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Obama's 2010 Defense Budget: Top Five Worst Choices for National Security

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President Obama has submitted a defense budget request to Congress for fiscal year 2010 that, if implemented, will dramatically reshape America's military.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates often says this budget shifts about 10 percent of funds to irregular warfare. That is a deceptive description: While the budget does shift funding, the far more important truth is that it cuts programs.

In the short term, the 2010 defense budget—if enacted—signals the beginning of yet another procurement holiday for the military. Over the longer term, the Obama budget blueprint actually cuts top-line defense spending in real terms.

If Congress ultimately gives the Administration what it wants, America's armed forces will lose capabilities that its leaders and citizens have come to take for granted. Those capabilities include, but are hardly limited to:

- Strategic defense;
- Control of the seas;
- Air superiority;
- Space control;
- Counterterrorism;
- Counterinsurgency;
- Projecting power to distant regions; and
- Information dominance throughout cyberspace.

And this decreased capability will happen in the absence of any careful reevaluation of America's glo-

bal mission. The Obama Administration, by its own admission, is recommending fundamental changes for the U.S. military without having conducted a strategic review of defense or foreign policy.

1. Scaling Back Missile Defense. President Obama's 2010 defense budget proposes cutting \$1.4 billion from the Missile Defense Agency's budget. These cuts include scaling back the Airborne Laser boost-phase program, terminating the Multiple Kill Vehicle and Kinetic Energy Interceptor, canceling the expansion of ground-based interceptors in Alaska and California, and delaying funding for interceptor and radar sites in Poland and the Czech Republic.

It is one thing to carefully oversee the operational capability and technical feasibility of specific ballistic missile defense (BMD) programs; it is an entirely different endeavor to substantially cut the overall missile defense budget when the risk of a ballistic missile launch is palpably growing. North Korea is aggressively testing missiles and weapons, Iran is moving closer to acquiring nuclear capability, and insurgents and terrorists are fighting for control of Pakistan and its substantial nuclear arsenal. A multi-layered missile defense system is the

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only protection the world has against these growing threats.

The ideological opposition by many to missile defense dates back to the Cold War, when the left believed missile defense would destabilize America's relationship with the Soviet Union. That position was at least understandable, albeit misguided. But the Cold War has been over for nearly 20 years, and missile defense today is a clear tool for peace. In fact, it may be the only stabilizing tool available to prevent a global nuclear arms race. As the ballistic missile programs of North Korea and Iran continue to mature, America must invest in a comprehensive, multi-layered missile defense system to stay ahead of the technology curve—instead of deemphasizing and restructuring the program for a more a constrained vision of what the future may hold.

2. Ending F-22 Production at 186 Fighters.

Over a decade ago, the U.S. Air Force made a decision to build two complementary fifth-generation fighter aircraft to work together and harmonize one another's capabilities. The F-22A Raptor, with its advanced super-cruise and thrust-vectoring technologies, would provide air dominance, while the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) would be optimized for ground attacks.

The F-35, a single-engine attack aircraft, was not designed to fulfill certain core missions of the more advanced F-22. Just like shoes need shoelaces, to be an effective conventional deterrent in a 21st-century environment—at least until approximately 2040—the Air Force must have the proper mix of both platforms. Senior Air Force leadership argued through numerous budget cycles over many years that a fleet of 381 F-22s is the minimum requirement for such a mix.

Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz recently said that 243 F-22s would place the U.S. Air Force at moderate risk during future conflicts, while 183 F-22s would result in “moderate to high” risk. Despite the advice of Air Force leadership, however, Obama is prepared to end production of the F-22 at just 186 aircraft (which is only about 127 combat-ready planes as some fighters will be used for training and testing) while continuing with the planned build of 2,443 F-35s.

This reduced fleet size—in addition to ensuring that the service life of operational F-22s will expire much more quickly than was originally anticipated—is wholly insufficient to ensure that America's Air Force can maintain an effective conventional deterrent force in the decades ahead. Indeed, the Chinese and Russians are continuing to acquire large numbers of new generation fighter aircraft. Without adequate numbers of F-22s, the U.S. will lose the ability to achieve air dominance in places like the Middle East and the straits of Taiwan. Considering the implications for the next three decades of American security, no less than a moderate-risk fleet of 243 F-22s should be acceptable to the U.S. Congress and the American public.

3. Ending C-17 Cargo Aircraft Production.

Even though the C-17 was singled out by President Obama during his campaign as a priority for ensuring America can “preserve global reach in the air,” his Administration is now prepared to end production of this aircraft at 205 frames. The C-17, which can carry 169,000 pounds of equipment, including the Abrams tank and Apache helicopter, is also ideal for operating from austere airfields, including dirt runways.

Secretary Gates has repeatedly emphasized that he wants a force capable of fighting counterinsurgency operations. If that is indeed the case, then ending the C-17 line makes no sense. Given the danger of rockets, improvised explosive devices, and guerrilla attacks on truck convoys overseas, the C-17 has become the preferred means for moving men and materiel in theaters like Afghanistan.

Also, with Army and Marine endstrength still growing, there is little chance for a decline in operational tempo in the years ahead. Given the cost to restart the C-17 line after shutting it down (estimated at \$5.7 billion), now is the wrong time to end the production of this core capability platform.

Yet even more disturbing is the repeated trend of the Administration making this sweeping recommendation to Congress in the absence of any analytical justification or security rationale.

4. Delaying Army Modernization. The Obama Administration wants to cancel the Army's Future Combat Systems (FCS) program, despite the fact that

it is the only program through which the Army was going to replace most of its tracked vehicles—many of which date back to the 1970s. Further, the label “future” is misleading, because the Army has already put technologies and capabilities from the program into the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan.

This decision is also troubling because the Army must update its medium-weight forces now. As a result of the procurement holiday of the 1990s, the Army has essentially missed an entire generation of modernization. Over the past two decades, Army leaders phased out the Sheridan—the service’s only light tank capable of rapid deployment—and canceled its replacement, the Armored Gun System. Budget constraints halted research and development of other advanced armor vehicles, including the Future Scout and Cavalry System, the replacement for the Humvee and the Bradley. The consequences of the 1990s defense drawdown first became apparent in Kosovo when the Army struggled to deploy quickly from Germany and later when Turkey denied use of its territory for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Meanwhile, major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are wearing down the Army’s fleet of heavy vehicles. The Army estimates that the operational tempo of Abrams and Bradleys in Iraq and Afghanistan has increased fivefold and sixfold, respectively. Coupled with harsh environmental conditions, each year of deployment equals about five years of normal wear and tear.

Canceling the FCS means that the Army will have no modern, medium-weight forces that are useful in a variety of conflicts ranging from peace-keeping and counterinsurgency operations to full-scale conventional combat. FCS is designed to give the Army a capability that it has today only in a high-demand interim replacement vehicle known as the Stryker. Delaying what has already been delayed for 20 years is a disservice to those in uniform.

5. Delaying the Navy’s CG(X) Cruiser Program. President Obama has proposed postponing the Navy’s next-generation cruiser, known as the CG(X), in order to revisit both the requirements and acquisition strategy. The CG(X) should be the

Navy’s highest acquisition priority. China and Russia have acquired large numbers of carrier-killer and other missiles against which the U.S. Navy currently has no effective defense.

Delaying the procurement of CG(X) beyond the middle of the next decade will leave the fleet and U.S. forward bases unnecessarily vulnerable while compromising America’s conventional deterrence. Even with the service-life extensions for the Ticonderoga-class cruisers, the retirement age for the remaining 15 cruisers will fall between 2026 and 2034. With just 15 cruisers at sea in 2025 that were originally built in the 1980s, Navy leaders will be forced to operate under unacceptable risk levels.

Choosing not to build an advanced radar and instead improving the CG(X) radar system incrementally may offer the best course for Navy leadership to move ahead with the program now by reducing near-term technical risks associated with the program.

Defense Is Not a Zero Sum Game. The Obama Administration may be cutting defense because the President believes in negotiation and conciliation, and he may think that those tactics are inconsistent with military power. If so, he is making a strategic mistake that will eventually overwhelm his foreign policy.

The tools of diplomacy and soft power require an atmosphere of security within which they can operate—an environment only American strength can provide. If Members of Congress really want the President to succeed, they will step back, re-examine Vietnam-era assumptions about the American military, and ask themselves whether they really want American power to continue to decline. Walking softly in foreign policy is not a new idea nor a bad idea; however, it works only if you also carry a big stick.

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