

## Inevitable Wars

by Fr. John S. Rausch

The United States spends more on defense than all other nations combined. Considering the basic budget for the Department of Defense that covers salaries, operations and equipment and the supplemental budget that pays for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, defense spending bests the second military spender by nearly a factor of ten. The supplemental itself for funding the two wars looms larger than the combined military budgets of China and Russia.

In addition, the government has folded a variety of military-related expenditures into departments other than Defense. The Department of Energy FY 2008 will spend \$23 billion on developing and maintaining nuclear warheads, and the State Department will distribute an additional \$25 billion among allies as foreign military assistance. Add in obligations with Veterans Affairs, military recruiting and Homeland Security, plus Military Retirement, the paramilitary activities of the FBI, outer space related security and interest for past debt-financed defense spending, and U.S. spending on its military establishment for the current year, according to Chalmers Johnson, professor emeritus at University of California, San Diego, reaches \$1.1 trillion!

In a 2006 Angus Reid poll, 65 percent of Americans said the country has been “too quick to get American military forces involved” in conflicts. Instead, the American public supports more preventive security measures like diplomacy, nuclear nonproliferation, peacekeeping and foreign aid. A 2007 World Public Opinion poll found 78 percent of Americans “believe that all countries should eliminate their nuclear weapons” through a well-coordinated international verification system. Yet, the military budget continues to grow and has more than doubled since the end of the Cold War.

Behind the expanded military budget lies certain structural reasons for this aggressive spending. Prior to World War II, the U.S. had no dedicated arms industry. In time of war, manufacturers would convert their facilities from producing consumer goods to military hardware. That changed after the war.

In his Farewell Address to the Nation in 1961, President Eisenhower confessed, “...we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions.” Yet, later in the speech he issued his famous warning: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial-complex.”

Eisenhower recognized the need for arms manufacturers, yet emphasized their dangers. Originally, his notable phrase read: “the military-industrial-congressional-complex,” though he chose to drop the one term in the final draft of the speech. Yet, Congressional representatives get reelected when they bring home federal money to their districts, and arms manufacturers make profit when they sell weapons to the government. Killing a weapons system becomes near impossible because of the economic and political impact. The F/A-22 “Raptor” fighter jet, for example, designed to counter a Soviet aircraft that was never built, has one thousand subcontractors in 42 states.

People of faith recognize morally troubling aspects of the military-industrial-congressional-complex. Plainly, the opportunity cost—what could have been purchased instead of military items—represents a matter of justice. The catastrophe of a bridge collapse in Minnesota and the levees’ failure in New Orleans represent essential

infrastructure problems overlooked while unnecessary weapons get funded. Morally, opportunity costs represent choices: eradicate polio worldwide or do 3 tests of the missile defense system; vaccinate 10 million children worldwide or buy 6 Trident II missiles; provide health coverage for 7 million children or fund the nuclear weapons program for one year.

The words of Paul VI remain true today: “If you want peace, work for justice.” Justice demands we rethink the military-industrial-congressional-complex that robs society of essential goods and services while raising the threat of more and longer wars.