

**A budget, searching for a strategy; Protecting the baseline at NRO;
The strait drifts toward China**

ONE WAR AT A TIME, PLEASE

The US ability to fight two medium-size wars in close succession—a precept of national military policy for the last 18 years—could be declared dead in the next couple of months. It would be a victim of defense budget cuts.

The force-sizing construct, which has witnessed a number of variations, perturbations, and nicknames, such as “win-hold-win,” “two-and-a-half wars,” “1-4-2-1,” and others, was held intact through three Administrations.

The two-war construct provided a deterrent capability meant to assure allies and adversaries alike that even if heavily engaged in one conflict, the US could still respond credibly if a second erupted. Among other things, this was meant to discourage opportunism by enemies, say, North Korea, that could take advantage if it judged the US unable to effectively respond if the military was already engaged in, say, Iraq.

However, a strategic military review set in motion by last summer’s debt crisis seems to be spelling the doom of the second-war capability.

That message came across loud and clear in a late September speech by Lt. Gen. Herbert J. Carlisle, the Air Force’s deputy chief of staff for operations, plans, and requirements.

Speaking to an industry group at a program sponsored by the Secretary of the Air Force and the Air Force Association, Carlisle said force levels now being set for the 2013 budget could mean the end of the ability to undertake secondary or tertiary operations such as this spring’s action over Libya.

The Air Force, Carlisle said, will shape itself to be capable of dealing with a “high-end adversary,” such as China or Russia, though at sharply diminished capacity. He said USAF will try to keep its technology edge, but will lack the forces necessary to prosecute multiple operations in close succession.

Under the new force levels, “we probably couldn’t do what we did last March,” when the Air Force, already heavily occupied with Afghanistan and Iraq, was called on to simultaneously assist with tsunami relief in Japan and Operation Odyssey Dawn in Libya, Carlisle said.

Amidst the rush to find ways of cutting spending to live within anticipated funds, the Air Force has been asked if sharply reduced resources would be enough to keep the service in business.

“To do what?” has been USAF’s answer to those questions, Carlisle said. After further discussion, it became clear that national leaders weren’t willing to relieve the service of any of its traditional roles. Thus, it has been tasked “to do what we’re doing now, just at a lower capacity,” he said.

“Currently, we’re kind of a budget in search of a strategy,” Carlisle asserted.

The coming cuts are already bad enough, he said, but the results will be “dire” if the congressional deficit “supercommittee” fails to reach an agreement on restructuring federal spending by its deadline this month. Such a failure would trigger far deeper cuts in defense spending, doubling the reduction to total about \$900 billion over the next decade.

If that happens, Carlisle said, “the Air Force will not look like it does today.”

Despite the grave financial circumstances, Carlisle said the services are under marching orders not to poach on each other’s programs or missions. Adm. Michael G. Mullen, before retiring as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued the edict. Mullen, Carlisle said, told the services, “We’re not going to pull knives on each other. ... We’re in this together.”

Carlisle reported progress with the Navy in carving out a new AirSea Battle interdependency concept. The goal is to improve operational capabilities more efficiently than would be possible if the Air Force and Navy developed their programs alone.

Under ASB—which Carlisle said is the necessary response to rapidly worsening anti-access, area-denial threats—the two services will seek to interleave their operational concepts and training wherever possible, team up on programs such as Global Hawk where they can use similar gear, and do everything they can to reduce redundancy and take advantage of each other’s strengths.

Carlisle said ASB is not “targeted at a particular place,” but that China represents the nation with “the most capability” at the end of this decade, and will be the military against which the Air Force and Navy must measure themselves.

China “will be the pacing influence” on how fast the services must modernize and to what degree, Carlisle added.

“Will we ever fight China? Hopefully not,” he said. However, given China’s aggressive export of military equipment, it’s logical to assume “we’ll probably fight their stuff,” he predicted.

SPACE TURNAROUND

After years of struggle with schedule and cost—which often made space the poster child for the Pentagon’s acquisition problems—the National Reconnaissance Office’s director is proud to report all his space programs are “in the green.”

Bruce Carlson, NRO director and a retired Air Force general, told defense reporters in late September that “as recently as a couple of years ago, more than 30 percent of our programs were in the yellow or red, meaning they weren’t performing appropriately.” Today, however, “all of our major system acquisitions are in the green. In other words, they’re delivering on schedule and on ... price.”

Carlson, delivering a rare update on the typically hyper-secret NRO, also said that the ability to fuse the sensor take from imagery and signals intelligence “has improved exponentially over the last three years.” During that time, the improvement has been “one order of magnitude” better, but is still “five orders of magnitude less than we need.”

Once designed “to collect Soviet long-haul communications” during the Cold War, NRO now employs legacy birds in new ways.

When asked to geo-locate the source of push-to-talk radio transmissions, Carlson said the best NRO could initially offer was accuracy “within three miles.” Insurgents use push-to-talk radios “extensively in the combat zone” because they are difficult to geo-locate, he said, and for a time they were a safer alternative to cellular phones. Locating the signals

"requires overhead assistance and ... the fusion of that data," he explained, but with a series of overhead sensors pointed in the right direction, the accuracy is now within meters, Carlson said. "That means it's targetable."

He credited NRO's science and technology efforts with rapidly advancing the state of the art, which has resulted in many direct saves of troops in battle. He noted, for example, the Red Dot program that literally puts a red dot on the computer screens of ground troops, warning them where improvised explosive devices are likely to be.

The NRO now has the ability to retask its signals or communications systems quickly, Carlson said. If a pilot bailed out of an airplane, "we can, within a matter of seconds, turn an incredible number of our sensors on a specific area in order to be of service in a situation like that. ... We have the power to be very flexible."

There is less flexibility in imaging systems, but NRO has demonstrated "we can do it in a matter of hours."

The NRO has launched six satellites in a seven-month period, the biggest launch boom in decades, and Carlson credited the agency's healthy science and technology effort with providing "60 percent" of the technology those satellites carry. The S&T base "is very important to us," he said.

Carlson said that as soon as it became obvious that all defense agency budgets were going down, he made protecting the intellectual capital of the NRO (in its engineers, scientists, and acquisition experts) a top priority.

"Second, I'm going to protect my baseline programs. Third, I'm going to protect S&T," he said. To fund those priorities, and in that order, "I'll take money out of other things," such as operations accounts. Carlson said he's managed to get S&T spending back up to "historical levels" of eight percent of NRO's budget, up from a low of five percent a few years ago.

Reduced operations funding means Carlson will have fewer people doing "collaboration or integration," however.

Though Carlson said he's "happy" with his budget, "I would always like more," especially to demonstrate "several candidate technologies" that he currently lacks the funds to try out.

Although the NRO deals primarily in large, high-specification systems, "we love small satellites," he said. The agency uses them chiefly to demonstrate new technologies. Carlson said the "sweet spot" for an NRO satellite is now between 800 and 1,000 pounds. That is the point offering the best convergence of sensor capability, launch weight, flexibility, and cost.

Nevertheless, sometimes only a big satellite will do. Carlson said, "We tried, 10 years ago or so, ... to take the capability that we put in our imaging satellites and make it compact and put it on a smaller lift vehicle, a medium lift vehicle. That process was incredibly unsuccessful. It was a colossal failure."

While there's no "hangover" about it at NRO, "there certainly is hangover in Washington, D.C." The failure was pinned on the agency, though Carlson said, "I was around in that time and I know there's plenty of blame to go around."

FALCON STRAITS

In September, the Obama Administration deferred a decision on Taiwan's request to buy 66 new F-16C/Ds, causing members of Congress to charge the Administration with kowtowing to Beijing and prompting a bill requiring the sale to go through.

Instead of the new airplanes, the Administration forwarded to Congress a \$5.3 billion package of upgrades for 145 existing Taiwanese F-16A/Bs. This would bring the fighters roughly up to the configuration of advanced C/D models, though on 20-year-old airframes. The package would include new active

electronically scanned array radars, AIM-9X missiles, and structural life-extending enhancements. New engines could be a later addition.

The upgrades would improve the "capability, survivability, and reliability" of Taipei's Falcons and "greatly enhance" the island's ability to defend itself, the Administration said.

China fumed about the decision and reiterated its standard charge that Washington is meddling with China's internal politics. China maintains that Taiwan is a breakaway province.

Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.) charged that the Obama Administration, by not agreeing to the new sale, was giving Beijing veto power over America's relations with its friends and allies. This, he said in a press release, puts the US "on a very slippery slope" in foreign policy. Lockheed Martin builds F-16s in Texas.

Cornyn and Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) introduced the Taiwan Airpower Modernization Act of 2011, which would require the sale to be approved. The bill was touted as compelling the Administration to observe the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which calls for the US to provide Taiwan with military equipment deemed essential for self-defense capability.

The Taiwan airpower bill noted that the Administration's most recent evaluation of Chinese military power indicates that the advantage in arms across the Taiwan Strait is shifting inexorably toward China. The US should continue to help allies defend themselves, given imminent reductions in US military spending that will make fewer forces available to help them, Cornyn said.

He suggested that the sale would generate an \$8.7 billion economic shot in the arm for the US, creating "nearly 88,000 'person-years' of employment" across the US. Menendez likewise said the sale would create 750 manufacturing jobs in New Jersey.

Six retired Air Force generals and former Air Force Secretary Michael W. Wynne wrote Cornyn a letter in October, voicing their support for the Taiwan bill and for continued exports of military hardware to Taiwan.

The F-16 sale "is in the security interest of Taiwan and the United States alike," they said.

As the Defense Department "has consistently reported in recent years," the group wrote, "the cross-strait balance continues to shift in China's favor. At the same time, Taiwan's aging air force has resulted in an erosion of the qualitative military advantage Taiwan has historically enjoyed and which has long served as a strong deterrent against Chinese military aggression."

Besides Wynne, the signatories included retired generals John M. Loh, William R. Looney III, Lester L. Lyles, and Lloyd W. Newton and retired lieutenant generals David A. Deptula and Michael M. Dunn. Dunn is now president and CEO of the Air Force Association.

The authors noted that China is pursuing anti-access, area-denial strategies that could block the US from helping Taiwan in a military crisis. The US obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act, they said, "are, arguably, more important today than when first signed into law in 1979."

The former USAF leaders also noted that while Taiwan has about 400 combat aircraft, "far fewer" than that number are operationally capable. Taiwan has requested purchase of new F-16s since 2006, but has been rebuffed, they noted.

"It is our assessment that the sale of F-16C/D aircraft to Taiwan will significantly help to restore the balance of power in the Taiwan Strait, increase stability in the region, and decrease the likelihood that that the United States will one day have to intervene in a military action between China and Taiwan," they wrote. ■