

AMERICA AT RISK MEMO

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Protecting the American Dream

Edwin J. Feulner, PhD

We live in an exceptional country. Our Founding Fathers laid the framework upon which Americans have risen to greatness through principles of liberty, the rule of law, and self-determination.

However, there are some in the world who threaten America's exceptionalism. Oppressive regimes still rule some nations. Rogue states openly declare aggression against the United States and our way of life. Yet American society and democracy have prevailed against challenges through our shared commitment and the strength of those forces that protect us. We must continue to support those who support our nation.

The proud men and women who serve in the United States military have fought, defended, and sometimes made the ultimate sacrifice, based on the belief that our liberty is

worth preserving at all costs. When Nazi Germany spread across Europe threatening the livelihood of free peoples, the American people and leaders like Generals George C. Marshall and Dwight D. Eisenhower rose to the challenge to preserve freedom around world.

Today, our military services fight on often ill-equipped, with old or sometimes even broken hardware. Fighter pilots fly jets that span generations. Soldiers have had to tape body armor to the sides of their trucks because the vehicles were not properly fortified. Ships have not met missions because of mechanical failures. The men and women who serve our country will continue to do so proudly, despite these challenges, but their service and sacrifice deserve better from us.

Threats to America's Armed Forces

Unfortunately, many today take the defense of liberty for granted. Economic hardships weigh heavily on the minds of Americans and others around the world. As the U.S. pulls out of Afghanistan, many think we can turn resources and attention away from the military to more pressing needs such as our fiscal woes.

Every day, Americans disagree over fiscal, social, domestic, and diplomatic policies—and they can do so only because of the men and women who protect their right to do so.

- The Navy patrols the high seas, assuring the free flow of goods, services, and information.
- The Army and Marine Corps station their troops abroad, projecting power and strengthening bonds with allies.
- Strategic forces deter current or potential nuclear adversaries.
- Reserve and National Guard Forces stand ready to protect the homeland and serve alongside active duty forces overseas to defend the homeland.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ar12-05>

Produced by the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

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Protect America
Month

Providing for the Common Defense in the 21st Century

The Heritage Foundation's Protect America Month focuses on defense spending in the 21st century. America still faces serious threats in the world and now is not the time to weaken our military through defense budget cuts.

All of our armed forces are under threat not from an outside adversary, but from budget battles in Washington. The Administration contends that its domestic priorities matter more than sustaining the greatest military force for good in the world. It appears willing to reduce the Department of Defense budget even beyond the roughly \$500 billion it has already put on the chopping block by threatening to veto legislation that would defer or set aside automatic cuts under legislation signed by the President last year. This makes no sense.

As he left office, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said it clearly: When it comes to predicting what our next military engagement will be, “since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right.” We do not know when or where the next conflict demanding our action or the next attack on America will arise.

The defense budget is not the real culprit of our ballooning federal debt. Out-of-control spending on our entitlement programs is.

Saving the American Dream

The Heritage Foundation’s transformative *Saving the American Dream* plan lays out a practical and principled blueprint for how to restore America’s economic vitality while providing the adequate funding our military needs to protect our nation and our interests. At its root is the conviction that we do not have to choose between liberty and security. Ronald Reagan proved that we can have liberty *and* security *and* prosperity as long as we are willing to commit to them all. As James Madison wisely said, “There are

more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations.”

The *Saving the American Dream* plan addresses excessive entitlement spending and proposes common-sense solutions to such programs as Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. Today, these programs account for 43 percent of the entire federal budget, but they will grow much, much larger in future years. Comparatively, the defense budget accounts for less than a fifth of federal spending and is shrinking as a share of the budget. Moreover—*even though the government’s primary constitutional responsibility is to provide for the common defense*—failure to address entitlement spending simply increases the risk that defense funding will shrink even further.

The House of Representatives acknowledged its constitutional duty to provide for the common defense when Members passed the Sequester Replacement Reconciliation Act (H.R. 5652). “Sequester” refers to automatic cuts in spending (which includes defense) that will go into effect in January 2013 because the so-called Super Committee failed to come to an agreement over how to reduce the national debt. This “salami-slice” will blindly cut more than \$500 billion from the national security budget—a reduction that Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said would be “devastating” to our armed forces. The House Armed Services Committee said that sequestration “would break the back of our armed forces while slowing our economic recovery and doing little to resolve our debt crisis.”

Fortunately, supporters of the primary duty of providing for our nation’s defenses have made a statement that they will not allow these cuts to hit U.S. national security forces.

Just because our troops are coming back from Afghanistan, America’s leaders should not assume the world is a safer place. It is not. Existing and emerging threats abound, both from nations and from non-state actors. And no one else on the world stage is stepping forward to take our place as protector of the free world.

America at a Crossroads

As we have highlighted over the past four weeks during our Protect America Month, our national security forces defend the principles upon which our nation was founded. We have highlighted what it means for our services to be ready to protect us, the threats they protect us from, and the capabilities they need to uphold those duties. These strategic principles deserve Congress’s full support.

America is now at a crossroads. Politicians are struggling to get our fiscal house in order. But as they do so, they must not lose sight of the constitutional obligation to provide for the common defense. No one will claim that this is an easy task. However, if we choose to cut our security forces further, we weaken our ability to pursue the American Dream. When thinking about these tough decisions, we should reflect not only on what services the armed forces perform, but also on the liberties that we enjoy every day and that they protect.

—**Edwin J. Feulner, PhD**, is
President of The Heritage Foundation.