

With Panetta nomination comes speculation on DOD budget

By [Amanda Carey](#) - The Daily Caller 1:21 PM 04/27/2011

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President Obama will nominate Leon Panetta to replace Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense and Gen. David H. Petraeus to become CIA Director, [according](#) to press reports Wednesday. The shuffling is the first in what is expected to be a complete restructuring of the national security team in the Obama Administration.

The choice for Panetta to go to the Department of Defense comes as no surprise to most. Panetta is expected largely to follow in Gates' path. Even John Bolton, former Ambassador to the United Nations and prospective 2012 presidential candidate simply told The Daily Caller, "Most likely it means no change of policy."

Gates, however, very effectively shielded his turf from any significant budget cuts. In January, Secretary Gates even made a point to promise to stay on as DOD Secretary throughout the budget cut negotiations.

But some view the choice of Panetta as a signal that the DOD will continue to go on without making tough budget cuts. "Considerable cuts, beyond even the \$400 billion-over-12-year target that President Obama announced earlier this month, will require a fundamental rethinking of the military's role, something that Gates was unwilling to do," [wrote](#) the Cato Institute's Christopher Preble.

"But I worry that President Obama's decision to fill these positions from within his administration signals an unwillingness to rethink U.S. foreign policy. Such a reevaluation is desperately needed," Preble added.

And Gary Johnson, a Republican presidential candidate told TheDC in his reaction to the Panetta nomination that he advocates putting the defense budget on the table and hopes it will be under a new director.

But Jamie Fly, Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Initiative, views a Panetta nomination as good news precisely because it will protect the Pentagon's budget.

"I think Panetta is a solid choice," Fly told TheDC. "Everyone seems to assume that he is being brought in to oversee reform of the Pentagon, but hopefully he will bring the formidable skills he deployed on behalf of the COA to make the case to the president and skeptical White House Office of Management and Budget that our global obligations are too significant and too important to slash the defense budget."

Before Wednesday's announcement, speculation on who could replace Gates [ran rampant](#). Everyone from Hillary Clinton, to Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, to Democratic Senator John Kerry were floated as possibilities.

Leslie Gelb, a former president of the Council on Foreign Relations, who favored Clinton early on, told TheDC he thinks Panetta is a solid choice, and while he does not expect him to change much of Gates' policies, spending could be tweaked under new leadership.

"Panetta will basically follow Gates' path and he hasn't got much choice," said Gelb, who has a friendship

with Panetta dating back to 1966. “It’s only a little over a year before the election so he’s really limited.”

“But I don’t think he would make any drastic changes if he had more time,” Gelb added. ”Only change I can possibly see is he might be more inclined to cut defense spending than Gates. But he’s going to see how possible that is or not if he gets the job.”

“He’ll get along well with the Pentagon,” said Gelb. “He knows how to get along.”

A longtime Democrat, Panetta –who turns 73 this summer – is a former U.S. Representative from California, was President Clinton’s budget director, then chief of staff, and has been CIA Director since 2009.

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