

# The Washington Post

## ^UWill the defense cuts do what Robert Gates says they will?

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Regarding the Aug. 10 front-page article "[Thousands of defense jobs to be eliminated](#)":

While I applaud Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates's goal of controlling defense spending, his proposal to cut defense contracting by 10 percent a year for three years raises many questions. Three top the list.

-- Will the cuts actually save money? Arbitrary across-the-board cuts generally don't produce the desired result and are not a strategic means of achieving savings. Mr. Gates admitted that previous efforts to reduce reliance on contractors did not achieve the savings the Pentagon had hoped for.

-- Who will be hurt by the arbitrary cuts? Smaller contractors -- companies owned by minorities, women and disabled veterans -- are the low-hanging fruit and probably will bear the brunt. Large contractors have the resources to weather such cuts, but for small employers, those struggling most in this tepid recovery, the loss of a contract could push them out of business.

-- What are the ramifications? Besides the obvious impact on the economy and workforce in Northern Virginia and other regions with a high concentration of federal contractors, there are serious concerns about whether these arbitrary reductions will hurt the Pentagon's national security interests. There are no promises that the expertise lost when contracts are cut will automatically flow into the federal workforce.

We need answers on the rationale and reasoning behind this decision. That's why the House Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee on management, organization and procurement, at my request, will hold hearings on the matter when Congress returns from its district work period.

*Gerald E. Connolly, Washington*

*The writer, a Democrat, represents the 11th District of Virginia in the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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The Aug. 12 editorial "[Mr. Gates's rough cuts](#)" and David S. Broder's Aug. 12 column, "[Gates's budget warning shot](#)," applauded the defense secretary for his plans to cut spending even though the plans will do no such thing. As Mr. Broder wrote, Mr. Gates proposed closing the U.S. Joint Forces Command and shedding contractors and generals in the Pentagon's employ. But neither piece noted that these proposals are part of a plan to shift some Pentagon spending from administration to force structure -- not to cut total spending.

The impetus for the cost-shifting plan is the White House's reluctance to increase Pentagon spending by more than 1 percent above inflation for the next few years. Rapid growth in procurement and personnel

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spending makes that increase insufficient to cover the military's programmatic costs.

Bloated administrative overhead is a good place to find funds for that end. But taxpayers gain nothing.

Mr. Gates has requested substantial increases in defense spending every year that he has been secretary. He opposes spending cuts, even after the wars end, even though the United States now spends more on defense than at any time during the Cold War, adjusting for inflation. He openly hopes that these proposals to heighten administrative efficiency deflect pressure to cut spending. By pretending that these changes do so, The Post helps shield Pentagon spending from scrutiny.

*Benjamin Friedman, Cambridge, Mass.*

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