

U.S. MILITARY SPENDING: Hundreds of Billions for Foreign Wars, How Much for National Defense?

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The original version of this article was written in 1999 by Randall Forsberg and Alex Carlin. Ms. Forsberg died in 2007. This updated version, done after her death, maintains the same methodology as the original. The updating was done by Alex Carlin, with help from the World Security Institute and Global Action to Prevent War. Mariam Grodzins assisted in the preparation of the manuscript.

“There’s a big debate right now about where 3000 marines in Okinawa should go. My suggestion is Nebraska.”—Congressman Barney Frank

INTRODUCTION

For years, the debate about military spending has divided those who assert the need for "a strong defense" from those who argue that military spending is excessive. Put this way, the debate never gets to the heart of the issue.

The truth is that a shockingly small part of the U.S. military budget is earmarked for defense, that is, for the actual protection of U.S. territory. Following 9/11, spending on territorial defense increased due to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. However, military forces and security maintained specifically for the defense of U.S. territory still take up only a small portion of the total amount of U.S. military spending, and almost none of the budget for the Department of Defense (DoD), which is projected to reach a staggering \$739 billion dollars in Fiscal Year 2011.

Where does this \$739 billion go? Nearly all of it goes to forces intended for use in foreign wars, and for projecting power and influence outside U.S. borders. Therefore, these DoD expenditures, rather than addressing U.S. national security threats directly, actually affect a variety of other foreign policy issues: To what extent should the U.S. prosecute or intervene in foreign conflicts? To what extent should the U.S. continue to spend vast sums to project power globally? To what extent should the territory of other countries be our concern? And, what role should all members of the international community, including the U.S., play together to prevent and minimize armed conflict around the world?

This paper identifies funds that actually go to national territorial defense, and distinguishes those allocations from funds that go to forces for other purposes overseas. And then, when the categories of military spending are finally clarified, and the genuine defense expenditures are made distinct from the non-defense expenditures, the figures are so shocking that they can be a catalyst to transform the policy debate.

This paper also offers a way to take advantage of this clarification by outlining an alternative plan for military spending that is much more fiscally conservative than the current policy, but delivers more security than we have today.

Most of the figures and terminology come directly from unclassified sources published annually by the U.S. Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Homeland Security. World Security Institute (formerly Center for Defense Information) contributed research.

MILITARY SPENDING TODAY

PROTECTION OF U.S. TERRITORY

Deterrence

The 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and other U.S. targets notwithstanding, the only weapons in the world capable of broadly destructive military attacks on U.S. territory are the hundreds of long-range ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads—mostly in land silos and on submarines—held by Russia and to a lesser extent China. (France and the UK also have this capability, but are not considered a threat.)

Despite advances in technology, there is still no effective defense against a massive attack by long-range ballistic missiles. The only protection offered by policymakers against large scale nuclear attacks is the policy of “deterrence.” U.S. nuclear missiles are intended to deter Russia, China and other nations from launching a missile attack by posing a threat of retaliation in kind. Nuclear deterrence is actually a form of psychological warfare—since neither the U.S. nor its potential nuclear adversaries can effectively (completely) stop the other side's incoming missiles, the “defensive” role of the missiles on each side is to strike enough fear in the hearts of the opposing leaders that they are never tempted to launch their missiles in the first place.

Development and on-going maintenance of nuclear warheads, along with associated command and control and non-proliferation activities, is conducted by the Department of Energy and its National Nuclear Security Administration. The FY 2011 request for this appropriation is **\$11.2 billion**. This includes over \$2 billion in funds to support the current administration’s stepped-up efforts on nuclear non-proliferation. It also supports stockpile management and what are called “major infrastructure improvements.”

The nuclear-weapon delivery systems, such as missiles, planes and submarines, are developed, produced, manned, maintained, and protected by their respective DoD services. Estimating these costs within a given fiscal year is extraordinarily difficult given that many such systems and personnel perform duties relating to both non-nuclear and nuclear weapon operations. The DoD does not specifically break out all of these costs. The most extensive analysis (Steven I. Schwartz, Atomic Audit, p. 111—for FY2008) estimates DoD nuclear force and operational support costs of **\$22.5 billion** and this probably remains the best current cost approximation (“Nuclear Security Spending,” Stephen I. Schwartz with Deepti Choubey, 2009).

The FY 2011 request for Deterrence, that is, the U.S. nuclear force (including all the above mentioned related costs) is approximately \$33.7 billion.



Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD)

In 2002, administration of ballistic missile defense, or “Star Wars” type systems, was consolidated and renamed the “Missile Defense Agency.” At this time, a number of systems exist in various stages of development.

These systems are designed to defend against large-scale attacks from Russia and China, and also against small scale “limited” ballistic missile attacks including regional missile threats to U.S. forces (and even targets in “space”). The “attackers” may include North Korea, non-state actors, and possible future entrants such as Iran.

In theory, BMD can be categorized as a genuinely defensive military system. In practice, however, two points should be acknowledged:

- (1) BMD is viewed by many as an offensive weapon because it makes a “first strike” more viable by reducing effective retaliation—reducing deterrence.
- (2) It has long been recognized that BMD can be overwhelmed by an expansion of the opponent's forces, provoking an endless arms race. As a result, long-term BMD will be immensely costly, if it ever succeeds technically. Thus far, no prototype appears to show signs of success.

Therefore, to say that BMD is actually protecting U.S. territory is a highly problematic statement.

The FY 2011 appropriation request for all BMD is \$9.9 billion.



Air Defense and Tracking

In FY 2011, 1010 Air National Guard, 134 Active Air Force, and 214 Air Force Reserve personnel will comprise Air Sovereignty Alert operations to man the now 18 alert bases responsible for U.S. territorial defense (16 of the bases are ANG, two are AF). These FY 2011 personnel, operations and maintenance costs are **\$256 million**.

Command and control of this domestic air defense system is performed by the same personnel (including the Joint Air Defense Operations Center for NORAD and U.S. NORTH COM) that track space objects and provide early warning of missile attack. These FY 2011 personnel, operations, and maintenance costs are **\$92 million**.

The FY 2011 request for the Air Defense and Tracking appropriation is \$348 million.



Civil Defense

Army and Air National Guard support 55 “Civil Support Teams” and 17 “Enhanced Response Force Packages.” The FY2011 Operations and Maintenance for these units and their transport is **\$362 million**. The “Teams” are 22-person units, and the “Packages” are 170-person units. Hence, over 4,000 persons are likely in, or supporting, the units, with estimated personnel costs of **\$360 million**.

The FY 2011 request for the Civil Defense appropriation is \$722 million.



Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

DHS was forged largely in the aftermath of 9/11. It includes functions and agencies as diverse as U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (the largest DHS budget item), the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Secret Service, and the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (which is in part a National Guard function), airport screeners, and other security-related functions.

DHS has stated its mission as:

- *Preventing Terrorism and Enhancing Security*—Guarding against terrorism was the founding mission of DHS and remains the top priority today.
- *Securing and Managing the Nation's Borders*—DHS monitors air, land, and sea borders to prevent illegal trafficking that threatens the U.S., while facilitating lawful travel and trade.
- *Smart and Effective Enforcement of Immigration Laws*—DHS is responsible for enforcing the nation's immigration laws while streamlining and facilitating the legal immigration process.
- *Safeguarding and Securing Cyberspace*—DHS defends against, and responds to, attacks on cyber networks—analyzing threats and vulnerabilities, coordinating the response to cyber incidents and working with the private sector and our state, local, international and private sector partners to ensure that our computers, networks, and cyber systems remain safe.
- *Preparing for, Responding to, and Recovering from Disasters*—DHS provides the coordinated, comprehensive federal response in the event of a terrorist attack, natural disaster or other large-scale emergencies while working with federal, state, local, and private sector partners to ensure a swift and effective recovery effort.

The FY 2011 request (completely separate from DoD) for the Homeland Security appropriation is just over \$56 billion.



Defense Against Conventional Attack

No country has the naval or air forces or the logistical support needed to launch a conventional military attack on U.S. territory. It is therefore understandable that the U.S. does not currently allocate any funds specifically to defend against a military attack by another country's conventional (non-nuclear) ground, air, or naval forces. Rather, our large conventional armed forces which are perceived by many to exist for the purpose of defending the U.S. against a conventional attack are currently geared for other purposes, such as foreign wars.

Forces for Use Overseas

THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT BUDGET

The DoD budget is broken down into two categories: The Base Budget and Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO).

The Base Budget

Nearly all of the Base Budget is dedicated to support forces that are available for various roles overseas: to prosecute foreign wars, to help defend certain nations from external

attack, to intimidate certain nations, to conduct other forms of unilateral and multilateral intervention, and, in theory, to conduct humanitarian interventions within other nations.

Primary Categories in the FY 2011 Base Budget Request (in billions)	
Military Personnel	\$138.5
Operation and Maintenance	\$200.2
Procurement	\$112.9
Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation	\$ 76.1
Military Construction	\$ 16.9
Discretionary (Revolving)	\$ 2.4
Family Housing	\$ 1.8

Broken down by service category, the figures look like this:

Army	\$143.4
Navy (Marines)	\$160.6
Air Force	\$150.0
Defense-Wide	\$ 94.9

The Army and the Marines are organized into divisions and brigades of ground troops with tanks, helicopters, artillery, and non-nuclear anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns and missiles.

The Navy has two main force components, called “Power Projection” and “Sea Control” forces. The Power Projection forces are centered on aircraft carriers and amphibious assault ships—floating bases for Naval air forces and Marine ground troops, which can launch an assault from offshore in any part of the world where the United States does not have access to secure land bases. Carrier and amphibious battle groups include a covey of other ships for their own protection and support: cruisers, destroyers, and frigates equipped with anti-aircraft and anti-submarine armament; “hunter-killer” submarines, designed to identify and destroy other submarines; and unarmed support ships dedicated to the continual re-supply of fuel, ammunition, food, and so on. Sea Control naval forces have the job of keeping the sea lanes open for commercial traffic and for sea transport of military forces and supplies. (In the past, this meant being able to find and destroy Soviet ships and submarines equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles and torpedoes.)

The Air Force has two main components: Tactical Air power, comprising fighter and attack aircraft, which are organized in squadrons and wings; and Airlift, comprising large transport aircraft for moving ground forces and their equipment, as well as supplies for the Tactical combat aircraft.

The Base Budget request is \$549 billion, almost none of which is directed to territorial defense. One significant exception is the above mentioned \$22.5 billion for delivery systems and personnel involved in nuclear weapon “deterrence.” The other exceptions for air defense, tracking, and civil defense add up to slightly more than \$1 billion.

The FY 2011 Base Budget request for use overseas is approximately \$525 billion.



The Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) Budget

OCO primarily funds the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, plus select counter-insurgency operations in Pakistan.

\$43.4 billion is requested for Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq), \$110.3 billion requested for Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), and about \$5 billion for Pakistan.

The FY 2011 OCO Budget request is \$159 billion.



Summary of Current Spending for Protection of U.S. Territory	
Deterrence	33.7 billion
Ballistic Missile Defense	9.9 billion
Air Defense and Tracking	0.3 billion
Department of Homeland Security	56.0 billion
Civil Defense	0.7 billion
TOTAL	100.6

Forces For Use Overseas	
From the Base Budget	525 billion
Overseas Contingency Operations Budget	159 billion
TOTAL	784 billion

ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

DETERRENCE

Regarding our nuclear forces maintained for deterrence, cutting back our current force of several thousand nuclear warheads to a “minimum deterrent force” of a few hundred would create a more secure environment, in two ways. First, retiring the land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and B-1 and B-2 bomber aircraft, leaving only the nuclear missiles based on submarines, goes a long way towards ending fears of

hair-trigger alerts and pre-emptive, disarming strikes. Second, after replacing the multiple nuclear warheads on the submarine-based missiles with single nuclear warheads—reducing the force from many thousand nuclear bombs to a few hundred—the world will see that the United States has abandoned its decades-old “nuclear-war-fighting” strategy (being prepared to escalate to a nuclear attack on hundreds or thousands of military targets in an effort to support U.S. troops overseas), and is limiting its remaining nuclear weapons to the more narrowly defensive role of protecting U.S. territory from threats of nuclear attack (“Deterrence”). This will help stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons to more and more countries, and promote steps toward global nuclear disarmament.

Moreover, a cutback in the size and scope of U.S. strategic nuclear forces would make it possible to shut down most of the nuclear-weapon activities of the Department of Energy. A small team should be retained for know-how, along with a somewhat larger team assigned to the dismantling and disposal of the tens of thousands of nuclear weapons and fissile material that remain in storage today.

With current spending on deterrence standing at about \$33.7 billion, and taking into account the above mentioned cutbacks in such forces, the authors suggest a budget for deterrence of \$15 billion.



DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS)

DHS has legitimate goals regarding small-scale defense of U.S. territory, plus preparation for, response to, and recovery from disasters. Cyber attacks, and threats such as weapons crossing borders in passengers’ suitcases, container ships, or commercial airplanes, can be handled by this department. The budget of the Department of Homeland Security, by remaining close to its current level, will give the U.S. more than enough resources for its citizens to feel secure in these areas.

We would suggest a budget for the Department of Homeland Security of \$50 billion.



AIR DEFENSE, TRACKING, AND CIVIL DEFENSE

We believe that the budget for Air Defense, Tracking, and Civil Defense should be similar to what is currently budgeted, that is, about \$1 billion.



SUBTOTAL OF PROPOSED NATIONAL DEFENSE SPENDING

In sum, our proposed budget for National Defense narrowly defined, that is, the protection of U.S. territory, is as follows:

Deterrence	\$15 billion
Homeland Security Department	\$ 50 billion
Air Defense, Tracking, and Civil Defense	\$ 1 billion
Subtotal: National Defense	\$66 billion

DEFENSE AGAINST CONVENTIONAL ATTACK

Today, no country has the naval or air forces or the logistical support needed to launch a conventional (non-nuclear) military attack on U.S. territory, and so, accordingly, no spending is required to meet any current conventional threat. However, this situation could change over time. Therefore, additional spending may be required to handle any future threat of a military attack by another country's conventional ground, air, or naval forces. This spending is discussed in the following section.

DEFENSE AND PEACE IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

The United States, as the world's wealthiest nation, is expected to take the lead in international affairs. But this need not and should not mean that U.S. leaders' assume the right to decide if and when the "international community" should intervene militarily in a foreign war, and if so, conducting the mission alone or under their own authority.

The current unilateral U.S. approach to war and peace around the world leads to the current situation in which taxpayers pay over \$700 billion per year to finance a military establishment that is geared neither to defend U.S. territory nor to help people working for peace in war-torn countries.

This article argues in favor of an alternative system, in which rights, responsibilities, risks, and costs are genuinely shared by the international community. The new system would be a far more effective means of preventing and ending war than the current unilateral approach. Assigning to itself the roles of "jury, judge, and executioner" certainly impedes the spread of peace and democracy. The new system would be far more likely to succeed, and would cost U.S. taxpayers far less.

A detailed guide to such a system is offered in the program of a new international movement called Global Action to Prevent War (GAPW) (see www.globalactionpw.org). The GAPW program includes plans for the gradual transition to an international collective defense system that addresses the critical scenarios of threats to U.S. national security, and is designed to pick up threats to all nations, not just the U.S. Step by step, regional and global security systems would be built up while national militaries shed their offensive, border crossing capabilities. As U.S. citizens trade in their “go it alone” approach, wars become less and less likely. Each step of the way leads to a gain, rather than a loss, in security.

The GAPW plan includes interrelated systems for conflict resolution, some of which already exist today, plus new ones. For example, if an oppressed group in Uganda needs help in ending human rights abuses, there are a number of agencies to which it might appeal. The GAPW could take its place among them, providing personnel, including police and mediators, and, if necessary, armed soldiers, to undertake appropriate actions (www.globalactionpw.org/?page_id=60). This approach would be much more likely to prevent atrocities and avert escalations into greater conflicts and wars than the current option of waiting and hoping for the U.S. or some other major powerful country to take action, or waiting for the UN to cobble together sufficient peacekeepers using current systems and procedures.

This article argues that **\$100 billion** should be spent on these new systems that prevent and end cross-border attacks, including those against the U.S. This amount is greater than the military budget of any other nation today and, together with the additional spending of other countries, this should be more than enough to preserve or restore peace around the world in the event of cross-border aggression or even internal genocide.

Since presently no country has the naval or air forces or the logistical support needed to launch a conventional (non-nuclear) military attack on U.S. territory, this level of spending is enough to keep the U.S. territory safe from any current conventional ground, air, or naval threat. And because the current level of conventional threat is so low, we will have plenty of lead time to increase this spending if emerging threats are detected and require more spending.

Globally, this \$100 billion is a large enough U.S. contribution today to keep the peace in the world’s most contentious hotspots, including the Middle East and Korea. But to be prudent, such hotspots should be reassessed frequently to determine what the world needs to do collectively to keep the peace, and how much the U.S. contribution may have to increase.

Adding this \$100 billion to the \$66 billion allocated for national defense narrowly defined, we arrive at a total military spending package of **\$166 billion**. Compared with the FY 2011 budget of \$739 billion for the Defense Department plus the nuclear-weapon related activities of the Energy Department, this represents a savings of well over \$500 billion every year. In addition to supporting a military posture more likely to foster peace and democracy around the world, redirecting funds of this magnitude to constructive human ends would change the world (including the U.S.) in previously unthinkable, immensely positive ways.

CONVERSION, DISMANTLING, DISPOSAL, BASE CLOSINGS

Some of the redirected \$500 billion annual savings should fund "economic conversion" programs to wean some communities off dependence on high military spending. This should include funds to help with the problems associated with base closings, and the dismantling, disposal and clean up (to the extent possible) of military hardware as it is retired.

RELATIVE SPENDING

As noted by Glenn Greenwald in *Common Dreams* (2010), U.S. military spending levels are not justified by foreign military spending: "The U.S. spends almost as much on military spending as the entire rest of the world combined, and spends roughly six times more than the second-largest spender, China. Even as the U.S. sunk under increasingly crippling levels of debt over the last decade, defense spending rose steadily, sometimes precipitously. That explosion occurred even as overall military spending in the rest of the world decreased, thus expanding the already vast gap between our expenditures and the world's."

CIA, DIA, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT

These agencies also have large budgets, and their activities are closely related to the issues discussed in this article. However, in the interests of clarity, our scope is limited to the budgets of departments such as DoD and Energy, which are more directly connected to military spending.

THE NATIONAL GUARD

Within the FY 2011 DoD request, allocations for the Army National Guard are \$15.06 billion, and for the Air National Guard \$9.22 billion—a total of about \$24 billion.

Within this \$24 billion, the DoD budget request breaks down figures for the use of National Guard forces in Overseas Contingency Operations: \$1.37 billion for the Army National Guard and \$370 million for the Air National Guard are specifically included in the above mentioned \$159 billion OCO budget. It is difficult to track the remaining funding, but it is important to note that while these units were formerly restricted to domestic tasks such as disaster relief, now they are currently being used on a large scale to supplement "regular" Army and Air Force units fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Nearly 28 percent of total U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan at the end of 2007 consisted of mobilized personnel of the National Guard and other Reserve components (according to the Associated Press, February 12, 2008).

National Guard funding actually dedicated to guarding the nation is not currently apparent, other than a small amount for disaster relief.

HOW THINGS MIGHT CHANGE

LESS WASTE

The famous \$1,000 coffee pots and other scandals of waste are clearly the smaller part of the problem. The truly gigantic waste lies in the funding of monstrously expensive, unneeded weapons programs, and the maintenance of excess forces that are not necessary for territorial defense.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK LOOPS

International peacekeeping offers big benefits to defensively oriented military policies, and vice versa. A well-developed international peacekeeping system would make large national defense budgets unnecessary. And nations with small, defensive military budgets are likely to support international peacekeeping efforts because they cannot afford to go it alone. And then, as the peacekeeping systems become more successful, nations will feel safer and spend less on their military forces, which in turn makes international peacekeeping even more successful, further encouraging nations to reduce their offensive capabilities.

IMPROVED MINDSET

The “Overview” of the 2011 Department of Defense Budget submitted for Congressional approval provides a rationale for its vast request for military expenditures:

America’s interests and role in the world require armed forces with unmatched capabilities and a willingness on the part of the nation to employ them in defense of our interests and the common good. The United States remains the only nation able to protect and sustain large-scale operations over extended distances.

Unfortunately, the “large-scale operations” referred to here are ruinously expensive, and will leave our nation financially unable to solve its most important problems, including climate change, crumbling infrastructures, budget deficits, etc. Fortunately, as this paper shows, these “operations” are not necessary for our national security, and we have better alternatives that will keep our nation secure both militarily and financially.

CONCLUSION

The policy habits embedded in our latest military budget request can be broken; the addiction to bloated military budgets can be cured. To achieve such a big change in policy we will need a massive public demand. First, taxpayers need to see just where their money is currently going, and then see clearly the better alternative, including a new, more collective role for the U.S. to play in the world.

The rewards are great, including over 500 billion dollars in savings every year. But it will take more than tinkering. It will require more than canceling a few aircraft orders, re-deploying a few battalions, and closing a few bases. The changes we need are vast and wide-ranging. We must first wipe the slate completely clean and ask the key question: “what does defense spending look like when it is limited to the defense of U.S. territory?”

At the same time we must make a commitment to global collaborative security as we build up international institutions of conflict resolution. Then we can look to a future where we project the power of international law more than the power of weapons.

Proposal for the US Military Budget	
Defense of U.S. Territory	\$ 66 billion
Contribution to the Global Security System	\$100 billion
TOTAL	\$166 billion

