

## Ravenel: Cut Military Spending

*By Thomas Ravenel ||*

Why do we have 227 military bases in Germany, 124 in Japan, and 87 in South Korea? Why must the U.S. taxpayer shoulder the cost of military defense for wealthy countries like Germany, France, Japan and England? Why should we defend South Korea from North Korea when South Korea has a GDP 35 times that of North Korea?

We have a national debt of \$14.3 trillion and many so called fiscally conservative Republicans say that military cuts should be off the table. Military spending is 20 percent of our budget and represents half of our discretionary spending. The Pentagon budget has nearly doubled in real terms since 1998, and now is higher than at any time since World War II.

If our country goes bankrupt would that be a national security issue?

Remember it was a Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower, who warned us about the “Military Industrial Complex.” And nobody could accuse him of being soft on defense. He was a five star general who led us to victory in the European theater during World War II. He warned of powerful interests — defense contractors, communities who benefit from military spending, retired high ranking officers who take jobs with military contractors as well as public intellectuals — who are paid by the Pentagon and other interests to hype threats.

How we interpret threats is driven by those who pay to have them interpreted a certain way. That process often lacks intellectual rigor. These interests produce ideas are very pervasive and hard to get rid of. And as a result of the constant onslaught of arguments suggesting that our safety depends on controlling this or that corner of the world, it has become conventional wisdom that we should continue spending at these levels – and more.

The title of this letter is “Cut Military Spending,” not “Defense” spending because much of the Pentagon’s budget has nothing to do with defending our country from legitimate threats – and more to do with satisfying the needs of the Military Industrial Complex. How big a lead do we need? For example, we have eleven Carrier battle groups and our biggest potential adversary, China, is working on its first.

While reading Senator Lindsey Graham’s recent defense of his “no” vote on the debt ceiling increase, I expected that he opposed the deal because it didn’t cut enough but sadly was I wrong; it was because they were cutting too much — in military spending! Presidential candidate Mitt Romney, likewise, argues that military cuts should be off the table.

According to the Cato Institute, we now spend twice as much on defense in real inflation adjusted dollars as we did during President Eisenhower’s term — even though the justification for such elevated spending levels was the Cold War (which has been over for more than 20 years)!

This fact would have no doubt shocked President Eisenhower – as well as confirmed his worst fears that we have allowed the “Military Industrial Complex” to define threats that in years past would have seemed absurd.

Of course, rhetorically, a refrain we often hear is that if you want to cut the military then you must be “against the troops.”

However, that argument only works if you fail to reduce our military’s commitments along with spending. If you were to tell the Pentagon that you are going to cut their budget – but are also reducing our commitment to defend wealthy allies and to fighting never ending counter-insurgency campaigns, then in fact, you are supporting the troops.

A nation that defends everything defends nothing.

Treating every conflict on the other side of the planet as a national security issue, trying to be the world’s police force and attempting to “rid the world of evildoers” makes us less safe, less prosperous and less free.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *Thomas Ravenel is a real estate developer and former statewide elected official. He currently resides in Charleston, S.C.*