



The Wounded Giant: America's Armed Forces in an Age of Austerity An eSpecial from The Penguin Press

Michael O'Hanlon

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A farseeing and controversial analysis of the military America needs and the military we can afford from the director of research at Brookings.

As total federal debt trends toward 100 percent of the GDP, and America wavers on the edge of another recession, Congress has responded with a plan for deficit reduction—more than two trillion dollars over ten years. But its plan emphasizes some parts of the federal budget over others. Entitlements are likely to be spared, and tax reform deferred. Defense spending, however, could be cut by as much as one trillion dollars over a decade, above and beyond savings from ending current wars. This, Michael O'Hanlon argues, isn't just unwise—it is potentially catastrophic. Such a prospect demands that we have a serious conversation about our national security priorities in an age of austerity.

Deep cuts to the U.S. military would make for brutal politics in any ordinary time, and this is no ordinary time—our government is rife with partisan enmity, and 2012 promises to be one of the most heated presidential election campaigns in our history. THE WOUNDED GIANT asks us to take a deep breath and think clearly and deeply about our national security, and about our role in the world. O'Hanlon forcefully reminds us that it's not a question of how much we want to pay for our military, but how much we need to pay. O'Hanlon's command of the whole vast range of American military spending, past and present, is rare, as is his grasp of the strategic logic of our military's gigantic footprint.

O'Hanlon tests his proposals through a series of chilling plausible scenarios. What would happen if North Korea detonated a nuclear bomb? If the Pakistani government fell? If China turned militant? His conclusions are challenging and impossible to dismiss easily. Through tougher management, changes in military compensation policies, a selective reduction in the number of ground, air, and naval forces, as well as smart and selective modernization efforts and technological advancements, O'Hanlon argues, we can reduce our defense budget without untenable risk to our military, and our country, as long as cuts over the next ten years do not exceed half a trillion dollars. None of the choices is easy: these recommendations will be controversial; all involve the goading of a cherished sacred cow in someone's view. But the heated debate THE WOUNDED GIANT will spark is a necessary one, and the sooner we have it, the better.

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