



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 30, 2012

## Opinions Differ About Wisdom of Proposed Military Cuts

As the Obama administration prepares to present a budget to Congress that includes \$487 billion in military cuts over the next 10 years, some experts are warning that the downsized defense that is planned could severely jeopardize the nation's security posture. As reported by the Associated Press, the projected military cuts announced by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta (left) January 26 would include slashing combat brigades from 45 to as low as 32, and shrinking Army ground forces by at least 80,000 soldiers and the Marines by about 20,000 over the next five years.



According to the AP, Pentagon officials said that "plans call for the active duty Army to shrink from a high of about 570,000 soldiers to roughly 490,000 over the next decade or so. Initial cuts have been ongoing, and there are currently about 558,000 active duty soldiers in the Army."

In addition, the proposal calls for the Air Force to retire some of its aging aircraft, including about two dozen C-5As and more than 60 older C-130 cargo planes, and to cut back on the purchase of its F-35 stealth fighter jets. One increase would be a 30-percent spike in the number of drones the Air Force has in the sky. "The Air Force now operates 61 drone combat air patrols around the clock, with up to four drones in each patrol," reported the [Wall Street Journal](#). "Mr. Panetta's plan calls for the military to have enough drones to comfortably operate 65 combat air patrols constantly with the ability to temporarily surge to 85 combat air patrols...."

As for the Navy, it "would keep a fleet of 11 aircraft carriers but retire seven cruisers earlier than planned," reported [Fox News](#) of the plan. The proposal would also delay the addition of some specialized vessels such as the new Virginia-class submarine. Additionally, Fox noted, "plans for building a new generation of submarines that carry long-range nuclear missiles would be delayed by two years."

The AP report noted that the Obama cuts are based on a projected shift "away from the hard-fought ground wars of Iraq and Afghanistan that relied on tens of thousands of troops to battle stubborn terrorists and insurgent groups. The future military, instead, will focus more on Asian security risks such as China and North Korea, and build on partnerships in the Middle East to keep an eye on Iran."

That shift would also reduce America's military presence in Europe from four Army brigades to two, one stationed in Germany and one in Italy.

Panetta's announcement prompted expressions of concern from defense experts, who pointed out that cutting military spending, particularly through reduced troop strength and hardware, is a risky move for the nation's defense posture. "Just like every other entity in the federal government, the Pentagon requires better fiscal accountability," said Senator John Cornyn (R-Texas), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "But taking us back to a pre-9-11 military force structure places our



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country in grave danger. We should ensure our military requirements determine the budget and not the other way around.”

Cornyn is not alone in his concern. Defense experts noted that the overall reductions will eliminate America’s ability to engage in military operations in two distinct theaters, a requirement that stretches back to World War II. Instead, the Obama-inspired defense posture would equip America to fight just one large-scale war, while engaging in a holding action on a second front.

Military analyst Robert Maginnis warned in a [Human Events](#) article that such a change will largely neutralize the nation’s ability to send troops to “conduct stability and counterinsurgency operations such as in Iraq and Afghanistan.” He argued that “the potential for such operations in a volatile world remains high, and it is naïve to [say] otherwise.” Added Maginnis: “Abandoning a two-war doctrine is also dangerous not only because we lack flexibility and a right-sized force for global missions, but also because it sends a bad message that weakens deterrence.”

Baker Spring, a national security analyst with the [Heritage Foundation](#), echoed the concerns of Maginnis, noting that, as happened following the Vietnam War, the defense reductions envisioned by the Obama administration will result in a dangerously diminished combat readiness. “This is because a force that is too small has to endure higher operating tempos and rotation cycles,” wrote Spring in an evaluation of the proposed cuts. “It also results in a reduction in the technological edge that permits the U.S. military to achieve victory on the battlefield quickly and with fewer casualties. Finally, it becomes more difficult to man the force with high-quality personnel and maintain high morale.”

Spring argued that the security challenges facing the U.S. will mean continuing to field a force capable of a global presence. Without the presence of significant U.S. troop strength in Asia, he asserted, China might be tempted to block free access to the South China Sea. “The resulting disruption of trade would be a disaster for U.S. friends and allies, including Taiwan, which imports 98 percent of its oil via this sea-lane,” he cautioned. Similarly, he noted “an Iranian blockade of the Strait of Hormuz would disrupt global commerce, as 20 percent of the world’s petroleum products transit the strait.”

Spring warned that the budget cuts projected by the Obama administration “will decrease the power-projection capacity of the U.S. military” — a capability, he claims, that “permits the U.S. to fight its enemies ‘over there’ in places like Afghanistan, as opposed to here at home.”

One expert who disagrees with the notion that American troops need to be “over there” in massive numbers of troops and installations is retired U.S. Army Colonel Douglas Macgregor, who has been mentioned as a possible Secretary of Defense in a Ron Paul presidential administration. Macgregor told Andrew Napolitano of the Fox news show [Freedom Watch](#) (see video below) that “as Ron Paul has pointed out, we do need to scale back our overseas footprint.” Macgregor warned that America’s presence in many parts of the world “is actually a catalyst for conflict. We’re not cultivating peaceful conditions. In many case we are doing the opposite.” He added that “for most Americans, war is something that happens on someone else’s soil, in someone else’s country.... That’s a serious mistake, because ... increasingly we are inviting war to the United States with our behavior.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqNq3U66K8Q>

He challenged the idea that in order to remain a powerful global force the U.S. needs to maintain its presence on every continent, arguing that in doing so “we’re relieving lots of powerful nations-states from Germany to Japan of the obligation to pay for their own defenses, because we’re doing it for them. As soon as we stop doing that they’ll begin to step up and expend the money and the resources



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necessary to defend themselves.”

Echoing candidate Paul’s assertion that the nation’s defense posture must align with its bank book, Macgregor noted that “we simply don’t have the money” to be conducting military adventures in locations that do not directly impact America’s security. “We’re headed into a very serious financial crisis in the future. We can’t afford these grandiose schemes [floated by Mitt Romney] for 450 ships,” or “the larger forces committed to another war,” as he said Santorum has suggested with regard to Iran.

He also chided the proposal to cut troop strength by 80,000 men, while maintaining a top-heavy Pentagon filled with generals and admirals. “So you’re going to end up with a ratio of one general to every three or four hundred men,” compared to a one to 5,000 ration during World War II. “And we were in a real war against a real enemy,” he said.

While Ron Paul himself has issued no official response regarding the Obama administration’s proposed military cuts, as both a congressman and a presidential candidate he has repeatedly emphasized a defense posture that focuses on (as delineated on his [campaign website](#)):

- secured American borders
- an end to “nation building” military adventures that are “draining troop morale, increasing our debt, and sacrificing lives with no end in sight”
- military campaigns that adhere to constitutionally mandated congressional oversight, and which “send our military into conflict with a clear mission and all the tools they need to complete the job — and then bring them home”
- an end to most foreign aid

Most importantly, Paul has emphasized the importance of a revitalized American military that eliminates “waste in a trillion-dollar military budget,” and a national defense policy ensuring that “the greatest nation in human history is strong, secure, and respected.”



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