



Capitol Hill conservatives and Pentagon brass fighting cuts to defense spending have argued that the military is limping off the battlefield with decrepit hardware. It's quite the sob story: At a hearing last week, Rep. Buck McKeon (R-Calif.), the chair of the House armed services committee, cut his remarks short to literally sob for "these young men that are going outside the wire over in Afghanistan, every day on patrol."

But a new report shows the US defense establishment is in much better shape than it claims: The DOD has blown roughly \$1 trillion on shiny new tanks, ships, and jets since the 9/11 attacks—and it's often done so with dollars that were supposed to be spent on those troops on the battlefield in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Stimson Center study, "What We Bought: Defense Procurement From FY01 to FY10" [PDF], says the military is hardly in dire straits when it comes to funding its big-ticket items. "The services capitalized on funding to modernize their forces, especially the major weapons programs that constitute the heart of the services' capabilities," writes the report's author, Russell Rumbaugh—a retired Army officer and ex-CIA military analyst.

The study shows there's one big reason the brass are concerned about budget-cutting discussions in Congress: They've been double dipping into the taxpayer's pocket to finance weapons purchases. Of the roughly \$1 trillion spent on gadgetry since 9/11, 22 percent of it came from "supplemental" war funding—annual outlays that are voted on separately from the regular defense budget. Those bills are primarily intended to keep day-to-day operations running in Iraq and Afghanistan—meaning that if a member of Congress votes against a supplemental spending bill, she exposes herself to charges that she doesn't "support the troops" in harm's way.

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