

## The U.S. Military Needs to Budget: Decreasing Military Spending in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Abstract:** Current U.S. military spending comprises roughly 54% of federal discretionary spending. In 2015, the U.S. federal discretionary spending budget was about \$1.11 trillion dollars, \$598.5 billion of which went to the military.<sup>1</sup> For fiscal year 2017, Congress has boosted the amount spent on the military up to \$611 billion, roughly a 5% increase from 2016 levels of federal military spending.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the U.S. alone accounts for one-third of all military spending globally, and spends more on its military than the next 8 countries combined.<sup>3</sup> In short, considered in either absolute or comparative terms, the U.S. spends an extraordinarily large amount of money on the military.

In this paper, I argue that the U.S. ought to drastically reduce its military spending. I begin by pointing out that increased military spending does not straightforwardly improve either national or global security, and in fact may undermine both national and global security by a) shifting the balance of power that is so essential to stable international relations, by b) weakening the U.S.'s overall commitment to finding peaceful solutions to both existent and potential international and regional conflicts, and by c) creating an entire sub-culture of American citizens who are trained to respond to both interpersonal and political conflicts with the threat, and subsequent use, of physical force. There is some truth to the old adage that, when what you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Then, I go on to argue that increased military spending does not significantly help either the U.S. or the global economy, and in fact may be hindering both U.S. and global economic growth. It is true that the U.S. military does employ a large number of people and purchase tons of both material and non-material goods. However, because military jobs are prevented by military hiring and promotion practices from being market sensitive, military personnel are essentially prevented from competing for jobs in an open market, and so military wages can be (and are) kept artificially low, which in turn prevents economic growth. In short, the military operates as a monopoly, and thus has all of the economic problems of a monopoly. We would do better, I contend, to re-direct much of the federal funding that currently goes to the U.S. military into other areas, such as education, infrastructure, and regional stabilization, which more reliably contribute both to overall economic growth and to national and global security. I conclude by considering a number of readily available objections and responses to my two main arguments.

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1 Adam Taylor and Laris Karklis, "This remarkable chart shows how U.S. defense spending dwarfs the rest of the world," *The Washington Post*, 9 February 2016. Retrieved 25 May 2017.

2 John W. Schoen, "Here's how US defense spending stacks up against the rest of the world," *CNBC*, 2 May 2017. Retrieved 25 May 2017.

3 *Ibid.*