

BACKGROUND

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America's Security Commitment to Asia Needs More Forces

Bruce Klingner and Dean Cheng

Abstract

Since the 19th century, Asia has been—and will continue to be—a region of vital importance to the United States. And yet, even as the threats to stability in Asia multiply, there has not been a commensurate increase of U.S. capabilities. While the Obama Administration believes its “Asia Pivot” will animate U.S. policy toward Asia, the U.S. military lacks the resources necessary to implement such a strategy. Indeed, even as the Administration heralds America’s “return” to Asia, the President has proposed cuts to defense spending. Ultimately, this is a strategy of hope: a hope that big wars are a thing of the past; a hope that America’s allies will do more; and a hope that fewer resources do not jeopardize the lives of American soldiers.

With the end of combat operations in Iraq and the ongoing drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, the Obama Administration believes its recent “Asia Pivot”¹ will provide U.S. policy toward Asia with a much-needed (and in its estimate, long overdue) increase in priority. The intention behind this shift is noble—providing a comprehensive, integrated strategy toward a region of critical importance to the United States—even though the pivot itself is largely a continuation of existing initiatives put in place by previous Administrations.

This pivot is undercut, however, by the fact that the U.S. military lacks the resources necessary to implement such a strategy. Even as the number of threats to stability in Asia continues to multiply, there has not been a commensurate increase of U.S. capabilities. While the Obama Administration claims there will be no forces cut from Asia, reductions in the overall U.S. force structure will constrain America’s global power projection and force sustainability capabilities.

It is unrealistic to think that the United States can sustain a half a trillion dollar cut in defense spending, let alone the trillion dollar cut currently pending congressional

KEY POINTS

- Ultimately, the Obama Administration’s “Asia Pivot” represents a strategy of hope: a hope that big wars are a thing of the past; a hope that America’s allies will do more; and a hope that fewer resources do not jeopardize the lives of American soldiers.
- The much-vaunted Asia Pivot represents a shift in focus, but not in forces.
- The Administration’s Asia Pivot is undermined by the fact that the U.S. military lacks the resources necessary to implement such a strategy. Even as the number of threats to stability in Asia continues to multiply, there has not been a commensurate increase in U.S. capabilities.
- The Asia-Pacific region will remain a vital American interest and there is no substitute for a robust forward-deployed U.S. military presence to serve as the primary security guarantor for the region.
- Underfunding defense requirements could restrict potential U.S. policy options and increase the danger to U.S. forces during any future Asian engagements. And, ultimately, the price of such underfunding will be mission failure or American servicemen’s lives.

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The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

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action, and still maintain its current level of commitment, much less augment it, as implied by the Administration's avowed pivot.

If Washington is to implement the pivot to Asia, without shedding additional missions and tasks, then it needs, for example, to reverse a planned reduction to the size of the U.S. Navy. Current acquisition rates would decrease the available force of surface combatants, attack submarines, and amphibious warfare ships. Similarly, the U.S. Air Force will be hard-pressed to fulfill mission objectives in Asia, given plans to retire combat squadrons as well as strategic mobility and refueling aircraft.

The United States must also retain a qualitative advantage over potential adversaries. As technological change continues at a blistering pace, Washington needs to be preparing the next generation of weapons. American military preeminence demands force modernization and a commitment to developing cutting-edge martial technology.

The Asia-Pacific region will remain a vital American interest and there is no substitute for a robust forward-deployed U.S. military presence to serve as the primary security guarantor for the region. Reducing U.S. military capabilities undercuts America's ability to defend its allies, deter threats, and respond quickly to aggressive actions or natural disasters in Asia.

A smaller Navy, Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps means a reduced U.S. presence overseas and, due to an even higher operational tempo, a greater strain on existing forces and equipment. Underfunding defense requirements could restrict potential U.S. policy options and increase

the danger to U.S. forces during any future Asian engagements. And, ultimately, the price of such underfunding will be mission failure or American servicemen's lives.

American Grand Strategy Toward Asia

Asia has long been a vital U.S. interest. Even at the time of the founding of the American Republic, Asia was considered to be an important market. Indeed, one of the first ships to fly the flag of the newly founded United States of America was the merchant ship *Empress of China*, which set sail for Chinese markets in 1783.

In the 21st century, Asia's importance to the U.S. will only continue to grow. First, Asian nations will remain key economic and trading partners for the United States. Not only is Asia home to the world's second-largest and third-largest economies, but, given Europe's economic turmoil, Asia is the only component of the global economy that, at least in the near future, will grow. This growth will be fueled not only by Asia's continued economic expansion, but also by the region's technological innovations. Consequently, preventing the Asian region from being dominated by any single power must continue to be a top U.S. strategic priority.

A strong American economic, diplomatic, and military presence in the region is also necessary because Asia remains politically unstable. The Cold War, for example, has not concluded in Asia, as China and Taiwan and the two Koreas remain separated by deep ideological divides. Moreover, significant territorial disputes also persist; in the South

China Sea, for example, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Brunei all have competing, overlapping claims.

These long-standing disputes and historical animosities have prevented political cohesion or a regional architecture comparable to either the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union (EU), or even a region-wide free trade zone (as the proposed Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific). Indeed, there are few bilateral alliances between Asian states.

Amid these conflicting interests and mutual suspicion, the United States has proved to be the only nation with both the capabilities and the historical record necessary to assume the role of regional balancer and "honest broker." Consequently, the United States is the hub of a "wagon wheel" of bilateral alliances that undergirds regional security. While Japan and South Korea have only recently agreed to undertake staff talks with each other, both sides have long maintained channels of communications through their respective alliances with the United States, and the attendant U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ). And yet, historical animosities still continue to hinder South Korean-Japanese relations.

This regional balancing is of such importance that many local states are subsidizing the American presence. Japan, for example, provides funding for virtually every aspect of the American military forces in Japan, from fuel expenditures to maintenance costs. Indeed, under the Host Nation Support agreement

1. Since late 2011, the Obama Administration has repeatedly declared it will rebalance U.S. policy away from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Europe toward Asia. The "pivot" moniker came primarily from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's November 2011 *Foreign Policy* article, "America's Pacific Century."

signed this past year, Japan will provide 188 billion yen (\$2.4 billion) per year over the next five years to offset the cost of stationing U.S. military forces in Japan. South Korea also spends substantial sums of money on the USFK, paying \$800 million, or 47 percent, of U.S. non-personnel stationing costs.² In addition, the infrastructure that has grown over the past six decades in many Asian states represents substantial value: U.S. bases on Okinawa, or access to facilities in Thailand and Singapore, would be unimaginably expensive if they had to be acquired today.

The American network of alliances is also indirectly supported by many local states. Such support is primarily expressed through shared military technology and training. For example, many Asian militaries are equipped with American weapons: F-15s and F-16s are flown by a number of local air forces; local surface combatants bristle with Harpoon anti-ship missiles; and an increasing number also boast AEGIS combat systems. Local forces also train with American forces. Sharing weapons and training facilitates interoperability, while providing a signal of mutual support; it also means substantial orders for American factories and plants.

The U.S. and its local allies each contribute based on their own strengths, thereby reducing redundancy and overlap. For example, the U.S. often depends on local military to provide the bulk of ground forces for any contingency operations; whether on the Korean DMZ or in defense of Taiwan, any ground war

will be largely fought by local forces. In the air and at sea, however, U.S. and allied forces will benefit from the comprehensive set of command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) assets that the United States brings to the fray. As a result, local and American forces will achieve far more together than either would alone.

This division of labor has also fulfilled other American objectives. In terms of human capital and technological sophistication, and increasingly financial wherewithal, many Asian states, such as Japan and South Korea, have the potential ability to develop their own nuclear deterrent. That they have not done so may be attributed, in part, to the American extended deterrence guarantee. Although often perceived as only a nuclear guarantee, the U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence includes “the full range of military capabilities, to include the U.S. nuclear umbrella, conventional strike, and missile defense capabilities.”³ It is striking how, as American military resources are in decline, the Republic of Korea (ROK) has openly raised the possibility of asking for American tactical nuclear weapons to be reintroduced to the peninsula.⁴

Similarly, the American alliance network has obviated the need for member nations to acquire power projection platforms. In the absence of a regional security infrastructure, and with no shared perception of pressing threats, many Asian states would likely have sought a range of capabilities that might be perceived

as threatening by their neighbors—the “security dilemma” problem. The American presence, however, negates the need to pursue such potentially threatening capabilities.

The United States has significant economic, strategic, and national security interests at stake in Asia. By providing certain key capabilities (e.g., extended nuclear deterrence, power projection, and C4ISR), the United States has helped stabilize the region, reassuring friends while deterring opponents. The provision of security, in turn, has increased American influence in the region beyond the purely military.

A Budget-Driven Defense Strategy

It is customary for a country to first identify its national interests, then develop a comprehensive strategy to achieve those objectives, and, finally, provide the requisite resources—military, diplomatic, or economic—to execute said strategy. These elements of national power are inexorably intertwined. For example, diplomacy is most effective when supported by credible military force. As Frederick the Great once said, “Diplomacy without arms is like an orchestra without instruments.”

The Obama Administration, however, has turned the usual strategy-making process on its head, creating a procrustean bed in which the strategy was forced to fit the budget by:

- **Setting the desired budget level by predetermining an additional \$400 billion in defense cuts.**

2. Author interview with U.S. military official, June 2011 (on file with author).

3. United States and Republic of Korea, “Joint Communiqué: The 42nd U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting,” October 8, 2010, at <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20101008usrok.pdf> (accessed July 25, 2012).

4. “South Korea Should Get Nuclear Weapons: Representative Chung,” *Donga-ilbo* (English language edition), June 4, 2012, <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?bicode=050000&biid=2012060446358> (accessed July 25, 2012).

- **Conceptually lowering the international threat level to conform to the strategy and forcing the strategy to fit the pre-determined funding levels.** President Obama envisions that “the tide of war is receding” and foresees “the end of long-term nation-building with large military footprints.... Reduced force structure will result in less capacity to conduct operations in multiple regions. Accordingly, the strategic guidance calls for a fresh approach to the traditional ‘two war’ force-sizing construct.”⁵ This change in strategy means abandoning the decades-long U.S. objective of being able to fight two opponents simultaneously—instead substituting a delaying action on the second opponent.
- **Claiming excess force levels as a result of the narrowed definition of requirements and reducing forces.** By eliminating the standing U.S. objective of fighting two wars simultaneously, the President provides the justification necessary to make cuts to “significant excess capacity in the U.S. airlift fleets.”⁶ Despite a critical need for transport in the Pacific, particularly as Marine forces are moved further east, President Obama has directed the Pentagon to cut 27 C-5, 65 C-130, and 38 C-27 transport aircraft.⁷

- **Issuing bold rhetoric to allay concerns over force draw-downs,** creating a force that is “capable of deterring aggression and providing a stabilizing presence, especially in the highest priority areas and missions in the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East, while still ensuring our ability to maintain our defense commitments to Europe and other allies and partners.”⁸

By lowering the objectives of, and the requirements for, America’s military, the President was able to introduce a budget that, on its face, is justified in its dramatic cuts to defense spending.

In April 2011, President Obama complimented Secretary of Defense Robert Gates for the \$300 billion in defense budget cuts already scheduled and then declared that he wanted to cut an additional \$400 billion from the defense budget over the next decade. To attain his desired defense cuts, the President called upon the military to conduct a “fundamental review of America’s missions, capabilities, and our role in a changing world.”

In July 2011, President Obama revealed his intent to use these defense cuts not to reduce the ballooning deficit, but to provide funding for domestic programs, commenting that “the nice thing about the defense budget is it’s so big...that

you can make relatively modest changes to defense that end up giving you a lot of head room to fund things like basic research or student loans or things like that.”⁹

Released in January 2012, the President’s defense strategy validated pre-ordained defense cuts. In essence, the Administration set a goal of slashing the defense budget, and then crafted a strategy justifying such draconian cuts—a fact evidenced by the conflict between the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and the 2012 Defense Guidance.

Specifically, the QDR declared that “US forces must plan and prepare to prevail in a broad range of operations that may occur in multiple theaters in overlapping time frames. This includes maintaining the ability to prevail against two capable nation-state aggressors.” But the 2012 Defense Guidance offers far weaker language, seeking the ability to fight one war while “denying the objectives of—or imposing unacceptable costs on—an opportunistic aggressor in a second region.”

Similarly, the QDR pledges that “the US must retain the capability to conduct large-scale counterinsurgency, stability, and counterterrorism operations.... US forces must plan and prepare to prevail in a broad range of operations [including] conducting large-scale stability operations.” But the 2012 Defense

5. U.S. Department of Defense, “Defense Budget Priorities and Choices,” January 2012, p. 7, http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Budget_Priorities.pdf (accessed August 2, 2012).

6. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

9. Kristina Wang, “Obama Addresses Defense Spending, Vets at Twitter Town Hall,” ABC News, July 6, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/07/obama-addresses-defense-spending-vets-at-twitter-town-hall/> (accessed July 25, 2012).

Guidance retreats from such a bold strategy, proposing only that “US forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations” like those in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Administration’s reduction in U.S. missions poses a two fold risk. First, by stating that America will retreat from a second war, Obama increases the risk that, during a single conflict, other adversaries will exploit this decreased U.S. deterrent value by attempting to open up a second front. Second, by decreasing U.S. forces, the Administration is putting at greater risk both U.S. national interests and America’s servicemen and servicewomen. Despite no diminution of global threats, the 2012 defense budget document reduces U.S. missions and forces. As a result, there is an increasing gap between bold, reassuring political rhetoric and the long-term ability of the United States to meet its international commitments, including as security guarantor for East Asia.

Another Viewpoint: The Independent QDR Panel

In February 2010, Congress commissioned an independent, bipartisan panel of 20 national security and defense experts and retired senior military leaders to review the QDR; assess the long-term threats facing America; examine the assumptions, strategy, conclusions, and risks identified in the QDR; and produce its own recommendations regarding the capabilities necessary to meet those threats. The panel published its report in July 2010.

Bipartisan QDR Panel Warned of Hollowed-Out U.S. Military

- o “The QDR force structure may not be sufficient to assure others that the United States can meet its treaty commitments in the face of China’s increased military capabilities.”¹²
- o “The armed forces are operating at maximum operational tempo, wearing out people and equipment faster than expected, using the reserve component more than anticipated, and stressing active duty personnel in all the military services.”¹³
- o Modernization has suffered in the interest of sustaining readiness and carrying the cost of current operations; however, the modernization bill is coming due.”¹⁴
- o “We have long been living off the capital accumulated during the equipment investment of 30 years ago. The useful life of that equipment is running out; and, as a result, the inventory is old and in need of recapitalization.”¹⁵
- o “The Department of Defense now faces the urgent need to recapitalize large parts of the force. The general trend has been to replace more with fewer more-capable systems. We are concerned that, beyond a certain point, quality cannot substitute for quantity.... Because military power is a function of quantity as well as quality, numbers do matter.”¹⁶

In its report, the QDR Panel warned of a coming national defense crisis sparked by the long-term trend of failing to provide sufficient military capabilities to meet America’s international commitments. The panel highlighted that each QDR since the end of the Cold War had “emphasized new missions for the U.S. armed forces [but] over the last two decades ... the size of the U.S. armed forces declined by roughly a third.”¹⁰

In response to an increasingly challenging threat environment, the QDR panel advocated “substantial and immediate additional investment that is sustained through the long term.” In particular, the panel argued that:

The force structure in the Asia-Pacific area needs to be increased. In order to preserve U.S. interests, the United States will need to retain the ability to transit freely the areas of the Western Pacific for security and economic reasons. The United States must be fully present in the Asia-Pacific region to protect American lives and territory, ensure the free flow of commerce, maintain stability, and defend our allies in the region.¹¹

Clearly, the QDR’s recommendations envision a very different role for the U.S. in Asia than the role promulgated by the Obama Administration.

10. Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America’s National Security Needs In the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2010), pp. 52–53.

11. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

Speak Loudly and Carry a Shrinking Stick

Despite claims from the Obama Administration that there will be no forces cut from Asia, reductions in the current and planned overall force structure will inevitably impact U.S. global power projection and force sustainment capabilities. The Obama Administration is attempting to revise the long-standing definitions of U.S. overseas “presence” and “engagement” away from permanent forces and toward rotational forces. However, as Representative Randy Forbes (R-VA) of the House Armed Services Committee commented, “What’s more powerful: seeing an aircraft carrier out there, or a sign saying we’re going to have an exercise in a few months?”¹⁷ Brief U.S. participation in a military exercise is not a substitute for a permanent presence.

Any successful defense of the Pacific Theater will be reliant on strong air, naval, and amphibious capabilities. The ability to deploy forces thousands of miles from American bases is critical, and is not a capacity that can be improved by technological advancement; America needs ships. But defense cuts would impact the combat and transport elements necessary to augment existing

Pacific forces in response to an Asian crisis. The Navy had planned to increase its 285-ship fleet to a “minimum fleet” of 313 ships by 2020, but will instead fall far short.

In late 2011, the Obama Administration said the Navy should construct 276 ships but only five months later declared the Navy only needed 268 new ships. Last year’s defense budget funded construction of 57 ships during FY 2013–2017. But the Asian Pivot budget only allows for 41 ships, which will leave the U.S. Navy with fewer than 280 ships.¹⁸

The Marine Corps has meanwhile stated that, in order to meet Combatant Commander requirements, it needs 38 amphibious ships; yet the defense shipbuilding plan provided for only 33 “gators,” and was later further reduced to below 30.

Since 2001, the Air Force has added new missions while eliminating 500 aircraft, leaving it with the smallest force structure since its inception in 1947. Meanwhile, the aircraft left in the inventory are aging: The average age for fighter airplanes is 22 years, bombers 35 years, and tankers 47 years. To put this in perspective, the Federal Aviation Administration defines an aircraft as “antique” if it was built more than

30 years ago.¹⁹ Furthermore, the fact that many of these aircraft are antiques is exacerbated by the reality that a number of these planes, especially the fighters and bombers, have, for years, engaged in stressful combat maneuvers. And in the case of tankers and transports, these planes have been on constant duty since the end of the Cold War.

Rather than replacing these older aircraft—planes whose airframes have been subjected to punishing conditions—funding cuts actually forced the USAF to slow the pace of modernization, or, in some cases, forgo modernization entirely. For example, the USAF has abandoned both its new trainer craft and the new CSAR-X. The Air Force has also reduced research funding for “both unmanned vehicles and reconnaissance systems—highly networked programs that seem to fit into the Administration’s focus on conducting counterterrorism and modernizing to maintain the balance of power in Asia.”²⁰ The service is deferring or terminating numerous acquisition programs such as the Common Vertical Lift Support Platform, Light Mobility Aircraft, and Light Attack and Armed Reconnaissance aircraft.²¹

12. Ibid., p. 59.

13. Ibid., p. 56.

14. Ibid., p. 61.

15. Ibid., p. 55.

16. Ibid., pp. 53 and 55.

17. John Bennett, “Obama Administration Quietly Altering Military’s Global Presence,” *U.S. News & World Report*, January 24, 2012, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2012/01/24/obama-administration-quietly-altering-militarys-global-presence?page=2> (accessed July 25, 2012).

18. Mackenzie Eaglen, “Cutting Navy While Obama Pivots to Asia Does Not Add Up,” *AOL Defense*, March 30, 2012, <http://defense.aol.com/2012/03/30/navy-shrinking-while-obama-pivots-to-asia-does-not-add-up> (accessed July 25, 2012).

19. Federal Aviation Administration, “Identification and Registration Marking,” *Advisory Circular* No. AC45-2D, October 16, 2009, http://www.faa.gov/documentLibrary/media/Advisory_Circular/AC%2045-2D.pdf (accessed July 26, 2012).

20. Mackenzie Eaglen, “Obama’s Shift-to-Asia Budget Is a Hollow Shell Game,” *AOL Defense*, March 15, 2012, <http://defense.aol.com/2012/03/15/crafty-pentagon-budget-showcases-marquis-programs-while-masking> (accessed July 25, 2012).

21. U.S. Air Force “Air Force Priorities for a New Strategy with Constrained Budgets,” February 2012, <http://www.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-120201-027.pdf> (accessed July 25, 2012).

A Smaller Military Is ... a Smaller Military

The Obama Administration posits that it can nonetheless respond to growing threats with a smaller, more flexible military—albeit one that has been denied critical modernization funds. The President’s defense guidelines declared that “the focus on the Asia-Pacific region places a renewed emphasis on air and naval forces.”²² Yet, counter-intuitively, the President will reduce the number of ships by slowing the pace of building new ships while accelerating the retirement of existing ships.

Representative Howard “Buck” McKeon (R–CA), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, dismantles the President’s argument: “A smaller force may sound synonymous with greater flexibility and agility ... [and] a smarter military. This is fallacious. A smarter military is a force tailored to threats.” He also pointedly asks, “Does having fewer Navy warships increase our flexibility to respond in multiple theaters? Does having fewer Air Force transport aircraft grant us greater agility to respond to an unforeseen contingency?”²³ Consider McKeon’s argument using an analogy from a different sort of battlefield: Is a football team more effective by having only 8 players instead of 11 on the gridiron?

Sequestration: The Deepening Crisis of America’s Underfunded Defense Requirements

Already reeling from the President’s goal of a downsized

military, America’s defense planners must now contend with the Budget Control Act (BCA) of August 2011. The BCA was enacted to end the government impasse over raising the U.S. debt ceiling and avert sovereign default. Congress pledged to cut budget cuts by \$2.1 trillion from 2012 to 2013. The BCA contained cuts of \$917 billion—half borne by defense—and established a “super committee” to identify further debt reduction measures.

The super committee’s failure to achieve consensus on an additional \$1.2 trillion in cuts set in motion automatic spending reductions (sequestration) evenly split between security and non-security discretionary spending to take effect in January 2013. Sequestration will have a devastating impact on the defense budget.

Defense spending comprises only 19 percent of total federal budget authority but has to absorb 50 percent of total federal budget cuts. Even without sequester, “defense spending is estimated to fall to 13 percent of the budget in 2017.”²⁴ Earlier this year, Jack Lew, White House Chief of Staff, stated that “I think that there’s pretty broad agreement that the time for austerity is not today.”²⁵ Except, apparently, when discussing the defense budget.

The U.S. deficit is driven primarily by entitlement spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, which, combined, account for 43 percent of federal spending; yet the BCA shielded these three programs from cuts. The BCA is ignoring the actual

U.S. Forces to Be Eliminated Due to Defense Budget Cuts

- o Army
 - 8 brigade combat teams
 - 70,000 troops
- o Navy
 - 7 *Ticonderoga*-class cruisers
 - 2 LSD-41 class dock landing ships
 - 8 joint high-speed vessels
 - Delay of the next LHA-7 amphibious assault ship
 - 2 littoral combat ships
 - 16 ships out of new construction budget
- o Marine Corps
 - 1 infantry regiment headquarters
 - 5 infantry battalions (4 active and 1 reserve)
 - 1 artillery battalion
 - 4 tactical air squadrons (3 active and 1 reserve)
 - 1 combat logistics battalion
 - 20,000 Marines
- o USAF
 - 6 combat fighter squadrons
 - 1 training squadron
 - 286 aircraft
 - 123 combat aircraft (102 A-10s and 21 F-16s)
 - 133 mobility aircraft (27 C-5s, 65 C-130s, 21 C-27s, 20 KC-135s)
 - 30 ISRs
 - Reduce F-35 production by 167

22. Department of Defense “Defense Budget Priorities and Choices,” p. 5.

23. Representative Howard “Buck” McKeon, “Undermining Our National Defense,” *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2012.

24. Robert Samuelson, “Defense Is Under the Gun,” *The Washington Post*, March 2, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/budget-sequestration-would-be-a-dagger-to-defense/2012/03/02/gIQAfPwR_story.html (accessed July 25, 2012).

25. Michael O’Brien, “Romney: Spending Cuts Slow Economic Growth,” MSNBC, February 21, 2012, <http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/02/21/10469786-romney-spending-cuts-slow-economic-growth> (accessed July 25, 2012).

source of the U.S. budget deficit and spending problems. With such lopsided priorities, even if defense spending were eliminated entirely, the rising costs of these entitlement programs would consume all federal taxes within a few decades.

Ignoring the Coming Sequestration Train Wreck

Like an ostrich with its head in the sand, many Administration officials and Members of Congress are ignoring the danger of imminent sequestration to defense funding. Too many officials feel they can ignore the impact that sequestration would have on the U.S. military because they blithely presume that since sequestration would be such a catastrophe, it simply will not happen.

Neither the Pentagon's 2013 budget nor the congressional defense authorization and appropriations bills address sequestration. Secretary of Defense Panetta said, "We have made no plans for a sequester because it's a nutty formula, and it's goofy to begin with, and it's not something, frankly, that anybody responsible ought to put into effect."²⁶

Representative Adam Smith (D-WA), ranking minority Member on the House Armed Services Committee, said, "[A] good chunk of Congress is in denial about the deficit" and was "confident [sequestration] would never happen."²⁷ Representative Roscoe Bartlett

(R-MD), a senior Member of the House Armed Services Committee, commented that the defense authorization bill "does not reflect any recognition that sequester is in sight. I'm not sure that's realistic, but that's where we are."²⁸

Yet, sequestration is a sword of Damocles hanging over the Pentagon: It is the law of the land and *will* occur in January 2013—unless the executive and legislative branches can work out a compromise on \$1.2 trillion in budget cuts or tax increases. Many in Washington are complacent, and simply assume the other side will blink and accept tax increases, cuts to non-defense discretionary spending, or entitlements reductions.

Though unwilling to make any plans to implement sequestration, Secretary Panetta recognizes the damage it would do to America's defenses. He commented that the "meat-ax approach" of sequestration would "result in hollowing out the force and inflicting severe damage to our national defense." He warned that sequestration "would result in a further round of very dangerous cuts across the board—defense cuts that I believe would do real damage to our security, our troops and their families, and our military's ability to protect the nation."²⁹

Secretary Panetta also commented that, under sequestration, the United States would have the "smallest ground forces since 1940," a "fleet of fewer than 230 ships, the smallest level since 1915," and the "smallest

tactical fighter force in the history of the Air Force." Of course, existing budget cuts are already impacting the U.S. military in terms of smaller fleets, overstretched units, aging inventory, and underfunded research and development (R&D) for future forces.

Although it is the Administration's responsibility to identify what cuts would be necessary under sequestration, President Obama is trying to avoid responsibility by passing the buck to Congress. It is irresponsible for Panetta and Obama to not delineate what forces would have to be cut in the event of sequestration; simply saying it cannot be done is an abrogation of responsibility.

There will be no progress on budget issues until after the November 2012 elections. However, it is unlikely that even a post-election lame duck Congress will reach a detailed agreement on \$1.2 trillion in cuts to defense and non-defense discretionary spending in less than two months before sequestration automatically begins on January 2, 2013. Indeed, that Congress will face "two or possibly three highly contentious issues: the expiration of the Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003; the looming start of the sequester; and, possibly, the need to raise the federal debt ceiling."³⁰ Presuming that a divided Congress will undo the Gordian Knot in less than two months is naïve; sequester is far more likely to occur than many Members of Congress think.

26. News release, "Shooting Ourselves in the Head," Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=6b2eb53e-4b68-4948-a23d-8881953354e3 (accessed July 26, 2012).

27. Walter Pincus, "Ignoring Sequestration Won't Make It Vanish," *The Washington Post*, March 13, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/ignoring-sequestration-wont-make-it-vanish/2012/03/09/gIQAblmB8R_story.html (accessed July 26, 2012).

28. Jeremy Herb, "Defense Bill in for Smoother Ride This Year," *The Hill*, April 29, 2012.

29. News release, "Shooting Ourselves in the Head."

30. Samuelson, "Defense Is Under the Gun."

Growing Risk in the Western Pacific

While the Administration and Congress are battling over budgets, the Asian security situation continues to deteriorate. In particular, the PRC has been improving its military, with two decades of unbroken, usually double-digit growth in defense spending. The People's Liberation Army (PLA), the largest military in the world, is a far cry from the old force that relied on "rifles and millet," and human wave tactics to overwhelm opponents. Instead, today's PLA is a modern force, preparing for joint operations involving combat not only on land, at sea, and in the air, but also in outer space and cyberspace. It is a force that has spent two decades studying foreign military experiences, especially those of the United States, in order to identify weaknesses ripe for exploitation.

Given China's dependence on global economic trade, it is hardly surprising that the PLA is modernizing, if only to meet the expanding requirements for maintaining its economic security. But the PLA appears intent not on preserving access to the global sea and air lanes, but on denying the U.S. the ability to operate within what has been termed the "first island chain,"—the East Asian littoral from Japan and the Korean Peninsula, through Taiwan

and the Philippines, to the Strait of Malacca.

To this end, the PLA has chosen to pursue capabilities that challenge American superiority, particularly what American analysts term "anti-access/area denial capabilities." For example, China has developed anti-ship ballistic missiles, which are considered a direct threat to U.S. aircraft carriers. In addition, China has fielded a variety of cruise and ballistic missiles, as well as modern strike aircraft, to target U.S. bases throughout the western Pacific. Meanwhile, the PLA is also modernizing its large fleet of submarines, and deploying dozens of missile-armed fast attack craft—forces that would make the U.S.'s ability to intervene in support of its western Pacific allies very difficult.

Asia Pivot: Where's the Beef?

Even as it faces relentless Chinese military expansion, as well as domestic budgetary chaos, the Obama Administration continues to claim that it has "intensified [the] American role" in Asia. Indeed, the Administration has even declared that, as a result of its efforts, "the U.S. is back in Asia."³¹ Using his characteristic first-person self-congratulatory rhetoric, President Obama, while on a November 2011 trip to Australia, declared that "I

have, therefore, made a deliberate and strategic decision—as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future."³²

But it was Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who established the "pivot" moniker, declaring that as a result of the military drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, the "United States stands at a pivot point" and "we will need to accelerate efforts to pivot to new global realities."³³ She also underscored the importance of the Asia-Pacific to the United States, a theme she affirmed as "America's pivot toward the Asia Pacific" in remarks to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting in Honolulu.

To implement this pivot strategy, President Obama pledged that the United States "will be strengthening our presence in the Asia Pacific and budget reductions will not come at the expense of that critical region." The President's January 2012 Defense Guidance declared that "we will necessarily rebalance force structure and investments toward the Asia Pacific and Middle East regions."³⁴ Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta affirmed, "We will continue not only to maintain, but to strengthen our presence" in Asia³⁵ and "increase its institutional weight and focus on enhanced presence,

31. Tom Donilon, "America Is Back in the Pacific and Will Uphold the Rules," *Financial Times*, November 27, 2011, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/4f3febac-1761-11e1-b00e-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1ulp3s0Tq> (accessed July 26, 2012).

32. News release, "Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament," The White House, November 17, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament> (accessed July 26, 2012).

33. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy* (November 2011), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century?page=full (accessed July 26, 2012).

34. News release, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," The White House, January 2012, and News Release, "Defense Budget Priorities and Choices," Department of Defense, January 2012.

35. Karen Parrish, "Panetta Answers Troops' Questions in Japan," American Press Services, October 24, 2011, <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123277060> (accessed July 26, 2012).

power projection, and deterrence in the Asia-Pacific.”³⁶

Continuity Rather Than Change. To assess the Asia Pivot, it is first necessary to discard the Administration’s politically driven rhetoric of “the U.S. is back in Asia.” In reality, America never left. For decades, successive U.S. Presidents have articulated that America is an integral part of Asia and developed their strategies accordingly. China and North Korea, for example, have been a major focus of U.S. Administrations for decades.

Nor is the Asia Pivot a “new” grand strategy. As Ralph Cossa and Brad Glosserman of Pacific Forum CSIS articulate, “[E]ver since the end of the Cold War, U.S. presidents have been acknowledging the growing importance of Asia and the need for the United States to remain engaged in this critical region in our own national interest.” They note that President George H. W. Bush’s 1990 East Asia Strategy Initiative declared:

Our goals in the next decade must be to deal with the realities of constrained defense budgets and a changing threat environment while maintaining our resolve to meet American commitments. In this context, we believe that our forward presence in the Asia-Pacific region will remain critical to deterring war, supporting our regional and bilateral objectives, and performing our military missions.³⁷

To date, the Obama Administration’s Asian accomplishments have been few: joining the East Asia Summit, acceding to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN) Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and announcing rotational military deployments to Southeast Asia. The Obama Administration’s embrace of Asian multilateral organizations was intended to distinguish itself from the Bush Administration, which was perceived by Southeast Asia as not caring about the region. This view was largely due to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s having only attended two of four Asian Regional Forum ministerial meetings and President Bush canceling the 2007 U.S.–ASEAN summit.

The economic components of Obama’s Asia Pivot—the U.S.–South Korea free trade agreement (KORUS FTA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—were actually initiatives inherited from the George W. Bush Administration. President Obama had resisted submitting the KORUS FTA for two years until further concessions that benefited U.S. labor unions—a key Democratic Party constituency—could be forced from Seoul.

It is noteworthy that Obama’s firm policies toward China and North Korea, including augmented sanctions against Pyongyang and advocacy for strengthening the military in Asia, are tacit admissions of the failure of his original policies. When Obama first entered office, he believed that extending an “open

hand” of dialogue would moderate the bad behavior of nations who were, it was claimed, merely responding to U.S. unilateralism under Bush. Three years later, it is clear that the enmity of Pyongyang and the obstreperousness of Beijing are not functions of the occupant of the White House.

Robbing Peter to Not Pay Paul. In November 2011, President Obama declared that since Asia was a “top priority. ... [R]eduction in U.S. defense spending will not—I repeat, will not—come at the expense of the Asia-Pacific.” Yet, Obama’s defense budget dictates cuts to U.S. forces in Europe, including two brigade combat teams and an A-10 squadron.

Ironically, the new defense plan *reverses* an earlier Obama Administration reversal of a 2004 decision to remove two of four brigade combat teams (BCT) from Europe. In April 2011, the Obama Defense Department announced it would only remove one BCT from Europe:

Based on the administration’s review, consultations with allies and the finding of NATO’s new Strategic Concept, the department will retain three BCTs in Europe to maintain a flexible and rapidly deployable ground force to fulfill the United States’ commitments to NATO, to engage effectively with allies and partners, and to meet the broad range of 21st century challenges.³⁸

Since the Obama Administration did not claim that the geostrategic

36. Xinhua, “China to Raise Defense Budget by 11%,” CNN, March 4, 2012, http://articles.cnn.com/2012-03-04/asia/world_asia_china-defense-budget_1_defense-budget-defense-spending-xinhua?_s=PM:ASIA (accessed July 26, 2012).

37. Ralph Cossa and Brad Glosserman, “Return to Asia: It’s Not (All) About China,” Pacific Forum CSIS *Pac Net* No. 7, January 30, 2012, <http://csis.org/files/publication/Pac1207.pdf> (accessed July 26, 2012).

38. News release, “DOD Announced U.S. Force Posture Revision in Europe,” Department of Defense, April 8, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=14397> (accessed July 26, 2012).

security situation had improved in Europe, it is clear that the decision to remove two BCTs was driven by budget cuts rather than strategy.

Removing U.S. forces from Europe and Afghanistan does not mean the problems there are resolved. U.S. forces in Europe serve as forward operation bases to deter security threats, augment allied forces, and protect U.S. interests. Reducing American forces in Europe degrades U.S. power projection, surge, resupply, and crisis response capabilities, especially in support of the Middle East. Given that there has been no discussion of reducing American commitments to that region, there is a real question of what the Asia Pivot will actually look like.

No Pacific Augmentation.

Secretary Panetta commented that cutting forces in Europe would “free up money so the United States could maintain or increase its forces in Asia.”³⁹ But none of the forces removed from Europe or Afghanistan will be redeployed to Asia.

In February 2012, Panetta testified that the United States would rebalance its force posture to emphasize Asia. But, he added that the defense budget only maintains the current bomber fleet, maintains the aircraft carrier fleet, maintains the big-deck amphibious fleet, and restores Army and Marine Corps force structure in the Pacific to pre-Iraq and Afghanistan deployment levels.⁴⁰

Furthermore, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, Chief of Naval Operations, downplayed perceptions that the U.S. pivot to Asia would lead to an increased naval presence or redeployment of forces, noting: “It’s not a big buildup in the Far East. We’re there, we have been there, we will continue to be there.”⁴¹

Indeed, there are no plans for new permanent force deployments to the Pacific. New initiatives announced or under discussion by the Obama Administration include units or ships on rotational assignments or exercises. The Darwin Initiative—in which up to 2,500 Marines will operate in Australia to reassure Southeast Asian nations increasingly nervous about China’s increasing assertiveness—would temporarily rotate Marines through the region conducting training exercises. This “rotational presence” is also the basis for projected deployments of the new littoral combat ships (LCS), with two to four expected to rotate through Singapore.

Over-Hyped and Under-Resourced. The Administration’s declaration of an Asia Pivot and an increase in America’s capacity to defend its security interests is only plausible if sufficient resources are provided. To date, however, the Administration’s bold rhetoric has not been matched by any budgetary commitments.

Instead, planned defense reductions, including additional draconian cuts under sequestration, threaten to stretch America’s ability to maintain

its global deterrent and defense capabilities beyond the breaking point. Emphasizing a U.S. commitment to Asia, while claiming to augment forces but in reality cutting the overall U.S. force structure, creates dangerously unrealistic expectations.

What the U.S. Should Do

The Asia–Pacific region will remain a vital American interest. As such, there is no substitute for a robust forward-deployed U.S. military presence to serve as the primary security guarantor for the region. Therefore, the United States will need more than just platitudes and loud claims of an Asia Pivot. Instead, the Obama Administration needs to set forth concrete measures that will demonstrate to all of Asia that the United States will remain a foremost Asian power.

Extending the American Presence. The Administration points to the rotation of American Marines through Darwin, as well as its proposal to base several littoral combat ships in Singapore, as proof of an Asia Pivot. Yet, the Marines will not be permanently based in Australia; the initiative is simply the resurrection of the pre-9/11 Unit Deployment Program. Previously, three battalions of Marines would rotate through Okinawa. In the future, one battalion each would rotate through Okinawa, Guam, and Australia.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department’s own Office for Testing & Evaluation concluded that

39. Thom Shanker and Elizabeth Bumiller, “Weighing Pentagon Cuts, Panetta Faces Deep Pressures,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/07/world/panetta-weighs-military-cuts-once-thought-out-of-bounds.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed July 26, 2012).

40. Leon Panetta, “Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta Defense Budget Request—Written Submitted Statement,” Armed Services Committee, U.S. Senate, February 14, 2012.

41. Phil Stewart and Paul Eckert, “No Big U.S. Naval Buildup in Asia, Top Officer Says,” Reuters, January 10, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/10/us-usa-asia-military-idUSTRE8092CG20120110> (accessed July 26, 2012).

LCS is not expected to be survivable in a hostile combat environment. This assessment is based primarily on a review of LCS design requirements, which do not require the inclusion of the survivability features necessary to conduct sustained operations in its expected combat environment.⁴²

This report will hardly be seen as a genuine improvement in American capability. Rather than putting forth paper tigers, the United States needs to project real, credible power. To this end, the Administration should work with Canberra, Tokyo, and Seoul to homeport additional U.S. forces in Asian ports, much as the *George Washington* carrier battle group is currently homeported in Yokosuka, Japan.

Ideally, these new homeportings would comprise a carrier strike group or a Marine Expeditionary Unit (typically, three amphibious assault ships plus a number of escorts), perhaps in Southeast Asia, to complement the forces currently stationed in northeast Asia. Although political realities make it unlikely that such high visibility forces would be allowed to permanently base in any nation in the region (including Australia), it might be possible to base one or more U.S. submarines in Asian ports, especially as these vessels are, by their very nature, stealthy. Having several additional attack submarines permanently based in Asia would significantly reduce transit time, allowing these subs to spend much more of their time on patrol in Asian waters,

rather than shuttling to and from Pearl Harbor.

The U.S. government should also examine the potential utility of an additional submarine tender based in the Asian littoral. Such a vessel would further extend the patrol time of U.S. attack submarines. Moreover, as a mobile staging area, this additional vessel could be redeployed in time of crisis as a deterrent signal. The United States currently only has two of these very useful ships.

In the longer term, rather than continuing to risk the lives of American sailors by stationing them onboard ships that are not designed to survive engaging the enemy, the Navy needs to rethink its approach to surface combatants. Specifically, the United States should purchase additional proven combatants such as the *Arleigh Burke* guided missile destroyers, or perhaps consider purchasing foreign frigate designs for manufacturing in U.S. yards—either approach would be superior to sending American sailors out as sacrificial lambs.

Deepening the American Presence. The seas dominate the Asia-Pacific region; yet, in many Asian states, it is the ground forces that are the senior service, enjoying the lion's share of resources. The importance of interacting with not only admirals but ground-force generals, from a political as well as military perspective, should not be underestimated. As the Army and Marine Corps reduce their presence in Afghanistan, there should be a concerted effort to increase their exposure to, and interaction with, Asian militaries. One possibility

would be for Army Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) to align with particular Combatant Commands, for example, European Command (EUCOM), Central Command (CENTCOM), and Pacific Command (PACOM).

BCTs assigned to PACOM should strive to build relations with local militaries through increased exchanges of officers, mutual exercises, and deeper intelligence and human terrain efforts. Asian officers enrolled in the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program might also be rotated through the relevant BCTs to further enhance mutual contacts. General Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently stated that “the idea [is] that as we rebalance, we want to invest first and foremost in the human capital, the human dimension, in building relationships and increasing the cultural awareness of leaders.”⁴³

Sustaining the American Presence. The United States must retain a balance between permanent basing and rotational deployments, such as military exercises. While the latter reduce the potential for protests against new U.S. bases, they risk straining an already overstretched U.S. military. It is one thing for America to proclaim a strategy for deterring and defeating security threats; it is another altogether to have the robust, permanently forward-deployed U.S. military necessary to execute such a strategy. The mandated cuts in the defense budget jeopardize America's ability to enforce its deter and defeat strategy; sequestration will make clear that any Asian Pivot is mere

42. Naval Engineering Education Center, “The Future of LCS,” April 26, 2012, <http://goneec.org/News/NEECBlog/tabid/136/EntryId/18/The-Future-of-LCS.aspx> (accessed August 2, 2012).

43. Karen Parrish, “Dempsey: Partners Enthusiastic About Asia Strategy,” American Forces Press Service, June 6, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=116648> (accessed July 26, 2012).

rhetoical flourish. Congress, therefore, needs to at least hold the line on defense spending, and then allocate the resources necessary to ensure U.S. military supremacy.

But acquiring current weapons at the cost of R&D programs would be tantamount to grinding seed corn to make bread. Military research, development, and modernization were neglected during the recent decade of war. As a result, the U.S. military is reliant on weapons bought during the Reagan modernization surge. As then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, “When it comes to our military modernization accounts, the proverbial ‘low-hanging fruit’—those weapons and other programs considered most questionable—have not only been plucked, they have been stomped on and crushed. What remains are much needed capabilities.”⁴⁴

The United States must retain a qualitative weapons advantage over potential adversaries. Given the pace of technological change, including ever more capable computers and communications systems, the DOD needs to be preparing the next generation of weapons for the next generation of service personnel. Indeed, the military R&D budget needs to be preserved, not only because technological shifts heighten the possibility of surprise, but also because the weapons that are developed today are likely to enter service when current troops’ children join the military—and are likely to remain in service even as they retire. Consequently, in order to preserve U.S. military preeminence, Washington must be committed to modernizing America’s weaponry.

Preserving the American Presence. Ultimately, however, the only way that the United States can hope to maintain its position in the western Pacific is to increase the resources available to the military. Of particular importance, as noted earlier, is the Navy acquisition budget. The inability to field even 300 warships for a maritime theater means that even minimal margins of safety are unachievable. Similarly, asking pilots to fly aircraft that the FAA would consider antiques is hardly a credible conventional deterrent.

Forward basing a carrier group, as with the USS *George Washington* battlegroup to Japan, reduces the pressure somewhat, but does not eliminate it entirely. Ships still have to undergo repairs and refits, and personnel want to be united with their families. Nonetheless, the United States should be pressing for increased forward deployments.

Shifting forces, increasing rotations, and extending deployments are all stopgap measures—many of which are as likely to lead to a “hollow military” as to actually deter aggressors. The tyranny of distance, the reality that a ship or aircraft can only be in one location at any time (no matter the level of capability of each platform), and considerations of wear and tear on both people and systems demand that the U.S. either reduce its commitments or halt sequestration and take the necessary steps to increase its capabilities.

These same realities, unfortunately, also mean that increasing capabilities cannot be obtained on the cheap. For each U.S. carrier strike group that forward deploys to the western Pacific, for example,

there is typically one carrier working up to eventually replace it and another steaming home from its deployment. Thus, maintaining an additional carrier group requires *three* carrier groups. The same inexorable mathematics also applies to submarines, amphibious ships, and supply vessels.

Regarding the Air Force, a comparable set of problems exists. The decision to end the F-22 line has further complicated contingency planning. While the F-35 is likely to be a capable aircraft once it has overcome its teething problems, the aircraft’s limited range means that it will have to operate deep within the Chinese anti-access/area denial envelope. Worse, it will require significant additional tanker assets to extend either range or loiter time. Longer-range aircraft like the F-22 offer a wider array of potential basing locations for a given time on station, while relieving pressure on tanker and other support assets.

The shorter-range F-35 also highlights the vulnerability of bases. In the absence of additional facilities, current bases are likely to be crowded with aircraft, both combat and support (e.g., tankers, airborne early warning, and electronic warfare, etc.). In the event of a conflict, these bases are likely to be lucrative targets for enemy cruise and ballistic missiles. The lack of hardened aircraft shelters (HASs) at many of these bases means that multi-million dollar aircraft are vulnerable to not only sophisticated precision munitions, but also Special Forces with mortars—or bouts of extended bad weather. Not only should the services be acquiring additional aircraft; they

44. News release, “Debunking Myths About Defense Spending,” Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=14731281-b52c-4656-b50b-ea1f3e7cd459 (accessed July 26, 2012).

need to pursue facility hardening as a way to ensure the survivability of the forces they already have. In this regard, the F-35B, the short takeoff, vertical landing (STOVL) variant being developed for the U.S. Marine Corps and the British armed forces, may be the most useful jet, as it will be able to operate from a larger array of airbases and, in a crisis, even from parking lots and straight stretches of highways (albeit at a reduced operational tempo due to logistics complications).

Possible Force Structures

If the Asia Pivot is to make the transformation from clever rhetoric to effective policy, the Administration must provide PACOM with the necessary assets. The following force structure considerations would make the President's pivot a reality.

U.S. Navy (USN). As a recent Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report details, under the current U.S. Navy shipbuilding plan, "the Navy would not build the appropriate number of ships at the right times to meet the service's [own] 328-ship inventory goal. In particular, the plan would lead to shortfalls relative to the Navy's goals in attack submarines, large surface combatants, and amphibious warfare ships."⁴⁵ The Obama Administration's pledge to shift the fleet ratio toward Asia still shortchanges Pacific Fleet ongoing missions at the expense of the Atlantic Fleet.

A carrier strike group typically contains:

- One aircraft carrier: *Nimitz* or *Gerald Ford* class;
- One or two cruisers: *Ticonderoga* class;
- Two or three destroyers: *Arleigh Burke* class;
- One or two frigates: *Oliver Hazard Perry* class;
- One or two nuclear-powered attack submarines: *Los Angeles*, *Seawolf*, or *Virginia* class; and
- One supply-class vessel for underway replenishment.

The Navy technically has 11 carriers in service, but Congress has continued to give it a waiver for an effective fleet of only 10, and there are only 10 carrier air wings. If the U.S. is to implement the pivot to Asia without shedding additional missions and tasks (and recent additions to forces in the Middle East suggest that this will be the case) then, at a minimum, the Navy needs to retain 12 aircraft carriers—especially given the reality that, at any time, one is likely to be undergoing long-term maintenance and refitting. This increase in carriers, in turn, would mean providing for the necessary attending escorts and support vessels as well (and also the munitions for their magazines).

In addition, the U.S. Navy is acquiring nuclear-powered attack submarines at the rate of approximately one per year. This pace is insufficient, as it will not allow the Navy to maintain its stated goal of

48 boats in the inventory. Even the previous plan to purchase 44 boats in 29 years, the equivalent of 1.5 boats every year, would see U.S. attack submarine inventories fall to a low of 39 in 2030.⁴⁶ This reduction is inevitable, since the *Los Angeles*-class boats were built in the 1970s and 1980s at a rate of three to four per year, and are being replaced at a far lower rate.

Similarly, the Navy, which is responsible for acquiring the ships associated with U.S. Marine Corps amphibious operations, is falling behind in its acquisition of amphibious warfare ships. Delays with the USS *America* (LHA-6), as well as problems with the USS *San Antonio* (LPD-17) are likely to affect the total number of amphibious warfare ships available.

To address these potential deficits—shortfalls that will directly affect the ability to implement the Asia Pivot—the Navy should consider acquiring additional submarines, and returning to a minimum 1.5 submarine-per-year production rate, if not higher. Similarly, the Navy could increase production rates on amphibious ships, to a rate of one every three years, rather than one every four to five years. Finally, rather than continuing acquisition of the LCS, the Navy should consider acquiring platforms that are less vulnerable. Such a shift in acquisition strategy might entail expanding the Navy's purchase of larger combatants, such as the *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyers, or else acquiring better designs from abroad, such as the German MEKO or British Type 26 frigate. Such ships would give

45. Eric Labs, *An Analysis of the Navy's Fiscal Year 2012 Shipbuilding Plan* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), p. 11.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

more teeth to the Asia Pivot, so that, should deterrence fail, American forces will nonetheless be able to operate effectively.

United States Air Force (USAF). As part of the recent defense budget cuts, the U.S. Air Force has announced substantial reductions to its combat aircraft and squadrons. Although it will retain some 54-fighter squadrons, some 300 aircraft will be retired over the course of the Five-Year Defense Plan.⁴⁷ These cuts raise a troubling question: How much capability will be retained, especially if sequestration mandates further reductions?

The USAF currently has six wings of combat aircraft posted to the Pacific area of operations, two of which are mixed (18th Wing at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa and 3rd Wing in Alaska). In the event of any kind of conflict, these forces would need rapid reinforcement. Yet, the U.S. Air Force has already announced that it will be cutting five A-10 squadrons, which provide support for Army and Marine forces.

Supporting and sustaining these combat aircraft is the nation's fleet of airlift and tanker aircraft; yet that, too, is being cut. The C-141 and KC-135, both 1960s-era aircraft, have been removed from the inventory, but the USAF has indicated that it would also like to eliminate the C-5 fleet, due to the expense of maintenance and operations. Meanwhile, the replacement KC-46 tanker is still not yet in full production. Similarly, tactical airlift aircraft, including the entire C-27 fleet, are also being retired.

In order to support the Asia Pivot, the U.S. Air Force needs to retain

sufficient numbers of combat aircraft of sufficient capability to be able to secure air superiority. At the same time, it must also retain sufficient strategic mobility assets to support Air Force operations and also move American (and potentially allied) forces throughout the region. These requirements would suggest that the ongoing retirement of F-15s and F-16s, with no prospect of replacement, is the wrong decision; at a minimum, those systems should be retained (albeit modernized), but reopening the F-22 line (and addressing ongoing problems with that aircraft) would arguably be a superior choice. Given the shrinking disparity in price between the F-35 and the F-22 (a major reason for the premature cancellation of the F-22 in the first place), as well as the growing number of advanced Chinese fighter and surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, expanding the USAF's F-22 inventory beyond 187 aircraft would seem prudent and increasingly cost-effective.

The United States should also follow through on fielding a next-generation bomber to provide a flexible, global-strike and power-projection capability. In the face of improving enemy air defenses, America cannot rely solely on UAVs, many of which are remotely piloted vehicles utterly dependent upon communications and data links, which are potentially subject to cyber attacks. Only a manned system is able to offer the flexibility and mission assurance against targets defended by sophisticated air defense threats. At the same time, the manned bomber is likely to also retain a role in providing massive ground support. There are few

weapons as destructive as a B-52 or a B-1B with multiple bomb bays of joint direct attack munitions (JDAMs) providing extended, pinpoint fire support. But the B-52 is nearly a century old, and the B-1B has been in service for nearly three decades. A new long-range bomber will play a critical Air Force role in the AirSea Battle operational concept designed to counter China's growing A2/AD capabilities.

U.S. Marine Corps. U.S. air and naval forces alone cannot achieve security objectives; standoff weapons are insufficient by themselves. History has shown that, to ultimately break an opponent's will, ground forces are indispensable. In Asia, the United States requires scalable, rapidly deployable, powerful expeditionary ground force to respond to a broad spectrum of contingencies. The U.S. Marine Corps serves as America's 9-1-1 force and is superbly tailored for the Pacific theater.

Marine Air Ground Task Forces, composed of organic ground, air, and logistics components under a single commander, can project power from the seas by securing critical facilities, evacuating civilians, and providing forward land and air strike power.

Yet, announced by Washington and Tokyo in April, the revised deployment plan for U.S. Marine Corps forces in the Pacific would sacrifice alliance military capabilities for political expediency. The plan moves Marine units further from potential conflict and humanitarian disaster zones, making them more vulnerable to the tyranny of distance endemic in the Pacific theater.

The Obama Administration should redress the growing shortfall

47. U.S. Air Force, *USAF Force Structure Changes: Sustaining Readiness and Modernizing the Total Force* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, February 2012), <http://www.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-120203-027.pdf> (accessed July 27, 2012).

in critical U.S. sealift capability by fully funding Marine Corps amphibious ship requirements. The Marines identified a need for 38 ships to fulfill their missions. Failure to do so would, in the words of a senior retired Marine general, “risk leaving the Marines stranded on the beaches of Darwin.”⁴⁸

A Shift in Focus—Not Forces

Some perceive that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq and Afghanistan can provide a “peace dividend”—quiet time for regrouping America’s military. But, as Secretary Panetta testified in February 2012, “unlike past draw downs when threats have receded, the United States still faces a complex array of security challenges across the

globe” including a continuing war in Afghanistan, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, Iran and North Korean nuclear weapons programs, Middle East turmoil, rising China, and cyber attacks. Highlighting the particular dangers in northeast Asia, Panetta responded after the April 2012 North Korean missile launch that “we’re within an inch of war almost every day in that part of the world.”

The U.S. military in Asia provides both a shield behind which nations can develop and prosper and a sword whose threat deters those nations that would otherwise try to influence weaker nations through coercive diplomacy or the threat of force.

By overdramatizing and overselling an evolutionary development of U.S. foreign policy, the

Obama Administration risks providing false reassurances to allies of Washington’s ability to deliver on its promises.

Ultimately, the Obama Administration’s Asia Pivot represents a strategy of hope: a hope that large-scale wars are a thing of the past; a hope that America’s allies will do more; and a hope that fewer resources do not jeopardize the lives of American soldiers. The much-vaunted Asia Pivot represents a shift in focus—not in forces.

—**Bruce Klingner** is Senior Research Fellow for Northeast Asia, and **Dean Cheng** is Research Fellow in Chinese Political and Security Affairs, in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.

48. Author interview, April 2012 (on file with author).