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## ***The United States is First in War, But Trailing in Crucial Aspects of Modern Civilization***

Maybe those delirious crowds chanting “USA, USA” have got something. When it comes to military power, the United States reigns supreme. Newsweek reported in March 2018: “The United States has the strongest military in the world,” with more than two million military personnel and vast numbers of the most advanced nuclear missiles, military aircraft, warships, tanks, and other modern weapons of war. Furthermore, as the New York Times noted, “the United States also has a global presence unlike any other nation, with about 200,000 active duty troops deployed in more than 170 countries.” This presence includes some 800 overseas U.S. military bases.

In 2017 (the last year for which global figures are available), the U.S. government accounted for more than a third of the world’s military expenditures—more than the next seven highest-spending countries combined. Not satisfied, however, President Trump and Congress pushed through a mammoth increase in the annual U.S. military budget in August 2018, raising it to \$717 billion. Maintaining the U.S. status as “No. 1” in war and war preparations comes at a very high price.

That price is not only paid in dollars—plus massive death and suffering in warfare—but in the impoverishment of other key sectors of American life. After all, this lavish outlay on the military now constitutes about two-thirds of the U.S. government’s discretionary spending. And these other sectors of American life are in big trouble.

Let’s consider education. The gold standard for evaluation seems to be the Program for International Student Assessment of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which tests 15-year-old students every few years. The last test, which

occurred in 2015 and involved 540,000 students in 72 nations and regions, found that U.S. students ranked 24<sup>th</sup> in reading, 25<sup>th</sup> in science, and 41<sup>st</sup> in mathematics. When the scores in these three areas were combined, U.S. students ranked 31<sup>st</sup>—behind the students of Slovenia, Poland, Russia, and Vietnam.

The educational attainments among many other Americans are also dismal. An estimated 30 million adult Americans cannot read, write, or do basic math above a third grade level. Literacy has different definitions and, for this reason among others, estimates vary about the level of illiteracy in the United States. But one of the most favorable rankings of the United States for literacy places it in a tie with numerous other nations for 26<sup>th</sup>; the worst places it at 125<sup>th</sup>.

The U.S. healthcare system also fares poorly compared to that of other nations. A 2017 study of healthcare systems in 11 advanced industrial countries by the Commonwealth Fund found that the United States ranked at the very bottom of the list. Furthermore, numerous nations with far less “advanced” economies have superior healthcare systems to that of the United States. According to the World Health Organization, the U.S. healthcare system ranks 37<sup>th</sup> among countries—behind that of Colombia, Cyprus, and Morocco.

Not surprisingly, American health is relatively poor. The infant mortality rate in the United States is higher than in 54 other lands, including Belarus, Cuba, Greece, and French Polynesia. According to the World Cancer Research Fund, the United States has the 5<sup>th</sup> highest cancer rate of the 50 countries it studied. For the past few years, as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported, U.S. life expectancy has been declining and, today, the United States reportedly ranks 53<sup>rd</sup> among 100 nations in life expectancy.

Despite the fact that the United States is the world’s richest nation, it also has an unusually high level of poverty. According to a 2017 UNICEF report, more than 29 percent of American children live in impoverished circumstances, placing the United States 35<sup>th</sup> in childhood poverty among the 41 richest nations. Indeed, the United States has a higher percentage of its people living in poverty (15.1 percent) than 41 other countries, including Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Thailand, Brazil, and Sri Lanka.

Nor does the United States rate very well among nations on environmental issues. According to the Environmental Performance Index, produced by Yale University and Columbia University in 2018, the United States placed 27<sup>th</sup> among the countries it ranked on environmental health and ecosystem vitality. The Social Progress Index, another well-respected survey that rates countries on their environmental records, ranked the United

States 36th in wastewater treatment, 39th in access to at least basic drinking water, and 73rd in greenhouse gas emissions.

Actually, the findings of the Social Progress Index are roughly the same as other evaluators in a broad range of areas. Its 2018 report concluded that that the United States ranked 63rd in primary school enrollment, 61st in secondary school enrollment, 76th in access to quality education, 40th in child mortality rate, 62nd in maternity mortality rate, 36th in access to essential health services, 74th in access to quality healthcare, and 35th in life expectancy at age 60. In addition, it rated the United States as 33rd in political killings and torture, 88th in homicide rate, 47th in political rights, and 67th in discrimination and violence against minorities. All in all, there's nothing here to cheer about.

Does the U.S. government's priority for military spending explain, at least partially, the discrepancy between the worldwide preeminence of the U.S. armed forces and the feeble global standing of major American domestic institutions? Back in April 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower pointed to their connection. Addressing the American Society of Newspaper editors, he declared: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed." A militarized world "is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children." People infatuated with military supremacy should give that some thought.