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Legislature

Implications of Reduced Military Spending for National Security

Prepared Statement of
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Thank you for this opportunity to speak about these important resolutions before the Massachusetts Legislature. I am Neta Crawford, a professor of Political Science at Boston University.

Great empires fall when they overreach and create too many adversaries, or when they overspend their blood and treasure on military ventures overseas. This was the history of Rome, Spain, the Habsburg Empire, and most recently Great Britain. Their foreign and military policies were unsustainable.

Although the US is only about 22 percent of world population, the US accounts for about 40 percent of world military spending. This is unsustainable for our economy. It is also unsustainable for our national security. Cuts in military spending should be accompanied by and indeed determined by a grand strategy that includes diplomacy and collective security.

Several core beliefs about military force and military spending are taken for granted and rarely challenged — specifically:

- that war makes us safer;
- that a strong military deters aggressors;
- that threats and even the use of force will cause others to back down;
- that the amount of spending is correlated with military capacity;
- and that military spending is good for the economy

This view is summarized by the Latin saying, *si vi pacem, para bellum*. If you want peace prepare for war. Indeed, war works and is good for you. I will discuss these beliefs in turn:

That war makes us safer: War doesn't necessarily make us safer — it breeds resentment and resistance that could lead to later conflict.

What about the belief that a strong military deters?
A strong military sometimes deters a determined aggressor.

But more often, attempts to appear stronger lead others to arm defensively against us. This is a security dilemma, where what we do to protect ourselves appears threatening to others. They react by increasing their military spending and the temperature of their rhetoric and then we react by increasing our arms, spending and the hostility of our statements. This action-reaction cycle of mutual fear and hostility is very difficult to break unless and until one side stands down.

How about the belief that threats cause others to back down? Threats, even one's backed by overwhelming military force, don't generally cause states to back down and acquiesce. More often they resist — as Argentina did Britain, as Iraq did the US in 1991 and 2003, as Iran and North Korea are doing now. We might better negotiate because threats only seem to harden the determination of others to resist.

Is high military spending correlated with an effective military? The amount of spending is not correlated with military capacity. Rumsfeld was a famous proponent of reduced military spending because he recognized that waste, fraud, and inefficiencies could balloon the military budget. Secretary Gates also argued that military spending could be reduced for those same reasons.

There is a corollary myth — that the US won the Cold War in part by forcing the Soviet Union to try to keep up with our level of military spending. Even if that were true, we might bankrupt ourselves well before China or Russia felt the pinch.

Others will/have addressed the claim that military spending is good for the economy. I will simply remind you that all the innovations we get from military spending could be had much more efficiently by direct investment in achieving those innovations.

Would the United States be less secure if the US were to dramatically decrease military spending?

No. In fact, Americans would be more secure if the United States decreased military spending by between 20 and 50 percent.

But cutting military spending across the board, or without a plan consistent with a grand strategy — as the sequester, even though those cuts are relatively small, has forced the Pentagon to do — is not so wise. A smaller military budget, organized around defense of the territorial US and a limited capacity to project military power abroad for humanitarian interventions — would improve US national security both narrowly and broadly conceived.

The US would be as or more safe if we reduced military spending because:
We would appear to be less threatening to the leaders of those countries that are arming against us because they fear our might.

Others will probably decrease their military spending; this is in fact what tends to happen. When the US increase its military spending, the spending of other countries grows; when our spending decreases, theirs tends to go down as well.

But even if our rivals don't decrease their spending, the US is far enough ahead in key technologies and capacities that we ought not to worry about securing our homeland. We have the military capacity in the standing military, national guard and reserves to defend and win.

If the Pentagon were told to live within a smaller budget, they would find ways to focus on essential missions and capacities. If time permits, I will discuss programs and platforms that could be dramatically cut — Space Command, the F-35, acquisition of new aircraft carriers, and Pentagon military equipment give aways to Pakistan.

The money freed up by reductions in military spending could be spent in other ways that would strengthen the national security of the US broadly defined. For example, the US could balance its budget and pay down the national debt, which was itself ballooned by the wars of the last 12 years, and decrease its reliance on China. Or the US could invest in ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We all know of good ways to spend any reductions in military spending.

Finally, what about the argument that war works to get what you want in the world. Well sometimes. But it is a very inefficient way to get what we want. And often, what we get is misery and death and more enemies and an outcome that is ambiguous at best.

In sum, I have argued *si vi pacem, para pacem*: if you want peace, prepare for peace.

Appendix. Some examples of Pentagon Programs that need to be rethought.

Parts of the Space Command program (space defense and missile defense) are a boondoggle that drives other countries to increase their efforts to develop space weapons. It costs \$15 billion annually.

Or consider the new F-35 joint strike fighter is a nifty jet made by Lockheed Martin costing more than 200 million a plane. The US F-35 program, begun in 1984 has been plagued by cost overruns, the failure to meet performance targets, and delays due to the need to redesign to meet performance targets. More than \$87 billion will have been spent on the F-35 program for 182 aircraft by the end of 2014, about half of that (\$46.2 billion) for research and development. Another 39.5 billion has gone for Procurement, and \$1.8 billion for initial spare parts. But the F-35 is really a sitting duck, with its cracked wings and fusilages — easy to criticize and many have done so.

The Pentagon wants to buy more than 2,400 F-35 for the AF and Navy, and US allies have committed to purchase other versions. We have already purchased about

More controversially, think about the way the US projects its power around the world. The US now has 10 aircraft carriers. It is scheduled to keep that number and replace older carriers when they reach the end of their service life.

Each carrier strike group consists of an aircraft carrier, a cruiser, two destroyers, and 65-75 aircraft and associated personnel of 7,500 people. These strike groups project US power all over the globe. The US has recently retired several carriers and replaced them with more advanced a/c carriers. A smaller navy means reduced health care costs, which is one of the fastest growing areas of military spending.

Instead of replacing the oldest ships as they are retired, the US could retire 2 additional carriers. The ones that remain, all commissioned after 1980 could be maintained from between 2031 and 2057. That would leave the US with less capacity but we arguably don't need this capacity.

In addition, the US should stop selling or giving away military technology to other countries such as Pakistan (which the US recently gave 12 F-16s, and helped them buy attack helicopters, missile launchers, and missiles) who have the capacity to make great trouble in their regions. We seem to inevitably meet that technology later.