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\$680 billion military budget an affront to God, the poor

by Art Laffin



Commentary

President Obama signed into law Oct. 28 the \$680 billion 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, the largest military spending bill of its kind. The bill includes \$130 billion in funding for the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and only modifies the military commissions system at Guantánamo Bay, rather than abolish it.

The bill included several military spending projects Obama had previously opposed, including \$560 million for a new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter engine the Pentagon had rejected. Then there is the approximately \$16 billion tucked away in the Energy Department's budget, money dedicated to maintaining the huge U.S. nuclear arsenal. Overall, the bill increases military spending \$24 billion from the last fiscal year.

However the president or members of Congress may try to justify this military budget, it is an affront to God and constitutes a direct theft from the poor. This budget is more than a bailout for the weapons industries; it is a massive giveaway to the war profiteers.

Where is the moral outrage at this gross misuse of the public treasury and the political doublespeak used to justify it? How is it possible that so much money could be appropriated in this time of recession when so many billions of taxpayers' funds have already been used to bail out Wall Street, banks and other

private financial institutions? Why are there few, if any, public officials saying that this money should instead be spent on providing universal health care for the poor, addressing the global climate crisis, and alleviating poverty? Finally, why is there such deafening silence from the church leadership regarding this colossal misappropriation of wealth and resources?

What would Jesus have us do? I believe Jesus would have us say that to appropriate any money for weapons, war and killing betray his command "to love one another," and is a sin that must be condemned without hesitation.

The poor and the victims cry out for justice ? for bread, not nuclear weapons; for affordable housing, not F-35 Joint-Strike Fighters and drones; for universal health care, not war-making and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If people of faith and conscience won't speak out for the poor, the victims and the marginalized, call for an immediate suspension of this immoral war budget, and take action for justice and peace, who will?

Despite the difficult challenges we face, signs of hope abound. There are growing numbers of groups and individuals who are speaking out for peace and social justice, and who are taking nonviolent action to bring about universal health care, climate justice and economic justice; to end U.S. war-making in Iraq and Afghanistan; to stop the drone attacks in Pakistan; to abolish torture and close Guantánamo and Bagram U.S. military prisons; and to disarm our nuclear arsenal.

Recently, two disarmament actions of note have occurred. Oblate of Mary Immaculate Fr. Carl Kabat, who has spent more than 15 years of his life in prison for disarmament actions, is currently in jail in Greeley, Colo., and is facing trial in December for his Aug. 6 Plowshares action at a Minuteman III missile silo. On Nov. 2, All Souls' Day, five peacemakers called the "Disarm Now Plowshares" carried out a Plowshares action at the U.S. Naval Submarine Base Kitsap-Bangor in Washington state.

It is time to end all of our war-making, beat all the swords of our time into plowshares, and redirect all monies and resources of this military budget to meet the urgent human needs of our country and world.

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