

# *Forbes Online*



## Doug Bandow

### The Politics of Plunder

Op/Ed

# Target Everything In The Budget, Including Military Expenditures

Aug. 1 2011 - 2:37 pm | 0 views | 0 recommendations | 0 [comments](#)



The impending limit on federal borrowing has triggered more than a few proposals for slashing future government outlays. Most Americans recognize that they no longer can afford Washington’s corral full of Sacred Cows.

But many conservatives, who otherwise shout most loudly for fiscal responsibility, believe in Big Government for least one federal department: the Pentagon. No matter what the U.S. spends, it is never enough. Indeed, leading neoconservatives continue to press for a massive increase in “defense” outlays.

In opposing proposed reductions unrepentant hawks mouth left-wing rhetoric. Anyone suggesting a smaller U.S. government role in the world is an “isolationist.” Proposals to merely slow planned spending increases are “cuts” that would “gut” the military.

Indeed, proposing fiscal responsibility at the Pentagon is equated with a desire to weaken defense. For instance, [columnist Lurita Doan accused](#) President Barack Obama of intending “to hollow out the military.” Worse, the president “seeks to render our military neither well-armed nor well-planned which calls into question our nation’s ability to remain a free people for long.”

Doan should take up comedy. She believes the world’s most powerful nation, allied with every major industrialized nation save China and Russia, deploying a globe-spanning military far beyond anything possessed by any other country, and spending roughly as much on the military as every other nation combined, is in danger. Indeed, inflation adjusted outlays today are higher than at any point in the Cold War, Korean War, or Vietnam War. Yet in her mind a spending reduction would risk America’s freedom.

What Doan fails to understand — as do so many liberals when it comes to domestic expenditures — is that spending money does not guarantee positive results. Military outlays are not the same as defending America, just as spending money on the Department of Housing and Urban Develop is not the same as housing America. In fact, most of what the Pentagon does has little to do with protecting this nation.

The U.S. remains the main member of NATO, yet Europe’s GDP and population both exceed those of the U.S. Nor does the continent face any serious military threats: Russia’s military is but a pale imitation the Soviet Red Army. America’s continuing security guarantee subsidizes Europe’s generous welfare states. In effect, the Neo-con hawks would cut Medicare at home to preserve socialized medicine abroad.

Similar are Washington’s security commitments to Japan and South Korea. Until last year the former had the second largest economy on earth, but Tokyo relied on America for its protection. If someone needs to deter potential Chinese adventurism, it is Japan.

The Republic of Korea has upwards of 40 times the GDP of North Korea. The former also has a high-tech economy, twice the North’s population, and friendly relations with its neighbors. Despite allegedly fearing a North Korean invasion, for years the ROK sent money and food to its enemy; Seoul recently sent another shipment of food aid northward even after Pyongyang’s military provocations last year. Yet the U.S. is supposed to defend South Korea, apparently forever. Why?

Worse than turning industrialized allies into international welfare queens are America’s unnecessary attempts at global social engineering. Rep. J. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) has criticized spending reductions which would result in an America “that can go fewer places and do fewer things,” but going to most of those “places” and doing most of those “things” does not advance U.S. interests. For instance, the Clinton administration took

the U.S. into a war in the Balkans over the Serbian territory of Kosovo, a cause without the slightest relationship to American security.

President George W. Bush started a war in Mesopotamia to find nonexistent WMDs, triggering a violent social collapse which killed or wounded tens of thousands of Americans, cost upwards of 200,000 Iraqis their lives, and left Iran greatly strengthened. This conflict, with the high number of badly injured military personnel, has turned into a large unfunded liability, with costs ultimately likely to exceed \$2 or \$3 trillion.

President Barack Obama has expanded the war in Afghanistan in a desperate attempt to create a competent, honest, and effective national government — a fool’s errand with little benefit to America even in the unlikely event that it succeeds. Yet on average, it costs \$1.2 million to deploy *a single serviceman or woman* in Afghanistan.

Even more devoid of rational justification is the “kinetic military action” in Libya, America’s third needless war in the Muslim world in a decade. The only good news is that the administration’s participation has been so anemic that total costs remain under \$1 billion.

Terrorism remains a concern, but the threat from thugs with box-cutters attempting to hijack airplanes does not match that of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Indeed, al-Qaeda has been largely neutralized through good intelligence, deadly Special Forces operations, limits on terrorist funding, and international cooperation. In contrast, large-scale military operations like in Afghanistan and Iraq are counter-productive, creating more terrorists than they kill and creating a recruiting cause around the world.

Other dangers could arise in the future, but they remain far away. The most plausible challenger to the U.S. is China, which last year officially claimed the world’s number two economy. However, the People’s Republic of China remains a poor nation facing extraordinary economic, social, and political challenges.

Even if that government harbors aggressive ambitions, which is by no means certain, its ability to achieve any malign objectives will remain limited for years. Indeed, the current estimate for Chinese military expenditures runs \$100 to \$150 billion, a fraction of America’s spending, even not counting war outlays.

At this rate Beijing is not catching up with the U.S., let alone surging ahead. For instance, the PRC has just launched its first carrier — a Soviet cast-off purchased from Ukraine as scrap. The U.S. possesses 11 large and well-armed *carrier groups*. A surprise Chinese attack on Pearl Harbor is not in the offing.

What China is doing is emphasizing defense by working to neutralize America’s ability to attack China. Submarines and missiles increasingly give the PRC the ability to sink U.S. carriers. The resulting threat is not to America’s ability to defend itself, but to defend allies which should be defending themselves. Only in recent years has this nation

enjoyed virtually unrestricted power around the globe. That era is coming to an end. Constantly boosting military outlays would only delay the inevitable, since China and other nations will do whatever it takes for them to not remain forever vulnerable to American military action.

Without major and long-term spending cuts, the U.S. government is headed towards fiscal crisis. Every program should be on the cutting block: middle class entitlements, political pork, corporate welfare, special interest subsidies, foreign aid, and military outlays. In fact, the latter is really welfare, just for American arms producers and foreign countries.

It's time to turn the Department of Defense's job back to defense—of America. [Even George Melloan](#), a former editor with the hyper-hawkish *Wall Street Journal*, now acknowledges the need to exercise “greater discretion” in the use of force.

This approach would make the U.S. more secure, contra the hyperbolic rhetoric of some. Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld warned of “American lives lost.” House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon predicted an inability “to provide for the safety and security of our country.” But none of America's recent wars have made this country safer.

Reducing military spending requires scaling back Washington's international objectives. The U.S. no longer can garrison the globe, underwriting rich friends and remaking poor enemies. Instead, Washington will have to do what it should have been doing all along, look after America and Americans.