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Strange bedfellows: Liberals and Libertarians call for defense spending cuts

Posted By [Josh Rogin](#) ■ Wednesday, October 13, 2010 - 1:01 PM ■ [Share](#)

If there's one thing that the liberals and libertarians can agree on, it's the need for large cuts in defense spending in order to reduce the U.S. budget deficit.

55 lawmakers **sent a letter** Wednesday to the **National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform**, widely known as the Debt Commission, urging them to include in their final report "substantial reductions in projected levels of future spending by the Department of Defense." The letter was signed by leading liberal representatives such as **Barney Frank** (D-MA) and **Lynn Woolsey** (D-CA), but also many Democrats involved in national security matters such as Senate Appropriations Foreign Operations subcommittee chairman **Patrick Leahy** (D-VT) and House Oversight and Government Reform National Security subcommittee chairman **John Tierney** (D-MA).

The lone Republican to sign the letter was libertarian Rep. **Ron Paul** (R-TX). But the libertarian Cato Institute has also campaigned aggressively in support of the movement.

"We hope that the report you release this coming December will subject military spending to the same rigorous scrutiny that non-military spending will receive, and that in so doing a consensus will be reached that significant cuts are necessary and can be made in a way that will not endanger national security," the lawmakers wrote.

On a conference call, Frank and Cato experts argued that their longstanding call for a **revision** of the U.S. military role in the world is more necessary than ever due to the United States' fiscal woes, particularly as political leaders search for ways to limit cuts to entitlements.

"I've been a critic for some time of America's excessive military engagement with the rest of the world," said Frank. "We have a changed situation... it is clear that we have to do something to reduce our deficit.

Cato's **Benjamin Friedman** argued on the call that the **recent aggressive conservative efforts** to defend ever-increasing defense budgets was a recognition of the libertarian wing of the Republican Party's increasing momentum in support of trimming military spending.

"Conservatives are starting to figure out that trying to run the world is not conservative," Friedman said.

Friedman participated **in a bipartisan report**, published in June, which spelled out exactly how \$1 trillion of savings could be found in the Pentagon budget over the next 10 years by scaling back military arsenals, large weapons systems, and permanent overseas troop deployments.

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Josh Rogin reports on national security and foreign policy from the Pentagon to Foggy Bottom, the White House to Embassy Row, for *The Cable*.

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Frank and Friedman both acknowledged that the issue of defense spending is highly polarized and that, politically, implementing defense budget cuts would be extremely difficult, especially in Congress. But they are nevertheless laying down a marker by going on record that there are at least 55 votes in Congress in support of such moves.

"What we are saying is that there will be a number of us that will be very unhappy if defense cuts are not part of the tradeoffs," Frank said.

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