

ISSUE BRIEF

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Top Five National Security Priorities for Congress in 2014

Steven P. Bucci, PhD, and Michaela Dodge

America is dramatically less safe and prosperous than when President Obama took office. Threats to the nation have increased as the President's "leading from behind" strategy only caused the U.S. to lose respect and influence on every front. U.S. adversaries became more emboldened. As a result of President Obama's poor leadership, the U.S. will have to face the return of great power competition, the spread of global terrorism, assaults on U.S. sovereignty and individual liberties from unaccountable international organizations, and an uncertain global economy made worse by unsustainable fiscal policies and debt. The U.S. ability to "command its own fortunes," as George Washington put it, will be greatly diminished.

The U.S. needs leadership so that the nation can be secure and prosperous. Congress has an important constitutional role in providing for the common defense. This includes raising and maintaining the U.S. armed forces. A strong national defense allows all Americans to enjoy their many freedoms safely. Congress should restore a strong national defense, adopt a prudent and self-confident foreign policy, and promote freedom—especially economic freedom—abroad. It should protect U.S. national sov-

eighty, ensure the competitiveness of the U.S. economy, protect the constitutional liberties of Americans, and respect the rights of others.

1. Reform Defense

U.S. taxpayers and men and women in uniform deserve defense reforms that protect their ability to fight future wars. These reforms would help the Pentagon operate more effectively and efficiently. Export control, acquisition, auditing, entitlements, overhead, logistics, and contracting reforms are particularly important.

These measures would over time incentivize best practices, efficiency, innovation, and stewardship, and they would make resources available for badly needed force modernization.

2. Protect Defense Readiness

Under President Obama's stewardship, U.S. military readiness is declining. Fighter squadrons have stopped flying, carriers have not sailed, and ground units have not trained. In the Army, 800 vehicles, 2,000 weapons, and 32 helicopters are unavailable due to maintenance cuts. The Navy has canceled multiple planned deployments and does not have a strike group trained to respond on short notice in case of a contingency. The Marines are losing a division's worth of combat power, which leaves no rotational relief for sustained operations. The Air Force has grounded 31 squadrons, including 13 combat-coded squadrons. Due to the pro-

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The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

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curement holiday the nation took under President Clinton, some of the weapons systems the military now uses in combat are generations older than soldiers who operate them.

Readiness is the life blood of an effective military. It has no natural constituency except the troops who will pay the ultimate price for its absence. President Obama's policies are exacerbating the problem. Congress should ensure that the downward spiral on readiness does not continue and that the leadership considers it central to the nation's safety.

3. Advance U.S. Missile Defense Programs

Effective and appropriate investment in ballistic missile defense is absolutely critical in a modern world where missile capabilities are proliferating. Iran and North Korea are cooperating on obtaining ballistic missiles that can hit anywhere in the U.S. in less than 33 minutes. They threaten U.S. allies.

The U.S. cannot afford to turn a blind eye to these crucial developments. The U.S. should pursue and acquire the best available missile defense capabilities, including an improved Aegis missile defense system, the Ground-Based Midcourse Defense system, and space-based interceptors.

The U.S. should expand its space- and ground-based tracking programs, which increase the probability that its interceptors will hit the adversary missiles aimed at U.S. and allied targets. It should also revive its efforts on the boost-phase missile defense programs, because that is when the enemy ballistic missiles are the most vulnerable. The ground lost by inaction and lip service should be reversed.

4. Strengthen U.S. Nuclear Weapon Capabilities

Currently, America is the only nuclear power without a substantive nuclear weapons modernization program. U.S. strategic systems have been under extreme pressure caused by years of

neglect and underfunding. Both the U.S. nuclear triad and the nation's nuclear laboratories are in dire need of reinvestment. Know-how in the nuclear laboratories is deteriorating as a result.

Congress has the power to reverse these dangerous trends. Nuclear weapons and infrastructure modernization are key to a secure America. Both are facing a serious challenge from ideological opponents who wish to see this capability eliminated. However, a world in which the U.S. does not have nuclear weapons but its adversaries do would be a more dangerous place.

5. Maintain U.S. Presence Overseas

Forward-deployed troops allow the U.S. to strengthen military and civilian relations with host nations. European bases allow the U.S. access to some of the most contested areas in the world, such as the Middle East. They allow the nation to supply its forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and evacuate wounded troops to prime medical facilities in Europe.

U.S. military bases abroad play an important role in potential contingencies in hostile regions and provide U.S. policymakers with the flexibility, resilience, and opportunity to react quickly in unpredictable conflicts and international crises.

Provide for the Common Defense. Given the truism that making everything a priority means that nothing is, Congress should focus on the priorities outlined above. While they alone will not make America secure, they are important enough to warrant special attention.

To be sure, if these areas are ignored or are not given sufficient attention, America's ability to properly "provide for the common defense" will further decline. The Heritage Foundation is determined to work to ensure that does not happen.

—*Steven P. Bucci, PhD, is Director of, and Michaela Dodge is Policy Analyst for Defense and Strategic Policy in, the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a department of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*