



# National Security Watch

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## The 2011 National Military Strategy: Resetting a Strong Foundation

by Nicholas R. Krueger

### Introduction

The 2011 *National Military Strategy of the United States of America (NMS)* discusses how the Joint Chiefs of Staff intend to employ the military in advancing American interests. Composed in the wake of broader strategy statements such as the *National Security Strategy* and the *Quadrennial Defense Review*, the document serves two main purposes: to assess the global security situation and some emerging forces likely to mold it in the future, and to identify a set of discrete national military objectives that define the main missions to be undertaken by the armed forces.

The international security environment has changed since the last time such a document was produced in 2004—when the war in Iraq was entering just its second year. The U.S. military has been continuously engaged in combat operations for the longest span in its history. This commitment has presented many challenges, foreseen and unforeseen, but the experience has also taught the military important lessons about which competencies are most valuable in the full spectrum of 21st century warfare. In addition, the nation's civilian leaders have substantially shifted their foreign policy priorities toward issues of broadly shared mutual interest, including energy security, climate change, poverty and pandemic disease. Meanwhile, America's adversaries have been innovative: state actors have been arming, nonstate actors have been subverting and the nexus of state and nonstate actors has become even more threatening. The new *NMS* incorporates these recent developments and aims to supply the armed forces with strategic direction for the future.

It should be no surprise, then, that the 2011 *NMS* is markedly different from the previous version. But what is remarkable is that it defines America's defense objectives even more broadly than before. This philosophical shift is potentially problematic because the United States cannot afford, strategically or financially, to pursue every interest equally. It must therefore wisely wield its military capability to make efficient, appropriate use of limited national resources.

### Background

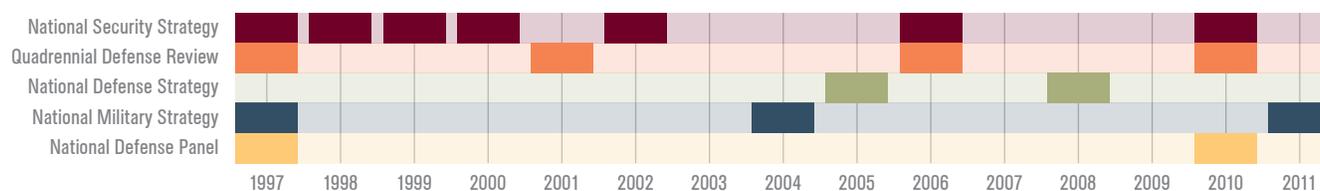
To understand the scope of this document, it is useful to understand how it relates to other institutionalized national strategy statements.

The grandest of these statements is the *National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS)*, authored by the President. Its purpose is very broad: it conveys the global interests and goals of the nation and a general picture of how all elements of national power (including military, diplomatic and economic) will be applied to meeting these requirements. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 clarified that the President is expected to deliver a *NSS* document to Congress annually; in practice, these reports have been delivered regularly but not always annually. The most recent editions were released publicly in 2002, 2006 and 2010.

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## Recent National Security Documents



The *Quadrennial Defense Review* (*QDR*) is the Defense Department’s (DoD’s) most substantial strategy process. Its purpose is somewhat more specific than that of the *NSS*: to “delineate a national defense strategy consistent with the most recent National Security Strategy.”<sup>1</sup> It first appeared as a one-time requirement of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 1997 and became permanent in the NDAA for FY 2000. The most recent *QDR* was delivered on schedule in early 2010. In addition, Congress has twice authorized a one-time national defense panel to provide an independent assessment of the *QDR*—once in 1997 and once in 2010.

In 2005 DoD broke this model and authored a separate *National Defense Strategy* (*NDS*). In a sense, this move split the strategy section from the comprehensive department-wide *QDR* process and expounded upon it. Unlike the *NSS* and *QDR*, the *NDS* is not explicitly codified anywhere in federal law, but DoD has kept this new model of reporting, releasing its second and most recent *NDS* in 2008. This schedule is a convenient way for DoD to update its report on national security strategy between *QDR* cycles.

The *National Military Strategy* (*NMS*), authored by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is yet one step narrower in scope than the *NDS*. Its purpose is to describe, in considerable detail, the global strategic environment, regional threats to specific American interests and asymmetric and transnational threats. Its further purpose is to articulate a detailed set of national military objectives and the elements of military power that will contribute to their achievement. The NDAA for FY 2004 established the *NMS*, previously produced only sporadically, as a biennial report to Congress, but until now, it had not been updated since 2004.

### Major Themes in the 2011 *National Military Strategy*

**Strategic Environment.** The 2004 *NMS* highlighted three main aspects of the security environment that were expected to affect the strategy: (1) a “wider range of adversaries” that would demand new means of deterrence and operational countermeasures; (2) a “more complex and distributed battlespace” spread across the globe and unfamiliar to U.S. forces more accustomed to training for high-intensity combat; and (3) rapid “technology diffusion and access” that permit the proliferation of disruptive capabilities to adversaries.<sup>2</sup>

In the 2011 version, these themes are still important. The strategic environment depicted includes headings of “Nonstate Actors,” “Weapons of Mass Destruction” and “Global Commons and Globally Connected Domains,”<sup>3</sup> all of which loosely fit into the main 2004 categories. Nonstate actors are part of the “wider range of adversaries” from the 2004 *NMS*; weapons of mass destruction certainly count as technology to be denied to certain actors; and the security of “global commons” figures prominently in the 2011 *NMS*. However, there are some significant differences. For instance, “global commons” is defined comparatively narrowly as the “shared areas” of sea, air, space and cyberspace.<sup>4</sup> This definition is a different concept from the “arc of instability”<sup>5</sup> across several sovereign states, which in the 2004 version, described the distributed battlespace. Also, rogue states such as Iran and North Korea are mentioned in this section only in the context of nonproliferation and not explicitly for any other reasons, such as their propensity to sponsor terrorism or engage in unprovoked conventional military aggression.

Additionally, in the 2011 *NMS*, all of these factors are actually subordinated chronologically to two other themes: “demographic trends,” including population growth in the developing world, and “prosperity and security,”<sup>6</sup> a section that cites growing national security risks arising from American national debt, reduced NATO member defense spending and accumulation of wealth in Asia. The mention of these before nonproliferation and transnational terrorism is striking.

**National Military Objectives.** The most fundamental departure from the 2004 *NMS*, however, is the 2011 version’s rewritten set of national military objectives.

## 2004 National Military Objectives<sup>7</sup>

Protect the United States  
Prevent conflict and surprise attack  
Prevail against adversaries  
Shape the future force

## 2011 National Military Objectives<sup>8</sup>

Counter violent extremism  
Deter and defeat aggression  
Strengthen international and regional security

There is certainly some overlap between the two sets. For example, countering extremism certainly contributes to the protection of the United States. Deterrence of aggressors makes surprise attacks less likely. But the disparity between 2004 and 2011 is more than simply reorganization of the same ideas. Together, the changes demonstrate a profound shift in military strategy that accompanies a broader shift in national security strategy.

- **Countering violent extremism.** “The nation’s strategic objective in this campaign,” according to the 2011 *NMS*, “is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates in Afghanistan and Pakistan and prevent their return to either country.”<sup>9</sup> But ultimate victory even against only al Qaeda cannot be achieved in one campaign. Even though the 2011 version acknowledges this, the language committing the United States to victory is cautious: “[W]e will be *prepared* to find, capture, or kill violent extremists wherever they reside *when they threaten* interests and citizens of America and our allies [emphasis added].”<sup>10</sup> It suggests that the plan is not necessarily for America to retain its primary warfighting role but to “enable Pakistan to ultimately defeat al Qaeda and its extremist allies.”<sup>11</sup> Instead of “prevailing” against all of the enemies who threaten American interests, the 2011 *NMS* promises that the military will “counter” them via expanded deterrence and expanded partnerships. The new *NMS* suggests that the definition of victory in this ongoing fight and the military’s role in securing victory have evolved since 2004.
- **Deterring and defeating aggression.** The 2004 *NMS* described not only a “new model for strategic deterrence” focused on maintenance of the nuclear and nonnuclear strike force, active and passive defenses and strong infrastructure to support this force but also a “strategic communication plan” in which combatant commanders were to play central roles.<sup>12</sup> The 2011 *NMS* deterrence section mentions no such strategic communication, reduces the role of the nuclear force and declares that conventional force posture “shall be . . . politically sustainable through visible partnering efforts.”<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the “defeat aggression” section primarily focuses on the growing need to counter enemies’ anti-access and area-denial strategies by securing the future domains of space and cyberspace. In contrast, the two most prominent plans for arresting aggression listed in the 2004 version were the maintenance of a dominant forward-force presence and the doctrine of employing military “preventative missions”<sup>14</sup> to eliminate certain threats before they materialize. Neither concept appears in the 2011 section.
- **Strengthening international and regional security.** In 2004 growth of partnerships was advanced as a means toward achieving such ends as swift defeat of an emerging adversary or the eventual and decisive defeat of terrorism. In the 2011 *NMS*, there are (rightly) many examples of objectives given for each world region that can be advanced through security partnerships, but this version employs a different end-goal approach. Military success is properly measured not by the number or strength of new relationships built but by finite security gains achieved through various means. By presenting objectives as supporting details for what is more accurately process-oriented, the 2011 *NMS* seems to advocate building relationship tools first and then addressing problems with those tools. To be sure, many 21st century security problems cannot be satisfactorily addressed without the existence of strong, new military partnerships, and the 2011 *NMS* does well to increase its attention on building relationships that will surely be vital for resolving yet-unknown security challenges. But it is also crucial that strategy focus on the scope of such efforts and offer guidance for prioritization of campaigns undertaken in pursuit of objectives by answering questions, such as “to what end?” and “how much?”
- **Shaping the Future Force.** The 2004 *NMS* clarified that the transformation of military servicemembers’ skill sets was to be a core means of modernizing military functions and capabilities in four areas: applying force, deploying and sustaining military capabilities, securing battlespace and achieving decision

superiority. Each of these competencies was elaborated upon in some detail.<sup>15</sup> The 2011 *NMS* preserves the focus on growth in full-spectrum capability but also discusses what the force intends to do *for*, in addition to *with*, its people—such as mastering “the challenging upheavals of returning home from war” and focusing more on the “values of diversity and inclusivity,” the “increased costs of health care,” and better “early preventive actions to diminish . . . tragic risks.”<sup>16</sup> In short, the new document maintains a strong approach to growing innovative battlefield leaders but adds guidance about managing the transition of forces from deployment to garrison.

### Implications of a New Philosophical Approach

Taken as a whole, the 2011 *NMS* represents a watershed philosophical shift at the top level of the U.S. military. The “protect, prevent and prevail” vision of victory and its corresponding military strategy of overwhelming specific threats to American interests have morphed into a plan to partner against, deter and counter the threats. It inflates the role of allies such as Pakistan in global campaigns like the war on terrorism. This strategy has the advantage of reducing the likelihood that global campaigns will become unsustainable but has the disadvantage of depending more often on less reliable, politically weaker, militarily inferior allies. As adversaries and various regional competitors zealously rearm, it will be important for the United States to constantly evaluate its military strategy according to evolving circumstances in order to preserve the strategic initiative in the face of emerging threats.

Foreign policy experts broadly agree that the role of the U.S. military has recently shifted fundamentally. According to Dr. Kim Holmes and Dr. James Carafano of the Heritage Foundation, current American foreign policy has coalesced around four main themes:

- “America will ratify more treaties and turn to international organizations more often to deal with global crises and security concerns like nuclear weapons, often before turning to our traditional friends and allies;
- “America will emphasize diplomacy and ‘soft power’ instruments such as summits and foreign aid to promote its aims and downplay military might;
- “America will adopt a more humble attitude in state-to-state relations; and
- “America will play a more restrained role on the international stage.”<sup>17</sup>

Brian Katulis and Nina Hachigian, senior fellows at the Center for American Progress, suggest four similar themes to which American foreign policy is anchored:

- America should lead the world in joint efforts to solve problems that know no borders;
- American national security strategy stresses the importance of international order and the rebuilding and expansion of multilateral institutions;
- America “must champion human rights around the world” but “cannot effectively impose democracy from the outside;” and
- American strength abroad depends on American strength at home.<sup>18</sup>

Only in such an overarching context of reduced priority for employing the military could a *National Military Strategy* claim to redefine *military* leadership as the “enabling [of] whole-of-nation approaches.”<sup>19</sup> (Note that, again, process seems to trump ends; why not enable whole-of-nation *solutions* instead of *approaches*?) The 2011 *NMS* document does a lot of things correctly—especially in the sections where it focuses on the necessity of building interstate infrastructure to combat future, ill-defined threats and continuing to empower the strategic asset of the American volunteer force—but its breadth of purpose presents some challenges.

There are several potential trickle-down implications. First, this type of philosophy does not benefit the defense budget. If military strategy calls for accomplishing mainly those international security objectives that America can perform in a supporting role as a military partner, the priority of defense funding could decrease. During a time when a national budget crisis is generating significant attention in Washington, defense becomes a bigger target of reductions when its fundamental mission changes in this way. It is especially worrisome given the 2011 version’s strongly worded concern about substantial future reductions in global defense expenditures by America’s allies. At the same time, the national security strategy’s ambiguity in articulating limits and priorities for foreign aid has

already started to drive up costs in this area even as the military power that enables the success of such missions is allowed to decline in terms of real capability and its share of the federal budget.

Second, the document's ambiguity begins to harm genuine strategic and tactical capability that still exists, and over time, the potential decrease in such capability could affect hard-won security. An excellent example of this trend is the current decline in the American strategic nuclear force. American nuclear arms have long permitted the U.S. military maximum ability to be a force for good. In Europe, the American nuclear umbrella not only saved allies from the Soviet Union's ambitions but also helped permit conventional disarmament of those allies over time and allowed the United States to build stronger economic and cultural ties among them—all of which combined to make interstate war less likely, regional security much stronger and American conventional forces more available. But in the past few years, the readiness of these forces and the nation's ability to rebuild them in the future have been reduced significantly because their strategic and corresponding fiscal foundations have worn away. Similar effects to general warmaking capabilities could take place if leaders undervalue their contribution to international peace and come to view conventional military power as a relic of the bad old days.

A third major implication of the philosophy underpinning the 2011 *NMS* is that genuine American interests and capabilities do not get pursued as vigorously as they ought. The same ambiguity of limits and priorities that affects the preservation of future capabilities can also blunt the pursuit of current, competing objectives. Seeking to deflect security responsibility to partners could reduce U.S. decision making influence in international proceedings. For example, as long as the United States is primarily conducting the war on terror in Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is certain that operational and tactical decisions will continue to be made based on U.S. security interests. But the plan, as stated in the 2011 *NMS*, to delegate the conclusion of al Qaeda's defeat to the Pakistanis comes at the cost of maintaining full operational control.

### **Focusing the National Military Strategy**

There are a few aspects of the 2011 *NMS* that could be cornerstones of an even more sharply focused military strategy. In discussing combating terrorism, it supports the case, as offered toward the beginning of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, that the "true bedrocks of counterterrorism efforts"<sup>20</sup> include the blending of military power, economic development, governance and the establishment of the rule of law in particular parts of the world. After all, successful American stability operations have long been understood to require the skillful application of all elements of U.S. national power including diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial, intelligence and law enforcement instruments.<sup>21</sup> It promotes taking diplomatic steps and enabling partner capacity (short of war, yet interventionist nonetheless) to reduce potential safe havens and prevent violent extremism from taking root.<sup>22</sup> Discussing the importance of new deterrence measures, it holds that "preventing wars is as important as winning them, and far less costly."<sup>23</sup> Finally, it states the intention of maintaining a military presence capable of "preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear arms."<sup>24</sup>

A more focused strategy does indeed depend on bold U.S. civilian and military leadership; however, American military leadership does not need to be redefined but rather reinvigorated. The United States and its military have led international security efforts for generations now, and its track record of success is far better than any other nation's—largely because of principled, objectives-based leadership. The United States must embrace the fact that its interests are global and its founding principles universal. The first priority should be to reorient the national security framework around the core concepts of protecting, preventing and prevailing against adversaries that aim to destroy the United States. The 2011 *NMS* has rightly recognized that new vehicles of international cooperation are going to be necessary to counter unknown future adversaries. However, it is extremely difficult to predetermine the ways and means of security before objectives are defined. Even so, recent events abroad, such as in Libya, continue to demonstrate that traditional land-based expeditionary military capability is not easily replaced by air power alone or by other instruments of national power. The most central military objectives that must continue to guide the development of American national security policy today and tomorrow are to protect, prevent and prevail against the nation's adversaries.

Regarding the war on terrorism, the primary goal or military objective is ultimate: to permit no attacks against U.S. interests and wipe out or transform the murderous ideology that purports to justify such barbarism. This objective enables action to directly advance core U.S. security interests and creates a strong standard against which

definable progress can be measured. The ultimate goal is grand, but it permits the military to perform the tasks it does best and, in concert with all the other elements of U.S. power, combat transnational terrorism at its source.

Other objectives mentioned in the 2011 *NMS* can be similarly adjusted and means properly fitted to them. Instead of trying to deter more actors from committing more grievous acts against more allies with less visible, less capable and fewer strategic forces, America can more clearly communicate its purpose to use these forces for good. Such communication removes doubt that these forces are safely maintained and kept in a high state of readiness. Foreign aid, security cooperation and international engagement can be prioritized in a manner consistent with the security gains expected to be achieved in specific places, and these tools can be leveraged more consistently to demand evolutionary change in foreign lands that spreads American values and advances liberty. These processes must be executed as they once were: for finite purposes—perhaps grand ones, as the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union once was, but which are defined by some sense of finality—and not only because strengthening others is presumed to be inherently good. The nation can better preserve the existence of its all-volunteer force, provide better care for its veterans and better transform the military into a force of skilled innovators who are made even more capable and more battle-ready than they already are.

Many of these themes were strongly promoted in the 2004 *NMS*, but the changes need not and should not all look backward in history. The 2011 *NMS* suggests several ways in which future institutions might be developed as strong vehicles of military achievement. In particular, bilateral and multilateral partnerships, new international institutions and new sets of international norms can and should be implemented in such areas as the governance of space and cyberspace and in areas of broadly shared mutual interests such as theater and intercontinental ballistic missile defense and the defense of human rights. New military partnerships may be well-suited to usher these in. But these partnerships should be forged with clear purposes, and their existence as tools should not be considered more valuable than the achievement of new gains. Instead, they must be built with foundations in common values.

U.S. military power is only one element of many necessary to ensuring America's national security, and by no means can every 21st century security problem be resolved solely through the application of military force. However, military strategy should continue to orient around a protect-and-defend policy in which today's primary objectives—protection of the United States, prevention of emerging threats to it and prevailing over current adversaries—constitute the starting point, and the ways and means are created around the objectives, instead of the reverse. American military leadership must be integrated with all other elements of American power to provide assertive, principled application of force when other approaches to national and international security are not able to secure American objectives on their own.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Quadrennial Defense Review*, Title 10, *U.S. Code*, Subtitle A, Pt. I, Chapter 2, §118 (b) (1), 1 February 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff. *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington, DC, 2004), 5–6.
- <sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff. *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington, DC, 2011), 3–4.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>5</sup> *NMS* 2004, 5.
- <sup>6</sup> *NMS* 2011, 2.
- <sup>7</sup> *NMS* 2004, 9.
- <sup>8</sup> *NMS* 2011, 4.
- <sup>9</sup> *NMS* 2011, 5.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>12</sup> *NMS* 2004, 12–13.
- <sup>13</sup> *NMS* 2011, 8.
- <sup>14</sup> *NMS* 2004, 13.
- <sup>15</sup> *NMS* 2004, 16–20.
- <sup>16</sup> *NMS* 2011, 16–17.
- <sup>17</sup> Kim Holmes and James Carafano. “Defining the Obama Doctrine, Its Pitfalls, and How to Avoid Them.” *Backgrounder* 2457 (The Heritage Foundation, 1 September 2010), <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/08/Defining-the-Obama-Doctrine-Its-Pitfalls-and-How-to-Avoid-Them>.
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- <sup>19</sup> *NMS* 2011, 21.
- <sup>20</sup> *NMS* 2011, 6.
- <sup>21</sup> “The U.S. Army’s Role in Stability Operations,” Torchbearer National Security Report (Association of the United States Army, October 2006), <http://www.ausa.org/publications/torchbearercampaign/tnsr/Documents/TB-StabOps.pdf>, 8–11.
- <sup>22</sup> *NMS* 2011, 6.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

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