

## **Conservative Texans join California liberals in hunt for Pentagon spending cuts**

*This report was written by Carolyn Lochhead of the Washington bureau.*

Astronomical deficits and Tea Party enthusiasm for deficit reduction are producing hairline cracks in the GOP over defense spending, and an uneasy alliance between anti-war San Francisco liberals and small-government Texas conservatives.

California Rep. Barbara Lee, a liberal Democrat from Oakland, and Texas Rep. Kevin Brady, a conservative Republican from The Woodlands, both think defense spending needs to be restrained and the global mission of the U.S. military, including bases in Europe and Asia, re-examined.

"Until recently, defense was sacrosanct," including among Democrats, said Lee, who is trying to recruit Tea Party backed members to her cause. "You couldn't get anyone, except for a few of us, to talk about cutting defense, regardless. Now I think there's an opening."

Brady, the top House Republican on the congressional Joint Economic Committee, has included defense in his bill to reduce spending \$153 billion over five years.

"Is the Department of Defense a sacred cow?" Brady asked. "Every wasted dollar is a dollar either lost to a soldier's care or heaped upon a soldier's children as future debt. That's just not acceptable."

Two forces are driving the new scrutiny: the size of the defense budget and fear, even in the Pentagon, that the debt itself has become a national security threat.

This year's deficit is expected to hit a record \$1.5 trillion; the debt is on course to reach 90 percent of the economy within the decade. Within nine years, interest payments will cost \$1 trillion, exceeding the entire \$725 billion Pentagon budget, according to a deficit commission headed by former GOP Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico and former Clinton budget chief Alice Rivlin.

The Pentagon budget — not counting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — has doubled since the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, reaching a new post World War II high. The United States spends almost as much as the rest of the world combined on defense and confronts no peer.

The U.S. Navy is larger than the next 13 navies combined, 11 of which belong to U.S. allies.

"Just the research and development budget is larger than any other defense budget in the world, including China's," said former Pentagon official Gordon Adams, a professor of international relations at American University.

The Pentagon also spends more than all domestic programs combined: highways, airports, law enforcement, education, energy, agriculture, national parks, research and everything else Congress funds each year. Add homeland security and Veteran's Affairs, and the share rises above 60 percent.

Defense consumes nearly as much as Social Security, and almost as much as Medicare and Medicaid combined, the governments' two big health care programs that are the main drivers of future debt.

The Pentagon is set to spend more than \$6 trillion in 10 years. Under the \$78 billion, five-year "cut" proposed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, spending would just rise less.

Under Obama, military spending has grown as a share of the economy.

Although it was a Republican president and former general, Dwight Eisenhower, who warned of a "military- industrial complex" and drew trade-offs between new schools and new weapons, his party has since made a "strong national defense" a core platform.

With live wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Democrats are terrified to show anything less than enthusiastic support for the military. As a result, the entire defense budget has become what Lee called a "black hole, with no oversight, no accountability and really no consequences."

Leading conservative defense experts have begun to ask how much is enough.

Kori Schake, a former Bush administration national security official, called the debt "the major threat to American security."

"While I don't think defense should be the only thing cut," Schake said, "defense should make a contribution to the broader national goal of solvency."

The new budget plan that House Budget Committee chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wisc., issued Thursday slashes domestic spending but allows defense spending to rise \$8 billion this year. Still, that is half the amount Obama requested.

Outside groups are calling for much bigger savings of \$1 trillion or more over a decade. Reps. Barney Frank, D-Mass., and Ron Paul, R-Lake Jackson., first proposed cuts that size last summer, outlined by the Sustainable Defense Task Force, but had few takers. Since then, the president's own bipartisan deficit commission and the Domenici-Rivlin study called for similar \$1 trillion-range cuts.

Even cuts this size would still preserve massive U.S. military superiority, Adams said.

Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy for the libertarian Cato Institute, argued for scaling back the global military mission, especially bases in Germany and Japan that were aimed against the former Soviet Union.

"The primary obligation of the U.S. government is the safety and security of American citizens," Preble said. "It is utterly absurd to think that the security environment today is more perilous than it was in 1985 or in 1960."

Rep. Frank called much military spending is used "to back up American intervention in the affairs of other countries" and is "irrelevant to our own security." He said once people realize they are subsidizing the defense of rich allies, the constituency is "non-existent."

Since last November's election, House and Senate GOP leaders have shifted course on defense cuts, saying they are on the table. But Rep. Buck McKeon, R-Calif., the new chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said he would "oppose any plans that have the potential to damage or jeopardize our national security."

A group of conservative leaders influential in the Tea Party movement, including Freedom Works, led by former House majority leader Dick Armey, and Grover Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform, wrote to GOP leaders in December saying it was "outrageous" to say reducing military spending to Bush-era levels is insufficiently pro-military.

Freedom Works public policy chief Max Pappas said Tea Party activists are divided over whether to scale back the global U.S. military posture, but there is "no division over the need to look at all aspects of government spending...if you're going to cut other departments, it is only fair to consider all portions of the budget."

Texas Rep. Brady said he has a "100 percent pro-defense voting record" and his little brother is in active Army duty at Ft. Bliss.

"I won't support any cut that damages him or any other military family or their mission, but a leaner bureaucracy makes for a stronger military," he said. "As lawmakers start to dig deeper into the deficit and understand what we're facing, we don't have a choice."