

## **War's burden too heavy U.S. should shun rivalries, focus on own problems.**

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Let's cut to the chase. The American people simply cannot afford a new Cold War. In no way, shape or form is it in our interests to have one. And the planet can ill afford our nation and the Russians engaging in another protracted round of bilateral rivalry. Beyond cost, there are serious risks entailed in any such international jockeying for position, especially when the players are nuclear-armed.

We do have very real and pressing security concerns that urgently need to be addressed. These include the climate crisis, global and domestic poverty, the failure to invest adequately in the infrastructure needed for a sustainable future, the depletion of non-renewable resources, the failure to provide quality education and health care to all and more. None of these will be ameliorated by geopolitical competition or increased spending on the military. In fact, moving in this direction would constrain our ability to focus investment and resources where they're truly needed.

Many don't realize just how costly the original Cold War was. Ignoring, for the moment, the tragic loss of life during the periodic hot wars embedded within the Cold (Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Central America, Angola, Afghanistan, Indonesia, etc.) we can measure the economic cost. Just in terms of military budgets, this five-decade-long debacle was enormously expensive. The conservative Cato Institute has calculated this for the period 1948 to 1986. Put in today's dollars, the cumulative cost, just to the U.S., is \$15.5 trillion. The nonpartisan Center for Defense Information looks at 1948 to 1991 and, in today's dollars, pegged the cost at \$19.8 trillion.

When economists look at costs, however, they also have to look at indirect costs. One aspect to consider is opportunity cost. What could we have done with all this money instead? Most military spending is spent and then gone. If we had used the money in a more prudent fashion, we could have invested it in productive assets, including more efficient technology, sustainable energy systems, useful infrastructure (e.g. transportation systems, high-speed rail, etc.) and human capital (e.g. quality education to allow for a more productive populace).

Instead we spent nearly five decades engaged in a destructive and sometimes extremely dangerous rivalry that enriched a handful of people who own the various corporate entities of the famed Military Industrial Complex. On several occasions, we came to the brink of nuclear war, an action as unforgiving as any ever conceived.

And all this while our government and the elites were able to keep large sections of the populace frightened and docile. This is, of course, the real meaning of Orwell's notion "War is peace." The existence of the external "enemy" breeds fear and obedience to authority, thus social tranquility in the face of a supposed external threat.

## **GETTING THE LOG OUT OF OUR OWN EYE**

But, some might ask, hasn't Russia sparked this conflict by aggressive behavior, including the occupation and annexation of Crimea? Well, it is true that Russia's action in Crimea violated treaty commitments and was illegal under international law. We, in the peace movement, condemn this.

We can do this with a straight face, as we have condemned numerous other such violations, many of them by our own government (Panama, Iraq, Yugoslavia, Libya, etc.) when countries were attacked, bombed and/or occupied. When John Kerry or other U.S. spokespeople call for the Russians to respect international law, their entreaties ring hollow.

It is also necessary to examine Russian actions in context. At the end of the Cold War, the Soviets agreed to German reunification with membership in NATO while the U.S. agreed to press no farther east. Since then, virtually all of Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet republics in the Baltic, has been incorporated into NATO, encircling Russia. The push to unseat the elected government in Kiev and replace it with one hostile to the Russians was seen as an aggressive geopolitical move by the U.S.

Unlike a typical U.S. invasion of a foreign country, such as Iraq or Panama, Russia's actions were taken in an area that for hundreds of years was an integral part of Russia; one where the majority of the population was Russian. Yes, Crimea was transferred to Ukraine in the 1950s, but this was at a time when both were parts of the Soviet Union, and this administrative transfer was of little significance. Moreover, the Russians didn't invade Crimea; their military was already there, an acknowledgment of the Russian stake in this province where their fleet is based. As noted above, we condemn Russia's actions, but, looked at in context, they are pretty tame when compared to U.S. actions around the world that have repeatedly involved invasions, the unseating of governments, occupations, etc.

Finally, our government condemns the repressive and undemocratic aspects of Putin's Russia. We join in calling for greater respect for human rights. It should be noted, however, that it is hypocritical to single out rivals for condemnation while continuing to support, without criticism, allies or clients. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Honduras, for example, have far worse records. And, if our nation aims to be a champion of human rights around the world, perhaps we can start by ending the wholesale violations of privacy at home and abroad, and the extrajudicial drone killings of innocents, including U.S. citizens.

A new Cold War would be a disaster for all concerned. Please join in letting President Obama and Congress know that the American people want a peace economy and a foreign policy that fosters global cooperation.