

## Panetta: Military Spending Is Going Up

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On Thursday, Leon Panetta held a press conference announcing what he called “cuts” to military spending. The first question following his remarks pointed out that the “cuts” are to dream budgets, while the actual spending will be increased over Panetta’s 10-year plan. Is there any year, the reporter asked, out of the 10 years in question, other than the first one, 2013, in which spending will actually decrease at all. Panetta replied that he was proposing really truly to cut the projected dream budgets that he had hoped for. In other words, he did not answer the question.

Now, there are additional minor cuts “on the table” as the saying goes, cuts that Panetta has described as disastrous, cuts that would take U.S. military spending back to about 2007 levels, cut nowhere close to what a majority of the country [favors](#). (How we survived 2007 and all the years preceding it has never been explained.) Earlier this week, Republican members of the House Armed Services Committee sent President Obama a video denouncing these cuts. They are, of course, the cuts mandated by the legislation that created the Super Committee, which failed, resulting in supposedly automatic cuts.

The video ([available here](#)) is itself packed with lies. It falsely claims that cuts have already been made. It uses dollar figures derived from lumping 10 years of budgets together to make cuts sound 10 times larger. It pretends the automatic cuts would all be to the military, whereas many could be to the State Department and other subsidiary arms of the military. These Republicans propose slashing 10% of non-military government jobs and describe this as saving jobs, even though non-military spending produces more jobs for the same dollars than military spending does. And of course there is no mention in this video or in any official discussion of exactly how [outrageously huge](#) the U.S. military has become. But a crazy video, and a bill to go with it, can not only pass the House and make its way into the Senate (Senator John McCain is already working on companion legislation), but the President is already in agreement with this bill’s primary purpose of undoing any actual cuts to the military. The history of lame duck officials, by the way, is that of becoming less, not more, representative of the public will. Caveat emptor!

In 2004, three times in three debates Senator John McCain proposed cutting military spending and Obama avoided the topic. Candidate Obama proposed significantly enlarging the largest military the world had ever seen. And he has done so. He now proposes not to cut it while pretending to cut it. The best bit of rhetoric in this week’s State of the Union address was this:

“Take the money we’re no longer spending at war, use half of it to pay down our debt, and use the rest to do some nation-building right here at home.”

On Thursday, Panetta put that in real dollar terms. Setting aside any possible supplemental spending bills, and ignoring increased war participation by the CIA, the State Department, etc., and apart from the much larger “non-war” military spending that continues to inch upward, not downward, Panetta claimed that, if Congress would agree, we would spend \$88 billion on wars next year, instead of \$115 billion this year. That \$115 billion is fairly typical of the past decade, in which we have spent between \$100 billion and \$200 billion on wars each year (not counting veterans care, fuel price impacts, lost opportunities, debt interest, etc.) I suspect it also does not include Libya. So, we’re saving \$27 billion, maybe. Take half of that for debt, and we’ve got \$13.5 billion with which to do our nation-building right here at home. Let’s be generous and round it up to \$100 billion. That’s still in comparison with an overall war and “security” budget of well over \$1 trillion annually. And \$13.5 billion is less than a quarter of the \$60 billion Panetta now claims he will save purely through “increased efficiency.” (Granted, that actually could be done in the Pentagon if it were not, you know, the Pentagon.)

The talk of cuts serves more than a political purpose for Panetta and Obama. It also serves to justify actual cuts to services for troops and veterans even while increasing spending on weapons and occupying new nations. Also announced on Thursday, Obama is working on re-occupying the Philippines. To his credit, there has been no mention of the benefits to “our little brown brothers.” There will be an increased Asian presence, Panetta said. The Marines will maintain their Pacific presence, he noted in particular, horribly smashing the hopes of the entire population of [Okinawa](#). There will be no cuts to bombers. We will have a “posture forward” and be able to “penetrate defenses” strengthening “the ability to project power in denied areas,” also known as other people’s countries. But healthcare fees and deductibles for troops and veterans will have to go up, Panetta said.

The second question asked at Panetta’s press conference (how did actual reporters get in there?) was why a tiny reduction following a massive increase in troops in Afghanistan was really sufficient. Panetta was unable to explain. Can you?

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