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Trump's New Era of Militarism and Mendacity

By Melvin Goodman
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There is no better introduction to the militarism and callousness of the Trump era than the budget proposal for 2018. Much has been written about the miserly cuts to Meals on Wheels, housing aid, and other community assistance, but it's just as important to examine the unjustified and unnecessary increases in defense spending. The Trump budget is clearly designed to enable another cycle of militarized national security policy and, in the words of Steve Bannon, to “deconstruct the administrative state.”

In April 1953, soon after the death of Joseph Stalin, President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave his “cross of Iron” speech, warning against “destroying from within what you are trying to defend from without.” Eisenhower wanted to avoid the enormous domestic price that would accompany unwarranted military spending. And military spending, he emphasized, meant “spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.” This is exactly what Trump is calling for in a federal budget that takes direct aim at scientific and medical research, the endowments for the arts and humanities, and the block grants for food and housing support. Even the Department of Energy's tiny program to help insulate the houses of the poor would be eliminated.

Meanwhile, the over-financed military will received an increase of \$54 billion, which is equal to the former budget of the Department of State as well as the entire defense budget of Russia. Defense spending and procurement should be linked to actual threats to the United States, which

faces no existential threat. If this were done, Trump's administration would have to take into account that the United States is the only country in the world with a global military presence that can project air and naval power to every far corner. The Russian navy is an operational backwater, and the Chinese navy is a regional one, not global. There is no air force to rival the U.S. Air Force, and no other country has huge military bases the world over or even access to countless ports and anchorages. As a result, no other country has used lethal military power so often and so far from its borders in pursuit of dubious security interests.

The sad reality is that every aspect of the Pentagon's budget, including research and development, procurement, operations and maintenance, and infrastructure, could be scrutinized for additional savings. The excessive spending on the Air Force is the most wasteful of all military expenditures. The Air Force is obsessed with fighter superiority in an era without a threat. The Air Force has not been threatened by air power since the end of the Second World War, and the U.S. Air Force holds an advantage over any combination of air powers. There was no adversary for the F-22, the world's most effective and lethal air-to-air combat aircraft, but the program was killed in 2011 to make way for the more costly and contentious F-35, the Pentagon's most expensive weapons program. Even Senator John McCain (R-AZ) referred to the program as a "train wreck."

As with the Air Force and its dominance of the skies, the Navy has had total dominance at sea since the end of the Second World War. Even the chief of naval operations concedes that the United States enjoys a "degree of overmatch [with any potential adversary] that is extraordinary." The Navy has its own air force, its own army, and its own strategic weapons, and it is equal in size to all the navies of the world combined. The Navy has a subordinate organization, the Coast Guard, which represents the world's seventh-largest fleet. Second to the F-35 nightmare is the worst-case costs for the next generation of aircraft carriers, which Donald Trump inadvertently highlighted when he toured the USS *Gerald R. Ford*, the Navy's most expensive warship at \$14 billion. China's success with inexpensive anti-ship missiles questions the strategic suitability of U.S. aircraft carriers.

The very existence of the Marine Corps, which has more planes, ships, armored vehicles, and personnel than the entire British military, is questionable. The Marines have not conducted an amphibious landing in 65 years, and there is no other nation in the world that has such a Corps in terms of numbers and capabilities. The Marines' V-22 Osprey, a futuristic vertical takeoff and landing hybrid aircraft is neither reliable nor safe, and even President George H.W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney tried to kill the program 25 years ago. The Marine version of the F-35, with an expensive and unwieldy vertical take-off and landing program, should be canceled.

The budget proposal does not address how the Pentagon would spend its latest windfall, but surely there will be unneeded increases for our huge nuclear force, which could be significantly reduced. Other nuclear powers such as Britain, France, China, and even Israel, India, and Pakistan, believe that 200-300 nuclear weapons are sufficient for deterrence. Several years ago two U.S. Air Force officers wrote an authoritative essay that pointed specifically to 331 nuclear weapons as providing an assured deterrence capability. But Russia and the United States have thousands of warheads; Russian President Vladimir wants to cut the inventory, but Donald

Trump wants to keep building. Trump had to interrupt a phone call with Putin last month in order to learn about the New START Treaty that the Kremlin would like to use as a stepping stone to a round of deeper cuts in the U.S. and Russian arsenals. Trump was uninterested.

President Eisenhower was spot-on in describing the social costs of defense spending and in warning that “humanity was hanging from a cross of iron.” In view of the counterproductive use of U.S. military power over the past two decades in North Africa, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia, cutting the defense budget would be a realistic way to begin to reduce the operational tempo of the U.S. military, control the deficit, and reorder U.S. priorities. The United States is in an arms race with itself; it must be stopped.