

# DEFENSE DOSSIER



*FEBRUARY 2012*

*ISSUE 2*

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- *THE DANGERS OF A NUCLEAR DRAWDOWN*
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**American Foreign  
Policy Council**

# DEFENSE DOSSIER

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## ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE AND AMERICAN SECURITY

By Eric Hannis

One of our nation's most glaring national security "Achilles Heels," the threat of an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) incident, has received new attention of late in the popular media as well as the Republican presidential debates. This focus is certainly welcome, but it is far from typical; beyond a small circle of think tanks and policy wonks inside the Washington Beltway, few people even know that this threat exists.

So what is an electromagnetic pulse? An EMP is a burst of electromagnetic radiation that is usually caused by either a very high yield explosion—such as a nuclear detonation – or by a natural solar eruption that periodically emanates from our sun. If the explosion or solar burst is strong enough, the resulting high energy electromagnetic fields can produce electrical voltages so intense that they can destroy electrical components used in everyday items, such as computers and communications equipment, as well as large infrastructure equipment and transformers used in our electric grid.

### New salience

The EMP threat has been known for some time. During the Cold War, we were aware that the Soviets maintained an EMP attack

plan in their portfolio of nuclear options. Our primary deterrent to such a Soviet EMP attack was the same as for other scenarios at the time: simple nuclear retaliation. We knew that were this attack to be used, it would likely be only one adversary launching it. It was an effective and logical deterrent.

But in the intervening decades, we have become ever more dependent on our information technologies (IT) and computer-based infrastructure systems, thus making us an even more appealing and likely target for an EMP attack. In addition, since nuclear and missile technologies have spread to even more unpredictable and "rogue" nation states, relying solely on a strategy of nuclear deterrence is increasingly insufficient.

The stakes are grave indeed. One successful high altitude EMP detonation has the capability to disable electronic systems that could result in our population plunging back into the 18<sup>th</sup> century overnight. While immediate and direct deaths from an EMP detonation would be minimal, associated long term mortality would be very high. Multiple successful detonations above the continental United States could potentially result in the entire nation becoming completely incapable of utilizing any

*Eric Hannis is Executive Director at Etherton and Associates, a defense consulting firm, as well as a Lt Col in the Air Force reserve. Previously, he was the Military Legislative Assistant to Rep. Randy Forbes, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's Readiness Subcommittee.*

technologies dependent on electricity. Very quickly, our just-in-time and highly efficient infrastructure systems that supply food, energy, and transportation would be rendered inoperable. Hospitals and emergency services could be incapacitated. Water would not flow, vehicles would not run, and food would spoil and go undelivered. The result would be starvation, disease, and lawlessness on a scale not experienced in modern times.

The capability to deliver an EMP attack, moreover, is expanding. Whereas decades ago only a handful of states possessed the capability to create an electromagnetic pulse event, today the associated knowledge has become more diffuse – and the ability to do so more widespread.

Two of the three nations that were named by the Bush administration as members of the “Axis of Evil,” North Korea and Iran, are known to be developing capabilities to launch EMP attacks. North Korea is developing several technologies that could allow it to launch an EMP attack.<sup>1</sup> These include long-range nuclear-capable missile technologies, according to recent testimony to Congress by the Defense Intelligence Agency. Moreover, according to South Korean military officials, North Korea is in the process of finishing the development of a “Super-EMP” nuclear warhead. Although it lacks an ICBM capability, Iran too could cause devastating harm to the U.S. through a ship-launched EMP attack. The Iranian regime is known to have conducted missile launches off surface

vessels in the Caspian Sea – tests that bear a striking resemblance to EMP launch exercises.<sup>2</sup>

But EMP attacks need not be launched directly by an adversary nation-state. Iran, or another rogue state, could use a proxy organization to launch a missile from a freighter in the Atlantic. Moreover, we also have known for some time that non-state terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda have been urgently trying to acquire nuclear weapons.

However, an attack is not the only way that an EMP event could happen. Many scientists

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believe there is a strong chance that impending solar eruptions, called “coronal mass ejections” (CME), have the potential to cause the same effects as an EMP detonation on terrestrial systems. In fact, many scientists believe the question is not “if” such storms will occur, but “when.” Solar storms of

strong magnitude erupt in 11-year cycles, and our sun’s solar storm activity is expected to peak in 2013. One of the biggest threats from a CME event is the potential damage it could cause to our electric grid. Power surges caused by solar particles can destroy giant transformers. The costs from the loss of power to our most vulnerable east coast cities for even weeks or months could easily reach the billions of dollars. And even if the CMEs that occur between now and next year do not cause massive disruptions or damage to our electric infrastructures, our continued and increasing reliance on electronic systems

means that we will be even more vulnerable during the next 11-year cycle of solar storms.

### A lagging response

While we clearly are aware of these current EMP threats, both natural and man-made, what have we done to prepare our nation? The answer, unfortunately, is very little.

The United States first began to seriously address the current EMP threat through the establishment of a formal commission (known as the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse Attack) back in 2001. Following years of study, this blue-ribbon panel produced a thorough analysis of the potential effect of EMP attacks, and provided the government with concrete steps needed to safeguard our nation.<sup>3</sup> Yet to date, very few of the Commission's recommendations actually have been implemented.

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In its recommendations, the Commission focused its attention on a quartet of basic steps necessary to prepare for and deter an EMP incident. These include:

#### Infrastructure hardening

Hardening our infrastructure systems and post-incident planning will allow our most important systems to function after an EMP incident. It will also make us a less appealing target, signaling to hostile nations that they would only be able to hamper us temporarily – and then only at potentially catastrophic retaliatory cost.

Unfortunately, however, the federal agencies charged with post-incident planning and hardening of our electric grid have failed to move beyond the theory and discussion phase. The Department of Energy (DoE), likewise, has done little to prepare for an EMP incident. While hardening our entire electric grid is unrealistic, DoE could do much to mitigate the effects of an EMP incident by establishing plans, in coordination with industry, on how to most efficiently restore electric power after an EMP incident. Yet it has failed to do much of anything in this regard. This is true even though experts estimate that it would cost in the hundreds of millions of dollars to protect our 300 largest transformers, and less than \$1 billion to harden an additional 3,000 smaller transformers – a comparatively small price to pay in order to stem the potential loss of life and destruction of our infrastructure and economy that would result from an EMP attack.

#### Communicating during an EMP event

The responsibility for developing civilian protocols for command and control in the event of an EMP attack largely falls on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Since its inception in 2001, the EMP Commission has provided many actionable recommendations to DHS in regard to planning and incident response. DHS, however, shows no indication of working to develop solutions to the shortfalls specified in the recommendations. In fact, an EMP threat scenario has not even been included in the

DHS's "National Planning Scenarios," its list of the nation's most critical threat scenarios, despite the potentially catastrophic nature of such an event.

#### Hardening of defense and space systems

Unlike DHS and DoE, the Department of Defense (DoD) has begun to undertake many of the steps recommended by the EMP Commission, particularly the hardening of electronic components used in critical weapon systems. In particular, DoD has been making investments in hardening our strategic weapons systems, such as the nation's nuclear forces.<sup>4</sup> In addition, it has started to invest in enhancements that provide for electronic hardening during upgrades of existing conventional weapon systems such as bombers and fighter aircraft.<sup>5</sup> However, these steps are still early ones; much of our conventional force still remains vulnerable to an EMP attack. And the military's increasing use of commercial electronic technologies, which have no hardening characteristics, make vulnerability to EMP an escalating problem.

#### Defending against EMP and EMP-capable attack

A key component to our EMP defenses is the ability to intercept incoming ballistic missiles. The Commission correctly asserts that a viable missile defense system is our nation's best deterrent to an EMP attack. While neither the Bush nor Obama administrations did enough to harden our infrastructure, the differences on missile defense are starker. During the Bush administration, our Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) capabilities advanced through several programs with the capability to protect the homeland from an EMP attack (including the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System and the Airborne Laser).

The Obama administration, by contrast, has done considerably less. Despite unveiling a new four-phase missile defense plan in September 2009, it began to make large cuts to the missile defense budget beginning in FY2010. In addition, the Obama administration has cancelled or delayed the fielding of systems that held much potential to defend against EMP attacks. The DoD's *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*, released in early 2010, indicates that the Obama administration is retreating on the fielding of the ground-based midcourse defense (GMD) systems to defend the U.S. and Europe against potential ballistic missile attacks. While the Bush administration planned to field 44 ballistic missile interceptor systems in the U.S. and 10 in Europe, the Obama administration is planning to field just 30 systems in the U.S. and none in Europe.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the ABL program was cancelled by the Obama Administration back in 2009. Lastly, the Obama administration, via the New START Treaty, has limited our future missile defense options as part of its attempted "reset" of relations with Russia.

#### **Steps toward a solution**

Over the last few years, responding to these deficiencies, Congress has fielded several legislative initiatives to address our shortfalls in EMP incident preparation and infrastructure hardening. As of yet, however, no EMP-focused bill has yet been sent to the President for signature.

The so-called SHIELD Act (Secure High-voltage Infrastructure for Electricity from Lethal Damage Act) is one of the better plans currently under consideration. It would amend the Federal Power Act by encouraging

cooperation between industry and government to mitigate vulnerabilities in the electric grid and develop solutions to current shortcomings associated with a major EMP event. The SHIELD Act, sponsored by Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ), calls for the establishment of protection standards and hardware fixes (such as the hardening of large transformers and other key elements of the nation's power infrastructure). Another attribute of the SHIELD Act is that it does not rely solely on government for a solution, but rather depends on a partnership of government and industry to achieve its goals of protecting American electric infrastructure.

If passed, the legislation would eliminate many of our vulnerabilities to an EMP event, whether caused by an attack or by nature. Moreover, the SHIELD Act's bipartisan list of supporters shows that threat of an EMP attack is one of very few issues that unites both Republicans and Democrats in this highly-polarized Congress.

### Time to act

Our federal government, through the EMP Commission, has now studied the threat posed by EMP for over a decade. Policymakers in Washington now need to move beyond theory, and into practice.

This means expending the appropriate resources to harden our military and civilian infrastructures. It also requires building the redundancies and communication capabilities that would make it possible for America to

weather an EMP event more or less intact. The proposals outlined in the SHIELD Act provide a blueprint for doing so. We now need our federal government and agencies to at long last take the EMP threat seriously, and begin to protect against it. ●

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*, February 2010, 4-6, [http://www.defense.gov/bmdr/docs/BMDR%20a%20of%2026JAN10%200630\\_for%20web.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/bmdr/docs/BMDR%20a%20of%2026JAN10%200630_for%20web.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Dr. William R. Graham, Testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, July 10, 2008, <http://www.empcommission.org/docs/GRAHAMtestimony10JULY2008.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See *Report of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic (EMP) Attack*, vol. 1: Executive Report, 2004, [http://www.empcommission.org/docs/empc\\_exec\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.empcommission.org/docs/empc_exec_rpt.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), *Operation and Maintenance Overview Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Estimates*, February 2011, 131.

<sup>5</sup> Department of the Air Force, "Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Budget Estimates," *Justification Book Volume 3, Research, Development, Test & Evaluation, Air Force, Volume III – Part 1*, February 2011, 46, 48, 49, 647.

<sup>6</sup> *Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report*, 16.

## THE DANGERS OF A NUCLEAR DRAWDOWN

By *Lionel Martin*

Recent reports indicate that the Pentagon has prepared an option of reducing nuclear weapons by up to 80 percent from the current levels mandated by the “New START” treaty of 2010, leaving the U.S. with 300-400 total nuclear weapons.<sup>1</sup> This is one option among several prepared by the Defense Department in order to slash anticipated growth in defense spending for the next decade.

The argument for unilateral cuts also accords with President Obama’s well-known support for the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons. Intellectually, it rests on the postulates, outlined in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, that the end of the Cold War, the growth of unrivaled and unprecedented U.S. conventional capabilities, and major improvements in missile defenses allow us to deter potential adversaries, reassure allies and partners with fewer nuclear weapons, and to do these things with reduced reliance on such capabilities. All of these are questionable propositions, yet behind them lies another, still more dubious assumption: namely, that nuclear weapons are increasingly irrelevant strategically, that conventional capabilities are in any case approaching them in lethality and quality, not to mention precision, and that therefore it would be senseless to use them.

Unfortunately neither Moscow nor Beijing – not to mention Pyongyang, Tehran, New Delhi and Islamabad – appear to have received that particular memo. All of those governments are either building new nuclear weapons, simultaneously upgrading their existing weapons, or are far along in proliferation.

### **Nuclear maneuvers in Moscow...**

Russia, for example, is working on fusion and low-yield nuclear weapons with genuine battlefield capability. It has relied on tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) and short-range weapons in its exercises against China and NATO, respectively. And on February 15th, Russian General Staff Chief Nikolai Makarov reiterated that Russia would use nuclear weapons (presumably in a first-strike) if its integrity was threatened.<sup>2</sup>

But that is not all. Earlier, on November 17, 2011, Makarov told the Defense Ministry’s Public Chamber that:

The possibility of local armed conflicts virtually along the entire perimeter of the border has grown dramatically... I cannot rule out that, in certain circumstances local and regional armed conflicts could grow into a large-scale war, possibly even with

*Lionel Martin is the pseudonym of a U. S. Department of Defense official specializing in U.S. strategy and defense planning.*

nuclear weapons.<sup>3</sup>

Makarov further warned that the cause for such wars in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) lies in NATO's advancement to the CIS' and Russia's borders.<sup>4</sup> This is a much broader threat of nuclear use than simply defending Russia's integrity, and it conforms to his predecessors' similar remarks, previous official Russian statements, and statements by Russian military commanders indicating their full expectations that in major wars nuclear weapons will be used.

### ...and Beijing

Similarly, China is steadily modernizing its sea-based (if not land-based) nuclear weapons and nobody appears to know how many nuclear weapons it actually has. Recent work by Phillip Karber of Georgetown University<sup>5</sup>, though criticized by many China-watchers, suggests

that China has much more nuclear capability than previously imagined. So while the jury is out on that issue, we actually have no clear idea of China's true capabilities.

There likewise are signs of a growing Chinese debate regarding the viability of its earlier "no first use" policy.<sup>6</sup> In addition, we have long known that China is building a previously undisclosed nuclear submarine base in the Pacific and a major nuclear base in its interior. These moves not only suggest Beijing's active consideration of a second strike capability, but have the effect of putting pressure on Russia's Pacific Fleet and Russian Asia.<sup>7</sup>

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Indeed, Russian commentators and military officials no longer hide that nuclear weapons, particularly TNW, are Russia's ultimate trump against China. For that and many other reasons, Russia has hitherto flatly refused to negotiate cuts to TNW and demanded that China be present at any future arms control negotiations. In any case, it is clear from the comments of informed Russian and American experts that Moscow, due to the inferiority of its conventional capabilities, cannot and will not go below 1,000 total nuclear weapons any time soon.

### Assurance at risk

Another obstacle to the option of unilateral disarmament is that it undermines protection of our allies in Europe who, especially in the Baltic, are visibly concerned about an ongoing steady buildup of the Russian military in Northwest Russia.<sup>8</sup> This sort of rollback, it should be

noted, would also serve to weaken, perhaps significantly, the credibility of Article V of the North Atlantic Charter, which stipulates that an attack on one NATO member state is an attack on all.

Beyond Europe, however, American disarmament can be expected to have deleterious effects on Japanese and South Korean confidence in U.S. promises of support. Given North Korea's propensity to challenge its neighbors forcefully, and China's long record of trying to intimidate Japan, if either Seoul or Tokyo no longer believes in the credibility of past U.S. promises, each will

be strongly inclined to build up its own deterrent capabilities. Moreover, ample evidence suggests that both countries can do so rapidly, if they make the strategic decision to go nuclear. The end result would be a militarization of East Asia that would greatly complicate U.S. strategy there.

### Politics and pragmatism

Most directly, the unilateral disarmament now being contemplated by the Obama administration contravenes the President's promise to Congress to allocate \$85 billion over several years to modernize our nuclear capability. Notably, this was the *quid pro quo* that the Senate attached to its ratification of the New START treaty back in December of 2010. Under the circumstances, such cuts would be regarded as an act of bad faith toward the Senate – something that is never beneficial for any administration.

But the larger question also remains. Perhaps for us nuclear weapons are no longer as important as they once were. Yet the United States remains the country that others expect to preserve order and lead coalitions for that purpose. Meanwhile, Russia, China et al. clearly believe that nuclear weapons have strategic utility and that they can and will use those weapons under certain circumstances. Unilateral disarmament, therefore, would undermine our alliances, encourage our rivals and adversaries, and stimulate others who cannot match our conventional capabilities to continue or begin proliferation.

While we must cut budgets, we should do so intelligently, understanding that our actions cannot be taken in a strategic vacuum. Indeed, unilateral disarmament invites strategic repercussions that will trigger much

more instability, insecurity, and violence, even at higher levels of escalation. In their pursuit of fiscal stability, U.S. policymakers cannot forget to consider the following question: do we really want to invite other states to test the proposition that nuclear weapons actually possess strategic utility and can and should be used to achieve the strategic advantages they seek? ●

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine M. Grossman, "U.S. Can Safely Take Deeper Nuclear Arms Cuts: Senior Defense Official," Global Security Newswire, February 16, 2012, <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/us-can-safely-take-deeper-nuclear-arms-cuts-senior-defense-official/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Russia Willing to Use Nuclear Weapons in Conflict, General Says," Global Security Newswire, February 16, 2012, <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/russia-willing-use-nukes-conflict-general-says/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Border Alert: Nuke War Risk Is rising, Russia Warns," *Russia Today*, November 17, 2011, <http://rt.com/politics/makarov-nuclear-russia-nato-575/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.; Roger N. McDermott, "General Makarov Highlights the 'Risk' of Nuclear Conflict," Jamestown Foundation *Eurasia Security Monitor* 8, iss. 221, December 6, 2011, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=38748&cHash=bf936593e8402b718ffcdb0452f1b41d](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=38748&cHash=bf936593e8402b718ffcdb0452f1b41d).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, William Wan, "Georgetown Students Shed Light on China's Tunnel System for Nuclear Weapons," *Washington Post*, November 29, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/georgetown-students-shed-light-on->

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<sup>6</sup> Larry M. Wortzel, *China's Nuclear Forces: Operations, Training, Doctrine, Command, Control, and Campaign Planning* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007); Richard Spencer, "China To Modernise Nuclear Weapons Capability," *Daily Telegraph* (London), May 9, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/1939031/China-to-modernise-nuclear-weapons-capability.html>; Baohui Zhang, "The Taiwan Strait and the Future of China's No-First-Use Nuclear Policy," *Comparative Strategy* XXVII, no. 2 (March-April, 2008), 164-183.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.; "Extensive Missile Site in China Revealed by Satellite: Analyst," *Space War*, May 15, 2008, [http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Extensive\\_missile\\_site\\_in\\_China\\_revealed\\_by\\_satellite\\_analyst\\_999.html](http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Extensive_missile_site_in_China_revealed_by_satellite_analyst_999.html); Hans Kristensen, "Extensive Nuclear Missile Deployment Are Discovered in Central Asia," Federation of American Scientists blog, May 15, 2008, <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2208//05/extensive-nuclear-deployment-area-discovered-in-central-china>.

<sup>8</sup> Author's conversations with Finnish legislators and Polish analysts, Helsinki and Warsaw, November 2011.

## “STRATEGIC” GUIDANCE IN NAME ONLY

*By James Jay Carafano*

There is a smoking gun that proves the Pentagon’s recently released strategic guidance is little more than an election year platform for rubber-stamping the almost \$500 billion-worth of reductions in defense spending ordered by the White House. On whichever side one falls on the question of whether gutting defense is the best means for reducing runaway federal spending – they shouldn’t believe the president’s line that Pentagon cuts are anything but a budget drill.

### Drawing down

In 2010, the Administration delivered the Congressionally mandated Quadrennial Defense Review to the House and Senate. The always highly-anticipated QDR, by law, is required to offer a twenty-year assessment of military needs. Yet, when it was concluded, the 2010 assessment called for dramatically more capability than provided for in the most recent strategic guidance. Back then, Senate Armed Services Committee Chair Senator Carl Levin summed up the findings of the report this way: “[t]he panel goes on to warn us about what it calls the ‘growing gap’ between what the military is capable of doing and what they may be called upon to do in the future.”

That was where things stood two years ago. Today, the White House has declared that we can get by with dramatically less capability. All of which begs the question: what does the White House know now that it did not know when it signed off on the 2010 report? The answer is, not much.

Early on in his tenure in office, President Obama clearly expressed his intent to get U.S. combat troops out of Iraq by 2011, and out of Afghanistan by 2014. Yet, back in 2010, there was no signal that the forces used to fight those wars would be scrubbed from the Pentagon’s ranks.

Furthermore, little else in the global security environment is dramatically different. Iran is still an aggressive, destabilizing power that is a proven state sponsor of terrorism and is actively seeking to gain nuclear weapons. Indeed, in the last year, there has been plenty of evidence to suggest that the Iranian threat has grown significantly. Last October, U.S. law enforcement agencies foiled an Iranian-sponsored terrorist plot that would have resulted in the killing of Americans on U.S. soil. More recently, Iran has threatened to close the Straits of Hormuz, the vital waterway that permits the transit of between 20 and 30 percent of the world’s oil supply.

*James Jay Carafano is Deputy Director of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies and Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies at The Heritage Foundation.*

When the Heritage Foundation analyzed the

impact of such an act in 2007, economic modeling revealed that the price of a barrel of oil in the U.S. would double and the American economy would lose one million jobs. Finally, concerns over Iran’s nuclear program are growing – not receding. The head of Israeli Intelligence recently declared that Iran probably has enough enriched uranium to build four nuclear weapons. And Director of National Intelligence James Clapper acknowledged in recent Congressional testimony that there are now deep concerns over the direct threat to U.S. security from Iran.

Meanwhile, North Korea remains as aggressive as ever. Both its nuclear and missile programs continue to advance, and its proliferation activities continue. Multi-party talks have achieved nothing. Since the release of the QDR, North Korea has conducted two major acts of aggression against South Korea (sinking a South Korean warship and shelling a South Korean Island). The only real change in the situation is that North Korea now has a new leader – a young, untested and unpredictable neophyte with his finger on the country’s nuclear trigger.

Russia is as restive as ever. Despite White House claims of successfully “resetting” relations with Moscow, there have been no real foreign policy breakthroughs, or closer alignment with the Kremlin. Most recently, Moscow demonstrated its determination to go its own way by continuing to back the Assad regime in Syria despite mounting international condemnation. At the same time, corruption and human rights abuses

within Russia itself have skyrocketed, making the likelihood of a real partnership less likely than ever.

Nor can the administration claim it has made great strides in managing strategic competition with China. In fact, the strategic guidance calls for a “pivot” towards Asia for one reason – to keep pace with Beijing’s efforts to erect an expanding sphere of influence that crowds out the United States.

And then there remain the bugbears of Iraq and Afghanistan, where there are deep concerns over whether the U.S. can continue to secure its interests. In Iraq, government officials admit there is a potential for a resurgence of violence. There are also concerns over Iraq’s political stability in a post-Coalition environment. At the same time in Afghanistan, U.S. and NATO intelligence assessments alike cast doubt on whether enough has been done to prevent the resurgence of an armed, anti-American Taliban. And when the Taliban returns, so will al-Qaeda – seeking to reestablish the operational base it had in the country before 2001.

In other words, the world does not look all that different two years after the QDR. The White House, therefore, cannot argue that the Pentagon needs to change because the world has.

### How the Pentagon does business

Likewise, the White House cannot argue that the armed forces now have at their disposal dramatically different ways and means to

*The strategic guidance does represent a “new” strategy—of a sort. The U.S., quite simply, is going to do less with less.*

protect U.S. interests. There has been, for example, considerable hype of late that drones and special forces troops can be used as a substitute for most national security tasks. That simply doesn't square with the facts; the U.S. has been heavily using drones and special forces since 2001. If there really was proof that covert operations were the simple answer to our national security dilemmas, the Pentagon might have noted that fact before now. In truth, what we have learned over the last ten years is that covert and special operations work best when they are done in concert with and supported by conventional forces. Special forces in Iraq worked because they were part of the "surge." We succeeded in killing Osama Bin Laden because the U.S. had a large base of operations in Afghanistan to work from. The recent successful hostage rescue in Somalia worked because the special forces team was backed by an extensive U.S. air, naval, and intelligence presence.

At the same time, the armed forces are struggling to find "smarter" ways of doing business, and real "efficiencies" that are not just cuts. The Pentagon's recent call for a new Base Realignment and Closure Commission, or BRAC, is a case in point. In truth, most of the military excess force structure is long gone, stripped away in 2005 in the last BRAC process. But even if there is indeed excess fat to be trimmed, it isn't likely to be cost-efficient. Closing bases as a result of the last BRAC review cost the government \$30 billion. The Government Accountability Office has estimated that the "savings" of the closing over ten years would amount to less than half that.

Nor are there any "new" capabilities being added to the Pentagon tool kit. To be sure,

there are plans for a new bomber and new submarine, but those were on the books before 2010 and have no real impact on the budget, since acquisition of these systems is outside the Pentagon's five-year budget planning. Likewise, new talk about more emphasis on space and cyberspace is just that: mostly talk.

The shift into pouring more resources into cyberwarfare predates the 2010 QDR. U.S. Cyber Command, for example, was set up in 2009.

### **Less with less**

The strategic guidance does represent a "new" strategy – of a sort. The U.S., quite simply, is going to do less with less. It would not do, however, for that to be the political message emanating from the White House, particularly in an election year. The result is a strategic guidance which masks budgetary drawdowns with talk of new strategic requirements, and glosses over the resulting vulnerabilities.

At least for the moment, official Washington seems to be of two minds about a strategic guidance that promises more but delivers less. On the one hand, the White House is likely to face stiff scrutiny on the Hill to explain why U.S. intelligence assessments and plummeting military readiness concerns don't match up with its assurances that we will maintain the world's best military.

On the other hand, many in Washington seem to accept the cuts as necessary to help get Washington's fiscal house in order. Defense cuts, however, are likely to do anything but help solve the current fiscal mess. First, the cuts will leave the world a

more dangerous place – and that is likely to cost the U.S. more in the long run. Second, defense cuts will not serve to stem America’s budgetary bleeding, for defense spending is dwarfed by the soaring costs of entitlements.

If anything, defense cuts are likely to exacerbate the problem, providing temporary relief but leaving the root causes of our fiscal difficulties unaddressed. ●

## RECALIBRATING CENTRAL ASIA STRATEGY

*By Jonathan Lee*

The 2014 deadline for the United States to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan is rapidly approaching. In anticipation, Washington now is focusing on the continued build-up of Afghanistan's military and the development of Afghanistan's economy, particularly its transport and trade sector. In the process, the utility of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), which currently supplies forces in Afghanistan by transporting supplies through Europe and Central Asia, has underscored the benefits of reconnecting and resurrecting the "Silk Road" of old. As a result, the U.S., today, is flirting with the idea of a "New Silk Road" (NSR) strategy – one which aims to create security and stability in Afghanistan and the South-Central Asia region at large.

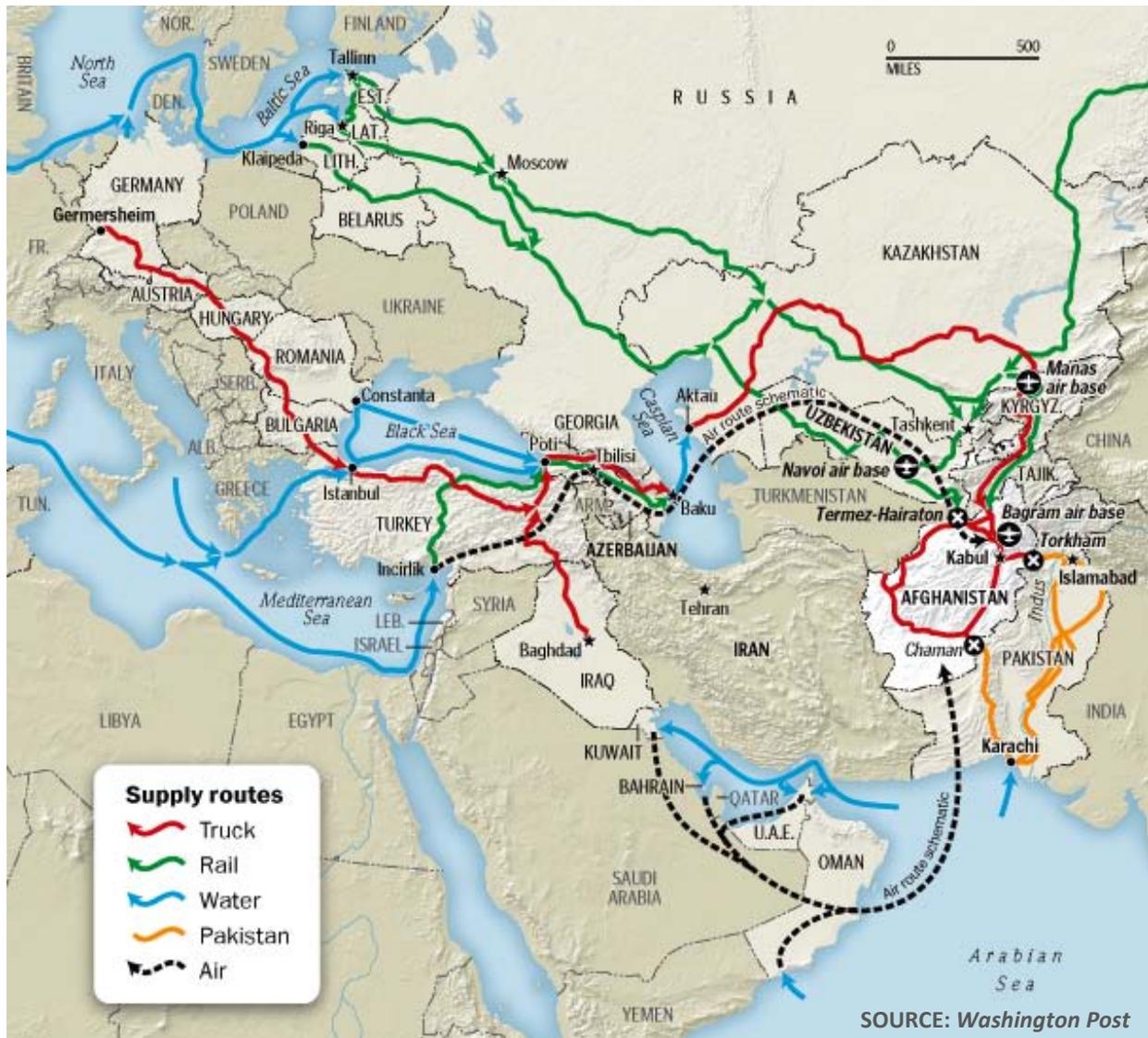
### **A sub-optimal status quo**

While the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan is now well-nigh inevitable, that country's ability to function without foreign military presence and assistance is less certain. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in formally proposing the NSR strategy in the Fall of 2011, explained that sustainable prosperity in Afghanistan will require working "alongside all of [Afghanistan's] neighbors to shape a more integrated economic future for the region that will create jobs and will

undercut the appeal of extremism."<sup>1</sup> But ensuring Afghanistan's continued functioning, and encouraging its neighbors to participate in such a regional project, might turn out to be a difficult task, as the problems plaguing the current regional supply and distribution network suggest.

That web, the NDN, can be called a success, at least logistically. In recent months, use of the NDN has allowed the U.S. and Coalition allies to continue to transport supplies and equipment to Afghanistan amid the further deterioration of Washington's already-troubled relationship with Pakistan. While use of the NDN is more expensive and time-consuming than transport via Pakistan, prices have declined steadily (from \$21,000 for the typical 20-foot cargo container at the outset of NDN use in 2009 to \$17,500 today). And while the route is more circuitous, the relative safety of the cargo provides a favorable trade-off for the extra transit time. Still, transit prices and times remain excessively high, in large part because of archaic trade practices and rampant corruption at border crossings of the four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) currently participating in the NDN. But more problematic still are the regional regimes which have become critical to the NDN's

*Jonathan Lee is a Fellow in Defense Studies at the American Foreign Policy Council. He also currently serves as a Senior Irregular Warfare Analyst at the Department of Defense.*



continued functioning – and none more so than Uzbekistan.

Once a partner in the Global War on Terror, Tashkent has been diplomatically decoupled from the United States since 2005, when the U.S. cut off political ties in the wake of its violent suppression of anti-government demonstrations in Andijan. Since that time, however, Uzbekistan nevertheless has quietly become an indispensable logistical partner, and today some 98 percent of all NDN traffic passes through its territory.

Although the U.S. Department of State claims that Uzbekistan has made progress on human rights, little truly appears to have changed except for the rhetoric of its president, Islam Karimov. Rather, Karimov has shrewdly positioned his country to exploit the U.S. need for access to NDN transshipment, and intimidated regional neighbors who might jeopardize Uzbekistan’s position and gain.

Those gains have been substantial. Some estimates put Uzbekistan's financial windfall as a result of the NDN at upwards of \$100 million. More significant still have been the influence and legitimacy that have been derived from Uzbekistan's involvement and partnership with the United States. Tashkent is even poised to upgrade its military capabilities as a result of this cooperation, with potentially significant effects to the regional balance of power.<sup>2</sup> As one former OSCE security advisor put it, this assistance "will provide an adverse reaction in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan... Stocking up Uzbekistan with munitions will create a dangerous imbalance of power within an already fractious region."<sup>3</sup>

Uzbekistan has wasted no time flexing this new strategic muscle. In mid-November 2011, after Tajikistan expressed its desire to expand its role in the NDN, Uzbekistan is suspected of disabling a key railway bridge linking Tajikistan to the outside world and derailing the latter's further integration into the NDN.<sup>4</sup> Uzbek authorities claimed the bridge was bombed by terrorists, but no terrorist group has claimed responsibility. Nor has Uzbekistan yet set a timeline for repairing the bridge – a transport link that is vital to Tajikistan's economy, but inconsequential to Uzbekistan. Goods bound for Tajikistan now remain stuck in Uzbekistan, diminishing Tajikistan's ability to contribute to routing traffic for the NDN.

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Moreover, ethnic conflict between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 led to the closure of their shared border, creating a de facto embargo on Kyrgyzstan and drastically driving up food prices and threatening stability there. While Uzbekistan re-opened the border some 18 months later, it is believed to have done so largely in order to prevent Kyrgyzstan from joining Russia's Customs Union, which Uzbekistan opposes.

### Accounting for regional realities

It is on this fragile peg that the U.S. is now hanging its hopes for Afghanistan's future. The Obama administration's New Silk Road strategy is predicated upon regional

integration and cooperation in historically-fractious Central Asia. To this end, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has called for reestablishing "economic and transit connections that will bind together a region too long torn apart by conflict and division."<sup>5</sup>

Yet conflict and division are precisely the nature of regional geopolitics. As Kristian Berg Havripken of

the *Peace Research Institute Oslo* has aptly outlined, "[a]mong the Central Asian states, there is not a strong sense of common security, and cooperation is mainly coming about through the roles of Russia and China. Uzbekistan aspires to hegemonic status within Central Asia proper, but is challenged by Kazakhstan, which has similar ambitions." Therefore, Havripken emphasizes, maintaining power is a priority and there is "an

obsession with domestic security, in the sense of securing regime survival.” At best, cooperating in any regional, multilateral economic or security partnerships will be a secondary priority for regional regimes. At worst, it could challenge their well-developed survival instincts.

A successful U.S. regional strategy will need to take these cultural dynamics into account—and work to dilute them. Washington can begin to do so by broadening its brokerage beyond Uzbekistan and expanding its engagement with weaker Central Asian states like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. With Uzbekistan, meanwhile, the U.S. should take a more sustainable line. For, although Tashkent’s cooperation in the NDN is important, it cannot be allowed to absolve the country of participating meaningfully in regional stability. Additionally, Turkmenistan provides a target of opportunity. Despite its self-proclaimed neutrality from the NDN, Ashgabat already allows some U.S. aerial overflight and refueling. Expanding this cooperation, and adding Turkmenistan to the NDN, would provide significant redundancy, as well as a strategic counterweight to Uzbekistan’s current dominance.

These steps will undoubtedly take both time and political effort from Washington, which

historically has boasted little by way of strategic vision for Central Asia. But laying the foundation for the New Silk Road now is vital, if the U.S. hopes to secure Afghanistan’s future stability. ●

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<sup>1</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, Remarks at the New Silk Road Ministerial Meeting, New York, September 22, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/09/173807.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> “Uzbekistan: Pentagon Mulls Giving Military Equipment to Tashkent,” Eurasianet.org, December 15, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64707>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Myles Smith, “Is There a Motive Behind Uzbekistan Rail Blast?” Eurasianet.org, December 3, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64628>.

<sup>5</sup> Clinton, Remarks at the New Silk Road Ministerial Meeting.

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