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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

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September 13, 2011

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-3000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

We are aware that the Department of Defense is currently conducting a strategic review of military roles, missions, and requirements as a basis for your budget recommendations to carry out the President's direction for a \$400 billion reduction in defense spending. We were recently informed that you may not be ready to unveil any recommendations for changes to the future year's defense budgets based on this strategy review until at the earliest December, 2011, or more likely when the President submits his budget for Fiscal Year 2013 to Congress in early 2012.

As you know, the Budget Control Act directs the establishment of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction that is charged with producing debt reduction legislation by November 23, 2011, for consideration and vote without amendment by Congress no later than December 23, 2011. The Budget Control Act calls for standing committees, including our committee, to provide input to the select committee by October 14. The select committee will be considering budgets for all federal programs with the goal of cutting from \$1.2 to \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years.

We strongly believe that deliberations by Congress on the proposals set forth by the select committee that may impact national security must be informed by the Department's strategic review. It is imperative that this committee and the select committee understand the impact on national security that will result from the defense budget reductions that you intend to implement to achieve the President's direction to obtain a \$400 billion reduction in future defense spending. We also need to understand the impact on national security of any greater reductions.

We understand the reluctance to disclose future defense budget details before release of the President's budget each February. However, we note that last year Secretary Gates announced major force program reduction and termination decisions in August 2010 and again in January 2011, both before release of the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2012. Given the timeline set in statute for the select committee to make recommendations and congressional action to either adopt or reject them by December 23, it is imperative that Congress be informed of the results of the Defense Department's strategic review and recommended budget changes before the normal presentation of the President's Fiscal Year 2013 budget.

Any major budget review, whether conducted by the Administration or Congress, must be accompanied by an honest and comprehensive review of requirements to include setting priorities based on sound strategy and solid policies. We must also be aware of the threats that we will face in the future, and focus defense resources to adequately meet those threats in a manner that maintains our accountability to the American people for what we spend and the results of those expenditures. While we are not sure to what degree, if any, the select committee will propose defense cuts in addition to those directed by the President, we are sure that Congress must have the benefit of your counsel and the results of a strategic review in order to make any critical decisions in the next four months affecting our national security.

Sincerely,



John McCain
Ranking Member



Carl Levin
Chairman