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ASI Update:

Obama's Big Budget

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Amid the din of excitement about the Oscars and the Superbowl, the Obama administration's budget is getting some attention.

It shouldâ€™ it is enormous! A whopping \$3.8 trillion in federal spending.

Have you heard our explanation of one trillion? Okay, we did not make it up, but we use it alot. One million seconds from now is 11½ days later. A billion seconds is 32 years later. And a trillion seconds is 32,000 years later. Does that help you imagine \$3.8 trillion in federal spending?

Let's break it down: more than half of that moneyâ€™ \$2.4 trillionâ€™ is "non-discretionary:" funding levels for entitlements like Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security that are locked in over years. The restâ€™ \$1.4 trillionâ€™ is "discretionary;" the parts of the budget that Congress makes decisions about each year. So, of the \$1.4 trillion that Congress is considering for 2011, \$708.3 billion (or more than half) is slated for military purposes, including the Pentagon's base budget, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the nuclear weapons-related activities in the Department of Energy.

The Obama administration's federal budget proposal includes freezes on spending levels for about 120 different (mostly) domestic programs, with the Office of Management and Budget estimating that over three years these spending freezes will generate \$250 billion in savings.

At the same time, military spending is up. The total of \$708.3 billion includes \$159 billion in projected war spending for 2011.

For 2010, the base Pentagon budget was \$531 billion with another \$129.6 billion in budgeted war spending. In addition, Congress will have to pass at least \$33 billion more for 2010 to pay for President Obama's surge in Afghanistan.

Accompanying news of the biggest military budget of all times, was the release of the Quadrennial Defense Review, a report on military strategy and posture that comes out every four years (hence the word quadrennial). The big news of the big report is that the United States is no longer going to prepare to fight two major wars at the same time. Long the preferred hallmark of American military superiority, the two war doctrine is going out of fashion just as the United States finds itself fighting (and not winning) two wars.

Instead of this ambitious agenda, the Pentagon's new strategy will be

a much more limited and strategic four prong focus (are you getting the sarcasm?) that will have the United States: 1) prevail in today's wars, 2) prevent and deter future conflicts, 3) prepare to defeat adversaries and succeed in a wide range of contingencies, 4) enhance the all volunteer force. So there you have it. When you look at it that way, \$700 plus billion may not be enough. The real question is why the Pentagon is embracing this huge range of activities in the name of "defense."

It will take some time to pour through the details in the doorstep-sized budget, but below we offer some resources and analysis to help wrap the mind around the budget behemoth.

Best,

Frida Berrigan

Bill Hartung

[Arms and Security Initiative](#)

BUDGET RESOURCES

["Fiscal Year 2011 Defense Spending Request: Briefing Book"](#)

Laicie Olson, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, February 2010

Taxpayers for Common Sense, [regularly updated analysis of the budget](#)

["Gates Shakes Up Leadership for F-35"](#), New York Times, February 2, 2010

Best line of the article: "The defense industry is pleased but bemused," said Loren Thompson, the chief operating officer at the Lexington Institute, a policy group financed partly by military contractors. "It's been telling itself for years that when the Democrats got control it would be bad news for weapons programs. But the spending keeps going on."

["Obama Seeks Money for Nuclear Weapons Work"](#)

Associated Press, February 1, 2010

The administration on Monday asked Congress for more than \$7 billion for activities related to nuclear weapons in the budget of the National Nuclear Security Administration, an increase of \$624 million from the 2010 fiscal year.

QDR RESOURCES

[Quadrennial Defense Review](#) (128 pages)

["Vision Meets Reality: 2010 QDR and 2011 Defense Budget"](#)

A (very timely) report by Travis Sharp, Center for a New American Security, February 1, 2010

["How to Read the QDR"](#)

a shorter piece based Sharp's report was published by Foreign Policy Magazine,

["QDR: Pentagon Revises Its Long-Held Two-War Doctrine"](#), Christian Science Monitor, February 1, 2010.

For a deeper analysis of trends in military spending: ["An Undisciplined Defense: Understanding the \\$2 Trillion Surge in US Defense Spending"](#), Carl Conetta, Project on Defense Alternatives, January 2010.

U.S. military power-when is enough enough?

[By Bernd Debusmann, Fri Feb 5, 2010](#)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The numbers tell the story of a superpower addicted to overwhelming military might: the United States accounts for five percent of the world's population, around 23 percent of its economic output and more than 40 percent of its military spending. America spends as much on its soldiers and weapons as the next 18 countries put together.

Why such a huge margin? The question is rarely asked although there is spirited debate over specific big-ticket weapons systems whose conception dates back to the days when the United States was not the only superpower and large-scale conventional war against the other superpower, the Soviet Union, was an ever-present possibility. Those days are over.

Now, the U.S., deep in deficit and grappling with the aftermath of the worst recession since the 1930s, is reaching a point where the only way the country can maintain its role as the world's towering military giant is to borrow money from the country many military planners see as a potential future adversary - China. "Obviously, this is not a tenable arrangement over the long run," says Loren Thompson, CEO of the Lexington Institute, a think tank with close ties to defence contractors.

The Pentagon, he says, must wean itself from the idea that the American military can go anywhere and do anything equally well.

Whether that weaning process will ever happen is open to doubt. "America's interests and role in the world require Armed Forces with unmatched capabilities," according to the just-published Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), a report required by Congress on the future of U.S. national security strategy.

"Unmatched" is one thing, dwarfing the rest of the world is another. The U.S., for example, has 11 aircraft carriers in service; the rest of the world has eight. China is building one but analysts say it won't be completed before 2015. "The United States," notes the QDR, "remains the only nation to project and sustain large-scale operations over extended distances."

That it can do so is largely thanks to weapons systems developed during and for the Cold War, from aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines to long-range bombers. During his campaign for the presidency, Barack Obama frequently pledged to reform the defence budget "so that we are not paying for Cold War era weapons systems that we don't use." He repeated that pledge in his first State of the Union message.

But his defence budget, released in the same week as the QDR, shows no distinct departure from the spending habits perpetuated in the budgets of his predecessor, George W. Bush. It allotted more funds for special forces, helicopters, missile-launching drones and other equipment for the "asymmetric wars" in Afghanistan and Iraq but it also provided for a new aircraft carrier and attack submarines.

If they are not Cold War era weapons meant for conventional conflict, what is?

IMBALANCE BETWEEN HARD AND SOFT POWER

In the eyes of Miriam Pemberton of the Institute for Policy Analysis, a liberal Washington think tank, Obama's budget provides for add-ons rather than hard choices and actually widens the huge imbalance between military spending and spending on non-military foreign engagement.

Also known as soft power, the term embraces concepts from diplomacy to foreign aid and some of the most eloquent warnings about the perils of the imbalance have come from the Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, the only Bush cabinet member kept on by Obama.

In 2007, Gates startled the military establishment by calling for increased funding for the State Department and pointing out that the entire American diplomatic corps numbered fewer people than the staffing of an aircraft carrier group. Diplomatic posts have been added since then but according to the Institute for Policy Analysis, the military to non-military imbalance has grown from 11:1 to 12:1.

"U.S. militarism has long been a core part of the American Way," writes Steven Hill in a just-published book, *Europe's Promise*, that compares the United States and Europe. Militarism does "triple duty as a formidable foreign policy tool, a powerful stimulus to the economy, and a usurper of tax dollars that could be spent on other budget priorities."

Health care, say, or education, or the nation's crumbling infrastructure. As it is, according to a study by a peace lobby, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, military spending and the cost of past wars have been swallowing up more than 40 percent of federal tax dollars, health care 20 percent, science, energy and environment 2.5 percent and education just over 2.

There is little grumbling over such lop-sided allocations largely because most Americans equate military spending with security. But having the world's strongest Armed Forces, by far, did not guard America against the September 11, 2001, attacks, nor does it guarantee victory against enemies using such primitive weapons as roadside bombs and suicide vests.

(Bernd Debusmann is a Reuters columnist. The opinions expressed are his own)
