

Re-evaluate military goals

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Nearly a decade after the 9-11 attack, the killing of Osama bin Laden in a city in Pakistan (not in Afghanistan, by the way) is a necessary and important achievement in the war against al-Qaida. Bin Laden's death should move us to re-evaluate our military goals in Afghanistan and the Middle East. Put simply, as a nation, we must ask what are our troops in Afghanistan trying to accomplish and what is the final outcome that we wish to achieve there.

These questions become more pressing when we consider, especially in light of our \$14 trillion in national debt, that we already have spent roughly \$400 billion on military operations in Afghanistan, in addition to the over \$790 billion on the foolish, unnecessary and disastrous war in Iraq. The above costs do not include the huge loss of life, both civilian and military.

Looking forward, Secretary of Defense Gates has asked Congress to approve \$553 billion in regular military spending for 2012, with an additional \$118 billion for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Military spending is now at an all-time high, after 13 consecutive years of growth.

With the dire budget situation facing the nation, many actors in Washington have begun to scrutinize Pentagon spending. These actors include the bipartisan Sustainable Defense Task Force led by Reps. Ron Paul and Barney Frank; the libertarian think-tank Cato Institute; and the Bipartisan Policy Center, among several other groups. These groups have proposed various cuts to the military budget. Among these are: reducing troops deployments to Europe and Asia; reducing our large Navy; phasing out certain expensive weapon systems; cutting back our nuclear arsenal; reforming military pay scales; controlling Pentagon health-care costs; reining in spending on private contractors; reducing Army and Navy personnel.

It is curious how the tea party and conservatives avoid talking about the large expenditures of taxpayer money on the wars and the military. In our present circumstance, this will have to change.

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