

Bipartisan consternation; Our own worst enemy; Don't forget the nukes; Points for realism

PANEL: SEQUESTRATION IS A "CRISIS"

Soon after the Pentagon released its 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review earlier this year, a dissatisfied Congress asked a bipartisan panel of experts to look it over and give a second opinion. The panel has reported back, with a blunt conclusion: The US military isn't big enough to do the stated job, and the Budget Control Act, which inflicts deep defense cuts through sequestration, must be repealed. Now.

Sequestration has imposed a "readiness crisis," and Congress should appropriate funds to reverse it "on an emergency basis," according to the 10-member National Defense Panel, co-chaired by former Defense Secretary William J. Perry and retired Army Gen. John P. Abizaid. Sequestration constitutes a "serious strategic misstep" that is "ultimately self-defeating" and will put the US in grave danger for years to come, the panel said in its report, "Ensuring a Strong US Defense for the Future."

The forces called for in the QDR "clearly exceed" those resulting from sequester-level spending, the panel pointed out, making the national military strategy impossible to execute. The members also flatly rejected the Pentagon's underlying notion that expected funding should play a big role in determining strategy.

The "QDR is not the long-term planning document envisioned by Congress," the panel said, "because it was dominated by the shifting constraints of various possible budget levels." The panelists said they believe "national defense needs should drive national defense budgets, not the opposite," and recommended that Congress ask the Pentagon for a plan to build needed forces "without undue emphasis on budgetary constraints."

Explaining the QDR at its release, defense leaders said it's pointless to identify needs that won't be funded, insisting the document has to be "realistic."

A review of defense requirements not driven by dollars will likely conclude that the US "must prepare for what will almost certainly be a much more challenging future" in national security, the panel said.

In addition, the NDP urged expansion of the Navy and Air Force and said the planned drawdown in Army end strength "goes too far." The Air Force, the NDP pointed out, "now fields the smallest and oldest force of combat aircraft in its history" and will shrink even further "to approximately 50 percent of the current inventory by 2019" if sequester continues. The Navy is headed toward a fleet of "260 ships or less" but needs between 323 and 346 to meet its obligations, the panel said. All of these force levels are "unacceptable," it said.

Because the scenarios that might involve the US in a new major war are multiplying rapidly, the group insisted there be no delay in getting the US military back up to speed.

TWO WARS, NO WAITING

Since the early 1990s and the end of the Cold War, the US has used the so-called "two-war" scenario as both an ersatz strategy and force-sizing device. It calls for the US to have enough forces to prevail rapidly in one major regional war while being able to deter or stop an aggressor in another region until the first conflict is resolved—at which point the full force can be brought to bear and obtain victory in the second war. In recent years, the idea has been summarized as "win-hold-win."

The NDP said it finds "the logic of the two-war construct to be as powerful as ever" but that it needs some fine-tuning.

It nominated its own take on the two-war construct, as follows: "The United States armed forces should be sized and shaped to deter and defeat large-scale aggression in one theater, preferably in concert with regional allies and partners, while simultaneously and decisively deterring or thwarting opportunistic aggression in multiple other theaters by denying adversaries' objectives or punishing them with unacceptable costs, all while defending the US homeland and maintaining missions

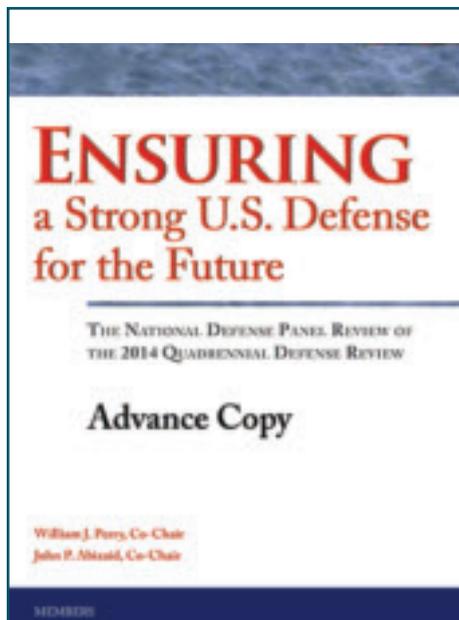
such as active global counterterrorism operations."

The two-war model was useful in the early '90s and remains so, but since then, "the international security environment has deteriorated," while the size of the US military has declined, the NDP said, urging a return to force levels of the early post-Cold War period.

Today, the US "could plausibly be called upon to deter or fight in any number of regions in overlapping time frames—on the Korean peninsula, in the East or South China Sea, South Asia, in the Middle East, the Trans-Sahel, Sub-Saharan Africa, in Europe, and possibly elsewhere." It's a more dangerous world than it was when the two-war construct was new and requires more capacity as well as capability, the panelists said.

Everything that can be done to save money should be done, the NDP said, noting there's certainly more efficiency to be found in defense management, reducing acquisition costs, and cutting the Pentagon's in-house health care expenses, now nearing \$60 billion a year.

Moreover, "the panel believes that the costs of maintaining a quality all-volunteer force need to be reduced" to avoid cutting



force structure, readiness, or modernization further. The NDP applauded the formation of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, expressing its hope that the other panel will find a way to “be fair” to taxpayers, serving and retired personnel alike.

Likewise, the NDP called on Congress to act responsibly and allow another base realignment and closure, or BRAC, process “as soon as possible” because DOD has 20 percent more infrastructure than it needs. “Delay is wasteful,” the panelists said.

The US should up its presence in South Asian waters and the Middle East, to reassure allies “of our capability and our resolve.” Specifically, the NDP said the US military must “deter Iran” and present a counterweight to “the rising tide of violence in Iraq and Syria.”

RUSSIA, TECHNOLOGY, AND NUKES

The NDP didn’t criticize the Obama Administration’s so-called “pivot” to the Pacific, but said that Russian adventurism makes it all the more important that NATO “bolster the security of its own frontline states, especially in the Baltics and across southern Europe, but also in Poland, lest they be subject to intimidation and subversion.” The US “must lead the alliance in this regard,” and the NDP suggested that Europe is a “net producer of security.”

The NDP also wants “targeted reinvestment in research and development” so the US can maintain or regain a lead in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, “space architecture, cyber, ... joint and coalition command and control, air superiority, long-range and precision-strike capability, undersea and surface naval warfare, electric and directed energy weapons, strategic lift, and logistical sustainment.”

While it wasn’t in the NDP’s purview to review US nuclear strategy or capability, the members did say that they “are quite concerned about the aging of [US] nuclear forces,” and the fact that some elements of it “are approaching obsolescence.” Fixing that “would be a substantial cost on top of the already costly increase in general purpose forces recommended in this report.” The NDP recommended a successor panel to review the modernization of nuclear arsenal, in search of a “sustainable program plan” free of the “neglect and political whiplash it has endured since the end of the Cold War.”

The nation certainly does have to get its “fiscal house in order,” but fixing it by slashing defense—especially given that defense had already given up almost a half-trillion in projected spending before the Budget Control Act was enacted—is the wrong thing to do, the panelists said.

“American military forces will be at high risk to accomplish the nation’s defense strategy in the near future unless recommendations of the kind we make in this report are speedily adopted.”

Besides Perry and Abizaid, NDP members included retired Marine Corps Gen. James E. Cartwright; Ambassador Eric S. Edelman, former undersecretary of defense for policy; Michèle D. Flournoy, also a former USD for policy; retired Army Lt. Gen. Francis H. Kearney; retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples; former Rep. Jim Marshall (D-Ga.); retired Air Force Gen. Gregory S. Martin; and former Sen. Jim Talent (R-Mo.).

THE AIR FORCE ADDS UP

Alone among the armed forces, the Air Force’s preliminary budget submission to the defense leadership—which includes a daunting list of new gear—seems well-balanced and paid for with offsets, the Pentagon’s acquisition, technology, and logistics chief said in September.

Frank Kendall, Pentagon weapons czar, said at the COMDEF 2014 conference in Washington, D.C., that the services submitted their program objective memoranda proposals just after Labor Day, and only the Air Force’s appears to be “reasonably balanced.” Given USAF’s moves to shrink its size, both in people and aircraft, Kendall said he sees no reason why the service can’t afford the F-35 fighter, Long-Range Strike Bomber, the KC-46 tanker, a replacement for the E-8 Joint STARS, and the T-X trainer.

That impressive list is “still affordable,” at the budget levels proposed by President Obama, Kendall said, but if sequestration goes back into force, it will have to be rethought.

“There’s the problem, of course, with ... Congress agreeing to anything ... we want to do [that] will save money,” he said.

The Defense Department has asked Congress to accept “reductions in the growth rate of compensation,” as well as a BRAC, to “lay-up some cruisers,” retire the A-10 fleet, and realign Army aviation.

However, “the answer to all of these, so far, seems to be, basically, ‘No.’” That will present the Pentagon with unsavory choices, Kendall said. Without the shifts to new equipment and research and development, “I’m deeply concerned about the fact that we are at risk of losing our technological superiority in certain areas of warfare.”

The Air Force’s sister branches haven’t stepped up yet to the unhappy task of shrinking in some areas to pay for needed modernization, Kendall said.

“The other services, I think, are trying to preserve different parts of their force structure, and they’re not quite as in balance, perhaps,” as the Air Force, Kendall observed.

The Army “has made a decision to emphasize end strength,” but has “very little left in terms of modernization.” The Navy is making an effort toward striking a balance, but is too focused on shipbuilding, Kendall added. Meanwhile, USAF has made the “difficult trade-offs” necessary to have a robust modernization plan.

Kendall said he’s concerned that certain programs that don’t represent a major platform but are “very important to the department,” such as electronic warfare, missile systems, wide-area surveillance systems, and communications, may not be getting all the attention they deserve.

The submission of the POMs marks the beginning of the season of budget horse trading, in which Kendall’s shop looks at the service proposals and suggests things AT&L believes “should be in the service budgets but aren’t there.”

Kendall said he’s got grave concerns about research and development. The defensewide R&D budget has plummeted from \$80 billion to \$60 billion, he said—a “major cut.”

“That’s a lot of engineers who’ve lost their jobs,” he said.

Consequently, Kendall is pushing for “tailored” R&D that will focus on what the Pentagon believes will be the game changers of the future.

The department’s new deputy secretary, Robert O. Work, is “looking for what he calls the ‘technology offset strategy,’” Kendall reported. In the 1950s, that meant tactical nuclear weapons, and in the 1980s to 2000s, it was “precision weapons, stealth, networked forces, and wide-area surveillance systems, ... the capabilities we demonstrated [in] the first Gulf War ... and that we’ve continued to rely on in the operations that we’ve done over the ... 20 years since then.”

Without giving away all the new technology pushes, Kendall suggested they will be in the areas of “things that allow us to act from longer range” as well as unmanned systems and “autonomy.”

There will also be a new shift away from “the reliance on small numbers of very expensive objects.” In space, for example, “we need to start looking at how to get quantity into the mix at a reasonable cost.”