US Global Power Projection: Is the World’s Policeman still Credible?

Gábor Vörös
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In the face of the growing global disarray, the United States is still relied upon as the “world’s policeman”. This role requires an “omnipresent” military, a function the United States accomplishes by having unparalleled power projection capabilities. While its military is still well ahead of its potential rivals, it has to face asymmetrical threats in the form of hybrid warfare and anti-access/area-denial. Russia and China, in particular, are employing methods to cancel out the global reach of the United States. Additionally, this global role places a substantial strain on American military assets and resources, which are becoming increasingly lacking in certain areas. Therefore, the United States needs to devise ways to fill these capability gaps and ensure its access to all domains. To do so, it needs to devolve more responsibility to its allies, while at the same time to come to terms with its own limits and enhance its capabilities accordingly.

ASSUMING THE POLICEMAN ROLE

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the global balance of power lost its bipolarity. The loss of Soviet economic and military support, as well as the demise of its socialist ideology, created a number of power vacuums in the world, making the 1990’s one of the most unstable decades in modern times. The world needed a policeman who is both ready to and capable of intervening in conflicts. And since the United States came out of the fierce arms and ideological race as an economically thriving, militarily unmatched, and culturally enviable nation, it was perfectly suited to fill that role. To fulfil its self-imposed obligations, it literally needed to be present everywhere in the world but it also needed to be proactive. Its use of force projection is not new: it had this capability since the 19th century, and both in the two World Wars and in the Cold War the United States had to rely on its power projection capability but then it was more reactive than pre-emptive.¹ In the span of 25 years, the United States was militarily involved multiple times in the Middle East and in Africa, it resolved the Balkan military conflicts, sustained its War on Drugs, led numerous humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions and embarked on the War on Terror, all of which required some forms of power projection. Given its access to two world oceans and its immensely powerful Navy, it also upheld the freedom of navigation in the high seas and safeguarded the global maritime trade.

But its policeman role did not bring about world peace, so much so that the world today holds arguably more dangers than in the past couple of decades. One, however, cannot only blame the US for this, since the world has also become perplexingly complex with many violent non-state actors rearing their heads, major powers becoming increasingly assertive, and geostrategically located states failing

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¹ Global Security, 2011 b.
one after another. This has incurred an anti-US sentiment by many towards its policeman role but at the same time, ambiguously, drew criticism from others when it did not want to interfere in world affairs. While many US Presidents ran on a more isolationist platform, eventually they had to resort to military options as the threats did not solve themselves. So now, in 2016, we still have the United States as the world’s only superpower, the one which is able to project its soft and hard power globally. But today, it is challenged on many fronts. While the US is stuck in a quagmire in the Middle Eastern shatterbelt – still engaged in the War on Terror –, its budgets are hardly keeping up with its responsibilities, and looking into the future, its conventional superiority cannot be taken for granted. And at this time it is facing a dyad of assertive nations, who are using a very vague definition of international borders, namely China and Russia. In the Asia–Pacific, China is embarking on a remarkable military modernisation, while concurrently trying to expand its sphere of influence towards the First (and also the Second) Island Chain. In Europe, when people have even called for the irrelevance of the NATO, comes the Russian annexation of Crimea and it seems the Old Continent is facing a resurgent threat again. So given the plethora of issues worldwide, one can rightly ask the questions: Is the United States’ global policeman role still credible? Is it still able to confront all of these threats? If it can, is it sustainable?

**US Power Projection Strategies**

In trying to answer these question, one must first look at how the United States perceives itself, that is, one must look at its strategic documents regarding its military objectives and capabilities. Its premier military publication, the *National Military Strategy* recognises the volatile nature of the global security situation and asserts that the United States has to have an integrated approach to confront today’s threats. That includes the capability to defend its homeland; disrupt, degrade and defeat any actor in a hybrid or non-state conflict; and deter, deny and defeat any conventional actor. Should deterrence fail, it must project power across all domains to defeat its adversary. It also mentions that the US must have global network of allies and partners to preserve the international stability.

Of similar importance the *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* promulgates what can be perceived as the 4 types of power projection, in the form of “instruments of national power”. First, the diplomatic instrument aims to advance US interests (mainly) through the Department of State and to resolve issues peacefully. Second, the informational instrument uses “interconnected global

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2 *Fund For Peace*, 2016.
3 *Global Security*, 2011 c.
4 O’Toole, 2016.
networks and evolving social media platforms” to attain the interests of the United States and to discredit the harmful propaganda and misinformation of violent non-state actors and nation states. Third, the military instrument is to support of its national security goals through coercive force. It has various tools in its repertoire ranging from deterrence through limited contingency operations to major military campaigns. Lastly, the economic instrument is used to leverage the US’ economic heft to encourage growth elsewhere, prevent financial crises, and, through the Department of the Treasury, to sanction non-complying international actors.7

As one can see, the United States employs power projection both in the form of soft and hard power. Additionally, the service branches have separate means of force projection. In the Army’s FM 3-0 document, it is explicitly mentioned that the Army requires “strategic and operational reach to deploy and immediately conduct operations anywhere with little or no advanced notice.” On strategic level this is to be achieved with expeditionary army forces through force projection with the support of the US Transportation Command and through entry operations either unopposed or in a forcible fashion. Additionally, the document states that there is a need for forward basing to maintain strategic reach.8

The Navy, which can be thought of as the premier force projection tool of the United States, clearly defines its six core capabilities in its Naval Doctrine Publication 1. Naval Warfare. These are: forward presence, deterrence, sea control, power projection, maritime security, and HA/DR (humanitarian assistance/disaster relief). Probably these are the capabilities that describe the most accurately not only the US Navy’s but also generally the United States’ core strategic imperatives. As the document puts it: “The ability to operate freely at sea is one of the most important enablers of joint operations and military support to OGAs (other government organizations) and NGOs (non-government organizations).”9

**Military Tools of US Power Projection**

To fulfil the “global policeman” role, the US Armed Forces needs a solid, forward deployable force. The ability of the United States to exert its power everywhere in the world and uphold global stability rests upon a set of intertwined military systems, many of which are unique to the US. What are these systems, how can they be employed, and what threats are their use facing?

Since over 90 per cent of the global trade is conducted by sea and the United States can be identified as a maritime power, its premier assets for power projection are its 10 Carrier Strike Groups (CSG).10 These strike groups are centred on a nuclear-powered supercarrier that houses a Carrier Air Wing which typically consists of

7 United States Department of Defense, 2013 a.
around 65 aircraft. The supercarrier has a ring of defence (anti-submarine, anti-air, missile defence) around it with ships called escorts. Those typically comprise, at minimum, one Ticonderoga-class cruiser, two Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers, two Los Angeles-class nuclear attack submarines, and a support ship.\textsuperscript{11} The CSGs not only represent American hard power with their immense firepower but they also serve as vehicles of soft power.

In case of a conflict their missions include projecting air power to the shores of an adversary, establishing control of the seas, and air superiority in their vicinity. In times of peace they secure the sea lines of communication (SLOC) to facilitate world maritime trade and occasionally they are used as a high-profile show of force. A good example of this is when in the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis an American supercarrier transited through the Taiwan Strait in a “showing-the-flag” mission.\textsuperscript{12} These CSGs are strategically deployed to various parts of the world to be able to quickly react to contingencies and to assure regional allies of American resolve.\textsuperscript{13} Although even a single CSG is more powerful than the combined navy and the air force of a middle power, they have their vulnerabilities.

Since their inception, every hypothetical adversary tried to devise ways to sink these ships, now with China, Russia, and Iran leading the way with their anti-access/ area-denial (A2/AD) strategies. China is allegedly in possession of an anti-ship ballistic missile (DF-21D) that can hit a US supercarrier from over 1000 nautical mile (although the missile has not been tested against a moving object, with heavy anti-ballistic missile [ABM] coverage and jamming).\textsuperscript{14} Additionally, the anti-ship subsonic, supersonic (and later hypersonic) cruise missiles, like the Russian Kalibr or the Chinese YJ-18 present an additional threat by overwhelming or outmanoeuvring the CSGs’ defences.\textsuperscript{15}

Ultimately, the “swarms” mean an increasing hazard to the CSGs. These are huge quantities of small, manoeuvrable boats armed with either anti-ship missiles or explosives. The goal here is also to inundate the defence systems with a strength-in-numbers approach. Iran is known to practice such tactics, and China is also potentially capable of this with its huge fishing and commercial vessel fleet.\textsuperscript{16} Consequently, new strategies have to be devised to counter these threats (more potent ABM coverage, enhanced cyber and jamming capabilities, etc.) or if the defensive capabilities cannot keep up with the offensive ones then the US has to rely on CSGs only in permissive environments.

Another form of force projection is the use of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF). On paper they are less powerful than a Navy-operated Carrier Strike Group, but their mission also differs quite a bit. The MAGTF’s task is that of an amphibious expeditionary unit, therefore their primary focus is to deploy an expeditionary force

\textsuperscript{11} United States Navy, 2016 a.
\textsuperscript{12} Global Security, 2011 d.
\textsuperscript{13} Stratfor, 2015.
\textsuperscript{14} Cole, 2013.
\textsuperscript{15} Goldstein, 2015.
\textsuperscript{16} Williams, 2013; Minnic, 2014.
on the ground as fast as possible, some even in 6 hours.\textsuperscript{17} This is a requirement for the kind of missions they undertake, which include mostly contingency response, but also humanitarian assistance and non-combatant evacuation missions. As their name suggests they comprise both air and ground weapon systems, which usually include various types of amphibious assault ships, an air component with helicopters (CH-53E Super Stallion, MV-22 Osprey, AH-1Z Viper), and close air support aircraft like the AV-8B Harrier, as well as a ground component with tanks (M1A2), armoured personnel carriers (LAV, AAV), and other transport vehicles. They are complemented by logistical and support systems.\textsuperscript{18}

The mission of the MAGTF might be somewhat transformed in the future, since with the inclusion of the F35B stealth fighter jet with effective suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD) capability and advanced sensors, the MAGTF will be able to conduct some of the operations that were limited to CSGs and forward based units before.\textsuperscript{19} The effectiveness of this force will also be multiplied as the 9 current amphibious assault ships will essentially double as aircraft carriers with capabilities matching or exceeding that of other nations’ aircraft carriers.\textsuperscript{20} However, a considerable obstacle in such a transformation is that these units lack appropriate air defence and anti-submarine capabilities, so they would be even more susceptible in anti-ship attacks. Nonetheless, by filling those capability gaps with possible submarine escorts and more potent missile defences, they would very much complement the CSG forces in a time when the US Navy is getting strained.

Another crucial element in power projection is the forward basing, in which the United States is miles ahead of other states. According to the estimates, there are around 600–800 US military installations worldwide.\textsuperscript{21} These include huge military bases but also small “cooperative security locations”.

In addition to that, there is another astounding figure: according the Department of Defense, the United States has military personnel deployed currently in 181 countries.\textsuperscript{22} This, of course, excludes secret installations, like CIA black sites, so the actual number could be even higher. This figure dwarfs that of other countries, as their number only adds up to around 30–40 bases. Even France and the United Kingdom, which have many dependencies around the globe, have only 25–30 bases together.\textsuperscript{23} The forward basing constitutes about $\frac{1}{6}$\textsuperscript{th} ($\sim$100 billion dollars) of the US military budget.\textsuperscript{24} These military installations are scattered all around the world, so the United States essentially has global military coverage. The most notable ones include those in South Korea (25,000 troops) to deter North Korea from invading its southern neighbour, in Japan (52,000 troops) to assure the Asian allies of its

\textsuperscript{17} United States Marine Corps, 2015.
\textsuperscript{18} United States Marine Corps, 2016.
\textsuperscript{19} Seck, 2015; Majumdar, 2016.
\textsuperscript{20} United States Navy, 2015.
\textsuperscript{21} Vine, 2015.
\textsuperscript{22} Department of Defense – Defense Manpower Data Center, 2015.
\textsuperscript{23} Harris, 2015.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
defence commitment, in Germany (37,000) and Italy (12,000) for NATO assurance, and in Bahrain (3,500) to maintain the security of the Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{25}

The forward deployment of US military personnel is vital for quick contingency responsiveness not only by having the pre-deployed personnel to carry out missions but also by providing infrastructure for troops transferred from other regions. It also acts as a deterrent element, especially where there are US military troops in high numbers. Besides those functions, it carries a “soft power projection” role by providing assurance to the host nation and by fostering security co-operation between the parties.\textsuperscript{26} These bases function as “unsinkable aircraft carriers” so they would be more resilient to an attack than their “sailing counterparts”, but they are still vulnerable to ever-longer-ranged missile attacks which would render the runways, harbours, and base infrastructure unusable. Therefore, aircraft shelter hardening, quick runway repair crews, and capable missile defence systems have to be deployed to ensure the utility of forward deployed bases.

An often overlooked but very important tool in the US force projection toolkit is the use of the Special Operations Forces (SOF), whose importance will only grow in the future. The United States’ Special Forces of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps are under the command of the Special Operations Command (SOCOM). It is a nearly 70,000-strong force, which is in fact larger than the entire militaries of some middle powers.\textsuperscript{27} But the quantity in this case is not to the detriment of quality, since the US special forces are widely regarded as the premier elite military troops in the world.

A component command of the SOCOM, the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) includes the most revered (and feared) Tier 1 units in the world, including the Delta Force and the Seal Team 6 with the occasional support of the 160\textsuperscript{th} Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) and the CIA’s shadowy Special Activities Division.\textsuperscript{28} Former Commander of the USSOCOM Joseph Votel said that these elite troops are present in at least 80–85 countries at any given time.\textsuperscript{29} This number is put at around 150 countries by some other – uncorroborated – estimates.\textsuperscript{30} Their missions include kinetic (hunter-killer) or other direct action operations, hostage rescue, support for American and other allied military personnel, training of local troops but also intelligence gathering.\textsuperscript{31} With the variety of missions they are able to carry out and with their massive global presence, the SOCOM can be deemed the most versatile element in the US power projection. The only vulnerability that the SOF face is burning out due to high workloads and too many deployments. This can be somewhat mitigated by more troop rotations and a more enabling work–life balance system.

\textsuperscript{25} \textsuperscript{24} – DoD.  
\textsuperscript{26} Lostumbo, McNerney \textit{et al.}, 2013.  
\textsuperscript{27} Feickert, 2014.  
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Strategy Page}, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{29} Starr, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{30} Turse, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{31} United States Special Operations Command, 2016.
But the linchpin that holds all of these elements together is logistics. This is one of those elements that regarding its scope and sophistication is unique to the United States. To be able to carry out its power projection strategy, the United States relies on its unparalleled airlift and sealift capabilities. The airlift is administered by the Air Mobility Command, with its C-5, C-17, C-130, and other cargo aircraft, as well as with its tanker force, providing strategic, theatre, and direct support airlift to its forces around the world.\textsuperscript{32} The sealift is the most important part of the replenishment and support, since 90 per cent of the US equipment and supplies travels by sea, as per the Military Sealift Command, the organisation which is in charge of this duty. They are using prepositioning, high-speed cargo vessels, tankers, and dry cargo ships to provide the necessary supply to US troops both during contingencies and in peacetime.\textsuperscript{33}

Along with the surface lift component of the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, these three service component commands, under the umbrella of the US Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), provide the United States with the necessary capabilities to sustain its global presence. These capabilities are subject to an increasing threat by submarines and long-range missiles which aim to interdict the supply lines. Therefore, through the new “Distributed Lethality” concept, the US Navy aims to outfit its logistic vessels with defensive and even offensive weapons to be able to defend themselves in limited threat situations.\textsuperscript{34}

Given that power projection is the cornerstone of the US military, there are many other tools, which serve this purpose apart from these main elements – for example the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) which can react to any contingency within 72 hours or the whole Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C5ISR) complex of the US which is by far the most sophisticated in the world.\textsuperscript{35}

\section*{Global Security Landscape}

With the military systems required for power projection seemingly in place, how ready is the United States in the major regions to confront the current threats there? The emphasis of the US military is on Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Still, Africa and Central and South America will also be analysed briefly, since although they are less prominent in the US strategic planning, they still warrant a few words.

\textsuperscript{32} United States Air Force, Air Mobility Command, 2016.
\textsuperscript{33} United States Navy, 2016 b.
\textsuperscript{34} Rogoway, 2015.
\textsuperscript{35} Global Security, 2011 a.
The most complex operating environment is also the one which has seen its importance grow the most significantly in the recent years. A stable Indo-Pacific region that is amenable to US interests is vital to the United States for a number of reasons. First, the economic centre of gravity is increasingly moving towards the region, while it already accounts for more than half of the world’s trade. But there are also tangible tensions in the region and the concerned countries are militarising rapidly. On top of that, the United States has treaty obligations with several states of the area, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and implicitly Taiwan.\textsuperscript{36}

The main culprit of the perturbations is China who has made great strides recently in its military modernisation. A benevolent modernisation could not be a reason for anxiety among its neighbours but it has also made audacious territorial claims which are incompatible with international law and are conflicting with other nations’ claims. To top it all off, China has embarked on massive island reclamations in the South China Sea and established an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea.\textsuperscript{37} This all fits nicely in the anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy it is pursuing to uphold its sphere of influence and eventually to expand it. But at least with China, there are some hopes to resolve this peacefully. The same cannot be truly said about North Korea which is actively pursuing nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of lobbing them at the United States.\textsuperscript{38} The “Hermit Kingdom” also presents a danger to South Korea with its enormous artillery forces directed at Seoul. Ultimately, while terrorism in the ASEAN countries seems to be contained, save for a few flare-ups in the Philippines and Bangladesh, the instability at the Indo-Pakistani border is still present. Two nations at odds with each other with their own terrorist problems and nuclear weapons at hand truly sounds like the recipe for disaster.

Although the security landscape is very volatile, the United States is uniquely placed to confront these threats in the near future. The Pacific Command (PACOM) is the largest of the unified combatant commands and has control over the most powerful US naval forces, like the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 7\textsuperscript{th} Fleets.\textsuperscript{39} With the “pivot to Asia”, the United States wants to have 60 per cent of the Navy and Air Force based in the Asia-Pacific.\textsuperscript{40} Besides that, the United States is strengthening its current alliances in the region reaching out to Vietnam, Indonesia, and importantly, to India. The Heritage Foundation’s “2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength” concludes that the current state of the alliances is “excellent”, an improvement over the state in 2015, but it also depends hugely on the domestic politics of an ally, as we can see it in the case of the Philippines.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{36} United States Department of State, 2016.
\textsuperscript{37} Reuters, 2015 a; Osawa, 2015.
\textsuperscript{38} Philipp, 2015.
\textsuperscript{39} United States Pacific Command, 2016.
\textsuperscript{40} LaGrone, 2014.
\textsuperscript{41} Heritage Foundation, 2015; Moss, 2016.
The sustainability of US power projection in the Asia-Pacific hinges upon its ability to use its naval forces without the limitation imposed by A2/AD, its ability to station troops in the region, and its ability to resupply those forces. Since the US aircraft carriers and other vessels are increasingly vulnerable to anti-ship missiles and due to the “tyranny of distance” the sustainability of naval forces is onerous, the United States either needs more permanent bases in the region or has to secure access to bases through rotational deployment. It already has around 85,000 pre-deployed troops and numerous bases there (Hawaii, Guam, Japan, South Korea, only to mention the most important ones) but aims to base additional forces in the Philippines, for example.\textsuperscript{42} Even with the growing missile, conventional and cyber threat from China and the nuclear threat from North Korea, the US forces in the region are still superior to that of its potential adversaries. But the dominance of the United States is eroding, and will need to invest both in key capabilities to offset this erosion and in regional allies for additional burden sharing. The force projection capabilities can still be used in the region but not with impunity, as certain strategies try to counter it.\textsuperscript{43}

**Europe**

Since the dissolution of the USSR, there was no major threat to the European continent. The NATO’s function as a bulwark against the Soviet Union was vanishing and the defence expenditures of the European nations entered in a state of decline. But after Russia annexed Crimea and entered in a hybrid conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, the apprehension in Europe made the United States to reconsider its stance there. Whether the threat of a Russian attack is real is up to anyone’s guess, but the fact that it has made belligerent actions certainly warrant a firmer stance both from the United States and the NATO. While some have voiced that Russia is not capable of conduction major military operations, it might be down (mostly financially) but not out. It used an unconventional type of warfare in Ukraine that the NATO was unprepared for, namely the hybrid warfare which included elements of deniable operations, cyber attacks, disinformation trough propaganda, and also “fifth column” (a group of people who undermine a city or even a country from within in favour of an enemy) tactics. Russia has also conducted snap military exercises where it amassed 100,000 troops without warning.\textsuperscript{44}

And then there is also the nuclear threat which is not far-fetched. Russia has adjusted its nuclear doctrine which includes very vague language about the contingencies in which it would use nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{45} Additionally, the threat of a “de-escalation” – the Russian military doctrine’s word for limited

\textsuperscript{42} Heritage Foundation, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{43} Heginbotham \textit{et al.}, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{44} Rathke, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{45} Sokov, 1999.
nuclear strike – that would freeze the conflict is not something out of the realm of possibility.\textsuperscript{46} The three areas of particular importance to Russia are the Arctic (where it already enjoys military superiority over the NATO), the Baltic States (it may deploy Iskander short-range ballistic missiles to Kaliningrad permanently) and the Black Sea (it is deploying advanced weapon systems to Crimea and is upgrading its Black Sea Fleet).\textsuperscript{47}

A predicament for the United States in Europe is that its armed forces are mainly designed for offensive actions, rather than defensive ones that would be needed in Europe against a potential Russian invasion. Besides that, since Europe is a landmass the United States would not be able to fully realise its power projection capabilities, which are centred on maritime forces. Therefore, it would need to rely on its Army and Air Force principally. And here comes the problem: according to the Heritage Foundation’s "2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength", the Army has inadequate readiness, with only a handful of Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) ready for action, it has diminishing end strength, and due to perpetual acquisition problems, it does not have the technological upgrades it needs.\textsuperscript{48} The Air Force is in a better situation regarding their strength of force but it is also ridden with readiness and modernisation issues.

To prevent a Russian foray into Europe it would need to preposition a much more capable force into Eastern Europe, since its military bases are dotted in the very vicinity of Germany and are only numbering around 65,000.\textsuperscript{49} According to estimates, Russia would be able to reach the capitals of Estonia and Latvia in no more than 60 hours and deploy 60,000 troops by air in only 72 hours, while the reaction time of even the NATO’s Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (5,000 troops) is measured in days.\textsuperscript{50} Consequently, a much greater burden sharing would be needed by other NATO member states (both by troop and financial contributions), since the US in itself cannot defeat a Russian invasion because its forces are needed elsewhere too. What the United States, in its current posture, should be able to do is to devise new strategies to counter hybrid threats, reposition some of its permanent forces eastward, preposition equipment and possibly deploy more SOF and air units into Eastern Europe. The latter proposition is very much advisable because of another reason: to keep the tensions in the Balkans at bay. As for the nuclear threat, the proposed second phase of the missile shield in Poland should be cancelled, because it cannot possibly intercept Russian ICBMs and would only amount to a tit-for-tat situation with Russia.\textsuperscript{51}

As for the Iranian ICBMs, which are used as the rationale for the establishment of the Aegis Ashore (radar) sites: not only do estimates expect their deployment the earliest in the 2020s but realistically Europe is much less conceivably a target

\textsuperscript{46} Sokov, 2014.
\textsuperscript{47} Bender, 2015.
\textsuperscript{48} Heritage Foundation, 2015.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Shlapak and Johnson, 2016; Rathke, 2015; Wagner, Ugrósyd, and Németh, 2016.
\textsuperscript{51} Sanders, 2007.
to them since the nuclear deal.\textsuperscript{52} And as for “rouge states” acquiring ICBMs: while it is very far-fetched in itself due to the complexity and the expense of the building of these ballistic missiles (see North Korea), the United States has permanent ship-based Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense system operational in the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{53}

**Middle East**

The current Middle East is a melting pot of terrorism and intrastate violence, proxy conflicts between regional powers, and state breakdowns. No wonder that there are signs that the United States is trying to withdraw from the region to divert its focus more to Asia (and to some extent, to Europe). Although a clear strategy is seemingly missing, there are nevertheless some objectives the US adheres to. Terrorist organisations, like ISIS or Al-Qaeda pose danger not only to the region but to Europe and the United States as well. Therefore, containing or defeating them (if that is even possible) is imperative to the United States. Also, the brewing “Middle Eastern Cold War” between Sunnis and Shias – or more precisely between Saudi Arabia and Iran – must be defused lest the region implodes completely. It is debatable whether the United States is in a position to do so, but it still has some leverage in this tug-of-war owing to its military power. It also needs to protect its other allies there (like Israel). Losing them would amount to a huge soft power loss. Lastly, the United States wants to keep the strategic straits (Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb) open to keep flow of hydrocarbons and other goods going.

The United States can leverage its power projection capabilities nearly to a full extent in the Middle East. It has established bases there with ground and sea lines of communication, the proximity of Arabian and Mediterranean Sea allows it to conduct carrier operations, and it has allies in the region who are more willing to enter a conflict on the side of the US than their European counterparts.\textsuperscript{54} If Iran does not abide by its pledge to give up on nuclear weapon development, the United States has to face a difficult task of destroying Iran’s WMD capabilities. Iran’s nuclear facilities are hardened and the majority of it are underground, so destroying them would require bunker buster munitions. If Iran acquires the Russian S-300 air defence system, then dozens of air sorties with standoff weaponry and stealth aircraft would also be needed to defeat the then formidable Iranian air defences. Additionally, forward deployed US vessels would be in danger of Iranian anti-ship missiles and swarm attacks.\textsuperscript{55} Such a conflict would draw substantial American military assets from other theatres, and therefore would jeopardize its role to uphold global stability.

\textsuperscript{52} Thielmann, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{53} Missile Defense Agency, 2016.  
\textsuperscript{54} Heritage Foundation, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{55} Cordesman, 2015.
Even if the United States would commit ground troops to any contingency – be it ISIS, Yemen, or Syria –, it would be a huge drag on US resources. Therefore, a strategy to pursue for the United States is to assure its allies of its commitment to defend them but by relying chiefly on remote deterrence and surgical operations. Eventually, the US must to delegate more responsibility to its allies there so it will not be stretched too thin in other regions. A way to do that is twofold: first, by supporting its allies with weapons and – more importantly – training; and second, by pursuing diplomatic avenues so they will not use those newfound force enablers offensively.

Africa

The second largest continent has enormous potential with its large and young population but governance issues and intrastate violence by state and non-state actors (like Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islam Maghreb) still hinder its development. The main concern of the United States in the region currently is counterterrorism and preventing further state failures. Therefore, it invests into development aid to try to address the root causes of terrorism but also conducts direct operations with special operations forces, as well as training and assisting operations to bolster regional forces. These threats require very limited allocation of US military resources, so it does not put a considerable strain on its military capabilities. In the future we will certainly see more US involvement in Africa, both as its importance grows and also as other major powers (China, for one) seek to exploit it, so it will be interesting to see how the US will manage the allotment of its assets there.

Central and South America

Latin America, on the other hand, should seem as a region which matters more to US strategy due to its proximity but it is still lagging behind in importance. This can be attributed to its stall in economic and social development, perpetual problems with corruption and criminal organisations. As part of its War on Drugs, the United States infused a lot of money into combating drug smuggling in the region. In addition, high crime prevalence rates threaten effective governance which in turn could present a problem to the United States right on its doorstep. Therefore, its approach to Central and South America is chiefly about cracking down on the drug trade and thwarting state failures in Central America. For the most part it involved, yet again, special operations forces to assist local police and

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military with huge aid packages and training. This measured US strategy is partly due to the lack of state-to-state tensions, and the fact that there are no flare-ups in its backyard is a boon to the United States. The future of the continent is uncertain, as it has seen a dearth of investment recently, and even big spenders, like China, are constrained due to their economic problems. A resurgence in importance is conceivable since the continent still has much more room to grow. In such case, a more active US foreign and security policy towards the region is certain.

**Conclusion**

From the First Gulf War the United States has defined its need to be able to fight and win two major regional conflicts (MRCs) simultaneously and decisively, wherever they are in the world. That was a different global landscape back then, but today this “2 MRC Doctrine” is perfectly applicable to the prevailing international security situation: a resurgent Russia and an assertive China. (As a disclaimer, this hypothetical global conflict is only based on the current relative probability of a conflict. The belligerents are interchangeable with any potential major threat in the near future.) What the United States could be able to do in such a conflict with current capabilities – and this is very much speculative! – is defend Europe with the help of the NATO (save for temporary or frozen territorial losses on the Eastern Flank) and counter China’s objectives while inflicting massive damage on its military and its infrastructure. Whether that would be able to dissuade the sides from further conflict is up for debate, essentially it would be a gamble, since both sides could also resort to nuclear weapons, disregarding how unlikely it would be in China’s case. (For the sake of this analysis the nuclear option is excluded since it would make all of these other remarks moot.) Therefore, at present the US is not able to win decisively in two MRCs at the same time but it still has the capacity to make those confrontations so costly for the enemy that it abandons the conflict over time.

In essence, the degree of investments and reforms to undertake are contingent on what capabilities the United States wants to possess. If it wants to have the capability to deter aggression in every major theatre and win limited regional wars, while still conducting its “global policeman” role, then it would need at least to maintain its current Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force troop levels, and more importantly, prevent further cuts to the Army, ideally increasing their end strength. While in the Asian theatre the Navy, the Air Force and the Marine Corps are still in somewhat favourable position, the current Army forces in Europe are not sufficient to repel a Russian attack. But if the United States wants to have the capability to defeat two near-peer adversaries decisively it has two options: it either bolsters

60 Reuters, 2015 b.
its Army to maintain ample readiness and around 50–55 Brigade Combat Teams while also modernising its other services (this upgrade would cost approximately 70 billion dollars annually), or it devolves much more responsibility to its allies in the NATO and/or in Asia.\textsuperscript{61}

In each case the US has to work with its allies in Asia and Europe to alleviate some of its defence burden, while also fostering ties in other parts of the world. It should also maintain and hone its already leading SOF capabilities but at the same time enact the long-awaited personnel overhaul to continue to attract the best people and to reduce the workload on troops. Importantly, the United States needs to pursue breakthrough technologies like autonomous systems, swarms, or cyber deterrence through the Third Offset Strategy to maintain its technological edge.\textsuperscript{62}

On a final note, the United States' capability to project power globally in the future depends on its ability to circumvent the A2/AD and the hybrid warfare challenges. There have been multiple operational concepts devised to address the problem posed by the proliferation of A2/AD. The most salient one is the Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JCAM-GC) which is essentially the famous AirSea Battle concept with bigger scope, and the inclusion of land troops. The gist of this concept is to assure access to even contested environments by dominating all domains (air, space, sea, land, and cyberspace) with long-range weapons like standoff mining, blinding enemy communications, and dispersing of the forces to reduce losses, among other tactics.\textsuperscript{63} As for the hybrid warfare, there is no scholarly consensus or even an official document outlining the measures to be taken against such a tactic but the general countermeasures include counterpropaganda, anti-cyberwarfare, and, most importantly, military deterrence.

For enhancing the global power projection capabilities of the US there is an interesting concept which could even substitute for some expeditionary force deployments. The Conventional Global Prompt Strike (CGPS) aims to develop a capability to strike any target anywhere in the world in less than 1 hour with conventional weapons. This would be particularly useful in such time-intensive situations where scalable firepower is needed, for example striking a terrorist compound or pre-emptively attacking a near-peer adversary's C5ISR assets. CGPS would mostly use conventional ballistic missiles and hypersonic weapons. A problematic part of this is that other states could misunderstand a conventional ballistic missile launch for a nuclear one, and could respond accordingly. However, there are some steps that can be taken to mitigate the risk, like designating missile bases only for conventional launches.\textsuperscript{64}

To accomplish all of this, first the United States needs a stable budgetary environment and reforms to the acquisition system. For both there are signs pointing in the right directions. For the former, the first passage of a multi-year budget in place of continuing resolutions is a big deal that not only brings some

\textsuperscript{61} Goure, 2013.
\textsuperscript{62} Martinage, 2015.
\textsuperscript{63} United States Department of Defense, 2013 b.
\textsuperscript{64} Woolf, 2015.
needed stability but also an increased budget to work with. As for the latter, the Better Buying Power 3.0 program aims to streamline the acquisition process in a “more bang for the buck” approach.

All of these efforts will have to take place while there are loud voices coming from Europe (and also from Asia) calling for more stationed assets from the United States. Considering the present security situation in both of these areas, it is understandable from the point of view of the concerned countries, most importantly Poland and the Baltic States in Europe, and the Philippines in Asia-Pacific. But the call for more permanent troop deployments is unlikely to materialize in any tangible form, only in rotational forward basing which drains less US resources. We might also see increased pre-deployment of equipment to increase reaction time, like in Norway, for example, but American troop levels in Europe comparable to that of in the Cold War are a pipe dream, unless a major and more credible Russian or other threat (the Balkans, for example) emerges. Even so, the militaries of Europe have to take on much bigger responsibility if they want to credibly complement the US troops in deterring hostile actions. This should be started on the financial side by reversing the declining military budgets and reducing the “peace dividend”. On the military side, more interoperability and joint exercises, as well as streamlined C2, are necessary to confront the future threats.

The present situation does look somewhat gloomy for the United States' global power projection. Threats are popping up one after another in every segment of the world and the American military readiness is lower than it is expected from the world’s preeminent power. But there is a silver lining though: if the United States can implement its ambitious operating concepts while minding its own limits and can operate in a sustainable yet more permissive budgetary environment, it will be able to confront the myriad of threats the world is facing today thus continuing its role as the world’s policeman.

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