

# Analysing the 2015 US Military Strategy: Forward Positioning and Hybrid War

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The United States Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staffs, General Martin Dempsey recently published the [new July 2015 Military Strategy for the US armed forces](#). The last strategy paper was published in 2011, and a lot has changed since then, which is acknowledged in this surprisingly jargon-lacking paper. The forward by Dempsey states that the global security situation has changed a lot, since the last time this paper was published. “Today’s global security environment is the most unpredictable I have seen in 40 years of service. Since the last National Military Strategy was published in 2011, global disorder has significantly increased while some of our comparative military advantage has begun to erode.” states Dempsey. He added the US is now facing “multiple and simultaneous” security challenges from traditional state actors and trans-regional networks of non-state and sub-state actors – all taking advantage of rapid technological change, at a time, when US is losing the comparative technological advantage.

The paper first highlights the strategic challenges facing the United States. Globalization, diffusion of technology and demographic shifts are the major causation of a plethora of challenges as per the paper, which states the entire security situation is morphing relentlessly. It specifically states the factors of Globalization and diffusion of technology is already known as a primary cause which is changing modern global warfare, including the use of social media, as means of propaganda, organization, mobilization and adaptation, and technology proliferation bringing a combat parity to various non-state actors, a phenomenon, which was comparatively unknown and low-risk even fifteen years back. With that, demographics are a major problem, as the population of Middle East and Africa is growing and young, due to various social and cultural trends, whereas North Americans and European population growth is much lower and relatively older.

The paper however acknowledges that despite all the security threats from non-state actors and others, states and nations still remain the most dominant factors in international order, for now and the near foreseeable future. Of the nations, four countries are specifically mentioned in this paper. Russia is regarded as a primary adversary in this paper, and the recent uptick in hostility is acknowledged. Admitting that Russia is contributing and cooperating in select security areas as counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism and space research, it however states that military actions of Russia are undermining regional and global security.

Iran and North Korea’s ballistic missile programme and pursuit of modern nuclear power is also mentioned in this paper. This is the first time, North Korea’s ballistic missile capability is acknowledged admitting their future capability of threatening the US mainland; their cyber warfare capability is also acknowledged. The paper also specifically states US support for Chinese rise, and expects that China and US can settle international issues with regards to international norms.

The document admits the concept of “hybrid war”, will gain ground, after its “successful operationalization” in Ukraine by Russia. The need to counter these hybrid wars, which is basically a mix of covert operations and massive propaganda blitz, is therefore regarded as one of the primary challenges facing the US forces. To counter this, the document advocates that US forces should be forward positioned, and incase the forward positioning is not feasible or practically achievable, then to rely on rapid massive and disproportionate reaction. The forward position would provide maximum deterrence against adversaries. The paper also stresses that to counter hybrid wars, like alleged Russian forces in Ukraine, or the fast moving and dispersing Islamic State forces, United States have to rely on intelligence sharing with coalition forces, around the world, admitting that the days of US solo hyper power projection maybe be over. The document notes that the technological advantages that the US enjoyed over the years has slowly eroded in the past decade and a half, and that non-state actors and other small transnational agencies now enjoy much asymmetric advantage over the colossal US army. Satellites will not be useful against IEDs, even though they might be useful against other equal peer rivals; therefore just relying on technology would be foolish in the future.

Finally, the paper states that even though the global threat quotient remained low, the chances of inter-state and even great power wars are growing. The world is not balanced anymore and is

undergoing a power transition with new powers rising and old powers returning to cold war form and with these there are increased chances of miscalculation and flare-ups.

This paper highlights some of the problems, the trends of which are already evident over the last few years. The rise of non-state actors is nothing new. However, what's new and is also acknowledged by this paper is the ability of these non-state actors to use technology proliferation and social media to devastating effect. Nowhere is it more prominent than in Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State. Other policy recommendations like [detering Russia](#) with forward positioning military in Eastern Europe, and [balancing a rising China](#) with coalition and alliance building in Asia is something that is already practiced by the US strategic community. What was always been practiced is now theorized and formalized in this document.

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