

# O'Hanlon proposes defense savings during Commandants Lecture Series opener

*by Thomas Zimmerman*

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Jan. 18, 2012 - As the purse strings get tighter due government cutbacks, Army War College students heard from an expert on ways to think outside the “strongbox” for the new fiscal reality facing the Department of Defense.

**Michael O'Hanlon**, a senior fellow with the 21st Century Defense Initiative and director of research for the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution, served as the first speaker for the Commandants' Lecture Series in Bliss Hall Jan. 9.

The Commandant's Series this year explores strategy in an era of declining resources.

“This series is intended to augment the study of strategic leadership, national security policy and strategy, theater strategy campaigning, and defense management through a series on notable lectures on a relevant topic,” said **Prof. Lou Yuengert**, CLS director and faculty member in the Department of Command, Leadership and Management.

“Even if it doesn't happen in sequestration terms, the budget is still up for grabs along with the rest of the federal budget,” said O'Hanlon. “We don't know how big it's going to be. What I'm trying to find ways where we can do things a little more economically -- accept a little more risk -- but not a dramatic amount,” he said. “Then we can argue against even deeper cuts, like those from sequestration.”

O'Hanlon laid out a few short and long term changes that could help the Department of Defense as it enters a constrained resource environment.

**The U.S. Navy** can improve efficiency for crafts by swapping crews instead of constantly rotating ships. Right now, the Navy gets about 15 percent efficiency from their ships due to the 6-month rotation.

“By instituting a change like this, the Navy could gain an additional 30-45 percent efficiency,” he said.

He pointed to recent studies by the Navy that reinforce this concept.

“Additionally, current positioning of two carrier battle groups within range of the Persian Gulf is not optimal when you know where the threat is. You want to use land-based forces,” he said. He suggested five or six close partners in the region that may be willing to host forces permanently. The need to retain a surge capability is important but day-to-day vigilance may be more effective on land, he said.

**The nuclear weapons domain** should stay at a level comparable to Russia, but we don’t need to worry as much about nuclear weapons modernization. Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory no longer needs to be designed and structured around the idea of nuclear weapons design and production, he said, suggesting that the facility can be gradually transitioned to a civilian laboratory and save a significant amount of money.

**Ground forces** should be slightly smaller than those of the 1990s given the very small likelihood of two ground conflicts at the same time, he said. Rather than the current plans for a 490,000 active duty Army and 182,000 Marines, He proposed an Army of 450,000 with a reserve component comparable to what is already planned, and a Marine Corps of 160,000. “By reducing the forces by approximately 60,000, you can save yourselves real money,” he said.

He specified that DoD changes should be part of a whole-government integrated deficit reduction.

“The military has already done quite a bit, proportionally speaking,” he said. “If there is a serious effort to attack everything, including entitlements, how much more can defense responsibly be cut? We have to look at ways to responsibly contribute across all aspects of government.”