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## Obama: Fiscal Commission Cut Defense Too Deep

By KATE BRANNEN  
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U.S. President Barack Obama believes cutting defense spending by nearly \$1 trillion over the next decade, as suggested by the Simpson-Bowles Commission, goes too far for a country still at war.



**U.S. PRESIDENT BARACK** Obama speaks during a July 15 White House press conference on the ongoing budget and debt limit negotiations. (Mark Wilson / Getty Images)

"There were aspects of Bowles-Simpson that I said from very early on were not the approach I would take," Obama told reporters July 15. "On defense spending, a huge amount of their savings on the discretionary side came out of defense spending. I think we need to cut defense,

but as commander in chief, I've got to make sure that we're cutting it in a way that recognizes we're still in the middle of a war, we're winding down another war, and we've got a whole bunch of veterans that we've got to care for as they come home."

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Two-thirds of the government's discretionary spending goes toward security, which besides DoD includes funding for the State Department, the intelligence community, the Department of Homeland

Security, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the nuclear weapons activities of the Department of Energy.

The National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, created by the president, is better known by the names of its two chairmen: Sen. Alan Simpson, a former Republican senator from Wyoming, and Erskine Bowles, who served as chief of staff to President Bill Clinton.

In their final report, released in December, the commission recommended cutting security spending by roughly \$1 trillion between 2012 and 2020. The Defense Department, along with other federal agencies, would be subject to strict spending caps. More specific recommendations included placing DoD civilians on a three-year pay freeze.

The president's fiscal commission was not alone in calling for cuts of this magnitude.

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The Bipartisan Policy Center's deficit reduction proposal also called for a \$1 trillion cut to defense spending over 10 years.

In September, the Cato Institute outlined \$1.2 trillion in cuts over 10 years in its report, "Budgetary Savings from Military Restraint."

The president has rejected these proposals and in April called for a \$400 billion cut to security spending between 2012 and 2023.

However, the Pentagon appears to be preparing for even leaner times.

"I'm certainly doing budget drills beyond \$400 billion," Gen. James Cartwright, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, [told reporters July 14](#).

Many observers agree that such preparations are wise.

It looks like \$400 billion is the best the Defense Department is likely to do, Gordon Adams, who oversaw the national security budget at the Office of Management and Budget under the Clinton administration, told the House Budget Committee July 7.

As negotiations continue between the president and leaders of Congress, defense could take a bigger hit, especially if Republicans refuse to include any tax increases in a final deal.

Some of the loudest calls to cut defense spending come from conservative tax activist groups, like the Americans for Tax Reform, which is led by Grover Norquist.

In a July 14 interview with radio host Diane Rehm, Norquist said he didn't want to see the Defense Department eliminated but he would like to see it "dramatically reduced in terms of cost."

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