

## **Focusing on reliability, availability and maintainability**

### **GATES APPROVES NEW DEFENSE STRATEGY OVER OBJECTIONS OF SERVICE CHIEFS**

Defense Secretary Robert Gates has dismissed concerns raised by the four military service chiefs that portions of a new defense strategy present too much risk, approving a blueprint for the Pentagon to swing its focus away from preparing for major conventional wars in order to be ready for more Iraq-like missions.

On June 6, after allowing the services nearly four months to make their case against portions of the document, and a day after ousting the Air Force secretary and chief of staff, Gates signed the 2008 National Defense Strategy. The final version of the document includes elements that caused the service chiefs some concern, according to Pentagon officials.

“The services non-concurred on the issue of risk” in the strategy, said a Pentagon official familiar with the objections of the four-star military chiefs.

“There was a clear sense in the OSD leadership — almost across the board — that the urgency for force development is much more focused on the long war on terror than on some other variety of campaigns,” said a senior military leader involved in hammering out a final version of the strategy.

Gates has pushed the services to focus their efforts on current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and not structure long-term plans for how to train and equip forces based on fighting a major war against a potential adversary such as China or Russia.

“We think the conflicts of the future are probably going to look a lot like they are today, but we have to be prepared to fight the wars of today as well as anything that might come up,” said a Pentagon official familiar with the new document, which has not yet been made public. A 25-page unclassified version is due to be released soon.

By approving the new document, Gates rounds out the catalog of updated strategic planning documents the defense secretary will leave the next administration and establishes in the official Pentagon canon his view that near-term needs are the highest priority.

A companion document being prepared by the Joint Staff, the National Military Strategy, is still in draft and is expected to be issued in the coming weeks, according to a Pentagon official.

In a May 21 address in Tampa, FL, Gates previewed a small portion of the new strategy.

The “exceedingly complex challenge posed by religiously motivated and profoundly revolutionary international terrorism — as well as by failed and failing states, and by tribal and ethnic and sectarian conflicts — is not going to go away,” Gates told the gathering of the Special Operations Forces International Conference.

“As the upcoming 2008 National Defense Strategy states, the war on terror will be a ‘long-term, episodic, multi-front and multi-dimensional conflict,’” the defense secretary said.

The Pentagon official who described the document said it “looks at ways to defeat violent, extremist networks, deal with rogue regimes [and] weapons of mass destruction and [interact] with what we consider rising partners, primarily China.”

Defense Department officials originally intended to unveil the new strategy, prepared by Thomas Mahnken, deputy assistant secretary of defense for policy planning in the Pentagon’s policy shop, four months ago. Last month, Gates approved two other key strategic planning documents — the Guidance for the Development of the Force and Guidance for the Employment of the Force.

The Unified Command Plan and the Quadrennial Defense Review — the remaining so-called “gold standard” guidance documents — are not due to be updated until next year. — *Jason Sherman*