

QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW



EAST CHINA SEA (March 19, 2014) Marines assigned to Battalion Landing Team (BLT) Second Battalion, 5th Marines, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, embarked with the amphibious transport dock ship USS Denver (LPD 9), fire M4 and M16A4 rifles as part of the combat marksmanship program on the flight deck. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Todd C. Behrman/Released)

THE UNITED STATES QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW REPORT: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

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As the name implies, the United States publishes its major strategic document, Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) once every four years. Mandated by the U.S. Congress, this report focuses both United States defense strategy and military spending. Not coincidentally, the 2014 QDR was released on the same day as the Obama Administration's Fiscal Year 2015 budget (for reference the United States Fiscal Year runs from October 1 through September 30).

Tying the 2014 QDR so closely to the President's budget was done purposefully and sends a clear message the U.S. Department of Defense is operating in a tight fiscal environment. And it is also clear that the department is making strategic choices that are informed by a number of factors ranging from the substantial United States debt, to constant budget deficits, to the desire for a bit of a peace dividend as the United States extracts itself from two decade-long land wars in the Middle East and South Asia.

Of interest to the nations and peoples of the Asia-Pacific region is what the current QDR presages for the widely-announced United States Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region. While there is a no point solution to this question and strategic intent is heavily influenced by often unanticipated events - witness flashpoints as diverse as Syria, the Ukraine and the South China Sea - examining the QDR exposes important trend lines. Therefore, there is value-added in dissecting the United States Quadrennial Defense Review Report to see what it means for the region.

THE QDR - CONNECTING WITH PREVIOUS STRATEGIC GUIDANCE

As is typically the case with many high-level strategic documents, the U.S. Department of Defense QDR is general in many of its aspects. A case in point is what is explained in the document's Executive Summary:

Given this dynamic environment, the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) is principally focused on preparing for the future by rebalancing our defense efforts in a period of increasing fiscal constraint. The 2014 QDR advances three

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important initiatives. First, it builds on the Defense Strategic Guidance, published in 2012, by outlining an updated defense strategy that protects and advances U.S. interests and sustains U.S. leadership. Second, the QDR describes how the Department is responsibly and realistically taking steps to rebalance major elements of the Joint Force given the changing environment. Third, the QDR demonstrates our intent to rebalance the Department itself as part of our effort to control internal cost growth that is threatening to erode our combat power in this period of fiscal austerity. We will protect the health of the All-Volunteer Force as we undertake these reforms.

Fair enough as a general summary. But this general outline begins to reveal what the QDR portends in the context of the widely-announced United States Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region. By announcing that this document builds on the 2012 U.S. DoD Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG), the QDR embraces the ten tenets of the DSG. The QDR strongly suggests an increased focus on the Asia-Pacific region. Among the most important and widely-discussed tenets of the DSG:

- *Deter and Defeat Aggression:* "Our planning envisages forces that are able to fully deny a capable state's aggressive objectives in one region by conducting a combined arms campaign across all domains, including cyberspace. U.S. forces will plan to operate whenever possible with allied and coalition forces."
- *Project Power Despite Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) Challenges:* "The United States will invest in capabilities to operate in A2/AD environments. This will include implementing the Joint Operational Access Concept, sustaining our undersea capabilities, developing a new stealth bomber, improving missile defenses, and continuing efforts to enhance the resiliency and effectiveness of critical space-based capabilities."
- *Provide a Stabilizing Presence:* "U.S. forces will conduct a sustainable pace of presence operations abroad, including rotational deployments and bilateral and multilateral training exercises."
- *Conduct Humanitarian, Disaster Relief, and Other Operations:* "The Nation has frequently called upon its Armed Forces to respond to a range of situations that threaten the well-being of its citizens and those of other countries."

These four tenets clearly tie the United States to an increasing presence in the Asia-Pacific region - a presence that increasingly focuses on integration with our allies throughout the region.

The second key theme of the QDR is a description of how the Department is taking steps to rebalance

major elements of the Joint Force given the changing security and fiscal environment. This is a reaffirmation of the steps - already in effect, underway, or planned - to establish an increasing U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is one thing to issue policy pronouncements such as the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review from the E-Ring of the Pentagon. It is quite another to shift forces, build alliances and infrastructure, and do all the other things that militarily undergird a major strategic shift. One of the most closely-watched indicators over the next several years will be how the United States is moving to "operationalize" this shift.

Indeed, over the past several years, the United States has moved to "operationalize" this new strategy, from reaffirming treaty obligations with Asia-Pacific nations; to speeches and articles in international media by Obama administration officials; to more robust U.S. participation in Asia-Pacific such as the East Asia Summit; to issuing its Air-Sea Battle Concept to address anti-access and area denial challenges in the region. All of these initiatives are important, but what has garnered perhaps the most attention has been the concrete military steps that are underway in the region. From this perspective, the QDR reinforces and instantiates the United States Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region.

While Europe is a landscape, the Asia-Pacific region is a seascape. Therefore, the most significant - and most closely-watched - U.S. force posture changes

Navy is operationalizing this rebalance in four ways: deploying more forces to the Asia-Pacific region, basing more ships and aircraft in the region, fielding new capabilities focused on Asia-Pacific challenges, and developing partnerships and intellectual capital across the region. More on these U.S. Navy initiatives in a moment.

WHAT CHANGES IN UNITED STATES DEFENSE STRATEGY DOES THIS QDR PORTEND?

As a strategic document, the 2014 United States Quadrennial Defense Review does not break a great deal of new ground. Rather, the QDR restates and repackages tenets that have undergirded U.S. defense posture for most of this century. The 2014 U.S. defense strategy articulated in the QDR emphasizes three pillars:

- *Protect the homeland, to deter and defeat attacks on the United States and to support civil authorities in mitigating the effects of potential attacks and natural disasters.*
- *Build security globally, in order to preserve regional stability, deter adversaries, support allies and partners, and cooperate with others to address common security challenges.*
- *Project power and win decisively, to defeat aggression, disrupt and destroy terrorist networks, and provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.*



PACIFIC OCEAN (March 20, 2014) An MV-22 Osprey attached to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 161 approaches for a landing aboard the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS Anchorage (LPD 23). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Christopher Lindahl/Released)

in the region are likely to be in naval force structure. As the U.S. Navy's Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jonathan Greenert noted in his Foreign Policy article, "Sea Change: The Navy Pivots to Asia," the U.S.

One needs to dig deeper - often far deeper - into this eighty-eight page document to better understand what capabilities - read platforms, systems, sensors and weapons - will be the ones that the United States

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will field in the ensuing decades as well as where the U.S. military will deploy these assets. Tellingly, this 2014 QDR spends a great deal of time discussing the extent to which the U.S. Department of Defense budget has been cut as a result of the U.S. Budget Control Act of 2011.

In a nutshell, in the current U.S. DoD budget environment "flat is the new up" and if a capability has not been cut it is one of the few that will likely be sustained year-over-year. The QDR notes: "As the Joint Force rebalances so that it remains modern, capable, and ready, the Department will take additional steps that are consistent with the President's FY2015 Budget submission to protect key capability areas in support of our strategy." This is important, both in what it says and what it doesn't say. And without putting too fine a point on it, if a capability is not on this list, the chances of it being important to the U.S. strategic focus is limited indeed. The protected (read valued) capabilities for the U.S. DoD as defined in the QDR are:



WATERS NEAR GUAM (March 23, 2014) The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin (DDG 89) launches an anti-submarine rocket during a live-fire exercise. (U.S. Navy photo by Culinary Specialist 2nd Class Fidel C. Hart/Released)

- **Cyber** We will invest in new and expanded cyber capabilities and forces to enhance our ability to conduct cyberspace operations and support military operations worldwide, to support Combatant Commanders as they plan and execute military missions, and to counter cyber-attacks against the United States.

- **Missile Defense** We are increasing the number of Ground-Based Interceptors and deploying a second radar in Japan to provide early warning and tracking. We will make targeted investments in defensive interceptors, discrimination capabilities, and sensors; and we are studying

the best location for an additional missile defense interceptor site in the United States if additional interceptors are needed.

- **Nuclear Deterrence** We will continue to invest in modernizing our essential nuclear delivery systems; warning, command and control; and, in collaboration with the Department of Energy, nuclear weapons and supporting infrastructure.

- **Space** We will move toward less complex, more affordable, more resilient systems and system architectures and pursue a multi-layered approach to deter attacks on space systems while retaining the capabilities to respond should deterrence fail.

- **Air/Sea** We will continue to invest in combat aircraft, including fighters and long-range strike, survivable persistent surveillance, resilient architectures, and undersea warfare to increase the Joint Force's ability to counter A2/AD challenges.

- **Precision Strike** We will procure advanced air-to-surface missiles that will allow fighters

and bombers to engage a wide range of targets and a long-range anti-ship cruise missile that will improve the joint ability of U.S. air forces to engage surface combatants in defended space.

- **Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance (ISR)** We will rebalance investments toward systems that are operationally responsive and effective in highly contested environments, while sustaining capabilities appropriate for more permissive environments in order to support global situational awareness, counterterrorism, and other operations.

- **Counter Terror and Special Operations** We

will grow overall Special Operations Forces end strength to 69,700 personnel, protecting our ability to sustain persistent, networked, distributed operations to defeat al Qaeda, counter other emerging transnational threats, counter WMD, build the capacity of our partners, and support conventional operations.

One needn't be a Clausewitz or Sun Tzu to recognize many of the capabilities the United States seeks to protect are those that would be effective in "high-end" warfare worldwide - and especially in the Asia-Pacific region. This is not to suggest the United States is girding for war - far from it. Rather, it reflects a reality that a prudent evaluation of the geopolitical climate makes not having these capabilities imprudent at best, foolhardy at worst.

As one - albeit major - vehicle for instantiating the United States Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review must recognize that the United States does face a major peer competitor in the Asia-Pacific region. That is why "high-end" capabilities such as Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance; AirSea; Precision Strike; Nuclear Deterrence; Missile Defense; Space and Cyber are "protected" in this QDR. U.S. policymakers have been clear that the Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific and the Air-Sea Battle Concept are designed to reassure allies and partners, not to threaten China. Naval War College Professor James Holmes put it this way in The Diplomat:

It's not because a U.S.-China war is fated, but because of expediency. Military planners are negligent if they don't plan against the toughest challenge elected leaders may order them to face. For instance, the U.S. Navy planned for war with Britain's Royal Navy well into the interwar years. No one wanted or expected an Anglo-American conflict, but the Royal Navy remained the gold standard for naval power. It only made sense for the U.S. Navy to measure itself against the most exacting standard available while hedging against the unexpected.

As the United States continues to "measure itself" against China and reassure allies and friends in the region, the QDR will continue to provide guidance for force shifts and force allocations worldwide. An examination of the Obama Administration's Fiscal Year 2014 budget validates the strategic changes the QDR reveals. The U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force - the forces likely to be most valued in the U.S. Air-Sea Battle Concept - fared relatively well, while U.S. Army forces fared less well. For the U.S. Navy specifically - the U.S. military service most noticeable in the Asia-Pacific region - both the QDR and the budget submission call for a carrier strike group force

to remain at eleven. Conversely, capabilities less-well-suited to high-end deterrence, such as the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), fared less well, with the number of LCS capped at 32 ships from a previous build plan of 52 ships.



EAST CHINA SEA (March 17, 2014) Combat rubber raiding crafts prepare to enter the well deck of the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Raymond D. Diaz III/Released)

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITED STATES MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

As noted earlier, the U.S. Navy is traditionally the U.S. military service that is most visible in the Asia-Pacific region - a region that is more Mahan than Mackinder. An important lens to use when determining what both the QDR and the most recent U.S. Department of Defense budget portend for the Asia-Pacific region is to see what is occurring with U.S. Navy assets. In brief:

- The U.S. Navy is "Pivoting to the Pacific" and as widely-announced, by 2020 60% of the U.S. Navy Fleet will be in the Pacific region while only 40% will be in the Atlantic.
- The U.S. Navy's newest assets are being fielded in the Pacific first. These include the P-8 Poseidon aircraft, the MQ-4C Triton, and the F-35 Lightning Joint Strike Fighter.
- The USS Ronald Reagan (CVN-76), one of the U.S. Navy's most modern aircraft carriers, will replace the USS George Washington (CVN-73) as the Japan-based forward deployed U.S. Navy aircraft carrier.
- More Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense capable U.S. Navy ships are being assigned to the U.S. Pacific Fleet.
- The United States presence - especially U.S. Navy presence - in Guam is growing year-over-year.
- The U.S. Navy will forward stage four Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore and rotate crews from the United States.
- The U.S. Marine Corps is forward staging forces in Darwin Australia on a routine, rotational basis.

In summary, the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review and the Obama Administrations Fiscal Year 2015 budget act in concert to reaffirm the United States commitment to the Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region. This is a trend that is likely to continue in the future regardless of the U.S. budget machinations. The reasons are clear. As President Obama noted in a speech to the Australian Parliament in 2011:

"Our new focus on this region reflects a fundamental truth - the United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation ... Here, we see the future. With most of the world's nuclear power and some half of humanity, Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation, needless suffering or human progress."

Stay tuned to this column in the future as the impact of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review and the Obama Administrations Fiscal Year 2015 budget play out over the ensuing months and years. ■ The views expressed in this article are the author's own

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