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**Call for nimbler force echoes Rumsfeld's pre-9/11 plan**

President Barack Obama speaks about the revamped U.S. military strategy as Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, left, listens, during an appearance at the Pentagon on Thursday.

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has for the first time put his own stamp on an all-encompassing U.S. military policy by turning from the ground wars that he inherited from the Bush administration and refocusing on what he described as a smaller, more agile force across Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East.

In an appearance at the Pentagon briefing room Thursday, Obama outlined a new national defense strategy driven by three realities: the winding down of a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, a fiscal crisis demanding hundreds of billions of dollars in Pentagon budget cuts and a rising threat from China and Iran.

A fourth reality, not mentioned in the briefing room, was Obama's re-election campaign and the chorus of Republican presidential candidates who have sought to portray him as decimating the Pentagon budget and being weak in his response to Iran.

Obama underscored the national security successes of his administration — the ending of the Iraq War, the killing of Osama bin Laden and the ouster of Libya's Moammar Gadhafi — before declaring that the United States would downsize to a smaller ground force, get rid of "outdated Cold War-era systems" and step up investments in intelligence-gathering and cyberwarfare.

He also said, in a comment that seemed to be aimed at the Republicans as well as Defense officials in the room, that "our military will be leaner, but the world must know the United States is going to maintain our military superiority."

Many elements of the new strategy echoed the goals of a smaller but more technically proficient military advanced by then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld before the Sept.

11, 2001, attacks. Those plans were soon overtaken by the need to build up U.S. ground forces for the kind of conventional wars that the Pentagon had not envisioned a decade ago.

"Conventionally it makes perfect sense to avoid fighting worst-case wars," said Anthony Cordesman, a military analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "But the 20th century, and even the 21st century, is a warning about how well anybody can do long-term forecasting. I have listened for decades to, 'This time we're going to be more efficient, this time we're going to use technology.'"

Pentagon officials acknowledged the risks in a strategy that declares that U.S. ground forces will no longer be large enough to conduct prolonged, large-scale counterinsurgency campaigns like those in Iraq and Afghanistan — Defense Secretary Leon Panetta has said the Army must shrink to 483,000 soldiers over the next decade, from 570,000 — and said they were prepared to change course if required.

**What does an 8 percent defense budget reduction mean?**

» **SMALLER ARMY**

Already scheduled for a 50,000 troop reduction beginning in 2015, the Army appears headed for an even larger trim. A reduction from the current level of 570,000 down to 483,000 would put troop levels near where they were prior to the 9/11 attacks, when it was believed that the U.S. could be successful in two ground wars. Going forward, it could be that U.S. simply cannot afford to fight two major ground campaigns.

» **FEWER MARINES**

Earlier reports suggested a reduction in Marines from their current level of 202,000 to approximately 175,000. Research by the Center for a New American Security, the Sustainable Defense Task Force and the Cato Institute — a broad spectrum of views on defense spending — suggest that the combined Army and Marine reductions could save at least \$41 billion over 10 years.

Source:

The New York Times

In a briefing after Obama's remarks, Adm. James Winnefeld, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the new strategy

embraced "reversibility," which would allow the Pentagon to avoid "departmental hubris." In other words, the Defense Department would begin a slow drawdown of the Army that could be reversed and, in an emergency, it could order up a massive mobilization of the National Guard and Reserves.

Other analysts said that the strategy appeared good but that without the details — specifically, what kind of budget cuts it would result in — it was hard to judge. The specific cuts are to be made public in coming weeks.

"It's kind of an incomplete," said Andrew Krepinevich, a military expert at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "It's like when you jump out of an aircraft with a parachute, the first five seconds are 'so far, so good.' But you're still waiting for the chute to open."

White House and Pentagon officials said Obama spent a substantial amount of time with military officials on the new strategy, which they defined as six meetings he had on the strategy with military leaders and regional commanders between September and late December. Although other presidents have been deeply immersed in military policy, for Obama the time commitment appears to signal an interest in a policy that turns the page from President George W. Bush's wars.

"Certainly it indicates a level of interest on the president's part, over and above what we've seen from him before," Krepinevich said.

The new strategy document finally does away with the Defense Department's historic requirement to have the ability to fight and win two wars at once — a measure that one official said "has been on life-support for years."

The strategy released under Obama in 2010 said the military was responsible for "maintaining the ability to prevail against two capable nation-state aggressors."

In contrast, the strategy released Thursday said the military must be able to fight one war, but is responsible only for "denying the objectives of — or imposing unacceptable costs on — an opportunistic aggressor in a second region."

Senior Pentagon officials said that viewing military requirements through something as static as the two-war model had become outdated and that the true measurement was whether the Pentagon could field a force capable of carrying out a wide range of military actions to protect the nation's interests.

Pentagon officials made it clear that the department's priorities in coming years would be financing for defense and offense in cyberspace, for special operations forces and for the broad area of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.