

# Britannia Rules The Waves. Not So Much.

Posted by [Mark Thompson](#) Tuesday, February 8, 2011 at 12:55 pm

The cash-strapped British military -- remember our [post](#) on it putting the aircraft carrier *HMS Invincible* up for sale not too long ago? -- is cutting the patrols of the Caribbean its warships have sailed since World War II, the *Guardian* [reports](#). It's another sign that a lack of funds is forcing a one-time world superpower to curb its military might. Like an elderly neighbor, this pensioner is finding that money doesn't seem to go as far as it used to, so it's cutting marginal expenses.

Hunting down drug runners thousands of leagues from home isn't a vital security interest of the Royal Navy, apparently. But there are two key take-aways here:

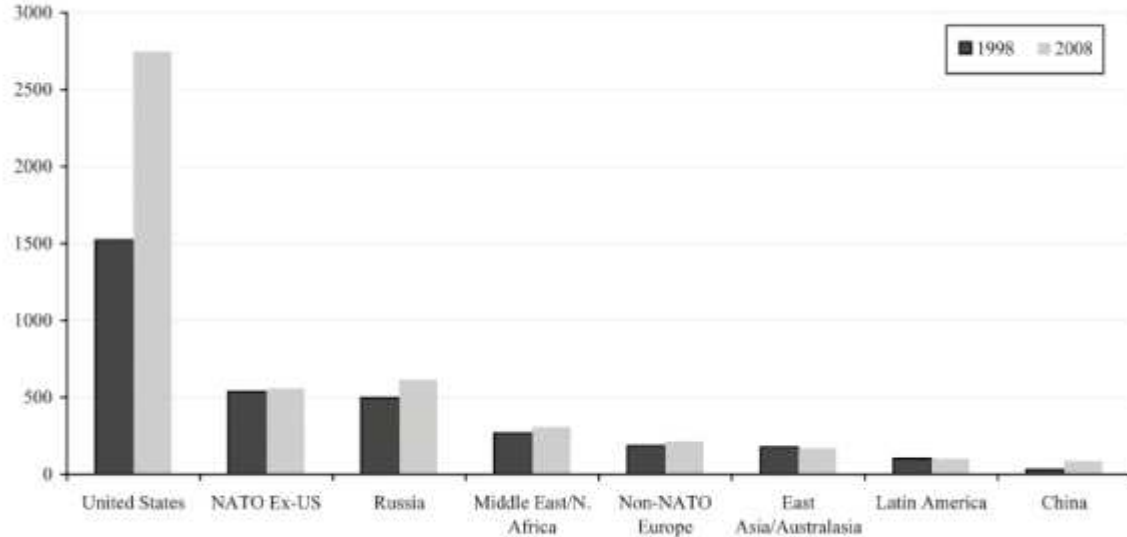
The report is booming like a depth charge in the Caribbean:

The up-coming withdrawal has sparked concern among regional law enforcement officers, with Barbadian Police Commissioner Darwin Dottin stating to the Daily Nation that his country and neighbouring territories "would now have to work harder to stem the inflow of narcotics."
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...[warns](#) the *St. Kitts-Nevis Observer*. Imagine that: local folks will have to protect themselves, instead of relying on a colonial overlord.

Which leads to the second point: nations are disinclined to spend their own money on defense so long as someone else is willing to shoulder the burden. The libertarian Cato Institute has done some fascinating [work](#) in this area.

### Defense Expenditure per Capita, Constant 2008 U.S. Dollars



Source: IISS, *The Military Balance 1999-2000*; IISS, *The Military Balance 2010*.

-- Cato Institute

Bottom line: over the past decade, the amount of money the U.S. spends on defense per person has jumped from \$1,500 to \$2,700 annually. Russia and our NATO so-called allies spend about \$500 per capita, both in 1998 (before 9/11) and 2008 (after 9/11). China spends far less. The perverse thing about the imbalance between the U.S. and the rest of NATO -- every dollar we spend defending them is a dollar they can let their taxpayers keep, or spend on things like education, infrastructure or health care.

Read more: <http://swampland.blogs.time.com/2011/02/08/britannia-rules-the-waves-not-so-much/#ixzz1DTyGV5DI>