

The Bush Administration: What Can We Expect for the Pentagon?

By Chris Hellman, Center for Defense Information

Although we don't yet know what a Bush cabinet will look like, the Pentagon will undoubtedly get a warm reception at the White House. In addition to whomever is selected as defense secretary, President Bush will be receiving advice from former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, and it is clear that former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell will have an important role in the administration, probably as secretary of state.

Strategic Programs

Nuclear Weapons — During the presidential campaign, Bush supported substantial reductions in the number of deployed nuclear warheads and indicated that he would consider reducing the U.S. nuclear arsenal unilaterally. He also supported the concept of nuclear “de-alerting”—taking U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals off of their current state of “hair-trigger” alert. Said Bush: “It should be possible to reduce the number of American nuclear weapons significantly further... without compromising our security in any way.... In addition, the United States should remove as many weapons as possible from high-alert, hair-trigger status.”

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) — Bush opposes the CTBT, which he believes would negatively impact America's ability to ensure the safety and reliability of its nuclear deterrent. He has described the CTBT as unverifiable, unenforceable, and ineffective as a nonproliferation tool. According to Bush, “We can fight the spread of nuclear weapons, but we cannot wish them away with unwise treaties.”

National Missile Defense — Bush is ready to move ahead with the rapid deployment of a

national missile defense system. He has also indicated that he is interested in a considerably more robust system than the one currently envisioned by the Clinton administration, with a significant space-based component and designed to defend not only the United States but also its allies from ballistic missile attack. He has not, however, specified which allies he intends to include or how to address the major technical challenges such a system would face. In Bush's words: “America must build effective missile defenses, based on the best available options, at the earliest possible date. Our missile defense must be designed to protect all 50 states—and our friends and allies and deployed forces overseas—from missile attacks by rogue nations or accidental launches.”

It is also clear that Bush will find the limits of the Antiballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty overly restrictive, although it isn't clear whether he will scrap it outright. During the campaign, Bush said: “One of the things that's important to understand is that under the current ABM Treaty, we can't [build] sea-based systems, we're not allowed to test sea-based systems. We're not allowed to test sensors off of satellites. So it makes it very hard for us to be able to deploy the most effective systems.”

Military Operations and Commitments

Overseas Military Missions — Bush has stated that he would closely reexamine all U.S. overseas military deployments. A Bush administration, he has said, will maintain longstanding U.S. commitments but will order an immediate review of overseas deployments in dozens of countries, with the aim of replacing uncertain

missions with well-defined objectives. Said Bush: "America will not retreat from the world. On the contrary, I will replace diffused commitments with focused ones." While campaigning, Bush received severe criticism when it was reported that he would consider pulling U.S. troops out of Bosnia and Kosovo. These comments were actually made by Condoleezza Rice, one of his advisers, and a likely member of the new Bush administration. The president-elect has since sought to distance himself from those statements.

NATO — Bush will attempt to maintain U.S. dominance of the NATO alliance while shifting a greater portion of its costs and operations to our NATO allies. "For NATO to be strong, cohesive, and active," said Bush, "the president must give it consistent direction: on the alliance's purpose, on Europe's need to invest more in defense capabilities, and, when necessary, in military conflict... For our allies, sharing the enormous opportunities of Eurasia also means sharing the burdens and risks of sustaining the peace."

The Military Budget

The Pentagon will get additional funding under the Bush administration. During the campaign, Bush pledged to increase military spending by \$45 billion over nine years, with an emphasis on research and development of sophisticated weapons technology and on "quality of life" programs for U.S. military personnel

in an effort to recruit and retain the highest quality people. It remains to be seen, however, whether the spending increases proposed by Bush will be sufficient to accomplish all the things he says he wants to achieve. It is also likely that members of his administration—and the Pentagon—will push for additional military funds.

According to Bush: "My first budget will [add] a billion dollars in salary increases... I will earmark at least 20% of the procurement budget for acquisition programs that propel America generations ahead in military technology. I will also commit an additional \$20 billion to defense [research & development—R&D] between the time I take office and 2006."

Forty-five billion dollars over nine years works out to \$5 billion annually. Of this, his proposed funding boost for R&D will eat up \$3.3 billion annually. Another \$1 billion will go into military pay, and, unless this pay is in the form of a one-time bonus, this represents an annual increased commitment of \$1 billion. That leaves roughly \$700 million to fund any additional initiatives.

Weapons Procurement — Bush has indicated his support for "skipping" procurement of a generation of weapons systems, with an eye toward developing the "generation after next" of high-tech weapons. In Bush's words: "We will modernize some existing weapons and equipment, necessary for current tasks. But our relative peace allows us to do this

selectively. The real goal is to move beyond marginal improvements to replace existing programs with new technologies and strategies—to use this window of opportunity to skip a generation of technology. This will require spending more—and spending more wisely." To fund this initiative, in addition to increasing the annual R&D budget, Bush has pledged to spend 20% of the annual procurement budget (or roughly \$13 billion) on advanced technology programs.

Tactical Aircraft — The Bush administration is likely to reexamine the Pentagon's plans to modernize its tactical aircraft fleet. Currently the Defense Department is developing or purchasing three major fighter aircraft programs: the Navy's F/A-18E/F "Super Hornet," the Air Force's F-22 "Raptor," and the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). The current estimated cost of these three programs is \$350 billion, although it is likely to be much higher. Both Condoleezza Rice and Richard Armitage, another high-ranking Bush adviser, have indicated that the costs and sizes of the programs are at issue. Mr. Armitage has said that the 3,000 aircraft currently planned may be an excessive number, and in reference to the three tactical aircraft programs said that "it could be that one, two, all, or none are cut back or slowed down."

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