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Top Five Military Modernization Mistakes Congress Should Fix

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It is already clear that the U.S. capabilities necessary for meeting the nation's global security requirements will not be met if current defense budget policies are left in place. The lack of funding will translate into a U.S. military that might not be able to control the skies, have enough ships to deploy its forces, or train and equip service members to address disasters at home and support operations worldwide.

Peace through strength saves both lives and money. While there are many areas of inadequate modernization funding under existing budget policies, the following are particularly important.

1. Failure to Restore the Missile Defense Program. According to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta's January 26 fiscal year (FY) 2013 defense budget preview briefing, missile defense will have to accept some reductions in funding. In addition, the program will have to accept some risk in terms of regional missile defense deployments. While specifics remain to be determined, President Obama proposed to cut the missile defense program by \$1.6 billion the first year after he took office. Subsequent budget requests have failed to make up the lost ground. It will be nothing short of impossible to restore the necessary funding in the years ahead under Obama Administration budget policies.

2. Lack of Funding for Nuclear Forces. White House decisions on the size and shape of the

U.S. nuclear force under the so-called Nuclear Posture Review implementation study will be factored into the budget once they are made. In its efforts to achieve "nuclear zero," the Obama Administration is considering unilateral cuts to U.S. nuclear weapons. The U.S. Senate, however, expressed its concern regarding unilateral U.S. nuclear reductions in the New Strategic Arms Control Treaty's (New START) resolution of ratification. The resolution states that "the President should regulate reductions in United States strategic offensive arms so that the number of accountable strategic offensive arms under the New START Treaty possessed by the Russian Federation in no case exceeds the comparable number of accountable strategic offensive arms possessed by the United States."

It remains to be seen whether Moscow will continue to build up its long-range nuclear forces while maintaining its advantage in short-range nuclear forces, as it has been doing following the New START's entry into force. China will likely continue its lack of transparency regarding its

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nuclear weapons program. Finally, nuclear proliferation trends are pointing in the wrong direction. Accordingly, large-scale reductions to U.S. nuclear forces would be quite imprudent at this point.

Currently, the U.S. is the only country in the world without a substantial nuclear modernization program. Furthermore, due to budget constraints, the Department of Defense is already considering or planning for postponing nuclear certifications for its next bomber or delaying a follow-on strategic submarine. The Administration did not manage to secure funding for maintaining nuclear weapons laboratories and their core competencies (pursuant to section 1251 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2010) in the FY 2012 budget. It is even less likely that the Administration will uphold President Obama's commitment to modernize the U.S. weapons complex made to the Senate during its consideration of New START in the following years.

3. **Decreases in the Number of Fighters.** The spending plan will disestablish six tactical fighter squadrons as the Air Force is planning on eliminating about 286 aircraft.¹ A training fighter squadron will also be eliminated. The procurement rate of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter will be slowed. This will likely increase the unit cost of the aircraft and lead to a reduction in the size of the buy over time. These reductions will increase attrition rates and make training of new pilots more difficult due to the demanding operational schedule.
4. **Limits on the Navy's Global Capabilities.** The Navy is moving to retire seven cruisers and two amphibious ships at an early juncture. One of these cruisers is capable of ballistic missile defense (BMD). It is likely that the retirement

of cruisers will increase the pressure on the rest of the fleet, including BMD-capable ships. In addition, the Navy might delay or reduce the procurements of a large amphibious ship, a *Virginia*-class submarine, the replacement strategic nuclear submarine, Littoral Combat Ships, and Joint High-Speed Vessels.

If the sequestration process moves forward, the Department of Defense would face a "23 percent cut in ship and military construction projects [which] would render them unexecutable—you cannot buy three quarters of a building," according to Secretary Panetta's November letter to Senator John McCain (R-AZ).² In addition, long-term Budget Control Act effects would leave the Navy with the smallest fleet since 1915.

5. **Retirement of Old Cargo Planes Without a Procurement of New Ones.** The Air Force plans to retire 27 C-5As and 65 C-130s and divest 38 C-27s. Such substantial cuts in cargo aircraft without a procurement of additional C-17s will diminish U.S. air mobility capacity. The Air Force will no longer be capable of supporting two simultaneous large ground campaigns.

Not Worth the Risk. Meeting the security challenges of the 21st century requires a ready force that is capable of conducting operations on a global scale. It will be difficult if not impossible to address modernization challenges at the current level of funding, as the FY 2013 defense budget raises the level of risk for the U.S. and its friends and allies around the world.

Perhaps the most important contributing factor to this increase in risk under current budget policies is the large-scale reduction in the overall defense modernization program, in particular the five areas described in this paper. Congress and the American people need to understand that the stakes are exceedingly high. These stakes include the lives

1. David Fulghum, "U.S. Air Force Reveals Budget Cut Details," *Aviation Week*, February 3, 2012, at http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/generic/story_channel.jsp?channel=defense&id=news/awx/2012/02/02/awx_02_02_2012_p0-420642.xml&headline=U.S.%20Air%20Force%20Reveals%20Budget%20Cut%20Details (February 3, 2012).

2. Press release, "Statement by Senators McCain and Graham on Secretary Panetta's Letter Detailing 'Devastating' Impact of Sequester," Senator John McCain (R-AZ), November 14, 2011, at http://mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressOffice.PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=a4074315-fd3e-2e65-2330-62b95da3b0e9 (February 8, 2012).

and well-being of many people around the globe, the preservation of the global trading system and future prosperity, and, ultimately, the cause of liberty worldwide. These are not risks that are worth taking.

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