

Despite a \$ 22 Trillion National Debt, America Is on a Military Spending Spree. 800 Overseas US Military Bases

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While the national debt of the United States was recorded at 22.03 trillion as of April 2019, Washington's going ahead with its hawkish policies worldwide with recent NATO summit pushing for further unity against China, Russia and Iran. NATO's annual overall military budget was US\$ 957 billion in 2017 where the US's share was US\$ 686 billion, accounting for 72 percent of the total. This number is pressed by the US to rise in the years to come.

According to The Guardian, Trump takes more than \$1tn in taxpayer money and allocates \$750bn to the military. In other words, out of every taxpayer dollar, 62 cents go to the military and Department of Homeland Security and seven cents to Veterans affairs. It leaves just 31 cents for all the rest: education, job training, community economic development, housing, safe drinking water and clear air, health and science research and the prevention of war through diplomacy and humanitarian aid.

The Trump budget finds vast billions for militarization, while it cuts “smaller” poverty alleviation projects and other programs, claiming the goal is to save money.

Rutherford Institute's founder and director John W. WhiteHead writes in his institute's website that the American nation is being preyed upon by a military industrial complex that is propped up by war profiteers, corrupt politicians and foreign governments. He remarks:

“Don't be fooled into thinking that your hard-earned tax dollars are being used for national security and urgent military needs”.

He writes “you know what happens to tax dollars that are left over at the end of the government's fiscal year? Government agencies – including the Department of Defense – go on a ‘use it or lose it’ spending spree so they can justify asking for money in the next fiscal year”.

“We are talking about \$97 billion worth of wasteful spending”

He maintains that the nation's educational system is pathetic, the infrastructure is antiquated and growing more outdated by the day and the health system is overpriced and inaccessible to those who need it most.

The tax cuts on super-rich, outflow of huge sums in interest payment for debt and more

spending are plunging the US economy into a new crisis, according to many authors. The US economy faces a deficit which means the spending especially on military and defence is far exceeding the tax revenues.

In 2017, US spent US\$ 685,957 billion with 3.6 of its GDP on military spending while the UK stood second at US\$ 55,237 billion with 2.1 per cent of GDP. France and Germany allocated US\$ 45,927 billion and 45,472 billion respectively with 1.8 and 1.2 percent of their GDPs. The NATO member states are pressured for raising their defense spending to 2 percent and gradually up to 4 percent in five years.

According to a study regarding world powers' overseas military bases

- China retains twelve military bases;
- France runs nine military bases including in Germany, Lebanon and UAE;
- Germany has two military bases in France and United States;
- India has seven bases including in Tajikistan and Maldives;
- Israel possesses one military base in Syria's Golan Heights;
- Pakistan has a military center with 1,180 personnel in Saudi Arabia;
- Russia runs eight military facilities including in Armenia, Georgia, Syria and some Central Asian countries;
- UK controls ten military bases including in Bahrain, Canada, Germany, Singapore and Qatar;
- the US is leading nearly 800 military bases across the world that run in full swing with the highest budget.

In other words, the US possesses up to 95 per cent of the world's military bases. The Department of Defense says that its locations include 164 countries. Put another way, it has a military presence of some sort in approximately 84 percent of the nations on this planet.

The annual cost of deploying US military personnel overseas, as well as maintaining and running those foreign bases, tops out at an estimated US\$ 150 billion annually. The US bases abroad cost upwards of US\$ 50 billion only for building and maintenance, which is enough to address pressing needs at home in education, health care, housing and infrastructure.

In 2017 and 2018, the world's largest military spenders were the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and India. The UK took over France as sixth largest spender in 2018 while Japan and Germany stood at eighth and ninth positions.

In early 2018, Pentagon released a report saying that Afghan war costs US\$ 45 billion to taxpayers in the preceding year. Of this amount, US\$ 5 billion has been spent on Afghan forces, US\$ 13 billion towards US forces in Afghanistan and the rest on economic aid.

But these costs are far lower than the time when the US military was highly engaged in Afghanistan. With nearly 100,000 soldiers in the country from 2010 to 2012, the price for American taxpayers surpassed US\$ 100 billion each year. For now, there are around 16,000 US troops in Afghanistan. Despite hundreds of billions of dollars have gone into Afghanistan, the US admits it failed in war against militants in Afghanistan.

In November 2018, another study published by CNBC reported that America has spent US\$

5.9 trillion on wars in the Middle East and Asia since 2001 including in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. The study also reveals that more than 500,000 people have been killed in the wars and nearly 10 million people have been displaced due to violence.

The US has reportedly spent US\$ 1.07 trillion in Afghanistan since 2001 which include Overseas Contingency Operations funds dedicated to Afghanistan, costs on the base budget of the Department of Defense and increase to the budget of the Department of Veteran Affairs.

In Afghanistan, the US costs of war in 2001 commenced with US\$ 37.3 billion that soared to US\$ 57.3 billion in 2007 and US\$ 100 billion in 2009. The year with record spending was 2010 with US\$ 112.7 billion that slightly plummeted to US\$ 110.4 billion in 2011 but took downwards trend in the later years.

Due to skyrocketing military costs on the US government, Trump Administration recently decided to pack up some of its military bases in Afghanistan and Middle East to diminish expenditures, though it doesn't mean the wars would end at all.

According to Afghanistan Analysts Network, the US Congress has appropriated more than US\$ 126 billion in aid for Afghanistan since financial year 2002, with almost 63 percent for security and 28 percent for development and the remainder for civilian operations, mostly budgetary assistance and humanitarian aid. Alongside the US aid, many world countries have pumped millions of dollars in development aids, but what is evident for insiders and outsiders is that a trickle of those funds has actually gone into Afghanistan's reconstruction.

With eighteen years into Afghan war, the security is deteriorating; Afghan air force is ill-equipped; poppy cultivation is on the rise; roads and highways are dilapidated or unconstructed; no mediocre hospital and health care has been established; weekly conflict casualties hit 150-250; electricity is still imported from Central Asian countries; economy remains dependent upon imports; unemployment rate is at its peak; more than three quarters of population live under poverty line and many, many more miseries persist or aggravate.

The US boasts of being the largest multi-billion dollar donor for Afghanistan, but if one takes a deeper look at the living standards of majority and the overall conditions, it can be immediately grasped that less than half of that exaggerated fund has been consumed. The US-made government of Afghanistan has deliberately been left behind to rank as the first corrupt country in the world. Thanks to the same unaddressed pervasive corruption, a hefty amount of that fund has been either directed back to the US hands or embezzled by senior Afghan officials.

Afghanistan's new Living Conditions Survey shows that poverty is more widespread today than it was immediately after the fall of Taliban regime, or in other words, in the early days of US invasion.

Next month, Kabul will host a Consultative Loya Jirga attended by around 2,000 representatives from Afghanistan which will cost the Afghan Ministry of Finance AF 369 million (equivalent to five million US\$). Even as the past has proved that these events are only symbolic and further complicating the achievement of peace, a country with great majority under poverty line doesn't deserve to organize such costly gatherings.

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