

## A Realistic Look at the U.S. Defense Budget

By Allan C. Brownfeld

The U.S. accounts for almost half of the world's military spending. Iran's defense budget is less than 1 percent, and the defense budgets of Russia and China are each less than 10 percent, of that of the U.S. The U.S. and its Western allies supply more than 95 percent of global arms sales.

Beyond this, what we have been spending money on may be quite different from our future requirements. Writing in *The American Conservative*, Commander Jeff Huber, U.S. Navy (retired), notes that, "The time-honored adage says that generals always plan for the last war. American generals, taking things a step

further, always plan for the last World War.

As strategy analyst William Lind notes of our weapons-acquisitions practices, 'most of what we are buying is a military museum.' For all of the Pentagon's lip service to 'transformation' and 'revolution in military affairs,' today's force looks like a Buck Rogers version of the force we defeated the Axis Powers with: aircraft carriers, destroyers, submarines, armor, infantry, bombers, fighters, special forces, and so on."

In Huber's view, "Our 'Good War' military was suited to symmetrical enemies whose political behavior could be compelled by defeat of their armed forces. We haven't had a foe like that since the Berlin Wall came down; arguably, the Soviets ceased to be a serious military threat years if not decades before then. Yet the preponderance of our defense budget is spent on gee-wizardry to deter or fight a peer competitor that will never emerge.... The \$2 billion B-2 stealth bomber is albatross enough, but the Air Force wants to replace it by 2018 with an even costlier manned bomber that will have the same combat radius but carry fewer bombs."

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, in presenting the Defense Department budget for 2010, seeks to overhaul Pentagon spending and the way the military does business. His proposals include cutting back on the Air Force's most advanced fighter jet, the F-22, but adding programs in other areas, so that the Pentagon budget is projected to grow by 4 percent in 2010 to \$534 billion.

The new budget calls for more men at the expense of machines; more drones rather than top-end fighter jets and future bombers; more helicopters for combat troops rather than a replacement for the presidential chopper; more coastal vessels and fewer aircraft-carriers; better cyberdefenses but scaled back missile defenses and laser weapons. The new budget focuses more on today's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and less to stave off potential future threats from Russia and China.

Explaining Secretary Gates's new approach, *The Economist* argues, "To begin with, Mr. Gates has spent the past two years trying to avert military failure, first in Iraq and now in Afghanistan, rather than taking on powerful constituencies over contracts for expensive equipment. He has given notice for nearly a year that the Pentagon's spending priorities would have to change to support its new emphasis on counter-insurgency. Moreover, the financial crisis means that America will not be able to spend more to equip itself both for small wars and big ones."

Secretary Gates says that the budget is "one of those rare chances to match virtue to necessity, critically and ruthlessly separate appetites from real requirements."

For many years the strain in defense spending has been relieved by supplemental spending -- often off-the-books. But Gates says that long-term commitments -- such as health care for wounded and traumatized troops and other forms of personnel spending for an expanding army and marine corps should be brought into the base budget. Special forces, so important in fighting terrorists and training allies, will also get a boost in numbers.

Among those big-ticket items that Gates considers no longer needed or too costly and "exquisite" to meet the Pentagon's requirements are the F-22 Raptor, a \$143 million supersonic jet fighter originally designed to shoot down Soviet aircraft; the DDG-1000 Zumwalt class destroyer, a \$3.3 billion stealth combat vessel; and the Army's Future Combat Zystem, an ensemble of futuristic tanks and armored vehicles.

The proposed cancellation or termination of these and other multibillion-dollar programs has already provoked a firestorm of criticism from lobbyists in the defense industry and Members of Congress whose districts will suffer manufacturing losses if the systems are cut. For many in Congress, defense spending has little to with the real military needs of the nation; it is viewed more as a jobs program.

In November 2008, a Virginia-based lobbying firm whose clients have benefited from earmarks promoted by Rep. John Murtha (D-PA), chair of the powerful defense appropriations subcommittee, was raided by the FBI. The PMA Group was founded in 1998 by former top Murtha aid Paul Magliochetti, who previously served as a staff member of the House Committee on Appropriations.

Taxnavers for Common Sense, a watchdog group, said Murtha obtained \$38 million in federal

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