Military Transformation Requires Planners to Rethink Priorities
Lawrence Korb

During the 2000 presidential campaign, few military people — or congressional supporters of the military — paid close attention to president-elect George W. Bush when he said that if elected, he would transform the military. Rather, they focused more on his statement that he would re-build the military, and that “help [to the military] was on the way.” Many of these people assumed he would add funds to the Clinton budget, enabling the military to buy additional tanks, aircraft carriers and high-tech war planes.

But, not surprisingly, the new president ordered Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to conduct a top to bottom review of our armed forces in order to transform it to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Toward that end, Rumsfeld has established 10 panels to address various aspects on this subject, and expects to unveil the results by mid-May.

According to those who support transformation, the U.S. military, while preeminent in the world, is not structured to carry out its new missions, which include: fighting regional wars; providing support for peacekeeping operations; surviving attacks by highly capable missile systems in the hands of potential enemies; being able to strike terrorist bases deep inside enemy territory; and, having the capability to operate over the vast distances of the Asia-Pacific region.

To carry out these new missions, the military will have to transform itself by relying less on heavy armored ground divisions (which are too cumbersome to be moved quickly to the danger zones), aircraft carrier battle groups (which are vulnerable to attack by cruise missiles) and short-range air superiority fighters, like the F-22 (which must rely on overseas bases, not likely to be available in Asia).

Instead, the military should initiate the following changes:
The Army should outfit its brigades with new armored vehicles, much smaller than the M-1 Abrams tank, and capable of being moved quickly into a combat zone.

The Navy should build a new class of small, fast, lightly-manned carriers, missile ships and submarines, including a 6,000-ton aircraft carrier (as opposed to the 90,000-ton Nimitz carriers it currently uses), and a 3,000-ton arsenal ship loaded with cruise missiles (as opposed to 30,000-ton Aegis class destroyers).

The Air Force should devote more money to developing unmanned combat air vehicles— which would take pilots out of harm’s way while destroying early warning radars and anti-aircraft weapons — and reopen the B-2 production line so the United States would have more than 20 planes capable of projecting power long-distances from American territory.

Finally, all the services should develop cruise missiles capable of traveling thousands instead of hundreds of miles.

These changes will result in the cancellation of several on-going programs, like the Nimitz class aircraft carriers, the F-22 Raptor, and the new Joint Strike Fighter. This will be resented by the services, many members of Congress and major defense companies like Lockheed and Boeing. These groups will claim that the military is already being transformed and that without these legacy systems, the armed forces cannot carry out their current missions.
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