

The Budget, Defense and High Speed Rail

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This one is sure to get me in hot water with some of my friends, but as we go down the path toward yet another showdown on Capitol Hill over the budget, I couldn't resist the chart, replicated below, that ran in the Wall Street Journal on September 18.

For years people have been asking me why we in the U.S. can't have High Speed Rail like China, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, and even the U. K.? This chart makes for a succinct initial response (there is, of course, more that could be offered in the way of a comprehensive explanation of the U.S.A. HSR question). We might also criticize entitlements, farm subsidies, health care, and other even more questionable budget items.

Nevertheless, one can't help but recall President Eisenhower's warning as he left office in 1961; to *beware of the military-industrial complex*, which has now grown to enormous proportions. The conclusion seems in-escapable: the U.S. cannot forever be the policeman of the entire world. To continue to do so requires us to forfeit High Speed Rail, as well as short changing education, health, and many other domestic programs.

Military Spending

In billions of dollars, 2012

U.S.-----	\$682
China-----	\$166
Russia-----	\$ 91
U.K.-----	\$ 61
Japan----	\$ 59
France---	\$ 59
Saudi Arabia	\$ 57
India--	\$ 46
Germany	\$ 46
Italy--	\$ 34
Total of these ten (not all, e.g. North Korea, Iran, etc).	\$1,301

Sources :Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, and Wall Street Journal 9/18/13

Not for one minute do I advocate going soft on defense. We must treat our military justly in terms of compensation and benefits. We must also give them the tools that they need to do the job for us; but not necessarily every weapons system that congress wants to continue for political rather than military purposes.. When we read, as we did on Sept 21st, that the contractor which vetted Edward Snowden and the Navy Yard shooter was awarded a five-year, \$2.46 billion contract in 2011 to conduct security

clearances, that leaves even the most supportive of us shaking our heads. Recall when the F.B.I. and military intelligence personnel did much of this, arguably with better results?

We have clearly lost our way, not only the way to the HSR train station, but to a more rational and efficient government. But is a fix possible in the current political environment? We certainly hope for better! ####