War as a Business Model: How the U.S. Loses While Corporations Win

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Chris Hedges (CH): From November 10th to the 13th, the anti-war group Code Pink will lead what it is calling a taxpayer's uprising in Washington to protest the Trump administration's proposed $1.5 trillion war budget, the largest increase in war spending in modern American history. The drain on the government budget for war is already unacceptable, with the average taxpayer paying over $4,000 for weapons and war last year alone. This proposed increase in spending on war will not only see an array of vital government programs such as health care and education slashed and defunded, but will hand $500 billion to AI billionaires. It will see the effective merging of the US and Israeli militaries, half of the proposed $1.5 trillion budget will go to private contractors, including those who are building massive data centers on military bases. For three days, activists will flood the halls of Congress, visit congressional offices and carry out protests and vigils. They will call on congressional leaders to end the war on Iran, halt all funding for Israel, reject the proposed merger of the US and Israeli militaries, and vote to refuse to fund the $1.5 trillion war budget. The increase in military spending comes as Americans struggle with rising prices. Nearly 30% of people in the US go into debt to buy groceries. Some 45,000 Americans die each year due to lack of health care, and affordable health care and 25% of Americans are functionally unemployed. Finally, the increase in military spending will accelerate the climate crisis. The Pentagon, powered by the fossil fuel industry, is the world's largest institutional polluter, emitting 55 million metric tons of CO2 annually. Joining me to discuss the taxpayer uprising is Jodie Evans, the co-founder of Code Pink.

So this $1.5 trillion increase in military spending comes, as you well know and have been fighting for many years, a constant increase in military spending, sometimes with Congress actually giving the Pentagon more than it asks for, it comes also at a time when the Pentagon is completely unaccountable. I mean, they don't even audit the Pentagon. Just talk a little bit about, and you've been standing up against this with Code Pink since the Iraq War, the first Iraq War, just talk a little bit about what the military, you know, the kind of a state within a state that the military has become in American society.

Jodie Evans (JE): Oh, it's so frightening, Chris, and just watching it over this war on terror, what it was like when we entered the halls of Congress 24 years ago to try to stop the war in Iraq and what it's become, it is a monster. And really it's the tail wagging the dog. We see the amount of money that has infiltrated all the congressional elections. And I want to say when we say the amount of money, the money that the weapons industry has to get lobbyists, and I believe it's some huge number, like 1,300 to 2,000 lobbyists for the weapons industry, but they're paying for those lobbyists with your tax dollars. So how the weapons industry has money is your tax dollar, they make a lot of money off your tax dollars and they use some of that excess to get even more money. And the other thing, Chris, is super frightening and nobody talks about, but in every congressional office, there's a military attache that is in the office pushing war, literally working for the weapons industry to make sure that every member of Congress is voting for more money for weapons. And then they cleverly get pieces of the weapons to be built in every Congressional Office District so that every Congress person is like a jobs deal. instead of it is destroying the planet, as you just said. It is destroying our culture. It is destroying life itself, like it's murdering people, ad hoc. I mean, we watch people being poor fisher people being bombed in their boats in the middle of the Caribbean who've done nothing to anyone, besides the genocide in Gaza, what's happening in Iran... Like, what is happening in Iran? Code Pink fought against drones for many years, actually got Obama to go from 1,200 a month to down to 200. But with AI, someone saw there were kids in this playground. And they just bombed them. I mean, these weapons...

CH: Are you talking about the attack in Iran on the school?

JE: Yeah, the school. They've made everyone crazy. I mean, this level of weaponry just creates insanity. When we're watching what is actually happening, I mean, come on, Chris, you've been in war zones, what you're seeing right now, is it not exponentially more than what you witnessed? I mean the violence of war is the violence of war. I don't know if there's a next...

CH: Well, yeah, because the technology has gone places that the last war I covered was in Bosnia and Kosovo, that technology did not exist, and it has, through AI, through drones, and these drones are very sophisticated – with a book I just did with Joe Sacco, *Requiem for Gaza*, and we interviewed 29 Palestinian families who had fled Gaza, but they would talk about how the drones would call people out of buildings, and you would have to line up in front of the Israeli drone and show your identification, and then have your retina scanned by the drone, and then the drone would separate the men and boys... This was not like anything I saw in any war zone that I covered. And then of course you have AI, as we see with the genocide in Gaza, selecting so many targets the Israelis can't even keep up in terms of hitting them. So yes, it is but you're right, it's like I don't know some kind of drug like crack or something.

JE: Yeah, it's worse than crack. It's definitely...

CH: Well, it's a lot worse than crack, yeah. But it has kind of drugged the war industry, or, you know, intoxicated the war industry.

JE: That's why they keep coming back. If we look at this bill, this is almost double Biden's military budget, which was already too much. So just at whim it's a war at whim. Because there's all these weapons and there's all this money no different than at whim what happens in cities with ICE because there is all this money and capacity. So it's literally like throwing gas on a fire, to give this money to an already very sick, very disturbing Pentagon and let's just not call it the Pentagon because we are literally handing this money over to Hegseth and Trump. Hegseth, who just said that he was going to live stream a firing squad. I mean, the level of insanity of the people that we want to hand this money over to, hard-earned taxpayer money, that we are literally half of it goes to the contractors, that means half of the goes to the weapons manufacturers and the AI billionaires. So your hard-earned money is going to make the rich richer, which therefore makes the world more insane, more violent, and less able to be lived in. I mean some of the numbers you mentioned earlier, but just one that came out today was every family in America is spending $2,000 on the Iran War, like you said, they can't pay their bills, they're dying from the incapacity to be able to pay their medical bills. Or the article that just came out that said 50% of Americans can't afford to live. They can't pay their bills, 50%. 25% are functionally unemployed. I mean, if you could fight 650 billion more dollars, there's so much that this needs to be spent on that could fix everything that we're concerned about.

CH: Well, this money has just been spent on one military debacle after another, Iraq, Afghanistan, now Iran, and of course caused tremendous suffering and dislocation. But nobody is held accountable for these debacles. We just leap from one debacle to the next.

JE: Well, the rich get richer, by the way...

CH: Well, of course, war is a good business...

JE: We lose every war and I mean, we do, but the people do, but the rich don't.

CH: Well, let's talk a little bit about what we can do to kind of halt this insane squandering of taxpayer money into the war industry. I mean, I think as you pointed out, that we don't have the money the lobbyists have. We don't have the money that the war industries has in our system of legalized bribery to buy politicians and those politicians can be democrats or republicans, I mean one of the things that is thrown me is that the democrats complain is that they weren't consulted about the war on iIan they haven't actually opposed the war on Iran.

JE: Exactly. Well, I just want to bring up one other piece that's in this war bill. I call it the Hegseth $1.5 trillion war bill, and that is there's a clause at section 224 that merges the defense industry of the United States with a foreign one, which is Israel. And that is also quite frightening. Many of the members of Congress who are opposing it also say that if this happens they lose all capacity for transparency into what's happening. And its supply chains are fused. It takes away even their capacity to look at what's happening. But that's scary. And what is that for? That is to develop even more horrendous weapons with AI. So yes, we're looking at what is horrendous, but this money is to make it even worse. So that's another piece of this.

CH: But Jodie just let me interrupt, it's also to fuse the Israeli war industry with the American war industry at a time when 60% of Americans and 77% of registered Democrats do not want to give Israel billions of dollars – this was actually set up by Obama and then Biden of course turbocharged it with a genocide, they do not wanna give Israel billions of Dollars to sustain the apartheid state in the genocide.

JE: Exactly. And 70% of Americans don't want war. There you have the people, but Congress is not hearing them. And that is why we're calling for this taxpayer uprising. Chris, when this bill comes up every year, everybody rolls their eyes and just goes, it's gonna pass. This year, we are not going to let it pass. And so this is really important. This bill cannot pass. And the only way that we can stop it is to flood the halls of Congress. I want to go back to the last Trump administration. 50 million emails were sent to block the education secretary from her appointment and she went right through. After that, everybody was like, okay, well that didn't work. And the next thing that came up to vote was them getting rid of Obamacare. And what did we do? We flooded the halls of Congress and said no. And it was a no. And so I'm calling on that memory and I'm calling on all the people. When people wring their hands and wonder why we got here, it's because Congress is fully owned by a genocidal Zionist state and the military industrial complex. And they are not afraid of the people, they don't really care what we think. But they are using our tax dollars to make the rich richer and destroy our future, literally destroy our future. And so I want everybody to be inspired by what is happening in France and Spain and India. And like, where the heck are we? The people? The terrorists of the planet? Where are the people of America? Show up, show up and say no. And we're gonna make this really simple because always what happens with the vote on the NDAA, it gets really complicated and people wanna get into amendments and they call it the NDAA, no. This is the Trump-Hegseth $1.5 trillion war bill and it is going to destroy your future. And all you need to show up and say is, I am a taxpayer and no, you cannot use my money for war and genocide anymore because they're not hearing it. It's not in their ear. And they don't feel us.

JE: And we have to show up and they have to feel us and they have to hear our stories. We're going to talk to them and people that come, it's not, I mean, Code Pink is organizing for people to come, but people are coming as taxpayers. They're coming each one as I know why I'm here. I know what I'm losing and tell your story. The coalition partners, we have over 30 coalition partners are growing; Doctors Against Genocide is coming on Thursday the 12th and the veterans are coming on Wednesday because it's Armistice Day and Ben Cohen's coming to tell his Oreo story of what this money could be spent on instead. People are coming as taxpayers, that's the thing that is missing. And it's an uprising that's missing. They're not seeing us. Can I tell you what they see every day? They see a representative of the military and the military industrial complex in their office every day. And they see it on the checks that they're depositing so they can run for office. And this is happening the day that Congress gets back from the elections. You know, remember with Obama, everybody disappeared, like they elected Obama and then they disappeared and later went, oh, that wasn't such a good idea. As soon as the elections are over that are taking everyone's minds, it's up to the people to demand, to demand that they can no longer spend our money on war

and militarism and a genocide. And no, we can't merge the United States military with a foreign government. That's insane.

CH: Talk a little bit about what, you know, the logistics of how it's going to work for people who do go –I'm going to try and get down there, I'm on book tour, so I don't know if my publicist is going to set me free on those dates or not, but I will try my best – but talk a little about what we have to do in terms of numbers and in terms of activities.

JE: Sure, you can go to codepink.org and there's a place to sign up and we'll reach out and add you to a coalition or an affinity group that fits the issue that you're interested in because we'll go through the halls of Congress and affinity groups. You can come from the 10th to the 12th, you come for one day. We hope this is a match that lights a fire that continues beyond these three days but we want to at least light a match. Yoko Ono, one of her first acts for peace was to light a match, and so it's like, here's the match, we're lighting it, may you be inspired by the taxpayers that come, and there be a flow of taxpayers until this bill is stopped, and the pressure has to continue to be on it. Sign up, we do calls every Wednesday, we give you where to meet each morning. We will have a member of Congress greeting everyone in the morning before we take to the halls of Congress. We'll start all together and then we'll break out into interest groups to have meetings in specific offices where the people in Congress and in the Senate need some extra pressure. I wanna say that with this, we've got the Senate, we have folks in the Senate and folks in Congress that are doing their work by working on the membership. So we have to do our work as the people by creating the fire outside to give them what they need to push the votes to say no.

JE: So our task is to bring as many people as we can into the halls of Congress. Book your flight, find a friend that you can stay with, show up on each morning at nine o'clock in the halls, and this is a nonviolent action. We are voters, we are citizens of the United States, we have the right to be in these office buildings. So we will walk the halls. We will go to offices. We will teach. We will share our voices. We will also do a vigil outside all day long between both the Senate and the Congress where they both walk to go do votes so that we can speak there; so there'll be some people outside some people inside and at night we'll be in Busboys and Poets sharing voices of the taxpayer uprising. Norman Finkelstein will be with us Ben Cohen will be with us; we have a list of people that are coming to share their voices, people that can't afford to pay for anything, bets who've been at war and can talk about the cost of it.

JE: I mean, Chris, I think what people don't talk about enough and you're so good at this is the cost of war. We talk about war like it's an abstract idea instead of the utter insanity that war is. There is never an excuse for war. And I don't know if you saw the New York Times did an interview this weekend with the head of the International Red Cross. She never gives an interview, but she's freaked out. She did the interview because she's freaked out. She says we're in World War III, there are 130 wars right now, there's no laws, it's like you said, accountability. There's no laws. After a horrible war, laws and agreements were put in place to stop this madness from happening and they've all been shattered. And so we're living in a world of anarchy around war and that's why we're seeing the barbarism.

JE: And I think even in the face of that, it is our task to stand up and say no. Because if we're hearing the calls of people that are pretty mainstream and conservative say where we are, where are we, the people, that are funding this? This is our money. We're letting them do this with our money. And it's the world, it's World War III. It's an insane level of barbarism and violence that we're watching. And this funds the research for even more insanity with AI. And again, Andrew Feinstein just finished a book, I think it comes out in a few weeks, where he talks about the $40 billion profit that has been made by weapons companies on the war on Gaza and Lebanon, and Yemen. So, I mean, I think it should be enraging to us. I'm just like, where is everybody? I'm calling out to say, people, this is us. If you watched what happened at the UN, when people listened to Trump and just sat in their chairs, except for the Cubans and the Venezuelans; civil society, all the things that were put in place to keep us from going into this madness, they don't function. So the idea is when you look at that, it's to say the task is now mine because there's nothing else. When I was young and I was looking at the Vietnam Wars when I realized there were like no grownups, well, now not only there are no grown ups, but there's just mad men with these weapons. And they're firing everybody from the military that actually gets in the way. That should even be scarier. So what is happening if you just look at the details of what has happened? We should all be called to be walking these streets and saying no.

CH: How much opposition to this budget is there within the House and Senate?

JE: Actually, healthy; the most opposition I've seen in my 24 years. The first, when it was first presented to the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Senate, 12 democratic members of the Senate voted against that. That's historic. Chris, that's historic, and I would say that the senators and the members in the House, they're ready for a fight. And they're fighting, they feel like me, we have to stop this, they have the same – usually like I say, everybody rolls their eyes, it's gonna pass, no, this is not, this isn't gonna pass – with the same you know fear of curiosity, it's like no, we cannot let this pass. Because they know what this means. I just wish we could articulate – we can't articulate what this level of increase means because we've never seen it. As you said, it's the greatest increase in modern history. We don't know what that even means, but I can tell you just look at what it meant the last few years with the increase. What on steroids could this mean? And I don't want to know, I do not want to know. That's why I'm throwing everything, my body on the line, calling out to everyone that will listen, please join us because we have to stop it. And I think back to being in the halls of Congress with Medea and saying, no, we have to stop this war in Iraq. Well, let me just remind everybody what this last 24 years has meant. And Chris, I'd love you to join in because this last 24 years of this war on terror, it means over five million people have died from that war. Something like 33 million people are refugees, refugees. You do not want to be a refugee. What happened to Gaza? Maybe that's just coming for us. They'll have enough that it just becomes whatever they don't like. Look, they get to kidnap a president and they get to threaten to annihilate another country. What happens when you've got double that amount of money? I don't want to know. Nobody wants to know, but when they get this amount of money and this level of addiction that is accelerating and accelerating, it's up to us to say no. We've got to be the adults in the room. Someone has to be the adult in the room and say no.

CH: Well, Arnold Toynbee, when he writes his work on the death of civilizations, pinpoints an unregulated, uncontrolled military apparatus that disembowels the civilization itself. And I think that's ultimately, and I'm not talking about the empire, I'm no friend of the empire, but it disembows the civilization. And that's really what at this point were seen.

JE: Well, and yes, thank you, because I don't think people understand the cost of the culture that we live in right now, which is a result of the 25 years of the war on terror. My grandkids live in anxiety. I can't get them out of it. I mean, it's insane that we are allowing this culture that has been created by war, be created by the inequality, these wars have created to allow our children to live in this much anxiety, that that's not life. That's not how our children should be living. But they're not finding hope. It's getting worse every year. And so we have to stop this money from going to war.

CH: It's also ignoring the greatest existential crisis we face, which is the climate catastrophe. That's the battle we should be fighting.

JE: Yeah, well, the *Earth's Greatest Enemy*, Abby's movie, shows you the existential threat and the unfathomable nature of the cost to the planet that war is. I think when you finish that film, you see it's just uncalculable, unfathomable what the cost of war is to the planet and how many layers it affects from our water to the seas, to the air, to climate change. I mean, it's horrific. It's our future. Yes, this bill steals our future and also the moral compass, isn't your, your constitution. It's what you spend your money on. And you know Gloria Steinem taught me that back in the 60s, look at your checkbook and see what you spent your money on, those are your values. Well, these are our values. This is that we let over 50% of our discretionary tax dollars be spent on war and weapons and destruction.

CH: Great. Thanks, Jodie. And I want to thank Malena and Max, who produced the show. You can find me at chrishedges.substack.com.

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