

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH THOMAS MAHNKEN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY PLANNING VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 2:30 P.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 2008

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs): Dr. Mahnken.

MR. MAHNKEN: Yeah. I hear that echo too. (Laughs.)

MR. HOLT: All right. Well, sorry about that.

MR. MAHNKEN: That's okay.

MR. HOLT: We'll try to get through this as best we can. But welcome to the DOD Live Bloggers Roundtable. And we appreciate you joining us today. And the floor is yours, sir.

MR. MAHNKEN: Oh. Well, thanks for expressing an interest in the National Defense Strategy.

As -- I guess to open things up, I would, I guess I would say, one of, you know, I guess one of the questions that often comes up is, why? Why did Secretary Gates decide to release a new National Defense Strategy? And the why has as much to do with, you know, the internal processes that drive our strategy development as anything else.

We have developed, the Secretary has signed, a whole series of internal strategy documents in recent months. And they were really driven by the National Defense Strategy, as sort of the capstone strategy document for the department. It's part of, you know, the way we do our strategy development and planning within the department.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Well, Andrew, you were first on line. So why don't you get us started here?

Q Thank you.

Doctor, Andrew Lubin from the U.S. Naval Institute's Proceedings and Get the Gouge. Thank you for the time with us today, sir.

MR. MAHNKEN: Glad to be with you.

Q Thank you.

So there seems to be, in the defense strategy, members of the Army, the Navy and, to a great extent, the Air Force; seem to be fighting against the whole concept of fourth generation warfare.

Can we have a united National Defense Strategy, when a lot of our senior officers don't seem to believe in it?

MR. MAHNKEN: Are you saying they don't believe in the defense strategy or they don't believe in -- I'm not sure what they don't believe in.

Q They don't believe in how important, you know, fighting against insurgents, you know, what T.X. Hammes calls fourth generation warfare, is to the American defense strategy. They seem to be running out there, building huge weapons systems, to recreate the war against, you know, against the North Koreans coming across the border.

MR. MAHNKEN: Right. Well, I think, you know, what Secretary Gates said in -- I'm sorry, the echo's getting to me.

Q (Laughs.)

MR. MAHNKEN: What Secretary Gates said in releasing the strategy is really important, which is it's all about balance and that there -- if you look at the investments that the department makes in traditional warfare, it's pretty substantial. And if you look at what the services fund in terms of programs, in terms of training and education and when it comes to traditional warfare, it's substantial.

And what the National Defense Strategy is saying is that, you know, that it's important to have that balance and to emphasize irregular warfare. And in doing so it's really continuing, you know, what the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review said.

And so I think -- you know, I think it's something that requires cultural change, organizational change. And I think we see that change occurring. You mentioned the Navy. I mean, the Navy just stood up its Irregular Warfare Office. I believe it was last week or the week before that.

Q But on the other hand, the secretary's firing two -- you know, he fired those people from the Air Force who didn't roger up and agree with it, so I'm wondering whether -- if Secretary Gates wants the balance, but some of the senior leaders seem not to. That's why I'm curious to how -- whether this will be successful or not.

MR. MAHNKEN: Well, that's why the National Defense Strategy is there, right? It's there to drive the department and to drive a whole series of subordinate strategy documents, some of which are out publicly but actually most of which are classified and are not in the -- you know, not in the public realm but drive our resource allocation, drive our planning and so forth.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Jim Dalbow.

Q Good afternoon, Doctor. This is Jim Dalbow with the Unofficial Coast Guard Blog.

MR. MAHNKEN: Hey. Good afternoon. Q What is the impact of the 2008 National Defense Strategy on the roles and missions of the U.S. Coast Guard?

MR. MAHNKEN: (Chuckles.) Well, it is the -- it is the National Defense Strategy, and it -- the National Defense Strategy seeks to describe how the Defense Department fits in with the activities of other departments and agencies, including Department of Homeland Security, as well as the efforts of our allies and our partners and our friends.

So, you know, in the NDS, what we're seeking to do is describe the Defense portion of that. And clearly, the Coast Guard has a very close, you know, complementary role in a number of these missions.

Q Okay, thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Jason.

Q Hello, sir. I was interested about the entry about terrorism where it says that victory will include discounting extremist ideology, creating fissures and reducing them to the level of nuisance groups that can be tracked and handled by law enforcement capabilities. I like the sentiment; however I thought it was a little bit different from what the White House has expressed as their view on terrorism, for instance. And I was wondering about the origin of that language and if that's Secretary Gates's position that he's pushing for the war -- the long war, as we're calling it now.

MR. MAHNKEN: That -- I mean, that verbiage that you quoted is really discussing how we would envision the long war against violent extremism playing out and ultimately ending. It's a vision that, you know, is likely to unfold over decades. We're not saying that local law enforcement groups are sufficiently robust to deal with violent extremist groups. What we're saying is, over time, if we are successful, we should hopefully be able to reduce these groups to the level of a nuisance. So it's not a statement of today. It's our aspiration and our goal if we're successful in carrying out that strategy. So really, I don't see any difference between, you know, what Secretary Gates is saying and what the president has said at all.

Q Thanks very much.

MR. MAHNKEN: Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And again, I apologize for the echo.

Paul -- Paul McLeary, are you still with us? (No response.) All right. Colin?

Q Hi. Dr. Colin Clark with Military.com.

MR. MAHNKEN: Hi, Colin.

Q Wow, I hate to say anything. (Pause.) It seems to me, looking out over the department the last, let's say, three months, I understand that at least several -- it's unclear how many -- of the Joint Chiefs nonconcurred with

the strategy. And the RAND Corporation, you know, recently came out with its report basically saying we should not be, quote, "waging war" against terrorism, we should be managing the terrorist threat as an intelligence and law enforcement issue.

There does seem to be, I guess going back to the Navy guy's question, some distance between what Secretary Gates is saying we will do, and what a raft of people, including some senior people inside the building, think we should be doing. Can you give us some idea how you got to this conclusion that, you know, the terrorist threat is the fundamental one that we have to address with our military?

MR. MAHNKEN: Yeah. Well, I think -- I think what Secretary Gates has said on any number of occasions is that this is the war that we are fighting now and that whatever else we plan for and whatever else we do, we need to succeed in the war that we're -- that we're fighting now. You know, so this is -- this is a statement of that, but it's not the only statement that he's made.

And he is not saying that irregular warfare is the only capability that we need, the only contingency that we need to plan for. And again, I think if you read the strategy, it talks about the need for balance and the need to prepare for a variety of different contingencies. But it does say that, you know, we need to -- the most important capability we need is the capability to win the war that we're fighting now.

Q All right.

MR. MAHNKEN: And in part -- just to add on to that, I mean, in part that is because we, you know, do not -- you know, we are still in the process of building up that capacity, that institutional capacity within the department. It's a process that began with the 2006 QDR. We've clearly made progress, but we're not there.

Q And what -- just if I can sort of piggyback on that, there was a lot of chatter among the chattering classes that Gates was coming out with his strategy to try and influence the next administration and its priorities. Ridiculous, absolutely on target, or what?

MR. MAHNKEN: Ridiculous, given the two choices. As I mentioned earlier, the National Defense Strategy was developed and ultimately released to influence internal DOD processes, our process of developing the National Military Strategy and subordinate guidance documents. And that is something that happens on a regular basis every couple of years.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Greg?

Q Yeah. Doctor, Greg Grant here. I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about how the strategy may be influencing the Roles and Missions Review that's under way -- you said it's designed to have an effect on some of the internal discussions there -- and perhaps a little bit about where that review stands and any findings that have come out already --

MR. MAHNKEN: Well, I'll just say that as, you know, the capstone strategy document for the department, of course it -- of course it influences things like the Roles and Missions Review.

But as to, you know, where that review stands, it is ongoing, but I'm not going to talk about any findings, because certainly they would need to be vetted and ultimately approved by the leadership of the department.

Q All right, thank you.

MR. MAHNKEN: Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any follow-up questions?

Q Yeah, Jack. Paul McLeary -- (inaudible).

MR. HOLT: Oh, yeah, I forgot you, Paul. Go ahead.

Q Yeah, sorry I -- (inaudible).

The name of the game going forward, joint operations -- (inaudible) -- as well as dealing with terrorism, talk a bit about the -- (inaudible) -- joint ops.

MR. MAHNKEN: Wow, I'm having real difficulty hearing you, but I think you asked me about joint operations?

Q Correct, yeah.

MR. MAHNKEN: Okay. You know, one of the things that the strategy talks about is the need for an expanded conception of what jointness is all about. You know, 22 years on to Goldwater-Nichols, 21-22 years on from Goldwater-Nichols we have a superb joint force. But what we need to face many of the challenges that we see now and are likely to see in the future is a jointness that encompasses not only the armed services but civilian capabilities within the Defense Department, other departments and agencies, and our friends and allies. And it's really that integration of all the elements of national power and being able to bring them to bear on the security challenges we face that's an imperative.

Obviously, that's been on display in Iraq and Afghanistan with the need for whole-of-government approaches for counterinsurgency, but I think we would argue that it is equally applicable to other security challenges that we face now and will face in the future. It's one of the reasons why Secretary Gates has been such a vocal proponent of greater funding for, you know, the non-military instruments of national security, if you will, particularly the State Department, USAID and others.

MR. HOLT: All right. Anyone else?

Q If I could ask a quick one. This is Jason Sigger again. I had heard that the National Defense Strategy was largely ready to go way back in November, December, as the guidance for the development of the force and the guidance for the employment of the force documents were being drafted. Along that line, here we are months later. I was just curious what the hold-up was. Was it just a timing issue, or were there other interested parties that were taking a look at it?

MR. MAHNKEN: Well, what you say is right, that the document was largely completed a number of months ago and certainly informed the guidance for the employment of the force and the guidance for the development of the force.

That's why I say that the NDS was developed primarily to inform our internal strategy-making within the Defense Department.

As to why it was released when it was, I think, part of it had to do with the internal staffing process. Part of it had to do with just, you know, various issues of timing and the limited time budget of the senior leadership for considering various things.

Q Sure. Thanks very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any other follow-on questions.

Q Yeah. (Name inaudible.)

I'd like to go back to the issue of how -- obviously it's the Defense Department. So when Secretary Gates says, this is our strategy, everybody says, yes, sir. But how much dissent was there prior to its final approval?

MR. MAHNKEN: I wouldn't comment on that. I would just say that it is the secretary's document. And it bears his signature. And he stands behind it.

Certainly, you know, there were efforts throughout the development of the document, to seek people's views, to take those into account. But ultimately it is the secretary's document.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right. Anyone else.

Well, Dr. Mahnken, thank you for being with us. Once again I apologize for the echo.

MR. MAHNKEN: Well, glad to be with you. I just hope I sound more articulate on the transcript than I do when I'm trying to listen to myself.

MR. HOLT: I know. The transcript will be a handy thing to have on this one.

MR. MAHNKEN: (Laughs.)

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir, for joining us. And we look forward to having you back on the program again. MR. MAHNKEN: Thanks very much.

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