

## April 6, 2009 - Defense Secretary Gates Proposes Weapons Cuts

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Defense Secretary Gates proposes weapons cuts

By ANNE GEARAN, AP

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Robert Gates is recommending a broad overhaul of military spending that would start almost immediately and slash giant weapons programs and the private sector jobs that go with them.

The Pentagon should stop buying a futuristic jet fighter that hasn't fought a day in either Iraq or Afghanistan, scrap an expensive new presidential helicopter and spend more money on tools soldiers can use now, Gates said Monday.

The Defense chief said he is gearing Pentagon buying plans to the smaller, lower-tech battlefields the military is facing now and seems likely to confront in the coming years.

With rising unemployment rates and a global economic funk, Congress is unlikely to go along with many of the cuts in Gates' proposed \$534 billion budget for the 2010 budget year, which would be an increase over the \$513 billion for 2009.

"I am extremely disappointed in this decision by the Obama administration," said Sen. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., said of the proposal to quit buying the F-22 Raptor plane beyond 187 already planned.

"America has maintained air dominance in every conflict since the Korean War, and now this administration is willing to sacrifice the lives of American military men and women for the sake of domestic programs favored by President Obama," Chambliss said.

Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed, the nation's largest defense contractor, has said almost 95,000 jobs could be at stake if the Pentagon didn't buy more of the F-22 fighters at \$140 million apiece. Most of the aircraft are being built by Lockheed Martin in Georgia and Texas.

Gates said he hopes Congress will resist parochial temptations and look at the larger goal of refocusing defense spending on the needs of soldiers now fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. That means giving up whiz-bang systems conceived during the Cold War or with a technically sophisticated future enemy in mind.

Those weapons don't fit the wars the United States is fighting now or is likely to face in the coming years, Gates said. He would expand spending that he said targets insurgents, such as \$2 billion more on surveillance and reconnaissance equipment, including 50 new Predator drones like those that launch unmanned missile assaults along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

"It is important to remember that every defense dollar spent to over-ensure against a remote or diminishing risk &mdash; or in effect to run up the score in a capability where the United States is already dominant &mdash; is a dollar not available to take care of our people, reset the force, win the wars we are in and improve capabilities in areas where we are underinvested and potentially vulnerable," Gates said.

Gates pulled the plug on a new fleet of presidential helicopters &mdash; with a price tag of \$13 billion. He said new helicopters would be needed at some point, but there is time to figure out a better solution.

A \$160 billion Army system of combat vehicles, flying sensors and bomb-hunting robots would be scaled back. Plans to build a shield to defend against missile attacks by rogue states also would be scaled back, and the Navy would revamp plans to buy new destroyers. A new communications satellite would be scrapped, and the program for a new Air Force transport plane would be ended.

Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., chairman of the House Appropriations Defense subcommittee, called the proposals an important and overdue attempt to balance want and need at the Defense Department.

"However, the committee will carefully review the department's recommendations in the context of current and future threats when we receive the detailed fiscal year 2010 budget request," Murtha said.

Some programs would grow. Gates proposed speeding up production of the F-35 fighter jet, which could end up costing \$1 trillion to manufacture and maintain 2,443 planes. The military would buy speedier ships that can operate close to land. And more money would be spent outfitting special forces troops who can hunt down insurgents.

The Pentagon said it could not predict how much money Gates' proposals might save, if any. Gates read off a hit list of programs to be canceled or trimmed, but the Pentagon did not release details.

Gates said he had also made recommendations he did not discuss during a one-hour news conference Monday, including to secret programs.