

# WebMemo



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## Top Five Defense Moves for 2012

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Iran is rattling sabers. Iraq may be falling apart. In North Korea, one of the world's most inexperienced and unpredictable leaders has his thumb on the country's nuclear button. Talks with the Taliban look like an instant replay of the Paris peace negotiations with Hanoi. The Arab Spring has turned into a long winter of discontent. Now is not the time to be gutting defense.

Yet the Secretary of Defense is poised to announce a new strategy that will rubber stamp massive military cuts, pulling the safety net out from a global security architecture that has protected U.S. vital interests worldwide since 1945. The Obama Administration's strategy by wishful thinking will not be sufficient to keep the nation safe, free, and prosperous in the year ahead. Rather, Congress and the White House should be making bold moves to restore America's capacity to protect itself. Here are the top five they could make.

**1. Own the Skies.** Rather than slowing production of the F-35—America's newest combat aircraft, which can replace upwards of a dozen airframes that do a variety of missions from reconnaissance to attacking targets—the Pentagon ought to be ramping up production. It is time to reap the benefits of the \$50 billion taxpayer investment in this program. Likewise, the Pentagon should reopen the recently canceled F-22 production, the companion stealth fighter for the F-35. The two planes were designed to work together to give the U.S. the capacity to maintain air supremacy in any theater for decades.

At the same time, the government should be aggressively seeking to export both planes to any capable ally. In particular, the goal ought to be to ring the Asia-Pacific from India to the Arctic with a robust allied air fleet of F-35/F-22 fighters.

**2. Build Ships Faster.** The U.S. has the smallest Navy since before World War I. While it is true that modern ships are much more capable than their predecessors, the planet is the same size. When U.S. presence is absent for critical areas, as was recently seen in the Strait of Hormuz—trouble follows. From submarines to amphibious ships to carriers, the U.S. needs to ramp up production.

The needs also go beyond the Defense Department. Replacing the Coast Guard's aging fleet of ships continues to lag, undermining the capacity of the U.S. to protect its sovereignty at sea. In particular, replacing the Coast Guard (part of the Department of Homeland Security) fleet of "high-endurance" cutters has to be a priority.

**3. Do Not Cut Ground Forces.** Human capital is the most valuable resource in the armed forces. Shedding the most qualified, combat-experienced,

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volunteer ground forces in the nation's history would be like Apple canceling the production of iPhones to save money. It makes no sense.

The argument that “we won't need these troops because we are not going to do any more Iraqs and Afghanistans” is just a strategy of hope. These were the same arguments used to justify troop cuts before 9/11. As then, the enemy gets a vote, and it always votes to fight the wars that the U.S. is least prepared for. Rebuilding ground forces is far more expensive—and less risky—than maintaining adequate troop strength to defend the nation's interests and deter conflict.

**4. Put Missile Defense on the Fast Track.** President Obama's “phased and adaptive” missile defense program has proven itself to be insufficient and inadequate. The nation needs immediate and comprehensive missile defense now. That demands starting a three-step process:

1. *Expand* and continually improve the Navy's proven and popular sea-based Aegis missile defense system;
2. *Pursue* advanced integration of the various components of a layered missile defense system, including ground-based interceptors; and
3. *Develop* and deploy space-based missile defenses, particularly space-based interceptors, to counter ballistic missile attacks.

**5. Start with Smart Savings.** There are savings to be gained from more efficient defense spending,

but they should be reinvested in defense modernization. The most immediate source of efficiencies to be gained is in the area of simplifying, consolidating, and contracting defense logistics. Estimates of immediate benefits range up to \$90 billion. Congress and the Administration should focus laser-like on this area of Pentagon spending—now.

Really curbing cost growth over time requires getting the cost of manpower under control by establishing a more rational and practical package of pay and benefits for service members and their families. This can be done in a manner that honors commitments to those currently serving and providing more flexible and desirable benefits that would allow the service to continue to recruit and retain a quality all-volunteer force at reasonable cost.

**The Wrong Way to Balance the Budget.** Gutting defense would not balance the budget. However, it would certainly contribute to making the world less safe for America and its allies and leave the U.S. less prepared to deal with the dangers ahead. The smart move would be to invest in defense—rather than pay the butcher's bill later.

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