



## Guy W. Farmer: How to cut the defense budget

By: Guy W. Farmer - December 2, 2012

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As our nation approaches the so-called “fiscal cliff” at the end of the year, it's becoming increasingly apparent that President Obama and congressional Democrats will be forced to agree to meaningful spending cuts if they want to increase taxes on millionaires and billionaires. Nothing is off the table, including defense spending, which accounts for nearly 20 percent of the overall federal budget.

Last month I attended a very informative lecture on “Why the U.S. Can and Should Cut Military Spending” sponsored by Ty Cobb's nonpartisan National Security Forum group in Reno, and came away convinced that Dr. Chris Preble of the libertarian CATO Institute was correct when he called for significant cuts in the defense budget.

Dr. Preble told his audience that we should reduce our defense spending, encourage our allies to assume greater responsibility for their own defense, and avoid the tendency to intervene militarily in faraway conflicts. He cited four important “strategic misapprehensions”:

- Counterterrorism requires nation-building, aka COIN, and we can master nation-building (think Iraq and Afghanistan).
- Alliances distribute our defense burden rather than adding to it.
- Primacy pays; we should try to run the world, and
- Security threats are always imminent, and therefore require urgent attention and persistent global presence.

Dr. Preble revealed that the U.S. accounts for nearly half (47.6 percent) of global defense spending — more than the next 10 countries combined — and questioned why we need more than 70,000 American troops in Western Europe and nearly 40,000 troops in South Korea 30 years after the Cold War ended. Good questions. In fact, I'll note that the military has more uniformed band members than the total number of American diplomats stationed overseas. Clearly, this implies the militarization of U.S. foreign policy, when the Pentagon predominates over the State Department, which is charged with carrying out our policies overseas.

The militarization of U.S. foreign policy was frequently mentioned by former Defense Secretary Robert Gates and I saw it in action when I went to Grenada on TDY during Operation Urgent Fury, the 1983 multinational invasion of that small Caribbean island. The military had all the assets while we civilians had to scrounge for communications

equipment and transportation.

And finally, Dr. Preble laid out his “new rules for the 21st century”: (1) We should not engage in overseas military operations unless there is a compelling U.S. national security interest at stake, (2) there must be strong public support for the mission, (3) the mission must be clearly defined and reasonably attainable and (4) we should remember that war is a last resort. Amen!

So even if the defense budget sustains significant cuts during “fiscal cliff” negotiations, the U.S. will remain by far the strongest nation on earth. Perhaps the negotiators could begin by eliminating weapons systems that the Pentagon doesn't want and doesn't need, like the \$2.5 billion Global Hawk unmanned drone program. That would be a promising start.

- Guy W. Farmer, of Carson City, is an Air Force veteran who often dealt with political-military issues during his U.S. Foreign Service career.