



# News & Views

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## The 2004 Election: One Issue, One Candidate

by Enver Masud, The Wisdom Fund

FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF AMERICANS, there's only one issue in the 2004 election that has the potential for making their life significantly better than it is now: reducing defense spending.

We now have the highest defense budget in our history, it is breaking the national budget, and diverting resources from things Americans want: peace, security, jobs, lower taxes, health care, education, fixing social security, infrastructure development, social services, a better environment, etc. High defense spending is also responsible, indirectly, for increasing government intrusion into our lives. Our democracy itself is at risk.

Our \$400 billion defense budget equals the combined military spending of the next 15 biggest defense spenders in the world. The defense budgets of our designated "enemies" — Iran, North Korea, and Syria — are \$5 billion, \$2 billion, and one billion. That of our Cold War enemies Russia and China are \$65 billion and \$47 billion. We also have NATO, the United Kingdom, and others to share the burden of defense against our "enemies."

The \$400 billion for defense, plus the military portion from other parts of the budget, plus the interest on the military portion of the national debt, plus veterans benefits, account for roughly 50% of total federal outlays!

Clearly, there is a huge mismatch between the military threat posed by our "enemies" and our response to the threat, yet the Bush administration is pushing a new generation of nuclear weapons — we already have enough to annihilate virtually every major city on the planet.

While spending on unnecessary weapons, and weapons that we know won't work — such as missile defense systems — crowd out \$2

trillion, badly needed, capital improvements in the civilian economy, a study by the Defense Department's inspector general found that the Pentagon couldn't properly account for more than a trillion dollars it had spent.

Furthermore, missile defense systems, nuclear weapons, cruise missiles, and traditional armies are hardly the way to fight "terrorism" which many experts say is inspired by our foreign policies. Indeed the wars we've been fighting are creating more "terrorists," and making Americans less secure both at home and abroad.

To justify our massive spending on "defense" our government has to instill fear in Americans, find enemies on whom to focus our military might, and break international laws to attack other countries, thereby, throwing into chaos the entire system of international law without which no country can prosper in this interconnected world.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, Americans were expecting a "peace dividend." However, the economy was depressed, taxpayers had just spent billions bailing out the S & Ls, and President Bush, Sr. needed a distraction. Islam — the Green Peril — became the designated enemy. Iraq, our former ally against Iran, became the new bogeyman, and so we had the first Gulf War.

Yes, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, but we had a hand in getting him to invade, and we could have ousted him without resorting to war, but that didn't fit in with the aim of the empire builders who wished to gain control of the energy resources in the region.

In 2001 we had the attack on the World Trade Center, the economy was depressed, we had the Worldcom, Enron scandals, and by 2003 President Bush, Jr. needed a distract-

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tion. So we had another war on Iraq. Intelligence reported no Iraq links to al-Qaeda, or the attack on the World Trade Center. Now we're spending one billion dollars per week to sustain our occupation of Iraq. We have added 10,000 Iraqi civilians killed and 20,000 wounded to the hundreds of thousands already killed, maimed, or born with birth defects as a result of the first Gulf War, and the subsequent sanctions. This is not winning us many friends in the region, and President Bush has promised us a "war on terror" for years to come.

This "war on terror" will not eradicate "terrorism" — often this "terrorism" is resistance to some misguided policy of ours. Rather than examine our policy, "terrorism" is used to justify greater defense spending, and to divert spending from those things which will improve Americans' lives.

In his 1961, farewell speech to the nation, President Dwight D. Eisenhower — former Supreme Commander of the allied forces in France, President of Columbia University, commander of the new NATO forces being assembled in 1951 — said:

"Crises there will continue to be. In meeting them, whether foreign or domestic, great or small, there is a recurring temptation to feel that some spectacular and costly action could become the miraculous solution to all current difficulties."

President Eisenhower warned:

"This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are

all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

"We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together."

Only one candidate for president in 2004 has shown the courage to take on the issue of defense spending. He first came to national prominence in 1977 when he was elected mayor of Cleveland at age 31 — the youngest person ever elected to lead a major American city. As a state senator, and as a U.S. Congressman from Ohio, he has stood for what's right at considerable risk to his own career. He was among a handful of lawmakers who filed suit to stop the Bush administration from going to war with Iraq.

There's only one candidate for president who has the potential to deliver what the vast majority of Americans want: peace, security, jobs, lower taxes, health care, education, fixing social security, infrastructure development, social services, a better environment. That candidate for president of the United States is Mr. Dennis J. Kucinich. ❖

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