

A True Strong Defense

Defense spending is one of the most sacred cows in the budget pasture. It is the farthest element away from the budget adjustment process and the one that almost all fear touching, let alone putting on a fiscal diet.

Yet when we talk about a strong defense, we are only as strong as our weakest link. A reckless defense spending policy, as we have now, is that weakest link. An out-of-control deficit needs to be fought with wisdom, adjustment and calibrated spending – not bloated, wasteful draining of our fiscal ammunition.

The United States needs a budget defense that protects Americans rather than wastes vast sums on hometown projects or garrisons in parts of the world where we have no interest, where it spends on weapons that crafting an agile and acute military force that PROTECTS and not on weapons not need or that postures merely to project. Protecting our nation also includes protecting our prosperity – and that cannot happen in a deficit defense.

Here is an irony: although defense has arguably the worst examples of bloating, waste, inefficiently and reckless spending – some parts of the defense sector have led in ways to make smart, sensible and strong reforms in the spending process by eliminating waste and thus make more potent the remaining spending.

It is irrefutable, as politicians from both parties have said, that if the nation does not make substantial adjustments in the projected levels for defense spending there will be incredible damage to our economy and a decimation of our quality of life.

Recasting defense priorities means not just spending changes but philosophical changes that redefine what U.S. defense needs should be – both what works best for the defense of America and what is, literally, the best bang for the buck.

Thus – and to be clear – this is NOT about cutting the money needed to supply U.S. troops in the field, to take care of those in uniform and those who have served, to provide benefits, training, and the best equipment and care. This is not about cutting real funds for combating terrorism. Our goal is to defend our nation the best way possible.

For example, the Armament, Research, Development and Engineering Center (ARDEC) at the Picatinny Arsenal in northern New Jersey has been a mainstay in producing vital military advancements for the Army and other branches since 1880, developing new

weapons and munitions and being a leading edge in research and development. It is the only military operation to win the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and is a consistent winner of the annual Army Greatest Invention awards.

One key reason: the facility has been successful is its in-house implementation of a Lean Six Sigma program, which is a highly disciplined approach to decision making that provides the mechanism to solve problems in an effective and efficient manner and achieve continuous process improvement. That also has an important budget punch, as ARDEC delivers the Army meaningful fiscal savings: \$230 million in FY 2009 and \$4 billion in savings since 2001.

Using ARDEC as a guide, the Army additionally believes it can use better management to reduce waste and avoid costs by at least 2 to 3 percent a year. So it saves dollars – while the improved equipment and materials SAVE lives.

Of course, that amount from one small program at one facility is just a small beachhead on the war against budget buffoonery. But beachheads are needed to begin the drive to victory – and if extrapolated throughout the military, it would be significant.

And let's not forget the independent Base Realignment and Closing (BRAC) commissions of the 1980s and 1990s, the highly successful body that curbed waste and made it easy for Congress to go along -- since no member of Congress ever had to vote for shutting down any particular military base. The military – with a strong whip from political leaders – can do it.

Today we have the bipartisan Sustainable Defense Task Force, experts on military expenditures that span the ideological spectrum who recently produced a detailed report with specific recommendations for readjusting Pentagon spending by approximately \$1 trillion over a 10-year period. Their plan would eliminate unneeded Cold War weapons and makes smarter more clinical decisions regarding overseas commitments, among other thoughts.

Even with these changes the U.S. will still be immeasurably stronger than any nation we may have to engage – and a leaner, less flabby military actually enhances security.

Despite the hype of Defense Secretary Robert Gates about cutting big-ticket military projects, the Pentagon's \$680 billion budget is actually slated to increase in coming years. So now WE must insist again. Waste not only burns valuable dollars, it jeopardizes focus on a true defense. A weak economy leaves us vulnerable and a scattering of dollars means true priorities are lost.

And really -- when was the last time we had a REAL audit of defense spending?

One would never deploy troops without a strategy. Why do we spend without a strategy? You can't spend what you don't have and if you do, you are in trouble. We need responsible government now.

