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U.S. needs to change its military spending

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Recent polls show that a majority of Americans oppose the idea of military strikes against Syria for their use of chemical weapons. I agree with that sentiment. When asked to explain the reason for such opinions, many war-weary Americans express the view that we should be spending our federal resources to solve problems at home and not use our military as a tool to serve as policeman of the world. That is also a sentiment I agree with.

If America is not to be a policeman of the world, then we should have a leaner, less expensive, and less expansive military system. As the Congress and the president embark on the difficult and contentious tasks of deficit reduction and decreasing federal spending, it is important and timely to put military expenditures on the table. According to the conservative Cato Institute, the U.S. military budget is bloated and not related to results. We have extravagant weapons systems that are more closely related to the politics of where they are made than to military strategy; and we are burdened with expensive items that are relics of the cold war and irrelevant to the current threats of terrorism.

We can start reducing military spending on the following items (their 10-year savings in parentheses according to Cato): reduce the size of the Army (\$220 billion), cut the Pentagon's civilian workforce (\$105 billion), reform command support and infrastructure (\$100 billion), reduce intelligence spending (\$112 billion). A specific example of an extravagant and unneeded item is the F-35 weapons system (fighter aircraft). Originally estimated to cost \$67 million per unit, the cost has now skyrocketed to \$137 million per unit-with over 2,000 units to be built in the next 15 years; its helmet visuals don't work; it can't land on aircraft carriers; and Lockheed Martin, the major contractor for this boondoggle, has repeatedly missed production deadlines.

Instead of spending government money on military items that support our presumptuous position as policeman of the world, we should be investing federal dollars in training and retraining our work force for the high-demand, high-wage jobs that go unfilled by Americans in areas like advanced manufacturing, welding, engineering, computer science, and health-care professional fields. And instead of building with federal funds over 2,000 aircraft that are strategic hold overs from the cold war, we should be investing federal money in rebuilding our national infrastructure of roads, bridges, airports, and sea ports in order to increase our national productive capacity. Cutting military spending is a reasonable, timely, and appropriate way to help balance our deficit and reduce federal spending. It's just not fair that military spending is off the table in the discussion of federal budget reductions. After all, military spending is government spending.

