

## DEFENSE

## Frank Leads Call For Deep Budget Cuts

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by Andy Leonatti

A group of House and Senate members led by House Financial Services Chairman **Barney Frank** unveiled today a plan to reap nearly \$1 trillion in defense savings over the next 10 years to help bring down the deficit.

The lawmakers commissioned outside experts to write a report making recommendations to be forwarded to President Obama's deficit-reduction commission. Joining Frank were Reps. **Lynn Woolsey**, D-Calif., **Walter Jones**, R-N.C., and **Ron Paul**, R-Texas, as well as Sen. **Ron Wyden**, D-Ore.

The commission, dubbed the Sustainable Defense Task Force, recommended reducing the U.S. nuclear arsenal for \$113.5 billion in savings; cutting \$55 billion from missile defense and space spending; reducing the naval fleet by 230 ships for \$126.6 billion in savings; and withdrawing 50,000 troops from Europe and Asia, with \$80 billion saved.

In a letter to the deficit commission, Frank, Paul, Wyden and Jones said "maintaining that collection of overseas bases results in a perverse daisy chain of borrowing money from foreigners, spending those borrowed funds from overseas, then sending never-ending interest payments back overseas as we roll over that debt again and again."

Frank, speaking at a news conference with task force members, acknowledged that some proposals would be dead on arrival on the Hill. In particular, he cited a proposed means test for TRICARE, the military healthcare program, on veterans working full-time jobs but who still opt to for military healthcare coverage. The commission's report notes that TRICARE makes up 8 percent of defense spending.

In procurement cuts, the task force recommended canceling the Air Force F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and replacing it with advanced F-16 and F-15E for \$47.9 billion in savings. The report also called for ending procurement of the MV-22 Osprey and delaying the KC-X Aerial Refueling Tanker for five years.

One member of the task force, Christopher Preble of the libertarian Cato Institute, said the recommendations would not affect the "essential security" of the United States and does not make any cuts that would hinder the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For his part, Frank criticized what he termed "weaponized Keynesianism" among lawmakers who criticize all government spending as job killing except military spending.

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"It's like insurance -- spending that you hope won't be used," he said. He added that military spending is "single-use spending" that is not a long-term job creator.

Frank he has not yet discussed the report with either defense appropriators or House Armed Services Committee members, but he said an opportunity has opened due to the deficit commission.

He predicted that scaling back the European commitment and reducing the nuclear stockpile would be the easiest items to slice, but he noted that cutting defense is never easy.

"If it was easy, we all could have slept in this morning," he said.

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