

# Flournoy shares perspective on defense spending, options during lecture series

by Thomas Zimmerman

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*Michèle Flournoy, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, spoke to the Army War College Class of 2013 in Bliss Hall Feb. 20 as the most recent speaker in the Commandant's Lecture Series.*



Feb. 20 -- Continuing with the theme of keeping defense strong in an era of austerity, **Michèle Flournoy**, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, shared her unique perspectives on the issue of with the Army War College Class of 2013 as part of the Commandant's Lecture Series Feb. 20.

Flournoy started her remarks by framing the global security environment and outlined a few key aspects.

- We live in a complex and volatile world
- There are challenges for the U.S. as it comes out of a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan
- There are challenges in a congested global commons
- There is the continued threat of al Qaeda
- There is an ongoing threat of nuclear proliferation

“There is no strategic pause or period of calm on the horizon,” she said.

### **Guarding against retrenchment, staying engaged in the world**

“With all of these challenges, there is a huge temptation to turn inwards, but we cannot,” she said. “The US has a very important and unique leadership role to play in the world. We are indispensable in leading our alliances around the world to deal with common threats. “

Flournoy went on to explain how she felt the U.S. can balance these competing agendas.

“We have to be smart and selective about that engagement, where and how we get involved,” she said. “It’s imperative, in my view, that institutions like the Army War College lead the way in helping to shape that principled pragmatism by sorting through the right and wrong lessons to learn from the past 10 years of war.”

### **Right ways and wrong ways to manage the looming budget cuts**

Flournoy spoke about how she felt the budget cuts could be done effectively.

“Now is the time to go back to first principles, remember what our enduring national interest are – protecting and advancing American prosperity, our security and our way of life,” she said. “Now is the time to remember that the foundation of our national power in the world and our prosperity is our economy. “

A budget agreement is key to this idea she said.

“Our top priority must be in getting our economic house in order,” she said. “We have to get a budget deal that addresses all of the fundamental challenges -- it will almost certainly cut additional defense spending.”

The challenge is balancing two key areas – “how do we maintain the best military in the world, ready for the future, and still keep faith with our all-volunteer force,” she asked.

“As we deal with reduced defense spending we need to try to preserve the capabilities, the readiness, the agility, we need to protect Americans interests in a challenging and unpredictable environment.,” she said. “We need to retain the ability to respond effectively to a broad range of contingencies and time to protect our interest and our allies from harm. “

Flournoy went on to say that the DoD must protect mission-critical capabilities even as it adjusts to a new set of fiscal constraints.

“Making additional deep cuts in force structure, readiness and modernization should be the last resort, not the default course of action.”

She outlined four areas where she felt spending could be reduced without affecting capabilities and breaking faith with the men and women who serve and their families.

### **Overhead in headquarters**

- “We need to systemically streamline and de-layer our headquarters in OSD, in the joint staff, in

the services, in the CoComs, and the defense agencies,” she said. “ As budget pressures mount, DoD needs to ask Congress for the authorities it needs to do this kind of streamlining and re-shaping of its workforce.”

### **Healthcare**

- “I am not talking about cutting benefits, but using management tools and taking an unmanageable system and put it on a manageable trajectory,” she said. “We need more aggressive management in this area. “

### **Excess infrastructure**

- “DoD desperately needs another round of BRAC to reduce excess infrastructure that diverts billions of dollars from readiness,” she said.

### **Acquisition**

- “We need a fundamental overhaul of our acquisition system,” she said. “Timelines are unresponsive to need and there is a lack of ability to adapt to a changing threat. There is opportunity here for more fundamental reform. “