

RELEASE EMBARGO DATE: April 28, 2015 at 9:00 AM

Panel: Revolution in Military Affairs

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 28, 2015 / 12:30-13:45

Talking Points for: Bruce Bennett, RAND Corporation

Military power has long been a foundation of American global preponderance. That military power is in turn a function of the level of military technology achieved, the military budget committed to acquiring weapons systems with that military technology, the ability of military personnel to effectively employ the weapon systems, and a number of other factors. In the current world, there are many dimensions of military technology. And there is ongoing competition between the various powers to dominate or at least be able to impact several of the dimensions. The interconnectivity of these dimensions requires that a dominant country master all of them to at least some degree, whereas a challenger may only need to master a single dimension to significantly undercut its opponents' military power. This interconnectivity contributes significantly to leveling the military playing field.

While the United States has enjoyed a degree of military superiority in recent years, it has never been in a position of military supremacy. This was illustrated by the U.S. 9/11 experiences, but also by the U.S. decision not to build missile defenses that would stop a Soviet or now Russian intercontinental missile attack on the United States.

In the last few years, the United States and most of its allies have decided to reduce investments in military power in favor of social programs and achieving government budget responsibility. Compared to peak U.S. military spending five to six years ago, the United States is reducing its 2015 military research and development (R&D) about 27 percent and its military procurement about 37 percent in real dollar terms. Nevertheless, the average U.S. military R&D investments in the last few years has still been substantially higher than the average R&D investments in real terms during the 1980s, often considered the heyday of U.S. military advances.

The United States is reducing its military budget in part by reducing its subsidies of its allies' national security. It has effectively been telling its allies to assume more responsibility for their own national security, though the United States is still prepared to support them with limited resources when they face external aggression. This message has not been wholly lost on the ROK, as illustrated by the ROK development of its own kill chain to counter the North Korean ballistic missile and nuclear weapon threats. But any conflict in Korea will

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TALKING POINTS

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fundamentally turn on the ground force operations needed to impose Korean unification. The ROK faces major demographic challenges but also political issues that are causing it to reduce its conscription duration. The size of the ROK Army has already shrunk more than 10 percent and is scheduled to shrink another roughly 20-40 percent over the coming 7 to 11 years. This will occur as U.S. ground forces are also reducing in size. Moreover, the ROK technology versus manpower trade-off planned in 2005 is only funded at roughly half the 2015 level originally planned. Thus, on the Korean peninsula, the combined ROK/U.S. military power may not be sufficient for future challenges, and that could be disastrous.

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