

## **U.S.: What the Sequester Will Do to the Military**

March 1, 2013 | 1116 GMT

<http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/us-what-sequester-will-do-military>

США: Что секвестр сделает с армией ("Stratfor", США)

Эксперты американского аналитического центра Stratfor распространили доклад под названием "США: Что секвестр сделает с армией", в котором содержится прогноз о последствиях сокращения государственного финансирования ВС США. ИА REGNUM приводит текст этого любопытного доклада с незначительными сокращениями.

Sequestration, the automatic spending reductions scheduled to take effect March 1, will affect the U.S. military's ability to project force around the world. The current continuing resolution that Congress is using to fund the entire government until March 27 has already affected U.S. forces. The longer these funding cuts continue, the more degradation the U.S. military will incur, with longer-lasting effects.

### **Analysis**

Although Stratfor typically does not examine domestic U.S. issues, this one is geopolitically significant. The U.S. military, and particularly the Navy, is the most powerful force projection instrument in the world. When the sequester takes effect, it will immediately reduce military spending by 8 percent, with more than \$500 billion in cuts to defense spending over 10 years divided equally among the military branches. The continuing resolution is already affecting the military since it has locked the military budget into 2011 spending levels and prevented spending increases or reallocations among various budgets. On March 27, Congress will have to have a new budget in place, extend the continuing resolution or force a government shutdown; the most likely decision will be to maintain the continuing resolution.

It is not the overall amount of the reductions that is damaging, necessarily; it is the way in which the cuts will be implemented. The across-the-board cuts required by the sequestration coupled with the limits set by the continuing resolution are constraining budget planners' options in how to absorb the spending reductions and thus are damaging all the military branches, programs, training, deployments and procurement.

### **Funding Cuts and Force Readiness**

Just the threat of continued budget reductions has had an immediate effect on the military's readiness. The Navy decided not to deploy a second carrier to the Persian Gulf, backing down from its standard of two carriers in the region. Instead, the second carrier will serve in a surge capacity for the immediate future. The other branches have extended the deployments of units already in theaters and delayed others from rotating in as replacements since it is relatively less expensive to have units stay in place than move them and their equipment intercontinentally.

Maintenance budgets across the forces have been reduced or suspended in anticipation of cuts. Training of all non-deploying forces who are not critical to the national strategic forces is also being heavily curtailed. These options were chosen because they are immediate cost-saving measures that can be reversed quickly as opposed to the big-budget procurement programs, in which changes can cause delays for years. In many cases, the Department of Defense would have to pay massive fines for withdrawing from binding contracts, and renegotiations are often very costly. The Defense Department hopes that the cuts will be short-lived, but the longer the spending constraints continue, the more the military's platforms and personnel units degrade in readiness.

The medium- to long-term effects can be even more serious. Any given military platform, from a Stryker armored vehicle to an aircraft carrier, requires a lot of money in order to be ready for use at any time at its intended level of performance. These platforms require consistent use to maintain a certain readiness level because machines cannot sit idle for months to years and then operate effectively, if at all, especially if called on for immediate action. Moreover, the people that operate this equipment need to maintain their working knowledge and operational skill through continued use. This use causes wear and tear on the platform and requires consistent maintenance. All of this is necessary just to maintain the status quo. In the end, there must be a balance between a platform's readiness level and the amount of funding required for operations and maintenance, but if the money is no longer available there is no choice but to reduce readiness.

Also, upgrades are needed so platforms can stay up to date and useable within the system the military is using to move, shoot and communicate. This is a constant cycle that, when interrupted, has very long-lasting consequences. For example, the Navy has said it is considering suspending operations of four of its nine carrier air wings while shutting down four of its carriers in various stages of the operations and maintenance process. This

would essentially give the United States one carrier deployed with one on call for years. This will be sufficient if the world remains relatively quiet, but one large emergency or multiple small ones would leave the United States able to project limited force compared to previous levels.

In the longer term, procurement programs for new equipment will either be delayed or cut altogether. This will put more pressure on existing platforms, requiring them to operate past their intended life spans, and will preclude or delay the introduction of better abilities into the military. Procurement cycles are very slow and take decades to implement; for instance, the Navy that the United States wants to have in 20 years is being planned now. An extreme example of the damage that a military force can incur because of a lack of procurement, operations, maintenance and upgrades is the current state of the Russian military. Russian forces still feel the effects of the Soviet Union's collapse and the subsequent decade of neglect.

### **A Smaller Presence Around the World**

The U.S. military has a global presence, and sequestration would have appreciable effects on this in certain areas. Potentially, the hardest hit region will be the Pacific, which has been the focus of the United States' new strategy. If the United States wants to continue pivoting its focus toward the Pacific, the military would have to draw more resources than originally planned. No specific mention has been made of changing the U.S. military footprint in Japan, other than possibly curtailing combat air patrols, and U.S. forces are already consolidating their presence in South Korea to fewer bases south of Seoul and diminishing their role in relation to the South Korean military. The Navy's reduction in ship deployments to the region will just reinforce the current trend.

The U.S. military's footprint is being reduced in a few other areas. The combat zone in Afghanistan has 66,000 troops, with 34,000 scheduled to come home by the end of the year. All but around 8,000 will return home by the end of 2014. The 5th Fleet headquartered in Bahrain is being affected by the Navy's decision to have only one carrier in the Persian Gulf. Europe is seeing a reduction from four brigade combat teams to two, which was already planned and is another reinforced trend. The U.S. ground presence in Africa and South America should be relatively unchanged, since these predominantly involve special operations forces -- the kind of deployment that is already being emphasized over larger conventional forces.

The single biggest capability gap that will develop will be the U.S. military's surge capacity. If the Syria-Iraq-Lebanon corridor were to become

more unstable, the United States will not be able to respond with the same force structure it had in the past. The U.S. military can still shift its assets to different regions to attain its strategic goals, but those assets will come from a smaller resource pool, and shifting them will lessen the presence in some other region. The military's ability to use one of its softer political tools -- joint military exercises -- will also be at risk.

### **Reduced Relative Dominance**

This is not to say that the U.S. military will be wrecked immediately or that its condition is anywhere near that of the Russian military in the 1990s. A military's effectiveness is measured against its potential opponents, and the United States has enjoyed a large gap for decades. However, if a military is not growing in capabilities and other militaries or groups are, then its relative power is decreasing. This means that after sequestration is implemented or the continuing resolution is maintained, the U.S. military will remain dominant for years to come, but not as dominant as it has been relative to other forces.

There are many ways the effects of funding cuts can be mitigated. Congress can continue to delay addressing budget issues and the military's concerns indefinitely, or it can make some changes, such as allowing the Department of Defense more discretion in how it implements these cuts. However, the budget cuts are already having preliminary effects, and the longer the cuts continue, the greater the potential for degradation of the U.S. military's force projection capabilities. Funding cuts are not necessarily abnormal for the United States while winding down into a postwar stance. Historically, the pattern has been a reduction in spending and retrenchment of a large volume of forces from abroad. However, Pentagon planners typically go into a postwar period with the stated goal of not damaging the force through these cuts and reductions.