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Whose Common Defence?

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Late last week, the Heritage Foundation's Jim Carafano posted [an essay at the Daily Caller](#)^[3], that took issue with the characterization of recent efforts by Heritage, AEI, and the Foreign Policy Initiative to sell the American people on the idea that we don't spend too much on the military. He seemed particularly incensed by [the suggestion that this was a GOP-sponsored effort](#)^[4] to speak to the Tea Party movement. On the contrary, protests Carafano, the message that the Pentagon's budget should be off-limits to any deficit reduction effort is aimed at the "ruling elites" and comes from three think tanks with no formal partisan affiliations.

It is these ruling elites who seem determined, in Carafano's telling, to gut the military. He predicts that Tea Partiers, already warm to a message of "peace through strength," will oppose any attempts to cut military spending, and will soundly reject measures to merely shift resources from defense to dubious domestic programs and bailout schemes for the well-heeled.

I'll respond to each of those points in turn, but must first correct the record. Carafano claims that Barack Obama aims to slash Pentagon spending. [That isn't true](#)^[5]. [I wish it were](#)^[6]. Each of the first two DoD budgets submitted to Congress by the Obama administration have been larger than those inherited from George Bush, and the Pentagon projects real spending increases over the coming years. Recall also that these increases have been piled on top of the enormous

growth of the past decade, and it is patently false to claim that Obama is slashing military spending or starving the troops of resources. In real, inflation-adjusted terms military spending has grown by 86 percent since 1998 [7], and the Pentagon's base budget (excluding the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan) has grown by more than 50 percent since 2001. [8]

With respect to Carafano's assessment of the Tea Partiers's views on foreign policy and military spending, most of what he puts forward is pure speculation. Little is actually known about the foreign policy views [9] of a movement that is organized primarily around the idea of getting the government off the people's backs. It seems unlikely, however, that a majority within the movement like the idea of our government building other people's countries, and our troops fighting other people's wars.

Equally dubious is Carafano's claim that the Tea Party ranks include "many libertarians who don't think much of the Reagan mantra 'peace through strength'" but an equal or larger number who are enamored of the idea that the military should get as much money as it wants, and then some. Carafano avoids a discussion of what this military has actually been asked to do, much less what it should do. By default, he endorses the tired status quo, which holds that the purpose of the U.S. military is to defend other countries so that their governments can spend money on social welfare programs and six-week vacations.

Tea Partiers are many things, but defenders of the status quo isn't one of them. This movement is populated by individuals who are incensed by politicians reaching into their pockets and funneling money for goo-goo projects to Washington. It beggars the imagination that they'd be anxious to send money for similar schemes to Brussels, Paris, Berlin and Tokyo, and yet that is precisely what our foreign policies have done -- and will do -- so long as the United States maintains a military geared more for defending others than for defending us.

One last point: with respect to libertarians and Ronald Reagan, he was fighting a globe-straddling Soviet Union armed with tens of thousands of nuclear warheads. Carafano and I both served in that Cold War military, so we obviously agree that that was a fight worth fighting. It is pretty bizarre, however, to invoke Ronald Reagan's memory to make the case for spending more money on our military today -- when our primary adversary is a few hundred al Qaeda figures hiding in safe houses and caves -- than we spent to defeat the Soviets.

Equally bizarre is the claim that we cannot and should not cut military spending. On the contrary, if we were to refine our objectives, expect other countries to do more for their own defense, and avoid open-ended nation building missions in distant lands, we could safely cut military spending without undermining our security, and without imposing additional burdens on our troops.

Barack Obama has refused to take the necessary steps to shift the burdens off the backs of American taxpayers. Here's hoping that the American people, perhaps with the Tea Partiers in the lead, remind him -- and Jim Carafano -- that the Constitution provides for "the common defence" of ourselves and our posterity, not the common defense of the entire world.

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