

The Security Budget vs. the Necessities of Americans.

How does military spending impact Americans?

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President Obama and the Congress have taken 66% of discretionary spending in the federal budget off the table - [the Security Budget](#) - while proposing a freeze to the rest of the budget and deep cuts to some programs that provide necessities for the American people. His budget crystalizes a choice that U.S. presidents have been making since President Eisenhower warned of the military-industrial complex - investment in the military vs. investment in the civilian economy.

The bloated and sacrosanct security budget - the military, domestic security and intelligence budgets - all saw rapid growth under President Bush when the DoD doubled its budget. Under President Obama the trend has continued with record military, intelligence and domestic security budgets.

And, while the so-called recovery has only been a recovery for Wall Street and big business, the administration and congress are focused more on the deficit than on re-starting the economy for the rest of us. But there is more talk of cutting Social Security and Medicare than cutting the security budget. In fact, these two items are called entitlements because they are a contract with working Americans who pay for them in every paycheck. For this reason they should not even be considered part of the deficit. Payroll taxes fund these two programs that are essential for older Americans in their retirement years. Both face budget challenges but can be fixed, indeed [Social Security has more than \\$2.5 trillion in Treasury Notes in reserve](#).

President Obama has proposed the largest DoD budget since World War II, \$553 billion (not including war funding and nuclear weapons funding in the Department of Energy). Much attention has been shined on Secretary of Defense Gates' proposal to "cut" \$78 billion in the Pentagon budget. Those "cuts" take place over five years with reductions taking place after the 2012 election in 2014 and 2015. And, the "cuts" do not include the cost of wars. The Afghanistan war alone could eat up projected "savings" and if the CIA's war in Pakistan escalates that will be an even bigger budget item. Further, we have not seen what the continuing U.S. military footprint in Iraq will cost. These projected cuts are more image than reality.

How does military spending impact Americans? President Reagan's former assistant secretary of defense [Lawrence Korb describes](#) the military budget as "an annual tax of more than \$7,000 on every household in the country." While increasing the security budget, Obama and the Democrats have proposed widespread cuts to critical programs from a 50% cut in low-income heating assistance to nearly a 30% cut to the clean drinking water fund.

They have also proposed a 25% cut (\$1.3 billion) to the community development block grants used to fund local community development including affordable housing, anti-poverty programs, and infrastructure development. These are essential services needed for Americans health, safety and economic security. Of course, Republican cuts in the House budget are even more extreme but Obama set the table for them by making the debate about deficits and both parties will not touch the security budget. Military analyst, [William Hartung, writes](#) "These cuts will be painful, and they will be felt in every middle- and lower-income household in America."

Cities and states are cutting essential services to balance their budgets. U.S. taxpayers will spend \$737 billion for Pentagon spending for FY2011 (including war funding). To get a sense of what these means, for the same amount of money tax payers could provide funding for [11.3 million elementary school teachers](#) for one year or [93.5 million scholarships](#) for university students for one year or restart the economy by providing [166.9 million households with renewable electricity](#) - solar photovoltaic for one year. Instead all these programs face cutbacks, while military spending grows.

To get a sense of the absurdity of protecting all military spending, the federal government spends [\\$500 million each year for military marching bands](#). In comparison it spends \$430 million a year on public broadcasting. [More than half of all Americans use PBS each year](#), 170 million people, but PBS faces cutbacks while military bands are protected from budget cuts.

The greater damage will be in the failure to restart the economy. Economists like Nobel Prize winner, [Paul Krugman](#) and former Labor Secretary [Robert Reich](#), are convincingly urging more spending. Big business is sitting on \$2 trillion in cash stifling job creation and a real economic recovery. There are no signs of inflation because the recovery - if you can even call it a recovery - is non-existent for working Americans and the unemployed/underemployed whose consumer purchases are needed to drive the economy. [Obama risks a 1937 mistake](#) - cutting spending too soon and causing another collapse.

Cutting \$1 trillion from the federal budget is the goal of the Obama administration deficit plan. All of these cuts could come from military spending and still leave the U.S. militarily dominant. In fact, since the administration has projected an increase in spending of \$6.5 trillion from 2011 to 2020, even a trillion would be a slowing of growth more than a real cut. Lawrence Korb lays out a [five point plan](#) to reduce military spending by \$1 trillion without jeopardizing national security and thereby protecting U.S. economic security.

He is not alone, the [Sustainable Defense Task Force](#) provides specific cuts without harming U.S. national security including:

- The \$238 billion Joint Strike Fighter program: Cancelling the program and relying instead on upgraded versions of current aircraft would save almost \$50 billion over ten years.
- The MV-22 Osprey: Replacing this dangerous, overpriced, and underperforming aircraft with cheaper alternatives would save over \$10 billion over ten years.
- Reducing the number of U.S. troops in Europe and Asia to 100,000 from current levels of 150,000 would save \$80 billion over a decade.
- Reforming Pentagon health care systems so that retirees pay modest, reasonable

premiums could save \$60 billion over a decade.

- Scaling back missile defense and space weapons programs could save over \$50 billion over a decade.
- Further reductions in the U.S. nuclear arsenal, including deployment of fewer ballistic-missile launching submarines, could save over \$100 billion in a ten year period, much of it in operating costs.
- Reducing the size of the Navy from 286 to 230 ships would save over \$125 billion over ten years.

If you combine these recommendations of the five point plan of Lawrence Korb, which includes items like bringing home 50,000 of the 150,000 troops stationed in Asia and Europe, reducing the size of the Army and Marine Corps to their pre-Iraq invasion level and reducing nuclear weapons from 1,968 to the 311 the Military War College says is needed for defense, the U.S. would save another \$200 billion.

For many, these would only be the starting points of correctly prioritizing military spending. President Eisenhower warned about the military industrial complex 50 year ago. [During that time](#), U.S. spending on the military adjusted for inflation has more than doubled and we have moved to [a permanent war state](#). Columbia University's Seymour Melman, a professor of industrial engineering, pointed out that "Industrial productivity, the foundation of every nation's economic growth, is eroded by the relentlessly predatory effects of the military economy." In fact, we have seen - as we see in the Obama budget - a constant conflict between the military economy and the civilian economy. The civilian economy is losing that battle.

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[Thomas Woods, Jr. recently wrote in the American Conservative](#) that military spending is parasitic as it feeds off the economy rather than grows it. The scale of resources used by the military is exorbitant, Woods writes: "To train a single combat pilot, for instance, costs between \$5 million and \$7 million. Over a period of two years, the average U.S. motorist uses about as much fuel as does a single F-16 training jet in less than an hour. The Abrams tank uses up 3.8 gallons of fuel in traveling one mile. Between 2 and 11 percent of the world's use of 14 important minerals, from copper to aluminum to zinc, is consumed by the military, as is about 6 percent of the world's consumption of petroleum. The Pentagon's energy use in a single year could power all U.S. mass transit systems for nearly 14 years."

To get a sense of the competition between the civilian and military economy, the Department of Commerce estimated the value of the nation's plants, equipment, and

infrastructure (capital stock) at just over \$7.29 trillion in 1985; and from 1947 to 1987 [the military spent the equivalent](#), \$7.62 trillion in capital resources.

With the long record of the ascendancy of military spending it is not surprising to see the U.S. economy in collapse, industry disappearing and the infrastructure crumbling. Not only has the U.S. failed to win a major war since World War II, but the cost of the standing army has become a burden on all of us and a drag on the economy. Some describe the [U.S. Empire in decline](#) and others see a [collapse as possible](#) at [any moment](#).

The failure of President Obama to confront military spending in this time of economic collapse and perceived deficit crisis, when tax dollars are needed to restart the domestic economy, is not only a short term budget failure but does not face up to the long-term damaging economic impact of the American military empire.

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