

Military Spending and the Economic Crisis

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Before You Read:

1. Brainstorm some examples of military spending (such as foreign military bases, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, etc.). List them on the board. Brainstorm some examples of domestic needs (such as public schools, national parks, Medicare, etc.), and list them on the board.
2. Look at the list of domestic needs. Have any of them suffered budget cuts due to the economic crisis? Share what you know about cuts to the domestic budget. Share your own experiences about the effects of these cuts.
3. Look at the list of military expenses. Do you know if any of these are being cut? Which ones should be priorities? Are there any that could be cut? Are there any that should be increased?

The 25% Solution

A congressional representative from Massachusetts, Barney Frank, wants to cut military spending by 25%. He believes we are developing weapons that we cannot use now and that we probably won't be able to use in the future. "If we are not able to get military spending under control," he recently said, "we will not be able to respond to important domestic needs."

What About Our Security?

Sarah Palin, former vice-presidential candidate, says that cuts in military spending are a bad idea. She says that these are "perilous times." She believes that reducing our defenses "is a show of weakness, it is not a sign of strength."

What Do You Think?

What do you think of the idea that we should spend less on the military and more on domestic needs? List some advantages and disadvantages of cutting the military budget by 25%.

What Could the 25% Solution Mean to You?

What effect could the 25% Solution have on this year's budget cuts? These math activities will help you find out how the 25% Solution could affect your community.

- a) The U.S. spends about \$1 trillion a year on war and the military. (This includes the Pentagon's budget plus nuclear weapons programs in the Department of Energy and other agencies' military expenses.) What is 25% of \$1 trillion?
- b) There are 304 million people in the United States. If every person equally shared the savings by cutting the military budget by 25%, how much would each person get?
- c) Find out how many people live in your city and your state. Then multiply those numbers by the answer to "b" to find out how much money your city or state could get if the savings from the 25% Solution were sent to your area.
- d) Find out how much your city and state's budgets are being cut this year because of the economic crisis. Is it more or less than your local share of a 25% cut in the military budget?
- e) Visit <www.25percentsolution.org>. Tell your Representative and Senators how you feel about the 25% Solution.

Answers: a) \$250 billion; b) About \$822 (after you do this calculation, consider rounding to the nearest 10 or the nearest 100); c) For example, Massachusetts has a population of about 6,400,000. If \$822 per person were redirected from military spending to our state, Massachusetts would receive \$5,260,800,000; d) Massachusetts budget cuts could total about \$5 billion for FY2010. If the federal savings from The 25% Solution were redirected towards Massachusetts, it would make up for the state's shortfall and bring in an additional \$260,800,000. (Source: <www.massbudget.org>.)

What About Jobs?

If the federal government cut back on defense spending and instead spent money in other areas like health care, education, mass transit, and home weatherization, it could generate more jobs and better wages and benefits. The table below shows the effect of spending \$1 billion on various sectors of the economy.

What Are Our Values?

Forty years ago, Martin Luther King said we lived in a “thing-oriented” society rather than a “person-oriented” society. He believed that our society put a higher value on “machines and computers, profit motives and property rights” than it did on people. He expressed his outrage at what he called “the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism.” He said, “We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.”

Discuss this quote by Martin Luther King. Work with others to define racism, materialism, and militarism. Do you agree that these “giant triplets” play a big role in society? Why did King

mention “machines and computers, profit motives and property rights”? What are profits and property rights? Why do you suppose he thought society was putting a higher value on profits and property rights than it was putting on people? What values do you think should govern our society?

Exploring the Cost of War

War is expensive. But it costs more than just money. What are the costs of war? Think and talk about this with others, keeping in mind that some costs might be obvious and others might be hidden or might take years to become visible.

Revisit Your List of Advantages and Disadvantages

After reading and discussing the information in this lesson, go back and look at your list of the advantages and disadvantages of the 25% Solution. Would you make any changes to that list?

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The Effect on Employment of Spending \$1 Billion in U.S. Economy, 2005

Spending Targets	# of jobs created	% change in jobs relative to defense spending	average wages and benefits per worker	average wages and benefits relative to defense	total wages and benefits from employment in millions	% change in wages & benefits relative to defense wages & benefits per worker
Defense	8,555	—	\$65,986	—	\$564.5	—
Health care	12,883	+50.2%	\$56,668	-14.2%	\$730.1	+29.3%
Education	17,687	+106.7%	\$74,024	+12.2%	\$1,309.3	+131.9%
Mass Transit	19,795	+131.4%	\$44,462	-32.6%	\$880.1	+55.9%
Construction for home weatherization	12,804	+49.7%	\$51,812	-21.5%	\$693.7	+22.9%

This chart compares the effect of spending \$1 billion on defense and on various other sectors of the economy. For example, the chart shows that spending \$1 billion on health care would create 50.2% more jobs than if it were spent on defense. The wages in health care are, on average, 14.2% lower than in defense. The total salary package (including benefits), however, is generally 29.3% higher. Study the chart and discuss it. Consider this chart in light of the 25% Solution. How do you think the government should prioritize spending? Why? **Source:** <www.peri.umass.edu/fileadmin/pdf/other_publication_types/PERI_IPS_WAND_study.pdf>.