

U.S. President Barack Obama has three absolutely critical priorities for the next 20 or so months: 2012, 2012 and 2012.

The elections will dominate whatever agenda the White House has in mind. And, in turn, that means focus will be on three equally critical issues: the economy, jobs, and to do as little harm as possible in foreign policy, especially as nearly two of every three Americans favor getting out of Afghanistan.



By **Harlan Ullman**, chairman of the Killowen Group, which advises government and business leaders, and senior adviser at Washington's Atlantic Council.

Robert Gates is in the process of standing down. When that will happen is a good question. This fall, Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ends his term and will be replaced. And the vice chairman,

Marine Corps Gen. James Cartwright, will either move up or move out.

The White House has two options and a wish in finding Gates' successor. The wish is that Gates stays for as long as possible. He has done a commendable job. That he has a Republican veneer has not hurt. And Gates is both a safe pair of hands and someone who can make tough decisions, such as canceling major weapon programs and dismissing military and civilian subordinates who have not met the tests of their offices.

With the 2012 election possibly in the balance, Obama does not need problems at the Pentagon. Hence, another safe pair of hands is very attractive politically and is the leading contender as the likely basis for selecting the next defense secretary.

The second option recognizes that the fiscal sky is going to implode over the Pentagon in the coming months. Major changes will be needed as the appetite to

sustain arguably the most professional military force in our history will be starved by colossal deficits and debt, no matter how much Congress tries to pass a budget.

Estimates of a one-fourth to one-third shortfall between what is needed to pay for current and projected force levels and defense budgets likely to be approved over the next years may be on the conservative side, especially if the catastrophes in Japan infect the international economy.

If this option is the basis for choosing Gates' relief, that individual must be formidable in leading the Pentagon and navigating what could be a budgetary tsunami. That requires one tough cookie. And regardless of which option the White House takes, many possible candidates will be reluctant to serve, given the turmoil that lies ahead.

Most likely, the White House will opt for the safe pair of hands option while hoping that Gates' successor will have the right stuff

to cope with the post-2012 election world and what that will mean for the Department of Defense. Unfortunately, doing the least harm now and then transforming into a different personali-

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ty later, while theoretically possible, is practically unworkable because deferring action for the next 20 months will make the tasks even more difficult, whether or not Obama is re-elected. Of course, the next secretary could be interim, as unwieldy as that may be.

The media are filled with names of possible candidates. Many fit the bill for the first option and would be good stewards of the Pentagon. However, good steward-

ship will not be enough. To use a painful metaphor, the image of a patient requiring serious surgery without an anesthetic and delaying as long as possible is relevant.

Who is prepared to bite on this particular bullet? Obvious replacements such as Gen. Colin Powell, Sen. Jack Reed, John Hamre and others have demurred for understandable reasons. The list will be even shorter if the White House decides that it needs a Democrat to respond to party pressure, excluding possible Republicans or independents such as Joe Lieberman.

If that is the case, then someone from inside the Pentagon, such as Navy Secretary Ray Mabus or acquisition Undersecretary Ashton Carter, may prove to be attractive choices.

If it were up to me, the nation needs to start now to prepare for what could be, over the long term, the mother of all defense drawdowns, certainly since the Korean War. That view flies directly in the face of political expediency and the 2012 elections.

We will see what Obama does. But that choice will say a great deal about the president's character and his willingness to confront the toughest issues. □

NATO Needs Better Nonmilitary Options

Against the backdrop of a decade of Western intervention in Afghanistan, the ongoing turmoil in the Arab world makes it clear the U.S. and its allies desperately need better coordination of their nonmilitary responses to security challenges.

When NATO released its new strategic concept in Lisbon last November, there were no surpris-



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es and, perhaps, some disappointments. The document was the product of extensive consultations, not just among governments but also with input from expert discussions and public forums around the alliance, led by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. After the grand unveiling, some wondered how so much time and effort could have been spent on producing a snapshot of the status

quo, rather than an adventurous path toward NATO's future.

The 2010 strategic concept reflected a lot of change beyond the last one drafted in 1999, and in that respect was a success. Perhaps most important, all the allies now agree that threats to their territorial integrity and interests can arise far from their borders, and that their security cooperation needs to reflect this reality. This was a key sticking point in 1999.

However, the 2010 project was not able to take the next step — actually developing new cooperative approaches to deal with future security challenges ranging from terrorism to Middle Eastern instability to energy security.

Over the past decade, it has been increasingly accepted that military power alone will not be sufficient to confront such challenges. But attempts to develop comprehensive trans-Atlantic approaches that integrate military means with the panoply of nonmilitary instruments of power available on both sides of the Atlantic have failed.

One lesson we can already take from Afghanistan is that security challenges should be met with advance planning that integrates all tools of statecraft. This means that diplomacy, military planning, intelligence sharing, development assistance, financial cooperation, police

and security collaboration, and other nonmilitary security instruments should be combined to try to prevent crises from turning violent and to deal with them when they do.

However, attempts to meld the resources of the two most important Euro-Atlantic institutions, NATO and the European Union, and the work of U.N. agencies and nongovernmental organizations, whether in Afghanistan or more generally, have run into serious political obstacles. Those obstacles have nothing to do with the perceived need for such approaches — everyone agrees in principle on that goal. The problem is that other political issues or bureaucratic turf concerns get in the way.

For example, the EU was reluctant to get too intimately involved in Afghanistan, at least partly out of concern that it would become subordinate to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. In Brussels, NATO and EU consultations, which should cover the whole range of security issues, are limited to their shared roles in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Discussions of all other areas of possible security collaboration are blocked by festering differences between NATO members Greece and Turkey over Cyprus.

Prospects for multilateral coop-

eration are further complicated when U.N. and nongovernmental organizations are reluctant to get too close to NATO military operations, fearing that their humanitarian efforts will be perceived as part of a war effort.

Adding urgency to this challenge is the fact that NATO's new concept will do nothing to improve the lopsided burden-sharing equation (with the U.S. doing much more militarily than the allies). At a time when all governments will have constraints on future defense spending, more effective collaboration on nonmilitary aspects of security — an area in which European allies and the EU have many useful resources — could help create a better holistic balance in security efforts.

If the Obama administration hopes to make progress toward more effective international security cooperation, it might be forced to take some steps that appear inconsistent with the multilateral-institution bias the administration has admirably deployed. That bias has helped solidify U.S.-European relations in NATO and improved the atmosphere for international cooperation. However, the administration perhaps should consider working with, but not necessarily through, trans-Atlantic institutions.

This could be done by organizing a running dialogue on the topic

among NATO and EU member states, in which all participants represent their nations rather than any organization. The relevant institutions could be involved as observers and even commentators. If the dialogue produces ideas around which cooperation can be built, those ideas could be introduced into the relevant institutions for action.

If the old roadblocks prevent progress, the U.S. and allies that are agreeable could produce ad hoc approaches intended to enhance trans-Atlantic cooperation in preventing or dealing with security challenges with all instruments of national power, nonmilitary as well as military. If such a mechanism were in place at the beginning of 2011, it could have been activated to help coordinate diplomatic, financial and humanitarian responses to the turmoil spreading across the Middle East.

Such an American policy approach would likely engender howls of protest from inside and outside institutional structures in which member states, as well as bureaucracies, have vested interests. But perhaps those howls would help call attention to the fact that current institutions are simply not producing all that the U.S. and its allies need to confront future security challenges. □