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## Mitt Romney's military myopia

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The United States, as everyone knows, is up to its eyeballs in deficit and debt. Contributing mightily is its astronomical annual defence budget. At \$711-billion, according to the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, it spends more than the next 13 countries combined. Second on the list for military outlays is China, at \$143-billion – more than half a trillion behind America.

Barack Obama's administration has terminated one war in Iraq and is closing down another one in Afghanistan. Major decreases in military spending requirements result.

But despite the ending of wars, the staggering deficits and the Brobdingnagian advantage over competitors, Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney wants to add \$2-trillion to the Pentagon budget over the next decade.

Where, you ask, is the logic? Good question. China currently holds, in what's an embarrassment to U.S. prestige, more than \$1-trillion in American debt. It might be interesting if Mr. Romney were to view this in the context of defence spending. When your extravagance is such that you're already spending half a trillion more than Beijing, is that not part of the problem? Now you want even more?

In Canada, the Harper government ramped up military spending for several years. But our debt and deficit grew, and we ended our military campaign in Afghanistan. The Conservatives put two and two together and have smartly begun cutting back. The military budget is being pared by 11 per cent.

Mr. Romney doesn't add or subtract the same way. He says he's determined to slash the deficit. But in addition to his prodigious Pentagon outlays, he's promising major tax cuts, including a \$5-trillion package for the wealthy. The revenues will be recouped, he says, by closing loopholes. He doesn't specify them, but there's hardly an economist out there who says loopholes will cover that amount. Economic growth as stimulated by the tax cuts will augment revenues. But that'll be well down the line.

The Pentagon, no slouch when it comes to budgetary demands, hasn't even asked for the increases Mr. Romney desires. He wants a 20-per-cent increase in the number of ships that would bring the total to 350. In 2010, then-defence secretary Robert Gates said that, "in terms of total missile firepower, the U.S. arguably outmatches the next 20 largest navies [combined]."

The Republicans have long been manic about defence spending. There have been times, the Cold War being one, when the country was rivalled in arms stockpiling and there was a need to keep and exceed the pace.

The problem is that the Cold War mentality never ended, not among Republicans, not among most Democrats, not among the American media, which rarely question why the country, with so many pressing domestic challenges, demands a military paramountcy so excessive that the field need be lapped 10 times over while fiscal health is compromised.

Washington doesn't give out precise figures, but it's currently funding an estimated 1,000 military bases or installations around the world. Even though the Second World War ended 77 years ago and the Cold War two decades ago, the U.S. has 124 bases in Japan.

What was noteworthy about last week's presidential debate on foreign policy was that Mr. Romney, fearing that his party's warrior image might not sit well with the voters, worked hard to come across as dovish. Wars and killing people were not the solution, he said. But where he didn't budge was on the need for more guns. It's Republican religion that can't be forsaken, no matter what fiscal cliffs it might lead to.

Mr. Obama, who mocked Mr. Romney on the need for more ships, hasn't succeeded to any appreciable degree in changing the American arms psychology. But his approach, as it is on many issues, is more rational than that of his more ideological challengers – which helps explain why Canadians, as polls indicate, overwhelmingly favour him in next week's election.