

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 4257 | AUGUST 1, 2014

National Defense Panel Provides Congress an Honest Path Forward

Diem Nguyen Salmon

This week, the bipartisan National Defense Panel (NDP) delivered to Congress its review of the Department of Defense (DOD) 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). This report comprises a key element of information needed by Congress and the American public to truly understand the state of the US military and the requirements to meet today's threats. Unlike the QDR—which worked within budget constraints without a clearly articulated national security requirement, with no obvious linkage to either real-world threats to national security interests or a meaningful strategy to address such threats—the NDP “assessed [the] U.S. national security interests and objectives, future threats, various force structures, and resource requirements” necessary to “successfully execute the full range of missions required by the Defense Strategy at a low to moderate level of risk.”¹

In actually fulfilling its mandate, unlike the QDR, the NDP strongly condemns the current state of the military that has been brought on by continuous budget cuts. Furthermore, the NDP provides a useful, clearly articulated argument for what the U.S. needs to appropriately address how to meet national interests and objectives, given growing threats in a dynamic security environment.

Five Important Takeaways from the National Defense Panel

1. Budget cuts have left the military in disrepair. This report unequivocally refutes the notion that the Defense Department should be used to remedy fiscal problems facing the United States and recommends an immediate end to the defense sequester. Despite what some may think, the budget cuts starting in 2010, the passage of the Budget Control Act (BCA), and the implementation of sequester have “caused significant investment shortfalls in U.S. military readiness and both present and future capabilities,” which has in turn caused “our current and potential allies and adversaries to question our commitment and resolve.”² According to the NDP report, the military is already in a “readiness crisis” due to the fiscal year (FY) 2013 sequester.³ If the FY 2016 sequester is not stopped, the military will become a hollow force.⁴

2. A two-war force-sizing construct should be used. While the military has relied on some form of a two-war force-sizing construct since the end of the Cold War, the panel asserts that today, a two-war force-sizing construct is even more relevant due to the increase in threats.⁵ The Obama Administration also uses a two-war force-sizing framework in the 2014 QDR. It states that the military should be able to defeat “a regional adversary in a large-scale multi-phased campaign, and [deny] the objectives of—or impose unacceptable costs on—a second aggressor in another region.”⁶ By denying rather defeating a second aggressor, the 2014 QDR force-sizing construct has been referred to as a “one-plus” rather than two-war construct.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at
<http://report.heritage.org/ib4257>

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

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

By contrast, the NDP recommends that the military should be able not only to defeat a “large-scale aggression in one theater,” but also to “simultaneously and decisively [deter] or [thwart] opportunistic aggressions in *multiple* other theaters by denying adversaries’ objectives or punishing them with unacceptable costs.”⁷ The addition of multiple simultaneous acts of aggression in various regions instead of one will have a large impact on the size of the force. What is most critical is the affirmation that DOD should use a two-war force-sizing construct.

3. Force structure in the QDR is inadequate.

The panel correctly determines that the recommended force size stated in the 2014 QDR is not sufficient to meet the nation’s security challenges. The panel does not provide an ideal force size but uses the 1993 Bottom-Up Review (BUR) as a solid starting point.

The BUR provided a thorough analysis of the force-structure requirements based a similar two-war construct. The panel posits that if today’s force size is smaller than the 1993 force, which was operating during the early post-Cold War era and in a time of relative stability and peace, then it is reasonable to conclude that not only is today’s force too small, but the force proposed by the 2014 QDR would be wholly incapable of defending national interests.

4. Capability does not make up for capacity.

The Administration, due to budget pressures, has perpetuated the argument that capability can make

up for capacity. In other words, the military can make do with less because of technically superior equipment. The NDP rejects this assertion. In order for the U.S. to maintain constant global presence, a certain size of force is required, and advanced technology cannot make up for this shortfall in capacity. In addition, America’s technology superiority gap is shrinking, and relying on advanced capabilities to offset quantity is therefore extremely risky.⁸

5. Recommended force size and budget is a minimum. Because the NDP could not conduct a thorough force-structure analysis, the report provides a budget and force size level that is to serve only as a bare minimum. The NDP recommends that Congress return to the President’s FY 2012 budget request, as “it is the minimum required to reverse course and set the military on a more stable footing.”⁹ Compared to the President’s current budget of \$496 billion for FY 2015, the Gates FY 2012 budget proposed \$584 billion.¹⁰

The FY 2012 Gates budget is used as the benchmark because it was the last time the DOD appropriately analyzed threats and considered national military strategy to determine the resources required. However, due to recent budget cuts, the level of funding “will not be adequate to prepare the Defense Department for the challenges ahead.”¹¹ Additional resources must be provided on top of this baseline to make up for the readiness shortfalls as well as to support the recommended force sizing construct.

-
1. National Defense Panel, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense for the Future: The National Defense Panel Review of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review*, July 31, 2014, pp. 9, http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Ensuring-a-Strong-U.S.-Defense-for-the-Future-NDP-Review-of-the-QDR_0.pdf (accessed July 31, 2014).
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
 6. U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, 2014, p. VI, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf (accessed July 30, 2014).
 7. National Defense Panel, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense for the Future*, p. 26.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 10. U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Comptroller, *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2015*, April 2014, p. 14, Table 1-9, http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2015/FY15_Green_Book.pdf (accessed July 30, 2014); U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Comptroller, *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2012*, March 2011, p. 14, Table 1-9, http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2012/FY12_Green_Book.pdf (accessed July 30, 2014).
 11. National Defense Panel, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense for the Future*, p. 30.

Similarly, the NDP uses historical references to determine a baseline level of forces. The NDP recommends that the military “not be reduced below their pre-9/11 end-strengths—490,000 active-duty soldiers in the Army and 182,000 active Marines.”¹² In addition, the NDP believes the fleet size requirement will be between 323 to 346 ships; by contrast, the U.S. currently has 289 ships.¹³ These figures serve as a bare minimum. The actual objective force size, which will likely be higher, will require a full force-structure analysis based on the proposed force-sizing construct.

The Next Steps for Congress and DOD

- **Congress should fully fund defense.** The artificially low defense budget topline and sequester have caused significant damage to the military already, a condition that will worsen over time. Congress must reverse course and begin to fund defense properly.
- **DOD should resubmit the 2014 QDR that incorporates the assessments from this report.** Most important, the new QDR should not be tied to current budget constraints, but rather should reflect the current status of the military and its future requirements based on the global environment and a competent, relevant national security strategy.

- **DOD should conduct a force-structure analysis based on the panel’s two-war force-sizing construct.** As the report indicated, the panel did not have the resources necessary to conduct a complete force-structure analysis. DOD should conduct this analysis and provide Congress with a proper force-structure objective.
- **DOD should align budgets with their requirements.** Either through the President’s FY 2016 budget request or a separate document, DOD must inform Congress of the costs associated with the recommended force structure from the NDP force-sizing construct.

The NDP report is a bipartisan warning to Congress that the military is in dire straits. Congress must act before the military can no longer guarantee U.S. national security.

—*Diem Nguyen Salmon is Senior Policy Analyst for Defense Budgeting in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign and National Security Policy, of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, at The Heritage Foundation.*

12. Ibid., p. 49.

13. Ibid.