less Butter," Glenn Hubbard, the former Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers, wrote in an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, demanding cuts in social programs. The phrase harkened back to the statement of Nazi leader Hermann Goering, who declared in 1936, as Germany was preparing for world war, "Guns will make us powerful; butter will only make us fat."

The corollary to massive military spending is cuts in everything else. The gargantuan military budget was announced as more than 1,000 Americans die every day from the COVID-19 pandemic. Key life-saving programs are being eliminated, due to the claim that there is no money to pay for them.

Last week, the federal program to reimburse hospitals treating uninsured patients with COVID-19 ran out of funding, meaning that COVID-19 tests for uninsured patients are no longer free, "due to lack of sufficient funds." Next week, funding for COVID-19 vaccines for the uninsured is due to run out, while federal shipments of monoclonal antibodies are being slashed.

Even as the government expends unprecedented sums on the military, Biden said that his administration will "balance" the budget. "We're returning our fiscal house to order"—that is, the war machine will be financed by an intensified assault on the working class as the costs of basic goods are rising at double-digit rates.

The US is being transformed more and more into a garrison state that has two essential functions: the financing of a military-police apparatus and the bailout of the rich. The preparations for world war are at the same time preparations for war against the working class.

Shattered in the process are all the claims that the Biden administration would open up "space" for social reform, exposing Bernie Sanders' preposterous claim that Biden would be the "most progressive president since FDR." The Democratic Party has demonstrated once again that it is a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus.

The growing intersection of the diversion of social resources for military spending and the offensive against the working class makes one thing abundantly clear: The social constituency for opposing war is the working class.

The surge in the cost of living around the world is triggering a global eruption of the class struggle. The growing global movement of the working class provides the essential social constituency for the struggle against war. But this movement must be armed with the perspective of socialism. It must have as its aim the overthrow of the capitalist nation-state system that is the root of inequality and war.



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