

## The War on Terror

Tragically, the government programs and agencies you *do* support are the ones that are least constructive. What does society gain from the \$721 billion the Department of Defense spends each year?<sup>18</sup> Or the \$66 billion the Department of Homeland Security spends?<sup>36</sup> What have we gained from the \$4 trillion cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?<sup>37</sup> Does the \$1 trillion or more we spend each year on the military really make us more secure? Of course not. One of the open secrets in Washington that no politician dares utter aloud is that only a tiny fraction of our military spending is actually about national security. The truth is that the trillion-dollar-per-year War on Terror is a thinly veiled economic stimulus program designed to boost consumer spending and create jobs. And of course this permanent stimulus program works very well, just as all the economics textbooks say it should. Sadly, the only way politicians can sell stimulus programs of such magnitude to conservatives like yourself is to frighten you into thinking the Commies or the Terrorists or some other boogeymen who hate us for our freedoms will come swarming over the hills if we don't.

The tragedy is that spending \$1 trillion in almost any other conceivable way would be more constructive than spending it on the military. Tanks and fighter planes and destroyers cost millions of dollars to build, and so do the shells and missiles and bombs they carry. But these tools of war are of little use when they aren't blowing things

up. A 20-million-dollar bridge helps hundreds of thousands of people get to work every day. A 20-million-dollar tank that isn't firing on the enemy is useless. A 200-million-dollar highway can save hundreds of millions of man-hours that would otherwise be lost to traffic jams. A 200-million-dollar fighter plane that isn't firing on the enemy is useless. A two-billion-dollar rail system can transform an entire region. A two-billion-dollar navy destroyer that isn't firing on the enemy is useless.

The world is an imperfect place and armed forces are of course essential, but our military would be more than sufficiently intimidating to ensure our national security at a tenth of its present size. A single submarine such as the USS *Louisiana* (price: \$2 billion), with its armament of 192 independent nuclear warheads atop 24 Trident II ballistic missiles, could completely destroy any other nation on Earth a dozen times over.<sup>38</sup> There are 71 nuclear-powered submarines currently in commission, no less than 18 of which are the same class as the USS *Louisiana*.<sup>39</sup> Is this sort of psychotic overkill really the best way to secure our future?

Economic power is what matters in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Just imagine how much more powerful our economy would be if we invested \$1 trillion *each year* building roads, bridges, railways and other infrastructure. Imagine if we invested \$1 trillion each year building universities and research labs, funding scientific research, and incubating new technology. Imagine if we invested \$1 trillion each year building hospitals and clinics, funding medical research, and preventing illnesses before they

start with universal healthcare. Imagine if we invested \$1 trillion each year lifting the poor out of poverty with high-quality housing, job training, universal childcare and early childhood education. Any of these investments would advance our society by leaps and bounds. Instead, we squander these trillions on misguided and fruitless wars, on ships that sail in circles, on fighter planes that never fight, on bases we don't need, on missiles we will never fire, and on bombs we will never drop. Worst of all, we have asked – and continue to ask – the brave men and women of our armed forces to make sacrifices that we can't even begin to put a price on.

You complain bitterly that our government spends beyond its means. I agree, but I am deeply dismayed that you have called for cuts to social investments before cuts to our gargantuan, bloated military. Did we really need to cut NASA's \$19 billion budget in 2010 when it cost \$20 billion just to provide air-conditioning for our servicemen deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan that year?<sup>40,41</sup> Should we really have cut the \$8 billion Head Start early education program when we spent almost \$77 billion on F22 fighter planes that never flew in combat despite the fact that we were embroiled in *two* ongoing wars?<sup>42,43</sup> Given the number of dogfights we've had with the Taliban, couldn't we at least wait until we are at war with an enemy who has an air force before building 187 of these 413-million-dollar airplanes?<sup>42</sup>

There seem to be two major reasons for your hypocrisy in calling for government cutbacks while simultaneously supporting outrageously wasteful military

spending. First, conservatives are far more supportive of military action as a foreign policy instrument than liberals are. This undoubtedly stems from your propensity toward win-lose thinking and your correspondingly greater ability to demonize other human beings as *the enemy*. While our fellow human beings deserve our recognition and respect, *the enemy* does not. We do not listen to *the enemy*. We do not negotiate or compromise with *the enemy*. We impose our will upon *the enemy*, and if *the enemy* resists us then they must be defeated by any means necessary. Violence, torture, and even the nonsensical “preemptive war” of the Bush Doctrine are all legitimate foreign policy instruments in the eyes of conservatives. It should go without saying that this primitive, tribal form of selfishness is woefully maladaptive for our 21<sup>st</sup> Century global civilization. And second, I suspect that conservatives are more likely than liberals to work in defense-related industries that are dependent upon a steady financial flow of government contracts. I have no data to support this claim, but the logic seems compelling: how many bleeding-heart-liberal-tree-huggers are willing to build tanks and bombs for a living? As selfish as this second reason may be, it is at least understandable that you wouldn't want to bite the hand that feeds you, even if that hand represents the very opposite of the principles you claim to stand for.