A Conservative Defense Budget

Wilson Beaver[1]

The Constitutional Foundation

In the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, the Founders stated that the government has the responsibility to "provide for the common defence."[2] This is restated in Article 1, Section 8, as one of Congress's enumerated powers.[3] The Heritage Foundation's *Guide to the Constitution* calls this purpose "obvious—after all, it was by this means the United States came into being."[4] The question for Congress, the executive branch, and ultimately the American people, is how to right-size the defense budget to match the national security needs of the American people, an exercise best done by aligning the defense budget with the defense strategy of the United States so that the American military is equipped with the troops and weapon systems it needs to meet the challenges of each era.

Aligning the Defense Budget with Defense Strategy

Defense spending should be closely aligned with defense strategy with the capabilities and commands most relevant to the primary national security objectives of the United States receiving more funding than secondary or tertiary capabilities and commands. A conservative defense budget should reflect the realization that some degree of prioritization is necessary within strategic planning and that defense spending should flow from strategy. While being mindful of the multitude of threats America faces, in accordance with the past two *National Defense Strategies* (NDS),[5] the defense budget should recognize China as the primary challenge to the United States and allocate resources accordingly.

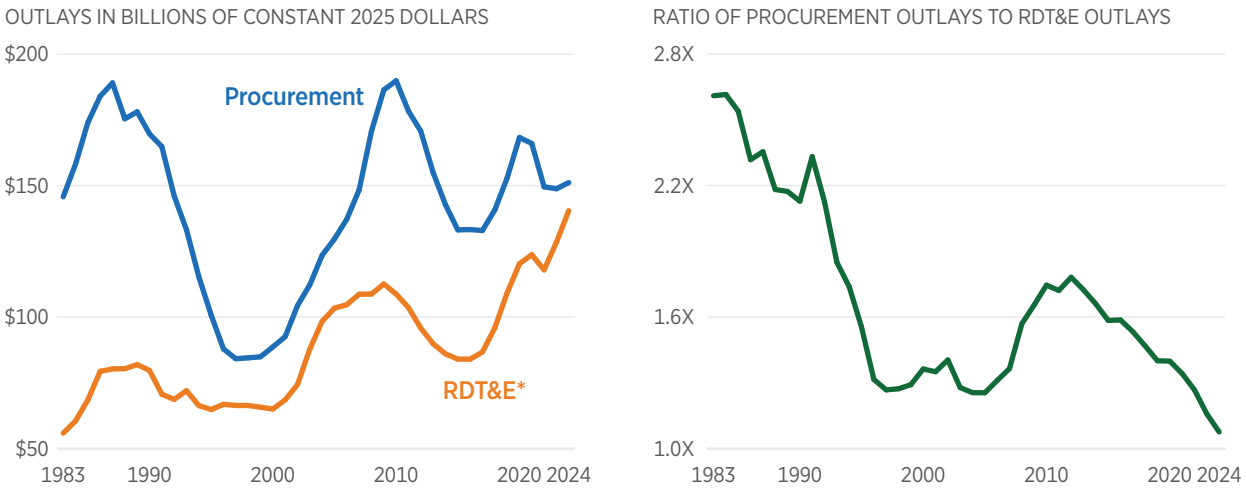
As public servants, Department of War officials have a duty to the American public to spend their money wisely. The department should be aggressive in cutting and reallocating waste and inefficiencies both because it is its duty and because waste and inefficiency limit the military's ability to achieve its prime objective: being a lethal fighting force capable of defending the American people and their interests. The intent is for more military spending to be directed more to the warfighter and less toward the defense agencies' bloated bureaucracies. Policymakers should be aggressive in identifying efficiencies and searching for reforms to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely and the military is getting the best product at the best cost in a timely manner.

Ships, aircraft, and munitions are the basis of real military capacity that potential adversaries are prioritizing, and they need to be similarly prioritized within the U.S. defense budget. When faced with budget constraints, the services invariably cut procurement. In the official fiscal year (FY) 2025 budget request, for example, the Navy chose to cut a *Virginia*-class submarine, and the Air Force chose to cut its procurement of F-35 fighter jets. Meanwhile, the Air Force increased its research, development, test, and evaluation (RDT&E) budgets, and the Navy proposed hiring an additional 2,000 civilian employees.

But procurement of critical capabilities, such as ships and aircraft, should be the *last* place the War Department chooses to cut when faced with budget constraints, particularly under current circumstances. Ideally, the department should cut bloat, waste, and non-military spending within the budget to pay for necessary procurement. Within RDT&E, the department must focus spending on the projects that are most likely to produce real military capacity, like the Next Generation Air Dominance

CHART 2

Department of War Outlays



* Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation.

SOURCE: Table 6-11, "Department of Defense Outlays by Public Law Title," in U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2025*, April 2024, pp. 162–169, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2025/fy25_Green_Book.pdf (accessed January 21, 2026).

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(NGAD) platform. Generalized RDT&E projects, or RDT&E projects of secondary importance, must be cut and reallocated to the procurement of ships, planes, and munitions.

Over the years, procurement spending as a percentage of total defense spending has decreased with money lost in the higher costs associated with personnel, the Operations and Maintenance "death spiral" caused by insufficient procurement of new systems, and what The Heritage Foundation and others have argued is a significant imbalance between procurement and RDT&E. During the Cold War, the ratio of RDT&E fluctuated, but for much of the period, it was around 1:3. Throughout the Cold War, the procurement and fielding of sufficient quantities of military hardware were given funding priority. During this period of procurement prioritization, era-defining technological breakthroughs ranging from stealth technology to the Global Positioning System (GPS) emerged from the defense industrial base.

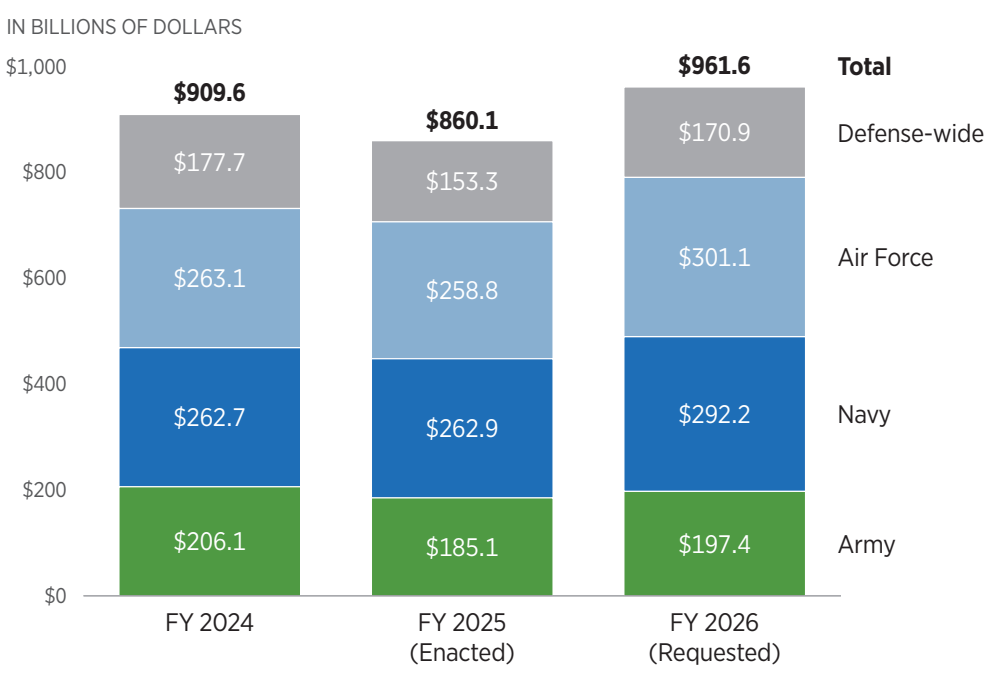
Since the end of the Cold War, the ratio has changed and is now approaching 1:1 in the latest defense budgets, with RDT&E at approximately $143 billion and procurement at $167 billion.[6] These numbers are imbalanced. It is, of course, important to invest in the future of the force, but not at so high a level that it detracts from the military's ability to field equipment and munitions that already exist for the security concerns of the present.

Understanding the Defense Budget

When discussing the defense budget, one should always begin by defining the terms being used. Depending on who is talking about the defense budget and the message that is being highlighted, different numbers can be used. In many cases, the choices being offered depend on how the specific institutions define the terms, and the implications are not immediately obvious.[7] Even within the executive branch, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of War have different concepts of the "defense budget." Congress has still another definition because it is organized by committees and focuses its attention on the different appropriations and authorization bills.

CHART 3

Department of War Total Budget by Military Department



SOURCE: Table A-2, "DoD Total (Discretionary + Supplemental + Mandatory Reconciliation) Budget by Military Department ($ in millions)," in U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, *United States Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request: Defense Budget Overview*, July 2025, p. A-2, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2026/FY2026_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf (accessed January 29, 2026).

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There is an initial division between discretionary and mandatory spending in the defense budget just as there is in the overall federal budget. Discretionary spending is the element of the budget that is annually debated and appropriated by Congress. Mandatory spending, on the other hand, is not debated annually and is defined largely by formulas that govern the various benefit programs operated by the federal government such as Social Security and Medicare. The defense budget includes both mandatory and discretionary funding, but most defense dollars are classified as discretionary.

Realistically, the defense budget for FY 2024, for instance, could be said to have been as low as $842 billion if you focus just on discretionary spending controlled by the Department of Defense or as high as $1.2 trillion if you include Veterans Affairs and other possible mandatory spending.

Of the many possible ways to consider the defense budget, it is important to highlight a few of the ones that are commonly used in the executive branch. The first one, known as 050, encompasses the War Department, Atomic Energy Defense Activities within the Department of Energy,[8] and other defense-related activities. This category was utilized in the Budget Control Act of 2011 to cap discretionary spending. It was also used in the legislation that raised the debt ceiling in 2024. Another important category, known as 051, is the War Department's portion of the national defense budget within OMB tables. It constitutes the major portion of 050 but is usually discussed and debated separately from the other functions within the category and is often referenced as the "defense budget."

Within the War Department itself, different sets of numbers are used to define the defense budget. The first is the 051 category because these are the funds under the department's control and include both mandatory and discretionary spending. Category 051 numbers can be described as the defense budget, and in many reports and news stories, these are the numbers that are most often used.

One additional set of numbers that is commonly discussed and characterized as the "defense budget" is the funding appropriated by Congress. Because the Constitution specifies that Congress must appropriate every dollar that is withdrawn from the Treasury, appropriations bills are among the most crucial pieces of legislation that are passed in any fiscal year.

The Department of War receives resources mainly through two distinct appropriations bills: Defense Appropriations and Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations. This division reflects the different public law titles and the characteristics of appropriated dollars that compose the defense budget.

The defense appropriations bill includes military personnel; operations and maintenance; procurement; RDT&E; and revolving funds. Military construction appropriations include mainly military construction funds and family housing.

Beyond the appropriations bill, the same resources that the War Department receives are also authorized by the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), a bill that has been passed and has grown in length for more than 60 consecutive years. The War Department is one of the very few federal departments that reliably has its funding both authorized and appropriated.[9] The NDAA is sometimes referred to as a defense policy bill because it does not actually appropriate dollars to the War Department; it sets policy and establishes limitations on how the appropriated dollars will be used through the fiscal year. The NDAA includes important measures that have both financial and practical implications for how the nation provides for the common defense.

Altogether, there are several ways to discuss and represent the defense budget. Foremost, an informed reader should understand who is communicating so that he or she can understand what one means by "the defense budget."

It is also important to know that defense is not the biggest item in the federal budget; entitlements constitute a much larger category.[10] Defense spending is not the primary factor driving the nation's financial problems, especially the explosive growth in public debt and the annual federal budget deficit. In addition, current plans have the relative burden of defense decreasing over time as the economy grows. Understanding the broader context of the federal budget is therefore very important when considering the defense budget.

The Burden of Defense on the Federal Budget

As in all things related to the budget, it is important to understand the burden of any financial expense relative to the available resources and the importance associated with the tasks that are being resourced. When commentators focus narrowly on discretionary spending, defense is usually noted as commanding a huge share of the budget. However, when one looks at the whole of the federal budget, the picture is quite different.

In the context of the whole federal budget, in FY 2025, for example, national defense as defined by the OMB consumed roughly 13 percent of the federal budget.[11] This is by no means an insignificant amount, but it is dwarfed by other federal expenditures, including health care insurance and provision, income security, and many other governmental functions for which Washington is currently responsible.

Medicare, Medicaid, and other health care spending accounts together comprise the biggest portion of the budget: 27 percent. Social Security constitutes the second biggest element at 19 percent. Income Security—a collection of programs such as Civil Service Retirement and Disability, Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Housing Assistance—follows closely at 18 percent. The 12 percent representing the broader national defense enterprise is followed closely by net interest on our debt, which currently stands at 8 percent, although the burden of servicing our national debt through interest payments is likely to increase as interest rates in the United States rise.[12] Every other function of the federal government, from the administration of justice to the collection of taxes, accounts for the remaining 16 percent. It is important to keep in mind how the government truly allocates taxpayers' dollars when considering the defense budget.

It is also important to understand the size of the federal government's obligation when compared to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Much of the nation's GDP is consumed by three different categories of federal spending that include both mandatory and discretionary spending: defense, non-defense, and interest on our national debt. This conveys two important messages:

- The relative burden of our national defense has declined steadily over the past 60 years.

- The portion of government resources allocated to the provision of non-defense services and goods has increased substantially over time.

All in all, the relative burden of defense has gone down over the past 60 years. Put another way, defense has become more affordable for the country. As noted above, regardless of what the defense budget's topline figure is, as public servants, War Department officials have a duty to the American public to spend their money wisely. The department should be aggressive in cutting and reallocating waste and inefficiencies both because it is the responsible thing to do with the public's money and because waste and inefficiency limit the military's ability to achieve its prime objective: being a lethal fighting force capable of defending the American people and their interests.

Trajectory of the Defense Budget

The Department of War organizes and reports on its budget in multiple categories and with multiple ways of displaying the information in a yearly document, the *National Defense Budget Estimates,* commonly known as the "Green Book" because of its seafoam green cover pages.[13] Many of its tables contain data from as far back as FY 1948. Many also contain estimates for the coming four fiscal years.

The Green Book also provides three different categories of resources: budget authority (BA); total obligational authority (TOA); and outlays. The simplest differentiation of these is that budget authority includes the new yearly resources that the department can obligate; total obligational authority counts resources appropriated in previous years that can be obligated in a different fiscal year; and outlays are actual disbursements made by the Department of the Treasury on behalf of the War Department. Of these, budget authority is the term used most frequently in public debate because it reflects the resources appropriated in the current fiscal year.

There is another differentiator that is relevant to understanding the data provided by the War Department: current versus constant dollars. Current dollars represent the face value of an item in the present, as if you are spending money today to buy that item. When people reminisce about a bottle of Coke in the 1950s costing less than a dollar, they are talking about current dollars. Constant dollars, on the other hand, represent a price relative to a past price in a given base year, usually the current year—for example, the price of a bullet in 1978 adjusted to be in 2024 dollars—thus accounting for the effect of inflation over time. Currently, there is a broader appreciation of this difference because of the recent spikes in the inflation experienced by the public.

There have been four distinct peaks and troughs in the defense budget during the past 70 years: the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Reagan military buildup, and the global war on terrorism. These increases reflect different periods in our recent history when there was a renewed attention and commitment to the military that was driven by both internal and external events. In these periods, the nation allocated more resources to its military. All are followed by reductions in defense spending, reflecting the nation's sense that a danger had passed and it could invest less in its military.

Each of these waves reflects a combination of geopolitical pressures and internal politics. It is worth noting that the Korean War generates a more abrupt peak and trough, while the other peaks are smoother and take longer both to materialize and to dissipate. In the end, the defense budget is the product of political debate and considerations and thus reflects the political environment and how the leadership interprets and reacts to it.

During the Korean War, there was a quick spike that peaked in FY 1952 with $844 billion allocated to the Department of Defense. It is followed by the end of the war and a sharp drop in FY 1955 to $479 billion. It is worth noting that the data start in FY 1948 during the post–World War II era when military expenditures were severely reduced. Between FY 1948 and FY 1950, the DOD's budget fluctuated at around $238 billion a year—a low point even when compared to the aftermath of the Korean War.

The next peak comes in FY 1968 during the Vietnam War when the Department of Defense had a $719 billion budget. After that peak, there was a slow and consistent decline until FY 1975 when the department's budget reached a trough of $489 billion. This decline lasted for about five fiscal years. Then, in FY 1980, the department's budget began an upswing that peaked in FY 1985 at $775 billion, largely under the Reagan Administration's military

buildup. Between FY 1986 and FY 1998, the defense budget once again consistently declined, reaching a low of $502 billion in FY 1998.

After FY 1998, the defense budget started to climb again—a climb that was accelerated by the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the nation's subsequent response to them with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It peaked in FY 2008 with $971 billion allocated to the DOD. Interestingly, there was a quick drop in FY 2009 to $944 billion, which was followed by an increase in FY 2010 to $966 billion before another sustained decline that lasted until FY 2015 when the defense budget reached $733 billion.

Since FY 2016, there has been some increase in the defense budget, but it is still far from either a peak or a trough. In the past eight years, there have been slight increases and slight decreases with an annual average of $828 billion. There is not enough direction or time to serve as the basis for a concrete determination about the trend of the defense budget in recent years.

Fundamentally, the defense budget's increase in constant dollars reflects our nation's changed expectations of what the Department of War should do, how it should do it, and the availability of technology. In the decades since 1947 when the department was created, its mission has expanded significantly. Today, the department not only prepares and fights wars, but also runs recruiting stations spread out across the country as well as schools, supermarket chains, and medical facilities. It purchases billions of dollars of services and goods every year. Even small military bases provide multiple services from small sandwich shops to facilities that maintain extra-large airplanes.

Today, the War Department is expected to be able to mobilize within a moment's notice and deploy almost anywhere in the world. Maintaining this level of preparedness and planning takes a substantial number of resources, both in manpower and in material. America's armed forces have prepositioned stocks in strategic locations around the world, which allows the United States to forward deploy forces rapidly into theater.[14]

The department also has unique requirements both in terms of security and in terms of material conditions that are fundamentally different from those of the commercial sector. Any War Department information technology system will have to handle access by at least three different types of users—military, civilian, and contractors—with different levels of access to information, even if they are accessing only unclassified information. The infrastructure required by our armed forces is incredibly detailed and prescriptive because they deal with matters of life or death. It goes hand in hand with our society's expectation that our armed forces will value the lives of our servicemembers and the individuals who interact with them. The drive for higher levels of commercial off-the-shelf systems is laudable and will no doubt result in savings in certain defense activities, but certain systems will continue to be bespoke military products.

The Defense Budget and the Military Departments

The Department of War is composed of three military departments—Army, Navy, and Air Force—and multiple agencies and field activities that are grouped under a budgetary category called defense-wide. Each of the five military services resides within one specific military department:

- The Department of the Army oversees the U.S. Army;
- The Department of the Navy oversees the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps; and
- The Department of the Air Force oversees the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Space Force.

The agencies and activities provide support functions to all of the military departments and services. Examples include the Defense Logistics Agency, the Defense Financial and Accounting Service, and a majority of the medical care expenses and many of the intelligence functions within the department.[15]

These organizations collectively are known as the "fourth estate," and most of their efforts represent attempts to consolidate and standardize some support activities that are common to all military departments. Each of these organizations within the War Department receives a portion of the defense budget.

There are many public discussions about the share of the budget that each of the military departments receives and whether such distribution

should be equitable. However, the portion of the budget that each receives is *not* equal to the shares that others receive and has fluctuated greatly over time.[16] Depending on the technological developments of the time and the external threats to which the armed forces were responding, the share received by each of the services has ebbed and flowed to account for the different challenges. The Army, for example, received a higher proportion of defense dollars in the years following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks because of the land wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Air Force received a substantially larger share when it was establishing itself and there was an emphasis on air power and nuclear weapons under President Dwight Eisenhower.

Over the past several years, as the return to great-power competition with China and Russia has become the widely agreed upon national security strategy of the United States, the allocation between the services has started to shift with a higher percentage of the budget going to the Navy and the Air Force and the Army's budget remaining generally stagnant. This shift is in recognition of the outsized role that the Navy and Air Force would play in an Indo-Pacific conflict.

Another aspect of the budget that deserves attention is the growth of defense-wide accounts that are associated with defense agencies outside of the military departments. They started as a few individual programs that were later centralized and as specific business functions that were made uniform and since then have expanded, progressively consuming a larger portion of the budget. These accounts have grown from a low of 0.7 percent of the defense budget in FY 1952 to a peak of close to 21 percent in FY 2022. The Heritage Foundation has argued for a decrease in funding allotted to the defense agencies and a reallocation of funding back to the services, in line with Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's prioritization of warfighting capabilities and efforts to reduce the number of civilians working for the department.[17]

Changing Nature of the Defense Budget

Since the end of World War II, the decrease in the number of members of the armed forces and the increased presence and complexity of technology have forced a substantial change in how defense resources are allocated. The number of total active military personnel decreased substantially from a peak of 3.6 million in FY 1952 to a low of 1.37 million in FY 2015. The last time the United States had 2 million individuals in its armed forces was in FY 1991. The U.S. has been reducing the active members of its armed forces since FY 1987.

The data also reveal how a higher proportion of defense resources has been invested in the category of non-pay items, which in this instance amounts to operations and investment—in other words, what it costs to equip and operate the force. In simplified terms, pay is the cost of establishing the force and non-pay is the cost of using that force.

This is consistent with the technological evolution that the United States has experienced as a society over the past 70 years as the tools of war have become increasingly capable, complex, and costly. Every tool and machine that we have at our disposal today is undoubtedly more capable than those that our parents and grandparents had at their disposal. This is also true in the military where the information technology revolution has influenced everything from how people communicate to how weapon systems operate. These systems and support services are more complex, more capable, and more expensive to maintain and operate.

When it comes to pay, the decrease in the size of the force has not been matched by a proportional decrease in the amount dedicated to pay. In other words, as a practical matter, the level of resources allocated per servicemember has increased over time. This reflects the amount that is spent on salaries and benefits as well as other services provided to servicemembers that are not funded with resources labeled as pay.

As Americans generally and servicemembers in particular have become more educated and productive, especially with the consistent introduction of new technologies, they have commanded higher wages in the market, and this is reflected in the relative increase of pay within the War Department. Rightfully, Congress consistently votes in favor of pay raises for the troops in recognition of the invaluable service they provide to the nation.

The Defense Budget as Lagging Indicator

The defense budget is built through a unique process that has come under much criticism over the years, although substantial efforts have been made to reform the process recently. Both the War

Department and the Defense Department before it have long utilized a system called Planning, Programming, Budgeting and Execution (PPBE) to build and execute the defense budget. This system was developed in the 1960s and is showing some cracks.[18] Within the PPBE process, development of the services' budgets starts at least two years before the fiscal year that they are intended to fund. This guarantees that the budget will present a projection of the future that is tied to past projections and assumptions. Thus, incorporation of a relevant innovation that was developed during the period between composition of the budget and the start of the fiscal year has been a challenging exercise.

Modifying resources that were programmed years in advance is equally challenging because these resources represent real costs that would be incurred by a program or organization. Whether for good or ill, this makes the defense budget quite inflexible, and large movements of funds and changes in programming take several fiscal years to become fully apparent. It is common for new Administrations to say that it will take a few budget cycles to implement the changes desired at the Pentagon.[19] Thus, the defense budget will always be a lagging indicator of the ongoing challenges being faced by our military. The PPBE system makes budgetary decisions very "sticky" and is inherently biased toward maintaining the status quo.

Further, because the budget is about allocating taxpayers' dollars, the decisions that are made both inside and outside the department are ultimately political in nature. The final resolution of the defense budget rests with Congress, an inherently political body. However, politics also permeates the other levels of decisions involved in making the defense budget. The leaders who manage internal department programs will often base their actions on their expectation of what the services will do with their budget submissions, and the services will often base their actions on what they think the Office of the Secretary of War will do. In turn, the Secretary of War will anticipate and respond to the actions of the Office of Management and Budget, the President, and Congress. These interactions occur several times a day during all phases of the budget process.

There should always be continuous process improvement in the allocation of precious defense dollars. One such effort currently underway is the congressionally established Commission on Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution Reform (PPBE Commission). Established by the FY 2022 NDAA and composed of 14 commissioners appointed by congressional leaders and the Secretary of Defense,[20] it has conducted a variety of sessions to engage with the different individuals and organizations that participate in the PPBE process.[21] The commission submitted its final report in 2024 and recommended replacing the PPBE process with a new Defense Resourcing System (DRS) that would strengthen "the connection between strategy and resource allocation while creating a more flexible and agile execution process," aiming to alleviate many of the problems identified within the PPBE process.[22] The commission recommended improvements in five critical areas:

- Improving the alignment of budgets to strategy,
- Fostering innovation and adaptability,
- Strengthening relationships between the department and Congress,
- Modernizing business systems and data analytics, and
- Strengthening the workforce.[23]

Conclusion

Defense spending should flow from strategy and should be focused on military capacity and lethality. Non-defense spending, politicized initiatives within the Department of War, and unfocused spending all distract from the military's core mission of defending the American people. Given the dramatic expansion of China's military capabilities in recent years, U.S. defense spending must focus on capabilities—especially air and naval platforms and precision-guided munitions—that are relevant to deterring China in the Indo-Pacific.

Endnotes

1. Written with contributions from previous author Frederico Bartels.
2. Constitution of the United States, Preamble, https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/preamble/ (accessed October 30, 2025).
3. "Congress shall have Power to…provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States." Constitution of the United States, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 1, https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/article-1/#article-1-section-8-clause-1 (accessed October 30, 2025).
4. Forrest McDonald, "Preamble," in The Heritage Foundation, The Heritage Guide to the Constitution, https://www.heritage.org/constitution/articles/0/essays/1/preamble.
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6. Robert Peters and Wilson Beaver, "An Open Letter to the Next Defense Department Comptroller," Heritage Foundation Issue Brief No. 5369, January 8, 2025, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/IB5369.pdf.
7. Frederico Bartels, "Understanding the Defense Budget," in 2024 Index of U.S. Military Strength, ed. Dakota L. Wood (Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 2024), pp. 83–95, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/2024_IndexOfUSMilitaryStrength_0.pdf.
8. The department lists seven categories of such activity: "(1) Naval reactors development; (2) Weapons activities, including defense inertial confinement fusion; (3) Verification and control technology; (4) Defense nuclear materials production; (5) Defense nuclear waste and materials by-products management; (6) Defense nuclear materials security and safeguards and security investigations; and (7) Defense research and development." See U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Management, Directives Program, "Atomic Energy Defense Activity," https://www.directives.doe.gov/terms_definitions/atomic-energy-defense-activity#:~:text=Any%20activity%20of%20the%20Secretary%20performed%20in%20whole,%283%29%C2%A0Verification%20and%20control%20technology%3B%20%284%29%C2%A0Defense%20nuclear%20materials%20production%3B (accessed October 30, 2025).
9. Once dollars are appropriated, federal agencies can start to spend them. Authorizations are not legally necessary, but they play an important role in budgeting because they authorize the existence of programs and organizations. For a discussion of unauthorized appropriations, see Justin Bogie, "Time to End 'Zombie' Appropriations," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4583, June 24, 2016, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/IB4583.pdf.
10. See, for example, The Heritage Foundation, *Budget Blueprint for Fiscal Year 2023*, 2022, https://www.heritage.org/budget/index.html.
11. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Fiscal Data, "America's Finance Guide: How Much Has the Federal Government Spent This Year?" https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/americas-finance-guide/federal-spending/ (accessed October 30, 2025).
12. Natalie Sherman, "US Interest Rates Raised to Highest Level in 16 Years," *BBC*, May 4, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/business-65474456 (accessed October 31, 2025).
13. For the FY 2025 edition, see U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2025*, April 2024, https://comptroller.war.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2025/fy25_Green_Book.pdf (accessed November 27, 2025).
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15. See Bradley Penniston, "Explainer: What Is the Pentagon's Fourth Estate?" *Defense One*, updated May 12, 2021, https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2020/02/what-pentagons-fourth-estate/162939/ (accessed October 31, 2025).
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17. Robert Greenway, Wilson Beaver, Robert Peters, Alexander Velez-Green, John Venable, Brent Sadler, and Jim Fein, "A Conservative Defense Budget for Fiscal Year 2025," Heritage Foundation Special Report No. 281, April 2, 2024, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/SR281.pdf.
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19. A good example can be seen in former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's description of the first budget released during his tenure. See Aaron Mehta, "Mark Esper on the 'Big Pivot Point' that Will Define the 2022 Budget," *Defense News*, February 10, 2020, https://www.defensenews.com/smr/federal-budget/2020/02/10/mark-esper-on-the-big-pivot-point-that-will-define-the-2022-budget/ (accessed October 30, 2025).
20. S. 1605, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, Public Law No. 117-81, 117th Congress, December 27, 2021, Title X, Section 1004, https://www.congress.gov/117/plaws/publ81/PLAW-117publ81.pdf (accessed October 30, 2025).

21. See Appendix 1, "Commission on PPBE Reform Community Engagement," updated as of February 21, 2023, in Commission on Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution Reform, *Status Update*, March 2023, p. 18, https://ppbereform.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/PPBE-REFORM-COMMISSION-STATUS-UPDATE-MAR-2023-Public.pdf (accessed October 31, 2025).
22. Commission on Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution Reform, Final Report: Defense Resourcing for the Future, March 2024, pp. 4 and 47, https://ppbereform.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Commission-on-PPBE-Reform_Full-Report_6-March-2024_FINAL.pdf (accessed October 31, 2025). Cited hereinafter as Commission Final Report. See also Brendan W. McGarry, "Defense Primer: Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) Process," Congressional Research Service In Focus No. IF10429, updated December 6, 2024, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PDF/IF10429/IF10429.16.pdf (accessed October 30, 2025).
23. Commission Final Report, p. 6.