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Rep. Ryan's Budget Doesn't Touch Military Spending

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For all the boldness of Rep. Paul Ryan's [proposal](#)^[3] to reduce projected federal expenditures by \$5 trillion, an initiative that I support, the Pentagon's budget emerges essentially unscathed in Ryan's plan. This is a mistake on both fiscal and strategic grounds. Significant cuts in military spending must be on the table as the nation struggles to close its fiscal gap without saddling individuals and businesses with burdensome taxes and future generations with debt. Such cuts will also force a reappraisal of our military's roles and missions that is long overdue.

The Pentagon's base budget has nearly doubled during the past decade. Throw in the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, plus nuclear weapons spending in the Department of Energy, and a smattering of other programs, and the total amount that Americans spend annually on our military exceeds \$700 billion. These costs might come down slightly as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are drawn to a close—as they should be—but according to the Obama administration's own projections, the U.S. government will still spend nearly \$6.5 trillion on the military over the next decade. Surely Rep. Ryan could have found a way to cut...*something* from this amount?

Defense is an undisputed core function of government—any government—and spending *for that purpose* should not be treated on an equal basis with the many other dubious roles and missions that the U.S. federal government now performs. But please note the emphasis. The U.S. Department of Defense should be focused on *that purpose*: defending the United States. But by acting as the world's de facto policeman, we have essentially twisted the concept of “the common defence” to include the defense of the whole world, including billions of people who are not parties to our unique social contract.

The rest of the world is more than content to free ride on Uncle Sam's largesse. Absolved of their core obligation to provide for the defense of their own citizens, the governments in other countries have been busy expanding the social welfare state and growing the public sector. The true burdens fall on U.S. taxpayers who spend two and a half times more on national security programs than do the French or the British, five times more than citizens living in other NATO

countries, and seven and a half times more than the average Japanese. Meanwhile, our troops and their families are struggling to cover the many commitments that their civilian leaders have unwisely incurred. And yet the defenders of the status quo—those who prefer that Americans pay these costs and bear these burdens—cry for more. More money [4] *and* more missions [5].

Fiscal hawks such as Ryan are not serious if they cannot see massive waste and inefficiency in the Pentagon. Robert Gates' ballyhooed reforms barely scratch the surface of the problem. Mismanagement of major weapons programs is rampant; cost overruns are the norm. A meaningful cap on future defense expenditures will force the Pentagon to seriously confront these inefficiencies, and might also precipitate some useful competition between the services on who is best positioned to keep the country safe and secure.

If Washington is serious about cutting spending, and if the Pentagon's budget is included in the search for savings, then we need to adopt a different strategy [6], one that would husband our resources, focus the military on a few core missions, call on other countries to take responsibility for their own defense, and share the burdens of policing the global commons. A serious proposal for reining in runaway Pentagon spending would have precipitated such a strategic shift. By giving the Pentagon a free pass, Rep. Ryan practically ensures that such a discussion never sees the light of day.

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[4] <http://blog.heritage.org/2011/04/05/morning-bell-chairman-ryans-budget-resolution-changes-americas-course/>

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