

March 2026

OCCASIONAL PAPER

Volume 6, Number 3

Expert Commentary on the 2025 National Security Strategy



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

**Expert Commentary on the
2025 National Security Strategy**

Edited by

David J. Trachtenberg

National Institute Press®

Published by
National Institute Press®
12150 Monument Dr., Suite 125
Fairfax, Virginia 22033

Copyright © 2026 by National Institute Press®

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by an electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, and recording or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. The views expressed in this *Occasional Paper* are those of the author(s) alone and do not represent any institution with which they are or have been affiliated.

National Institute for Public Policy would like to thank the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that made this *Occasional Paper* possible.

Cover design by Stephanie Koeshall.

Table of Contents

Preface.....	v
The 2025 National Security Strategy: Breaking More Than Continuity <i>Kathleen C. Bailey</i>	1
An American Return to the Western Hemisphere	11
<i>Ilan Berman</i>	
The 2025 NSS: Keep Calm and Bolster Deterrence	19
<i>Rebecca Heinrichs</i>	
Securing America’s Home While Reframing U.S. Security Policy	27
<i>Peter Huessy</i>	
Two Cheers for the National Security Strategy	39
<i>Matthew Kroenig</i>	
NATO Enlargement: An Obituary?.....	47
<i>Michael Rühle</i>	
Two National Security Strategy Blind Spots: Nonproliferation, Extended Deterrence	59
<i>Henry Sokolski</i>	
Parsing the New National Security Strategy: A Remarkable About Face	69
<i>David J. Trachtenberg</i>	

Preface

This *Occasional Paper* provides a compilation of views on the Trump Administration's 2025 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS). The document, publicly released in December 2025, is half as long as, and represents a significant departure from, the *National Security Strategy* released during President Trump's first term in December 2017. The 2025 NSS provides insight into the Trump Administration's worldview with respect to the threats faced by the United States in an increasingly dynamic and dangerous international environment and how the United States plans to deal with them. The president has described the strategy as "a roadmap to ensure that America remains the greatest and most successful nation in human history, and the home of freedom on earth."

The commentaries contained in this *Occasional Paper* reflect the personal views of well-respected subject matter experts in the field of national security and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the U.S. government or any entity or organization with which the authors may be affiliated. Many of the contributors have a distinguished record of service at senior levels of the U.S. government and their views are informed by years—in some cases, decades—of public service dealing with strategic-level national security issues. In addition, foreign expert perspective is also included.

This volume begins with commentary from Kathleen Bailey, who contrasts the 2025 NSS with the Reagan Administration's 1987 NSS, noting the significant changes in how the United States views its allies and adversaries. She also recommends a non-partisan group of experts develop an "alternative NSS-style White Paper" that "cultivates allies, partners, and friends" and "relies on cooperation and leadership rather than coercion." Ilan Berman asserts that the NSS reflects "the logical extension

of a reinvigorated focus on the Western Hemisphere on the part of the current U.S. government.” He contends that this “more activist presence in the Western Hemisphere...represents an essential component of homeland security,” noting that this “reorientation amounts to a sea-change in U.S. policy.” Rebecca Heinrich argues that the NSS “did not specify and explain the risks to the United States and its allies posed by adversaries.” However, she notes that “it did maintain similarities with the first Trump Administration’s NSS in ways that are important to highlight, and it does present opportunities to build on important continuity from across administrations.” She concludes that the “NSS’s sharp criticisms of allies certainly risks trust and credibility of assurances and positive diplomatic cooperation,” but asserts that “the reality of the threats, and this administration’s acknowledgment of U.S. vital interests retain continuity on which the United States and its allies can and should build.” Peter Huessy writes that the NSS properly focuses on the Western Hemisphere and does not represent, as critics suggest, “an implicit retreat from other areas of the world.” He asserts that such criticism “makes little logical sense.” While praising the strategy’s acknowledgement that both China and Russia “are in the business of coercive nuclear diplomacy,” he argues, “Most noteworthy in the document is the central role nuclear weapons play in U.S. security. It is clear from the current security mosaic that the United States is firmly dedicated to modernizing the nation’s nuclear deterrent.” Matthew Kroenig argues that “the new NSS gets much right and a couple of big things wrong.” He contends that the NSS “correctly doubles down on many of the key pillars of the United States’ successful 80-year grand strategy, updating them with practical answers to new challenges,” but that it fails “to properly frame the challenge posed by the ‘axis of aggressors’ and in disavowing the pragmatic promotion of

democracy and human rights.” He concludes that “the document would have benefited from a clearer strategic context section that outlined the threats and opportunities that the United States is facing.” Michael Rühle argues that the 2025 NSS “is more a manifesto of the *Weltanschauung* of a few true believers in the Make-America-Great-Again (MAGA) movement than a coherent presentation of a cohesive policy.” Regarding the document’s approach to the issue of NATO enlargement, he contends that while such a policy may have been beneficial early on, “the enlargement process increasingly came into conflict with geopolitical realities” and “its continuation risks squandering many of these initial achievements.” In this regard, he sees the NSS as ratifying the Trump Administration’s antipathy toward NATO. Henry Sokolski argues that an astonishing feature of the NSS is not what it says but what it doesn’t say. Specifically, it ignores any discussion of extended deterrence or nuclear nonproliferation. He concludes that on these important issues the NSS is “missing in action” and that this oversight needs to be addressed. David Trachtenberg argues that the 2025 NSS essentially repudiates the findings and conclusions of the 2017 NSS, issued in the Trump Administration’s first term. He notes the lack of any significant discussion of major power and rogue state threats to U.S. security, noting that this “denial of realities” sends dangerous messages to both U.S. foes and friends alike.

In short, some of the expert commentaries contained in this volume characterize the NSS as a welcome and refreshing course correction, jettisoning the failed policies of the past and reprioritizing emphasis on those areas most relevant and important to American interests. Others point to a strategy document that is incomplete and inconsistent with traditional bipartisan approaches— one that refocuses American attention on the Western Hemisphere to the

detriment of other regions where U.S. interests are at increasing risk, downplays significant great power threats, essentially ignores rogue state challenges, chastises allies more than adversaries, and suggests a growing detachment from the network of global alliances, typically led by the United States, that have helped keep the peace for the past eight decades. Despite these differing assessments, it is clear that the 2025 NSS reflects a major course change from the traditional sinews of American foreign and defense policy.

The 2025 National Security Strategy: Breaking More Than Continuity

Kathleen C. Bailey

Introduction

Once sovereignty is treated as conditional and resources as spoils, alliances weaken, trust erodes and others follow suit. A 19th-century world of spheres and seizures, armed with 21st-century weapons, is not a strategy, it is a systemic risk.¹

This essay briefly explores three aspects of the 2025 *National Security Strategy*: the vastly dramatic shift since January 2025 in the objectives and means of U.S. national security objectives; how pursuing some of the objectives of the NSS may clash with the implementation of others; and how degradation of alliances and relationships in the wake of the NSS may promote nuclear proliferation and greater conflict.

Shift in Objectives and Means

A good starting point for understanding the dramatic shift inherent in the 2025 Trump NSS is by quoting the introduction to Ronald Reagan's 1987 NSS, which was a hallmark and set the course for NSS's that followed until 2025. Reagan set out the following broad aims for America's leadership:

- Commitment to the goals of world freedom, peace and prosperity;

¹ Christoph Stahl, "Letters," *The Economist*, January 13, 2026, <https://www.economist.com/letters/2026/01/13/americas-operation-to-remove-nicolas-maduro-from-power>.

- Strong and close relationships with our Alliance partners around the world;
- Active assistance to those who are struggling for their own self-determination, freedom, and a reasonable standard of living and development;
- Willingness to be realistic about the Soviet Union, to define publicly the crucial moral distinctions between totalitarianism and democracy; and
- Seeking meaningful ways of working with the Soviet leaders to prevent war and make the world a more peaceful place.²

The contrast with the 2025 NSS is stark. Now gone is the premise that U.S. strength is derived from alliances, freedom and development worldwide, democracy rather than totalitarianism, and meaningful ways to work with others. In place of these are very U.S.-centric goals: to control the Western Hemisphere, prevent adversaries' dominance in the Middle East, control natural resources, restore Europe's "western identity," fence the U.S. economy from "damage that foreign actors inflict," keep open navigation in the Indo-Pacific, and ensure world-dominant U.S. technology.³ These "core, vital" interests are distilled in the NSS: "[U.S. foreign policy] is motivated above all by what works for America—or, in two words, 'America First'."⁴

² The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, January 1987, p. 1, <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1987.pdf?ver=FUZbPLY3ZDfa4UTDpMkNzw%3d%3d>.

³ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, p. 5, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

The two primary means to reach these objectives—military and economic leverage—are, like the goals themselves, framed as coercive rather than cooperative. The NSS discussion of achieving hemispheric dominance describes the strategy.

A principal method of achieving hemispheric dominance is prepositioning military force and exercising it to deny others the ability to own or control assets in the region—the so-called “Trump corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine.⁵ This is accompanied by “enlisting regional champions” to assist in U.S. goals and “rewarding” those who cooperate. Perhaps inherent in this is the threat that those who are not champions will be removed, as was President Maduro. And the model for a “champion” might be Nayib Bukele, president of El Salvador, who has taken deportees from the United States in return for money and a visit to the Oval Office.

While the degree to which such American strongarm tactics will be effective is still unproven, they clearly will be costly financially in terms of personnel and distraction of resources. Operation Southern Spear—the 124-day buildup that preceded capture of Nicolás Maduro—is estimated to have cost \$31 million per day (and to have involved around 38 percent of Navy ships underway and available for the Caribbean),⁶ for a total of about \$3.84 billion.

A second tool is to “...prioritize commercial diplomacy, to strengthen our own economy and industries, using tariff and reciprocal trade agreements as powerful tools.”⁷ (emphases

⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶ Mark F. Cancian and Chris H. Park, “Ongoing Military Operations Around Venezuela Cost \$31 Million per Day—\$2.8 Million Is Unbudgeted,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ongoing-military-operations-around-venezuela-cost-31-million-day-28-million-unbudgeted>.

⁷ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, op. cit., p. 16.

added) The obvious critique of such tools' viability is that they are already having the opposite of the intended effect. Tariffs and economic threats during 2025 have spurred countries to quickly conclude pacts with non-U.S. partners. Among others, China has diversified exports away from the United States to Europe and Southeast Asia; Canada and Mexico have strengthened ties;⁸ small economies are joining together in trade agreements;⁹ Canadian Prime Minister Carney went to Beijing in January 2026 to discuss new trade;¹⁰ and, India has closed three trade agreements since last year (with Britain, New Zealand, and Oman), is working on one with the European Union, and preparing for talks with Canada.¹¹

Throughout the NSS there is neither acknowledgement of the costs of the pressure campaigns required for dominance in the hemisphere, nor of the actual effects on world trade that the tariffs and lopsided trade deals pushed by the United States are having. Instead, there is a presumption that the United States will prevail based on the value that it offers. The following tone-deaf NSS quote summarizes the faulty U.S. perspective: "What

⁸ "Canada-Mexico Action Plan 2025-2028," (Government of Canada, January 8, 2026), <https://international.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/corporate/reports/mexico-partnership/action-plan-2025-2028>.

⁹ For example, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates have coordinated 14 countries into the Future of Investment and Trade Partnership. "Why Donald Trump's tariffs are failing to break global trade," *The Economist*, October 8, 2025, <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2025/10/08/why-donald-trumps-tariffs-are-failing-to-break-global-trade>.

¹⁰ Zi-Ann Lum, "Lutnick: Carney's China deal opens 'road map' to change USMCA," *Politico*, January 22, 2026, <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/01/22/lutnick-carney-davos-usmca-00741329>.

¹¹ "The odd thing about Modi's mojo," *The Economist*, January 22, 2026, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2026/01/22/the-odd-thing-about-modis-moj>.

differentiates America from the rest of the world—our openness, transparency, trustworthiness, commitment to freedom and innovation, and free market capitalism—will continue to make us the global partner of first choice.”¹²

Goals Clash

Portions of the NSS are at odds, both with reality and with each other. For example, the goal of dominating the Western Hemisphere undermines the goal of restraining China in the Indo-Pacific.

The Trump NSS seeks to assert and enforce control over the Western Hemisphere by nurturing leaderships that act in consonance with Washington, limiting the presence of non-regional foreign powers, and ensuring U.S. access to critical materials and locations. “We will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in our Hemisphere.”¹³

Contrast this with the two principal NSS goals for the Indo-Pacific: preventing a toll being levied on commerce or closing maritime traffic at will; and preventing China's taking Taiwan by force. The NSS declares that by deepening U.S. commercial, defense, and technology ties in the Indo-Pacific, the United States will enhance its competition in that region. Thus, while it is deemed acceptable for the United States to blockade ship traffic to Venezuela and to threaten military action and crippling tariffs against Columbia, China is supposed to refrain from the same type of behavior. If the United States asserts the right to dominate the Western Hemisphere, why is it not reasonable for China to expect to do the same in its own backyard? The

¹² *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, op. cit., p. 22.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 15.

NSS conveys an untenable assumption: the United States has rights to a sphere of ownership whereas China and others do not.

Another clash is that some goals asserted by the NSS are betrayed by the means envisioned for their implementation. Striving to be the world's strongest military power does not jibe with denigrating and tearing at the fiber of alliances. Defending the principle of sovereignty rings hollow when one threatens to take over another nation. Becoming a trusted economic partner does not comport with using tariffs and financial technologies to coerce concessions repeatedly.

The consequences of the clash of objectives and means could be dire. Already, European allies have begun to view the United States as unworthy of trust and NATO as on the brink of breaking. East Asian allies are jittery, rethinking whether they need their own nuclear deterrent. Smaller nations, feeling alternately ignored and economically squeezed by the United States, are prone to consider the protective arms of China.

As nations pull away from reliance on the United States for security and as a partner, some U.S. tools of coercion—such as using financial technologies “to induce” countries to comply with U.S. demands¹⁴—are likely to further weaken. Financial and technology cudgels already are losing effectiveness as other countries construct alternatives,¹⁵ and the pace is now likely to quicken. For example, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa have devised a digital blockchain payments system for cross-

¹⁴ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, op. cit., p. 18

¹⁵ Marco Cipriani, Linda S. Goldberg, Gabriele La Spada, “Financial Sanctions, SWIFT, and the Architecture of the International Payments System,” (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, January 2023), https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/research/staff_reports/sr1047.pdf.

border payments. It was inspired largely by the U.S. repeated use of the SWIFT banking system, which is based on the U.S. dollar, to gather intelligence and to apply sanctions. We can expect an uptick in others' efforts to insulate themselves from the effects of such coercive tools, in part, because China increasingly offers alternatives.

Prospects for Proliferation

After President Carter took office in 1977, then-National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski argued successfully for the United States to sever its Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan, withdraw military personnel, and break formal ties with Taipei in order to achieve a broader "strategic partnership" with China. After Washington abruptly abandoned Taiwan, the Taiwanese fast-tracked development of their own nuclear deterrent. But upon learning of the secret program, Washington shut it down. In return, the U.S. Congress passed legislation assuring Taiwan of ample conventional weaponry to deter China and committed to preventing any forceful takeover. Yet, despite these assurances, the U.S. commitment has waned over time while the threat of takeover has grown. A clear lesson to Taiwan, and any country that observes this history, is that depending on the United States for security may not be the best option.

The NSS is likely to spur insecurity among U.S. friends, partners and allies because it deemphasizes security guarantees and advocates that alliances instead focus on U.S. economic aims. The NSS mentions "allies" 32 times, 25 of which are to complain about allies' lack of expenditures, lack of character, or need for them to help the United States gain critical resources. Only 7 times are allies noted in the context of security and solidarity, and even then, not always in positive terms. The NSS notes "...it is far from obvious

whether certain European countries will have economies and militaries strong enough to remain reliable allies.”

Arguably the most drastic change in the NSS is toward the U.S. friend and partner, Taiwan. The meticulously maintained policy since 2003¹⁶ had been that the United States “*opposes* any unilateral changes to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait” from either side of the Strait (emphasis added). “Oppose” represents an active policy stance against unilateral action. The Trump NSS changes this to read “...the United States *does not support* any unilateral change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait” (emphasis added). Previous administrations have taken great care to maintain the prior language precisely—using the word “oppose” rather than “not support” to signal China that we would not tolerate taking the island by force. The linguistic change is a green light for China.

That sentence bodes badly enough for Taiwan's security, but the next sentence is perhaps worse, “We *will build* a military capable of denying aggression anywhere in the First Island Chain”¹⁷ (emphasis added). Not only has the focus shifted from Taiwan's defense to that of the First Island Chain, but the NSS asserts that the U.S. military capability to deny aggression doesn't presently exist.

The 2025 NSS sends clear messages to U.S. allies worldwide that they have become less secure in the past year. It will not be surprising if future historians mark this NSS as a turning point for allies' trust in the United States, a trigger for the invasion of Taiwan and all the losses for the West that this entails, and renewed efforts worldwide to acquire nuclear weapons.

¹⁶ The policy was first articulated by President George W. Bush in 2003. Prior to that time, U.S. policy had been focused on finding a “peaceful resolution” to the Taiwan dispute.

¹⁷ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

Conclusion

The 2025 NSS accurately reflects the worldview and intent of the Trump Administration. Stephen Miller, a senior adviser to Mr. Trump, offered a concise view of the same message the NSS sends: the “real world” is governed by strength, power and force and these are “the iron laws of the world since the beginning of time.”¹⁸

We need an alternative NSS-style White Paper. It will not be used by the Trump Administration, of course, but it will be available as a guide to strategy for when there is a course correction.

A non-partisan panel of educated, experienced individuals could be charged with writing a strategy mindful of history, current threats, and requisite capabilities. This paper should not be a critique of what is wrong with the NSS; it should describe a constructive path forward. To the extent reasonable, it should utilize and build on the NSS, but its charter should clearly be to devise an alternative strategy that cultivates allies, partners, and friends. It should describe the threats that the United States and its allies face, the bridges that need building or rebuilding, and a course that relies on cooperation and leadership rather than coercion.

Kathleen C. Bailey is former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the Department of State and Assistant Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

¹⁸ Stephen Miller, Interview with Jake Tapper, CNN, January 5, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/01/06/politics/trump-greenland-venezuela-colombia-miller-analysis>.

An American Return to the Western Hemisphere

Ilan Berman

In the early morning hours of January 3, 2026, the Trump Administration launched “Absolute Resolve,” a military operation to apprehend Venezuelan dictator Nicolas Maduro and remove him from office. The effort marked the most consequential U.S. intervention in Latin America in decades, involving large-scale coordinated intelligence, air and special operations assets.

While news of Maduro’s ouster came as a shock to many, it should not have. The decision to remove Venezuela’s illegitimate president—whose rule had not been recognized by the United States since 2019—was the logical extension of a reinvigorated focus on the Western Hemisphere on the part of the current U.S. government.

This priority was officially codified in the administration’s November 2025 *National Security Strategy*, which outlines that the administration seeks “a Hemisphere whose governments cooperate with us against narco-terrorists, cartels, and other transnational criminal organizations,” and one that “remains free of hostile foreign incursion or ownership of key assets.”¹ The administration’s subsequent *National Defense Strategy*, released in January 2026, reinforces this focus, detailing that “American interests... are under threat throughout the Western Hemisphere.” It goes on to outline plans to secure

¹ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

the U.S. homeland by, among other things, “secur[ing] key terrain” in the Americas.²

The framing makes clear that, in the eyes of the Trump Administration, a more activist presence in the Western Hemisphere is not optional. Rather, it represents an essential component of homeland security.

Backward From Engagement

Such a reorientation amounts to a sea-change in U.S. policy. Back in 2013, in a speech before the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C., then-Secretary of State John Kerry declared that “the era of the Monroe doctrine is over.”³ Kerry’s pronouncement was intended to signal to regional states that the heavy-handed interventionism that at times had characterized America’s approach was a thing of the past. In practice, however, it also conveyed something else: that Washington no longer intended to actively contest the growing influence of outside powers south of its border.

The results were pronounced. In the years that followed, the U.S. scaled down its involvement in the region, cutting back funding for key initiatives and military partnerships and disengaging politically from vulnerable regional states.⁴ At the same time, the influence of external actors expanded significantly. Russia deepened its political

² U.S. Department of War, 2026 NDS: *National Defense Strategy*, January 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

³ Keith Johnson, “Kerry Makes It Official: ‘Era of Monroe Doctrine is Over,’” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2013/11/18/kerry-makes-it-official-era-of-monroe-doctrine-is-over/>

⁴ J.D. Gordon, “The Decline of U.S. Influence in Latin America,” AFPC *Defense Dossier* Issue. 9, December 2013, <https://www.afpc.org/publications/e-journals/security-and-stability-in-latin-america>.

contacts, intelligence cooperation, and military collaboration with the region's anti-Western states, including Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba. China made Latin America a major focus of its sprawling Belt & Road Initiative, engaging regional states in ways that increased their economic and political dependence on Beijing while heightening security risks to the United States through the construction of dual-use infrastructure and China-dependent telecommunications networks. Iran, meanwhile, undertook a systematic effort to expand its political, economic and operational footprint in the region, using Venezuela as a beachhead. Non-state actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah flourished as well, exploiting permissive environments and weak governance to expand their fundraising, logistics and facilitation networks.

By early 2025, Latin America was increasingly characterized by deeply adverse political and security dynamics. These included the growing presence of strategic competitors—most notably China, through expanding economic, technological, and infrastructure activities, and Russia, through support for regional authoritarian regimes as well as reinvigorated disinformation operations and military contacts—who sought to undermine U.S. influence. Iran likewise expanded political, military, and economic cooperation with sympathetic governments while cultivating ideological networks capable of generating asymmetric leverage in the Western Hemisphere. At the same time, transnational criminal organizations and violent gangs continued to exploit the region's weak governance, fueling drug trafficking, irregular migration, corruption, and endemic violence.⁵

⁵ Admiral Alvin Holsey, Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 13, 2025, https://www.southcom.mil/Portals/7/Documents/Posture%20Statements/2025_SOUTHCOM_Posture_Statement_FINAL.pdf?ver=5L0oh0wyNgJ2_qzelc6wKQ%3D%3D.

The Road to Caracas

Even before President Trump returned to the White House in January 2025, it was clear that the Western Hemisphere would loom large on his second term foreign policy agenda. The Biden Administration's failure to control migration from Latin America, or to adequately secure the southern U.S. border, had become a heated national political issue. Meanwhile, the President's state of residence was shared by two of his top officials, National Security Advisor-designate Michael Waltz and Secretary of State-designate Marco Rubio, thereby guaranteeing that Florida, with its large Latino population and focus on the Americas, would effectively drive foreign policy in a second Trump Administration.

On his first day in office, President Trump issued an Executive Order laying the groundwork to designate criminal organizations and drug cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs).⁶ Tellingly, in an early indicator of what would follow, that Order included an explicit reference to Venezuelan criminal gang Tren de Aragua. A month later, the administration formally designated eight Latin American crime organizations, including Tren de Aragua, as FTOs under U.S. law.⁷

By August, ongoing activity by drug cartels led the Trump Administration to initiate military deployments to the Caribbean. U.S. warships were deployed near

⁶ The White House, "Executive Order: Designating Cartels And Other Organizations As Foreign Terrorist Organizations And Specially Designated Global Terrorists," January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/designating-cartels-and-other-organizations-as-foreign-terrorist-organizations-and-specially-designated-global-terrorists/>.

⁷ U.S. Department of State, "FACT SHEET: Designation of International Cartels," February 20, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/designation-of-international-cartels>.

Venezuela as part of an effort to curtail drug cartel activity,⁸ and beginning the following month the Pentagon commenced a sustained maritime strike campaign against drug-smuggling vessels.⁹ In October, President Trump confirmed that he had authorized the CIA to carry out covert operations inside Venezuela itself.¹⁰ In November, the U.S. Department of State formally designated another Venezuelan cartel, the Cartel de los Soles, as an FTO—with the designation explicitly outlining the role of Maduro and other regime officials in its continued functioning.¹¹ And in December, the U.S. ordered a blockade of sanctioned oil tankers entering and leaving Venezuela, commenced the interception of such vessels, and levied sanctions on Venezuela’s “shadow fleet” and oil trade facilitators.¹²

By the time it made the decision to remove Maduro from power, the Trump Administration had both attempted to mitigate Venezuela’s destabilizing activities and explicitly linked Maduro himself to the criminal networks emanating from its borders. Thereafter, rather than pursuing wholesale

⁸ Steve Holland, “US deploys warships near Venezuela to combat drug threats, sources say,” *Reuters*, August 18, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/us-deploys-warships-near-venezuela-combat-drug-threats-sources-say-2025-08-18/>.

⁹ See, for instance, Phil Stewart, Idrees Ali and Steve Holland, “US military kills 11 people in strike on alleged drug boat from Venezuela, Trump says,” *Reuters*, September 3, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/us-military-kills-11-people-strike-alleged-drug-boat-venezuela-trump-says-2025-09-03/>.

¹⁰ Nandita Bose, “Trump authorizes CIA operations in Venezuela, raising pressure on Maduro,” *Reuters*, October 16, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/trump-confirms-cia-authorization-venezuela-2025-10-15/>.

¹¹ U.S. Department of State, “Terrorist Designation of Cartel de los Soles,” November 16, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/11/terrorist-designations-of-cartel-de-los-soles>.

¹² U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Targets Oil Traders Engaged in Sanctions Evasion for Maduro Regime,” December 31, 2025, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0348>.

regime change in Caracas, the White House has opted to allow Maduro's vice president, Delcy Rodriguez, to take power—reflecting the administration's core priority that, whatever its political composition, Venezuela cease to function as a source of instability and platform for regional power projection for hostile actors.

Looking Beyond Venezuela

In the aftermath of Maduro's ouster, speculation has abounded over which additional Latin American nations might become targets of increased U.S. pressure. For the moment, at least, a second American military intervention in the region appears unlikely. What has changed more fundamentally, however, is the tenor of Washington's approach toward several regional states.

Columbia is one. Once a privileged security and counternarcotics partner, Columbia under current president Gustavo Petro has come to be seen as a security concern. Accordingly, the United States has threatened tariffs, levied sanctions and increased political pressure over alleged links between elements of Petro's government and drug trafficking networks.¹³ While recent weeks have seen at least a partial de-escalation of this confrontation, ongoing U.S. pressure reflects the fact that Bogota is now seen as a conditional ally whose behavior is best shaped through coercive leverage.

Mexico is another. The Trump Administration has exerted growing economic and political pressure on Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum in the form of tariff threats, seeking to compel more resolute Mexican action

¹³ Daphne Psaledakis, "US imposes sanctions on Colombian President Petro over drug accusations," *Reuters*, October 24, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/us-sanctions-colombian-president-petro-citing-illicit-drugs-2025-10-24/>.

against both cartels and irregular migration.¹⁴ President Trump has gone so far as to threaten potential military action against cartels inside Mexico to eliminate the threat they pose to the U.S. homeland and American citizens.¹⁵

Cuba is a third case. In January 2026, President Trump issued a new Executive Order outlining that Cuba's government "has taken extraordinary actions that harm and threaten the United States" – including cooperation with, and support for, extra-regional actors such as Russia, China and Iran, as well as non-state groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.¹⁶ In response, the new White House Order authorizes supplemental tariffs on any country providing oil to the island nation.

These and other examples reflect a sustained shift in U.S. policy – away from the passivity and disengagement that characterized the approach of previous administrations to the Americas, toward one that treats the region as a real arena of strategic competition.

Monroe, Modernized

"After years of neglect, the United States will reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere, and to protect our

¹⁴ See, for instance, "Mexico pledges action should U.S. talks fail by August tariff deadline," *Reuters*, July 15, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-pledges-action-should-us-talks-fail-by-august-tariff-deadline-2025-07-15/>.

¹⁵ Maria Verza, "Mexico dismisses US military intervention despite Trump's threats after Venezuela operation," *Associated Press*, January 5, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/mexico-trump-cartels-military-e8a8080b9b5ff429b2cf8c960202fe7d>.

¹⁶ The White House, "Executive Order: Addressing Threats to the United States by the Government of Cuba," January 29, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/addressing-threats-to-the-united-states-by-the-government-of-cuba/>.

homeland and our access to key geographies throughout the region,” the 2025 *National Security Strategy* lays out. “We will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to control strategically vital assets, in our Hemisphere.”¹⁷

This formulation alludes to the 1823 address to Congress of James Monroe, in which America’s fifth president defined the Western Hemisphere as a U.S. sphere of influence and warned external powers (back then, European nations) against establishing a significant beachhead there.¹⁸ But the so-called “Trump Corollary” articulated in the 2025 *National Security Strategy* represents a modernization of Monroe. Washington’s focus is no longer simply preserving the independence of fragile Latin American states, as it had been in the 19th century. Rather, it revolves around ensuring that the Hemisphere is not exploited by hostile actors in ways that threaten the United States or disadvantage it economically.

That approach will require strengthening America’s regional military posture, actively contesting the activities of external actors south of the U.S. border, and expanding economic partnerships with regional states. These priorities are reflected throughout the 2025 *National Security Strategy*. If the Trump Administration matches those words with additional concrete actions, it will reflect a long-overdue recognition of the centrality of the Western Hemisphere to U.S. security and prosperity.

Ilan Berman is Senior Vice President of the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, D.C.

¹⁷ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, op. cit.

¹⁸ National Archives, “Monroe Doctrine (1823),” n.d., <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/monroe-doctrine>.

The 2025 NSS: Keep Calm and Bolster Deterrence

Rebecca Heinrichs

The Trump Administration released its 2025 *National Security Strategy* on December 4, 2025.¹ It was unusual for a NSS in that it did not specify and explain the risks to the United States and its allies posed by adversaries. Rather than outlining the intent and capabilities of China, Russia, Iran, or North Korea, as the first Trump NSS did in 2017 and the Biden NSS did in 2022, it focused its criticism on the decisions of ally nations that risk what the 2025 NSS called “civilizational erasure.” And unlike the 2017 Trump NSS, it also failed to take hold of the role as “leader” among its allies in the civilizational West. But it did maintain similarities with the first Trump Administration’s NSS in ways that are important to highlight, and it does present opportunities to build on important continuity from across administrations.

First, it emphasized the administration’s view that the “world’s fundamental political unit is and will remain the nation-state. It is natural and just that all nations put their interests first and guard their sovereignty.”² This view, that nation states will vie for power according to the perceived interests of each one, was reflected in the first Trump NSS, putting it in the conservative as opposed to liberal school of thought in international relations.

Recall the first Trump NSS, from 2017. There is an emphasis on sovereign nation-states as those with the

¹ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, November 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

capacity to enable stability, none more than the United States. It sets a strategy to lead in the world while prioritizing American interests and defending the American way of life. It also describes the strategy as one of “principled realism” in an era of challenging competition between nation-states with rival interests and aspirations to harm the United States and its vital interests, including its treaty allies. It also criticized previous administrations for relying too much on other nations complying with fair practices within international institutions and for failing to more forcefully compete for U.S. advantage. It said, “We stood by while countries exploited the international institutions we helped to build. They subsidized their industries, forced technology transfers, and distorted markets.”³

It pointedly characterized the behavior of America’s most powerful adversaries saying,

China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence. At the same time, the dictatorships of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Islamic Republic of Iran are determined to destabilize regions, threaten Americans and our allies, and brutalize their own people.⁴

³ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: White House, December 2017), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

It is from this assessment of the motives of adversary nations that the 2017 Trump NSS articulated a strategy to defend U.S. interests by competing with, deterring, and, if necessary, wining against adversaries.

The 2022 Biden NSS likewise embraced a leadership role for the United States. But in a meaningful nuance, its authors viewed the means of improving a fraying international order differently than the 2017 Trump NSS. The 2022 Biden NSS placed a greater emphasis on international institutions and cooperation, in contrast to encouraging strong, sovereign nations. Woodrow Wilson sought to replace power rivalry with cooperation through supranational organizations.⁵ It would not be accurate to categorize the Biden NSS as purely Wilsonian, but it did give more weight to Wilsonian aspirations than either Trump strategies. It characterized the threats posed by Russia and China as less directed towards the United States concretely, and more towards the global system, as such:

Russia poses an immediate threat to the free and open international system, recklessly flouting the basic laws of the international order today, as its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shown. The PRC, by contrast, is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective.⁶

Thus, the Biden NSS, while clearly identifying the external threats, could more accurately be described as a strategy

⁵ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949) p. 16.

⁶ The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: White House, October 2022), p. 8, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

within the conceptual framework of liberal internationalism.

Despite the meaningful differences from its predecessors in the form of highlighting its European allies' democratic deficiencies and failures to husband and strengthen resources to vie for sovereignty and power, its departure from the first Trump NSS in its muted discussion of its many varied authoritarian adversaries, and its decision to eschew a leadership role among allies, the 2025 NSS does not signal a shift in core global interests. Indeed, it reaffirms that its vital interests are within its own hemisphere, global sea lanes far from its hemisphere, the Middle East, Europe, and the Indo-Pacific. It also expresses the goal of maintaining "the world's most robust, credible, and modern nuclear deterrent, plus next-generation missile defenses—including a Golden Dome for the American homeland—to protect the American people, American assets overseas, and American allies."⁷

Therefore, the United States' allies and Washington's own foreign policy strategists can continue to build on the strategies that bolster the credibility of deterrence against the shared threats to those expressed areas of overlapping vital interests. The first Trump Administration and the Biden Administration sought to encourage European and Pacific allies, for example, to increase conventional deterrence, even as the United States maintains its fundamental role of nuclear deterrence and assurance.

The 2025 NSS makes it especially clear that the United States won't cede ground to China. It reaffirms U.S. policy that it "does not support any unilateral change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait."⁸ The United States will continue working with allies to create incentives for shared adversaries to choose peace. This is further bolstered by the

⁷ *National Security Strategy, 2025*, op. cit., p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Trump Administration's decision to maintain AUKUS, bolster the Quad, and to prioritize military weapons sales to Taiwan.⁹

Even despite its sharp critique of several Europeans policies, the 2025 NSS lauds commitments from NATO allies to boost defense spending and to take on more of the defense burden. Moreover, it declares that "transatlantic trade remains one of the pillars of the global economy and of American prosperity." Indeed, last year U.S. exports of goods and services to Europe accounted for 28 percent of all U.S. exports and Europe contributed 59 percent of all foreign direct investment into the United States.¹⁰ The 2025

⁹ Zita B. Fletcher, "Trump Backs US Nuclear Submarine Deal for Australia," *Defense News*, October 21, 2025, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2025/10/21/trump-backs-us-nuclear-submarine-deal-for-australia/>; "2025 Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting," U.S. Department of State, July 1, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/07/2025-quad-foreign-ministers-meeting>; Matthew Lee and Simina Mistreanu, "US Announces Massive Package of Arms Sales to Taiwan Valued at More than \$10 Billion, Angering China," *Associated Press*, December 18, 2025, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2025/12/18/us-preps-massive-weapons-package-for-taiwan-valued-at-over-10-billion/>.

¹⁰ These figures are based on data from January through October 2025, which is the latest available and not yet seasonally adjusted. Ken Roberts, "New Trade War Risk? For 1st Time, Europe Bigger Export Market than Asia," *Forbes*, January 21, 2026, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenroberts/2026/01/21/new-trade-war-risk-for-1st-time-europe-bigger-export-market-than-asia/>; Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Table 6.2. U.S. International Financial Transactions for Direct Investment by Country and Industry," U.S. Department of Commerce, January 14, 2026, <https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/?reqid=62&step=6&isuri=1&tablelist=310>

Trump NSS places a greater focus on its material interests and less on the value of democracy-promotion as such, but its democratic allies have produced such economic prosperity, prodigious scientific research and technology, etc. that their security remains tied to America's security.

Thus, even if U.S. diplomacy takes a sharp departure, including its use of trade and tariffs to shape and change the behavior of allies and adversaries alike, the United States should, and seems to be poised to, continue to prioritize nuclear weapons modernization and bolstering the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. Shortly after the release of the NSS, American Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth said at the Ronald Reagan Defense Forum that the U.S. nuclear deterrent "is the foundation of our nation's defense. Nothing else matters if we don't get this right, and so we will."¹¹ It is also important that he rightfully noted that the United States faces "two other major nuclear-armed powers."¹² The U.S. Strategic Posture Commission concluded that deterring China and Russia simultaneously places a demand on U.S. strategic posture such that the nuclear modernization program of record is "necessary but not sufficient."¹³ The 2025 Trump NSS's statement that nuclear deterrence is a priority along with Golden Dome is, therefore, consistent with the recommendations of this

04&product=1&_gl=1*jcxdfq*_ga*MTc1OTgwNDE2NS4xNzY5NjM3MzE1*_ga_J4698JNNFT*cze3Njk2MzcMTQkbzEkZzEkdDE3Njk2Mzc4NTMkajUzJGwwJGgw.

¹¹ Secretary Pete Hegseth, "Secretary of War Pete Hegseth Keynote Address at the Reagan National Defense Forum," Department of War, December 6, 2025, YouTube video, <https://youtu.be/LAQbqbhVsdC?si=g-Ly8VVdDXAtr24i&t=1482>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States* (2023), pp. 51, 101, <https://www.ida.org/research-and-publications/publications/all/a/am/americas-strategic-posture>.

pivotal bipartisan report. The Trump Administration has signaled in other ways that it is open to, and even favors, prioritizing nuclear deterrence. And so, maintaining bipartisan efforts to do this, working with allies to invest more in their respective defense industrial bases and increasing their role in conventional deterrence (as well as the nuclear deterrence mission) should continue.

The 2025 NSS's sharp criticisms of allies certainly risks trust and credibility of assurances and positive diplomatic cooperation. Allies will understandably bristle at the public criticisms of domestic policies while the United States emphasizes the defense of the principle of national sovereignty. Furthermore, the public debate and even the issuance of U.S. threats to forcibly acquire Greenland likewise make diplomatic efforts to encourage allies to invest more in conventional weapons and to buy American weapons systems far more difficult. (President Trump has clarified that the United States will not use threats of force against its ally, Greenland,¹⁴ and Secretary of State Marco Rubio testified that discussions for securing Greenland are now occurring in professional diplomatic fora.¹⁵ Still, the damage between allies may have lasting negative consequences.) Policymakers in Congress and across the administration should, as the 2025 NSS encourages, have "clear eyes" and acknowledge these setbacks, make corrections where possible, and work to restore and maintain the working relationships necessary to collaborate with allies on the most urgent and pressing threats to U.S. vital interests. Still, the reality of the threats, and this

¹⁴ President Donald J. Trump, "Davos 2026: Special Address by the President of the United States, Donald J. Trump," January 21, 2026, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-special-address-donald-trump-president-united-states-america/>.

¹⁵ Aamar Madhani, "Rubio says technical talks with Denmark, Greenland officials over Arctic security have begun," *Associated Press*, January 28, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-rubio-greenland-denmark-technical-talks-7e2180f90bc6e7a6005a6895a8164a00>.

administration's acknowledgment of U.S. vital interests retain continuity on which the United States and its allies can and should build.

Rebecca Heinrichs is Senior Fellow and Director of the Keystone Initiative at the Hudson Institute.

Securing America's Home While Reframing U.S. Security Policy

Peter Huessy

The Trump Administration's *National Security Strategy* (NSS) is best understood within the context of the past year's American use of military force, completed trade deals, energy and mineral policy actions, immigration law enforcement, military officers' testimony to Congress, and the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) or FY2026 budget appropriations. Most notable is the very strong advocacy for nuclear deterrent modernization and missile and air defense, and a strong commitment to allied defense and taking care of business here at home, while explicitly ending open borders, drug and human trafficking.¹

The NSS must also be examined as a whole as its elements are fully connected and do not represent isolated transactional elements that critics have emphasized.² In particular the critically necessary new focus on the Western Hemisphere – wrongfully assumed to represent an implicit

¹ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

² Eliot A. Cohen, "The National Security Strategy Is Incoherent Babble," *The Atlantic*, December 5, 2025,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2025/12/national-security-strategy-incoherent-babble/685166/>; "Isolationism highlighted in new US security strategy while North's denuclearization dropped," *Korea JoongAn Daily*, December 7, 2025,

<https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2025-12-07/national/defense/Isolationism-highlighted-in-new-US-security-strategy-while-Norths-denuclearization-dropped/2471721>; Morgan Phillips, "Trump rewrites national security playbook as mass migration overtakes terrorism as top US threat," *Fox News*, December 5, 2025, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-rewrites-national-security-playbook-mass-migration-overtakes-terrorism-top-us-threat>.

retreat from other areas of the world)³ – should be carefully examined as such concentration is fully connected to stopping adversaries around the globe, including and especially the “Brothers Mayhem” – Russia, China, North Korea and Iran.⁴ Venezuelan oil for example is being exported to India, as India has now pledged to cease importing Russian oil, even as Cuba and China are projected to no longer receive free or discounted Venezuelan oil.⁵

Unfortunately, much of the critical commentary to date has been largely hostile to the strategy’s objectives, including a largely mistaken conclusion that the administration is: (a) Embracing isolation or a go it alone strategy, to largely protect only U.S. interests in the immediate continental U.S. (CONUS) connected region; (b) Abandoning our traditional allies in NATO and the Western Pacific, and (c) Adopting a misguided conciliatory approach to China.

³ “Experts react: What Trump’s National Security Strategy means for US foreign policy,” *Atlantic Council*, December 5, 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/experts-react-what-trumps-national-security-strategy-means-for-us-foreign-policy/>; Ryan C. Berg, P. Michael McKinley, Christopher Hernandez-Roy, Juan Cruz, and Eric Farnsworth, “Experts React: The NSS and Washington’s New Approach to the Western Hemisphere,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 10, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/experts-react-nss-and-washingtons-new-approach-western-hemisphere>.

⁴ Peter Huessy, “The Mayhem Brothers: Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran,” *Global Security Review*, January 4, 2024, <https://globalsecurityreview.com/the-mayhem-brothers-russia-china-north-korea-and-iran/>.

⁵ Erica Downs and Luisa Palacios, “US Action Threatens Venezuela-China Oil Flows, Debt Repayment, and Investments,” Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, School of International and Public Affairs, January 7, 2026, <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/venezuela-china-oil-ties-severely-impacted-by-us-action/>.

All are wrong. As Hudson Institute's Rebecca Heinrichs has explained, "The strategy does not call for the United States to abandon Europe or its other traditional allies. It does not open the door to Chinese expansionism. And it does not indicate that Washington is preparing to withdraw from much of the world."⁶ In fact, as Heinrichs emphasized, "Quite the contrary: it suggests that the United States still has globe-spanning shared interests with its historical allies, and that the country is planning to expand its geographical interests."⁷

Many commentators believe there is a serious weakness in the report as apparently the strategy doesn't adequately examine the security threats from Moscow even should a successful outcome be reached in the war against Ukraine. Dr. Stephen Blank of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, emphasizes that Russia sees itself as an empire destined to be a European hegemon, with borders that need continued expansion to guard against what Moscow for centuries has assumed are surrounding hostile powers.⁸ The Defense Department document on U.S. strategy acknowledges "Russia will remain a persistent but manageable threat to NATO's eastern members for the foreseeable future," while warning Russia continues to modernize "the world's largest nuclear arsenal."⁹

⁶ Rebecca Heinrichs, "What Trump's National Security Strategy Gets Right," *Foreign Affairs*, December 15, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/what-trumps-national-security-strategy-gets-right#>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Personal Communication by the author with Dr. Stephen Blank; see especially Keir Giles, *Who Will Defend Europe?: An Awakened Russia and a Sleeping Continent* (London, UK: Hurst and Company, 2024); Keir Giles, *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

⁹ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, op. cit., p. 10.

The good news is, as NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte explained, the U.S. administration was right and succeeded to push Europe to increase its defenses.¹⁰ This adoption of higher defense investment is combined with a heightened European understanding that Russian aggression must be stopped, whether against Ukraine but also potentially against NATO itself such as in the Baltics. In short, the U.S. support for Ukraine is acknowledging President Reagan did not free the “captive nations” of Eastern Europe to see NATO some 35 years later risk giving it back.

Some of the harshest criticisms have been over the administration’s treatment of European internal politics. What virtually all critics have missed is that administration’s criticisms of Europe are precisely parallel to the administration’s serious concern with its own hemisphere and most importantly U.S. domestic policy. True the administration was highly critical of the continent’s excessive regulatory and trade restrictions, the welcomed massive, often illegal, migration of people unwilling to assimilate into Europe, and an energy policy that continued dependency on Russia oil and gas, while pursuing carbon zero fuels, undergoing mass blackouts and skyrocketing energy prices, and adopting blanket ideas such as the benefits of energy poverty.

What has not been mentioned is the American administration has been equally critical of this nation’s move in precisely those same Europe-like directions. Here in the United States, the country has moved markedly away from exactly such policies that alarmed us about Europe’s direction. For the United States, the mass migration at the border has stopped, though ten million or more

¹⁰ Diana Stancy, “NATO chief warns Europe can’t defend itself without US as tensions rise over Greenland,” *Fox News*, January 27, 2026, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/keep-dreaming-natos-rutte-says-europe-needs-us-defense>.

unassimilated migrants remain in the country. Major regulatory burdens have been taken down off the backs of U.S. business. U.S. oil production has risen to 78 percent of Russia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia combined (the second and third largest producers in the world), compared to an average of 49 percent in 1970-80. And gasoline prices have fallen to below three dollars a gallon and are down \$2.28 cents per gallon since the previous national peak in 2022.¹¹

There is much to commend in the strategy document. One of the most innovative and creative aspects of the strategy has largely been overlooked. The strategy calls on China to embrace and adopt commonly accepted norms on internationally important behavior, including free and open ocean sea lanes and maritime choke points, fair trade, respect for territorial boundaries, keeping the Arctic safe, rejecting nuclear coercion, and avoiding cyber and space aggression. However, while the administration extends an offer to China to reject its policy of unrestricted warfare against the United States and its allies, the strategy is clear that U.S. military and diplomatic power will be marshalled to prevent China, or any other power, from exercising hegemonic behavior while seeking predominance in the Indo-Pacific,¹² as the document recognizes the extreme danger of some hostile power controlling a region with a projected 5 billion people and \$60 trillion in economic product by 2050.

The strategy is also clear that the United States and its allies in the Indo-Pacific region will cooperate to protect the

¹¹ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "U.S. retail gasoline prices rose in summer but ended 2022 lower than start of 2022," January 5, 2023, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=55099>.

¹² Ngo Di Lan, "Should China Be Reassured by Trump's National Security Strategy?," *The Diplomat*, December 13, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/12/should-china-be-reassured-by-trumps-national-security-strategy/>.

first island chain from encroachment which would prominently include American allies Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and Taiwan. Numerous visits of high-level administration officials to Japan and the ROK, historically unprecedented arms sales to Taiwan, and upgrades to U.S. military installations in the region all point to a secure extended deterrent connection to the region.

For example, the day the strategy study was released, Elbridge Colby, the Under Secretary of War for Policy, visited the Republic of Korea where he explained the U.S. posture in the region: “This includes a resilient, distributed and modernized force posture across Japan, the Philippines, the Korean peninsula and elsewhere in the region, a posture optimized for a denial of quick or decisive gains through military force that is resilient rather than fragile, and that binds us together in our shared pursuit of peace and stability.”¹³

One news report explained that Stephen Nagy, a professor of international relations at Tokyo’s International Christian University, said Colby’s emphasis on deterrence along the first island chain represented a “coherent strategic logic” that unified U.S. force posture around the “primary threat of Chinese expansionism.”¹⁴ Most importantly the strategy declares no acceptance of any change to current policy with respect to the Taiwanese Strait.

And the cooperative work with Australia, India, Japan and the United States continues to hold. This is consistent with the security strategy push for regional allies of the United States to markedly increase their own defenses, such as Japan, which has doubled its defense budget and the

¹³ Seong Hyeon Choi, “Pentagon eyes expanded role for South Korea-based US forces to help deter China,” *South China Morning Post*, February 1, 2026,

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3341991/pentagon-eyes-expanded-role-south-korea-based-us-forces-help-deter-china>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

ROK which is seeking to reach a 3.5 percent of GDP milestone.

Describing South Korea as a “model ally” for its investment in its own defense, Colby called for a “greater balance” in defense burden-sharing between the United States and its allies to ensure that “deterrence remains credible, sustainable and resilient in this changing world.”¹⁵

Ramon Pacheco Pardo, a professor of international relations at King’s College London, said the United States was trying to make clear to Beijing that it would lose any conflict over Taiwan, and that Washington was willing to force its allies to lead their own security so U.S. military assets could focus mainly on the People’s Liberation Army.¹⁶

The most controversial element of the U.S. security strategy is the embrace of Hemispheric security concerns. Why this has been the objective of so much criticism makes little logical sense. The oceans no longer provide a sanctuary buffer for the United States as the reach of missiles even from Iran and North Korea cannot be dismissed as only rudimentary Scud type missiles to say nothing of Russian and Chinese ICBMs.¹⁷ Ocean going vessels also are of concern as they can approach the U.S. coasts and be within a very short distance of America’s key infrastructure nodes.

General Alexis Grynkewich, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, recently warned that both China and Russia are increasing their Arctic patrols. He explained their activity is not routine, as they are working together including “traveling from the northern coast of Russia all

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Patrick Dennis, “Wake Up Call for White House as Russia and China Move In on Alaska,” *American Liberty Report*, February 2, 2026, <https://americanlibertyreport.substack.com/p/wake-up-call-for-white-house-as-russia>.

the way to areas just north of Alaska.”¹⁸ Given Greenland’s critical importance to protecting the eastern entrance to the Arctic, the administration’s pursuit of a markedly bigger military, missile defense, and space footprint on the island makes much sense. As does the possible contribution Greenland could make to U.S. mineral independence.

The security strategy is complimented by other defense documents provided both to the nation and Congress, including very strong testimony from high-ranking military officers describing the serious threats to the United States from China, Russia, and North Korea, threat assessments that were approved at the highest levels of the administration.¹⁹

This is true especially of the administration’s overall stance on nuclear deterrence and extended deterrence, reflected in testimony to Congress and for the record material during confirmation hearings, such as from the new Commander of U.S. Strategic Command, as well as the summary reference in the *National Security Strategy*.²⁰ The administration proposed significantly new nuclear capability, such as the sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N), and funds to get both the Columbia SSBN and Sentinel ICBM back on schedule, along with continued

¹⁸ Ibid.; Rudy Ruitenberg, “NATO’s Europe commander sees growing Russian, Chinese threat in Arctic,” *Defense News*, January 12, 2026, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2026/01/12/natos-europe-commander-sees-growing-russian-chinese-threat-in-arctic/>.

¹⁹ Testimony of VADM Richard A. Correll before the Senate Armed Services Committee, October 30, 2025, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/10-30-2025_transcript_nom.pdf.

²⁰ Carla Babb, “New Pentagon strategy to focus on homeland, Western Hemisphere,” *Defense News*, September 25, 2025, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2025/09/25/new-pentagon-strategy-to-focus-on-homeland-western-hemisphere/>; The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

modernization of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) complex. The new defense budget now passed by Congress and the companion authorization legislation has considerable review of nuclear threats to the United States and the nation's needed response.

For example, the new Commander of U.S. Strategic Command significantly expanded on the strategy documents' assessment of the nuclear environment. Admiral Correll told the Exchange Monitor nuclear summit in February that U.S. nuclear forces delivered nuclear deterrence at "the speed of need."²¹ He further explained that the decision making system has to be clear of impediments; multiple options must be presented to the nation's leader; defenses contribute significantly to deterrence; precision strike capability is critical; AI will be subordinate to commanders; and the Chinese buildup is vast and serious, especially in the context of cooperation with Russia, Iran and North Korea.

Additionally, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth reiterated at the Reagan Defense Forum that the United States faced two nuclear armed near peer adversaries.²² And as many

²¹ Author attended the Admiral's remarks on February 3, 2026, at the Nuclear Summit and Exchange Monitor conference; the Admiral's remarks are only available online to conference attendees but will later be more widely available. See also Dr. Christopher Yeaw, *The Escalatory Attraction of Limited Nuclear Employment For Great Power Competitors of the United States*, National Strategic Research Institute at the University of Nebraska, October 26, 2021, <https://nsri.nebraska.edu/-/media/projects/nsri/docs/academic-publications/2021/october/escalatory-attraction-of-limited-nuclear-employment.pdf>; Kurt Guthe, "Summaries of the 1994, 2001 and 2010 Nuclear Posture Reviews," *Information Series No. 405* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, May 12, 2016), https://nipp.org/information_series/guthe-kurt-summaries-of-the-1994-2001-and-2010-nuclear-posture-reviews-information-series-no-405/.

²² Department of Defense, "Remarks by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth at the Reagan Defense Forum," December 6, 2025, <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4354431/rem>

senior military commanders have repeatedly underscored, the Secretary reinforced that nuclear deterrence is the foundation upon which all other U.S. military capability rests. Often forgotten is that in much of the post USSR period, many analysts assumed nuclear weapons were generally irrelevant. And that Russia and China would become largely cooperative nuclear powers, continuing the Nunn-Lugar program running down “loose nukes” in the former USSR, preventing “bad hombres” from getting nuclear technology, and marching toward more nuclear reductions on the way to abolition. Today, the administration has clearly jettisoned such happy talk.

Most importantly the American administration understands Russia and China are in the business of coercive nuclear diplomacy,²³ with Russia declaring such threats some 134 or more times since 2022 when Russia for the second time invaded Ukraine.²⁴ Although some critics claim only one of these 134 threats by Russia were serious, not being able to respond with an appropriate deterrent force—which the addition of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) and SLCM-N are precisely designed to do—doesn’t help much when the real threat is put on the table, an occurrence of which the bad guys are not necessarily going

arks-by-secretary-of-war-pete-hegseth-at-the-reagan-national-defense-forum-a/.

²³ Philippe Dickinson, Ryan Arick, and Natasha Lander Finch, “How the US and Europe can deter and respond to Russia’s chemical, biological, and nuclear threats,” Atlantic Council, October 15, 2025, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/how-the-us-and-europe-can-deter-and-respond-to-russias-chemical-biological-and-nuclear-threats/>; Atlantic Council Discussion on Russian Nuclear Threats, *C-SPAN*, October 28, 2022, <https://www.c-span.org/program/public-affairs-event/atlantic-council-discussion-on-russian-nuclear-threats/618695>.

²⁴ George Perkovich, “How to Assess Nuclear ‘Threats’ in the Twenty-First Century,” Carnegie Endowment, January 20, 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2026/01/assessing-nuclear-threats-in-the-twenty-first-century>.

to provide advance notice. And it's not a deterrent you go over to Home Depot to pick up in an emergency.

In Europe, as previously noted, the United States has expanded the capability of the extended nuclear deterrent with the deployment of a nuclear capable F-35 or JSF. The defense budget has considerable investments in SLCM-N development, which is precisely aimed at protecting Europe through an extended nuclear umbrella, as recommended by the 2023 Strategic Posture Commission report.²⁵

On the Middle East, the strategy rejects the false notion that, as former President Clinton noted in 2014, terrorism was largely related to Israel failing to offer the Palestinians a state.²⁶ And it implicitly rejects the idea that Islamic jihad is some kind of peaceful religious individual empowerment as opposed to often being an ideology of conquest and murder.²⁷ Keeping Iran from dominating the Middle East hydrocarbon reserves and engaging in terrorism while the United States also remains closely allied with Israel are priorities. This is a welcome change from the embrace of Oslo, "the peace process" and Palestinian "from the river to the sea" demands.²⁸

²⁵ Institute for Defense Analyses, *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, October 2023, <https://www.ida.org/research-and-publications/publications/all/a/am/americas-strategic-posture>.

²⁶ Peter R. Huessy, "ICBM EAR Report - Week of July 14-18," July 20, 2025, <https://geostrategicanalysis.substack.com/p/icbm-ear-report-week-of-july-14-18>.

²⁷ Stephen Coughlin, *Catastrophic Failure, Blindfolding America in the Face of Jihad*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Security Policy Press, 2015).

²⁸ National Council of Resistance of Iran – U.S. Representative Office (NCR), *Iran: Where Mass Murderers Rule*, 2017; NCR, *Iran's Ballistic Buildup*, 2018; NCR, *Iran's Nuclear Core*, 2017; NCR, *Iran: The Rise of the Revolutionary Guards Financial Empire*, 2017; Alireza Jafarzaden, *The Iran Threat*, (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); Sebastian Gorka, *Why We Fight*, (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2018).

Gone too is the notion that scarce, expensive and hard to secure energy is a great idea as previously adopted green energy mandates assumed. Coupled with establishing secure sources of minerals, through mapping, mining and milling, as recent deals with Australia, Malaysia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and others have presaged, will further improve U.S. security and end our reliance upon China for rare earth and other key minerals.²⁹

Most noteworthy in the document is the central role nuclear weapons play in U.S. security. It is clear from the current security mosaic that the United States is firmly dedicated to modernizing the nation's nuclear deterrent. This key point in the NSS is reinforced in the *National Defense Strategy*, which explains that the United States “requires a strong, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal adapted to the nation's overall...defense strategies.” And it pledges to “modernize and adapt our nuclear forces accordingly with focused attention on deterrence and escalation management amidst the changing global nuclear landscape. The United States should never – will never – be left vulnerable to nuclear blackmail,” echoing the unanimous and bipartisan conclusions of the 2023 October report of the Strategic Posture Review.³⁰

Peter Huessy is Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, President of Geostrategic Analysis, and Senior Fellow at the Gold Institute for International Strategy.

²⁹ Ned Mamula, *Undermining Power: How To Overthrow Mineral, Energy, Economic and National Security Disinformation* (Washington, D.C.: TerraDynamics Corporation, 2024); Mamula is the new Director of the U.S. Geological Survey.

³⁰ Department of War, *2026 National Defense Strategy*, January 2026, p. 17, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

Two Cheers for the National Security Strategy*

Matthew Kroenig

Last week, the Trump Administration published a new *National Security Strategy* (NSS), and critics panned the document as a “moral and strategic disaster.”¹

But claims that U.S. President Donald Trump is abandoning the liberal international order focus heavily on values and give inadequate attention to the order’s security and economic foundations.² By promising to revitalize American “economic and military preeminence,” the NSS correctly doubles down on many of the key pillars of the United States’ successful 80-year grand strategy, updating them with practical answers to new challenges, such as emerging technology, and legitimate populist concerns with the excesses of globalization.

The strategy does err, however, in failing to properly frame the challenge posed by the “axis of aggressors” and in disavowing the pragmatic promotion of democracy and human rights.

This is, of course, only a strategy document, and whether it matches the president’s actual thinking or the

*Original publication: Matthew Kroenig, “Two Cheers for the National Security Strategy: Trump’s new document gets much right and a few things wrong.,” *Foreign Policy*, December 11, 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/12/11/national-security-strategy-trump-economic-political-democracy/>. Reprinted with permission.

¹ Kori Schake, “The Only War the White House Is Ready for Is Culture War,” *Foreign Policy*, December 8, 2025, https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/12/08/trump-national-security-strategy-culture-war/?tpcc=recirc_latest062921.

² Adam Serwer, “Trump’s New Imperialism,” *The Atlantic*, December 10, 2025, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2025/12/trump-imperialism-foreign-policy/685196/>.

administration's policy is beyond the scope of this essay. Still, the text of the NSS matters. These documents are closely read by allies and adversaries, and they give marching orders to many national security bureaucracies. When placed in this light, therefore, we can see that the new NSS gets much right and a couple of big things wrong.

Any discussion of contemporary U.S. grand strategy must begin with World War II. Looking back on the horrors of the first half of the 20th century, U.S. leaders wanted to establish an international system that could avoid a return to global wars and depression.

The security foundation of the system was built around U.S. military power, strong alliances in Europe and Asia, nuclear deterrence, preventing hostile powers from dominating important regions, and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

On top of this security foundation, the United States and its allies built the liberal part of the liberal international order. Premised on classic liberal principles, they wanted a system to advance free and fair trade, democracy and human rights, and cooperation through multilateral institutions.

Throughout the Cold War, the system was cultivated in the free world. But after the Cold War ended, the liberal order went global. Countries that had been locked behind the Iron Curtain rushed to join the West.

The strategy worked. There have been zero great-power wars in 80 years. Standards of living in the United States and around the world have skyrocketed since 1945. Global poverty rates have plummeted from 66 percent of the human population in 1945 to 8 percent today.³ We often forget, but in 1945, there were roughly a dozen democratic

³ Joe Hasell, "Data appendix – The fight against global poverty: 200 years of progress and still a very long way to go," *Our World in Data*, July 7, 2019, <https://ourworldindata.org/history-of-poverty-data-appendix>.

countries in the world.⁴ Today, there are nearly 100. The world is safer, richer, and freer because of U.S. power and purpose.

The new NSS, like many contemporary critics, is obsessed over the mistakes of U.S. policy in the post-Cold War era – of which there were many. Efforts to incorporate China and Russia as “responsible stakeholders” in the liberal order failed, leaving them both strengthened and dangerously entangled with Western economies. Manufacturing jobs and industrial production were outsourced. The United States fought decades-long wars in the Middle East without a clear strategy and disappointing results. Allies free rode on the back of U.S. military power. Irregular immigration prompted a nationalist backlash in the United States and Europe.

Still, despite these very real downsides, the aggregate data shows that the United States’ post-Cold War strategy also worked. The average American and global citizen was better off in the post-Cold War era than during the Cold War or, indeed, any other time in human history. Widespread perception that U.S. strategy was an unmitigated disaster during the unipolar moment, therefore, is not backed by evidence.

It is not 1945 or 1991 anymore, however, and U.S. strategy needs to be updated for a new era. The challenge for the drafters of the new NSS (even though they did not frame it this way) was to update the United States’ largely successful grand strategy for the present. This means maintaining long-standing pillars of U.S. grand strategy that still work while also addressing the three biggest emerging challenges that the global order faces today:

⁴ Ash Jain and Matthew Kroenig, “Present at the Re-Creation: A Global Strategy for Revitalizing, Adapting, and Defending a Rules-Based International System,” The Atlantic Council, *Strategy Papers*, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Present-at-the-Recreation.pdf>.

concerns with the excesses of globalization, the new tech revolution, and the “axis of aggressors.”

The NSS largely succeeds in recognizing and reaffirming traditional pillars of U.S. grand strategy. In the security domain, it called for American “military dominance” and “overmatch.” This must include a strong strategic deterrent provided by “the world’s most robust, credible, and modern nuclear deterrent, plus next-generation missile defenses – including a Golden Dome for the American homeland.” It seeks to “prevent the emergence of dominant adversaries.” It touted Trump’s success in addressing the most significant nuclear proliferation threat of our time – Iran – with Operation Midnight Hammer.

It recognized alliances as a major amplifier of U.S. power, noting that “together [Washington and its allies constitute] more than half the world economy.” It called for the maintenance of strong alliances in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East to be achieved through enhanced allied burden-sharing and economic coordination.

To be sure, the document’s harsh criticisms of Europe go too far for a public document, and they are already straining trans-Atlantic relations. But it is true that a weaker Europe (from 25 percent of global GDP in 1990 to 14 percent today) is a problem for Europe and for U.S. grand strategy. The past decade also shows that vinegar works better than honey in getting Europe to take its own defense seriously.

In the economic domain, the NSS called for “fair, reciprocal trade deals with nations that want to trade with us on a basis of mutual benefit,” as well as increased economic engagement with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, the Western Hemisphere, and Africa. It recognized trans-Atlantic trade as one of the pillars of the global economy and of American prosperity, aiming to ensure “the dollar’s future as the world’s reserve currency.”

Washington does not want to abandon multilateral institutions, but instead “use its leadership position to implement reforms that ensure they serve American interests.”

The NSS errs, however, by disavowing the pragmatic promotion of democracy and human rights. The NSS celebrated American freedom and welcomed “genuine democracy” among like-minded partners, including in Europe, but it eschewed “imposing on [other countries] democratic or other social change that differs widely from their traditions and histories.”

To be sure, “imposing” on others is rarely a good idea, but where Washington can continue to pragmatically promote freedom and human rights, consistent with its security and economic interests, it should do so. After all, democracy was also foreign to most of Europe and East Asia at the end of World War II, but those regions are full of flourishing democracies that make for closer U.S. security and economic partners today.

On new challenges, the NSS is especially strong in laying out solutions to the problems of excessive globalization in the post-Cold War world. Indeed, the Trump Administration is uniquely well-positioned to take on this important task. The NSS called for a suite of policies, including securing supply chains, re-industrialization, reshoring manufacturing, and enhanced border security. Together, these policies can help correct the mistakes of the 1990s and 2000s, address some of the legitimate grievances held by the losers of globalization, and win back popular support for continued U.S. leadership and international engagement.

The NSS also offered credible solutions to the new technology challenge, calling for the United States to win the new tech race with China. It celebrated the United States’ possession of the “world’s most advanced, most innovative, and most profitable technology sector” and

aims to “ensure that U.S. technology and U.S. standards – particularly in AI, biotech, and quantum computing – drive the world forward.” It called for increased technology collaboration with partners around the world, which is partly to counter China’s technological inroads. This week’s news that the Trump Administration has decided to sell advanced chips to China would, of course, undercut this vision. Perhaps Congress and other outside voices critical of this vision might still convince the administration to reverse course.

Finally, the NSS fell short in failing to clearly identify the challenge posed by the “axis of aggressors,” perhaps the greatest security threat that the United States has ever faced. As Trump’s first NSS correctly identified, Washington is in a new era of great-power rivalry with China. Moreover, China is increasingly working with other revisionist autocracies – Russia, Iran, and North Korea – to disrupt and displace the U.S.-led system. There is the possibility of multiple great-power wars across Eurasia.

Yet, the NSS did not even mention North Korea. The Iran problem is treated as largely resolved by Operation Midnight Hammer. The Russia challenge is presented as one of squabbling between Europe and Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which Washington must play a mediator role. The document pulled its punches on the China threat. The dangerous interlinkages among these autocratic adversaries went unmentioned.

To be sure, executing the strategy will entail continued competition with China. Who are the nuclear weapons and missile defenses in the document meant to deter? The section on the Indo-Pacific stated that a “favorable conventional military balance remains an essential component of strategic competition” and calls for “winning the economic and technological competition.” Presumably, these competitions are with China.

Still, the document would have benefited from a clearer strategic context section that outlined the threats and opportunities that the United States is facing.

Trump's new NSS "looks forward to a new golden age" for America. U.S. power has been a force for good in the world for the past 80 years. In the preamble to the strategy, Trump vowed to make the United States "safer, richer, freer, greater, and more powerful than ever before."

Let's hope he succeeds.

Matthew Kroenig is Vice President and Senior Director of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security and professor in the Department of Government and the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

NATO Enlargement: An Obituary?

Michael Rühle

Introduction

The new U.S. *National Security Strategy* (NSS) is arguably one of the most peculiar official documents ever produced by a U.S. government. Anne Applebaum described it as “the longest suicide note in American history,” criticizing, *inter alia*, the fact that, in contrast to the 2017 NSS, the United States now appears unwilling to acknowledge that it is engaged in a struggle with countries such as China or Russia.¹ In contrast, the NSS pours much scorn on the United States’ traditional allies, particularly in Europe, for their domestic policies. Equally disturbingly, the muffled criticism of the U.S.’s two peer competitors stands in stark contrast to President Trump’s threats to NATO ally Denmark regarding the need to “have” Greenland, which he justified by reference to the military presence of Russia and China in that region.² These and many other inconsistencies suggest that the NSS is more a manifesto of the *Weltanschauung* of a few true believers in the Make-America-Great-Again (MAGA) movement than a coherent presentation of a cohesive policy.

However, this does not mean that the document is meaningless. On the contrary, the NSS’s focus on the Western Hemisphere was vindicated by the U.S.

¹ See Anne Appelbaum, “The Longest Suicide Note in American History,” *The Atlantic Column*, December 16, 2025, <https://www.anneapplebaum.com/2025/12/16/the-longest-suicide-note-in-american-history/>.

² See Sam Meredith, “Why Trump wants Greenland – and what makes it so important for national security,” *CNBC online*, January 7, 2026, <https://www.cNBC.com/2026/01/07/why-trump-wants-greenland-and-what-makes-it-so-important-for-security.html>.

intervention in Venezuela only a month after the document was released. This demonstrates that the NSS's geopolitical musings, although contradicting earlier documents of the same administration, are not entirely far-fetched. Therefore, neglecting the NSS could be perilous, as there may be many more surprises to come.

Preventing NATO's Further Enlargement

Another section of the NSS that should not be disregarded is its discussion of the future of NATO enlargement. According to the National Security Strategy, one of the United States' political priorities for Europe is to "end the perception of NATO as a constantly expanding alliance and prevent this from happening in reality." Despite its clumsy wording, the implications of this statement are profound: If Washington had its way, the NATO enlargement process would probably be over.

This statement did not come as a complete surprise, however. As far as discussions about Ukraine's NATO accession bid were concerned, the Trump Administration had already ruled out this option months earlier. What was unexpected was the unapologetic tone of the NSS, which appears to extend beyond Ukraine and fundamentally calls NATO's entire enlargement policy into question. The strategic rationale for these statements becomes clearer, however, when read in conjunction with the statements on Russia. While the NSS portrays Russia as the instigator of the war in Ukraine, it also suggests that the United States is prepared to negotiate with Moscow to bring the conflict to an end. Moscow has long argued that it will not accept Ukraine joining NATO, and the Trump Administration appears to agree.

As expected, upon release of the NSS, some Europeans attempted to soften Washington's categorical statements regarding the end of NATO's "open door" policy. They

want to keep the option of Ukraine joining NATO at a later date open, at least formally. Nevertheless, even if Europeans dislike the radical wording of the NSS, they too will have to acknowledge that NATO's "open door" promise has become counterproductive, as demonstrated by the debate about the conditions for a lasting peace in Ukraine. The initial stages of NATO's post-Cold-War enlargement had been thoroughly beneficial, as that process aligned with North American and European interests. However, its continuation risks squandering many of these initial achievements.

From the outset, the NATO enlargement process, which started after the dissolution of the USSR and led to the number of NATO member countries doubling from 16 to 32 over a period of 25 years, was considered a major success for the transatlantic security community. Above all, it was praised as a significant contribution to overcoming Europe's erstwhile division. NATO enlargement was in line with the thinking of idealists and realists alike. Idealists saw the expansion of the alliance as the expansion of a democratic, transatlantic Europe. Realists could argue that the admission of Central and Eastern Europe into the alliance would prevent the emergence of a strategic no-man's-land and new rivalries in the region. Furthermore, should Russia's reform process fail and the country return to military expansionism, it would no longer be able to harm its former satellite states, since they had become firmly embedded in the West.

The Russian Conundrum

However, both idealists and realists recognized early on that the success of NATO enlargement would also depend on Russia's position. Since Russia, unsurprisingly, rejected NATO enlargement as an encroachment on its security, Washington, in particular, undertook considerable efforts to

signal to Moscow that it had nothing to fear from this process. The Europeans shared the U.S.'s views about Russia as a critical security variable and also sought ways to strengthen relations between NATO and the Eurasian power. In addition to the special relationship between NATO and Russia, as set out in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, NATO developed a number of other partnership initiatives in the 1990s to bring non-NATO countries and other institutions closer to the alliance.

These initiatives—above all the 1994 Partnership for Peace—not only created new mechanisms for military cooperation, but also the cooperative context that allowed NATO enlargement to proceed without destructive debate on “in” vs. “out.” Moreover, the enlargement process was designed to be “soft” in military terms. To avoid feeding into Russia’s narrative of encirclement, NATO did not deploy large multinational combat units or nuclear weapons in the new member states. This approach also seemed reasonable because NATO was increasingly focusing on peacekeeping missions. In the 1990s and 2000s, collective defense was not NATO’s main concern.

The diligence with which NATO prepared for enlargement paid off. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined in 1999, followed by the 2004 so-called “Big Bang,” when seven more Central European countries, including the three Baltic republics, also joined NATO. Moscow remained relatively calm, which many observers took as confirmation that Russia had come to terms with NATO enlargement. Hence, former negotiators still claim that, by signing the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997, Russia accepted NATO enlargement.³

³ “By signing the NATO-Russia Founding Act, Russia officially accepted the principle of enlargement of the North Atlantic alliance. The persistent whispering about alleged Western promises to Russia in 1990 has thus actually been off the table since 1997: Russia has accepted

However, Russia never really came to terms with this development. The Russian chief negotiator, Yevgeni Primakov, described the 1997 Founding Act as mere damage limitation, stating that it “enabled us to minimize the negative consequences of NATO’s expansion for Russia’s security.”⁴ The accession of numerous former Warsaw Pact states and even former Soviet republics to NATO marked a significant geopolitical power shift to Russia’s detriment—changes of a magnitude that could not be glossed over with mere political cosmetics. A country that had ensured its security by keeping its immediate neighbors in a state of limited sovereignty was not receptive to Western explanations about the benign nature of NATO’s enlargement. The dilemma for Russia was even more profound: for the West, NATO expansion was as an open-ended process with no clearly defined endpoint. For Russia, this could eventually result in the loss of its entire sphere of influence. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s comment that Russia “should ultimately become bored with NATO”⁵ was just one bizarre example of a Western narrative portraying the expansion of the alliance as a benign family reunion with which no one could take offense.

The idea that Russia had moved closer to NATO through the NATO-Russia Council also quickly proved overly optimistic. Russia was disappointed because it had

NATO enlargement in writing.” Wolfgang Ischinger, “Russia, NATO and Us: Will our search for a European security order end in war?,” Op Ed, Munich Security Conference, December 31, 2021, <https://securityconference.org/en/news/full/russia-nato-and-us-oped-ischinger/>.

⁴ Yevgeny Primakov, *Russian Crossroads: Toward the New Millennium* (Yale University Press: New Haven & London 2004), p. 161.

⁵ Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Statement at the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council Meeting, NATO Headquarters, Belgium, Brussels, December 17, 1997, <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/971217a.html>.

harbored the utterly unrealistic hope that this forum would give it a say in NATO decisions. The allies, for their part, took great care to demonstrate unity, fearing that Russia could exploit their differing positions to its own advantage. From Russia's perspective, at least, the format of "NATO plus 1" remained "NATO against 1."

Russia's increasingly apparent relapse into autocracy made it more and more difficult for NATO to balance each step on enlargement with new initiatives to improve NATO-Russia relations. Moreover, some of the new members from Central and Eastern Europe showed little interest in a policy that sought continued engagement with Russia. Pointing to Russia's aggressive past, these countries warned against a resurgence of Russian expansionism and were wary of a Russia policy that they considered to be a distraction from NATO's core business of deterrence and defense.

NATO's Bucharest Sin

The Bucharest Summit in April 2008 marked the beginning of the reversal of the success of NATO's enlargement policy. At that time, the administration of President George W. Bush pushed for Ukraine and Georgia to be admitted to the so-called "Membership Action Plan" (MAP). Although the MAP was merely a preliminary step towards full membership, Germany and France in particular viewed it as a significant provocation to Russia. Consequently, they sought to negotiate more conciliatory language. William Burns, the U.S. Ambassador to Russia (and later Director of the CIA), also warned his administration against such a move, arguing that it would mean crossing "the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just for Putin)."⁶

⁶ William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal* (London: Hurst and Company 2019), p. 233.

After tough negotiations, a compromise was reached that no longer mentioned the MAP and avoided setting a specific timeframe for the accession of the two countries to NATO.⁷ However, in stating that Georgia and Ukraine “will become members” the West drew a new demarcation line. Just one year after Putin had complained at the Munich Security Conference that the West was ignoring Russian security interests, NATO announced its support for the accession of two states that would not be ready to join the alliance for years, possibly even decades, and that Moscow considered an integral part of its “zone of privileged interests” (Dmitry Medvedev). During a candid conversation with President Bush a few days after the Summit, Putin made it clear that, to undermine Ukraine’s NATO aspirations, Russia would continuously “creat[e] problems” in the country.⁸

That NATO had gone too far became apparent just a few months after the Bucharest Summit, when Russia defeated politically rebellious Georgia in a war that lasted only a few days. This war, coupled with political changes within Russia, led some observers to conclude that, henceforth, NATO should only accept countries that it could realistically defend. However, such a change of course would have meant that several aspiring members would be forced to remain in the geopolitical no-man’s-land between NATO and Russia. Furthermore, it would have given Russia a veto over decisions that were the sole prerogative of the alliance itself. The West therefore stuck to its “open door” policy, especially since the accession of the next

⁷ However, the United States then started to argue that in order for a candidate country to accede to NATO, the MAP was not strictly necessary.

⁸ Memorandum of Conversation. Subject: Meeting with President of Russia, April 6, 2008, *National Security Archive*, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/33711-document-3-memorandum-conversation-subject-meeting-president-russia>.

candidates from Southeast Europe – Albania and Croatia – would only affect Russian interests to a limited extent.

Russia's Challenge to European Security

However, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 created a completely new situation. It no longer seemed necessary to take Russian objections to NATO expansion into consideration. As recently as 2015, Zbigniew Brzezinski, often characterized as an anti-Russian “hardliner,” had urged assurance to Russia that Ukraine would not be admitted to NATO.⁹ However, Russia's flagrant violation of international law, which seemed to confirm the constant warnings of NATO's Central and Eastern European members about Russian revanchism, would have made such assurances to Russia a betrayal of the right of every state to determine its own foreign policy orientation.

Although NATO shied away from formally terminating the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, it increased its military presence along its eastern flank, intensified its training and exercise activities, and agreed to increase defense spending. The alliance, which had focused primarily on crisis operations since end of the Cold War, started to return to its core task of collective defense in Europe. Russia, which had been considered a “partner” in the 2010 Strategic Concept, was now designated an adversary. Initially, this did not change NATO's “open door” policy. The accession of two small states, Montenegro (2017) and North Macedonia (2020), confirmed NATO's direction of travel. It was not until Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 that NATO enlargement made headlines again. With Finland and Sweden joining NATO in 2023 and 2024, respectively, two security heavyweights

⁹ At the GMF Brussels Forum, March 20, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4CHzZ0jw6U&list=PLRlpW88SeBSO_qz52o8RipNO9ZXBO9eew.

became members of the alliance, thereby significantly changing the strategic situation for Russia.

While Moscow remained calm about the accession of Finland and Sweden, it was not so sanguine about the prospect of Ukraine joining NATO. Hardly anyone in the West considered NATO expansion to be the immediate cause of the Russian invasion. However, the Biden Administration had good reason to believe that insisting on Ukrainian NATO membership would make peace negotiations with Moscow virtually impossible. Adherence to moral principles increasingly clashed with the necessities of realpolitik. Consequently, the alliance's new Strategic Concept, adopted in summer 2022, mentioned the NATO option for Ukraine only in passing.¹⁰

These developments confirmed what many observers had long recognized but dared not say: NATO enlargement had become counterproductive because it locked NATO into a rigid policy that was too inflexible to address the most pressing challenges. While there were many good reasons to believe that only NATO membership could provide true security, such a NATO-centric view restricted the West's political room for maneuver. Naturally, no one wanted to be accused of depriving Ukraine of its right to freely choose its alliances. However, Kyiv had already made it clear that it could forego NATO membership if the West were to come up with credible alternatives for ensuring the country's security.

¹⁰ "We reaffirm the decision we took at the 2008 Bucharest Summit and all subsequent decisions with respect to Georgia and Ukraine." *NATO Strategic Concept 2022*, para. 41, <https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/publications-and-reports/strategic-concepts/2022/290622-strategic-concept.pdf>.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no question that NATO's enlargement policy after the end of the Cold War made an important contribution to overcoming the division of Europe. It has strengthened NATO and the West. However, it is equally clear that the enlargement process increasingly came into conflict with geopolitical realities. This became apparent for the first time with the controversial invitations to Ukraine and Georgia, which were contentious even within NATO and further strained the relationship with Russia, which was already burdened by disagreements over Kosovo and missile defense. Ironically, it was a Republican U.S. administration that opened Pandora's box, and now another Republican U.S. administration is trying to close it again, albeit in a much different political and military context.

Given Ukraine's impressive struggle for survival, forcing a peace deal on the country without credible security assurances would be a massive political and moral failure for the West. However, just as Europe's insistence on negotiating with Russia only after its withdrawal from Ukraine has already proven to be futile, sticking to the "open door" policy also seems unlikely to succeed in light of new geopolitical realities—at least while the Trump Administration is in power. Ukraine needs security arrangements that do not require NATO membership. Developing such arrangements may well be the greatest immediate challenge facing the transatlantic community.

NATO's enlargement process was based on the right to freely choose alliances. It therefore had no intellectually or morally justifiable end point. As long as NATO only admitted countries that were not (or no longer) within Moscow's immediate sphere of influence, this ambivalence did not matter much. However, the invitation to Ukraine and Georgia turned this principle into dogma, which now

does more harm than good to European security. The tragedy of the NATO enlargement process is not that it began, but that no thought was ever given to how and when it might end.

Michael Rühle is former head of the Climate and Energy Security Section in NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division and Senior Political Advisor in the NATO Secretary General's Policy Planning Unit.

Two National Security Strategy Blind Spots: Nonproliferation, Extended Deterrence*

Henry Sokolski

One of the most astonishing things about the administration's new *National Security Strategy*, isn't what's in it, but what's missing—any mention of extended deterrence and nuclear nonproliferation.¹ The administration's omission of these two critical security concepts, in turn, reflects inattention to the two greatest security failures of the previous century—World War I and II.

These wars began, in no small part, with risky diplomatic experiments to cope with a world armed to the teeth. In 1939, Poland tried to save its skin by signing a non-aggression pact with Hitler.² It only egged him on. Meanwhile, Stalin, not fully sensing the Nazi danger, agreed to help Hitler invade Poland in exchange for Polish territorial spoils.³ Similarly, before World War I, Europe

* An earlier version of this article was published in *The National Interest* on December 12, 2025: Henry Sokolski, "What Donald Trump's National Security Strategy Missed," *The National Interest*, December 12, 2025, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-donald-trumps-national-security-strategy-missed>.

¹ The White House, *2025 National Security Strategy*, December 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

² Interaffairs, "The Pilsudski–Hitler Pact, or How Poland Tried to Make Friends with the Nazis," November 25, 2022, <https://en.interaffairs.ru/article/the-pilsudski-hitler-pact-or-how-poland-tried-to-make-friends-with-the-nazis/>.

³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "German–Soviet Pact," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, September 7, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-soviet-pact>.

frantically piled up secret diplomatic security guarantees as they simultaneously planned military mobilizations.⁴

The assumption in 1914 and 1939 was that these sophisticated maneuvers could produce stability and deterrence. They didn't. Even Franklin Delano Roosevelt's eleventh hour forward deployments of B-17s to the Philippines and of the Western Fleet to Pearl Harbor succeeded in only drawing attacks as these deployments were extremely vulnerable to Japanese first strikes.⁵

These deterrence disappointments helped shape sounder policies that emerged during the Cold War. First, America got serious about guaranteeing the security of its allies and creating alliances—NATO, SEATO, ANZUS, mutual security pacts with Japan and South Korea, and a firm commitment to defending the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Second, the United States backed these security guarantees with the world's largest navy and air force and the forward deployment of large numbers of nuclear weapons. The latter deployments were required early on because the United States lacked accurate long-range sea-launched, air-launched, and land-based nuclear missiles. Once the Pentagon acquired such systems, America was able to withdraw almost all of its forward nuclear weapons deployments, which were becoming increasingly vulnerable to first strikes.

Finally, the United States leveraged its security guarantees to keep its allies from thinking they needed nuclear weapons of their own. The aim here was to keep

⁴ Elias Beck, "Alliance Systems before World War I," *History Crunch*, January 7, 2020, <https://www.historycrunch.com/alliance-systems-before-world-war-i.html>.

⁵ Sam McGowan, "Japanese Attack on the Philippines: The Other Pearl Harbor," *Warfare History Network*, Winter 2012, <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/japanese-attack-on-the-philippines-the-other-pearl-harbor/>.

America's friends and allies aligned with American efforts to defeat the Communist Bloc. American strategists – from Schlessinger and Wohlstetter to Kissinger – understood that more states with nuclear weapons would be worse, not better.⁶ As the number of nuclear-armed states increased, they understood that each would have more agency to act independently of Washington and that this would spell trouble.

Today, if Washington encouraged Seoul to get a bomb,⁷ a dovish South Korean president could ask American forces to leave the Peninsula. What if the two Koreas, now both with nuclear arsenals, then decided to confederate? This would be twice as bad. If we let or encouraged Saudi Arabia to go nuclear,⁸ they'd be more likely to explore what they could gain by working more closely with China, Russia, and other bad actors. Again, not good.

History suggests smaller nations' nuclear weapons programs also can draw large nuclear powers into conflicts. In 1956, Israel joined Great Britain and France to seize the

⁶ Melanie Kirkpatrick, "Why We Don't Want a Nuclear-Free World," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 2009, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124726489588925407>; Henry Sokolski, "Nuclear Heuristics Commentary: Timely Warnings Still," Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, June 2021, <https://npolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Nuclear-Heuristics-Commentary-Timely-Warnings-Still.pdf>; and, Henry A. Kissinger, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," *Henry A. Kissinger*, January 4, 2007, <https://www.henryakissinger.com/articles/a-world-free-of-nuclear-weapons/>.

⁷ Doug Bandow, "Why South Korea Wants Nuclear Weapons Now More Than Ever," *Cato Institute Commentary*, March 3, 2025, <https://www.cato.org/commentary/why-south-korea-wants-nuclear-weapons-now-more-ever>.

⁸ Julian Borger, "Crown Prince Confirms Saudi Arabia Will Seek Nuclear Arsenal if Iran Develops One," *The Guardian*, September 21, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/21/crown-prince-confirms-saudi-arabia-seek-nuclear-arsenal-iran-develops-one..>

Suez Canal.⁹ Russia threatened to intervene and to use its nuclear weapons.¹⁰ Eisenhower had to force Britain, France, and Israel to withdraw.¹¹ Would matters have been eased if Israel had its own bomb in 1956? Probably not. In 1991, the possibility of Saddam going nuclear sucked American military forces into the region.¹² In a smaller repeat performance, last June, the Pentagon bombed Iran's nuclear fuel-making plants after Israel failed to get the job done.¹³ Finally, the United States and Israel are bombing Iran in hopes of forestalling any final move it might make to acquire nuclear weapons.¹⁴

Despite this history, it's become fashionable to argue that spreading nuclear weapons might be a solution, rather than a problem. Why station U.S. troops overseas or spend

⁹ National Army Museum, "Suez Crisis," *National Army Museum*, n.d., <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/suez-crisis>.

¹⁰ Keesing's Record of World Events, "Soviet and Western Communications on Middle East Situation, November 1956," Keesing's Record of World Events Volume X, November 1956, <https://web.stanford.edu/group/tomzgroup/pmwiki/uploads/200-1956-11-KS-f-LIZ.pdf>.

¹¹ Peter Hahn, "The Suez Crisis (1956)," *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, October 14, 2021, The Ohio State University, <https://origins.osu.edu/milestones/suez-crisis-1956>.

¹² Jim Garamone, "Iraq and Its Quest for Nuclear Weapons," *DVIDS News*, February 4, 2003, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/532090/iraq-and-its-quest-nuclear-weapons>.

¹³ Faris Tanyos, "U.S. Launches Strikes on Iranian Nuclear Facilities, Trump Says," *CBS News*, June 22, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/u-s-launches-strikes-iranian-nuclear-facilities-trump-says/>; and, Helen Regan, Lauren Izso, Tamar Michaelis, Nadeen Ebrahim and Kara Fox, "Israel hits Iran's nuclear program and military leadership in unprecedented strikes," June 13, 2025, *CNN International*, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/12/middleeast/israel-iran-strikes-intl-hnk>.

¹⁴ "The Iran Strikes Explained: How We Got Here and What It Means," American Jewish Committee, March 9, 2026, <https://www.ajc.org/news/the-iran-strikes-explained-how-we-got-here-and-what-it-means>.

billions to project force to protect America's friends, some argue, when, with nuclear arms, our friends could defend themselves?¹⁵ America then could pull back and spend less on its own defense. Some realists insist Washington should encourage America's friends to go nuclear as the cheapest way to keep the peace.¹⁶

Maybe, but again, history suggests otherwise. After Britain, France, Israel, and Pakistan went nuclear, America actually spent more, not less on defense.¹⁷

As for serving U.S. security interests by staying out of other people's wars, it's an appealing argument. It's what Lindbergh, Henry Ford, Senator Borah, and Father Coughlin all urged prior to World War II and President Wilson demanded from 1914 to 1917.¹⁸ America followed

¹⁵ Moritz S. Graefrath and Mark A. Raymond, "America's Allies Should Go Nuclear," *Foreign Affairs*, November 19, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/canada/americas-allies-should-go-nuclear>.

¹⁶ Bhagyasree Sengupta, "Germany, Japan Should US Allies Be Given Nuclear Bomb? Experts Make a Proliferation Case," *Firstpost*, November 22, 2025, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/germany-japan-should-us-allies-be-given-nuclear-bomb-experts-make-a-proliferation-case-13953046.html>.

¹⁷ Zachary Keck, *Atomic Friends: How America Deals with Nuclear-Armed Allies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2022).

¹⁸ Charles A. Lindbergh, *America First Committee: Noninterventionist Efforts & America First*, n.d., <http://www.charleslindbergh.com/americanfirst/>; Lawrence S. Wittner, "The Ugly Origins of Trump's 'America First' Policy," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 19, 2024, <https://fpif.org/the-ugly-origins-of-trumps-america-first-policy/>; Zach Dorfman, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Isolationism," *Carnegie Council*, May 22, 2012, <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/media/article/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-isolationism>; Robert S. Gallagher, "Father Coughlin: The Radio Priest," *American Heritage*, 1972, <https://www.americanheritage.com/father-coughlin-radio-priest>; and, Norwich University Online, "Isolationism and U.S. Foreign Policy After World War I," *Norwich.edu*, n.d. <https://online.norwich.edu/online/about/resource-library/isolationism-and-us-foreign-policy-after-world-war-i>.

their advice and maintained American neutrality. Doing so, however, failed to deter war and slowed American preparations for the fights the United States finally was dragged into.

Hardcore isolationists might bridle at this. But extended deterrence has helped prevent repeat performances of the total wars that America was dragged into in 1917 and 1941. It has also helped prevent innumerable small wars from catalyzing into large ones and kept nonaligned and allied states from complicating everyone's security by consorting with America's adversaries.

Another popular argument is that, with the Golden Dome, America can technically protect itself against all forms of missile attack. Fine, but getting such defenses will take time.¹⁹ Until then, America's security and that of its allies will depend, as it has for decades, on threatening to project force and, if necessary, to use nuclear weapons to deter our enemies.

There will be disagreements as to how best to fortify our security guarantees. This should have been addressed in the *National Security Strategy*. Some are suggesting we need to have more nuclear weapons stationed overseas.²⁰ Others suggest that would be self-defeating, as basing these weapons—even in fortified storage areas—would constitute a target sink.²¹ They recommend creating an

¹⁹ Mike Stone, "Delays, Setbacks Loom over Trump's Golden Dome Missile Shield," *Reuters*, November 21, 2025,

<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/delays-setbacks-loom-over-trumps-golden-dome-missile-shield-2025-11-21/>.

²⁰ Robert Peters and Eli Glickman, "Forward Deployment of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons Is Needed to Deter Adversary Aggression," *The Heritage Foundation*, March 6, 2025,

<https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/forward-deployment-non-strategic-nuclear-weapons-needed-deter-adversary-aggression>.

²¹ Alexander Sorg and Julian Wucherpennig, "Before Deploying More U.S. Forces to Europe, Consider the Consequences," *War on the Rocks*,

American nuclear weapons escrow account that would enable countries like South Korea to pay to refurbish 100 or more American nuclear weapons slated for dismantlement and store them in the United States.²² The paying country would then have dibs on them in a crisis.

Yet another question that the *National Security Strategy* should have addressed is how the United States should show it is serious about preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Since the Obama Administration, America's nonproliferation policy has been "case by case" – no policy at all.²³ Washington has toyed with helping Saudi Arabia enrich uranium and helping South Korea make nuclear fuel – both key steps towards getting the bomb.²⁴ This has to change.

Is Washington serious about eliminating dangerous nuclear weapons activities in countries like Iran? The bombing runs of last June and this winter suggest the answer is yes. What will the follow up be? Should the United States announce that it will dedicate a unit of STRATCOM for this mission?²⁵

What about preventing or deterring nations from withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty

August 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/before-deploying-more-u-s-forces-to-europe-consider-the-consequences/>.

²² RAND Corporation, *Assessing U.S. Nuclear and Strategic Forces: A Research Report*, RAND Corporation Research Report RRA2612-1, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2612-1.html.

²³ Daniel Horner, "Officials Spell Out Nuclear Trade Policy," *Arms Control Today*, March 2012, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2012-03/officials-spell-out-nuclear-trade-policy>.

²⁴ Kelsey Davenport, "U.S.-Saudi Deal Said to Loosen Nonproliferation Vows," *Arms Control Association*, March 7, 2026, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2026-03/news/us-saudi-deal-said-loosen-nonproliferation-vows>.

²⁵ Henry Sokolski, "Trump Wants to Stop Nuclear Proliferation; STRATCOM Could Play a Major Role," *Breaking Defense*, August 29, 2025, <https://npolicy.org/trump-wants-to-stop-nuclear-proliferation-stratcom-could-play-a-major-role/>.

(NPT)—something North Korea did with impunity in 2003?²⁶ What is Washington's position on what the NPT means by not letting countries get “control” of nuclear arms? China and Russia have very different views from one another and the United States. It would be useful for Washington to clarify its position.

Finally, the NPT requires all parties to negotiate in good faith to reduce the “nuclear arms race.”²⁷ What is Washington prepared to do to get China to the negotiating table—something it has refused repeatedly to allow?

On these questions—as well as extended deterrence—our *National Security Strategy* is missing in action. There are signs that the administration now understands this. It's a correction that they need to double down on.²⁸

²⁶ Henry Sokolski, “Should We Walk Away from the NPT or Double Down?” *The National Interest*, October 6, 2025, <https://npolicy.org/should-we-walk-away-from-the-npt-or-double-down-national-interest/>; and, Henry Sokolski and Victor Gilinsky, “Locking Down the NPT,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, June 17, 2009, <https://thebulletin.org/2009/06/locking-down-the-npt/>.

²⁷ Henry Sokolski, “Stop Blinking at China’s NPT Misbehavior,” *RealClearDefense*, May 4, 2022, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2022/05/04/stop_blinking_at_chinas_npt_misbehavior_830593.html.

²⁸ Elbridge Colby, “Remarks by Undersecretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby at the NATO Defense Ministerial (As Prepared),” U.S. Department of War, February 12, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4404801/remarks-by-under-secretary-of-war-for-policy-elbridge-colby-at-the-nato-defense/>; Thomas DiNanno, “United States Statement by Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security The Honorable Thomas DiNanno to the Conference on Disarmament,” U.S. Mission Geneva, February 6, 2026, <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2026/02/06/u-s-statement-at-the-conference-on-disarmament/>; and, Jenniver Kavanagh, “Marco Rubio’s Munich Speech Was An Ultimatum to Europe,” *Defense Priorities*, February 15, 2026, <https://www.defensepriorities.org/opinion/marco-rubios-munich-speech-was-an-ultimatum-to-europe/>.

Henry Sokolski is executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, was deputy for nonproliferation policy in the Department of Defense (1989-1993) and is author of China, Russia, and the Coming Cool War (2024).

Parsing the New National Security Strategy: A Remarkable About Face*

David J. Trachtenberg

Introduction

After nearly a year in office, the Trump Administration finally issued its long-awaited *National Security Strategy* (NSS), the first of a series of strategy documents typically released by every new administration explaining its worldview and approach to the most serious national security issues confronting the United States. Much commentary on the NSS has already been written, with some extolling its virtues, others criticizing its shortcomings, and some observers describing it as a compilation of the good, the bad, and the ugly.¹ Unfortunately, there is more ugliness than goodness to the strategy, which in many ways reflects a significant retreat

*Original publication: David J. Trachtenberg, "Parsing the New National Security Strategy: A Remarkable About Face," *Information Series*, No. 648 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, January 19, 2026).

¹ See, for example, Rebecca Heinrichs, "What Trump's National Security Strategy Gets Right," *Foreign Affairs*, December 15, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/what-trumps-national-security-strategy-gets-right>; Anne Applebaum, "The Longest Suicide Note in American History," *The Atlantic*, December 16, 2025, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2025/12/national-security-strategy-democracy/685270/>; Matthew Kroenig, "Two Cheers for the National Security Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, December 11, 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/12/11/national-security-strategy-trump-economic-political-democracy/>; Emily Harding, "The National Security Strategy: The Good, the Not So Great, and the Alarm Bells," *CSIS Commentary*, December 5, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/national-security-strategy-good-not-so-great-and-alarm-bells>.

from the approach taken by the *National Security Strategy* issued in President Trump's first term.

A Tale of Two Strategies

The 2017 NSS issued during the first Trump Administration correctly focused on the reemergence of great power rivalries in world affairs, highlighting the rise of China as the preeminent external threat to American security and the resurgence of a revisionist Russia threatening U.S. interests and allies. The prescience of refocusing U.S. national security strategy on America's two most powerful nuclear-armed adversaries was confirmed by the provocative actions and growing aggressiveness of both Moscow and Beijing. This focus was repeated in the Biden Administration's 2022 *National Security Strategy*. Yet, the Trump Administration's 2025 NSS virtually ignores its earlier warnings during President Trump's first term of the dangers to U.S. security posed by China and Russia, acting independently or in concert. These threats have greatly increased since 2017, but, inexplicably, they now no longer command any attention in this strategy document. Ironically, the message that apparent denial of realities sends to foes and friends alike can only be described as dangerous for U.S. security.

Indeed, Russia's expansionist designs, its war of aggression against Ukraine, its nuclear threats against the United States and the West, its development of a plethora of new and sophisticated strategic nuclear weapons systems, its violations of the New START Treaty, its joint political and military collaboration with China under a friendship treaty with "no limits," and its solidifying relationship with the world's worst aggressors and human rights offenders, including North Korea and Iran – have all taken place since the first Trump Administration's 2017 NSS. Yet, none of these developments is even mentioned in the new NSS.

Likewise, China's massive expansion of its own nuclear arsenal, including the building of some 300 new ICBM silos, its repeated threats against Taiwan's autonomy, its buildup of military bases in the South China Sea, its aggressive actions against regional neighbors such as the Philippines, its intellectual property theft, its massive propaganda and influence operations targeting the West, its cyber warfare activities, and its flouting of international norms and legal conventions are unmentioned and unaddressed in the current NSS.

These mounting threats have not disappeared from the world stage, just from the fundamental U.S. policy document that should call them out. It is true, as the NSS notes, that prior assumptions that economic engagement with China "would facilitate China's entry into the so-called 'rules-based international order'" proved fallacious.² This conclusion was also evident in the 2017 NSS. Yet, the 2025 NSS declares, "Going forward, we will rebalance America's economic relationship with China," as though such economic "rebalancing" will reduce or eliminate the national security threats to the United States that Beijing poses.³ And though the strategy acknowledges that "the potential for any competitor to control the South China Sea" poses a "security challenge" for the United States,⁴ the NSS lacks important details such as *who* that competitor is or *how* the United States plans to prevent this. It argues only that the United States will build a strong military to deter and deny aggression, while calling on U.S. regional allies to "step up and spend—and more importantly do—much more for collective defense."⁵ This is a far cry from the

² The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, p. 19, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

warnings in the 2017 NSS that “China is expanding its economic and military presence in Africa,”⁶ that “China is gaining a strategic foothold in Europe,”⁷ and that “China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor.”⁸

With respect to Russia, the 2025 NSS ignores Moscow’s responsibility for its aggression against Ukraine and its constant nuclear threats. It reserves its fire for America’s European allies who see Russia as an “existential threat” that requires “significant U.S. diplomatic engagement” for “managing European relations with Russia.”⁹ Indeed, the strategy openly acknowledges that “The Trump Administration finds itself at odds with European officials who hold unrealistic expectations for the [Russia-Ukraine] war perched in unstable minority governments, many of which trample on basic principles of democracy to suppress opposition.”¹⁰ It argues that Europe faces “civilizational erasure” due to lax immigration policies and questions “whether certain European countries will have economies and militaries strong enough to remain reliable allies,”¹¹ calls on Europe to “regain its civilizational self-confidence,”¹² and declares that “Our goal should be to help Europe correct its current trajectory,”¹³ foreshadowing

⁶ The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, p. 52,

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

some sort of direct intervention in Europe's affairs. It argues for shifting the burden of defending the European continent from the United States to Europe itself. And importantly, the strategy calls for reestablishing "strategic stability with Russia,"¹⁴ a concept that is undefined and often equated with minimal U.S. nuclear capabilities and an arms control approach that eschews defending the U.S. homeland against the prospect of crippling Russian strategic nuclear strikes—contrary to the president's own Golden Dome initiative. This apparent inconsistency is left unexplained.

In addition to the different approaches taken to China and Russia in the 2017 and 2025 NSS documents, there are other concerning features. In some cases, what the document does not say about the national security threats to the United States posed by external actors such as Iran and North Korea is more telling than what it does say. For example, the 2017 NSS stated:

We are rallying the world against the rogue regime in North Korea and confronting the danger posed by the dictatorship in Iran.... North Korea—a country that starves its own people—has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons that could threaten our homeland.... North Korea seeks the capability to kill millions of Americans with nuclear weapons. Iran supports terrorist groups and openly calls for our destruction.... The Iranian regime sponsors terrorism around the world. It is developing more capable ballistic missiles and has the potential to resume its work on nuclear weapons that could threaten the United States and our partners.... We will work with partners to deny the Iranian regime all paths to a

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 27.

nuclear weapon and neutralize Iranian malign influence.¹⁵

Interestingly, there is no mention in the 2025 NSS of the threats posed by either North Korea or Iran to the U.S. homeland. In fact, the words “North Korea” do not appear even once in the document. This is an odd omission for a national security strategy, as the rudimentary missile defense system deployed in the United States since 2004 is deliberately designed to defend the nation against rogue state missile threats emanating from North Korea and potentially Iran.

With respect to Iran, there are also internal inconsistencies. For example, in the introductory preface to the document, the president states, “In Operation Midnight Hammer, we obliterated Iran’s nuclear enrichment capacity.”¹⁶ Yet, the strategy document itself draws a more nuanced conclusion, stating that Operation Midnight Hammer “significantly degraded Iran’s nuclear program.”¹⁷ Clearly, the terms “obliterated” and “significantly degraded” are not synonymous.

The Law of Unintended Consequences

The abrupt policy about face reflected in the current U.S. NSS has led America’s allies—already increasingly skeptical of the U.S. commitment to their own security—to question further not only the direction of U.S. foreign and national security policy but the reliability and credibility of

¹⁵ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, op. cit., pp. 1, 3, 7, 26, 49.

¹⁶ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, op. cit., p. i.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 28.

the United States as an ally. Indeed, it has fostered calls in some quarters for Europe to consider the transatlantic alliance that has deterred major war on the continent for more than eight decades to be over. The deterrence, extended deterrence, and proliferation implications of this are grave.

An American retrenchment from Europe, however characterized and publicly articulated, would have cascading effects that increase the risk of conflict, as allies seek alternative security arrangements and expansionist powers such as Russia salivate at the prospect of an ending to the U.S. role as the bulwark against continental aggression. In such a situation, there is a greater risk that the edifice of extended nuclear deterrence that has prevented the outbreak of major conflict in Europe for the past eight decades will crumble. Moreover, the apparent U.S. retrenchment from much of the world may lead multiple countries, including those who have counted on the United States and the NATO alliance for their ultimate security, to consider the acquisition of their own independent nuclear capabilities to offset a folding of the American “nuclear umbrella.” If so, this will lead to an unprecedented cascade of nuclear proliferation that would undermine and overturn decades of American nonproliferation policy.

A Strategy... or Not?

Strategy has been defined as “the intelligent allocation of resources through a unique system of activities to achieve a goal.”¹⁸ With this in mind, the 2025 NSS is more of an aspirational document than a strategy. Its goal is “to strengthen American power and preeminence and make

¹⁸ Rich Horwath, “What is Strategy?,” Strategic Thinking Institute, September 23, 2020, <https://www.strategyskills.com/what-is-strategy/>.

our country even greater than it has ever been.”¹⁹ Yet, it says nothing about *how* the United States intends to align means with ends in order to accomplish the aspirational objectives it articulates.

It advocates for “peace through strength,” saying that the United States “must maintain... the world’s most capable military,”²⁰ while it is silent on the nature of looming threats or what resources are necessary to achieve this. It advocates for a policy of “non-interventionism,” yet acknowledges that “rigid adherence to non-interventionism is not possible”²¹ and provides no standards, metrics, criteria, or framework for judging when U.S. intervention would be acceptable, necessary, or successful (though apparently the aforementioned effort to correct Europe’s civilizational missteps meets this undeclared standard). It declares U.S. policy to be based on a principle of “flexible realism.”²² However, it offers no definition of the term, yardstick by which to assess its implementation, or any explanation of why or when something other than “realism” should prevail. It asserts that “the United States cannot allow any nation to become so dominant that it could threaten our interests,”²³ yet it is silent on Russia’s and China’s ongoing and expanding efforts to do just that. Indeed, it calls for a “readjustment of our global military presence to address urgent threats in our Hemisphere... and away from theaters whose relative import to American national security has declined in recent decades or years” (e.g., Europe).²⁴ Such an approach reflects a repudiation of the prescient 2017 NSS, which warned, for example, of the

¹⁹ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025, op. cit., p. 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

dangers of China's growing global political, economic, and military presence.

Conclusion

In short, the 2025 NSS leaves much to be desired and many questions unanswered. Perhaps at least some of those answers will be forthcoming when the long-delayed *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) is finally released. Certainly, the NDS should be nested under and consistent with the NSS. Hopefully, the NDS will reflect a more coherent view of the national security challenges facing the United States and how the administration plans to confront them.

Of course, no strategy is worth its weight in paper without the necessary resources to implement it. In this regard, the Congress should carefully examine the new NSS, ask the tough questions, and assess whether the strategy itself makes sense, and, if so, how the administration intends to implement it, what programmatic adjustments are needed to support it, and what level of funding is required to resource it successfully. In addition, a full examination of the implications of the new NSS on both allies and adversaries is warranted. Ultimately, it is Congress' responsibility to ensure that the course set by the executive branch is adequate to the task of defending the nation in an increasingly dynamic and dangerous international environment.

David J. Trachtenberg is Senior Scholar with the National Institute for Public Policy. Previously, he served as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the first Trump Administration.

Previous National Institute Press Occasional Papers

Volume 6 (2026)

On Deterrence, Defense and Arms Control: In Honor of Colin S. Gray, February 2026

David J. Trachtenberg, *Deterrence, Missile Defense and Arms Control*, January 2026

Volume 5 (2025)

Sarah Faris, *Tailoring Deterrence: What and Why?*, November 2025

Michaela Dodge, *Russian Escalation Threats in Its War Against Ukraine*, October 2025

Mark B. Schneider, *The Case for Resumed Nuclear Testing*, September 2025

Thomas Scheber, *A Responsive Nuclear Warhead Infrastructure: What Still Needs to Be Done? Why Is A Responsive Infrastructure More Urgent Now Than in the Past?*, August 2025

Matthew R. Costlow, *Anxious and Indispensable: U.S. Allies and Partners Confronting New Challenges*, July 2025

Mark B. Schneider and Keith B. Payne, *Tailored Deterrence and Low-Cost Nuclear Weapons Upload*, June 2025

Kathleen Ellis, *Re-examining National Missile Defense Strategy: Defending Against China*, May 2025

Michaela Dodge, *U.S. Domestic Polarization and Implications for Allied Assurance*, April 2025

Matthew R. Costlow, *Deterring the New Pacing Threats: Opportunistic and Coordinated Aggression*, March 2025

Christopher A. Ford, *Struggling with The Bomb: Competing Discourses in the Nuclear Disarmament Movement*, February 2025

David J. Trachtenberg, *Next Steps in Homeland Missile Defense*, January 2025

Volume 4 (2024)

Christopher A. Ford, *Call it by its Name:*

Communist Chinese Imperialism, November 2024

Mark B. Schneider, *Current and Projected Growth of
China's Nuclear Arsenal*, October 2024

Keith B. Payne, Michaela Dodge, Matthew R. Costlow,
David J. Trachtenberg, *The Pernicious Effects of Arms
Control Misconceptions on Extended Deterrence and
Assurance*, September 2024

Michaela Dodge, *Trends in Allied Assurance: Challenges
and Questions*, August 2024

Michaela Dodge, ed., *The 75th Anniversary of NATO's
Founding: Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead*, July 2024

David J. Trachtenberg, *The Demise of the "Two-War
Strategy" and Its Impact on Extended Deterrence and
Assurance*, June 2024

Joseph R. DeTrani, *The North Korean Threat: Intelligence
and Diplomacy – A Personal Memoir*, May 2024

Matthew R. Costlow, ed., *Expert Commentary on the 2023
Strategic Posture Commission Report*, April 2024

Steve Lambakis, *Moving Missile Defense Sensors to Space*,
March 2024

Christopher A. Ford, *Nuclear Posture and Nuclear
Posturing: A Conceptual Framework for Analyzing China's
Nuclear Weapons Policy*, February 2024

Michaela Dodge, *What Do Russia's Nuclear Threats Tell Us
About Arms Control Prospects?*, January 2024

Volume 3 (2023)

Jennifer Bradley, *The Democratization of Deterrence: The Impact of Individuals and the Private Sector on Strategic Deterrence*, November 2023

David J. Trachtenberg, ed., *Lessons Learned from Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine*, October 2023

Keith B. Payne, *The Rejection of Intentional Population Targeting for "Tripolar" Deterrence*, September 2023

Mark B. Schneider, *How Many Nuclear Weapons Does Russia Have? The Size and Characteristics of the Russian Nuclear Stockpile*, August 2023

Matthew R. Costlow, *Restraints at the Nuclear Brink: Factors in Keeping War Limited*, July 2023

Gary L. Geipel, *Reality Matters: National Security in a Post-Truth World*, June 2023

John A. Gentry, *Influence Operations of China, Russia, and the Soviet Union: A Comparison*, May 2023

David J. Trachtenberg, ed., *Expert Commentary on the 2022 Missile Defense Review*, April 2023

Keith B. Payne, ed., *Expert Commentary on the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review*, March 2023

Michaela Dodge and Matthew R. Costlow, eds., *Expert Commentary on the 2022 National Security Strategy*, February 2023

Christopher A. Ford, *Assessing the Biden Administration's "Big Four" National Security Guidance Documents*, January 2023

Volume 2 (2022)

David J. Trachtenberg, *Deterring China in the Taiwan Strait: Potential Economic Tools for a Victory Denial Strategy*, December 2022

Kathleen C. Bailey, *China's Quest for a New International Order and Its Use of Public Diplomacy as a Means*, November 2022

Michaela Dodge, *Alliance Politics in a Multipolar World*, October 2022

Matthew R. Costlow, *Vulnerability is No Virtue and Defense is No Vice: The Strategic Benefits of Expanded U.S. Homeland Missile Defense*, September 2022

Keith B. Payne and David J. Trachtenberg, *Deterrence in the Emerging Threat Environment: What is Different and Why it Matters*, August 2022

Jennifer Bradley, *China's Nuclear Modernization and Expansion: Ways Beijing Could Adapt its Nuclear Policy*, July 2022

Christopher A. Ford, *Building Partnerships Against Chinese Revisionism: A "Latticework Strategy" for the Indo-Pacific*, June 2022

Ilan Berman, *Crisis and Opportunity in U.S. Mideast Policy*, May 2022

Michaela Dodge, *Russia's Influence Operations in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania*, April 2022

Keith B. Payne and Matthew R. Costlow, *Victory Denial: Deterrence in Support of Taiwan*, March 2022

Christopher A. Ford, *Defending Taiwan: Defense and Deterrence*, February 2022

Keith B. Payne, *Tailored Deterrence: China and the Taiwan Question*, January 2022

Volume 1 (2021)

Gary L. Geipel, *Post-Truth and National Security: Context, Challenges, and Responses*, December 2021

Thomas D. Grant, *China's Nuclear Build-Up and Article VI NPT: Legal Text and Strategic Challenge*, November 2021

Susan Koch, *Securing Compliance with Arms Control Agreements*, October 2021

Keith B. Payne and Michaela Dodge, *Stable Deterrence and Arms Control in a New Era*, September 2021

Steve Lambakis, *Space as a Warfighting Domain: Reshaping Policy to Execute 21st Century Spacepower*, August 2021

Matthew R. Costlow, *A Net Assessment of "No First Use" and "Sole Purpose" Nuclear Policies*, July 2021

David J. Trachtenberg, Michaela Dodge and Keith B. Payne, *The "Action-Reaction" Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities*, June 2021

Matthew R. Costlow, *Safety in Diversity: The Strategic Value of ICBMs and the GBSB in the Nuclear Triad*, May 2021

David J. Trachtenberg, *Congress' Role in National Security Decision Making and the Executive-Legislative Dynamic*, April 2021

Bradley A. Thayer, *The PRC's New Strategic Narrative as Political Warfare: Causes and Implications for the United States*, March 2021

Michaela Dodge, *Russia's Influence Operations in the Czech Republic During the Radar Debate and Beyond*, February 2021

Keith B. Payne, *Redefining Stability for the New Post-Cold War Era*, January 2021

