

Rumsfeld's Travails are Temporary

Issue Brief

May 22, 2001

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Sunday's *Washington Post* contained a critique of how defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld has conducted the Pentagon's strategy review. The story made it sound like dissatisfaction is centered in the Army, but in fact all of the services are complaining about being excluded from a process that may determine their fate. Congress and the defense industry are unhappy too (although industry has grown accustomed to being ignored).

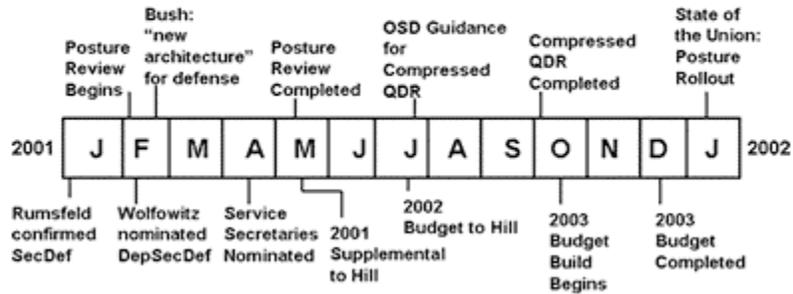
Rumsfeld ought to be concerned. Les Aspin never recovered from his early missteps as defense secretary. But complaints about Aspin were focused on the substance of his policies. The whining about Rumsfeld is mostly about style. Critics are likely to be pleasantly surprised when they see what he has actually decided. He doesn't intend to throw huge amounts of money at space or missile defense. He is mainly concerned with fixing problems the Clinton Administration created.

In the case of the **Air Force**, that means arresting the slide of the combat-aircraft inventory towards senility. Most types of USAF aircraft have either exceeded their maximum acceptable average age, or are within months of doing so. So the biggest part of Pentagon budget increases on Rumsfeld's watch will be new aircraft for the Air Force, because that's where the need is greatest. It's too bad Clinton's irresponsibility will force the new administration to simultaneously buy new bombers, fighters, tankers and transports, but global air superiority is essential to military success, so that's probably what Rumsfeld will do.

In the case of the **Navy**, Rumsfeld is too shrewd to believe all the trendy commentary about aircraft-carrier vulnerability. He knows underway carriers are nearly impossible to track, and that killing them is even harder. He also knows the U.S. has no suitable substitutes for its nuclear-powered carriers in a wide range of demanding missions. So he will direct spending increases to assuring the future survivability of carriers through networking, sensor upgrades, and aircraft modernization -- including the stealthy Joint Strike Fighter.

In the case of the **Army**, Rumsfeld is well aware that neglecting land warfare will encourage potential adversaries to concentrate their military investments in items like armor. He is likely to support every major feature of the Army's proposed transformation strategy, because it's long overdue and relatively cheap. That means a lighter, more deployable armored vehicle, acceleration of the stealthy Comanche armed recon helicopter, and continued investment in the next-gen Crusader howitzer. If that sounds like giving the Army almost everything it wants, well it's about time.

Transformation Timeline: Year One



• Posture review & budget revision require entire year.

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