



## Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development Office of Domestic Social Development

### A Peace Economy: Rebalancing Spending Priorities February 2015

#### BACKGROUND

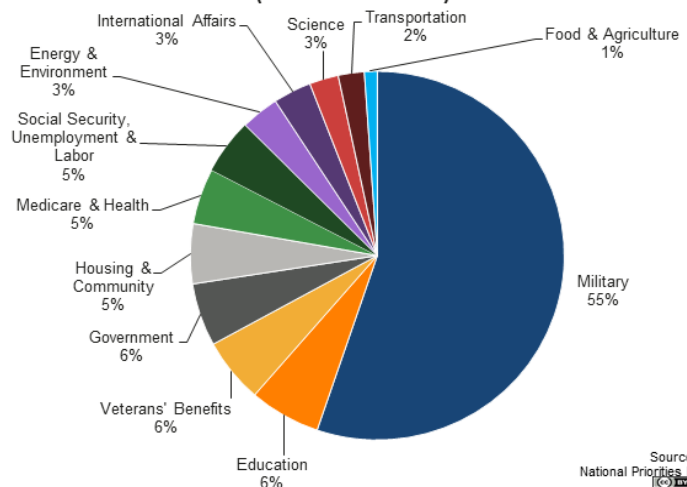
The increased attention in recent years on the federal budget deficit and national debt has led to loud calls for fiscal restraint and substantial spending reductions. The priorities of federal spending--where the dollars actually go, and how many--has received much less attention, so the real imbalance that exists in the federal discretionary budget is unknown to many.

Over half of the federal discretionary budget (not including mandatory spending programs such as Medicare, Social Security, veterans' retirement benefits, SNAP) goes to military spending.

Due to budget realities, this imbalance comes at the expense of programs at home and abroad that alleviate poverty and create opportunity. And the effects are readily apparent: millions of people--a disproportionate number of them women and children--continue to live in poverty because sufficient aid is not forthcoming.

It is also important to note that not only does our nation's discretionary budget devote disproportionate resources to the military, but also that our country spends disproportionately relative to other countries. The US spends more on its military and defense than the next 10 highest countries combined. Most of those countries are U.S. allies.

President's Proposed Discretionary Spending  
(Fiscal Year 2015)



#### USCCB POSITION

The serious immediate and long-term challenges facing our national economy demand a just and equitable balance of needs and resources. These choices have real consequences on people's lives. USCCB has consistently stated that federal spending priorities are a reflection of values, so they should abide by moral criteria. Among them is the belief that **“a just framework cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons; it requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly”** ([USCCB letter to Congress on FY 2013 budget](#)).

In [Economic Justice for All](#), the bishops wrote:

The precarious economic situation of so many people and so many families calls for examination of U.S. economic arrangements. . . . The investment of human creativity and material resources in the production of the weapons of war makes these economic problems even more difficult to solve. . . Defense

policies must be evaluated and assessed in light of their real contribution to freedom, justice, and peace for the citizens of our own and other nations. (no. 19-20)

## **CATHOLIC TEACHING**

Countries have an obligation to defend their people and ensure peace, and they have additional responsibilities to promote human development domestically and abroad, engaging in relations with other countries from a place of mutual respect and commitment to dialogue. When these obligations and responsibilities are not in proper balance, serious moral questions arise.

The [Second Vatican Council](#) taught:

[T]he arms race...is not a safe way to preserve a steady peace.... Rather than being eliminated thereby, the causes of war are in danger of being gradually aggravated. While extravagant sums are being spent for the furnishing of ever new weapons, an adequate remedy cannot be provided for the multiple miseries afflicting the whole modern world. [T]he arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity, and one which ensnares the poor to an intolerable degree. (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 81)

Saint John Paul II stressed the importance of development in turning away from war:

Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development. Just as within individual societies it is possible and right to organize a solid economy which will direct the functioning of the market to the common good, so too there is a similar need for adequate interventions on the international level. . . . to accomplish this, the poor--be they individuals or nations--need to be provided with realistic opportunities. Creating such conditions calls for a concerted worldwide effort to promote development, an effort which also involves sacrificing the positions of income and of power enjoyed by the more developed economies. (*Centesimus Annus*, no. 52)

And the [Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#) teaches that government spending has a proper framework:

Tax revenues and public spending take on crucial economic importance for every civil and political community. The goal to be sought is public financing that is itself capable of becoming an instrument of development and solidarity. Just, efficient and effective public financing will have very positive effects on the economy, because it will encourage employment growth and sustain business and non-profit activities and help to increase the credibility of the State as the guarantor of systems of social insurance and protection that are designed above all to protect the weakest members of society.

Public spending is directed to the common good when certain fundamental principles are observed: the payment of taxes as part of the duty of solidarity; a reasonable and fair application of taxes; precision and integrity in administering and distributing public resources. In the redistribution of resources, public spending must observe the principles of solidarity, equality and making use of talents. It must also pay greater attention to families, designating an adequate amount of resources for this purpose.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

USCCB Federal Budget Page: [usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/federal-budget/](https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/federal-budget/)

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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