



President Barack Obama outlined substantial cuts in military spending over the next decade when he made a rare appearance to the Pentagon last week. The message: We're going to use the peace dividend to provide more domestic spending.

He said his administration would not repeat the mistakes made after World War II and Vietnam when defense reductions left the military ill-prepared. But what he wants to do is shift from our current two-war capability to a "win-spoil" plan that maintains the capability to fight and win one regional conflict while spoiling the military aspirations of another adversary in a different theater.

Specifically, he wants the Pentagon to focus on Asia-Pacific. This presupposes an ability to predict and control the actions of possible enemies, discounting the common-sense view that the world is dynamic and filled with uncertainty — and a significant number of bad actors.

Responding to the new plan, U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo., a Marine Corps combat veteran and member of the House Armed Services Committee, urged the administration to consider military spending reductions that achieve major budget cuts without compromising national security. "I believe that we can responsibly cut defense spending without compromising capability," he said, "but changing our strategy from an ability to simultaneously fight two conflicts to only one compromises our security as a nation."

Rep. Coffman has been a critic of the top-heavy Pentagon. "The Navy has more admirals than ships and the other services are just as top-heavy," he said. "I'll be looking for specifics to see whether this effort to streamline the military to reduce cost goes far enough."

As an example, he noted that the U.S. spends an inordinate amount to defend South Korea and asked why we shouldn't ask Seoul to increase its financial support.

Meanwhile, the defense budget could shrink by more than 30 percent in the next decade, down to 2.7 percent of GDP in 2021 from 4.5 percent last year. That would put U.S. outlays at 1940 levels — when the American military was ill-equipped to enter World War II.

We hope thoughtful members of Congress on both sides of the aisle will be careful not to gut our nation's ability to defend our citizenry. After all, that's the first responsibility of our national government.

[*The Pueblo Chieftain*](#)
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