

Reasonable Defense

A Sustainable Approach to Securing the Nation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The United States can meet its real security needs and remain a world leader with an active military of 1.15 million personnel. The key is to rebalance the nation's security instruments, reform and enhance security cooperation, use the armed forces more cost-effectively, and set mission priorities based on strict attention to costs and benefits. These steps will enable a low-risk reduction in defense spending of more than 12% from today's level in real terms, to be implemented in steps over four or five years. Over ten years, this will release \$560 billion from the Pentagon base budget for other uses.



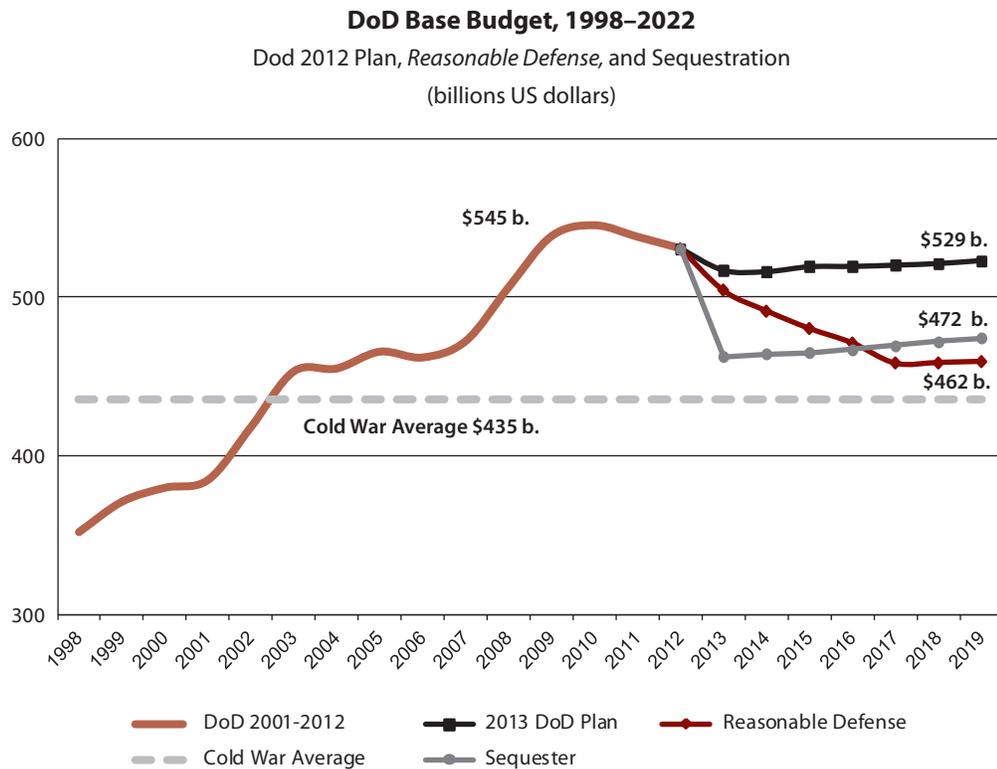
A NEW STRATEGIC REALITY

Today the United States faces an unparalleled strategic challenge – one related to the process of globalization and the emergent reality of a multipolar world. The task this poses for America is the preservation of national strength in the context of a world economy that is rapidly evolving, increasingly competitive, and distinctly unstable. How well the United States manages this task will affect all facets of national life and power for decades to come.

The financial crisis of 2007–2008 and the Great Recession that followed it have prompted a reappraisal of US national priorities. In all areas of policy, new economic realities compel national leaders to adopt a longer view, set clearer priorities, seek new efficiencies, and attend more closely to the ratio of costs, risks, and benefits when allocating resources.

In the area of defense policy, a steep rise in spending between 1998 and 2010 – nearly 100% in real terms – has made the Pentagon a debt and deficit leader.[1] During the first decade of the 21st century, the United States spent more on defense in real terms (\$5.95 trillion dollars) than during any decade of the US–Soviet Cold War, including the Reagan years and the Vietnam war period. Only about 25% of this recent expenditure was for war. Current plans are to spend nearly as much during the next ten years – 5.77 trillion in 2012 dollars – despite the economic plight of the nation and the absence of a peer military competitor.

Today, the United States accounts for more than 40% of all defense spending worldwide.[2] Together with its allies, America spends four times more on military



power than do all current and potential adversary nations combined – including Russia and China. By contrast, the Cold War ratio was approximately one-to-one. Nevertheless, some Pentagon leaders argue that even modest reductions from current spending levels would risk catastrophe.[3] Such assertions, if not just hyperbole, are more an indictment of our current strategy than a reason to persist in trying to fund it.

Is it possible for America to be both solvent and secure? A way forward was proposed by 48 US security policy experts in a 2010 appeal to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.[4] They suggested that America’s need for military power could be reconciled with the preservation of economic strength if America were willing to rethink how it produces military power as well as how, where, and why it puts it to use.

A REASONABLE DEFENSE POSTURE

The *Reasonable Defense* model is a strategy-based approach to resetting America’s defense posture along more effective and less costly lines. It is based on a sober appraisal of the security challenges facing America and a realistic sense of what can be accomplished by means of military power. (A short summary of the model’s strategic underpinnings is presented in the section “Strategic Framework” beginning on page 6.)

The *Reasonable Defense* model:

- Sets stronger defense priorities, emphasizing those real and present dangers that are most consequential;
- Employs US military power in a more cost-effective way by focusing the armed forces on those missions for which they are best suited: traditional defense, deterrence, and crisis response; and,
- Tailors military equipment acquisition to our real security needs, emphasizing modular upgrades to dependable systems and near-term reliance on proven technology.

Based on these guidelines, *Reasonable Defense* provides a sustainable path to securing the nation.

Principle features

The *Reasonable Defense* model prescribes:

- An active-component military of 1.15 million uniformed personnel – a reduction of 19% from 2012 levels. (See Table 1.)
- National Guard and Reserve components comprising 755,000 personnel – approximately 11% fewer than in 2012.
- A routine peacetime presence overseas not exceeding 115,000 uniformed personnel – a reduction of about 40% from currently planned levels.

Table 1. Active Military End Strength, Current vs. Reasonable Defense (thousands of personnel)			
	<i>Current</i>	<i>Reasonable Defense</i>	<i>% difference</i>
USAF	333	295	-11.4
USN	330	275	-16.7
USMC	203	160	-21
US Army	553	420	-24
TOTAL ACTIVE	1419	1150	-19

Cost factors

The *Reasonable Defense* option would cost America approximately \$5.2 trillion (nominal) over the decade, 2013–2022. (See Table 2.) This contrasts with the \$5.76 trillion set out in President Obama’s Fiscal Year 2013 budget submission, for a savings of more than \$560 billion.[5]

- Assessed in constant 2012 dollars, *Reasonable Defense* would stabilize the Pentagon’s annual base budget at \$465 billion after 2022 – a reduction of about 12% from today’s level. (See Table 3.) This represents an inflation-corrected rollback to the spending level of 2005.
- At \$465 billion in 2012 dollars, the budget would still be 7% above the average for the Cold War years in real terms. And it would be 24% above the post-Cold War low point, reached in 1998.
- The *Reasonable Defense* option would achieve savings from current levels roughly comparable to those occurring under the sequestration provisions of the Budget Control Act.
- Unlike sequestration, however, *Reasonable Defense* would implement reductions gradually over a five-year period, allowing both the Pentagon and the economy to adjust to a lower level of defense spending.

Table 2. Pentagon Base Budget Plans for 2013–2022 (billions of dollars)	
	<i>10-year Total</i>
Budget at 2012 Level, Corrected for Inflation	5,858
Obama FY-2012 10-year Plan	6,269
Obama FY-2013 10-year Plan	5,757
Reasonable Defense 10-year Budget Plan	5,190
Pentagon Budget Under Sequestration (est)	5,210

Table 3. Future Steady State Pentagon Base Budget (billions 2012 dollars)			
<i>Future Steady State</i>	<i>2013 DoD Plan (est.)</i>	<i>Reasonable Defense</i>	<i>RDef as % of New DoD Plan</i>
Military personnel	136	128	94%
Operations and maintenance	208	177	85%
Procurement	114	97	85%
R&D	61	55	90%
Military Construction	7.5	5.7	76%
Family Housing	1.5	1.4	93%
Revolving, management, trust funds & other	1	0.9	90%
TOTAL	530	465	88%
Active Duty End Strength (thousands)	1320	1150	87%

Special features

An increased proportion of combat forces. While reducing the total number of active-component military personnel by 19% from 2012 levels, the *Reasonable Defense* option would reduce those serving as part of the Operating Forces by only 17%. (This 17% is a rough proxy measure for the reduction in combat structure.) It does this by moving 20,000 military personnel out of “infrastructure positions” that might be filled by civilians and into service as part of the “operating force.” (See Table 4.)

A reduced reliance on contractor personnel. *Reasonable Defense* would also reverse the dramatic growth in contractor personnel working for the Pentagon, reducing this cohort by 25%. To some extent, civilian DoD personnel would substitute for contractors – notably in those cases where comparative costs warrant and/or greater control over output is needed.

No reduction in military pay and benefits. The *Reasonable Defense* posture is \$567 billion less costly than the Pentagon’s Fiscal Year 2013 ten-year plan but, unlike that plan, involves no reduction in military pay and benefits. Should such cuts be implemented, as in the official plan, an additional \$40 billion to \$130 billion might be saved over the next ten years.

Table 4. Change in DoD Personnel – Active, Reserve, Civilian, Contractor (thousands)			
	<i>Current</i>	<i>Reasonable Defense</i>	<i>% change</i>
Active Military Personnel	1419	1150	–19%
Operating Force	927.5	770	–17%
Infrastructure	491.5	380	–23%
Civilian DoD Employees	784	715	–9%
Estimated Contractor Personnel (non-war)	500	375	–25%
Selected Reserve Military Personnel	846	755	–11%

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

National defense budgeting should flow from strategic considerations, rather than the converse. However, the place to begin this calculation is not with defense strategy, per se, but with national strategy. National strategy involves setting priorities and allocating federal resources among the nation's various strategic challenges, foreign and domestic, security and non-security.

Today, the challenge that will most affect America's future prospects lies in the economic sphere, not the military one.[6] In this respect the current era is distinct from the period of the Second World War and the Cold War. How America handles current fiscal challenges and reorders government priorities should reflect this fact.

The *Reasonable Defense* model is based on *Adaptive Security* – a national security strategy that aligns US security efforts with the need to preserve the fundamentals of national strength. While addressing immediate security concerns, it also aims to reduce future risk in cost-effective ways. Key to this is a rebalancing of America's security policy "tool kit," which encompasses efforts in the areas of defense, diplomacy, and development.

America's defense strategy derives from its national security policy. The *Reasonable Defense* model is based on a strategy of "discriminate defense," which aims to:

- Use America's incomparable military power in more cost-effective ways, giving greater attention to the balance between costs and outcomes, and
- Set stricter priorities among America's military goals and commitments to ensure adequate attention to those challenges that concern America the most.

Adaptive Security

The *Adaptive Security* formula for success is to *focus America's armed forces on deterring and containing current threats, while working principally by other means to reduce future conflict potentials and strengthen the foundation for cooperative action.* This would move America toward a future in which threat potentials are lower and security cooperation greater.

While the United States uses its military power to check real and present threats of violence, it would employ non-military instruments to impede the emergence of new threats and reduce future conflict potentials. Diplomatic and development initiatives would serve the goal of "prevention" by promoting and supporting (i) effective, responsive, and representative government; (ii) sustainable and equitable economic growth; and (iii) effective inclusive global and regional security institutions. As the nation leans more heavily on its diplomatic and development programs, it must take steps to restore funding in these areas, as numerous reports have proposed.[7] As much as 20% of the savings from defense might be profitably invested there.

The guiding precepts of *Adaptive Security* are: *Sustain, Defend, Cooperate, and Prevent:*

- Sustain the fundamentals of national strength for the long haul,
- Deter and defend against "real and present" threats to the nation, its people, and its assets,

- Broaden and deepen multilateral and multipolar cooperation, and
- Address and mitigate the root causes of conflict and instability, emphasizing non-military instruments and cooperative action.

Adaptive Security would:

- Save on near-term military power by setting stronger priorities for our armed forces and focusing them on those real and present dangers that are most consequential.
- Use America’s armed forces more cost-effectively by focusing them on those missions for which they are best suited: traditional defense, deterrence, and crisis response.
- Complement US military power with increased investment and emphasis on non-military foreign and security policy instruments, which are especially suitable for preventive security tasks.
- Amplify US security efforts with increased investment and emphasis on multilateral cooperation to help meet current security challenges and mitigate future risks.
- Manage future risk and insure against uncertainty by increasing investment in the fundamentals of national strength and flexibility – infrastructure, research and development, education, and health care – while reducing federal debt levels over time.

Discriminate Defense

US defense efforts should proceed as part of a balanced suite of security initiatives that are orchestrated by the nation’s national security strategy. Defense strategy, which derives from national security strategy, governs the use of US military power. The *Reasonable Defense* model reflects a strategy of “Discriminate Defense,” which is distinguished by (i) emphasizing the cost-effective use of military power and by (ii) setting strong, clear, and finite priorities for America’s security goals & commitments.

Use military power in cost-effective ways

Discriminate Defense would focus the armed forces principally on those missions for which they are best suited: traditional defense, deterrence, and crisis response. It would limit or, in some cases, entirely preclude using the armed forces for ill-defined “environment shaping” tasks, nation-building efforts, counter-insurgency campaigns, and most preventive security missions. Such uses push the armed forces beyond the limits of their true utility and, thus, exhibit a poor ratio of cost to outcome. *Discriminate defense* assumes and prescribes using non-military means for most preventive security tasks.

Discriminate Defense does not see using American military power as a substitute for other instruments of foreign policy. It does not prescribe using military power to transform nations or re-shape the world order. Instead, a discriminate defense would principally use military power to contain real and present threats of violence – deterring them when possible, defeating them when necessary. Secondly, it would use military power to support diplomatic efforts at conflict management and resolution. Thus, the armed forces might still conduct “peace and stability operations” of limited scope and mandate, although these would have to be truly multinational efforts based on a high-level of regional consensus and substantial indigenous consent. Such operations are not “small wars” and should not be conducted as such.

Prioritize America's military security goals & commitments

A discriminate defense would parse America's military commitments into three categories – *Core Defense*, *Alliance Defense*, and *Common Security* – reflecting a range of US national interest, authority, and responsibility. To varying degrees, these categories would be subject to three limiting conditions:

- The resources invested to meet any particular security challenge must align with risks, stakes, and expected outcome or “payoff. This would apply to all three mission categories.
- Defense cooperation must be founded on reciprocity. This would apply to both *Alliance Defense* and *Common Security* missions.
- Military commitments must be weighed against the competing requirements of sustaining national strength for the long haul. This would weigh most heavily on the *Common Security* missions and least heavily on the *Core Defense* missions

Core Defense mission: The *Core Defense* mission of the US armed forces is to deter and defend against real and present threats to the United States, its people, and its assets.

Alliance Defense missions: The United States participates in alliances for purposes of common defense. However, alliance commitments must be clearly defined and finite. And they must reflect “balanced reciprocity.” This means that alliance authorities and responsibilities should be shared equally among members, and that alliance burdens should be borne by each member proportionate to their national resources and to the benefits they receive from alliance. Where reciprocity does not exist, it can be achieved by adjusting alliance goals and strategy until a common denominator is found.

Common Security missions: These involve general issues of common concern to the international community, such as: defense of the global commons, regional stability, troubled states, weapon proliferation, various transnational problems, interstate aggression, forceful occupation, and genocide. In an interdependent world, all nations are affected by problems in these areas, wherever and whenever they occur. However, in any particular instance, the effect on most nations will be indirect, diffuse, delayed, uncertain, or muted. The cost of global action can match the benefits, however, if common security problems are approached in a broad cooperative fashion. The United States should lead in facilitating such cooperation, while recognizing that no single nation or group of nations has the capacity or the writ to act on behalf of all. Once again, “balanced reciprocity” is essential to success and affordability. In addition, the United States must carefully balance its diffuse global security commitments with the need to invest in the preservation of national strength. No other approach is sustainable.

RESET DEFENSE

Guidelines for resetting US defense posture

The United States can begin to reset its defense posture and budgeting along discriminate lines by implementing several practical policy imperatives:

- *Refocus the armed forces on those threats that concern us the most.* Our defense policy should prioritize those threats that pose the greatest danger of direct harm to ourselves and our allies: terrorist attack and the spread of nuclear weapons. There is today a reduced requirement for conventional war-fighting capabilities.
- *Reduce our permanent military presence overseas and adopt a “surge strategy.”* Our military should be sized principally in accord with crisis-response “surge” requirements – not for routinely “policing” the world or maintaining today’s high level of permanent peacetime presence overseas.
- *Tighten the focus of counter-terrorism efforts and employ proven methods.* US counter-terrorism efforts should emphasize those methods proven to work most cost-effectively: intelligence gathering, cooperative police work, and special operations. Direct action should focus proportionately on those organizations posing an active threat of violence to the United States and its allies. Direct action must be precise and discrete with minimal collateral effects.
- *Limit counter-insurgency operations and eschew armed “nation building.”* The conduct of large-scale protracted wars of occupation and counterinsurgency is not a wise or cost-effective use of our armed forces.
- *Take a significant step now toward a “minimal deterrent” nuclear posture.* The large-scale nuclear standoff of the Cold War years is now 20 years behind us. America’s nuclear posture should reflect this fact. The relevant standard for sufficiency today is a “minimal nuclear deterrent” as a way station on the road to a world free of nuclear weapons. A reasonable defense would take a substantial step in this direction. Further reductions could be pursued through negotiation and reciprocal unilateral steps.
- *Limit missile defense efforts.* Efforts at strategic missile defense have produced no reliable shield against attack. Instead, they have fueled offensive weapon developments and helped to undermine arms reduction and non-proliferation efforts. A better approach is to limit acquisition to those systems that have shown effectiveness in blunting conventional missile attack – mostly shorter-range missiles. By contrast, strategic defense efforts should be limited to research done in cooperation with other nations, especially other nuclear powers. Should strategic defenses eventually prove effective, then mutually agreed development and deployment might facilitate, rather than impede a move to “nuclear zero.”
- *Rebalance our security policy toolkit.* As America’s armed forces refocus on appropriate and cost-effective missions, other agencies of government will have to carry increased responsibility for preventive security. Diplomacy and development efforts will have to play a larger role in US security policy.

- *Adopt a more cooperative approach to meeting “common security” challenges.* The United States must assume a more cooperative multilateral/multipolar approach to global common security goals, such as protecting the “global commons,” mitigating regional instability, and strengthening security in weakly governed areas. Responsibilities, burdens, and authorities for common security must be broadly shared. The United States can lead in facilitating cooperation, but it should not substitute its own action for that of the global community. A central objective should be the maturation of regional institutions on which real cooperation depends.
- *Hedge against future uncertainties by investing in long-term national strength and capacities for force expansion.* More powerful foes may emerge in the future, but the wisest way to hedge against this eventuality is to husband the fundamentals of national strength, maintain a strong foundation for force reconstitution, and continue support for research, development, and the prototyping of new military technologies. Maintaining a proportionately larger Reserve component is also a way to hedge against near-term uncertainty.

Adapting the force

Changes along the lines suggested above would allow a significant reduction in both the size and operational tempo of our armed forces. US defense requirements can be met by a force of 1.15 million active-component military personnel, which is a reduction of 19% from current levels and a reduction of about 13% from officially planned future levels. Changes in force structure and assets are summarized in Table 5.

Ground forces – the US Army and Marine Corps. America’s ground forces would be resized to reflect the reduced requirements for forward presence, conventional warfare, and counter-insurgency operations. The *Reasonable Defense* model prescribes an Army and Marine Corp force of 39 active-component brigade equivalents and 23 reserve-brigade equivalents – 62 total, which is 27% fewer than DoD had planned circa 2011.

Naval forces. At present, the size and tempo of US naval forces are significantly determined by routine peacetime rotations abroad. Re-orienting the Navy toward surging power when needed for crisis response would allow a significant reduction in fleet size. The *Reasonable Defense* model prescribes a US Navy battle fleet of 230 ships, including 9 aircraft carriers and 6 or 7 cruise-missile “arsenal submarines.” This represents a 21% reduction in fleet size.

Combat air power. US air power – both ground- and sea-based – can be reduced in accord with the diminished requirement for conventional warfare capabilities, but not as much overall as other assets. Air power will retain a special place as a key rapid deployment asset and an important force multiplier for units operating across the conflict spectrum. The model reduces the total planned number of US fighter and bomber aircraft by 9%.

Table 5. Summary of US Military Assets, People, and Dollars			
Official Future Planning <i>circa</i> 2011 vs. <i>Reasonable Defense</i> Alternative			
	<i>DoD Plan circa 2011</i>	<i>Reasonable Defense</i>	<i>RD as % of DoD Plan</i>
<i>Nuclear Forces</i>			
Deployed warheads:	1790	900	50%
Launchers:	~776	340	44%
Posture:	Air-Land-Sea Triad	Sea-Land Dyad	
<i>Conventional Forces</i>			
Total Bomber & Fighter Inventory	3316	2942	89%
Total Battle Fleet:	290	230	79%
Combat Brigade Equivalents:	82	62	76%
<i>Personnel, Deployment, and Budget</i>			
Active Military Personnel	1,420,000	1,150,000	81%
Reserve Military Personnel	846,000	755,000	89%
Routine Presence Abroad	190,000+	~ 115,000	60%
Steady-state DoD Base Budget (billions 2012 USD)	\$555	\$465	83%

Special forces. Special Operations Forces (SOF) and capabilities for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance would be largely retained or even enhanced in accord with the needs of counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation operations.

Strategic nuclear forces. A reasonable defense stance would move to reduce America’s nuclear arsenal from a currently planned level of about 2000 warheads deployed on about 780 launchers to a future level of 900 warheads on 340 launchers. This would be a first step toward a “minimal deterrence” posture. Following on the recommendations of the Sustainable Defense Task Force, this reduction would involve moving from a triad posture to a dyad by retiring the bomber leg.[8] Also reduced would be the number of Ohio-class missiles submarines from 14 today to 7 in the future.

Notes

1. Primary sources for budget data are *Budget of the United States Government FY 2013* (Washington DC: Office of Management and the Budget, 2012); *DoD Budget Briefing, Fiscal Year 2013 DoD Budget Request* (Washington DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense – Comptroller, February 2012); and *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2012* (Washington DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense – Comptroller, March 2011).
4. *Experts Letter on Defense Spending to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform*, Project on Defense Alternatives and the Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy, 18 November 2010.
5. See footnote #1.
6. Richard N. Haass, “The Restoration Doctrine,” *American Interest* (January/February 2012); Joseph M Parent and Paul K MacDonald, “The Wisdom of Retrenchment: America Must Cut Back to Move Forward,” *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec 2011); and, Leslie H. Gelb, “GDP Now Matters More Than Force: A U.S. Foreign Policy for the Age of Economic Power,” *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec2010).
7. Current shortfalls in US diplomatic and development efforts as well as remedial steps are explored in: Task Force on a Unified Security Budget, *Rebalancing Our National Security: The Benefits of Implementing a Unified Security Budget* (Washington DC: Center for American Progress and the Institute for Policy Studies, October 2012); *A Foreign Affairs Budget for the Future: Fixing the Crisis in Diplomatic Readiness* (Washington DC: American Academy of Diplomacy and the Stimson Center, October 2008); and, Cindy Williams, “Beyond Preemption and Preventive War Increasing US Budget Emphasis on Conflict Prevention,” *Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief* (Muscatine, Iowa: February 2006).
8. *Debt, Deficits, and Defense: A Way Forward*, Report of the Sustainable Defense Task Force (Washington DC: SDTF, 11 June 2010).

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