

SMART, SUSTAINABLE, STRATEGY-DRIVEN

# DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SPENDING



The greatest threat to America's safety and future prosperity is our mounting debt, which endangers our ability to fund a strong national defense. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen recognized this when he called our national debt “the most significant threat to our national security” as early as 2010. After years of record spending, our national debt is now nearly \$30 trillion and counting. As the largest source of discretionary spending, a right-sized defense budget must be part of any conversation about securing America's financial future. The best way to spend our limited defense resources more sustainably and wisely is by prioritizing our core interests through a grand strategy of realism and restraint.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

**Smarter strategy drives sustainable spending:** The Pentagon's 2021 Global Force Posture Review was rightly criticized for rubber-stamping existing, overextended U.S. deployments around the world rather than offering a shakeup to prioritize our biggest threats.<sup>i</sup> In its first National Security Strategy (NSS), the Biden Administration should course correct. A heavy U.S. military footprint in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia at the same time is unsustainable for our troops and taxpayers alike. The NSS should prioritize securing core U.S. interests such as commanding the commons rather than attempting to maintain significant ground forces in several regions at once.

As the CBO demonstrated in late 2021, a National Security Strategy more rooted in realism and restraint offers significant opportunities to put defense spending on a more sustainable path over the next decade while giving our military a more manageable set of missions.

**After Afghanistan, right-size the DOD budget:** The next Department of Defense (DOD) budget should reflect our reduced obligations now that the war in Afghanistan has ended. As such, Congress should reduce the FY 2023 DOD topline reduced by at least \$50 billion—the projected amount staying in Afghanistan another year would have cost U.S. taxpayers.

**Support greater ally burden-sharing:** Congress can support force structure decisions that don't incentivize capable allies to “free ride” off of U.S. troops and taxpayers by passing S. 677, the Allied Burden Sharing Act, which would reinstate annual reports on the defense spending of NATO allies and other security partners that were suspended in 2004.

**Create a DOD Audit with real accountability:** Congress should pass the S. 1707, the Audit the Pentagon Act, which would create real consequences for failing for the DOD Audit for the first time by cutting the line-item budgets of DOD agencies that fail their audits by 1% the following year.

**Define emergency war funding:** To end the frequent misuse of emergency war funds for activities that belong in the base DOD budget, Congress should also pass S. 2744, the Restraining Emergency War Spending Act, which would statutorily define Overseas Contingency Operations spending for the first time.

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## Sources

i. Alex Ward, “DOD Fails to Make Force Posture Choices.” Politico: National Security Daily, 11/29/2021.