

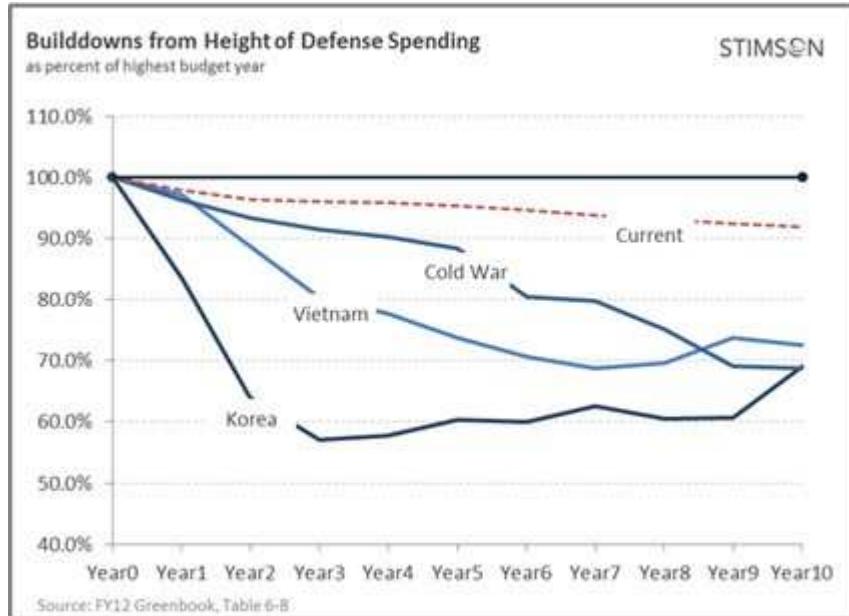


## \$1 Trillion in Defense Cuts? Big Deal.

Compared to past cutbacks, current proposed DOD cuts don't look so drastic

By Danielle Kurtzleben

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Defense cuts always make for political handwringing, as hawks worry about losing national muscle and doves try to avoid looking like they don't care about security.

[[The 3 Financial Shocks of 2012.](#)]

And as the U.S. winds down two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the hawks and doves are lining up over inevitable budget battles as the focus shifts to domestic fiscal realities.

Pro-defense lawmakers in the Senate have proposed legislation to undo pending defense cuts, and between the defense reductions agreed to in this year's budget and automatic cuts due to the so-called "Super Committee's" failure to reach a deal on deficit reduction, the Pentagon is slated to see its bottom line drop by roughly \$1 trillion over the next 10 years.

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has decried the cuts, saying they're like "shooting ourselves in the head" on the ability to confront future threats. As he says it, the [post](#)-cut, "hollow military" will have "the organizational structure but lacks the people, the training and the equipment it needs to actually get the [job](#) done."

#### [\[What's in Store for Jobs in 2012?\]](#)

However, recent analysis as the U.S. commitment to Iraq and Afghanistan recedes, the spending isn't dropping as much as it did after previous wars. Numbers released by from the Stimson Center, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank that researches global security issues, shows how so-called "builddowns" in spending from recent conflicts do not compare to reductions associated with previous wars.

The figures include the roughly \$450 billion in defense spending cuts associated with this year's budget legislation, but do not reflect the additional \$600 billion associated with sequestration. Still, by this measure, sequestration cuts would not put defense spending in lean territory.

The shallow trajectory associated with the current builddown is an indication that Panetta's fears are overblown, says Gordon Adams, a professor at the School of International Service at American University and a distinguished fellow at the Stimson Center.

"You get some version of this every time you get a builddown," says Adams, who oversaw defense budget planning in the Bill Clinton White House. "For me all the hairpulling and rending of garments is a bit excessive, given the slope that we're on."

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Some proponents of increased defense spending argue that especially since September 11, the United States faces ongoing threats, requiring more money toward security. Since 2001, defense spending has nearly doubled to \$700 billion per year. This is as much as the next 17 nations combined, and [accounts](#) for nearly half of all [global defense spending](#), as the Associated Press reported earlier this year.

In January, former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Adm. Mike Mullen told reporters that the doubling of the defense budget in some ways hurt the military.

"We've lost our ability to prioritize, to make hard decisions, to do tough analysis, to make trades," he said.

In a similar vein, Christopher Preble of the right-leaning Cato Institute has argued for [rethinking the national defense strategy](#) as a natural precursor to budget cuts. Defense proponents also say the cuts could be damaging to the fragile [economy](#). In October, the Aerospace Industries Association, a trade group representing several large defense contractors, estimated that the cuts could result in the loss of 1 million jobs.

Furthermore, international relations are as unpredictable as ever. With the death of Kim Jong Il, a sabre-rattling Iran, and shaky U.S.-Russia relations, the United States faces an uncertain and even threatening international atmosphere, which makes increased security attractive to some.

But Adams argues that no amount of money can mitigate uncertainty, adding that current threats do not loom nearly as large as those of past decades.

"The reality is that in terms of existential threats, we don't face one," says Adams. "I grew up during the Cold War. I was the generation that hid under its desk. ... We don't face anything like that today."