

FOREWORD

Today, America's military is not in crisis. That could change, unless the nation commits to sustained and adequate levels of defense spending over the long term. *Four Percent for Freedom: The Need to Invest More in Defense* makes the case for a bipartisan consensus to maintain annual defense appropriations at 4 percent of Gross Domestic Product—GDP (the total measure of goods and services produced by the U.S. economy). Bringing together cutting-edge research and commentary by Heritage scholars this collection:

- Argues that measuring defense spending as a percentage of GDP is the most appropriate and realistic means to gauge America's commitment to ensuring an adequate national defense;
- Warns that without maintaining annual defense budgets at 4 percent of GDP America's military will become a "hollow" force placing the lives of our young men and women in uniform at risk and jeopardizing the Pentagon's ability to defend the nation's vital national interests;
- Demonstrates that a 4 percent level of spending is achievable and fiscally responsible, encouraging the military to prudently use its resources while not limiting the capacity of the U.S. economy to grow and prosper;
- Cautions that the nation won't be able to meet its obligations to our military without a bipartisan consensus in Washington committed to both maintaining adequate defense spending and addressing the pressing challenge of the historically unprecedented and unsustainable growth in Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid which are consuming ever larger portions of the federal budget.

In short, *Four Percent for Freedom* makes a compelling case that Congress must put the need for robust defense budgets and addressing current fiscal challenges at the front of its agenda—and then keep those priorities throughout the decades ahead. The reason is simple. To do anything less will put our men and women in uniform in harm's way without the equipment, training, and support they need to protect America.

U.S. history is replete with cautionary tales of the cost of playing politics with American security. After World War II, America's military was sadly neglected. When the Korean War broke out soldiers were thrown into battle with weapons that did not work, wearing sneakers instead of combat boots. Lives were lost needlessly, and the U.S. effort in Korea almost faltered because the nation was unprepared. After the Vietnam War, defense spending once again plummeted, leaving the Pentagon with a "hollow force" lacking in training and readiness and without enough money to fix its equipment or modernize for the future. After a decade of neglect, the cost of rebuilding the military during the Reagan years cost far more than if Washington had simply sustained a responsible level of defense spending year in and year out. These are lessons worth learning.

As America looks beyond the first years of the long war against terrorism and combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, the nation's military could well become "hollow" again—and it will unless Congress and future administrations commit to responsible levels of defense spending. The United States is a global power with global interests, and even with the support and cooperation of friends and allies around the world, America must have the capacity to secure its vital national interests. Sustained, robust defense budgets are a prerequisite for that effort.

Four Percent for Freedom: The Need to Invest More in Defense provides the rationale for sensible spending on defense; illustrates the dire consequences of inadequate funding for supporting our troops and promoting America's national interests; and lays out the policy challenges that have to be overcome to achieve the bipartisan consensus that will be needed in the next decade. It is a call to action to Congress and future administrations that they must heed in order to keep America safe, free, and prosperous in the 21st century.

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