

Defense Dollars

By Miriam Pemberton

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Summary:

To the Editor:

Richard Betts ("A Disciplined Defense," November/December 2007) laments that most "organizations associated with mainstream policy thinking," instead of arguing for military budget rationality, have been cowed into silence. He refers to recent proposals by my own organization -- the Institute for Policy Studies, which has been known over the years for its far-reaching proposals to scale back the military budget -- that focus on a set of cuts amounting to only about \$56 billion, or 11 percent of the total. Betts is right that this \$56 billion is only the low-hanging fruit.

Our report "A Unified Security Budget" also includes a set of recommendations for how to reinvest these funds in what Betts rightly calls the "comparatively starved" accounts for such nonmilitary tools as diplomacy, foreign aid, international organizations, and peacekeeping missions. Implementing these recommendations would signal a commitment to writing a new chapter in U.S. foreign relations.

Betts' proposal for Washington -- "Half a trillion dollars is more than enough" -- is still too much. It would leave the core infrastructure of the U.S. empire in place, in the form of more than 700 military installations spread across the globe, more than for any previous empire in history. The Pentagon's plans to turn these into what the journalist Robert Kaplan calls a "stealth" empire -- moving the pieces around and substituting more mobile, less visible "lily pads" for some of them -- will not change this fact. The only way of convincing the world that we are actually abandoning what Betts describes as the "dangerously misguided" policy of running a post-Cold War empire is by acting, visibly, to shrink it.

For this reason, the Institute for Policy Studies has now embedded its zero-sum rebalancing of military and nonmilitary security resources in a broader framework. This "just security" framework lays out a security budget that adds key elements to the core recommendations of the report "A Unified Security Budget." The first and most obvious is ending the war in Iraq. Cuts in subsidies for the arms trade is another important one. And finally, the institute recommends scaling back U.S. military bases in the near term by one-third. Our "just security" proposal outlines a way that our \$600 billion budget could be cut by a third, too. We look forward to engaging in the debate we hope Betts has finally begun.

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