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Mitt Romney's indefensible Defense budget

by Jon PerrFollow

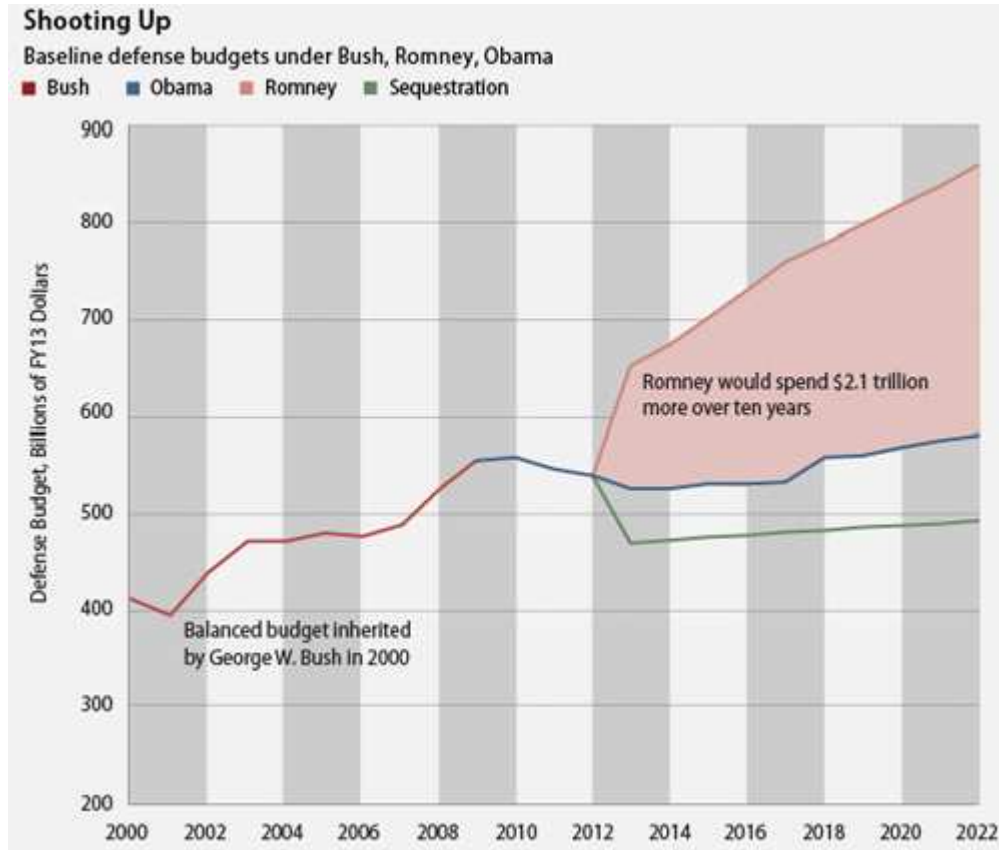


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Mitt Romney has a national defense problem. Or more accurately, a series of problems. After all, the **same man** who five years ago said that "it's not worth moving heaven and earth" to get Osama Bin Laden forgot to mention America's war in Afghanistan and the men and women still fighting it during his RNC acceptance speech last week. Worse still, Romney slammed Republican leaders--including his own **running mate Paul Ryan**--for voting for the August 2011 debt ceiling deal that is set to sequester \$550 billion from the defense budget over the next decade. But not to content to rest there, **CEO turned Commander-in-Chief Mitt Romney** would spend money like a drunken sailor, adding **\$2 trillion in new Pentagon outlays** without either a strategy to justify it or funding to pay for it.

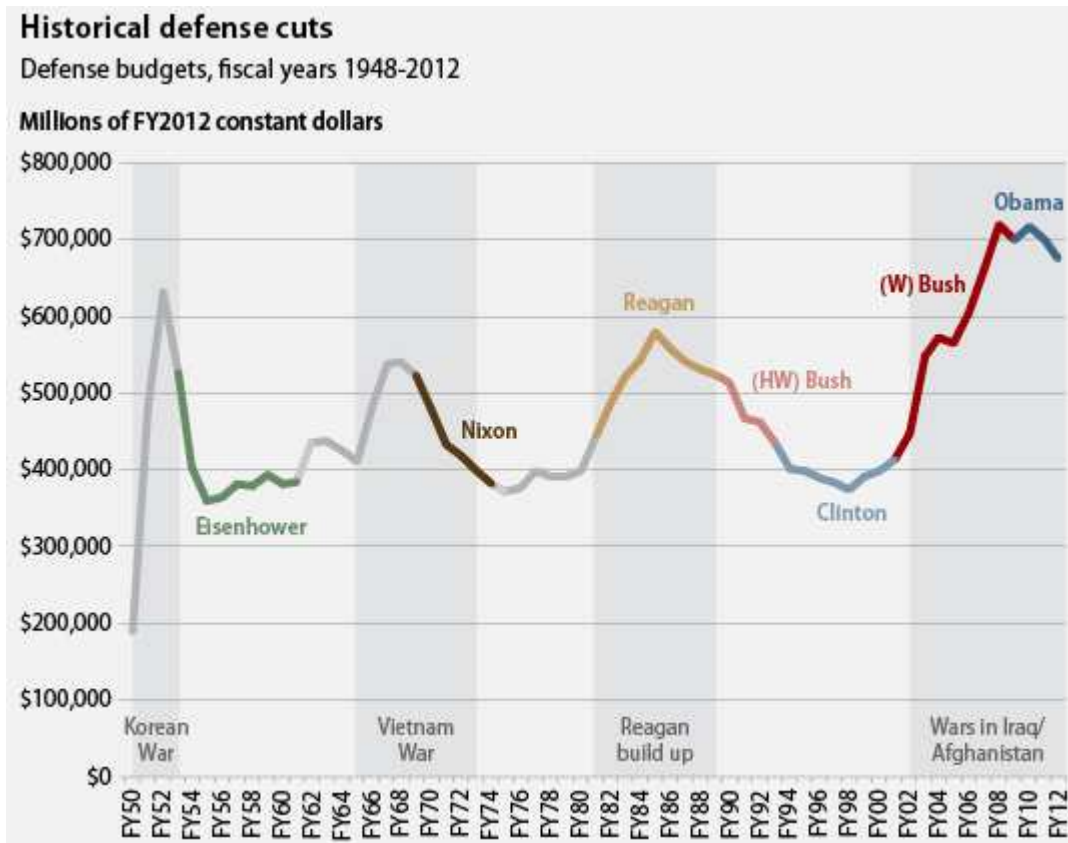


Appearing on **NBC's Meet the Press** with David Gregory, Governor Romney said the debt deal that Ryan and House Speaker John Boehner struck with President Obama was a **"big mistake."** (As you may recall, Romney was mocked by **Democrats** and **Sarah Palin** alike for his silence during last year's debt ceiling hostage crisis, only to weigh in after a deal was struck to announce he was **opposed to the agreement** which prevented the United States from default.) On Sunday, he explained why:

"I want to maintain defense spending at the current level of the GDP. I don't want to keep bringing it down as the president's doing. This sequestration idea of the White House, which is cutting our defense, I think is an extraordinary miscalculation in the wrong direction."

Of course, as a quick glance at the numbers shows, it is Mitt Romney who is making an extraordinary miscalculation when it comes to defense spending. Romney is proposing to do for the Pentagon what spreadsheet users like him call "fill right." By setting defense spending as fixed percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), the DoD budget would fall and rise along with the economy. The result is a golden shower for the military that would make Ronald Reagan look like Mahatma Gandhi.

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Whether or not the United States is at war or peace, or as it is now, drawing down from a conflict, the implications of **Romney's 4 percent "floor"** are mind-boggling. **CNN** noted in its analysis that the price tag could reach \$2.1 trillion over the next decade. As the **Boston Globe** detailed in March:

The cost appears to be far greater than when Romney first broached the idea several years ago, when the nation was spending closer to 4 percent of GDP on defense. Under next year's budget, defense spending is projected to be about 3.2 percent - yet Romney has stuck by his 4 percent vow. Put another way, that means Romney proposes spending 61 percent more than Obama at the end of a decade-long cycle, according to the libertarian Cato Institute. Enacting such an increase at the same time that Romney wants to slash taxes and balance the budget could cost trillions of dollars and require huge cuts in domestic programs. As Romney's website puts it matter-of-factly, "This will not be a cost-free process."

That's right. By 2021, even a peacetime Romney defense budget would approach \$900 billion a year. That open spigot would come despite the fact that **baseline U.S. defense spending** (that is, outside of "overseas contingency operations" war funding for Iraq and Afghanistan) has **risen during every year** of the Obama administration so far.

Figure 1-2. Department of Defense Topline Since September 11th Attacks

| <i>\$ in Billions</i> | FY01 | FY02 | FY03 | FY04 | FY05 | FY06 | FY07 | FY08 | FY09 | FY10 | FY11 | FY12 | FY13* |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Base | 296.9 | 328.1 | 364.9 | 376.5 | 400.0 | 410.5 | 431.4 | 479.0 | 513.2 | 527.9 | 528.2 | 530.6 | 525.4 |
| OCO/ Supplementals | 13.4 | 16.8 | 72.5 | 90.7 | 75.6 | 115.7 | 166.2 | 186.9 | 145.6 | 162.3 | 158.8 | 115.1 | 88.5 |
| Other** | 5.8 | -- | -- | 0.3 | 3.2 | 8.1 | 3.1 | -- | 7.4 | 0.7 | -- | -- | -- |
| Total | 316.2 | 345.0 | 437.4 | 467.6 | 478.9 | 534.4 | 600.9 | 665.9 | 666.3 | 690.9 | 687.0 | 645.7 | 613.9 |

And as **even his boosters** like James Jay Carafano of the Heritage Foundation admit, "If you look at the state of our industrial base, you couldn't spend 4 percent on the military if you wanted to. People couldn't build the ships and planes fast enough."

Regardless of whether we needed them or not.

Of course, even if he could articulate the national security threat and needed strategic response justifying his massive military build-up, Mitt Romney has remained silent on how he would pay for it.

Recall that George W. Bush became the first modern president to cut taxes during wartime. By 2020, the total costs to the U.S. Treasury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including international development, health care and interest on the national debt, **could reach \$ 3 trillion**. (Recall also that last year, Mitt Romney and all of his GOP primary rivals **rejected even a 10-to-1 ratio** of spending cuts to tax increases by the "Debt Super Committee" as a means of avoiding sequestration.) And while that tab remains unpaid, President Romney would double-down by making the Bush tax cuts permanent and slashing an additional 20 percent across the board. To that \$5 trillion revenue hole, Romney would add over \$2 trillion more in new defense spending. Because **his plans to close tax loopholes are as secret** as his own tax returns, the inevitable result will be **draconian cuts in domestic programs** and an **ocean of red ink**.

And that's a big problem for CEO Mitt Romney, the man who would be our next Commander-in-Chief.