

Impact of Russia-Ukraine Conflict on United States National Defense Strategy

Tzu-Li Wu
Associate Research Fellow

Division of Defense Strategy and Resources

The Biden Administration originally planned to announce the new National Defense Strategy (NDS) in February 2022 but was postponed due to the Russian military invasion in Ukraine on February 24. The previous NDS was announced in January 2018 by the Trump Administration. As a routine, the newly elected president will announce the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy one year after taking office. The current Secretary of Defense began working on the 2022 NDS since the Biden Administration took office, and had the content largely ready by the end of 2021. But with the Russia-Ukraine conflict escalating to war, the US Department of Defense had to reevaluate and revise the original content of the national defense

strategy in response to the changes in the strategic and security situation in Europe.¹

The US National Defense Strategy pivots from regional terrorist threats to major power conflicts

With conflicts easing in the Middle East, the 2018 US National Defense Strategy shifted focus from the Middle East to major powers including China and Russia. The 2018 US NDS clearly stated that China was the main strategic threat to the United States. The Biden Administration also confirmed that China is a pacing threat growing ever more acute to the United States. The 2022 US National Defense Authorization Act reinforced the resources invested in military power toward the Indo-Pacific

1. Connor O'Brien, Paul Mcleary And Lee Hudson, "Russia Crisis Forces Pentagon to Rework Defense Strategy on the Fly," *POLITICO*, March 3, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/qObKE0>.

region, and pointed out that actions must be taken to restore the competitive edge of the US military in the region to deter China, and win a war when inevitable conflict arises.

The concept of integrated deterrence has been the cornerstone of the US national defense strategy since 2021

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities, Mara E. Karlin, said, “the cornerstone of the new National Defense Strategy will be the secretary of defense’s concept of integrated deterrence ... The idea of integrated deterrence means that you are integrating across your domains ... [we won’t] just go to our traditional thinking of air, maritime and ground ... how do you integrate across domains? How do you integrate across the whole of government? ... we’re thinking about diplomacy, which also means integrating with our partners and allies.”² Most senior executives of

DOD have been pushing for the concept of integrated deterrence domestically and internationally since early 2021, laying the foundation for the essence of 2022 NDS.

The impact of Russia-Ukraine war on the 2022 national defense strategy

Thanks to internet communication technology and social media, not only has the world experienced almost firsthand the Russia-Ukraine war since the invasion by Russia began, but strategic research experts worldwide have also reviewed and debated the strategic thinking and operations adopted by Russia. Among these, as former Assistant Secretary of DOD Elbridge A. Colby strongly emphasized, the US should place its strategic focus foremost on the Indo-Pacific region, taking seriously the threat posed by China.³ Furthermore, as John G. Ferrari, senior fellow of the American Enterprise Institute argues, the US should abandon its one-war strategy, review

2. Refer to Terri Moon Cronk, “DOD Official Outlines 2022 National Defense Strategy in CNAS Forum,” *DOD News*, December 10, 2021, <https://reurl.cc/O2baNk>; Tzuli Wu, “Integrated Deterrence’ -- the Transition in the Concept of the US National Defense Strategy,” *National Defense and Security Real-time Assessment, Institute for National Defense and Security Research*, December 9, 2021, <https://reurl.cc/VjZmG5>.

3. Refer to Peter Tasker, “Books: A Potential Sino-American Conflict Can be Avoided,” *NIKKEI Asia*, March 12, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/e6bpbpb>; Elbridge A. Colby, “The Strategy of Denial - American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict,” *Yale University Press*, 2021.

its capabilities globally, and resume the deployment of armed forces in the frontier of these regions.⁴ A research report from the Atlantic Council highlights that the responding strategy must also address challenges from China and Russia.⁵ DOD states that it will continue to reinforce the concept of integrated deterrence. Although regimes in other regions such as Russia prove to be an obvious threat, the Indo-Pacific region continues to be the priority war zone with China being the pacing challenge for the United States.⁶ To the question asked by the moderator in an online seminar hosted by Project 2049 regarding whether the United States can cope with two wars at the same time, Elaine Luria, a Navy veteran serving as the US representative from Virginia, pointed out that the upcoming US 2022 NDS may be planning for deterring

another potential conflict while facing one war.⁷

The US national defense strategy with integrated deterrence as cornerstone and prepared to win a war

The Russian invasion of Ukraine clearly showed that the threat posed by Russia to the stability of regional and world peace remains strong. However, with the United States using integrated deterrence to integrate capabilities across domains globally to address the Russian invasion, the comprehensive capability of Russia may face a profound impact and in turn, lower the short and mid-term traditional threats to the United States. Whereas China experienced no obvious, significant impact in this Russia-Ukraine conflict but instead benefitted politically and economically, shows that the Chinese

4. John G. Ferrari, "Tear up the National Defense Strategy and Start Again, Recognizing Reality," *AEI*, March 8, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/Lpx2o4>.

5. Clementine G. Starling, Christian Trotti, and Tyson Wetzel, "The Next National Defense Strategy Must Get Russia Right," *Atlantic Council*, February 24, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/Zrd2pV>.

6. Refer to the press release by the US Department of Defense, Jim Garamone, "Austin Says Current Operations Give Hints of New National Defense Strategy," *DOD News*, February 18, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/AKW9Oe>; Jim Garamone, "National Defense Strategy Includes Lessons Learned From Past 6 Months," *DOD News*, March 4, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/GoqGGx>.

7. "Taiwan's Global Gravity: The Push and Pull of Coercive and Annihilative Cross-Strait Scenarios," *The Project 2049 Institute and the International Stability Operations Association (ISOA)*, February 14, 2022, <https://reurl.cc/WkYgAe>.

military power will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. The challenge and threat of China is without a doubt the first priority of the US national defense strategy. The US 2022 NDS will probably be addressing capabilities that will be required should military conflicts occur simultaneously in the Taiwan Strait and other regions such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or Northeast Asia. A reasonable conclusion is that the United States will prioritize and concentrate its resources to face the pacing challenge and competition from China, while following the solidarity currently demonstrated by the western countries in view of the Russia-Ukraine war, and maintain the deterring capability to support and actively campaign the boosting of national defense resource investment by European countries, and increase the overall self-defense capability of Europe to cope with future challenges to regional safety.

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