

THE TRUE COST OF DEFENSE

Notable Interviewees' Biographies

Mackenzie Eaglen

Mackenzie Eaglen is a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), specializing in defense budgeting, military readiness, and industrial-base investment. She frequently advocates for multi-year budget deals and sustained real increases in defense funding to keep pace with inflation and support readiness, arguing that continuing resolutions and freezes compromise shipbuilding, weapons procurement, and troop welfare.

Jack Segal

Former Senior U.S. Diplomat. Former chief political advisor to the Commander at NATO. Expert lecturer on NATO, especially relating to his experience with Afghanistan, the rest of the Middle East, and Russia.

Elaine McCusker

Elaine McCusker, as Acting Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) from 2017–2020, oversaw a nearly 18% increase in the defense topline—averaging about \$694 billion annually—and redirected over \$7 billion toward high-lethality investments while enhancing budget transparency and audit compliance.

Kori Schake

Kori Schake is Senior Fellow and Director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at AEI, where she champions aligning defense budgets with strategic priorities. Her work includes proposals to create sustainable, focused reductions in defense spending without sacrificing capability, improving acquisition efficiency, and reallocating end-strength and procurement resources.

General Jim Mattis

General James “Jim” Mattis (U.S. Marine Corps, Ret.) served as Secretary of Defense (2017–2019) after a distinguished 40-year military career. As Pentagon leader, he oversaw defense policy and budget planning during a period of rising defense spending focused on readiness and modernization.

Gary Sinise

While best known for his acting and philanthropy, Gary Sinise chairs the Gary Sinise Foundation, which allocates defense-related charitable funding to support wounded veterans, military families, and first responders, leveraging private resources to offset gaps in government support.



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Rose Gottemoeller

Rose Gottemoeller served as NATO's Deputy Secretary General (2016–2019) and was instrumental in negotiating the New START treaty, influencing both U.S. and NATO defense spending by shaping nuclear arms reduction and modernization funding priorities.

Lloyd J. Austin III

Lloyd J. Austin III, a retired four-star Army General, led CENTCOM before being confirmed as U.S. Secretary of Defense in 2021. In that role, he oversaw management of a roughly \$740 billion defense budget, implementing strategic allocation of resources across readiness, modernization, and alliance support.

Travis Mills

Retired Army Staff Sergeant Travis Mills became a quadruple amputee in Afghanistan and founded the Travis Mills Foundation. The foundation constructs retreats to help severely wounded veterans—and, in doing so, highlights the real-world human costs behind defense spending and rehabilitation funding priorities.

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