



WHAT ROLE FOR DEFENSE?

How can we talk about the defense budget without clarity on what we want the DOD to do?

History. Since WW II, the US has engaged in several types of international operations.¹

1. **Geopolitical.** We've acted on behalf of a 'friend' under threat. The Korean War (invasion by North Korea), the Vietnam War (Communist threat to Southeast Asia), the first Iraq War (invasion of Kuwait by Iraq), and our continued support for Israel (attacked periodically by its neighbors) are examples of this purpose.
2. **International commerce.** The US commits military resources to keep the global system functioning. As Buck McKeon puts it in a WSJ editorial," The US Military is the principle guardian of our global economy's avenues of commerce. We protect the skies, cyberspace and the world's oceans."²
3. **Threat to the US.** We've acted to deter/eliminate a direct threat to America. The second Iraq war (although much-debated) and the war in Afghanistan were initiated because of direct threats to the US.
4. **Wars to prevent atrocities.** Our interventions in Bosnia, Nicaragua and Libya attempted to halt persecution of a group of people. Strong pressure existed for intervention in various African conflicts to avoid bloodshed. On October 14th, President Obama deployed up to 100 troops (advisors) to Central Africa to assist in ending atrocities.

Future. How should we behave regarding current international issues?

1. **Geopolitical.** Should we go to war to defend Taiwan, Israel, or Georgia from attack by their larger and very powerful neighbors? Or to prevent nuclear weapons development by Iran or North Korea that threaten our allies, but not the US directly?
2. **Commercial.** Must we continue to patrol the world's oceans, airspace, and cyberspace as Mr. McKeon suggests? Can Americans continue to pay for this service to the remainder of humanity? Or, is it in our own best interests to do so because it allows us to exert a dominant influence over international activities?
3. **Threat to US.** Al Qaeda, Iran, China, and Russia pose very real long term threats to the US that we must be prepared to confront. Are these the most important legs of our defense policy and most deserving of our limited resources?
4. **Wars to prevent atrocities.** Africa continues to witness ethnic and political genocide: - should we intervene? Does the capability to end some humanitarian disaster oblige us to do so? Since we ourselves are not threatened, is it constitutional to spend our tax dollars in the defense of others?

For what purpose do we spend one-fifth of our national resources? With the sole exception of 9-11, hasn't our military 'investment' paid off in security and economic opportunity? Or, can we withdraw to fortress America, stop being the global traffic cop, and let other nations take care of themselves?

YOU DECIDE!

¹ A complete history of US military actions shows military action outside the US virtually every year since 1945. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_United_States_military_operations

² Editorial, [Why Defense Cuts Don't Make Sense](#), Wall Street Journal, October 14, 2011.