

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 2723
December 8, 2009

The U.S. Can Afford the Troop Increase in Afghanistan

Baker Spring

In 2010, President Obama's proposal to increase U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan will cost an estimated \$30 billion. Designed to protect the lives and well-being of the American people, the President's proposal will defend the vital interests of the United States. To put this additional \$30 billion in perspective, it amounts to roughly 0.2 percent of the estimated size of the economy in 2010. The defense budget as a whole, including this \$30 billion increase, will amount to less than 5 percent of the economy. Clearly, defense spending is not a threat to the U.S. economy.

Some Members of Congress want to pay for this troop increase by raising taxes. Specifically, they propose imposing a surtax on higher income taxpayers. First, this proposed surtax should be seen for what it really is: a means to defeat President Obama's planned troop increase, not a legitimate means of funding the President's plan. It is not a coincidence that the Members most opposed to the President's plan are those pressing for the tax increase. Second, the tax increase proposal is also misplaced in terms of overall fiscal policy. The budget deficit and debt problems facing the federal government are not the result of insufficient revenue rates but out-of-control domestic spending.

A Little Perspective, Please. It is also appropriate to compare the cost of military operations in Afghanistan with the estimated cost of the health care proposal now before Congress.

The entire cost of the Afghan war, from fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2009, is \$210 billion.

This \$210 billion is less than one-fifth of the \$1.2 trillion projected cost of the health care bill in its first 10 years. Accordingly, the \$30 billion incremental cost of strengthening U.S. forces in Afghanistan compares to favorably \$120 billion average annual increase in spending stemming from the health care bill.

Supplemental Appropriations. In September 2008, Heritage Foundation defense and budget analysts proposed moving funding for the Iraq and Afghan military operations out of supplemental appropriations and into the regular budget.¹ The proposal, however, was qualified insofar as it acknowledged that a return to supplemental appropriations may be necessary "if circumstances require a significantly larger military engagement than what is now foreseen for either operation."

Clearly, the President's proposed increase in troop strength in Afghanistan meets the requirements of this qualification. Therefore, it is appropriate, and Congress should expect, that the increase in the cost of the Afghan operation will be paid for out of a supplemental appropriations bill next year. The return to supplemental appropriations, however, should not be an excuse for fiscal excess. The sup-

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm2723.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

plemental appropriations bill should be limited to the President's expected \$30 billion funding request for Afghanistan.

Protecting the American People. By any reasonable historical standard, defense spending is not the source of the federal government's fiscal woes. This is the case even when the increase in spending on Afghanistan operations is factored into the equation.

Further, the increase in spending on the Afghan operation, as President Obama has stated clearly, is

a necessity. Ultimately, operations in Afghanistan are about protecting and defending the American people against future terrorist attacks. There nothing inconsistent or unachievable in pursuing a policy that simultaneously funds the U.S. war effort and preserves a strong economy.

—*Baker Spring is F. M. Kirby Research Fellow in National Security Policy in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*

-
1. Brian M. Riedl and Baker Spring, "Time to Move Iraq and Afghanistan Funding into the Regular Budget Process," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2068, September 19, 2008 (updated September 26, 2008), at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Budget/wm2068.cfm>.