



Ron Paul: Excessive Defense Spending Endangers U.S.

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Three of the four remaining candidates for the Republican presidential nomination have spoken out against planned reductions in future defense spending. Both former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich have urged President Barack Obama to prevent the sequestering of \$600 billion from the defense budget over the next 10 years as required by last summer's debt ceiling deal. Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum stated categorically that he "would absolutely not cut one penny out of military spending."

One candidate, however, has repeatedly argued that defense spending must join domestic spending on the chopping block if the United States is to avoid bankruptcy. In fact, said Texas Congressman Ron Paul, the country would actually be safer if our government spent less on the military.

In his February 20 *Texas Straight Talk*, Paul remarked on the contradiction between conservatives' alarm over "unprecedented spending" in [Obama's 2013 budget proposal](#) and their simultaneous warnings that the President is seeking to gut the defense budget.

"I continue to be dismayed that in spite of our economic problems, most of those who call themselves fiscal conservatives refuse to consider any reductions in military spending," Paul wrote.

Citing an article by Doug Bandow in the February issue of the *American Conservative*, Paul pointed out that "the President's budget calls for an 18% increase versus the previously planned 20% increase." For the mathematically challenged he patiently explained: "This is not a cut, yet Pentagon hawks continue to issue dire warnings that this 'draconian' decrease in proposed future spending will seriously threaten our national security."

Furthermore, Paul observed:

Even adjusted for inflation, military spending is 17% higher now than when Obama took office. Even the worst case scenarios of Obama's "cuts," adjusted for inflation, still put outlays at 2007 levels, which are 40% higher than a decade ago. Our total spending on overseas adventurism and nation building equals more than the next 13 highest spending countries in the world combined. Even if we were to slash our military budget in half, we would still be the world's dominant military power, by far.

In his article Bandow described five "liberal ploys" that the "pork hawks" use to justify ever-increasing defense spending. Paul summarized them in his brief piece, but they are worth exploring in more detail.

"First," Bandow averred, "big spenders on the right argue that Washington must continue doing everything that it has ever done abroad." This includes maintaining "a thousand military installations around the world"; continuing to protect prosperous nations such as Japan, South Korea, and much of Europe; and engaging in further disastrous "nation-building" efforts. (It's worth recalling that as a candidate for President in 2000, George W. Bush opposed using the military for nation-building, to great applause from his fellow Republicans.) None of these makes the United States more physically secure; all make it less fiscally secure.

The second ploy, wrote Bandow, is "equat[ing] money with results." Just as liberals insist that more education spending translates into better student outcomes, pork hawks buy into the notion that "bigger Pentagon budgets mean increased national security." This, he maintained, is "not true: greater military spending is strategic waste on a grand scale" for "overcapacity actually encourages Washington to meddle in foreign conflicts that foolishly deplete our military capital."

Third Bandow referred to the "baseline budgeting" trick: claiming that reductions in planned future increases are cuts when, of course, they are still increases, as Paul explained.

The fourth liberal tactic used by Republican hawks is "threatening to kill the most important programs (in this case, weapon systems) first" if the defense budget is cut, Bandow observed. This, he argued, is akin to liberals' threats to cut schools, police, and fire departments – the most essential and desired of government functions – whenever state and local budgets are in danger of being reduced. It is also just as disingenuous. There is plenty of fat that could be trimmed from the Pentagon's budget. In addition, if the hawks took Bandow's advice, they would find much more to cut, namely many army units (since the United States is highly unlikely to find itself fighting a land war if it sticks to defending its own territory) and a smaller number of air and naval forces.

“The fifth and last resort of Washington’s big-spenders is demagoguery,” stated Bandow. “Advocates of a colossal military trash their opponents as ‘isolationists’ who want to undermine America.” Paul knows this all too well, having been subjected to the “isolationist” smear his entire political career, and especially during his presidential campaigns. But as Bandow noted, “the fundamental question is whether military spending should respond to the threat environment.” If the answer is no – as many Republicans, including Romney, Gingrich, and Santorum, would have it – then there is no limit to how much Americans should be taxed to support what Paul called “overseas adventurism.” If the answer is yes, said Bandow, with America “more secure today than at any point since before World War II,” there is no reason not to reduce “military outlays ... accordingly.”

In order to do so, Bandow concluded, “Washington’s international objectives” will have to be scaled back. “But,” he continued, “the U.S. should stop garrisoning the globe, subsidizing rich friends, and reconstructing poor enemies. Instead, it’s about time Washington focused on defending America and its people.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Paul stated after quoting those last two sentences from Bandow’s article. “Wasting money on overseas adventurism and nation building threatens our national security by massively contributing to our debt.” That debt, he added, is endangering our society because at some point the government simply isn’t going to be able to pay its bills; and then down will come both the welfare state and the warfare state.

The other Republican candidates, as well as all other political leaders of both parties, would do well to heed Paul’s warning. The United States cannot afford to go on catering to Americans’ every demand for freebies, nor does it have the wherewithal to maintain a global empire. At the end of the welfare-warfare thoroughfare, Paul said, lies Greece with its rioting citizens weaned on the welfare state that can no longer provide for them. “Is that,” he asked, “the sort of security we envision for our nation’s future?”