



The 2008 National Defense Strategy: Implications for the United States Army

The security of the United States is tightly bound up with the security of the broader international system. As a result, our strategy seeks to build the capacity of fragile or vulnerable partners to withstand internal threats and external aggression while improving the capacity of the international system itself to withstand the challenge posed by rogue states and would-be hegemony.

2008 National Defense Strategy¹

Introduction

On 31 July 2008, the Secretary of Defense announced a new *National Defense Strategy (NDS)* for the United States. This new strategy is a significant departure from earlier ones in that it emphasizes a shift toward irregular warfare—the violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over relevant populations, employing the full range of military and other capabilities to erode an adversary’s power, prestige and will. While the strategy highlights irregular challenges, it also directs close monitoring of the rising military power of other states. “We must monitor the capabilities required to defeat state adversaries including those armed with nuclear weapons.” This is particularly important for the U.S. Army in its role as the world’s premier landpower.

An Interagency, Joint, Full-Spectrum-of-Conflict Approach to Irregular Threats

The world of today and the future will be marked by a state of persistent conflict. Al Qaeda and other violent extremist groups will continue to menace the United States and friends throughout the world. These groups do not intend to defeat the United States through direct combat; rather, they seek to take advantage of failed and failing states as well as a weak international order to undermine American security and prosperity. Thus, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the illicit drug trade, piracy and ethnic, religious and environmental resource disputes are not only threats in their own right, but are among several of the irregular challenges that violent extremist groups can exploit

against the United States, its allies and the international system as a whole.

Since the threats that the United States faces now and in the near future are irregular, the U.S. military must “display a mastery of irregular warfare comparable to that which it possesses in conventional combat.” Along these lines, in Iraq the U.S. military has shown flexibility in its ability to conduct simultaneous operations throughout the full spectrum of conflict—from limited intervention to major combat operations. Moreover, since the goal is to build capacity among local populations to resist violent extremist groups, U.S. policy must be an interagency effort, relying on other tools in addition to the military, and must include a wide range of organizations such as the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of Agriculture.² According to the *NDS*: “Victory requires us to apply all elements of national power.” However, this interagency, multidisciplinary effort must also be a fully multinational effort, including not only U.S. military and civilian actors, but also host nations, allies, international organizations and other coalition partners.

Given that “U.S. predominance in traditional warfare is sustainable for the medium term given current trends,” the U.S. military must focus its investments on irregular warfare capabilities and examine areas where it “can assume greater risk.” One of the main conclusions of the *NDS* is that in the current international environment, the Long War and other irregular challenges are the greatest threats to American security; the U.S. military must improve its

¹ Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy*, June 2008, p. 6, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/2008%20National%20Defense%20Strategy.pdf>.

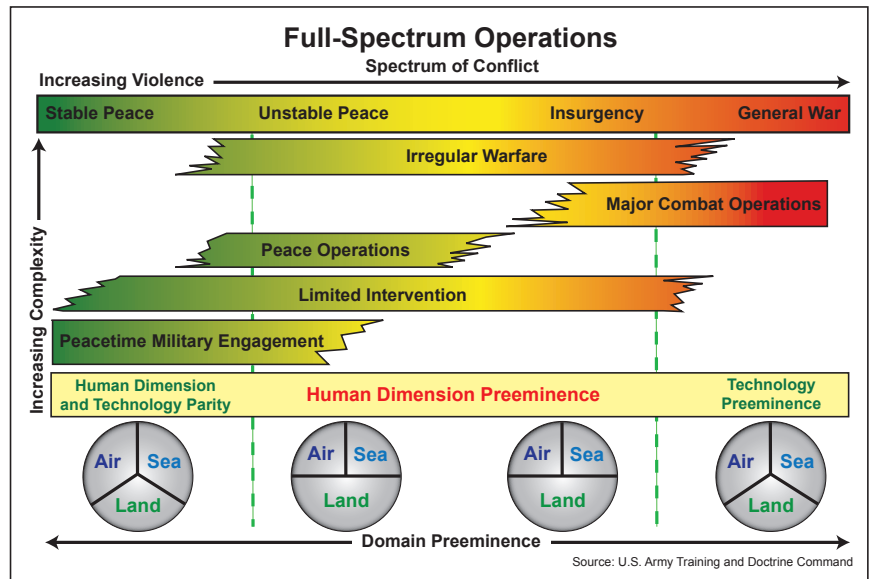
² See AUSA Torchbearer National Security Report “The U.S. Army’s Role in Stability Operations” (October 2006), <http://www.ausa.org/programs/torchbearer/nsr/National%20Security%20Reports/TB-StabOps.pdf>.

capabilities against these irregular threats. Nonetheless, the United States must closely monitor rogue states and the “rising military power of other states.” In fact, in view of the current events in the nation of Georgia, the *NDS* is quite prescient in warning that Russia’s recent aggressive behavior, especially the bullying of its neighbors, suggests that it is “exploring renewed influence, and seeking a greater international role.”³

The 2008 *National Defense Strategy* outlines five objectives for the U.S. armed forces:

1. Defend the Homeland⁴
2. Win the Long War
3. Promote Security
4. Deter Conflict
5. Win the Nation’s Wars

operations. It is vital that the Army ensures that its units and Soldiers have the right capabilities to accomplish the wide variety of operations called for in the *NDS*.



Implications for the U.S. Army

With more than 130,000 Soldiers currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan the U.S. Army is at the forefront of the Long War against violent extremist groups. After overthrowing the Saddam Hussein regime, American ground forces methodically have adapted to the counterinsurgency (COIN) mission. For the near future, the Army will remain in the “central fronts” of Iraq and Afghanistan, in the tens of thousands, to train host nation security forces and assist in the destruction of violent extremist groups. Furthermore, the Army, in the form of large brigade combat teams (BCTs) or more agile Special Forces units, is fully prepared to deploy anywhere around the globe to conduct full-spectrum operations in support of host nations and against violent extremist groups.⁵

The Army’s current focus is on preparing forces and building readiness for COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. **Despite this current and critical mission, the Army also must be ready to provide combatant commanders with the forces and capabilities they need for operations anywhere around the world, ranging from peacetime military engagement to major combat**

To do so requires:

1. a significant increase in the Army’s endstrength, to maintain and to sustain the all-volunteer force;
2. sufficient funding and dwell time at home station to repair, replace and recapitalize equipment as well as retrain and revitalize Soldiers and their units for future deployment and other contingencies; and
3. continuous modernization to maintain a technological advantage over any enemy the Army faces.

In summary, the new *NDS* argues for an Army that possesses full-spectrum capabilities as well as the ability to operate in a joint/interagency/multinational environment. Currently the Army is out of balance as the current demand for land forces exceeds the sustainable supply. At this time, the Army is restoring that balance through a campaign plan that preserves the all-volunteer force, restores necessary depth and breadth to Army capabilities and builds essential capacity for the future. **While conflict can be resolved only by applying all elements of national power, expeditionary- and campaign-capable landpower remains the critical military component.**

³ For more information on the U.S. Army’s role in Georgia and the former Soviet Union, see AUSA’s National Security Watch “U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army: A Model of Strategic Flexibility” (23 June 2008), http://www.ausa.org/about/ilw/Documents/NSW_08-2.pdf.

⁴ For more information on the U.S. Army’s role in homeland defense, see AUSA’s National Security Watch “U.S. Army North/5th Army: Building Relationships to Defend the Homeland and Meet Emerging Regional Challenges” (15 February 2007), http://www.ausa.org/pdfdocs/NSW07_1.pdf.

⁵ Currently 244,000 Soldiers are deployed or forward-stationed in nearly 80 countries overseas (Headquarters, Department of the Army, “Army Global Commitments,” 19 August 2008).