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Congress Should Invest in Seapower over Bureaucracy

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The U.S. House of Representatives showed strong support for national security when it voted through a reconciliation process to override the sequestration cuts scheduled for defense in January 2013. By following the House Armed Services Committee's (HASC) lead in raising the top-line budget for defense over the President's fiscal year 2013 request, Congress can sustain this momentum. This will enable depleted military assets such as the Navy's fleet to modernize and grow. While legislators should strive to find efficiencies within defense, they should also reinvest savings into national security programs in need, such as the Navy's perennially underfunded shipbuilding budget.

Revitalize the Navy's Fleet.

The Navy's shipbuilding program has suffered particularly weak funding

for a number of years. As a result, the fleet has dwindled to a low not seen since the First World War. While opponents of a robust shipbuilding budget argue that new capabilities and technologies mean the Navy can do more with less, naval experts often counter by saying quantity is a quality all its own. Furthermore, even as the fleet has shrunk, demand for naval presence has remained high. The stress this imposes on the remaining vessels is evident in cases such as the USS *Essex*, which failed to set sail twice in seven months due to mechanical failures. As fewer ships try to do more, they are strained. Building more ships and fully funding maintenance and modernization are critical to sustaining a healthy fleet. Congress should continue gains made in this regard by HASC and support additional funding for shipbuilding and operations and maintenance accounts in the Navy.

Strive for Efficiencies, but Reinvest Savings in DOD. The Department of Defense (DOD) has expanded, but not in a way that will sustain the force into the future. Part of this results from diminishing the roles of service staff far beyond what the Goldwater–Nichols Act of 1986 had envisioned. This bill intended to

streamline military actions and quell inter-service competition. It has since been used to direct the work of the services in recent years, as the President has run the military from a top-down perspective rather than listening to the commanders. The service chiefs, Secretary of Defense, and President as commander in chief should more effectively communicate with command leaders to create an effective strategy.

The Obama Administration has also championed insourcing as means for eliminating government waste. By hiring thousands of contractors in the DOD and bringing them out of the private sector, Administration officials believe they can better control costs by managing work more directly. Rather than taking broad action without determining cost effectiveness, the DOD should create goals of rationalizing reductions and focusing on its core functions.

Amidst DOD budget cuts and the economic downturn, Congress and DOD officials have urged for finding efficiencies. However, what is often lost in this argument is where the money will go. These savings should be reinvested where they are needed within the military, not pulled to fund deficit-reduction efforts.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib3604>

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Congress should work with the services to better understand what they need and where they are lacking, and fund the military appropriately.

Give Troops Their Due Coverage—On the Battlefield as Well as Off. The President and Congress have each pledged—rightly so—that during DOD budget downturns, they will not reduce the benefits of the men and women who serve. While Congress should not attempt to strip service members of their well-earned benefits, there are ways to cut costs in these accounts. The Heritage Foundation’s *Saving the American Dream* plan lays out systematic changes that would allow service members to use benefit accounts more effectively, thus freeing up money to be reinvested in modernization.¹

Since personnel costs account for a considerable portion of the overall budget,² this means that the other accounts will take disproportionate cuts: procurement, operations and maintenance (O&M), and research, development, test, and evaluation (RDT&E). These are the accounts that generate modernization and maintain America’s status as the global power.

Furthermore, these modernization accounts also protect our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines. Armored vehicles are supplied through procurement accounts.³ Military strategists and developers find new ways to keep the service members out of harm’s way and ahead of the game in the RDT&E, working in conjunction with universities and industry to develop new technologies and systems. The O&M account helps maintain the systems on which the service members rely. Congress and the Administration should strive to ensure that America’s service members have the best equipment when going into harm’s way to protect the nation.

National Defense Authorization Act Proposal a Positive Step. In increasing top-line spending on defense by more than \$2 billion, the House Armed Services Committee is making a rational decision and a strong commitment to support national security. The committee is demonstrating that it will not accept the Administration’s across-the-board cuts and attempt to undermine the services.

As Congress prepares to pass a budget for fiscal year 2013, it should

remember its primary constitutional responsibility: provide for the common defense. While the economy is still struggling and efficiencies remain an important charge for our military’s leaders, these issues cannot detract from fielding a capable force that can deter and defeat any adversary. Nor should they be used as a bill payer for the Administration’s fiscal policy. Congress should attempt to reverse recent damaging cuts to defense to ensure that it remains strong well into the future.

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1. Stuart M. Butler, Alison Acosta Fraser, and William W. Beach, eds., *Saving the American Dream: The Heritage Plan to Fix the Debt, Cut Spending, and Restore Prosperity*, The Heritage Foundation, 2011, <http://savingthedream.org/about-the-plan/plan-details/>.
2. U.S. Department of Defense, *Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Request*, February 2012, p. 8-1, http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2013/FY2013_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf (accessed May 14, 2012).
3. U.S. Department of Defense, *Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Request*, February 2012, p. A-19, http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2013/fy2013_p1.pdf (accessed May 15, 2012).