

Defending Defense – or Not: Let's Have The Debate

Written by Kathleen McCarthy
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For decades, the political machine has perpetuated a deliberate void in the average American's knowledge and understanding of our foreign policies, militarism versus defense, and the relative budgets for all three. The mainstream media gives these subjects a wide berth as far as meaningful coverage goes. Even the federal budget for defense breaks out military spending from other significant defense expenditures.

Let's review how U.S. defense spending compares to the rest of the developed world. Military spending in 2010 for Germany was \$46.8 billion, United Kingdom \$57.4 billion, France \$61.8 billion, Japan \$51.4 billion, Russia \$52.5 billion, and China \$114.3 billion. The U.S. was \$687 billion! That is nearly twice as much as all these other countries combined, adding up to \$384.2 billion by comparison, according to *2010 World Military Budgets*, issued by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditure Database.

This \$687 billion covers military spending but does not include other defense-budget items – which account for an additional \$225.1 billion (RCReader.com/y/defense) – including international development and humanitarian assistance (\$28.6 billion); conducting foreign affairs (\$15 billion); foreign information and exchange activities (\$1.6 billion); foreign military trust fund (\$26.9 billion); import-export bank loans program (\$600 million); contributions to international organizations (\$1.7 billion); veterans (\$141.4 billion); and defense-related activities (\$7.3 billion).

There is a breakdown of these budget categories at the above link that further illustrates the exhaustive spending that goes well beyond actual military defense. Interestingly, these budgets have caps, but if items are moved from base defense-budget spending to war-related spending, they avoid such caps. Regardless, Americans need to understand the rationale behind these

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excessive military expenses and decide for themselves how much of it complies with national goals for a strong defense and border protection.

With the exception of veterans' care, which arguably deserves a greater portion of the funding, Americans need to make the distinction between actual national-defense spending and militarism or interventionism spending. The distinction matters. We need to determine how much interventionism is justified and, in keeping with our values, actually contributes to our national security while honoring commitments to our allies within reason.

It is the height of hypocrisy to claim friendship with one one country while, in the spirit of equal opportunity, funding and/or arming it and its enemies. How is this honorable, let alone justified or productive foreign policy? These are serious questions for Americans to consider, but we need the proper data to make informed decisions.

Which brings us to the more important issue: All these military expenditures, whether for national security or interventionism, are made using borrowed money – 40 cents of every dollar. We are literally going broke implementing foreign policies that may or may not be demonstratively achieving goals of national defense but are definitely enriching a military industrial complex beyond imagining.

During last October's congressional hearing on war contracting, it was revealed that out of the annual \$150 billion spent on war contracting, \$60 billion of it was identified as either waste, fraud, or abuse – 40 percent! (These hearings can be viewed in their entirety online at C-SPAN's video archive.)

Many of these defense contractors, to keep revenues flowing, are tailoring military weapons for domestic deployment to police agencies across the nation. This proliferation is unconstitutional because it is military-grade weaponry for use against U.S. civilians. Weapons, including new technologies in nonlethal crowd control, armed helicopters and SUVs, and surveillance drones, are being deployed in our larger cities, funded mostly with federal grants. This is vital information almost completely ignored by the mainstream media. What threats could possibly justify ignoring the U.S. Constitution with such extreme measures domestically? What else don't we know?

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It always comes back to money. America's influence in the world, both at home and abroad, will greatly diminish if we do not have the economic fortitude necessary to successfully implement whatever foreign policies we adopt in the future. Without financial strength and stability, all the military posturing is for naught. History has proved that economic might yields far greater power to influence peace than all the weaponry in the world. The status quo, however, resists this ideology above all others.

Let's at least have an honest, informed debate on whether more non-interventionism is truly isolationism, and whether there are alternatives with more merit. We must know more, and since the mainstream media isn't sharing, we have to investigate for ourselves. Clearly the debate is needed, considering that we could almost cut our defense spending in half and still spend more than all the other major global powers combined.