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# US Foreign Policy Is a Scam Built on Corruption

US foreign policy seems to be utterly irrational. The US gets into one disastrous war after another -- Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Ukraine, and Gaza. In recent days, the US stands globally isolated in its support of Israel's genocidal actions against the Palestinians, voting against a UN General Assembly resolution for a Gaza ceasefire backed by 153 countries with 89% of the world population, and opposed by just the US and 9 small countries with less than 1% of the world population.

In the past 20 years, every major US foreign policy objective has failed. The Taliban returned to power after 20 years of US occupation of Afghanistan. Post-Saddam Iraq became dependent on Iran. Syria's President Bashar al-Assad stayed in power despite a [CIA effort to overthrow him](#). Libya fell into a protracted civil war after a US-led NATO mission overthrew Muammar Gaddafi. Ukraine was bludgeoned on the battlefield by Russia in 2023 after the US secretly [scuttled a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine in 2022](#).

Despite these remarkable and costly debacles, one following the other, the same cast of characters has remained at the helm of US foreign policy for decades, including Joe Biden, [Victoria Nuland](#), Jake Sullivan, Chuck Schumer, Mitch McConnell, and Hillary Clinton.

What gives?

The puzzle is solved by recognizing that American foreign policy is not at all about the interests of the American people. It is about the interests of the Washington insiders, as they chase campaign contributions and lucrative jobs for themselves, staff, and family members. In short, US foreign policy has been hacked by big money.

As a result, the American people are losing big. The failed wars since 2000 have cost them around [\\$5 trillion in direct outlays](#), or around \$40,000 per household. Another \$2 trillion or so will be spent in the coming decades on veterans' care. Beyond the costs directly incurred by Americans, we should also recognize the horrendously high costs suffered abroad, in millions of lives lost and trillions of dollars of destruction to property and nature in the war zones.

The costs continue to mount. US Military-linked outlays in 2024 will come to around \$1.5 trillion, or roughly \$12,000 per household, if we add the direct Pentagon spending, the budgets of the CIA and other intelligence agencies, the budget of the Veteran's Administration, the Department of Energy nuclear weapons program, the State Department's military-linked "foreign aid" (such as to Israel),

and other security-related budget lines. Hundreds of billions of dollars are money down the drain, squandered in useless wars, overseas military bases, and a wholly unnecessary arms build-up that brings the world closer to WWIII.

Yet to describe these gargantuan costs is also to explain the twisted “rationality” of US foreign policy. The \$1.5 trillion in military outlays is the scam that keeps on giving—to the military-industrial complex and the Washington insiders—even as it impoverishes and endangers America and the world.

To understand the foreign-policy scam, think of today’s federal government as a multi-division racket controlled by the highest bidders. The Wall Street division is run out of the Treasury. The Health Industry division is run out of the Department of Health and Human Services. The Big Oil and Coal division is run out of the Departments of Energy and Interior. And the Foreign Policy division is run out of the White House, Pentagon and CIA.

Each division uses public power for private gain through insider dealing, greased by corporate campaign contributions and lobbying outlays. Interestingly, the Health Industry division rivals the Foreign Policy division as a remarkable financial scam. America’s health outlays totaled an astounding \$4.5 trillion in 2022, or roughly \$36,000 per household, by far the highest health costs in the world, while America ranked roughly 40th in the world among nations in life expectancy. A failed health policy translates into very big bucks for the health industry, just as a failed foreign policy translates into mega-revenues of the military-industrial complex.

The Foreign Policy division is run by a small, secretive and tight-knit coterie, including the top brass of the White House, the CIA, the State Department, the Pentagon, the Armed Services Committees of the House and Senate, and the major military firms including Boeing, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, and Raytheon. There are perhaps a thousand key individuals involved in setting policy. The public interest plays little role.

The key foreign policy makers run the operations of 800 US overseas military bases, hundreds of billions of dollars of military contracts, and the war operations where the equipment is deployed. The more wars, of course, the more business. The privatization of foreign policy has been greatly amplified by the privatization of the war business itself, as more and more “core” military functions are handed out to the arms manufacturers and to contractors such as Haliburton, Booz Allen Hamilton, and CACI.

In addition to the hundreds of billions of dollars of military contracts, there are important business spillovers from the military and CIA operations. With military bases in 80 countries around the world, and CIA operations in many more, the US plays a large, though mostly covert role, in determining who rules in those countries, and thereby on policies that shape lucrative deals involving minerals, hydrocarbons, pipelines, and farm and forest land. The US has aimed to overthrow at least 80 governments since 1947, typically led by the CIA through the instigation of coups, assassinations, insurrections, civil unrest, election tampering, economic sanctions, and overt wars. (For a superb study of US regime-change operations from 1947 to 1989, see Lindsey O’Rourke’s Covert Regime Change, 2018).

In addition to business interests, there are of course ideologues who truly believe in America’s right to rule the world. The ever-warmongering Kagan family is the most famous case, though their financial interests are also deeply intertwined with the war industry. The point about ideology is this. The ideologists have been wrong on nearly every occasion and long ago would have lost their bully pulpits in Washington but for their usefulness as warmongers. Wittingly or not, they serve as paid performers for the military-industrial complex.

There is one persistent inconvenience for this ongoing business scam. In theory, foreign policy is carried out in the interest of the American people, though the opposite is the truth. (A similar contradiction of course applies to overpriced healthcare, government bailouts of Wall Street, oil-industry perks, and other scams). The American people rarely support the machinations of US foreign policy when they occasionally hear the truth. America's wars are not waged by popular demand but by decisions from on high. Special measures are needed to keep the people away from decision making.

The first such measure is unrelenting propaganda. George Orwell nailed it in 1984 when "the Party" suddenly switched the foreign enemy from Eurasia to Eastasia without a word of explanation. The US essentially does the same. Who is the US gravest enemy? Take your pick, according to the season. Saddam Hussein, the Taliban, Hugo Chavez, Bashar al-Assad, ISIS, al-Qaeda, Gaddafi, Vladimir Putin, Hamas, have all played the role of "Hitler" in US propaganda. White House spokesman John Kirby delivers the propaganda with a smirk on his face, signaling that he too knows that what he is saying is ludicrous, albeit mildly entertaining.

The propaganda is amplified by the Washington think tanks that live off of donations by military contractors and occasionally foreign governments that are part of the US scam operations. Think of the Atlantic Council, CSIS, and of course the ever-popular Institute for the Study of War, brought to you by the major military contractors.

The second is to hide the costs of the foreign policy operations. In the 1960s, the US Government made the mistake of forcing the American people to bear the costs of the military-industrial complex by drafting young people to fight in Vietnam and by raising taxes to pay for the war. The public erupted in opposition.

From the 1970s onward the government has been far more clever. The government ended the draft, and made military service a job for hire rather than a public service, backed by Pentagon outlays to recruit soldiers from lower economic strata. It also abandoned the quaint idea that government outlays should be funded by taxes, and instead shifted the military budget to deficit spending which protects it from popular opposition that would be triggered if it were tax-funded.

It has also suckered client states such as Ukraine to fight America's wars on the ground, so that no American body bags would spoil the US propaganda machine. Needless to say, US masters of war such as Sullivan, Blinken, Nuland, Schumer, and McConnell remain thousands of miles away from the frontlines. The dying is reserved for Ukrainians. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) defended American military aid to Ukraine as money well spent because it is "without a single American service woman or man injured or lost," somehow not dawning on the good Senator to spare the lives of Ukrainians, who have died by the hundreds of thousands in a US-provoked war over NATO enlargement.

This system is underpinned by the complete subordination of the U.S. Congress to the war business, to avoid any questioning of the over-the-top Pentagon budgets and the wars instigated by the Executive Branch. The subordination of Congress works as follows. First, the Congressional oversight of war and peace is largely assigned to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, which largely frame the overall Congressional policy (and the Pentagon budget). Second, the military industry (Boeing, Raytheon, and the rest) funds the campaigns of the Armed Services Committee members of both parties. The military industries also spend vast sums on lobbying in order to provide lucrative salaries to retiring members of Congress, their staffs, and families, either directly in military businesses or in Washington lobbying firms.

The hacking of Congressional foreign policy is not only by the US military-industrial complex. The Israel lobby long ago mastered the art of buying the Congress. America's complicity in Israel's apartheid state and war crimes in Gaza makes no sense for US national security and diplomacy, not to speak of human decency. They are the fruits of Israel lobby investments that reached \$30 million in campaign contributions in 2022, and that will vastly top that in 2024.

When Congress reassembles in January, Biden, Kirby, Sullivan, Blinken, Nuland, Schumer, McConnell, Blumenthal and their ilk will tell us that we absolutely must fund the losing, cruel, and deceitful war in Ukraine and the ongoing massacre and ethnic cleansing in Gaza, lest we and Europe and the free world, and perhaps the solar system itself, succumb to the Russian bear, the Iranian mullahs, and the Chinese Communist Party. The purveyors of foreign policy disasters are not being irrational in this fear-mongering. They are being deceitful and extraordinarily greedy, pursuing narrow interests over those of the American people.

It is the urgent task of the American people to overhaul a foreign policy that is so broken, corrupted, and deceitful that it is burying the government in debt while pushing the world closer to nuclear Armageddon. This overhaul should start in 2024 by rejecting any more funding for the disastrous Ukraine War and Israel's war crimes in Gaza. Peacemaking, and diplomacy, not military spending, is the path to a US foreign policy in the public interest.

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