

Reallocating Military Spending, Taking Care of Soldiers, & Increasing National Security

The saying goes, “Rome was not built in a day.” It did not fall in one day either. An economic, cultural and military powerhouse, the Roman Empire once seemed unassailable, permanent and omnipotent. Confident in their enduring supremacy, emperors pushed expansion, putting more gold into spears, fleets and cavalries while neglecting the day-to-day needs of their subjects, which led to the fall of the Roman Empire according to historians.

Today the US is the world’s sole superpower, enjoying huge economic and cultural sway, with interests and influence in every corner of the globe. Our military might is unparalleled. However, as history shows, in time a rising nation becomes preoccupied with national security, diverting profit into war and preparations for war. Economic strength wanes, industrial capacity atrophies and the great power falls. George Washington once said, “Overgrown military establishments are, under any form of government, inauspicious to liberty, and are to be regarded as particularly hostile to republican liberty.” Our own “liberty” is in danger, and we must learn from history, instead of repeating mistakes of the past. This begins with acknowledging the imbalance of resources invested in the military, broadening the definition of “security” and reallocating some of these resources to better support the strength of our nation.

• Frida Berrigan
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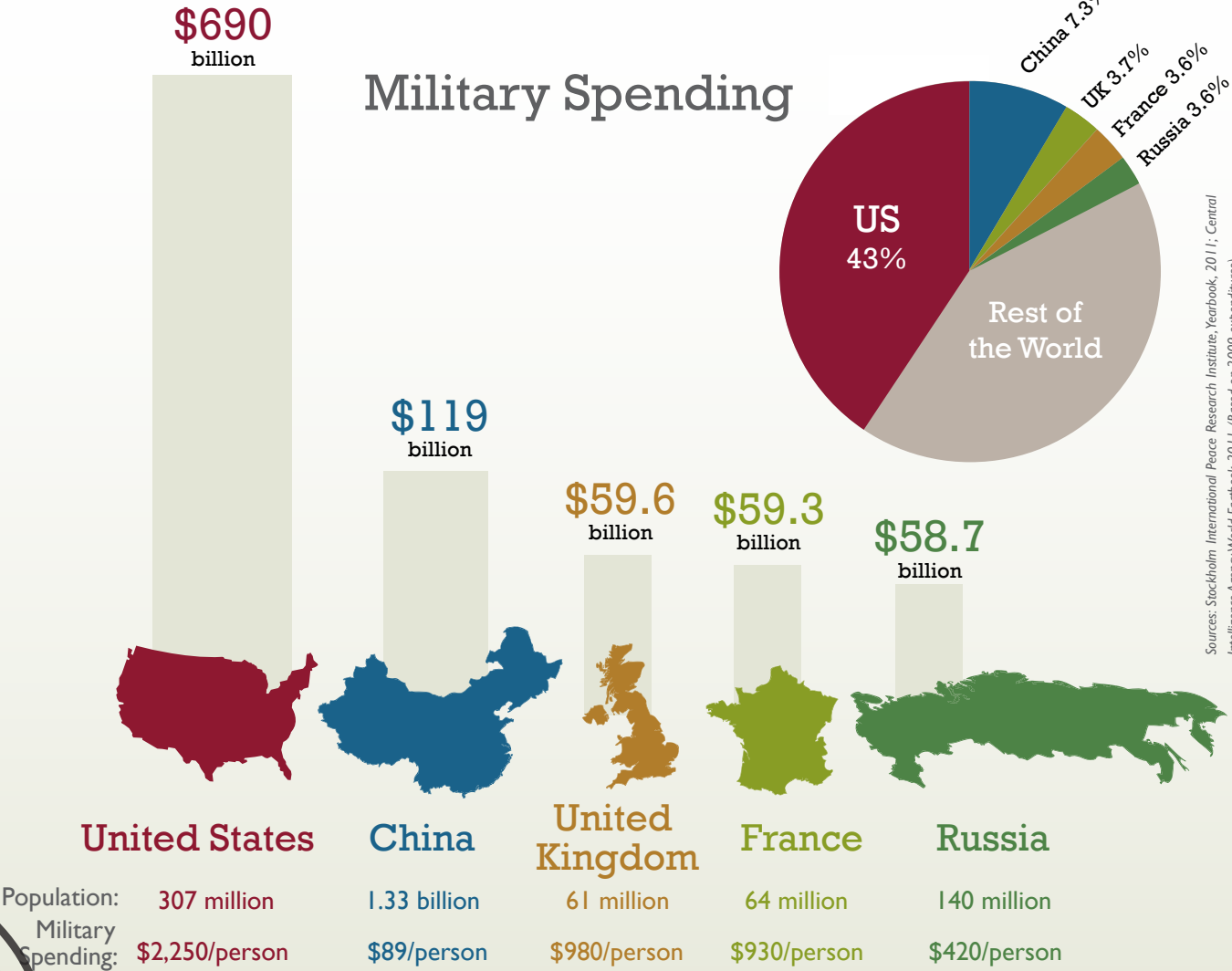
Out of Step: US Military Budget

The US’ 2010 military budget was over \$690 billion, including funding for military personnel, research and development, new weapons procurement, as well as operations and maintenance. Also included in this figure is \$128 billion for military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Of the \$690 billion military budget, 87 percent of it goes to defense spending while only 8 percent for Homeland Security and 5 percent for preventative measures. For comparison, in 2010 the federal government spent \$108 billion on services for veterans, \$93 billion on education, \$23 billion on community and regional development and \$19 billion on foreign aid.¹

To understand these huge numbers, it is helpful to look at the US military budget within the context of the rest of the world. The US outspends China, the next biggest military power, almost seven times over. According

to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military expenditures passed \$1.6 trillion in 2010. When the costs of US military operations were added to the defense budget, US spending was nearly half of the global total.²

Many individuals and organizations are advocating for spending reductions, including the Sustainable Defense Task Force, a newly formed ad hoc advisory panel. Commissioned by a bipartisan group of five congressional representatives, the Task Force outlines nearly \$1 trillion in cuts to defense spending through 2020. The 16-member panel of individuals from non-profits, non-governmental organizations, think tanks and a private college identified measures that remove inefficiencies and redundancies within the Pentagon’s budget. The strategy is intended to convince Congress and the deficit reduction commission to include a reduction in military spending among the solutions for the nation’s rising budget deficit and debt.³



Two Military Budgets in One: The Legacy of the Military Industrial Complex

The US military budget is two military budgets rolled into one: one for national security, the other for industry. Despite the fact that the Cold War ended in 1991, tens of billions of dollars in outdated, irrelevant and expensive systems—ballistic missile defense, tri-dent submarines and ships such as the Zumwalt class destroyers (\$3.9 billion per ship)—remain barnacled in the budget, bloating it to such an extent that it eclipses a host of other priorities that are central to the notion of security.⁴



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These Cold War-era systems endure not because they are critical to national security but because of the influence from the weapons industry. This warning was offered to the nation by two-term President and Five-star General, Dwight Eisenhower. In his 1961 farewell address, he stated, “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”⁵

Reallocate the Military Budget to Increase National Security

Britain and France both spend about \$1,000 per person on their military budgets, have robust and able military forces with the most modern equipment and

plenty of money left over for a strong social safety net, generous pensions, enviable health care and a modern infrastructure. The US spends over \$2,200 per man, woman and child on the military while budgets for education, housing, health and infrastructure repair barely keep up with the rate of inflation.

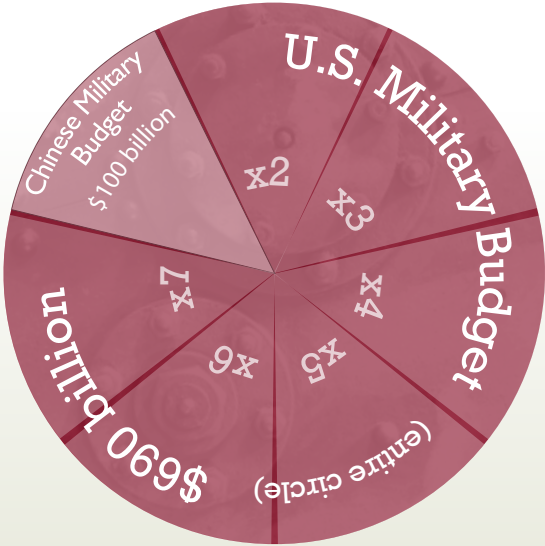
Reallocating the US military budget could make us more secure as a nation. If half of the military budget was reallocated to provide more benefits to veterans and to pay for other domestic needs, for example, the US would still have the largest military budget in the world three times over. But, we would also have the funds to invest in the education and even better services and opportunities for veterans, infrastructure and building a green and sustainable energy platform, which would ultimately create hundreds of thousands of well-paying jobs to power prosperity and ingenuity into the 21st century.

How do we get there from here? There are concrete ways to revise the size and mission of the US military that will make us more stable and secure as a nation and, at the same time, add new resources to invest in national revitalization.

Reduce US Military Operations Abroad:

Between 2001 and 2010, the US spent more than \$1 trillion on military operations for the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Looking forward through 2019, additional costs for continuing these wars could total as much as \$867 billion.⁶ These military operations have emptied the US treasury and resulted in thousands of war casualties, while the resulting increase in national security is questionable at best. Despite stabilization progress, remaining troops must be withdrawn, occupation ended and real reconstruction commenced in order to restore America’s place in the world and ensure lasting peace.

Cut Back on Bases: The US maintains military bases and outposts in more than 800 locations around the world, and the Pentagon spends about \$102 billion a year to run these overseas bases (not including the facilities in Iraq or Afghanistan). More than half a century



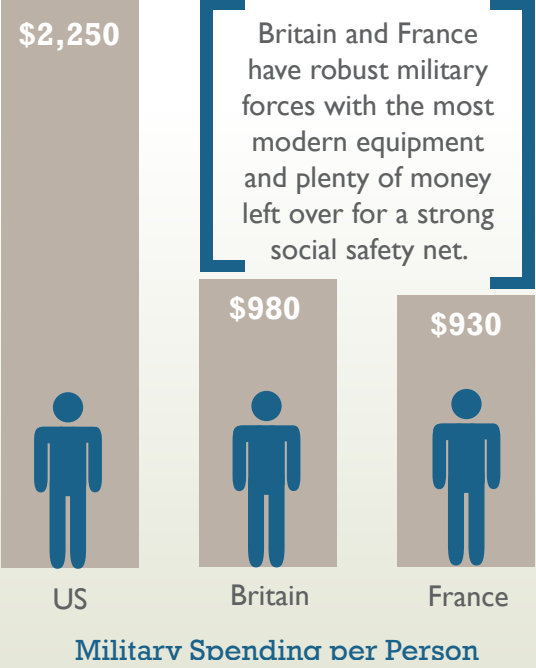
The US’ 2010 budget was \$690 billion in military spending, over 7 times that of China, the next highest military spender.

after World War II and the Korean War, we still have 268 bases in Germany, 124 in Japan and 87 in South Korea.⁷ Are they really necessary today? In 2004, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld suggested shuttering about one-third of US overseas bases; a move he estimated would save \$12 billion.

Nuclear Disarmament: The US possesses about 5,200 nuclear warheads, and an estimated 1,000 of those are ready to launch at a moment’s notice.⁸ President Barak Obama presented his vision of nuclear disarmament to the world, saying, “I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” Since then, his administration has ratified important arms control treaties and engaged Russia in nuclear reductions.

As the Obama administration pursues this commitment to disarmament, billions of dollars will be available for building real security in the form of programs for jobs, education and opportunities for veterans and all citizens. In a Carnegie Endowment report, analysts estimated that nuclear weapons activities throughout the federal budget totaled at least \$52 billion annually. Of this, only about \$14 billion was for non-proliferation, waste clean-up and nuclear incident response.⁹

Eliminate Waste: In a recent report on Pentagon weapons acquisition, the Government Accountability



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Office identified \$295 billion of cost overruns on 95 major weapons systems.¹⁰ Some of which had doubled or tripled original cost estimates and were years behind schedule. Because of the way contracts are written, the Pentagon is still obligated to award billions of dollars’ worth of performance bonuses to private contractors regardless of the results of their work. The Pentagon’s procurement budget is about \$100 billion annually, much of this going to weapons systems for the last or the next war, rather than systems relevant to today’s security environment. Renovating this system so that it only purchases what it needs from manufacturers able to deliver a product on time and at budget is a huge undertaking—but without significant change, the Pentagon’s purchasing will remain a form of socialized support for a military-industrial complex that has far too much influence.

The V-22 Osprey is a telling example. Although the program is being phased out, nearly two decades ago, then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney called the V-22



If we didn't waste **\$295 billion** on weapons systems overruns we could:

Provide healthcare for the 42 million the 46 million Americans with no healthcare coverage.¹

OR

Increase the average \$40,500 salary of the 4,180,000 teachers in the US by 25%, and do so for approximately seven years.²

OR

Build enough wind turbines to power 52 million homes, which accounts for 40% of the country's home energy needs.³

And this is **not cutting a dime** from the military budget; it's simply sticking to the (already enormous) budget.

from the editor

“a program I don't need,” and cited it as one example of how Congress “forces me to spend money on weapons that don't fill a vital need in these times of tight budgets and new requirements.”¹¹ An estimated \$54 billion has been spent on the program since its inception even though the aircraft was reported to be unsafe, overpriced and completely inadequate.¹²

What's Our Mission? Redefining National Security: Currently the US has a very broad and encompassing definition of what constitutes a threat to national security, but that must be scaled back so that US territory and significant interests can be robustly protected. Just because the US can project power to any corner of the globe, at any moment in time, should it do so? Carl Conetta of the Project for Defense Alternatives suggests that a more narrow and sustainable role for the US's armed forces would focus on “containing, deterring and defending against actual threats of violence to critical national interests.”¹³

A New Blueprint: The Path Forward

These are just a few of the steps that we need to take to halve the US military budget and increase national security. But that is only part of the work. If the US military is smaller and has a more limited mission, what is the role of military personnel—especially given the fact that economic necessity and job scarcity have driven many men and women into the military?

The other part of charting a new path forward is caring for our veterans and building a stronger and more

sustainable US economy. There are about 440,000 US military personnel stationed or deployed overseas right now. Of that number, almost half are engaged in combat operations and more than 30,000 have been wounded in action. As these men and women return from battlefields and bases around the world, they will need long-term care and services, and they will require jobs and stability.

The annual budget in 2010 for the Veterans Administrations (VA) was close to \$108 billion. While that might sound like a lot of money, it equates to only about \$4,700 per veteran—for health care, education, pension programs and job training.¹⁴ Making an unequivocal commitment to veterans and their families by augmenting the budget and improving services is nothing more than fair compensation for their service.

Then there is the question of jobs for veterans. The unemployment rate for veterans aged 18 to 24 is almost 5 percent higher than for that age group as a whole. In addition to the recession, veterans groups attribute the high jobless rate to a lack of education, job experience and job training in the years before entering the service.¹⁵

Vocational training for veterans should focus on emerging industries that have the potential for well-paying jobs. For example, there are about 3,400 companies in the solar energy sector in the US, employing 60,000 people. The Solar Energy Industries Association is bullish about growth, estimating 110,000 direct solar jobs by 2016.¹⁶ Policies supporting both renewable energy and jobs for veterans are in the very early stages



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and the expansion of them could lead to more employment opportunities for veterans and a sustainable economy creating a new kind of national security, one with clean energy and good jobs.

The potential for jobs is vast, and Congress seems to agree. The new Energy Jobs for Veterans Act calls for the establishment of a pilot program to encourage the employment of eligible veterans in energy-related positions. Under the Veterans Energy-Related Employment Program, the Department of Labor will award competitive grants to three states for the establishment and administration of a state program to reward energy employers who employ eligible veterans.¹⁷ Instituting this and other similar programs in every state in the nation would go a long way towards offering more opportunities for veterans in all areas of the US while benefiting the national economy.

In an effort to increase sustainable development and reduce our dependency on foreign oil, the Apollo Alliance proposes \$10 billion in investments to develop and expand public transit systems and fund infrastructure repair on those systems, creating a total of 172,500 jobs in construction and repair work.¹⁸ Retraining returning soldiers and Marines for jobs in

public transit would offer union representation, a steady paycheck, job security and a visible and respectable job for men and women accustomed to collaborative work that is of service.

These are just a few ways in which money reallocated from the Pentagon can be invested with confidence for a high-yield gain. Clearly some progress is being made; through existing and new programs. A comprehensive strategy to reallocate money from the military budget will go a long way toward bolstering needs in education, foreign aid, infrastructure, healthcare and a range of other national priorities.

We know where we will end up if we follow the trajectory set by the military industrial complex of ever-rising military budgets and ever-new enemies: we will fall as Rome fell, as all great powers fall. But, we are also learning that there are new paths forward. With foresight and thrift, diplomacy and cooperation, the US can be a great and powerful nation, a strong and secure nation, an enduring and exemplary nation.

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