

Yes, Americans are Fat; The US Military is Fatter

“Military leaders are worried about the shrinking pool of young people who qualify for military service,” Gina Harkins reports at [Military.com](#). “More than 70% of young Americans remain unable to join the military due to obesity, education problems, or crime and drug records.”

Mission: Readiness, a group of retired military officers, wants the US Department of Defense to create an “advisory committee on military recruitment,” with a view toward getting the next generation in shape so that they’re qualified, as the old saying goes, to “travel to exotic, distant lands; meet exciting, unusual people; and kill them.”

I’ve got a better idea: Instead of trying to trim fat off America’s adolescents, trim fat off the US Armed Forces.

The US military employs nearly 1.4 million active duty personnel and about 850,000 reservists.

The latest National Defense Authorization Act — vetoed by President Trump but looking likely as I write this to be passed over his objection — calls for \$740 billion (\$2,300 for every man, woman, and child in the country) in theoretically “defense”-related spending next year.

The US, which is separated by oceans from all credible potential enemies and hasn’t fought anything resembling a defensive war in 75 years, boasts the third largest (after India and China, far more populous countries with real adversaries on their borders), and far and away the most expensive, military apparatus on Earth.

While the US defense budget and the armed forces’ staffing levels could probably be cut by 90% without significantly degrading actual national defense capabilities, I understand the impulse to moderation.

So how about a 50% cut in military spending and active duty troop levels over five years, with an upward bump in reservist numbers to a full million?

That would leave the US with 700,000 active duty personnel (still the world’s fifth largest military), and still the world’s number one military big spender (about twice as much as China, three times as much as Saudi Arabia, and nearly five times as much as Russia or India).

With 2 million Americans reaching military age each year and some veterans re-enlisting, the Pentagon would have little problem finding the skinny, literate, non-criminal people it

needs to fill its ranks.

Yes, some US arms manufacturers would take big hits to their lavish corporate welfare paychecks, but they could retool — every American taxpayer would be better off by about \$1,250, meaning fatter markets for products that don't kill people.

It's time to put the Pentagon on a diet.