

By Robert S. Dudley, Editor in Chief

## Protect, Prevent, Prevail

**I**N MID-MAY, Gen. Richard B. Myers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, signed off on the first new military strategy in seven years. Its purpose, according to a DOD definition of the work, was to lay out the means for “distributing and applying military power to attain objectives in peace and war.”

It wasn't the first time the subject had been addressed in the Bush years. In 2001, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld unveiled a muscular new defense strategy. In 2002, President Bush issued a broader national security strategy, embracing pre-emptive or preventive war.

However, the last purely military strategy paper came out in 1997. Gen. John M. Shalikashvili wrote that US armed forces would be used to shape world conditions, respond to threats, and prepare for the future. After 9/11, this “shape, respond, prepare” idea faded away, but no formal military concept replaced it.

Myers has filled the void with “National Military Strategy 2004,” which has circulated widely in Washington. In many ways, it is an impressive piece of work. Compared to the 1997 concept, it has a harder edge. It provides a bridge between broad civilian goals and real-world actions of service chiefs and combat commanders.

The Myers paper declares US military leaders and forces have three priorities. They are to win the war on terrorism, increase the powers of the four individual services to fight together, and transform the nation's military forces.

According to Myers, success in these areas will help the American military carry out its fundamental military missions. They are:

- **Protect the United States.** Taking an aggressive stance, the paper declares, “Our first line of defense is abroad,” where the nation's forces can “counter threats close to their source.” In addition, the military must secure air, land, sea, and space approaches closer to US territory.

- **Prevent conflict and surprise attacks.** Forward presence, good intelligence, and security assistance are vi-

tal. At a time when a foe might possess nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons, said the paper, the potential for “catastrophic” damage may require US forces to “pre-empt adversaries before they can attack.” The US would target only those adversaries who pose “an unmistakable threat of grave harm” and are “not otherwise deterrable.”

- **Prevail in war.** This is becoming a more complicated task, according to Myers. He warns that “the character of

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conflict has changed,” and the US needs capabilities to defeat a wide range of adversaries “from states to nonstate actors.” The global battlespace is more complex and sprawling, encompassing blighted urban areas and remote, ungoverned wastelands. Technology of high military value is widely diffused and must be countered.

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The military's force-sizing standard is unchanged. Myers' paper explicitly accepts the so-called “1-4-2-1” concept that Rumsfeld unveiled in 2001.

That concept says the force should be big enough to: defend the homeland, deter aggression in four key theaters (Southwest Asia, Northeast Asia, East Asia's littoral, Europe), “swiftly defeat” two aggressors simultaneously, and have the power to occupy and effect regime change in one of those aggressor nations.

Without doubt, these requirements place formidable pressure on America's smallish armed force of some 1.4 million active and 900,000 Guard and Reserve troops. Myers does not, however, believe the force is too small for the mission.

“Given current force levels and appropriate resources,” said the paper, “this strategy is executable.”

Even so, there are warning signs.

The strategy emphasizes “innovative and efficient” use of US troops to cover commitments, no doubt because the force margin is razor thin. The paper cites several factors as worthy of senior leader attention.

**New Baseline.** The war on terrorism is an addition to, and not a substitute for, pre-existing missions. And it is not going away. Its “extremely demanding circumstances,” said Myers, are part of every commander's permanent bag of worries. These officers must find “options” and “trade-offs” to cope with increased risk.

**Disengagement.** The Pentagon has long claimed that, faced with a war, it would pull forces from smaller operations and make them available. However, Washington may be unwilling or unable to do so, warned Myers. Commanders are therefore instructed to “consider” this in planning for conflicts.

**Escalation.** Small operations can swiftly escalate to large-scale conflicts and unexpectedly draw in forces that may be committed elsewhere. Reducing the risk of this escalation requires forward presence and ability to “surge” reinforcements where needed.

**Transformation.** US armed forces will be transformed “in stride,” said Myers, meaning the fielding of new concepts and systems must continue even at a time of high operational tempo. “Transforming” forces often will be taken off-line for training and be unavailable for operations.

Each of these factors increases risk—defined as the gap between actual requirements and the level of forces available to meet them. The actual level of risk is not stated; a classified annex deals with that issue. Myers does, however, admonish senior military leaders to find ways to “mitigate” risks by rethinking how, when, and where forces are deployed.

We don't doubt that Myers has produced the best possible plan for “distributing and applying military power to attain objectives in peace and war.” Yet to be answered, however, is the question of whether there is enough of that power to go around. ■