Pie chart: Current Defense 51.4%, Trump Increase 5.2%, Nondefense 43.4%

Military Spending and U.S. National Budget Priorities

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In fiscal year 2015, Pentagon and related spending accounted for 54% of all federal discretionary spending at an astounding $598.5 billion. This amount is equivalent to the budgets of the next seven largest military spenders in the world—combined. The additional $54 billion increase proposed by President Trump nearly equals the total of Russian military spending!

According to the National Priorities Project, the only nonprofit, nonpartisan federal budget research organization in the nation, military spending increased by 50 percent (adjusted for inflation) in the decade following September 11, 2001, while "spending on domestic discretionary programs—essentials like education and public transit—grew by just 13.5 percent over the same time period." To put the magnitude of United States military spending in perspective, note that education accounted for a paltry 6% of total federal discretionary spending in fiscal year 2015, energy and the environment for an even ghastlier 3.5%, and science for a mere 2.67%. The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program *alone* cost the U.S. government $11.6 billion, which would have been enough to provide scholarships to 349,303 university students for four years or to create 156,626 clean energy jobs.

Included within the massive sum devoted to the U.S. Military, moreover, is the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) fund, which was established by President Bush after the September 11th attacks in 2001 for the immediate purposes of war. Although the OCO budget was initially created as a separate pot of funding operated by the Department and Defense and State Department and designated expressly as "war funds," it is now utilized largely as a military "slush fund." As much as $30 billion of the $64 billion OCO budget, which is protected from legislated cuts made to all other federal discretionary spending, is presumed to have been used for Pentagon spending unrelated to any present conflict in 2015. Additionally, hundreds of billions of dollars not included in the Pentagon budget are allocated to Homeland Security functions such as law enforcement and border control, as well as to the Department of Energy for nuclear weapons and for "intelligence" operations.

October (2016) and February (2017) polls administered by the Charles Koch Institute and Center for the National Interest show that recent congressional spending does not align with the American public's priorities. Both polls indicated that over half of all Americans feel that the current administration should use the military less than it has been used since 2001, and that a majority of Americans believe that U.S. foreign policy over the past fifteen years has made the country *less* safe. In its summary of the February poll's results, the Charles Koch Institute stated that, "when asked how the federal government should spend a hypothetical additional tax dollar 79% expressed a desire to see it go toward a domestic priority, 42% said it should go toward debt and deficit reduction, and 37% said it should go toward domestic spending generally. Only 12% said it should go toward military spending." William Ruger, the institute's vice-president, explains that, "Respondents believe that any additional tax revenue should be focused on domestic priorities, especially reducing the debt and deficit. Americans simply don't want more military spending."

And yet, President Trump announced his intention of implementing a $54 billion (10%) increase to military spending. Such a boost would necessitate drastic domestic cuts for essential social services and draw crucial resources away from domestic programs such as environmental protection and education. Official reports indicate that, in terms of government agencies, the State Department and EPA will suffer most, with the former expected to see a 30% cut and the latter 24%, together totaling tens of billions of dollars. Certain programs, such as the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, will likely be eliminated entirely. A national poll

conducted by CNN and ORC International between March 1st and 4th, immediately after Trump's budget plan was made public, shows that while most Americans support tax cuts for the middle class and increased spending on infrastructure, a majority stand firm in their disapproval of increased military spending and funding construction of a border wall with Mexico.

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