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# Tim Pawlenty Cuts Against Tea Party Energy, Says No To Pentagon Cuts



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WASHINGTON -- If Tim Pawlenty intended to tell his audience something they didn't want to hear during his speech at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute Thursday, he did so in his response to a question about reducing Pentagon spending.

"I'm not one who is going to stand before you and say we should cut the defense budget," said Pawlenty, the former Minnesota governor and current Republican presidential hopeful, when asked by an audience member why the U.S. has 170 military bases around the world.

Cato officials vigorously support cutting from the Pentagon's expenditures, which are [just under \\$700 billion](#) in the current fiscal year. So do many of the Republican party's leaders who are most popular with the Tea Party, such as Sen. Jim DeMint (S.C.) and Sen. Rand Paul (Ky.).

But whether he intended to or not, Pawlenty continued his nascent campaign's pattern of making statements in locales where they'll be especially unpopular. Prior to Wednesday, it had been by design. In Iowa on Monday, he [endorsed phasing out ethanol](#) subsidies over the next few years. In Florida on Tuesday, he [said](#) Social Security and Medicare have to be dramatically overhauled.

But in this case, Pawlenty's stance on Pentagon spending might put him at odds with the view that has the most energy and intensity among the conservative grassroots. It certainly did not sit well with Cato's president, Ed Crane.

"There is a difference between military spending and defense spending," Crane said in a statement e-mailed to The Huffington Post after Pawlenty's speech. "The constitution provides for a military to defend the U.S -- not to democratize the world. One would hope that presidential candidates would consider America's commitments overseas very seriously before endorsing those commitments."

Rep. Ron Paul (R-Tex.) made the idea of cutting from defense less sacrilegious to conservatives during his 2008 run for the GOP nomination. And while Paul's hard line view that the U.S. should basically shut down all of its foreign bases and withdraw the military from the rest of the world is not accepted by a large number of voters, the belief that the U.S. is overextended has certainly become a mainstream idea. And the examples of waste, fraud and abuse within the Pentagon contracting system have been well documented.

Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, during his time exploring a run for president, [staked out](#) a position that sought to align with current concerns over military overextension and waste at the Pentagon. Former Ambassador to China Jon Huntsman, during his trip to New Hampshire last weekend, [followed](#) Barbour's lead with an emphasis on the need to cut costs even if that breaks some china in other parts of the world.

"The deployments are mighty expensive," he said. "We've got to ensure that going forward into our new world that we have a foreign policy that is an extension of our core national interests. And does that mean that we're going to have to look at the map at some point and reset our level of engagement and our deployments in some corners of the world. Absolutely it does."

Huntsman even said that a withdrawal from Afghanistan could cause civil war in that country but said that he was "not sure there's a whole lot we can do about that."

Pawlenty's comments Wednesday showed how clearly he and Huntsman differ on the role of the U.S. military abroad, a key factor going forward as many Republicans decide which of the two they might like to see become the foremost alternative to former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney. Romney [has said](#) he will not cut from defense.

"I'm not for shrinking America's presence in the world. I'm for making sure that America remains the world leader, not becoming second or third or fourth in the list," Pawlenty said.

He based his argument on a concern that China will fill any vacuum in parts of the world that the U.S. might vacate or cede.

"If you go to Asia and you see what is at play there in terms of China's influence -- economically, militarily, strategically - one of the questions that our friends and allies have in the region is this: 'Are you going to be here? Because if you're not we've got to make other arrangements. We're going to have to start hedging our bets,'" Pawlenty said. "You say, 'Why would we want to be in South Korea?' Well I think we have some pretty profound commitments because of the Korean war. Also we have a failed state or nearly failed state in North

Korea with nuclear weapons. And we need to make sure that we have a presence, as the United States of America, in areas that could affect our national security interests and the security interests of our friends and allies."

"But if you did what I think your question is implying, which is summarily and dramatically pull troops and take bases down out of Asia, I think you'd see a massive realignment of strategic relationship toward China and away from America in Asia. I think that would be very unwise," he continued. "That is not to say that Defense can't be more efficient, that facilities can't be prioritized and some of them shut down or reduced. It's not to say that some weapons systems can't be scaled back or reduced. It's not to say there aren't savings and efficiencies that can't be found within the Department of Defense."

It was as clear an outline of his foreign policy as Pawlenty has offered so far. Pawlenty told reporters afterward that while the rate of growth in the Pentagon budget could be slowed, the base budget amount should not "shrink."

Cato officials shrugged at the remarks, expressing disagreement but saying that Pawlenty's approach to cutting the federal work force and to overhauling entitlements is one they agree with and is more fundamentally important.

The slogan for Pawlenty's campaign -- which he officially launched Monday -- is "a time for truth." He will continue his opening week tour by talking about Wall Street reform in New York on Friday.

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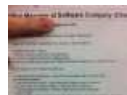
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