



Rebuttal of the “we can cut defense spending deeply at no cost to security” notion

By: Zbigniew Mazurak – February 24, 2013

In a recent 3-minute video, Christopher Preble of the CATO Institute falsely claimed that the US could “spending considerably less on defense at no cost to security”. That was just one of the many blatant lies made in the video; it, like others, was refuted in a recent article, but this lie was particularly blatant and egregious, and therefore, I have decided to write a more detailed rebuttal.

The claim that the US can “spend considerably less on defense at no cost to security” is a blatant lie.

Firstly, any large-scale defense spending cuts would have to “come out of somewhere”, i.e. something specific would have to be cut deeply to make large cuts to the defense budget topline.

There isn’t nearly as much waste in the defense budget as is often alleged, and not nearly enough to allow for deep cuts, so any steep topline cuts would have to result in deep cuts in one or more of the following:

- The number of military personnel and the care they receive;
- The military’s force structure (i.e. its size and the number and size of its units);
- Training and the maintenance of existing equipment and bases;
- The execution of missions (ranging from air patrols over the US to submarine patrols to fighting pirates);

The development and acquisition of new equipment – from ships to aircraft, to ground vehicles, to munitions.

Deep cuts in any of these areas would severely weaken the US military. This is because:

With little or no new equipment, the US will not be able to defeat its enemies, who are fielding very modern, very good weapons in rapidly growing quantities, and the US military’s current, aging, worn-out equipment will eventually wear out and age out (i.e. reach the end of its service life) – sooner rather than later.

Poorly trained people wouldn’t be able to defeat anyone – not even a trivial enemy. Troops need much time to gain and hone their skills (whether in seamanship, piloting aircraft, or marksmanship); if training funding is dramatically cut, they will lose those skills, which will take a lot of time and money to regain.

Significantly cutting funding for missions means that many, if not most, missions would not be executed.

Significantly cutting funding for maintenance means, of course, that much, if not most of the military's current equipment and bases would not be properly maintained. There wouldn't be enough spare funds and fuel for the equipment, nor enough money for the maintenance and renovation of military installations – thus turning them into slums, as happened during the 1990s.

Significantly cutting the force structure would make the US military – which has already been dramatically cut across the board since the end of the Cold War – unable to defend the US, not to mention its allies, because there wouldn't be enough people, ships, planes, and ground platforms to defend even the US itself (a huge country with long land borders, 3 long coasts, and a huge population), let alone its interests around the world or its allies. It could also mean cutting the already barely-adequate US nuclear deterrent, which could invite a nuclear first strike on the US by Russia or China.

No, the US could not “considerably reduce defense spending at no cost to security”. Not even close.

Deep cuts in defense spending on the scale of sequestration would have the consequences of sequestration. And what would those consequences be? The Joint Chiefs of Staff explained this precisely during a recent HASC hearing.

Among these would be:

Ceasing of deployment of at least one carrier and of any amphibious assault ships to the Persian Gulf, and of any warships to the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Horn of Africa;
Ceasing of deployment of any ships to the Caribbean and of the drug interdiction mission there;
Ceasing of the Marines' many missions around the world, including deployments to the Philippines, Japan, Pakistan, and many countries elsewhere around the world (including the Persian Gulf, “to do the nation's bidding there” as the USMC Commandant said) and deep cuts in the force structure, training equipment maintenance, and modernization of the Marine Corps; the Marine Corps would have to ground at least 4 of its 9 F/A-18 Hornet squadrons;
Deep cuts in the force structure (to the tune of 200,000 soldiers), training, and modernization programs of the Army (78% of Army brigades would not receive the training they need);
Delaying hundreds of base repair and renovation projects around the country (note: in the US, not just abroad)
Deep cuts in the USAF's flight training programs – both basic and advanced – leading to woefully undertrained pilots; possibly also cuts to the long range strike bomber program due to topline cuts;
Cuts to the number of hours during which missile attack warning radars would be operational;
and
Deep cuts in everything the National Guard does – from training, to equipment, to missions.

You can (and should) listen to the Joint Chiefs here.

And as the Joint Chiefs have made clear, the problem with sequestration is BOTH its salami-slicing method AND its magnitude; Gen. Dempsey, their chairman, has even said that “I can't give you another dollar” if the nation continues to ask the military to do what it's doing today.

Some will likely say, “Then let's start jettisoning missions and commitments!”. But that would also be a foolish mistake which would cost the US dearly in terms of security.

Those who advocate deep defense cuts need to be forced to say which exact missions do they want the military to cease performing, and forced to admit that foregoing many of these missions would cost America dearly in terms of security.

Significant cuts in defense spending cannot be made solely by terminating the defense commitment to Europe (through NATO) and to South Korea (and dumping those allies in the face of rapidly arming and increasingly aggressive Russia and North Korea, as both of them grow and modernize their nuclear and ICBM arsenals, would be a huge blunder, BTW).

Jettisoning those two commitments will not come even close to paying for the deep defense cuts that some people demand.

Such cuts would mean going far deeper than that and jettisoning entire missions crucial to America's own security: air superiority, sea control, ground superiority, early warning, ISR, cyberwarfare, nuclear deterrence, missile defense, etc.

Scrapping any of these crucial missions – all of which are crucial for and directly related to the security of the US homeland (to say nothing of America's interests or its allies) – would severely imperil US security, because you can't be secure if you don't control the air, sea, ground, space, and cyberspace, don't receive early warning of incoming attack, or cannot provide nuclear deterrence and missile defense to your own country (let alone to allies, who will have to develop their own nuclear weapons if the US doesn't continue to provide a large nuclear umbrella; this would make the nuclear proliferation problem so much worse).

Then there is the threat environment. Despite the CATO Institute's and other anti-defense organizations' blatant lies that the threat to US security has dramatically declined since the end of the Cold War (it was true during the 1990s, but it is no longer true today, due to China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran), the world is currently more dangerous than at any time during the Cold War (except maybe the Cuban Missile Crisis) – as the Joint Chiefs have testified. During the Cold War, the US had to deal only with the Soviet Union and its clients; today, the US has to deter China, a resurgent Russia buoyed by huge oil revenues, North Korea (which now has nuclear weapons and ICBMs capable of reaching the US), and Iran, which is speeding towards nuclear weapons and has an asymmetric arsenal of weapons capable of crippling the US military in the Gulf through A2/AD weapons and tactics.

Detailed analysis of Russia's and China's capabilities is available [here](#) and [here](#).

Some, including CATO, claim that “the US has significantly cut its defense spending after every major war; it's normal”. But it was a grave mistake, and the US deeply regretted it (later on) everytime it did that.

In the 20th century, five times US policymakers and citizens wrongly concluded after major wars that there was no longer any significant threat, that mankind had changed for the better, and that the US military could be cut deeply; and they proceeded to cut it severely.

Everytime they did that, they regretted it later on, because the military was gutted and unready for other, including future, threats; America was drawn (usually unwillingly) into a new major war; and the military had to be painstakingly rebuilt at a much higher fiscal cost than what it would've cost to maintain high readiness permanently.

So defense cuts don't even save any money in the long term – they only lead to war (provoked through America's weakness) and to much higher defense rebuilding costs (as well as human casualties) later on. Thus, they're not only suicidal, but also immoral, because people needlessly die as a result of deep defense cuts.

No, America cannot afford to “spend considerably less on defense at no cost to security”. “Considerable” defense cuts lead to a significantly weaker military – for the reasons I stated above.