

# THE US NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY: US ARMY SUPPORT TO NATIONAL MILITARY OBJECTIVES

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This paper will explain the National Military Strategy (NMS) of the United States and its implications for the US Army. In order to do so we must answer the following questions: what is a National Military Strategy; how this strategy is developed and how it supports other national strategies; what is the current strategy; and how the US Army contributes to achieving the National Military Objectives (NMOs) established in the NMS.

## **What is a US National Military Strategy?**

The National Military Strategy (NMS) is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's contribution to meeting the ends established in the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Defense Strategy (NDS). In addition, the NMS provides strategic direction to the services, especially how the services should work together in the joint environment to meet those ends (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013). The most recent NMS is dated June 2015 and aligned with the NSS dated February 2015. The NMS advises the President and directs the services on how to employ the military instrument of national power, the M in DIME (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic) to achieve national security objectives. In order to effectively provide guidance to the services, the NMS defines the strategic environment. This includes key threats and characteristics of the international political and economic situation that will impact the employment of military force. Furthermore, the NMS establishes National Military Objectives and prioritizes missions that the military can be expected to perform in support of these objectives. Finally, the NMS explains how the Joint Force will support the execution of nationally prioritized missions in accordance with the strategy formulation framework.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to being an internal strategy document for the Armed Services, the NMS also advises the President of what resources will be required to carry

1 Oficial do exército dos Estados Unidos designado instrutor da ECEME.

out the strategy. This, in turn, drives the President’s budget request to the Congress, allowing the legislative branch to make decisions on the proper resourcing to meet the desired ends. Finally, the NMS provides the armed forces with an opportunity to explain to the American public, allies, and adversaries how the Joint Force plans to employ its resources to achieve US defense goals. Thus the NMS establishes the ends, ways, and means that the military will use to achieve US security objectives.

## 2. How is the NMS developed and how does it fit in the mosaic of national strategies?

The National Military Strategy seeks to apply strategic concepts (ways) and military resources (means) to achieve the National Military Objectives (ends). In order to develop this strategy, the NMS relies on guidance from key US strategic documents including the President’s National Security Strategy, the Secretary of Defense’s National Defense Strategy and Defense Strategic Guidance, as well as the congressionally mandated Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). The NMS will then be used to inform operational planning at the regional Combatant Commands, and to provide guidance to the services on capabilities and concepts for joint warfighting. Figure 1 demonstrates how the various strategy documents are nested and how they are translated into military plans.



Figure 1 – National Strategy (Army War College Defense Strategy Course, 2016)

## 3. Current National Military Strategy

The NMS describes the strategic environment as increasingly complex with a rapid diffusion of informational and military technologies that erodes long stand-

ing military advantages. In addition to technology diffusion and global demographic shifts, revisionist states seek to change regional balances of power and the state of the international order.

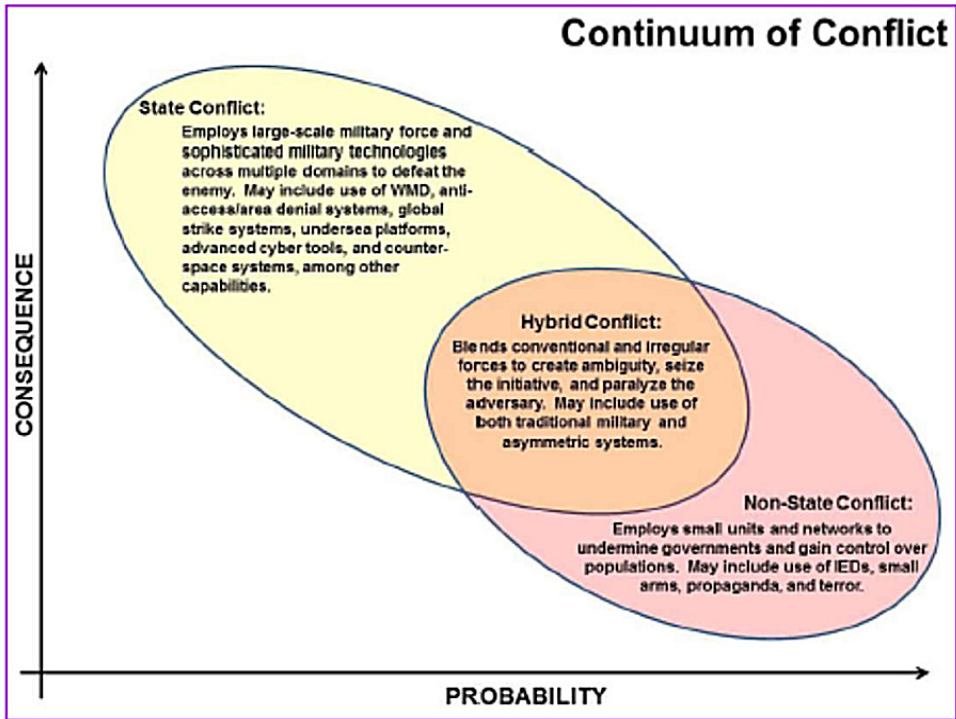


Figure 2 – Continuum of conflict

Chief among these challenges are Russia, Iran, and North Korea (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015). In addition, the strategic environment accounts for and welcomes a rising China, but points out that China also has interests that may conflict with the existing international order. Although none of these actors are likely to directly challenge the US in a conventional armed conflict, the US must be prepared to respond to the security challenges posed by these nations' policies. In addition to challenges presented by state actors, the strategic environment includes challenges posed by non-state actors such as Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), exemplified by Al-Qaida and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).<sup>5</sup> These actors inject additional volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity into the international security environment. In between the conventional state and unconventional non-state actors lies the gray area of hybrid conflict in which state actors may employ elements of non-state forces or tactics to achieve limited political objectives.

This environment presents the military instrument with a wide range of possibilities for conflict. The NMS posits an “integrated approach”<sup>6</sup> to deal with the complex international security environment. This integrated approach yields

three national military objectives (NMO): deter, deny and defeat state based threats; disrupt, degrade and defeat non-state threats; and strengthen our global network of allies and partners.

#### **4. How the US Army Contributes to Achieving National Military Objectives**

The current NMS indicates that the Joint Force will be called upon to deal with high capability state based threats, hybrid threats, and non-state actors in order to meet the National Military Objectives (NMO), the “ends” of the NMS. Of the twelve Joint Force Prioritized missions to meet the NMOs, land forces have a significant role in eleven. The challenges associated with employing the army to meet NMOs is similar to being prepared to play football, hockey, and basketball near simultaneously was equipped with only a rugby team.

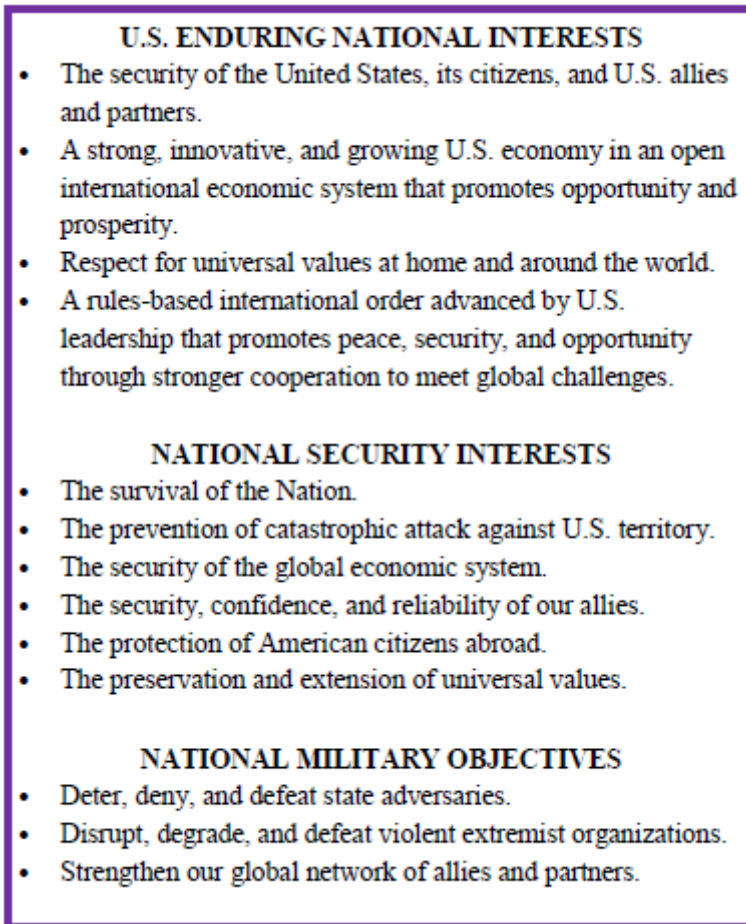


Figura 3 – Strategic Interests and National Military Objectives.

This requires a land force, and specifically an army, that is flexible, adaptable and innovative to deal with a wide range of missions. Therefore US Army must be prepared to compel an adversary, deter aggression and assure allies (Briefing by TRADOC Commander, GEN Perkins at The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014). Compel includes being prepared to defeat an adversary on a high intensity, conventional battlefield with joint and combined arms maneuver. Deter includes preventing adversaries from taking aggressive action against allies in attempts to disrupt the status quo. Assure includes demonstrating to US treaty allies that the US is willing and capable of meeting its international defense commitments. The Army's plan to meet these requirements, the "ways" of the strategy, include increased readiness, development of new operating concepts and doctrine. Finally the "means" of the strategy include current systems and force modernization efforts.

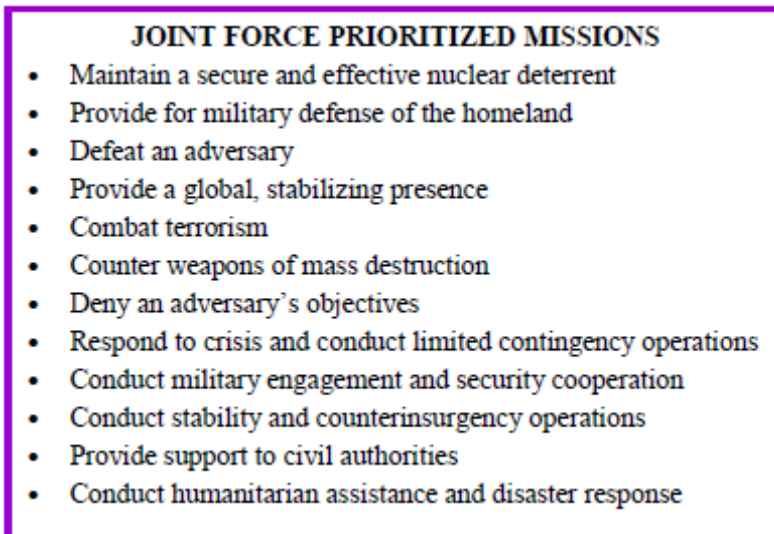


Figure 4 – Joint Force Missions where the US Army has a significant role (National Military Strategy).

### **5. Deter, Deny, Defeat State Adversaries**

In the near term, the US Army must maintain a high level of readiness from crew to brigade combat team (BCT) level in order to deter adversary aggression, deny adversary objectives, and if necessary defeat adversaries in high intensity close combat. To this end, US Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley made readiness is the Army's number one priority. This focus on increased readiness includes additional training at the Combat Training Centers (CTC), exercises and deployments. Increased readiness requirements apply to the Total Army which includes the US Army Reserve and Army National Guard. The reserve component must be prepared to mobilize rapidly in support of large scale conventional



operations. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2017 approved an increase of Army end-strength to 476,000 (Harrison and Todd, 2017) from a planned 460,000. This increased end strength will improve readiness by allowing the army to more rapidly respond to threats due to an increase of combat units available to deploy in support of contingencies. The NMS requires land forces that are trained and prepared to deploy from the continental United States (CONUS) to a theater of operations and win. The recent deployment of a BCT from Fort Carson Colorado to Eastern Europe, as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve, trained units not only to fight, but to deploy over multiple modes of transport into a theater of operations. The US Army plans additional BCT rotations to exercise this deployment capability and to assure NATO allies of US capability and commitment and to deter further Russian aggression on its western frontier (Freeburg, Sydney J., 2017). This will ensure that the US Army is well trained and prepared to deploy to a theater of operations and conduct combined (multinational), joint, and combined arms maneuver. All of these factors contribute to the Army's ability to achieve the NMO of deterring, deny and defeat as part of the joint force.

In addition to readiness, the Army must develop concepts, doctrine, and tactics to adapt to the new realities of the modern battlefield. The challenges most recently exposed on the battlefields of eastern Ukraine include operating in a degraded environment, being subjected to electronic warfare attacks, cyber-attacks, constant observation of enemy unmanned systems and human sources, and under threat of precision targeted and massed enemy indirect fires. New concepts articulated in the Army Operating Concept "Win in a Complex World" (TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1) and Multi-Domain Battle (*Multi-Domain Battle: Combined Arms for the 21st Century*) seek to address doctrine and tactics gaps for operating across the spectrum of operations, with a renewed focus on high end threats. The US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) along with the US Marine Corps is leaning forward on the development of the Multi-Domain battle, publishing a white paper in early 2017. Although the concept is still developing, the decisions made now in doctrine and tactics will have a major impact on the Army's ability to contribute to the success of the NMO of defeating an aggressor state.

In addition to increased readiness and development of new doctrine, the US Army must innovate to use its existing equipment in new ways and develop new systems to defeat emerging adversary tactics and systems. Operations in Ukraine demonstrated the need for improved air defenses, cyber-electromagnetic warfare (CEW), precision target acquisition and massed strike, as well as improved tank and armored infantry fighting vehicles (Karber Phillip, 2017). The US Army is currently developing these systems, but they will not be available in the short term. The replacement systems for the "Big 5" will not be fielded until the 2020s

and beyond. However, in the near term the army is fielding anti-unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) systems, improving tactical CEW systems, and integrating a 30 millimeter automatic cannon on the Stryker wheeled armored vehicle. Continued improvement of legacy systems such as the Stryker and M1 tanks as well as developing new capabilities such as CEW, and high energy lasers will allow the US Army to contribute to achieving NMOs in the land domain.

## **6. Disrupt, Degrade, and Defeat Violent Extremist Organizations**

In addition to being prepared to face state actor adversaries in the near future, land forces must be prepared to operate against networked and asymmetric threats on the lower end of the combat spectrum in current operations. In order to contribute to the disruption, degradation and defeat of VEOs, the Army works as part of a joint, inter-organizational, and multinational team. In support of the NMO, the US Army deployed conventional combat forces, special operations units, advise and assist units and training teams in support of contingency operations and allied countries facing internal VEO threats. A clear example of this is US Army Support to Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria. In support of Operation Enduring Freedom against the VEO threat in Afghanistan, the Army continues to conduct counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, support wide area security missions, and conducts advisory and combat operations in conjunction with Afghan forces.

In addition to combat and advisory deployments in support of operations against violent extremist organization (VEOs), the US Army works with partners and allied forces around the world. Security Cooperation activities include conducting interoperability exercises, providing materiel and support to purchases of US equipment, and conducting training of partner nation military and security forces. Security Cooperation activities not only work to disrupt, degrade and defeat VEOs by building partner nation capabilities and capacity, but also ensure interoperability when conducting combined operations against VEOs. These activities also support efforts related to the third nation military objective of strengthening the global network of allies and partners.

## **7. Strengthen Our Global Network of Allies and Partners**

As stated in the Army Operating Concept, future operations will be not only joint and inter-organizational, but also multinational. This means that the US Army must be prepared to build stronger partnerships with allied countries and be prepared to provide technical assistance and training to partner nation security forces. In order to reach the objective of strengthening the network of allies and partners, the US Army plans to create a Security Force Assistance Academy and six permanent Security Force Advise and Assist Brigades (SFAB) at Fort Benning, Georgia (US Army Public Affairs, 2017). The academy will focus on providing

the necessary advisory skills to work effectively with partner nation forces. The SFABs will be manned with seasoned officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). In addition, these officers and NCOs will have additional training in culture and language required to work with partner nations. The end state will be dedicated units SFAB with better prepared to assist combined arms units because of the level of experience and technical knowledge of combined arms operations at the brigade combat team level.

The Army's network not only includes international partners, but the US interagency as well. The National Military Strategy states that "Success will increasingly depend on how well our military instrument can support the other instruments of national power and enable our network of allies and partners."(NME) Thus, the Army must be prepared to operate in the interagency environment. In order to improve interagency operations, the US Army invites interagency partners to attend Professional Military Education (PME), integrates political advisors at the theater armies, and stations officers in embassies around the world as military Attaches and Security Cooperation Officers.

## **8. Strategic Risk for Ground Forces**

The US Army's contributions to achieving the National Military Objectives are not without risk. There is a tradeoff in the US Army's efforts to meet current requirements. In order to maintain higher levels of readiness and increased end-strength, the Army is prepared to take some longer term strategic risk in terms of force modernization. Almost all of the US Army's major weapon systems are over 30 years old and will not see the possibility of replacement until the 2020s or beyond. This risk becomes considerably greater when faced with an aggressive Russia that has begun to modernize its major systems and apply new technologies in novel ways to legacy systems as evidenced in Russian Army operations in the Ukraine. Russia currently fields main battle tanks with active protection systems (APS) and has integrated unmanned aircraft targeting with legacy rocket artillery systems (Karber, MWI lecture). The US Army currently does not field APS and is ill equipped to face manned and unmanned aerial threats because of a lack of modern short range air defense systems at the Brigade Combat Team level. If the US Army does not address its modernization shortfalls, it may be faced with localized overmatch in close combat with a peer or near-peer adversary.

The primary mitigations of the strategic risk is the high level of training and readiness that the US Army maintains as well as increased forward presence to deter adversaries, and the strength of the joint force. Moreover, incremental improvements in legacy systems as well as small scale deployments of new systems also work to mitigate strategic risk in potential conflict with a peer or near-peer adversary.



## 9. Conclusion

The National Military Strategy is the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff's strategy that articulates how the 'M' in DIME, will support the National Security Strategy. It is developed in a manner that is fully nested with the National Security Strategy and The National Defense Strategy, outlining how the military will support national security objectives. Moreover, the NMS provides clear National Military Objectives that the Joint Force must be prepared to achieve. These NMOs are Deter, Deny and Defeat State adversaries; Disrupt, Degrade and Defeat Violent Extremist Organizations; and Strengthen the Global Network of Allies and Partners. The US Army is well postured within the Joint Force to meet these objectives through ready forces, combat deployments, and security cooperation activities. Although the US Army is prepared to accept some risk in near to medium term modernization, this is largely offset by increased readiness and incremental improvements to legacy systems. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2017 developed some new requirements for the National Defense and National Military Strategies, and both are currently under review (The National Defense Authorization Act of 2017). Based on these requirements the new National Defense Strategy will be published by mid-2017 and the new National Military Strategy will be produced in 2018.

*“The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the United States Government.”*

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