

FEED THE GENERALS CATFOOD, TOO

I had a bit of fun with Michael O'Hanlon on Tuesday. At the America's Future Now conference, he was pitted against Juan Cole in a debate over the future of our Afghan war. I took the first question to note that we weren't just facing a choice between escalating in Afghanistan (O'Hanlon's position) or maintaining the status quo (Cole's position). We also faced a choice between escalating in Afghanistan and doing something about our 10% unemployment rate.

O'Hanlon responded by explaining how much longer he thought the surge of troops needed to remain in Afghanistan.

To his credit, when I noted that by defunding schools, we're creating a much bigger national security problem than Afghanistan, he said we shouldn't have to choose (while admitting that politics in DC meant we would have to do so).

Finally, someone in DC—Barney Frank—is making a similar argument in concrete form.

A panel commissioned by Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) is recommending nearly \$1 trillion in cuts to the Pentagon's budget during the next 10 years.

The Sustainable Defense Task Force, a commission of scholars from a broad ideological spectrum appointed by Frank, the House Financial Services Committee chairman, laid out actions the government could take that could save as much as \$960 billion between 2011 and 2020.

[snip]

The acceptance of the recommendations would depend on a "philosophical change" and a "redefinition of the strategy," Frank said at press conference on Capitol Hill.

He said the creation of the deficit reduction commission offers the best opportunity for the reduction recommendations. Frank wants to convince his colleagues to write to the deficit reduction commission and warn that they would not approve any of the plans suggested by the commission unless reduction of military spending is included.

Now, Frank's committee's recommendations are actually not the defense equivalent of cat food. They involve cutting things like the F35 we have no use as anything but a jobs program.

But it's something we may well have to sell as a national security issue. The effects of the recession (and a decade of Norquist-inspired bathtub shrinking) really are forcing us to cut education. That's something the federal government could prevent. So it's high time we invested in our base-level national competency before yet another set of military toys.