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EDITORIAL

## The Defense Budget

The cold war has been nearly banished from the Pentagon's latest review of military challenges. The Quadrennial Defense Review, released this week, finally catches up with the current world, one where the United States confronts a host of different adversaries on a variety of different battlefields.

It acknowledges that while the United States remains the world's leading military power, it is much more dependent on allies to help maintain international stability. It places long overdue emphasis on preserving and rebuilding the overstretched, all-volunteer force. It recognizes the need to rebalance American forces to perform multiple new tasks and to finally jettison cold war weapons that are too expensive, over budget, underperforming or ill suited to today's missions.

[The review](#) and the accompanying 2011 defense budget request still fall short, particularly in their failure to address the security-related consequences of a world of deficits as far as the eye can see. The review talks about the need for future "trade-offs" but suggests that that is only a possibility when it must be a given.

President Obama is asking Congress for \$708.3 billion in defense spending for fiscal year 2011. That includes a base budget of \$549 billion (the growth rate, adjusted for inflation, is 2.3 percent over 2010, compared with 4 percent per year from 2000 to 2009) and \$159 billion for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The White House is separately seeking another \$33 billion for the 30,000 more troops being sent to Afghanistan.

At a time when the country is fighting two wars, major savings are not likely to be possible. This Pentagon budget, like President Obama's last one, makes some tough choices — but not enough.

On the positive side, the budget reflects the defense review's priorities by adding billions in new financing for helicopters, unmanned drones and special operations forces that are all crucial to the fight against extremists.

It also calls for canceling some anachronistic or unnecessary programs. Defense Secretary Robert Gates boldly took on the lobbyists and their many allies in Congress last year and canceled the F-22 fighter jet, a cold war relic. We applaud his efforts to try — once again — to end production of the C-17 transport plane, which military planners say they have enough of, and an alternate engine for [the F-35](#), which the planners say is redundant.

He could cut more. An estimated \$26 billion can be saved by halting production of the troubled V-22 Osprey vertical lift aircraft and the hugely costly Virginia class submarine, slimming the still unproven missile defense program and refitting existing warships (not buying new ones) for Mr. Obama's new missile defense plan in Europe.

The budget rightly calls for improved medical care and support programs for soldiers and their families; all

are under incredible strain after eight years of war. Over the long term, defense planners are worried about this country's ability to pay for the all-volunteer military, in part because the annual cost of health care (for retirees as well as active-duty personnel) has skyrocketed from \$19 billion in 2001 to more than \$50 billion in 2011.

Mr. Gates was right this week to raise the issue of unrealistically low annual health insurance premiums for military retirees (active-duty military do not pay for health care), saying they have not been increased (from \$460 per family, \$230 per individual) in 15 years.

Congress now gets to poke, prod and, we hope, seriously debate the budget and the defense review. It must start with another post-cold-war notion: The country cannot afford to write the Pentagon a blank check. And that means that Congress will have to spend less time listening to defense lobbyists and more time thinking about the country's real strategic needs.

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