Obama packs administration with ex-Clinton officials

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needed to be looked at carefully. Financial analysts expect the F-22 Raptor stealth fighter will also be scrutinized because Obama wants to move away from “Cold War-era” thinking on weapon systems.

The president-elect has said he favors missile defense but not “unproven” aspects such as the ground-based midcourse missile the Bush administration wants in Poland, much to the dismay of Russia. But Russia’s latest threats to place Iskander missiles within striking distance of Poland could force Obama to retain the program, to keep from appearing soft on defense.

Obama advisers have acknowledged there will be no peace dividend from a drawdown of troops in Iraq because money will be needed for sending forces to Afghanistan, replacing war-worn equipment and funding an increase of the Army and Marine Corps by 92,000 troops. While some liberals in Congress like House Banking Chairman Barney Frank (D-Mass.) have suggested cutting the defense budget by 25% to pay for healthcare and infrastructure, Danzig says he doesn’t see defense spending declining “in the first years of an Obama administration.”

Another challenge will be focusing on near-term issues and affordability while dealing with long-term planning.

The new administration will either have to abandon the idea of a Next Generation Bomber (NGB) for USAF, or make a case for it. During 2009, the Pentagon has to decide whether to bet the entire future of the fighter force on JSF, or restructure the program.

Military space programs have drifted and slipped beyond belief. The question of whether it is healthy for the Army to conduct FCS as a monolithic program has to be settled. Navy shipbuilding is wobbling between two strategic poles: the Congress-favored DDG-1000 is designed to support Marines ashore, while the CG-X is intended to protect against antiship ballistic missiles in a China scenario. And the bill to maintain the Marines as a sea-based force equipped for a “forced entry” assault on a defended coast is reaching astronomical proportions.

Congress will be focusing on a number of high-profile projects that have been pitched into this administration’s lap because crucial decisions were deferred. The refueling tanker issue is one—USAF is going to have to run another competition, with the same competitors for the same requirement. The CSAR-X (combat search and rescue) helicopter is still in limbo. One way or another, the fate of the F-22 will be decided, as will the future of the Navy’s shipbuilding strategy.

Some programs will lose congressional supporters as Republicans retire. Three senior Republicans are leaving the House Armed Services Committee, including the ranking member, Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.), a “buy America” advocate and Iraq hawk. Also retiring are Reps. Jim Saxton (R-N.J.), senior Republican on the Air and Land Forces Subcommittee who pushed for a replacement to the Air Force’s aging KC-135 refueling tanker fleet, and Terry Everett (R-Ala.), ranking member on the Strategic Forces Subcommittee, an advocate of missile defense and military space programs such as the transformational communications satellite.

Rep. Thelma Drake (R-Va.), a shipbuilding advocate, lost her reelection bid. One Democrat leaving the committee is Rep. Mark Udall (D-Colo.), who was elected to the Senate. Udall’s seat is one of six picked up by Democrats. Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), at 90 the oldest sitting senator and a vehement critic of Bush’s war-spending tactics, is stepping aside as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), a World War II Medal of Honor winner, replaces him.

Among the Senate Republicans retiring is Sen. John Warner of Virginia, former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, an advocate of the Rolls Royce-General Electric alternate engine for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. As a supporter of the Iraq war, Warner made headlines, and shook up the Bush administration, when he said during an Armed Services Committee hearing after visiting the war zone in the violent pre-surge phase, that things there were “drifting sideways.”