

Syria Today, Peace Tomorrow

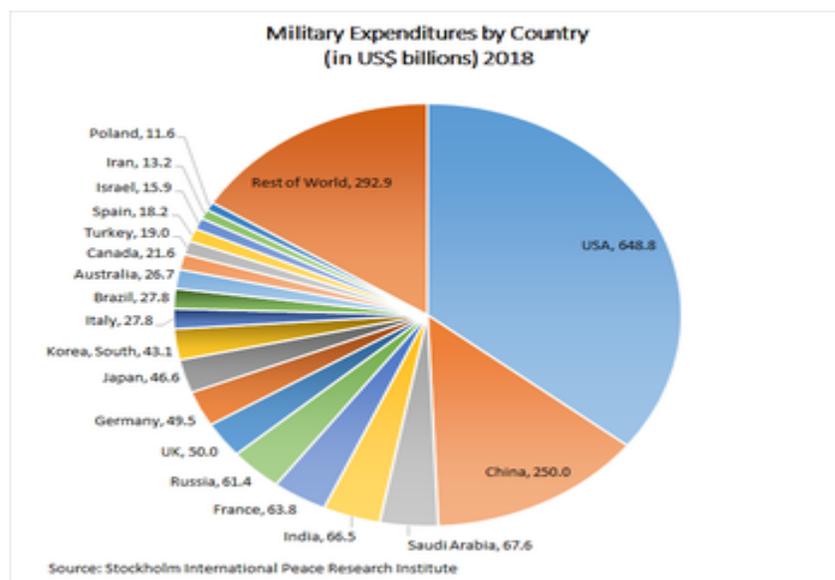
Top Republicans have joined Democrats in blasting President Trump's withdrawal from Syria as betraying Kurdish allies, empowering ISIS, and ceding influence in the region to Russia. But neither side is talking about world peace and U.S. militarism. Bringing our troops home from the Middle East, and elsewhere, is not only the right thing to do, this along with reallocating military spending, will make good on his campaign promise to put America first.

Critics will say that the U.S. should move slowly and find diplomatic solutions to places like Syria. This is true but it cannot be an excuse for maintaining the status quo of indefinite military occupation, human rights violation and excessive spending.

Others will say that we are clearing space for our adversaries, the Russians, to take over foreign turf. But if we are serious about leading on peace, we must have the courage to condemn and disincentivize their militarism too.

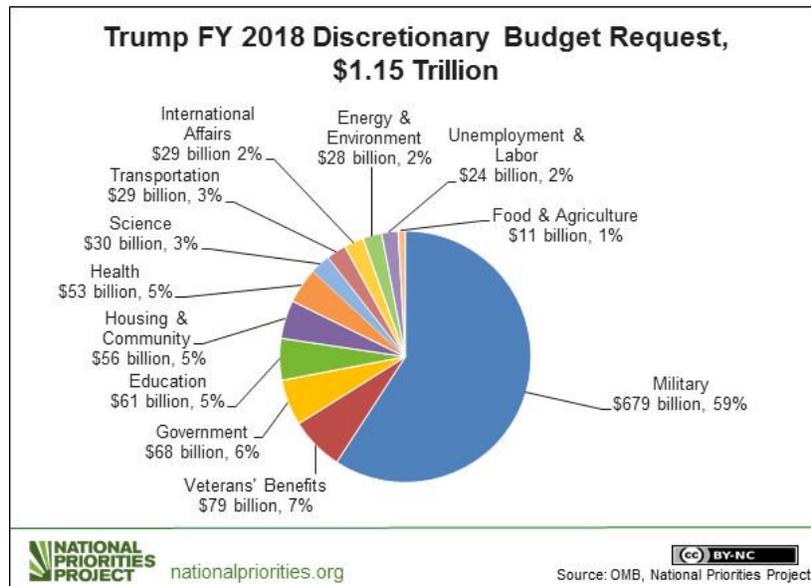
Still others will claim that disengaging our military is a betrayal of our troops. But what better way to support them than by investing in their welfare and the welfare of their families here at home?

If the "Make America Great" campaign slogan meant anything, it meant recognizing the economic price of war. The military industrial complex is expensive. In 2018, the USA spent \$648.8 billion to fight wars, keep boots on the ground, and maintain military bases on foreign soil. America foots a much larger portion of the tab than other nations including China, Russia, and the UK for policing the world and supporting repressive dictators.



More money on military expenditures means less money on other things that matter to Americans like job creation, fighting opioid addiction and the mental health crisis, and greater support for farmers, families, and small businesses.

During a phone call, Mr. Trump reportedly told Turkish President Erdogan that he would rather spend American dollars on domestic issues than on helping others fight their battles. Right now, the lion's share of the U.S. budget goes to military spending, and the 2018 discretionary budget request would only make matters worse. So, if Mr. Trump wants to be the peace president and address homegrown matters we need to see a new budget that reallocates more money to food and agriculture, unemployment and labor, veterans' benefits, and to other issues that concern ordinary Americans.



President Dwight D. Eisenhower once warned us about the military industrial complex, skeptical of the post-Cold War consensus that America needs to be engaged militarily. This raises tough questions: What are the results of U.S. militarism? Has it generally been a force for peace or subjugation and tyranny? Who benefits most from it? While we scrutinize the abruptness with which Mr. Trump withdrew troops from Syria, and the pace at which such a removal should have been undertaken, we need to recall Mr. Eisenhower's sage warning.

We also need to remember that by rolling back the costly U.S. war machine, and leading on global peace, the President of the United States could free up billions of dollars to improve the lives of hardworking and patriotic Americans here at home including war veterans and their families. Such visionary action could also redirect funds towards diplomacy, peacemaking, and development. Rather than choosing between being the "world's policeman" and "nativist isolationism," we could truly become the "shining light on the hill," giving the world an example of how a rich nation with might can lead on a global peace effort.

In early October, Mr. Trump tweeted that "it is time for us to get out of these ridiculous Endless Wars, many of them tribal, and bring our soldiers home." We agree this. But it is also time to reckon with the U.S.'s role in creating, sustaining and expanding these wars. We have very dirty hands. And somebody—Trump or the next president— must take charge of cleaning up our mess.

Mr. Trump has made it known that he wants a Nobel Peace prize for opening up dialogue with longstanding American enemies such as North Korea. But it will take much more than photo ops with Kim Jong-un to be worthy of this honor. If the president stays the course on bringing our troops home from Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, takes the really courageous step of redirecting money away from excessive military spending and to the issues that everyday Americans care about, and he takes the lead on calling for global peace, he might have a better shot at earning this honor.