CSBA’s Strategic Choices Tool is designed to illuminate these challenges and foster better understanding of the linkages between the U.S. defense budget and force structure. It accomplishes this by asking users to conduct long-term defense planning, develop new operational concepts, assess alternative force structures and postures, identify areas for greater investment or divestment, and evaluate the division of labor between the United States and its allies.

In real terms, defense spending in the FY 2017 future years defense program (FYDP) is 12 percent lower than in the FY 2012 FYDP, the last pre-Budget Control Act (BCA) budget request. These two trends place a premium on understanding key linkages between national strategy, military capabilities, and available resources for policymakers, analysts, and industry.

The Strategic Choices Tool allows users to explore alternative defense investment priorities and develop strategies for future plans and programs, highlighting how future plans should differ from current plans. Driven by the user’s view of threats to national security and the best strategy for addressing them, users rebalance defense force structure and investments over two five-year moves that correspond to consecutive FYDPs. The U.S. tool includes over 1,200 force structure and capability options across twelve areas, including air, sea, ground, manpower, readiness, and R&D.
The Strategic Choices Tool is...

- **Strategy-Driven**: By drawing on actual and projected budget data, the tool offers a unique ability to link strategy-driven choices with real-world spending implications.

- **Straightforward**: It does not involve building a budget from the ground up, which would require detailed programmatic knowledge. Instead, users change the current program of record through an intuitive web-based platform that automatically updates changes to defense spending and force structure.

- **Adaptable and Scalable**: It supports variable financial targets and time periods, multiple users (100+), remote access, exercise-specific options, and new options created before or during an exercise.

While senior military leaders have used the Strategic Choices Tool to develop and assess alternative mixes of major capabilities for future challenges given specific fiscal constraints, others can use the tool to understand the possible defense spending implications of strategic investments and divestments in specific sectors. Users can explore which sectors will be more likely to see spending increases and which are more likely to be bill-payers under alternative strategic capability investment scenarios.

The Strategic Choices Tool has recently expanded to include the defense portfolios of Poland and Japan, allowing users to focus on the specific challenges facing each country individually, as well as challenges confronting their respective alliances. CSBA intends to continue expanding the tool’s international datasets to include other allies and partners in addition to developing datasets for potential adversaries, which will enable dynamic move-by-move strategic competition.

CSBA also plans to enhance the tool by adding visual representations of force structure and spending choices and expanding the reporting and analytic capabilities. Additionally, CSBA intends to develop a condensed version, with the same budget fidelity as the current tool but accessible to a broader audience, allowing users to rebalance the defense portfolio in just a few hours versus over the course of an entire day.

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