

The new US National Security Strategy: a manifesto for a sovereign America in a multipolar world

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On 4 December, the Trump administration released a new National Security Strategy, signalling a profound redefinition of the United States' role in the world and a shift in the objectives and assumptions of its foreign and security policy. The US is abandoning its pursuit of global dominance and its efforts to maintain the liberal international order in favour of embracing an asymmetrically multipolar world and preserving both the global and regional balance of power. The strategy emphasises the importance of national sovereignty, expresses a critical stance towards international organisations, and adopts a more instrumental approach to the United States' partners and allies.

The document sets out a vision of the United States limiting its global engagement to issues that directly affect its national security. It also establishes a new hierarchy of key regions, focusing on the Western Hemisphere and the Indo-Pacific. While the strategy outlines a framework for continued cooperation with European countries, its sharp criticism of societal and economic changes in Europe – coupled with a pledge to counter them – will pose a major challenge for individual European states and for the European Union as a whole, potentially generating serious tensions in transatlantic relations. Equally problematic for Europe is the document's stated aim of pursuing a 'strategic stability' with Russia in Europe and ending the war in Ukraine as quickly as possible, while transferring responsibility for the continent's security to its European allies.

The NSS and US strategic documents

The National Security Strategy (NSS) is the primary strategic document that each US administration is required to publish. It forms the basis for a range of other documents, including the National Defense Strategy (NDS). The Pentagon is expected to outline the key assumptions of the new NDS in the coming weeks, although the full document will remain classified. The NDS, in turn, serves as the formal basis for the Global Force Posture Review, which determines the scale of US military presence in individual countries and regions worldwide.

The previous US National Security Strategy, published in 2022 by the Biden administration, focused on the rivalry between democratic and authoritarian states. Developing cooperation with 'like-minded' countries and building closer ties within multilateral frameworks – such as NATO and AUKUS (a defence and technology partnership between Australia, the UK, and the US) – were deemed essential to US national security.

In addressing the most significant challenges to US security, the Biden administration upheld the core assumptions of the 2017 National Security Strategy released by the first Trump administration, which marked a shift away from focusing on the terrorist threat towards countering challenges posed by revisionist powers – specifically China and Russia – and rogue states such as North Korea and Iran. In response, the US would pursue a strategy of ‘peace through strength’ – deterrence founded on US military power. Even then, the document called for adopting a realistic approach and an ‘America First’ orientation, while also emphasising the importance of US allies and partners and the need for a fairer distribution of responsibilities.

The objectives and assumptions of the new strategy

In many respects, the National Security Strategy of the second Trump administration is a landmark document. It marks a turning point in how the United States defines its role in the world. The authors reject what they regard as a flawed assumption underpinning US policy since the end of the Cold War – namely, that global dominance, along with globalisation and free trade, serves US interests. According to the new document, Washington overestimated its capacity to bear the costs of necessary investments in the armed forces, diplomacy, intelligence, and development assistance. At the same time, it underestimated the negative impact on the United States of the international organisations established since 1945 as part of the so-called liberal international order.

The new strategy emphasises the importance of the United States’ internal security, encompassing political, military, economic, technological, social, and cultural dimensions. It identifies a range of challenges and threats, including armed attacks, hostile influence operations, espionage, predatory trade practices, drug and human trafficking, destructive propaganda, and cultural subversion.

The objectives of US policy include regaining full control over the country’s borders in response to pressure from illegal migration; building resilient domestic infrastructure; maintaining the world’s strongest conventional armed forces, supported by credible nuclear deterrence and complemented by an emerging next-generation missile defence system (the Golden Dome); developing an innovative economy with an expanded industrial base and a dynamic energy and technology sector; and renewing America’s spiritual and cultural heritage.

Building on these objectives, **the strategy redefines the underlying assumptions of US foreign and security policy.** It clearly states that the United States will adopt a narrower definition of the national interest, deter adversaries by demonstrating its economic and military power under the concept of ‘peace through strength’ and pursue a policy of ‘flexible realism’ – that is, developing economic relations with other countries without seeking to democratise them or effect social change.

The document underscores the ‘primacy of nations’ and takes a critical view of multilateral organisations, regarding them as potential constraints on US action. It also emphasises ‘sovereignty’, focused in part on countering the influence of other powers on US domestic politics.

The strategy rejects the notion of US global dominance and stresses the pursuit of a global and regional balance of power as part of a vision of an asymmetrically multipolar world –

one in which the United States and China hold an advantage – pursued in cooperation with partners and allies. The United States must not allow any state to achieve global or regional dominance and pose a threat to its interests. At the same time, the strategy recognises the right of larger and stronger powers to exert influence over other states. Military interventions should, as far as possible, be limited in US policy, yet the country must remain prepared to use force when necessary.

Priority regions: the Western Hemisphere and the Indo-Pacific

The document outlines the strategic assumptions for individual regions, ranking them according to their significance for US national interests: the Western Hemisphere, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

The Western Hemisphere gains prominence under the new strategy, which revives the Monroe Doctrine with Trump Corollary. Its key premise is that the situation in Latin America directly affects the national security of the United States. Enhancing regional stability is viewed as essential to curbing illegal immigration, organised crime, and drug trafficking into the US. Washington considers it necessary to maintain and expand US economic and military influence in the region by securing access to strategic locations such as the Panama Canal, relocating elements of key supply chains to bolster the resilience of the US economy to global shocks, and increasing trade and investment with Latin American countries.

Partnerships with governments ideologically aligned with the current administration will form the basis for cooperation with the region. The United States also seeks to curtail the presence of its international rivals in the Western Hemisphere. To advance these objectives, it intends to increase its military presence in Latin America, partly by reducing its footprint in other parts of the world.

The strategy's approach to Asia focuses heavily on a fundamental restructuring of economic relations with China, whose actions are perceived as a threat to US economic interests and security. These concerns relate to China's trade and industrial practices (such as state subsidies for domestic companies), which contribute to the deindustrialisation of the United States, as well as to intellectual property theft, restrictions on access to critical raw materials, the export of substances used in fentanyl production, propaganda, and influence operations. To counter these challenges, the strategy calls for deeper economic cooperation with regional US allies and greater investment in research and development of advanced US technologies.

Secondly, **the document underscores the need to ensure continued access to the Indo-Pacific, particularly in terms of trade and maritime routes.** The region is defined as crucial to the United States' economic prosperity. Particular importance is attached to Taiwan and to deterring any potential Chinese invasion of the island, as control over it enables the US to maintain maritime access to both Northeast and Southeast Asia. Washington expects its allies and partners in the region – including South Korea, Japan, and India – to take a more prominent role in cooperating with the United States on military deterrence and to recalibrate their economic relations with China. This order of priorities suggests that China is viewed more as an economic challenge than as a strategic threat to the United States.

The Middle East and Africa lose prominence in the new strategy. US energy independence, the negative legacy of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and effective cooperation with regional actors – primarily Israel and the Gulf monarchies – are prompting Washington to scale back its military involvement in the Middle East. The United States does not seek to impose its agenda on Middle Eastern states; it accepts the region and its current leaders, particularly the Arab monarchies, as they are. In Africa, the US also intends to reduce its engagement, both militarily and in terms of development assistance. In both regions, the priority shifts towards economic cooperation, particularly in the areas of trade and investment.

Europe in strategic balance with Russia: a key partner facing civilisational erasure

The strategy ranks Europe third among the regions deemed important from the US perspective, after the Western Hemisphere and the Indo-Pacific. The authors highlight the continent's exceptional strategic and cultural significance for the United States, as well as the transatlantic economic relationship, described as one of the pillars of American prosperity.

At the same time, the strategy contends that **Europe is experiencing economic and civilisational decline**. These challenges are attributed to a range of factors, including the erosion of the member states' sovereignty by the European Union, immigration altering the demographic composition of individual countries, low fertility rates, restrictions on freedom of speech and the activities of opposition parties, and the erosion of national identities.

The United States regards the European Union as an international organisation whose regulatory powers negatively affect the operations of US economic actors in Europe, thereby constraining US sovereignty. Halting these negative trends is considered a matter of US national interest.

In the sphere of security, the United States seeks to restore 'strategic balance' with Russia in Europe as a means of reducing the likelihood of a European-Russian conflict. Russia is not portrayed as a challenge or a threat to the US. However, the strategy notes that 'many Europeans regard Russia as an existential threat.' It states that US diplomatic efforts will help establish a new *modus vivendi* on the continent, but makes no mention of any US military role in stabilising these relations.

The strategy argues that achieving this goal requires **ending the war in Ukraine as swiftly as possible**, claiming that this is what most European societies expect to see. According to the document, European officials 'hold unrealistic expectations for the war perched in unstable minority governments, many of which trample on basic principles of democracy', thereby prolonging the conflict and increasing the risk of its wider escalation.

The strategy also signals **an end to NATO enlargement**. It states, in clear and unequivocal terms, that European allies must assume primary responsibility for the continent's security.

Conclusions

The strategy marks a turning point in US foreign and security policy, while also reaffirming the Trump administration's existing approach. It does not necessarily reflect the personal convictions of the president himself; he is unlikely to feel bound by its provisions to the same extent as during his first term. Nevertheless, the document reveals a widely held

mindset within President Trump's inner circle. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the Republican Party will maintain this policy direction beyond the end of his presidency.

The strategy reflects the differing priorities of various factions within the Trump administration. The emphasis on domestic security bears the imprint of Stephen Miller, Deputy Chief of Staff and the president's adviser on homeland security. The heightened importance assigned to the Western Hemisphere, a position also championed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, is closely tied to this focus. Latin America is depicted as a source of human and drug trafficking into the United States, contributing to rising crime levels in the country. At the same time, the 'Trump Corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine reveals that the president and his inner circle conceptualise international relations in terms of great powers establishing spheres of influence within a multipolar world.

The strategy's extensive provisions concerning the rebalancing of economic relations with China demonstrate the influence of Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on the document's content. The strategy also refers – albeit to a much lesser extent and in general terms – to the military deterrence of China in the context of Taiwan, reflecting a position advocated by the Pentagon. Meanwhile, the section devoted to Europe indicates that intellectuals linked to the new US right, represented within the administration by Vice President J.D. Vance, played a substantial role in drafting the strategy.

In the field of European security, the strategy and its derivative documents are likely to initiate a process of further reducing the US contribution to collective defence within NATO. However, this does not necessarily entail a rapid and abrupt drawdown of the permanent US presence in Europe, or of rotational US deployments along NATO's eastern flank; the latter may depend on the outcome of the war in Ukraine and on the progress of efforts to restore a 'strategic balance' with Russia. This formula signals a shift in the paradigm of US policy – a departure from the strategy of weakening Russia in favour of seeking a *modus vivendi* with Moscow. This could undermine the credibility of NATO's deterrence posture towards Russia and increase US pressure on European allies to engage in direct European-Russian dialogue and to re-establish arms control agreements and confidence-building measures along NATO's eastern flank.

In the area of economic cooperation with Europe, the strategy reaffirms the current administration's objective of reducing the role of the EU – particularly the European Commission as the guardian of the single market and trade policy – and of reversing the process of European integration. In future, the Trump administration may also link security issues far more explicitly with concessions in the sphere of economic cooperation, pressing individual member states and the EU as a whole to provide greater access to European markets for US goods and services. To advance these objectives, the current White House administration may increase its support for ideologically aligned political forces and Eurosceptic movements within individual European states. It is also likely to deepen political and economic relations with countries in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, seeking to leverage these closer ties to advance its interests within the EU.