

Explaining the Pentagon's Defense Strategy



Julie Zelnick



Mieke Eoyang

Vice President for the National Security Program

[@MiekeEoyang](https://twitter.com/MiekeEoyang)

The purpose of this paper is to translate the long and technical national security strategic directive the Obama Administration laid out on January 5, 2012 into plain language and provide policymakers with guidance on how to make the case for the President's plan. The directive has four over-arching goals, which are reflected in the budget:

Geopolitics	Shape of the Force
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Concentrating on the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions.2. Maintaining a global U.S. military presence.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Transforming and modernizing the force.2. Cutting costs and embracing new technologies like drones.¹

- The new directive represents a shift from a Cold War military to a mobile, targeted, lethal fighting force. It is shedding outdated systems and missions so that the U.S. can better meet the demands of the future. And we have to do all of this with an eye toward fiscal responsibility in a time of constrained budgets.
- Change is hard. Those who protect old ways will accuse the Administration of gutting our security. But there is no question that under this strategy, the U.S. will remain the world's largest, most experienced, and most effective fighting force.

Geopolitics

The new strategy shifts where the U.S. will concentrate its presence geographically. These changes include:

Concentrating on Asia and the Middle East

The U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) is responsible for 50% of the world's population and about half of the world's surface. This includes North Korea, China, India, and Pakistan, where rising tensions and population growth demand U.S.

attention.² Therefore, the new strategy will maintain, or increase in some areas, military personnel and assets to help ensure regional stability and freedom for ships in the Pacific and South China Sea. This began with a small increase in troop presence in Australia late last year.



Of course, we are not starting from scratch. The U.S. currently has a major military presence in Asia with 28,500 troops in Korea,³ 53,000 in Japan,⁴ and around 180 ships in the Pacific.⁵ U.S. troops are also based in the Philippines, Guam, and elsewhere on the Pacific Rim, and we routinely station a number of additional carrier groups in the area. But increased emphasis will not result an immediate increase in military ships in the Pacific.⁶

“As we end wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our focus is shifting to Asia to ensure stability and security in a fast-growing region.”

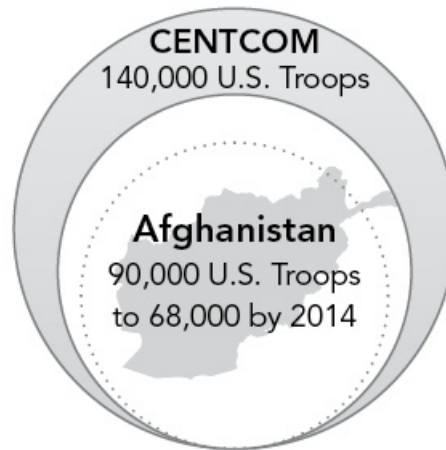
Meanwhile, the Department of Defense (DOD) will continue to focus on the Middle East, especially with:

- **The war in Afghanistan.** Currently there are between 135,000 and 150,000 U.S. troops in the region designated U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) AOR.⁷ Of those, around 90,000 troops in Afghanistan, which will fall to 68,000 through 2013.⁸ Combat operations will last until at least mid-2013, and troops could remain after 2014.⁹
- **The Arab Spring.** With delicate transitions happening in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, and a potential civil war in Syria, the U.S. military will need a significant presence across the region.
- **Heightening tensions with Iran.** As we try to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, we are facing real threats to our interests and our allies, especially Israel.

“We will stay in the Middle East to ensure the security of our allies and protect our vital interests there.”

Maintaining a Global U.S. Military Presence

The new directive envisions keeping a military presence in Europe, Latin America, and Africa, increasing military-to-military trainings, and establishing new partnerships. Overall, DOD will focus on providing more diplomacy, development, and security force training assistance with our allies, all of which are vital to maintaining and deepening those relationships.



In Europe, the U.S. now funds most of NATO. We will need to negotiate a more equal burden-sharing agreement. ¹⁰

The DOD will maintain a small presence in Africa and South America. In South America the U.S. provides security trainings and exercises, but has no bases. ¹¹ To put troops on the ground there, DOD may use the model it has developed successfully in the Horn of Africa, where small military operations are conducted. ¹²

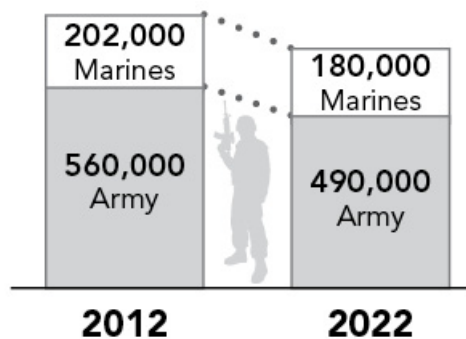
Shape of the Force

Evolving American Ground Forces

The strategy will move DOD to a more lean, agile, and flexible force. The U.S. military will counter threats or help in humanitarian efforts quickly and anywhere. Therefore, the current composition of troops worldwide will shift. For example:

“We need to get our fiscal house in order to retain national power. There’s no need to maintain wartime spending levels once the wars are over.”

- The military will increase the use of Special Operations units to perform smaller, more targeted missions, which have had great success over the past decade. These units will maintain or increase their funding levels and personnel.
- Active-duty end strength will decrease. There are currently over 560,000 active-duty Army soldiers and 202,000 Marines. Total ground force end strength will be reduced over the next decade to 490,000 and 180,000 respectively.¹³
- As the active-duty force shrinks, the Reserve and National Guard will help maintain combat capabilities. These components will be activated if the military needs to rapidly increase its troop levels to fight a major war.



- The new directive calls for moving two brigades from Europe to the U.S. by 2014. They will be replaced by smaller rotating units of battalion or company size.¹⁴ Secretary Panetta and Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno argue that this will help diversify NATO capabilities.¹⁵ No reduction in troop end strength is expected from the Asia Pacific area.¹⁶

Embracing New Technologies

The new strategy shifts away from Cold War systems to more modern platforms, as well as investing in the technologies for the future. The plan calls for increased Research and Development (R&D) funding for satellites, intelligence

gathering, energy independence, cybersecurity, and unmanned systems like drones. These technologies will allow our servicemembers to protect the nation from a distance, identifying threats before they emerge, and eliminating them without extensive use of ground forces.

“Investing in Special Operations, drones, and new technology will make our military leaner and more agile at a lower cost.”

Defense Spending

After more than ten years of war and spiraling defense costs, the new strategy envisions a substantial change in the Pentagon’s funding levels. Some of these changes are already in place. As prompted by the bipartisan *Budget Control Act* (BCA) of 2011, the new directive plans for a reduction of \$487 billion in DOD’s budget over the next ten years.¹⁷ Savings are coming from cuts to administrative staff and troops, personnel benefit changes, retirement of outdated weapons, and another round of base closures.

“Unlike the end of the Cold War, this is a transformation to a modern military, not simply downsizing.”

Critics of the new strategic directive will say this strategy slashes the budget. This is a distortion. The BCA requires DOD to cut its projected increases in spending. Over the long haul, the Administration is slowing the rate of growth in the Pentagon budget, not cutting it. It is true, however, that this year’s base budget is lower than last year’s. These reductions reflect the troop withdrawal from Iraq and the savings from the BCA.¹⁸ After next year, defense budgets continue to rise, and our nation will still account for nearly half of all military

spending worldwide.¹⁹ But ultimately, what we do with the budget is more important than its size.

Those wedded to outdated systems and ways will always focus on the size of the budget, rather than how it is being spent.

Looking forward, policymakers will need to continuously assess the new military strategy and determine if the spending levels it proposes are sufficient over the coming years. Secretary Panetta has warned that if sequestration occurs as a result of Congress failing to achieve another debt deal, the impact on the Pentagon budget would be disruptive.²⁰

DOD believes more efficient spending will cure a variety of bad habits, including a lack of auditability, cost overruns, schedule delays, and redundancies. But that is not enough. To save more tax dollars, policymakers must do a better job of monitoring the acquisitions process, where in many cases there is little or poor oversight.²¹ Under the current system, DOD purchases weapons systems in bulk before they have completed operational testing.²² In addition, DOD must truly embrace energy efficiency. Every time the price of jet fuel goes up by 25 cents, the Department pays another \$1 billion in energy costs.²³ Without focusing on energy efficiency, rising fuel costs will eat the Defense budget from the inside out.

Conclusion

As policymakers examine the details of the Administration's new strategy, they must ensure that military spending reflects America's commitment to having the most modern, efficient, and lethal fighting force on the planet in order to protect the nation.

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