

Executive Memorandum

No. 1028
December 13, 2007



Published by The Heritage Foundation

Providing for the Common Defense: Four Percent for Freedom

The Honorable Jim Talent and Mackenzie M. Eaglen

America's military leaders are asking—practically begging—for more support, and some Members of Congress are starting to listen. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen recently told *The New York Times* and *Defense News* that current defense spending of about 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) is the floor for the next several years and that the U.S. military will need to increase its share of the overall budget to replace aging weapons and platforms. Air Force Chief of Staff General T. Michael Moseley has also endorsed the 4 percent floor and has said there needs to be a national debate about robust and sustained defense spending.

Representative Trent Franks (R-AZ) and Senator Elizabeth Dole (R-NC) recently introduced a joint resolution (H.J. Res. 67 and S.J. Res. 26) that supports a baseline defense budget of 4 percent of GDP in light of current budget projections that show defense spending falling to just 3.2 percent of GDP by 2012. This legislation astutely notes that demands on America's armed forces—including the National Guard and Reserves—have increased since the end of the Cold War, while the size of the force has decreased. Echoing Admiral Mullen, the resolution also notes the major modernization programs that must immediately be undertaken in

each of the services. It concludes by resolving that Congress supports committing to a minimum of 4 percent of GDP to meet the national security requirements of the United States.

A Call to Action. The Franks–Dole joint resolution is welcome news. U.S. foreign policy needs a strong military. The U.S. cannot afford an inadequate defense budget that fails to provide the military with the necessary means to meet its obligations. The resolution correctly notes that the “defense of the United States is contingent on fully equipped, fully armed, well trained, and healthy volunteer armed forces.” This minimum level of funding would ensure that the military can continue to meet its national security obligations. In addition, maintaining steady and robust funding will protect the military from a post-Iraq “peace dividend” similar to the “procurement holiday” that ravaged the military after the end of the Cold War.

-
- U.S. foreign policy needs a strong military.
 - By allocating a minimum of 4 percent of GDP to defense spending, Congress would take a first step toward meeting both current and future U.S. national security requirements.
-

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/em1028.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies
of the
Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis
Institute for International Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

The federal government has been ignoring the need to develop and build the next generation of weapons and equipment since the early 1990s. The military is facing similar funding dilemmas this decade as modernization needs are displaced by immediate demands to fund military operations, including those in Afghanistan and Iraq, in both the baseline budget and supplemental appropriations. As a direct result of the massive budgetary cuts following Operation Desert Storm, today's force is roughly half the size of the military in the early 1990s. The Army has been reduced from 18 divisions to 10, the Air Force from 37 tactical air wings to 20, and the Navy from 568 ships in the late 1980s to a fleet of only 276 today.

Yet the number, size, and duration of military deployments have increased dramatically since the end of the Cold War. Many soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are already on—or scheduled for—their third or fourth overseas tour. Others have served even longer. Providing the proper funds to increase the number of soldiers and marines by 94,000 will considerably alleviate their burden and bolster the nation's ground forces as they continue to meet national security requirements.

In addition to current manpower shortages, much of the military's equipment is too old and increasingly unreliable. Even if the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ended tomorrow, the military would require steady and robust funding for the next five to 10 years to repair and replace worn-out equipment and undertake modernization programs to replace technologies that are often more than 30 years old. Admiral Mullen has described America's forces as "breakable" but not yet broken.

Keeping the Pledge. If Congress is to keep its pledge of providing "unconditional moral and monetary support" for the nation's armed forces, it must act with the spirit of this resolution in mind and acknowledge that:

- Defense spending as a percentage of GDP is the most appropriate and realistic means to gauge America's commitment to providing for an adequate national defense.
- Unless annual defense budgets are maintained at 4 percent of GDP, America's military could

become a "hollow" force, placing the lives of America's young men and women in uniform at risk and jeopardizing the Pentagon's ability to defend the nation's vital national interests.

- Spending 4 percent on defense is achievable and fiscally responsible. It would encourage the military to use its resources prudently without limiting the U.S. economy's capacity to grow and prosper.
- The nation will not be able to meet its obligations to the military without a bipartisan consensus in Washington that is committed both to maintaining adequate defense spending and to addressing the pressing challenge of the unprecedented and unsustainable growth in Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, which are consuming ever-larger portions of the federal budget.

Policymakers who say that they support a strong military should be judged by whether or not they support spending a minimum of 4 percent of GDP on the regular defense budget over the next decade. The Military Coalition, a consortium of 33 nationally prominent military and veterans organizations that represent more than 5.5 million members plus their families and survivors, has recently added its voice to the debate by publicly supporting spending at least 4 percent of GDP on national defense.

Conclusion. Allocating 4 percent of GDP to meet the national security needs of the United States will drive long-term trends instead of establishing a precise requirement for any specific year. In some years, the defense budget can and should exceed 4 percent of GDP. By supporting the 4 percent floor for defense spending, Congress would take a helpful first step toward allocating the resources to provide adequately for national security. Ideally, this would happen before any budget resolution amendment during the spring budget debate.

—The Honorable Jim Talent is Distinguished Fellow in Military Affairs at The Heritage Foundation and served as a U.S. Senator from 2002 to 2007. Mackenzie M. Eaglen is Senior Policy Analyst for National Security in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.