Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense

January 2012

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 3, 2012

Our Nation is at a moment of transition. Thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, we have responsibly ended the war in Iraq, put al-Qa'ida on the path to defeat – including delivering justice to Osama bin Laden – and made significant progress in Afghanistan, allowing us to begin the transition to Afghan responsibility. At the same time, we must put our fiscal house in order here at home and renew our long-term economic strength. To that end, the Budget Control Act of 2011 mandates reductions in federal spending, including defense spending.

As Commander in Chief, I am determined that we meet the challenges of this moment responsibly and that we emerge even stronger in a manner that preserves American global leadership, maintains our military superiority and keeps faith with our troops, military families and veterans. I therefore directed this review to identify our strategic interests and guide our defense priorities and spending over the coming decade.

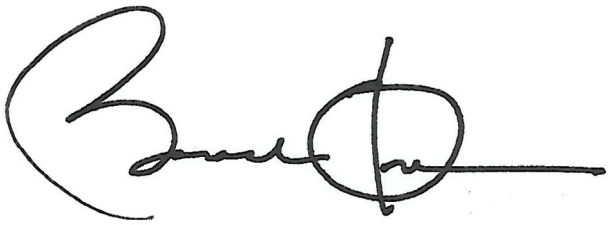
This review has been shaped by America's enduring national security interests. We seek the security of our Nation, allies and partners. We seek the prosperity that flows from an open and free international economic system. And we seek a just and sustainable international order where the rights and responsibilities of nations and peoples are upheld, especially the fundamental rights of every human being.

Indeed, as we end today's wars, we will focus on a broader range of challenges and opportunities, including the security and prosperity of the Asia Pacific. As a new generation across the Middle East and North Africa demands their universal rights, we are supporting political and economic reform and deepening partnerships to ensure regional security. In contrast to the murderous vision of violent extremists, we are joining with allies and partners around the world to build their capacity to promote security, prosperity, and human dignity. And the growing capabilities of allies and partners, as demonstrated in the successful mission to protect the Libyan people, create new opportunities for burden-sharing.

Meeting these challenges cannot be the work of our military alone, which is why we have strengthened all the tools of American power, including diplomacy and development, intelligence, and homeland security. Going forward, we will also remember the lessons of history and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past when our military was left ill-prepared for the future. As we end today's wars and reshape our Armed Forces, we will ensure that our military is agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies. In particular, we will continue to invest in the capabilities critical to future success, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; counterterrorism; countering weapons of mass destruction; operating in anti-access environments; and prevailing in all domains, including cyber.

Most importantly, we will keep faith with our troops, military families and veterans who have borne the burden of a decade of war and who make our military the best in the world. Though we must make hard fiscal choices, we will continue to prioritize efforts that focus on wounded warriors, mental health, and families. And as our newest veterans rejoin civilian life, we continue to have a moral obligation -- as a government and as a Nation – to give our veterans the care, benefits, and the job opportunities they deserve.

The fiscal choices we face are difficult ones, but there should be no doubt – here in the United States or around the world – we will keep our Armed Forces the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped fighting force in history. And in a changing world that demands our leadership, the United States of America will remain the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known.



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I am releasing new strategic guidance for the Department of Defense to articulate priorities for a 21st century defense that sustains U.S. global leadership. This guidance reflects the President's strategic direction to the Department and was deeply informed by the Department's civilian and military leadership, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of the Military Departments, and the Combatant Commanders.

This country is at a strategic turning point after a decade of war and, therefore, we are shaping a Joint Force for the future that will be smaller and leaner, but will be agile, flexible, ready, and technologically advanced. It will have cutting edge capabilities, exploiting our technological, joint, and networked advantage. It will be led by the highest quality, battle-tested professionals. It will have global presence emphasizing the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East while still ensuring our ability to maintain our defense commitments to Europe, and strengthening alliances and partnerships across all regions. It will preserve our ability to conduct the missions we judge most important to protecting core national interests: defeating al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and succeeding in current conflicts; deterring and defeating aggression by adversaries, including those seeking to deny our power projection; countering weapons of mass destruction; effectively operating in cyberspace, space, and across all domains; maintaining a safe and effective nuclear deterrent; and protecting the homeland.

The Joint Force will be prepared to confront and defeat aggression anywhere in the world. It will have the ability to surge and regenerate forces and capabilities, ensuring that we can meet any future threats, by investing in our people and a strong industrial base. It will remain the world's finest military.

Introduction

The United States has played a leading role in transforming the international system over the past sixty-five years. Working with like-minded nations, the United States has created a safer, more stable, and more prosperous world for the American people, our allies, and our partners around the globe than existed prior to World War II. Over the last decade, we have undertaken extended operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to bring stability to those countries and secure our interests. As we responsibly draw down from these two operations, take steps to protect our nation's economic vitality, and protect our interests in a world of accelerating change, we face an inflection point. This merited an assessment of the U.S. defense strategy in light of the changing geopolitical environment and our changing fiscal circumstances. This assessment reflects the President's strategic direction to the Department and was deeply informed by the Department's civilian and military leadership, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of the Military Departments, and the Combatant Commanders. Out of the assessment we developed a defense strategy that transitions our Defense enterprise from an emphasis on today's wars to preparing for future challenges, protects the broad range of U.S. national security interests, advances the Department's efforts to rebalance and reform, and supports the national security imperative of deficit reduction through a lower level of defense spending.

This strategic guidance document describes the projected security environment and the key military missions for which the Department of Defense (DoD) will prepare. It is intended as a blueprint for the Joint Force in 2020, providing a set of precepts that will help guide decisions regarding the size and shape of the force over subsequent program and budget cycles, and highlighting some of the strategic risks that may be associated with the proposed strategy.

A Challenging Global Security Environment

The global security environment presents an increasingly complex set of challenges and opportunities to which all elements of U.S. national power must be applied.

The demise of Osama bin Laden and the capturing or killing of many other senior al-Qa'ida leaders have rendered the group far less capable. However, al-Qa'ida and its affiliates remain active in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere. More broadly, violent extremists will continue to threaten U.S. interests, allies, partners, and the homeland. The primary loci of these threats are South Asia and the Middle East. With the diffusion of destructive technology, these extremists have the potential to pose catastrophic threats that could directly affect our security and prosperity. For the foreseeable future, *the United States will continue to take an active approach to countering these threats* by monitoring the activities of non-state threats worldwide, working with allies and partners to establish control over ungoverned territories, and directly striking the most dangerous groups and individuals when necessary.

U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, *we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region*. Our relationships with Asian allies and key partners are critical to the future stability and growth of the region. We will emphasize our existing alliances, which provide a vital foundation for Asia-Pacific security. We will also expand our networks of cooperation with emerging partners throughout the Asia-Pacific to ensure collective capability and capacity for securing common interests. The United States is also investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region. Furthermore, we will maintain peace on the Korean Peninsula by effectively working with allies and other regional states to deter and defend against provocation from North Korea, which is actively pursuing a nuclear weapons program.

The maintenance of peace, stability, the free flow of commerce, and of U.S. influence in this dynamic region will depend in part on an underlying balance of military capability and presence. Over the long term, China's emergence as a regional power will have the potential to affect the U.S. economy and our security in a variety of ways. Our two countries have a strong stake in peace and stability in East Asia and an interest in building a cooperative bilateral relationship. However, the growth of China's military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region. The United States will continue to make the necessary investments to ensure that we maintain regional access and the ability to operate freely in keeping with our treaty obligations and with international law. Working closely with our network of allies and partners, we will continue to promote a rules-based international order that ensures underlying stability and encourages the peaceful rise of new powers, economic dynamism, and constructive defense cooperation.

In the Middle East, the Arab Awakening presents both strategic opportunities and challenges. Regime changes, as well as tensions within and among states under pressure to reform, introduce uncertainty for the future. But they also may result in governments that, over the long term, are more responsive to the legitimate aspirations of their people, and are more stable and reliable partners of the United States.

Our defense efforts in the Middle East will be aimed at countering violent extremists and destabilizing threats, as well as upholding our commitment to allies and partner states. Of particular concern are the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). U.S. policy will emphasize Gulf security, in collaboration with Gulf Cooperation Council countries when appropriate, to prevent Iran's development of a nuclear weapon capability and counter its destabilizing policies. The United States will do this while standing up for Israel's security and a comprehensive Middle East peace. *To support these objectives, the United States will continue to place a premium on U.S. and allied military presence in – and support of – partner nations in and around this region*.

Europe is home to some of America's most stalwart allies and partners, many of whom have sacrificed alongside U.S. forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Europe is our principal partner in seeking global and economic security, and will remain so for the foreseeable

future. At the same time, security challenges and unresolved conflicts persist in parts of Europe and Eurasia, where the United States must continue to promote regional security and Euro-Atlantic integration. The United States has enduring interests in supporting peace and prosperity in Europe as well as bolstering the strength and vitality of NATO, which is critical to the security of Europe and beyond. Most European countries are now producers of security rather than consumers of it. Combined with the drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, this has created a strategic opportunity to rebalance the U.S. military investment in Europe, moving from a focus on current conflicts toward a focus on future capabilities. *In keeping with this evolving strategic landscape, our posture in Europe must also evolve.* As this occurs, the United States will maintain our Article 5 commitments to allied security and promote enhanced capacity and interoperability for coalition operations. In this resource-constrained era, we will also work with NATO allies to develop a "Smart Defense" approach to pool, share, and specialize capabilities as needed to meet 21st century challenges. In addition, our engagement with Russia remains important, and we will continue to build a closer relationship in areas of mutual interest and encourage it to be a contributor across a broad range of issues.

Building partnership capacity elsewhere in the world also remains important for sharing the costs and responsibilities of global leadership. Across the globe we will seek to be the security partner of choice, pursuing new partnerships with a growing number of nations – including those in Africa and Latin America – whose interests and viewpoints are merging into a common vision of freedom, stability, and prosperity. *Whenever possible, we will develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives,* relying on exercises, rotational presence, and advisory capabilities.

To enable economic growth and commerce, America, working in conjunction with allies and partners around the world, will seek to protect freedom of access throughout the global commons – those areas beyond national jurisdiction that constitute the vital connective tissue of the international system. Global security and prosperity are increasingly dependent on the free flow of goods shipped by air or sea. State and non-state actors pose potential threats to access in the global commons, whether through opposition to existing norms or other anti-access approaches. Both state and non-state actors possess the capability and intent to conduct cyber espionage and, potentially, cyber attacks on the United States, with possible severe effects on both our military operations and our homeland. Growth in the number of space-faring nations is also leading to an increasingly congested and contested space environment, threatening safety and security. *The United States will continue to lead global efforts with capable allies and partners to assure access to and use of the global commons, both by strengthening international norms of responsible behavior and by maintaining relevant and interoperable military capabilities.*

The proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons technology has the potential to magnify the threats posed by regional state actors, giving them more freedom of action to challenge U.S. interests. Terrorist access to even simple nuclear devices poses the prospect of devastating consequences for the United States. Accordingly, *the Department of Defense will continue to enhance its capabilities, acting with an array of domestic and foreign partners, to conduct effective operations to counter the proliferation of WMD.*

Primary Missions of the U.S. Armed Forces

To protect U.S. national interests and achieve the objectives of the 2010 *National Security Strategy* in this environment, *the Joint Force will need to recalibrate its capabilities and make selective additional investments* to succeed in the following missions:

- **Counter Terrorism and Irregular Warfare**. Acting in concert with other means of national power, U.S. military forces must continue to hold al-Qa'ida and its affiliates and adherents under constant pressure, wherever they may be. *Achieving our core goal of disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al-Qa'ida and preventing Afghanistan from ever being a safe haven again will be central to this effort.* As U.S. forces draw down in Afghanistan, our global counter terrorism efforts will become more widely distributed and will be characterized by a mix of direct action and security force assistance. Reflecting lessons learned of the past decade, we will continue to build and sustain tailored capabilities appropriate for counter terrorism and irregular warfare. We will also remain vigilant to threats posed by other designated terrorist organizations, such as Hezbollah.

- **Deter and Defeat Aggression.** U.S. forces will be capable of deterring and defeating aggression by any potential adversary. *Credible deterrence results from both the capabilities to deny an aggressor the prospect of achieving his objectives and from the complementary capability to impose unacceptable costs on the aggressor.* As a nation with important interests in multiple regions, our forces must be capable of deterring and defeating aggression by an opportunistic adversary in one region even when our forces are committed to a large-scale operation elsewhere. Our planning envisages forces that are able to fully deny a capable state's aggressive objectives in one region by conducting a combined arms campaign across all domains – land, air, maritime, space, and cyberspace. This includes being able to *secure territory and populations and facilitate a transition to stable governance on a small scale for a limited period using standing forces and, if necessary, for an extended period with mobilized forces*. Even when U.S. forces are committed to a large-scale operation in one region, *they will be capable of denying the objectives of – or imposing unacceptable costs on – an opportunistic aggressor in a second region.* U.S. forces will plan to operate whenever possible with allied and coalition forces. Our ground forces will be responsive and capitalize on balanced lift, presence, and prepositioning to maintain the agility needed to remain prepared for the several areas in which such conflicts could occur.

- **Project Power Despite Anti-Access/Area Denial Challenges**. In order to credibly deter potential adversaries and to prevent them from achieving their objectives, the United States must maintain its ability to project power in areas in which our access and freedom to operate are challenged. In these areas, sophisticated adversaries will use asymmetric capabilities, to include electronic and cyber warfare, ballistic and cruise missiles, advanced air defenses, mining, and other methods, to complicate our operational calculus. States such as China and Iran will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities, while the proliferation of sophisticated weapons and technology will extend to non-state actors as well. *Accordingly, the U.S. military will invest as required to ensure its ability to operate effectively in anti-access*

and area denial (A2/AD) environments. This will include implementing the Joint Operational Access Concept, sustaining our undersea capabilities, developing a new stealth bomber, improving missile defenses, and continuing efforts to enhance the resiliency and effectiveness of critical space-based capabilities.

- **Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction.** U.S. forces conduct a range of activities aimed at preventing the proliferation and use of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. These activities include implementing the Cooperative Threat Reduction (Nunn-Lugar) Program, and planning and operations to locate, monitor, track, interdict and secure WMD and WMD-related components and the means and facilities to make them. They also include an active whole-of-government effort to frustrate the ambitions of nations bent on developing WMD, to include preventing Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability. In partnership with other elements of the U.S. Government, DoD will continue to invest in capabilities to detect, protect against, and respond to WMD use, should preventive measures fail.

- **Operate Effectively in Cyberspace and Space.** Modern armed forces cannot conduct high-tempo, effective operations without reliable information and communication networks and assured access to cyberspace and space. Today space systems and their supporting infrastructure face a range of threats that may degrade, disrupt, or destroy assets. *Accordingly, DoD will continue to work with domestic and international allies and partners and invest in advanced capabilities to defend its networks, operational capability, and resiliency in cyberspace and space.*

- **Maintain a Safe, Secure, and Effective Nuclear Deterrent.** As long as nuclear weapons remain in existence, the United States will maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal. We will field nuclear forces that can under any circumstances confront an adversary with the prospect of unacceptable damage, both to deter potential adversaries and to assure U.S. allies and other security partners that they can count on America's security commitments. *It is possible that our deterrence goals can be achieved with a smaller nuclear force,* which would reduce the number of nuclear weapons in our inventory as well as their role in U.S. national security strategy.

- **Defend the Homeland and Provide Support to Civil Authorities.** U.S. forces will continue to defend U.S. territory from direct attack by state and non-state actors. We will also come to the assistance of domestic civil authorities in the event such defense fails or in case of natural disasters, potentially in response to a very significant or even catastrophic event. Homeland defense and support to civil authorities require strong, steady–state force readiness, to include a robust missile defense capability. Threats to the homeland may be highest when U.S. forces are engaged in conflict with an adversary abroad.

- **Provide a Stabilizing Presence.** U.S. forces will conduct a sustainable pace of presence operations abroad, including rotational deployments and bilateral and multilateral training exercises. These activities reinforce deterrence, help to build the capacity and competence of U.S., allied, and partner forces for internal and external defense, strengthen alliance cohesion, and increase U.S. influence. A reduction in resources will

require innovative and creative solutions to maintain our support for allied and partner interoperability and building partner capacity. *However, with reduced resources, thoughtful choices will need to be made regarding the location and frequency of these operations.*

- **Conduct Stability and Counterinsurgency Operations.** In the aftermath of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States will emphasize non-military means and military-to-military cooperation to address instability and reduce the demand for significant U.S. force commitments to stability operations. U.S. forces will nevertheless be ready to conduct limited counterinsurgency and other stability operations if required, operating alongside coalition forces wherever possible. Accordingly, U.S. forces will retain and continue to refine the lessons learned, expertise, and specialized capabilities that have been developed over the past ten years of counterinsurgency and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. *However, U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.*

- **Conduct Humanitarian, Disaster Relief, and Other Operations.** The nation has frequently called upon its Armed Forces to respond to a range of situations that threaten the safety and well-being of its citizens and those of other countries. U.S. forces possess rapidly deployable capabilities, including airlift and sealift, surveillance, medical evacuation and care, and communications that can be invaluable in supplementing lead relief agencies, by extending aid to victims of natural or man-made disasters, both at home and abroad. DoD will continue to develop joint doctrine and military response options to prevent and, if necessary, respond to mass atrocities. U.S. forces will also remain capable of conducting non-combatant evacuation operations for American citizens overseas on an emergency basis.

The aforementioned missions will largely determine the shape of the future Joint Force. The overall capacity of U.S. forces, however, will be based on requirements that the following subset of missions demand: counter terrorism and irregular warfare; deter and defeat aggression; maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent; and defend the homeland and support civil authorities.

Toward the Joint Force of 2020

To ensure success in these missions, several principles will guide our force and program development. First, given that we cannot predict how the strategic environment will evolve with absolute certainty, we will maintain a broad portfolio of military capabilities that, in the aggregate, offer versatility across the range of missions described above. The Department will make clear distinctions both *among* the key sizing and shaping missions listed above and *between* these mission areas and all other areas of the defense program. Wholesale divestment of the capability to conduct any mission would be unwise, based on historical and projected uses of U.S. military forces and our inability to predict the future. *Likewise, DoD will manage the force in ways that protect its ability to regenerate capabilities that might be needed to meet future, unforeseen demands, maintaining intellectual capital and rank structure that could be called upon to expand key elements of the force.*

Second, we have sought to differentiate between those investments that should be made today and those that can be deferred. This includes an accounting of our ability to make a course change that could be driven by many factors, including shocks or evolutions in the strategic, operational, economic, and technological spheres. *Accordingly, the concept of "reversibility" – including the vectors on which we place our industrial base, our people, our active-reserve component balance, our posture, and our partnership emphasis – is a key part of our decision calculus*.

Third, we are determined to maintain a ready and capable force, even as we reduce our overall capacity. *We will resist the temptation to sacrifice readiness in order to retain force structure, and will in fact rebuild readiness in areas that, by necessity, were deemphasized over the past decade.* An ill-prepared force will be vulnerable to corrosion in its morale, recruitment, and retention. Unless we are prepared to send confident, well-trained, and properly equipped men and women into battle, the nation will risk its most important military advantage – the health and quality of the All-Volunteer Force.

Fourth, the Department must continue to reduce the "cost of doing business." This entails reducing the rate of growth of manpower costs, finding further efficiencies in overhead and headquarters, business practices, and other support activities before taking further risk in meeting the demands of the strategy. As DoD takes steps to reduce its manpower costs, to include reductions in the growth of compensation and health care costs, we will keep faith with those who serve.

During the past decade, the men and women who comprise the All-Volunteer Force have shown versatility, adaptability, and commitment, enduring the constant stress and strain of fighting two overlapping conflicts. They have also endured prolonged and repeated deployments. Some – more than 46,000 men and women – have been wounded, and still others – more than 6,200 members of the Armed Forces – have lost their lives. As the Department reduces the size of the force, we will do so in a way that respects these sacrifices. This means, among other things, taking concrete steps to facilitate the transition of those who will leave the service. These include supporting programs to help veterans translate their military skills for the civilian workforce and aid their search for jobs.

Fifth, it will be necessary to examine how this strategy will influence existing campaign and contingency plans so that more limited resources may be better tuned to their requirements. This will include a renewed emphasis on the need for a globally networked approach to deterrence and warfare.

Sixth, the Department will need to examine the mix of Active Component (AC) and Reserve Component (RC) elements best suited to the strategy. Over the past decade, the National Guard and Reserves have consistently demonstrated their readiness and ability to make sustained contributions to national security. The challenges facing the United States today and in the future will require that we continue to employ National Guard and Reserve forces. The expected pace of operations over the next decade will be a significant driver in determining an appropriate AC/RC mix and level of RC readiness.

Seventh, as we transition out of Iraq and draw down in Afghanistan, we will take extra measures to retain and build on key advancements in networked warfare in which joint

forces have finally become truly interdependent. This imperative will shape a number of Departmental disciplines, ranging from establishing warfighting requirements to the way our forces train together.

Finally, in adjusting our strategy and attendant force size, the Department will make every effort to maintain an adequate industrial base and our investment in science and technology. We will also encourage innovation in concepts of operation. Over the past ten years, the United States and its coalition allies and partners have learned hard lessons and applied new operational approaches in the counter terrorism, counterinsurgency, and security force assistance arenas, most often operating in uncontested sea and air environments. Accordingly, similar work needs to be done to ensure the United States, its allies, and partners are capable of operating in A2/AD, cyber, and other contested operating environments. To that end, the Department will both encourage a culture of change and be prudent with its "seed corn," balancing reductions necessitated by resource pressures with the imperative to sustain key streams of innovation that may provide significant long-term payoffs.

Conclusion

The United States faces profound challenges that require strong, agile, and capable military forces whose actions are harmonized with other elements of U.S. national power. Our global responsibilities are significant; we cannot afford to fail. The balance between available resources and our security needs has never been more delicate. Force and program decisions made by the Department of Defense will be made in accordance with the strategic approach described in this document, which is designed to ensure our Armed Forces can meet the demands of the *U.S. National Security Strategy* at acceptable risk.