

# Strategy Research Project

## Strategically Misaligned in a Competitive World

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## Strategically Misaligned in a Competitive World

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### Abstract

National Security Strategy 2017 (NSS 2017) establishes the way forward to serve national interests and meet strategic objectives in today's environment. It characterizes the global environment as one of competition with the great powers of the People's Republic of China, Russian Federation, and the rogue states of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Islamic Republic of Iran. As with any national strategy, NSS 2017 must correctly align ends, ways, and means to increase the probability of success in advancing United States (U.S.) interests. Joint doctrine provides a lens to analyze and evaluate NSS 2017. Analysis reveals that this strategy faces a significant problem. NSS 2017 implies that the Army be prepared to simultaneously deter and defeat the great powers and rogue states, but the Army lacks the capacity to accomplish this without incurring a high level of risk. As such, an adjustment is required to bring NSS 2017 into proper strategic alignment, with Army resources, against the demands of U.S. National interests and the objectives which drive it.

## **Strategically Misaligned in a Competitive World**

The recently released National Security Strategy (NSS 2017) establishes the way forward concerning national interests and strategic objectives in today's environment. As with any national strategy, security professionals must properly align NSS 2017 to increase the probability of success. This strategy characterizes the global environment as one of competition and promises American response.<sup>1</sup> This competition negatively affects relations with the great powers of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russian Federation (RF), and the rogue states of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). This strategy attests that the nation must pursue the interests of "preserving peace through strength" to meet the challenge of competition.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, NSS 2017 declares, "We must deter and if necessary, defeat aggression against U.S. interests."<sup>3</sup> In support of this vision, the military national instrument of power is an essential resource in which to confront aggression against national interests. As the nation's "primary land warfare component" and largest branch of the armed forces, the Army is a critical component of any strategic vision involving armed conflict.

This paper discusses a Joint perspective on strategy, provides an overview of the National Security Strategy, and utilizes the four steps of Operational Design to assess NSS 2017. Analysis identifies this strategy's ambiguous direction and guidance, which impacts the United States (U.S.) Army. NSS 2017 implies that the Army prepare to deter and defeat the Nation's competitors simultaneously. However, Army capacity prevents it from accomplishing this without incurring a high level of risk.<sup>4</sup> If the Army is unable to support this strategy, then NSS 2017 is strategically misaligned. As such, an

adjustment is required to bring NSS 2017 into proper strategic alignment, with Army resources, against the demands of U.S. National interests and the objectives which drive it.

### Thinking About Strategy

Joint doctrine provides an excellent model to formulate and assess strategy. First, Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Planning (JP 5-0) defines strategy as a “prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives.”<sup>5</sup> Second, JP 5-0 builds on the definition by modeling strategy’s three essential components of ends, ways, and means.<sup>6</sup> It continues to describe strategy as, “the art of determining a future state or end, determining the operational approach or way, and identifying the resources or means necessary to reach the intended end state.”<sup>7</sup> Although intended for the operational or theater level, this framework can adapt easily to analyze NSS 2017. In this treatment, ends are the interests that the nation seeks to advance, ways serve as the medium in which to accomplish these interests, and means represent the resources employed to accomplish these interests.

Military officers utilize measurable criteria (adequacy, acceptability, and feasibility), contained in Joint doctrine, to assess operational plans.<sup>8</sup> However, security professionals, both civilian and military, can employ Joint doctrine to evaluate the National Security Strategy. First, adequacy determines the ability of this strategy to advance national interests.<sup>9</sup> Second, acceptability evaluates the strategy’s potential to “balance cost and risk with the advantage gained.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, feasibility assesses the strategy’s aptitude to achieve national strategic objectives “within the established time, space, and resource limitations.”<sup>11</sup>

Operational Design provides an analytical methodology to determine the potential effectiveness of any given strategy.<sup>12</sup> JP 5-0 describes Operational Design as “a process of iterative understanding and problem framing and a methodology to conceive of and construct viable approaches to operations and campaigns.”<sup>13</sup> This methodology consists of four focus areas: “understanding strategic direction, understanding the operational environment, framing the problem, and developing operational approaches.”<sup>14</sup>

Using Operational Design to analyze the National Security Strategy will accomplish several objectives. First, this appraisal will determine the national interests that are relevant to the U.S. Army. Second, this analysis will identify and evaluate the approaches or ways involving the Army. Third, this appraisal will discuss the characteristics of the current environment. Fourth, this evaluation will examine the resources that the Army requires to advance national interests. Finally, this assessment will discern relevant problems and offer informed solutions.

#### Overview of National Security Strategy 2017

The National Security Strategy serves as the highest tier of strategy for the United States and the executive branch releases it with the purpose of synchronizing the national instruments of power to advance American interests. It provides strategic direction to federal departments and agencies, including the Department of Defense (DoD) and is overarching rather than specific. This strategy establishes not only national priorities, but those of U.S. foreign policy as well. NSS 2017 identifies American interests and provides clarifying guidance for specific geographic regions, such as the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East.<sup>15</sup>

NSS 2017 provides broad descriptions of the ends, ways, means, and risk. Civilian and military defense leadership uses this initial guidance to determine the best ways to achieve the established security objectives. NSS 2017 provides the foundation from which the DoD builds a family of strategies and plans, of which the most significant are the National Defense Strategy, the National Military Strategy, and the Joint Strategic Campaign Plan. These documents refine priorities and provide further direction to the U.S. military. The joint force utilizes the “integrated planning process” to confront the “complex challenges” dispersed throughout the globe.<sup>16</sup> Finally, these documents serve as the catalyst for Combatant Commanders (CCDRs), Service Secretaries, and Service Chiefs to conduct internal assessments and to characterize their status through posture statements and hearings with the Congressional Armed Service Committees.

#### Apply Design to NSS 2017: Step 1 – Analyzing Strategic Direction and Guidance

Operational Design emphasizes the necessity of understanding strategic direction and guidance, for it provides “purpose and focus to the planning of the employment of military force.”<sup>17</sup> There are multiple ends and myriad ways supporting the American interests listed in NSS 2017, yet one interest generates the highest level of involvement with the U.S. Army. NSS 2017 states, “[W]e can, together with our allies and partners, deter and if necessary, we will defeat aggression against U.S. interests.”<sup>18</sup> This principle interest is the maintenance of an environment characterized by peaceful competition, adherence to the current international order, and the reduction of the potential for “violent conflict.”<sup>19</sup> However, if the United States is engaged in armed conflict, then the conflict is resolved with a decisive American victory.<sup>20</sup>

This analysis divides the strategic ways, requiring significant Army involvement, into three sections. First, NSS 2017 focuses on defense cooperation with U.S. allies, which reflects the partnerships that the Army maintains with allied militaries. Second, this strategy prioritizes the deterrence of rival powers. The DoD defines deterrence as, “The prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefit.”<sup>21</sup> Third, NSS 2017 concentrates on the defeat of these rivals, if deterrence fails. Ironically, the DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms does not define the term defeat at the strategic level.

The Joint force lacks a common understanding of the objective or effect of defeat, due to the DoD’s lack of a definition clearly specifying the term defeat. This ambiguity can generate confusion among the Combatant Commanders and Joint Task Force Commanders responsible for engaging potential adversaries to advance U.S. interests. The Secretary of Defense or Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff should determine measures of effectiveness, pertaining to strategic defeat, to prevent the potential for confusion. However, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1-02, Terms and Military Symbols offers an appropriate definition. This publication describes defeat as “a tactical mission task that occurs when an enemy force has temporarily or permanently lost the physical means or the will to fight.”<sup>22</sup> This paper offers an adjustment of the tactical definition to establish a suitable strategic definition of this term. Consider a strategic definition of defeat as, causing a state or non-state actor to lose the means or will to engage in armed conflict, temporarily or permanently.

The U.S. Army has enormous responsibilities in both deterrence and defeat, even as joint doctrine does not yet define this latter term. As the Nation's principal land force, the Army is an essential element to accomplish the deterrence or defeat of any adversary. Consequently, Army strategic and senior leaders must determine if the institution maintains the capacity and capability necessary to prevent hostile action through deterrence or to defeat a threat through armed conflict.

NSS 2017 does not offer an alternative to its specified tasks of deterrence and defeat. Notably, these tasks reside at opposite ends of the spectrum. On one end, the United States seeks to "deter" or to prevent acts of "aggression against U.S. interests."<sup>23</sup> On the other, the Nation expects to "fight and win" in conflict.<sup>24</sup> NSS 2017 does not contain a task that resides between the extremes of prevent and win. Moreover, this strategic document does not attribute a temporal aspect or suspense requirement to the execution of these tasks. As such, significant implications result. If NSS 2017 is not refined, then the Army should assume three expectations. First, the Army will attempt to prevent acts of aggression, from each competitor, to support the task of deterrence. Second, if deterrence fails and war ensues, then the Army should cause each adversary to lose either the means or will to continue to engage in armed conflict. Third, the Army should prepare to deter or defeat each of the Nation's competitors simultaneously.

NSS 2017 also lists the national interest of "the preservation of peace through strength" which also affects the U.S. Army.<sup>25</sup> This interest focuses on the improvement of military capacity and the development of military capabilities "to defeat enemies, consolidate military gains, and achieve sustainable outcomes that protect the American people and our vital interests."<sup>26</sup> The advancement of this interest involves the

development of Army capabilities, procurement, and modernization.<sup>27</sup> Army strategic and senior leaders are responsible for identifying critical capabilities and requirements. However, these leaders lack the authority to approve the required funding and the ability to manufacture the associated equipment and munitions. As such, the legislative branch and private industry are the necessary agents to help achieve the strategic objectives of “renewing America’s competitive advantages and renewing capabilities.”<sup>28</sup>

Against these objectives, NSS 2017 also divides the globe into several regions (Indo-Pacific, Europe, Middle East, and South and Central Asia) specifying area or theater interests, along with strategic ways involving the U.S. Army.<sup>29</sup> This strategy discusses an underlying strategic end and way serving as common denominators to each region. This common strategic interest is the “sustainment of favorable balances of power” and the shared way is “a strong commitment and close cooperation with allies and partners.”<sup>30</sup> NSS 2017 implies that the desired regional balance of power favors U.S. interests over the great power competitors of the PRC and RF, and the rogue states of the DPRK and IRI.

First, NSS 2017 isolates the Indo-Pacific region listing “deterrence and defeat” as strategic ways to achieve this pro-U.S. balance of power and a forward military presence as the primary means.<sup>31</sup> Although not mentioned in this strategy, the United States arguably has a legal obligation derived from its mutual defense treaty with the Republic of Korea (ROK). Yale Law School asserts that the U.S. understanding of the treaty (Article III) includes the Nation will “come to the aid of the ROK” if attacked by an “external” actor, which includes the DPRK.<sup>32</sup>

Second, NSS 2017 emphasizes a “strong and free Europe” as a “vital” interest to U.S. foreign policy.<sup>33</sup> A stated political way to achieve this is by “countering Russian subversion and aggression”, and this has implied military involvement.<sup>34</sup> The strategic way involving the military is that the United States will “fulfill its defense responsibilities and continue to strengthen deterrence.”<sup>35</sup> Notably, U.S. regional defense responsibilities involve commitments to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance, which potentially extends beyond deterrence to include the term of “collective defense.”<sup>36</sup> Consequently, a conventional attack against a NATO ally could serve as the catalyst for U.S. military action in the European Area of Responsibility (AOR).

Third, NSS 2017 lists a Middle East free of jihadist terrorists and absent of a hegemon hostile to the United States, as among the nation’s interests in that region.<sup>37</sup> In addition to strengthening the nation’s “long term partnership with Iraq” as a strategic way, the United States will “retain an American military presence to protect the nation and allies from terrorist attacks and to preserve a favorable regional balance of power.”<sup>38</sup> NSS 2017 implies that this forward military presence will remain enduring for the near future. As such, there is a persistent demand in military means and generates an opportunity cost.

Fourth, NSS 2017 specifies South and Central Asia as a region of focus. The strategy lists “countering terrorist threats” and preventing nuclear proliferation as ways to support U.S. regional interests.<sup>39</sup> The primary strategic way concentrates on U.S. military efforts geared toward the “support of the Afghan government and security force in their fight against the Taliban, al-Qaida, ISIS, and other terrorists.”<sup>40</sup> The stated strategic regional end is that of “enduring peace.”<sup>41</sup> Significantly, U.S. Special

Operations Command (USSOCOM) lists counter-terrorism as a core activity, but this mission is not among the Army's designated DOD functions.<sup>42</sup> However, the Army possesses the largest amount of special operations forces in the DoD. As such, the Army provides the bulk of counter-terrorism forces in USSOCOM, which generates a considerable opportunity cost. Hence, USSOCOM requires substantial Army support, in order to fulfill its responsibility as the lead Functional Combatant Command for counter-terrorism operations across the globe.

Finally, NSS 2017 provides "purpose and focus to the planning of the employment" of the Army.<sup>43</sup> This strategy identifies the national interests that the Army, as a member of the Joint force, will strive to advance. Additionally, NSS 2017 contains myriad ways and tasks, specified and implied, for the Army to accomplish. Next, the strategy lists critical regions, in which the Army will conduct operations. As such, Army strategic and senior leaders must develop an understanding of these environments.

#### Apply Design to NSS 2017: Step 2 – Framing the Environment

The next step in Operational Design is to frame the operational environment. NSS 2017 provides a relevant description of the strategic environment. NSS 2017 is an open source document, in which the Commander in Chief directly communicates his perception of the strategic environment. Notably, President Trump used the federal agencies, at his disposal, to determine the environmental assessment contained in NSS 2017.

NSS 2017 labels the contemporary environment as a "competitive world" and contends that the perception of "American weakness invites challenge."<sup>44</sup> Significantly, it directly identifies the competitive actors. First, it states that "China and Russia challenge America power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American's security and

prosperity.”<sup>45</sup> It characterizes these great powers as striving to render external “economies free and less fair” and of “increasing their military power” to expand their influence.<sup>46</sup> The strategy highlights China’s militarization of several islands in the South China Sea, which “endanger the free flow of trade, threaten the sovereignty of other nations, and undermine regional stability.”<sup>47</sup> Additionally, NSS 2017 identifies the PRC’s “rapid military modernization program” meant to “limit U.S access to the region.”<sup>48</sup> Next, the RF “continues to threaten” U.S. NATO allies, particularly in the Baltic States situated at its western border.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Russia persists in its military build-up to destabilize U.S. and NATO influence.<sup>50</sup> The RF’s “invasions of Georgia and the Ukraine” enhance its legitimacy as a credible regional threat to U.S. regional interests.<sup>51</sup> Due to the activities and agenda of the PRC and RF, the Commander in Chief characterizes the operational environment as requiring containing regional great powers that actively seek to overturn U.S. influence in their respective regions and to establish themselves as regional hegemons.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, these competitors have aspirations of global influence and seek to alter the current rules-based system, established by the United States, following World War II.

In addition to the great power competition, NSS 2017 also classifies three actors as “the scourge of the world”, who pose both regional and potential global threats.<sup>53</sup> Two state actors, the DPRK and IRI, actively seek to “destabilize” their respective regions and “threaten the U.S. and its allies.”<sup>54</sup> First, NSS 2017 criticizes the DPRK for its pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.<sup>55</sup> Second, it denounces the IRI for exporting state sponsored terrorism throughout the operational environment.<sup>56</sup> In addition, it condemns them for ballistic missile development and for aspiring to resume

its nuclear weapons program.<sup>57</sup> Third, NSS 2017 identifies the non-state actors of jihadist terrorist groups as the last scourge. It emphasizes these groups as a persistent threat that “maintains global reach with established branches in strategic locations.”<sup>58</sup> Finally, the rogue states of the DPRK and IRI not only “violate all principles of free and civilized states” but also pursue a nuclear agenda that the United States cannot afford to ignore.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, Operational Design analyzes the contemporary environment to develop strategic and senior leader understanding. NSS 2017 describes this “competitive world” as an environment in which China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran will continue to challenge U.S. interests.<sup>60</sup> These challenges could manifest in war or through activities short of armed conflict. Conflict generates problems and Operational Design identifies the problem which could prevent the Army from accomplishing the tasks listed in NSS 2017.

#### Apply Design to NSS 2017: Step 3 – Framing the Problem

Security professionals must evaluate strategy through measurable criteria to determine its potential for success. Moreover, an evaluation identifies areas of risk associated with strategy. Additionally, an assessment will identify potential strategic shortfalls. Finally, evaluating NSS 2017 through the criteria of acceptability, adequacy, and feasibility will determine the alignment of America’s national security strategy.

In evaluating the acceptability of NSS 2017, one must consider the audience. Political leaders determine the acceptability of policy. The strategic decision makers are primarily the Commander in Chief, with the support of the Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Service Secretaries, Service Chiefs, Secretary of State, National Security Advisor, and Congress. Notably, the Constitution entrusts the

institutions, of the legislative and executive branches, with the highest levels of political power and authority over war and peace; this revolves around the power of authority. First, Article I of the Constitution empowers the Congress with the authority to tax the American citizenry, to spend taxable revenue, to raise and support Armies, to provide and maintain a Navy, to make laws, and to pass necessary legislation on declarations of war.<sup>61</sup> Second, Article II of the Constitution bestows the President of the United States with command over the armed forces, the power to negotiate treaties, oversight over the execution of laws, and ultimately with the executive power required to fulfill the duties of the office.<sup>62</sup>

Most of the strategic ends and ways, contained in NSS 2017, are acceptable to both the legislative and executive branch, apart from one area. The Congressional Democratic minority viewed an increase in defense spending as highly unfavorable. This was evident in the recent budget dispute involving defense spending, immigration, and tax reform, that resulted in a brief federal government shut down. Eventually, the Congress agreed to pass the spending bill and President Trump signed this legislation into law on February 9, 2018.<sup>63</sup> Details include an “increase of the FY 2018 defense budget to \$700 billion—an increase of \$108 billion, or 18 percent, above the proposed 2017 budget—and the FY 2019 budget to \$716 billion.”<sup>64</sup> The defense budget has grown by 23% or \$133 billion since President Trump took office.<sup>65</sup>

The U.S Army is an essential enabler of the military related strategic ways, specified in the national security strategy and contributes to its adequacy. Consider its recent work, discussed during the May 2017 Senate Armed Services (SASC) Army Posture Hearing, in defense cooperation with allies and activities throughout the world.

Robert Speer (Acting Secretary of the Army) and General Milley (Army Chief of Staff) testified, “Over 187,000 Soldiers support combatant commander requirements worldwide.”<sup>66</sup> First, the Army supplies nearly 34,000 Soldiers to support Russian deterrence efforts and partner with NATO allies in the European Area of Responsibility (AOR).<sup>67</sup> Second, the Army contributes approximately 71,000 Soldiers to deter the DPRK, partner with regional allies, oppose violent extremist organizations, and to assist in providing disaster relief in the Pacific AOR.<sup>68</sup> Third, the Army deploys 42,000 Soldiers to “support the defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, deny enemy safe havens in Afghanistan, deter Iran, assist with the stability of Jordan, and build partner capacity with our partners” in the Central Command AOR.<sup>69</sup> Fourth, the Army deployed 9,000 Soldiers to participate “in over 250 security cooperation events, exercises, and missions in more than 30 countries” throughout the African Command AOR.<sup>70</sup> Fifth, the Army provided 4,000 Soldiers to support regional partners, target extremist and criminal networks, and to provide disaster relief in the Southern Command AOR.<sup>71</sup> Finally, each of these partnerships increased allied defense capabilities, build capacity, and advance interoperability in regions occupied by competitors.

This defense cooperation, coupled with the forward presence, has a positive impact on deterrence. The United States seeks to prevent acts of aggression by competitors and rogue states.<sup>72</sup> Hence, the presence of aggression is a metric to evaluate the adequacy of strategic deterrence. Currently, overt aggression by competitor conventional forces is virtually non-existent. For the moment, Russian military westward expansion towards Europe has ceased, since the United States began to deploy the regionally aligned Army forces into the Baltic States. The United

States and ROK prevented North Korean conventional aggression, since the Army has maintained regional combat power following the armistice in 1953.<sup>73</sup> So too has Taiwan maintained its independence of the PRC, as the Army maintains a dispersed presence in the ROK and the Hawaiian Islands. Also, the United States restrains Iran from committing a conventional attack against the State of Israel and the Republic of Iraq, by way of Army presence spread through the region. In these cases, deterrence is adequate in preventing overt aggression. However, it is highly unlikely that the presence of the Army is the sole causal factor, but it certainly constitutes a corollary element.

Conversely, competitors and rogue states exhibit negative behaviors that seek to degrade U.S. interests. First, the RF occupied the Ukraine and Crimea and they refuse to withdraw. Also, Russian interference in the last U.S. presidential election is the subject of a contentious U.S. investigation. Second, the DPRK continues to pursue a nuclear weapons program, despite the U.S. regional presence and imposing of sanctions. Third, the PRC illegally seized several islands in the South China Sea and is in the process of establishing military anti-access and area denial assets, despite U.S. and allied protest. Fourth, the IRI continues to export terrorism and seeks to erode the stability of Iraq. Although unfavorable, these actions generally fall under the threshold of “military conflict”, which the United States actively seeks to avoid.<sup>74</sup> As such, the U.S. strategic way of deterrence appears inadequate in preventing negative behavior short of the threshold of armed conflict.

Assessing the way of strategic deterrence to advance the U.S. interest of peaceful competition is complex, for it contains two opposite ends of the spectrum. Currently, the prevention of armed conflict among U.S. regional allies, great powers,

and rogue states is highly effective. However, the effectiveness of preventing negative behavior, below the threshold of armed conflict, is low. Moreover, these actions have the potential to escalate and could eventually result in armed conflict with multiple competitors. Therefore, these high and low extremes cause an overall assessment of adequacy as medium, in employing the way of strategic deterrence to advance U.S. regional interests.

Currently, the total Army (Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve) has 31 brigade combat teams (BCTs), which are the “basic building blocks for the employment of Army combat forces.”<sup>75</sup> Previous armed conflicts, involving the Army, reveal that the nation has employed an average of 21 BCTs to engage in a sole regional conflict.<sup>76</sup> Considering the troop conversion of approximately “3.5 BCTs per division, the Army deployed 21 BCTs in the Korean War, 25 BCTs in the Vietnam Conflict, and 14 BCTs in the Persian Gulf War”; this equates to 21 BCTs.<sup>77</sup> In 2016, General Milley, the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), stated that the Army “can now and we will ... retain the capability to rapidly deploy, and we will destroy any enemy anywhere, any time.”<sup>78</sup> In support of the CSA’s assertion, the Army possesses the current capacity to individually defeat either the PRC, DPRK, RF, or the IRI. As such, the probability of U.S. failure is likely low. Hence, deploying the Army to defeat a single adversary is adequate and feasible.

However, the U.S. Army faces a significant problem if directed to defeat multiple adversaries simultaneously. The Heritage organization warrants that the Army currently possesses the capacity to fight a single adversary, but that simultaneous conflict with multiple adversaries increases the probability of failure to high.<sup>79</sup> NSS 2017 lists China,

Russia, North Korea, and Iran as the Nation's competitors and potential adversaries.

This strategy does not provide an alternative to the task of defeat, nor specify a general period required to accomplish this task. Due to ambiguity, NSS 2017 implies that the Army be prepared to deter and defeat the Nation's multiple competitors simultaneously. However, the Army lacks the capacity to engage in simultaneous conflict against multiple adversaries without incurring a significant level of risk.

Risk is associated with any strategy and in any activity involving armed conflict. History reveals that victory in war is elusive, despite the confidence voiced by the CSA and Heritage Organization. Consider, for example, the U.S. conflicts with North Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. The U.S. Army employed ample combat power, both in personnel and in equipment, against these adversaries. Moreover, the Army received support, from the other services, against these enemies that the Nation initially considered inferior by comparison. In certain respects, the conditions for armed conflict with these actors were ideal. Army end strength was high in the case of Korea and Vietnam, it maintained a technological advantage against all three, the defense budget increased to support each of these conflicts, and the Nation's industrial complex mobilized in support. However, the defeat of these adversaries proved elusive.

Conversely, potential U.S. armed conflict against China, Russia, North Korea, or Iran generates a new litany of challenges, which increase risk. The United States considers these actors as near peer competitors, which reduces the gap in a technological advantage. Likewise, these competitors possess either nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, or chemical weapons. Next, the Army's current end strength is low in comparison to that of previous conflicts. Consequently, the Army's defeat of any of

these single adversaries will likely prove challenging and dictates a reasonable level of risk. Finally, additional conditions potentially cause this level of risk to escalate.

Ponder the possibility of simultaneous conflict against multiple competitors. This includes any combination, of the four actors, that NSS 2017 designates as a competitor. The Army's simultaneous engagement of multiple competitors significantly increases the level of risk. Furthermore, it reduces the probability of success in armed conflict. Notably, NSS 2017 provides for this possibility.

Strategic advisors must understand this problem to properly address the issue and to make informed recommendations. NSS 2017 is highly acceptable to decision makers. Defense cooperation and the U.S. Army forward presence contributes to the adequacy of strategic deterrence, in preventing armed conflict between U.S. forces abroad, allies, great power competitors, and rogue states. Although, this strategy appears inadequate in preventing negative behavior, short of armed conflict, from China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. Additionally, directing the Army to defeat a sole adversary is likely adequate and feasible. NSS 2017 implies that the Army should prepare to deter or defeat each of the Nation's competitors simultaneously. Conversely, the Heritage organization warrants that the Army lacks the historically required capacity to fight a simultaneous conflict against multiple adversaries.<sup>80</sup> If this is true, then the strategy focusing on defeat is not feasible. Thus, the lack of Army capacity to defeat multiple adversaries renders NSS 2017 strategically misaligned. Finally, this problem must be summarized.

A problem statement frames the problem by limiting considerations and causes the problem to become manageable. As such, this facilitates the development of

recommendations and solutions. A problem statement concerning the current national strategy follows: NSS 2017 implies that the U.S. Army be prepared to simultaneously deter and defeat the great powers and rogue states, but the Army lacks the capacity to accomplish this without incurring a high level of risk. Finally, Operational Design requires approaches or options to resolve this problem.

#### Apply Design to NSS 2017: Step 4 – Developing Approaches

Strategy must align in the areas of ends, ways, and means to increase its probability of success. If the strategy is misaligned, then a strategic problem exists. One can view strategy through two views. One view states: the desired ends drive strategy and the required means must be resourced accordingly. A second view maintains: the available means determine the scope of the ends. Both views are supportive of alignment and serve as different approaches in resolving the strategic problem.

Policy option one surmises that resources are determined by strategic ends and ways. If the interests and strategic ways are the nation's fixed standards, then the resources need to support them accordingly. If the U.S. government desires for its Army to defeat multiple adversaries simultaneously, then it should increase the number of BCTs to match the historic number required to increase the probability of success.<sup>81</sup> Also, this provides additional combat power, for the Geographic Combatant Commander, to employ against a single adversary, which would further reduce strategic and operational risk.

Policy option two concludes that resources determine the scope of strategic ends and ways. If the U.S. government limits defense spending to the manning of 31 Army BCTs, then strategic leaders should adjust the way of strategic defeat to something more feasible. Due to the Army's current capacity, the simultaneous defeat of multiple

adversaries is highly unlikely. However, the Army's strategic disruption of multiple adversaries is highly probable, given current resources. Furthermore, this is feasible.

The DoD dictionary does not offer a definition of disruption. However, Army tactical doctrine defines it as, "A task to upset an enemy's formation or tempo, interrupt his timetable, or cause enemy forces to commit prematurely or attack in piecemeal fashion."<sup>82</sup> Disruption is the art of hindering an adversary. If an enemy possesses either superior capacity or capability at a specific location and time, then tactical forces often employ disruption. A military commander can use disruption to buy time by delaying an adversary's momentum, until the friendly force can mass and employ adequate combat power. Simultaneous armed conflict with multiple strategic competitors likely constitutes superior adversarial capacity. The Commander in Chief can employ the U.S. Army to simultaneously defeat an adversary and disrupt the momentum of another competitor. A suitable strategic definition for disruption is: hindering the ability, of a state or non-state actor, to achieve objectives pursued through conflict, either to end those actions on their own or delay until sufficient forces are ready.

Each of these policy options are adequate, but drastically differ in feasibility and acceptability. First, this analysis rates policy option one as low in feasibility and acceptability. Prior to becoming law, Congress disputed the recent increase in defense spending. Despite a significant rise in defense spending, the size of the U.S. Army experienced an increase equating to only one additional BCT. The federal government would need to increase defense spending to resource the additional BCTs required to support the simultaneous defeat of multiple adversaries. The financial cost will undoubtedly be astronomical, and government analysts would need to determine the

precise cost of resourcing. Moreover, the opportunity cost will be tremendous. The budgets of other federal agencies would experience severe reductions, yet the available funding would likely remain insufficient. Hence, the feasibility of this option is extremely low. As such, the federal government would require additional revenue to resource this additional capacity, which translates to an increase in federal taxes. Significantly, the recent change in tax reform was also highly disputed among the legislative branch. Following the contentious passing of the new defense spending and tax laws, the legislature and public will likely view drastic increases in defense spending or the raising of federal taxes as intolerable. Thus, this option is also extremely low in acceptability. However, this option demonstrates the lowest level of risk. It provides the necessary capacity for the Army to prevent the military objectives of multiple adversaries simultaneously. Ultimately, the low levels of feasibility and acceptability render this option unfavorable, despite its effectiveness in advancing the American interests of “peace through strength.”<sup>83</sup>

This paper assesses policy option two as high in feasibility and acceptability, but with a higher level of risk. The criteria of adequacy, acceptability, and feasibility each support this option. This option acknowledges the U.S. Army’s limitations and verbalizes the nation’s capability, in terms of Army capacity. However, this option has a higher level of risk. Disruption hinders the armed conflict objectives of an adversary, rather than preventing them from achieving their objectives. Additionally, this strategy communicates a signal, which is the decisive might of the Army is limited to defeating a sole adversary. By nature, competitors seek to determine and exploit an opponent’s limitations and weaknesses to gain an advantage. Therefore, the great and rogue

powers could synchronize efforts to engage the United States in armed conflict, and the United States would be unable to employ its Army to defeat a combined adversarial effort. The strategic risk inherent in this option could embolden the great and rogue powers to transition from the role of peaceful competitor to aggressive adversary, in order to advance its state interests. However, the high levels of adequacy, acceptability, and feasibility designate policy option two as the favorable option, despite the associated risk.

### Conclusion

NSS 2017 establishes the way forward concerning national interests and strategic objectives in today's competitive environment. First, it directs the U.S. Army to cooperate with allies and partners, deter competitors, and defeat aggression against U.S. interests."<sup>84</sup> Second, this strategy labels the global environment as one of persistent competition, contends that the perception of "American weakness invites challenge" and identifies the nation's state competitors (PRC, RF, DPRK, and IRI).<sup>85</sup>

An evaluation of this strategy reveals a significant problem. NSS 2017 does not contain a task that resides between the extremes of deter and defeat or prevent and win. Moreover, this strategic document does not attribute a temporal aspect or requirement associated with these tasks. Due to ambiguity, NSS 2017 implies that the Army be prepared to deter and defeat the Nation's multiple competitors simultaneously. However, the Army's current capacity cannot accomplish this without incurring extreme risk. Consequently, this results in strategic misalignment. Although, there are two options that will bring this national strategy into greater alignment. The recommended option urges the strategic way to adjust to the Army's capacity, which communicates strategic limitation. The alternate option requests the government to increase the end

strength of the Army, in order to prevent multiple adversaries from achieving competing objectives via armed conflict. Despite a higher level of effectiveness, this alternate option requires a politically unacceptable increase in financial and material resources.

It is imperative to align the ends, ways, means, and consider the risk of the U.S. National Security Strategy. An aligned strategy communicates strategic capability and capacity to the nation and to the security apparatus that defends its interests. It also sends strategic signals to both allies and competitors, who assess the nation's capability, capacity, and will. Finally, an aligned strategy effectively manages the expectations of strategic decision makers and the American public. We owe them no less.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Heritage Organization, *An Assessment of U.S. Military Power: U.S. Army*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength/assessment-us-military-power/us-army> (accessed February 20, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, Joint Doctrine Reference Publication 5-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, December 26, 2006), 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, I-5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, IV-17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, I-5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, V-28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., xxi.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., IV-1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 111-17.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, I-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., II-6.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>23</sup> Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 26.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 28-32.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 26-28.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 45-53.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>32</sup> "Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea; October 1, 1953," linked from *The Lillian Goldman Law Library Avalon Project*, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/kor001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kor001.asp), (accessed February 25, 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> NATO webpage, "Collective Defense-Article 5," updated March 22, 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_110496.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm) (accessed February 25, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

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<sup>61</sup> National Constitution Center, *Article I: The Legislative Branch—The Enumerated Powers (Section 8)*, February 21, 2014, <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/article-1-the-legislative-branch-the-enumerated-powers-sections-8> (accessed February 28, 2018).

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

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<sup>82</sup> Department of the Army, *Terms and Military Symbols*, 1-20.

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