



Militarism and Carcerality under the U.S. National Security State

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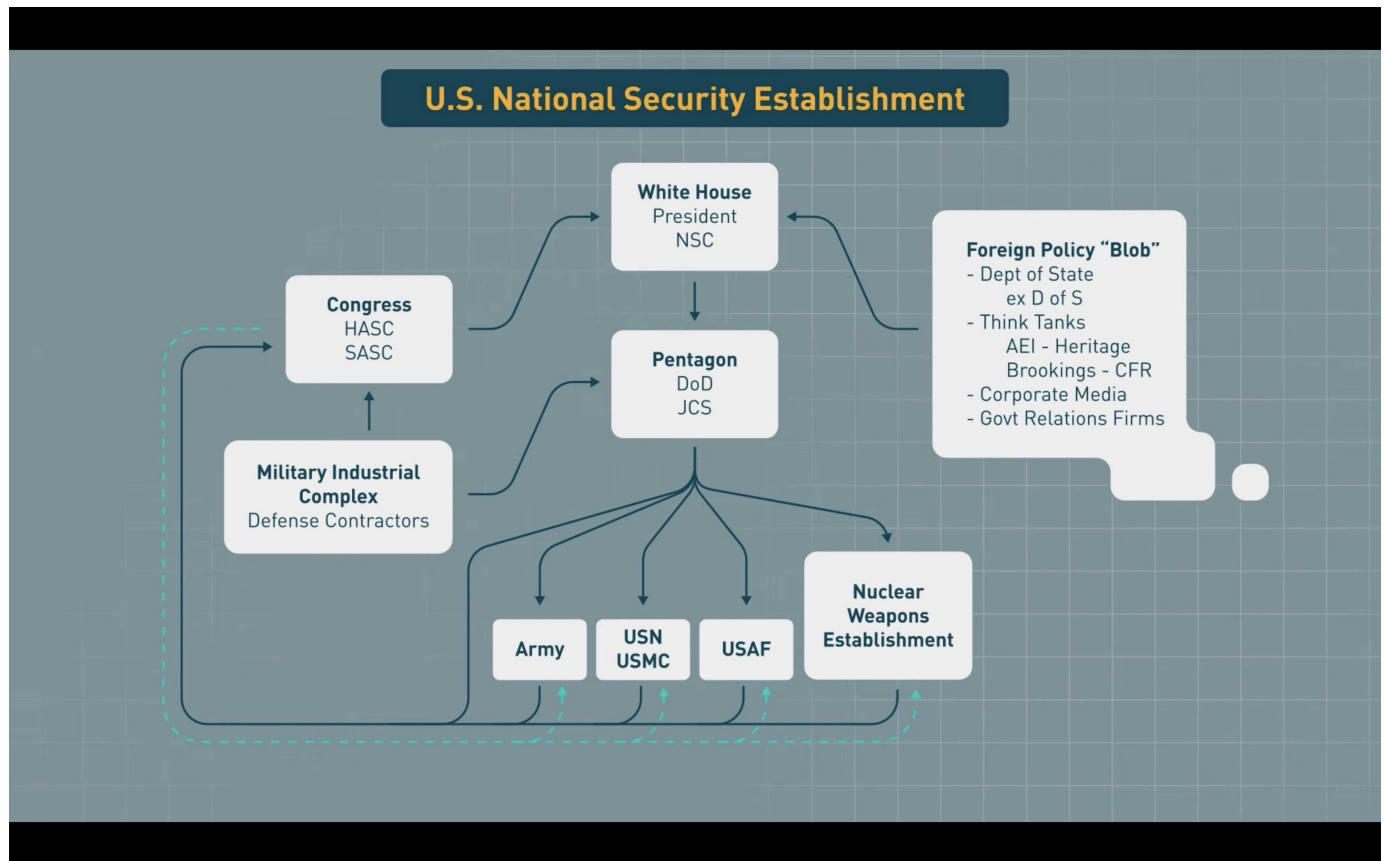
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Contextualizing the U.S. National Security State

The U.S. National Security State encompasses key subsystems, including the White

House, the Pentagon, Congress, foreign policy entities, the Armed Forces, and the military industrial complex, which operate to collectively uphold the centrality and strength of the United States in order to project as much global influence as possible. For example, one single branch of the National Security State, the Department of Defense, spends more than \$850 billion annually, controlling over 800 military installations across more than 160 countries, making it the most expansive military network worldwide (Klare, 2024).

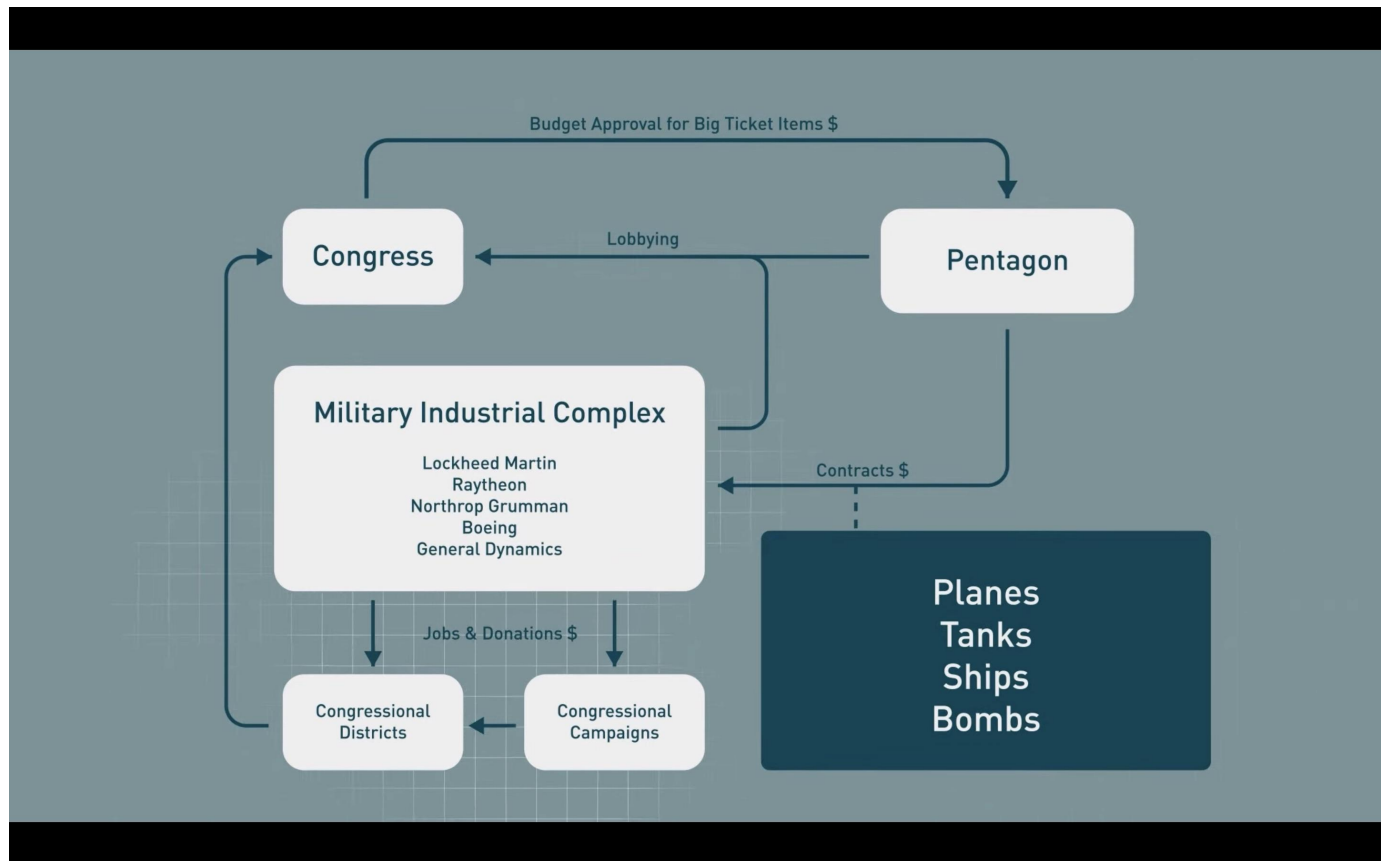


A visual of the subsystems that make up the U.S. National Security State | Michael Klare via Security in Context

The U.S. Military Industrial Complex

The U.S. military industrial complex, the popular term for the defense industry, is another extremely rich and powerful component of the U.S. National Security State. The U.S. military industrial complex encompasses a network of agencies located in the U.S. that produce surveillance and weapon technology which is sold domestically and abroad. Several large arms producing companies, referred to as defense contractors, gain immense portions of their income from contracts with the Pentagon. The prime defense contractors include Lockheed Martin, Raytheon,

Northrup Grumman, Boeing, and General Dynamics. The prime defense contractors “are major spenders and employers in key congressional districts and are among the leading donors for congressional campaigns. Lobbyists from these companies typically collaborate with Pentagon officials to lobby Congress for increased spending on major planes, tanks, ships, and bombs” (Klare, 2024). Large contracts (often in the billions) are passed with bipartisan support and without much debate. This cyclical relationship is illustrated below.



A Breakdown of the Military Industrial Complex | Michael Klare via Security in Context

Venture Capitalists and the Changing Terrain of the U.S. Military Industrial Complex

Venture capitalists (VCs) are private equity investors who give money and assets to startups, and in return receive equity stakes in the companies. During World War II, the first U.S. venture capital firm was created in order to profit on new wartime weapons technologies, and this military spending led to Silicon Valley becoming the technology center it is today. Although the prime defense contractors have historically made up the majority of the military industrial complex, venture

capitalists are beginning to rapidly change the terrain of the industry, prompting increased development of military and surveillance technologies among startups (Predin, 2023). In fact, VC firms funnelled almost \$100 billion dollars to defense startups in 2021-2023 alone (González, 2024).

The traditional defense contractors (including Raytheon, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, and Northrop Grumman) “have been funding think tanks to promote U.S. militarism abroad for decades, while also reshaping U.S. government intervention to subsidize their operations, deregulate their activities, and minimize oversight while draining resources from every other aspect of our lives” (Marshall, 2023). Similarly, VCs are beginning to introduce initiatives and policies to make way for startups supported by VCs to increasingly obtain a portion of the U.S. military industrial complex and reshape its terrain for more rapid development and return, and less regulation through lobbying (Marshall, 2023). Essentially, the increase in venture capitalists profiting off of weapons and surveillance industries is changing the terrain of the military industrial complex and further hastening the rapid development of violent and deadly technologies to be utilized by the U.S. National Security State domestically and abroad.

Connections to Prison Labor

The prison industrial complex is broadly defined as the web of connections between institutions of imprisonment (like jails, prisons, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers) and business agencies which profit off of them. One central way the U.S. military industrial complex is connected to the prison industrial complex is through coerced prison labor. In 2022, MintPress News proved that 37% of the top 100 largest Defense Department contractors in the United States were profiting from incarcerated people’s labor- from jails to prisons to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) camps [5]. Of the top 25 largest Defense Department contractors, 16 (64%) were found to use coerced prison labor [5]. Among them are Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, General Dynamics, and Northrup Grumman. The full list is provided here.

When MintPress News presented this evidence to Chris Hedges, a journalist and prison educator, he exclaimed,

“The fabric of the defense industry, the carceral state, the intelligence industry, it is all interwoven. And I think these findings prove it.”

When speaking with abolitionist organization Worth Rises' founder Bianca Tylek, she told MintPress, "There's considerable overlap between the two industries, which isn't shocking; these are controversial industries. Corporations that operate in one controversial industry aren't afraid to take part in another. Where we see a particular overlap is in security and surveillance technology. In fact, historically, the federal government has awarded grants to test technology being developed for anti-terrorism in prisons and jails."

From Massachusetts to Yemen: Raytheon's Abuse of Domestic Prison Labor and Profit from International Violence Raytheon, one of the largest and most central defense contractors for the U.S. National Security State, whose headquarters are in Massachusetts, secured a contract for upwards of \$40 million to create a central Department of Homeland Security database for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Macleod, 2022). Additionally, Raytheon takes advantage of the U.S. prison population to widen their profits, as "Prisoners are coerced into working for as little as 23 cents per hour (minus taxes and other fees) for subcontractors who manufacture parts for Patriot missiles that cost up to \$5.9 million apiece, meaning it would take nearly three thousand years of round-the-clock working for a prisoner to be able to afford what they are making" (ibid).

Raytheon sells its weapons internationally as well. For example, since the beginning of Saudi Arabia's attacks on Yemen in 2015, Raytheon has sold the Saudi military over \$3.3 billion worth of products (ibid). One Raytheon weapon, a laser-guided missile, was used by the Saudi military "to blow up a school bus full of Yemeni children, killing 51 people" (ibid). Through this example, we see how defense contractors take advantage of the domestic prison-industrial complex by participating in the implementation of coerced prison labor, thereby further strengthening the influence of the U.S. military complex globally.



A frame from a fast-paced video compilation of Raytheon's F-22 equip Raptor, the central imagery on the home website for Raytheon Technologies Corporation

Militarism, Carcerality, and the U.S. National Security State

Carcerality is control and confinement that expands beyond prisons. Carcerality is ICE detention, imprisonment in jails and prisons, occupation of lands and people, life under military violence, surveillance, war, and other lived manifestations of confinement and control. As the U.S. continues to implement an increasingly militarized rule over people in the U.S. through surveillance, policing, and a for-profit prison system, the military industrial complex is forcing incarcerated people to aid in the U.S.-backed militarization of the world in order to bolster the supremacy of the U.S. National Security State.

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