

Romney's Pentagon Budget Out of Step

While advocating more tax cuts tilted to the rich, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney also wants to expand military spending, meaning that social programs would take a big hit. But polls indicate Americans prefer cutting Pentagon dollars rather than Social Security and Medicare, writes Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

On some issues, there is a serious disconnect between candidates for public office and the public they are hoping to represent. Take the case of Mitt Romney and military spending.

For some time now, the Republican presidential candidate has been an avid proponent of a vast U.S. military buildup. Last October, in a speech at the Citadel, he promised that he would never “wave the white flag of surrender” but, rather, devote himself to creating “an American Century.” This would be secured, he explained, by a hefty increase in U.S. armaments.

In terms of U.S. warships alone, he promised to raise annual production by 67 percent. Attacking President Barack Obama for what he claimed was military weakness, Romney called for increasing the U.S. military budget, in fiscal 2013, by 17 percent. Indeed, he has proposed raising U.S. military spending by as much as \$2 trillion over the next decade.

This military obsession comes at a curious time. After all, the U.S. military budget – currently standing at \$648.6 billion – has risen dramatically over the last 13 years and is the largest in U.S. history. Currently, U.S. military spending constitutes nearly as much money as the military spending of all other countries combined.

Furthermore, in the context of severe budget cutting by Congress, popular domestic social programs are being sacrificed to support the U.S. military budget – so much so that it currently consumes more than half of the U.S. government's discretionary spending.

Even the Republican-dominated House of Representatives seems to recognize that the time has come for cuts – and not increases – in military spending. On July 19, it voted 326 to 90 for a budget that reduced U.S. military spending (earmarked for the Defense Department and for current wars) to \$606 billion in fiscal year 2013.

If liberals and critics of the Afghan War had had their way, the military budget

would have been cut still further. And, if the threatened budget sequestration takes place, it will be cut more substantially. Indeed, the idea of cutting the huge U.S. military budget seems to enjoy considerable popularity among Americans.

In May 2012, a survey of U.S. public opinion by the Stimson Center, the Program for Public Consultation, and the Center for Public Integrity found that 76 percent of respondents favored slashing U.S. military expenditures. This included 80 percent of respondents in districts that elected Democrats and 74 percent in districts that elected Republicans.

Even in districts with the heaviest military spending – and, thus, presumably benefiting from its economic impact three-quarters of the public favored reducing the military budget. “The idea that Americans ... want to keep total defense spending up so as to preserve local jobs is not supported by the data,” reported Dr. Steven Kull, director of the Program for Public Consultation, a survey group associated with the University of Maryland.

By contrast, support for increasing military spending – so fervently backed by Romney – stood at only 4 percent in Democratic districts and 15 percent in Republican districts. Even more striking, the average cut in such spending favored by the American public was very substantial: \$103.5 billion.

Part of the explanation for this widespread approval of deep cuts in the military budget probably reflects the fact that the participants were well informed. Before taking the survey, the respondents received detailed information about that budget and had the chance to read numerous arguments for and against it.

But other recent polls, done without the provision of such information, also indicate substantial restlessness at the level of U.S. military spending. Earlier this year, asked to choose which of three programs – Medicare, Social Security or the military – should receive lower funding “in order to cut government spending,” 52 percent of Americans chose the military, 15 percent chose Medicare, and 13 percent chose Social Security.

Surveys in 2011 had similar findings. Several CBS/*New York Times* polls revealed that, when it came to budget cuts, 45-55 percent of respondents preferred targeting the military, 16-21 percent preferred targeting Medicare, and 13-17 percent preferred targeting Social Security.

Other polls taken in 2011 also indicated Americans’ willingness to cut U.S. military spending. That September, a *National Journal* poll asked Americans whether they favored a plan for “reducing the growth of defense spending by

about \$350 billion over 10 years.” In response, 55 percent said they did. Another poll that September, by the Kaiser Foundation, found 67 percent approval for some reduction in the defense budget, with 28 percent supporting a major reduction and 39 percent a minor reduction.

In October, a *Washington Post*/Bloomberg poll of Americans asked whether they supported or opposed “reducing military spending” to help cope with the U.S. budget deficit. Fifty-one percent expressed their support and 41 percent their opposition.

Overall, as Dr. Kull and other opinion analysts have concluded, there is substantial support among Americans for cutting the U.S. military budget, especially when the public is provided with relevant information and a choice of alternatives.

Of course, there are hawkish elements within the American public, as well as powerful defense contractors, that champion a U.S. military buildup. But Romney’s militarism seems unlikely to fire up many Americans outside their ranks.

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Is NATO Still Needed?

Street protests in Chicago targeted a NATO summit where President Obama was promoting a gradual military withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, protesters challenged the continued need for this expensive alliance designed for the Cold War, reports Lawrence S. Wittner.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (better known as NATO) is in the news once again thanks to a NATO summit meeting in Chicago over the weekend of May 19-20 and to large public demonstrations in Chicago against this military pact.

NATO’s website defines the alliance’s mission as “Peace and Security,” and shows two children lying in the grass, accompanied by a bird, a flower and the happy twittering of birds. There is no mention of the fact that NATO is the world’s most powerful military pact, or that NATO nations account for 70 percent of the

world's annual \$1.74 trillion in military spending.

The organizers of the demonstrations, put together by peace and social justice groups, assailed NATO for bogging the world down in endless war and for diverting vast resources to militarism. According to a spokesperson for one of the protest groups, Peace Action: "It's time to retire NATO and form a new alliance to address unemployment, hunger and climate change."

NATO was launched in April 1949, at a time when Western leaders feared that the Soviet Union, if left unchecked, would invade Western Europe. The U.S. government played a key role in organizing the alliance, which brought in not only West European nations, but the United States and Canada. Dominated by the United States, NATO had a purely defensive mission – to safeguard its members from military attack, presumably by the Soviet Union.

That attack never occurred, either because it was deterred by NATO's existence or because the Soviet government had no intention of attacking in the first place. We shall probably never know. In any case, with the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union, it seemed that NATO had outlived its usefulness.

But vast military establishments, like other bureaucracies, rarely just fade away. If the original mission no longer exists, new missions can be found. And so NATO's military might was subsequently employed to bomb Yugoslavia, to conduct counter-insurgency warfare in Afghanistan, and to bomb Libya.

Meanwhile, NATO expanded its membership and military facilities to East European nations right along Russia's border, thus creating renewed tension with that major military power and providing it with an incentive to organize a countervailing military pact, perhaps with China.

None of this seems likely to end soon. In the days preceding the Chicago meeting, NATO's new, sweeping role was highlighted by Oana Longescu, a NATO spokesperson, who announced that the summit would discuss "the Alliance's overall posture in deterring and defending against the full range of threats in the twenty-first century, and take stock of NATO's mix of conventional, nuclear, and missile defense forces."

In fairness to NATO planners, it should be noted that, when it comes to global matters, they are operating in a relative vacuum. There are real international security problems, and some entity should certainly be addressing them.

But is NATO the proper entity? After all, NATO is a military pact, dominated by the United States and composed of a relatively small group of self-selecting European and North American nations. The vast majority of the world's countries

does not belong to NATO and has no influence upon it.

Who appointed NATO as the representative of the world's people? Why should the public in India, in Brazil, in China, in South Africa, in Argentina, or most other nations identify with the decisions of NATO's military commanders?

The organization that does represent the nations and people of the world is the United Nations. Designed to save the planet from "the scourge of war," the United Nations has a Security Council (on which the United States has permanent membership) that is supposed to handle world security issues.

Unlike NATO, whose decisions are often controversial and sometimes questionable, the United Nations almost invariably comes forward with decisions that have broad international support and, furthermore, show considerable wisdom and military restraint.

The problem with UN decisions is not that they are bad ones, but that they are difficult to enforce. And the major reason for the difficulty in enforcement is that the Security Council is hamstrung by a veto that can be exercised by any one nation.

Thus, much like the filibuster in the U.S. Senate, which is making the United States less and less governable, the Security Council veto has seriously limited what the world organization is able to do in addressing global security issues.

Thus, if the leaders of NATO nations were really serious about providing children with a world in which they could play in peace among the birds and flowers, they would work to strengthen the United Nations and stop devoting vast resources to dubious wars.

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The Rebirth of May Day's Message

Since the rise of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, America's rich have been on a roll, with their tax rates slashed by more than half and a concentration of both wealth and power at the top, a restoration of an earlier time of inequality and exploitation, as Lawrence S. Wittner recalls.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Many people might be surprised to learn that the May Day celebrations that occurred around the world Tuesday were born more than a century ago out of a struggle by American workers for the eight-hour day.

The late 19th Century was a particularly hard and brutal time for working people in the United States. The rise of giant corporations fostered accelerated exploitation of workers in the interests of profit by the wealthy few.

In the new, giant factories, it was common for workers to labor from 60 to 80 hours a week. Many workers had a six-day workweek, but a seven-day workweek was the standard for steel mills, oil refineries, paper mills, and other highly mechanized plants.

The industrial accident and death rate soared to new heights – not only thanks to new, dangerous machines and the use of child labor, but because of worker exhaustion. In 1881 alone, an estimated 30,000 American railway workers were killed or injured on the job.

Although popular celebrations on May 1 can be traced back to pagan times, they became connected to the lives of workers as a result of these lengthy, exhausting workdays and workweeks. In the United States, a campaign to limit the workday to eight hours picked up steam in the 1880s, thanks to its backing by the Knights of Labor (a rapidly-growing labor federation), small craft unions, and left-wing supporters of the working class.

Among working people, a popular slogan swept across the country: “Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will.” Meanwhile, the corporate titans of the era closed ranks against the eight-hour day movement, with the *New York Times* condemning it as “un-American.”

Gradually, plans took shape for a day of worker protests demanding the eight-hour day. And on May 1, 1886, protests erupted all across the United States, with some 340,000 workers taking part. An estimated 190,000 went out on strike.

In Chicago, a center of the eight-hour day agitation, some 80,000 workers walked off the job, with most of them joining a vast parade through the city streets. At a concluding rally, the marchers were regaled with speeches condemning the exploitation of workers by big business.

Although things passed peacefully enough during the great demonstration in Chicago, soon after that the local police launched an assault on union members by gunning down locked-out workers at the nearby McCormick Harvester Plant.

When an explosion of unknown origins went off at a subsequent protest rally at the Haymarket, a large open square in the city, police also opened fire on that

worker gathering, killing some and wounding hundreds of others in what became known as the Haymarket Massacre. Radical labor agitators were arrested and blamed for the bloodshed, although most of them were not present at the rally. Four of them were executed.

Nevertheless, the march of labor was unstoppable. Although the Knights of Labor crumbled rapidly during the time of hysteria and repression that followed the Haymarket Massacre, the new American Federation of Labor vowed to continue the eight-hour day movement, and set May 1, 1890, as a day for further action.

Joining the call for May Day protests, the International Socialist Workers Congress, in 1890, helped organize May 1 parades, meetings, and rallies throughout Europe in support of the struggles of American workers. Starting in 1891, May Day demonstrations became annual events in the United States and many other countries.

Decades later, communist governments, eager to appear as champions of the working class, organized official May Day celebrations in their countries, and this, in turn, led to a falling off in support for May Day in *non*-communist nations. In 1958, Congress – anxious to undermine the significance of May Day as a time of worker protest – declared May 1 to be Loyalty Day, which thereby became an official U.S. holiday.

Nonetheless, the tradition of May Day as an occasion for the display of workers' power continued in many lands and, in the post-Cold War years, began to revive in the United States. It received a major boost on May 1, 2006, when mostly Latino immigrant groups in the United States launched massive protests and strikes against anti-immigrant legislation.

And, on May 1, 2012, that tradition of protest against exploitation of workers was drawn upon by the Occupy movement, which held May Day demonstrations and rallies – often with a significant union presence – in numerous cities and towns across the United States.

Of course, the labor movement's long and difficult campaign for the eight-hour day was won in 1938, when the Roosevelt administration – as part of its New Deal program – shepherded the Fair Labor Standards Act through Congress. This legislation made the 40-hour workweek the norm and established a minimum wage for American workers.

But, in recent decades, the drive of the wealthy to enrich themselves at the expense of the rest of society has grown considerably more intense, and certainly more flagrant. Popular anger has grown over Wall Street impunity, huge tax breaks for the rich, unlimited spending in election campaigns, corporate

destruction of the environment, and the widening gap between the falling wages of workers and the rising income of corporate executives.

Therefore, it seems likely that the struggle for economic justice will heighten in coming years, with May Day continuing to serve as a potent symbol of worker discontent.

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World Military Spending Still Rising

Despite economic recession and government austerity, the world's military spending continued to grow last year, exceeding \$1.7 trillion, with the United States accounting for more than two-fifths of that money, as Lawrence S. Wittner reports.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

On April 17, as millions of Americans were filing their income tax returns, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released its latest study of world military spending. In case Americans were wondering where most of their tax money – and the tax money of other nations – went in the previous year, the answer from SIPRI was clear: to war and preparations for war.

World military spending reached a record \$1,738 billion in 2011 – an increase of \$138 billion over the previous year. The United States accounted for 41 percent of that, or \$711 billion.

Some news reports have emphasized that, from the standpoint of reducing reliance on armed might, this actually represents progress. After all, the increase in “real” global military spending – that is, expenditures after corrections for inflation and exchange rates – was only 0.3 percent. And this contrasts with substantially larger increases in the preceding 13 years.

But why are military expenditures continuing to increase – indeed, why aren't they substantially *decreasing* – given the governmental austerity measures of recent years?

Amid the economic crisis that began in late 2008 (and which continues to the present day), most governments have been cutting back their spending

dramatically on education, health care, housing, parks, and other vital social services. However, there have not been corresponding cuts in their military budgets.

Americans, particularly, might seek to understand why in this context U.S. military spending has not been significantly decreased, instead of being raised by \$13 billion – admittedly a “real dollar” decrease of 1.2 percent, but hardly one commensurate with Washington’s wholesale slashing of social spending.

Yes, military expenditures by China and Russia increased in 2011. And in “real” terms, too. But, even so, their military strength hardly rivals that of the United States. Indeed, the United States spent about five times as much as China (the world’s #2 military power) and ten times as much as Russia (the world’s #3 military power) on its military forces during 2011.

Furthermore, when U.S. allies like Britain, France, Germany and Japan are factored in, it is clear that the vast bulk of world military expenditures are made by the United States and its military allies. This might explain why the government of China, which accounts for only 8.2 percent of world military spending, believes that increasing its outlay on armaments is reasonable and desirable. Apparently, officials of many nations share that competitive feeling.

Unfortunately, the military rivalry among nations – one that has endured for centuries – results in a great squandering of national resources. Many nations, in fact, devote most of their available income to funding their armed forces and their weaponry.

In the United States, an estimated 58 percent of the U.S. government’s discretionary tax dollars go to war and preparations for war. “Almost every country with a military is on an insane path, spending more and more on missiles, aircraft, and guns,” remarked John Feffer, co-director of Foreign Policy in Focus. “These countries should be confronting the real threats of climate change, hunger, disease, and oppression, not wasting taxpayers’ money on their military.”

Of course, defenders of military expenditures reply that military force actually protects people from war. But does it? If so, how does one explain the fact that the major military powers of the past century – the United States, Russia, Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and China – have been almost constantly at war during that time, in one way or another? Perhaps the maintenance of a vast military machine does not prevent war but, instead, encourages it.

In short, huge military establishments can be quite counterproductive. Little wonder that they have been condemned repeatedly by great religious and ethical

leaders. Even many government officials have decried war and preparations for war – although usually by nations other than their own.

Thus, the release of the new study by SIPRI should not be a cause for celebration. Rather, it provides an appropriate occasion to contemplate the fact that, this past year, nations spent more money on the military than at any time in human history.

Although this situation might still inspire joy in the hearts of government officials, top military officers and defense contractors, people farther from the levers of military power might well conclude that it's a hell of a way to run a world.

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Americans Fed Up with Neocon Wars?

Mitt Romney and other Republican presidential hopefuls (with the exception of Ron Paul) are touting tough-guy global strategies that sound like George W. Bush, circa 2002. But recent public opinion polls suggest that Americans are leery of new neocon adventures, Lawrence S. Wittner reports.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Are American politicians out of sync with the public when it comes to foreign policy? There is considerable reason to believe so.

Throughout the scramble for the Republican presidential nomination, the major candidates have certainly been rabidly nationalistic. In a major foreign policy address on Oct. 7, 2011, Mitt Romney proclaimed that “the twenty-first century can and must be an American Century.”

Championing a vast military buildup, he argued that, to secure this “American Century,” the United States should have “the strongest military in the world.” By contrast, he assailed the “shameful” role of the United Nations and other international institutions and declared that he did not see any reason to obey them, or the international law they represented, when it did not suit the U.S. government.

Romney's newly-anointed top competitor, Rick Santorum, says nothing about the

United Nations, international cooperation or international law in the “10 Steps to Promote Our Interests Around the World” posted on his campaign website. Instead, he argues that the United States is “intrinsically better prepared to lead than any other nation.”

The former Pennsylvania senator adds: “I truly do believe that we are ‘the last best hope of earth,’” but, alas, under President Barack Obama, “we have been weak where we should have been strong and we have been appeasing of evil.” Naturally, then in Santorum’s view, Americans should be “increasing our military preparedness.”

By contrast, polls show that most Americans favor a more cooperative world order based on international law, a stronger United Nations, and a less dominant role for the United States in world affairs.

In a World Public Opinion poll of 16 nations in 2009, 69 percent of Americans supported the view that nations are obliged to abide by international law even when doing so is at odds with their national interest.

Furthermore, a 2010 poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found 82 percent of Americans favored ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (rejected by the GOP-dominated Senate in 1999), 70 percent favored participation in the International Criminal Court (rejected by President George W. Bush), and 67 percent backed a new international treaty to combat climate change. In December 2008, a World Public Opinion poll found that 77 percent of Americans backed an international treaty abolishing nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, most Americans favor expanding the role of the United Nations in world affairs. Polling in 2010 by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that majorities of Americans favored creating a standing UN peacekeeping force (64 percent), giving the United Nations the authority to enter countries to investigate human rights violations (72 percent), creating an international marshals service with the power to arrest leaders responsible for genocide (73 percent), and empowering the United Nations to regulate the international arms trade (55 percent).

Overall, as public opinion studies show, Americans want a smaller, rather than a larger, global footprint for their nation. According to a 2010 poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, only 8 percent favored the United States playing the role of the preeminent world leader, while 71 percent favored a cooperative approach.

Gallup polls have turned up similar results. In 2011, Gallup reported that only 16 percent of Americans endorsed the option of the United States playing “the

leading role” in world affairs. According to Gallup, 32 percent of Americans favored “a minor role” or “no role” at all for the United States, while 50 percent wanted the United States to “take a major role, but not the leading one.”

Much of this opposition to U.S. dominance in the world is undoubtedly based on distaste for the overseas U.S. military intervention of the past decade. In recent years, polls have found substantial public opposition to the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2010, a poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that 79 percent of Americans agreed with the statement that “the U.S. is playing the role of world policeman more than it should.”

Of course, during the frenzy of an election campaign, it is tempting to whip up nationalist sentiment through high-flying rhetoric about an “American Century” and America’s allegedly unique virtue. How many times have we heard, in these circumstances, that America is the greatest nation in the history of the world?

But, in the end, Americans might prove more committed to an internationalist policy than this year’s flag-waving politicians think.

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In Case You Missed...

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"Romney's Neocon Foreign Policy Plan" by Lawrence S. Wittner, describing Mitt Romney's plan to restore full neocon control. (October 10, 2011)

"Freedom Plaza Protesters Settle In" by Ray McGovern, giving a first-person account of DC's Tahrir Square. (October 11, 2011)

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"Is Mitt Romney a Neocon Purist?" by Robert Parry, noting how the Washington Post chided Romney for some deviations. (October 15, 2011)

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Romney’s Neocon Foreign Policy Plan

Presidential contender Mitt Romney has laid out his vision for a foreign policy in a Romney administration and it looks like it could have been dreamt up by the same neocons who guided George W. Bush’s disastrous pursuit of permanent U.S. military dominance, as Lawrence S. Wittner reports.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

If current polls are correct, Mitt Romney seems likely to become the 2012 Republican presidential candidate and, quite possibly, the next president of the

United States.

Therefore, we should carefully examine his first major foreign and military policy address, delivered on Oct. 7 at the Citadel, in Charleston, South Carolina, and ponder the question: Is Mitt Romney ready for the world?

Romney began his speech with a heavy dose of fear. Iran, he warned, could well become “a fully activated nuclear weapons state, threatening its neighbors, [and] dominating the world’s oil supply.” Indeed, “Iran’s suicidal fanatics could blackmail the world.”

In Afghanistan, the Taliban might well “find a path back to power,” with the country sinking “back into the medieval terrors of fundamentalist rule.” Pakistan’s instability could end up placing nuclear weapons “in the hands of Islamic jihadists,” while “the malign socialism” of Venezuela and Cuba could “undermine the prospects of democracy” in Latin America.

Then, of course, there are the heavy dancers. China’s leaders could well take that nation down “a darker path, intimidating their neighbors, brushing aside an inferior American Navy in the Pacific, and building a global alliance of authoritarian states.”

And Russia might well “bludgeon the countries of the former Soviet Union into submission, and intimidate Europe with the levers of its energy resources.” Nor should people forget “Islamic fundamentalism, with which we have been at war since Sept. 11, 2001.”

Fortunately, though, there is help for a beleaguered world on the horizon.

“God did not create this country to be a nation of followers,” Romney explained. “America is not destined to be one of several equally balanced global powers.” Instead, “the United States should always retain military supremacy.”

As president, he would not “wave the white flag of surrender” but, rather, “devote” himself to building “an American century.” As he explained: “The twenty-first century can and must be an American century.” He would “not surrender America’s role in the world. . . . If you do not want America to be the strongest nation on earth, I am not your president.”

And how, exactly, would this American century be achieved? To provide the major pillar for the new order, Romney would “reverse President Obama’s massive defense cuts.”

(The fact that there *were* no defense cuts during the Obama years, indeed, that Obama took office with an annual Defense Department budget of \$513 billion and,

as of Sept. 30 of this year, had an annual Defense Department budget of \$530 billion, plus increased spending for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, seems not to have thrown Romney off stride.)

In the production of new U.S. warships alone, Romney promised to increase the annual number from nine to 15. He would also dramatically upgrade the (still unworkable) national missile defense system.

“In an American century,” he argued, America needed “the strongest military in the world.”

Of course, this military behemoth (currently costing almost as much as the military forces of all other nations combined) would have lots of work to do. In Afghanistan, for example, Romney would call a halt to plans for U.S. military withdrawal.

Meanwhile, he would “speak with our generals in the field, and receive the best recommendation of our military commanders” as to “the force level necessary to secure our gains and complete our mission successfully.” That might require a lot of troops, a lot of money, and a lot of time.

Throughout his address, Romney never acknowledged that, at least on occasion, U.S. foreign policy might have been plagued by faulty judgments or methods. Naturally, then, he did not mention the unnecessary Iraq war, the past U.S. support of Osama bin Laden, or other embarrassing ventures.

This assumption that the U.S. officials can never err, with the notable exception, of course, of the evil Barack Obama, is implicit in Romney’s promise that he would “never, ever apologize for America.”

Despite this nationalist emphasis, Romney did not entirely omit reference to the United Nations and other international institutions. But he discussed them in a very demeaning way.

“Too often,” he declared “these bodies prize the act of negotiating over the outcome to be reached. And shamefully, they can become forums for the tantrums of tyrants. . . . The United States must fight to return these bodies to their proper role.”

Nor did he see any reason to obey them, or the international law they represented, when it did not suit the U.S. government. He observed: “While America should work with other nations, we always reserve the right to act alone to protect our vital national interests.”

Romney’s speech was also noteworthy for the international issues he did *not*

address. They included nuclear arms control and disarmament, global climate change, world health (such as the AIDS epidemic), and the tottering global economy.

Presumably he did not consider these important, or at least capable of being dealt with through the instrumentalities of a massive military buildup and an American century.

One wonders what citizens and statesmen of other nations think of this potential world leader who argues that his country is confronted everywhere by malignant enemies, must forever be militarily supreme, is exempt from following international law, can do no wrong, has been created by God, and must dominate the planet for the rest of this century.

Perhaps, in addition to questioning whether Romney is ready for the world, we should ask: Is the world ready for Romney?

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Nuke Plant Battle in Kansas City

A dispute in Kansas City over a new plant for modernizing U.S. nuclear weapons has drawn local opposition and international attention as political and religious leaders question the Obama administration's commitment to a nuke-free world, Lawrence S. Wittner writes.

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Should the U.S. government be building more nuclear weapons? Residents of Kansas City, Missouri, don't appear to think so, for they are engaged in a bitter fight against the construction of a new nuclear weapons plant in their community.

The massive plant, 1.5 million square feet in size, is designed to replace an earlier version, also located in the city and run by the same contractor: Honeywell. The cost of building the new plant, which, like its predecessor, will provide 85 percent of the components of America's nuclear weapons, is estimated to run \$673 million.

From the standpoint of the developer, Centerpoint Zimmer (CPZ), that's a very sweet deal. In payment for the plant site, a soybean field it owned, CPZ

received \$5 million. The federal government will lease the property and plant from a city entity for 20 years, after which, for \$10, CPZ will purchase it, thus establishing the world's first privately-owned nuclear weapons plant.

In addition, as the journal Mother Jones has revealed, "the Kansas City Council, enticed by direct payments and a promise of 'quality jobs,' . . . agreed to exempt CPZ from property taxes on the plant and surrounding land for 25 years."

The Council also agreed to issue \$815 million in bond subsidies from urban blight funds to build the plant and its infrastructure. In this lucrative context, how could a profit-driven corporation resist?

Kansas City residents, however, had greater misgivings. They wondered why the U.S. government, already possessing 8,500 nuclear weapons, needed more of them.

They wondered what had happened to the U.S. government's commitment to engage in treaties for nuclear disarmament. They wondered how the new weapons plant fit in with the Obama administration's pledge to build a world free of nuclear weapons.

And they wondered why they should be subsidizing the U.S. military-industrial complex with their tax dollars.

Taking the lead, the city's peace and disarmament community began protests and demonstrations against the proposed nuclear weapons plant several years ago.

Gradually, Kansas City PeaceWorks (a branch of Peace Action) pulled together the local chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility, religious groups, and others into a coalition of a dozen organizations, Kansas City Peace Planters.

The coalition's major project was a petition campaign to place a proposition on the Nov. 8 election ballot that would reject building a plant for weapons and utilize the facility instead for "green energy" technologies.

The significance of the Kansas City nuclear weapons buildup was also highlighted by outside forces.

In June 2011, against the backdrop of the Obama administration's plan to spend \$185 billion for modernization of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex over the next ten years, the U.S. Council of Mayors voted unanimously for a resolution instructing the President to join leaders of the other nuclear weapons states in implementing U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's five-point plan for the elimination of all nuclear weapons by the year 2020.

It also called on Congress to terminate funding for modernization of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex and nuclear weapons systems. Addressing the gathering,

the U.N. leader declared that “the road to peace and progress runs through the world’s cities and towns,” a statement that drew a standing ovation.

Even more pointedly, Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, the Vatican’s ambassador to the United Nations, appeared in Kansas City in July.

According to the National Catholic Reporter, Chullikat “came to this Midwestern diocese because it is the site of a major new nuclear weapons manufacturing facility, the first to be built in the country in 33 years.”

In his address, the prelate remarked: “Viewed from a legal, political, security and most of all, moral, perspective, there is no justification today for the continued maintenance of nuclear weapons.”

This was the moment, he declared, to address “the legal, political and technical requisites for a nuclear-weapons-free world.”

Highlighting Chullikatt’s speech, the National Catholic Reporter declared, cuttingly: “The U.S. trudges unheedingly down the nuclear path. Now more than ever we need to attend to the messages of the often marginalized peacemakers in our midst.”

Actually, peace activists in Kansas City looked less and less marginalized. Nearly 5,000 Kansas City residents signed the petition to place the proposition rejecting the nuclear weapons plant on the ballot, giving it considerably more signatures than necessary to appear before the voters.

Naturally, this popular uprising came as a blow to the Kansas City Council, which put forward a measure that would block the disarmament initiative from appearing on the ballot.

At an Aug. 17 hearing on the Council measure, local residents were irate.

“You cannot divorce yourselves from the hideously immoral purpose of these weapons,” one declared, comparing the city’s subsidy for the weapons plant to financing Nazi gas chambers “for the sake of ‘jobs.’”

Referring to the Council’s charter, which provided for the appearance of propositions on the ballot when they secured the requisite number of signatures, the chair of PeaceWorks asked: “Are we a government of laws or of . . . corporations and special interests?”

Since then, the situation has evolved rapidly. On Aug. 25, the City Council voted 12 to 1 to bar the proposition from the ballot. The next day, the petitioners went to court to block Council interference.

Honeywell, CPZ, and their friends dispatched a large legal team to Kansas City to fight against the citizens' initiative, securing a court decision that might delay redress for years.

In response, Peace Planters seems likely to speed up the process by crafting a new petition, one that would cut off city funding for the plant.

Whatever the outcome, the very fact that such a struggle has emerged indicates that many Americans are appalled by plans to throw their local and national resources into building more nuclear weapons.

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