

W.H. plan to help troops, families ... Armed services goodwill for SOTU ... Survey: Tea Party bark worse than bite on defense ... HASC demands pause on fate of EFV

By PHILIP EWING & JEN DIMASCIO | 01/25/11 5:33 AM EDT

EVERYONE'S INVOLVED – The White House was not kidding about bringing the whole of government into its long-term program to take care of military families: Health and Human Services, Education, Agriculture and other agencies you don't normally link to defense or veterans issues are part of Obama's support plan announced Monday. The initiative lays out many goals across a range of issues, from reducing Army suicides to better health care and education for troops' children, creating a long-term plan for how Uncle Sam will help troops, veterans and their families.

Much more on this below, plus there's a good chance the president himself will touch on it tonight at 9 when he gives his

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS – Look for Obama to cite progress in Iraq and reaffirm that the U.S. is on the right path there and in Afghanistan. Both drawdowns will go forward cautiously, he'll say – despite violence, political dysfunction and a foreboding uncertainty about what will happen when American troops pull out. And in a speech about reinvigorating the economy, spurring competition and putting people back to work, it'll be interesting to see whether Obama mentions any role for the defense industry.

– **DISTINGUISHED GUESTS** – Four military guests have been invited to sit with first lady Michelle Obama, including Army Staff Sgt. Sal Giunta, who wears the Medal of Honor for his heroism in Afghanistan; Army Staff Sgt. Brian Mast, who lost most of both legs to an IED in Afghanistan; Marine Gunnery Sgt. Nicole Mohabir, who has deployed three times to Iraq and Afghanistan; and Dr. Peter Rhee, the Navy veteran trauma surgeon who helped save Rep. Gabrielle Giffords.

– **DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES** – They belong to opposite parties, but HASC chairman Buck McKeon and ranking member Adam Smith will sit together for the speech tonight. Other armed services luminaries from both parties will sit together, too. <http://bit.ly/eKTqW0>

DESPITE ALL THIS YEAR'S NOISE, DEFENSE IS SAFE FROM THE TEA PARTY RIGHT, writes Benjamin H. Friedman of the Cato Institute, who cites original research showing there aren't many Republican lawmakers who actually support major

cuts to DOD. Even though “antiwar pundits have heralded every dovish murmur from the right,” he writes, when the rubber meets the road and decisions have to be made for real, nothing’s gonna change.

Some key points from Cato’s survey: “Of the Republicans’ 47 senators and 242 representatives, only 5 percent (15 members) expressed support for cutting defense spending. Adding those in the ‘ambiguously for’ category makes it 13 percent. Forty-one percent are against cutting defense spending; with those ambiguously against, it’s 60 percent. ... Only 10 Republicans, or 4 percent, are against the war in Afghanistan, and none are senators. Including the skeptical members, 10 percent are somewhat antiwar. Eighty percent support the war.” Check out the full, must-read column in the Philadelphia Inquirer. <http://bit.ly/f1uhSA> . Another data point:

HASC ASKS GATES TO MAINTAIN WORK ON EFV – McKeon and the HASC subcommittee chairmen sent a letter to Gates on Monday asking him not to issue any stop-work orders on the EFV or the Army missile program that DOD wants to cancel under this month’s “efficiencies” program. Even though Amos has said he signed the death warrant for the EFV himself because it would’ve vacuumed up almost his entire vehicle budget, McKeon and his colleagues said “it was unclear what analysis” led to its termination and that of the Army’s SLAMRAAM. Until such analyses materialize, the lawmakers wrote, they want DOD to keep the programs going. The letter (pdf) <http://politi.co/guWljn>

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NO COMMENT from Pentagon spokesman Col. Dave Lapan on Monday about the story that China used technology from a crashed F-117 Nighthawk to build the J-20. “In fact I’ve seen some reports that talk about how far-fetched that is,” he said.

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WHO’S WHERE WHEN – Gates attends the president’s speech tonight ... many other senior defense officials will be there as well, including the service chiefs ... Mabus speaks at the Clean Energy Summit this morning at 10:30 at the Mayflower Hotel ... Donley has meetings in the Building ... Michael O’Neill, head of mission for the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team, briefs via satellite this morning at 10:30

THE GAGGLE IS AT 11:30

DEATH MISSILE BRIEF – Virginia Republican Rep. Randy Forbes is hosting a closed-door brief this morning at 8 for members of Congress on China’s much-feared “carrier-killer” DF-21D missile. He sounded an ominous note in his announcement:

“America’s reality is that China now has a missile capable of completely destroying a U.S. carrier in under ten minutes and as it stands right now, the United States has no viable way of stopping it.”

– **M-D STRAIGHT TALK** – Since this issue has finally made it all the way up to Congress, let’s take a moment and look it in the face: If China used the DF-21D in a sneak-attack scenario, it would start World War III. In fact, its ballistic launch might even trigger a strategic response by American nuclear weapons. (The How-Do-You-Tell-It-Ain’t-A-Nuke Problem is one reason why the American “prompt global strike” concept involving ICBMs armed with conventional explosives hasn’t yet panned out.)

But many thinkers who have laid out Roland Emmerich-style disaster-movie scenarios for the DF-21 don’t treat it seriously: They’ll try to sell you yarns in which China sinks the USS George Washington, denies it, and gets away with it because broke America doesn’t want to bother with a major Pacific war, and the rest of the world doesn’t care. Don’t buy it. The loss of a carrier would mean more dead Americans than Pearl Harbor or Sept. 11, and then months or years of unthinkably costly fighting.

It’s also worth remembering that if China wanted to sink an American carrier, it has missiles that could hit the George Washington while the ship were tied to its pier and much easier to find, or submarines that could torpedo the ship while it was underway. So the real issue isn’t the DF-21 per se, just as it’s not really about the Chinese carrier or the J-20, but this: Whether the U.S. should arm itself for a full-scale war with China, and more broadly, whether we want to seriously consider the full implications of all this.

– **AS IT HAPPENS**, none other than Loren Thompson wrote on Monday: “America’s military must begin preparing for the possibility that it might be in a war with China sometime in the next few decades.” Of course that means more F-22s, more submarines, more UAVs, the next-generation bomber, more, more, more. <http://bit.ly/exQxbK>

HELPING HAND FOR TROOPS, FAMILIES – Some of the White House measures are common sense: The Army will continue to try to wrestle down its rate of suicides. Holly Petraeus’s new office in the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau will watch for scams targeting military customers. The VA will continue fighting its case backlog and keep stressing that recovery from psychological injury is as important as healing physical injury.

But there are surprising elements that came out of the White House’s internal review: The Agriculture Department’s 4-H headquarters will increase its work with troops’ kids in rural areas. The Department of the Interior will give the kids jobs. State will help spouses find jobs in embassies and consulates overseas. There are too many to list in full, but the White House has a more comprehensive rundown if you’re interested in the details. <http://bit.ly/gw7qrV>

– **KEY QUOTE**, from first lady Michelle Obama: “I want to emphasize that this is not a one-time press conference. This isn’t just a headline for today that gets buried under

tomorrow's news. These are lasting commitments by the government to address your needs and concerns for years to come. And my hope is that these recommendations will live on no matter the president, no matter the party."

KABUL FASHION REPORT – How prevalent in the Afghan capital are the private guards that Karzai reportedly wants to kick out? A friend in Kabul e-mails: "Honestly – there are so many civilians in cargo pants, North Face black fleece jackets, Oakley shades, beards and ballcaps wandering around here that it looks like this place is loaded with security contractors. Although that also seems to be the standard American (civilian) male uniform here. We got a little directive about walking in town, and it said something like 'try not to wear clothing that easily identifies you as military or American.' I wonder if these jokers think their cargo-pant uniform makes them 'blend.' Uh, no, you big losers."

EXPEDITIONARY LINKS

AP: The ex-stealth engineer convicted of selling secrets to China was sentenced to 32 years in prison on Monday. <http://bit.ly/hwIWeL>

LAT: Despite its awesome name, the Air Force surveillance capability known as Gorgon Stare is far from awesome, according to Pentagon test reports, which found it doesn't work as hoped and breaks a lot. <http://lat.ms/fCZDjW>

AP: Former SecDef Rumsfeld gave a wide-ranging interview about how and why he wrote his pending memoirs, due out early next month. He needed six aides, four years and 700 pages of supporting documents, he says. <http://abcn.ws/gcTkVT>

Military Times: The iconic, much-visited Iwo Jima Memorial is getting on 60 years old and needs a lot of sprucing up, reports Gina Cavallaro. The Marines are partnering with the National Park Service to begin restoring the monument, she writes – but they need your help. <http://bit.ly/eUUFPY>

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