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BUDGET REQUEST BEGINS SHIFT TOWARD A MORE “BALANCED” DEFENSE POSTURE

Today’s release of the Obama Administration’s FY 2010 budget request signals a new direction for the Department of Defense. While the top-line budget figures and many of the programmatic decisions have already been released, the detailed budget unveiled today provides some clues as to how the new administration plans to remake the Defense Department. It begins the process of rebalancing the DoD’s portfolio of programs and activities to align them better with the national defense strategy.

The President’s budget request represents a 4 percent increase over the base budget enacted for FY 2009, or 2.9 percent if adjusted for inflation. While this is comparable with the previous administration in terms of the level of funding, there are several substantive differences. First, it moves many items that were previously funded through supplemental appropriations, such as cost associated with increasing the end strength of the Army and Marine Corps, into the base budget. Second, it shifts funding away from a number of programs and adds to others, putting a renewed focus on irregular warfare in general, and meeting the challenges faced today in Iraq and Afghanistan in particular. Third, it changes the allocation of funding among the Services from levels that had been relatively stable since the early 1990s, with the Navy receiving the greatest increase. Finally, it includes projections for the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for future years—something the Bush administration had resisted doing.

In response to the budget release, Andrew Krepinevich, President of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, said, “On balance, I believe Secretary of Defense Gates’ recent decisions as reflected in the budget released today will enhance our overall military capabilities. Hopefully this is the start of a much-needed debate on the state of the nation’s defense posture.”

Todd Harrison, Fellow for Defense Budget Studies at CSBA, noted, “Overall, I think this is a good start toward rebalancing the defense budget to focus more on the threats we face today and better match resources with strategy. In preparing this budget, Secretary Gates made a number of difficult decisions, and that has cleared the way for the QDR to better focus on some of the major outstanding issues that remain.”

CSBA released an update today (attached) which compares this year’s budget request to the previous budget and provides more detailed analysis of significant changes.

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The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) is an independent policy research institute established to promote innovative thinking about defense planning and investment strategies for the 21st century.