

TRANSCRIPT:
Is Disarming America Smart Politics?
The Security and Economic Costs of Obama's Policies

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FRANK GAFFNEY:

Welcome. My name is Frank Gaffney. I'm the president of the Center for Security Policy. We are hosting this event today on behalf of a coalition that we are part of, along with those at the table with me. We call it the Coalition for the Common Defense. A reflection of the fact that, of course, the common defense is the first priority, first, at least, responsibility, of government under our Constitution and one that we believe it's imperative be addressed, especially in an environment internationally like the one we're in right now. I'm going to say a few words about that international environment and then introduce this distinguished company to talk about different aspects of the challenges that we're facing both in terms of our position as citizens of this country and, most especially, I think as members of this conservative movement. Because, after all, the topic of this particular conversation is not just about the national security implications of what is being done to the military in the name of deficit reduction. It's not even just about the economic implications, though those are very real, as you'll see. It's also about the political implications for a movement that has as part of the Republican Party for many years been associated with a very different approach to the one that's being taken at the moment. President Reagan, of course, most prominently described it as Peace Through Strength. We believe it is a time-tested approach to dealing with adversaries, present and prospective. And we depart from it at our peril. And we think that's true, again, politically as well as in terms of the economy and, as I say, most importantly, the national security.

So let me just kick off with a couple of thoughts about this international environment. I think if you are a sentient being at the moment you have some sense of this. You cannot really get through the morning newspaper, your internet downloads, or perhaps even just your day-to-day lives without being exposed to some sense of the disorder that is rapidly emerging around the world. Where to begin? I suppose with the Arab Spring, so-called, and the effects that it is having in terms of translating into dynamics and challenges by the day. Including, in some of the most strategically sensitive parts of the world, including those that affect oil flows, that affect commerce through things like the Suez Canal and, more to the point, that affect probably the threats that are likely to emerge from that region elsewhere. The Muslim Brotherhood being a prime manifestation and mover in those threats, I think, is one example of the kinds of challenges that we're going to face in the days ahead from North Africa, the Middle East, and probably far beyond. Iran, though under different theological discipline, nonetheless shares the Brotherhood's commitment to shariah. And its, therefore, obligation to engage in jihad. That is coupled with a sense of messianic purpose that they believe obliges them to seek the return of the mahdi, the twelfth imam. Something that unfortunately, according to their theology, is to be triggered by events that seem a lot like the apocalypse. That's not good.

Beyond the Middle East we have, of course, some of the same forces at work in Africa, in Central Asia, in the Far East, in Europe, in our own hemisphere, and, including, I think, here in the United States. Which we can talk about if you'd like. Beyond all that, we have a rise of a new threat in China. Unmistakeably, on a trajectory that I believe will bring us into conflict with them in the foreseeable future. Or at the very least, see them pose a threat to our security interests, our economic interests, and perhaps our people. Russia is likely, for the foreseeable future, to remain under the control of a man who is profoundly determined to exact revenge for what he considered to be a rather unhappy outcome. In fact, he called it, I think, the greatest catastrophe of the 20th Century, namely, the demise of the Soviet Union. I'm speaking of Vladimir Putin. We have Hugo Chavez in our own hemisphere metastasizing anti-Americanism and seeking, I think, through both electoral means and other measures, to turn what some have called our backyard – I consider our frontyard – into an area that is by and large impoverished and tied in with some of the other forces that I've just talked about, the Chinese, the Russians, the Iranians, Hezbollah, Hamas, to make it a very, very unfriendly region for us, our interests, and for that matter, for freedom, for the people who live there as well. One could go on. But let me simply stop at that and say, this is an environment that is almost certainly going to cause great harm to our interests and perhaps to our people as well.

It is an environment that, if history is any guide, becomes worse as some of the forces that I've just described, some of the individuals that I've just described, perceive we are in retreat. Or decline. Or weak. Or irresolute, at least. History indicates that thugs on the playground right on up to dictators governing nations and empires respond to that perception with aggression and that aggression is often accompanied by war. Anybody who tells you that we will save money by creating the conditions that produce war has not had much experience with war. It proves to be a very expensive bit of business in every sense of the word, including most importantly the currency we hold most dear and that is the lives of our people. Our men and women in uniform, about which you'll – about whom you'll hear much momentarily. But also, the people that they are sworn to defend. And the country and the Constitution they've taken a solemn oath to preserve and protect. We're going to talk a bit about how this international environment and the real prospect that it will become more ugly still, more dangerous still, especially if we encourage these sorts of perceptions, as part of a larger conversation about some of the other points that I've mentioned. Specifically, we're going to talk about what these cuts, both those that are now in place or being adopted as part of the present budget cycle, and those that have been directed by law but have not yet been shown to the public – and I'm not talking simply about the budget details that will be coming out next Monday, though those have not of course been revealed yet, I'm talking about the cuts that will be coming about as a result of what's come to be called sequestration, the Budget Control Act 2.0, if you will. That basically doubles the cuts that have been taken to date. Again, we'll have from Mackenzie Eaglen a better explanation of what those cuts are and how they are likely to manifest themselves in terms of real impact on our capabilities. We'll be talking about how those impacts are going to be felt by the troops. By the people who have sworn those oaths, by the people who have those responsibilities.

Joel Arrends will be describing those for us, from particularly the perspective of his organization, Vets for a Strong America, but also as a captain in the United States Army Reserve, a man who has been a platoon leader on multiple tours in places like Iraq. We'll then have a presentation from my colleague, Christine Brim, whose machine seems to be acting up a little bit at the

moment but hopefully will sort itself. She is the chief operating officer of the Center for Security Policy. She's going to share with you some analyses that we've done about how the cuts will affect not just the military capabilities of this country, not just the personnel, but also the economy of the United States in a way that I think may shock you. This is not a jobs program, providing for the national security. But anybody who tells you it doesn't have economic repercussions if you don't provide for the national security, particularly in the way that's now being proposed, again, doesn't know, I think, what they're talking about. Joel will be followed by Major General Al Zapanta who, excuse me, Christine will be followed by Major General Al Zapanta who will give a further exposition as to how economic interests of the United States are likely to be affected more broadly. Particularly trade. He is currently the president and CEO of the US/Mexico Chamber of Commerce. And has in that capacity as well as in his time in uniform – in which he served as a chairman of the Reserve Forces Board and served in peacekeeping operations as well as Desert Storm and Somalia, terrific perspective on all of the issues that we'll be talking about. And finally, we'll hear from Lieutenant General Jack Klimp, former deputy commandant of the United States Marine Corps, responsible for manpower and reserve affairs. Currently serving as the president of the National Association for the Uniformed Services. And we'll get a reading from him as to both what it's been like in the past when we've hollowed out our military and what it means to the troops, to the future recruits, if we wind up making the sorts of cuts in places that affect the contract we've made with them. In terms of benefits and health care and the like. So it's a very full program. It's a very small room. We appreciate so many of you being here and we appreciate your forbearance as we work through this program quickly and then we will have time for questions at the end.