

The Seattle Times

Sunday, November 29, 2009 - Page updated at 04:00 PM

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Colbert conservatism and the military budget

By David Sirota
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Pop quiz: Name the political leader who said the following:

"We must be willing to pull the plug before sinking more dollars into weapons that do not provide what our warriors need."

Now name the leader who said this:

"(W)e cannot track \$2.3 trillion in (Pentagon spending) ... We maintain 20 to 25 percent more base infrastructure than we need to support our forces, at an annual waste to taxpayers of some \$3 billion to \$4 billion ... There are those who will oppose every effort to save taxpayers' money ... Well, fine, if there's to be a struggle, so be it."

I'm willing to bet many self-described "conservatives" guessed Ralph Nader and Dennis Kucinich. I would make that wager based on the enraged response to my recent column about government data showing that our waste-ridden, \$600-billion-a-year defense budget will cost about seven times more than the health-care legislation currently before Congress.

In e-mails, letters and Web site comments, right-wingers didn't vent anger at Pentagon profligacy, but at the criticism of Pentagon profligacy — as if brazenly throwing away billions on outdated weapons systems and obsolete military programs is now a "conservative" value.

Notably, the vitriol didn't include contrary numbers disproving the figures I referenced (none exists) — the responses just used Fox News-ish slogans like "the cost of freedom" to deride all criticism of Pentagon spending as unpatriotic ultraliberalism.

Of course, if that's true, then Stephen Colbert's refrain that "reality has a well-known liberal bias" is now less a laugh line than a devastatingly accurate commentary on the deranged terms of America's political discourse. I say that because here are some objective, nonpartisan, nonideological facts:

- The 2010 Pentagon budget means "every man, woman and child in the United States will spend more than \$2,700 on (defense) programs and agencies next year," reports the Cato Institute. "By way of comparison, the average Japanese spends less than \$330; the average German about \$520; China's per capita spending is less than \$100."



- "(The Pentagon budget) dwarfs the combined defense budgets of U.S. allies and potential U.S. enemies alike," reports Hearst Newspapers.
- "President (Obama) is on track to spend more on defense, in real dollars, than any other president has in one term of office since World War II," reports National Journal's Government Executive magazine.
- In 2000, the Pentagon admitted it has lost — yes, lost — \$2.3 trillion. In 2003, the San Francisco Chronicle reported that a subsequent Department of Defense study said it was only \$1 trillion. To put such numbers in perspective, contemplate what those sums could finance. \$1 trillion, for instance, could pay the total cost of universal health care for the long haul. \$2.3 trillion would cover universal health care plus the bank bailout plus the stimulus package.

Obviously — obviously! — these points are no cause for alarm and certainly no cause for military spending reductions, right? All they must prove is that the archconservative Cato Institute, William Randolph Hearst's newspaper chain, National Journal employees and Pentagon officials are secretly America-hating liberals.

And — obviously! — so are two of the most aggressive neoconservative hawks ever to hold government office, Sen. John McCain and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. After all, they're the ones who issued those scathing statements about wasteful military spending in the pop quiz above. That means they're actually terrorist-appeasing lefties, right?

Really, how could anyone other than traitorous communists see the data and then consider backing the mildest Pentagon spending cuts? I mean, come on — in a country whose paranoid conservative movement now makes a dead-serious ideology out of Stephen Colbert wisecracks, how dare any red-blooded American even think of pondering basic budgetary facts?

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