A defense policy vision

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President Obama announces the nomination of CIA Director Leon Panetta as the next defense secretary, Army Gen. David Petraeus to take the helm of the CIA, Marine Corps Lt. Gen. John Allen to replace Petraeus as commander of U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan and Ryan Crocker as the next ambassador to Afghanistan.

The commander in chief should set out goals for the next SecDef

BY P.W. SINGER

Barack Obama might ultimately rival Lincoln, JFK and Reagan as among the greatest communicators to hold the office of president. He is also the commander in chief of a nation now fighting three or four wars (depending on whether you count Libya and Pakistan as half or whole operations). From his days as a state senator to his time in the Oval Office, he has spoken with energy and eloquence about the issues that surround military deployments, articulating in detail in perhaps greater detail than any other president his sense of when and where force ought to be used in the nation's interest (now being called the "Obama doctrine").

However, there is one thing that Obama has never delivered a major speech on, either during his prior political campaigns or as commander in chief: defense policy.

Obama's voice on this question has been unheard largely because of the continuation of Defense Secretary Robert Gates for the last four years. Gates will go down as a "Hall of Famer," whose tenure shines all the more brightly when compared with his predecessor, Donald Rumsfeld. Obama's nomination for Gates' successor, Leon Panetta, has served his nation in the halls of Congress, the White House, the Office of Management and Budget and the Central Intelligence Agency. Notably, other than proven budget-cutting savvy, Panetta doesn't bring a clear background or an established constituency at the Pentagon in the area of defense policy. (Panetta thrived at the CIA despite a similar challenge, so no one should underestimate this consummate Washington power player, especially as he now comes in with the political capital of having at least part of Osama bin Laden's scalp on his belt.)

Perhaps the greatest thing that Obama can therefore do for his new defense secretary is to kill two proverbial birds with one rhetorical stone. He should do what any good boss does for a new employee: Set clear targets of action that he should undertake to reach success. Obama should do so by stating these goals in a defined and public manner, through a major defense policy speech.

There are some who maintain that a civilian president should concern himself only with the questions that surround the use of force, rather than the military institution that delivers on those decisions. Equally, there are others in Obama's own party who assert that a young, Democratic president should avoid discussing the "hard" area of traditional defense issues. But as another young Democratic president noted in 1961, the year that Obama was born, such notions could not be more wrong. Facing renewed great power competition and the rise of insurgencies around the world, John F. Kennedy delivered a speech in which he said, "In my role as commander in chief of the American armed forces, and with my concern over the security of this nation now and in the future, no single question of policy has concerned me more since entering upon these responsibilities than the adequacy of our present and planned military forces to accomplish our major national security objectives."

Obama's speech would not merely fill the gap in the commander in chief's oratory portfolio. It would help his new defense secretary by providing clear direction (especially to those in the Pentagon bureaucracy and Congress, whom Panetta will have to lead, cajole and lobby) on the key areas in defense policy that must be faced directly faced. These are:

■ **Use the brain, don't just spread the pain, in budgeting.** Economic security's link to national security will be a thread running through any such speech, as it was a clear factor in the choice of Panetta and a dilemma that the new defense secretary will face every day. How will the president's proposed $400 billion cut over the next few decades be met through "a fundamental review of America's missions, capabilities and our role in changing world"? The answer is both simple and painful. As Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, put it: "The [defense] budget has basically doubled in the last decade. And my own experience here is that in doubling, we've lost our ability to prioritize, to make hard decisions, to do tough analysis, to make trades."

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deferred by prior Pentagon leaders for too long or even having the gumption to launch the next Base Closure and Realignment Commission and review of foreign basing that we all know is necessary. He must also establish a clear and consistent framework for how each of the services will carry out the analysis necessary to set and execute on priorities, rather than just protect pre-existing programs of record. The kind of poor analysis, acceptance of program delays, ever-changing requirements and generally contorted processes that led to the bizarre situations that we ended up in with programs such as the Future Combat Systems, DDX destroyer, Littoral Combat Ship, F-35 aircraft and the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle can no longer be tolerated.

■ **Change the battle from efficiency to effectiveness.** The laudable effort to seek efficiencies over the last year will have to be looked at as the start, not the end, of the effort. The steps taken so far have mainly targeted symbolically rich but not core issues. Shutting down Joint Forces Command (not actually) and eliminating flag officer postings (where there were mostly none anyway), doesn't fundamentally alter the situation.

The new SecDef faces the difficulty of being painted as having an agenda of budget-cutting in the guise of efficiency, so the president should clarify that the strategy of his new general manager at the Pentagon is focused equally on effectiveness. Efficiency is about trimming fat to achieve the same output with slightly less inputs; effectiveness is about identifying and getting the right things done in the best possible manner. Both the means and the ends matter in effectiveness.

As illustrations, the president should note that in whatever cuts are made, he will not tolerate the typical budget drill of salami slicing across the board. Rather, the next years' budgets should be built up in a way that focuses on what we want our military forces to deliver, rather than by whom (for example, how the service budget ratios haven't changed for years). It also means that the investment and risk relationship between the Pentagon and its vendors has to be changed. The president must make clear that he expects the new secretary to break the Pentagon free of its consistent predicament of committing to buy systems before it has competed prototypes and of being afraid to cancel underperforming contracts because of sunk costs and future cancellation charges. Indeed, the current process often resembles a series of bad prenuptial agreements with major contractors.

An effectiveness-based approach would instead bolster industry where it matters most to national security. It would promote innovation, rather than using the Defense Department procurement and basing system to defensively protect jobs. It would not pare down research and development (as happened in the most recent budget salami slice), and instead recognize that this part of the budget is the seed corn for future capabilities and the future health of the defense industrial base. It would also reward risk and innovation by constant competition of prototypes and expand the marketplace by launching a series of crowd-sourcing projects to answer Pentagon needs for everything from software design to weapons.

Effectiveness will also require a re-evaluation of the services that the Pentagon buys, in greater ratio than widgets and weapons. The critical issue in outsourcing, both in lost budget billions and undermined operations in the field, was the willy-nilly way that vast portions of contingency operations were outsourced to a "coalition of the billing," which still number greater than the military forces sent to Iraq and Afghanistan by our coalition partners. Yet, rather than rein in the operational use of firms such as KBR, Blackwater/Xe, etc., (which have continued to garner contracts, in some cases even larger in scale), the response instead morphed into an "insourcing" agenda back inside the Beltway that focused on the old problem of goods and was aimed at generic numbers rather than functions.

Just as it was a mistake to outsource for outsourcing's sake a decade ago, insourcing for insourcing's sake today is similarly shortsighted. In a time when, as Defense News reports, 42 percent of the budget goes to infrastructure, with more than 340,000 troops working in commercial functions and never deploying, the secretary should be tasked to provide a clear strategy for determining what nonmilitary functions are appropriate to outsource in a competitive market situation. However, he must also finally show the courage to determine and act upon what roles and missions are inappropriate to outsource especially in the battle space, not just in the armed roles, but also in such mission-critical areas as weapons loading and cybersecurity.

Finally, any secretary who wants to lead an efficient or effective department must face up to the challenge of personnel and benefits costs, whose continued growth will eat up any savings in operations and acquisitions. The problems are systemic enough that they can't be solved in any single budget cycle or presidency, but the new secretary should be expected to deliver a plan that lays out a vision of personnel reform over the next generation that better aligns with the modern work cycle while retaining professionalism.

Specifically, each service should be tasked to establish a series of "continuum of service" programs that offer benefits options other than the standard 20-year package. The Pentagon must figure out what works and what doesn't for the modern force, rather than stick with today's Cold War-era model. Too many of the Google and Facebook generation feel they are square pegs in a Pentagon personnel and family-support system of round holes that were created in the era of General Motors and "Mad Men."

■ **Match offices to problems.** Many of the DoD's authority structures and divisions of authority are not aligned to present and future requirements, either for internal needs or for working with other agencies. This is to be expected of a system that hasn't had a major structural change since 1947. More complementary structures are needed in some areas, for example, with the Pakistan Counterinsurgency Contingency Fund, while redundancy cries out to be eliminated in others. The number of offices across the government that have chased after buzzwords like "stabilization" and "cybersecurity" could fill the Pentagon (and in fact do!), while the fact that the president believes we need "a fundamental review of America's missions, capabilities, and our role in a changing world" shows that something is amiss in the empire of quadrennial reviews and collection of strategic policy shops across the National Security Council, military services and Office of the Secretary of Defense that supposedly has that portfolio.

As such, Obama should make clear that he expects the new SecDef to work with his cabinet counterparts, especially at the State Department and the National Security Council, to move "whole of government" and "interagency" reform initiatives out of the discussion holding pattern they have been stuck in for almost two decades. He should demand a cross-agency and cross-service alignment of the ways that the U.S. divides the bureaucratic world into geographic and functional domains. It's time to align the maps and wire diagrams, so that the same assistant secretaries, commanders and directors can work together in coherent regional and functional teams across government. He should also order the Quadrennial Defense Review empire be shrunk by double the amount of any broader personnel cuts. Historically, good strategy is not accomplished by large bureaucracies and lowest common denominator thinking.

■ **Make partnering real.** A key element of the Obama Doctrine is to build and lead coalitions. This is a necessary reality when one looks at the range of current and foreseeable U.S. operations in everything from counterinsurgency (COIN) to cyber. The president should make clear that his expectations don't stop at this realization (a hard one for prior administrations to wrap their heads around), but that substantive action is necessary to turn coalition-building into an operationally effective reality. As one strategic analyst posted to Afghanistan put it, "We have to move well beyond the budget-centric conceptualization of burden-sharing and think about truly 'partnering' with our allies."

Building interoperability is not about the nation's civilian leaders pressuring American allies into buying the exact same equipment we want. (The WikiLeaked cables about the F-35 deals make some used car salesmen shine compared with several of our ambassadors and defense leaders.) It is about building common understandings, shared training and enduring relationships of trust built upon a web of joint postings. Indeed, the Royal Air Force flies almost none of the same gear as we do, but we have an incredible partnership with it. The Gulf states fly our same jet fighters, but our "partners'" planes are kept isolated during air exercises, let alone during actual operations such as Libya, for safety's sake. Building real partnerships is especially needed in the many emerging domains where NATO isn't the answer yet again, such as the Indian Ocean, space and with states, such as Vietnam and Indonesia, that neighbor key powers.

We clearly partner best with fellow democracies, but it is notable that the most recent National Military Strategy was the first in more than two decades to be void of the terms "democracy" and "emerging democracies." While the Bush administration certainly gave these terms a bad name in its focus on regime change, avoiding their discussion doesn't solve the more important strategic question of how the U.S. military can best support and bolster nations that desire democratic governments. Events in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and Jordan already illustrate the problem with such an oversight. We require a redefinition of the U.S. military's 21st century role in working with emerging democratic partners, including a reform of Title 10 and 22 to synchronize with other agencies, to establish exactly who in the strategic quiver will carry out this task and how the military personnel and acquisitions system will support them (beyond simply selling them gear).

■ **Make energy joint and powerful.** While there are scattered islands of excellence in the Pentagon energy architecture, we still lack an overarching defense energy strategy. A defense energy policy not only makes fiscal sense, (every $10 increase in the price of a barrel of oil costs our military $1.3 billion — equivalent to a loss of almost the Marine Corps' weapons procurement budget), but also saves lives (a mere 1

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percent improvement in energy efficiency would mean 6,444 fewer convoy missions, one of the most dangerous roles in Iraq and Afghanistan).

The type of clear energy goalposts that Navy Secretary Ray Mabus has set for the Navy are missing for the entire joint force and haven't moved into acquisition requirements and research and development priorities. We cannot afford to buy systems now without an eye toward their energy efficiency over their expected decades-long lifetimes.

Correcting this gap should be a signature item in the Obama presidency. It crosses traditional partisan lines (appealing to hawks by making our forces more lethal and maneuverable, but also appealing to the liberal crowd in its "green" factor) and also illustrates a way in which national security spending can add to rather than undermine economic security. Moreover, in a world in which 32,000 Chinese energy workers were evacuated from Libya, it would help the Pentagon to begin to intellectually wrestle with the larger energy competition going on at the global and strategic levels.

■ **Establish Air-Sea Battle Doctrine (and help the Air Force regain its mojo).** The last decade has been notable for the rise of insurgency and, in turn, counterinsurgency thinking. But the same period also saw the building of anti-access/area denial (AAAD) capabilities that could undermine the strategic position the U.S. has enjoyed in Asia for decades, as well as invert certain core U.S. military strengths into potential vulnerabilities (targeting our highly networked forces and our dependence on power projection from a shrinking number of increasingly vulnerable carriers and fixed air bases).

The president should demand that his new secretary truly give meaning to the oft-abused term of "balance." Air-Sea Battle Doctrine (ASBD) may be the answer to the challenge of AAAD, but the shared planning and acceptance of cross-service mutual dependency required to make it real is still not truly accepted by the services' staff and program offices. Adding to the gap, the services' civilian leadership remains largely quiet and, in some cases, not even involved in the off-and-on ASBD discussions (much like our regional allies, upon whom the success of the doctrine depends, underscoring again the need to make partnership real).

Establishing presidential support for this vision (especially for a new generation of long-range strike weapons) is not only a strategic requirement, but also will better define what is expected of the force beyond Afghanistan and Iraq and beyond the growing notion of simply more COIN in more places. While the risks of irregular, asymmetric warfare likely won't go away regardless of what we do, ASBD addresses the other risk we can influence. It defines the most important wars that the Air Force and Navy, in particular, had better prepare to fight, so that we don't ever have to fight them.

This presidential tasking is about joint vision and execution, but is also perhaps most important for the Air Force's own internal identity. The series of decapitation strikes that Gates carried out against Air Force leadership may have been bureaucratically necessary, but they also seemingly stole the service's mojo when it was already wrestling with the massive technologic and organizational shifts that unmanned systems and space/cyberwarfare present. As opposed to the confidence the Air Force exuded during the Cold War, observers now comment on its uncertainty regarding long-term priorities and roles. Injecting the new doctrine into education, acquisitions and training exercises won't just answer a core national security need, but also will re-establish this critical service's own narrative and vision.

■ **Answer the call of the commons.** Growing attention has been paid in recent strategic documents to "global commons" and the emergence of new conflict domains like cyberspace. But the president should make clear that he expects more than the regurgitation of buzzwords and demand an organizational clarification of DoD's mission and interests in them. That is, what does war look like in these spaces, versus insurgency in these spaces, versus terrorism, versus crime, etc., and what is the DoD role in each?

For example, when it comes to talking about cyber attacks, senior defense leaders have lumped together teenagers defacing public DoD websites, disgruntled soldiers leaking documents, hackers stealing industry secrets, terrorists using YouTube and foreign military agents accessing classified networks to plant worms, as if they were all one and the same, simply because their activities all involved a digital series of 0s and 1s. This is akin to treating the threat posed by a teenager with a bottle rocket, a robber with a revolver, an insurgent with a bomb or a state with a cruise missile as the same simply because they all involve gunpowder.

The next secretary must focus not just on building capacity, but on determining how this capacity will be used to reinforce, not overwhelm, other parts of national strategy. The practice of "double-hatting" civilian and military agency positions and "switching" between Title 10 and Title 50 roles is a sub-optimal management practice regardless of how talented the single individual is in both roles. It also violates the spirit, if not the letter, of those laws. Equally, the presently confused chain of command between the new Cyber Command and the geographic combatant commands must be clarified, rather than waiting for what a recent Brookings report calls a "Digital Kasserine Pass" in the making.

These tasks may seem broad, but each hits a core area of defense policy that presently stands in dire need of presidential level guidance and SecDef execution.

There may be pushback from the peanut gallery of wonks and politicos claiming that any such speech would restrict the new secretary's freedom of action. They could not be more wrong. By setting out his vision as a series of such flag posts, the president would provide direction and support, not micromanage the process of reaching them.

Obama has consistently made clear a strong personal conviction, saying, "I have no higher priority than the safety and security of the American people." Nominating Panetta to be Gates' successor was a seminal moment in that effort. But even more important than the "who" are the goals he sets for Panetta and how he ensures they are met. Those words may be the actions that most define Obama's legacy in the defense policy space. **AFJ**