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[Sorry, Cato: It's Not Just Republicans That Refuse to Cut Defense Spending](#)

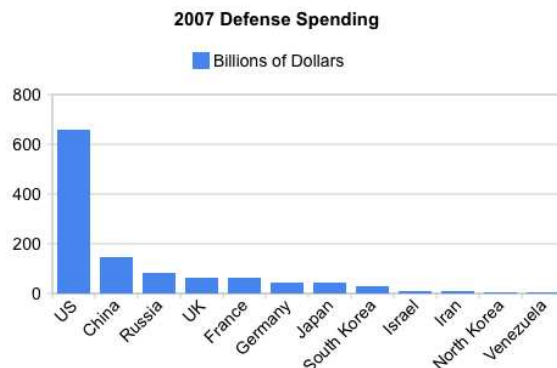
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By: [Blue Texan](#) Friday June 5, 2009 10:30 am

The Cato Institute takes a look at the GOP's bogus [budget cut proposals](#) and [isn't impressed](#).

The GOP proposal claims savings of more than \$375 billion over five years, the bulk of which (\$317 billion) would come from holding non-defense discretionary spending increases to no more than inflation over the next five years.

First, it should be cut — period. Second, non-defense discretionary spending only amounts to about 17% of all the money the federal government spends in a year, so singling out this pot of money misses the bigger picture. **At least, defense spending, which is almost entirely discretionary, should be included in any cap. But it has become an article of faith in the Republican Party that reining in defense spending is tantamount to putting a white flag in the Statue of Liberty's hand.**



And the Democratic Party.

While it's true that Republicans are even crazier on defense spending -- witness Willard arguing that [\\$650B a year isn't enough to keep us safe](#) earlier this week -- Democrats aren't much better.

Obama himself [campaigned on increasing the size of the military](#) and recently [renewed those pledges at Annapolis](#). Yes, he's made some [half-assed gestures](#), but there are simply no prominent Democrats

proposing anything as bold and sensible as [cutting the military budget in half](#). Unless you count [George McGovern](#).

This is a bipartisan problem.

[graph via [Yglesias](#)]

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29 Responses to “Sorry, Cato: It’s Not Just Republicans That Refuse to Cut Defense Spending”

ART45 June 5th, 2009 at 10:45 am

[1](#)

Defense spending: keeping the trough and the campaign coffers well-filled.

 [Reply](#)

[egregious](#) June 5th, 2009 at 10:45 am

[2](#)

Are we safer yet?

 [Reply](#)

Twain June 5th, 2009 at 10:49 am

[3](#)

The military will suck up every penny it can and buy lots of useless toys to experiment with - usually on other countries. I say no more and a lot less. Will start e-mailing today.

 [Reply](#)

Synoiia June 5th, 2009 at 10:56 am

[4](#)

Defense spending. Just not cost effective.

It's a losing proposition to propose to "cut" defense spending. It provokes a knee jerk (jerk...) reaction.

It's a better meme to demand it be "cost effective", and have each line item focused at clearly defined threats.


 [Reply](#)

orcatjf June 5th, 2009 at 10:59 am

[5](#)

can you imagine the good we could do in the world with \$500 billion per year?

 [Reply](#)

 [Albatross](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:01 am

[6](#)

Why does reckless defense spending, the kind that caused the collapse of the Soviet Union, continue to come from Congress? Why is the government buying multi-billion-dollar jets that the Pentagon does not even want?

Because of ~~bribery~~ lobbying of Congress by Defense Contractors, who donate to election campaigns.

We need to make bribing Congress illegal again. We need Campaign Finance Reform. Before we go the way of the Soviet Union.

 [Reply](#)

Teddy Partridge June 5th, 2009 at 11:02 am

[7](#)

Barney Frank called for a [25% cut in defense spending](#), before last fall's election. It may have been strategic, to enable Obama to reinforce his proposed increases, but it was a real proposal taken seriously that went nowhere:

Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) said Democrats will push for a stimulus package after the November election, and called for a package reducing defense spending by 25 percent while saying Congress will "eventually" raise taxes.

Frank told the editorial board of the SouthCoast Standard-Times that he wanted to reduce defense spending by a quarter, meaning the United States would have to withdraw from Iraq sooner.

"The people of Iraq want us out, and we want to stay over their objection," he said. "It's extraordinary."

 [Reply](#)

[Blub](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:18 am

[8](#)

I just don't understand this whole "increase the size of the military" mantra on both sides. We only need to increase the size of the military if we plan to pursue multiple wars in multiple theaters simultaneously. Avoid having to fight more than one discretionary war at one time, and you avoid having to increase the size of the military.

As it is, the US military is already one of the largest volunteer non-conscription militaries in the world, second only to China's and not even by a very big margin in terms of total in uniform plus reserves. Several countries have larger militaries (Iran's spectacular 11 million man army or North Korea's 3 million), but these are conscription-based personnel structures.

China's pretty much the only other major power in the world interested in creating a true blue water navy and has an overseas network of naval and airbases (their String of Pearls grand strategy), and they seem happy with a ratio of about 2 out of every one thousand of their population being in uniform (much of it civil defense and internal security), and a spending rate of about \$200 billion a year (\$80 billion officially). We spend \$750 billion a year to put nearly 1 out of every one hundred of our population in

uniform (exclusive of civil defense and internal security).. which means our military is effectively 5 times larger than China's is, per capita.

 [Reply](#)

[Hugh](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:19 am

[9](#)

It isn't really a military industrial complex anymore, or even an Iron Triangle of the military, politicians, and defense contractors. It is more a political industrial alliance with the military along as props. Civilian uses are generally more stimulative than military ones. A school or clinic improves the community. A tank can never be anything more than a tank. The problem is that politicians are too lazy and comfortable with the current system to want to change it.

National defense like healthcare is overpriced and underperforming, but for politicians all they want is more of the same.

 [Reply](#)

[eCAHNomics](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:24 am

[10](#)

If you wanted to cut defense spending, get rid of all the big weapons. The U.S. doesn't need them, unless it plans a war against China or Russia.

And remember, the real defense budget is approximately two times the commonly reported figures. Two of the big excluded items are nuclear, which is in the Energy Dept. (I think it still is, anyhow), and Veterans are also in a separate department and therefore not included in DOD.

 [Reply](#)

 [Albatross](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:33 am

[11](#)

In reply to [Blub @ 8](#):

None of those facts matter. In fact, if The Rapture came and depopulated every other nation on Earth tomorrow, Congress would still call for increased Defense spending.

Defense contractors want taxpayer money for their projects, so they use some of that money from prior years (also known as "profits") to bribe Congress to fund more projects. Congress having been bribed (and threatened that if they are not bribable, they will be replaced with a candidate who IS) allocates funds for the projects. Our tax money, and that of our grandchildren, is then given to the defense contractors, who use part of it to bribe Congress again, ad infinitum.

The way to stop this cycle is to prevent the defense contractors from being able to threaten Congresspeople. The way to do that is to fund elections with equal amounts of public money ONLY (you can use some of the money that would have gone to defense contractors for this). Freed from having to worry about the defense contractors funding their opponents, Congresspeople can consider such radical ideas as de-funding unwanted multibillion dollar fighter jets.

 [Reply](#)

[eCAHNomics](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:33 am

[12](#)

Off again to other tasks.

 [Reply](#)

STTPinOhio June 5th, 2009 at 11:37 am

[13](#)

In response to [Albatross @ 6](#)

We need to make bribing Congress illegal again. We need Campaign Finance Reform.

That is the exact root of the problem.

Without reform you'll never put a dent into defense spending.

The dollar cost of lobbying (unwanted jets & weapon systems, the cost of repairing Wall Street, etc.) needs to be laid out vs. the cost of publicly financed elections.

When discussed as a way to *save* money (not to mention our democracy) the public will be all for it.

 [Reply](#)

BobTinKY June 5th, 2009 at 11:38 am

[14](#)

why is it bipartisan, that is the fault of us Democrats.

Force them to cut it by supporting primary candidates who advocate cutting defense.

 [Reply](#)

[Minnesotachuck](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:40 am

[15](#)

Somehow the ideas in [America's Defense Meltdown: Pentagon Reform for President Obama and the New Congress](#) have got to be made a part of this conversation. I don't mean this thread per se, but the whole public space dialog about how best the defense establishment can serve our interests without continuing headlong down the path to national insolvency. The book was originally published last summer on a print-to-order basis and for a time was available in its entirety for free download. That stopped once they got a "real" publisher, Stanford University Press. It is a collection of essays by eleven men who were either proteges of the late military reformer and strategist [John Boyd](#), who was the leader of the reform movement of the late 70s and early 80s, or intellectual descendants of Boyd and his circle. The editor (and one of the contributors) is Winslow Wheeler, who AFAIK is not related to Marcy.

What follows are a few paragraphs from the Preface (Apologies for not using the "blockquote" function, but the FDL comment script doesn't deal well with paragraph and bullet breaks):

The mere notion of a "meltdown" within the U.S. military may seem ridiculous to many. America's armed forces are surely the best in the world, perhaps even in history. Democrats and Republicans, liberals, moderates and conservatives in Washington all agree on at least that. On what basis does a bunch of lesser known, if not obscure,

analysts make such a preposterous assertion?

The vast majority, perhaps even all, of Congress, the general officer corps of the armed forces, top management of American defense manufacturers, prominent members of Washington's think-tank community and nationally recognized "defense journalists" will hate this book. They will likely also urge that it be ignored by both parties in Congress and especially by the new president and his incoming national security team.

It is not just that following the recommendations of this book will mean the cancellation of numerous failing, unaffordable and ineffective defense programs, as well as the jobs, and more importantly careers, those programs enable. The acceptance of data and analysis presented in this book, and the conclusions and recommendations that flow from them, would require the elite of Washington's national security community to acknowledge the many flaws in their analysis of weapons, Pentagon management and leadership of the nation in a tumultuous world. In too many cases, it would also require those elites to admit their own role in the virtual meltdown of America's defenses.

Our equipment is the most sophisticated and effective in the world. We easily whipped one of the largest armies in the Middle East, not once but twice, and we have now clearly mastered a once difficult and ugly situation in Iraq. Success in Afghanistan will not be far away, once we devote the proper resources there. Those who take comfort in the last three sentences are the people who need to read and consider the contents of this book the most. Reflect on the following:

- America's defense budget is now larger in inflation adjusted dollars than at any point since the end of World War II, and yet our Army has fewer combat brigades than at any point in that period, our Navy has fewer combat ships and the Air Force has fewer combat aircraft. Our major equipment inventories for these major forces are older on average than at any point since 1946; in some cases they are at all-time historical highs in average age.
- The effectiveness of America's "high-tech" weapons does not compensate for these reduced numbers. The Air Force's newest fighter, the F-35, can be regarded as only a technical failure. The Navy's newest destroyer cannot protect itself effectively against aircraft and missiles, and the Army's newest armored vehicle cannot stand up against a simple anti-armor rocket that was first designed in the 1940s.
- Despite decades of acquisition reform from Washington's best minds in Congress, the Pentagon and the think tanks, cost overruns in weapon systems are higher today, in inflation adjusted dollars, than any time ever before. Not a single major weapon system has been delivered on time, on cost and as promised for performance. The Pentagon refuses to tell Congress and the public exactly how it spends the hundreds of billions of dollars appropriated to it each year. The reason for this is simple; it doesn't know how the money is spent. Technically, it doesn't even know if the money is spent. Even President George W. Bush's own Office of Management and Budget has labeled the Pentagon as one of the worst managed agencies of the entire federal government.

- At the start of the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, the Pentagon's senior military leadership failed to warn the nation's civilian leaders of the tremendously difficult mission they were being asked to perform. Indeed, most of the military hierarchy did not even comprehend the difficulties of those missions and misperceived that the key issue was the number of military personnel sent to invade and then occupy an alien land in the Middle East. And then, many of them publicly complained that the civilian leadership had made a mess of things, saying so from the comfort of a retirement pension.

- In Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, there have been acrimonious hearings and meetings, but no real oversight to appreciate just how and where programs and policies ran off the tracks. Except for a very, very small handful, no one has been held accountable. Indeed, it is not even apparent that anyone in Congress knows how to perform oversight. If they do, they apparently lack the spine to perform it in a manner Harry Truman, who carried out superb oversight as a senator during World War II, would call competent.

- Perhaps most damning of all, America has permitted itself, and most leaders from both political parties have aggressively pursued, a national security strategy that has torn us apart domestically, isolated us from our allies, made us an object of disrespect in the eyes of those uncommitted to our cause and caused our enemies to find motivation for greater action on their own part. In fact, it is not even clear whether our national leadership understands what an effective national security strategy is, much less how to put one together and exercise it effectively.

 [Reply](#)

PonchoLefty June 5th, 2009 at 11:40 am

[16](#)

I don't know where it stands now, but I recall reading in 2005 the US defense budget was almost equal to all the worlds countries defense budgets combined. It was 8 times larger than China.

 [Reply](#)

[Blue Texan](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:40 am

[17](#)

In response to [Teddy Partridge @ 7](#)

True, but even that's too modest.

 [Reply](#)

TarheelDem June 5th, 2009 at 11:43 am

[18](#)

Because it's the Republican's jobs and stimulus program, it's the only pork expenditures that Democrats can count on reliably passing. And just watch the Democratic Congresscritters and governors crow in their campaign ads about how many jobs they "saved" by not permitting a base closure or by gaining a new defense contractor's offices or plant.

And that's all before you even talk about lobbyists and PACs and the more direct bribes.

 [Reply](#)

STTPinOhio June 5th, 2009 at 11:51 am

[19](#)

We should demand cuts in the defense budget until we have the single largest defense budget in the world.

Versus any other country.

Instead of *all of them combined*.

 [Reply](#)

[Blub](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:54 am

[20](#)

In response to [PonchoLefty @ 16](#)


Its not quite that much of a gap, since China classifies things like base construction and operating expenses with local infrastructure budgets and other accounting differences, from what I recollect from back when I actually knew followed such things closely - apples to apples, their budget is probably \$200 billion to our \$750 billion. But as I said above, their budget includes a lot of civil defense (Sichuan earthquake relief was in the military budget, for example). Total manpower, apples-to-apple, isn't much of a difference - they probably have about 300-400,000 more total personnel than we do, and their population is much bigger than ours.

All told, in terms of raw people, our military is roughly FIVE TIMES larger than China's per capita. And they're still diligently cutting down total personnel, while increasingly both their budget (they aim to match their budget increases with GDP growth) and their overseas (Indian Ocean and Southern Pacific) bases. China's actually a fairly good comparison given that they and us have the only two really large all-volunteer professional militaries, with an emphasis on combat-ready active divisions instead of massive reserve and militia units.

Other countries have much bigger militaries, per capita, such as Russia, the EU and ridiculous places like Vietnam, Iran, Burma, North Korea that each have total armies reportedly larger in absolute terms than the US or China's. But these are generally conscription- and militia-based models, with consequently much much lower costs per soldier (the EU, collectively, spends a mere \$300 billion for roughly 7 to 11 million in uniform, depending on whether you count militia).

So basically, the land of the free, is an extremely militarized society, in both absolute numbers of troops and budget, by world standards.

 [Reply](#)

 [DrDick](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:54 am

[21](#)

An actually reasonable proposal would be to cut the US defense budget by 2/3 which would still leave us with the largest in the world by a wide margin. Will never happen, but should.

 [Reply](#)


[Minnesotachuck](#) June 5th, 2009 at 11:55 am

[22](#)

In response to [TarheelDem @ 18](#)

The Congressional defense dysfunction is fully bipartisan. When Rumsfeld killed the Army's Crusader 155 mm artillery system (arguably the only intelligent large procurement decision he made) Minnesota's then-senator Mark Dayton, as skeptical as anyone regarding defense expenditures, saw fit to bloviate about the cancellation would place the country at risk because of the gun's vital role in America's future defense needs. Of course it was just coincidence that the ammunition supplier was located in the state.

 [Reply](#)

 [Raven](#) June 5th, 2009 at 12:04 pm

[23](#)

In response to [eCAHNomics @ 10](#)

“Veterans are also in a separate department and therefore not included in DOD.”

Nor should they be.


 [Reply](#)

[Blub](#) June 5th, 2009 at 12:08 pm

[24](#)

One big problem in the US is that entire cities (and regions) seem to be dependent on military-welfare. Imagine San Diego without the Navy and Marine Corps, the Mountain and High Plains states without the Air Force, eastern Virginia without the Navy, etc. When the populace of a country becomes this dependent on military spending to fill stomachs, you basically have Brezhnev's Russia. Altogether, its kind of a scary place to be for a democracy.

 [Reply](#)

 [Raven](#) June 5th, 2009 at 12:09 pm

[25](#)

In response to [Blub @ 24](#)

They are closing the Navy School a couple of blocks away here in Athens.

 [Reply](#)

[TheLurkingMod](#) June 5th, 2009 at 12:14 pm

[26](#)

Christy LiveChat is upstairs!

[SCOTUS: Selecting Justice, A Live Chat With CAC's Doug Kendall](#)

 [Reply](#)

[Hugh](#) June 5th, 2009 at 12:18 pm

[27](#)

In response to [Minnesotachuck @ 15](#)

Nice citation. A lot of defense spending is just pork wrapped in the flag. What gripes me is all these politicians who style themselves as super-patriots spending and wasting vast sums of money on the

Pentagon in ways that often degrade our national security.

 [Reply](#)

Twain June 5th, 2009 at 12:19 pm

[28](#)

In response to [TheLurkingMod @ 26](#)

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Hugh June 5th, 2009 at 12:19 pm

[29](#)

In response to [Raven @ 25](#)

How is the view of the ocean from Athens, Georgia?

 [Reply](#)

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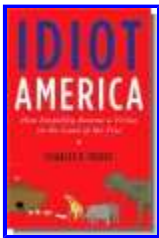
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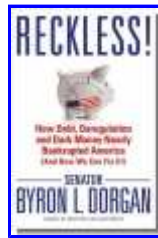


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[Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free](#)

Chat with Charles Pierce about his new book.



Sunday, June 7 2009 3:30pm Eastern
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Chat with Senator Byron Dorgan about his new book. Hosted by Bill Black.



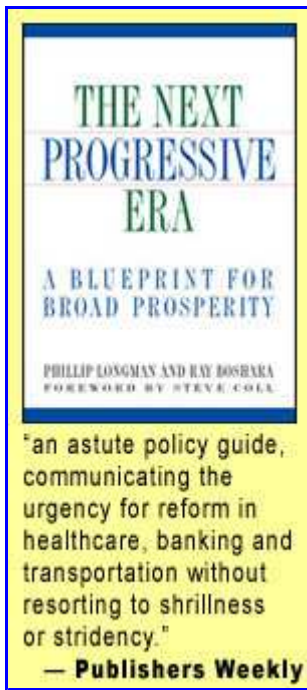
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