



Why Cutting Defense Helps America

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Benjamin Friedman [explains](#) how cuts to American defense spending will, in fact, weaken the nation's military capabilities — and why that's a very good thing for everyone other than defense contractors.

The Pentagon's boosters are right that big cuts will limit military capabilities. But that would actually be a good thing for the United States. Shrinking the U.S. military would not only save a fortune but also encourage policymakers to employ the armed services less promiscuously, keeping American troops — and the country at large — out of needless trouble. Especially for the last two decades, the United States' considerable wealth and fortunate geography have made global adventurism seem largely costless. The 2011 U.S. military budget of nearly \$700 billion is higher in real terms than at any point during the Cold War. But for the American public (except the members of the military and their families, that is), the only real impact of such spending has been marginally higher taxes, which have lately been subsidized by deficits...

Far bigger savings are possible if the Pentagon is recast as a true defense agency rather than one aimed at something far more ambitious. And cuts would force U.S. officials to prioritize. For starters, they would have to recognize that the U.S. military is currently structured to exercise power abroad, not provide self-defense. The U.S. Navy patrols the globe in the name of protecting global commerce, even though markets easily adapt to supply disruptions and other states have good reason to protect their own shipments. Washington maintains enormous ground forces in order to conduct nation-building missions abroad — despite the fact that such missions generally fail at great cost. Garrisons in Germany and South Korea have become subsidies that allow Cold War-era allies to avoid self-reliance.

Not only are these missions unnecessary, they are counterproductive. They turn economically capable allies into dependents, provoke animosity in far-flung corners of the globe, and encourage states to balance U.S. military power, often with nuclear weapons. A strategy based on restraint would allow Washington to save at least

about \$1.2 trillion over a decade, three times what the Obama administration is now asking for.

He offers a long list of major things that the military can do without if they were to assume a defensive rather than an offensive posture. But then again, he works for the Cato Institute, so he's obviously a warmongering neo-con doing the bidding of the Koch brothers. /sarcasm