

## Defense Cuts Remain Off Table in Debt-Ceiling Talks — For Now

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**WASHINGTON** — House Republicans have yet to settle on a plan to raise the nation's borrowing limit, but it appears using defense cuts as a bargaining chip is not an option.

House GOP leaders are searching for the right combination of legislative items that would allow a debt-ceiling bill to pass with mostly Republican votes, according to sources and other media reports.

During previous debt-ceiling fights during the Barack Obama presidency, ultra-conservative tea party Republicans in the lower chamber have pressed hard for cuts to the Pentagon's annual budget as part of bills that lower the deficit in exchange for raising the borrowing limit.

That has yet to happen this time. Yet.

Several congressional observers say, as GOP leaders look for a combination of legislative sweeteners, the Pentagon's nearly \$500 billion annual budget could become a target.

Longtime Senate Armed Services Committee leader John McCain, R-Ariz., told Defense News late last month that he expects defense cuts likely will be brought up in the debt-ceiling discussion.

House GOP members are looking at things like language on the controversial Keystone Pipeline and Obamacare — not defense cuts. For now, at least.

If the Pentagon and industry can keep new defense cuts out of whatever debt-ceiling bill emerges, it will represent the defense sector's third major victory in as many months.

In December, a bipartisan budget deal eased the amount of 2014 and 2015 defense sequester cuts. Then, in January, Congress passed a massive government-wide spending bill that included a full 2014 Pentagon-funding measure and a war-funding measure that some analysts calculate, when totaled, will give the Defense Department over \$600 billion.

Many GOP House members are remaining mum about what a final ceiling-raising measure should look like, preferring to let their leadership talk privately with rank-and-file members and among themselves.

That is not stopping senior Democrats from pressing the House GOP to pass a "clean" debt-ceiling measure — meaning one with no unrelated policy provisions.

"With just two days before the Treasury Department has to begin taking extraordinary measures to prevent default, Republicans are still debating what to write on their ransom note," Senate Budget Committee Chairwoman Patty Murray, D-Wash., said in a Wednesday statement.

"Republican leaders should do right away what they already know they'll do soon — and what some in their caucus are already recommending.

“They should drop the demands, do the right thing for workers and the economy, and join Democrats in preventing default,” she added.

If a deal is not reached that can pass Congress and be signed into law by Obama, the US would for the first time default on its debts.

US national security and Obama administration officials — and some lawmakers — warn that would undermine America’s national and economic security, which are increasingly intertwined as globalization continues to take root.