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Carrots and Sticks: Reprioritize Weapons Budgeting

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American military supremacy is unmatched, both in might and expense. Congress is prepared to spend \$886 billion on defense this year, in line with decades of federal investments meant to strengthen deterrence and military capabilities. Defense spending may exceed non-defense spending by over \$100 billion – a clear demonstration of America’s muscular approach to foreign policy.

This year’s defense budget includes \$315 billion earmarked for Major Weapons Systems, or what Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin refers to as “highly lethal precision weapons.” Over a third of all defense appropriations are spent on weapons that include hypersonic missiles, advanced nuclear submarines, and continued development of the B-21 bomber program. At the same time, private defense contractors are set to enjoy rising profits as the beneficiaries of America’s force-first defensive posture.

But the nature of warfare is changing. Guns and missiles are the weapons of yesteryear. However formidable, they are not enough to keep America and our allies safe from the most pressing threats. Instead, our nation needs to realize that the threats we face in the 21st century are unprecedented and require novel diplomatic tools of defense. Congressional leaders must invest more in diplomacy if America is to remain free and safe.