

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 27, 2010

National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform  
1650 Pennsylvania Ave  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Commission Members,

At a time when our nation is facing serious economic problems, when it is borrowing trillions of dollars from foreign nations of varying degrees of friendliness, and it must deal with the rising costs of tens of millions of retiring baby boomers, we believe meaningful deficit reduction requires that no element of existing federal spending can be excluded from consideration. So while we have differing political views and party affiliations, we are united in the belief that your Commission must rethink the nature and scope of every category of federal spending.

As a result, we are surprised at the apparent absence of discussion about the efficacy, the extent, and cost of overseas U.S. military commitments when debating how to deal with our extremely serious deficit problem.

For instance, the United States currently operates 460 military installations in more than 38 countries overseas, not including temporary installations located in Afghanistan and Iraq. Given that every incremental federal dollar spent today is being financed with borrowed funds, maintaining that collection of overseas bases results in a perverse daisy chain of borrowing money from foreigners, spending those borrowed funds overseas, then sending never-ending interest payments back overseas as we roll over that debt again and again.

In 2004, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called for closing one-third of our overseas bases, and moving 70,000 troops and 100,000 family members back to the United States. National Security Advisor Jim Jones, then-commander of U.S. forces in Europe, called for closing 20% of our bases there. According to Rumsfeld's estimates, we could save at least \$12 billion by closing 200 bases alone.

Similarly, we believe substantial savings can be achieved by scaling back America's global military commitments to a level that reflects our nation's ability to pay for those commitments. It is not realistic for a nation with limited resources to be expected to shoulder the defense burden of the entire planet. Yet American military spending today makes up approximately 44% of worldwide defense expenditures.

While we must fully fund what we need to protect Americans here at home and to combat terrorism, it is not realistic – particularly under our current economic circumstances – for America to be expected to borrow money to pick up the tab to referee the disputes of, and provide protection for, nations far from our borders where our nation is not risk.

We should note that we are not proposing to reduce the support available to our brave men and women in uniform once a decision is made to engage in a conflict. While we have some differences about the current course in Afghanistan, none of us propose in any way to give our troops in the field anything less than everything they need. Rather, we believe that over the long-term, matching America's military spending to our country's genuine military needs and ability to pay – including being supportive of those friendly nations that genuinely face external threats – can help restore the fiscal responsibility that the American public demands.

We believe our nation's fiscal situation demands action. While each of us individually has differing views of the contributing causes of the present situation, we share the belief that consequential deficit reduction must be achieved, and that this can only happen when all federal spending is closely scrutinized to ensure that the taxpayers are getting their money's worth.

Accordingly, we have reached out to a group of experts in national security from across the political spectrum, a list of whom is attached to this letter. We are asking them to provide suggestions for how to achieve cost savings while still meeting America's legitimate security needs. We will be forwarding those suggestions to you, and we will also be circulating among our colleagues a letter insisting that any deficit reduction package that is put forward include contributions from both military and domestic spending.

  
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Ron Wyden  
United States Senate

  
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Barney Frank  
United States House of Representatives

  
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Ron Paul  
United States House of Representative

  
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Walter B. Jones  
United States House of Representatives

ENCLOSURE

## **The Sustainable Defense Task Force**

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