

THINK PROGRESS

The Progress Report

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BUDGET

TEA PARTY-PROGRESSIVE COALITION FOR DEFENSE CUTS

"Republicans should resist pressure to take all defense spending off the table. ... Taking defense spending off the table is indefensible. We need to protect our nation, not the Pentagon's sacred cows." Those words come not from a progressive Democrat or antiwar activist, but from famed ultra-conservative Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK), who wrote a bold op-ed last week chiding his fellow Republicans for their resistance to reducing the defense budget. Coburn is the latest in a string of Senate Republicans to come out in favor of scaling back the Pentagon's treasure chest, which makes up the largest chunk of discretionary spending in the federal budget. With the U.S. debt now exceeding \$13 trillion, sensible efforts to cut wasteful spending while minimizing cuts to job-enhancing measures for average Americans are more welcome than ever. In early December, President Obama's Deficit Reduction Commission will release its plan to Congress, likely setting off a furious debate about the proper measures to take to rein in U.S. debt. Slowly, Tea Party-backed conservatives interested in downsizing the government and progressives who have long sought to lower U.S. defense spending are coming together to ensure that reducing the military budget to a more appropriate size for the 21st century will be prominent part of the debate. As John Norris, the executive director at CAP's Sustainable Security and Peacebuilding Initiative, writes, "Progressives and Tea Partiers may find that cutting defense spending would both reduce the deficit and allow for sensible investments in infrastructure and job creation that could produce greater growth and competitiveness over the long haul."

A BLOATED BUDGET: The defense budget for FY2010 is a whopping \$533.8 billion, larger than the 2008 GDP of 116 countries. This is without accounting for the price of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which would bring the total to \$663.8 billion. The "2009 U.S. defense budget of \$660 billion was more than the combined defense expenditures of the next 17 countries. ... And that budget continues to rise steadily, growing at 4.8% for 2010, a year in which the U.S. economy's GDP growth is likely to be less than 2%." As a result, defense spending has accounted 65 percent of the discretionary spending increase since 2001, making it a major factor in the growth of the U.S. budget deficit since then.

REPUBLICAN REBELS: In the GOP's much-touted "Pledge For America," Republican leaders explicitly exempted defense-related spending from waste-trimming. Yet, a number of Republican senators chose to rebuke the Pledge and call for defense cuts. Last month, Sen. Johnny Isakson (GA) told a local news station that reducing the deficit "begins with the Department of Defense." The same month, Senator-elect Pat Toomey (PA) criticized Congress for voting for "programs the Pentagon doesn't even want" during a debate with Rep. Joe Sestak (D-PA). The week before, Senator-elect Mark Kirk

(IL) said that we need "across-the-board" reductions in defense spending. And three weeks ago, Sen. Bob Corker (TN) said on CNBC that defense cuts have to be "on the table" because there's "a lot of waste there." Perhaps the Republican Senate caucus's most outspoken advocate for defense cuts is Tea Party "darling" and Senator-elect Rand Paul (KY), who told PBS's Gwen Ifill that cutting defense spending "has to be on the table." Paul reiterated his call for reducing the military budget this weekend while appearing on ABC's This Week. He tweaked Republicans for "never" saying "they'll cut anything out of military. ... There's still waste in the military budget. You have to make it smaller." In his op-ed in the Washington Examiner last week, Coburn praised Paul's "courage" in calling for a smaller military budget and said he looks forward to "working with him" toward that goal. All of these Republicans have received significant backing from the Tea Party. "I have yet to hear anyone say, 'We can't touch defense spending, or any other issue. ... Any tea partier who says something else lacks integrity," said Mark Meckler, a Tea Party Patriots national coordinator.

FOR A SUSTAINABLE DEFENSE: Last Spring, Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA), working in a bipartisan fashion with Reps. Ron Paul (R-TX) and Walter Jones (R-NC) and Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), assembled a commission composed of military and budget experts from across the political spectrum -- including CAP Senior Fellow Lawrence Korb and Benjamin H. Friedman of the Cato Institute -- to look at ways we can resize the defense budget to make it more appropriate for the challenges of the 21st Century. The commission, called the Sustainable Defense Task Force (SDTF), called for nearly \$1 trillion in cuts over the next 10 years. The SDTF report lays out a number of cuts to unneeded defense programs, such as curtailing missile defense programs, reducing the number of U.S. military abroad in places like Europe and Asia, reducing the size of the U.S. Navy, scaling back the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal, and ending unneeded military systems like the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle. Additionally, Korb and CAP researcher Laura Conley released a report last September that lays out \$108 billion in defense cuts in the current 2015 budget forecast. These reports highlight much of the same work that formed CAP recommendations found in the December 2008 report "Building a Military for the 21st Century: New Realities, New Priorities," which calls for a number of different reforms in the defense budget, like including supplemental war funding in a consolidated defense budget.

A GROWING MOVEMENT: Perhaps anticipating this left-right call for reducing defense spending, a trio of far-right movement leaders -- Bill Kristol, director of the Foreign Policy Initiative, American Enterprise Institute president Arthur C. Brooks, and Heritage Foundation president Arthur Feulner -- wrote an op-ed last month in the Wall Street Journal warning that sensibly reducing the defense budget would "make the world a more dangerous place" and "impoverish our future." And former Bush Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld tweeted yesterday that there are "tough fiscal choices ahead" and that "reforming entitlements should top the list -- cutting the defense budget should not." Yet the American people have the exact opposite view of the "list" of our fiscal choices. In a New York Times/CBS News poll conducted just days before last week's election, a plurality of voters said that their top priority for government spending cuts was "national security." Cuts in Social Security and Medicare were ranked second to last in popularity (cuts to education spending were least popular, with only 8 percent of Americans in favor). The conservative-leaning National Taxpayers Union and the progressive-leaning U.S. Public Interest Research Group released a joint report titled

"Toward Common Ground: Bridging the Political Divide to Reduce Spending," which outlined billions of dollars that can be trimmed from the defense budget by "ending orders for obsolete parts and supplies in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Defense Logistics Agency" and "implementing the findings of the Bipartisan Defense Acquisition Panel." The strong desire for defense cuts from both the public and the policy community has started to gain traction in Congress. Last month, a bipartisan group of 55 members of Congress signed a letter to the President's Deficit Commission urging it to "subject military spending to the same rigorous scrutiny that non-military spending will receive. ... We strongly believe that any deficit reduction package must contain significant cuts to the military budget." There is evidence that the Pentagon is starting to recognize the strength of this growing coalition for defense cuts, too. At a "closed door meeting" last month between Deputy Defense Secretary William Lynn and Wall Street analysts, one senior defense industry executive said that he expects "real pressure" from Congress over defense spending. "The grim reality is that the midterm elections are going to have a significant impact in terms of accelerating the contraction in defense funding," Jim McAleese, a Virginia-based defense consultant, told Reuters.

THINK FAST

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) will file a friend-of-the-court brief in the multi-state lawsuit **challenging the constitutionality of health care reform**, Politico reports. McConnell argues in his brief that the reforms "dramatically oversteps the bounds of the Commerce [Clause] which has always been understood as a power to regulate, and not to compel, economic activity."

Sen. Jim DeMint (R-SC) said yesterday that he will **challenge McConnell and other "old guard" Republicans over earmarks** that DeMint and other Tea Party-backed Republicans campaigned to eliminate. "Americans want Congress to shut down the earmark favor factory, and next week I believe House and Senate Republicans will unite to stop pork barrel spending," DeMint said.

As President Bush begins his public relations campaign for his new memoir, Gallup finds that his approval ratings have increased marginally. **Bush receives a 44 percent favorable rating**, up slightly from 40 percent in January 2009.

In a news conference in Indonesia yesterday, President Obama said that, even with the "earnest and sustained" efforts, the **U.S. must do "a lot more work" to improve ties with Muslims around the world**. "We don't expect that we are going to completely eliminate some of the misunderstandings and mistrust that have developed over a long period of time, but we do think that we're on the right path," Obama said.

Middle East peace talks may be in jeopardy following a sharp dispute between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over expanded Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. After Israel announced the settlements yesterday, Obama said in Indonesia that **such actions were "never helpful,"** while Netanyahu later fired back that "Jerusalem is not a settlement."

A special prosecutor "**cleared the CIA's former top clandestine officer** and others Tuesday of any charges for destroying agency videotapes showing waterboarding of terror suspects but he continued to investigate whether the harsh questioning went

beyond legal boundaries." CIA Director Leon Panetta said the Agency welcomes the decision and will continue to cooperate with the Justice Department.

Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY) yesterday called for "a full, independent **investigation**" in to **the possible "criminal use of torture"** under President Bush. "I am outraged by President Bush's own admission in his newly released memoir that he personally authorized the use of waterboarding," Nadler said. Republican Rep. Jason Chaffetz (UT) also said yesterday that he is willing to investigate Bush's use of torture.

Senior GOP officials are "maneuvering" to **pressure RNC Chair Michael Steele to not seek re-election** when his term ends in January or, "failing that, to encourage a challenger to step forward to take him on." Gov. Haley Barbour's nephew, Henry Barbour, is "leading the effort" and House and Senate Minority Leaders John Boehner (R-OH) and Mitch McConnell (R-KY) both said they'd "prefer a new chairman as well."

And finally: A spokesman for **Alec Baldwin denied rumors that the actor is planning to run for Congress**, but did leave the door open a bit, saying yesterday, "Alec is interested in politics and public service, but now is not the time." Republican Randy Altschuler, who ran against Rep. Tim Bishop (D-NY) in Baldwin's district, said he would look forward to running against Baldwin: "I actually like his TV show," 30 Rock.

BLOG WATCH

Nevermind the Arab-looking guys with AK-47s.

The most nauseating lie in President Bush's new book.

Could someone please define what a "real American" is?

Internet communism.

Anti-abortion pastor who put a doctor's home address on "Wanted" posters convicted for stalking.

Police force a woman to say that non-consensual sex was not rape.

The Supreme Court's one thousandth cut against consumers.

Some of Gaza's dilapidated hospitals are now asking patients to bring their own medicines.

DAILY GRILL

"The Oklahoma lawmaker who sponsored [a constitutional amendment to ban Sharia law] says the courts are increasingly consulting and using Sharia law to decide matters pertaining to U.S. Muslims in this country."

-- Fox News' Trace Gallagher, 11/09/10

VERSUS

"Legal experts contacted by ABC News said they did not know of one instance of a judge in the U.S. invoking sharia in rendering a decision."
-- ABC News, [6/14/10](#)

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