

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

January 5, 2012

**Remarks for President Barack Obama - As Prepared for Delivery
Defense Strategy Rollout
Thursday, January 5, 2012
The Pentagon**

As Prepared for Delivery -

Good morning. The United States of America is the greatest force for freedom and security that the world has ever known. In no small measure, that's because we've built the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history – and as Commander in Chief, I'm going to keep it that way.

Indeed, all of us on this stage – all of us – have a profound responsibility to every Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine and Coast Guardsman who puts their life on the line for America. We owe them a strategy with well-defined goals; to only send them into harm's way when it's absolutely necessary; to give them the equipment and support they need to get the job done; and to care for them and their families when they come home. That's our solemn obligation.

Over the past three years, that's what we've done. We've continued to make historic investments in our military – our troops and their capabilities, our military families and veterans. And thanks to their extraordinary sacrifices, we've ended our war in Iraq. We've decimated al Qaeda's leadership, delivered justice to Osama bin Laden, and put that terrorist network on the path to defeat. We've made important progress in Afghanistan, and begun a transition so Afghans can assume more responsibility. We joined with allies and partners to protect the Libyan people as they ended the regime of Muammar Qaddafi.

Now, we're turning the page on a decade of war. Three years ago, we had some 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, we've cut that number in half. And as the transition in Afghanistan continues, more of our troops will continue to come home. More broadly, around the globe we've strengthened alliances, forged new partnerships, and served as a force for universal rights and human dignity.

In short, we've succeeded in defending our nation, taking the fight to our enemies, reducing the number of Americans serving in harm's way, and restoring America's global leadership. That makes us safer and it makes us stronger. And that's an

achievement that every American – and every man and woman in uniform – can be proud of.

This success has brought our nation, once more, to a moment of transition. Even as our troops continue to fight in Afghanistan, the tide of war is receding. Even as our forces prevail in today's missions, we have the opportunity – and the responsibility – to look ahead to the force we need for the future.

At the same time, we have to renew our economic strength here at home, which is the foundation of our strength in the world. That includes putting our fiscal house in order. To that end, the Budget Control Act passed by Congress last year – with the support of Republicans and Democrats alike – mandates reductions in federal spending, including defense spending. I've insisted that we do this responsibly. The security of our nation, and the lives of our men and women in uniform, depend on it.

That's why I called for this comprehensive defense review – to clarify our strategic interests in a fast-changing world, and to guide our defense priorities and spending over the coming decade. Because the size and structure of our military and defense budget have to be driven by a strategy – not the other way around. Moreover, we have to remember the lessons of history. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past – after World War II, after Vietnam – when our military was left ill-prepared for the future. As Commander in Chief, I will not let that happen again. Not on my watch.

We need to be smart, strategic and set priorities. The new guidance that the Defense Department is releasing today does that. I want to thank Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey for their extraordinary leadership during this process. I want to thank the service secretaries and chiefs, combatant commanders and so many defense leaders – military and civilian; Active, Guard and Reserve – for their contributions. Many of us met repeatedly – asking tough questions; challenging our assumptions; making hard choices. And we've come together today around an approach that will keep our nation safe and our military the finest in the world.

This review also benefited from the contributions of leaders from across my national security team – from the departments of State, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs, as well as the Intelligence Community. This is critical, because meeting the challenges of our time cannot be the work of our military alone – or the United States alone. It requires all elements of our national power, working together, and in concert with allies and partners.

I'm going to let Leon and Marty go into the details. But I just want to say that that this effort reflects the guidance I gave throughout this process. Yes, the tide of war is receding. But the question that this strategy answers is what kind of military will we

need after the long wars of the last decade are over. And today, we're moving forward, from a position of strength.

As I made clear in Australia, we'll be strengthening our presence in the Asia Pacific, and budget reductions will not come at the expense of this critical region. We're going to continue investing in our critical partnerships and alliances, including NATO, which has demonstrated time and again – most recently in Libya – that it's a force multiplier. We're going to stay vigilant, especially in the Middle East.

As we look beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – and the end of long-term, nation-building with large military footprints – we'll be able to ensure our security with smaller conventional ground forces. We'll continue to get rid of outdated Cold War-era systems so that we can invest in the capabilities we need for the future, including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; counterterrorism; countering weapons of mass destruction; and the ability to operate in environments where adversaries try to deny us access.

So, yes, our military will be leaner, but the world must know – the United States is going to maintain our military superiority with Armed Forces that are agile, flexible and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats.

We're also going to keep faith with those who serve, by making sure our troops have the equipment and capabilities they need to succeed; and by prioritizing efforts that focus on wounded warriors, mental health and the well-being of military families. And as our newest veterans rejoin civilian life, we'll keep working to give our veterans the care, benefits and job opportunities they deserve.

Finally, although today is about our defense strategy, I want to close with a word about the defense budget that will flow from this strategy. The details will be announced in the coming weeks. Some will no doubt say the spending reductions are too big; others will say they're too small. It will be easy to take issue with a particular change. But I would encourage all of us to remember what President Eisenhower once said – that “each proposal must be weighed in the light of a broader consideration: the need to maintain balance in and among national programs.” After a decade of war, and as we rebuild the sources of our strength – at home and abroad – it's time to restore that balance.

Let's also remember – over the past ten years, since 9/11, our defense budget grew at an extraordinary pace. Over the next ten years, the growth in the defense budget will slow, but the fact of the matter is this – it will still grow, because we have global responsibilities that demand our leadership. In fact, the defense budget will still be larger than it was toward the end of the Bush Administration. And I firmly believe, and I think the American people understand, that we can keep our military strong – and our

nation secure – with a defense budget that continues to be larger than roughly the next 10 countries combined.

So, again, I want to thank Secretary Panetta, Chairman Dempsey and all our defense leaders for their leadership and partnership throughout this process. Our men and women in uniform give their best to America every day, and in return they deserve the best from America. And I thank all of you for your commitment to the goal we share: keeping America strong and secure in the 21st century and keeping our Armed Forces the very best in the world.

And with that, I'll turn it over to Leon and Marty, who can explain more and take your questions. Thank you all very much.

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