



Written by on June 4, 2010

Defense Department to Economize to Fund War

Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Lynn III told reporters on June 3 that his department plans to cut \$100 billion in expenses in all other areas to guarantee a three-percent annual increase in real growth — beyond inflation — in the accounts that pay for combat operations.

"To get \$100 billion, you're going to have to identify lower-priority programs that are not going to be part of future budgets," said Lynn in an interview with reporters. "Given the nation's fiscal situation, there is an urgency to doing this, rather than shifting more of the nation's resources toward national defense," he added.



Lynn told reporters that past experience indicates that the Pentagon will require two- to three-percent real growth to maintain its combat capabilities and continue to provide troops with what they require for optimum performance.

"This is an effort to develop that two- to three-percent with these internal changes, these efficiencies, and these reductions in overhead and infrastructure," he said.

Reuters news reported that the Obama administration's core national defense budget request for fiscal 2011 was \$548.9 billion, but that does not include the costs of fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, estimated to increase up 1.8 percent from the current year.

The *New York Times* on June 3 summarized the cuts ordered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates as follows: During fiscal year 2012, the departments of the Army, Air Force, and Navy — which includes the Marine Corps — must each reduce expenditures by \$2 billion, with the remainder of the Defense Department to reduce spending by \$1 billion. By 2016, each branch department must reduce spending by \$10 billion, with \$7 billion in cuts for the rest of the Defense Department.

"You are not going to be able to do it just on pure efficiencies," Secretary Lynn said. "You are going to have to eliminate lower-priority programs. You are going to have to find headquarters that you don't think you need. You are going to have to find staffs that you think you can cut."

The *Times* reported that the Defense Secretary has set a deadline of July 31 for receiving data from underlings on which programs and personnel can be cut, along with a description of savings in management practices to be included in the Defense budget proposal for the next fiscal year, 2012. Two-thirds of the ordered savings must be an actual money transfer from noncombat accounts to the war-fighting budget, while one-third can be found in running operations more efficiently, eliminating redundant operations, and overhead.

Fiscal conservatives who favor efficiency in government and the elimination of wasteful programs will, of course, welcome any effort made by a governmental department to cut costs. As Secretary Gates stated, however, two-thirds of the "savings" will result from a money transfer from noncombat accounts



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to the war-fighting budget, which will be increased three-percent annually beyond the rate of inflation. Supporters of a strong national defense may also applaud this reordering of priorities, since warfare is the “business” of the Defense Department, with all non-combat operations coming under the category of “overhead.” A city police department making such changes, putting more money into putting more police officers on the street while reducing office administrative costs, would be universally applauded for fiscal responsibility.

However, evaluating the pros and cons of this — and other — Defense Department utilization of resources must be done in light of what the department’s overall mission is. As with all other federal responsibilities, that mission is defined by our Constitution. In addition, statements made by our nation’s Founders and early Presidents serve to put that mission into sharper focus.

The Constitution gives Congress the power to initiate most actions pertaining to national defense including:

- To declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water;
- To raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years;
- To provide and maintain a navy;
- To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces;

While Congress certainly has the power to appropriate money to support an army, and the Secretary of Defense, as a member of the President’s Cabinet (the President being Commander in Chief of the armed forces) has the authority to make decisions (including financial decisions) concerning the operation of a war, one key element has been overlooked: Congress has not declared war since December 8, 1941 (against Japan), December 11, 1941 (against Germany and Italy), and June 5, 1942 (against Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania).

The ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were supposedly authorized, respectively, by [S.J. Res. 23](#) on September 14, 2001 and by [H.J. Res. 114](#), on October 16, 2002.

However, the Constitution gives Congress the power to “declare” war, not “resolve” to go to war.

Beyond the constitutionality of going to war without a declaration, moreover, is the *rationality* of doing so. A formal declaration states unequivocally exactly who our enemy is, which carries weight not only in the realm of international law (such as POW issues, etc.) but also aids greatly in creating the national will and morale necessary to achieve victory. It is probably no coincidence that World War II, fought under the 1941 and 1942 declarations cited above, was also the last war that resulted in a clear-cut U.S. victory.

In addition to our Constitution, however, our Founders also gave us their wisdom. They repeatedly advocated a combination of a strong national defense force combined with a neutral, non-interventionist foreign policy. The former deters foreign aggressors, while the latter serves to avoid turning friendly nations into adversaries.

How much money should the United States spend for defense?

In 1797, an agent sent from the French diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord told U.S. ambassador to France, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, that the American Commissioners sent to Paris to protest French attacks on U.S. shipping would be received only if they paid a £50,000 bribe and made a



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large loan to the French government. Pinckney replied, "Not a sixpence, sir."

On June 18, 1798, at a Philadelphia banquet for John Marshall, one of the three commissioners involved in the incident — later known as the XYZ affair — Representative Robert Goodloe Harper, proposed the following toast: "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute."

Representative Harper's words were indicative of the common American belief that no price was too much to pay for the defense of our nation.

In addition to the amount, however, is the *purpose* to which our defense monies should be used. President John Quincy Adams said in a July 4, 1821 (as U.S. Secretary of State) address to the House of Representatives of his country that "she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy."

If America should not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy, then it seems that the Defense Department could (and should) be saving money by closing overseas bases and ending foreign military operations. Instead, we are not only financing wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan, but under the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure (or BRAC) policy, more than 350 *domestic* installations were closed between 1989 and 1995.

The title of an article by [Chalmers Johnson](#) says a lot in a few words: "[Spending \\$102 Billion a Year on 800 Worldwide Military Bases Is Bankrupting the Country](#)." Which perhaps begs the question: Instead of robbing Peter to pay Paul to finance our overseas wars, why not bring the troops home and close all foreign U.S. military bases?

Photo: Defense Secretary Robert Gates during the Shangri-La Dialogue's Asia Security Summit in Singapore, June 4, 2010: AP Images



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