



May 2018

WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

An Assessment of DOD Documents Used in Previous Efforts to Rebalance to the Pacific

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-192](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2011, President Obama announced that the United States would turn its attention to the Asia-Pacific region and make the U.S. presence there a top priority. Rebalancing to the Pacific became strategic guidance that informed military planning. By the end of 2015, DOD published strategy documents that included references to the rebalance to the Pacific or related concepts. In February 2018, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs stated that while DOD continues to prioritize the Asia-Pacific region, the rebalance to the Pacific is no longer U.S. policy. DOD has published the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which establishes an objective of maintaining a favorable regional balance in the Pacific region, among other regions.

Prior to the change in policy, House Report 114-102 included a provision for GAO to review matters related to the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region. GAO evaluated the extent to which DOD developed strategy documents to guide the rebalance to the Pacific that included desired elements of an effective national strategy.

GAO analyzed six DOD strategy documents that officials identified as providing guidance for the rebalance to the Pacific to determine whether, as a set, they included desired elements associated with an effective national strategy. DOD had no comments on this report.

View [GAO-18-192](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or RussellC@gao.gov.

May 2018

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An Assessment of DOD Documents Used in Previous Efforts to Rebalance to the Pacific

What GAO Found

Department of Defense (DOD) strategy documents that collectively guided the rebalance to the Pacific included most of the desired elements of an effective national strategy. The U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), which is responsible for the Asia-Pacific region, used DOD strategy documents to implement the President's direction to rebalance to the Pacific, which generally refocused U.S. efforts to that region. PACOM officials told GAO that there was no single rebalance-specific strategy document. Instead, officials identified a number of strategy documents published since 2012 that guided activities associated with the rebalance to the Pacific, including: *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*; *Quadrennial Defense Review*; *National Military Strategy*; *Guidance for the Employment of the Force*; *Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan*; and the *PACOM 2015 Theater Campaign Plan (DRAFT)*.

Based on GAO's analysis, DOD's six strategy documents that guided the rebalance to the Pacific included 24 of the 31 desired elements of an effective national strategy. However, two key elements were missing from the group of strategy documents: (1) a definition of the rebalance to the Pacific, and (2) the identification of the overall results desired, or end state, for the rebalance. DOD officials also could not identify a definition for the rebalance to the Pacific in the strategy documents or provide a definition that was used consistently across the department.

According to a DOD official with performance management responsibilities, defining the rebalance to the Pacific and identifying the initiative's strategic objectives, or end state, were important for establishing accountability and measuring progress. For instance, a clear definition of rebalance could have helped those charged with implementation to distinguish activities essential to operationalizing the strategic guidance from activities that were peripheral to that effort. Similarly, knowing the end state could have helped management make the best use of resources, enable the assessment of progress, and facilitate the development of strategic and military objectives. In moving forward in the Asia-Pacific region, considering the identification of strategic end states as well as other missing elements could help position DOD to achieve its objectives in the region.

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Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
GEF	Guidance for the Employment of the Force
Joint Pub	Joint Publication
JSCP	Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan
NMS	National Military Strategy
PACOM	United States Pacific Command
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
TCP	Theater Campaign Plan

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May 24, 2018

Congressional Committees

In the fall of 2011, President Obama announced that the United States would turn its attention to the Asia-Pacific region and make the U.S. presence there a top priority.¹ According to the President, the United States was going to play a larger and long-term role in shaping the Asia-Pacific region after spending a decade at war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The President then directed his national security team to conduct a global, strategic assessment of U.S. priorities. The team made key determinations including that a pivot toward the Asia-Pacific region would help to rebalance the projection and focus of U.S. power.² Rebalancing efforts to the Pacific subsequently became defense strategic guidance that began to inform military planning.³ Consequently, in 2012 the commander of U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) described the military focus of the rebalance as strengthening relationships with allies and partners; adjusting military posture and presence; and employing new concepts, capabilities and capacities. In a 2015 address, the Secretary of Defense outlined other aspects of the rebalance such as reinforcing partnerships and enhancing posture in the Asia-Pacific region. By the end of 2015, the Department of Defense (DOD) had published strategy documents that included references to the rebalance to the Pacific or related concepts. PACOM used these documents as guidance for developing the command's plans to implement the rebalance to the Pacific.

In January 2018, DOD published the 2018 National Defense Strategy which establishes an objective of maintaining a favorable regional

¹White House Press Office, *Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament* (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 17, 2011).

²Since 2012, observers of the U.S. strategic focus on the Asia-Pacific region have termed the strategic turn as a pivot to the Pacific and as rebalancing to the Pacific. For the purposes of this report, we use the phrase rebalance to the Pacific to describe the 2011 presidential strategic direction to the U.S. military to focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

³Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, D.C.: January 2012).

balance in the Pacific region.⁴ In February 2018, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs stated that while DOD continues to prioritize the Asia-Pacific region, the rebalance to the Pacific is no longer U.S. policy.

Prior to the change in policy, House Report 114-102 included a provision for GAO to review matters related to the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region.⁵ We evaluated the extent to which six DOD-developed strategy documents used to guide the previous rebalance to the Pacific effort included the desired elements of an effective national strategy. Based on interviews with DOD officials from multiple offices, we identified six key DOD strategy documents that were used for the rebalance and contained information about the rebalance, such as purpose and scope.⁶ We systematically reviewed these strategy documents to determine whether this set of strategy documents included desired elements associated with an effective national strategy.⁷ Additionally, we interviewed DOD officials from numerous organizations responsible for

⁴Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.) Specifically, the January 2018 National Defense Strategy identifies a defense objective of maintaining favorable regional balances of power in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, and the Western Hemisphere.

⁵See H.R. Rep. No. 114-102, at 213-14 (2015) (House Armed Services Committee report, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016).

⁶The multiple offices included the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Joint Staff, and the U.S. Pacific Command.

⁷See GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004) for a list of examples of desired elements that we adapted for our review of DOD strategy documents. In 2004, we identified these examples of desired elements and characteristics by consulting statutory requirements pertaining to particular strategies, as well as legislative and executive branch guidance for other national strategies. In addition, we reviewed the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, general literature on strategic planning and performance, and guidance from the Office of Management and Budget. We also gathered published recommendations made by national commissions chartered by Congress, by our past work, and by various research organizations that have commented on national strategies. Since 2004, we have used these examples of desired elements to assess and report on several national strategies, such as those related to combating terrorism, rebuilding Iraq, improving citizens' financial literacy, public diplomacy, and addressing potential pandemics. See the Related GAO Products page at the end of this report for information concerning these reports. In our review, we did not include elements identified in the 2004 report that were not applicable to an effective national strategy in this context. For example, concerning methodology we did not include consideration of the DOD process used to produce a particular strategy.

planning, providing guidance or implementing the rebalance to the Pacific. See appendix I for more details on our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2015 to May 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

DOD Strategies Inform Combatant Command Plans

DOD, through the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, develops department-wide strategic guidance based on direction from the President and issues this guidance through strategy documents. According to joint doctrine and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff guidance, combatant commanders use strategy documents as guidance for planning operations.⁸ Specifically, combatant commanders translate this guidance into their commands' campaign and contingency plans.⁹ The military services organize, train, equip, and provide forces to the combatant commanders to execute command plans. The combatant commander must make certain the combatant command can execute these plans.¹⁰

⁸See, e.g., Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Aug. 11, 2011); Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3100.01C, *Joint Strategic Planning System* (Nov. 20, 2015).

⁹As described by joint doctrine, campaign plans are joint operation plans for a series of related major operations aimed at achieving strategic or operational objectives within a given time and space. Combatant commanders translate national or theater strategy into operational concepts through the development of an operation plan for a campaign. Contingency plans are plans for major contingencies that can reasonably be anticipated in the principal geographic subareas of the command. Contingency plans are conceptually considered branches of the overarching campaign plans. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Aug. 11, 2011).

¹⁰For example, joint doctrine notes that the commander and staff must constantly make certain that military actions are effective, correctly aligned with resources, and are contributing to the accomplishment of directed strategic and military end states. Joint Pub. 5-0, at I-7.

PACOM is one of six geographic Unified Combatant Commands of the U.S. Armed Forces.¹¹ With an area of responsibility extending from the waters off the west coast of the United States to the western border of India, and from Antarctica to the North Pole, PACOM is the primary U.S. military authority in the Pacific. In 2016, PACOM reported that approximately 380,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel were assigned to this area. PACOM describes the 36 nations that comprise the Asia-Pacific region as home to more than 50 percent of the world's population and 3,000 different languages, several of the world's larger militaries, and five nations allied with the United States through mutual defense treaties or agreements. PACOM's commander reports to the President and the Secretary of Defense through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and is supported by four service component commands: U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, U.S. Army Pacific, and U.S. Marine Forces, Pacific.¹²

DOD's Previous Rebalance to the Pacific Strategy and Current Policy

In President Obama's speech to the Australian Parliament in November 2011, he stated that after a decade of fighting two wars, the United States was turning its attention to the vast potential of the Asia-Pacific region. The President described the U.S. as a historic Pacific power whose interests are inextricably linked with Asia's economic, security, and political order. According to a senior administration official, the United

¹¹A combatant command is a unified or specified command with a broad continuing mission under a single commander established and so designated by the President, through the Secretary of Defense and with the advice and assistance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. DOD has six geographic combatant commands responsible for missions in specific areas of the world: U.S. Africa Command, U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. Southern Command.

¹²As described in joint doctrine, the President and Secretary of Defense exercise authority, direction, and control of the Armed Forces through two distinct branches of the chain of command and control. One branch runs from the President, through the Secretary of Defense, to the combatant commanders for missions and forces assigned to their commands. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff transmits to combatant commanders the orders given by the President or the Secretary of Defense, and, as directed by the Secretary of Defense, oversees the activities of those commands. The other branch runs from the President to the Secretary of Defense to the Secretaries of the military departments and, as prescribed by the Secretaries, to the commanders of military service forces. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, at II-9, II-11 (Mar. 25, 2013).

States planned to implement a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy in the Asia-Pacific region.¹³

PACOM used military strategy documents to implement presidential strategic direction to rebalance efforts to the Pacific. However, according to officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Joint Staff, and the U.S. Pacific Command there was no single rebalance-specific strategy document. Instead, these officials identified a number of strategy documents published since 2012 that guided activities associated with the rebalance to the Pacific effort.¹⁴ Based on our interviews with U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) and DOD officials, we focused our review on six strategy documents, issued between 2012 and 2015, that these officials considered relevant and representative of DOD's previous strategy to implement the rebalance to the Pacific through 2016. The six documents that we reviewed are:

- ***Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense.***¹⁵ DOD issued this document in January 2012. This publication reflected presidential strategic direction to DOD and described the key military missions for which the department would prepare. In describing the security environment, this strategic guidance stated that the United States would, of necessity, rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region.

¹³Over the years, senior administration leaders' descriptions of particular elements of the rebalance have varied over time. For example, in 2013, the administration's national security advisor delivered a speech establishing particular rebalancing objectives, such as basing 60 percent of the U.S. naval fleet in the Pacific by 2020 and modernizing PACOM's capabilities with a shift to submarines, fifth-generation fighter jets such as F-22s and F-35s, and reconnaissance platforms. See White House Press Office, *Remarks by National Security Advisor T. Donilon* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2013). In a 2015 address, the Secretary of Defense described other particular aspects of the rebalance: (1) investing in future capabilities; (2) fielding key capabilities; (3) adapting a geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable defense posture; and (4) reinforcing partnerships. See U.S. Department of Defense, *Secretary of Defense Speech, IISS Shangri-La Dialogue: "A Regional Security Architecture Where Everyone Rises"* (Republic of Singapore: May 20, 2015).

¹⁴An effective national strategy does not have to be described in a single document. For example, we have previously considered the effectiveness of a framework of strategy documents and presidential directives, as well as effectiveness involving a single strategy document and a plan. See GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Observations on National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-03-519T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2003).

¹⁵Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 3, 2012).

- **Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).**¹⁶ According to DOD guidance, the QDR articulates a national defense strategy consistent with the broader government-wide *National Security Strategy* by defining force structure, modernization plans, and a budget plan allowing the military to successfully execute the full range of missions within that strategy.¹⁷ The 2014 QDR referred to the rebalance to the Pacific as a part of sustaining U.S. presence and posture abroad to better protect U.S. national security interests.
- **National Military Strategy (NMS).**¹⁸ The 2015 NMS described how DOD would employ military forces to protect and advance U.S. national interests. The NMS provided focus for military activities by defining a set of military objectives and concepts used by the combatant commanders and others. The 2015 NMS referenced the rebalance to the Pacific as part of a national military objective. The NMS was informed by the QDR.
- **Guidance for the Employment of the Force (GEF).**¹⁹ According to joint doctrine, the GEF provides direction to combatant commands for operational planning, force management, security cooperation, and posture planning.²⁰ The GEF is the method through which the Secretary of Defense translates strategic priorities in the QDR and other strategy documents into direction for operational activities. The GEF is described in joint doctrine as an essential document for combatant command planners as it provides the strategic end states for the deliberate planning of campaign and contingency plans.
- **Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP).**²¹ The JSCP is the primary vehicle through which the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff directs

¹⁶Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014* (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 4, 2014).

¹⁷See Joint Pub. 5-0, at II-3; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3100.01C, *Joint Strategic Planning System*, at GL-5 (Nov. 20, 2015). The *National Security Strategy* is prepared by the executive branch for Congress, outlining major U.S. national security concerns and how the administration plans to address them using all instruments of national power.

¹⁸Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015: The United States Military's Contribution to National Security* (June 2015).

¹⁹Department of Defense, *Guidance for the Employment of the Force* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2015) (S//NF).

²⁰See Joint Pub. 5-0, at II-3.

²¹Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3110.01J, *2015 Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP)* (Sept. 25, 2015) (S).

the preparation of joint plans. The JSCP provides military strategic and operational guidance to combatant commanders for the preparation of plans based on current military capabilities. The JSCP tasks combatant commanders to develop campaign, contingency, and posture plans and translates requirements from the GEF and other guidance into prioritized military missions, tasks, and plans. The JSCP is informed by the GEF and the NMS.

- **PACOM 2015 Theater Campaign Plan (DRAFT) (TCP).**²² Campaign plans, such as PACOM's TCP, focus on the combatant command's steady-state or daily activities and operationalize combatant command theater strategies. According to joint doctrine, joint planning draws from tasks identified in the GEF and JSCP and campaign plans should focus on the combatant command's steady-state activities. These include ongoing operations, military engagement, security cooperation, deterrence, and other shaping or preventive activities. Campaign plans provide the vehicle for linking steady-state shaping activities to the attainment of strategic and military end states.

In January 2018, DOD announced its new *2018 National Defense Strategy* that cited as the department's principal priorities the long-term strategic competition with China and Russia. The strategy also stated that concurrently the department would sustain its efforts to deter and counter rogue regimes such as North Korea and Iran, defeat terrorist threats to the United States, and consolidate gains in Iraq and Afghanistan while moving to a more resource-sustainable approach. In February 2018, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs notified GAO that although DOD continues to prioritize the Asia-Pacific region, the rebalance to the Pacific is no longer U.S. policy.²³

²²Concerning PACOM's Theater Campaign Plan, we reviewed portions of the plan that DOD identified as relevant to and illustrative of the command's efforts to implement the rebalance. Those portions were as follows: 2015 Theater Posture Plan; Theater Security Cooperation Plan; Allies and Partners Line of Effort; and Maritime Line of Effort Plan.

²³The *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* notes that enduring coalitions and long-term security partnerships, underpinned by alliances and reinforced by allies' webs of security relationships, remain a priority, and lists strengthening alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific as one such effort.

DOD Strategy Documents Associated with Rebalancing to the Pacific Collectively Included Most of the Desired Elements of an Effective National Strategy

Six DOD strategy documents that helped guide the rebalance to the Pacific collectively included most of the desired elements of an effective national strategy.

We have previously reported that effective national strategies incorporate six characteristics, and their associated desired elements.²⁴ Table 1 lists desired elements that we adapted from our prior work and tailored toward our review of the six DOD strategy documents.²⁵

²⁴See [GAO-04-408T](#); GAO, *Influenza Pandemic: Further Efforts Are Needed to Ensure Clearer Federal Leadership Roles and an Effective National Strategy*, [GAO-07-781](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 14, 2007); and GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Strategy to Counter Iran in the Western Hemisphere Has Gaps That State Department Should Address*, [GAO-14-834](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 29, 2014). Joint doctrine describes military planning processes and documents that generally include elements and information that are similar to the desired elements of an effective strategy we identified. For example, both GAO's desired elements and DOD joint doctrine underscore the importance of defining the desired results (or "end state") against which a strategy's success can be measured; identifying the tasks necessary to accomplish a mission; managing resources; and defining the problem to be addressed. See *generally* Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Aug. 11, 2011).

²⁵For example, we limited our scope to how rebalancing strategy related to other DOD strategies, and added the term rebalancing to the descriptive element listed in the table. Additionally, we further refined some existing elements for clarity as we conducted our assessment, such as adding a definition of rebalancing as an important key term.

Table 1: GAO’s Selected Set of Desired Elements and Associated Characteristics for an Effective DOD Strategy

Characteristic	Selected Desired Elements for Each Characteristic
Purpose, scope, and methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies the impetus that led to the strategy being written, such as a statutory requirement, mandate, or key event • Discusses the strategy’s purpose • Defines or discusses key terms, major functions, mission areas, or activities the strategy covers • Definition of “rebalance”
Problem definition and risk assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes a detailed discussion or definition of the problems the strategy intends to address • Includes a detailed discussion of the causes of the problem • Includes a detailed discussion of the operating environment • Addresses a detailed discussion of the threats the strategy is directed toward • Discusses the quality of data available, e.g., constraints, deficiencies, and unknowns
Goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the overall results desired (i.e., an “end state”) • Identifies strategic goals and subordinate objectives • Identifies specific activities to achieve results • Identifies specific tasks to achieve results • Addresses priorities • Addresses milestones • Addresses output-related performance measures • Addresses outcome-related performance measures • Identifies the process used to monitor and report on progress • Identifies limitations on progress indicators
Resources, investments, and risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies what the strategy will cost • The sources (e.g., federal, international, and private) of resources or investments needed for addressing gaps • The types of sources or investments needed (e.g., budgetary, human capital, information technology, research and development, contracts) • Addresses where resources or investments should be targeted to balance risks and costs • Addresses resource allocation mechanisms • Identifies risk management principles and how they will aid implementing parties in prioritizing and allocating resources
Organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses who will be implementing the strategy • Addresses lead, support, and partner roles and responsibilities of specific federal agencies, departments, or offices (e.g., who is in charge during all phases of the strategy’s implementation) • Identifies which organizations will provide the overall framework for oversight and accountability • Addresses mechanisms and/or processes for parties to coordinate efforts both within DOD and with other agencies • Identifies the process for how conflicts will be resolved
Integration and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses how the rebalance strategy relates to other DOD strategies, goals, and objectives

Source: GAO analysis based on [GAO-04-408T](#) and other previous work. | GAO-18-192

We found these six DOD strategy documents that collectively guided the rebalance to the Pacific included, to varying degrees, 24 of the 31 desired

elements we determined as being the most relevant to an effective strategy for the rebalance. For example, as a set, the six strategy documents contained a detailed description of the operating environment in which activities for the rebalance were to take place and included references that described the relationship of the rebalance to the Pacific to other strategies, goals, and objectives. The strategy documents referenced their purposes and, in unclassified and general descriptions, the threats that the strategies were to address including long-range missile threats and weapons of mass destruction. Collectively, the strategy documents referred to selected types of resources needed, such as the deployment of ships and aviation assets, and who would be implementing the strategies.

We were, however, unable to find any reference to 7 of the 31 elements in any of the six strategy documents. For example, 2 of the 7 missing elements were:²⁶

Lack of a documented, consistent definition of the rebalance to the Pacific. Based on our systematic review, we found that none of DOD's six strategy documents issued from 2012 to 2015 included a definition of the rebalance to the Pacific that described the rebalance's key terms, major functions, mission areas or activities. Further, DOD officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Joint Staff, and the U.S. Pacific Command involved in planning and implementing the rebalance to the Pacific were unable to identify a definition for the rebalance to the Pacific in the strategy documents, and consequently could not provide a definition that was in use consistently across the department. During discussions about the absence of a definition, these PACOM officials told us that all PACOM activities were rebalance activities, even activities that were underway before the President's announcement to rebalance. Senior DOD policy officials referred us to the speeches of senior administration officials given since the President's 2011 address to derive the definition of the rebalance. However, as noted earlier, after the President's speech in 2011, there were a number of

²⁶The other five missing elements that were not included in the strategy documents were: the impetus that led to the strategy being written, such as a statutory requirement, mandate, or key event; a detailed discussion of the causes of the problem; output-related performance measures; limitations on progress indicators; and what the strategy will cost. We have previously reported that the more detail that a strategy provides, the easier it is to implement and to achieve its goals. However, we have also reported that it is unrealistic to expect all national strategies to provide details on each element. Further, some of these elements may also be addressed by other means, such as identifying costs in a budget.

pronouncements from senior administration officials that varied over time. The lack of consistent attributes to a strategy can make it difficult for policy makers to assess its effectiveness and accountability.

Lack of a documented end state for the rebalance to the Pacific.

Based on our systematic review, we found that none of DOD's six strategy documents from 2012 to 2015 identified an end state for the rebalance to the Pacific. Identifying the end state is a desired element associated with establishing goals and objectives for effective strategies and plans. Joint doctrine also states that military planners must know where to look for the guidance to ensure that plans are consistent with national priorities and are directed toward achieving national security goals and objectives.²⁷

A national strategy that identified the end state of the rebalance could distinguish new efforts from the longstanding U.S. military presence in the region, and the associated increase in resources to support the post-2011 rebalancing. For example, we found a lack of clarity concerning the end state for the rebalance. DOD officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Joint Staff, and PACOM—whom we interviewed because they were involved in planning and implementing the rebalance to the Pacific—said that they were unaware of an end state for DOD's efforts to rebalance. The same officials told us that there was no foreseeable end state because, as long as the Asia-Pacific region was important to the U.S., the focus would remain on the region. However, officials from different military service components told us that their individual services had an end state for their service-specific activities to support the rebalance. For example, officials from U.S. Army Pacific told us that they had completed their service's rebalance. They stated that they achieved the end state with the completion of force posture changes and that some efforts supporting rebalancing had begun before rebalancing was inaugurated. In contrast, a Marine Corps official in the Pacific reported there was no end state for rebalancing. According to the official, Marine Corps activities such as posture realignments supported rebalancing, but these longstanding activities were ongoing prior to the President's announcement to rebalance.

Moreover, we found a lack of an awareness of a command-wide end state for rebalancing and coordination among the various military service activities in support of rebalancing. It was unclear how service-defined

²⁷Joint Pub. 5-0, at II-1.

end states could have been fully integrated or prioritized for funding without a consistent overall end state for DOD's overall effort. In such instances, a department-wide defined end state could have helped with the allocation of resources because the most important priorities would be known.

A clear and consistent definition for rebalance and the identification of an end state, as well as the inclusion of the other 5 missing elements, could have better positioned decision makers to effectively plan, manage, and assess DOD's progress toward rebalancing efforts to the Pacific. According to DOD officials from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy responsible for policy for the rebalance to the Pacific, the speeches by senior administration officials between 2012 and 2015 supplanted the need to identify and document a definition of the rebalance or an end state in a strategy document. However, as noted earlier, these statements included varying descriptions of the strategy and objectives over time. According to a DOD official from an office with department-wide performance management responsibilities, defining the rebalance to the Pacific and identifying the initiative's strategic objectives, or end state, were both important for establishing accountability and measuring progress. For instance, a definition could have helped those charged with implementation to distinguish activities essential to operationalizing the strategic guidance to rebalance from those activities that were routine or peripheral to that effort.

Further, knowing the end state could have helped management make the best use of resources, enable the assessment of progress toward a particular goal, and as described in joint doctrine, facilitate the development of strategic and military objectives. In moving forward in the Asia-Pacific region, considering the identification of strategic end states (one of the desired elements of an effective national strategy that is also discussed in joint doctrine) —as well as the other missing elements— could help position DOD to achieve its objectives in the region.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review. DOD had no comments.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Defense; the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; the commander of the U.S. Pacific Command; the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the Secretaries of the military departments. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you have any questions about this report or need additional information, please contact me at (202) 512-5431 or RussellC@gao.gov. Contact points for our Office of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix II.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cary Russell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "C".

Cary Russell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

List of Committees

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
The Honorable Dick Durbin
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
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Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To determine the extent to which the Department of Defense (DOD) has developed strategy documents to guide the rebalance to the Pacific that include desired elements of an effective national strategy, we conducted a search of the literature, from January 2010 to July 2015, to identify official statements on, guidance for, and studies of DOD's implementation of the rebalance to the Pacific. We reviewed department guidance, such as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructions and joint publications, to understand DOD's processes and procedures for developing and disseminating guidance and strategic plans. We also interviewed DOD officials from numerous organizations listed below who were involved with planning, providing guidance or implementing the rebalance to the Pacific to identify DOD's rebalance efforts and whether a strategy or strategies existed that focused on or included the rebalance. The organizations contacted included:

- Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and Chief Financial Officer
- Office of the Deputy Chief Management Officer, Deputy's Management Action Group
- Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs
- Assistant Secretary of Defense for Logistics and Materiel Readiness
- Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans and Capabilities
- Director of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation
- Joint Chiefs of Staff
- U.S. Air Force
- U.S. Army
- U.S. Marine Corps
- U.S. Navy
- U.S. Pacific Command
- U.S. Army Pacific
- U.S. Marines Corps Forces, Pacific

- U.S. Pacific Air Forces
- U.S. Pacific Fleet
- U.S. Transportation Command

Based on these interviews and written responses to questions we submitted to the officials associated with these organizations, officials identified documentation and speeches that they indicated informed DOD organizations about implementing the rebalance. Also, based on this information, we found that there was not a single strategy or plan that provided guidance for or outlined DOD's implementation of the rebalance to the Pacific. Instead, DOD officials from multiple offices identified a number of strategy documents that guided activities associated with the rebalance to the Pacific, including government-wide documents.¹ Based on our interviews with U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) and DOD officials, we focused our review on the six selected strategy documents, issued between 2012 and 2015, that these officials considered relevant and representative of DOD's previous strategy to implement the rebalance to the Pacific. Those six strategy documents are described earlier in the main report.

We reviewed and analyzed these six strategy documents to determine whether, as a set, they included the 31 desired elements of the associated key characteristics of an effective national strategy. Our prior work on effective national strategies included examples of desired elements that we adapted and tailored toward our review of DOD strategy documents. We selected 31 desired elements as most relevant to DOD's rebalance effort and for systematically reviewing DOD's strategy

¹The multiple offices included the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Joint Staff, and the U.S. Pacific Command.

documents associated with the rebalance. These elements and associated key characteristics are described in table 2 below.²

Table 2: GAO’s Selected Set of Desired Elements and Associated Characteristics for an Effective DOD Strategy

Key Characteristic	Selected Desired Elements for Each Characteristic
Purpose, scope, and methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies the impetus that led to the strategy being written, such as a statutory requirement, mandate, or key event • Discusses the strategy’s purpose • Defines or discusses key terms, major functions, mission areas, or activities the strategy covers • Definition of “rebalance”
Problem definition and risk assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes a detailed discussion or definition of the problems the strategy intends to address • Includes a detailed discussion of the causes of the problem • Includes a detailed discussion of the operating environment • Addresses a detailed discussion of the threats the strategy is directed toward • Discusses the quality of data available, e.g., constraints, deficiencies, and unknowns
Goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the overall results desired (i.e., an “end state”) • Identifies strategic goals and subordinate objectives • Identifies specific activities to achieve results • Identifies specific tasks to achieve results • Addresses priorities • Addresses milestones • Addresses output-related performance measures • Addresses outcome-related performance measures • Identifies the process used to monitor and report on progress • Identifies limitations on progress indicators

²See GAO, *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004); and GAO, *Influenza Pandemic: Further Efforts Are Needed to Ensure Clearer Federal Leadership Roles and an Effective National Strategy*, [GAO-07-781](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 14, 2007) for a list of examples of desired elements that we adapted for our review of DOD strategy documents. In 2004, we identified these examples of desired elements and characteristics by consulting statutory requirements pertaining to particular strategies, as well as legislative and executive branch guidance for other national strategies. In addition, we reviewed the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, general literature on strategic planning and performance, and guidance from the Office of Management and Budget. We also gathered published recommendations made by national commissions chartered by Congress, by our past work, and by various research organizations that have commented on national strategies. Since 2004, we have used these examples of desired elements to assess and report on several national strategies, such as those related to combating terrorism, rebuilding Iraq, improving citizens’ financial literacy, public diplomacy, and addressing potential pandemics. See the Related GAO Products page at the end of this report for information concerning these reports.

Key Characteristic	Selected Desired Elements for Each Characteristic
Resources, investments, and risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies what the strategy will cost The sources (e.g., federal, international, and private) of resources or investments needed for addressing gaps The types of sources or investments needed (e.g., budgetary, human capital, information technology, research and development, contracts) Addresses where resources or investments should be targeted to balance risks and costs Addresses resource allocation mechanisms Identifies risk management principles and how they will aid implementing parties in prioritizing and allocating resources
Organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses who will be implementing the strategy Addresses lead, support, and partner roles and responsibilities of specific federal agencies, departments, or offices (e.g., who is in charge during all phases of the strategy's implementation) Identifies which organizations will provide the overall framework for oversight and accountability Addresses mechanisms and/or processes for parties to coordinate efforts both within DOD and with other agencies Identifies the process for how conflicts will be resolved
Integration and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses how the rebalance strategy relates to other DOD strategies, goals and objectives

Source: GAO analysis based on [GAO-04-408T](#) and other previous work. | GAO-18-192

To determine whether as a set these strategy documents included the desired elements of an effective national strategy, we reviewed each strategy document using a scorecard method, using the following steps:

- First, we developed scorecards with a two-level scale of “address” and “did not address.” We used a binary scale of “address” or “did not address” and scored a passage as “address” if it included any part of an element description in order to provide the widest latitude in determining whether the selected passage included the specific element. Also, we used 31 desired elements from the six characteristics to make the comparison because these elements provided more specificity than the broad six characteristics.
- Second, analysts reviewed all of the selected passages from each strategy document and determined whether they were relevant to understanding the rebalance to the Pacific in order to reach agreement on which passages they would consider in the comparison to the desired elements. The readers agreed upon the inclusion and exclusion of passages before assessing whether these passages included the desired elements.

- Third, two analysts reviewed the relevant passages in each strategy document related to the rebalance and determined whether or not the passages included the element. The analysts used the scorecards to score each passage.
- Fourth, upon completion of the independent scoring process for each strategy document, the analysts compared their respective scores and reconciled any differences, thereby reaching a consensus on the final score. As needed, a third analyst facilitated reconciliations where there was a difference in the assessment reached by the individual analysts and documented the consensus results.
- Lastly, upon completion of scoring, the team compiled and summarized the results.

To further corroborate our systematic review of the six strategy documents, we asked officials from DOD organizations responsible for the Asia-Pacific region a standard set of related questions. We asked officials these questions in order to obtain DOD's perspective regarding the applicability of using the selected desired elements and associated key characteristics in reviewing these specific DOD strategy documents.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2015 to May 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

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Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, key contributors to this report were Guy LoFaro, (Assistant Director), Pedro Almoguera, Patricia Donahue, Richard Powelson, Paulina Reaves, Michael Shaughnessy, and Stephen Woods.

Related GAO Products

Combating Terrorism: Strategy to Counter Iran in the Western Hemisphere Has Gaps That State Department Should Address. [GAO-14-834](#). Washington, D.C.: September 29, 2014.

U.S. Public Diplomacy: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight. [GAO-09-679SP](#). Washington, D.C.: May 27, 2009.

Influenza Pandemic: Further Efforts Are Needed to Ensure Clearer Federal Leadership Roles and an Effective National Strategy. [GAO-07-781](#). Washington, D.C.: August 14, 2007.

Financial Literacy and Education Commission: Further Progress Needed to Ensure an Effective National Strategy. [GAO-07-100](#). Washington, D.C.: December 4, 2006.

Rebuilding Iraq: More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve U.S. Goals. [GAO-06-788](#). Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2006.

Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism. [GAO-04-408T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 3, 2004.

Combating Terrorism: Observations on National Strategies Related to Terrorism. [GAO-03-519T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 3, 2003.

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