

Militarism: Save \$500 billion?

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The Navy SEALs raid that exterminated the world's worst terrorism leader involved only a handful of attackers. It illustrated the small, specialized military force needed today, when the deadliest menace comes from hidden cliques of fanatics, not from massed armies.

America still spends \$1 trillion a year for a gigantic Army, Navy, Air Force and other instruments for fighting old-style global wars. But the colossal outlay is mostly a waste, because the chance of a nation-against-nation war is almost nil. The new threat comes from crazed suicide martyrs. Defense against them requires intense intelligence-gathering and skilled commando teams -- not million-soldier armies.

With Congress struggling to reduce federal spending, the sensible approach is to cut military costs -- not programs that help U.S. families. As we've said before, there's no reason for America to be the world's most militaristic nation, spending as much as the rest of the planet combined.

Eight defense experts were invited by *The New York Times* to discuss "How to Cut the Military." Here are some of their comments:

Benjamin Friedman of the Cato Institute:

"The United States, 5 percent of the globe's population, now accounts for half its military spending. The cause is not our enemies, who are weak and scattered by historical standards. Power, instead, tempts us to meddle and boss, distributing forces and promises willy-nilly. Playing global sheriff injects us into conflicts.... If we let rich allies defend themselves and admitted that we lack the ability to fix disorderly states, we could have a smaller, more elite, less-strained and far-less-expensive military."

Professor Gordon Adams of American University:

"A defense build-down is upon us.... Leon Panetta, the new defense secretary, will need all his budgetary knowledge and negotiating skills to manage this build-down.... Put on the front burner the question of whether the U.S. military should continue to circumnavigate the globe fighting insurgents and building nations in countries that don't particularly want to be experiments for our preconceptions about proper governance."

Professor Linda Bilmes of Harvard University:

"One out of five dollars spent by the federal government goes to the military. Since 2001, the size of the annual military budget has grown by nearly \$1 trillion, not counting the

wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.... Buried in the defense budget are thousands of line-items left over from the Cold War -- reports that no one reads and parts for weapons we no longer use.... The Pentagon admits that it has 'lost visibility' on tens of billions of dollars in spending, particularly in conflict areas. The department has flunked its budget audit every year for the past two decades."

It's senseless for Washington to pour \$1 trillion a year into needless war spending. Solve the national budget crisis by reducing militarism -- not by crimping the safety net that sustains families.

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