

America's High Tech Global War Machine: U.S. Military Strategy - Is It Really New?

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Global Research, January 20, 2012

[Strategic Culture Foundation and Stop NATO](#) 20 January 2012

Theme: [Militarization and WMD, US NATO War Agenda](#)

The idea of having an agile, high-technology, ready-to-move on short notice force is not new. It has been the same concept in force before the protracted land operations in Iraq and Afghanistan started. Correspondingly, the army's strength grew by 65 thousand. So it's mainly about going back to before the 9/11 numbers. The same thing applies to the Marine Corps. An increase in the size of special forces of all the services, the army in particular, is not new too. It's a long-established tendency to boost first strike, intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities.

In fact, this reduction is quite moderate compared to prior defense drawdowns in US history. President Dwight Eisenhower, for example, cut the defense budget by 27 percent after the Korean War. President Nixon cut it by about 30% percent after Vietnam, and defense spending was reduced by a whopping 35 percent after the end of the Cold War, though still remaining a heavy burden on the shoulders of American taxpayers that was hard enough to justify. Then defense expenditure skyrocketed by nearly 70 percent under the Bush administration.

Even with \$500 billion in reductions, the United States will continue to spend more on defense each year in the next decade than it did during the height of the Cold War and more than the next 10 countries combined.

The US military will be reshaped between now and 2020 with an emphasis on countering terrorism, maintaining a nuclear deterrent, protecting the U.S. homeland and "deterring and defeating aggression by any potential adversary." That's what the Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense new military strategy review says.

The National Military Strategy is a supporting document based on the National Security Strategy, a document prepared periodically by the administration for Congress which outlines the major national security concerns of the United States and ways the president plans to deal with them. The legal foundation for the document is spelled out in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. The document is general in content, to be elaborated in supporting documents, the national military strategy in particular.

At the beginning of 2012 President Obama unveiled the results of an eight-month defense strategy review providing guidelines on cutting hundreds of billions of dollars from previously planned Pentagon' spending over the coming decade. The eight-page document contains no details about how broad concepts for reshaping the military - such as focusing more on Asia and less on Europe - will translate into cuts.

Since 9/11 the Defense budget grew by leaps and bounds. Over the next decade, the budget will grow less, but will still go up, and it will still be larger than it was at the end of the Bush administration.

President Obama said that looking beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – and the end of long-term nation-building with large military footprints – the USA would be able to ensure its security with smaller conventional ground forces.

The military drawdown is probably to meet stiff resistance from the Republicans. Sen. John McCain, a ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, did not directly criticize the administration, but said the United States couldn't have a "budget-driven defense strategy.

"The United States must continue to lead the world in order to ensure our economic prosperity and national security," McCain said. "For that reason, when it comes to how we fund and procure our defense programs, business as usual will not cut it. I intend to ensure that our national defense strategy and budgets continue to strengthen America in its position of global leadership."

The calls for a smaller nuclear arsenal are sure to draw fire from congressional Republicans. Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, immediately issued a statement saying, "This is a lead-from-behind strategy for a left-behind America."

WHAT'S NEW?

The new strategy is said to be a high-stakes act by the administration under conditions of financial austerity combined with U.S. responsibilities overseas remaining in force against the backdrop of the ongoing concentration of three aircraft carrier groups in the Persian Gulf to counter a possible Hormuz strait blockade.

The new strategy unveils a change in missions assigned. It abandons the requirement to have the ability to fight and win two wars simultaneously – a fundamental deviation from the Obama's national defense strategy of 2010 and a paramount requirement of all military strategies for many years in US history. Now it says the military must be able to fight one war, but is responsible for "denying the objectives of – or imposing unacceptable costs on – an opportunistic aggressor in a second region."

While some military capabilities of the military will be curtailed, none of the basic missions will be scrapped. To enjoy global military superiority, the United States sees cyberspace warfare, special operations, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance topping the priorities list. No scale-down on missile defense is envisaged.

The new strategy comes as the Defense Department faces \$487 billion in budget cuts over the next 10 years, part of an agreement with Congress reached in August, as well as probably another \$500 billion as a result of the failure to reach a deal over the federal budget deficit.

Army strength is to go down about 490 from 570 thousand. The Defense Department will begin a slow build-down of the Army that could be reversed and, in a national security emergency, it could order a massive mobilization of the National Guard and Reserves. The

Marine Corps is going to face 25 thousand cuts from the present strength of 202 thousand men. Both services are set to shrink beginning in 2015. A few programs are facing up to a few years delay like the second new-class aircraft carrier, new-class nuclear attack submarine and the F-35 fifth-generation fighter, but dramatic increases in spending for warplanes in general, with an eye toward more Libya-style wars, are envisioned.

The strategy sees a reduced U.S. military presence in Europe, notwithstanding a continuing close relationship with NATO. The focus is shifted to a renewed commitment to security in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States will also work to maintain progress in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa. The text of the new strategy notes that the current American military presence in the Middle East will remain, and that it will be focused on maintaining regional stability in the shadow of suspected Iranian efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

The Pentagon clearly sets sights on China as a potential competitor. An evolving concept known as “air-sea battle” assumes that the next war will be fought by air and sea forces against a technologically advanced adversary. China boasts rapid economic growth in a world struck by stagnation. Growing military capabilities make the Chinese military a force to reckon with. A more immediate concern is Iran for its nuclear ambitions and threats to hit the world economy by closing the Hormuz strait.

Talking about defense priorities, some changes are really drastic enough.

The strategy says the U.S. presence in Europe “must evolve.” It remains to be seen what that is supposed to be in concrete terms. But some reduction of U.S. troops based there in favor of deployments in Asia is a certain thing. It means the Asia-Pacific region has taken center stage on the Administration’s foreign policy agenda for many years to come.

The U.S. withdrawals from both Iraq and Afghanistan mean the US strategy is reoriented to other priorities. The fight against terror is one of them but by far it’s not what it was since 9/11 anymore.

The Pentagon plans to intensify its effort in boost its cyberwarfare capability. Cyberspace is a potential battlefield now, where the state’s interests are defended or offensives launched to neutralize a potential adversary.

Strategic nuclear forces are subject to reductions along the START-3 lines. But, as mentioned above, the Euro missile defense is not to be curtailed. As Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said more than once, Russia’s position is that strategic nuclear reductions and the missile defense issue are intertwined.

The US military is to field new combat systems to make sure the armed forces are capable of entering and operating where “states such as China and Iran” have weapons intended to deny such access. We’ll probably know which ones soon.

With the United States unlikely to undertake extended nation-building operations in the foreseeable future, this new strategy will rely increasingly on the overwhelming naval and air superiority to project power around the globe.

An Air-Sea Battle Command was established not long ago within the structure of the US armed forces. But the “air-sea battle” concept presupposes air dominance capability and sea control. Does it mean that, besides special operations units, the army is not a favorite

son anymore? What exactly are the lessons drawn from recent war experience and how it will influence the military in the coming years?

Many details will come to light in the coming days when the Pentagon unveils its 2013 budget plan.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT

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Under President Obama's plan the defense budget will continue to grow in nominal terms, though not quite fast enough to keep up with expected levels of inflation. Even with \$500 billion in reductions, the United States will continue to spend more on defense each year in the next decade than it did during the height of the Cold War and more than the next 10 countries combined.

In other words, new and old tactics are featured. Strategies are unchanged. It's all about abetting regional instability to justify US intervention. Compared to the USA, Iran hasn't committed aggression against another country in over 200 years and threatens none at present. Neither does China.

The goal is to preserve power projection capability that others don't possess and have little to counter it with. Actually, who assigned the USA the mission to intervene (two wars or one war and a half) in other regions?

What about the legal aspects of such interventions? Wouldn't it be wiser to change the strategy to defending the territory of the USA instead of looking for ways to preserve the capability to remain an international constable at a time the country faces financial and economic woes?

What about missile defense and the legitimate Russian concern that is so easy to understand: just imagine any other country installing strategic missile-kill-capable systems under the US's nose, somewhere in the Caribbean, for instance? Recent experience shows no high-tech systems guarantee victory against people even if the military capability to resist them is brought to nought. No gadgets can defeat people and their will to resist those who intervene to impose values not wanted. These are the questions the military strategy fails to address.

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