



CENTRE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

**DEFENCE WHITE PAPER  
PROJECT**

**THE UNITED STATES  
NATIONAL DEFENSE  
STRATEGY 2018**

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## About the author

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# Introduction

The last decade has seen a re-alignment of the world's strategic position, with the Unipolar world order dominated by the United States gradually giving way to a multipolar world order, with emerging powers such as China and Russia muscling their way into the centre stage of world politics, and being far more aggressive in the pursuit of their ambitions than they have been in the past. These states have thus closed the technological and economic gap with the US, and prove a serious threat to the United States Pre-eminence in the Global world order.

This geopolitical restructuring, or even turmoil in the eyes of those who would like to maintain the current geopolitical status quo, occurs at a time when there has been a profound leap in technology, both civil and military, that can have far-reaching changes. Technologies such as AI, Big Data Analytics and Quantum technologies are changing the daily lives of people and society, and can have a profound impact on not just the destructive capabilities of new weapons, but can alter the face of warfare as we know it. Thus, this technological leap has also necessitated a major rethinking of countries' operational plans and doctrines, and a revamping of doctrine from the ground up to account for these new technologies, all around the world, in what has been dubbed as the 'Revolution in Military Affairs'<sup>1</sup>.

It is these emergent technologies that the United States' rivals have used extensively, investing heavy amounts, to overtake the US in areas it has not focused on, to be able to fight the US in fields of their choosing. China, for one, has invested heavily in Civil-Military Fusion<sup>2</sup>, which

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<sup>1</sup> Gill, Mehul Singh (2022), The Chinese Revolution in Military Affairs: Implications for India, Issue Brief, Centre For Security Studies, O.P Jindal Global University

[https://www.cssjsia.com/files/ugd/348fae\\_4ae1c1bab0704372a976f0689eeeb3e7.pdf](https://www.cssjsia.com/files/ugd/348fae_4ae1c1bab0704372a976f0689eeeb3e7.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Levesque, Greg (2019), Military-Civil Fusion: Beijing's 'Guns AND Butter' Strategy to become a technological superpower, China Brief, Volume 19, Jamestown Foundation <https://jamestown.org/program/military-civil-fusionbeijings-guns-and-butter-strategy-to-become-a-technological-superpower/>

deliberately blurs the lines between civil and military research, to produce technologies beneficial in both areas. China has also focused on Technologies such as AI<sup>3</sup>, Quantum Communications and Big Data Analytics, as part of its 2049 Modernisation program to create a ‘World-Class’ Military capable of fighting what the PLA calls ‘Intelligentised Wars’<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, Russia has made huge strides in Missile technology, particularly Hypersonic Missiles<sup>5</sup>, along with taking steps to protect its economy from western sanctions.

It is in this background that the United States launched its National Defence Strategy (hereafter referred to as NDS 2018) in 2018. The document provides valuable insight into the American thought process, revealing who and what America thinks are the greatest threats to its security, what are their motivations for the same, and how the US intends to counter these threats.

## The NDS 2018

The NDS 2018 first describes the strategic environment, that is the geopolitical scenario which it seeks to negotiate. The US makes a clear shift from being the world policeman with its primary counter-terrorism focus to now focusing on the growth of Russia and China, whom it terms ‘revisionist powers’, which pose long-term strategic threats to the US’s pre-eminence in the world order. The US feels that these states aim to create an authoritarian world order to dominate and gain control, in what it terms as gaining ‘veto power over the affairs of other countries’<sup>6</sup>.

The US views the Chinese Revolution in Military Affairs with extreme suspicion and distrust, feeling that its 2035 Modernisation plan is in reality aimed at gaining Indo-Pacific hegemony, and its 2049 plan to develop a ‘World-Class’ military is aimed at displacing the USA’s position in the

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<sup>3</sup> Kania, Elsa (2019), Learning without fighting: New developments in PLA Artificial Intelligence War-Gaming, China Brief, Volume 19, Jamestown Foundation <https://jamestown.org/program/learning-without-fighting-new-developmentsin-pla-artificial-intelligence-war-gaming/>

<sup>4</sup> Gill 2022, Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Bhagwagar, Rayan V (2022), Hypersonics and the Global Disorder, Issue Brief, Centre for Security Studies, O.P Jindal Global University [https://www.cssjsia.com/files/ugd/348fae\\_62f72085791a4b85a568aed7fbca7ced.pdf](https://www.cssjsia.com/files/ugd/348fae_62f72085791a4b85a568aed7fbca7ced.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> United States National Defense Strategy 2018, U.S Department of Defense

world order. The US also notes the Chinese use of Influence operations, as was done in the Taiwan elections of 2018<sup>7</sup>. Also noted are China's Debt Trap tactics, which have resulted in China gaining access to Critical infrastructure around the world, which could also be used for Military purposes if the need arises.

Russia, the US feels, seeks to establish 'veto authority' over its neighbours, creating a Sphere of influence, in an attempt to create the 'Russkiy Mir', or the 'Russian World'. The Americans also feel that Russia wants to shatter NATO and gain control over countries in the Middle East and Europe to dislodge the US. Russia's use of emergent technologies to discredit and subvert 'democratic processes' in Georgia, Crimea and Eastern Ukraine were concerns to the US at the time.

The US also notes the role played by what it dubs rogue regimes such as Iran and North Korea, which it feels pursue NBC weapons and Terrorisms as a way to ensure the survival of their undemocratic regimes and to gain control over its neighbours. The US notes that both Revisionist powers and Rogue powers have used a mix of different methods including conventional and non-conventional means to increase their strength and project their power.

The US recognises the fact that the post-WW2 world order is weakening with new revisionist powers acting more assertively and not adhering to responsible international practices while doing so. It also recognises the fact that the US does not have the technological lead it once did, with countries having developed technologies that have overtaken the US in some aspects, while also developing technologies and methods to counter existing US technologies. Thus, the US needs to focus on emergent technologies such as AI, Big Data Analytics, Directed energy weapons, Biotech, Hypersonic weapons etc. To do so, there needs to be a robust research structure to support the Military Industrial complex.

Thus, in light of new technological developments, the US concludes that the US homeland does not enjoy the security it once did due to its isolation, but is just as susceptible to attacks in the face of new technologies, which need to be countered.

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<sup>7</sup> Beauchamp-Mustafaga (2019), Cognitive Domain Operations: The PLA's New Holistic Concept for Influence Operations, China Brief, Volume 19, Jamestown Foundation <https://jamestown.org/program/cognitive-domain-operations-the-plas-new-holistic-conceptfor-influence-operations/>

To that end, the US Department of Defense has outlined the following goals as some of its main objectives<sup>8</sup>. In light of the circumstances and the trends in operations, the precedence of these objectives does seem to show the order of importance it attaches to these objectives.

1. Homeland Defense.
2. Maintaining Balance of Power in Favour of the US throughout the world.
3. Long-Term Strategic Rivalry Vs China and Russia.
4. Countering Rogue Regimes such as Iran and DPRK.
5. Defeating Terrorist Threats to the US
6. Strengthening Allies to take up and Share in Defense obligations
7. Ensuring Common Domains such as High Seas and Space remain open and free.
8. Resource Sustainable approach in conducting and sustaining ongoing operations.

To the above-mentioned end, the US has taken a mix of hard and soft power to try and reach settlements with its main competitors, leaving avenues for diplomacy open. However, the US has clearly stated its intention to bolster its hard power to conduct these negotiations from a position of strength.

The US aims to follow a policy of being predictable at a strategic level, but unpredictable at the operational level, meaning that it would showcase its resolve to use military or other means to secure its strategic goals, but the means it uses to do so would not be predictable, thus not letting the enemy react effectively.

The US has also focused on Inter-Agency cooperation to better serve its strategic needs. 9/11 has been cited time and again as a classic case of the failure to cooperate between different agencies<sup>9</sup>. The US aims to change that and aims to improve cooperation not only amongst intelligence and law and order bodies but also among other government wings such as the State Department,

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<sup>8</sup> U.S Department of Defense 2018, Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Zegart, A. B. (2005). September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies. *International Security*, 29(4), 78–111. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137498>

Treasury Department, USAID and others to help build strategic partnerships that would guarantee American security.

The Department of Defense realises that it needs to outthink and out-innovate its rivals if it is to maintain relationships and maintain its current position. To that end, there has been an effort to foster a competitive mindset.

To achieve the abovementioned, the Department of Defense has identified 3 areas in which it would invest its efforts<sup>10</sup>.

1. Improving Military Readiness
2. Strengthening existing alliances and attracting new partners
3. Improving performance and cost efficiency

Improving Military Readiness: The job of any military is to deter a war breaking out, or if one breaks out, to fight wars and win them. To do so, the USA needs to start a multi-year plan to invest in new technologies and to re-orient itself from fighting the counterinsurgencies it was occupied in fighting against in the last 20 years to focusing on fighting conventional and hybrid wars once again. The US aims to deter aggression in 3 areas- Indo-Pacific, Europe and the Middle East. To that end, it has identified the need to improve key capabilities such as modernising its nuclear triad, investing in survivable and resilient C4ISR networks, Improving Missile defence networks in light of the hypersonic threat, spreading smaller and independent forces capable of withstanding damage, Autonomous weapons systems and a logistics system capable of withstanding enemy strikes.

However, merely improving technology is not enough in the age of the RMA, and the US has also sought to improve its doctrine to better suit modern needs. To that end, there has been an effort to innovate new operational concepts or to adapt existing concepts to better suit today's needs. This is to be done by envisaging how technology would shape the battlefield, and the potential uses of technology by the adversary. There has been an effort on creating agile forces, mobile in nature who could deploy to any theatre on short notice and adapt to wide conditions. There has also been

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<sup>10</sup> U.S Department of Defense 2018, Ibid.

an effort to improve Professional Military Education, with an emphasis on action in operations, and the ability of junior leaders to take the initiative.

**Strengthening Alliances:** The US has heavily relied on its allies in the past. The US is the only country in the world with the capacity to launch military operations anywhere in the world, but this capacity exists because of U.S security partnerships around the world. Without these partnerships, it would lose access to the crucial bases and logistics chains that allow the US to maintain its global presence. The US also pools resources and duties with its allies to lighten the burden on itself.

Meanwhile, the US has also tried building upon building new alliances in the Indo-Pacific, with key countries who have similar concerns as America when it comes to maintaining free access to common domains, by bringing in bilateral and multilateral security arrangements, most notably Quad. There has also been an effort to strengthen NATO against an increasingly belligerent Russia, with NATO countries agreeing to increase spending and take up the onus of protecting Europe, and reduce reliance on the US for its security. The US is also trying to consolidate the gains it has made in the middle east while fighting terrorism and ensuring stable democratic regimes in the region. The US aims to maintain its predominance in the western hemisphere and continues to bolster support for African states in their fight against terrorism.

**Greater Cost-efficiency:** In light of soaring costs and the need to redirect military spending away to more critical sectors of the economy, there has been an effort to reduce wastage in the DoD, which has often been accused of wasting taxpayers' money on exorbitant projects which fail, spending huge sums of money with no accountability. Here, there has been an effort to reduce unneeded manpower, duplication of efforts and excess property, while encouraging innovation and budget discipline to ensure better usage of resources.

## **Conclusion**

The United States finds itself re-orienting its foreign policy objectives, facing new adversaries and what could be the start of new world order, one that would be harmful to American interests and one that the Americans will do anything to prevent. It is against this backdrop that the US aims to re-orient itself in the military sphere as well, changing from its focus on counter-terrorism to now focusing on fighting against conventional threats.



To that end, the US has tried to launch some reforms in an attempt to stay ahead of what it calls the revisionist powers. However, the fact remains that these reforms are not nearly as far wide-ranging as those instituted in China and Russia recently. While it is true that these reforms will not result in China and Russia overtaking the US, they will certainly help match the US, and that itself ought to be a cause for concern in the US. The US had a lead of over a generation when it came to military technology and military affairs when it came to its rivals, but this gap has drastically reduced, particularly in with reference to China, which has made huge strides in its modernisation drive and is catching up to the US. Thus, the US is still somewhat complacent and this is merely a half-hearted attempt to stay ahead of the race, but barely so. If the US wants to maintain its pre-eminent position, it must pull up its socks, and maintain its generational gap over its closest adversaries, in both the Technological realm and the Operational realm.

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