GUEST COLUMN: Defense cuts would undermine national security
Maj. Gen. Bentley Rayburn (Ret.)
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The approaching debt ceiling recommendations from the "Super Committee" appointed by Congress seem unlikely to generate a bipartisan consensus on deficit reduction. If that happens, massive across-the-board cuts to the Pentagon budget are in the offing, and that could set back our national security, research and industrial base capabilities for decades.

But is defense spending really the problem? Defense spending is currently less than 20 cents of every dollar spent by the Federal government. We must always spend every defense dollar wisely, but if you are going to fix a budget problem, you must look to where you spend the 80 cents first and foremost. Budget experts warn that our current level of spending masks shortfalls — after the last decade of "hollow growth" and extended combat, our equipment stocks have only grown "smaller and older."

Outgoing Defense Secretary Gates had already identified almost $200 billion in defense savings and canceled more than 30 programs. He warned, however, that another round of heavy cuts would be "catastrophic."

Despite such warnings, the likely failure of the Super Committee to reach an agreement might result in across-the-board cuts ranging from the $400 billion called for by the Administration to a trillion or more in cuts demanded by some members of Congress.

Congress should remember that we are still facing very real threats. Today, we are fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, fighting al Qaeda across the globe using intelligence and special operations forces backed up with Predator drones and other modern-age technologies. We're also protecting the nascent democratic movements in Libya and elsewhere, expanding operations to hot spots like Yemen, and rotating home a fighting force worn-down by a decade of repeated, extended combat deployments.

Terror attacks are on the rise as the threat spreads around the globe — according to the National Counter-Terrorism Center, there were 2,534 terror attacks worldwide in 2010, nearly triple the 945 recorded five years ago.

And if these rising threats weren't daunting enough, a surging China is building a new aircraft carrier, multiple nations are developing and flying stealthy aircraft to challenge our dominance of the skies, space has becoming a battleground of its own as the Chinese recently proved by shooting one of their satellites out of the sky. Rogue states like North Korea and Iran are steaming ahead developing nuclear weapons and long range missiles that put the entire world at risk.

The last ten years have demonstrated that there is no virtue in using low-tech methods to fight low-tech enemies. IEDs may be low-tech, but the methods we rely upon to combat them rely on cutting-edge technologies.

The Pentagon may understand the shift from the Soviet enemy to the asymmetrical shadow world of terrorists and rogue states, but does the Congress? The paradox of technology means that even the lowest-rent criminals and despots can now get hold of the most sophisticated and devastating armaments.

Those sounding the alarm about the deficit are surely well intentioned, but until they can show us how to match their cleaver-like cut proposals with our actual security needs, it's dangerous.