

# Obama unveils strategy for 'leaner' US military

Sets Asia-Pacific region as top priority

BBC ONLINE

The US military will become "leaner" while maintaining superiority as it switches focus to the Asia-Pacific region, US President Barack Obama said on Thursday.

In a rare appearance at the Pentagon, he unveiled a far-reaching defence review under which thousands of troops are expected to be axed.

The tide of war was receding and the US must renew its economic power, he said.

The strategy is designed to accommodate at least \$450bn in Pentagon cuts over the next decade.

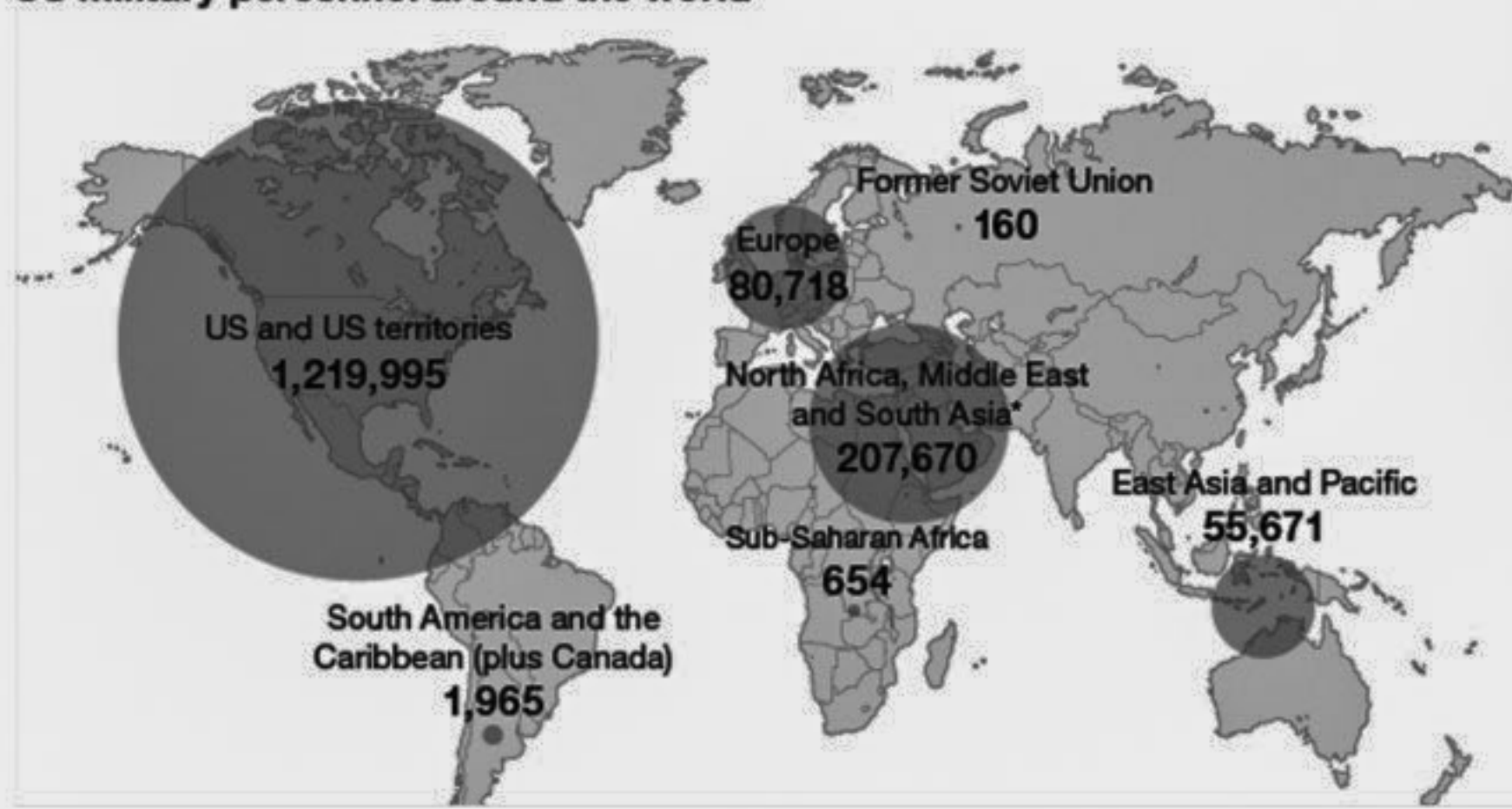
The defence budget could also lose another \$500bn at the end of this year after Congress failed to agree on deficit reduction following a debt-ceiling deal in August.

"So yes, our military will be leaner," Obama told reporters, "but the world must know - the United States is going to maintain our military superiority with armed forces that are agile, flexible and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats."

No specific cuts to troop numbers or weapons programmes were announced on Thursday - those are to be presented as part of the federal budget next month.

But a 10-15% reduction to the US

US military personnel around the world



- ⇒ 0-15% reduction to forces in a decade
- ⇒ Focus shifts to Asia-Pacific region
- ⇒ Aims to cut \$450b in military budget

Army and Marine Corps is being considered over the next decade - amounting to tens of thousands of troops, Obama administration officials have told US media.

Anticipating criticism from his Republican rivals in an election year, the president stressed that the defence budget would still grow, but at a slower pace.

Joined by Defence Secretary Leon Panetta, Obama said the US was "turning the page on a decade of war" and faced a "moment of transition".

"Even as our troops continue to fight in Afghanistan, the tide of war is receding," he said, with military top brass on the stage behind him.

The president said the new strategy would end "long-term nation-building with large military footprints". The Pentagon would instead pursue a national security strategy based on "smaller conventional ground forces".

Obama said in November on a visit to Canberra, Australia, that the Asia-Pacific region was now a top priority for the US. That speech was seen as a challenge to the rising regional power of China.

"As I made clear in Australia, we'll be strengthening our presence in the Asia-Pacific, and budget reductions will not come at the expense of this critical region," he told media at the

Pentagon.

Panetta emphasised the military would retain its ability to confront more than one threat at a time, and would be more flexible and adaptable than in the past.

The strategy shifts the Pentagon away from its long-standing doctrine of being able to wage two wars simultaneously.

In 2001, former Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told Congress that strategy was not working.

And when the US was in fact fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the military suffered a manpower shortage.

# Suu Kyi, Hague in tune on lifting Myanmar sanctions

REUTERS, Yangon

Foreign Secretary William Hague and Myanmar's pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, set out similar conditions for the lifting of sanctions imposed on the country under the previous military regime at an historic meeting yesterday.

Western countries are cautiously renewing ties with the civilian government in place since last March and Hague, in the former Burma for a two-day visit, has set out four conditions for the easing of sanctions.

Those are the release of hundreds of political detainees, an end to human rights abuses by the army, an effort to resolve ethnic conflicts and the holding of free and fair elections.

Asked at a news conference what she wanted to see before sanctions should be lifted, Suu Kyi referred to what Hague, standing beside her, had said the day before.

"All political prisoners should be released and there should be all efforts made to put an end to all ethnic conflict within our country. Certainly we would want to see free and fair by-elections," she said.

The news conference was held on the lawn of Suu Kyi's lakeside home, where she spent years under house arrest until her release days after a general election in November 2010.

"I hope we're at a stage where we can say a long-held dream now has a chance of being realised, but there's so much work to be done. The long darkness in which the people of this country have lived may be coming to an end," Hague said.

"I think they're sincere, particularly the president," Hague told the news conference.



Suu Kyi met with William Hague in Yangon

He is the first foreign minister from the former colonial power to visit Myanmar since 1955. The army seized power in a 1962 coup.

The new civilian administration quickly embarked on political and economic reforms last year, to the surprise of many, given the number of former junta officials in its ranks.

Other developed countries are cautiously seeking to engage with Myanmar's new rulers, keen to improve living conditions in the country but also to let their companies invest in its rich natural resources, which are already being exploited by Asian countries such as China, Thailand and India.

Suu Kyi, the daughter of the leader of the campaign for independence from Britain, is important because of her influence at home and abroad.

Analysts and diplomats say that if she withdrew her long-standing support for sanctions, that would make it easier for Britain and others to scale down the embargoes.

# SUPREMACY OVER ASIA-PACIFIC: Panetta counts India as a challenge

PTI, Washington

For the second time in less than two months, US defence secretary Leon Panetta has said that the country is facing challenges from rising powers like China and India in Asia in 21st century.

"We have got the challenges of dealing with rising powers in Asia. We have got the challenge of, you know, dealing with countries like Russia, rising countries like India and others," Panetta told PBS News Hour in an interview.

"All of that represents the kind of challenges that we are going to have to deal with in this world of the 21st century," Panetta said.

This is for the second time in recent months that Panetta has identified India as a challenge among rising powers in Asia.

"We face the threats from rising powers -- China, India, others -- that we have to always be aware of and try to make sure that we always have sufficient force protection out there in the Pacific to make sure they know we're never going anywhere," Panetta had said on November 17.

Panetta's remarks came within hours of the Pentagon releasing its defence strategic review which said that the US is investing in long-term strategic partnership with India.



# China warns US on Asia strategy

BBC ONLINE

China's state media yesterday warned the US against "flexing its muscles" after Washington unveiled a defence review switching focus to the Asia-Pacific.

In an editorial, official news agency Xinhua said President Barack Obama's move to increase US presence in the region could come as a welcome boost to stability and prosperity.

But it added: "While boosting its military presence in the Asia-Pacific, the United States should abstain from flexing its muscles, as this won't help solve regional disputes."

Obama also plans \$450bn in cuts to create a "leaner" military. Thousands of troops are expected to be axed over the next decade under the far-reaching defence review.

# US-TALIBAN PEACE TALK: Taliban want US to sent prisoners to Qatar

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan's Taliban insurgents have demanded in negotiations with the US that prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay be transferred to Qatar, an Afghan government spokesman said yesterday.

But President Hamid Karzai's government objects strongly to the move and wants the prisoners sent directly to Afghanistan, presidential spokesman Aimal Faizi told AFP.

The Taliban announced this week that they planned to set up a political office in Qatar, a move seen as a precursor to peace talks with Washington.

At the same time, the hardline Islamists demanded the release of prisoners from the US military detention centre at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba -- but the statement did not specify where they should be sent.

Faizi said his government was in favour of a release of Guantanamo prisoners, "but we don't want them to go directly to Qatar -- our government is strongly against it".

Karzai's government is concerned about being sidelined in the negotiations towards possible peace between the Taliban and the US, and Faizi stressed that it wanted "an Afghan-led transition".

Washington said Wednesday it had taken no decision on releasing prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay to ease the path to negotiations aimed at ending the 10-year war with the Taliban.

# Fighting graft

FROM PAGE 20

"Corruption cases against big shots are withdrawn here exerting political influence, which ultimately encourages low-profile people to indulge in corruption... so, it's quite impossible to check corruption in the country," he told UNB yesterday.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman said absence of the rule of law and good governance is one of the major reasons why corruption is so widespread in the country. "We've good laws to combat corruption, but we never take steps to enforce those. [Then] how will you remove the menace?" he questioned.

Although Bangladesh has made a slight progress in reducing corruption in 2011 scoring 2.7 points in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of Berlin-based Transparency International (TI), the overall experience of the common people shows that corruption did not mark any fall, he said.

Bangladesh's position was 13th from below among the 182 countries included in the TI index, compared to the 12th among the 178 countries in 2010.

According to TIB's household survey 2010, corruption registered a rise during the period compared to previous years. About 84 percent people experienced corruption in 2010 while it

was 66 percent in 2007, he said.

Referring to the survey, the TIB executive director said the common people become the worst victims of corruption in getting services from government sectors.

He also said amendment to the Anti-Corruption Commission Act, culture of parliamentary boycott, non-disclosure of assets by the high and mighty, scope for whitening black money, influence-peddling by public representatives in procurement, land grabbing and recruitment breaking rules, and political influence in the administration and public services are among the reasons behind the widespread corruption in Bangladesh.

He suggested making corruption as a punishable crime so that everyone becomes aware of it. "There's a corrupt political economy. We'll also have to reduce it."

About the TI global report, Dr Iftekharuzzaman said, "Improving score and rank in 2011, Bangladesh still remains in the category of countries where corruption is considered to be of great concern -- remaining well below the threshold of 5 points indicates success in moderate control of corruption. Still, we'll have to go a long way."



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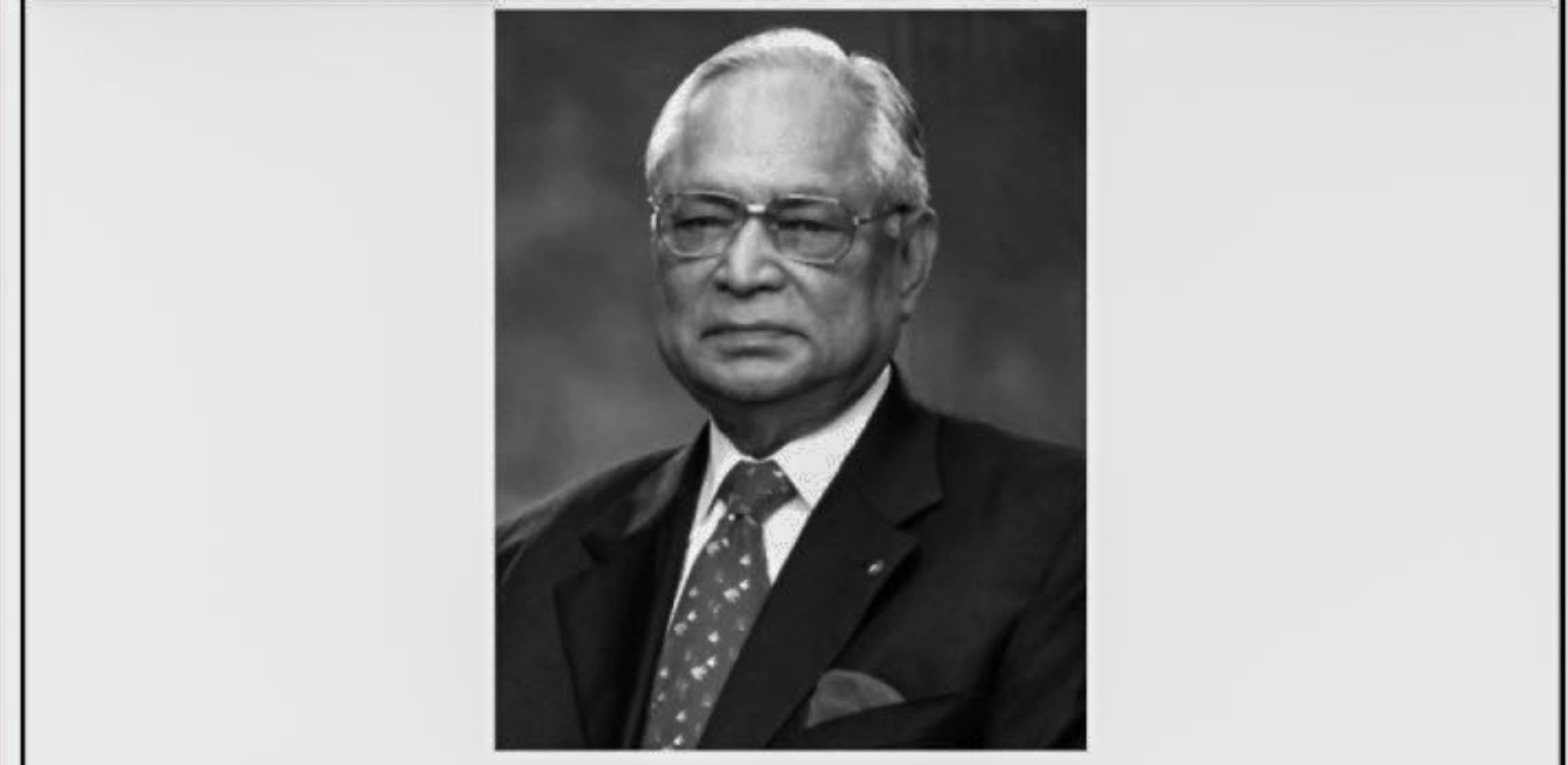
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