

War and the Destruction of Social Infrastructure in America

By [Andre Damon](#)

Global Research, January 28, 2016
[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Poverty & Social Inequality](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

As the water crisis in Flint, Michigan continues to occupy national headlines in the United States, scientists and environmental officials have revealed a dirty secret of American life: the poisoning of drinking water with toxic chemicals is not unique to Flint, Michigan, but takes place all over the country.

Counties in Louisiana and Texas, as well as the cities of Baltimore, Maryland; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Washington D.C. and Boston, Massachusetts all reported that substantial numbers of children have been exposed to elevated lead levels, largely through municipal drinking water.

This week, the head environmental regulator in the state of Ohio called national water regulations “broken,” saying that they dramatically understate the true scale of lead poisoning in American cities. As Virginia Tech researcher Marc Edwards put it, “Because of the smoke-and-mirrors testing, Flint is meeting the standard even as national guardsmen walk the street.”

Many water pipes in the United States are over 100 years old, and a large number of cities still have 100 percent lead plumbing.

The reasons are not hard to find. According to the Congressional Budget Office, public capital investment in transportation and water infrastructure, already underfunded for decades, has been slashed by 23 percent since its peak in 2003.

The year 2003 is significant as it coincides with the beginning of the illegal invasion of Iraq by the Bush administration. The “war on terror” has entailed a vast expansion of the military at the same time that spending on anything not directly related to the accumulation of wealth by the financial aristocracy has suffered from continual cutbacks.

The response of the political establishment to the poisoning of tens of thousands of people in Flint and potentially millions more throughout the United States has been characterized by indifference. The politicians responsible, from Michigan Governor Rick Snyder to local Democratic Party officials and the Obama administration, pull long faces, pretend to take responsibility or seek to shift blame, while doing nothing to address the issue.

Nowhere is there a single politician who has responded to the disaster by demanding what is clearly required: the immediate allocation of a relatively modest sum, \$273 billion according to the Environmental Protection Agency, to replace all of the municipal lead pipes in the US. This is equivalent to the annual spending on the US Army, just one of the four

branches of the US military. There is simply “no money” for such a proposal to be considered, much less approved.

While politicians pore over any allocation of resources for social spending with a fine tooth comb, almost unimaginable sums are made available to the military without a second thought. How many know that the US military is shelling out over a trillion dollars to defense contractor Lockheed Martin to fund its beleaguered F-35 program? Or that it is spending another trillion dollars to “modernize” its nuclear arsenal by making atomic bombs smaller and more maneuverable?

The US spends more on its military, as Obama boasted in his most recent State of the Union address, than the next eight countries combined. Yet more is continuously demanded.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) recently evaluated the Defense Department’s so-called pivot to Asia, in which military hardware has been either procured or restationed in the Western Pacific to counter the economic and military rise of China. Strikingly, the CSIS report gave the US military a failing grade. It called for the expansion and development of every aspect of US military capacity in the Pacific if it was to maintain superiority in the event of a shooting war with China.

Since the early 1990s, the US military has operated on the basis of a strategic doctrine that it will allow the existence of no other power that can challenge its military authority on even a regional level. That means that the US must be able to field such overwhelming military force that it would be able to defeat another major power, such as China, in a conventional war far away from the borders of the US.

This is a recipe for the bleeding white of American society in an insane attempt to maintain its military dominance, which can only end in catastrophe for the population of the US and the entire world.

Of course, it would be simplistic to say that war is the only cause of America’s social problems. The most conspicuous element of life in the US continues to be the vast chasm between the rich and the poor. However, the rise of war and militarism are interrelated and have a common root.

In response to the the longterm decline in the global position of American capitalism, the American ruling class responded on the one hand by promoting a wave of financial speculation, mergers and acquisitions, wage cuts, and the transfer of social wealth from the great majority of the population to its own pockets. On the other hand, it has sought to use its predominant military power to counteract the consequences of its economic decline by force.

In the insane and socially destructive priorities of the American ruling class, one sees in concentrated form the inextricable connection between war and capitalism, and at the same time the inextricable connection between the fight for all the social rights of the working class and the struggle against imperialism.

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