



Kasich's Post-Cold War Defense Cuts

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A pro-Jeb Bush super PAC says John Kasich “voted with Nancy Pelosi to cut troop levels and military funding.” That’s true. But those votes in the early to mid-1990s came at a time in U.S. history — post Cold War — when the debate on Capitol Hill was not *whether* to reduce troops or cut defense spending, but by how many and how much.

In fact, under President George H.W. Bush, active duty military personnel declined by about 425,000, a nearly 20 percent reduction. The Pentagon budget, meanwhile, dipped by about 15 percent. All with Bush’s blessing.

One could certainly argue that Kasich wanted to cut troop levels and defense spending deeper than Bush and many of his fellow Republicans in the House — though the ad doesn’t make such an argument — but we’ll get to that later.

The Bush campaign and Right to Rise, a super PAC supporting him, have made Kasich’s support for defense spending cuts a centerpiece of their attack in South Carolina, as aidestold Politico there is concern that Kasich’s voters are siphoning off what could otherwise be votes for Bush.

The ad, titled “Which Candidate,” ties Kasich to House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. The ad begins with the narrator asking, “Which presidential candidate voted with Nancy Pelosi to cut troop levels and military funding? And supported expanding Obamacare? If you guessed Bernie Sanders, you’re half right. It’s also John Kasich. Kasich even had the worst rating on spending of any governor in the country, Republican or Democrat.”

We’ve written previously about the claim that Kasich “had the worst rating on spending of any governor in the country, Republican or Democrat.” That’s based on an analysis by the libertarian Cato Institute of Ohio’s general revenue fund spending, but we noted that the rating relies on data from a nonpartisan group that warned the figures for Ohio were skewed, for state comparison purposes, due to accounting methods employed by the state for Medicaid expenditures.

As for the claim that Kasich supported “expanding Obamacare,” Kasich supported the Medicaid expansion made possible by the Affordable Care Act. But Ohio declined to establish its own state exchange, and Kasich has said he opposes the Affordable Care Act.

In this item, we’ll focus on the claim that Kasich “voted with Nancy Pelosi to cut troop levels and military funding.”

Votes on Troop Levels and Military Funding

The small print in the ad cites two votes. The first was Kasich's vote on June 3, 1992, for an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that sought to reduce the number of U.S. troops stationed in Europe from 235,700 to 100,000 by fiscal year 1995.

The amendment passed 241 to 162. Pelosi and Sanders, then a House member, also voted for it. And Kasich bucked the majority of Republicans, who voted 120 to 34 against the amendment. Two days later, Kasich and Sanders voted for the overall NDAA bill, which passed 198-168 (Pelosi did not vote). A majority of Republicans also voted against it.

Then President George H.W. Bush vehemently opposed the version of the NDAA passed by the House because it called for cutting his own proposed defense budget by \$10.5 billion. Bush also opposed such deep troop cuts in Europe.

But Bush's own budget plan called for reducing defense spending. And he proposed reducing the armed forces by 138,000 in 1992 and by 99,000 the following year.

At a debate against Bill Clinton and Ross Perot in 1992, Bush explained his opposition to drastic troop reductions in Europe, even as he boasted about his success in cutting troop levels and defense spending.

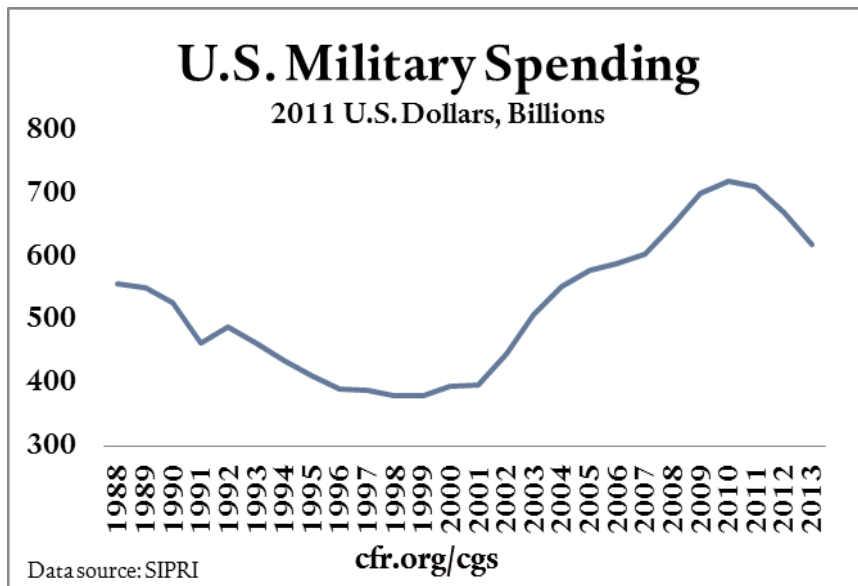
George H.W. Bush, Oct. 11, 1992: We have reduced the number of troops that are deployed and going to be deployed. I have cut defense spending. And the reason we could do that is because of our fantastic success in winning the Cold War. We never would have got there if we'd gone for the nuclear-freeze crowd; never would have got there if we'd listened to those that wanted to cut defense spending. I think it is important that the United States stay in Europe and continue to guarantee the peace. We simply cannot pull back.

Now, when anybody has a spending program they want to spend money on at home, they say, well, let's cut money out of the Defense Department. I will accept and have accepted the recommendations of two proven leaders, General Colin Powell and Dick, Secretary Dick Cheney. They feel that the levels we're operating at and the reductions that I have proposed are proper.

In that sense, the Right to Rise ad ignores some of the historical and geopolitical context of the time. From 1989 to 1993, the Bush administration was making ongoing cuts to the overall defense budget and the size of the military force in response to the end of the Cold War, Gordon Adams, professor emeritus at the American University and an expert in U.S. defense budgets, told us in a phone interview.

Colin Powell, who served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Bush and Clinton, boasted in 2011, "When the Cold War ended 20 years ago, when I was chairman [of the Joint Chiefs] and Mr. [Richard] Cheney was secretary of defense, we cut the defense budget by 25 percent, and we reduced the force by 500,000 active duty soldiers."

In fact, U.S. inflation-adjusted military spending fell by one-third in the 1990s, according to the Council on Foreign Relations.



In addition, the number of active duty military personnel dropped by 16 percent between 1992 and 1995, according to data from the Department of Defense.

“It was the end of the Cold War and nobody was in growth mode,” said Adams, who served as associate director for national security and international affairs in the White House Office of Management and Budget from 1993 to 1997.

Adams remembers Kasich as a budget hawk, “and as with many budget hawks, he wanted defense spending to be disciplined like anything else.”

The second vote cited in the ad was a failed amendment proposed by Kasich in 1995 to reduce the Air Force aircraft procurement appropriation by \$493 million to prevent further funding for new production of B-2 stealth bombers. Pelosi and Sanders both voted for it, but the amendment failed 210 to 213, with a majority of Republicans opposing it.

Kasich, then chairman of the House Budget Committee, was among those who believed the bomber was, as the *Columbus Dispatch* put it after the vote, “too expensive, doesn’t evade radar detection like it’s intended to, was designed for a now-obsolete mission of attacking the Soviet Union and is no longer wanted by the Pentagon.”

As the *New York Times* noted at the time, even the military opposed building new B-2 bombers.

New York Times, Sept. 8, 1995: Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Adm. William A. Owens, the Vice Chairman, summed up the military’s position in a letter to Mr. Kasich before the House vote in June.

“The service chiefs and combatant commanders have been consulted on this issue,” the letter said, “and with us unanimously support the Secretary of Defense’s position that there are more

pressing requirements than the marginal increases in capability offered by procuring additional B-2 bombers.”

Indeed, Bush years earlier had opposed building more B-2 bombers, and he explained why in his 1992 State of the Union address.

George H. W. Bush, Jan. 28, 1992: *Two years ago, I began planning cuts in military spending that reflected the changes of the new era. But now, this year, with imperial communism gone, that process can be accelerated. Tonight I can tell you of dramatic changes in our strategic nuclear force. These are actions we are taking on our own because they are the right thing to do. After completing 20 planes for which we have begun procurement, we will shut down further production of the B-2 bombers.*

Newt Gingrich, who was speaker of the House at the time of the 1995 vote (and voted against Kasich’s amendment), told Politico on Feb. 12 that efforts by Right to Rise to paint Kasich as anti-defense are “simply false.”

“I served with him for 16 years and he consistently fought for a better, more effective military,” said Gingrich, who has not endorsed anyone in the presidential race.

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Kasich has advocated for increasing military spending. His campaign website states that Kasich has “called for \$102 billion in increased defense spending over the next eight years to improve our conventional capabilities and create new cyber defense resources to better safeguard our security.”

We’ll leave it up to our readers to decide the merit of Kasich’s positions as a congressman — and the votes cited in the ad came with significant Republican opposition in the House. But broadly criticizing Kasich for votes to “cut troop levels and military funding” ignores the context that most everyone was proposing *some* cuts to troop levels and defense spending post-Cold War — even Jeb Bush’s father, President George H.W. Bush.