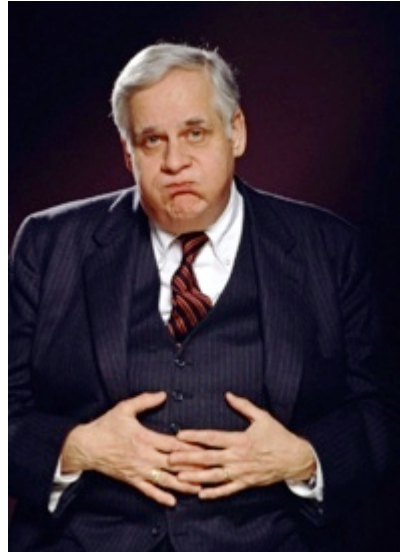




Tea Party Giving Neocons Heartburn

Several neoconservative writers have recently expressed nervousness about Tea Party supporters threatening to make substantial cuts in military expenditures in order to rein in government spending. Articles in the Washington Post and at Heritage.com, by Danielle Pletka, Thomas Donnelly, Arthur Brooks, Edwin Feulner, and William Kristol have made it clear that “the conservative movement — and the party that seeks to represent it — is at a crossroads.” One road will continue funding the military-industrial complex in “defense of freedom,” while the other road “beckons in an almost Calvinistic call to fiscal discipline” resulting in potentially severe defense department cuts.



According to Pletka and Donnelly, the issue isn't really about spending less but instead about “the soul of conservatism” itself. Taking the position that a strong international military presence is necessary to “keep the peace,” they see any threat to de-funding such efforts as harmful and potentially destructive to America's place in the world. It's a simple case of deciding to remain “the party of Eisenhower and Reagan, supporting and resourcing a robust American role in the world. Or they can reinvent themselves as ... Ebenezer Scrooge[s], withdrawing from the world to a counting house America.”

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Authors Brooks, Feulner and Kristol take a different tack, claiming that current defense spending isn't the cause of the nation's fiscal difficulties, since military spending hasn't risen as quickly as entitlements like Social Security and Medicare. They claim that “global prosperity requires commerce and trade [which] requires peace, [but that] peace does not keep itself.” In fact, these authors claim that “we have not done enough to help our military preserve the peace and deter (and if necessary, defeat) our enemies.” If Tea Partiers have their way, cuts in military spending will “make the world a more dangerous place, and it will impoverish our future.”

Justin Raimondo, [on the other hand](#), says that such efforts reflect panic on the part of those who, in the name of peace, support a strong military and an interventionist international policy. “They're living in fear of the so-called tea party, the spontaneous grassroots rebellion against runaway federal spending that has successfully challenged the GOP establishment and wants to cut big government down to size — *with a meat axe*.” [emphasis added] They especially fear supporters of Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) who are seeking to stuff the government genie back into its constitutional bottle. Raimondo refers to a study available at [Mises.org](#). “What You Paid For,” illustrating how much of the average taxpayer's taxes are spent for each department of government. Entitlements make up nearly 40 percent of his taxes, while 10 percent go to support the military establishment including the current wars, military personnel and veterans' benefits. And those numbers for defense keep climbing, he says, from \$437 billion in 2001 to



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on October 7, 2010

\$720 billion currently.

What we have here is a bankrupt empire — and that's the sort of empire that inevitably goes into decline. If we follow the advice of Kristol and his buddies, we'll be in receivership in no time.

Others are much less worried about any impact members of the Tea Party might have on government spending. In a [raucous piece](#) in *Rolling Stone* magazine, Matt Taibbi wrote of his adventures following some tea partiers around the country. In Kentucky he found an elderly couple, Janice and David Wheelock, whom he interviewed following a Tea Party rally. According to Taibbi, the interview is revealing about such supporters' commitment to pragmatism rather than ideology.

David: "I'm anti-spending and anti-government. The welfare state is out of control."

Taibbi: "OK. And what do you do for a living?"

David: "Me? Oh, I'm a property appraiser. Have been my whole life."

Taibbi: "Are either of you on Medicare?"

David: [silence] Then Janice, a nice enough woman, it seems, slowly raises her hand, offering a faint smile, as if to say, *You got me!*

Taibbi: "Let me get this straight. You've been picking up a check from the government for decades, as a *tax assessor*, and your wife is on Medicare. How can you complain about the welfare state?"

David: "Well, there's a lot of people on welfare who don't deserve it. Too many people are living off the government."

Taibbi: "But you live off the government. And have been your whole life!"

David: "Yeah, but I don't make very much."

Based on this interview and others, Taibbi concludes that "the average Tea Partier is sincerely against government spending — with the exception of the money spent on *them*."

This is the same point raised in his [member's newsletter](#) by Gary North: "If you take the state's nickel, you take its noose. There is no systematic resistance to handouts. The noose tightens. This is why I regard the Tea Party as a nice diversion. But until its members get consistent — spending cuts on a massive scale — I will not take it seriously.... I see little dedicated will to resist. Yet this is the basis of a roll-back of government in our lives. Americans have to say no."

North concludes: 'Until the Tea Party says: *Bring the troops home — all of them — by Christmas*, the charade will go on...and the deficit[s] will grow.'

If North and Taibbi are right, then the authors expressing concern — or panic — about possible Tea Party cuts in spending, especially military spending, have little to worry about. Only when taxpayers are willing to tip over the apple cart — the same cart that is providing them their apples — will there be significant pressure to force the government genie back into its constitutional bottle.



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