

The Sanctity of Military Spending

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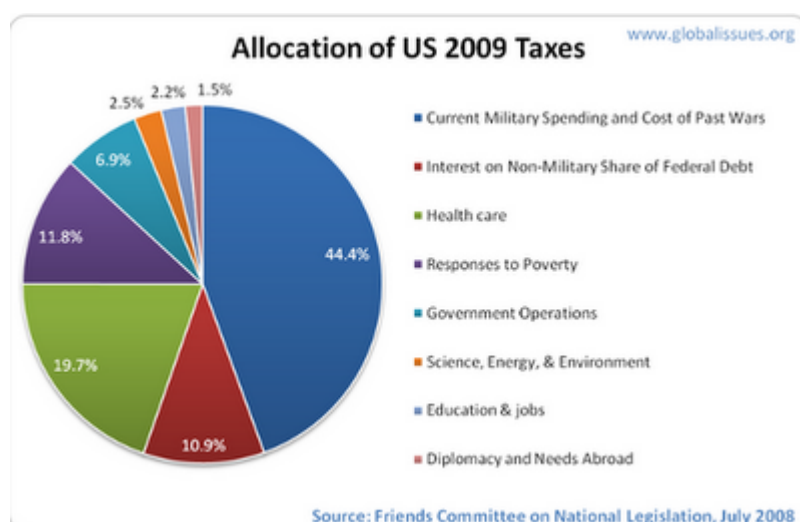
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Theme: [Global Economy](#)

Administration officials [announced last night](#) that the President, in tomorrow's State of the Union address, will propose a multi-year freeze on certain domestic discretionary spending programs. This is an "initiative intended to signal his seriousness about cutting the budget deficit," officials told The New York Times.

But the freeze is more notable for what it excludes than what it includes. For now, it does not include the largest domestic spending programs: Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. And all "security-related programs" are also exempted from the freeze, which means it does not apply to military spending, the intelligence budget, the Surveillance State, or foreign military aid. As always, the notion of decreasing the deficit and national debt through reductions in military spending is one of the most absolute Washington taboos. What possible rationale is there for that?

[The facts](#) about America's bloated, excessive, always-increasing military spending are now well-known. The U.S. spends almost as much on military spending as the entire rest of the world combined, and spends roughly six times more than the second-largest spender, China. Even as the U.S. sunk under increasingly crippling levels of debt over the last decade, defense spending rose steadily, sometimes precipitously. That explosion occurred even as overall military spending in the rest of the world decreased, thus expanding the already-vast gap between our expenditures and the world's. As one "defense" spending watchdog group [put it](#): "The US military budget was almost 29 times as large as the combined spending of the six 'rogue' states (Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria) who spent \$14.65 billion." To get a sense for how thoroughly military spending dominates our national budget, consider this chart showing where Americans' tax revenue goes:



Since much of that overall spending is mandatory, military spending — all of which is discretionary — accounts for over 50% of discretionary government spending. Yet it's absolutely forbidden to even contemplate reducing it as a means of reducing our debt or deficit. To the contrary, Obama ran on a platform of increasing military spending, and that is one of the few pledges [he is faithfully and enthusiastically filling](#) (while violating his pledge not to use [deceitful budgetary tricks](#) to fund our wars):

President Barack Obama will ask Congress for an additional \$33 billion to fight unpopular wars in Afghanistan and Iraq on top of a record \$708 billion for the Defense Department next year, The Associated Press has learned.

In sum, as we cite our debtor status to freeze funding for things such as “air traffic control, farm subsidies, education, nutrition and national parks” — all programs included in Obama's spending freeze — our military and other “security-related” spending habits become more bloated every year, completely shielded from any constraints or reality. This, despite the fact that it is virtually impossible for the U.S. to make meaningful progress in debt reduction without serious reductions in our military programs.

Public opinion is not a legitimate excuse for this utterly irrational conduct, as large percentages of Americans are receptive to reducing — or at least freezing — defense spending. [A June, 2009 Pew Research poll](#) asked Americans what they would do about defense spending, and 55% said they would either decrease it (18%) or keep it the same (37%); only 40% wanted it to increase. Even more notably, a [2007 Gallup poll](#) found that “the public's view that the federal government is spending too much on the military has increased substantially this year, to its highest level in more than 15 years.” In that poll, 58% of Democrats and 47% of Independents said that military spending “is too high” — and the percentages who believe that increased steadily over the last decade for every group.

The clear fact is that, no matter how severe are our budgetary constraints, military spending and all so-called “security-related programs” are off-limits for any freezes, let alone decreases. Moreover, the modest spending freeze to be announced by Obama tomorrow is just the start; the [Washington consensus has solidified](#) and is clearly gearing up for major cuts in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, with the dirty work to be done by an independent “deficit commission.” It's time for “everyone” to sacrifice and suffer some more — as long as “everyone” excludes our vast military industry, the permanent power factions inside the Pentagon and intelligence community, our Surveillance and National Security State, and the imperial policies of perpetual war which feed them while further draining the lifeblood out of the country.

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