

Tea Party to tackle US defense spending?

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The Tea Party movement has landed in Washington, with a number of elected Senators and Congressional Representatives – but the question remains, will they take on the behemoth that is US defense spending?

It has been quite the political journey for Dr. Rand Paul. He went from Tea Party hopeful, to clinching the Republican nomination for US Senate, to winning a US Senate seat representing the state of Kentucky.

Today was another crowning achievement for Paul. He seemed to be the center of attention at the first ever meeting of the Senate Tea Party Caucus in Washington DC. Senators Jim DeMint, Rand Paul, and Mike Lee, among others, all claimed they had the solutions to the country's many fiscal problems.

However, the real question is, what will they do with their new power?

Senator Rand Paul said, *"We've gotta come up with some real solutions about cutting spending and about what we're going to do to change things."*

While Tea Party members are proposing drastic domestic cuts, a recent USA Today/Gallup poll revealed that a majority of Americans oppose cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and other social programs, which leaves US defense spending.

Although many Republicans say all areas of the budget should be on the table when it comes to cutting, of the 47 Republican Senators and 242 Representatives, only 5 percent (15 members) expressed support for cutting defense spending.

Perhaps that is why political analysts like Brian Debose remain pessimistic.

"No President and no Congress has ever cut military spending while the country is in the theater of war," he claimed.

Debose said one thing that is certain, "

They're not gonna back down and they're gonna continue with this radical thinking. Radical now, maybe not in the future, who knows?

"

And this has many Americans asking, is the thinking radical enough to touch what some say call a “sacred cow” – the Pentagon budget?

Max Pappas, the vice president of public policy at FreedomWorks argued there are loads of places to cut, with the possibility of cutting \$3.5 trillion over the next 10 years, ranging from corporate welfare to agricultural subsidies, and even defense spending.

“We have some who think you just can’t cut defense spending, it’s just not possible,” he said. “There’s waste there, there’s the wrong incentives, there’s room for them to cut.”

Benjamin H. Friedman, a research fellow at the Cato Institute explained the Republican Party, who affiliates most closely with the Tea Party movement, have expanded and added to the growth of US defense over and over again.

“The Republicans are still overwhelmingly for growing the defense budget,” he noted. “When we talk about the Secretary of Defense cutting the defense budget, as he said he wants to recently, he’s just saying we’re going to slow the rate of growth. He’s not talking about actual cuts. Republicans don’t even want to do that for the most part.”

They explained the cuts are needed and possible, but unpopular. Only about 15 percent of Republicans support trimming Pentagon funds.

Many new congressional representatives and senators owe their wins to the Tea Party movement, however many have pushed back from big calls to cut defense spending. This is due to a lack of clarity on military and foreign policy on the Tea Party agenda.

“The Tea Party’s foreign policy views are unclear,” said Friedman.

Pappas explained, *“There is a consistent policy on spending, so much as that does some overlap there is some confusion, but the part that is strictly spending, it’s clear, the Tea Party movement is for less spending and getting rid of any excesses that we can, and there are those excesses in the Department of Defense.”*

The US government must cut, and not just cut excess but reevaluate both strategy and objections in order to make proper spending decisions to focus on items where spending is necessary, they argued.

“We have to have more restrained objectives. We don’t need to be defending Europe anymore from a threat that doesn’t exist. The South Koreans can afford to defend themselves. We have to not just cut and say we are cutting waste and being more efficient, but think about the choices we are making and how many missions we want to take on in the Pentagon,” explained Friedman.

To date, former President Richard Nixon is the only administration to have ever cut defense spending during a time of war by curbing the budget near the end of the Vietnam conflict.

