
Defense Report

AUSA



The Defense Share of the Federal Budget—It Shrinks While Others Swell

This summer a nationally syndicated columnist wrote, "There is something wrong when the richest, most powerful nation in history votes added billions to record military budgets, but refuses to spend money to insure health care for its citizens, housing for its homeless, or jobs for the unemployed."

Now, every writer tends to get carried away with his subject from time to time but it is the mark of the great journalist to be able to express conviction while, at the same time, conveying facts. Unfortunately this journalist fell short of that goal. An examination of the 18 Federal Budgets beginning with 1960 (a non-war year) and ending with 1977 shows some rather spectacular contradictions to the argument that defense spending is robbing social programs in the United States:

—In terms of constant 1960 dollars (disregarding inflation) defense spending has risen by just 5 percent in 18 years while spending on social programs has grown by 322 percent, 60 times faster!

—In the same period spending for weapons and for military research and development actually declined by 24 percent. The growth in the military budget has been primarily due to increased pay for service personnel to approach parity with the civilian sector and to increasing numbers of retirements by those who served in World War II and Korea.

—Over those 18 years the share of the federal budget devoted to social programs has grown by 94.7 percent while the defense share *fell* by 52 percent.

—Measured in terms of constant 1960 dollars our Gross National Product has grown six times as fast as our defense budget and, while our defense share of the GNP has dropped from 9 percent in 1960 to 5.2 percent in 1977 (a drop of 42 percent), the social program share has jumped from 5.3 percent to 12.5 percent—up 135 percent.

The inroads of inflation and the shift of emphasis away from defense to a wide range of social programs are most evident in the fact that despite the \$117 billion defense budget just signed into law for fiscal year 1979 we will have 500,000 fewer military people and 200,000 fewer civilians on the defense payroll than we had in 1960 when the defense budget only came to \$45.2 billion.

It is unquestionably true that for those citizens intent on improving education, health care and family life the defense budget appears to be an unfair competitor. They see different threats and different paths toward a better society. Somehow, though, they must be made to see the broader threat and to realize that only by readiness to defend our way of life can we be sure of the opportunity to improve it.