

Opinion: Meaningful debate on military spending is MIA

By Daniel Wirls

As the president and Congress grind their way to a budgetary compromise that will do far more to further alienate the American public than solve our fiscal crisis, one thing – military spending – is all but overlooked. For all the strife over taxes and entitlements, the president and majorities in both parties agree on the following: Military spending is essentially off the table, even though it is far and away the most distorted part of the national budget, the most egregious mismatch between the country's rational needs and the commitment of national resources.

Let's remind ourselves of a few basic facts. Since 2001, the nation has spent more than \$1.2 trillion on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the same period, military spending has increased more than 80 percent. That 80-plus percent increase is separate from, in addition to, the \$1.2 trillion for the wars. U.S. military spending is higher than at any point since World War II, without counting the hundreds of billions for the wars. The United States spends close to half the world's total in military spending and our closest allies bring the total to more than 70 percent. At about \$80 billion, the Pentagon's budget for research and development, alone, exceeds the entire military budget of any nation except China.

Moreover, the fastest growing entitlement program is not Medicaid, Medicare or Social Security – it's veterans' benefits, a separate category of spending, independent of the Pentagon budget or war spending. Over the last decade, the Veterans Affairs budget increased from \$47 billion to \$124.7 billion per year, or 162 percent (compared to Medicare's 109 percent, Medicaid's 119 percent, and Social Security's 61

percent).

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