

October 12, 2010

National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform
1650 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Commission Members,

As the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform continues its work of reviewing and recommending an appropriate set of responses to our nation's mid- and long-term fiscal challenges, we write to urge in the strongest terms that the final Commission report include among its recommendations substantial reductions in projected levels of future spending by the Department of Defense.

Given the size of our deficit and debt problems as well as the political challenges and policy controversies involved in implementing any solutions to them, it is clear to us that cutting the military budget must be a part of any viable proposal. The Department of Defense currently takes up almost 56% of all discretionary federal spending, and accounts for nearly 65% of the increase in annual discretionary spending levels since 2001. Much of this increase, of course, is attributable to direct war costs, but nearly 37% of discretionary spending growth falls under the "base" or "peacetime" military budget. Applying the adage that it is necessary to "go where the money is" requires that rigorous scrutiny be applied to military spending. We believe that such an analysis will show that substantial spending cuts can be made without threatening our national security, without cutting essential funds for fighting terrorism, and without shirking our obligations as a nation to our brave troops currently in the field, our veterans, and our military retirees.

Much of these potential savings can be realized if we are willing to make an honest examination of the cost, benefit, and rationale of the extensive U.S. military commitment overseas, which in large part remains a legacy of policy decisions made in the immediate aftermath of World War II and during the Cold War. Years after the Soviet threat has disappeared, we continue to provide European and Asian nations with military protection through our nuclear umbrella and the troops stationed in our overseas military bases. Given the relative wealth of these countries, we should examine the extent of this burden that we continue to shoulder on our own dime.

We also think that significant savings can be found if we subject to similar scrutiny strategic choices that have led to the retention and continued development of Cold War-era weapons systems and initiatives such as missile defense. While the Soviet Union and its allies nearly matched the West's level of military expenditure during the Cold War, no other nation today remotely approaches the 44% share of worldwide military spending assumed by the United States. China, for instance, spends barely one-fifth as much on

military power as the United States. Instead of protecting us against a clear and determined foe and enemy, Defense Department planning and strategic objectives now focus on stemming the emergence of new threats by maintaining a vast range of global commitments on all continents and oceans. We believe that such commitments need to be scaled back.

Additionally, we believe that significant savings can be realized through reforming the process by which the Pentagon engages in weapons research, development and procurement, manages its resources, and provides support services. Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has speculated that waste and mismanagement accounted for at least 5% of the Pentagon budget annually, and despite a long history of calls for reform from outside the Pentagon, and actual reform initiatives within it, it is clear that much more remains to be done.

We repeat that we are not urging reductions that in any way would cut resources and supplies necessary to protect American troops in the field. Similarly, while we are not opposed to an honest look at efforts at reforming the way that the Department of Defense provides health care and other services to personnel, we are opposed to cuts in services and increased fees for our veterans and military retirees.

As your commission scrutinizes the federal budget and discretionary spending, we ask that you look closely at the Department of Defense in regard to the issues we have raised, and others. We hope that the report you release this coming December will subject military spending to the same rigorous scrutiny that non-military spending will receive, and that in so doing a consensus will be reached that significant cuts are necessary and can be made in a way that will not endanger national security. We strongly believe this to be the case, and we strongly believe that any deficit reduction package must contain significant cuts to the military budget.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Jeff Merkley
United States Senator

Barney Frank
Member of Congress

Ron Paul
Member of Congress

Lynn C. Woolsey
Member of Congress

George Miller
Member of Congress

John Conyers
Member of Congress

Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress

Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress

John Lewis
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

Fortney Pete Stark
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John W. Olver
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Peter Welch.
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John F. Tierney
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Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Jared Polis
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Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Michael M. Honda
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Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes-Norton
Member of Congress

Bob Filner
Member of Congress

Donna F. Edwards
Member of Congress

Melvin L. Watt
Member of Congress

Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone Jr.
Member of Congress

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

Bill Delahunt
Member of Congress

Maxine Waters
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Jerrold Nadler
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Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress

David E. Price
Member of Congress

Alan Grayson
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
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David Wu
Member of Congress

Michael F. Doyle
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Luis V. Gutierrez
Member of Congress

Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Sam Farr
Member of Congress

Dennis Kucinich
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress