**Militaristic delusions**

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Despite a disagreement over some amendments in the Senate, the United States Congress is poised to pass a $778 billion military budget bill for 2022. As they have been doing year after year, our elected officials are preparing to hand the lion’s share – over 65 percent – of federal discretionary spending to the US war machine, even as they wring their hands over spending a mere quarter of that amount on the Build Back Better Act.

The US military’s incredible record of systematic failure – most recently its final trouncing by the Taliban after twenty years of death, destruction and lies in Afghanistan – cries out for a top-to-bottom review of its dominant role in US foreign policy and a radical reassessment of its proper place in Congress’s budget priorities.

Instead, year after year, members of Congress hand over the largest share of our nation’s resources to this corrupt institution, with minimal scrutiny and no apparent fear of accountability when it comes to their own reelection. Members of Congress still see it as a ‘safe’ political call to carelessly whip out their rubber-stamps and vote for however many hundreds of billions in funding Pentagon and arms industry lobbyists have persuaded the Armed Services Committees they should cough up.

Let’s make no mistake about this: Congress’s choice to keep investing in a massive, ineffective and absurdly expensive war machine has nothing to do with ‘national security’ as most people understand it, or ‘defense’ as the dictionary defines it.

US society does face critical threats to our security, including the climate crisis, systemic racism, erosion of voting rights, gun violence, grave inequalities and the corporate hijacking of political power. But one problem we fortunately do not have is the threat of attack or invasion by a rampant global aggressor or, in fact, by any other country at all.

Maintaining a war machine that outspends the 12 or 13 next largest militaries in the world combined actually makes us less safe, as each new administration inherits the delusion that the United States’ overwhelmingly destructive military power can, and therefore should, be used to confront any perceived challenge to US interests anywhere in the world – even when there is clearly no military solution and when many of the underlying problems were caused by past misapplications of US military power in the first place.

While the international challenges we face in this century require a genuine commitment to international cooperation and diplomacy, Congress allocates only $58 billion, less than 10 percent of the Pentagon budget, to the diplomatic corps of our government: the State Department. Even worse, both Democratic and Republican administrations keep filling top diplomatic posts with officials indoctrinated and steeped in policies of war and coercion, with scant experience and meager skills in the peaceful diplomacy we so desperately need.

This only perpetuates a failed foreign policy based on false choices between economic sanctions that UN officials have compared to medieval sieges, coups that destabilize countries and regions for decades, and wars and bombing campaigns that kill millions of people and leave cities in rubble, like Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria.

The end of the Cold War was a golden opportunity for the United States to reduce its forces and military budget to match its legitimate defense needs. The American public naturally expected and hoped for a ‘Peace Dividend’, and even veteran Pentagon officials told the Senate Budget Committee in 1991 that military spending could safely be cut by 50 percent over the next ten years.

But no such cut happened. US officials instead set out to exploit the post-Cold War ‘Power Dividend’, a huge military imbalance in favor of the United States, by developing rationales for using military force more freely and widely around the world. During the transition to the new Clinton administration, Madeleine Albright famously asked Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell, “What’s the point of having this superb military you’re always talking about if we can’t use it?”

In 1999, as Secretary of State under President Clinton, Albright got her wish, running roughshod over the UN Charter with an illegal war to carve out an independent Kosovo from the ruins of Yugoslavia.

The UN Charter clearly prohibits the threat or use of military force except in cases of self-defense or when the UN Security Council takes military action “to maintain or restore international peace and security.” This was neither. When UK Foreign Secretary Robin Cook told Albright his government was “having trouble with our lawyers” over NATO’s illegal war plan, Albright crassly told him to “get new lawyers.”

Twenty-two years later, Kosovo is the third-poorest country in Europe (after Moldova and post-coup Ukraine) and its independence is still not recognized by 96 countries. Hashim Thaci, Albright’s hand-picked main ally in Kosovo and later its president, is awaiting trial in an international court at the Hague, charged with murdering at least 300 civilians under cover of NATO bombing in 1999 to extract and sell their internal organs on the international transplant market.

Clinton and Albright’s gruesome and illegal war set the precedent for more illegal US wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and elsewhere, with equally devastating and horrific results. But America’s failed wars have not led Congress or successive administrations to seriously rethink the US decision to rely on illegal threats and uses of military force to project US power all over the world, nor have they reined in the trillions of dollars invested in these imperial ambitions.

Instead, in the upside-down world of institutionally corrupt US politics, a generation of failed and pointlessly destructive wars have had the perverse effect of normalizing even more expensive military budgets than during the Cold War, and reducing congressional debate to questions of how many more of each useless weapons system they should force US taxpayers to foot the bill for.

It seems that no amount of killing, torture, mass destruction or lives ruined in the real world can shake the militaristic delusions of America’s political class, as long as the ‘Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex’ (President Eisenhower’s original wording) is reaping the benefits.

Excerpted: ‘How Congress Loots the Treasury for the Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org