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And he expects it will propose cutting weapons systems that don't meet any plausible need.. "No matter how good a weapon is technically, we shouldn't buy it unless it has an enemy," he said.

Frank despairs that the deficit-reduction debate plays out in Washington as if there are only two choices: raise taxes or cut entitlements, such as Social Security and Medicare.

Even President Obama's proposed freeze on discretionary spending explicitly rules out any defense cuts, which Frank describes as "my biggest difference" with the president since he came into office.

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The group has met twice already, and expects to complete its recommendations shortly. Once that happens, Frank said, "what we are going to do is tell the deficit reduction commission that they have to include substantial reductions in military spending if they want our support."

Frank said he imagines many politicians avoid the topic for fear of being assailed as weak on terror. But, he said, "I don't think any terrorist has ever been shot by a nuclear submarine."

There's also some skittishness because our troops are currently in harm's way. "Once American troops are in the field, it becomes a tougher issue for a lot of people," he acknowledged. As a result, cutting spending for Afghanistan, at least for now, is not on his group's agenda.

But spending has increased completely out of proportion with the need, he said. "During the Cold War, 26 percent of military spending in the world was American; now it's 41 percent. So we have fewer enemies and we're spending more money."

The key to defense budget cutting, Frank said, is to attack the notion that the U.S. military needs to be everywhere in the world militarily. "If you let them insist that there is a need for worldwide military engagement, we will be at a disadvantage when we fight the specific fights" to cut programs, he said.

Once you drop that notion, he said, "I believe we would save over \$100 billion a year over what's been proposed."

The F-35 fighter program alone may end up costing \$338 billion or more. And according to author Chalmers Johnson, the U.S. military currently spends as much as \$250 billion a year maintaining approximately 865 facilities in more than 40 countries and overseas U.S. territories.

Frank is particularly critical of the proposed missile defense shield in Eastern Europe -- a Bush idea that Obama has adopted. "Defending Poland, the Czech Republic and I think it's Bulgaria against Iranian missile attack? I think what happened is the software from a video game escaped" and got into the Pentagon's computers, he said.

Task force member Charles Knight, who is co-director of the Project on Defense Alternatives at the Commonwealth Institute, told HuffPost that the group is making good progress.

"We all agree that the defense budget has objectively grown enormously in the last

decade and there's lot of room in which it could be reduced. And there's also reforms to the practices that could yield savings," Knight said.

"We think there are real reasons for [Obama's] Commission on Fiscal Responsibility to be taking a close look at the DOD budget."

Here are the members of Frank's "Sustainable Defense Task Force" and their affiliations, for identification purposes.

- Carl Conetta, Co-Director, Project on Defense Alternatives (Commonwealth Institute)
- Benjamin Friedman, Cato Institute
- William Hartung, New America Foundation
- Chris Hellman, National Priorities Project
- Heather Hurlburt, National Security Network
- John Issacs, Executive Director, Council for a Livable World
- Charles Knight, Co-Director, Project on Defense Alternatives (Commonwealth Institute)
- Larry Korb, Center for American Progress
- Paul Martin, PeaceAction
- Laicie Olsen, Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation
- Prasannan Parthasarathi, Boston College
- Miriam Pemberton, Foreign Policy in Focus, Institute for Policy Studies
- Laura Peterson, Taxpayers for Common Sense
- Christopher Preble, Director of Foreign Policy Studies, Cato Institute
- Winslow Wheeler, Center for Defense Information

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