

# WebMemo



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## The Nuclear Posture Review: Adding More of an “Unfunded Mandate” for Defense?

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In President Obama’s Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), the Administration is expanding the equivalent of an “unfunded mandate” for the Department of Defense (DOD), charging the already overstretched and under-resourced organization with even more responsibilities.

**Reason for Concern.** Even before the NPR, there was reason to be concerned about the direction of the DOD. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, for example, indicated that his focus was on fighting the wars in which the U.S. is currently engaged. A not unreasonable goal, but one that involves significant trade-offs—such as sacrificing high-intensity operations such as the Army’s Future Combat System to focus on counter-insurgency forces.

Such an approach is problematic for two primary reasons:

1. America’s potential adversaries, particularly China, have not made similar trade-offs. They are pursuing technologies and capabilities that jeopardize the ability of the U.S. to fulfill its commitment to regional peace and security in the Pacific.
2. By directing them to respond to a chemical or biological attack against America, the NPR is placing a dangerous strain on U.S. conventional forces.

**Growing Chinese Capabilities.** Currently, the PRC is pursuing a variety of programs aimed at denying U.S. military forces the ability to operate in the areas around China. The most prominent of these “anti-access” programs is the anti-ship ballistic missile, based on the DF-21/CSS-5 medium-

range ballistic missile.<sup>1</sup> This system, with a range of over 1,000 miles, is capable of targeting U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups while they are at sea. The ballistic missile program is complemented by new cruise missiles, both land-attack and anti-ship versions, which can threaten both U.S. bases and naval assets.

In addition, the PRC is also fielding at least two new classes of diesel-electric submarines and a new class of nuclear-powered attack submarine. These subs, which are very quiet, would further complicate any attempt by the U.S. Navy to bring forces to bear in support of Taiwan.

Moreover, the PRC is also deploying an array of advanced surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, some of which are domestically developed while others are purchased from the Russians. These SAM batteries are likely to inflict heavy damage against any air strikes that are not conducted by stealthy airframes—and may even be effective against stealthy platforms as well.

Nor is Chinese investment and innovation focused solely on weapons. China is improving its C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnais-

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sance) capabilities. The 2009 National Day parade, for example, included long-range unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Coupled with new over-the-horizon radars and space-based sensors, the Chinese military could now likely detect U.S. forces at some distance.

In light of the successful U.S. operations against Iraq, Serbia, and Afghanistan, Chinese military planners have concluded that the best way to defeat the U.S. is not to let its forces close with their targets. For the People's Liberation Army, this combination of far-ranging sensors, advanced SAMs, submarines, and anti-ship missiles would hopefully inflict substantial casualties if American naval and air forces try to fight their way toward the PRC. Ideally, these weapons would be sufficient to deter the U.S. from even launching an attack, a strategy consistent with Sun-Tzu's dictum that the greatest general is the one who can defeat an opponent without fighting.

**Cutbacks Dictating Strategy.** The risk from advanced Chinese arms is unclear, since many of these systems have not seen action—China's military has not fought a war since 1979. Unfortunately, not only do U.S. commanders have to contend with Chinese weapons, but they are also being asked to prepare their war plans in the face of programmatic cutbacks at home.

The elimination of the F-22, for example, means that U.S. forces will have to rely more on the less stealthy F-35 to penetrate those enhanced Chinese air defenses. Similarly, delays in funding anti-missile systems will place U.S. carriers and land bases at risk from China's substantial arsenal of medium-range missiles.

Meanwhile, even as China develops anti-satellite capabilities, such as those tested in January 2007, U.S. space capabilities face their own budget constraints. Over the past decade, a number of satellite programs have been cancelled, including the TSAT and the NPOESS. While each cancellation may be justified on its own, the aggregate effect has been to

weaken the space superiority upon which U.S. forces depend to fight America's wars at long ranges.

**Doing Ever More with Ever Less.** In addition to allowing potential adversaries to gain technological parity—if not superiority<sup>2</sup>—the NPR will also require America's conventional forces to shoulder yet another burden. Should the U.S. suffer a biological or chemical attack from an opponent who is deemed "compliant" with the NPT, the U.S. will use only conventional forces to retaliate. Such a policy essentially allows America's enemies to use chemical and biological weapons against the American homeland with the knowledge that the U.S. will not retaliate to the utmost.

Worse, any opponent who mounts such an attack will probably also field a substantial conventional capability. Indeed, they may even have purchased the requisite systems from China, Russia, or other suppliers of advanced munitions. Yet the Administration and Congress have both made clear that there will be no commensurate increase in defense spending to help U.S. conventional forces meet this new requirement. In essence, the Administration has created the equivalent of an unfunded mandate for the conventional forces.

Worse, the forces that would be required to conduct such operations would necessarily entail a drawdown of American forces committed to such other potential contingencies as Taiwan. American commanders are, in short, expected to confront China's growing anti-access capabilities not only while being put on "short rations" of funding, but also while they are expected to provide the necessary deterrent against other potential aggressors. America's allies, who have been told repeatedly of the reliability of the American nuclear umbrella, suddenly find themselves exposed.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Support investments in C4ISR.** The U.S. has not relied on sheer numbers to fight and win its wars in a very long time. Instead, the goal is to "fight smarter," but that requires sustained investment

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1. Admiral Robert Willard, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, testimony before Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, March 23, 2010, p. 14.
2. The United States is currently the only nuclear power with no nuclear weapons programs in design or production.

in C4ISR capabilities—which do not come cheap. This includes not only updating and upgrading current space capabilities but also UAVs and electronic warfare programs.

- *Ensure that the U.S. maintains the ability to deter its opponents.* Deterring America's opponents requires that they understand that they face defeat no matter the method of warfare they choose or the types of capabilities they acquire. This, in turn, requires a full spectrum of robust capabilities within DOD, both now and well into the future. Near peer competitors' development of anti-access capabilities cannot be seen as raising doubts about America's capacity to respond. But U.S. responses cannot be achieved on the cheap.
- *Sustain the ability to fight high-intensity conflicts.* When soldiers and Marines are undergoing fourth and even fifth rotations to Afghanistan and Iraq, it is important to provide as much support to them as possible. But at the same time, the security of the U.S. and its allies demands the ability to engage in high-intensity conflict in order to deter its opponents. This

means providing the financial and training resources necessary for proficiency in such specialized areas as strike warfare, anti-submarine warfare, and armored combat.

**Greater Instability and Uncertainty.** Perhaps the Administration is serious when its defenders suggest that the solution will be some form of "prompt global strike" capability. But there is reason to question both whether conventionally armed intercontinental ballistic missiles would be stabilizing and whether Congress would decide to support such a program (especially since it has suffered bipartisan skepticism in the past).

The NPR and its attendant issues seem to suggest that the Administration is pursuing a strategically incoherent policy, one that is ostensibly aimed at reassuring other nations but will more likely lead to greater instability and uncertainty. This is not the path to another Nobel Peace Prize.

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