

Who SAYS We Can and Should Cut Pentagon Spending?

Right, left, and center – budget watchers and decision makers, economists and military experts, foreign policy leaders and policy commentators agree on *one* thing: *it's time for substantial cuts in the Pentagon budget*. Public polls and common sense point in the same direction.

Last year, the President set up a bi-partisan **National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform**. Among its recommendations, released in December and affirmed by 11 members of the 18-member task force, was a clear call for *substantial defense reductions over the next 10 years*¹. Commission members supporting this call ranged from Senator Tom Coburn on the right to Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Andy Stern on the left, with Senate Budget Committee Chair Senator Kent Conrad and former director of the Congressional Budget Office in the center.

Non-governmental groups' recommendations echoed the Commission's call, including

- Bipartisan Policy Center (with recommendations formulated by former Senator Pete Domenici and Alice Rivlin)²,
- Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (chaired by former U.S. Representatives Bill Frenzel, Jim Nussle, Tim Penny and Charles Stenholm)³,
- National Taxpayers Union⁴,
- Our Fiscal Security group⁵
- US Public Interest Research Group⁶
- Peter G. Peterson Foundation⁷, and
- Stimson Center⁸

Commissioners Andy Stern and Representative Jan Schakowsky⁹ also issued an alternative deficit plan that preserved funding for low-income programs and incorporated deep cuts in the Pentagon budget. Senator Tom Coburn, also a commission member, issued a set of recommendations¹⁰ that called for a Pentagon audit and deeper cuts in military spending than the commission recommended. **All of these groups, right to left, agreed in calling for annual defense reductions in the \$70 billion to \$100 billion range.**

In **Congress**, Rep. Ron Paul joined Rep. Barney Frank in convening the Sustainable Defense Task Force¹¹ to name *specific* cuts in Pentagon spending that could save nearly a trillion dollars in the next 10 years without diminishing U.S. security.

On the eve of the 2010 election, more than 50 members of Congress conveyed to the President's Fiscal Commission a letter urging substantial reductions in defense as a key part of any deficit-reduction package. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor has insisted that military spending will be on the table in deficit reduction efforts.

Foreign policy and national security experts have spoken out. On November 18, 48 national security experts submitted a letter to the President's fiscal commission arguing that the defense budget might safely bear significant reductions given a willingness to rethink "how we produce military power and how, why, and where we put it to use." On November 15, a separate group of eight defense reformers submitted a letter similarly calling for significant budget restraint.

Former Secretary of State and retired Army General **Colin Powell** said on CNN's "State of the Union" that he sees no reason why

The public is ready to cut military spending.

The Program for Public Consultation recently released its study showing that, when average Americans are presented the federal budget in some detail, most are able to dramatically reduce the budget deficit. In a two-part study that collected the budget choices of a randomized sample of more than 2000 respondents, the study found that the public is indeed ready to cut about \$100 billion in one year from the Pentagon budget. Looking at the projected FY 2015 budget, respondents averaged one-year cuts of about \$145 billion, the bulk of which came from the Pentagon base budget (\$109.4 billion) and from military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq (\$12.8 billion). See www.worldpublicopinion.org/

the military budget shouldn't be considered for spending cuts as lawmakers grapple with the ballooning deficit. "I don't think the defense budget should be made sacrosanct," Powell said.

Policy commentators supporting substantial cuts include Michael O'Hanlon (Brookings Institution), David Stockman (former Reagan administration director of the Office of Management and the Budget), former US Inspector General David Walker, Loren Thompson (Lexington Institute), conservative columnist Cal Thomas, and the editor of *The Nation* magazine, Katrina vanden Heuvel. The report of the Sustainable Defense Task Force has received specific editorial support from the *American Conservative* magazine, the *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Boston Globe*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *USA Today* – as well as an array of smaller media.

¹ "The Moment of Truth," National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, http://www.fiscalcommission.gov/sites/fiscalcommission.gov/files/documents/TheMomentofTruth12_1_2010.pdf, December 2010.

² "Restoring America's Future," Bipartisan Policy Center, <http://www.bipartisanpolicy.org/projects/debt-initiative/about>, December 2010.

³ "What We'd Like to See in the President's Budget," Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, <http://crfb.org/document/what-wed-see-presidents-fy2012-budget>, January 2011.

⁴ "Common Ground: Bridging the Political Divide to Reduce Spending," National Taxpayers' Union and U.S. Public Interest Research Group, <http://www.ntu.org/assets/pdf/policy-papers/p10-10-28-ntu-pirg-spending-cut-paper.pdf>, October 2010.

⁵ "Investing in America's Economy: A Budget Blueprint for Economic Recovery and Fiscal Responsibility," Becky Thiess, Andrew Fieldhouse, *et al*, Our Fiscal Security, <http://www.ourfiscalsecurity.org/fiscal-blueprint/>, November 2010.

⁶ (*ibid.*)

⁷ "Issues and Solutions: National Defense" Peter G. Peterson Foundation, <http://www.pgpf.org/Special-Topics/HJ-Defense.aspx>, November 2010.

⁸ "Five Myths About Defense Spending," Gordon Adams, Stimson Center, <http://www.stimson.org/spotlight/five-myths-about-defense-spending/>, January 2011, and "A Leaner and Meaner Defense," Gordon Adams, Stimson Center, <http://www.stimson.org/summaries/a-leaner-and-meaner-defense/>, January 2011.

⁹ "The Schakowsky Deficit Plan," Representative Jan Schakowsky, http://schakowsky.house.gov/images/stories/1202_Schakowsky_Deficit_Reduction_Plan.pdf, December 2010.

¹⁰ "America's Fiscal Defense Crisis", Sen. Tom Coburn, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/Sen-Tom-Coburn-Americas-Fiscal-Defense-Crisis-06412/>, May 2010.

¹¹ "Debt, Deficits and Defense: A Way Forward," Sustainable Defense Task Force, <http://www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/1006SDTFreport.pdf>, June 2010.

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