

Secretary of Defense Gates is warning that the Obama administration's military spending cuts will "[hollow out](#)" the military. Congressman Allen West is [calling](#) for more military spending. They both fear the same thing: that politicians will raid the peace dividend between global wars and leave the military without the resources that it needs to respond to crises. That's exactly what happened after WWI, WWII, and the post-Vietnam Cold War, and it's what's happening again now.

Strangely for a President who [decided on a Tuesday to go to war in Libya on a Friday](#) , President Obama and his progressive chorus have gone all-in on military cuts as a way of heading off the entitlement crisis. The cuts would occur as the Navy, Air Force, and Marines are [pivoting to the Pacific](#) in response to China's ascendancy and the PLAN's carrier-killing ballistic missiles. The situation seems ripe for the kind of imperial overstretch that Obama used to rail against before he found out he could use U.S. troops to promote a [humanitarian Responsibility to Protect](#) agenda.

The "it wouldn't be that bad" argument for military cuts is that Pentagon expenditures come mainly from waste. That's the line the President has been [pushing for years](#) , but after dozens of terminated systems it's beginning to ring a little hollow. The stronger argument is that spending cuts actually make the military better. They force analysts to think harder and smarter about what kind of threats America is actually likely to face in the future. That's fine in theory but in practice, when forced to choose, long-term military strategists often choose badly.

The military is not immune from the same sociological and communication dynamics that plague any large organization. Bureaucratic inertia takes hold and—when it does get disrupted—it gets disrupted mostly by fashionable trends. Again [to quote Gates](#) , "our record of predicting where we will use military force since Vietnam is perfect—we have never once gotten it right. There isn't a single instance... where we knew and planned for such a conflict six months in advance."

Contentions's J. E. Dyer has written about that little quirk of U.S. military planning at length, and her post on planners' almost willful [disregard for amphibious landing vehicles](#) is more or less mandatory reading.

RMA during the 1990's was no less faddish than the current emphasis on network-centric warfare, now being pushed by people who don't quite understand network methods but like the 21st century ethos and social scientific gloss. That fad is already giving way to talk of "cyberwarfare F-16s," often by people who have trouble opening Outlook on their phones and use 1234 as their passwords. Eli Lake's [report from last week](#) (about the Pentagon's over reliance on drone data and the problems of "analysts . . . overwhelmed by the volume of data") is an early warning that we're moving in the direction of unreflexive technological reliance.

So given the choice between providing the military with fewer rather than more resources, the security argument is that analysts will be forced to productively prioritize. It'd be nice if that's how things worked, but they don't. In a deliberative environment where arguments mattered, pro-military cuts liberals would have to come up with something else.

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