

Gigged by McCaffrey; UAV Absurdity; China Moves Out

Make Your Case Now

The US armed forces—especially the Air Force—urgently need to be reset and modernized, and the defense community must now make that case to political leaders who believe the military can be run on the cheap. So said Barry R. McCaffrey at a Capitol Hill seminar in March.

McCaffrey, a 1991 Gulf War Army division commander, later national drug war czar, and now a military commentator and consultant, said that it's "been a failure of those in uniform for the last seven years" that they've anticipated the outcome of a political debate about social programs versus discretionary spending, and given political leaders "the answer they'd like to hear" rather than an honest military assessment.

McCaffrey observed that former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld told the uniformed leadership to expect "dramatically lower" budgets, and they in turn designed their forces "to live inside" expected funding. However, McCaffrey said it's "nonsense" that the nation can't afford the military it needs.

"I do not believe this country is an impoverished nation that can barely afford" the existing defense budget, he said. "I don't think this is a serious argument" when national leaders can quickly agree to send out \$600 checks to individuals "to pay their cable TV bills," he asserted.

McCaffrey urged agency heads to "get an ethically sound defense argument, put it on a piece of paper, and submit it for consideration. Then let the political debate take place." He said if the case is made soundly enough, "the American people will ... respond to that argument."

Specifically, McCaffrey said it would probably take "5.2 percent of GNP for five years to get ourselves out of this mess we've put ourselves in" by constraining military spending too much for too long.

The Air Force, he said, is "grossly underfunded," chronically \$18 billion to \$20 billion short in meeting its annual recapitalization needs. That's "basically a month's burn rate" of the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he added. It is "completely outrageous" that the Air Force must accept a 98-year aircraft replacement cycle.

"To be blunt, the tool of choice to maintain the peace 20 years from now is the United States Air Force," McCaffrey asserted. "You've got to pay for it in advance, and it costs a lot of money."

The Air Force is being asked to make do with 183 F-22s, which McCaffrey called a gimmick, and not a credible plan for control of the air. The Raptor is "a prerequisite to us preserving our ability to act ... to guarantee that the Navy can operate, and guarantee that our C-17s can land." At that level, the Air Force can only actually use "90 or 100 F-22s," if 40 are in training, 20 are in the shop, and 20 more are being held out "to protect against another threat." What's left puts the F-22 in the category of "a special-purpose ... aircraft" rather than a front-line fighter. He thinks the Air Force ought to have at least 350 F-22s.

"The principle axiom of US military power is, don't ever get in a fair fight," McCaffrey observed. "You need to stay two generations or more ahead of your competition."

In any future conflict, "clearly, option No. 1 is airpower.



The F-22 is in danger of becoming too special, says McCaffrey.

It's not rolling around in the mud throwing hand grenades at somebody 20 feet away."

McCaffrey said the country has "had it" with the wars in Southwest Asia, and is "going to tell us, 'Don't you do that again.'" However, there's the classic danger of shaping the force for the last war. He doesn't want the Army "trying to invent a force that could have gone into Iraq—minus the idiocies of Secretary Rumsfeld—and won." Air and naval power will be the principle guarantors of freedom of action and the tools of deterrence in the coming decades, he asserted.

The next President of the US must reset the military, "particularly if you don't want to fight. If you ... don't like having 34,000 killed and wounded, then you have to put a deterrence capability in place that's politically and militarily credible."

McCaffrey criticized Rumsfeld for making major strategic changes by executive fiat, with no national debate at all. He said Rumsfeld pulled American forces out of Western Europe, South Korea, Japan, and elsewhere, and moved them to bases in the heartland of the US, without then buying "the air and naval power to credibly project them back into their battle areas." He also faulted Congress for not stepping in as it was happening and demanding more explanations.

The situation now demands that the US buy 600 C-17s, a figure that McCaffrey said is not only realistic but necessary, given that the US is so dependent on air mobility to deploy forces quickly. The C-17, he said, is also not an Air Force or even a military asset but "national transportation capability," and one that will be essential in responding to any major humanitarian crisis at home or abroad. It's also a capability "you can't buy ... off the market."

The C-17 is especially important to the war in Afghanistan, especially if "Pakistan goes sour" and the US cannot depend on port facilities in that country.

Back in the late 1990s, when he was an Army general, McCaffrey said the senior uniformed leadership agreed to go to a "single fleet" of strategic airlifters—namely, the C-17. The C-5 is so old and unreliable, it should probably be relegated to use as "a flowerpot," he added.

The defense community "had better start talking" to the three

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main Presidential candidates now if the defense funding crisis is to be addressed properly.

"Write your white paper right now; don't waste it on the last eight months of the [Bush] Administration," McCaffrey admonished, "and let's get out there and have a debate that doesn't fall back on '60s twaddle."

View From the Mud

Internal Pentagon slugfests over roles and missions are "asinine," given that service budget shares remain at about one-third each, despite several Quadrennial Defense Reviews, retired Army Gen. Barry McCaffrey said at a Capitol Hill symposium in March. What's needed is some common sense, he said.

Despite the zero-sum battle for dollars, the force has made huge strides in jointness over the last 20 years, McCaffrey said, and should do even better with some clear thinking.

For example, he said, it should be obvious who ought to be in charge of unmanned aerial vehicles.

"It is patently absurd to not see that airspace ought to be integrated in a joint manner. There ought to be a single agency doing this ... probably [the] Air Force," McCaffrey said. The Pentagon leadership last year rebuffed the Air Force's push to be made executive agent for UAVs flying above 3,500 feet. USAF argued that it could save money by reducing duplication of effort, get the most out of UAVs by putting them where they're needed most, and deconflicting the thousands of such vehicles in the battlespace with manned aircraft. The Army argued that its division commanders have to have their own UAVs, and clear airspace above their operating areas in which to fly them.

It is "completely stupid to block out huge pieces of airspace because [an infantry division commander] wants to fly a Predator overhead," McCaffrey said. "I do not understand why we cannot have a joint commander ... do that." He said the likely reason is decades of distrust of the Navy and Air Force among the ground services, going back to World War II, when they believed they'd been left uncovered by airpower.

He floated the idea that an Army or Marine division ought to be a joint command, "and the No. 2 guy ought to be an Air Force one-star" because of the hundreds of Air Force people embedded with a division—"inside it, never mind flying in support of it"—as the ground forces' connection to aircraft overhead.

McCaffrey said he's baffled as to why the Air Force's role in the two ongoing wars seems unsung. He noted that "a rifle platoon ... can get a B-1 bomber overhead in 20 minutes," and C-130s are precision-air-dropping supplies to units at "9,000 feet in the Hindu Kush, ... putting them inside the platoon perimeter."

China Rising

China continues to grow and modernize its military at a brisk and disturbing pace, and is taking steps to rapidly move beyond simply being a regional power, the Pentagon said in its most recent annual review of China's military capabilities and trends, released in March.

The review notes a continued spending spree by China on advanced new systems, both imported from abroad and developed indigenously, and the basing of an ever-growing force of aircraft and ballistic missiles on the coast of the Taiwan Strait. It marked a growing number of Chinese cyber intrusions into the defense networks of the US and other countries worldwide, possibly as practice runs in the event of armed conflict. China is also spending heavily on space systems and counterspace systems, all with an eye toward blunting those capabilities in which the US enjoys an edge.

At the same time, China is working hard to professionalize

its military ranks, reducing numbers of troops somewhat but raising the quality of the people and systems it retains.

Although the US "welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China," that country is quickly shifting focus from fielding massive ground forces to being "capable of fighting and winning short-duration, high-intensity conflicts along its periphery against high-tech adversaries," according to the report. The Pentagon reiterated its 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review assertion that China has the "greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States."

The report specifically highlighted progress in Chinese missiles of every kind—"advanced cruise missiles, medium-range ballistic missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles designed to strike ships at sea, including aircraft carriers"—and its test of direct-ascent anti-satellite weapons.

China's defense spending now dwarfs that of its neighbors, according to its own published figures and Pentagon estimates. By its own account, China upped its military spending by nearly 20 percent in 2007, and over the last 12 years, it has raised annual defense spending at roughly the same pace as its economy is growing.

The self-reported Chinese military budget for 2007 is about \$46 billion; however, because it doesn't count whole categories of spending, such as research and development, and purchases of military hardware abroad, the figure under-reports the true scope of China's military outlays. The Pentagon pegs China's military budget for 2007 at between \$97 billion and \$139 billion—roughly double to triple what Russia or Japan spend on defense, and five to seven times India's outlay.

While China's defense spending is about a third that of the US—not counting military operations in Iraq or Afghanistan—due to a profound difference in the pay and benefits received by Chinese troops versus their US counterparts, the relative percentage of each country's budget that goes to buying capital equipment such as aircraft, tanks, and naval vessels is narrowing rapidly.

This year's report on China's military power, unveiled at a Pentagon press conference, is the first that represents the US government's "unified view," according to David Sedney, deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia. It collated the estimates of the State Department, intelligence community, National Security Council, and other agencies, along with that of the Defense Department, he said.

Sedney noted an acceleration in China's cyber intrusions in US and other nations' sensitive defense networks. It's not easy to know how much China may have seen and copied, or whether it corrupted some databases deliberately, Sedney said. Although Chinese hackers have not penetrated the most sensitive networks, "they gain an awful lot" by rooting around in unclassified areas where there is useful "scientific and technological material," such as in contracting databases. The Pentagon is constantly reviewing what should be classified and more vigorously protected, he said.

The China report notes some small decreases in certain types of hardware in the Chinese inventory, but David Helvey, the Pentagon's director of China, Taiwan, and Mongolia affairs, said this is indicative of the modernization effort.

"I would ... point out that as China's military forces improve, in terms of the quality of their equipment, you'll also see the retirement of older platforms and airframes." This is a clear indication of "a military that is undergoing a comprehensive transformation."

Sedney reiterated an oft-stated demand that China provide more "transparency" in its defense planning and spending, saying that unless China's military aims and capabilities are made clear, other countries will have to hedge their military posture relative to that of China. ■