



Rubio's defense boost could cost \$1 trillion

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Sen. Marco Rubio's plan to fund the military at pre-sequestration levels could cost an additional \$1 trillion over the next 10 years, and even that might not be enough to make good on all the promises he laid out in a campaign speech on Thursday, according to one defense analyst.

The GOP presidential contender said during a speech in New Hampshire that, if elected commander in chief, he would return to the "fiscally sustainable budget baseline proposed by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in 2012 before sequestration took effect."

Benjamin Friedman, a defense research fellow at the Cato Institute, said the exact cost of Rubio's plan depends on how long he would extend the spending level of the fiscal 2012 budget request, which laid out the framework for 10 years. If Rubio would spend at the 2012 pace for the next 10 years, through 2026, the country would spend \$1 trillion more on defense than it would under sequestration caps, Friedman said.

Even with that extra money, Friedman said it would be difficult for Rubio to fund all of the priorities he highlighted in his speech, including growing the Navy, reversing cuts to the Army and increasing the size of the Air Force.

"He just wants to do more of everything, he wants the U.S. to be everywhere," Friedman said. "It seems to be unlikely that the scoring of the 2012 budget would be enough money even to do all those things."

Rubio specifically said he would fully fund the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine replacement program, estimated by some to cost about \$10 billion over five years, according to reports.

He also promised more broadly to modernize the current assets and invest in innovation to U.S. forces so they can win today and in the future.

"If I become president, the days when a father, son and grandson all fly the same plane will be over," Rubio said, referring to the B-52 bomber.

He called for funding two Virginia-class attack submarines per year, up one boat from the current schedule. The program is cited as one of the Defense Department's rare on-time and on-budget programs, and is built by two shipyards: General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Conn., and Huntington Ingalls Industries in Newport News, Va.

Rubio said the accelerated purchasing of submarines will help the employees of Granite State Manufacturing, where he gave the speech and where components will be manufactured, and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in New Hampshire, which will be involved in maintenance.

He also called for fully funded missile defense.

Without speaking specifically about Rubio's plan, Chris Harmer, a senior naval analyst with the Institute for the Study of War, said the military is long overdue for some maintenance after operating a high tempo for years and that kicking the can down the road will only make the fixes more expensive.

"For at least three years now, probably closer to five, the Pentagon has been conducting operations and deployments without adequate funding for training and procurement. That bill for deferred training, maintenance and procurement is now coming due," Harmer said.

In his speech, Rubio said America's adversaries are taking advantage of the drop in readiness by investing more heavily in their own national defense, saying that Russia has increased its military spending 20-fold since 2000.

"They are sprinting up behind us, investing heavily in their own forces to close the gap in military strength," he said.

But Friedman took issue with Rubio's math, calling the comparison "dishonest" because it doesn't account for inflation.

The real increase is closer to four-fold, from \$29 billion in 2000 to \$120 billion in 2015, but it takes four or five rubles now to buy what one did in 2000 because of high inflation, he said.

Rubio also repeated a widely criticized statistic: that the Navy fleet is the same size or smaller than it was in World War I. While the numbers are close, critics point out that the capability of today's ships are significantly greater than ships from that era.

Navy Secretary Ray Mabus pushed back against similar comparisons of fleet size from other GOP candidates in August. He said that in the five years before he became secretary, the George W. Bush administration had ordered 27 ships. He has since ordered 70. He also points out that it takes time to grow a fleet, since ship development and construction takes years.

The World War I comparison is the same one GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney made in 2012.

"That's pretty irrelevant. We also have fewer telegraph machines than we did in World War I and we seem to be doing fine without that," Mabus told Politico. "Look at the capability. Look at the missions that we do."