

# "Guns vs. Butter" Returns

By Miriam Pemberton | January 27, 2005

When President George W. Bush sends his budget to Congress on or about February 7, look for "guns vs. butter" to make a comeback. Debating the surging defense budget and its effect on domestic spending went out of fashion after 9-11 with all that talk about Homeland Security.

Bush administration officials won't use these terms, of course. Their choice of words is likely to be along the lines of "crusading deficit hawks attack the deficit." They will bank on the public's short-term memory loss about what created the deficit in the first place, namely their massive tax cuts and war spending. In their newly-minted role as deficit hawks, they will turn around and solve the problem they created, by cutting all non-defense, non-entitlement spending. Simultaneously, by other means, they'll go after entitlements. Social Security is already under attack.

The White House has already told all departments to get ready for these cuts. When documents forewarning of the new budget policy leaked out, officials dismissed them as hypothetical. Now they are about to be real. The rumor most widely circulating on Capitol Hill pegs the cuts at 10 percent, across the board. This will do serious damage to programs that curb the spread of weapons of mass destruction and clean up toxic waste, and programs like Head Start, the works.

In early January the Pentagon leaked a new document indicating that its budget would take a hit too.

This document laid out a long list of weapons systems slated to be cut over the next six years.

But let's be clear that the military budget is not being cut at all, at least not as we ordinary mortals understand the term "cutting." The administration isn't talking about spending less on the Pentagon next year than this year. These would be cuts to the increases the Pentagon had been planning for next year.

---

But let's be clear that the military budget is not being cut at all, at least not as we ordinary mortals understand the term "cutting."

The administration isn't talking about spending less on the Pentagon next year than this year.

These would be cuts to the increases the Pentagon had been planning for next year.

---

The overall defense budget is likely to continue to rise. And spending for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will continue to be funded with extra money "off the books."

Most of the cuts won't even happen for several more years, during which time defense industry lobbyists will work to ensure that they don't happen at all. Leaking news of impending cuts to weapons systems is a well-worn Pentagon technique to gin up an outcry, and mobilize

congressional support to restore the cuts. The outcry has begun, right on schedule.

While these cuts in military spending will remain mostly in the realm of the theoretical next year, the cuts to the domestic side of the budget will be real.



---

Until now the Bush administration has waged an unnecessary war, cut taxes on the rich, and asked no sacrifices from most Americans—those of us, at least, who are not members of military families or in the Reserves. The best symbol of this surreal situation is the most costly inaugural spectacle in history, during the most costly war since Vietnam.

Two weeks after the spectacle is over, the budget will be announced. The sacrifices will be unveiled. Let the guns vs. butter debate begin.

---

*Miriam Pemberton is the Foreign Policy In Focus (www.fpif.org) peace and security editor at the Institute for Policy Studies (www.ips-dc.org) in Washington, D.C.*

---

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF), a joint project of the International Relations Center (IRC, formerly Interhemispheric Resource Center, online at [www.irc-online.org](http://www.irc-online.org)) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at [www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)). ©2005. All rights reserved.

## **Foreign Policy In Focus**

“A Think Tank Without Walls”

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to “making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner.” For more information, visit [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org).

Recommended citation:

Miriam Pemberton, “Guns vs. Butter’ Returns,” (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, January 27, 2005).

Web location:

<http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2005/0501guns.html>

Production Information:

Writer: Miriam Pemberton, IPS  
Editor: John Gershman, IRC  
Layout: Chellee Chase-Saiz, IRC

**p. 2**

---

**www.fpif.org**

A Think Tank Without Walls

