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Military Scuttles Strategy Requiring '2-War' Capability

By THOM SHANKER

WASHINGTON, July 12 — The United States is abandoning requirements that its military be prepared to fight two major wars simultaneously, according to a classified strategy document. Instead, the new strategy will order the armed forces to "win decisively" in a single major conflict, defend American territory against new threats and, at the same time, conduct a number of holding actions elsewhere around the globe.

For the first time, defense of the American homeland is incorporated into guidelines for American military strategy that are ultimately used to request money for the military. This elevation of homeland defense into one of the four main military "capabilities" refers mostly to administration plans for missile defense. But it also officially gives the military domestic duties in battling terrorism, especially in the case of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. Whether that mission is for the active force or the National Guard and Reserve has not been decided, officials say.

Since 1993, the American military has been told to prepare to fight two major regional wars simultaneously, for instance against Iraq and North Korea. The new requirements call on the military to fight and win one such war, while maintaining sufficient forces abroad to deter aggression by another enemy and to carry out an unspecified number of smaller-scale deployments like those in Bosnia, Somalia and Haiti.

While a change in military requirements had been expected in a strategic review under way at the Pentagon, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld told Congress as recently as June 21 that no action had been taken on whether to scrap the two-war requirement. This classified document will now shape that defense review mandated by Congress every four years.

Some senior administration officials had hoped that shifting from a two-war capability would provide significant savings through personnel cuts to free up money to

But as civilian officials and the military began this week to draft specific plans to replace the two-war requirement, officials said it quickly became obvious that a sizable increase in forces might be required, because of the number of missions other than the major regional war for which the military must prepare.

The changes are laid out in a 29- page document known as the "terms of reference," which the Pentagon will use to guide specific policy and budget requests for personnel and weapons — the numbers of everything from carrier battle groups to jet fighters to troops on the ground.




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After long and often difficult negotiations, a final version of the document was approved by Mr. Rumsfeld, the armed service chiefs and the regional war-fighting commanders about two weeks ago. Both civilian and military leaders described the text as a victory for compromise, even as they expressed concern that their new vision could be nullified by a shortage of available money, caused by the tax cut, Medicare expenses and other spending priorities.

"These terms of reference are realistic; they better reflect what we do and how we should prepare for it," one military officer said. "But is there enough money? If not, everybody will have to downsize their expectations."

The document requires the American military to maintain capabilities so that it can, "concurrently," carry out these four broad missions:

¶ Defend United States territory.

¶ Prevent aggressors from taking hostile action by making them afraid of a response from American forces in Europe, the Middle East, southwest Asia, northeast Asia and along the East Asian rim.

¶ "Win decisively" in one major conflict.

¶ Conduct "small-scale contingencies of limited duration in other areas of the world."

No specific number of missions beyond the one major war was stated, although closed-door debate centered on two or three such contingencies' flaring up at the same time, officials said.

The document is classified, officials said, mostly because of a few sections assessing risk and detailing the pre-positioning of war-fighting matériel. But more than a dozen senior civilian policymakers and military officers provided details of the document in recent days on the condition they not be identified.

The two-war requirement was always less a full-blown strategy than a system for deciding the size of the American armed forces. It became an issue in last year's presidential campaign when George W. Bush criticized the Clinton administration's military preparedness; the criticism involved a rating for one Army division as unready for its role in the two-war strategy — not because of poor training or morale, but because many of its troops were deployed by presidential order to a military mission in Bosnia.

"We haven't been able to do two- major-theater wars for years," a military officer said. "We paid it lip service. The new terms are supposed to acknowledge the realities of the world today. It's time we matched our forces to our strategy."

But some Pentagon officials and even members of Congress have warned that dropping the commitment to fight two major wars at once may frighten American allies, especially reluctant allies, for instance in the Middle East, and embolden adversaries like Iraq and North Korea.

"If an enemy seizes the initiative in a major way in one part of the world, we still have to prove we are not giving up everywhere else," a Pentagon official said. "We have to maintain the residual forces to win elsewhere — but perhaps not instantly."

One contentious issue that initially divided the military and civilians came when Mr. Rumsfeld's team described the expected outcome from war as one in which American forces would "prevail."

Such words have power, and the phrase struck those in uniform as equivocal, as allowing too much risk, as accepting a long period of combat with an outcome short of dominating victory.

"We don't like a fair fight," one officer said. "We want to win, absolutely and on our terms. The phrase, 'win decisively,' was not just a victory for the Army or Air Force or Navy or Marines, but for all the people who have to carry out the mission."

The challenge facing the Pentagon now is to translate the broad guidelines of this document into a detailed strategy, as part of the Quadrennial Defense Review required by Congress, which Mr. Rumsfeld has pledged to complete on an accelerated schedule by August. That review will guide the budget proposals.

"What this Pentagon is looking at is a broader range of scenarios," said Michele A. Flournoy, who drafted the previous quadrennial review while serving in the Clinton Pentagon. "They are striving to break out of two-major-theater-wars and get to something else that still adequately supports our alliances and our global interests, and gives greater attention to defending the United States."

One problem, said Ms. Flournoy, who is now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, is that there is no single predictable threat, and no single goal of a military campaign. For instance, the military requirements in a war to restore a national boundary are quite different from one whose goal is occupying an enemy or toppling a regime.