

AMERICA AT RISK MEMO

No. 12-04 | MAY 21, 2012

Providing the Capabilities That the Common Defense Requires

Rebecca Heinrichs

Threats to America's security, way of life, and allies are increasing rather than decreasing. Instability persists in the Middle East, terrorists continue to plot attacks, adversaries buy and sell ballistic missiles and nuclear technology, and the intent of countries with the ability to pose a strategic threat to the U.S. can suddenly change. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recently said, "Never has there been in my almost 49-year career in intelligence a more complex and interdependent array of challenges than that we face today."

Yet the Obama defense budget leads one to believe the President views the world as less dangerous and that after 10 years of war, the U.S. can relax its guard. The truth is that the President's budget both fails to provide the capabilities the

U.S. requires to protect its national interests and threatens to diminish American preeminence.

Reassess the Way to Budget: Policy Must Drive the Numbers

Since the end of the Second World War, four overriding national security interests vital to ensuring American peace and prosperity have remained relatively constant:

- **Safeguarding** U.S. national security;
- **Preventing** a major power threat to Europe, East Asia, or the Persian Gulf;
- **Maintaining** freedom of the commons (air, sea, land, space, and cyberspace); and
- **Defending** the homeland to protect Americans against threats to their lives and well-being.

Although these national interests remain the same, the threats to them change, and those threats must drive the strategies to defend against them. Once a strategy is determined, elected officials should give military

leaders the freedom to request funding for a menu of capabilities necessary to implement the policy.

The Obama Administration, however, has failed to follow this prudent course in putting together its defense budget. Dodging a discussion about what America's national security goals are and what capabilities are necessary to implement them, Obama officials insist that the \$487 billion cut in the defense budget over 10 years allows the U.S. to maintain its long-held security commitments and that the military will be more efficient—in a word, better.

This is impossible, and Americans should not be fooled. As explained by Baker Spring in a March 1, 2012, *Heritage Backgrounder*, "less than a quarter of the proposed savings over the next five years will come from increasing efficiency and more

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ar12-04>

Produced by the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies

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

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.



Protect America
Month

Providing for the Common Defense in the 21st Century

The Heritage Foundation's Protect America Month focuses on defense spending in the 21st century. America still faces serious threats in the world and now is not the time to weaken our military through defense budget cuts.

than three-quarters will come from reducing military capabilities.”

Fill the Capabilities Gaps

President Obama did not task the Pentagon with putting together a budget that would ensure that the U.S. remains the preeminent global force. The budget numbers were set, and then the Pentagon did what it could with what it had been given.

As a consequence, there are gaping holes in critical capabilities. In a Senate hearing, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said, “Let me be clear. You can’t take a half trillion out of the defense budget and not incur additional risk... [T]here is no margin for error.”

- The Obama budget requests \$1 billion less for the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) than it had planned to request for fiscal year 2013 the previous year. The President’s open-microphone incident with Russian President Medvedev reveals that if President Obama wins re-election, he intends to trade away U.S. missile defense even further in order to placate Russia.

Missiles are a comparatively cheap way to pose an asymmetric threat to the U.S. More dangerous countries than ever before possess ballistic missiles, and rogue states or their proxies could use them to deliver nuclear weapons. Missile defense is therefore necessary to protect against contemporary threats.

- President Obama, by his own admission, is determined to take the world down the path to “nuclear zero” and is considering unilateral cuts that could take the U.S. down to as many as 300 nuclear weapons. The Obama budget fails to include sufficient funds to modernize the current nuclear force even though the President promised the Senate that the budget would do so in light of passage of the New START arms control treaty.

The U.S. is the only nuclear power without a substantial modernization program, and failing to modernize is yet another means to disarm. In order to determine what should comprise the U.S. nuclear stockpile, rather than starting from an ideologically driven goal and working backwards, policy-makers must first make a sober analysis of what is necessary for America’s nuclear arsenal to pose credible assurances to our allies and deterrence to our foes.

- Despite the President’s plan to pivot to the Asia-Pacific region, the defense budget cuts assets that are necessary to strengthen air and sea power. Specifically, the Navy is anticipating the elimination of seven cruisers and two dock landing ships. The Air Force is planning on the removal of 303 aircraft from its force, including 65 C-130 cargo aircraft and 38 C-27 planes, and faces delay of the development of the F-35 fighter.

China is steadfastly investing in its military capabilities to achieve great-power status, and the U.S. must remain able to defend its interests in this context. The President’s budget may be inadequate to live up to treaty obligations that affect the Pacific region. For example, the war plan for North Korea (OPLAN 5027) calls for deploying 690,000 U.S. ground troops, 160 ships, and 2,000 aircraft within 90 days.

Forbid Sequestration

Despite Secretary Panetta’s warning that there is “no margin for error” in the budget, if Congress fails to find other ways to reduce the deficit by January 2013, sequestration, as mandated in the Budget Control Act of 2011, would eliminate still another \$500 billion from the defense budget over 10 years. This irresponsible high-stakes game of chicken between the White House and Congress poses a direct threat to American security. Secretary Panetta has compared the effects of sequestration to “shooting ourselves in the head.”

While America’s adversaries and potential foes continue to build up and strengthen their offensive military capabilities, the U.S. is poised to relax its guard. The American people must demand that their leaders maintain the capabilities that the common defense requires.

—*Rebecca Heinrichs* is a Visiting Fellow in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.