

PM: Where Will the Money Go in 2016?

By Polly Mann

In the congressional lobbying that ultimately affects taxes—that is, your income tax and mine—there's a new player in the game: a nonprofit called Americans for Peace, Prosperity and Security.

Who could oppose peace, prosperity or security? The organization's founder, former FBI agent, Mike Rogers, says its aim is to help “elect a president who supports American engagement and a strong foreign policy.” Recent research shows that of the seven-member advisory board, three have strong business links with defense companies and several are either employees or founders of defense giants like BAE Systems and Insight Technology. (The word defense, used in lieu of the word military, sounds less ominous, so it's the commonly accepted term.)

The United States could put an end to poverty in this country by a substantial reduction in its enormous military budget. (To do this would require a well-funded campaign, and how could the peace movement begin to amass funds sufficient to challenge those provided lobbyists by the military-industrial complex?) Lobbyists, in turn, use whatever means are legal (usually, that is) to influence the lawmakers to enact legislation benefiting the arms makers.



The proposed 2016 Pentagon budget is a whopping \$585.3 billion. According to Open Secrets, a project of the Center for Responsive Politics, the defense and aerospace industries spent a combined total of \$56,272,948 on lobbying efforts in 2015. A 2012 report showed that of the 137 lobbyists hired by the top contractors, 57 are former members of Congress, 39 are former congressional staff, 16 are former defense officials and eight are former Energy Department officials.

Of course, it isn't only lobbyists who are responsible for the situation. Lawmakers have the final say-so and are quite vulnerable. For example, just recently 10 lawmakers attended an expenses-paid conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, at which the development of natural gas in the Middle East was discussed. Cost of the trip, provided by an oil company, is being questioned by the Office of Congressional Ethics.

President Obama's proposed military budget for Fiscal Year 2016 is close to the average size of budgets for the last few years. However, the FY16 request is the largest of them all. So what is driving this increase? It's mainly weapons systems needed for a big war: aircraft carriers, stealth fighter jets, and submarines.

And so it seems that the United States will continue being the Best Armed Bully on the Block of the World, and what can be done about it?

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