

Odd Couple: Frank And Paul Target Military Spending

by NPR STAFF

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text size **A A A**

Governments around the country are feeling the strain of budget pressures, and in Washington, at least, that strain is producing some strange alliances. Take Congressmen Ron Paul and Barney Frank: The libertarian Republican and the liberal Democrat co-wrote [a piece for Huffington Post](#) this past week that takes aim at a longtime budgetary sacred cow: U.S. military spending.

The unlikely pair want to trim the Pentagon's budget by \$1 trillion over the next 10 years, significantly reducing U.S. military presence around the world, including Europe. Frank tells NPR's Lynn Neary that it's time the nation updated its military approach.

"This hangover from the Cold War, when America was seen as the superpower that had to protect everybody everywhere from everything, is outdated. In fact, it's often counterproductive." If America doesn't scale back its military footprint, Frank says, the price will be cutting domestic programs and increased taxes.

"That's what we're talking about," he says. "We're talking about, in particular, the overreach, the overview that America as a world power has this responsibility to protect military power everywhere — and it's enormously expensive."

Scaling Back America's Military Footprint

On HuffingtonPost.com

Rep. Barney Frank and
Rep. Ron Paul: Why We
Must Reduce Military
Spending

One target in Frank's sights: the U.S. military base in Okinawa. "We don't need 15,000 marines in Okinawa — they're a hangover from a war that ended 65 years ago. And Japan now ought to be able to defend itself."

Frank says U.S. sea and air power can deal with any threats from China, so having troops stationed nearby is unnecessary. "No one thinks you're going to land 15,000 Marines on the Chinese mainland to confront millions of Chinese military."

Same goes for Europe. "NATO was a great accomplishment 61 years ago," Frank points out. "I don't see why we need troops in Okinawa or why we need troops in Germany, why we need troops in Italy."

Some have argued that it's normal to position troops in ally countries. "Well, if that's the case, where are the Belgian troops in Arizona? Where are the French troops in South Dakota?"

Besides closing bases, Frank sees another place for major cost savings. "During the Cold War, we had three ways of destroying the Soviet Union with thermonuclear weapons," he says. "We had nuclear submarines; we had the intercontinental ballistic missile and the strategic air command."

These days, Russia's not the threat it used to be. Frank's proposal to the Pentagon is simple: "You know these three ways you have of destroying what's now Russia? Why don't you keep two and give up one? And save us tens of billions a year."

A Bipartisan Task Force

To look for more ways to trim the military budget, Frank set up a bipartisan commission. The Sustainable Defense Task Force includes people from the libertarian think tank the Cato Institute as well as "people with environmental and peace credentials," Frank says.

The task force has already proposed plans that it says would save \$100 billion a year through military cuts. It's a proactive attempt to direct the attention of President Obama's deficit reduction commission.

"What Ron Paul and I are doing," Frank says, "is writing to them and saying, 'Don't just come to us and say we're going to raise taxes and we're going to limit Social Security and cut EPA, etc., etc. There needs to be proportional reductions in the military budget.'"

"And we are going to tell them that if they don't add that, we don't vote for their program."

The bipartisan nature of the task force suggests that support for Frank and Paul's proposals comes from all corners of the political spectrum. Frank is clear that he is willing to work with nearly anyone in this effort – even the Tea Party.

"There are always going to be points of common ground," he says, and budget cuts are one of the Tea Party's priorities. Frank says he may disagree with them on a number of things, but he'd welcome their support.

But trimming the military's budget might be as far as that bipartisan compact might go. What happens to any savings will be another matter. Frank says that's a debate for another day. Right now the objective is clear.

"If we aren't able to make those cuts in the military, then we are going to find pressures for taxes higher than Ron wants — and that I might even want — and for domestic cuts more than I want," he says.

"We would like to be able to save that money and then have that second debate."

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Recent First



Michael Johnpaul (xanadunotxanax) wrote:

OMG, these NPR comment boards must be affecting me. I actual found myself agreeing with his highness, Barney.

Monday, July 12, 2010 9:39:11 AM

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Charles Phillips (TheDudeAbides) wrote:

Michael,

Since you apparently know everything (I was once that age), please tell me what should have been done.

Monday, July 12, 2010 8:41:22 AM

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Michael Langdon (science1) wrote:

Charles, sorry but you clearly don't know the course of events that took place on 9/11. My point was that if the military cannot determine whether an attack, civilian or military based, is real or a simulation then they are a massive failure. If missiles are launched against us, how do we know they will do anything. Everytime we have been attacked in the past, 9/11, Pearl Harbor, the Phillipines, the military failed. These are facts. Sorry, they interfere with your pretty world view, where all failures can be waved away with, "Don't know how to connect the dots and hindsight is 20/20, oh well."

Your hindsight comment is everybody's excuse for failure. It is perhaps laziest answer in the world. We were attacked but those in charge of defending us from attack didn't think about the ways we can be attacked. Nice logic.

Monday, July 12, 2010 8:12:56 AM

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Charles Phillips (TheDudeAbides) wrote:

"And Gunny Phillips before you lock me up again: I ain't talkin' about your kids."

Brim,

You sound like a DevilDog! :-)

Monday, July 12, 2010 7:58:34 AM

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Christina Griffith (Supafly42) wrote:

Politicians pick whatever philosophy, ideology, or worldview that gets them back in their seat the next time around. This is not libertarian or democratic, left wing or right wing, this is hopefully about recognizing our new place in the world, and our priorities being shifted to where resources are allocated to where they are needed most.

Monday, July 12, 2010 3:52:19 AM

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Tom O'Hern (LibertarianGuy) wrote:

Nice try Barney Frank but his intentions show in his words. He is still treating Americans as pawns in the game that government plays with its citizens under the veil of democracy. All this talk of taxes may be this or that to pay for program x or y shows he has no respect for the average American. Ron Paul is being pragmatic and using Frank who is high up in the hierarchy and can thus carry out parts of his strategy in reducing militarism and imperialism. However, Ron Paul's guiding interest is the principle of freedom, peace, and prosperity not this pragmatism of Frank who is doing so only to make room for his domestic spending programs. Sure let's curb militarism only to encourage socialism at home. That sounds great! Not really seeing as both encourage despotism. Frank is not even sincere towards the Pentagon. He says they had three ways why not give up one to save money. Not maybe we should abolish the Pentagon and promote peace. Politicians by and large are pragmatic not guided by principles and are only trying to further their own ambitions. This is a great example on Frank's part. I just hope Ron Paul's image is not tarnished by log rolling with such a loathsome character.

Monday, July 12, 2010 2:13:22 AM

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Thomas R (Fyreclaw) wrote:

Social safety nets like SS, Medicare, and were not designed to deal with today's needs. We have fewer workers coming into the workforce than we used to, we have a population of Baby Boomers that are about to retire and strain the welfare system even further.

We should not and cannot expect the government to hold our hand from the cradle to the grave. It is up to the government to provide a helping hand but it is up to the Average American to stand on their own two feet.

Monday, July 12, 2010 1:39:45 AM

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Thomas R (Fyreclaw) wrote:

Thomas R (Fyreclaw) wrote: The lion's share of the budget goes to entitlement programs and until we have the political courage to bring those costs in line and make them sustainable.....

Political courage, it would take, because it would be political suicide. You don't like programs that many depend on. Many will do their best to eliminate the political forces that consider them meaningless.

Cat's Paw: Pretty heartless to cast old people out on their own. You don't care about SS or Medicare. You must be rich! Rich people are Republicans. All they can see is selfish self-interest.

Way to assume buddy, I am neither rich nor a Republican nor would I consider myself heartless, quite the contrary. I do believe that certain programs like SS, Medicare and the like are important, but they must also be sustainable otherwise they only serve to bleed our country to death.

Money is not infinite and we should not treat it as such, if the government is going to spend money it should be investing it, not handing it out. That means more money to education, modernizing and expanding our infrastructure, and investing in future industries that will restore America's technological edge and economic dominance.

Monday, July 12, 2010 1:33:51 AM

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Brim Stone (brimstone) wrote:

Trisha York wrote:

"And why haven't we got the job done?"

Well Trish, 'cuz the military folks, and the defense contractors they gestate into, and the politicians the Military-Industrial Complex buys, don't want it to end. They want it to keep going on and on, smoldering away, while they suck away at the government teet. They're just ecstatic the party has lasted so long. All those Colonels getting their "combat commands", retiring and then stepping into the \$250k a year CACI, KBR, MPRI jobs. Jobs that would disappear overnight if we just left.

Boy I remember when this all started. They were running around with glee in there eyes, sayin' "This is gonna last for YEARS!"

The conventional military can't "win" in Afghan. There's no military victory in that sense. Despite all the complaining the military does about how the "politicians are losing this war" - and you'll here more of that as we leave- the ones who could end it don't want to.

And Gunny Phillips before you lock me up again: I ain't talkin' about your kids.

"I love the smell of napalm in the morning...The smell, you know that gasoline smell, the whole hill. Smelled like...victory. Some day this war's gonna end."

-COL Kilgore, "Apocolypse Now"

Sunday, July 11, 2010 11:39:24 PM

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S M (Karnac) wrote:

We can spend all this and billions given to Mexico and south American countries for a futile "war on drugs", but we can't give any temporary \$ to our own unemployed as a result of political incompetence/corruption in letting banks have their way!

Sunday, July 11, 2010 9:11:37 PM

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