



The Legacy of Bush II

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(Emphasis added in italics.)

By Robert Scheer

Curb your enthusiasm. Even if your favored candidate did well on Super Tuesday, ask yourself if he or she will seriously challenge the bloated military budget that President Bush has proposed for 2009. If not, military spending will rise to a level exceeding any other year since the end of World War II, and there will be precious little left over to improve education and medical research, fight poverty, protect the environment or do anything else a decent person might care about. You cannot spend well over \$700 billion on “national security,” running what the White House predicts will be more than \$400 billion in annual deficits for the next two years, and yet find the money to improve the quality of life on the home front.

The conventional wisdom espoused by the mass media is that Bush’s budget is a lame-duck DOA contrivance, but that assumption is wrong. *The 9/11 attacks have been shamefully exploited by the military-industrial complex with bipartisan support to ramp up military expenditures beyond Cold War levels.* This irrational spending spree, which accounts for more than half of all federal discretionary spending, is not likely to end with Bush’s departure. Which one of the likely winners from either party would lead the battle to cut the military budget, and where would the winner find support in Congress? *Both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have treated the military budget as sacrosanct with their Senate votes and their campaign rhetoric.* Clinton is particularly clear on the record as favoring spending more, not less, on the military.

John McCain, who previously distinguished himself as a deficit hawk and was almost in a class by himself in taking on the rapacious defense contractors, has thrown in the towel with his inane support for staying in Iraq till “victory,” even if it should take a century. It is simply illogical to call for fiscal restraint while committing to an open-ended war in Iraq that has already cost upward of \$700 billion. Bush’s request for \$515.4 billion for the Defense Department doesn’t even include the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which accounted for nearly \$200 billion over the last budget year and which will cost at least \$140 billion in 2009. Add to those numbers \$17.1 billion for the Department of Energy’s weapons program and over \$40 billion for the Department of Homeland Security

and other national security initiatives spread throughout the federal government, and you'll see that my \$700-billion figure underestimates the hemorrhaging.

McCain knows, and has frequently stated as a Senate watchdog, that much of the military spending is wastefully superfluous for combating terrorists who lack any but the most rudimentary weapons. Bush totally betrayed his campaign 2000 promise to reshape the post-Cold War U.S. military when he seized upon the 9/11 attack as an opportunity to reverse the “peace dividend” that his father had begun to return to taxpayers. Instead, Bush II ushered in the most profligate underwriting of weapons systems that are grotesquely irrelevant for combating terrorism.

The U.S. already spends more than the rest of the world combined on its military, without a sophisticated enemy in sight. The Bush budget cuts not a single weapons system, including the most expensive ones, those designed to combat a Soviet military that no longer exists. *Those sophisticated weapons have nothing to do with combating terrorism and everything to do with jobs and profits that motivate both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.* It is not known whether Osama bin Laden even possesses a rowboat in his naval arsenal, but that won't stop Joe Lieberman from pushing, as is his habit, for an increase in the defense budget to double the funding for the \$3.4-billion submarines built in his home state of Connecticut. Nor does the collapse of the old Soviet Union—and with it the need for enormously expensive stealth aircraft to evade radar systems the Soviets never built—dissuade congressional supporters of those planes from pushing for more, not less, than Bush is requesting. Nor does wasting an additional \$8.9 billion on ICBM missile defense have anything to do with stopping terrorists from smuggling a suitcase nuke into this country.

The centerpiece of the Bush legacy is a “war on terror” based on a vast disconnect between military expenditures and actual national security requirements that the presidential candidates all fully understand. *The question is whether the voters and media will force them to face that contradiction or whether we're in for more of the same—no matter how much the candidates go on about change.*



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