

## Shift wasteful defense spending to domestic needs

Written by Fred Easter  
Monday, 23 July 2012 14:14

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Nobody asked me, but a lot of people are paying attention to the wrong set of facts. I hear Tea Party politicians complaining about the deficit. They say that Obamacare and Medicare are too costly, not sustainable. I'll tell you what's not sustainable.

Did you know that China has the second largest defense budget in the world? They spend just under 90 billion dollars a year on defense. It shouldn't surprise you that we're in first place. In fact, we're on the other side of just first place. Our defense budget is larger than the COMBINED defense budgets of the countries that rank 2 through 11 on the list. Our defense budget is 739 billion dollars per year. What is even more shocking to me is that we have troops deployed in 175 countries around the world.

Please don't ask me what we're doing in each of the 175 countries. We are not, happily, fighting 175 wars although, at times, it has seemed that way. Happily, we do not have 175 enemies. Heck, we may not have 175 friends either. In fact, having arrogant, entitled, well-armed foreigners wandering around one's country does not have quite the same impact as "The Teacher Corps".

Sadly, when you look into the realities of our military involvement in 175 sovereign nations, at least two disturbing categories emerge. There is a set of countries that wish we would go away, but can't compel us to do so. Cuba falls into this category.

Guantanamo Bay is in Cuba. Maybe you could make the argument that we need to keep an eye on those "commie Cubans," but Cuba's defense budget is probably smaller than Minneapolis' budget for snow removal. Plus, they're close enough to us to be monitored electronically. Defectors from there have shown up on our shores in boats that would have three guys with their limit of walleyes if you found them on Mille Lac.

A second category, even more troubling, includes most of the countries of western Europe. We are a major part of the "national" defense of the likes of Germany, France, England and others. How can we justify spending billions per year on their defense while cutting the salaries of firemen and policemen at home.

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How can the Tea Party complain about entitlement programs for Americans like unemployment benefits and Medicare and be OK with western Europeans being entitled to U.S. funded “national defense” of western Europe?

I'm sure there are important strategic advantages to some of our foreign deployments, but 175 is a tough sell. And, what effect on our deficit or our recession would a defense budget of, say, 600 billion or 500 billion have? More than 5 times more defense than China ought to be sufficient to keep us safe. Nobody likes China and WE are the bastion of freedom, right? Yeah, unless you're poor, dark skinned, elderly, gay, Muslim, or in a union, and you like to vote.