

The US military is at a crossroads. After a decade of war with nearly unlimited defence spending, the Pentagon must determine how to absorb nearly \$500 billion in cuts over 10 years amid debate over how the 'future force' should be structured and equipped. The challenges of force planning for Pentagon strategists will only be exacerbated by an uncertain and challenging security environment combined with a war-weary public, debates over the United States' role in the world and fears of its 'retrenchment'.

The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review embraces two strategic 'rebalances': a shift in focus to the Asia-Pacific and an increased emphasis on special operations forces (SOF). Contrary to popular perception, the growing focus on Asia does not represent a zero-sum 'pivot', and it does not involve the movements of large numbers of personnel and equipment. Instead, this rebalancing is focused on reassuring Asian allies of the US commitment, multilateral engagement and military-to-military cooperation in order to improve regional security. Meanwhile, the reduction in conventional ground forces - including a planned 20 % reduction in the active component of the US Army - is largely matched by increases in SOF personnel.

This new military strategy also faces operational and political risks. By consciously abandoning its (arguably unsustainable) policy of preparation for two major, simultaneous conflicts, the Pentagon accepts some risk in its deterrent power of its conventional forces. Moreover, by not building up the force for large-scale stability operations, and relying on a policy of 'reversibility' should they occur, the Pentagon accepts some risk in the ramp-up time that would be required to regenerate the force structure required for such ground-force-intensive missions. The harsh partisan nature of domestic politics will also play a pivotal role in restricting available resources and in constraining the Pentagon's ability to cut costs where it chooses.

The Pentagon's overall military reform plan is certainly not perfect, and it does accept significant risk in preparing for conflicts short of all-out war. But in the light of the changing security environment and the role that America's military can and should play in the world, its proposed force structure and strategy represent a reasonable rebalance - not a retrenchment.

Source : [CHATTAM HOUSE](#)