

U.S. Strategy, Force Plans, and the FY2010 Defense Budget: The Questions Still to Be Answered

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Secretary of Defense Robert Gates provided the first indications of how he will seek to shift the U.S. defense budget and program in his press briefing of April 6, 2009. This briefing, however, raised at least as many questions as it answered. It also is unusual in that it was not accompanied by any charts or detailed background data, and no material that supplements his comments has been issued by OSD (Public Affairs).

An Uncertain and Undeveloped Context

Part of the reason for this lack of detail may lie in the need to rush some decisions out in time to meet budget deadlines, and before the secretary had time to develop all of the necessary supporting plans and analysis. The secretary said during his briefing that

“My decisions have been almost exclusively influenced by factors other than simply finding a way to balance the books or fit under the “top line”—as is normally the case with most budget exercises. Instead, these recommendations are the product of a holistic assessment of capabilities, requirements, risks and needs for the purpose of shifting this department in a different strategic direction. Let me be clear: I would have made virtually all of the decisions and recommendations announced today regardless of the department’s top line budget number.”

Perhaps, but according to some press reports, Secretary Gates was responding to new budget guidance from the White House and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that flatly rejected a previous request for an addition of \$60 billion to the past DoD budget baseline to pay for what the *Washington Post* referred to as Gordon England’s “fairy dust”—an effort described as “fairy dust” because the department sought to solve its procurement, manpower, and resource crises—and the issues raised in the previous Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)—by throwing more money at them.

Even if none of this reporting is true, Secretary Gates only began a series of massive adjustments to the U.S. defense posture that will play out over at least a decade. It will address most of the issues involved at a conceptual level and focus on a few select program decisions that will have to be followed by major changes in U.S. spending in the outyears, changes in U.S. force and procurement plans, and a massive long-term restructuring of the U.S. defense program budget.

It is also clear that there will still have to be an FY2010 supplemental for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, the Department of Defense is also committed to yet another QDR this year, although it is far from clear as yet that it will be any better tied to a clear force plan, procurement plan, and future year defense program and budget (FYDP) than its largely meaningless predecessors.

Furthermore, if the new administration is serious about creating an integrated national security strategy, at some point it will have to put forward an integrated approach to civil-military strategy, programs, and budget covering the Department of Defense, State Department, and other federal departments and agencies—a massive but necessary reform in the way that the U.S. approaches national security and one that could make the rationale for the FY2010 defense budget largely moot. If nothing else, it may be impossible to modernize the U.S. security posture until the chaos, lack of focus, and waste in the foreign aid efforts in wars like Iraq and Afghanistan are addressed. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has already warned about these problems, which are exemplified by the lack of any integrated plans, budget, and measures of effectiveness for the State Department, DoD, and USAID efforts.

Secretary Gates' Stated Goals

The secretary of defense did make some of his intentions clear. He said that his “proposed changes are interconnected and cannot be properly communicated or understood in isolation from one another. Collectively, they represent a budget crafted to reshape the priorities of America’s defense establishment. If approved, these recommendations will profoundly reform how this department does business...”

He also said that his decisions had three principal objectives:

- *First, to reaffirm our commitment to take care of the all-volunteer force, which, in my view represents America’s greatest strategic asset;*
- *Second, to rebalance this department’s programs in order to institutionalize and enhance our capabilities to fight the wars we are in today and the scenarios we are most likely to face in the years ahead, while at the same time providing a hedge against other risks and contingencies.*
- *Third, in order to do this, we must reform how and what we buy, meaning a fundamental overhaul of our approach to procurement, acquisition, and contracting.*

Unanswered Questions

Secretary Gates did provide many important details about the strategy, program, and budget he sought, but there were many, many areas where he did not. Even if one focuses on a few key areas, the secretary raised far more questions than he answered. This becomes clear when one examines his individual statements

• Choices between “Conventional,” “Irregular,” and “Mixed Warfare”

Even as we begin to shift resources and institutional weight towards supporting the current wars and other potential irregular campaigns, the United States must still contend with the security challenges posed by the military forces of other countries—from those actively hostile to those at strategic crossroads. Last year’s National Defense Strategy concluded that although U.S. predominance in conventional warfare is not

unchallenged, it is sustainable for the medium term given current trends. This year's budget deliberations focused on what programs are necessary to deter aggression, project power when necessary, and protect our interests and allies around the globe. To this end, I will recommend new or additional investments and shifts in several key areas: Some will say I am too focused on the wars we are in and not enough on future threats. The allocation of dollars in this budget definitely belies that claim. But, it is important to remember that every defense dollar spent to over-insure against a remote or diminishing risk—or, in effect, to “run up the score” in a capability where the United States is already dominant—is a dollar not available to take care of our people, reset the force, win the wars we are in, and improve capabilities in areas where we are underinvested and potentially vulnerable. That is a risk I will not take. To boost global partnership capacity efforts, we will increase funding by \$500 million. These initiatives include training and equipping foreign militaries to undertake counter terrorism and stability operations.

Some equipment decisions will have a major impact on conventional warfighting capabilities in the future, but there are no clear force plans or details that explain what choices have actually been made about the strategic goals for U.S. warfighting capabilities and how these translate into shifts in force plans, future equipment strength, and budgets.

• Military, Civilian, and Contractor Manpower and End Strength

Fully protect and properly fund the growth in military end strength in the base budget. This means completing the growth in the Army and Marines while halting reductions in the Air Force and the Navy. Accomplishing this will require a nearly \$11 billion increase above the FY09 budget level. This budget will support these goals by increasing the size of defense acquisition workforce, converting 11,000 contractors and hiring an additional 9,000 government acquisition professionals by 201—beginning with 4,100 in FY10. A final recommendation that will have a significant impact on how defense organizations are staffed and operated. Under this budget request, we will reduce the number of support service contractors from our current 39 percent of the workforce to the pre-2001 level of 26 percent and replace them with full-time government employees. Our goal is to hire as many as 13,000 new civil servants in FY10 to replace contractors and up to 30,000 new civil servants in place of contractors over the next five years.

Funding current requests for military end strength is important, but it does not address what the end strength should be, whether it will be affordable in terms of equipment and sustainability, and how it should be linked to a detailed force plan for each service and outyear budget. It is also painfully obvious that the United States has lacked the forces to come close to the “two major regional contingency” strategy it claimed to have in the past.

It also does not address the key questions that the Afghan and Iraq Wars have raised about the proper mix of military, career civilians, and contractors in an era when our current force posture seems to require as many civilians and contractors as military. A

budget and force plan that only examines military end strength, rather than all manpower needs, is essentially meaningless even if one ignores procurement and operations and maintenance.

More broadly, and even more critically, no decision is made about finding the proper balance, roles and missions, and readiness and equipment levels for any element of the active forces, reserves, and national guard—issues with critical outyear resource, force planning, and mission capability and which are inevitably affected by the past overdeployment of all those force elements involved in combat in Iraq and “AfPak.”

• **Military Entitlements Problems**

Continue the steady growth in medical research and development by requesting \$400 million more than last year. Recognize the critical and permanent nature of wounded, ill and injured, traumatic brain injury, and psychological health programs. This means institutionalizing and properly funding these efforts in the base budget and increasing overall spending by \$300 million. The department will spend over \$47 billion on healthcare in FY10. Increase funding by \$200 million for improvements in child care, spousal support, lodging, and education. Many of these programs have been funded in the past by supplementals. We must move away from ad hoc funding of long-term commitments. Thus, we have added money to each of these areas and all will be permanently and properly carried in the base defense budget. Together they represent an increase in base budget funding of \$13 billion from last year. As I told the Congress in January, our struggles to put the defense bureaucracies on a war footing these past few years have revealed underlying flaws in the priorities, cultural preferences, and reward structures of America’s defense establishment—a set of institutions largely arranged to prepare for conflicts against other modern armies, navies, and air forces. Programs to directly support, protect, and care for the man or woman at the front have been developed ad hoc and funded outside the base budget. Put simply, until recently there has not been an institutional home in the Defense Department for today’s warfighter. Our contemporary wartime needs must receive steady long-term funding and a bureaucratic constituency similar to conventional modernization programs. I intend to use the FY10 budget to begin this process.

This analysis dodges around the near crisis that the Congress has caused by grossly overfunding military entitlements—in spite of repeated efforts by senior military leaders to place reasonable limits on them—for domestic political reasons. The end result is to raise the cost per soldier to the point where it becomes less and less possible to fund the needed overall military end strength. Ironically, military entitlements are becoming a serious threat to the U.S. military, and this needs to be openly addressed and discussed.

• **Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance**

...we will increase intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support for the warfighter in the base budget by some \$2 billion. This will include:

- *Fielding and sustaining 50 Predator-class unmanned aerial vehicle orbits by FY11 and maximizing their production. This capability, which has been in such high demand in both Iraq and Afghanistan, will now be permanently funded in the base budget. It will represent a 62 percent increase in capability over the current level and 127 percent from over a year ago.*
- *Increasing manned ISR capabilities such as the turbo-prop aircraft deployed so successfully as part of “Task Force Odin” in Iraq.*
- *Initiating research and development on a number of ISR enhancements and experimental platforms optimized for today’s battlefield.*

To improve cyberspace capabilities, we will increase the number of cyber experts this department can train from 80 students per year to 250 per year by FY11.

Third, we will terminate the \$26 billion Transformational Satellite (TSAT) program, and instead will purchase two more Advanced Extremely High Frequency (AEHF) satellites as alternatives.

These are important changes growing out of U.S. experience in Iraq and “AfPak,” but they cannot be addressed without a much clearer picture of the overall architecture for the IS&R effort, particularly when it is increasingly tied to combat capabilities like unmanned combat air vehicles (UCAVs), 5th generation combat aircraft, and the army’s Future Combat Systems (FCS).

More generally, the potential vulnerability of IS&R systems to cyberwarfare and space warfare is not discussed in a meaningful way.

There also is a need to make major reforms in the overall IS&R structure to deal with massive cost escalation and delays in the U.S. satellite program and calls for more funding of human intelligence. These may be addressed, however, in the classified portion of the decisions made by the secretary.

• **Army and Ground Forces**

We will stop the growth of Army Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) at 45 versus 48 while maintaining the planned increase in end strength of 547,000. This will ensure that we have better-manned units ready to deploy, and help put an end to the routine use of stop loss. This step will also lower the risk of hollowing the force. Sixth, and finally, we will significantly restructure the Army’s Future Combat Systems (FCS) program. We will retain and accelerate the initial increment of the program to spin out technology enhancements to all combat brigades. However, I have concluded that there are significant unanswered questions concerning the FCS vehicle design strategy. I am also concerned that, despite some adjustments, the FCS vehicles—where lower weight, higher fuel efficiency, and greater informational awareness are expected to compensate for less armor—do not adequately reflect the lessons of counterinsurgency and close quarters combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. The current vehicle program, developed nine years ago, does not include a role for our recent \$25 billion investment in the MRAP vehicles being used to good effect in today’s conflicts.

Further, I am troubled by the terms of the current contract, particularly its very unattractive fee structure that gives the government little leverage to promote cost efficiency. Because the vehicle part of the FCS program is currently estimated to cost over \$87 billion, I believe we must have more confidence in the program strategy, requirements, and maturity of the technologies before proceeding further. Accordingly, I will recommend that we cancel the vehicle component of the current FCS program, re-evaluate the requirements, technology, and approach—and then re-launch the Army's vehicle modernization program, including a competitive bidding process. An Army vehicle modernization program designed to meet the needs of the full spectrum of conflict is essential. But because of its size and importance, we must get the acquisition right, even at the cost of delay.

These decisions may deal with the need for cost containment—although no outyear data are provided and there is no way to tell what will happen in any area that Secretary Gates addresses after FY2010. They clearly, however, do not provide any picture of the future size, force structure, equipment, readiness, or any other aspect of U.S. ground forces—army or marine corps.

The decisions that *are* made seem likely to require at least two years of detailed planning before the army can begin to create a stable path toward modernization, and no mention is made of the serious problems in the marine corps equipment program or the risks inherent in its dependence on ships that may not be built or could be delayed for years.

More broadly, no mention is made of the need to make difficult near-term decisions to deal with the wear of equipment because of the Iraq and “AfPak” wars—an issue sometimes called “reset.” This will be compounded by the fact that substantial amounts of equipment will be left in Iraq and later in Afghanistan, the increased operational tempo in the AfPak conflict, which will probably continue for at least three more years, and the fact that new equipment cancellations and/or program slippage will make it more difficult to decide whether to rehabilitate worn equipment, replace it with existing types, or buy new and more modern systems.

• **Aircraft Procurement and Force Size**

We will also spend \$500 million more in the base budget than last year to increase our capacity to field and sustain more helicopters—a capability that is in urgent demand in Afghanistan. Today, the primary limitation on helicopter capacity is not airframes but shortages of maintenance crews and pilots. So our focus will be on recruiting and training more Army helicopter crews. To grow our special operations capabilities, we will increase personnel by more than 2,800 or five percent and will buy more special forces-optimized lift, mobility, and refueling aircraft. To sustain U.S. air superiority, I am committed to building a fifth generation tactical fighter capability that can be produced in quantity at sustainable cost. Therefore, I will recommend increasing the buy of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter from the 14 aircraft bought in FY09 to 30 in FY10, with corresponding funding increases from \$6.8 billion to \$11.2 billion. We would plan to buy 513 F-35s over the five-year defense plan, and, ultimately, plan to buy 2,443. For naval

aviation, we will buy 31 FA-18s in FY10. We will retire 250 of the oldest Air Force tactical fighter aircraft in FY10. We will end production of the F-22 fighter at 187 – representing 183 planes plus four recommended for inclusion in the FY 2009 supplemental. To replace the Air Force’s aging tanker fleet, we will maintain the KC-X aerial re-fueling tanker schedule and funding, with the intent to solicit bids this summer. We will not pursue a development program for a follow-on Air Force bomber until we have a better understanding of the need, the requirement, and the technology. With regard to airlift, we will complete production of the C-17 airlifter program this fiscal year. Our analysis concludes that we have enough C-17s with the 205 already in the force and currently in production. I recommend that we terminate the VH-71 presidential helicopter. This program was originally designed to provide 23 helicopters to support the president at a cost of \$6.5 billion. Today, the program is estimated to cost over \$13 billion, has fallen six years behind schedule, and runs the risk of not delivering the requested capability. Some have suggested that we should adjust the program by buying only the lower capability “increment one” option. I believe this is neither advisable nor affordable. Increment One helicopters do not meet requirements and are estimated to have only a five- to 10-year useful life. This compares to the current VH-3 presidential helicopters that are 30 to 40 years old. We will promptly develop options for an FY11 follow-on program. ... We will terminate the Air Force Combat Search and Rescue X (CSAR-X) helicopter program. This program has a troubled acquisition history and raises the fundamental question of whether this important mission can only be accomplished by yet another single-service solution with single-purpose aircraft. We will take a fresh look at the requirement behind this program and develop a more sustainable approach.

The U.S. Air Force and other services have shown virtually no capability to create a stable, affordable path toward the modernization of our air fleet, bring programs in on time with the promised effectiveness, and tie procurement to either an affordable approach to deploying new technology or cope with the rapid aging of a fleet engaged in almost continuous combat.

The secretary has proposed a series of one-time fixes that does not define future force plans, programs, or procurement goals and leaves virtually every aspect of future aircraft modernization unresolved. These decisions also do not address the growing problems in creating a stable, competitive industrial base for the U.S. defense industry and bring future procurements into balance with both probable resources and maintaining a high technology edge in an affordable form.

They are a one-year fix at best to a crucial problem in both shaping our future force posture and developing affordable forces. They also do not address the key past problem of trade-offs between procurement expenditures and active force structure, particularly as measured in total fleet size and unit equipment numbers.

• Fleet Modernization and Ship Building

We will increase the buy of Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) – a key capability for presence,

stability, and counterinsurgency operations in coastal regions – from two to three ships in FY 2010. Our goal is to eventually acquire 55 of these ships. To improve our inter-theater lift capacity, we will increase the charter of Joint High Speed Vessel (JHSV) ships from two to four until our own production program begins deliveries in 2011. We will also add \$200 million to fund conversion of six additional Aegis ships to provide ballistic missile defense capabilities. In FY10, we will begin the replacement program for the Ohio class ballistic missile submarine program. The healthy margin of dominance at sea provided by America's existing battle fleet makes it possible and prudent to slow production of several major surface combatants and other maritime programs. We will shift the Navy Aircraft Carrier program to a five-year build cycle placing it on a more fiscally sustainable path. This will result in 10 carriers after 2040. We will delay the Navy CG-X next generation cruiser program to revisit both the requirements and acquisition strategy. We will delay amphibious ship and sea-basing programs such as the 11th Landing Platform Dock (LPD) ship and the Mobile Landing Platform (MLP) SHIP to FY11 in order to assess costs and analyze the amount of these capabilities the nation needs....In this request, we will include funds to complete the buy of two navy destroyers in FY10. These plans depend on being able to work out contracts to allow the Navy to efficiently build all three DDG-1000 class ships at Bath Iron Works in Maine and to smoothly restart the DDG-51 Aegis Destroyer program at Northrop Grumman's Ingalls shipyard in Mississippi. Even if these arrangements work out, the DDG-1000 program would end with the third ship and the DDG-51 would continue to be built in both yards. If our efforts with industry are unsuccessful, the department will likely build only a single prototype DDG-1000 at Bath and then review our options for restarting production of the DDG-51. If the department is left to pursue this alternative, it would unfortunately reduce our overall procurement of ships and cut workload in both shipyards.

The U.S. Navy has failed to create a stable, affordable path toward the modernization of its fleet, bring programs in on time with the promised effectiveness, and tie procurement to either an affordable approach to deploying new technology or cope with the rapid aging of a fleet engaged in almost continuous combat.

The secretary has proposed a series of one-time fixes that does not define future force plans, programs, or procurement goals, and leaves virtually every aspect of naval modernization unresolved. Once again, the proposed decisions do not address the growing problems in creating a stable, competitive industrial base for the U.S. defense industry, and bring future procurements into balance with both probable resources and maintaining a high technology edge in an affordable form.

A one-year fix at best to a crucial problem in both shaping our future force posture and developing affordable forces. Once again, these decisions do not address the key past problem of trade-offs between procurement expenditures and active force structure, particularly as measured in total fleet size and unit equipment numbers.

- **Nuclear Posture**

With regard to our nuclear and strategic forces:

- *We will examine all of our strategic requirements during the Quadrennial Defense Review, the Nuclear Posture Review, and in light of Post-START arms control negotiations.*

No decisions taken.

- **Missile Defense**

Fourth, in the area of missile defense:

- *We will restructure the program to focus on the rogue state and theater missile threat.*

- *We will not increase the number of current ground-based interceptors in Alaska as had been planned. But we will continue to robustly fund continued research and development to improve the capability we already have to defend against long-range rogue missile threats – a threat North Korea’s missile launch this past weekend reminds us is real.*

- *We will cancel the second airborne laser (ABL) prototype aircraft. We will keep the existing aircraft and shift the program to an R&D effort. The ABL program has significant affordability and technology problems and the program’s proposed operational role is highly questionable.*

- *We will terminate the Multiple Kill Vehicle (MKV) program because of its significant technical challenges and the need to take a fresh look at the requirement. To better protect our forces and those of our allies in theater from ballistic missile attack, we will add \$700 million to field more of our most capable theater missile defense systems, specifically the terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) System and Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) programs.*

Overall, the Missile Defense Agency program will be reduced by \$1.4 billion.

Once again, what may be necessary one-shot fixes for cost and individual program reasons, provide no sense of future direction, architecture, procurement, or deployment for either strategic or theater missile defenses. No mention of how this will affect plans for Europe, cooperation with Israel, or the needs of the Arab Gulf states in dealing with Iran. No discussion of the problems in getting the services ready to handle the transfer of theater systems from the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO), and links to arms control issues. No discussion of the problems in developing proper cost projections and test and evaluation methods. These are all practical areas that need to be addressed in any workable strategy, force plan, and program budget.

- **Interactions Between Department of Defense and State Department and Homeland Security Programs**

Not discussed in spite of calls for a “comprehensive” approach, and major problems in mission capability and budget overlaps or shortfalls.

- **Cost Containment and Procurement and RDT&E Reform**

In today's environment, maintaining our technological and conventional edge requires a dramatic change in the way we acquire military equipment. I believe this needed reform requires three fundamental steps.

First, this department must consistently demonstrate the commitment and leadership to stop programs that significantly exceed their budget or which spend limited tax dollars to buy more capability than the nation needs. Our conventional modernization goals should be tied to the actual and prospective capabilities of known future adversaries – not by what might be technologically feasible for a potential adversary given unlimited time and resources. I believe the decisions I am proposing accomplish this step.

Second, we must ensure that requirements are reasonable and technology is adequately mature to allow the department to successfully execute the programs. Again, my decisions act on this principle by terminating a number of programs where the requirements were truly in the “exquisite” category and the technologies required were not reasonably available to affordably meet the programs’ cost or schedule goals.

Third, realistically estimate program costs, provide budget stability for the programs we initiate, adequately staff the government acquisition team, and provide disciplined and constant oversight.

We must constantly guard against so-called “requirements creep,” validate the maturity of technology at milestones, fund programs to independent cost estimates, and demand stricter contract terms and conditions. I am confident that if we stick to these steps, we will significantly improve the performance of our defense acquisition programs. But it takes more than mere pronouncements or fancy studies or reports. It takes acting on these principles by making tough decisions and sticking to them going forward.

I welcome the legislative initiative of Senators Levin and McCain to help address some of these issues and look forward to working with the Congress in this regard. Fully reforming defense acquisition also requires recognizing the challenges of today's battlefield and constantly changing adversary. This requires an acquisition system that can perform with greater urgency and agility. We need greater funding flexibility and the ability to streamline our requirements and acquisition execution procedures.

The perennial procurement and contracting cycle – going back many decades – of adding layer upon layer of cost and complexity onto fewer and fewer platforms that take longer and longer to build must come to an end. There is broad agreement on the need for acquisition and contracting reform in the Department of Defense. There have been enough studies. Enough hand-wringing. Enough rhetoric. Now is the time for action. ... I will close by noting that it is one thing to speak generally about the need for budget discipline and acquisition and contract reform. It is quite another to make tough choices about specific systems and defense priorities based solely on the national interest and then stick to those decisions over time. To do this, the president and I look forward to working with the Congress, industry, and many others to accomplish what is in the best interest of our nation as a whole.

The secretary advanced some key issues and priorities for reform. Unfortunately, exactly the same comments could have been made during the Eisenhower administration—and were.