



## 'Trigger' Round of U.S. Budget Cuts Would Have Huge Impact on Defense

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Military Aircraft



U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, address the media following passage of debt-limit legislation. (Photo: DOD/R.D. Ward)

Defense spending cuts of some \$350 billion over the next decade contained in the new debt-limit legislation passed by the U.S. Congress correspond with the numbers expected from an earlier goal advanced by President Obama. But the Pentagon leadership described the potential of \$600 billion more in automatic spending cuts as disastrous.

The Department of Defense is conducting a comprehensive review of spending after the President called for spending on security to be held below inflation for 12 years. This would amount to a \$400 billion cut over previous plans. The cuts outlined in the debt-limit legislation passed August 2 "are largely in line with what we were anticipating and preparing to implement," new Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said at his first news briefing.

The debt-limit legislation requires \$917 billion in cuts to government spending over the next decade, beginning next year. A congressional "super committee," officially the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, must identify \$1.5 trillion in further cuts by November 23. By Christmas, Congress then will vote up or down on the

recommendations. Failing agreement in either case, a "trigger mechanism" requires \$1.2 trillion in automatic spending cuts, about half for security.

At the August 4 briefing, Panetta described the trigger scenario as "disastrous" to U.S. security. "It would result in a further round of very dangerous cuts across the board," he said. Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, noted, "Programs that can't meet their cost schedule requirements are very much in jeopardy."

No specific programs have been officially identified yet for cuts. Shaun McDougall, U.S. defense budget analyst with Forecast International, said aviation programs that could be vulnerable to trimming are the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and Marine Corps V-22 Osprey. Programs in early development, such as the Air Force long-range bomber, Army armed aerial scout and Navy/Marine Corps VH-71 presidential helicopter also face uncertainty. "These are basically efforts that were cancelled because of cost and were relaunched," McDougall said. "DOD is going to be on a short leash when it comes to cost, schedule and performance with these programs."

Source:

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