

# The Case for a Higher Minimum Wage

The Tea Party claims to represent average Americans but its anti-government zealotry lines up with the interests of big-business elites, such as opposition to an increased minimum wage, a plan that would help millions of average Americans, writes Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Some 47 million Americans live in poverty, and a key reason is the decline of the minimum wage.

First established under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the nationwide minimum wage was designed to lift millions of American workers out of poverty and to stimulate the economy. Unfortunately, however, it was not indexed to inflation, and big businesses – hostile from the start – fought, often successfully, to prevent congressional action to raise it.

As a result, over the past 40 years, the purchasing power of the minimum wage has fallen sharply. If Congress had kept the minimum wage in pace with inflation over this period, it would today be \$10.74. But, in fact, it is \$7.25 – about two-thirds of its previous purchasing power.

A major consequence is that increasing numbers of workers and their families live in poverty. The annual salary of a full-time American worker employed at \$7.25 per hour is \$15,080 – less than the official federal government poverty level for a family of two. The poverty level for a family of four is \$23,550 – considerably beyond what a minimum-wage worker earns.

At the same time, the rich have grown far richer. Between 1968 and 2012, as the minimum wage declined in value, the top 1 percent of households doubled their share of the nation's income. The typical CEO of a big business received a 16 percent raise in 2012 – to \$15.1 million. That year, the pay of Wal-Mart's CEO, Mike Duke, rose 14 percent, to \$20.7 million.

By contrast, Walmart – the largest employer in the United States – pays its sales associates an average wage of \$8.81 an hour. It is much the same story at McDonald's, which employs large numbers of the nation's low-wage workers. In 2012, the CEO of McDonald's was paid \$27.7 million. Although his income roughly tripled in 2012, the income of McDonald's fast food workers remained abysmal. Thanks to this pattern, the United States now has the most unequal distribution of income in the industrialized world.

Another consequence of keeping the minimum wage low is that, by under-paying

workers, corporations are shifting the real costs of doing business to the general public. According to a study released this October by the University of California and the University of Illinois, 52 percent of America's fast food workers receive assistance from public programs like food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Medicaid thanks to their poverty-level wages.

As a result, taxpayers are contributing \$7 billion per year to pick up the cost of supporting these fast-food workers. The study estimates that public assistance to McDonald's workers alone amounts to \$1.2 billion a year – the equivalent of one-fifth of that corporation's annual profits. Taxpayers are also paying enormous amounts to support the impoverished employees of Walmart and other giant companies.

Many people have recognized the negative consequences of letting the minimum wage dwindle to insignificance. Twenty states and the District of Columbia have raised their minimum wages higher than the \$7.25 federal rate. Congress is currently considering the Fair Minimum Wage Act that would gradually raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 in three steps and then index it to the cost of living.

In addition, more than 120 cities across the United States have adopted "living wage" ordinances that require employers benefitting from publicly funded service contracts or economic development subsidies to pay wages higher than the state or federal minimums.

Taking matters into their own hands, desperate workers in low-wage establishments, such as Walmart, McDonald's, Burger King and Wendy's have begun staging walkouts, demanding higher wages. This August, workers protested at nearly 1,000 fast-food restaurants in more than 50 cities, demanding \$15 per hour. Polls also show that the overwhelming majority of the American people support raising the minimum wage.

So why not do it? The major objection trumpeted by the corporations and their apologists is that raising the minimum wage would lead to a loss of jobs. But sophisticated studies by economists have reported little or no effect on employment of raising the minimum wage. Summarizing the studies earlier this year, Paul Krugman – the Nobel Prize-winning economist – declared: "The great preponderance of the evidence ... points to little if any negative effect of minimum wage increases on employment."

Why is this the case? One reason is that, with a higher wage, workers stay on the job longer, thus increasing labor efficiency and decreasing the cost of recruitment and retraining. Another is that two-thirds of minimum wage workers

are employed by large businesses, which can easily afford higher wages (though they'd rather not pay them). Walmart, for example, had \$469 billion in sales and \$17 billion in profits in 2012.

The number of jobs, however, is not really the crucial issue. What *is* the crucial issue is the kind of jobs. Americans could have full employment if they had a slave labor system. But they don't *want* a slave labor system. They could have full employment if they had a sweatshop labor system. But they don't *want* a sweatshop labor system. Most Americans want a labor system that treats workers with fairness and respect.

Another objection is that low-wage workers are mostly teenagers, who don't have to support a family. But people over the age of 20 constitute more than 88 percent of the 30 million American workers who would receive a raise if the federal minimum wage were increased to \$10.10 an hour. These are adults – many of them married and, also, parents.

Still another objection is that, in a struggling economy, raising the minimum wage would be bad for business. But, in fact, consumer spending drives 70 percent of the economy, and those at the lower end of the economic spectrum, out of necessity, spend a larger portion of their income than do the wealthy. Therefore, raising the minimum wage would pump billions of dollars of consumer spending into the American economy. And unlike the vast government subsidies to businesses, this would be at no cost to taxpayers.

And so it makes good sense to raise the minimum wage to a level that adequately supports working Americans and their families. Until that occurs, we will live with the shameful fact that the richest nation on earth has millions of full-time employees earning poverty-level wages while giant corporations and the wealthy amass trillions of dollars at these workers' expense.

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## Forgetting the Threat from Nukes

In recent weeks, international attention has focused on the apparent use of chemical weapons in Syria. But nuclear weapons represent an even greater threat to human life, and the countries possessing these fearsome weapons continue to press ahead in modernizing them, writes Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

The apparent employment of chemical weapons in Syria should remind us that, while weapons of mass destruction exist, there is a serious danger that they will be used.

That danger is highlighted by an article in the September/October 2013 issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Written by two leading nuclear weapons specialists, Hans Kristensen and Robert Norris of the Federation of American Scientists, the article provides important information about nuclear weapons that should alarm everyone concerned about the future of the planet.

At present, the article reports, more than 17,000 nuclear warheads remain in the possession of nine nations (the United States, Russia, Britain, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea). Over 90 percent of that inventory consists of U.S. and Russian warheads.

These weapons, of course, are incredibly destructive, and almost all of them can massacre populations far more effectively than did the atomic bomb that obliterated the city of Hiroshima. Indeed, a single one of these weapons can slaughter hundreds of thousands of people.

Although U.S., Russian, British, and French stockpiles of nuclear weapons have been declining since the end of the Cold War, those of the five other nuclear nations have been growing. Consequently, as Kristensen and Norris observe, with the possible exception of North Korea, all of these countries "have sufficient numbers of warheads and delivery systems to inflict enormous destruction over significant ranges with catastrophic humanitarian and climatic consequences in their regions and beyond."

Furthermore, many of these deadly weapons stand ready for almost instant use. As the authors state, "roughly 1,800 U.S. and Russian warheads are on high alert atop long-range ballistic missiles that are ready to launch 5 to 15 minutes after receiving an order."

But surely these terrible weapons are being phased out, aren't they? After all, the major nuclear powers, plus most nations, have formally committed themselves to building a nuclear weapons-free world. And it is certainly true that the number of nuclear weapons on the world scene has dropped very significantly from the roughly 70,000 that existed in 1986.

Even so, there are numerous signs that the nuclear disarmament momentum is slowing. Not only have nuclear disarmament negotiations between the United States (with 7,700 nuclear warheads) and Russia (with 8,500 nuclear warheads) apparently run aground, but none of the nuclear powers seems to take the

rhetoric about a nuclear weapons-free world seriously.

Kristensen and Norris note: "All the nations with nuclear weapons continue to modernize or upgrade their nuclear arsenals, and nuclear weapons remain integral to their conception of national security."

For example, the United States is modifying its existing nuclear warheads while planning production of warheads with new designs. Russia is phasing out its Soviet-era missiles and submarines and deploying newer missiles, as well as additional warheads on its missiles. France is deploying new nuclear missiles on its fighter-bombers and submarines. China is upgrading its missile force, while India and Pakistan are locked in a race to deploy new types of nuclear weapons.

Although Israel is the most secretive of the nuclear powers, rumors are afloat that it is equipping some of its submarines with nuclear-capable cruise missiles. North Korea reportedly lacks operational nuclear weapons, but its hungry citizens can take heart that it is working to remedy this deficiency.

In addition, of course, it is quite possible, in the future, that other nations will develop nuclear weapons, terrorists will obtain such weapons from national stockpiles, or existing nuclear weapons will be exploded or launched accidentally.

In these very dangerous circumstances, surely the safest course of action would be to have the international community agree on a treaty requiring the destruction of all existing stocks of nuclear weapons and a ban on their future production.

Nuclear disarmament discussions along these and other lines have recently been concluded by a UN Open Ended Working Group, and will be continued in late September by a UN High Level Meeting and later this fall by the UN General Assembly First Committee.

But, to judge from past government behavior, it does not seem likely that disarmament discussions among government officials will get very far without substantial public pressure upon them to cope with the nuclear weapons menace. And it is a menace – one at least as dangerous to the future of world civilization as the existence of chemical weapons. So pressing world leaders for action on nuclear disarmament seems thoroughly appropriate.

The alternative is to throw up our hands and wait, while power-hungry governments continue to toy with their nuclear weaponry and, ultimately, produce a catastrophe of immense proportions.

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## In the Grip of Warfare

Amid a deepening scientific consensus that human activity is inviting environmental catastrophe, humanity's continued reliance on warfare to settle disputes is the other incendiary element in the mix for global annihilation, as Lawrence S. Wittner observes.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Is the human race determined to snuff itself out through mass violence? There are many signs that it is.

The most glaring indication lies in the continued popularity of war. Despite well over a hundred million deaths in World Wars I and II, plus the brutal military conflicts in Korea, Indochina, Hungary, Algeria, Lebanon, Angola, Mozambique, the Philippines, the Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, wars continue to rage across the globe, consuming vast numbers of lives and resources.

In 2012, worldwide military spending reached \$1.75 trillion. Moreover, the most lavish spenders for weaponry, war, and destruction were the supposedly "civilized" nations of NATO, with \$1 trillion in military expenditures. By far the biggest military spender in 2012 was the United States, which accounted for 39 percent of the world total.

Nor has this pattern shifted since that time. Currently, the U.S. government is pouring \$7 billion a month into its 12 ½-year-long war in Afghanistan. Elsewhere, drones are rapidly becoming the U.S. weapons of choice in the worldwide "War on Terror," with America's largest spy drone, the Global Hawk, costing \$220 million each.

In recent months, as the U.S. House of Representatives dropped food stamps for the poor from the agriculture bill, continued the sequestration that slashed meals for sick and homebound seniors, and moved toward ending Saturday mail delivery, it rejected a 1 percent cut in military spending and, then, voted for a national defense authorization that provided for billions of dollars more than the Pentagon requested.

Furthermore, a nation's armed forces often engage in violent behavior quite unrelated to their national security. Commanded by military officers viewing themselves as the saviors of their countries, they have staged bloody coups against their own governments, terrorizing and massacring civilians in large numbers, as they did in Indonesia, Burma, Nigeria, Brazil, Greece, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and many other countries. At the moment, in fact, the Egyptian armed forces, having deposed a democratically-elected, civilian government, are busy gunning down thousands of Egyptians.

In fairness to the official armed forces, it should be noted that the mass violence in many societies goes far beyond them. Terrorism, gang wars and religious massacres continue to plague nations around the globe. In the United States, lynching has declined dramatically, but gun-related killings are quite common.

More than 30,000 Americans die in gun violence each year and in a society with over 300 million firearms in the hands of civilians it seems unlikely that such violence will decline. Indeed, massacres by gunmen for example, the murder of 20 children and 6 teachers at the Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut have become almost routine.

Admittedly, the Sandy Hook massacre was the work of a mentally-deranged individual. But the NRA's response to a series of mass killings opposition to all gun control legislation and a stubborn insistence that wider availability of guns will reduce violence makes the Newtown maniac look relatively sane.

And what is one to say about the mental state of the pro-gun zealots who, this August, made plans to turn up, fully-armed, at a Starbucks in Newtown – and were foiled only when the horrified management shut down the coffee house?

The acceptability of mass violence is demonstrated on a much larger scale by national governments' ongoing preparations for nuclear war. Sixty-eight years after the U.S. government employed atomic bombs to exterminate the populations of two Japanese cities and it became clear to all but the mentally feeble that nuclear war meant global annihilation, over 17,000 nuclear weapons remain in existence, with 94 percent of them in the arsenals of the U.S. and Russian governments.

Despite numerous claims by national leaders that they are committed to building a nuclear weapons-free world, the United States, Russia, China, India and Pakistan are currently modernizing their nuclear weapons, with the United States and Russia spending about \$75 billion a year between them on this project.

Meanwhile, the North Korean government threatens to attack the United States

with its small nuclear arsenal, while the Iranian government continues a uranium enrichment process that might enable it to enter the nuclear club. Appropriately enough, the famous “Doomsday Clock” of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists stands at five minutes to midnight.

There are, of course, important countervailing trends. Responding to the development of modern, mechanized warfare, mass-based peace movements began to appear in the Nineteenth Century. During the Twentieth Century, these movements grew even larger, particularly after the advent of nuclear weapons. In place of war, they championed international arbitration, global cooperation, arms control and disarmament, and the development of global governance.

The World Court, the United Nations and other international institutions owe much to this public pressure. Within individual nations, as well, critics of mass violence fostered new, more cooperative modes of education, non-violent resistance, conflict resolution, innovative therapies, peace studies programs and gun control campaigns.

But resorting to violence is a long-term, deeply-ingrained habit in human history, and is not easily discarded. To shake it probably requires less attention to a royal childbirth or the latest sex scandal and more attention to the dangers of mass violence in an age of modern weaponry and war.

This was certainly what the French writer, Albert Camus, meant when, in the immediate aftermath of World War II and the first use of nuclear weapons, he offered a simple but powerful challenge: “All I ask is that, in the midst of a murderous world, we agree to reflect on murder and to make a choice.”

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## Obama Bows to Nuke Status Quo

President Obama has spoken brave words about breaking with the Cold War legacy of mutual assured destruction from nuclear weapons. But he has failed to challenge the national security state in implementing the change he espoused, as Lawrence S. Wittner says.

By Lawrence S. Wittner



Nearly a quarter century after the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the U.S. government is still getting ready for nuclear war.

This fact was underscored on June 19, 2013, when the Pentagon, on behalf of President Barack Obama, released a report to Congress outlining what it called the U.S. government's "Nuclear Employment Strategy." Although the report indicated some minor alterations in U.S. policy, it exhibited far more continuity than change.

In 2010, the administration's Nuclear Posture Review declared that it would work toward making deterrence of nuclear attack the "sole purpose" of U.S. nuclear weapons. The 2013 report, however, without any explanation, reported that "we cannot adopt such a policy today." Thus, as in the past, the U.S. government considers itself free to initiate a nuclear attack on other nations.

In addition, the 2013 "Nuclear Employment Strategy" continued U.S. government reliance on a "nuclear triad" of ground-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles, and bomber-launched nuclear weapons. Although the need for one or more legs of this "triad" has been debated since the early 1990s, the 2013 report concluded that "retaining all three triad legs will best maintain strategic stability."

The 2013 "Nuclear Employment Strategy" also retained another controversial aspect of U.S. nuclear policy: counterforce strategy. Designed to employ U.S. nuclear weapons to destroy an enemy nation's nuclear weapons, delivery systems, and associated installations, counterforce is potentially very destabilizing, for it provides an incentive to nations caught up in a crisis to knock out the opponent's nuclear weapons before they can be used.

And this, in turn, means that nations are more likely to initiate nuclear war and to desire large numbers of nuclear weapons to avoid having their weapons totally destroyed by a preemptive attack. Consequently, as Hans Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists has noted, the report's emphasis on counterforce "undercuts efforts to reduce the role and numbers of nuclear weapons."

Furthermore, despite a growing desire among Western nations to have the U.S. government remove an estimated 200 nuclear-armed B61 gravity bombs – weapons dating back to the 1960s – deployed in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey, the Pentagon report made no proposal along these lines. These Cold War relics, too, remain untouchable.

One shift in emphasis indicated in the "Nuclear Employment Strategy" is a presidential directive to Pentagon officials to "reduce the role of `launch

under attack.'” Currently, it is U.S. policy to fire nuclear weapons at an opponent on short notice if there are signs that a nuclear strike is under way against the United States or its allies. But this reduction in the likelihood of sliding into a full-scale nuclear war would be more reassuring if the President’s directive did not also command the Pentagon to retain a launch-under-attack capability, in case the President decided to use it.

But what about Obama’s lofty rhetoric of April 2009, in Prague, where he stated that the U.S. government was committed to building a nuclear-weapons-free world? Also, didn’t he renew that approach in his Berlin speech of June 19, 2013, only hours before the issuance of the Pentagon’s “Nuclear Employment Strategy,” when he called for nuclear disarmament negotiations with the Russians?

Yes, the rhetoric of 2009 was very inspiring, landing Obama a Nobel Peace Prize and raising hopes around the world that the nuclear menace was on the verge of extinction. But fairly little came of it, with the modest exception of the New START Treaty with Russia.

The Berlin speech, too, was substantially over-rated. Although many media reports implied that Obama had proposed decreasing the Russian and American nuclear arsenals by a third, the reality was that the President suggested his readiness to support a reduction of “up to” a third of *deployed* Russian and American *strategic* nuclear weapons.

Under the New START Treaty, the limit to the number of these kinds of weapons in each nation is 1,550. Thus, in reality, Obama announced that he favored an agreement for each nation to eliminate 1 to 517 of them. From the standpoint of nuclear disarmers, that reduction would certainly be welcome – if, in the face of Republican resistance, it is ever consummated. But, it should be noted that, at present, the U.S. government possesses approximately 7,700 nuclear weapons.

Another indication that the Obama administration is in no hurry to fulfill its promises about building a nuclear weapons-free world is found in its fiscal 2014 budget proposal to Congress. Here, amid sharp cuts for a broad variety of programs, there is a proposed nine percent increase in federal funding for the Energy Department’s U.S. nuclear weapons activities, including upgrading nuclear warheads (like the B61 gravity bomb, slated for a \$10 billion makeover) and modernizing nuclear weapons production facilities.

This administration unwillingness to discard the immensely dangerous, outdated nuclear policies of the past flies in the face of public support for abolishing nuclear weapons, whether expressed in public opinion polls or in the resolutions of mainstream bodies like the National Council of Churches and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. But, unless there is a substantial public mobilization to

end the American government's reliance on nuclear war, it seems likely that U.S. officials will continue to prepare for it.

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## US Still Dominates in Arms Spending

The U.S. government's military spending excess – when compared with the rest of the world – is down somewhat due mostly to troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan but still accounts for 39 percent of the global total, according to a new international study, examined by Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

According to [a report](#) just released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), world military expenditures in 2012 totaled \$1.75 trillion. And, the report revealed that, as in all recent decades, the world's biggest military spender by far was the U.S. government, whose expenditures for war and preparations for war amounted to \$682 billion – 39 percent of the global total.

The United States spent more than four times as much on the military as China (the number two big spender) and more than seven times as much as Russia (which ranked third). Although the military expenditures of the United States dipped a bit in 2012, largely thanks to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, they remained 69 percent higher than in 2001.

U.S. military supremacy is even more evident when the U.S. military alliance system is brought into the picture, for the United States and its allies accounted for the vast bulk of world military spending in 2012. NATO members, including the United States, spent \$1 trillion dollars on the military.

Thus, although studies have found that the United States ranks 17<sup>th</sup> among nations in education, 26<sup>th</sup> in infant mortality, and 37<sup>th</sup> in life expectancy and overall health, there is no doubt that it ranks first when it comes to war.

This Number 1 status might not carry much weight among Americans scavenging for food in garbage dumpsters, among Americans unable to afford medical care, or among Americans shivering in poorly heated homes. Even many Americans in the

more comfortable middle class might be more concerned with how they are going to afford the skyrocketing costs of a college education, how they can get by with fewer teachers, firefighters and police in their communities, and how their hospitals, parks, roads, bridges and other public facilities can be maintained.

Of course, there is a direct connection between the massive level of U.S. military spending and belt-tightening austerity at home: most federal discretionary spending goes for war.

The Lockheed Martin Corp.'s new F-35 joint strike fighter plane provides a good example of the U.S. government's warped priorities. It is estimated that this military weapons system will cost the U.S. government \$1.5 trillion by the time of its completion. Does this Cold War-style warplane, designed for fighting enemies the U.S. government no longer faces, represent a good investment for Americans?

After 12 years of production, costing \$396 billion, the F-35 has exhibited numerous design and engineering flaws, has been grounded twice, and has never been flown in combat. Given the immense military advantage the United States already has over all other nations in the world, is this most expensive weapons system in world history really necessary? And aren't there other, better things that Americans could be doing with their money?

Of course, the same is true for other countries. Is there really any justification for the nations of Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America to be increasing their level of military spending – as they did in 2012 – while millions of their people live in dire poverty? Projections indicate that, by 2015, about a billion people around the world will be living on an income of about \$1.25 per day. When, in desperation, they riot for bread, will the government officials of these nations, echoing Marie Antoinette, suggest that they eat the new warplanes and missiles?

President Dwight Eisenhower put it well in an address before the American Society of Newspaper Editors 60 years ago: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. . . . This world in arms is not spending money alone; it is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. . . . This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the clouds of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

That sentiment persists. On April 15, people in 43 countries participated in a Global Day of Action on Military Spending, designed to call attention to the squandering of the world's resources on war. Among these countries was the

United States, where polls show that 58 percent of Americans favor major reductions in U.S. military spending. How long will it take the governments of the United States and of other nations to catch up with them?

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## The Greed of Lockheed Martin

In 1961, President Eisenhower warned Americans about the danger of a Military-Industrial Complex diverting public funds into excessive arms manufacturing, but now that influence reaches more broadly into U.S. politics as military contractors flex their muscles on other businesses, as Lawrence S. Wittner describes.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

What do hungry children and the world's largest military contractor have in common? Not much, it seems. At the very time when (thanks to sequestration) state governments are cutting back aid to low-income women and their children, the government of the State of Maryland seems en route to providing the Lockheed Martin Corporation with a handout worth millions of dollars.

This is not just a Maryland issue; Pentagon contractors seek special breaks in virtually every congressional district in the U.S. The details of the Maryland case are illuminating.

Lockheed Martin, which did \$47 billion in business during 2012 mostly weapons sales to the U.S. government owns a very large, luxurious hotel and conference center in Montgomery County, Maryland. In 2010, the corporation succeeded in getting the state to exempt it from paying the state lodging tax that all other Maryland hotels paid.

Then it sought exemption from paying Montgomery County's 7 percent lodging tax. But the County Council, realizing that this would pull \$450,000 per year out of its annual revenues revenues that it used to fund education and other public services refused to give way to corporate pressure.

Indeed, it pointed out that the lodging costs of the company's employees at the hotel, including taxes, were already subsidized through Lockheed Martin's

contracts with the federal government. The company readily admitted this, but stated: "The fact that some percentage of those costs over time can be reimbursed by the federal government doesn't reduce the need to lower our overhead costs whenever we can."

Rebuffed on the local level, Lockheed Martin turned once more to its friends in the state government, championing a bill that would exempt it from Montgomery County taxes and, furthermore, force the county to provide it with a \$1.4 million refund for past tax payments.

But this new company demand sparked a lively citizens' campaign in opposition to what was dubbed the "Corporate Welfare for Lockheed Bill." Dozens of organizations threw themselves into the battle, including advocacy groups (Common Cause, Fund Our Communities, Progressive Neighbors, Progressive Maryland, and the NAACP), labor unions (United Food and Commercial Workers, SEIU, and unions representing teachers, police, and fire fighters), and peace groups (Peace Action, Pax Christi, and Maryland United for Peace and Justice).

Articles started to appear in the press. Local politicians began to speak out against the legislation. The County Council again voted its opposition to exempting Lockheed Martin from taxation.

Faced with an upsurge of popular resistance, the State Senate sent the measure back to committee, where it was amended to eliminate the provision for retroactive payment to Lockheed. This action reportedly infuriated a Lockheed lobbyist and represented a small victory for opponents of the legislation.

Nevertheless, a bill providing for the corporation's future tax exemption went forward, and was passed by the Senate on the night of March 13 by a vote of 37 to 9. The large majority included all but one Republican, as well as a substantial number of Democrats.

A counterpart bill is expected to reach the Ways and Means Committee of the House of Delegates soon. Given the controversy surrounding the measure, its fate remains uncertain. But the corporation seems determined to press forward.

Actually, Lockheed Martin has a long track record when it comes to enriching itself through government support. Its C-130 military transport plane has been a major source of profit for the company. Although, in the late 1970s, the Carter administration concluded that the very costly plane was no longer necessary, Lockheed's friends in Congress saw to it that the U.S. government purchased 256 of them over the next two decades.

In response to a request from Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, the Government Accountability Office did a study of how many of these planes the U.S. Air Force

had ordered. The answer was: five. Finding no use for the hundreds of planes, the Air Force simply parked many of them on airport runways, where they gathered dust.

And so it goes. Making vastly expensive weapons systems for the government remains a lucrative business. Lockheed has already forecast a record profit in 2013. A January 2013 [article](#) in Bloomberg News reported: "Lockheed's fortunes depend in large measure on the F-35 jet fighter, its biggest program and the Pentagon's costliest weapon system, at an estimated development cost of \$395.7 billion."

Of course, Lockheed keeps billions of dollars flowing into its coffers by spending millions every year on lobbying and millions more on campaign contributions. According to [Dina Rasor](#) of the Project on Government Oversight, Lockheed is "the ultimate pay-to-play contractor."

In this context, it's not surprising that Lockheed has enormous influence in Maryland politics. Over the past year, Lockheed [contributed](#) \$25,000 to the Maryland Democratic Party, plus thousands of additional dollars to the President of the Maryland Senate, the Senate Democratic Majority Leader, the chair of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, another member of that committee, and a member of the House of Delegates. Four of the five became co-sponsors of the Lockheed tax-exemption legislation and all four Senate members voted for it.

This coziness with Lockheed Martin can also become a source of embarrassment now that the issue is hot. A day after the State Senate voted to send the legislation to the House Ways and Means Committee, a [private dinner](#) between Lockheed lobbyists and the members of that committee was abruptly canceled.

Of course, it might well be asked why Lockheed Martin bothers with getting itself exempted from Montgomery County taxes. After all, \$4.5 million over the next decade is small change to this giant corporation.

One reason might be that most wealthy people genuinely believe that they are entitled to keep every cent of their income. This certainly explains why they resist paying taxes so ferociously.

Another possibility, though, is that Lockheed Martin, like most other military contractors, has grown accustomed to thriving at government expense. Thus, it just can't resist going back to the public trough for a little more corporate welfare.

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# The Fallacy of Arming Up

Easy civilian access to powerful weapons is a recipe for greater domestic violence, just as an over-emphasis on military force leads to more wars, a conundrum that requires a greater commitment to both arms control and systems for resolving disputes peacefully, observes Lawrence S. Wittner.

Lawrence S. Wittner

In a number of ways, gun control issues are remarkably similar to arms control issues. People who favor gun control argue that the availability of guns facilitates the use of these weapons for murderous purposes. Arms controllers make much the same case, asserting that weapons buildups lead to arms races and wars.

Both stress the imperative of weapons controls in an era of growing technological sophistication, pointing out that assault weapons sharply increase dangers domestically, just as nuclear, chemical and biological weapons increase the dangers of a holocaust globally.

Weapons enthusiasts have also adopted a common approach. The National Rifle Association insists that weapons are harmless. According to the NRA, "people" are the problem, which can be solved by "good guys" using guns to intimidate or kill "bad guys."

Adopting much the same position, the military-industrial complex and its fans contend that the United States is the "good guy" and needs superior armaments to deter or destroy the "bad guys" or the "bad" countries.

In this debate, the weapons critics have a better case. Even if one leaves aside the difficulty of distinguishing between "good" and "bad" people, there is copious evidence indicating that, all other things being equal, the more access people have to weapons, the more likely they are to use them.

States and nations that have strict gun control laws have less gun-related violence than those that don't. Furthermore, heavily armed countries are more often at war than are militarily weaker nations. Indeed, nations flooded with weapons are particularly prone to bloodbaths. Just look at Syria, Congo, Mexico ... and the United States!

Although weapons enthusiasts in the United States lean upon other justifications



for armed might, these are even flimsier. The much-cited Second Amendment to the Constitution deals with a “well regulated militia” an outdated institution that has no connection to today’s gun-owners. Moreover, the alleged patriotic necessity of resisting the U.S. government by force of arms is not only unconstitutional, but treasonous.

Even so, the weapons enthusiasts have spotted a genuine weakness in the case made by the weapons controllers. Specifically, while weapons exist, it *is* necessary to prevent or restrain armed aggression – by individuals or by nations. The fact that the enthusiasts’ “solution” – throwing more weaponry into the mix – merely exacerbates the problem cannot hide the existence of the problem. So what, in these circumstances, should be done about it?

Preventing or restraining armed aggression needs to be tackled not only by arms control and disarmament, but also by just and effective governance on the local, national and international levels. To some degree, this job has been accomplished within many nations.

Particularly when countries have representative governments, equitable laws, an impartial judiciary, fair policing, an accessible mental health care system, and a high level of social well-being, conflicts within them can be settled short of resorting to armed violence – at least if these countries are not awash in guns.

The issue is trickier on the international level, where governance is a much newer and more rudimentary phenomenon. In this case, there is no alternative to supporting the development of global institutions that will replace the rule of force with the force of law.

Clearly this transformation will require scrapping aggressive action by individual nations, as well as vigilante action by groups of nations. Above all, it will require developing the United Nations as the final arbiter and resolver of international disputes.

As many people of goodwill recognize, the United Nations has shown the world the path that should be taken toward eradicating poverty and disease, defending human rights, and resolving conflicts among nations. The problem with the United Nations is that it is often too weak to move the world very far in this direction.

If, on the other hand, the United Nations were strengthened, it would not only provide a better means for the spread of international law, justice and social well-being, but a more effective force for disarmament and world peace.

After all, this is the job for which the United Nations was created. And is it so unreasonable to provide the world organization with the appropriate authority to handle the task?

In the Book of Isaiah, there is a well-known prophecy: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Today, a dramatic "Swords Into Plowshares" statue adorns the garden of the New York City headquarters of the United Nations, awaiting the day when that prophecy will be fulfilled.

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## Worshipping Materialism at Christmas

The prevailing view on Fox News is that everyone in America, regardless of his or her religious beliefs, must join in the lavish and lengthy celebration of the birth of Jesus or be accused of warring on Christmas. But the real assault on Jesus's teaching comes from gross materialism, says Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Although fundamentalist fanatics have been working for decades to turn the United States into a "Christian nation," they have not had much success along these lines.

One reason for their failure is that religious minorities and non-believers have resisted. And another is probably that a large number of Americans want to preserve religious tolerance and avoid theocracy. But it might also reflect the fact that the United States is now firmly in the grip of a different religion: shopping.

After all, in this "holiday season" the dominant activity does not seem to be traditional religious worship or prayer. The recently-concluded Black Friday provided the occasion not only for an orgy of consumer spending, but for ferocious action by screaming mobs of shoppers who engaged in [mass riots](#) in their desperate attempts to obtain a variety of products.

The frenzied participants were not starving, impoverished peasants or product-deprived refugees from communist nations but reasonably comfortable, middle-class Americans. Their desperation was not driven by hunger. They simply wanted ... *more!*

And now that the nation enters its Christmas shopping spree – conveniently begun in November, to allow plenty of time for the practice – there will undoubtedly be lots more commodity fetishism. The shopping malls are already alive with the Christmas music designed to encourage purchases, while visions of rising sales figures dance through the heads of happy store managers.

All of this, of course, leads to complaints by traditional religious believers about the commercialization of Christmas. Of course, the bloviators on Fox News seek to blame the decline of religious feeling during the Christmas season upon liberal thought. But the hard reality is that Jesus in the manger or bleeding on the cross has less appeal to many Americans than do the latest cellphones and other commercial gadgetry.

Actually, despite the emphasis on purchases during the holidays, shopping is a year-round phenomenon in the United States. Children might not be able to read, write, add, or subtract, but they know a great deal about the latest consumer products.

Their parents and grandparents are thoroughly familiar with them as well. And why wouldn't they be? A vast array of products is regularly featured on TV and radio programs, on roadside billboards, and in their newspapers and magazines.

In fact, commercial advertising is ubiquitous in the United States, with few Americans able to escape it. Even when people are not in their homes, commercial television programs – those shoddy, thought-free commodities developed to keep the ads from bumping together – run continuously in doctors' waiting rooms, auto repair shops, elevators, train stations, hospitals, restaurants, airports, school cafeterias, bars, and taxis.

Furthermore, advertising is not designed to merely alert people to the availability of a product, but to make them want it. Commercial enterprises understand that, thanks to the influence of advertising, purchases will not be based upon need, but upon desire.

Advertising will stir dissatisfaction with what people already have and create a craving for something else. And this is a very promising route to sales. Naturally, then, U.S. corporations engulf Americans in advertising. It's an excellent investment, and produces legions of eager, even desperate shoppers.

Only a very rare American politician would be willing to stand up against the

resulting steamroller of consumerism. Imagine the political future of a candidate for public office who said:

“There has been enough talk of economic growth and competition as the solutions to our problems. Our real challenges as Americans are to limit our consumption to what we genuinely need, to share with others who are less fortunate than we are, and to halt the plunder of our planet’s resources and the destruction of our environment.”

I suspect that she or he would not get very far. Nor, despite the similarity of this approach to the core values of religious faiths, is it popular among the mainstream U.S. churches. Yes, they encourage small-scale charitable ventures. But they do little to challenge the consumerist ethos.

Indeed, the most active and rapidly growing among the churches – the fundamentalist and evangelical denominations – have rallied behind political candidates championing unbridled capitalism and the prerogatives of wealth. “Drill baby, drill” seems far more popular among them than the Golden Rule.

Ironically, then, by not opposing the corporate cultivation of untrammelled greed among Americans, the churches have left the door open to the triumph of America’s new religion – not liberal secularism, but shopping.

**Lawrence S. Wittner is professor of history emeritus at SUNY/Albany. His latest book is *Working for Peace and Justice: Memoirs of an Activist Intellectual* (University of Tennessee Press).**

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## Americans Sour on Endless War

The Right thinks it has a winning issue in mocking President Obama for “leading from behind” on international crises like last year’s uprising in Libya. But a new study finds Americans leery of more war, supportive of diplomacy and eager for less military spending, says Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

In the midst of a nationwide election campaign in which many politicians trumpet their support for the buildup and deployment of U.S. military power around the world, the American public’s disagreement with such measures is quite remarkable. Indeed, many signs point to the fact that most Americans want to

avoid new wars, reduce military spending, and support international cooperation.

The latest evidence along these lines is a nationwide opinion survey just released as a report ("Foreign Policy in the New Millennium") by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Conducted in late May and early June 2012, the survey resulted in some striking findings.

One is that most Americans are quite disillusioned with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan during the past decade. Asked about these conflicts, 67 percent of respondents said they had not been worth fighting. Indeed, 69 percent said that, despite the war in Afghanistan, the United States was no safer from terrorism.

Naturally, these attitudes about military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan fed into opinions about future military involvement. Eighty-two percent of those surveyed favored bringing U.S. troops home from Afghanistan by 2014 or by an earlier date. Majorities also opposed maintaining long-term military bases in either country. And 71 percent agreed that "the experience of the Iraq war should make nations more cautious about using military force to deal with rogue states."

Certainly Americans seem to believe that their own military footprint in the world should be reduced. In the Chicago Council survey, 78 percent of respondents said that the United States was playing the role of a world policeman more than it should. Presented with a variety of situations, respondents usually stated that they opposed the use of U.S. military force.

For example, a majority opposed a U.S. military response to a North Korean invasion of South Korea. Or, to take an issue that is frequently discussed today Iran's possible development of nuclear weapons 70 percent of respondents opposed a U.S. military strike against that nation with the objective of destroying its nuclear facilities.

Yes, admittedly, a small majority (53 percent) thought that maintaining superior military power was a "very important goal." But this response was down by 14 points from 2002. Furthermore, to accomplish deficit reduction, 68 percent of respondents favored cutting U.S. spending on the military up 10 points from 2010.

Nor are these opinions contradictory. After all, U.S. military spending is so vast more than five times that of the number-two military spender, China that substantial cuts in the U.S. military budget can be made without challenging U.S. military superiority.

It should be noted that American preferences are anti-military rather than "isolationist." The report by the Chicago Council observes: "As they

increasingly seek to cut back on foreign expenditures and avoid military entanglement whenever possible, Americans are broadly supportive of nonmilitary forms of international engagement and problem solving.” These range from “diplomacy, alliances, and international treaties to economic aid and decision making through the UN.”

For example, the survey found that 84 percent of respondents favored the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (still un-ratified by the U.S. Senate), 70 percent favored the International Criminal Court treaty (from which the United States was withdrawn by President George W. Bush), and 67 percent favored a treaty to cope with climate change by limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

When asked about China, a nation frequently criticized by U.S. pundits and politicians alike, 69 percent of respondents believed that the United States should engage in friendly cooperation with that country.

The “isolationist” claim falls particularly flat when one examines American attitudes toward the United Nations. The Chicago Council survey found that 56 percent of respondents agreed that, when dealing with international problems, the United States should be “more willing to make decisions within the United Nations,” even if that meant that the United States would not always get its way.

Overall, then, Americans favor a less militarized U.S. government approach to world affairs than currently exists. Perhaps the time has come for politicians to catch up with them!

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## When GOP Likes Big Government

The Republican Party touts itself as the advocate for small government and individual liberty, but the reality is different when it comes to demanding that personal behavior fit with the moral precepts of fundamentalist Christianity and within the strictures of a national security state, says Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

One of the most widely advertised but falsest claims in American politics is

that the modern Republican Party stands for “small government.”

In the distant past, leading Republicans were indeed sharp critics of statism. And even today a few marginal party activists, like U.S. Rep. Ron Paul, have championed limited government – even libertarian – policies. But this is not at all the norm for the contemporary GOP.



For example, the Republican Party has stood up with remarkable consistency for the post-9/11 U.S. government policies of widespread surveillance, indefinite detention without trial, torture and extraordinary rendition.

It has also supported government subsidies for religious institutions, government restrictions on immigration and free passage across international boundaries, government denial of collective bargaining rights for public sector workers, government attacks on public use of public space (for example, the violent police assaults on the Occupy movement), and government interference with women’s right to abortion and doctors’ right to perform it.

And this barely scratches the surface of the Republican Party’s “big government” policies. The GOP has rallied fervently around government interference with the right of same-sex couples to marry, government provision of extraordinarily lengthy imprisonment for drug possession (for example, in the “war on drugs”) and numerous other nonviolent offenses, government interference with voting rights (such as “voter suppression” laws), and government restrictions on freedom of information.

Where, one wonders, is the Republican outrage at the U.S. government’s crackdown on people like Bradley Manning who expose government misconduct, or on whistle-blowing operations like WikiLeaks and its leading light, Julian Assange?

If the Republican Party were a zealous defender of civil liberties, as it claims to be, it would laud civil liberties organizations. But, in fact, the GOP has kept its distance from them. During the 1988 presidential campaign, George H. W. Bush, the Republican presidential candidate, publicly and repeatedly ridiculed his Democratic opponent as a “card-carrying member of the ACLU.”

Then, there is the largest national military machine in world history. A

Republican Party that wanted to limit government would be eager to cut funding for this bloated giant. But the reality is that the modern GOP has consistently supported a vast U.S. military buildup. Today, its presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, assails his Democratic competitor for military weakness and champions a \$2 trillion increase in U.S. military spending over the next decade.

Moreover, the Republican Party is an avid proponent of the most violent, abusive, and intrusive kind of government action – war. In recent decades, as U.S. military intervention or outright war raged in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada, Panama, Kuwait, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and other nations, the GOP was a leading source of flag-waving jingoism, as it is today in the U.S. government’s confrontation with Iran.

This is not a prescription for creating limited government. As the journalist Randolph Bourne remarked in the midst of U.S. government mobilization for World War I: “War is the health of the State.”

Yes, admittedly, there is plenty of GOP support for small government when it comes to cutting taxes on the wealthy, limiting regulation of big business, gutting environmental regulations, weakening legal protections for workers and racial minorities, and slashing government funding for public education, public health, and social welfare services.

But there is a common denominator to this kind of small government action. It is all designed to serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of everyone else. Thus, the Republican Party opposes government alleviation of hunger through the distribution of food stamps, but supports government subsidies to corporations.

Just take a look at the platform that will emerge from the GOP national convention. There will be plenty of rhetoric about freedom and limited government. But the party’s actual policies will reflect a very different agenda.

For those people who can see beyond the deluge of slick campaign advertisements, it should be clear enough that the Republican Party’s claim to support “small government” is a fraud. That claim is only an attractive mask, designed to disguise a party of privilege.

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