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True Budget Hawks are Foreign Policy Doves

During my presidential campaigns, well-meaning supporters would sometimes suggest I stop emphasizing opposition to overseas intervention and focus on fiscal issues. I disregarded the advice, not only because adopting a noninterventionist foreign policy is crucial to restoring constitutional government but because it is impossible to be both a budget hawk and a war hawk. This is shown by the constant failure of so-called fiscal conservatives in the Republican leadership to fulfill their promise to cut spending.



Military spending is the second largest category of spending in the federal budget, behind Social Security spending. The US military budget equals the combined budgets of the next seven biggest-spending countries. Yet, many Republicans who claim to want to reduce federal spending want to increase the military budget.

Many Republicans also prioritize protecting the military-industrial complex over reducing spending on welfare and entitlement programs. This makes them eager to agree to a deal giving Democrats almost all of their welfare wish list as long as Republicans get almost all of their warfare wish list. Many Republicans do not have a principled objection to the welfare state; they just think Democrats want to spend too much on welfare and not enough in warfare. Many Democrats find increasing warfare spending acceptable; they just think Republicans want to overspend on warfare and underspend on welfare.

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We saw the process at work again last week when the House passed a two-year budget deal that increases spending by approximately 320 billion dollars per year and suspends the debt ceiling for two years. Republican leadership ignored all these problems and claimed victory because the bill increases warfare spending.

A majority of Republicans opposed the spending bill, even though it was supported by President Trump and the Republican leadership. Of course, many more Republicans would have voted for the bill if a “conservative” Republican still held the speaker’s gavel.

Republicans’ love affair with the military-industrial complex is not the only reason they are unwilling to reduce spending, and military contractors are not the only Republican constituency demanding spending increases. Many farmers vote for Republicans who promise to cut most domestic spending except for agricultural subsidies. Also, many Republican Congress members support corporate subsidies and bailouts. Still, anyone who observes the behavior of Republican leaders around budget time can see they have a primary priority of protecting the military-industrial complex.

Republican Congress members’ support for ever-higher levels of military spending is justified by their support for an interventionist foreign policy. Some in Congress claim to favor both an interventionist



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foreign policy and reductions in military spending, but these so-called cheap hawks cannot resist the demands for an increased budget since they support a hyper-interventionist foreign policy. They are unable to effectively respond when their fellow hawks accuse them of compromising national security by opposing “adequately” funding the Pentagon.

As long as Republican leadership supports an interventionist foreign policy, it will never support reducing warfare or welfare spending. Therefore, fiscal conservatives must join libertarians to restore a foreign policy of peace and free trade. Lobbyists for the big military contractors would find it more difficult to make their case for big spending if Congress limits the defense budget to what is needed to defend America instead of wasting trillions in supposed efforts to police and democratize the world.

Ron Paul is a former U.S. congressman from Texas. This article originally appeared at the [Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity](#) and is reprinted here with permission.



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