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Governments spend trillions on weapons, claim there is no money for health care

As governments around the world last year rejected measures to contain COVID-19 on the grounds that there was no money to pay for them, the world spent unprecedented sums on nuclear weapons, tanks and missiles.

The United States, which spends more on its military than the next 10 countries combined, increased its military spending by 4.4 percent compared to the year before. The country outlaid some \$778 billion on its military last year alone.



An F/A-18E Super Hornet lands on the flight deck of the USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), as USS Nimitz (CVN 68) steams alongside in the South China Sea, Monday, July 6, 2020. (Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Samantha Jetzer/U.S. Navy via AP)

The data comes from an annual report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which has tracked global military spending going back over 30 years.

Total global military spending rose to nearly \$2 trillion last year, up 2.6 percent from a year ago, after adjusting for inflation.

Amazingly, this growth took place even as world economic output shrank by 4.4 percent. As a result, military spending as a share of the global economy surged by the highest level in a decade.

The SIPRI noted that the massive surge in US military spending is attributed to the policy—now spanning three presidents—of massively building up its military and conventional forces in preparation for “great power conflicts” with Russia and China.

“The recent increases in US military spending can be primarily attributed to heavy investment in research and development, and several long-term projects such as modernizing the US nuclear arsenal and large-scale arms procurement,” said Alexandra Marksteiner, a researcher with SIPRI.

“This reflects growing concerns over perceived threats from strategic competitors such as China and Russia,” she added.

This trend is only continuing. Earlier this month, the Biden administration requested the largest military budget in US history, demanding \$753 billion in annual military spending. The budget calls for additional spending on nuclear weapons, the upgrading of the country’s nuclear-capable ballistic submarine fleet and the development of a whole new range of long-range weapons targeting Russia and China.

After coming to office pledging to restrict nuclear weapons, the Obama administration initiated a multitrillion-dollar “nuclear modernization” program, which was only accelerated under Trump and now Biden. It involves developing a whole range of nuclear weapons and the delivery systems—from cruise missiles to ballistic missiles, to the high-tech bombers and submarines—that would launch them in the event of a world war.

However, the surge in spending has extended to all of the imperialist powers. “Nearly all members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) saw their military burden rise

in 2020. As a result, 12 NATO members spent 2 percent or more of their GDP on their militaries, the Alliance's guideline spending target, compared with 9 members in 2019."

The report noted that France, whose President Emmanuel Macron declared the population must "learn to live with" COVID-19, "passed the 2 percent [military spending] threshold for the first time since 2009." The country's military spending surged by 2.9 percent in 2020.

In the UK, where Prime Minister Boris Johnson last November declared, "No more f***ing lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!" military spending likewise rose by 2.9 percent, putting the country on the list of the top five biggest spenders.

Germany, which is rapidly rearming as it declares that it must once again become a "great power," had its military spending expand by 5.2 percent, putting the figure 28 percent higher than in 2011.

After the United States left the Intermediate Range Nuclear forces treaty last year, the world has been locked in a global arms race, with Russia and China, the targets of the US-NATO military buildup. They responded by increasing their own military spending, albeit at a slower pace than the global average.

And India, which has shown itself totally unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic as thousands die in the streets without access to medical care, increased its military spending by two percent.

The fact that the same governments, who claimed there was "no money" to pay for lockdowns to save lives in the COVID-19 pandemic, found trillions to shell out to arms manufacturers makes clear what the real priorities of the capitalist system are.

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