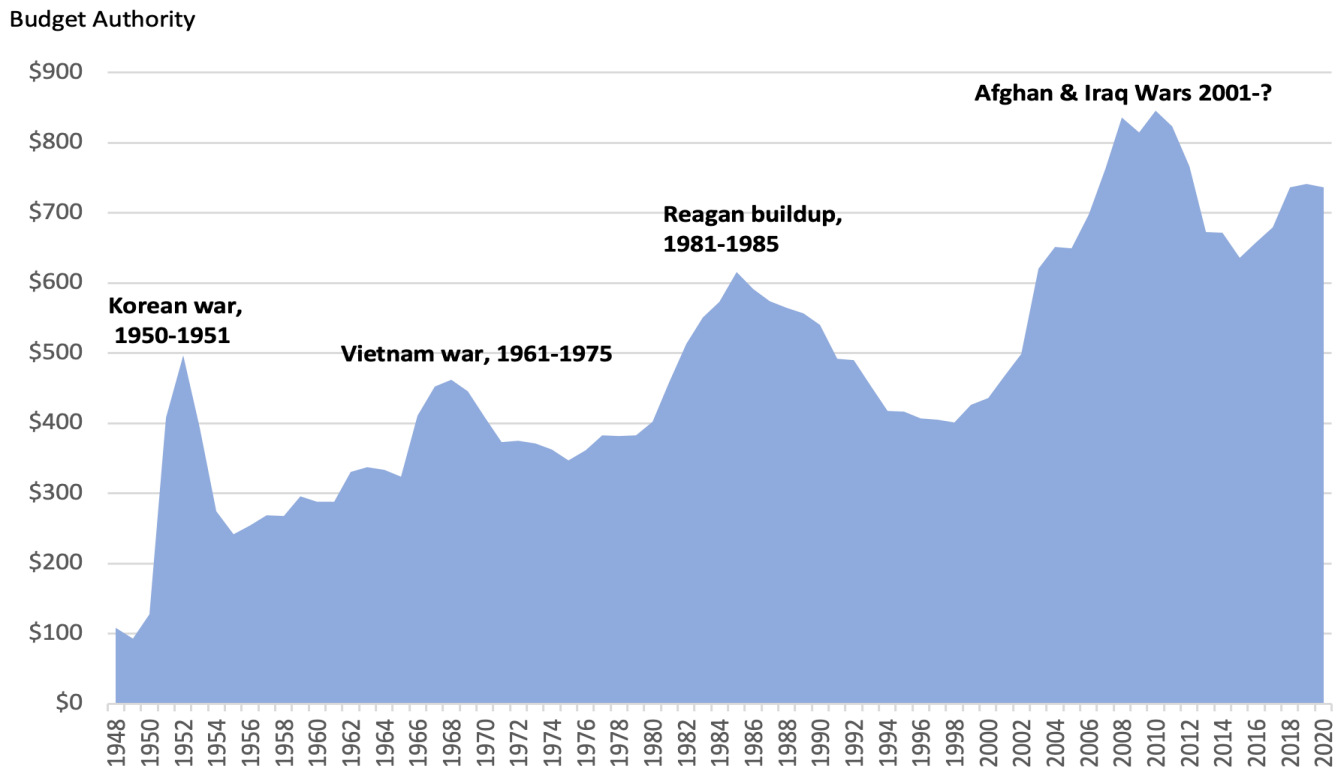


SUSTAINABLE DEFENSE: A Pentagon Spending Plan for 2021 and Beyond

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The events of 2020 have dramatically underscored the need to rethink the concept of national security. The COVID-19 pandemic, the devastation caused by climate change, and racial and economic injustice all pose risks to public safety and security as great, or greater than, traditional military challenges. Yet the Pentagon budget remains near historically high levels — higher by far than the peaks of the Korean and Vietnam wars or the Reagan buildup of the 1980s. Pentagon spending has remained high even as the number of troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan has dropped dramatically. There were over 180,000 troops in the two war zones in 2010, but they are scheduled to drop to as few as 7,500 by January 2021.¹ At a time when the greatest challenges we face are not military in nature, it's long past time to reduce the Pentagon budget to make way for investments in other national priorities. It is not sustainable for the funding of the Pentagon to continue to claim more than 50% of the country's annual discretionary budget.

**The Pentagon Budget from 1948–2020,
 In Billions of Fiscal Year 2021 Dollars²**



1. Eric Schmitt, Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Charlie Savage, and Helene Cooper, "Trump Is Said to Be Preparing to Withdraw Troops from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2020.
 2. Sources for Chart: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), National Defense Budget Estimates for FY2021, Table 6-8: Budget Authority by Title. Inflation adjustments were made using the GDP (Chained) Price Index from the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

In June of 2019, the Center for International Policy released the report of its Sustainable Defense Task Force (SDTF) — a group comprised of former White House and Congressional budget experts; retired military officers and former Pentagon officials; and think tank analysts from across the political spectrum. The report laid out a plan that could reduce Pentagon spending by \$1.2 trillion over ten years while making the United States and the world a safer place — a decrease of over 15%.³ The report's recommendations are now more urgent in light of America's current security dilemma.

The principal recommendations of the SDTF report are as follows:

- End America's forever wars and adopt a non-interventionist foreign policy that will allow a reduction of 10% in the size of the U.S. military, with the largest cuts coming from the Army and Marines;
- Eliminate the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account, which has been used as a slush fund to pay for tens of billions of dollars of items that have nothing to do with current conflicts;
- Adopt a more realistic approach to the challenges posed by Russia and China that relies more heavily on allies for military support and seeks cooperation, not confrontation, on issues of mutual concern like climate change and nuclear arms control;
- Reduce the size of the Navy in conjunction with a move away from a "cover the globe" strategy to one that calls for surging forces to areas of crisis. Abandon the fantasy of building a 500-ship Navy;
- Rely on diplomacy as the primary tool for dealing with nuclear proliferation involving regional powers like Iran and North Korea. Return the United States as a participant in good standing in the Iran nuclear deal — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA);
- Adopt a "deterrence-only" nuclear strategy along the lines proposed by the organization Global Zero, and roll back the Pentagon's nuclear modernization program, which could cost as much as \$2 trillion.⁴ Eliminate Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), which former Secretary of Defense William Perry has called "some of the most dangerous weapons in the world" because the president would have a matter of minutes to decide whether to launch them on warning of an attack, increasing the risk of an accidental nuclear war;
- Eliminate waste, bureaucracy, and redundancy at the Pentagon, starting by scaling back the more than 600,000 private contractors employed by the department, many of whom perform tasks that overlap with work done by civilian government employees, who can do the same work for less money.

The changes outlined above are consistent with a number of positions already taken by President-elect Biden. He has called for a move away from investing in the irrelevant weapons of the past or "staying entrenched in unwinnable conflicts that drain our capacity to lead on other issues." And he has indicated his support for the Democratic platform, which states that "we can maintain a strong defense and protect our safety and security for less." His support for reentering the Iran nuclear deal, renewing the New START Treaty, and reviving nuclear arms control can all be potential pillars of a new strategy that allows for substantial reductions in Pentagon spending.

The key to realizing savings in Pentagon spending in this new era is avoiding a new arms race with China or overspending on addressing the challenges posed by Russia.

3. Sustainable Defense: More Security, Less Spending, Center for International Policy, June 2019.

4. Dr. Bruce Blair, Jessica Sleight, and Emma Clair Foley, "The End of Nuclear Warfighting: Moving to a Deterrence-Only Posture," Global Zero, September 2018; Kingston Reif with Alicia Sanders-Zakre, "U.S. Nuclear Excess: Understanding the Costs, Risks and Alternatives," Arms Control Association, April 2019.

The challenge posed by China is primarily economic and political, not military. And on the military front, the United States spends more than two and one-half times as much on its military as China does, and its deployed nuclear arsenal is more than five times as large as Beijing's.⁵ Rather than pursuing a policy of confrontation and launching a new arms race with China, the United States should look for areas of cooperation like combatting climate change, addressing and preventing global pandemics, and reviving the global economy.

As for Russia, its primary tools of influence in recent years have been propaganda, cyber-threats, and "hybrid warfare" on its periphery (as in its use of local allies to destabilize Ukraine). Russia does not represent a traditional military challenge to the United States and shouldn't be used to justify another Pentagon spending boost. To the extent that there is a military challenge from Russia, it can be more than adequately addressed through increased security and diplomatic cooperation on the part of European nations within their existing defense capacities, with the United States in a limited, supporting role. After all, European members of NATO cumulatively spend more than three times what Russia does on their militaries and far outpace it economically.⁶ Russia's economy is now smaller than Italy's, and Moscow is in no position to engage in an arms race even with the nations of Western Europe, much less the United States.

It's long past time for the United States to adopt a new approach to national security that prioritizes our most urgent challenges, reduces U.S. global military deployments and spending, defunds unnecessary weapons systems, and eliminates waste.

[See List of Options for Reducing Spending table on the following page.](#)

5. Dr. Nan Tian, Alexandra Kuimova, Dr. Diego Lopes da Silva, Peter Wezeman and Siemon T. Wezeman, "Trends in World Military Expenditure 2019," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2020; Hans Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Status of World Nuclear Forces," Federation of American Scientists, September 2020.

6. William D. Hartung, "NATO Already Vastly Outspends Russia. Its Problems Are Not About Money.," Defense One, July 17, 2018.

**LIST OF OPTIONS FOR REDUCING SPENDING
(10-Year Savings Estimates)⁷**

| Force Structure and Weapons Procurement Reductions | |
|---|------------------------|
| Army Reductions and Restructuring | \$160 Billion |
| Marine Corps Reductions and Restructuring | \$60 Billion |
| Reduce U.S. Navy Personnel and Weapons Procurement | \$193 Billion |
| Reduce U.S. Air Force Personnel and Aircraft Procurement | \$100.5 Billion |
| Reduce Peacetime Troop Deployments Overseas | \$17 Billion |
| End America's Endless Wars | \$320 Billion |
| Overhead and Efficiencies | |
| Reduce O&M Spending on Service Contracts | \$262.5 Billion |
| Replace Some Military Personnel with Civilians | \$16.7 Billion |
| Close Unnecessary Military Bases | \$20 Billion |
| Nuclear Weapons, Missile Defense, and Space | |
| Eliminate the New Nuclear Cruise Missile | \$13.3 Billion |
| Cancel the New ICBM | \$30 Billion |
| Cancel the Space Force | \$10 Billion |
| Cancel R&D on Space-Based Weapons | \$3 Billion |
| Cancel Ground-Based Midcourse Defense System | \$20 Billion |
| Cancel New Nuclear Warheads and Rollback Modernization | \$15 Billion |
| Include Nuclear Weapons Complex in a BRAC Round | \$10 Billion |
| TOTAL 10-YEAR SAVINGS | \$1.25 Trillion |

7. Source: Center for International Policy, Sustainable Defense Task Force, <https://www.internationalpolicy.org/program/Sustainable-Defense-Task-Force>