

## **The Need for a New U.S. Force Planning Exercise**

### **Anthony H. Cordesman**

President-elect Trump campaigned on making broad increases in U.S. military forces: Raising U.S. Army manning from 450,000 active-duty soldiers to 540,000, Marine Corps manning from 182,000 marines to 200,000, Navy combat strength from 272 deployable ships to 350, and the number of combat aircraft in the Air Force (USAF) from 1,141 to 1,200. In gross terms, this would mean a 20% increase in the Army, 10% increase in the Marine Corps, 29% increase in the Navy, and 5% increase in the USAF.

These numbers, however, do little more than highlight a desire to make major increases in U.S. forces. They are suitable campaign goals for illustrating a set of policy goals, but they are too vague, and too military service oriented, to have any real meaning. Moreover, they are not tied to any clear strategy, mission priorities, threat, and time-scale, or defined in anything like the detail needed to determine their cost and budget impact.

### **What It takes to Create Real-World Plans for Building Up Defense**

Once Trump becomes President Trump, he will have to go from outlining broad goals and intentions to creating and implementing an actual force plan that will provide all of these details. He will have to decide how such a plan should be paid for and present it as part of the annual Department of Defense budget submission with all the necessary supporting strategy, documents, and future year defense plan.

To be specific, the new President, Secretary of Defense, and National Security Advisor will need to:

- Establish a strategy that defines the priorities for expanding U.S. forces, and one that considers both possible threats and the value of U.S. allies and strategic partnerships.
- Focus on building up key mission capabilities for joint warfare, deterrence, and other military goals by combatant command—both global and regional—rather than make increases by military service.
- Give equal weight to the quality of new weapons and equipment, rather than simply focusing on larger numbers.
- Tie manpower increases to specific increases in combat units and other force elements.
- Consider the cost and capability trade-offs between procurement, research and development, manpower, readiness, and sustainability—not just total force levels.
- Consider the cost and capability trade-offs between military services, between active and reserve forces, and between the present focus on longer term service and pensions and provide a mix of different career paths.
- Provide similar personnel planning for career civilians and contractors.
- Examine alternative time scales in terms of cost, procuring existing or new systems, retaining old systems and improving or modernizing existing systems—a process that

must lead to a coherent Future Year Defense Plan (FYDP) for at least five years in the future, and a procurement plan that can easily have a 15-year planning cycle.

- Consider priorities for related aspects of national security: CIA, Homeland Defense and related activity, nuclear weapons modernization, military aid, and arms sales.

Unlike broad campaign goals, all of these efforts will have to take full account of the very different nature and costs of the key elements of each service: Combat units, given types of ships, and given types of aircraft. These differences—and current U.S. force plans—are illustrated in **Figure One**.

**Figure One: Illustrative Size and Cost of Different Elements of U.S. Military Forces – Part One**

**Size, Costs, and Number of U.S. Forces**

	Military Personnel per Unit	Annual Cost per Unit (Millions of 2017 dollars)	Number of Units				
			2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Department of the Army</b>							
Active-Component Armored Brigade Combat Team	17,450	2,610	9	9	9	9	9
National Guard Armored Brigade Combat Team	14,440	820	5	5	5	5	5
Active-Component Stryker Brigade Combat Team	17,180	2,560	7	7	7	7	7
National Guard Stryker Brigade Combat Team	14,230	800	2	2	2	2	2
Active-Component Infantry Brigade Combat Team	16,250	2,410	14	14	14	14	14
National Guard Infantry Brigade Combat Team	12,720	700	19	19	19	19	19
Active-Component Aviation Brigade	4,300	890	11	11	10	10	10
Reserve-Component Aviation Brigade	2,750	200	11	12	12	12	12
Army Special-Operations Forces	45,100 <sup>a</sup>	7,210 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Rest of the Army	12,570 <sup>a</sup>	3,180 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Department of the Navy</b>							
Aircraft Carrier	6,590	1,180	11	11	11	11	11
Carrier Air Wing	4,860	910	10	10	10	10	10
Arleigh Burke Class Destroyer (DDG-51)	720	140	66	67	69	72	74
Ticonderoga Class Cruiser (CG-47)	550	110	22	22	22	20	20
Littoral Combat Ship	430	100	14	18	22	24	28
Zumwalt Class Destroyer (DDG-1000)	500	100	2	2	3	3	3
Attack Submarine <sup>c</sup>	390	140	51	52	50	51	51
Amphibious Ship <sup>d</sup>	1,450	270	35 <sup>e</sup>				
Active-Component Marine Corps Infantry Battalion	5,780	740	24	24	24	24	24
Reserve-Component Marine Corps Infantry Battalion	4,370	470	8	8	8	8	8
Marine Corps Aircraft Complement	2,750	520	24	24	24	24	24
Ballistic and Guided Missile Submarines	660	170	18	18	18	18	18

**Figure One: Illustrative Size and Cost of  
Different Elements of U.S. Military Forces – Part Two**

Size, Costs, and Number of U.S. Forces

	Military Personnel per Unit	Annual Cost per Unit (Millions of 2017 dollars)	Number of Units				
			2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Department of the Navy (Continued)</b>							
P-3 and P-8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft Squadron <sup>1</sup>	1,890	330	8	8	8	8	8
Seabee Construction Engineers	14,200 <sup>a</sup>	1,860 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Navy Special-Operations Forces	16,440 <sup>a</sup>	2,370 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Marine Corps Special-Operations Forces	3,530 <sup>a</sup>	490 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Rest of the Navy	37,990 <sup>a</sup>	6,550 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Rest of the Marine Corps	770 <sup>a</sup>	230 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Department of the Air Force<sup>1</sup></b>							
A-10 Attack Aircraft Squadron	1,190	230	16	13	10	6	2
F-15 Fighter Aircraft Squadron	1,540	300	25	25	25	25	26
F-16 Fighter Aircraft Squadron	1,250	220	45	45	46	46	46
F-22 Fighter Aircraft Squadron	2,390	470	13	13	13	13	13
F-35 Fighter Aircraft Squadron <sup>9</sup>	2,940	570	3	5	7	10	14
B-52 Bomber Aircraft Squadron	3,830	740	4	4	4	4	4
B-1B Bomber Aircraft Squadron	3,980	810	4	4	4	4	4
B-2 Bomber Aircraft Squadron	8,660	1,840	1	1	1	1	1
C-130 Cargo Aircraft Squadron	2,120	360	24	24	23	24	24
C-5 Cargo Aircraft Squadron	2,430	430	3	3	3	3	3
C-17 Cargo Aircraft Squadron	1,390	270	14	15	16	16	16
KC-135 Tanker Aircraft Squadron	1,930	360	30	28	28	27	28
KC-10 Tanker Aircraft Squadron	3,140	580	5	5	4	3	2
KC-46 Tanker Aircraft Squadron <sup>9</sup>	1,070	180	1	3	4	5	6
MQ-1 "Predator" UAS Squadron	260	70	9	0	0	0	0
RQ-4 "Global Hawk" UAS Squadron	1,840	440	3	3	3	3	3
MQ-9 "Reaper" UAS Squadron	920	160	23	24	26	27	27
Minuteman III Missile Squadron <sup>1</sup>	2,040	380	9	9	9	9	9
RED HORSE Construction Engineers	19,340 <sup>a</sup>	2,170 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Air Force Special-Operations Forces	24,070 <sup>a</sup>	3,730 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Rest of the Air Force	49,010 <sup>a</sup>	10,000 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Defensewide Activities</b>							
Special Operations Command	0 <sup>1</sup>	5,370 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Defense Health Program for Retirees	0 <sup>1</sup>	14,720 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Classified Defensewide Funding	0 <sup>1</sup>	14,540 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Rest of the Defensewide Organizations	0 <sup>1</sup>	4,060 <sup>b</sup>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: CBO, The U.S. Military's Force Structure: A Primer, July 2016, <https://www.google.com/search?q=CBO%2C+U.S.+Force+Structure&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>, pp. 123-126

## **Creating and Implementing Effective Plans in the Face of a BCA and QDR that are Self-Inflicted Wounds**

These are not easy tasks even when they do not involve a major military build-up, and President Trump will inherit a Department of Defense that has spent the period since the end of the Cold War focused largely on downsizing—except for the build ups for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The military services have been in a largely self-preservation mode and most of the combatant commands have limited force planning and budget drafting capabilities.

### ***The Threat from the BCA***

As **Figure Two** shows, President Trump will inherit a federal budget structure that the CBO projects will steadily cut the level of national security effort relative to entitlement programs, and will do so to levels well below both the levels of defense spending and the percentage of GDP that seems needed.

The DOD has also had to focus on an annual fight to avoid the limits of the Budget Control Act (BCA)—a legislative nightmare that was originally designed to be so bad that it would force the Congress to pursue more intelligent options.

**Figure Three** shows just how much the department has had to adjust its future spending plans downwards because of the BCA since FY2013, although President Obama did try to recoup some of the lost ground in FY2017.

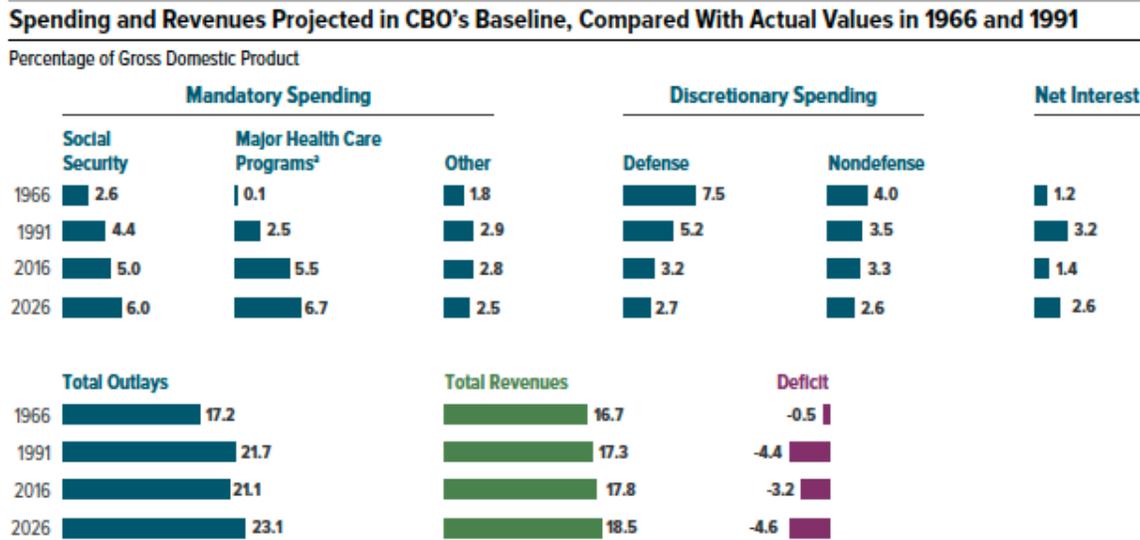
As a recent commentary by Max Boot notes, the impact of BCA is further compounded by other Trump campaign pledges that critics estimate could:

- Cost \$113 billion more than the sequestration caps allow and a minimum of another \$250 billion to \$300 billion extra over four years.
- Spend \$1 trillion on rebuilding infrastructure.
- Tax cuts that could cost the Treasury as much as \$10.8 trillion in lost revenues over ten years, and national debt would rise by \$5.3 trillion over a decade relative to current policy.

These estimates of the impact of the programs that Trump campaigned for are sometimes worst-case estimates by Trump's opponents, but it is important to note that the CBO's June 2016 forecast put the budget deficit at \$3.5 trillion for 2017-2021 under the existing budget structure, President Obama's program would have reduced this to \$2.6 trillion for 2017-2021, and \$9.3 trillion during 2017-2026, under the existing budget structure. They still cost \$6.9 trillion during 2017-2026, under best-case assumptions.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure Two: CBO Estimate of Trends in Defense Spending (August 2016)**

**Defense as a Percent of GDP**



Source: Congressional Budget Office.

a. Consists of spending on Medicare (net of premiums and other offsetting receipts), Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program, as well as outlays to subsidize health insurance purchased through the marketplaces established under the Affordable Care Act and related spending.

**Projected Defense Spending**

**Discretionary Spending Projected in CBO's Baseline**

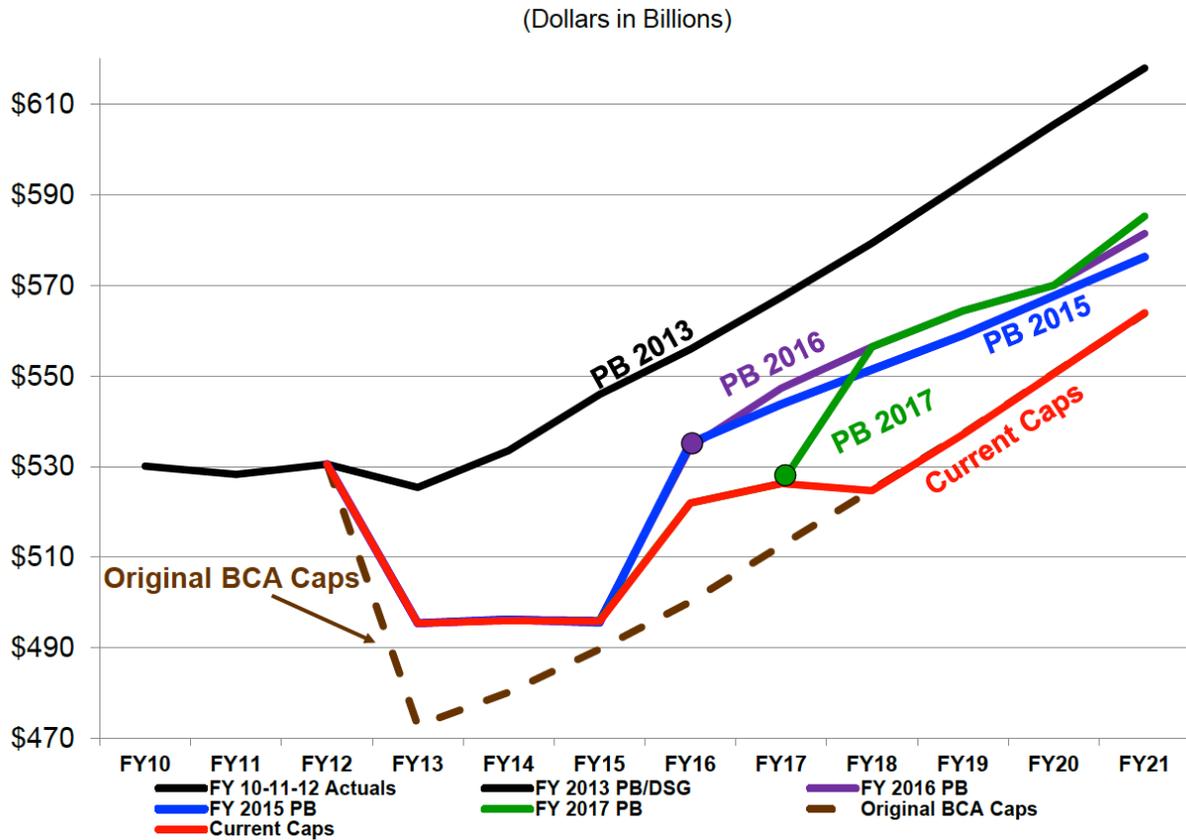
Billions of Dollars

	Actual, 2015 <sup>a</sup> - 2026												Total	
	2015 <sup>a</sup>	2016 <sup>a</sup>	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2017-2021	2017-2026
<b>Budget Authority</b>														
Defense	586	607	611	610	624	639	655	671	687	704	721	739	3,139	6,661
Nondefense	530	560	543	540	554	568	581	595	610	625	641	657	2,787	5,916
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,116</b>	<b>1,167</b>	<b>1,154</b>	<b>1,150</b>	<b>1,178</b>	<b>1,208</b>	<b>1,236</b>	<b>1,266</b>	<b>1,297</b>	<b>1,329</b>	<b>1,362</b>	<b>1,396</b>	<b>5,926</b>	<b>12,577</b>
<b>Outlays</b>														
Defense	583	579	592	593	609	623	637	657	668	680	701	719	3,055	6,480
Nondefense	585	602	615	612	614	625	637	649	663	678	694	710	3,102	6,497
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,168</b>	<b>1,181</b>	<b>1,207</b>	<b>1,205</b>	<b>1,223</b>	<b>1,248</b>	<b>1,275</b>	<b>1,306</b>	<b>1,332</b>	<b>1,358</b>	<b>1,396</b>	<b>1,428</b>	<b>6,157</b>	<b>12,977</b>
<b>Memorandum:</b>														
Caps in the Budget Control Act (As Amended), Including Automatic Reductions to the Caps														
Defense	521	548	551	549	562	576	590	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,828	n.a.
Nondefense	492	518	519	515	529	542	555	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2,660	n.a.
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,014</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>1,070</b>	<b>1,064</b>	<b>1,091</b>	<b>1,118</b>	<b>1,145</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>5,489</b>	<b>n.a.</b>
Adjustments to the Caps <sup>b</sup>														
Defense	65	59	60	61	62	63	65	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	311	n.a.
Nondefense	23	24	25	25	25	26	26	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	127	n.a.
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>n.a.</b>

Source: Congressional Budget Office.

CBO, An Update to the Budget and Economic Outlook: 2016 to 2026, August 23, 2016, <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/51908>, pp. 18 & 21

**Figure Three**  
**The Impact of the Budget Control Act in Cutting Past Defense Programs**



Source: OUSD (Comptroller), Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request, presentation, February 9, 2016, p. 5

***Having to Deal with Under-Costed Defense Budgets and Programs***

There also are major issues and problems in the existing budgets and future year programs. Budget projections by the CBO and others warn that many existing U.S. defense plans and programs were badly under-costed and involved entitlement efforts that could not meet public needs.

A CBO study notes that the FY2016 defense budget was planned to be relatively flat, and have an average cost of \$534 billion for 2016 through 2020, *but* that, “If DoD’s plans are projected for an additional 10 years, CBO’s analysis indicates that defense budgets would be larger, averaging \$565 billion per year from 2021 through 2030 under DoD’s cost assumptions. Moreover, CBO estimates that the cost of DoD’s plans would be 4 percent higher over the next 15 years under a set of policies and prices that more closely matched recent experience.”<sup>2</sup>

A different CBO study shows how important the gap between currently planned and probable actual spending could be to one specific aspect of the Trump force goals: U.S. Navy ship strength.<sup>3</sup>

The Navy's 2016 shipbuilding plan states that the service's goal (in military parlance, its requirement) is to have 308 battle force ships, consisting of aircraft carriers, submarines, surface combatants, amphibious ships, combat logistics ships, and some support ships. The 2016 shipbuilding plan falls short of the goals for some types of ships in some years, although generally the shortfalls are smaller than they have been in previous years' plans. The fleet today numbers 273 ships.

Under the 2016 plan, the Navy would buy a total of 264 ships over the 2016–2045 period: 218 combat ships and 46 combat logistics and support ships. Given the rate at which the Navy plans to retire ships from the fleet, the 2016 plan would not meet the inventory goal of 308 ships until 2022, but it would allow the Navy to maintain its inventory at least at that level through 2031. After that, in most years through 2045, the fleet would fall below 308 ships.

The size of the Navy does not depend on ship construction alone; the length of time that particular ships remain in the fleet affects the force structure as well. The Navy often shows flexibility in its approach to retiring ships: A ship may be retired before the end of its service life to save money or may be kept beyond that span to maintain a desired force level. Generally, the Navy's estimates of expected service life align with historical experience. However, the Navy currently assumes a 35- or 40-year service life for its large surface combatants; in the past, few of those ships were in the fleet for longer than 30 years.

The Navy estimates that buying the new ships specified in the 2016 plan would cost \$494 billion (in 2015 dollars) over 30 years—or an average of \$16.5 billion per year—slightly less than the costs of the 2015 plan. Using its own models and assumptions, CBO estimates that the cost of new-ship construction in the Navy's 2016 plan would total \$552 billion over 30 years, or an average of \$18.4 billion per year.

...The Navy's shipbuilding plan reports only the costs of new-ship construction. Other activities typically funded from the Navy's budget accounts for ship construction—such as refueling nuclear-powered aircraft carriers or outfitting new ships with various small pieces of equipment after the ships are built and delivered—would add \$1.7 billion to the Navy's average annual shipbuilding costs under the 2016 plan, by CBO's estimate. (Between 2010 and 2015, the cost of those other activities averaged \$2.1 billion per year.) Including those extra costs would increase the average annual cost of the Navy's 2016 plan to \$20.2 billion per year, CBO estimates. CBO's estimate of the total cost of the Navy's plan is 10 percent above the Navy's estimate.

... CBO's estimate of \$18.4 billion per year for new-ship construction in the Navy's 2016 shipbuilding plan is 32 percent above the historical average annual funding of \$13.9 billion (in 2015 dollars). And CBO's estimate of \$20.2 billion per year for the full cost of the plan is 28 percent higher than the \$15.8 billion the Navy has spent, on average, annually over the past 30 years for all items in its shipbuilding accounts. If funding were to continue at the average for the past 30 years, under one possible approach to ship construction, the Navy would be able to build about 70 fewer battle force ships than it currently plans, CBO estimates.

...the funding proposed in the 2016 FYDP exceeds the amounts available to DoD under the Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA), which placed caps on discretionary spending through 2021. (The BCA does not address specific budgetary accounts such as the one for shipbuilding.) ...Under the BCA, if the Navy receives the same percentage of DoD's budget during the coming decade and devotes the same percentage of its budget to ship construction that it has historically, the annual shipbuilding budget would be 30 percent below CBO's estimate of the amount required to execute the Navy's 2016 plan over the 2016–2021 period.

If all shipbuilding programs were cut proportionately, a reduction of that magnitude would require the Navy to purchase 16 fewer ships than the 57 it plans to purchase over that period. Consequently, under current law, policymakers face a choice between implementing the Navy's 2016 shipbuilding plan and cutting costs elsewhere in the Navy's budget (or in DoD's budget more broadly), scaling back the 2016 plan, or taking some combination of those actions.

As of this writing, the Congress was considering H.R. 1314, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015. That bill, if enacted, would raise the budget caps for national defense for fiscal years 2016 and 2017. That change would allow the Navy to cut 15 ships rather than 16 ships from its 2016 plan, if all shipbuilding programs were cut proportionately.

The Navy's problems are scarcely unique. The U.S. Army's most recent attempt to develop a comprehensive procurement program—the Future Combat Systems (FCS) program—was so badly managed and subject to so much cost escalation—that the entire effort had to be scrapped. Cost escalation and a lack of configuration control and effective management have led to massive cutbacks in the USAF F-22 and F-35 procurement plans as well as to premature cuts in the active strength of existing fighter forces.

### ***The Threat from the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)***

The Department of Defense must deal with another critical self-inflicted wound. It has long lacked a focus on real-world force planning, and its key strategy document is now a largely pointless Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) that does not involve any serious force planning, provides no specific force goals for the future, and deals with strategy largely in terms of concepts and intentions rather than practical plans.

At their best, the QDRs provided concepts without plans to implement them. At their more common worst, the QDRs have largely amounted to useless case examples of the worst aspects of assuming strategy can shape the future—rather than being shaped by it—and that a concept undefined in terms of specific threats and net assessments, implementation plans, actions, timescales, resources, and measures of effectiveness is a real strategy.

The combination of the BCA and QDR has almost deprived the United States of the need to worry foreign enemies. Both are sufficiently stupid to turn key aspects of U.S. national security planning into self-inflicted wounds, and the new administration is not going to find it easy to find the expertise that can provide the quality of planning that is now needed, deal with the government-wide impact of the BCA, and deal with an Executive Branch and Congress that face even more massive challenges in terms of tax reform, the national debt, entitlement programs and costs, and priorities for domestic spending.

Moreover, even the best Department of Defense plans and budgets will still have to compete through every year of the budget cycles to come with conflicting priorities in every aspect of domestic policy and spending both in terms of overall review of each annual budget within the executive branch, and the conflicting priorities of both houses of Congress—as well as the inevitable impact of changes in the global economy and national security priorities driven by the actions of foreign state and non-state actors.

### **Creating an Effective Force Planning Effort: The Right Path to a Stronger U.S. Military**

None of these factors mean that the new president cannot make a beginning as part the FY2018 budget request that his administration must submit to Congress this spring. President Trump will have to work with defense budget that was largely drafted during the Obama Administration, and the timing between the inauguration and the time the FY2018 budget must go to Congress is too short to revise the request for FY2018 and four years beyond it in ways that can shape a comprehensive new defense program. However, there are many aspects of readiness that clearly need to be improved, some cuts in personnel can be avoided, and there are some areas where an early start could be made in increasing procurement that is clearly needed and where some cost reductions could also be achieved by larger orders.

Finding the right path to making major changes in the U.S. military does, however, require a concerted and ongoing effort at long term force planning that shapes a Future Year Defense Program that addresses all of the needs listed at the start of this analysis. As an earlier effort to create a “600 ship Navy” during the Reagan Administration showed, seeking to increase force numbers without a clear strategic rationale, and without an overall and properly balanced force plan, becomes an exercise in wasting money. It ends in discrediting defense rather than strengthening it.

Shaping a real-world Trump program will require a broad annual effort that links all of the key elements in force planning together—one that is sustained over a period of years to both create the proper plans and implement them. Rushing into sudden surges simply does not work. Such an effort also needs to blend military expertise with civilian concerns with real world budgets and Congressional and popular budget support. It needs to be command and mission driven—not shaped by the individual priorities of each military service. It needs hard-nosed and demanding leadership, and ruthless efforts to push key defense contractors into effective performance.

*Anthony H. Cordesman holds the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C.*

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<sup>1</sup> CBO, *A Macroeconomic Analysis of the President’s 2017 Budget*, June 6, 2016 <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/51625>, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> CBO, “Summary,” *Long-Term Implications of the 2016 Future Years Defense Program*, January 14, 2016, <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/51050>.

<sup>3</sup> CBO, “Summary,” *An Analysis of the Navy’s Fiscal Year 2016 Shipbuilding Plan*, October 29, 2015, <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/50926>.