

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
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1. [U.S. Rebalances Strategic Focus Toward Asia-Pacific \(03-13-2013\)](#)

By Phillip Kurata
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration is shifting the focus of long-term U.S. foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific region with the aim of restoring U.S. economic strength, the foundation of U.S. global leadership.

“After a decade defined by 9/11, two wars and a financial crisis, President Obama took office [in 2009] determined to restore the foundation of the United States’ global leadership — our economic strength at home,” National Security Advisor Tom Donilon said March 11 in a speech to The Asia Society.

The president ordered a strategic assessment of U.S. foreign policy that led to the determination that U.S. engagement was “overweighted” in some regions, including U.S. military actions in the Middle East, and “underweighted” in Asia, Donilon said.

“Our guiding insight was that Asia’s future and the future of the United States are deeply and increasingly linked,” Donilon said. “Economically, Asia already accounts for more than one-quarter of global GDP [gross domestic product]. Over the next five years, nearly half of all growth outside the United States is expected to come from Asia.”

The security adviser said all elements of U.S. power will be involved in the rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific — military, political, trade and investment, and U.S. values.

He also emphasized what the rebalancing does not mean. “It doesn’t mean diminishing ties to important partners in any other region. It does not mean containing China or seeking to dictate terms in Asia. And it isn’t just a matter of our military presence.”

The adviser said the United States will proceed with the rebalancing in five channels: 1) strengthening its alliances in Asia, 2) deepening partnerships with emerging powers, 3) building a constructive relationship with China, 4) bolstering regional institutions and 5) promoting trade and investment throughout the Asia-Pacific.

ALLIANCES

Donilon said that the U.S.-Japan security treaty signed in 1960 is the cornerstone of regional peace and prosperity. “Looking ahead, there is scarcely a regional or global challenge in the president’s agenda where the United States does not look to Japan to play an important role,” Donilon said.

The U.S. security treaty with the Republic of Korea makes possible trilateral cooperation from Japan, Korea and the United States to keep northeast Asia free from war and contain the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, he said.

EMERGING POWERS

With regard to emerging powers, Donilon said the United States is eager to build a vibrant relationship with India.

“From Prime Minister Singh’s visit in 2009 to the president’s trip to India in 2010, the United States has made clear at every turn that we don’t just accept India’s rise, we fervently support it,” he said, adding that “U.S. and Indian interests powerfully converge in the Asia-Pacific, where India has much to give and much to gain. ... In the past year, India-ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] trade increased by 37 percent to \$80 billion.”

He named Indonesia as another emerging power that has the potential to become a global partner with the United States.

CHINA

Building a broad, productive and constructive relationship with China is the third element of the U.S. strategic rebalancing. “There are few diplomatic, economic or security challenges in the world that can be addressed without China at the table,” Donilon said.

The security adviser said it is critical that the United States and China strengthen their economic relationship, which is marked by increasing interdependence. He also called for better communications between the U.S. and Chinese militaries to “demonstrate practical cooperation on issues that matter to both sides.”

REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

As for bolstering regional institutions, Donilon said they are important to deal with Asia’s urgent need for economic, diplomatic and security-related rules and understandings. He singled out ASEAN, consisting of 10 member states across the Indian and Pacific oceans, for having a critical role in handling the territorial disputes in the resource-rich South China and East China seas.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Donilon said the centerpiece of the economic rebalancing is the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). He said the TPP involves 11 countries on the eastern and western shores of the Pacific that are negotiating an economic agreement that eliminates market access barriers to goods and services and addresses new, 21st-century trade issues.

“We can get this done,” Donilon said. “In fact, the United States is working hard with the other parties to complete negotiations by the end of 2013.”

2. U.S. Troops Advise Afghan Forces as Drawdown Proceeds (03-13-2013)

By Amaani Lyle
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 13, 2013 – Brigade advisory teams will continue to train and advise their Afghan counterparts as American forces drawdown as part of President Barack Obama’s directive to conclude U.S. combat operations in Afghanistan by the end of 2014, Army Maj. Gen. Robert B. Abrams told Pentagon reporters today.

Via satellite from Afghanistan, Abrams, commander of Regional Command-South, told reporters his command is providing advisors for 83 Afghan army battalions and district chiefs of police in southern Afghanistan to ensure the drawdown stays on track.

“We are on the glide path to meet our force-manning levels, in accordance with the president’s directive,” Abrams said. “As Afghan units progress into an ‘independent with advisory’ status that presents the option for us to consider ‘thinning up’ U.S. forces ... off of those respective units.”

U.S. forces use the commander’s update assessment tool to evaluate Afghan units’ readiness and gauge their shift from requiring day-to-day, man-to-man or level 1 contact to periodic training and advising over time, or level 2 contact.

“We ... anticipate ... these units will be holistically across the brigade independent with advisors and we will be able to thin up,” Abrams said. “And that will have an impact on reducing our overall number of forces here.”

The ratings, Abrams said, are not solely based on an Afghan unit’s ability to conduct operations, but also on the performance, manning, training, and equipping of the units.

Meanwhile, as the drawdown proceeds, Abrams said, “many of our sustainment units ... are going to be absolutely essential as we close or transfer our bases and retrograde our equipment back here to Kandahar Airfield.”

Commensurate with U.S. troop strength, he added, there will be a gentle reduction across enablers such as explosive ordnance disposal, route clearance and aviation teams, among others.

“We’ll maintain capability, preserve options for commanders, but it will be an overall reduction of our force over time,” the general said.

Biographies:

[Army Maj. Gen. Robert B. Abrams](#)

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[Obama Announces 34,000 Cut to U.S. Force in Afghanistan](#)

[3. Transition in Afghanistan on "Right Path," Hagel Says \(03-12-2013\)](#)

By Phillip Kurata

Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel said the transition happening in Afghanistan is on “the right path” as more Afghan forces take the lead for security in the country from U.S. and NATO forces.

In his first visit to Afghanistan as secretary of defense, Hagel met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, as well as U.S., Afghan and NATO commanders. The United States and NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are transitioning from a lead role to one of providing training, advice and assistance after 2014, when Afghan forces will fully take over the lead.

“You look over the past 11 years, it's pretty dramatic what's happened in this country,” Hagel said after his two-day visit. “I'm confident, after being here for two days and getting a renewed sense of commitment, both from the Afghans and our partners ... that we're on the right path.”

The United States has about 68,000 troops in Afghanistan. Hagel said no decision has been made yet about how many U.S. and NATO troops will remain in Afghanistan after 2014 in a residual advisory force.

The defense secretary said that he had a “very direct conversation” about the transition with Karzai, and he added that the two men have “always had a good relationship.”

Hagel said the solutions to the challenges raised by the transition will be “imperfect.”

“We should always be mindful of the higher purpose of what we’re doing and why,” he said.

“We’re going to continue to work with the Afghans and our coalition partners to fight that war and to assure that the Afghan people have every ability and right to develop their own country their way in a democracy,” Hagel said.

He said the way that the transition is being implemented will give “the Afghan people a very hopeful future.”

4. Carter Reassures Defense Industry Amid Budget Uncertainty (03-12-2013)

By Nick Simeone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 12, 2013 – Deputy Defense Secretary Ash Carter pledged today that the Pentagon will not allow a \$46 billion cut in spending and uncertainty over future funding to keep it from focusing on challenges facing the nation even though the current fiscal situation will lead to “perverse, unsafe and wasteful consequences.”

While calling the current budget sequester and the continuing lack of a defense appropriation bill harmful to the entire defense industry, Carter sought to reassure defense industry representatives attending a conference here that the department intends to “think and act ahead of today’s turmoil” by making strategic budget decisions for the future.

“We must continue to look above and beyond this year to the future, to the great strategic transition that is before us and to providing the country the defense it needs for the amount of money that it has to spend,” he said.

That transition comprises ending more than a decade of conflict and shifting focus toward the Asia-Pacific region, “where America will continue to play its seven-decade-old pivotal stabilizing role in the future,” he said.

At the same time, Carter said, “threats to the United States have not been sequestered,” mentioning North Korea, Iran, cyber threats and al-Qaida.

Carter acknowledged the ongoing budget uncertainty likely will create “second-order effects” that will last for years, with one of them perhaps being a pivot of the defense industry itself.

“The act of sequestration and longer-term budget cuts and the prolongation of uncertainty could limit capital market confidence in the defense industry,” he said, adding that “companies may be less willing to make internal investments in their defense portfolios. “Some of them have certainly told me that,” he added.

A \$46 billion across-the-board cut in defense spending through the Sept. 30 end of the fiscal year took effect March 1 after Congress failed to reach an agreement on how to reduce the federal budget deficit. As he has in the past, Carter predicted the impact the cuts will have on everything from military readiness across the force to furloughs for the department’s 800,000 civilian employees.

“Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and I and the entire DOD leadership are committed to doing everything in our power under this deliberately restrictive law to mitigate its harmful effects on national security,” the deputy secretary said. But he called the sequester and the ongoing continuing resolution now funding government operations in the absence of a federal budget a “double absurdity.”

Biographies:
[Ash Carter](#)

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5. U.N. Clamps New Sanctions on North Korea for Nuclear Test (03-08-2013)

By Phillip Kurata
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.N. Security Council has imposed new sanctions on North Korea in response to its nuclear test held February 12 in defiance of the international community.

“The strength, breadth and severity of these sanctions will raise the cost to North Korea of its illicit nuclear program and further constrain its ability to finance and source materials and technology for its ballistic missile, conventional and nuclear weapons programs,” said Susan Rice, the U.S. representative at the United Nations, March 7.

The Security Council vote in favor of the sanctions was unanimous, indicating that the “entire world stands united in our commitment to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and in our demand that North Korea comply with its international obligations,” Rice said. She said the United Nations will take further action if North Korea conducts another nuclear test or missile launch.

FINANCIAL MEASURES

The sanctions call for blocking North Korea from transferring money to pay for its nuclear and missile programs even if the money is carried by couriers in suitcases full of bulk cash, a common way that North Korea has moved illicit funds, according to a State Department fact sheet on Resolution 2094.

States are called upon to prohibit the opening in their territories of branches of North Korean banks with links to the country’s nuclear and weapons programs, making it harder for North Korea to launder money.

Similarly, the resolution calls on states to prohibit their financial institutions from opening branches in North Korea and requires them to withhold financial support for trade with North Korea if the trade is linked to North Korea’s banned weapons programs.

CARGO SHIPMENTS

The resolution requires states to inspect cargo on ships and airplanes within or transiting their territory if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the cargo contains prohibited items, such as conventional arms or items related to nuclear technology or ballistic missiles. Rice said airplanes carrying smuggled items can find themselves grounded and ships carrying prohibited cargo can be denied port access if they refuse to be inspected on the high seas.

In addition, the resolution encourages states to provide information to the Security Council’s North Korea Sanctions Committee about actions by North Korean vessels or aircraft to evade sanctions, such as by renaming and reregistering.

TRAVEL BANS

If a North Korean agent is caught making arms deals or selling nuclear technology, countries will be required to expel that agent, Rice said. She added that countries must prevent travel by people working for companies involved in North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs.

The resolution also seeks to counter activities by North Korean diplomats to advance their country's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. "It will now be much harder for such diplomats to procure technology or divert funds to the nuclear program without being detected and expelled," she said. She added that the resolution names additional North Koreans and North Korean companies whose assets will be frozen and who will be subject to travel bans.

LUXURY ITEMS

The resolution targets the opulent lifestyle of senior members of the North Korean regime while the North Korean population lives in poverty. Certain kinds of jewelry and precious stones, yachts, luxury automobiles and racing cars have been banned for transfer to North Korea, according to the fact sheet on the resolution.

"Taken together, these sanctions will bite and bite hard," Rice said. "They increase North Korea's isolation and raise the cost to North Korea's leaders of defying the international community."

6. U.S. Backing Yemen's Political, Economic Reforms (03-08-2013)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Through their upcoming National Dialogue, Yemenis can resolve their political differences without violence, and the United States is actively supporting the process and 2014 national elections as part of the \$356 million it spent in Yemen during 2012.

Speaking at the Friends of Yemen meeting in London March 7, Deputy Secretary of State William Burns praised developments over the past 15 months that have included electing a new leader for the first time in three decades, beginning a major reform of Yemen's armed forces and regaining control of large parts of their country that had been held by al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula.

Yemenis "today stand on the cusp of an historic National Dialogue" scheduled to begin March 18, Burns said. The dialogue aims to start the process of drafting a new constitution and laws that will regulate parliamentary and presidential elections that are scheduled for February 2014.

"We call on all Yemenis to seize this extraordinary opportunity to resolve their differences in a nonviolent way," Burns said.

"Let us have no illusions: Dialogue is hard. It requires difficult and painful compromises. It requires us to sit down with enemies and to argue with friends. But the alternative of more bloodshed and destruction is far worse," he said.

According to a March 7 State Department fact sheet on U.S. assistance to Yemen, as part of its \$356 million commitment to Yemen during the 2012 fiscal year, the Obama administration supported the Yemeni-led National Dialogue process with \$10.4 million in technical and operational assistance. The aid included help for constitutional reform and referendum projects, technical assistance to prepare for the 2014 elections, including reforms to Yemen's voter registry, and efforts to ensure that Yemeni women will be able to speak and contribute to their country's political transition.

Burns said that along with political renewal, Yemenis also need to see “concrete steps on economic reform and development.” He said the United States is strongly backing Yemen’s accession to the World Trade Organization and its participation in the Group of Eight’s Deauville Partnership, aimed at helping Arab countries in transition.

“Together, these initiatives will integrate Yemen into regional and global markets, improve the business climate, accelerate economic activity, and secure a more prosperous and hopeful future for all Yemenis,” he said.

Along with providing \$119 million in emergency humanitarian assistance in 2012, the Obama administration is planning to work with the Yemeni-endorsed Mutual Accountability Framework secretariat “to ensure that our assistance achieves results that tangibly improve the lives of all of Yemen’s citizens,” Burns said.

According to the State Department fact sheet, through the Mutual Accountability Framework, the United States will contribute to job creation and capacity-building of local communities through infrastructure rehabilitation, microfinance and small enterprise support, and agriculture development.

In addition, U.S. assistance is helping to rebuild conflict-affected communities in southern Yemen and supporting the country’s health care system through programs that reduce maternal, newborn and child mortality and morbidity.
