

Terrorism and the New National Defense Strategy of the US

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Theme: [Terrorism](#)

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On March 18, the Pentagon released the new “National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” (NDS) a sixteen page guide to US military policy outlining both the strategic objectives and the methods of attaining those objectives. While John Bolton’s new UN ambassadorship and “the U.S. withdrawal from the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for cases involving the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations,” on their own make the case for that the US remains in a unilateralist stance, Jim Lobe, writing for the Inter-Press Service, contends that the new document solidifies the continuation. Concentrating on the unilateralist aspects of the document misses the grim reality contained within. Unilateralism may be the means by which the strategic objectives presented can be met, but those means are not the objectives themselves.

Section II of the NDS lists the four strategic objectives:

- (1) secure the United States from direct attack,
- (2) secure strategic access and retain global freedom of action,
- (3) strengthen alliances and partnerships and
- (4) establish favorable security conditions.

While (1) and (3) are reasonable, traditional strategic military objectives — though, as Lobe points out, in the case of the US, (3) may not get the traditional interpretation it would in other countries — (2) and (4) require a deeper look. It is not all together clear what securing “strategic access” and retaining “global freedom” means. Nor is it clear what those “favorable security conditions” actually entail. In this article, I hope to show that the NDS makes a dangerous and trigger-happy commitment by the US to global socio-economic and military system that spawns terrorism — the very threat which it document contends the US military strategy should be designed to eliminate.

The most striking feature of the entire document, and the strategic objectives in particular, is the fact that “freedom of action for the United States” is now a key tenet in US foreign policy. While the NDS makes no attempt to clarify what this tenet means — likely for PR purposes — a commitment to protecting the sovereignty of nations is repeatedly made. That does mean, however, the US is willing to allow other nations “freedom of action.” The kicker is that the US commitment to sovereignty is made with heavy qualifications. Nation-states must “exercise their sovereignty responsibly.” This implies a dual role for the US, one of

which may help clarify as well as warrant US “freedom of action.” First, the document suggests it is the job of the US to interpret what it means for a nation-state to act responsibly, and, secondly, it is the job of the US to enforce breaches in responsibility. To be the enforcer, the US requires a “freedom of action” where other countries do not.

While a military enforcer is one way to interpret the claim, it may not be a fully sufficient understanding of what we should take “freedom of action” to mean. “Securing strategic access” is placed along side “freedom of action” as a key objective. And like the tenet of “freedom of action”, the NDS does not elaborate as to what “securing strategic access” means beyond calling it “access to key regions, lines of communication, and the global commons.” With “freedom of action” and a mandate to “secure strategic access” to “commons,” such as oil, the NDS appears justify the US invading a nation for oil. One needs speculate very little to see how this could easily endorse military action to give US corporations access to valuable commons such as oil in Iraq and natural gas in Afghanistan. Under these guidelines, however, invasion would still be contingent on those commons not being available on the global free-market.

Hence, the objective to “protect the integrity of the international economic system” as well as a larger commitment to (4) — “establish(ing) favorable security conditions.” Unlike “freedom of action” and “strategic access”, the NDS does state very clearly what those favorable conditions are: “Such conditions include the effective and responsible exercise of sovereignty, representative governance, peaceful resolution of regional disputes, and open and competitive markets.” Responsible use of sovereignty does simply include democratic institutions and respecting the sovereignty of other nations states, but also a free-market economy. On these grounds Saddam Hussein was acting irresponsibly not simply by being undemocratic, but also by not providing oil on the international market.

Under the new National Defense Strategy, US military intervention is justified on numerous levels. While the traditional objectives of preventing direct attacks on the US and its allies are included, there are also new military objectives. According to the document, applying military means to a sovereign nation-state to force it to open its markets and “commons” is a legitimate action. That nation need not threaten its neighbors, the greater political stability of the nation, its own people, or deny its citizens representative government to warrant US military action. While these conditions are still present, the lack of a free-market economy has been added to the list.

With the US military strength being what it is, the US can afford to impose this framework of military action. The US can afford the “freedom of action,” which is now key in US military policy. But at what price? When the US wishes to enforce the world order — and states its intentions as such — it locks itself into an unbeatable game. Under the US-led capitalist system, which the US seeks to make the exclusive political-economic framework, the problems that have plagued us this far, will continue to plague us. The 9/11 attacks were indeed perpetrated by those who wish to destroy the American imposed world order. Further promotion and expansion of that world order — now with even looser conditions justifying military action — will only continue to breed terrorism. While the NDS does indeed represent a reaffirmation of US unilateralism, it also represents a reaffirmation of the conditions by which terrorism spawns. Those conditions are the relentless imposition of American values on the rest of the world. Being a US citizen that respects the autonomy of others now is the time to dissent.

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