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Top 10 To-Do List for the National Defense Authorization Act

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The federal National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) annually specifies the budget and expenditures of the Department of Defense (DOD). The law can be a vehicle for both good and bad policies.

As Congress prepares to craft this legislation, it should seriously consider policy issues that can improve U.S. security and advance international partnerships:

- 1. Maintain permanent U.S. military presence in Europe.** It is in the strategic interest of the U.S. to maintain a permanent military presence in Europe.¹ Having U.S. troops in Europe provides flexible and resilient rapid deployment options to northern Africa and the Middle East as well. Permanent bases also strengthen critical alliances in Europe.
- 2. Support the sale of F-16C/D fighter aircraft to Taiwan and the promise to assist it in the acquisition of eight submarines.** Taiwan needs to modernize its increasingly obsolescent fighter fleet. Such modernization would contribute to maintaining a credible defense vis-à-vis

China and advance Taiwanese–U.S. relations. Taiwan also needs a modern and capable submarine force. For 20 years, gridlock in the bureaucracies and politics of both nations have prevented Taiwan from acquiring submarines. Congress should take the lead in finally making it happen.

- 3. Protect the mandate for the annual Pentagon report on the Chinese military and restrictions on military-to-military contact between the U.S. and China.** The “power report,” as it is generally known, is critical to developing the sort of public knowledge of the Chinese military that is necessary for informed policy debate. The restrictions on military-to-military contacts prevent inappropriate exposure to information concerning the U.S. military.
- 4. Impose conditions on U.S. military-to-military engagement with Burma.** Given the Burmese army’s continued egregious human rights violations, it does not deserve legitimacy stemming from participation in military exercises or other engagements with U.S. armed forces. The Burmese military remains firmly in control of the government and maintains the power to end Burma’s recent political reform efforts at any time. U.S. policies should not contribute to maintaining such a system.
- 5. Prohibit the Navy from spending resources on biofuels.** Biofuels cost the Navy many times more than conventional diesel fuel for its

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ships and are actually less fuel efficient.² They also potentially increase maintenance work on more frequently damaged ship components. It is not appropriate for the Navy to waste these resources that could be better used to address the Navy's shrinking fleet.

- 6. Advance a comprehensive, layered missile defense system.** North Korea and Iran are very public about their desire to advance their nuclear weapons and long-range missile programs. The NDAA should provide for the development, testing, and deployment of a comprehensive, layered missile defense system, including space-based platforms and a missile defense site to improve protection of the East Coast.
- 7. Maintain credible nuclear targeting and modernize nuclear weapons infrastructure.** The U.S. nuclear forces should be able to prevent and deter an attack on the homeland and U.S. allies. The U.S. should maintain a credible strategic deterrent underpinned by a healthy nuclear weapons infrastructure and production complex. It should be able to threaten adversaries' leadership structures and their ability to blackmail the U.S. and its regional allies.
- 8. Protect U.S. sovereignty regarding arms control.** A good NDAA would prohibit any funding to be expended to implement international agreements, such as the Arms Trade Treaty or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, unless such

treaties were signed by the President, received the advice and consent of the Senate, and had been the subject of implementing legislation by Congress.

- 9. Eliminate the FIRE Act grants.** The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program ("FIRE Act grants") should not be included in the NDAA authorization. These grants are ineffective, and the program has failed to save lives or prevent injuries. It lacks a focus on fulfilling a federal homeland security function.³
- 10. Lay the foundation for reforming the military retirement and health care system.** The NDAA should encourage the Pentagon to reform its military retirement and health care system. If the law does not change, these expenses will consume a majority of the Pentagon's budget within a next decade. Heritage's Saving the American Dream plan offers a blueprint for solving some of these pressing issues.⁴

Provide for the Common Defense. To provide for the common defense is one of the primary responsibilities of the federal government. A good NDAA should advance policies that keep the nation safe, secure, and prosperous in the years ahead.

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2. Anthony Andrews et al., "The Navy Biofuel Initiative Under the Defense Production Act," Congressional Research Service *Report for Congress*, June 22, 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42568.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2013).

3. David Muhlhausen, "Fire Grants: Do Not Reauthorize an Ineffective Program," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 3505, February 15, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/02/fire-grants-do-not-reauthorize-an-ineffective-program>.

4. 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/>.