

## 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](mailto:RussellC@gao.gov).

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## WARFIGHTER SUPPORT

### 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.