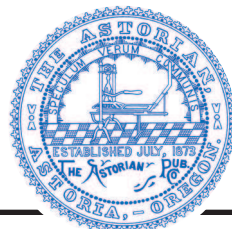


OPINION



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PRO-CON

Should the US increase military spending to keep pace with Russia and China?



Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ridge Leoni/U.S. Navy

The USS Gerald R. Ford embarked on the first of its sea trials in 2017 from Newport News, Va.

PRO: We need to beef up our military — and then some

WASHINGTON — Beer, pizza and defense. Americans spend more on each of these than anyone else. So what? These facts say nothing about how happy, healthy or safe we are. They are meaningless without context.

Perhaps Americans could do with fewer jumbo slices and more gym memberships. But when it comes to defense spending, America needs to spend more, not less.

For starters, comparing our defense spending to that of other nations doesn't make much sense.

Walmart has more than 2 million employees. The average small business has fewer than 100. Does that mean Walmart's payroll is out of whack? Of course not.

The U.S. is a global power, with global responsibilities and global economic interests to defend. We need a defense budget commensurate with those responsibilities and interests, not with other nations' lesser global posture.

Abandoning our responsibilities and interests is not a viable option. Europe can't defend Europe without us — that's why we have NATO. President Barack Obama tried walking away from the Middle East — only to see ISIS and Iran start to take over. Does anyone think turning Asia over to China is a good idea?

No, the U.S. neither can nor should be the world's policeman. Nor is it our responsibility to ensure all these places are the land of milk and honey.

But we do need to worry about big, destabilizing problems — things like wars and nuclear attack, that can spread untold misery around the world, to us and our friends included.

Nor should a particular foreign policy dictate the size of the Pentagon's budget.

The wisdom of staying in Afghanistan or hunting down terrorists in Africa can be debated. Still, in the end, the missions don't tell you how big a military is required.

That would be like picking the size of a fire department based on which fires you want to fight. A fire department has to be big enough to protect the community. The armed forces need to be big enough to defend the U.S. and its vital interests.

And, for sure, defense spending ought to be efficient and efficacious. That's a standard that should apply across all of our government. Our elected officials and public servants should be good stewards for the American taxpayer — period.

Adding all that context together, where are we on defense spending? The answer is: We are short of where we need to be.

Five years ago, my colleagues at The Heritage Foundation developed the Index of US Military Strength.

Our analysts established an objective, nonpartisan measure of defense sufficiency that graded how much military power America actually has in terms of manpower, readiness and weaponry; what the armed forces are required to do; and what the world was like — the actual threats that must be addressed.

Our latest analysis concludes that, after years of over-use and under-funding, the U.S. military is only marginally prepared to fight and win in a two-conflict scenario (the standard benchmark for a global power).

Scrimping on training has resulted in low readiness levels.

Air Force pilots, for example, fly only a fraction of the training hours they used to. The force isn't big enough.

The Navy, for instance, was unable — for the first time in a long time — to send an aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean to cover the Middle East.

And the force isn't modernizing fast enough. Marines are still driving combat vehicles built in 1972 — vehicles older than their drivers' parents.

America's competitors can count. They see that our armed forces are too small and ill-prepared to take on two regional powers simultaneously. They know that if America doesn't rebuild soon, they can soon match us in their part of the world.

That's a dangerous situation — with consequences far more costly than paying for an adequate national defense.

James Jay Carafano is an Army veteran and vice president for national security and foreign policy at the Heritage Foundation think tank.



JAMES JAY CARAFANO

CON: US military expenditures already dwarf our top rivals

COLUMBUS, Ohio — We do not need to increase military spending to deal with Russia or China. The 2019 military budget, authorized by Congress, stands at \$716 billion. That's "billion" with a "b."

That figure dwarfs expenditures by China and Russia. China spends \$175 billion a year. Russia, whose economy is lagging badly, has cut military expenditure in the past two years, and is now under \$60 billion.

Our competition with China is economic, not military. The only arena for military conflict is the South China Sea, but we don't need a beefed up military for that purpose.

In any event, we overplay the importance of the South China Sea to U.S. trade or other interests.

With Russia, our competition is political, not military. We have put Russia in fear by moving NATO into its backyard. That has generated reaction from Russia. There is much we could do to ease tensions.

Rather than spend more for military, we should examine current expenditures. We waste billions. We are building a new class of aircraft carrier for the Navy with little assurance of quality.

The nuclear-powered USS Gerald R. Ford, the first carrier in this new class, is costing \$13 billion. Now close to being online, it is experiencing what the Pentagon gingerly calls "manufacturing defect" issues.

It has an untried digital propulsion system that seems not to work. Carriers of this size, moreover, have been shown in war games to be vulnerable to anti-ship weaponry that has grown more sophisticated in recent years. So even if the Navy can get the USS Gerald R. Ford to sail, it may not serve its purpose. And the Navy wants three more.

If our security in the world is in jeopardy, it is not for lack of military hardware. It is because of our policies.

Our allies don't know what to expect from us. They are aghast at President Donald Trump's refusal to participate

in initiatives they find important to preserving world security. We perplex our friends by actions like relocating our embassy to Jerusalem, or repudiating the climate treaty and the nuclear arrangement with Iran.

We are separating ourselves from the world community. We are pulling out of treaties that call for resolving disputes peacefully, in the International Court of Justice.

When Palestine sued us, as it did recently, over the relocation of our embassy to Jerusalem, we overreacted.

Palestine was able to get the case into the International Court of Justice because both Palestine and the United States are party to a multilateral diplomatic relations treaty that lets states sue for violations of the law on diplomatic relations.

Seventy-one states of the world are parties. Instead of just dealing with the lawsuit, the White House announced that we will pull out of the treaty altogether. That is the same treaty that let us sue Iran when our people were taken hostage at the U.S. Embassy in Iran in 1979.

We should be protecting peaceful avenues to resolve disputes, not cutting them off. We should not fear application of universally agreed legal principles.

Military confrontation with either Russia or China is unlikely. If a serious confrontation were to come to pass, however, a U.S. president needs to have sufficient credibility to be able to convince allies to assist, even if some of their people would die in the effort.

Now we have little assurance of a response we might get. Our allies deal with Trump by appealing to his ego. They do not regard him as a reliable partner. They doubt his judgment, and even his truthfulness.

Security lies in being able to mobilize support from other countries in a crisis situation. We have enough weaponry. Spending more on weapons is a short-sighted avenue to national security.

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