

Addressing Our Debt is a National Security Imperative

A message from the new Coalition for Fiscal and National Security

We are former senior government officials who have served during eight Presidential administrations, Democratic and Republican, and former leaders in Congress from both parties. We join together now because we strongly believe that our long-term debt is the single greatest threat to our national security, and we urge elected leaders to agree by the end of this year on a plan that both averts the fiscal cliff and puts the debt on a downward path.

U.S. national security in the 21st century rests on both economic and military strength, for our military might and diplomatic muscle ultimately depend on a vibrant economy. Unless we change course, our huge and growing debt will undermine our economic growth, our military strength, and our global leadership.

Our leaders should use the consensus against going over the fiscal cliff as an opportunity to agree now on a framework for significant fiscal reform in 2013. Another “kicking of the can” — the lowest common denominator of what both parties can currently accept, without any structural reforms that truly address the nation’s problems — is not acceptable. We must reassure our own citizens and businesses, the international financial markets, and the greater global community that America will address its fundamental challenges and maintain its leadership role in the world.

At a minimum, the resolution of the fiscal cliff by the end of the year should have the following components:

- **The Objective:** Our fiscal goal must be to stabilize the debt as a share of the economy, and put it on a downward path for the longer term. We cannot continue to grow our national debt faster than our economy if we want to maintain our global leadership. Any solution which does not meet this simple test is insufficient.
- **The Framework:** To achieve this objective, our leaders should decide on a fiscal framework that results in substantial deficit reduction over the next 10 years and structural changes to our fiscal policies that eventually balance the budget over the long term, including:
 - Specific levels of revenue, spending and deficits over the next 10 years, and parameters for longer-term fiscal reform, including future levels of debt as a share of the economy, and a date by which the budget must balance.
 - Tax reforms to raise more revenues, encourage growth and enhance progressivity — and it must be decided how much should be done through eliminating deductions, increasing rates and/or more fundamental changes to our tax code.
 - Changes to entitlements to put them on a sustainable long-term path, as well as changes to defense and other discretionary spending, while protecting the most vulnerable and preserving sufficient resources to invest in the future.
 - In our judgment, advances in technological capabilities and the changing nature of threats make it possible, if properly done, to spend less on a more intelligent, efficient and contemporary defense strategy that maintains our military superiority and national security.
- **The Process:** Congress and the President should agree on an expedited process to enact legislation reflecting this framework in 2013, including appropriate default and enforcement mechanisms that ensure we will achieve the targeted result.

In a time of division and drift, the true test for America is neither military nor economic — it is political. We ask our elected officials from both parties to assert genuine leadership, communicate to the American people what needs to be done, and make pragmatic policy decisions to power our nation’s economy, democracy, and role in the world. It will require courage, shared sacrifice and a willingness to compromise and make the tough choices essential to setting a new course for our nation. It summons the truest form of patriotism — putting our country first.

The Coalition for Fiscal and National Security



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Harold Brown
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Henry A. Kissinger
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