

Sleepwalking into a New Arms Race

The West's current hysteria about "Russian aggression" ignores the long history of real Western aggression against Russia, now underscored by plans to sharply increase spending on nuclear weapons, note Chuck Spinney and Pierre Sprey.

By Chuck Spinney and Pierre Sprey

The Nuclear Question is becoming increasingly obfuscated by spin and lobbying as the West sleepwalks into Cold War II – a walk made all the more dangerous when the loose lips of the U.S. tweeter-in-chief announced that another nuclear arms race is a great idea (see [link](#), [link](#), and [link](#)).

Two Cold War II issues are central and almost never addressed: What will be the Russians' understanding of all the propaganda surrounding the Nuclear Question and the looming American defense spend-up? And how might they act on this understanding?

Barack Obama first outlined his vision for nuclear disarmament in a [speech](#) in Prague on April 5, 2009, less than three months after becoming President. This speech became the basis for what eventually became the [New Start](#) nuclear arms limitation treaty.

But Mr. Obama also opened the door for the modernization of our nuclear forces with this pregnant statement: "To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same. Make no mistake: As long as these weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary, and guarantee that defense to our allies -- including the Czech Republic."

Why call for nuclear disarmament while opening the door to nuclear rearmament?

Obama's speech [paved the way](#) to his Nobel Peace Prize in October 2009, but he was also trying to manipulate the domestic politics of the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex (MICC). By Dec. 15, 2009, 41 Senators sent a letter to President Obama saying that further reductions of the nuclear arsenal [would be acceptable only if](#) accompanied by "a significant program to modernize our nuclear deterrent."

Viewed in retrospect, it is clear that the new President – either naively or cynically – acquiesced to that senatorial spending demand in order to keep the powerful nuclear laboratories and their allies in the defense industry and Congress from lobbying against his new arms limitation treaty.

In April 2009, Obama took the first steps that launched a huge spending plan to modernize U.S. nuclear forces across the board. Eight years later, during his first call to President Putin on Jan. 28, 2017, President Trump locked that program in place by denouncing Obama's New START as a "bad deal," saying it favored Russia.

A particularly dangerous component of the Obama nuclear spending plan is the acquisition of low-yield precision-guided nuclear bombs/warheads. These weapons only make sense within a radical strategy for actually fighting a nuclear war – as opposed to the almost universally accepted idea that our nuclear arsenal exists only to *deter* any thought of using these weapons – since actual use is unthinkable, with profoundly unknowable consequences.

Last December, the prestigious Defense Science Board – an organization replete with members closely connected to the nuclear labs and their defense industry allies – added its imprimatur to this radical strategy by resurrecting the old and discredited ideas of limited nuclear options (LNOs). LNOs are based on the unproven – and unprovable – hypothesis that a president could actually detonate a few nukes to control a gradually escalating nuclear bombing campaign, or perhaps to implement a psychological tactic of encouraging deterrence with a few small "preventative" nuclear explosions.

Adding to Obama's expansion of our nuclear posture is President Trump's intention to fulfill his campaign promises to strengthen all nuclear offensive and defensive forces, with particular emphasis on spending a lot more for the ballistic missile defense (BMD) program – which implies expanding the current deployments of BMD weapons in eastern Europe within a few hundred miles of the Russian border.

Early cost estimates – really guesses – for Obama's entire nuclear modernization program are for one trillion dollars over the next 30 years. No missile defense costs are included in this estimate – nor are the costs of Trump's promised expansions.

The components of the currently authorized program – e.g., a new bomber, a new ballistic missile carrying submarine, a new ICBM, a new air-launched cruise missile, a complete remanufacturing upgrade of the existing B-61 dual-yield tactical nuclear bomb that also adds a precision guidance kit, a new family of missile warheads, new nuclear warhead production facilities, and a massive array of new large-scale intelligence, surveillance, command and control systems to manage these forces – are all in the early stages of development.

Cost Overruns, Anyone?

Assuming business as usual continues in the Pentagon, the one-trillion dollar estimate is really a typical front-loaded or “buy-in” estimate intended to stick the camel’s nose in the acquisition tent by deliberately understating future costs while over-promising future benefits.

The money for all of these programs is just beginning to flow into hundreds of congressional districts. As the torrent of money builds up over the next decade, the flood of sub-contracting money and jobs in hundreds of congressional districts guarantees the entire nuclear spend-up will acquire a political life of its own – and the taxpayer will be burdened with yet another unstoppable behemoth.

Readers who doubt this outcome need only look at how the problem-plagued F-35 Strike Fighter lives on, resisting reductions in money flows and even receiving congressional add-ons, despite mind-numbing effectiveness shortfalls, technical failures and unending schedule delays (e.g., see this recent [60-page report](#) by the Pentagon’s Director of Operational Test and Evaluation).

Locking hundreds of congressmen and senators into this nuclear modernization program guarantees that the money flow and cost overruns will increase without interference for the next 30 to 50 years. Our many years of observing and analyzing DoD’s largest politically-engineered acquisitions makes it obvious that the initial buy-in guess of a trillion dollar total will turn into at least a three trillion dollar price tag by the end of three decades. In short, the Pentagon is planting the seed money for another F-35-like disaster, only this time on steroids.

But there is more. Once this multi-trillion dollar, self-sustaining money gusher is sluicing steadily into the boiler rooms of the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex (MICC), U.S. force deployments, alliances, treaties and threat assessments will be shaped even more heavily than now to support the domestic politics of ever-increasing spending for the MICC. Despite this, our nation’s foreign policy mandarins seeking to steer the ship of state from their perch on Mount Olympus will remain oblivious to the fact that their “policy” steering wheel is not connected to the ship’s rudder.

As one perceptive Pentagon wag succinctly observed years ago, “In the real world, foreign policy stops at the water’s edge,” i.e., the domestic politics of the MICC always trump foreign policy. President Eisenhower understood this, though he did nothing about it before leaving office.

As of now, no one in the MICC really gives a damn how the Russians (or the Chinese) might actually react to America’s looming nuclear (and non-nuclear) spending binge. This is clearly seen in the cognitive dissonance of the Obama

Defense Department: It was torn between insisting the Russians are not the target of the nuclear program but at the same time justifying the nuclear build-up as a means to counter Russian conventional aggression.

Equally revealing, a Feb. 8 editorial in the Pentagon's favored house organ, Defense News, described President Trump's upcoming Nuclear Posture Review without once mentioning the Russians or Chinese nor how they might react to the looming American spending spree. On the other hand, the editorial took great pains to explain in detail how the forces of domestic political consensus will ensure steady funding for Obama's nuclear spending plans throughout the Trump Administration years.

Do Actions Trigger Reactions?

So, how might the Russians react to the threat of increased American defense budgets? Let's try to look at the nuclear modernization program – and the looming defense spend-up – from the Russian leadership's point of view.

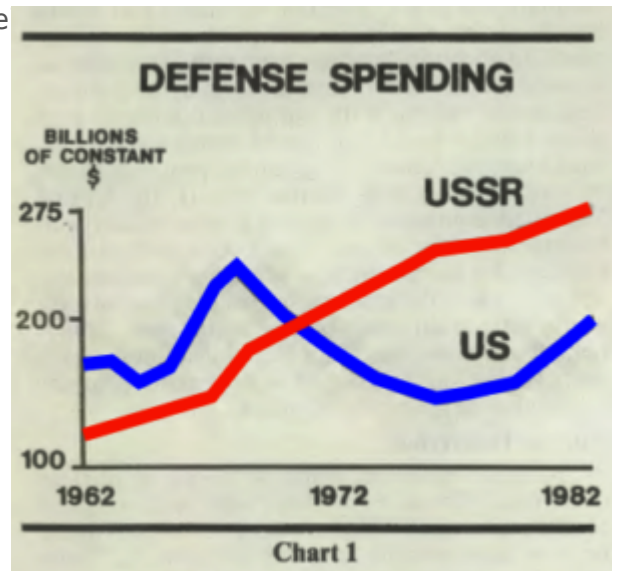
The Russians, particularly those internal political and industrial factions that benefit from Russian defense spending, are very likely to characterize the American spending program as an aggressive sharpening of the U.S. nuclear sword and a strengthening of its nuclear shield, synchronized with a threatening buildup of America's conventional force. And that will be used to argue that Russia is spending far too little on defense because it faces an existential threat due to increased American spending.

Don't laugh, this is a mirror image of the argument used successfully by President Ronald Reagan in a televised address to the nation on Nov. 22, 1982. His subject was also nuclear strategy, as well as the need to increase America's entire defense budget.

Reagan said [excerpted from pp. 3-5], "You often hear that the United States and the Soviet Union are in an arms race. The truth is that while the Soviet Union has raced, we have not. As you can see from this blue US line in constant dollars our defense spending in the 1960s went up because of Vietnam and then it went downward through much of the 1970s. Now, follow the red line, which is Soviet spending. It has gone up and up and up. ...

"The combination of the Soviets spending more and the United States spending proportionately less changed the military balance and weakened our deterrent. Today, in virtually every measure of military power, the Soviet Union enjoys a decided advantage. ... If my defense proposals are passed, it will still take five

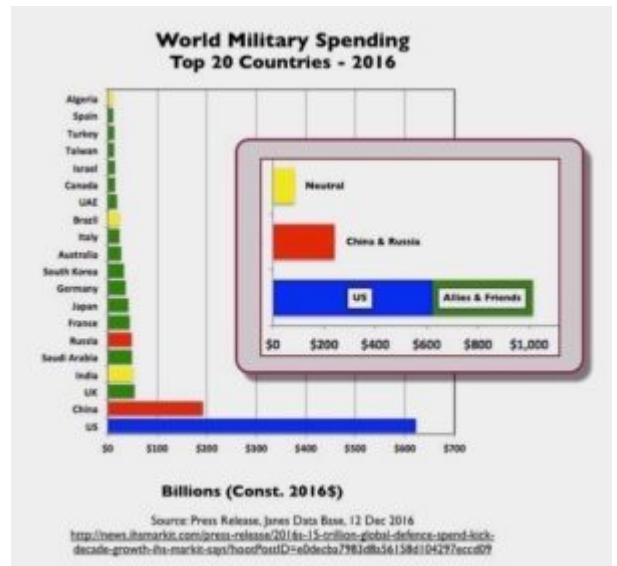
years before we come close to the Soviet level



Mirror imaging Reagan's argument, Russian defense advocates emphasizing the dangers of the U.S. spend-up are likely to point out that the United States and its allies are already spending far more on their military forces than Russia is spending. Moreover, America certainly intends to rapidly increase the size of this spending advantage, because the large new American nuclear modernization program is only part of a yet-larger long term spending buildup.

After all, have not President Trump and Sen. John McCain proposed huge increases to President Obama's defense budget to rebuild what Messrs. Trump and McCain claim is a "depleted" military (see [link 1](#) and [link 2](#) respectively)? Advocates of increased Russian defense budgets might also ask, are not Messrs. Trump and McCain declaring an emergency by calling on Congress to exempt defense spending from the spending restrictions imposed by the [Budget Control Act of 2011](#)?

Indeed, Russian politicians, echoing Mr. Reagan in 1981, might construct a graphic using the [West's own numbers](#) to prove their points, beginning perhaps with something like this:



A Russian defense advocate using the Janes' metric in Chart 2 could argue that (1) Russia is now spending slightly less than Saudi Arabia, less than India, and less than the UK; (2) the size of Russia's budget is only a quarter of China's; and (3) the size of Russia's defense budget is an astonishing one-twelfth of that of the United States!

Add to the U.S. defense budget the contributions of its allies and close friends and the spending balance in favor the U.S. and its allies to that of Russia alone becomes an astounding 21 to 1! Even if Russia could trust China to be a reliable ally – which it can't – the current spending imbalance is over four to one in favor of the U.S. and its allies on the one hand and Russia and China on the other.

Advocates of increased Russian defense spending might even argue their comparison does not suffer from the gross distortions created by Reagan's earlier chart because (1) the Ruble was not convertible into dollars in 1982 (whereas it is today), and Reagan's comparison severely overstated Soviet spending levels using an artificial exchange rate; and (2) the dollar numbers in their Chart 2 comparison start from zero, unlike the deliberately truncated dollar scale (100 to 275) Reagan used in Chart 1 to exaggerate his point.

Budget Asymmetries

Of course, from a Russian leader's point of view, the strategic threat goes well beyond the madness implied by the asymmetries in defense budgets. They might see the Trumpian expansion of both nuclear offense and missile defense as evidence the U.S. is planning to dominate Russia by preparing to fight and win a nuclear war – a radical shift from America's 50+ years of building nuclear forces only for deterrence (often referred to as Mutually Assured Destruction or MAD). Faced with such a threat, militarist factions inside Russia are likely to insist on a

rational application of the precautionary principle by the Russian nation.

That principle will dictate a response, presumably a massive Russian nuclear arms race with the United States. The obvious fact that the politically engineered U.S. nuclear program cannot be reined in or terminated by politicians in the U.S. is almost certainly understood by the Russians. But that appreciation would serve merely to magnify the sense of *menace* perceived by patriotic Russian leaders.

Bear in mind, the Russians are unlikely to view the emerging nuclear menace in isolation. For one thing, there is the toxic question of NATO's expansion and the mistrust it created. The vast majority of Russians, including former President Gorbachev, President Putin, and Prime Minister Medvedev, believe strongly that the U.S. and the West violated their verbal promises not to expand NATO eastward in return for the Soviet Union's acquiescence to the unification of Germany as a member of NATO.

Many leaders of the West have either denied any promises were made or downplayed the import of any such understandings. But reporters from the German weekly Der Spiegel discovered documents in Western archives that supported the Russian point of view, and on Nov. 26, 2009, published an investigative report concluding:

"After speaking with many of those involved and examining previously classified British and German documents in detail, SPIEGEL has concluded that there was no doubt that the West did everything it could to give the Soviets the impression that NATO membership was out of the question for countries like Poland, Hungary or Czechoslovakia."

One thing is beyond dispute: The impression or understanding or promise not to expand NATO was broken by President Bill Clinton – *largely for domestic political reasons* – making a mockery of President Gorbachev's hopeful vision of a greater European home.

Clinton announced support for NATO expansion in October of 1996, just before the November election, to garner conservative and hawk votes, the votes of Americans of Eastern European descent, and in response to an intense NATO expansion lobbying campaign mounted by the MICC – and to steal the issue from his conservative opponent Senator Robert Dole.

The expansion of NATO eastwards combined with President Bush's unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in June 2002, followed by the deployment of ABM systems to Eastern Europe certainly increased the Russians' sense of *mistrust* and *menace* regarding U.S. intentions. To this day, Putin's

speeches repeatedly refer to the broken American promises.

There is more to an appreciation of the Russian point of view. In parallel with the NATO expansion, the European Union (E.U.) expanded eastward, precipitously like an expanding cancer, beginning in 1995 and continuing to 2013. The E.U.'s exclusion of Russia from the "greater European home" further fueled an atmosphere of mistrust and menace.

A Russian Perspective

From a Russian perspective, the NATO and E.U. expansions worked to deliberately isolate and impoverish Russia – and the potential (though to date frustrated) expansion by the West into Ukraine and Georgia intensified the sense that Russia had been hoodwinked by the West.

The perception of a deliberate U.S. and E.U. campaign to cripple Russia has a history dating back to the end of the First Cold War in 1991: Russian leaders, for example, are unlikely to forget how, during the Clinton Administration, U.S. NGOs combined with American pressure, supported the extraordinarily corrupt privatization of the former Soviet state enterprises in the 1990s (aka "Shock Therapy").

In the words of the Nobel Prize winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz (June 16, 2000): "In the early 1990s, there was a debate among economists over shock therapy versus a gradualist strategy for Russia. But Larry Summers [Under Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, then Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, now Secretary] took control of the economic policy, and there was a lot of discontent with the way he was driving the policy.

"The people in Russia who believed in shock therapy were Bolsheviks—a few people at the top that rammed it down everybody's throat. They viewed the democratic process as a real impediment to reform. The grand larceny that occurred in Russia, the corruption that resulted in nine or ten people getting enormous wealth through loans-for-shares, was condoned because it allowed the reelection of Yeltsin."

And in a touch of irony, given the current hysteria over President Putin's alleged meddling in the U.S. presidential election, it gets worse. Russian leaders are also unlikely to forget American intervention on behalf of Boris Yeltsin in the Russian elections of 1996, including using American control of the International Monetary Fund to float a \$10.2 billion loan in March to 1996 to help the corrupt and malleable Boris Yeltsin to win the election in June.

So, from a Russian perspective, the recent increasingly severe U.S. sanctions are not only hypocritical, they certainly reinforce the view that the U.S.-led

campaign to cripple the Russian economy is ongoing and perhaps endless.

Moreover, the rapid, opportunistic expansion of NATO and the E.U. created a kaleidoscope of internal frictions. Now both institutions are in trouble, riven by contradictions and disharmonies. Great Britain is leaving the E.U. but will remain in NATO. Northern Europe and the E.U. bankers are imposing draconian austerity measures on Southern Europe, particularly Greece. Turkey, long a key NATO ally, is turning to Russia while being rejected by the E.U.

The destruction of Libya, Iraq and Syria, under U.S. leadership with European participation, has created an unprecedented flood of refugees into the E.U., deeply threatening the E.U.'s organizing principle of open borders. The increasing tide of European instability and chaos, accompanied by the looming specter of growing Fascist movements from Spain to Ukraine, inevitably add to the traditional Russian sense of being endangered and encircled.

That sense of endangerment is certainly heightened by a recent creepy piece of nuttiness coming out of Poland, perhaps the most Russophobic member of the E.U. and NATO. The German daily DW says Jaroslaw Kaczynski, a very conservative former prime minister of Poland, chairman of the ruling nationalist-conservative Law and Justice party (PiS), has called for a massive E.U. nuclear force – trading on Polish fears that the United States will not sacrifice Chicago to save Warsaw. That France and Britain already have nuclear weapons and are members of NATO is, of course, left unsaid in Kaczynski's demagoguery.

Russian leaders cannot ignore the fact that Kaczynski called for a nuclear E.U. shortly after the U.S. 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 4th Infantry Division (3,500 troops and 2,500 vehicles) deployed to Poland. Even worse, the commanding officer promptly declared the brigade is "ready to fight," though it is intended to "deter" any threat to Poland. One brigade is a trip wire ... or a kind of blank check that might be exploited for nutty reasons to trigger a shooting war – and as Kaczynski just demonstrated, nuttiness is afoot in that part of the world.

Past Aggressions

Now, if you were a Russian; and (1) you remembered the West's destruction to your homeland beginning in 1812, 1914, and 1941 together with the recent string of broken promises, economic exclusion, and destructive meddling in Russian internal affairs that made a mockery of the ideal of a post-Cold War common European home; and ...

(2) you faced a country that excluded you from Europe, suborned your election and is intent on crippling your economy, a country already outspending you on

defense by a factor of twelve to one while expressing an intent to increase that lopsided ratio in a major way; and ...

(3) that country has already started a nuclear arms race with a hugely expensive across-the-board modernization program to buy atomic weapons some of which can be justified only in terms of fighting and winning nuclear wars;

What would you do? To ask such a question is to answer it. For patriotic Americans interested in increasing their real national security (rather than their national security *budget*), the nuclear issue boils down to a question of understanding the powerful impact of America's spending decisions and actions on patriotic Russians. In other words, it is a question of reasoned empathy and pragmatic self-interest.

Yet the mainstream media and the politicians of both parties in thrall to our MICC are working day and night to pump up anti-Russian hysteria and hype fear to ensure Americans remain completely oblivious to the powerful, dangerous impact of our senseless Obama-Trump nuclear spend-up on the Russians – or on anyone else, for that matter.

Chuck Spinney and Pierre Sprey, between them, have over 75 years of Pentagon and industry experience in engineering weapons as well as in analyzing military systems effectiveness and defense budgets. Sprey was one of the early whiz kids in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) in the 1960s. He led the Air Force's concept design team for the legendary A-10 attack aircraft and, together with colonels Boyd and Riccioni, fathered the enormously successful F-16 fighter. Working in OSD in the 1980s, Spinney's critical analyses of the Pentagon's defective planning and budgeting landed him on the March 1983 cover of Time. Leaving the Pentagon in 2003, he did an in-depth interview on the military-industrial-congressional complex with Bill Moyers which resulted in a special Emmy Award winning edition of Bill Moyers' *Now* that aired on 1 August 2003. Sprey and Spinney have testified before Congress on many occasions and were founding members of the Military Reform Movement led by their close colleague, the renowned American fighter pilot and strategist, Colonel John Boyd. [This story previously appeared at

chuckspinney.blogspot.com/2017/02/sleepwalking-into-nuclear-arms-race.html

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GOP Ups Ante on Clinton's Israel Pander

By inserting Israel-first promises in the Republican platform, GOP regulars challenge Donald Trump's America-first policies and open a possible bidding war with Hillary Clinton over pandering to Israel, as Chuck Spinney explains.

By Chuck Spinney

The so-called two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in my opinion, has always been a distraction to buy time for the Israelis to formally annex most of the West Bank to Israel. Much like Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, annexation of this territory will be tangled up in the unexamined question of controlling access to scarce water resources.

This posting builds on my posting of last April, ["The Palestinian Question: Why the Two-State Solution is Kaput."](#) My aim was to explain how the central and generally ignored goal of controlling access to the West Bank's water resources water is shaping Israel's long-term settlement policies. That posting described how issues relating to control of these water resources go a long way toward explaining the "facts-on-the-ground" pattern of accelerating settlement growth in [Area C](#) of the now defunct Oslo Accord, which comprises about 60 percent of the West Bank.

Ensuring fair and equitable access to the water resources of the West Bank and the River Jordan's watershed is a *necessary* although not a sufficient condition

for an equitable solution to the complex Palestinian Question. That is true regardless of whether that solution takes the form of a two-state solution or a single-state bi-national solution.

However, the momentum of developments, in terms of the interaction between weak and vacillating U.S. policies and the accelerating rate of Israel's settlement growth in Area C, is leading inexorably to an Israeli annexation of Area C. Annexation will necessarily be accompanied by a Gazification of the Palestinian enclaves making up Areas A and B, and a perpetually unfair access to the West Bank's water resources.

Haaretz, Israel's leading left-of-center newspaper, recently carried a report entitled, "About Face on U.S. Foreign Policy: GOP Platform to Drop Support for Two State Solution," This report was first published in the Jewish Insider, and it informs the reader that the draft Republican platform rejects the "false notion" that Israel is occupying the West Bank. The draft language also includes:

"Support for Israel is an expression of Americanism, and it is the responsibility of our government to advance policies that reflect Americans' strong desire for a relationship with no daylight between America and Israel."

And the language goes on to recognize that "the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement ('BDS') is anti-Semitic in nature and seeks to destroy Israel." It calls for federal legislation "to thwart actions that are intended to limit commercial relations with Israel, or persons or entities doing business in Israel or in Israeli-controlled territories, in a discriminatory manner."

Whether Donald Trump will buy into such a blatant subordination of American interests to those of Israel is as yet an unanswered question. But the language puts Israel into political play in the 2016 presidential election. This creates a potential for a bidding war that could land Ms. Clinton in an awkward position.

To date, a cynical political strength of Ms. Clinton's campaign is that a large number of pro-Israeli Republican neocons in the national security establishment are flocking to her campaign. This crossover creates an appearance if not the reality of bestowing on Ms. Clinton an enhanced national security gravitas, at least among the Beltway establishment and mainstream media.

Her control of the Democratic platform committee has already enabled Ms. Clinton to defeat platform language criticizing Israel's occupation policies. Watch this video; note particularly the reference to the BDS by a Clinton stalwart.

Despite the Democratic platform committee's stuffing of the Palestinian

Question, the draft Democratic platform says nothing comparable to the Republican language. That silence may not go far enough to placate Hillary's neocon crossovers. So, Ms. Clinton may come under pressure to strengthen her already strong pro-Israel stance in an effort to outbid the Republicans in the war to win the anti-Trump Republican voters.

But in so doing, Clinton may drive Sanders's supporters into throwing up their hands in disgust and staying home in November or voting for the Green or Libertarian candidates. How this supposed "lesser of two evils" triangulates her way out of this cul de sac will be a fascinating spectacle in the Roman circus passing for a presidential election.

[For more on this topic, see Consortiumnews.com's "[Yes, Hillary Clinton Is a Neocon.](#)"]

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the "Spinney Report," which criticized the Pentagon's wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems. [This article appeared previously at <http://chuckspinney.blogspot.com/2016/07/draft-republican-platform-effectively.html>]

Lost in the Military-Industrial Complex

Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have ducked any serious discussion of America's escalating military spending, suggesting that whoever wins will be captive of President Eisenhower's "Military-Industrial Complex," writes Chuck Spinney.

By Chuck Spinney

America is engaged in the longest and second most expensive war in its history – a small war in terms of forces deployed and op-tempos, but a war that is grinding on endlessly, without a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.

Contrary to the whining about constrained budgets causing readiness and modernization problems emanating from the Pentagon, all dutifully regurgitated without question by the mainstream media, defense spending in the Pentagon's so-called Base Budget is close to an all-time high and poised to increase over the long term.

The bulk of the Pentagon's budget reductions from the recent peak in 2010 has been concentrated in the war fighting account (the Overseas Contingencies

Operations or OCO) account – and this is true regardless of if or how one accounts for inflation. Compared to the OCO, reductions in the Pentagon's so-called Base Budget – i.e., that part of the defense budget responsible for maintaining readiness and ensuring modernization – have been relatively modest.

Moreover, President Obama is leaving his successor with a base budget containing a modernization bow wave that is poised to explode, creating unstoppable political pressures for growing defense budgets until the end of the next decade or even beyond.

Yet the United States now spends far more on the military than any other country in the world. Add in the expenditures of our allies, and the spending advantage over any conceivable combination of adversaries becomes overwhelming.

Claiming today that we must increase the Pentagon's budget to counter the rising threats of spending increases by Russia and China is tantamount to saying that defense spending by the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex in the United States is grotesquely inefficient when compared to the spending of the MICC's equivalents in Russia and China.

Deafening Silence

Most puzzling of all, the size of the Pentagon's budget and the conduct of the militarized foreign policy that is a direct consequence of the domestic politics pushing so hard for defense budget increases are not significant political issues in the 2016 campaign for president.

To be sure, the alternative press is full of essays describing the patent lunacy of America's militarized foreign policy, but very little ink has been devoted to analyses of how the dirty triangular political forces of the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex (or MICC) drive that policy.

Some people hope Donald Trump will rein in the big green spending machine with a less aggressive foreign policy. But Trump is a grotesque bully, whose wild divagations of the mind exhibit neo-fascist behavior by inflaming hatred and xenophobia among his alienated and adoring supporters.

His recent kowtowing to Israel on the question of military aid suggests Trump is a transparent phony to boot. So, 'Trump the Bully' will end up spending what the power brokers in the MICC's Iron Triangle tell him to spend.

Hillary Clinton's public attitude toward defense spending is one of maintaining silence, no doubt to pacify the Left. All she has said (last September) was that she would appoint a blue-ribbon panel to examine the size of the defense budget, if elected president.

But her attitude toward the “symptom” of the domestic political imperative to keep spending at high levels – i.e., her attitude toward America’s militarized foreign policy – is obvious and ominous as David Bromwich brilliantly explains in “[The Roots of Hillary’s Infatuation with War](#)” – a very important essay, which I urge readers to study carefully.

She will play the tough girl, and in so doing, like Mr. Trump, she will also end up spending what the power brokers in the MICC’s Iron Triangle tell her to spend.

In short, President Obama is leaving his successor with a defense budget time bomb. But what passes for checks and balances on the Pentagon and its allies in the arms industry and in Congress has completely broken down in the election of 2016. This is Eisenhower’s nightmare writ large.

When I worked in the Pentagon, we had a term for describing this type of sick situation – the United States has maneuvered itself into one big sticky “chocolate mess.”

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the “Spinney Report,” which criticized the Pentagon’s wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems. [This article appeared previously at <http://chuckspinney.blogspot.com/2016/07/message-of-2016-election-goodbye-checks.html>]

Is Trump Really the Anti-Neocon?

Some American voters see Donald Trump as the only hope to break the neocon grip on U.S. foreign policy and to put U.S. interests ahead of the Israel Lobby, but that may not be so, says Chuck Spinney.

By Chuck Spinney

Pro-Israel neocons have said they will jump off the Republican ship and vote for Hillary Clinton, because she will continue business as usual with regard to our militarized foreign policy. Apologists for Donald Trump argue that he will pursue a more restrained and less warlike foreign policy, including a more balanced policy toward Israel.

But a recent report by Stuart Winer in the Times of Israel suggests Trump’s bombastic “art of the deal,” at least when applied to pol-mil policy, will turn

out to be yet another politician's distinction without a difference – to wit:

“A senior adviser to Donald Trump said Wednesday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should wait for the presumptive Republican presidential nominee to win the White House before signing a military aid deal with Washington, because Trump would offer a better deal than the Obama administration.

“In an interview with Channel 2 television David Friedman said that a Trump administration would maintain Israel's military advantage over its neighbors. He said Trump would not reduce defense aid to Israel but ‘in all likelihood will increase it significantly.’

“‘The aid package will certainly not go down in all likelihood it will go up in a material amount because Israel must maintain a technological and military superiority within the region,’ Freidman said. ‘I can't give advice how Israel should bargain and develop its own strategy.’

“Friedman's suggestion that Trump would increase aid to Israel apparently ran contrary to the GOP candidate's call to make Israel pay back foreign aid. In March, Trump said he believed Israel should pay for defense aid it receives from the US.”

Could it be that the choice for President in 2016 will have no effect on America's militarized foreign policy, and if so, would this be something new and different?

As with most political questions in Versailles on the Potomac, the pathway to answering this question is less one of Ivory-tower policy analysis than a gritty one of following the money – in this case the money flowing through the triangular relations of the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex.

It is a question that goes to the heart of President Eisenhower's prophetic warning, “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.”

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the “Spinney Report,” which criticized the Pentagon's wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems. [This article appeared previously at <http://chuckspinney.blogspot.com/2016/06/trumping-hillary-same-old-pol-mil-game.html>]

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in May focused on the new Cold War with Russia, the U.S. presidential election race, and the costs – financial, ethical and human – from endless war.

[“Russia Rises From the Mat”](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, May 1, 2016

[“Shying Away from 9/11 Evidence”](#) by Kristen Breitweiser, May 3, 2016

[“If Russia Had ‘Freed’ Canada”](#) by Joe Lauria, May 5, 2016

[“A Need to Clear Up Clinton Questions”](#) by Ray McGovern, May 5, 2016

[“How Obama Legalized the War on Terror”](#) by Michael Brenner, May 7, 2016

[“The Secret Behind the Yemen War”](#) by Daniel Lazare, May 7, 2016

[“Price for Witnessing Against War”](#) by Ray McGovern, May 8, 2016

[“China Closes the Innovation Gap”](#) by John V. Walsh, May 9, 2016

[“A Longwinded and Winding Rhodes”](#) by James W Carden, May 10, 2016

[“Exploiting Global Warming for Geo-Politics”](#) by Jonathan Marshall, May 10, 2016

[“Neocons and Neolibs: How Dead Ideas Kill”](#) by Robert Parry, May 11, 2016

[“Army Chaplain Resigns over Drone War”](#) by Ann Wright, May 12, 2016

[“Donald Trump’s Unsurprising Surprise”](#) by Mike Lofgren, May 12, 2016

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[“Political Pressure Stymies US-Iran Ties”](#) by Gareth Porter, May 14, 2016

["Escalations in a New Cold War"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, May 14, 2016

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["Trump's Five Questions on US Foreign Policy"](#) by John V. Walsh, May 22, 2016

["Intel Vets Urge Fast Report on Clinton's Emails"](#) by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, May 23, 2016

["Does Russia Have Reason to Fear?"](#) by James W. Carden, May 23, 2016

["More Game-Playing on MH-17?"](#) by Robert Parry, May 24, 2016

["NFL's War Against Science and Reason"](#) by Robert Parry, May 25, 2016

["Clinton's Imperious Brush-off of Email Rules"](#) by Ray McGovern, May 26, 2016

["America's Worst-Laid Plans"](#) by Michael Brenner, May 27, 2016

["Eerie Silence about a New World War"](#) by John Pilger, May 27, 2016

["Ticking Closer to Nuclear Midnight"](#) by Jonathan Marshall, May 27, 2016

["New Nukes for a New Cold War"](#) by Chuck Spinney, May 28, 2016

["Tragic Valor of Marines at Con Thien"](#) by Don North, May 29, 2016

["Democrats at a Clinton/Sanders Crossroad"](#) by Lisa Pease, May 31, 2016

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New Cold War Feeds War Machine

The apparent madness in the Obama administration starting a new Cold War with Russia and China makes sense if viewed from the perspective of the Military-Industrial Complex, which must justify ever-larger budgets, as Chuck Spinney explains.

By Chuck Spinney

Today, America's foreign policy is a shambles. Its primary features are (1) a perpetual war on terror, and (2) the seemingly inevitable march into a new and unnecessary Cold War against Russia and China.

At the same time, President Obama is leaving his successor with a budget plan containing a front-loaded and political-engineered procurement [bow wave](#) that guarantees steeply rising defense expenditures well into the next decade and possibly beyond. Such long term increases in the defense budget can only be justified by a new cold war. [For explanations on loading and political engineering, see my 1990 pamphlet [Defense Power Games](#)]

Yet the United States [now spends far more on the military](#) than any other country. Add in the expenditures of our allies, and the spending advantage over any conceivable combination of adversaries becomes overwhelming. Nevertheless,

U.S. citizens are more fearful than they were during the Cold War, and politicians and the yellow journalism of the mainstream media are hyping those fears to a greater extent than they did during the Cold War. What is going on?

Most pundits and policy-makers who debate this dismal state of affairs subscribe to the view that fixing foreign policy is the first step toward getting control of the Pentagon and ultimately reducing defense budgets. In their view, the top priority should be to re-define our foreign policy goals (hopefully in accordance with the criteria for a sensible grand strategy, although these criteria are seldom examined in a systematic way).

The redefined grand strategic goals would then form a basis for defining a rational military strategy to meet these goals. Once the strategy is settled upon by the policy elites, the drones in the Pentagon can define the force structure to meet the strategy. That force structure would then provide the template against which the budgeteers can define the budget decisions needed to build and maintain the forces necessary to execute the strategy. QED.

This neat comforting top-down viewpoint conveys the illusion of control. It plays well in the high-brow salons of Versailles on the Potomac, the halls of Congress, and among the elitist punditocracy in the mainstream media and the ivory tower think tanks of Washington. But history shows this logic does not work.

The logic has been repeated ad nauseam by policy wonks on the left and right since the dawn of the Cold War in 1950. Yet for all their handwringing about strategy-budget mismatches, the policy wonks refuse to recognize the obvious: Since 1962, the Pentagon's formal planning system – the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) – is a set of bureaucratic procedures designed precisely in accordance with their sacred top-down logic. Yet the PPBS has failed repeatedly to link budgets to forces and strategy (for reasons I explained here and here).

A Money-Eating Organism

The simple-minded idea that foreign policy (i.e., grand strategy) drives strategy and shapes force structures and budgets simply does not work in the real world. And the reason is fundamental: the Military – Industrial – Congressional Complex (MICC) is *not* a top-down mechanistic phenomenon that *responds* predictably to this kind of naive control theory.

The MICC is more accurately thought of as a synthetic (bottom-up) living culture that *creates* its own political-economic ecology. Part of that ecology is the

MICC's corrupting effects on domestic politics. President Eisenhower's prophetic warning about the rise of misplaced power hinted at but did not delve into the reasons for the living nature of this political-economic ecology.

It is now 54 years later, and the MICC has evolved into a deeply entrenched, bewildering variety of ever changing goal-seeking factions, each fighting for money and power in a game of very messy domestic politics. These factions are loosely self-organized (via revolving doors, for example) into iron triangles that grow and decay over time.

These factions compete with each other or make temporary alliances of convenience in their efforts to acquire money and power (as I explained here, here, and here). Put another way, the MICC is fundamentally a bottom-up living, evolving political-economic *organism*, and it produces its own peculiar ecology.

It is made up of self-organizing factions in which the pursuit of each faction's individual goals create combined effects that can be thought of as the MICC's emergent properties. There is simply no way the sterile top-down logic described above can cope with the MICC's ever-evolving power games and unpredictable work-arounds.

Or as Colonel John R. Boyd, a fighter pilot, aircraft designer and strategist, has observed: "People say the Pentagon does not have a strategy. They are wrong; the Pentagon does have a strategy. It is: Don't interrupt the money flow, add to it."

Boyd's quote pithily sums up the output of the game, and the MICCs players are now hell-bent on starting a new Cold War as the only way to achieve its factional ambitions. We will not fix this problem posed by the MICC until we come to grips with its elemental nature.

[For more on this topic, see a recent essay by my good friend Andrew Cockburn, who brilliantly elaborates on Boyd's point and the apparent disconnect between strategy and budgets. I say "apparent disconnect" because the MICC has a real strategy, and like all effective strategies, it is not obvious.]

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the "Spinney Report," which criticized the Pentagon's wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems.

Israel's Water Siege of Palestinians

Neocron domination of the U.S. foreign policy establishment has foreclosed serious debate over Israel's strangling control of Palestinian water resources and what that means for the future of that ghetto-ized population, as Chuck Spinney explains.

By Chuck Spinney

Access to water is one of the most fundamental and least discussed issues underpinning the Israeli – Palestinian conflict (as well as the recurring pattern of Israel's conflicts with Syria and Lebanon). Control of the West Bank's water resources is intimately tied into the growing pattern of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and, if left unchecked, Israel's inevitable annexation of Area C (60 percent) of the West Bank (thereby formalizing the Gazification of Areas A & B). Water resources are also intimately woven into pattern of destruction in Israel's siege of the Gaza ghetto.

Most Americans remain unaware of water's central importance in this conflict. Yet a fair and equitable solution to this issue is a necessary albeit not sufficient condition for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on terms that do not sow the seeds for future conflict.

The parameters of the water question in the Jordan River Valley have been long understood, if ignored, by American policy makers (see the 1955 Johnston Plan and the Johnston Plan Revisited). Indeed, in its current context, these parameters reach back to the Feb. 3, 1919 Zionist proposal to the Versailles Peace Conference for a Jewish national home (do a word search for "water" and think about the implications of the highlighted text).

More generally, the history of access to water in this region reaches back to the dawn of civilization and the creation of agriculture. The Jordan River drainage system (along with Lebanon's surface water systems) together with the aquifers in the highlands of the West Bank (and Lebanon) connect the two wings of the Fertile Crescent stretching from the Nile River system in the West to Tigris and Euphrates River systems in the East.

It is no accident that the location of one of the world's oldest cities, the Palestinian canton of Jericho, was determined in large part by its access to the wells and springs in the center of this link.

I first became interested in this issue in 2001 (and did a subsequent, more extensive analysis in 2003 here). Since 2001, the water question has worsened with each passing year, yet it still receives almost no attention in the

mainstream media.

The attached analysis by Camilla Corradin in Aljazeera is an excellent update of this steadily worsening question. The links in her report are particularly important sources of information. I urge readers to read the links as well as her essay.

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the “Spinney Report,” which criticized the Pentagon’s wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems.

Israel: Water as a tool to dominate Palestinians

Israel deliberately denies Palestinians control over their water sources and sets the ground for water domination.

By Camilla Corradin, Aljazeera, 20 June 2016

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/israel-water-tool-dominate-palestinians-160619062531348.html>

Occupied West Bank – As temperatures rise and summer months approach, yet again this year, thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are being deprived of their most basic need – access to water – as the Israeli national water company Mekorot restricted the water supply to villages and towns in northern West Bank.

Although extremely worrying for the livelihood and health impact on the affected tens of thousands of Palestinians, this comes to little surprise.

Since it occupied the West Bank in 1967, Israel has laid hands on Palestinian water resources through discriminatory water-sharing agreements that prevented Palestinians from maintaining or developing their water infrastructure through its illegal planning and permit regime. As a result, thousands of Palestinians are unable to access sufficient water supplies and became water-dependent on Israel.

By building on the myth of a water-scarce region – Ramallah has more rainfall than London – Israel has deliberately denied Palestinians control over their water resources and successfully set the ground for water domination, granting itself a further tool to exercise its hegemony over the occupied population and territory.

Palestinian water resources in the West Bank wouldn’t be scarce – they include the Jordan River, running all along the eastern border of the West Bank, and the Mountain Aquifer underlying the West Bank and Israel. Both water resources are

transboundary – meaning that, by international law, they should be shared in an equitable and reasonable manner by Israel and Palestine.

Yet, since Israel took over the West Bank in 1967, Israel has remained in near full control over Palestinian water resources in the West Bank.

Israel fully prevents Palestinians from accessing the Jordan River and using its water. As for the Mountain Aquifer, the 1995 Oslo II interim agreement – which also defined the water-sharing arrangements between Palestine and Israel – came to consolidate the Israeli control that had been in place since 1967.

Israel was granted access to over 71 percent of the aquifer water, while Palestinians were only granted 17 percent. While the agreement was supposed to last five years only, 20 years later, it is still in place.

Water-sharing agreement discussions are left to the long-awaited final status negotiations.

While the Palestinian population of the West Bank has almost doubled since, allocations have remained capped at 1995 levels. Today, Palestinians have access to less water than they were granted by the already-inequitable Oslo agreements: 13 percent, with Israel abstracting the remaining 87.

Indeed, as pointed out by the World Bank in its 2009 report about the water sector in Palestine, due to the dual Israeli permit regime, Palestinians have been unable to maintain and develop their water infrastructure.

In Palestinian wells where the water table has dropped, for instance, the Israeli restrictions on drilling, deepening and rehabilitation have made the wells un-usable and Palestinian water abstraction levels decline.

On the one hand, Palestinian water projects all over the West Bank need an approval by the Joint Water Committee (JWC), where Israel has a de facto veto power. Only 56 percent of Palestinian projects regarding water and sanitation were granted permits by the JWC (against a near 100 percent approval rate for the Israeli projects), and only one-third of those could actually be implemented.

Concerned by the asymmetry in the JWC functioning, Palestinians have refused to sit in the committee since 2010.

In addition to the JWC approval, all projects in Area C also require a permit by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA), which are notoriously difficult to obtain. As reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the ICA has refused between 2010 and 2014 98.5

percent of the Palestinian building permit applications for Area C projects.

Over 50 water and sanitation structures have been demolished by Israel since the beginning of 2016 already (more than in the entire 2015) on grounds that they were lacking the Israeli permits.

Israel's claims that the failing water infrastructure is the cause of the water cuts in the West Bank fail to acknowledge that the poor infrastructure is a direct result of the Israeli permit regime in the West Bank.

The lack of water and other basic services resulting from Israeli policies has created a coercive environment that often leaves Palestinians with no choice but to leave their communities in Area C, allowing Israel's land takeover and further expansion of its settlements.

But as recent events have shown, Areas A and B are not safe havens either. Due to the lack of sufficient water resources available, Palestine heavily depends on water bought from Mekorot (18.5 percent in 2014). Ironically, this is water that Israel takes from the rightful Palestinian share – which they are denied – before selling it back to them.

This has granted Israel further control over Palestinian access to water. As soon as water demand increases in the hot spring and summer months, supplies to settlements are privileged over Palestinian areas in the West Bank.

Every year, water supply to Palestinian towns and villages is cut off for days – if not weeks – during which Palestinians are forced to buy trucked water at five times the price of network water – as well as reduce their already low consumption.

Water consumption figures are telling: While Israelis have access to around 240 litres of water per person per day, and settlers over 300, Palestinians in the West Bank are left with 73 litres – well below the World Health Organization's minimum standard of 100.

OCHA report that in Area C, where 180 Palestinian communities are not connected to the water network and 122 have a connection with no or irregular supply as a result of Israeli restrictions, water consumption can drop to 20 litres of water per person per day as people have to buy expensive trucked water.

Here, vulnerable households spend up to one-fifth of their salary on water.

For instance, while people in the Palestinian community of al-Hadidiya in the northern Jordan Valley have access to as little as 20 litres of water per person per day – settlers in the neighbouring settlement of Ro'i enjoy 460 litres of

water per person for domestic use only, a swimming pool and flourishing agriculture.

Israel, as the occupying power has an obligation under international humanitarian law to ensure the dignity and wellbeing of the population under its control.

This includes obligations regarding the provision of and access to humanitarian relief and basic services, including water and sanitation.

Not only is Israel failing to provide for such basic needs. Its discriminatory water policies also prove that Israel is using water as a tool to dominate Palestinians, exercise its power, and punish an entire population by deliberately depriving its inhabitants the most basic of rights.

Camilla Corradin is advocating for Palestinian water rights with the EWASH NGOs coalition.

New Nukes for a New Cold War

Mythology about the rightness of dropping two atomic bombs on Japan is relevant to today's "modernization" of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and the revving up of a new Cold War with Russia, says ex-Pentagon military analyst Chuck Spinney.

By Chuck Spinney

With the passage of time, the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima (a uranium bomb) and Nagasaki (a plutonium bomb) in August of 1945 has become more controversial among historians but not in the public mind. Was the destruction of these two low priority targets necessary to end the war with the Japan?

In 1945 and thereafter, beginning with the Truman Administration, politicians and milcrats convinced the public that bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war quickly and thereby saved American *and* Japanese lives. Against the background of the brutality and racism of the Pacific War – and especially the just completed battles of Okinawa and Iwo Jima, and the overwhelming psychological effects of the Kamikazes – this justification was easy to believe by those troops designated for the invasion of Japan as well as by a public anxious to end the war.

It is hard to overestimate the immediate and lasting appeal of the government's line to people of all political persuasions: One of my dearest friends, for

example, was an anti-tank gunner in the 95th Infantry Division during WWII. While in Germany in 1945, he was notified that he would be redeploying to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan.

My friend was an extreme liberal with a WWII enlisted GI's contempt for the conduct of war; he believed the military leadership was incompetent; and that carried over to his vehement opposition to the Vietnam War. But 50 years later he still vociferously defended the decision to drop the atomic bombs. His reasoning was simple and heartfelt and honest: he had enough of fighting the Germans and wanted to go home and be done with the madness.

And this belief has lingered through the years, largely unquestioned. But the story of the decision to drop the bomb is far more complicated than this simple argument suggests. One of the world's leading historians of President Harry Truman's decision to drop the bomb, Gar Alperovitz, recently sat down with journalist Andrew Cockburn to discuss these complexities (attached below).

The question addressed by Alperovitz and Cockburn is more than an idle historical curiosity. Alperovitz hints as much in the last pregnant paragraph of his interview. President Obama's administration is planting the seed money for an across-the-board-modernization of nuclear weapons, delivery systems, and support systems that will cost at least a trillion dollars (more likely \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion, IMO) over the next 15-30 years.

While its details are shrouded in secrecy, public information is oozing out (e.g. see this [link](#)). Present information now suggests this program includes: a new ballistic missile launching submarine; a new strategic bomber; a new land-based intercontinental missile; a new air-launched cruise missile; modernization of and adding precision guidance to the B-61 "dial-a-yield" gravity bomb; modernization of strategic ballistic missile warheads; upgrades to the sea launched ballistic missiles; a massive upgrade to the surveillance, reconnaissance, command, control, and communications systems needed to *manage* nuclear warfighting; continuation and upgrades to ballistic missile defense systems (rationale: gotta have a "shield" to protect the aforementioned "swords"); modernization of the nuclear weapons laboratory infrastructure; and the increasingly demanding problem of nuclear weapons facilities cleanup (e.g. Hanford).

Given the highly evolved nature of the domestic politics driving defense spending (i.e., the domestic operations of the Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex (I described this in "[The Domestic Roots of Perpetual War](#)"), history shows the golden cornucopia of this nuc "bow wave" or programs will quickly evolve into an unstoppable tsunami of [front-loaded and politically engineered](#) contracts and subcontracts that will grow over time to overwhelm and

paralyze future Presidents and Congresses for the next 20-30 years.

This kind of budget time bomb has happened at least twice before in the non-nuclear part of the defense budget: The first began when the Nixon-Ford Administration planted the seeds of defense budget hysteria by starting a bow wave of new modernization programs, financed in the short term by readiness and force structure reductions in early-to-mid 1970s. These reductions led to budget pressures that exploded in the late 1970s and 1980s when President Jimmy Carter began growing the defense budget and President Ronald Reagan accelerated that growth.

The game repeated itself in the late 1980s through the mid-1990s, when Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton planted the seeds for future budget growth that would metastasize in the late 1990s. That bow wave was subsequently power-boosted and masked somewhat by hysteria accompanying 9/11, but it used the same formula of cutting readiness and force structure in the short term to finance the planting of the bow wave of modernization programs.

And now, history is repeating itself for a third time. This can be seen in the spate of recent hysterical and misbegotten reports (e.g., typical example) about how the relatively modest budget cutbacks from 2010 in the Pentagon's "base budget" have caused today's modernization crises, readiness shortfalls, etc.

Now add the full-scale nuclear tsunami to this limited description of the Obama bow wave and the pressure to grow future budgets justified by a new cold war will become unstoppable.

The only way such a modernization program can be justified is to concoct some kind of 21st Century nuclear warfighting scenario and to use the rubric of a new Cold War against a nuclear-armed competitor – read Russia or China or both – to terrorize the public into paying the bill.

Which brings us back to the logic of bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Attached beneath the end notes is Cockburn's short but incisive interview with Alperovitz. (Caveat: Andrew Cockburn is a close friend of 35 years, so I am biased.)

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the "Spinney Report," which criticized the Pentagon's wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems.

CONVERSATION

Unjust Cause

Historian Gar Alperovitz on the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki

By Andrew Cockburn, Harpers, 25 May 2016

<http://harpers.org/blog/2016/05/unjust-cause/>

President Obama is about to visit the Japanese city of Hiroshima, where on August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb that killed 140,000 people. Earlier this month, Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes wrote on Medium.com that “the President will shine a spotlight on the tremendous and devastating human toll of war.” But the White House has also made clear that the president has no intention of apologizing. Seventy years after World War II, it seems the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still a matter for evasion, justified by U.S. officials as the only way to end the war and save American lives. If Obama sticks to this script, his speech won’t amount to much more than Donald Rumsfeld’s “stuff happens.” To fill in Obama’s preannounced omissions, I turned to the historian Gar Alperovitz. His 1995 book *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of An American Myth* is the most definitive account we are likely to see of why Hiroshima was destroyed, and how an official history justifying that decision was subsequently crafted and promulgated by the national security establishment. As he explained, the bomb not only failed to save Americans lives, it might actually have caused the needless deaths of thousands of U.S. servicemen.

Let’s start with the basic question: was it necessary to drop the bomb on Hiroshima in order to compel Japanese surrender and thereby save American Lives?

Absolutely not. At least, every bit of evidence we have strongly indicates not only that it was unnecessary, but that it was known at the time to be unnecessary. That was the opinion of top intelligence officials and top military leaders. There was intelligence, beginning in April of 1945 and reaffirmed month after month right up to the Hiroshima bombing, that the war would end when the Russians entered [and that] the Japanese would surrender so long as the emperor was retained, at least in an honorary role. The U.S. military had already decided [it wanted] to keep the emperor because they wanted to use him after the war to control Japan.

Virtually all the major military figures are now on record publicly, most of them almost immediately after the war, which is kind of amazing when you think about it, saying the bombing was totally unnecessary. Eisenhower said it on a number of occasions. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs said it—that was Admiral

Leahy, who was also chief of staff to the president. Curtis LeMay, who was in charge of the conventional bombing of Japan, [also said it]. They're all public statements. It's remarkable that the top military leaders would go public, challenging the president's decision within weeks after the war, some within months. Really, when you even think about it, can you imagine it today? It's almost impossible to think of it.

Had the United States ever wanted the Russians to come in?

Here's what I think happened. Not knowing whether the bomb would work or not, the top U.S. leaders were advised early on that the Russian declaration of war, combined with assurances that the emperor could stay on in some titular role without power, would end the war. That's why at Yalta [the February 1945 summit between Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill] we desperately begged the Russians to come in, and they agreed to come in three months after the German war ended.

U.S. intelligence early on had said this would end the war, which is why we sought their involvement before the bomb was tested. After the bomb was tested, the United States was desperately trying to get the war over before they came in.

Is it possible that the U.S. leadership avoided actions that might have brought about surrender, to keep the whole thing going so that they would have an excuse to use the bomb?

Now you've put your finger on the most delicate of all questions. We cannot prove that. But we do know that the advice to the president by virtually the entire top echelon of both military and political leaders was to give assurances to the Japanese—that would likely bring about a surrender earlier in the summer of 1945, after the April intelligence reports.

Had they given those terms at that time, as many of the top leaders suggested—Under Secretary of State [Joseph] Grew for instance, and Secretary of War [Henry] Stimson as well—the war might very well have ended earlier, even before the Russians came in.

The allied leaders meeting at Potsdam in late July issued the Potsdam Declaration laying the surrender terms for the Japanese. In your book, you discuss an attempt to include the necessary assurances about preserving the emperor in the declaration. What happened?

As originally written, paragraph twelve of the Potsdam Declaration essentially assured the Japanese that the emperor would not be taken off of his throne, and [would] be kept on in some titular role like the king or queen of England but with no power. It was a recommendation of everyone in the top government, with

the exception of Jimmy Byrnes. Byrnes was the chief advisor to the president on this matter, and he was secretary of state. There's no doubt that he controlled the basic decision-making on it. He was also the president's personal representative on the interim committee, which considered how, not whether, to use the bomb. He was the man who was directly, in this case, in charge. They all thought the war would end once that was stated, and they knew the war would continue if you took out paragraph twelve, and Jimmy Byrnes took it out, with the president's approval.

So that was a deliberate effort to prolong the war?

I think that's true, but you can't prove that. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, facing a blockage by Byrnes, found a way to get the British Chiefs of Staff to go to Churchill to go around Byrnes to Truman to try to get him to put the paragraph back in, which Churchill in fact did. Truman did not yield. He followed Byrnes' advice. A remarkable moment.

What was the justification for Nagasaki?

Well, the claim was that it was an automatic decision. The decision had been made to use them when they're ready. I think the scientists, and then also the military, Groves in particular, wanted to test the second one.

There is another reason I think was probably involved. The Red Army had entered Manchuria on August 8, and Nagasaki was bombed on August 9. The entire focus of top decision-making, which means Jimmy Byrnes advising the president, at this point in time . . . we're now past whether or not to use the bomb . . . was whether you could end the war as fast as possible, as the Red Army was advancing in Manchuria. The linkage logically between that and "Is that why Nagasaki went forward?" or, rather, "why it was not aborted" is impossible to make with the existing documents, but there's no doubt that the feeling and the mood in the top decision-makers was on "How do we end this damn thing as fast as we can?" That's from a context in which the decision to hit Nagasaki either was made, or rather, not questioned.

The official line, that we had to do it, the bomb saved lives, the Japanese would have fought to the last man, and so forth, set in hard and fast fairly quickly. How do you account for that?

Harper's Magazine played a major role. They published what was basically a dishonest piece by the former secretary of war, Henry Stimson. There was in fact mounting criticism after the war, started by the conservatives, not by the liberals, who defended Truman, which was then opened up by the military, and then some of the scientists, and then some of the religious leaders, and then

the article in the New Yorker, John Hersey's "Hiroshima."

There was sufficient criticism building in 1946 that the leadership thought it had to be stopped, and so they rolled former Secretary of War Stimson out to do a strong defense of it. It was actually written by McGeorge Bundy [later National Security Adviser in the Vietnam years], and they got Harper's Magazine to publish it [in February of 1947]. The article became a major report all over the country, and it became the basis of reporting in the newspapers and radio at that time. I think it's correct to say that it shut down criticism for roughly two decades.

Well, we can consider this interview an act of expiation. Was it important for U.S. foreign policy going forward to convince the country and the world we had not done a bad thing but a good thing by ending the war and saving lives?

Yes, on two levels. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not military targets. That's why they had not been attacked, because they were so low in the priority list. So who was there? There were a few small military installations. The young men were at war, but who was left behind? Minimally, about 300,000 people—predominantly children, women, and old people—who were unnecessarily destroyed.

It's an extraordinary moral challenge to the whole position of the United States and to the decision-makers who made those decisions. If you don't justify that decision somehow, you really are open to extreme criticism, and justly and rightly so.

If Obama is not going to apologize for the bomb at Hiroshima, what should he say?

It would be good if the president were to move beyond words to action while in the city. A good start would be to announce a decision to halt the \$1 trillion buildup of next-generation nuclear weapons and delivery systems. And he might call upon Russia and other nuclear nations to join in the good-faith negotiations required by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to radically reduce nuclear arsenals.

The Pentagon's Medal Inflation

Like grade inflation in college, the Pentagon has engaged in medal inflation, diluting awards for actual heroism by proliferating ribbons for bureaucratic skills, as Chuck Spinney and James Perry Stevenson explain.

By Chuck Spinney

It should be clear that the Global War on Terror (GWOT) launched by George W. Bush and perpetuated by Barack Obama is a bust. It is now the longest war in U.S. history; it is now the second most expensive war in U.S. history; and there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

Yet despite the GWOT's astronomical cost, forces deployed and combat tempos are minuscule when compared with those of the far lower cost Vietnam War. Nevertheless, the top uniformed and civilian officials in the Pentagon are whining to Congress that these tepid tempos have created a looming readiness crisis. They assert the relatively small cutbacks in the future growth implied by the budget caps of Budget Control Act of 2011 to what is by far the largest defense budget in the world is now the "gravest strategic danger" facing the United States!

A logical person, living in a sane world, would think that the GWOT, its high cost, its clearly broken nature, and the huge size of the defense budget would be major issues in the 2016 presidential election. But the presidential candidates and the mainstream media, like the Pentagon, are silent on this surreal travesty. Indeed, the pathologies of the Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex (MICC) are as much off limits in contemporary political discourse as is foul language is at holy communion.

In part, that is due to the fact that lots of people and a substantial part of our nation's economy are prospering – i.e., they are becoming rich and powerful – from living off the MICC's degenerating status quo. One metric of this obscene transfer of wealth can be seen in the proliferation of MICC-related "McMansions" in and around Versailles on the Potomac.

Sustaining the money flow through the MICC requires ornaments of success to compensate for and distract attention from its glittering if depressing reality. The proliferation of American flags in politicians' lapels and on car bumpers, suggesting uncritical patriotism and triumphalism, is one example. Fantasies dressed up in Power-Point briefings about ever emerging technical revolutions, implying the future will be different from the past, are yet other examples of how ornaments prop up a dysfunctional reality in contemporary discourse.

My long-time friend and partner in crime, James P. Stevenson, has just written an essay analyzing yet another, little examined set of visual aids propping up the surrealism of the MICC. His subject is the proliferation of glittering "been there, done that" decorations now adorning the chests of our senior military officers.

Jim proves his point (1) by making an elegantly simple comparison of the gongs adorning the chests of today's generals to those that adorned the chests of the World War II generals – a war which historians may remember as our last “successful” war (thanks in large part to the enormous contributions of the Soviet Union) and (2) by showing how today's gong show highlights individual careerism and vanity while degrading the recognition of heroism and self-sacrifice.

To be sure, as Jim is at pains to point out, gong proliferation did not begin with the GWOT, but it has grown over time. But I would add, like the MICC (and the MICC's McMansions), which also evolved slowly and insensibly over time, gong proliferation, especially in the highest ranks, metastasized during the GWOT.

Attached herewith is Stevenson's handiwork – think of it as yet another metaphor for the Defense Death Spiral and yet another canary in the coal mine warning us of decay within.

Chuck Spinney is a former military analyst for the Pentagon who was famous for the “Spinney Report,” which criticized the Pentagon's wasteful pursuit of costly and complex weapons systems. [This story originally appeared at Spinney's blog at <http://chuckspinney.blogspot.com/2016/04/pentagon-gong-show.html>]

It's Hard to Tell War Heroes From Paper-Pushers When Everybody Gets So Many Dumb Ribbons

By James Perry Stevenson, War is Boring, April 25, 2016

There has been a jarring addition to U.S. military uniforms since the end of World War II. Seventy years ago, high-ranking officers wore relatively few ribbons or medals—and awards for valor were rare. Go back farther to the Civil War, and it was common for officers to not wear military decorations at all.

But for the modern officer, it's now possible to perform one's duties without being a hero and still have a chest full of ribbons that are indecipherable to all but the most dedicated students of phaleristics.

Most of all, the typical Twenty-first Century American general is a walking wall of multi-colored “great job” ribbons, none of which are awards for valor.

The ribbons have spread so widely that it has become difficult to differentiate heroes from bedecked bureaucrats, assignment-junkies and dedicated self-improvement types—which, I suppose, is partly the point.

The bureaucrats who added the great-job ribbons have ensured that some of these ribbons rank higher than do most medals for actual, individual acts of heroism.

That obviously reflects misplaced priorities within the U.S. military's value-system. But that isn't to say we should take away the officers' ribbons.

No, there's a better way?—one that would visually differentiate awards for valor and heroism from the clutter of ribbons for “great job,” “been there” and “done that.”

The American military acknowledges the commendable and selfless efforts of its soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen in two distinct ways?—promotions and medals.

The difference between a ribbon and a medal is merely technical. A ribbon is worn on the everyday uniform, while medals are reserved for formal occasions. They both refer to the same award.

Traditionally, the military rewards jobs-well-done with better or faster promotions. For officers, the addition of gold braid on their sleeves or a change in silver insignia represents an easy-to-discern promotion in rank.

In cases where no promotion takes place, a new, more responsible assignment?—such as becoming a commanding officer of a ship or aircraft squadron?—is a clear indication of an officer's continuous good work.

Acts of valor, on the other hand, are usually brief events?—sometimes instantaneous?—but of course are still worthy of note. Awarding ribbons are the usual way the military offers this notice.

The military also assigns precedence among various ribbons by placing them in an order of importance, with the most important residing at the top of a uniform's area for ribbons, and the least important living at the bottom.

A full chest of ribbons usually contains the four types?—one each for valor, for a job well-done, for stating where and when the wearer served, and?—finally?—ribbons representing an individual's professional self-improvement.

It gets more complicated. The military also awards “dual-use” ribbons that can indicate heroism with a quarter-inch “V” attachment. The Army and Air Force call the “V” the “V Device” and the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard call it the “Combat V.”

Without the V, the ribbon stands for “extraordinary” or “meritorious” conduct. And this varies between service branches. The same medal can mean different things depending on the service that issues it. Yes, this is complicated. Thanks for bearing with me.

At the beginning of World War II, the big three awards for valor and heroism—the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star—were known to most military personnel and even to many civilians.

But with the growth of military bureaucracy, manned by more and more careerists whose fingers have pulled more paper than triggers, the military developed a mindset that these silent warriors, working behind the lines, needed some recognition. The rear-echelon types began issuing themselves ribbons simply for being good administrators.

As a result, it's gotten really hard to discern a hero from a bureaucrat. Plus there's the visual pollution of dozens of ribbons adorning one uniform. Furthermore, ribbon-proliferation dilutes the importance of any particular award. Any one medal doesn't mean a whole lot when everyone's got lots and lots of them.

The following series, depicting four sets of ribbons, shows the evolution of medals for heroism competing with great-job ribbons.

The top seven ribbons the U.S. Army awarded at the beginning of World War II—five ribbons for heroism, one for a great job, and one for being wounded—are depicted here in priority order. The Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal (a great-job medal), the Silver Star Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Soldier's Medal for non-combat heroism and the Purple Heart.

The only addition for heroism in the U.S. Army by the end of 1945 was the Bronze Star Medal with the V Device. The medals the Army added for heroism after the 1950s are the Air Medal, the Joint Service Commendation Medal and the Army Commendation Medal, all of which offer the opportunity to attach the V Device, converting the ribbon from great-job award to an award for heroism.

Heroism medals have to compete visually with great-job medals as well as ones for "been there" and "done that." If we were to limit visual clutter to only the addition of great-job ribbons, you begin to see the problem.

Hero medals now compete with great-job ribbons added since the end of World War II (in red) and great-job ribbons added before and during World War II (in green). In both cases, hero ribbons compete for precedence. In some cases, great-job ribbons outrank awards for heroism. Furthermore, the qualifications are such that only those at the top of the military hierarchy are in a position to receive them.

Take the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, which outranks the Silver Star, the third-highest medal for heroism. According to the Defense Department, the

DDSM is only awarded to “members whose direct and individual contribution to national security or national defense are recognized as being so exceptional in scope and value as to be equivalent to contribution associated with positions encompassing broader responsibilities.”

But isn't that what high-ranking generals and admirals are supposed to do? Awarding generals and admirals a medal for “encompassing broader responsibilities” after also giving them four stars is the functional equivalent of a participation award.

Not that many service members would even recognize the great-job ribbons. The author's recent unscientific survey of a group of U.S. Air Force enlisted airmen illustrates the effect of ribbon-clutter. None of the five airmen could name or recognize any valor-based ribbon aside from the Medal of Honor.

“We have trouble keeping up with the ribbons they keep awarding us, so when we see someone else's medals, we usually try to see what ribbons we might have in common,” one airman said.

That airman has been in the Air Force for just under four years and yet he had been awarded seven ribbons. For a comparison, Army generals Dwight D. Eisenhower and Henry “Hap” Arnold each received only 10 American ribbons during their entire military careers—culminating, of course, with World War II.

The ribbons received by an Air Force airman after four years is close to reaching the number of American ribbons two American generals, Eisenhower and Arnold, received after over 30 or 40 years respectively in the U.S. Army.

Now contrast the number of ribbons Army general Omar Bradley received by the end of World War II to the ribbons awarded to Gen. David Petraeus after his 37-year career in the U.S. Army that ended in 2011.

Gen. David Petraeus's Medals.

Seven of Petraeus's 11 personal decorations were created after 1970, so if he wore only those medals available during World War II, he would have just four medals and only one for heroism—the Bronze Star Medal with V Device.

Gen. Omar Bradley's Medals.

Bradley's medals were all awarded by the end of World War II, including the Silver Star, the third-highest medal for heroism.

The addition of been-there and done-that ribbons added to Petraeus's personal decorations, resulting in a display not unlike that of a Latin American potentate. Petraeus's look differs from Bradley's more conservative appearance.

This is not to diminish the importance of great-job medals. Indeed, they are an important function of personal military decorations. Rewarding great work is an appropriate application of military medals, particularly for younger service members.

It's possible that great work can have an even greater benefit to the military and the country than an individual's heroic acts. An excellent example is illustrated by the efforts of the late Air Force Colonel John R. Boyd.

Five years after Boyd received his first Legion of Merit as a 32-year old Air Force captain—a virtually unheard-of feat, as the Legion of Merit is often referred to as a "colonel's medal"—he received another Legion of Merit because he "developed the energy-maneuverability concept," which helps pilots and designers to compare one airplane against another in a quantitative way.

In layman's terms, his methods permitted pilots to see where an enemy airplane has advantages and disadvantages in the air. Boyd took his energy-maneuverability concepts to Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War and briefed pilots on how to use the concepts to avoid getting hit by surface-to-air missiles.

While waiting for a friend at the Miramar Naval Air Station Officer's Club, I struck up a conversation with an officer sitting next to me at the bar. Noticing his gold wings and ribbons, indicating he'd been to Vietnam, I asked him if he'd ever heard of John Boyd.

"You bet," he said.

"What do you know about him?" I asked.

"He came over to 'Nam to brief us on how to use his energy-maneuverability to evade SAMs."

"What did you think of his briefing?"

"My wingman thought he was full of crap. I didn't. Only one of us is here talking to you."

Boyd ultimately was awarded four Legions of Merit. The cumulative effect of his efforts most likely saved more lives than any singular heroic act. However, if Boyd were alive today, I believe he would agree that individual acts of heroism should be at the head of the line.

Here then is a better way to make valorous awards stand out—and in such a way that even civilians will know they're looking at a warrior who has risked his or her life to save others.

Currently, the regulations call for unit citations—?ribbons awarded to a group rather than to an individual—?to be displayed on the right side of the uniform from the wearer’s perspective, the side opposite of where ribbons are normally worn. Although unit citations are important, deference should be given to the individual hero.

Looking at the picture of Petraeus, it’s not immediately obvious that he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with a V Device, a medal for heroism. But if it were on the right side where unit citations currently reside all alone, it would be clear to anyone that he’d been awarded a ribbon for heroism.

Ranking great-job medals higher in precedence than those for heroism also indicates a misunderstanding of human nature—?and a miscalculation of value—?on the part of the military bureaucracy

It is often less-expensive enlisted personnel who find themselves in hazardous conditions and who are likely to encounter—?to put it obliquely—?the opportunity to demonstrate valor. Awarding a two-star general at the Pentagon the third-highest military ribbon for creativity with his pen and ranking such action greater than, say, a combat soldier saving someone during a firefight, is plain wrong.

Becoming a one-star general or admiral should be reward in and of itself. And rising from one star to four should require no further adulation.

As Napoleon famously observed, humans are motivated by the possibility of being acknowledged for having done more than was expected of them. Our own Medal of Honor, awarded for acts “above and beyond the call of duty,” acknowledges this. Congress was concerned enough about the dilution of the Medal of Honor that, over the decades, lawmakers have passed several laws making it a crime to falsely wear the United States’ highest award ... or even claim to have won it.

A U.S. court of appeals effectively endorsed those laws in early 2016. “We conclude that the government ... has a ‘substantial countervailing objective’ of avoiding dilution of ‘the country’s recognition of [the award recipient’s] sacrifice in the form of military honors,’” the court wrote.

But an unintentional dilution of medals for valor, honor and sacrifice is exactly what has happened due to the proliferation of ribbons. To honor our true heroes, we should isolate their ribbons for the sake of visual clarity. Put ‘em on the wearer’s right.

That won’t totally solve the ribbon-clutter problem. But it’s a start.
