

Breaking the Mold: Military Choices for the Twenty-First Century

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The six-year budget plans that the military services submitted to the Secretary of Defense this spring call for taxpayers to spend another \$30 billion on defense each year beginning in 2002. Service leaders argue that the 10 percent increase over planned spending is urgently needed to cover critical shortfalls and ensure the military's readiness to deploy quickly and fight and win wars. But adding money will perpetuate a more fundamental problem: that today's military is not shaped properly to meet the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities of the new century.

Adding another \$30 billion to annual military budgets would restore military spending to about 98 percent of the average Cold War level — this despite the fact that the United States is the world's only surviving superpower, that the Cold War enemy no longer exists, and that no new enemy has emerged to take its place. Even without additional money, the United States spends more on its military than all of the next six countries — Russia, France, Japan, China, the United Kingdom and Germany — combined.

Part of what drives the services' request for another 10 percent increase is election-year politics. The presidential candidates are formulating positions and offering promises; why not lock in some promises for the military? Another driving factor is the prospect of huge federal budgetary surpluses. But a third factor is the very real budgetary pressure under which the military is working. Independent analysts say that as operating expenses and weapons costs rise over the next decade, the nation will need to spend tens of billions of dollars more a year than it does now just to keep today's forces at current readiness levels and carry out the Defense Department's plans for modernizing equipment.

The Defense Department hoped for years to offset growing budgetary pressures by instituting reforms of its processes for material acquisition and seeking efficiencies in infrastructure activities. But the savings the Pentagon currently projects from these efforts fall far short of the amounts that would be needed to hold budgets at today's levels as new equipment goes into production and other costs rise.

During the 1990s, formal arms control agreements and unilateral measures to reduce nuclear forces and lower their alert levels have saved the country significant sums. U.S. budgets for strategic offensive forces, nuclear weapons activities in the Department of Energy and nuclear threat reduction in the Former Soviet Union fell from about \$70 billion in 1990 to \$30 billion in 2000, freeing resources for other purposes. But further reductions in nuclear forces are unlikely to produce large additional savings. And depending upon the nature of future arms control agreements, the expense of new verification measures might offset any savings that are possible.

Given that future savings from procurement reform and infrastructure efficiencies are uncertain and additional large savings from nuclear reductions are unlikely, is there an alternative to big increases in defense spending for as far as the eye can see? The answer lies in a fundamental reshaping of the nation's conventional forces. Such reshaping, adopted in concert with a military strategy matched to the country's present and future security needs and interests, might put the armed forces into a far better position to face the future at today's level of spending.

After the Cold War ended, the military made significant reductions in the major elements of conventional force structure. But the remaining forces look very much like a shrunken version of their Cold War predecessors. The Defense Department argues that today's conventional force posture and modernization program are just as they should be to support the current national security strategy. But a look at the history shows that the opposite is

true: the current national security strategy was fashioned largely as a rationale for limiting the budget reductions and force structure cutbacks that military leaders during the Bush administration anticipated would take place during the 1990s. If the current strategy is not much more than a justification for preserving cold war forces, then a new strategy based more closely on the nation's current and future security needs and interests seems in order.

In matters that involve the military, the first priority of current strategy is to be able to fight and win in two major theater wars that occur at nearly the same time. But current forces are significantly larger than the ones the military would need to support today's economically strong and militarily capable South Korea against the weakened North and to fight today's Iraq, weakened by the Gulf War, daily no-fly patrols and a decade of economic sanctions. Moreover, the bipartisan Commission on National Security Strategy/21st Century found recently that the two-war yardstick is not producing the capabilities needed for the challenges that the military faces today and will face increasingly in the future. Clinging to the two-war standard no longer makes sense.

Another big driver of force structure is the military's involvement in activities to "shape the international environment." Much of what shaping entails would seem to be old-fashioned diplomacy or a military substitute for it. As such, it seems fair to ask why the burden of it must fall as heavily as it does on the military. Additional spending for the State Department's conduct of diplomacy, for support of international institutions and for aid to foreign countries might allow the nation to shape the international environment at lower expense and less risk.

A telling indicator of the nation's failure to embrace fundamental change in the armed forces has been the continued nearconstant apportionment of funding across the services. For decades during the Cold War, the three military departments each received a near-steady share of the defense budget. It stands to reason that the end of the Cold War and a world of new technology might have sparked a change in the utility of or preferences for airplanes, tanks, rockets, ships or helicopters. Yet the past decade has seen virtually no change in the budget share each service holds onto each year. Even within the services, shares continue to be set in a near constant pattern across key communities. No wonder the United States military today looks like a smaller version of its former self.

The nation could fix the military's budget squeeze for at least a decade by perpetuating the pattern of constant shares, reducing conventional force structure across the board by 15 to 20 percent from today's levels, trimming procurement plans to match. The resulting force of eight active duty Army divisions, 10 aircraft carrier battle groups, about 250 Navy ships, and 16 tactical fighter wings would be more than adequate to handle a single major theater war of the size currently envisioned by the Pentagon (perhaps two theater wars against the forces of any enemy that exists today).

At the same time, the newly reduced forces would be large enough to handle a significant level of so-called shaping activities, though the pace of such day-to-day commitments would likely have to be reduced from today's ambitious level. By dropping the strategic requirement for fighting a simultaneous second major theater war of the size the Pentagon envisions, the nation would also be assured that the military could continue to handle multiple smaller scale contingencies at least as well as it does today — operations that run the gamut from humanitarian relief and interventions to peace operations. Moreover, by shearing procurement programs to be consistent with the force structure cuts, the remaining forces would be equipped just as the Defense Department currently envisions.

Thus dropping the requirement to fight two theater wars simultaneously would allow the military to get by with and pay for a smaller version of its current force. But keeping forces designed for the Cold War and continuing

with weapons programs that were conceived well before the Warsaw Pact collapsed leaves other problems unaddressed.

For one thing, forces are not properly configured for the jobs they are asked to do. The Army's problems in deploying attack helicopters to the war with Yugoslavia and its complaints that it takes months to restore the readiness of forces engaged in peace operations are symptomatic of a wider ill: the military has not restructured to handle the real missions it faces today and in the future. For another, forces that no longer make sense and procurements that are not needed draw resources from those the nation cannot do without. Perhaps most important, retaining Cold War force structure and programs, albeit at reduced levels, fosters a business-as-usual attitude and stifles much needed innovation in every aspect of military affairs, personnel, organization, technologies and systems.

The United States needs a national security strategy that acknowledges the present and looks to the future instead of the past. It needs to reshape the conventional forces to reflect that new strategy and to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by new technologies — getting rid of forces and weapons programs that no longer make sense and emphasizing the ones that position the armed forces for the future. Such reshaping is both possible and affordable within today's budget levels. But it requires decision makers to take a fresh look at strategy, at the relative contribution of each element of force structure and each item of equipment to the security environment the nation actually faces, and at the opportunities afforded by new technologies, new ways of organizing and new ideas for attracting and holding the best people.

Holding the Line: U.S. Defense Alternatives for the Early 21st Century, forthcoming from MIT Press, explores military options for the nation to consider as the new president takes office. Chapters by Lawrence Korb (Vice President and Director of Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations) and Cindy Williams (senior research fellow in the Security Studies Program at MIT), review the recent draw-down and examine real problems and misperceptions that are driving defense budgets up. Williams also analyzes the progress of military infrastructure reform and recommends more aggressive approaches. Gordon Adams (Director of the Security Policy Studies Program of the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University) explores the potential for greater cooperation with European allies. David Mosher (Nuclear Policy Analyst at Rand) cautions that further savings from deterrent forces will be smaller than those already achieved. Owen Cote (Associate Director of MIT's Security Studies Program), James Quinlivan (Senior Analyst at Rand and former Vice President of Rand's Army Research Division), and Karl Mueller (Associate Professor at the U.S. Air Force School of Advanced Airpower Studies) recommend re-shaping the military, each author by drawing on the unique strengths of one of the three military departments. Each holds defense budgets constant in real terms for at least a decade and features substantial innovation.

Edited by Cindy Williams the book will appear as a BCSIA Study in International Security early in 2001. (BCSIA is the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs of Harvard University; for publication details, consult the MIT Press website, <http://mitpress.mit.edu>, after the first of the year).

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