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No shortage of potential spending cuts at Pentagon

Mary Ann McGivern | Aug. 13, 2013 NCR Today

This summer the Friends Committee on National Legislation has published a new fact sheet, Wasteful Spending: Weapons Systems [1]. The fact sheet describes four weapons systems the Pentagon could cut with no damage to national defense.

First is the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft. Not only does it have big cost overruns (double the development projected costs and double the estimated per hour operations cost at $11,000 an hour [2]), but the General Accounting Office questions whether its large size and limited ability for evasive action make it not well suited to replacing other helicopters. It has been plagued by crashes, fatalities and maintenance needs that delay its field readiness. Currently, 98 Ospreys are in the pipeline; 174 Ospreys have been produced and deployed. For the 2013 fiscal budget, the Osprey line item is $2.1 billion.

Second is the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Its projected unit cost has doubled to $162.5 million. It is the most expensive weapons system ever built. The projected final cost is $1.5 trillion. Aside from its performance problems and production delays, there remains the question of whether we need it at all. Originally, it was meant to eliminate the felt desire of the Navy and Marine Corps to have their own fighter planes. The goal was to reduce costs by reducing duplication. But new and enhanced performance and engineering specifications not only added to the cost but reduced its efficacy. I continue to maintain that if we would stop selling and giving away our F-14, F-15 and F-18 fighters, they would do us just fine for decades to come.

Third on the Wasteful Spending list are Littoral Combat ships. The littoral region of a sea or lake is the coastal area, and the Pentagon has commissioned 55 shallow-draft vessels built [3] to fight in coastal waters. They were budgeted at $220 million [4] apiece, but now the first 12 ships came in at $350 million each. The Defense Department request for the 2013 fiscal year is $1.8 billion for four ships, or $450 million apiece. They are made of aluminum and flammable.

Last but not least on the list is the unmanned Global Hawk Block 30 drone. The Air Force had decided U-2 planes are better spy planes, but Congress likes the drone and provides $260 million for the Global Hawk in the 2013 fiscal budget. The Air Force says if the program were cancelled there would be $2.5 billion in savings through the next four years.

On a personal note, I am very pleased that the author of this fact sheet, Tila Neguse, started her work as a military analyst and an advocate for cutting military spending at the Peace Economy Project in St. Louis. I helped found the Peace Economy Project 35 years ago and serve on its board today. Thank you, Tila, for your continued good work.

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[1] http://www.fcnl.org/issues/budget/Wasteful_Spending_Weapons_Systems.pdf
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