



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on January 5, 2011

Pentagon, White House in Tug-of-war Over Spending

Gates wants savings gained through reductions in overhead and elimination of unnecessary programs to be applied to troop costs and weapons programs, Reuters noted, while President Obama has been pushing for \$150 billion in cuts, with the savings used to reduce the federal deficit, expected to top \$1.2 trillion in 2011. But Gates has whittled the target number down to \$80 billion, according to defense analyst Loren Thompson of the Virginia-based Lexington Institute, who was briefed on the communications between the White House and the Pentagon, Reuters said. An unnamed defense company source said Gates was successful in getting Obama to agree to the reduction in the size of the cut, but the President made it clear the Pentagon would not be able to keep the money saved.



Obama plans to release his proposed budget for fiscal year 2012 during the week of February 14.

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Gates is expected to announce the end of a \$13 billion program for the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, a 40-ton amphibious landing craft that General Dynamics Corp. is developing for the Marine Corps, according to two defense company officials and a congressional source, none of whom was able to speak on the record, according to Reuters. The Defense Department will also likely cancel a surface-launched missile system being developed by Raytheon and make further savings by extending the development phase of the largest arms program, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, from one to two years, according to one defense department source. The F-35 is being developed by the Lockheed Martin Corp.

With the national debt approaching \$14 trillion, the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform issued a report last month calling for reductions in both discretionary domestic and defense spending. The report, entitled "Moment of Truth," said "the most significant threat to our national security is our debt. The ability of the United States to keep our country secure over time depends on restoring fiscal restraint today." The commission recommended capping discretionary spending for 2012 at 2011 levels. For the following year the spending should return to the "pre-crisis year" of 2008, before the financial meltdown, the bailouts, and the economic stimulus programs. The 2008 spending, adjusted for inflation, is the target set for 2013. From then until 2020, growth in discretionary spending should be half the projected rate of inflation, the commission said.

The published report made no specific recommendations for defense cuts, but an earlier version included proposals to freeze both military active duty and retirement pay as debt-reduction options, according to the December, 2010 issue of the [Marine Corps Times](#).



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The revised plan "doesn't mean military pay and benefits are off the hook," said staff writer Rick Maze. "Instead it means decisions would be made later, likely with Defense Department input."

While Republicans and conservative political organizations have typically championed increased defense spending, FreedomWorks, founded by former House Republican Leader Dick Armey, and other right-wing groups have recently called on Congress to include the Pentagon in deficit reduction efforts. In a [letter](#) sent last November 30 to Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and incoming House Speaker John Boehner, more than a dozen prominent conservatives called for removing the Department of Defense from the "protected status that has isolated it from serious scrutiny and allowed the Pentagon to waste billions in taxpayer money. A new Congress, with a clear mandate to cut spending and the size of government, should signal its fiscal resolve by proposing cuts for all federal spending."

The letter noted that military spending had increased from 3.9 percent of GDP under President Bush to the current level of 4.9 percent. "It is outrageous to assume spending under the president who launched the War on Terror, started the Department of Homeland Security and began the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is not sufficient for even the most hawkish member of Congress," said the letter, signed by Matt Kibbe of FreedomWorks, Tim Phillips of Americans for Prosperity, and Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform, among others. It ended with a call for "a new era of responsibility.... One that knows no sacred cows."

On a bipartisan note, two ideologically diverse members of Congress, conservative-libertarian Ron Paul (R-Texas) and liberal Democrat Barney Frank of Massachusetts, [together wrote an op-ed piece](#) for the congressional newspaper *The Hill* calling for a reduction in America's worldwide military commitments. In part, they stated:

We are not talking about cutting the money needed to supply American troops in the field. Once we send our men and women into battle, even in cases where we may have opposed going to war, we have an obligation to make sure that our service members have everything they need. And we are not talking about cutting essential funds for combating terrorism; we must do everything possible to prevent any recurrence of the mass murder of Americans that took place on September 11, 2001....

But the notion that American taxpayers get some benefit from extending our military might worldwide is deeply flawed. And the idea that as a superpower it is our duty to maintain stability by intervening in civil disorders virtually anywhere in the world often generates anger directed at us and may in the end do more harm than good.

The political odd couple "may not agree on what to do with the estimated \$1 trillion (over 10 years) in savings," they wrote, "but we do agree that nothing either of us cares deeply about will be possible if we do not begin to face this issue now."

Photo: Secretary of Defense Robert Gates



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