

Sustainable Defense Task Force

BY HERSCHEL SMITH

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To be fair concerning the brief things I am about to say (and quote), you may go directly to the [Sustainable Defense Task Force Report](#) and read the analysis and recommendations yourself. For now, the summary report at the [Marine Corps Times](#) will suffice.

An independent team has made a series of recommendations to Congress to reduce future Defense Department budgets, in light of the country's growing deficit — including big cuts to the Corps.

The team, dubbed, The Sustainable Defense Task Force, was tapped for the project by a bipartisan group of lawmakers. Their suggestions could reduce defense spending by \$960 billion from 2011 to 2020.

Ideas include:

- Roll back the size of the Army and Marine Corps as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down. The U.S. could save \$147 billion over the next decade by reducing the Army's end strength from 547,400 to 482,400 and the Corps' from 202,000 to 175,000, the task force says.
- Reduce the number of maneuver units in the Army and Marine Corps. The task force suggests reducing the number of Army brigades from 45 to 42 and the number of Marine infantry battalions from 27 to 24. Doing so would contribute to the \$147 billion in savings as the services reduce their end strengths.
- Delay or cancel development of Navy variants of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. The U.S. could save \$9.85 billion from 2011 to 2020 by canceling the purchase of JSF jets for the Navy and Marine Corps and buying more affordable F/A-18 jets instead. Doing so would leave the Corps without jump jets once the AV-8 Harrier leaves the service, but the task force argues that capability "has not proved critical to operations in recent wars."
- End the fielding of new MV-22 Ospreys. The Corps could save \$10 billion to \$12 billion over the next 10 years by buying new MH-60S and CH-53K helicopters, analysts say. The K variant of the CH-53 is not expected to hit the fleet until at least 2015, but the Navy began replacing outdated CH-46 helicopters early this century with the MH-60 on amphibious assault ships.
- Kill the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle program and field cheaper alternatives. The Corps could save at least \$8 billion in the next decade by refurbishing cheaper, existing amphibious assault vehicles instead of continuing development of the yet-to-be-fielded EFV, the task force says.
- Reduce military recruiting budgets. The task force does not provide a service-specific breakdown, but says that with a military drawdown underway, the U.S. will not need to spend as much money finding new recruits. Recruiting budgets could be reduced by \$5 billion over the next decade.

Some of the proposals — killing the EFV to save money, for example — are hardly new. But the report also includes a second set of proposals authored by Benjamin Friedman and Christopher Preble, analysts at the conservative **Cato Institute** in Washington.

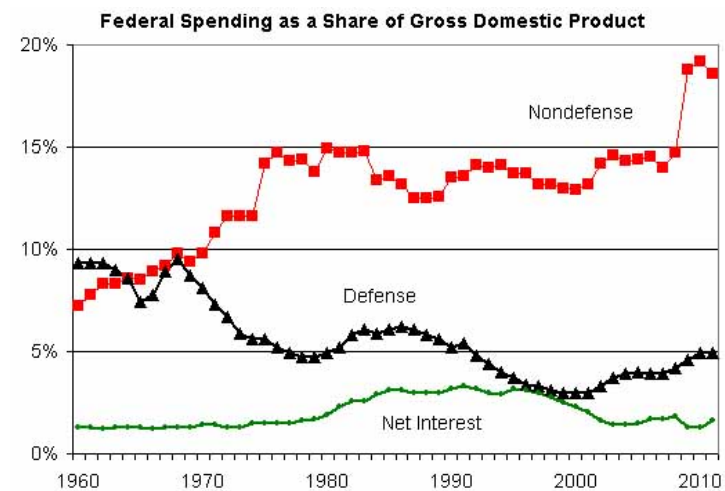
In a five-page section at the back of the task force's 56-page report, the two analysts propose a "strategy of restraint — one that reacts to danger rather than going out in search of it." If adopted — a big "if" — it would result in deep cuts to the Army and Marine Corps, with the Army reduced from about 560,000 soldiers to 360,000, a 36 percent reduction, and the Corps reduced from 202,000 Marines to 145,000, a 28 percent decrease. The cuts would make the Corps smaller than it has been at any time since 1950, when there were about 74,300 Marines on active duty before the U.S. took an active role in the Korean War.

[...]

"We are spending more on our military than we have at any point since World War II," Preble

said. "It's absurd to think that the type of threats that we're dealing with today in 2010 are greater than what we dealt with in 1950 or 1960 or 1970. It's absolutely absurd."

No, here is what's absurd. Pretending that this has anything to do with saving any significant amount of money via defense cuts. Recall that we have discussed this depiction of defense spending as a function of GDP (via [Instapundit](#)).



This graph also comes from the [Cato Institute](#). Maybe the analysts at the Cato Institute should talk to each other a little more. You know, maybe some staff meetings or hallway discussions or something. Maybe they should do lunch. With the Obama administration having thrown several trillion dollars into toilet to be flushed away without doing any good whatsoever, the focus on defense spending is disingenuous and hypocritical. Right before the executive summary, the following quote is strategically placed.

Conservatives needs to hearken back to the Eisenhower heritage, and develop a defense leadership that understands military power is fundamentally premised on the solvency of the American government and vibrancy of the U.S. economy," Kori Schake, Hoover Institution Fellow and former McCain-Palin Foreign Policy Advisor.


Nice try. Let's cut billions out of defense spending in order to counterbalance the trillions we throw away on social engineering programs so that if we ever really do need defense again after we have managed to control ourselves and stay out of fights with the enemy, maybe we will have spent so much on non-defense we will have curtailed our drunken appetite for throwing money away and we can get down to business defending ourselves.

The problem is that the enemy gets the majority vote. Say what you want about the expeditionary warfare concept, the 100 or so nations in which we currently have troops deployed and based, and the supposed meddling we do in the affairs of others. It keeps the fight abroad instead of at home. For those who wish to wait for the fight to come to our doorstep, be careful what you wish for and consider just what it would be like.

I have been as hard on the big plans for the Marine Corps as anyone. I dominate Google rankings for expeditionary warfare and the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle. I oppose it (the EFV) in all its manifestations. I have advocated a much lighter, and more air-mobile Corps, with reliance on forcible entry via air (a new helicopter fleet) rather than via sea, to allow the Navy to set up shop after the Marines have secured a beachhead. Relying on the hugely expensive and very heavy EFV is profoundly unwise. I have also opposed the money for the F-35 because it isn't half the aircraft that the F-22 is, and it has had halting production efficiency.

But the authors have crossed the Rubicon. They're talking about massive reductions in infantry battalions. Don't be fooled. Good Infantry Battalions can't be stood up easy, cheap or fast. We are left with our pants down if we follow the advice of this report sanctioned by this group of bipartisan lawmakers. And for the record, while I like the generally libertarian approach to domestic lawmaking, Ron Paul's views of national defense are naive and childish. Any study co-sponsored by Barney Frank and Ron Paul should immediately raise your hackles.

In the future, I have a better idea for saving money. Rather than pay these analysts to reiterate this same claptrap, next time pay me ten percent of what you would otherwise spend and I'll cut through the crap in one tenth of the words. One tenth the words for one tenth the cost. If Congress doesn't recognize that as a deal, they can't be trusted with our money.

 Army, Department of Defense, Expeditionary Warfare, Marine Corps