



NATIONAL SECURITY BUDGETS TO MAKE AMERICA SAFER

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Since September 2001, federal budgets for national security have climbed more than 50 percent in real terms. Unfortunately, much of the added money reflects “business as usual” rather than programs aimed at making the nation safer from today’s threats.

Compared with past decades, national security spending makes up a relatively small share of the U.S. economy. Nevertheless, with the federal debt growing rapidly and as large numbers of baby boomers approach retirement age, many observers expect future federal budgets to be tight. Thus it is critically important to ensure that national security funds go to projects that make the nation more secure.

When it comes to making the nation secure, policy makers have a choice of tools at their disposal, including nonmilitary international measures and homeland security as well as the military. Compared with the military, investments in the nonmilitary tools of national security can be a financial bargain. For example, as Matthew Bunn of Harvard University has discussed, the Nunn-Lugar cooperative threat reduction program has already greatly improved global security prospects by locking up or destroying vast quantities of nuclear material in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere. At a cost of about one billion dollars a year, the program is a real bargain compared with our \$10 billion annual investment in missile defenses that have failed many of their tests. Because the nonmilitary programs are a relative bargain, and because they solve problems and open opportunities for which military tools are poorly suited, it is crucial that policy makers become more explicit about tradeoffs across the range of national security tools, and that we begin to shift some resources away from military tools toward the nonmilitary ones.

This article examines broad changes in national security budgets since September 2001. It first reviews the three categories of federal spending for national security. It then examines how budgets in those categories have changed since September 2001. It ends with a look at alternatives that seem more relevant in an era of international mass-casualty terrorism.

THREE WAYS TO IMPROVE SECURITY

Three categories of federal spending are closely related to national security. The first is national defense—the offensive element. National defense includes funds for the Department of Defense (DoD), nuclear activities of the Department of Energy, and smaller military-related programs in other agencies. The national defense budget pays to raise, equip, train, and maintain the armed forces, conduct military operations, and deter attacks on the United States and its allies. It also pays about 80 percent of the nation’s intelligence bills.

The second category is homeland security—the defensive element.¹ This category includes law enforcement to track down terrorists and bring them to justice, border and aviation security, physical and cyber protection of critical facilities and systems, improvements to the public health infrastructure, and preparations to respond to and mitigate the consequences of attacks should they occur.

The third category is international affairs—the preventive element. International affairs includes the conduct of foreign affairs and diplomacy through the State Department, economic and military aid to foreign countries, contributions to international organizations like the United Nations, and foreign information and exchange programs.

The Bush administration’s national security strategy calls for bringing to bear all the tools of statecraft and security, including elements of offense, defense, and prevention. Of course, no simple formula can tell U.S. leaders how spending should be divided among the three categories. National security policy serves multiple objectives: protecting U.S. sovereignty and territorial integrity and sustaining a suitable level of relative power in the world, as well as keeping people and infrastructure safe from the threat of direct attack. To those ends, the United States needs a strong military, regardless of the terrorist threat. It also devoted efforts to homeland security even before the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Moreover, even if terrorism were not a problem, international diplomacy and aid programs would be crucial to sustaining national security.²

Achieving U.S. security objectives in the future will require continued substantial investment across all three categories. Nevertheless, U.S. resources for national security are not inexhaustible. Setting priorities and explicitly considering tradeoffs among the

¹ Federal spending for homeland security is divided among numerous agencies, with the Department of Homeland Security receiving about one-half of the total funding. Unlike national defense and international affairs, homeland security is not tracked as a function in federal budgets. From 1999 to 2003, spending for homeland security and combating terrorism were tracked by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in an annual *Report to Congress on Combating Terrorism*. More recently, OMB reports homeland security funds in the budget’s *Analytical Perspectives*. State and local governments and business firms play a role in homeland security; thus federal costs understate the total cost to the nation.

² Cindy Williams, “Beyond Preemption and Preventive War: Increasing U.S. Budget Emphasis on Conflict Prevention” (Muscatine, Iowa: The Stanley Foundation, February 2006).

competing demands of offense, defense, and prevention are crucial for the nation to get the most out of its sizeable financial investment in security.

NATIONAL SECURITY SPENDING SINCE SEPTEMBER 2001

Between 2001 and 2006, annual budget authority for national security (including operations in Iraq and Afghanistan) rose by 80 percent in nominal terms and more than 50 percent after adjusting for inflation (see Table 1). The national defense budget grew by about 50 percent in real terms. Homeland security experienced the largest percentage rise, nearly tripling in real terms. Much of that increase occurred within DoD, however, in part due to recent accounting changes; homeland security spending outside DoD grew by a factor of 2.5. International affairs budgets grew by nearly 40 percent in real terms.

Table 1. Budgets for National Security			
	Budget Authority (Billions of Current Dollars)		
	2001³	2006 Estimate⁴	2007 Request⁵
Offense: National Defense			
Excluding Iraq and Afghanistan	318	444	463
Iraq	0	97	50
Afghanistan	0	19	---
Total National Defense	318	559	513
Defense: Homeland Security			
Total Homeland Security	17	57	58
Homeland Security Spending in DoD	4	17	17
Homeland Security Net of DoD	13	40	42
Prevention: International Affairs	20	32	34
Total	351	631	589
Sources: Author's calculations based on Office of Management and Budget, Congressional Budget Office, and Congressional Research Service documents. Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.			

Across the three categories, national security budgets for fiscal year 2006 come to \$631 billion, more in real terms than at any time in at least five decades. As in 2001, the lion's share goes to the offensive element (see Figure 1). In 2006, the federal government will spend about 14 times as much for offense as for defense, and about 17 times as much for offense as for prevention. One possible reason for such disparities is that defense and prevention are inherently less expensive than offense. If that is the case, then modest investments in those areas should yield greater payoff than marginal added investments in offense.

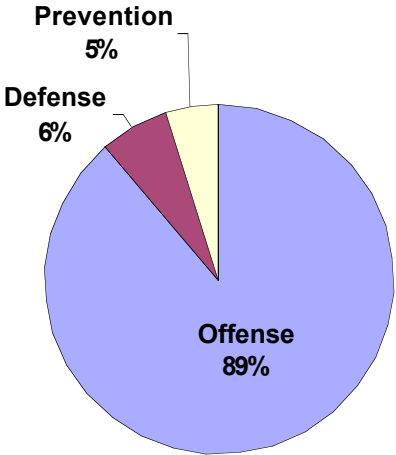
³ 2001 figures exclude post-9/11 emergency supplemental appropriations.

⁴ 2006 figures include the annual appropriation for fiscal year 2006 and the emergency supplemental appropriation signed by President Bush on June 15, 2006. The homeland security estimate for 2006 includes \$1.2 billion in supplemental funds for border security activities outside DoD and \$0.7 billion for border security activities involving the National Guard within DoD, but excludes \$2.3 billion allocated by the supplemental appropriation for avian flu preparedness as well as money allocated in the supplemental for disaster relief, community and economic development, and other funding related to the 2005 hurricanes. The international affairs estimate for 2006 includes \$3 billion for Iraq and \$1 billion for Afghanistan in the emergency supplemental appropriation.

⁵ The President's budget request for fiscal year 2007 includes a "bridge fund" of \$50 billion for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This table allocates the entire \$50 billion bridge fund to Iraq. Absent a major drawdown of forces early in fiscal year 2007, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to require emergency supplemental funding on the order of \$70 billion, in addition to the \$50 billion bridge fund included here.

Figure 1. US National Security Budget FY 2006

Includes Iraq and Afghanistan



MUCH OF THE RISE IN SPENDING IS UNRELATED TO FIGHTING TERRORISM

Unfortunately, much of the post-9/11 real increase in national security budgets goes not to make the United States safer from the threat of catastrophic terrorism, but to operations in Iraq and business as usual in the Department of Defense. Of the \$280 billion nominal increase from 2001 to 2006, the largest single share—some \$97 billion—goes for military operations in Iraq.⁶ The Bush administration argues that the war in Iraq is a necessary element of the fight against terrorism. Yet the existence of weapons of mass destruction or of prewar links between Iraq and Al Qaeda have not been demonstrated, casting doubt on the importance of the war to countering terrorism.

More than \$50 billion of the budget rise goes to increased investment in military equipment. Unfortunately, much of that money is not for the exploration of new technologies that might help to counter today's threats, but for technically troubled missile defense systems and for ships, aircraft, and ground vehicles better suited to conventional combat. Budgets for science and technology—the basic and applied research and advanced technology work that could lead to systems better suited to the new strategic environment—barely kept pace with inflation.

A large share of the post-9/11 rise in DoD's budget is for military pay and benefits, which climbed by about \$40 billion, largely because of entitlement expansions granted in 1999 and 2000 for service members and military retirees. Unfortunately, much of the new spending for military compensation will not make the nation safer. Pay raises for the men and women who are in uniform today may help the military compete as an employer in American labor markets as the Iraq war drains enthusiasm for service. But the billions of dollars in new entitlements for military retirees will do nothing for the 85 percent of service members who leave the military before becoming eligible for them; such entitlements will do virtually nothing to help the military compete as an employer.

About \$40 billion of the \$280 billion increase in annual spending is devoted to homeland security, the defensive component. A healthy share of that money, however, is for protection of facilities and forces inside DoD. The rise in homeland security spending outside DoD contributed just \$27 billion to the \$280 billion increase. Including funds added through the 2006 emergency supplemental appropriation, roughly \$11 billion of that rise goes to improvements in border and transportation security. Another \$4 billion goes toward emergency preparedness and response, much of it for grants to state and local governments to improve public health capacity or to prepare and equip local first responders. Only a few billion dollars of the increase go toward non-DoD research and development into technologies for homeland security.⁷ In particular, just \$1.8 billion of

⁶ Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," Congressional Research Service Report RL33110, April 24, 2006, p. 10. The figure includes funding in the administration's 2006 supplemental request for activities paid for through DoD budgets to support Iraqi security forces, coalition partners, and reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

⁷ For 2003 to 2006 figures, see Genevieve J. Knezo, "Homeland Security Research and Development Funding, Organization, and Oversight," Congressional Research Service Report RS21270, updated February 24, 2005.

the increase goes toward developing medical countermeasures to chemical, biological, nuclear, or radiological threats; a scant \$300 million pays for crucial research and development into technologies to detect and report on nuclear and radiological materials.⁸

Funding for international affairs, the preventive element, accounts for only \$12 billion of the \$280 billion increase in national security budgets between 2001 and 2006. Some \$2 billion of that is for President Bush's Global HIV/AIDS initiative. Another \$1.8 billion is for the Millennium Challenge Account, a program started by President Bush in 2002 to help certain developing nations improve their capacity for economic growth. Some \$4 billion, included in the emergency supplemental appropriation of June 2006, is to defray the wartime costs of the State Department's embassy in Baghdad, improve security, economic, and political conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and assist allies in the Middle East. In addition, a share of the new international affairs money goes to help U.S. allies in the fight against terrorism, including Afghanistan, Jordan, Pakistan, and the Central Asian Republics.

REALLOCATING RESOURCES TO PROVIDE GREATER SECURITY

Reallocating even relatively small amounts of the money devoted to offense could go a long way toward bolstering either prevention or defense. For example, for just half of the \$10.4 billion DoD plans to spend on missile defense programs in fiscal year 2007, the nation could triple spending for port security (planned at \$2 billion) and double spending to recapitalize the Coast Guard (planned at \$935 million).⁹ For what DoD spends on Iraq each month (currently about \$8 billion, according to the Congressional Research Service), the federal government could double planned FY 2007 spending for emergency preparedness and response (\$5.5 billion), nuclear detection (\$536 million), medical countermeasures to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats (\$2 billion), and enhancements to FEMA's alert and early warning systems (\$70 million).

Alternatively, for the \$2.8 billion the administration plans to invest in F-22 fighter planes built for dogfights with Soviet aircraft that were never produced, the nation could nearly double the administration's planned 2007 budget for Millennium Challenge. For the \$3.7 billion now allocated to the Army's technologically risky, increasingly costly Future Combat System, the nation could double foreign information and exchange activities (\$1.2 billion), double efforts to halt proliferation of nuclear materials and knowledge (\$1.2 billion), and still have money left over to improve resources for diplomacy (\$1.3 billion). Such shifts would better deliver on the administration's promise to use all the tools available to make the nation more secure. Even small shifts of funding from offense into defense and prevention could go a long way toward making the nation more secure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

⁸ OMB, *Analytical Perspectives*, Federal Budget for FY 2007.

⁹ At today's rates of spending, the Coast Guard's program to replace aging aircraft, vessels, and support systems will take 20-25 years.

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Cindy Williams is a Principal Research Scientist of the Security Studies Program of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her work at MIT includes an examination of the processes by which the U.S. government plans for and allocates resources among the activities and programs related to national security and international affairs, a study of options for reform of military personnel policies, and an examination of the transition to all-volunteer forces in the militaries of several European countries. Formerly she was an Assistant Director of the Congressional Budget Office, where she led the National Security Division in studies of budgetary and policy choices related to defense and international security. Dr. Williams has served as a director and in other capacities at the MITRE Corporation in Bedford, Massachusetts; as a member of the Senior Executive Service in the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon; and as a mathematician at RAND in Santa Monica, California. Her areas of specialization include the U.S. national security budget, military personnel policy, command and control of military forces, and conventional air and ground forces.

Dr. Williams holds a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of California, Irvine. She has published in the areas of command and control and the defense budget, and she is the editor of two books: *[Holding the Line: U.S. Defense Alternatives for the Early 21st Century](#)* (MIT Press 2001) and *[Filling the Ranks: Transforming the U.S. Military Personnel System](#)* (MIT Press, 2004). She is an elected fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration and a member of the Naval Studies Board, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the International Institute of Strategic Studies. She serves on the advisory board of Women in International Security and on the editorial board of *International Security*