Invest in Communities, Not Violence
November 2023

For far too long, the U.S. has clung to a budget that prioritizes war, deportations and detentions, and policing at the expense of human needs. It’s time to reinvest these taxpayer dollars into real human needs — healthcare, education, housing, and a just energy transition to name a few. Here’s how legislators have splurged on militarism, and what could happen if those funds instead benefited people and communities.

$1.1 Trillion on Militarism in FY 2023

In FY 2023, out of a $1.8 trillion federal discretionary budget, $1.1 trillion — or 62% — was for militarized programs, including war and the military, deportations and detentions, and prisons and policing.

- Less than $2 out of every $5 in federal discretionary spending was available to fund positive investments in people and communities.
- The U.S. spent $16 on the military and war for every $1 that was spent on diplomacy and humanitarian foreign aid.
- The U.S. spent $51.1 billion for homeland security, half of which goes to the agencies responsible for detentions and deportations, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE, $8.8 billion) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP, $17.4 billion). This is nearly triple the spending for substance abuse and mental health programs.
- The U.S. federal budget allocated twice as much for federal law enforcement, which includes federal prisons, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies ($31 billion), as for child care and early childhood education programs ($15 billion).
- Since 2001, the U.S. has added $2 to the discretionary budget for militarism for every $1 added to invest in communities.

$21 Trillion on Militarism Over Twenty Years

In the two decades following 9/11, the U.S. spent $21 trillion on foreign and domestic militarism.

- Over those twenty years $16 trillion went to the Pentagon and more than half of that, $7.2 trillion, went to Pentagon contractors.
- In its first twenty years, spending on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reached $1.4 trillion. Of that, about one-third, $442 billion, went to ICE and CBP.
- In the span of twenty years, spending on ICE and CBP more than doubled, from $12 billion in FY 2002 to more than $25 billion in FY 2021, adjusted for inflation.
- Federal prison funding has increased by more than 11 times since 1976, exploding from $901 million in 1976 to $10 billion in 2021, adjusted for inflation. The number of people
incarcerated in federal prisons increased ninefold, from 24,000 in 1980 to more than 219,000 by 2013.

The Human Costs of Militarism

- The post-9/11 wars have contributed to 4.5 million deaths, including thousands of U.S. troops and civilian contractors, and the displacement of 38 million people.
- More than 5 million people have been deported since the founding of DHS. There have been at least 287 fatal encounters with CBP since 2010.
- Every year, hundreds of thousands of immigrants are locked up in over 200 ICE detention centers, where they often face abusive conditions while they await determination of their immigration status.
- In 2022, police killed 1,239 people — more than 3 people per day.
- There are 1.9 million people currently incarcerated in the U.S.

A Better World is Possible (and Affordable)

- A $100 billion annual cut to military spending could have gone towards:
  - 10 times as many households receiving public housing (10.39 million), or
  - More than 1 in 3 children aged 0-5 going to Head Start (7.81 million), or
  - Nearly 1 in 3 veterans receiving medical care (5.88 million), or
  - More than 7 in 10 uninsured adults receiving health care (20.24 million), or
  - Solar power for every household in the U.S. (131.2 million), with billions of dollars to spare
- For the nearly $26 billion that ICE and CBP received in 2023, we could hire 230,000 registered nurses to address shortages, provide early childhood education for more than half a million kids, or build solar farms to power more than half the nation's households.
- Over the long term, reinvesting in human needs over militarism could be transformative. For far less than the $21 trillion spent on militarism in the 20 years after 9/11, the U.S. could allocate enough funds to do ALL of the following:
  - $4.5 trillion to fully decarbonize the U.S. electric grid
  - $2.3 trillion to create 5 million jobs at $15 per hour with benefits and cost-of-living adjustments for 10 years
  - $1.7 trillion to erase student debt
  - $449 billion to continue the extended Child Tax Credit for another 10 years
  - $200 billion to guarantee free preschool for every 3-and-4-year old for 10 years, and raise teacher pay