

China Perceived as a Global Threat: Spiralling US Defense Spending, A Bid to Sustain Military Dominance

US defense review fixes strategic focus on Asia-Pacific and China

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US defense review firmly fixes strategic focus on Asia-Pacific and China's perceived threat to its power projection abilities

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-Past events show that the US is strong enough to overthrow regimes in small countries, but it remains impotent to maintain a stable political order in targeted countries. It has become increasingly obvious that the US needs the cooperation of its allies to succeed with any of its global objectives, as indicated by the US' policy on the Libya. Similarly, the US calls for a bigger role for NATO in Europe and plans to "use innovative methods" to sustain the US presence in Latin America and Africa.

A revamped military strategy announced by US President Barack Obama at the Pentagon on Thursday has signaled a major shift in the US' long-established defense strategy and will lay the foundation for a shift in its slimmed-down military focus from Europe to Asia-Pacific.

It is a strategic shift that has been forced on the US by its fiscal crisis, as US Defense Secretary Leon Panetta acknowledged in an introduction to the strategy review.

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Together with the troop withdrawal from the Middle East, the newly announced defense strategy is an indication of the US' intention of ending its worldwide anti-terror campaign. It also reflects Washington's attempt to strike a balance between its flagging economy and its mounting military expenditure.

The US' defense spending has skyrocketed to a record high over the past decade. The ever-growing military outlay, together with the adoption of tax cuts for many years, has caused the US' national debt to rise to more than \$15 trillion. The US has such a huge deficit that Panetta believed that "serious deficit and debt problems are themselves a national security risk". The US military has exceeded the capacity of the economy to support it and hefty cuts in military spending are desperately needed.

The US plans to achieve a leaner military with around \$489 billion in spending cuts over the next decade. But while it will reduce its ground forces, the emphasis will be on “capabilities critical to its future success” and “prevailing in all domains, including cyber”.

“The US is going to maintain our military superiority with armed forces that are agile, flexible and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats,” Obama declared.

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Panetta listed the five priorities for the US...Among them, Panetta believed, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East will pose the two biggest challenges to the US in the future.

It is widely believed by some in the US that the country has paid excessive attention to the Middle East over the past decade while ignoring other regions, especially Asia.

Obama stressed that the US will continue to strengthen its presence in Asia-Pacific and that the “budget reduction will not come at the expense of that critical region.” Such remarks are an indication of the eastward shift of the US defense priority and its unconcealed intention to check and counter-balance China’s growing influence in the region.

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As part of its full strategic transformation, the new defense strategy, however, will not affect the US’ long-cherished strategy of maintaining the strongest military in the world. It merely reveals Washington’s intention of maintaining its world leadership status at cheaper cost.

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