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The New Congress Should Include Military Spending in Deficit Reduction

Posted by Christopher A. Preble and Benjamin H. Friedman Nov 9th 2010 at 4:56 am in Congress, Economy, Strategy, Weapons | Comments (52)

The prospect of balancing the federal budget forces choice, threatening political truces that luxury bought. It makes us better accountants, scrutinizing investments, separating needs from wants. It sharpens debate, forcing government agencies and their backers to remind taxpayers what they are buying.



Thanks to the deficit, military spending cuts are more likely today than at any time in the past decade. The \$550 billion non-war DoD budget is obvious prey for deficit hawks. It is more than we spent at any time in the Cold War, even adjusting for inflation, though our wealth creation makes it a smaller slice of the economy. It is over a fifth of federal spending, more than half of the discretionary variety, and it roughly doubled in the past decade. With the tea party up in arms about spending and [groping for a foreign policy](#), the right is reconsidering the pass it gives the Pentagon when it laments "big government." With the pressure on to find savings, the left is [worried](#) that entitlements will unduly suffer if military spending does not.

To get the target off his department's back, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates [is trying](#) to make it more efficient—shifting \$10 billion a year in administrative costs into force structure—even as he asks for future budgets that grow faster than inflation. But even if the funds Gates hopes to squeeze out of administration went to deficit reduction instead of weapons, they would cover less than one percent of the deficit. And even that's a reach. According to the [Congressional Research Service](#), the efficiencies Gates has identified will cover only a fraction of his savings goal.

We can save real money on defense by doing less, rather than doing the same thing better. Judged by the objective it is supposed to serve—the defense of Americans—much of the defense budget is wasted. Our forces defend rich allies, freeing them to spend more on social welfare. The misconception that we can use military occupations to build stable governments out of foreign chaos has [swollen](#) the ground forces.

By avoiding the occupation of failed states and reducing commitments to defend healthy ones, we could plan for far fewer wars, allowing cuts to force structure, manpower, procurement spending, and operational costs. The resulting force would be more elite, less strained, and far less expensive

A report we recently released, "[Budgetary Savings from Military Restraint](#)," is an initial attempt to outline this force. It lays out 19 cuts that would save \$1.2 trillion over ten years. For example, because our strategy makes both conventional and counterinsurgency warfare less likely, we call for a one third cut to the end-strength of the Army and Marine Corps, once the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan end. Advances in strike technology and fewer missions would also allow a reduction of six fighter wing equivalents from the Air Force. Comparable technological advances have greatly increased the effectiveness of naval platforms, and restraint requires fewer of them. That allows the elimination of four carrier battle groups, four expeditionary strike groups, and a commensurate number of ships from the Navy.

Congressmen that want immediate cuts that require less strategic upheaval might find some of our other recommendations more attractive. Here are six such items that are ripe for reduction even under the current strategic posture. These recommendations would save \$441 billion over ten years:

1. **Nuclear Weapons:** We have far more nuclear weapons than deterrence of any adversary requires. We should reduce the number of deployed warheads to 500, eliminating 50 percent of delivery platforms, including the bomber leg of the triad. A total savings of \$66 billion in the DoD budget and \$21 billion from the DoE budget.

FEATURED



Al-Qaeda cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki trained Pentagon's Muslim chaplains

by Patrick S. Poole

Back in September I reported on a video showing that Al-Qaeda cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki, spiritual mentor to at least two of the 9/11 hijackers, had led Friday prayers in the U.S. Capitol for congressional Muslim staff members. The video was part of the PBS documentary, "Mohammad,..."

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2. **Cancel the Littoral Combat Ship and develop a less expensive alternative:** LCS is now three times its initial price and will perform a mission that cheaper alternatives could handle. We should stop building LCS and instead refurbish 14 Oliver Hazard Perry class frigates, while researching an alternative platform. Net savings are \$14 billion.
3. **Terminate the V-22 Osprey:** The V-22 (shown above) is wildly expensive, has a spotty safety record, and cannot carry enough weight to allow the Marines it drops off to properly defend themselves. That means that its effective range is that of the helicopters that will supply them. Established rotary-wing aircraft—the MH-60 and CH-53—can handle the V-22's missions. Stopping production and using these alternatives would save \$15 billion.
4. **Cut the Pentagon civilian workforce:** Fewer missions and the smaller force we envision will ultimately require less civilian personnel. Through a hiring freeze, we can gradually cut the ranks of civilian personnel by roughly 30 percent, saving \$105 billion.
5. **Reduce expenditures on command, support, and infrastructure:** DoD estimates 40 percent of the budget is overhead costs. That includes rents, depreciation of equipment, facilities, maintenance, utilities, headquarters staff, IT and other defense-wide support programs. We endorse an aggressive version of Secretary Gates' efficiency initiative (consolidating the geographic combatant commands, for example), but would give the treasury the balance, saving \$100 billion over ten years.
6. **Reduce intelligence spending by 15 percent:** Adjusting for inflation, intelligence spending has more than doubled since 1998, growing to over \$80 billion. There is considerable evidence that this growth is excessive, creating organizational confusion and mountains of reports written by contractors and read by almost no one. Cutting 15 percent of this spending would save \$120 billion.

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
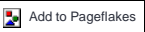
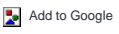
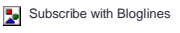
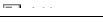
Tags: defense budget, defense cuts, Deficit, Department of Defense, force structure, intelligence budget, Littoral Combat Ship, Military Budget Cuts, nuclear weapons, Robert Gates, V-22 Osprey

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