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CRS Issue Statement on Defense Authorization and Appropriations

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Defense spending is a major focus of attention in Congress every year, initially in action on the congressional budget resolution, which recommends overall spending for national defense, and later when Congress considers annual defense authorization and appropriations bills. Congress also regularly considers supplemental appropriations for military operations abroad, often early in the agenda of a new legislative session.

In the Second Session of the 111th Congress, supplemental appropriations for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan for the remainder of FY2010 are again expected to be considered early in the year. A supplemental appropriations bill may become a vehicle for debate about U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan and their mission and about the metrics by which to determine the degree to which U.S. goals in that country are being achieved.

In legislative action on regular FY2011 defense authorization and appropriations bills, issues may include proposals to increase or to limit military personnel pay and benefits, whether to sustain a temporary increase in the size of ground forces, and whether to add or reduce requested funding for particular major weapons programs. These perennial issues may be particularly salient this year because, in addition to submitting its annual DOD budget request, the Administration will publish the results of the legislatively-mandated Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), which is intended to be a far-reaching assessment of U.S. force structure and plans.

Congress also may address a wide range of defense policy matters including proposals to reform the weapons acquisition process in an effort to reduce chronic cost overruns and delays; social issues, such as the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy toward gays in the military; buy American requirements for material used in weapon systems; and limits on outsourcing of civilian defense jobs. The 111th Congress may consider proposals to strengthen interagency coordination of national security planning and policy implementation. The role of the Defense Department in stabilizing countries facing insurgent attack also may be a significant issue in the debate.

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