

POLICY PAPER

How America Can Demilitarize and Prosper: Making the Peace Economy a Reality

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Counting only the direct costs, the U.S. is spending some 700 billion dollars in FY 2018 on war and war preparations. Upon closer examination, these expenditures are found to represent mostly weapon systems and troop deployments that are obsolete and unnecessary in a military sense. While not needed for security, they continue because they maintain the power and profits of special interests in government and the private sector.

In addition, U.S. policymakers have sought military supremacy to manage perceived threats from Islamist insurgencies, Russian and Chinese power, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. In each of these arenas, however, the only solutions are political, not military, and a new kind of foreign policy is needed. This paper shows how people and capital being squandered on unnecessary and counterproductive military programs can instead be put to work on a Green New Deal that can provide productive livelihoods and sustainable prosperity.

More than 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the defense budget of the United States remains at Cold War levels.¹ When confronted with this fact, hawk politicians and pundits often respond that American military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product has steadily declined since the Korean War.² As a result, they argue, American military power has waned to dangerous levels and is no longer adequate for the global challenges facing the country. In this paper, we will show why this argument is spurious and how the United States can in fact greatly reduce its military spending without adversely

¹ In constant dollars; see Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018
<https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20180319/BILLS-115SAHR1625-RCP115-66.pdf>
and Winslow Wheeler, Cooked Books Tell Tall Tales, Time/U.S., 15 July 2013
<http://nation.time.com/2013/07/15/cooked-books-tell-tall-tales/>

² Wheeler, *Cooked Books*

affecting the country's national security. Further, we will argue that deep reductions can be made in a way that does not cause catastrophic social and economic dislocations, and that in fact can put the country on a path to sustainable prosperity.

What Are We Paying For?

Armed force is not an end in itself. The troops and weapons a country legitimately needs relate to the military threats it faces, not the size of its gross domestic product. If we doubled the nation's obsolete ships, tanks, and missiles, the defense budget would soar, but the U.S. population and the world would not be any safer. Military spending is not a magic cure that somehow makes the country "strong." On the contrary, unnecessary military spending weakens the country by diverting resources from productive public and private investment on which future prosperity depends.

In Fiscal Year 2018, the Department of Defense budget and related military spending (such as nuclear weapons, part of the Department of Energy budget), amounts to 700 billion dollars.³ This includes spending on the war in Afghanistan and other "overseas contingency operations." It does not include more than 300 billion dollars in additional spending on veterans' benefits, military-related interest on the national debt, and other security expenditures.⁴ At a time when millions of Americans go without adequate health care, education, and other essential services, what can justify such lavish expenditures on war and war preparations in the absence a commensurate military threat to the United States?

In this paper, we will show how it is possible to demilitarize the U.S. economy and foreign policy without jeopardizing U.S. or international security. The first point that must be understood is that most of our weapon systems and troop deployments are obsolete in a strictly military sense and are not needed for any legitimate security missions. They exist only because they uphold the power and profits of special interests in government and the private sector at the expense of middle class taxpayers. A much leaner and less costly military system is now possible as a result of rapidly accelerating technological advances.⁵ Most notably, unmanned combat vehicles (e.g. drones, unmanned tanks) are greatly reducing both the number of combat personnel and the size and expense of vehicles needed to achieve various military capabilities.

³ William D. Hartung and Ari Rickman, Ready to Profit: Corporate Beneficiaries of Congressional Add-Ons to the FY 2018 Pentagon Budget, Center for International Policy, https://www.ciponline.org/images/uploads/actions/Completely_Final_5_2_18_18_Plus_up_report.docx.pdf and Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018

⁴ Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018

⁵ Dr. Olivier Mathey (physicist and public interest defense analyst), in discussion with one of the authors, provided valuable insight into current revolutions in military technology and their broader policy ramifications.

In the past, the size and much of the cost of many weapon systems was determined by the need to protect the human operators of the vehicles in combat environments. Current technology enabling military personnel to operate weapon systems remotely in locations far from the battlefield removes a key constraint on the design of fighter planes, tanks, and other vehicles, which can now be smaller and much less expensive.

These technologies have far-reaching ramifications that can reduce costs even further. A much smaller need for combat personnel means that the size and number of military bases can be greatly reduced, as can the logistical capabilities for “putting boots on the ground” and maintaining supply lines. The large fleet of aircraft carriers and transports that had served these logistical needs can now be greatly reduced, and so also the ships deployed to protect them. Finally, a much smaller army and navy means a much smaller civilian bureaucracy needed to administer the whole system.

As for our recent wars, the United States deployed tens of thousands of troops for more than fifteen years in Iraq and Afghanistan. Notwithstanding their staggering human and financial cost, these “overseas contingency operations” were futile at best and even counterproductive. U.S. intervention in Iraq created the conditions for an Islamist insurgency, while the Taliban is poised to regain power in Afghanistan in some form when the United States leaves.

This whole nightmare is reminiscent of America’s failed counterinsurgency war in Vietnam, which should have been a cautionary tale to defense policy makers when they sought to fashion a response to the September 11 attacks. But if it wasn’t clear then, it should be now—large-scale military occupation of territory in the 21st century is an ineffective and counterproductive policy. The best way to honor the thousands killed and maimed in these wars is to finally learn this lesson and make Afghanistan the last land war the United States ever fights.

It takes time, of course, for innovation to transform anything as big and complex as the Pentagon. This time lag is exacerbated by the tendency of power-holders to cling to power. In this case, high-level admirals and generals, whose power is measured by the number of people and amount of resources under their command, are fiercely resisting the kind of efficiencies and economies that are now possible. Also, while defense contractors are happy to supply the most advanced technologies, they do not want to lose contracts for all the obsolete, unnecessary and expensive weapons systems that account for such a large part of their profits.

The above analysis brings us to the political crux of the problem regarding defense policy. The top military brass and big defense contractors are well connected in Congress,⁶ whose individual members have their own vested interest in defense manufacturing and bases located in their districts. This is a perfect storm for a massive rip-off of the American public in the

⁶ See, for example, Hartung and Rickman, Ready to Profit and William D. Hartung, *Prophets of War: Lockheed Martin and the Making of the Military Industrial Complex*, (New York: Nation Books, 2012)

name of national security. Americans must now demand new fiscal priorities, which means eliminating unnecessary military programs and investing the resources in a Green New Deal that can meet the needs of ordinary people today and future generations.

Demilitarizing U.S. Foreign Policy

In the previous section, we have focused on the obsolescence of the country's weapon systems and troop deployments. The upshot of our analysis is that modernizing the country's armed forces would enable the United States to downsize our national security state to a fraction of its current size without in any way diminishing current military capabilities.⁷ But these capabilities are not ends in themselves. War is the continuation of politics by other means, as Carl von Clausewitz famously put it. In order to achieve its legitimate ends—U.S. and international security—military power must be subordinated to a foreign policy that addresses the political sources of security threats.

Unfortunately, U.S. foreign policy since the end of World War II has put the cart before the horse, pursuing military supremacy as an all-purpose solution to myriad problems that are fundamentally political. In the year 2000, this quest for military supremacy found expression in the doctrine of “Full Spectrum Dominance,” according to which the U.S. armed forces seek the capability to conduct military operations unhindered in all domains—land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace—everywhere on the planet. In this paper we will not address the last of these domains except to say that cyber-security should be a function civilian law enforcement, not the armed forces. We will limit ourselves to explaining why the quest for military supremacy in the first four domains is not in the public interest.

What capabilities for waging armed conflict on land, sea, air and space are really needed to insure the safety of Americans and help uphold international security? Under international law, the only legitimate uses of force are repelling an armed invasion of one's homeland and participating in military operations approved by the United Nations Security Council. The four arenas of greatest concern to U.S. policymakers in the coming decades are Islamist and other revolutionary movements, the confrontation between NATO and Russia in Europe, the rise of China as a global power, and nuclear weapons proliferation. Whatever else can be said about these complex security issues, U.S. efforts to act in all these arenas with the tools of military coercion are failing because in every case the underlying problems are political.

Regarding armed revolutions, as noted in the previous section, it is long overdue for the United States to learn the lessons of its failed counterinsurgency wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It is now obvious that large-scale “boots on the ground” military occupations are

⁷ For some of the many wasteful and unnecessary programs that can be cut, see reports of the Straus Military Reform Project <http://www.pogo.org/straus/> and the Center for International Policy's Arms and Security Project <http://www.ciponline.org/programs/arms-security-project>

ineffective and counterproductive. Beyond this, what should the U.S. exit strategy in Afghanistan be and how should the U.S. relate to future jihadist and other insurgencies?

Under a policy paradigm of Full Spectrum Dominance, the lesson from past failures is purely military. Instead of boots on the ground, a more effective counterinsurgency strategy, military planners might conclude, would be to establish a single military base remote from population centers, say in the Afghan desert, staffed with a few hundred special operations and technical personnel, who would use unmanned drones to monitor the country and interdict any armed person not bearing a valid electronic identification.⁸ Assuming the effectiveness of such a system (not a trivial assumption since guerilla movements are highly resourceful at infiltration and sabotage), Clausewitz's dictum about the political nature of military force raises two questions—what is America's political objective and what are the likely political consequences?

Under Full Spectrum Dominance, the *de facto*, unstated objective would be a stable government in Kabul friendly to the United States backed by a small but permanent U.S. military presence such as the abovementioned desert base. But the likely consequences of such an affront to Afghan sovereignty would be bitter and increasing resentment towards the United States and contempt for the collaborationist Afghan government. In addition, the long term projection of American power in Pakistan's backyard would further exacerbate U.S. relations with that country, which would take every opportunity to undermine the unpopular regime in Kabul and make its eventual replacement with an anti-American government highly likely.

This is a familiar story to students of international relations in the 20th century, which is littered with U.S. foreign policy failures of precisely this sort.⁹ Under a demilitarized foreign policy, by contrast, the United States would seek an exit strategy that respected Afghan sovereignty, enlist Pakistan and possibly Iran in the creation of regional security arrangements, and use cultural, political and economic influence (forms of "soft power") as well as the United Nations to promote democracy and human rights, to whatever extent that can be done. Refraining from counterproductive military interventions would help avert the rise of future jihadist movements, which can also be achieved through economic aid and diplomatic support for democratic regimes, costing a fraction of what the U.S. is currently spending on its bloated war machine.

Second, regarding the confrontation with Russia, it is necessary to rethink the conventional wisdom that Vladimir Putin's recent aggression in Ukraine justifies the U.S. policy of "projecting power" right to the borders of Russia. Mainstream journalists and pundits uncritically assume that only massive military power can deter Russia, which requires the

⁸ We are indebted to Dr. Oliver Mathey for suggesting this scenario.

⁹ For example, see Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003) and Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, Second Edition (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2004)

U.S., EU and NATO to maintain their existing military capabilities in Europe and even to expand them. This overlooks one of the most important but least widely known principles of military science—that it takes far fewer and less expensive armed forces to defend a territory from invasion than it does to conquer it. This principle is not new and it is not controversial.¹⁰ Rather, it is simply ignored by policymakers because it undercuts the permanent war economy from which corporate and state elites benefit.¹¹

For much of its history, Switzerland maintained a military posture, known as “non-offensive defense,”¹² based on this principle. It enabled Switzerland to deter threats from more heavily armed neighbors, including Bismarck’s and Hitler’s Germany. Though lacking Switzerland’s mountainous terrain, Ukraine could be rendered similarly unconquerable for a small fraction of what it costs Russia to threaten it. This would involve anti-tank capabilities to deter a land invasion and anti-aircraft capabilities to deter air attack. The U.S. should promote Ukrainian security (and European security generally) through non-offensive defense, paving the way for the demilitarization of Europe and for win-win-win political and economic relationships between Russia, the EU, and the United States.

Regarding the third potential threat, the rise of China as a military power, the United States stands at a crossroads between the paths of confrontation and collaboration. The first path leads to a futile, counterproductive, and expensive militarization of the Pacific and of space. This path is a lose-lose proposition for the citizens of both countries, who would bear the costs, but a win-win proposition for the U.S. and Chinese military establishments and defense sectors—who would amass greater power and profits at public expense. This path also leads to disaster for the rest of the globe because it ensures that China, as in the previous case of Russia, will be at loggerheads with the U.S. in the UN Security Council and unable to collaborate in the maintenance of international security.

The path of collaboration, by contrast, leads to demilitarization and international security. Since the U.S. currently holds the upper hand militarily, it is in the stronger negotiating position and can afford to make concessions in pursuit of a collaborative long-term relationship. China’s policy on the militarization of space indicates a willingness to collaborate but also a resolve to compete militarily if the United States refuses to collaborate.¹³

¹⁰ Carl Conetta, 1994, Nonoffensive Defense and the Transformation of US Defense Posture: Is Nonoffensive Defense Compatible with Global Power? Project on Defense Alternatives <http://www.comw.org/pda/nodglob.htm>; Bjørn Møller, 1996. Common Security and Non-Offensive Defence as Guidelines for Defence Planning and Arms Control? *International Journal of Peace Studies* 1 (July). http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol1_2/Moeller.htm

¹¹ Brian D’Agostino, *The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012)

¹² Conetta, Nonoffensive Defense; Møller, Common Security

¹³ Mike Moore, *Twilight War: The Folly of U.S. Space Dominance*. (Oakland, CA: The Independent Institute, 2008)

China has long championed the negotiation of a PAROS treaty (Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space) in the United Nations. But the U.S. has insisted on its own military supremacy in space and has not supported such initiatives. In this context, China successfully tested an ASAT (antisatellite) weapon system in 2007, indicating that if negotiation fails it will pursue military parity with the United States.¹⁴

Thus, Full Spectrum Dominance is leading to a costly and unnecessary arms race with an emerging superpower, a race that the U.S. could actually lose but that at the very least would enrich the shareholders of defense contractors at the expense of the general public. Instead, Americans should demand that our government join with China in the negotiation of a PAROS treaty and a range of other multilateral agreements in areas that include abolition of nuclear weapons, reduction of carbon emissions, and a trade regime that can eradicate global poverty.

Finally, as with the first three security challenges, the United States faces a crossroads on the issue of nuclear proliferation. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) is a social contract in which the nuclear “have-nots” agreed in 1970 to forgo acquisition of nuclear weapons on the condition that the “haves” work in good faith for complete abolition. The record of compliance of the “have-nots” over the history of this agreement has been nearly perfect while the “haves”—the U.S., Russia, China, France and Britain—doing nothing in half a century to plan abolition as they agreed, have been in flagrant violation of the treaty.¹⁵ The “have nots” (185 of the world’s governments) find this rogue behavior and nuclear double standard politically unacceptable. In this context, one of the non-nuclear signatories (North Korea) withdrew from the NPT and developed nuclear weapons and another (Iran) apparently had a covert Bomb program before the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal.

America’s efforts to maintain the nuclear double standard using military threats is not working. Continued reliance on this policy risks a war in the Middle East or Asia and the continued spread of nuclear weapons. Under a demilitarized foreign policy, by contrast, the United States would honor its obligations under the NPT and work with the other nuclear-armed signatories to establish a timetable for abolition. This would give the U.S. some semblance of moral authority when it talks about nuclear non-proliferation. Abolition is the best way to prevent terrorists from acquiring nuclear weapons and would finally end the morally and legally indefensible practice of nuclear deterrence.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Twilight War*

¹⁵ For a good introduction to the NPT and compliance issues see Nicole Deller, Arjun Makhijani, and John Burroughs, *Rule of Power or Rule of Law? An Assessment of U.S. Policies and Actions Regarding Security-Related Treaties* (New York: The Apex Press, 2003)

¹⁶ Peter Weiss, Taking the Law Seriously: The Imperative Need for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, *Fordham International Law Journal* (Vol. 34, 2011); Charles J. Moxley, Jr., John Burroughs and Jonathan Granoff, Nuclear Weapons and Compliance with International Humanitarian Law and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, *Fordham International Law Journal* (Vol. 34, 2011) <http://lcnp.org/pubs/index.htm>

To Washington Beltway elites, especially the so-called “realists,” a demilitarized foreign policy seems ridiculously utopian. Yet these are the very people who have held power and utterly failed to uphold international security. Only a utopian could have dreamed in 1915 that centuries of armed conflict among European countries would be permanently over in a mere 30 years. If that wildly improbable outcome could occur, major progress towards the abolition of war including the elimination of all nuclear weapons in this generation should be a major focus of U.S. foreign policy.¹⁷

Demilitarizing the U.S. Economy

Given the need to demilitarize America’s foreign policy and modernize its armed forces, it is an important question how to effect a rapid transition of financial, human and physical resources from unnecessary military programs to alternative uses while minimizing social and economic dislocation. There are three policy strategies for accomplishing this—economic conversion of the private sector defense economy, attrition, and redeployment of personnel within the public sector.¹⁸ Economic conversion involves workplace- and community-based planning of alternative civilian production for private sector manufacturing facilities, work forces, and communities currently dependent on defense contracts.¹⁹ Attrition involves a Pentagon hiring freeze that would bring about a natural downsizing of the workforce over time while providing for the job security of existing public employees. Waivers from the freeze would only be permitted in the few cases where specialized expertise is required for which existing personnel cannot be retrained.

Redeployment involves retraining public employees displaced by the phasing out of unnecessary military programs and putting them to work elsewhere in the defense sector or other federal, state or local government agencies. Examples of redeployment are as follows. Veterans returning from Afghanistan can be retrained and put to work building and maintaining public infrastructure. Many of these troops have transferable skills as operators of vehicles and other machinery, electricians, mechanics, and so on. Accountants, secretaries and other support staff can be redeployed in the same occupations elsewhere in the public sector.

All the human and physical resources currently being squandered on unnecessary military programs can be reclaimed for productive public and private investment under a Green New Deal. Former weapons engineers can be put to work building the sustainable energy

¹⁷ See Rethinking General and Complete Disarmament in the Twenty-First Century, UNODA Occasional Paper No. 28, October 2016. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/occasionalpapers/no-28/>

¹⁸ *The Middle Class Fights Back*

¹⁹ Jonathan Michael Feldman, Industrial Conversion: A Linchpin for Disarmament and Development, in Gustaff Geeraerts, Natalie Pauwels, and Eric Remacle, Eds. *Dimensions of Peace and Security: A Reader*. (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006. Jonathan M. Feldman, The Conversion of Defense Engineers’ Skills, in Gerald I. Susman and Sean O’Keefe, eds., *The Defense Industry in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Pergamon, 1998)

technology of the future. Steel being used for tanks and concrete used for military bases can be used instead to rebuild the country's crumbling water works and other infrastructure. The hundreds of billions of dollars previously spent on missiles, aircraft carriers and war can now be spent providing adequate facilities for underfunded public schools; planting trees to reforest areas devastated by wildfires; and constructing the windmills, biomass facilities, solar equipment and other sustainable energy infrastructure than can enable the country to reduce carbon emissions, avert catastrophic climate change, and lay economic foundations for sustainable prosperity for generations to come.²⁰ Swords into ploughshares.

The U.S. economy is not currently creating productive livelihoods at living wages for all Americans. One reason is that the defense sector is depleting our productive manufacturing economy of engineers, steel, energy, and the other factors of production. By contrast, a Green New Deal will create more jobs than the war economy and by rebuilding U.S. manufacturing, will create sustainable prosperity.

This brings us to the ultimate irony regarding the advantages of a peace economy over a war economy. A more robust manufacturing sector will provide better insurance against future threats to national security than a continued war economy.²¹ By depleting the country's industrial base, the war economy actually makes America *less* capable of mobilizing to meet future threats, like a spendthrift depleting his bank account and left unprepared for a future emergency. By contrast, public investment in green manufacturing is like putting money in the bank. It will be available if we really need it, and in the meantime will even earn interest. We can always turn our ploughshares back into swords if we ever need to, but until then they can produce sustainable prosperity.

What is standing in the way of such a common sense and urgently needed reallocation of public resources? The answer is an "iron triangle" of big defense contractors, Pentagon elites, and a corrupt and dysfunctional political system. Only a sustained revolt of the American public and a determined mass movement demanding a peace economy and a Green New Deal can turn the tide.²²

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²⁰ Jon Rynn, *Manufacturing Green Prosperity: The Power to Rebuild the American Middle Class*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010.

²¹ *Manufacturing Green Prosperity*

²² *The Middle Class Fights Back*