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# National Military Strategy: Shape, Respond, Prepare Now—A Military Strategy for a New Era

By

The Joint Chiefs of Staff

## INTRODUCTION

[The following is a reprint of the Executive Summary of the Joint Chiefs of Staff document entitled as above which was released in September 1997 under the signature of General John M. Shalikashvili, USA, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The entire document is available on the Internet at <<http://www.dtic.mil/jcs/nms>>.]

The *National Military Strategy* provides the advice of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) in consultation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Combatant Commanders on the strategic direction of the Armed Forces over the next three to five years. In formulating the 1997 National Military Strategy, the CJCS derives guidance from the President's 1997 *National Security Strategy* and from the *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)* report prepared by the Secretary of Defense.

In both the 1997 *National Security Strategy* and the *QDR* report, the President and the Secretary of Defense introduced an integrated strategic approach embodied by the terms *Shape*, *Respond*, and *Prepare Now*. The 1997 *National Military Strategy* is based on these concepts. It builds on the premise that the United States will remain globally engaged to *Shape* the international environment and create conditions favorable to U.S. interests and global security. It emphasizes that our Armed Forces must *Respond* to the full spectrum of crises in order to protect our national interests. It further states that as we pursue shaping and responding activities, we must also take steps to *Prepare Now* for an uncertain future.

## THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The United States has entered a period that presents both opportunities and challenges. Our nation is at peace and much of the world embraces the democratic ideals we cherish. The threat of nuclear war has diminished and diplomatic efforts continue to reap benefits in creating a more stable and peaceful world. Nonetheless, there remain a number of uncertainties, including potentially serious threats to America's security. Principal among these are regional dangers, asymmetric challenges, transnational threats, and "wild cards." This uncertain environment would be even more threatening without the American engagement and leadership that this strategy supports.

## THE STRATEGY

### National Military Objectives

To defend and protect U.S. national interests, our national military objectives are to Promote Peace and Stability and, when necessary, to Defeat Adversaries. U.S. Armed Forces advance national security by applying military power as directed to help *Shape* the international

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environment and *Respond* to the full spectrum of crises, while we also *Prepare Now* for an uncertain future.

### Elements of Strategy

*Shaping the International Environment.* U.S. Armed Forces help shape the international environment through deterrence, peacetime engagement activities, and active participation and leadership in alliances. Critical to deterrence are our conventional warfighting capabilities and our nuclear forces. Deterrence rests on a potential adversary's perception of our capabilities and commitment, which are demonstrated by our ability to bring decisive military power to bear and by communication of U.S. intentions. Engagement activities, including information sharing and contacts between our military and the armed forces of other nations, promote trust and confidence and encourage measures that increase our security and that of our allies, partners, and friends. By increasing understanding and reducing uncertainty, engagement builds constructive security relationships, helps to promote the development of democratic institutions, and helps keep some countries from becoming adversaries tomorrow.

*Responding to the Full Spectrum of Crises.* The U.S. military will be called upon to respond to crises across the full range of military operations, from humanitarian assistance to fighting and winning major theater wars (MTW), and conducting concurrent smaller-scale contingencies. Our demonstrated ability to rapidly respond and to decisively resolve crises provides the most effective deterrent and sets the stage for future operations if force must be used. Should deterrence fail, it is imperative that the United States be able to defeat aggression of any kind. Especially important is the ability to deter or defeat nearly simultaneous large-scale, cross-border aggression in two distant theaters in overlapping time frames, preferably in concert with allies. The ability to rapidly defeat initial enemy advances short of their objectives in two theaters in close succession reassures our allies and ensures the protection of our worldwide interests. We must also be prepared to conduct several smaller-scale contingency operations at the same time, as situations may dictate the employment of U.S. military capabilities when rapid action is required to stabilize a situation.

*Preparing Now for an Uncertain Future.* As we move into the next century, it is imperative that the United States maintain the military superiority essential to our global leadership. Our strategy calls for transformation of our doctrine and organizations and a stabilized investment program in robust modernization that exploits the Revolutions in Military Affairs (RMA) and Business Affairs (RBA).

### Strategic Concepts

The National Military Strategy describes four strategic concepts [i.e., Strategic Agility, Overseas Presence, Power Projection, and Decisive Force] that govern the use of our forces to meet the demands of the strategic environment. Strategic Agility is the timely concentration, employment, and sustainment of U.S. military power anywhere, at our own initiative, and at a speed and tempo that our adversaries cannot match. It is an important hedge against the uncertainty we face. It allows us to conduct multiple missions, across the full range of military operations, in geographically separated regions of the world. Overseas Presence is the visible posture of U.S. forces and infrastructure strategically positioned forward, in and near key regions. Forces present overseas promote stability, help prevent conflict, and ensure the protection of U.S. interests. Our overseas presence demonstrates our determination to defend U.S., allied, and friendly interests while ensuring our ability to rapidly concentrate combat power in the event of crisis. Power Projection is the ability to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain U.S. military power in and from multiple, dispersed locations until conflict

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resolution. Power projection provides the flexibility to respond swiftly to crises, with force packages that can be adapted rapidly to the environment in which they must operate, and if necessary, fight their way into a denied theater. Decisive Force is the commitment of sufficient military power to overwhelm an adversary, establish new military conditions, and achieve a political resolution favorable to U.S. national interests. Together, these four strategic concepts emphasize that America's military must be able to employ the right mix of forces and capabilities to provide the decisive advantage in any operation.

## THE JOINT FORCE

Our Armed Forces are the preeminent military force in the world, persuasive in peace and decisive in war. To successfully implement our strategy of shaping, responding, and preparing, the forces and capabilities recommended in the *QDR* report are essential. Equally critical to the success of our strategy are the men and women who comprise our military forces. We must continue to recruit, train, and maintain a high quality force to ensure our nation's security. Our forces must maintain the high state of readiness that is essential to global leadership; thus the means by which we achieve, maintain, and evaluate our readiness demand continue emphasis. Our military must be ready to fight as a coherent joint force—fully interoperable and seamlessly integrated. Capitalizing on technology will also be central to maintaining military superiority. Our modernization effort will focus on those technologies that improve the combat effectiveness of our Armed Forces while enhancing the interoperability and integration of the Total Force. Modernization is not an end in itself, but a means to improve the capabilities of our warfighters across the full range of military operations—from peacetime engagement activities to war.

## CONCLUSION

The *National Military Strategy of Shaping, Responding, and Preparing Now* addresses the challenges and opportunities that confront us now as well as those that await us as we approach the next century. Working with our allies, partners, and friends, we will promote peace in an increasingly complex and potentially more dangerous world. This strategy will ensure that the U.S. military will remain capable of performing whatever tasks we are called upon to perform around the world in the years ahead.