

America's Military Spending Is Foreign Aid—Cut It

By: Justin Logan
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Watching Washington politicians pretend to fix the fiscal nightmare they created has been a sickening spectacle. The latest stomach turner has been Congress' targeting "foreign aid" as though that will somehow help make the nation solvent. In fairness to the politicians, their instinct to resort to frivolous cuts is understandable, since the big-ticket items on the national credit card—Medicare, Social Security and defense—are all political minefields. So now Washington is playing on the public's profound ignorance of how much we spend on foreign aid, pretending that cutting it will make a dent in the deficit.

There are lots of reasons to favor cutting foreign aid, but its impact on the current fiscal shortfall is not one of them. We could zero out foreign assistance tomorrow, and it would not help our predicament one bit.

[Read more about [the deficit and national debt.](#)]

There's a different way of looking at the problem that holds more promise, however: Much of America's military spending constitutes a perverse form of foreign aid. American taxpayers (and their creditors) pay for the defense not just of America, but also dozens of European countries, Japan, South Korea, and a number of other allies and client states. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, like his predecessor Robert Gates, is currently hectoring our NATO allies to beef up their spending. But they would be stupid to spend their own money when they know we will spend for them. Until we push them off the teat, they will continue suckling.

If we cut off our free-riding (and reckless driving) allies and clients, we could potentially free up some real money: well over a trillion dollars over the next 10 years, and probably a good deal more than that. Even that isn't enough to solve our fiscal problems, but it's a start.