

It's time to cut spending on military — a few suggestions

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' recent speech on the need to save money in the military was spot-on.

Now we need to see if the proposal includes significant changes that will make a real difference. There are some possibilities:

1) Consolidate the four military academies. The programs have considerable overlap now (English is English) so the first three years would be the same for all with the fourth year being service specific.

The schools to close are those that could be sold for the highest prices and which have the least historical significance.

The Coast Guard and Navy campuses are on prime coastal property and the Air Force land would be a beautiful winter resort. The one remaining, and the natural choice to perpetuate, is the original — West Point. It already has the inclusive name. It is the U. S. Military Academy.

2) Eliminate general officer slots that are not needed. Among many examples: the Chief of the Army Reserve is a three star and the Chief of



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the National Guard Bureau is a four star. They command no troop units. None. They are only in charge of a few Pentagon paper pushers. A GS-12 could substitute.

3) Wipe out the costly mentoring program. (It pays retired general officers to come back and advise those now in leadership positions.) If the mentors really cared, they would do it for nothing.

4) Return the Air Force to its roots. It began as a part of the Army. It is time to correct the error of the 1947 National Security Act. The strategic mission of the Air Force is dormant. The transport role is often handled by contract commercial carriers. The tactical activities are now mostly run out of an office for drone control in Nevada. The air defense pilots have no capable enemy. What the Air Force does do is important but, as a separate service with the concomitant overhead, it can no longer justify its existence as an individual entity. Bring back the Army Air Corps.

5) The joint chiefs of staff seat abdicated by the previous paragraph should go to the Coast Guard. They

are the only service that does its mission every day. They are our border protection and their status should be raised to the level of their importance. Make them full members of the Department of Defense.

6) There is legislation now going through Congress that would change the name of the Department of the Navy to the Department of the Navy and Marine Corps.

That is a good idea, but the order of the two services, if we are to use the magnitude of their contribution to national security as a criterion, should be reversed.

7) Cut superfluous hardware. Eleven carrier groups? There should be six — two each in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans with one on station and the other being maintained. Fancy frivolous fighter planes? A second engine for the F-15? The secretary already has them in his sights.

8) Stop unjustified uniform changes. Many soldiers hate the beret (hard to put on properly and provides no sun protection). Other services go through the same nonsense periodically. Quit it.

9) Improve contracting integrity. Strong measures must be taken. Perhaps yearly polygraphs on program

managers and contracting officers.

10) Eliminate the cabinet level redundancy. What follows are mission statements from the websites of the departments.

First: Homeland Security: "...lead the unified national effort to secure the country and preserve our freedoms." Now: Defense: "The Department of Defense is responsible for providing the military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of our country." The problem jumps off the page. Two departments responsible for security. The taxpayers are funding multiple organizations for a single job. No wonder there are coordination problems. We already had a defense department to protect us against attack. Now we have another department to do the same thing? Come on.

The list is not exclusive. Others have many additional possibilities.

Coming up with ideas is easy. Implementation is hard. With parochial politicians the secretary is climbing a mountain. Let's all give him a boost.

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