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## Sequester the Empire

By Justin Raimondo

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The fake debate over the misnamed "defense" budget underscores everything that's wrong with our foreign policy, our political system, and the crooks who rule the roost in Washington.

This *Washington Post* piece on the politics surrounding the issue tells us everything we need to know about how the political class – and its journalistic camarilla – operates. Although the authors cite a figure – \$561 billion – nowhere do we read that this is an all-time high. Yet that's just the beginning of what's wrong with Washington.

In any debate, one would reasonably expect the two sides to disagree, but not in this case. Both the President and his Republican opposition agree that the military budget must be radically expanded – and that the Congress needs to break its own sequestration law in order to do it. As the *Post* puts it:

*"There's broad consensus in both parties that the military needs more money to modernize its forces and meet its responsibilities in a world that seems to have grown more chaotic and dangerous in the past 12 months. It's unclear, however, how Congress and the White House can come to an agreement on where to find the additional funds."*

No one in Washington is willing to admit that the rising chaos is a direct result of the US "meeting its responsibilities" to conquer Iraq, occupy Afghanistan, and undertake regime change operations in Libya, Syria, and Ukraine. That's because they all had a hand in it.

Instead of facing reality – a political no-no in the District of Columbia – an elaborate fantasy is constructed within the framework of an illusory partisan "debate." "The battle over the budget that President Obama will submit Monday," the *Post* breathlessly informs us, "is emerging as a preview of the 2016 presidential election on national security, an area that for now appears to be the greatest vulnerability of Obama and the Democrats."

How so? After all, the President is asking Congress to disregard the spending caps he himself put in place in order to eke out an extra \$38 billion for the military. Doesn't this prove his militarist bona fides? Not by Washington standards it doesn't:

*"Even if both parties share the blame, a cash-strapped Pentagon could still provide an opening for Republicans — whose standing on national security issues was damaged by the Iraq war — to make an argument that they are the party best positioned to keep the country safe."*

As if to underscore the *Post*'s – and Washington's – insularity, the next paragraph features a quote from one of the most discredited of all the unrepentant neocons, Danielle Pletka, vice president of the neoconish American Enterprise Institute, who declares that the presidential election is going to be "a referendum on Obama's foreign policy." Madame Pletka, you'll recall, was one of Ahmed Chalabi's biggest defenders: she once led a march of the neocons from AEI headquarters to the State Department demanding "Free Chalabi!" when he was accused by the CIA of selling his services to Iran. In Washington, however, no one is ever discredited by the complete failure of their policies, *especially* if said failure involves the death of hundreds of thousands and the utter destruction of a nation.

To imagine the Democratic leadership will reprise with some (milder) version of this is to expect far too much, however. The *Post* informs us that: "Democrats, though, are determined to prevent the reemergence of their pre-Iraq-war reputation as being the weaker party on defense."

What does "weakness" indicate, in this context? In Washington-speak, to spend more is to be "strong," to spend less is to be "weak," an equation that pleases Boeing, Raytheon, and the rest of the military-industrial complex to no end. Yet the real weakness here is being shown by an appeasing Congress besieged by the Pentagon, which is having a public tantrum over the mere possibility of budget cuts, however theoretical and remote:

*"The impasse over the defense budget has left the Pentagon's top generals complaining that the spending caps, which have been in place since 2013, are damaging the military at a time when the country can least afford it. The list of new threats includes Islamic State fighters, who last year seized major cities in Iraq and Syria, a Russian-backed insurrection in eastern Ukraine and the collapse of the government in Yemen."*

*"The global security environment is more dangerous, and sequestration is still on the books as the law,' Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last week. 'It's absolutely crazy for this country.'"*

What's absolutely crazy is that this country is becoming a banana republic, where the military can interfere in politics, openly intimidate elected officials – and get away with it. Gen. Dempsey needs to shut his trap and read up on the Founders' warnings of the dangers of a standing army. The framers of the Constitution well understood the threat posed by a permanent military class, and these were aptly expressed by James Madison, hardly a Jeffersonian decentralist:

*"The means of defense against foreign danger have been always the instruments of tyranny at home. Among the Romans it was a standing maxim to excite a war, whenever a revolt was apprehended. Throughout all Europe, the armies kept up under the pretext of defending, have enslaved the people."*

The slavery here referred to is the fiscal slavery in which an insatiable military keeps taxpayers, who in our day and age have become indentured servants to the war profiteers and their accomplices in Washington.

As the budget "debate" commences amid a word-cloud of obfuscating rhetoric, one thing is clear: Madison's fears have been more than realized.

How did this happen?

Take a look at the litany of alleged "threats" cited by the *Post*: none have any connection to the concept of "national security," rationally conceived. All are simply blowback from previous ill-fated interventions, starting with the "Islamic State," an entity created by our "allies" in the Persian Gulf and made possible by our disastrous invasion of Iraq. The Iraqi "army," which we ploughed billions into, reacted to the rise of the Islamic State by running as fast as they could away from the action. In any case, the "caliphate" isn't exactly on the verge of overrunning Iowa, as much as Marco Rubio and the other GOP presidential candidates hype the alleged "threat."

The Ukrainian insurrection is more blowback, this time from the US-financed *coup d'etat* in Kiev, which was orchestrated in Washington and Berlin. For some reason, the people of eastern Ukraine don't want to be ruled by a coterie of technocrats and outright fascists who want to cut their pensions in half. Who knew? Here's yet another non-threat to Americans that we're making it our business to confront – at the risk of restarting a cold war with nuclear-armed Russia.

Most puzzling is the idea that the fall of Yemen's nonfunctional "government" represents a dire danger that must be dealt with by the US military. The rebel Houthis are portrayed in the media as pawns of Iran, and yet there is zero evidence of Iranian backing – aside from the fact that the orthodox Shi'ite Iranian hierarchy considers the Houthis to be heretics, and would no more back them than give support to the Alawaites of Syria (or the Bahais of Boston). Besides which, is anybody in Washington seriously contemplating invading that perpetually divided non-country? Of course not.

None of these alleged "threats" justify spending one penny more on the military. The public largely agrees with this assessment: while the scare-mongering over ISIS has had some effect, this hasn't resulted in a desire to put troops back on the ground in Iraq – a prospect rejected by a clear majority of Americans. As for Ukraine and Yemen – no normal American can even locate these on a map (and a good thing, too). The only support for getting involved in these two hot spots is emanating from three places: Capitol Hill, the military-industrial complex, and the Washington "thinktanks" that spend all their resources ginning up the next war.

The problem isn't spending caps, it's the lack of a cap on the scope and ambition of our crazed foreign policy, which sees every eruption as a challenge to American interests. This is true only because we have defined those interests to encompass the entire globe.

The truth is the United States is dead broke: Washington can't afford the luxury of an empire, and it's high time we recognized that fiscal fact of reality. The "defense" budget is really an empire-building budget, and a subsidy to the plethora of American companies that live off its ever-expanding costs. It's high time to sequester the Empire – down to zero.