

## Washington's Daft Punk justification for wasteful military spending

By Dana Liebelson | The Week – 20 hrs ago

Republicans and Democrats alike seem blinded by the desire for a "[harder, better, faster, stronger](#)" America — so much so that they support useless defense projects

What's the difference between a Republican and a Democrat when it comes to [defense spending](#)? I posed this question to longtime defense analyst [Winslow Wheeler](#), who may be the only person to have ever worked as a personal staffer for a Republican and Democrat in Congress... at the same time.

"Republicans, with only the rarest exceptions, busy themselves pretending that more money means better defense, and that anyone urging budget restraint is worse than a fool," Wheeler told me. And Democrats? "[They] have fallen for the gag, and cower in the corner, thinking that going along with more money for the Pentagon will protect them from further political slander."

Wheeler argues that the key to successful military reform is *not* the old adage that more money equals better defense — instead, it's about spending smarter. And there's no better time to advocate for better defense spending than when the House and Senate are fighting tooth and nail over the fiscal year 2013 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The Senate Committee on Armed Services [passed this major defense bill](#) last week, and it now must be approved by the entire Senate in the coming months. (The Senate bill is also up against a competing version that has been passed by the House.)

The Navy may be willing to go down with the ship, but it doesn't need to bring taxpayer dollars with it.

When it comes to the NDAA, some legislators are starting to sound like they're borrowing a line from [the band Daft Punk](#). According to them, every extra dollar spent on defense makes the U.S. military "harder, better, faster, stronger." In actuality, though, there are a couple of glaring examples in which this isn't the

case. Here are two programs in particular that are costing taxpayers billions of dollars — without giving them much in the way of defense.

The multibillion-dollar nuclear money pit... that has no purpose  
The Department of Energy is doing its best to pitch taxpayers a nuclear project that experts are calling unnecessary — and whose estimated cost has climbed from [\\$375 million to \\$3.7 billion to \\$5.9 billion](#). The idea behind the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) in Los Alamos is to increase production of plutonium pits, which are needed to make nuclear weapons.

Throwing money into a bottomless pit for nuclear weapons production... What is this, the Cold War? Is the [Soviet Union trying to fluoridate](#) salt, flour, fruit juices, and ice cream? Last I checked, it's 2012, and we're trying to rein in defense spending. Plenty of [experts agree](#): There is no need to actually increase pit production.

"Pit production enabled by CMRR-NF is not needed to maintain U.S. nuclear weapons for decades to come" [writes](#) former Sandia Laboratories Vice President Bob Peurifoy. "As a result, the Nuclear Facility might just sit there with nothing to do."

Not only is CMRR-NF unnecessary; there's also evidence that the project [won't create jobs](#), undermines America's [commitment to reduce its nuclear arsenal](#) through the new START treaty, and could be [vulnerable to earthquakes](#).

President Obama has already proposed delaying funding for CMRR-NF for [five years](#), the House and Senate Appropriations Committees [have zeroed out funding for CMRR-NF](#) in their FY 2013 bills, and perhaps most importantly, even the Pentagon hasn't bothered actually allocating funds for the project.

But we still have this boondoggle on our hands, thanks to lawmakers like Rep. Mike Turner (R-Ohio), who has attempted to [appropriate \\$160 million back to the facility](#); failing to acknowledge the growing body of evidence that the facility isn't needed. We don't yet know the Senate's decision on CMRR-NF funding, but according to insiders close to the Project On Government Oversight (POGO), it doesn't look like funding will be cut.

The pirate-catching ship that can't keep its engines running  
The Navy is trying to sell taxpayers a \$358 million "combat" ship — Lockheed Martin's Littoral Combat Ship — but the vessel is corroding, has engine problems, and [doesn't actually engage in combat](#). The Navy also plans to buy a similar,

cheaper version of the ship that has less debilitating problems. Deciding which ship to buy *should* be obvious — so why is the Navy asking taxpayers to pony up cash for both? Good question. That's exactly [what POGO is asking](#).

"[Lockheed's] ship is like a Swiss army knife: It does a lot of things, it just doesn't do any of them well," POGO National Security Investigator Ben Freeman, who has worked with whistleblowers close to the program, said at the [CATO Institute last week](#).

The Littoral Combat Ship is intended to operate close to shore, with the capacity to bust drug traffickers and modern pirates, and also clear mines and find submarines. Unfortunately, it doesn't carry out its functions very capably. In one instance, the ship was looking for drug smugglers when the electricity on the entire ship went out, leaving it dangerously adrift.

The Navy has vehemently [defended the ship](#). At the CATO Institute, Under Secretary of the Navy Robert O. Work tried to argue that "you never, ever buy every ship to go into full battle." But the Littoral Combat Ship is designed for surface combat; it's just not living up to its promise. (Check out POGO's full rebuttal to the Navy [here](#).)

The good news is tides are starting to turn against Lockheed's troubled ship. The House version of the National Defense Authorization Act requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct [a full investigation into the ship's problems](#). Hopefully, the Senate will get on board as well.

Dropping the Lockheed Martin's vessel would save [at least \\$187 million](#) and likely billions more down the line, thanks to reduced operating costs. The Navy may be willing to go down with the ship, but it doesn't need to bring taxpayer dollars with it.

These overpriced programs are just two examples of the kind of defense spending that is hurting taxpayers. It's easy for Republicans and Democrats to scare us into coughing up more money for the military, but we should demand smarter spending. That's the key towards working together for a harder, better, faster, stronger — and *safer* America.