



Why We Must Reduce Military Spending

By Rep. Barney Frank and Rep. Ron Paul

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As members of opposing political parties, we disagree on a number of important issues. But we must not allow honest disagreement over some issues to interfere with our ability to work together when we do agree.

By far the single most important of these is our current initiative to include substantial reductions in the projected level of American military spending as part of future deficit reduction efforts. For decades, the subject of military expenditures has been glaringly absent from public debate. Yet the Pentagon budget for 2010 is \$693 billion -- more than all other discretionary spending programs combined. Even subtracting the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, military spending still amounts to over 42% of total spending.

It is irrefutably clear to us that if we do not make substantial cuts in the projected levels of Pentagon spending, we will do substantial damage to our economy and dramatically reduce our quality of life.

We are not talking about cutting the money needed to supply American troops in the field. Once we send our men and women into battle, even in cases where we may have opposed going to war, we have an obligation to make sure that our servicemembers have everything they need. And we are not talking about cutting essential funds for combating terrorism; we must do everything possible to prevent any recurrence of the mass murder of Americans that took place on September 11, 2001.

Immediately after World War II, with much of the world devastated and the Soviet Union becoming increasingly aggressive, America took on the responsibility of protecting virtually every country that asked for it. Sixty-five years later, we continue to play that role long after there is any justification for it, and currently American military spending makes up approximately 44% of all such expenditures worldwide. The nations of Western Europe now collectively have greater resources at their command than we do, yet they continue to depend overwhelmingly on American taxpayers to provide for their defense. According to a recent article in the New York Times, "Europeans have boasted about their social model, with its generous vacations and early retirements, its national health care systems and extensive welfare

benefits, contrasting it with the comparative harshness of American capitalism. Europeans have benefited from low military spending, protected by NATO and the American nuclear umbrella."

When our democratic allies are menaced by larger, hostile powers, there is a strong argument to be made for supporting them. But the notion that American taxpayers get some benefit from extending our military might worldwide is deeply flawed. And the idea that as a superpower it is our duty to maintain stability by intervening in civil disorders virtually anywhere in the world often generates anger directed at us and may in the end do more harm than good.

We believe that the time has come for a much quicker withdrawal from Iraq than the President has proposed. We both voted against that war, but even for those who voted for it, there can be no justification for spending over \$700 billion dollars of American taxpayers' money on direct military spending in Iraq since the war began, not including the massive, estimated long-term costs of the war. We have essentially taken on a referee role in a civil war, even mediating electoral disputes.

In order to create a systematic approach to reducing military spending, we have convened a Sustainable Defense Task Force consisting of experts on military expenditures that span the ideological spectrum. The task force has produced a detailed report with specific recommendations for cutting Pentagon spending by approximately \$1 trillion over a ten year period. It calls for eliminating certain Cold War weapons and scaling back our commitments overseas. Even with these changes, the United States would still be immeasurably stronger than any nation with which we might be engaged, and the plan will in fact enhance our security rather than diminish it.

We are currently working to enlist the support of other members of Congress for our initiative. Along with our colleagues Senator Ron Wyden and Congressman Walter Jones, we have addressed a letter to the President's National Committee on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, which he has convened to develop concrete recommendations for reducing the budget deficit. We will make it clear to leaders of both parties that substantial reductions in military spending must be included in any future deficit reduction package. We pledge to oppose any proposal that fails to do so.

In the short term, rebuilding our economy and creating jobs will remain our nation's top priority. But it is essential that we begin to address the issue of excessive military spending in order to ensure prosperity in the future. We may not agree on what to do with the estimated \$1 trillion in savings, but we do agree that nothing either of us cares deeply about will be possible if we do not begin to face this issue now.