

Breaking the Militarism Mindset: The Pentagon Budget

By Anthony Wier, Legislative Secretary

Today, U.S. taxpayers are giving as much money to the military as they did during the Vietnam War's height. The Pentagon budget rivals military spending in the last years of the Cold War. And, unless we can change their minds, members of Congress are going to give the Pentagon even more.

These budget increases reflect a mindset I observed in a decade of service inside the federal government. Any time a new national security challenge arose—from Iran to Ukraine, from Syria to North Korea—the default instinct of far too many in Washington, DC has been to mindlessly reach first for military power to respond—to look first for the Pentagon and the tools of war to address the problem.

The instinct to increase Pentagon spending runs right across Congress' partisan divides. In large part, that's because members of Congress and their staff hear practically every day both from all manner of Pentagon officials and from the legions of defense contractor lobbyists who swarm Capitol Hill.

If these are the only people they are hearing from, then it is going to make sense to many in Congress to go along with Pentagon budgets of \$600 billion, or \$700 billion, or even more in years ahead.

That's why they need to hear from all of us—right now, when leaders in Congress are quietly talking behind the scenes to work out top-line numbers for a budget for the rest of the year.

This November, I stood before a room of Quakers and friends at FCNL's Quaker Public Policy Institute. These grassroots advocates were about to go into congressional offices and urge them to reject budget proposals that grow Pentagon spending or force cuts for urgent needs in diplomacy, development, and domestic priorities. That lobbying was bolstered by the dedication of FCNL's Advocacy Teams—more than 1,300 people in 35 states as of this writing—who have been working for almost a year asking Congress to rein in Pentagon spending.

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