



Bush outlines reforms for Pentagon savings

Jacqueline Klimas

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Jeb Bush on Tuesday said that the military needs more than just an influx of cash to perform at its best and said he would reform its broken acquisition system if elected the next commander in chief.

But one analyst said no amount of acquisition reform can net the money needed to rebuild the military and that there are other areas where changes can save more money.

The GOP presidential contender laid out his plan for reforming the Pentagon's bureaucracy in an op-ed on Military.com, including reducing the number of civilian bureaucrats and shortening the amount of time to field new technology.

Bush specifically targeted the practice in the military of inflating lists of requirements for new systems as a practice that slows down how quickly new assets get into the hands of warfighters, saying that the must-have list for a new pistol recently stretched on for 350 pages.

"If the requirements for something as simple as a handgun clock in at longer than a Tom Clancy novel, imagine the list for a new nuclear missile submarine," Bush wrote.

He also criticized the way in which the Pentagon spends its money as "irrational," criticizing the department for end-of-fiscal-year "shopping sprees," a common practice government-wide. The purchases, which Bush said often includes new flat screen TVs to replace ones less than a year old, seek to empty the department's coffers and increase the next year's funding, since future years' budget requests are based on how much was spent the previous year.

"Money needs to be spent intelligently and directed to our troops, who should never find themselves in desperate need of equipment that never made it to the front lines," he said.

But James Jay Carafano, a defense analyst at the Heritage Foundation, said just looking at defense acquisition won't yield enough savings to cover the needed increase in ships, planes and personnel.

"Even if you took a lot of the friction out of the system, that's not going to generate nearly enough money to build back to capacity and capability of the military that we probably need," he said.

Carafano said reforming other pieces of the Pentagon — the logistics system, for example — could yield much greater savings. While in the private sector, a small number of people may touch a shipment from point A to point B, this number balloons in the military because of the bureaucracy.

The military could benefit from adopting the best practices for logistics from the commercial sector, which could save \$90 billion, he said.

But Mackenzie Eaglen, an analyst with American Enterprise Institute, said she wouldn't expect someone who is not even his party's nominee to tackle any of the controversial, big-ticket reform items. More sweeping changes, she said, might be proposed if he makes it to the Oval Office.

Leaders of the armed services committees on Capitol Hill are committed to reducing waste in the Pentagon and reforming the acquisition system bit by bit. Carafano said this is the right way to go about any changes to the acquisition system and that any real savings might not be seen for years.

"What [Sen. John] McCain and [Rep. Mac] Thornberry are doing is exactly right, systematically going through it," he said. "It's not a story that's sexy or pretty, it's nuts and bolts ... to get rid of it really takes years."

Bush commended the congressional military leaders for their work and vowed to work with them if elected next fall.

"Recognizing the expertise and role of Congress, and working closely with leaders there, is the only way a new president can fix this mess. Come January 2017, I intend to do precisely that," he said.

Eaglen said promising to work with Congress to make it happen is "smart and unique," differentiating himself from other candidates.

Bush also criticized expensive projects that the military pulls the plug on "five yards from the goal line" after investing billions in research and development.

The former Florida governor, who currently ranks fifth in the Washington Examiner's power rankings, previously laid out his plan to build up the military and defeat the Islamic State in a November speech at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C. Bush talked about deploying more U.S. special operators to Syria and growing both the Army and Marines.

Analysts largely said the foreign policy plan was a lot of aggressive talk, but lacked specifics on how Bush would accomplish any progress.

Bush's acquisition reform proposal also lacked specifics on how he would institute his planned changes that officials from both parties already agree are a good idea.

"It is all very agreeable and worthy of pursuit. Actually making it happen is a whole other story entirely," Eaglen said.

Benjamin Friedman, an analyst with the Cato Institute, also criticized Bush's lack of specifics, saying that the GOP presidential candidate gave no reason why his desire to reform would work better than any of the waves of changes that have preceded him.

"He's identifying standard problems and offering vague solutions, which seem unlikely to work," Friedman said.

Friedman also noted that raising the military's budget, as Bush has promised to do, will only lead to more of the administrative waste he wants to eliminate.

"If you want to reduce requirements creep and cut down overhead as Bush wants to, you probably need to cut the budget, not increase it as he would. Gold-plated requirements and excessive back office costs are symptoms of luxury," he said.

National security has played an increased role in the 2016 presidential race after terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif., raised the public's interest in safety at home. The last GOP presidential debate of 2015 in Las Vegas earlier this month focused heavily on national security and the candidates' proposed strategies to defeat the Islamic State.