

New Ways Of War Should Inform Our Defense Planning

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Posted 03/06/2014 06:41 PM ET

Investors.com • Investor's Business Daily

"We march backwards into the future" is a line written by mass media theorist Marshall McLuhan. He wrote it 50 years ago, but his words describe exactly how present-day media analysts, academicians and elected officials are approaching national security issues.

And that's no way to prepare for the fearsome threats on or not far over the horizon.

There is a way, however, to break out of that dangerous situation: Take a thoughtful look at the new ways we are fighting wars, including both new weapons systems and the shifting geostrategic environment in which we operate.

Those "new ways of war" provide a valuable window on our future national security needs, and they should be informing our national defense planning. Instead, we are locked into backward-focused defense "planning" that also is badly distorted by today's hyperpolitical government budgeting process.

Let's look at one of the new, high-profile weapons systems: drones. At present, we are focused on the legality of using drones to kill enemy leaders, including U.S. citizens in foreign countries. That's an issue worthy of legal attention, but what about the potential future use of drones by our enemies against targets in the U.S.?

Drones are relatively cheap and easily transportable. The possibility they'll be used to strike targets within our own borders is undeniable. In fact, Iran recently released videos of simulated drone attacks against a U.S. aircraft carrier and an enemy city.

Yet there appears to be little — or no — discussion of how we should be planning to prevent and respond to drone attacks against our own country.

Another element of the "new ways of war" that should be factored into national security planning is the probable expansion of the number of nations with nuclear weapons capability.

Membership in the "nuclear club" has expanded steadily, growing from the U.S. and the then-Soviet Union to include the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan and North Korea. Israel is also presumed to have nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them.

Barring a diplomatic miracle, the "nuclear club" soon will include Iran. And that could trigger a new round of nuclear weapons expansion among other Middle East nations. There also is the prospect of non-nation groups getting control of nuclear

weapons that could be used against the United States.

The prospect of a world in which North Korea can reach our West Coast cities and Iran can reach our East Coast and Midwest cities with nuclear weapons — or other weapons of mass destruction — should certainly be informing U.S. defense planning. But there's little evidence that is happening.

Shifting global alliances are yet another "new way of war" that should be factored into national security planning. Consider NATO, which has been the linchpin of our system of international alliances.

It began with 12 members: the U.S., the U.K., Canada, France, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg. Today, NATO includes 28 nations and lacks the common objective of blocking an aggressive Soviet Union.

It would be difficult to find a situation where today's NATO would find a cause in which the group would act with unanimity.

And even the "special relationship" with Britain has been diminished by both shifting U.S. diplomatic priorities and a diminished British military capability.

As U.S. foreign alliances have eroded, those of our potential enemies have expanded. The linkage already mentioned between North Korea and Iran is one example. There's also an evolving relationship between North Korea and Cuba. In addition, Russia has re-established its connections with Egypt.

These are only a few examples of strategic alliances among our potential enemies that are strengthening as our traditional alliances weaken.

The "new ways of war" cited are only a few of the many factors that should be influencing how we plan and budget for tomorrow's national security.

There also are profoundly troubling demographic and cultural trends, new ocean-bed sources of energy and minerals that are generating conflicting national claims, cyberattacks with devastating implications and space-launched weapons of mass destruction.

It's time to stop planning national security based on backward-looking strategic thinking or fallacious assessments of what we can "afford." We must instead start planning on the basis of what we need to reasonably assure our security well into the future.

Let the grass-roots pressure on legislators, journalists and academicians to see national security more realistically begin. And let it begin here and now. The consequences of failing to do so — or even delaying — are unthinkable.

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