**The Merits of Military Funding: A Review of the Factors Controlling U.S. Military Funding**

**Introduction**

Military Spending in the US has been higher than ever, including a planned $820 Billion in 2023 (“Biden Signs National Defense Authorization Act Into Law”). Recent trends indicate that this figure will rise as current events increase the need for defensive spending. Military spending has always been a contentious issue; many view the actions of the US military with distrust. Indeed, money allocated to defense spending forces sacrifice elsewhere, and much of the American public believes that allocation to other domestic programs is more beneficial than military spending (Brzoska et al.). The benefits of a strong military are often difficult to verify for the civilian population; military funding, in many cases, does not directly improve the life of the American citizen. In addition, military spending encompasses many uses. For example, much of the American public approves of government funding of research (Funk), yet funding for scientific research often comes from the military. Opacity surrounding military spending necessitates an analysis of the historical, political, and economic trends influencing military spending and the allocation of such spending.

**Historical Factors**

Broadly agreed upon by experts is that the United States invasion of Afghanistan and the resulting “War on Terror” has spurred much of the astronomical military spending during the preceding 20 years. Jill Kimball, Brown University press reporter, estimates that the DoD (US Department of Defense) has spent $8 trillion on wars in the middle east (Kimball). One can assume that historical trends will affect military spending; however, specific effects are difficult to ascertain. As the US has bloomed into a global power, it has needed funding to grow and maintain the most formidable armed force the world has ever seen. Jeffrey R. Crump, an associate professor at San Diego State University, authored a 1989 report that explores the various factors affecting military funding during major wars throughout the history of the United States. Crump finds that outside of wartime, the political learning of sitting administrations significantly affects military spending. While not pronounced when looking at per-capita trends of military funding in the US overall, per-capita spending of individual states particularly pronounces Crumps’s findings. For example, during the “missile age,” mountain states such as Colorado or Wyoming received substantial funding for the storage and development of missiles (Crump). Cold war era politics provide a relevant look into military spending; however, recent military spending has been a more significant point of discussion.  A 2014 report by Dinah Walker of the Council on Foreign Relations found that US military spending sharply rose following the September 11th terrorist attacks. Analyzing this figure as a percentage of world military spending confirms these trends. However, Walker’s report also finds that US national defense spending as a percentage of total GDP did not change in the years following the September 11th terrorist attacks. Compared to the GDP, defense spending took a hit in the years following the election of President Barack Obama, indicating that political factors played a substantial role in military spending (Walker). John Bellamy Foster, a professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon, further analyzes the various influences surrounding the growth of the US imperial triangle and military spending. It confirms that political factors played a dominant role in the rise of US military spending; after the Cold War, presidential administrations continued to maintain military spending to continue the effective wartime economy. However, anti-war sentiment, particularly during the Vietnam War, led to slashes in military spending, which subsequently rose as soon as public opinion became indifferent (Foster et al.). The prevalence of political factors may contribute to a reduction in military spending, should the issue be indicated in candidate choice. Throughout history, political factors have significantly affected US military spending, with technological advances triggering geographic and political reallocations but limited changes to the volume.

**Military Research**

Research as an allocation of military spending polarizes the public. Conflictingly, many agree that military spending should decrease, yet also advocate for funding research. The military employs over 173,000 in scientific roles, comprising around 17.3% of all employees as of March 2022 (*Military Careers*). In 2022, the DoD requested almost $120 billion in funding for research, development, testing, and evaluation, a number projected to increase in an age where technology moves at a lightning pace (Keller). Figures from 2014 projected that the DoD would likely have to allocate more funds to new technology, which required more funding despite ballooning defense spending bills (Tadjdeh). The influx of military spending on university research projects is not a new problem. A 1989 report by Vera Kistiakowsky, a professor of Physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, found that research funded by the DoD resulted in the “distortion of the balance between research fields… and political consequences.” Kistiakowsky identifies these factors as particularly problematic for research funded by the DoD, going so far as to say that “the negative consequences of DoD funding are much too great a price to pay” (Kistiakowsky). While likely an overreaction, concerns over inherent conflicts of interest in DoD-funded military research present a substantial issue. A contemporary appraisal of the problem surfaces in Melbourne Briscoe’s review of Naomi Oreskes’ book *Science on a Mission: How Military Funding Shaped What We Know and Don’t Know about the Ocean****.*** Oreske’s book examines anecdotal evidence for the problems presented by Kistiakowsky. Exploring cold-war-era military research on the ocean, Oreske finds numerous examples of suppression and comes to a similar conclusion to Kistiakowsky regarding DoD funding (Oreskes). However, Briscoe’s review finds a myriad of issues with the work and ultimately concludes that Oreske’s concerns are unfounded and are primarily the result of straw-man attacks. Briscoe argues that although the Navy’s intents did not align with all researchers, the knowledge ascertained from such research was not fundamentally inferior to other research (Briscoe). Overall, research funding benefits American citizens more directly than other budget allocations; as funding for research continues to rise, military spending is likely to become more beneficial.

**Conclusion**

Military funding is a complex issue shaped by historical, political, and economic factors. The US DoD holds an intricate position at the center of the Military Industrial Complex. While one may argue that current funding is excessive, a simple reduction in funds is an inadequate resolution. Nor is it definite that military spending is unreasonable, given the size and scale of the DoD. It employs more employees than any other organization in the US; downscaling poses a significant challenge regardless of other allocation issues (“The World’s Biggest Employers”). Efforts to reduce military spending must address downsizing, which may be unpopular among the public. Experts agree that congressional oversight over the DoD budget is positive. Yet even with such regulation, the DoD will often bend the purpose of the given funding (Hennigan). Transparency, collaboration, and sacrifice are necessary from all parties for effective legislation concerning military budgeting and funding.

**References**

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