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[How the Defense Department Will Escape the Super Committee's Budget Cuts](#)

[Peter Suderman](#) | November 3, 2011

Last week I [argued](#) that for anyone hoping for spending restraint, the best plausible outcome from the current deficit reduction Super Committee process was for the committee to fail and the automatic sequestration cuts to kick in. But best plausible doesn't mean it's likely to be a major step toward spending restraint, or anything close. The sequestration process would withhold funds from Democratic priorities like Medicare as well as Republican priorities like the defense budget in hopes of motivating both parties to work out a deal. But Republicans have made it pretty clear that they oppose the defense cuts and are going to attempt to avoid them if at all possible. And as *Wired's* Spencer Ackerman [reports](#), that doesn't look like it will be much of a problem:

It's true that right now [the Supercommittee looks imperiled](#). But that's less of a problem for defense than it seems.

Gordon Adams, a veteran of the White House budget office's mid-1990s battles to shrink the deficit, explains. "This sequester is announced in January, if the Supercommittee fails," says Adams, who's now an American University professor and [fellow at the Stimson Center](#) studying the defense budget. "But the sequester itself — the act of lowering available resources — won't happen until January 2013. It's just *announced* in January 2012, but it doesn't actually *happen* until January 2013."

Now let's take a trip, [Doctor Doom-like](#), to the dystopian future of January 2012, the day after sequestration. "There's a huge fracas in Congress," Adams predicts. The military, which has [railed for months against budget cuts](#), accelerates its warnings that the sky will fall under sequestration, amplified by hack think-tankers and journalists, and armed with [more defense-industry studies about massive nationwide job losses](#) soon to follow. Industry lobbyists kick into overdrive to roll sequestration back, teaming up with the small army of defense industry friends known as "members of Congress who want to get reelected."

Oh, and there's one other thing that will happen between January 2012 and January 2013: a presidential election. And under this scenario, the election will occur under the unwelcome cloud of defense cuts the Pentagon says are too big — a problem for President Obama, his Republican challenger, and legislators of both parties.

"In those circumstances, I don't think the sequester will ever happen," says Adams — even if the Supercommittee fails and sequester becomes allegedly "automatic." Congress

and Obama will have a full year to change the law, something that many in Congress already want to do.

As Ackerman notes, the military is working hard to convince legislators that the sequestration cuts would put American security at risk. Earlier this week, according to the AP, Army chief of staff Gen. Ray Odierno [declared](#) that sequestration "would be catastrophic to the military" and "would significantly reduce our capability and capacity to assure our partners abroad, respond to crises and deter our potential adversaries, while threatening readiness." But the cuts would merely slow the explosive growth in defense spending that's occurred over the last decade. As the AP [also explains](#):

The Defense Department's budget has nearly doubled to \$700 billion in the 10 years since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Those numbers do not include the trillion-plus spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

How much of this growth would the sequestration cuts roll back? How devastating would they actually be? [According](#) to the Cato Institute's Christopher Preble, if fully implemented, they would reset defense spending all the way back...to 2007 levels. Which apparently constitutes an unsafe and unacceptable risk to national security.