

October 30, 2019

# Strategic Defense Procurement

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*Addressing the Middle East Military Technology Conference, Bahrain: October 30, 2019*

*Your Excellencies, Chairman Sheikh Dr Abdulla bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, distinguished guests: My profound thanks for the invitation to be here with you at this important gathering, and our deepest appreciation to His Majesty for hosting this event.*

*Our impressive opening speaker yesterday, GCC Chairman His Excellency Dr AbdulLatif Al Zayani, unwittingly opened the door for me when he said that it was our task to avoid “black swan events”; unanticipated issues which could damage stability in the region. The good news is that I have just flown from my home state of Western Australia, where black swans not only originated, but are the state emblem. So I have been familiar with black swans all my life. And I can tell you: there is no such thing as a “black swan event”, only a failure of intelligence.*

*My talk today is specifically on “Strategic Defense Procurement”, highlighting a new era of conflict, and therefore a new era of technologies and defense procurement requirements. As such, it differs from the linear approach to defense thinking, but nonetheless still draws upon the advances in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and the like which also offer dramatic improvements in the capabilities of existing weapons and doctrine.*

**T**he sole object of power is the imposition of will. Now, finally, technologies are beginning to exist which take much of that task away from physical force capabilities and into the realm of information dominance — ID — systems and doctrine.

This very fact must transform the way national security forces think about deterrence, power projection, nation-building, and defense. ID is at the core of the entire governmental and social structure, and therefore determines the stability of currencies and economies. It can be used to build national cohesion, and erode it in opposing nations.

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ID warfare has its own set of technological capabilities, firmly rooted in all uses of the electronic spectrum. This has only been possible as a result of scientific advances over the past century.

So now, for the first time in a century or more, defense procurement and acquisition strategies must account for threats and operational responsibilities which extend beyond the conventional, kinetic defense spectrum. At the same time, because of sociological and population changes, alliance structures which have been in place for decades are now under extreme pressure, and in many areas may have lost their utility. When great sociological and historical upheavals occur, the threat of change creates uncertainty among populations, and this automatically triggers a turn away from globalist thinking toward nationalism. This has been the case throughout history. It is the case now, as we enter a period of great upheaval in the balance of power.

This means, as we enter a period of greater emphasis on state sovereignty (nationalism), that self-reliance in national security will become of primary importance. It does not, however, afford us the luxury of abandoning entirely old alliances, nor even of abandoning entirely the doctrine, force structures, and technological patterns on which we have relied. But we will now need to look at new frameworks which accommodate hybrid and proxy conflict in both the military and social spectra.

1. **The global strategic context has changed, therefore all defense thinking must also change.** The Middle Eastern strategic context has changed dramatically, particularly in the past year, and will change even further over the coming few years. This means that for national security mechanisms to successfully perform, they too must change with the new socio-geopolitical and technological realities. Failure to change national security structures, including what we called our “national security industrial bases”, will result in the potential loss of security or economic viability of our nation-states.

We have moved into an era in which Information Dominance (ID) doctrine and approaches will be the decisive strategic system which integrate conventional warfare, hybrid warfare, proxy warfare, cyber, and the like. This will require a decisive move to create new capabilities, many of them incorporating artificial intelligence, machine learning, remote sensing, automated systems, and the like. It will mean reducing some of our focus on legacy systems, structures, and doctrine. The new forms of warfare will require greater

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high-level coordination of civil and military agencies and capabilities, and will demand the involvement of national educational institutions to prepare the new generation of information dominance warriors.

On a positive note, this means that many of the skills required do not depend on a large population base, nor even an extraordinarily large economy, but more on innovation and creativity. Above all, the new situation requires state leaderships to actually define national objectives, and the ability to comprehend threats and opportunities.

The global strategic framework and the shape of the global economy began to change with the end of the Cold War in 1990, and, by the 2020s, we are seeing now a totally new architecture, or balance of power, emerging, militarily and economically. This is true globally, but it is particularly true right now in the greater Middle East and the Gulf.

Alliance structures changed totally in 2019, particularly in the Gulf, Arabian, and Red Sea regions. And, over the past four years or so, we had also seen precursors of this, with the US-Egypt break, and so on. We have yet to see the full ramifications of all of these changes. But what is urgent and clear is that the construct of — and the way we approach — coalition warfare within traditional military alliance structures is now totally inadequate to preserve the sovereign status of most states within the Arabian Peninsula, Gulf, and Horn of Africa region.

In other words, the military doctrine, hardware, and strategic policies of all states in the region now must accommodate the new era of hybrid, abstract, and proxy warfare which began with the end of the Cold War. In many respects, the old external powers of the region may be seen to be retiring (US, UK, West), but it should not be taken for granted that the new external powers (PRC, Russia, Turkey) will be successful. There is a strong push, particularly by Iran, to keep external powers marginalized. Tehran, as at late 2019, has been relatively successful, but it is also not guaranteed of future success. Most of the major powers have immediate, existential *domestic* threats which may determine their external behavior. This particularly applies to the PRC and to Iran.

The basic contextual reality which we see today, and for the coming decade, is that all major powers are functioning from a position of weakness; this ap-

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plies to the US, the People's Republic of China, Russia, the European Union states, Iran, and so on. What is therefore of primary concern is not just how to win conflicts, but how to ensure that adversaries lose them. Wars, like elections, are decided not so much by who wins, but by who loses. And loss is generally self-inflicted. Good strategy should induce an opponent's loss.

2. Threats, today, are more nuanced than in the recent past. This means — as we have seen during the past year — that threats are no longer clearly identifiable as “foreign” or “domestic”; they are often amorphous and transnational. Threats and strengths are as much sociological and economic as they are military, and yet the military, civil policing, and intelligence communities are at present the only tools of response available. Similarly, national capability-building is far more of a “whole-of-nation” issue than in the recent past, due to the changing nature of the strategic context, which today now has returned to an emphasis on nationalism, national identity, and sovereignty, after several decades of extended urban-dominated globalism. The good news and the bad news is that this now requires a prioritization on information dominance capabilities, which are heavily under-developed at present in most defense forces and intelligence services, but which can be developed using domestic resources. This places a greater priority on national strategic planning, and targeted force development in the areas of psychological and psychopolitical warfare and nationbuilding.
3. The fluid change in the strategic context is mirrored by the reality that coalition warfare practices, which have evolved gradually since World War I, are giving way to the real need for sovereign capabilities in Information Dominance, including cyber and other electronic capabilities. With modern computing capabilities, we are seeing the impact, as well, on kinetic capabilities, particularly with high-capacity unmanned vehicles which can be deployed even by seemingly primitive forces in an informal terrain. The September 14, 2019, pre-dawn attacks on the two major oil facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais in eastern Saudi Arabia were evidence of that, and the reality that conventional counter-UAV technologies remain insufficient.

This threat will soon morph into low-level, highly-maneuverable hypersonic glide weapons which will demand new, and probably heavily electronically-based, countermeasures.

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This means that each state should have inherent capabilities to develop strategic offensive and defensive capabilities which are less dependent on imported hardware and foreign support. Ideally, of course, there should be an inherent capability to be able to sustain conventional, kinetic warfare capabilities, especially in the area of expendables, such as ordnance, fuels and lubricants, and spare parts. But the emphasis over the coming decade and more will be on intangible and indirect forms of security. Napoleon said that, on the battlefield, “the moral is to the physical as two is to one”; in other words, that psychological factors were twice as important as physical factors. In reality, and in the broader strategic framework, psychological factors — such as those embodied in Information Dominance warfare — are perhaps a hundred times as important as the physical.

The delivery of ID capabilities as both an offensive and defensive system is, of course, heavily dependent on electronic capabilities, but must be driven by content considerations: or message considerations. ID warfare must build national resilience and purpose and must pre-emptively undermine or defeat foreign threats before they emerge.

That is the key: modern defenses in the ID age should, to be economic in manpower and financial terms, be pre-emptive in nature, targeting social and political structures in a way which *precludes* the likelihood of strikes of the type we saw in Saudi Arabia on September 14, or of the threat from hypersonic weapons of the coming decade.

This takes defense into the grand strategy realm. As Sun-tzu said: “To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”