

National Security Goals: Teacher Discussion Guide

Resource 2

- Who are the individuals in the cartoon?
Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and former U.S. President Barack Obama. Teachers may need to explain to students that the Secretary of Defense is appointed by the President and oversees all branches of the armed forces. Leon Panetta served as Secretary of Defense during President Obama's administration from 2011 to 2013.
- What is Barack Obama doing in the cartoon?
President Obama is defusing a bomb labeled "Pentagon Budget." Teachers may need to explain to students that the Pentagon is the headquarters of the Department of Defense and that the phrase "the Pentagon" often refers to the Defense Department.
- What point is this artist making about cuts to the defense budget?
The artist is pointing out that it is difficult to know what to cut from the defense budget. If we cut the wrong thing, it could have disastrous effects for our national security. Hence, the metaphor of defusing a bomb—if the President cuts the wrong wire, the bomb could explode.

Resource 3

- How does the amount of interest taxpayers will owe on the national debt relate to the amount of money budgeted to national defense?
The interest owed is equal to the total defense budget. From the article: "American taxpayers are going to pay an estimated \$600 billion in interest on the national debt in 2012... 'That's one year's worth of defense budget' he noted..."
- According to Mullen, spending within the defense budget has not been prioritized as well as it should have been, and leaders have not had to make tough decisions about which programs and procurements are a priority and which are not. Why was this the case in the past? What has changed to force this prioritization and these tough decisions?
Student's answers will vary, but may include: 1) In the past, the economy was strong and the defense budget was not limited; as the economy entered into a recession, cuts were required across all areas including defense. 2) Conservative administrations were more likely to cut social services to preserve defense spending whereas liberal administrations were more likely to take the opposite approach. 3) The threat of the Soviet Union required massive amounts of spending on nuclear technology and missile defense; modern threats to the United States cannot be addressed with the same military hardware. 4) In the aftermath of 9/11, national security was a top priority.
- What actions did the Defense Department consider to protect itself from future budget cuts?
Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates sought to find \$100 billion in savings in overhead by closing bases and other facilities and by reducing funding for contractors to ensure that the defense budget would grow no more than 2-3% each year. From the article: "For industry and adequate defense funding to survive [Chairman Mullen] said, the two must work together. Otherwise, he added, 'this wave of debt' will carry over from year to year, and eventually, the defense budget will be cut just to facilitate the debt."
- How might Mullen's positions of Navy Admiral and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time this article was written influence his opinion about the national debt? Why might he have been concerned about employment opportunities for returning veterans?
Student's answers will vary, but may include: Mullen's primary concern is national defense. He may ignore (intentionally or unintentionally) problems elsewhere in the economy to address military needs and defense spending. Although it is not spelled out in this article, Mullen's concern about jobs for veterans might have to do with maintaining the appeal of an all-volunteer army.

- What additional information would you need to determine whether you agree with Mullen's argument?

Students' answers will vary, but may include: additional information about the United States' defense priorities, the amount of money that is spent in specific areas (troop deployment, research and development, etc.), the long-term costs of our current military engagements, and alternate ways of meeting the same objectives at a lower cost.

Resource 4

Excerpt 1: From “Strong and Sustainable: How to Reduce Military Spending While Keeping Our Nation Safe,” Introduction and Summary

Define: expenditures, deterrent

Key Points:

- *We spend significantly more on defense than our adversaries do.*
- *The end of the Cold War and improvements in military technology have created a new security environment that requires different attitudes about spending.*

Questions and Answers (including evidence from the article):

- What changes have occurred concerning global security that will allow the United States to reduce its military spending while remaining secure?
We spend much more on defense than do our potential enemies, the Cold War has ended, and improvements in technology have reduced the need for combat troops.
- Which of the reasons for reducing the national defense budget is the strongest? Why?
Students answers will vary. Students should be encouraged to justify their answers with logical arguments.

Excerpt 2: From “Why We Must Reduce Military Spending”

Define: discretionary spending

Key Points:

- *American military spending represented 42% of worldwide military spending as of 2010, although that figure had declined by 38% by 2015.*
- *Representatives from both the Democratic and Republican parties are concerned about military spending.*

Questions and Answers (including evidence from the article):

- Measured as a percentage of military spending worldwide, how big was the U.S. military budget in 2010, and how big was it in 2015?
"Currently (as of 2010) American military spending makes up approximately 42% of all such expenditures worldwide." By 2015, that figure had declined to 38%.
- What is notable about the author's relationship, and what does that imply about this issue? What more might you want to know about the authors to understand their point of view?
Rep. Barney Frank is a Democrat and Rep. Ron Paul is a Republican; the two have very different political ideologies. These issues are important to both parties.

- Why might we "do substantial damage to our economy" if we do not reduce the projected levels of Pentagon spending?

Student answers will vary, and may mention increases in taxes or debt to pay for the spending.

Excerpt 3: From “Defense Spending Would Be Great Stimulus”

Define: procurement, stimulus

Key Points:

- *Increasing spending on the military could create over 300,000 new jobs.*
- *Increasing the military’s annual recruitment goal could create 30,000 additional jobs.*

Questions and Answers (including evidence from the article):

- How much money does Feldstein project it would cost to create 300,000 additional jobs?
It would cost \$20 billion for procurement and research plus \$10 billion for operations and maintenance for a total of \$30 billion for 300,000 jobs.
- What would be the benefit of increasing the military's annual recruitment goal by 15%?
Creating 30,000 jobs.
- What might the downside be to increasing military spending?
Student answers will vary. We could look hostile to other nations and we would have to continue this spending indefinitely or else we would lose the jobs we created.

Excerpt 4: From “UAB Study Confirms Military Spending Helps States Survive Poor Economy”

Define: GSP (gross state product), poverty rate

Key Point:

- *As a state’s dependence on military spending increases, employment rises, family income rises, and poverty rates fall.*

Questions

- How do increases in military spending related to gross state product (GSP) affect a state's employment rate?

A 5-10% increase in a state's dependence on military spending increases employment by about 1%.

- Why might military spending be related to employment, median family income, and poverty rates?

As spending increases, more jobs are needed to meet the demand. As more individuals are hired, family income increases and poverty rates fall.

Resource 4 Group Discussion

- Are increases in the level of defense spending sustainable over the long term?
Students' answers will vary, but may include the following: Increased defense spending will require increases in taxes, reductions in spending in other areas, or increases in the national debt.
- Are increases in defense spending good or bad for the U.S. economy?
Students' answers will vary, but may include the following: Money used for defense could be better spent in other areas to help the economy; or military spending, like all spending, helps the economy.
- What else do you need to know to answer these questions with more authority?
Students' answers will vary, but may include the following: Data showing the relationship between defense spending and the health of the economy overall.