

An Investment in Peace

By Goody Walowit

"The world is over-armed, and peace is underfunded." This is an excerpt from a 2012 statement from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon regarding worldwide nuclear disarmament. This sentence, simple and brief, spotlights a threatening problem the world faces today.

Despite ongoing conflicts that can be observed around the world, such as those in Middle East, Ukraine, Burma, and Afghanistan, many experts agree that we're living in the midst of the most peaceful era in human history. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the world has seen fewer bloody conflicts, deadly diseases, and oppressive regimes than any century in the past. The prevalence of genocide has nose-dived, and worldwide violent crime has been on a steady decline for over twenty years. For these reasons, it may be a surprise to many that world military spending is near an all time high.

Even during these promising times of peace, worldwide military spending has steadily increased over the last twenty years, receding only recently. In 2013, it amounted to more than 1.7 trillion dollars, up fifty-five percent from about 1.1 trillion in 2000. The US has always been at the forefront of military spending, usually accounting for between twenty-five and forty percent of the global yearly budget, even though it only represents less than five percent of the world population.

Peace is not a byproduct of military spending, but rather a result of education, tolerance, and the promotion of human rights. In order to achieve peace, we need a world that values peace. As stated in article three of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every human in the world is entitled to life, liberty, and security of person, among many other rights recorded in the Declaration's thirty articles. Too many governments have failed to provide these basic rights to their citizens, but continue to grow their militaries. It's time for a different approach.

Instead of funding weapons and wars, we need to create a world that fosters human rights, opportunity and prosperity for everyone - a world that would rather provide a child with food and education than provide a soldier with a rifle. Although the condition of the developing world has improved drastically over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, much of the globe is still in dire need of assistance. The United Nations estimates it would cost thirty billion dollars annually to end world hunger, or the same amount the world spends on defense every week. A recent world-bank study estimated that it would cost about thirty-eight billion dollars per year to provide primary education to every child in the world, or nine days worth of worldwide military spending. Addressing world hunger, education, and other

fundamental human rights would be a lasting investment in world peace, and it's attainable for just a small fraction of the world's military expenditures. All we need is a change in priorities.