

"Rebuilding America's Defenses": Access Problem Ignored

Issue Brief

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A conservative think tank called The Project for the New American Century has completed a two-year study of U.S. defense needs. It is issuing a report entitled "Rebuilding America's Defenses" that clearly is aimed at influencing the next administration. Most of the report makes sense, such as its advocacy of global missile defenses, its call for more multirole submarines, and its recognition of the importance of electronic warfare. Some parts, such as its proposals for a moratorium on aircraft-carrier production and a space service independent of the Air Force, make no sense at all.

But if there is a fundamental flaw in the report, it is the geopolitically naive notion that America can count on foreign allies to provide assured access to forward bases in Eurasia. To quote the report, "Independent, expeditionary air wings containing a broad mix of aircraft ... should be based in Italy, Southeastern Europe, central and perhaps eastern Turkey, the Persian Gulf, and Southeast Asia." The entire force structure proposed by the report revolves around the critical assumption that "forward operating bases" in those locations will be available.

Unfortunately, they probably won't be. The U.S. has been kicked out of all its major military bases in Southeast Asia, and the only reliable ally in the region (Australia) is too far from likely areas of action to be useful for projecting air power. All of America's Persian Gulf allies have imposed restrictions on the use of their bases, as have the Turks -- a trend that will grow worse over time as national interests diverge. The same divergence is apparent in Europe: many people have forgotten that Italy blocked use of the Aviano air base in 1995 when the U.S. resisted giving it a role in Bosnian peace negotiations. The Greeks are ... well, they're the Greeks.

It is foolish to base a force posture on the presumed durability of foreign relationships. Even if forward bases exist, a resourceful enemy will know how to disable them. But the report assumes otherwise: it calls for more short-ranged, land-based strike aircraft, cuts back the number of carriers to nine (a position favored by Dukakis in 1988) and declines to endorse further production of the B-2 bomber -- the only survivable, long-range strike aircraft available to the Air Force for the next 20 years. If such advice is followed, the "next American century" may not outlive Strom Thurmond.

“Rebuilding America’s Defenses”: Findings

<u>Service</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Systems Supported</u>	<u>Systems Opposed</u>
Air Force	\$110-115B (up ~32%)	F-15E strike aircraft, F-22 fighter, C-17 transport, JSTARS, AWACS	Joint Strike Fighter
Army	\$90-95B (up ~ 32%)	Comanche helo, Medium combat vehicles	Crusader self- propelled artillery
Navy/ Marines	\$100-110B (up ~17%)	Virginia-class sub, F/A-18 fighter, DD-21/51 destroyers, V-22 tiltrotor, AAV amphib	Joint Strike Fighter, CVX aircraft carrier

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