



A Tea Party Defense Budget

Tea Partiers rightly fear national ruin unless government spending is reduced. The numbers quickly show such reductions must include the defense budget. The

national-security state devours about half of all “discretionary” federal spending. Years ago, Sen. Charles Grassley said to President Ronald Reagan, “It’s great that you are going after the welfare queens, Mr. President. But when are you going to go after the welfare queens in the Pentagon?” The Tea Party, to achieve its goals, must answer, “Now.”

Bean-counting won’t do the job. For meaningful savings, we must begin by changing our grand strategy, which presently defines virtually everything that happens in the world as an American interest. Against the Founders’ advice, we are not only playing the great power game, we are attempting to be the globe’s dominant power.

In consequence, America does not today have a defense budget. It has an empire budget—perhaps the Tea Party should call it that. Derailing the neo-cons’ (and neolib’s) imperial ambitions and returning to the defensive grand strategy America followed through most of her history would save not tens but hundreds of billions of dollars.

We would no longer need a 3:1 “rotation base” for forward-deployed forces because we would no longer have forward-deployed forces. More important, we would have fewer enemies because we would not be inserting our nose into everyone else’s quarrels. That is true national security: reducing the threat by not posing a threat.

A second large tranche of savings would come from designing and equipping our forces for tomorrow’s wars—those that are forced upon us—not yes-

terday’s. Almost all the ships, planes, and weapons we are buying are designed for conflicts against other states. They are useless or worse for Fourth Generation wars against non-state opponents. Why do we need the F-22 and F-35 fighter aircraft? To shoot down Taliban flying carpets.

Canceling the programs—not just reducing the buys—would save tens of billions now and later. (The more complex the system, the higher its maintenance costs.)

The Pentagon will howl, “How can you be certain we won’t fight other states?” It will furiously puff the dragon—the “Chinese threat.”

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The answer, again, is strategic. We refuse to plan for wars against other states, including China, because the real winners are likely to be the 21st century’s main danger, nonstate elements. The defeated state in a war between nations is likely to collapse, like Iraq, creating a Petri dish for nonstate entities. If the price of victory is too high, the winner may go the same route. Our strategic preference, in a time when the main division will be between centers of order and centers of disorder, should be for strong, orderly states, including China.

A third source of savings arises from the fact that we have far too many support elements for our relatively few

combat units. Called the “tooth-to-tail ratio,” Congress has investigated it for years, with small results. The reason is that Congress sees it as an efficiency issue, when it is actually a doctrinal one. Our armed forces remain structured for Second Generation wars—think World War I on the Western Front—where the guiding assumption is that almost all combat units are engaged most of the time. Each therefore requires a large, dedicated “tail.” If we shift to Third Generation doctrine, maneuver warfare, the new assumption is that most of the time most combat units are in reserve, waiting to maneuver. Dedicated tails are small; logistical support is given mainly to the few units in contact. The tooth-to-tail ratio rises dramatically.

As the defense budget is cut, it will be important to insist that all reductions come from the tail. Combat units, espe-

cially ground combat, are few enough already. The Pentagon will want to do the opposite, mothballing front-line units while preserving the bureaucracy. The Tea Party must say “No.”

What would all this add up to? An achievable target would be a defense budget of around \$100 billion. That would still be the largest in the world. But the Pentagon’s welfare queens would have to look for real jobs—not just the vast surplus of field grade and senior officers, but the DOD civilians, hordes of contractors, and best of all the lobbyists of Gucci gulf. Fear not, boys, there are lots of houses that need cleaning. Starting with yours. ■

Coburn's Burden

Fiscal discipline is a moral issue for the Oklahoma senator — and that puts him at odds with his own party.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

"REPUBLICS LAST a limited amount of time," says Tom Coburn, "and they start to fail on fiscal issues, so there's no surprise where we are." Legs crossed, hands resting on the edge of a small armchair, the Oklahoma senator looks perfectly ready for a difficult fight over government spending. "If we do nothing, the middle class will be decimated. We'll have a large lower class with marginal incomes and a tiny wealthy elite," he continues. "That's what happens to all of the countries that go through what we're going through, if you don't fix it." How calmly he states this is almost unnerving.

A large flat-panel television hangs in the lobby of Coburn's office. Most senators have sets playing Fox News, CNN, or C-SPAN, hoping to catch a glimpse of themselves. Coburn's is tuned to USDebtClock.org, a website with over 50 live metrics. National debt, average household debt, M2 money supply, interest on debt, debt held by foreign countries—the numbers zoom by. Over \$13 trillion in United States debt. Nearly \$800 billion in Medicare and Medicaid obligations every year. \$690 billion for defense and wars. More than \$77 trillion in total Medicare liabilities. The chart whirs like a fiscal doomsday machine.

Phones rang nonstop as I visited Coburn's office. Sean, a junior staffer, patiently explained to one caller, "There has been some disinformation in the conservative media. The senator has never voted for a tax increase." Ring!

Another staffer, Laura: "Good afternoon, Dr. Coburn's office. No this wasn't a bill, and it won't raise your taxes. But the senator is for closing some loopholes in the tax code." Ring! "Good afternoon, Dr. Coburn's office. I assure you, the senator agrees with you, it is unconstitutional."

Dick Morris, the former Clinton political advisor who now gabs with Sean Hannity on Fox, had attacked Coburn that day because he voted for the recommendations of Obama's deficit-reduction panel. The Simpson-Bowles plan contained a battery of spending limitations and cuts balanced with some new taxes. Coburn cast his vote acknowledging that some of these measures might be "intolerable," but that it was a first step to averting a financial apocalypse. "The problem is so real, Tom Coburn can't have what he wants," he said. For this lack of partisanship, Morris screeched that Coburn "betrayed us." He blasted the senator's office number to newsletter subscribers. Republican supporters of the reform, Morris complained, "never said anything about endorsing big tax increases as soon as the ballots were cast. They hid their true intentions from us!"

It was once impossible to imagine Coburn being attacked from the right or building bridges with Democrats. He was considered a right-wing berserker himself. Bridges between the parties, bridges to the 21st century, bridges to nowhere—Coburn demolished them all.

He characterized one of his campaigns as a battle of "good versus evil." He has mused about Oklahoma schools "where lesbianism is rampant." He has earned the same moniker as Ron Paul—"Dr. No"—for the stumbling block he presents to business as usual in the Senate.

Liberals have long found him unpalatable. Earlier this year, Coburn put a hold on funds for war-ravaged Uganda because senators had inserted pet projects into the bill. Progressives went apoplectic. "I totally get that Tom Coburn is a man of principle," wrote commentator Matt Yglesias. "He thinks that minimizing federal spending is very important and preventing the rape, kidnap, and massacre of children is much less important." Yglesias went on to call Coburn a "moral monster, guided by a poisonously misguided ethical compass and a callous disregard for human welfare"

But as the country's fiscal outlook darkens, Coburn is coming into this own. "We're not even willing to have a debate about having a debate," he said after being blasted by Morris. The clock keeps ticking down, and one of the putative thought-leaders of the conservative movement was playing a phone prank on him—just the sort of "gotcha" Coburn had denounced on the Senate floor a day earlier. "Congratulations, somebody embarrassed somebody else. How does it feel? ... Who cares who is in charge if there is no country left to be salvaged?"