Policy Report

The Cost of the Global U.S. Military Presence

By Anita Dancs | July 3, 2009

The U.S. military's global presence is vast and costly. More than one-third of U.S. troops are currently based abroad or afloat in international waters, and hundreds of bases and access agreements exist throughout the world. At the beginning of the 21st century, the government pushed to expand this presence through a variety of mechanisms. Yet the Department of Defense's budget presentations lack enough detail to make it possible to know the precise cost. The budgets don't break down the numbers, for example, on maintaining bases at home and overseas.

Nevertheless, from data on personnel, bases, and the Pentagon's budgets, it's possible to make an estimate. This number comes from the proportion of each branch's budget devoted to military personnel stationed overseas, excluding troops based in and around Iraq and Afghanistan. Since one-fourth of these military personnel are stationed overseas, the overall figure includes one-fourth of the defense-wide budget. Finally, it includes the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the amount of military assistance to other countries. The report does not include subsidies from governments that host bases, three-quarters of which come from Japan alone.

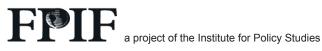
The final bill: The United States spends approximately \$250 billion annually to maintain troops, equipment, fleets, and bases overseas.

The Origins of Pax Americana

The sun never sets on the United States military. More than one-third of U.S. troops are currently based abroad or afloat in international waters, and 865 bases operate outside the United States. The military's global pres-

ence and ability to project power are, to put it mildly, substantial. During the past two decades, the military has pulled back its forces and then reasserted them. In the 1990s, the government closed overseas bases and recalled troops to the continental United States. However, over the last decade, a new military strategy expanded the global presence.

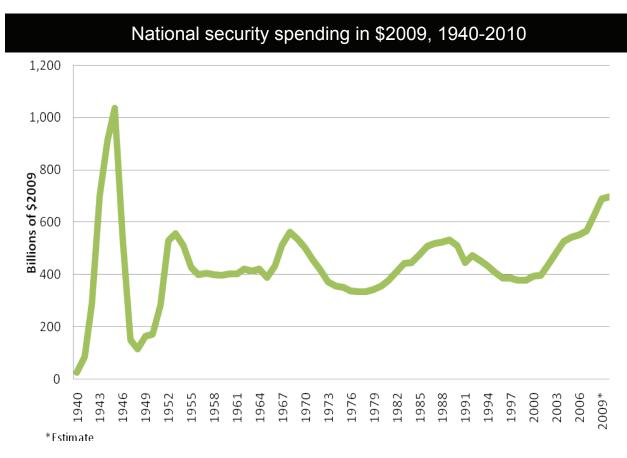
This report summarizes changes in the global presence of the military, then estimates the current cost of maintaining troops, bases, and operations abroad. If the U.S. government scaled back these operations, billions of dollars could be saved each year. More than \$100 billion could be saved immediately by ending the wars and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan. More could be saved by closing bases and reducing military personnel. Current economic priorities coupled with a new landscape of security challenges, including nonconventional threats and international crime such as piracy, strengthen the case for decreasing the U.S. military's global presence and increasing its emphasis on building mechanisms for international security cooperation.



Because the United States retains territories and possessions such as Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa, primarily for the purposes of the military and projecting military power, this report includes territories and possessions in its definition of global military presence. In other words, any troops, bases, or other military presence in U.S. territories or possessions is counted as "overseas." Fewer than 2% of bases and only a few thousand personnel are located in these territories and possessions. Yet, as the nature of global presence shifts, territories will become more important for housing troops overseas.

POSTWAR PAX AMERICANA

The United States emerged as an economic and military power at the end of World War II. Establishing an extensive global presence, the U.S. military maintained that presence for decades, scaling back only in the 1990s. If the U.S. government maintained the trend of the 1990s, the cost of maintaining the global presence would be significantly less. But at the beginning of this decade, the Bush administration chose once again to expand substantially the military's presence around the world — at a significant cost.



Source: Office of Management and Budget, Budget of the U.S. Government, FY2010, Historical Tables.

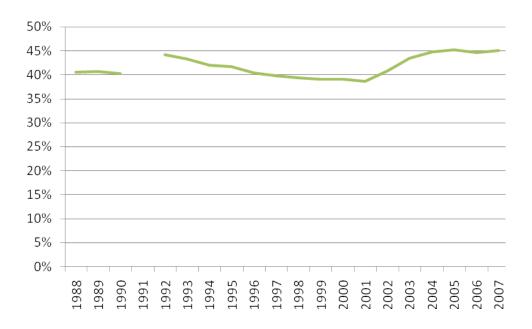
The term Pax Americana refers to the military and economic power of the United States in the postwar period. It was the set of institutions that emerged after World War II that governed the international economy and international relations. It included the Bretton Woods agreement, which created a system of fixed exchange rates and established the U.S. dollar as the key reserve currency. A strong dollar guaranteed terms of trade that favored U.S. industrial purchase of raw materials and intermediate goods and exports of manufactured goods. Rebuilding Western Europe and Japan guaranteed markets for U.S. goods abroad.

Military power enforced U.S. economic power. At the end of the war, the U.S. military was much larger in terms of budgets, personnel, and weaponry than prior to

the war. After 1953, the military budget, in real terms, never fell below 12 times what it was in 1940 prior to U.S. involvement in World War II, as shown in Figure 1. In today's dollars, military spending in 1940 totaled \$27 billion. By 1953, it was \$557 billion. Even in the mid- to late-1970s, when the United States was not at war, military spending stood at more than 1,200% of what it was in 1940. The Department of Defense maintained at least two million troops and exceeded an average of one million civilian personnel.

Hundreds of thousands of troops were based overseas, with the largest numbers in three countries: Germany, Japan, and Korea. The global command structure and forward deployments reflected military occupations after World War II. U.S. troops were based in Western

U.S. Military Spending as a Percentage of World Military Spending



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Data for 1991 is unavailable.

Europe to support the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in deterring Soviet expansion, and in Northeast Asia, using Japan to maintain a presence in the region.

Wars fought in Korea and Vietnam, as well as numerous smaller-scale overt and covert military operations, punctuated the later decades of the 20th century. The U.S. military protected U.S. economic interests abroad. For example, in 1953 a covert U.S. and British operation overthrew the prime minister of Iran to reverse the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. A year later, another American operation overthrew the democratically elected president of Guatemala to reverse the expropriation of land belonging to the United Fruit Company.

THE 1990S

The Cold War's end and the Soviet Union's demise made justifying enormous military budgets and bases across the world increasingly difficult. In the early 1990s, about 60% of U.S. bases were closed or turned over to host countries, and many troops returned to the United States. Total military personnel declined by nearly 500,000. In the second half of the 1980s, an average of 27% of active-duty military personnel were stationed or afloat abroad. By 1995, the number declined to 18.7%, increasing slightly by 2000 to 21.2%.

However, U.S. military spending continued to comprise at least 39% of world military spending, as shown in Figure 2. Western Europe made up at least another 28% of world military spending during the 1990s. In other words, the United States had uncontested superiority in the skills of its troops, sophistication of technology em-

bedded in its weaponry, and global reach. The strengths of its allies markedly augmented these advantages.

PAX AMERICANA TODAY

At the beginning of the 21st century, the U.S. military global presence and its costs have expanded. The neoconservative push for a renewed Pax Americana began two decades ago during the George H.W. Bush administration, when Paul Wolfowitz, undersecretary of Defense for policy, drafted the Defense Policy Guidance in 1992. The controversial draft was scuttled after a press leak caused an uproar. But the contents of the draft became a centerpiece of neoconservative defense policy. In 1997, other neoconservatives such as William Kristol, Dick

Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Jeb Bush joined Wolfowitz in creating a new organization, the Project for the New American Century, which built on the Wolfowitz document calling for maintaining Pax Americana as a strategic goal.1 According to the Project's 2000 publication, Rebuilding America's Defenses, the draft "provided a blueprint for maintaining U.S. preeminence, preventing the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests." 2 George W. Bush's election in 2000 gave this policy its opening.

The neoconservative agenda expanded the U.S. military presence across the world, especially in the Middle East, Africa, and South America. Establishing the new Unified Combatant Command and the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) partly indicate the nature and scope of the enhanced global military presence. New types of bases and basing arrangements, and especially the wars

in Iraq and Afghanistan, redefined U.S. presence in the world.

U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE TODAY

The U.S. military is organized in a command structure that includes 10 unified combatant commands. Four are responsible for logistical support and six are responsible for geographic regions of the world, as illustrated in Figure 3. The term "unified" means that each command includes a part of each branch of the military. The geographic command structure evolved considerably during the postwar decade. The two largest commands evolved out of the end of World War II.

The U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), established in 1947 and headquartered in Hawaii, is the largest. Its area of responsibility extends from the west coast of the United States, including Alaska, to the east coast of Africa, and from the Arctic to Antarctica. Pacific Command is also the only Unified Command with two naval fleets, making its naval presence particularly important to its projection of power.

The U.S. European Command (EUCOM), established in 1952 to deter Soviet aggression into Western Europe, was also responsible for operations in Africa until 2008.

The U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is a descendant of military units dispatched to the Panama Canal in the early 20th century. Its area of responsibility includes South and Central America, the Caribbean, adjacent waters, and a portion of the Atlantic Ocean.

The U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) has the Middle East in its area of responsibility. Due to the prevalence of oil in the region, President Jimmy Carter initiated the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force in 1980 to increase U.S. military presence in the Middle East. President Ronald Reagan elevated the task to a unified command (CENTCOM) in 1983.

The basing structure reflects the prominence of European Command and Pacific Command in the overall military structure. Each has more than 200,000 acres of bases. In comparison, Southern Command has less than 30,000 acres. However, these numbers do not reflect each command's changing role.

EUCOM was charged with creating a new unified command, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), which began in 2006 and became operational in October 2008. Initially, Africa was not of primary concern for the three commands responsible for it, in spite of more than 20 U.S. military interventions in the 1990s. EUCOM was increasingly preoccupied with the eastern region of its area of responsibility, and CENTCOM focused on oil-producing states. But its vast oil and natural gas supplies has made Africa a national security priority. As former Assistant Secretary of State Walter Kansteiner noted:

As we all start looking at the facts and figures of how many barrels per day are coming in from Africa, it's undeniable that this has become a national strategic interest for us...[African oil] will increase and become more important as we go forward.

The new AFRICOM commander noted in his first posture statement to Congress that European economic security was increasingly tied to stability in North Africa, since Europe imports a rising percentage of oil and natural gas from the region. This, he argued, makes instability in North Africa a threat to American national interests.3

AFRICOM's establishment also indicates EUCOM's changing role. While its history lies in deterring the Soviet Union, it now projects U.S. power from Europe to an "arc of instability" that includes northern Africa, the Middle East, and former Soviet states. EUCOM is a conduit, force trainer, and provider for Middle East conflicts. Its troops flew thousands of sorties and moved hundreds of thousands of tons of equipment and materiel for military operations in CENTCOM's area of responsibility.4 As NATO becomes increasingly focused on securing access to energy resources, EUCOM also has a strategic priority of boosting energy security for Europe, Eurasia, and the Black Sea region.5 It is more and more focused on the Caspian Sea, which has significant energy reserves, and is responsible for overseeing maritime security cooperation efforts. Today, its mission statement emphasizes "the need for continuing and expanded U.S. engagement throughout the command's area of focus."

SOUTHCOM has also recently elevated its presence in South America. In July 2008, the United States reestablished the Fourth Fleet, indicating a renewed military interest in the region. Prior to this, SOUTHCOM did not have a naval fleet as part of its command. South American leaders and media suggest the move may be linked to the leftward drift of South American governments, and the discovery of previously unknown oil reserves and other natural resources in the region. The United States is increasing its military presence in South America despite the SOUTHCOM commander's per-

ception that there are no conventional military threats to the U.S., "nor do we foresee any major military conflict between nations in Latin America or the Caribbean."6

NEW BASING ARRANGEMENTS

Hostility in countries that host U.S. bases has brought about a change in basing arrangements. The Pentagon has increased use of "warm facilities" with limited military presence. These changes, however, make it increasingly difficult to even know how many military bases exist outside the United States. Of the total Department of Defense inventory listed in the Base Structure Report for fiscal year 2008, 16% of its installations are overseas, along with 19% of all its buildings, and 23% of all other structures (e.g. roads, bridges, communication lines, electric power distribution). In total, the inventory includes 865 bases that are not located within the United States.

But this report is incomplete. Key U.S. military facilities are not included. For example, no Saudia Arabian bases, including the main Army facility in Eskan Village, are included in the installation report. It often appears arbitrary as to which bases are included and which are not. In the case of Saudi Arabia, for example, it appears that, for political reasons, those bases are not actively listed as U.S. bases, even though in practical terms, they are.

Other sites and locations are not included in Department of Defense reports either. The military defines three types of facilities:

Main Operating Bases (MOB) have permanently stationed troops, robust infrastructure, support facilities and are integrated in

command and control systems. Examples of MOBs are located in Germany, Japan and Korea. These are typically, though not always, included in the Base Structure Report.

- Forward Operating Sites (FOS) are "warm facilities," with a limited military support presence that is rotational rather than permanently based; they are able to host sustained operations quickly. These facilities might contain pre-positioned equipment and are a location for training events. Prepositioned programs of the Army and other branches result in placements of equipment, such as combat brigade sets or sustainment stocks that can be tapped into in case of military operation. FOS may or may not be listed in the Defense Department's inventory. For example, the Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras is not listed.
- Cooperative Security Locations (CSL) are facilities with little or no permanent U.S. presence, maintained by private contractors or the host nation. These locations include, for example, the Air Force site in Dakar, Senegal. There, U.S. military aircraft can

access land, fuel, and other support, and perform training exercises. The inventory does not include these locations.

The expansion of these new types of bases reflects changes in the global U.S. military presence. The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review, a comprehensive examination of the national defense strategy conducted every four years, called for a "reorientation of the posture" to "take account of new challenges, particularly anti-access and area-denial threats."7 The document declared "projecting and sustaining U.S. forces in distant anti-access or area-denial environments" and defeating these threats as one of six critical operational goals.8 The Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy, a document each administration periodically releases to announce its approach to security, called for bases and stations "within and beyond Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-distance deployment of U.S. forces."9 The 2004 global posture statement to Congress confirmed that the Department of Defense was seeking cooperation with partners in the Middle East and that the military sought to establish, maintain, and upgrade forward operating sites and cooperative security locations. The intention, though, was to seek a presence that avoided "the heavy footprint that abrades on regional sensitivities."10 The 2009 fiscal

Active-duty Military Personnel Stationed Overseas at the End of FY2008											
	Army		Nav	Navy		Marine Corps		Air Force		Total	
Military personnel abroad	203,368	32%	146,117	43%	113,148	55%	87,936	26%	550,569	36%	
Excluding wars	76,468	14%	124,967	38%	83,448	42%	63.686	19%	348,569	25%	

Source: Department of Defense, Statistical Information Analysis Division. The percentage of military personnel abroad is calculated by including activated military personnel and excluding troops based in the United States or afloat within the U.S. or its territories. The numbers which exclude the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan do not include the activated troops and use the worldwide figure of 1.4 million troops.

year budget request, submitted to Congress by President Bush in February 2008, included \$649 million for "new basing that will continue the shift of defense posture from legacy Cold War relationships and forces overseas to new structures that provide more strategic flexibility."11

By the end of the 2008 fiscal year, 25% of active-duty personnel were stationed overseas and aboard ships in international waters, excluding those fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. This number, approximately 350,000, may understate the true extent to which personnel are overseas but not involved in current conflicts. For one, the Department of Defense also has civilian personnel, with 7%, or more than 45,000, stationed in territories or in foreign countries. Secondly, the number of active-duty military personnel classified as afloat within the U.S. and its territories in 2008 fiscal year accounted for 6% of troops. But many of these troops are likely afloat in U.S. territorial waters far from the United States, which adds to the overseas military presence.

WAR AND OCCUPATION IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

The Afghanistan and Iraq wars account for much of the growth in the U.S. military's global presence over the past decade. Aside from the stationing troops in and around those countries, the United States seeks to establish more military bases in these two countries. These wars comprised 42% of the total cost of the military's global presence in 2008.

The United States, with limited assistance from other countries, invaded Afghanistan in October 2001, in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The govern-

ment's stated goal was to root out Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda members. The UN Security Council also established a second operation to secure Kabul and surrounding areas, which has since been taken over by NATO forces. NATO is led by the United States, so even this operation primarily represents U.S. global presence. By the end of 2008 fiscal year, 32,300 troops were stationed in and around Afghanistan. President Barack Obama, at the beginning of his presidency, expanded the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

The U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003. Initially, President George W. Bush and his administration falsely claimed that evidence pointed to Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction. Instead, real evidence points to the desire of neoconservatives to occupy Iraq, obtain access to Iraqi oil, and reshape the Middle East to better serve U.S. interests. Nevertheless, the Iraq War and occupation have lasted for more than six years. While Obama has officially promised a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, it isn't yet clear whether this will indeed happen, or how long it will take if it does. At the end of 2008 fiscal year, there were 190,400 troops stationed in and around Iraq. The administration is currently shifting some of these troops to Afghanistan.

Including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, more than one-third of active-duty troops are stationed overseas, as shown in Table 1.

THE COST OF THE U.S. MILITARY GLOBAL PRESENCE

The United States spent \$630 billion for national security in fiscal year 2008, not including international security assistance, space explorations, veterans' benefits,

or homeland security. The Department of Defense does not detail its budget, so it isn't possible to compare costs of maintaining bases overseas and in the United States. It also does not provide enough information about transportation or other logistics that would clarify how much of those costs could be attributed to maintaining a global presence.

Budget requests issued by the administration each February contain some information about global presence. For example, Obama's budget for fiscal year 2010 requests \$1.8 billion — the largest sum ever — for the global defense posture. As a budget item, this refers to changes in the forward (overseas) presence of the military. In other words, money is requested to rebase troops from one overseas location to another, or enhance presence in a new location. Most of the 2010 request is for construction in Guam so that Marines can relocate there from Japan.12 Other funds would be used to replace and upgrade facilities in the Middle East and Africa. This budget request reflects the changes in global presence from the traditional garrisons of Western Europe and Northeast Asia to the Middle East and Africa.

The budget also describes European consolidation, where the posture is shifting to the south and the east of Europe, for closer proximity to regions requiring military operations. In the Western Hemisphere, the objective is to develop access arrangements in several countries. In Africa and the Middle East, the Pentagon seeks access arrangements and a network of Forward Operating Sites and Cooperative Security Locations.

The 2010 budget request also includes \$1.2 billion for the geographic unified combatant commands, though this money is only to fund specific activities; it doesn't include funding for soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, ships, planes, and other equipment that are necessary to execute the geographic commands' missions.13

The operations and management budget does specify line items as "base operations support," but it is not possible to determine where the spending is intended. It is possible to dissect the military construction budget, but 47% of the dollar amount in the 2010 fiscal year budget request is labeled as "unspecified worldwide locations." Military construction increased at more than three times the rate of Department of Defense increases, yet much of this is due to the Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC). With BRAC, the military attempts to identify long-term savings that can be achieved through consolidation and changes in basing structure, though this requires spending more money in the short term. The military is currently in the fifth round of BRAC, which is focused on reducing excess capacity within U.S. bases and territories of the United States. One-third of the budget for military construction and family housing is for BRAC in the fiscal year 2010 budget request. However, the 1993 fiscal year did indicate operating costs according to location. Overseas bases did have disproportionate operating costs. For the 17% of overseas bases indicated in the report, operating costs exceeded 20% of the \$24.5 billion total.

To estimate the cost of the U.S. military's global presence, I used the proportion of military personnel stationed overseas, the budget authority for each military branch (e.g. Army) as well as defense-wide spending, and budget information about international security assistance and payments from governments that host U.S. bases. The estimate includes the following components:

- 1. The proportion of each budget for each branch (e.g. Army) according to the proportion of that branch's military personnel stationed or afloat overseas, not including those stationed in and around Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 2. The proportion of the defense-wide budget according to the proportion of total military personnel overseas, excluding Iraq and Afghanistan (i.e. 25% of the defense-wide budget).
- 3. The cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 4. The budget for international security assistance (i.e. subfunction 152).

To achieve the final number of roughly a quarter of a trillion dollars, I subtracted the estimated payments from host governments. As the table indicates, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan constitute a significant portion of the total cost: \$102.5 billion, or 42% in 2008.

Shrinking the global military presence will only result in savings if the military itself is scaled back. Troops must be demobilized, not stationed within the continental United States. In other words, simply returning the troops to U.S. basing will result in little savings.

Forward posture also likely increases transportation spending within the military. The budget request for the 2010 fiscal year includes \$9.8 billion for U.S. Transportation Command, one of the four logistical unified commands. The details of spending are insufficient to determine how much of this for overseas presence. Given current fiscal priorities, however, it is likely to be a disproportionate share. Overseas basing also implies transportation and support for dependents, as well as military and civilian personnel. Accommodating de-

Estimated Cost of the U.S. Military Global Presence (in billions of current dollars)						
Category	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010			
Army	\$24.7	\$19.6	\$20.0			
Navy	58.0	57.9	61.4			
Air Force	27.1	27.5	28.1			
Defense Wide	26.3	21.3	22.6			
Subtotal	136.1	126.2	132.1			
Wars	102.5	141.8	130.0			
International Security Assistance	10.5	9.1	12.8			
Payments from Host Governments	-5.0	-5.0	-5.0			
Total	\$244.1	\$272.1	\$269.9			

Source: Author's calculations; in budget authority.

pendents' needs and travel requirements is also likely to make basing overseas more expensive than within the United States. While it may be less expensive to operate a base in a low-wage country, most soldiers are stationed in high-wage countries, such as Germany and Japan.

Payments from host countries for the presence of U.S. troops could result in a net benefit to the United States. However, these payments are minor. Total direct contributions from allies amounted to just over \$4 billion, with another \$4 billion in "indirect contributions," according to the last available information. Moreover, 78% of direct contributions come from one country, Japan, which is currently funding the relocation of Marines from Japan to Guam. Payments from Japan are likely to be much smaller in the future. Other countries make little to no direct contribution to the U.S. bases.

The Unified Security Budget14 conceptualizes security spending as that for the military (including nuclear weapons that are in the Department of Energy and other spending not within the Department of Defense), international affairs, and homeland security (outside of overlaps). For 2010, the unified security budget would

be \$782.4 billion. In this case, spending on the military overseas presence is at least 34% of total security spending, as shown in Table 3. Scaling back the military and its overseas presence can result in freeing up funds for other priorities or deficit reduction, but it can also result in a change in security strategy as opposed to a decline in security.

CHANGING THE GLOBAL MILITARY PRESENCE

The cost of rising hostility toward the United States across the world must be added to the financial costs of the military's global presence. The Central Intelligence Agency refers to the result of such hostility as blowback.

The benefits of the military's global presence must be weighed against its annual \$250 billion price tag. Military strategy documents ascribe the vast presence overseas to projecting power and countering threats outside of U.S. borders before they can enter within the border. But as potential threats become increasingly nonconventional, defending the nation requires better

Military Global Presence as a Proportion of Total Security Spending					
Category	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010		
National security (050)	\$696.3	\$693.6	\$692.8		
International affairs (150)	68.4	48.0	44.6		
Homeland security	65.2	71.6	71.1		
Overlap (minus)	-23.8	-26.2	-26.1		
Total Security Spending	\$806.1	\$787.0	\$782.4		
% Global military presence	30%	35%	34%		

Source: Author's calculations based on Office of Management and Budget, Budget of the U.S. Government, FY2010.

intelligence, international policing, diplomatic efforts, and international cooperation, not a large military presence that irritates regional sensitivities.

Among the military's branches, the Navy is taking the most practical approach by clearly posturing itself as an organization that protects international trade. The national maritime strategy, A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower, co-released by the Department of Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard in 2008, states in big bold letters on the opening page that "90% of the world's commerce travels by sea." Increasing attention is paid to the rise in attacks of piracy and oil bunkering (large-scale theft of oil). References to these actions are prevalent in posture statements and other documents of the Department of Defense. But only about 10% of world exports come from the United States. The United States imports more than it exports fostering a large annual trade deficit. If the U.S. military is increasingly in the business of protecting trade, then the true cost of imports should be paid by the purchasers of the imports and beneficiaries of the exports. Moreover, international trade should be protected by an internationally branded and financed security wing, not the U.S. Department of Defense.

Likewise, other threats used by administrations, the Pentagon, and others to justify large military budget are not unique to the United States. Terrorist incidents occur all over the world. Through consensus building and cost-sharing, international cooperation can more effectively and efficiently address these threats.

Finally, the enormous cost of supporting such a large military drains resources. Burdensome spending as well as such an overwhelming focus on war has left the country unable to effectively cope with catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina. The country's infrastructure is neglected. The challenges presented by the economy as well as global warming require a change in focus for the government. In short, the United States cannot afford to spend \$250 billion every year on its global military presence.

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