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# WHITE HOUSE'S 2025 NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY (NSS): AN ANALYSIS

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# White House's 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS): An Analysis

*by Julia Davies*

The White House's 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) has been both lauded and condemned by American allies and adversaries alike, receiving heightened attention due to its radical departure from past US interventionist foreign policy. Indeed, past NSSs left almost no issue outside the scope of American national interests, suffering from what Washington pundits term the so-called "christmas tree problem" – whereby every special interest group in Washington is looking for a prime place to hang its proverbial ornament. This document does not check this or that state department program, but rather, articulates what is and what is not inside the scope of US national interest, based on the reasoning that if everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

The first page immediately condemns past American foreign policies which aimed to establish "permanent American domination of the entire world" as lacking any connection to US national interest. It defines what the US should want in straightforward, realist language: "the survival and safety of the United States." This is accomplished through border control, greater military spending, nuclear capacity, economic strength, industrialization, energy reshoring, technology investment, soft power influence, and revitalizing "American spiritual and cultural health." It then bullets the US's five core foreign policy interests: (1) migration from the Western Hemisphere; (2) free and fair trade practices in the Indo-Pacific; (3) bolstering Europe; (4) continued access to Middle Eastern oil and gas; (5) winning the AI and technology race. Finally, it connects the Trump administration's domestic agenda – rooting out "DEI" policies, energy production, reindustrialization, tax cuts and deregulation – as the means by which America can achieve these core interests.

The NSS is intended to make the best case possible for the president's worldview, and indeed, it has Trump written all over it. He takes the opportunity to further his "President of Peace" brand by celebrating his alleged ending of eight conflicts throughout the world during his tenure as president. He defines stopping regional conflicts before they spiral into global wars as one of the US's national priorities. Besides the conspicuous criticism that the conflicts claimed to be "solved" are still raging, and that perhaps this is just another tick along Trump's unending journey to be crowned a Nobel Peace Prize, it actually contradicts with the overall non-interventionist theme throughout the document.



While many appreciate the US's diplomatic efforts to end conflicts around the world, this principle does not align with the strict and selective prioritization previously outlined. First, the executive administration holds only a finite number of resources, and these spent negotiating peace deals around the world are by definition not being spent on other domestic or international issues. Second, the US may not be the best actor to negotiate a sustainable peace agreement, and certainly does not have the political will to ensure its implementation for a long-term, positive peace. While as a peace and conflict scholar I praise US diplomatic efforts towards ceasing armed conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East, and actually do agree that global peace and stability is a core US interest, it still is misaligned with the rest of the NSS as unselective and broadly interventionist.

The majority of the NSS's controversial discourse comes from "The Regions" section, ordering the world's five regions in terms of American national security importance. Departing from the Biden administration's 2022 NSS third place ranking of the Western Hemisphere, Trump puts this region as America's number one priority, introducing the dubious "Trump Corollary" amendment to the Monroe Doctrine. Largely undefined and hopefully further fleshed out in the soon-to-be released National Defense Strategy, the Trump Corollary re-asserts the Monroe Doctrine's principles of non-interference of foreign nations in the US's backyard through stability and security. While not naming which foreign influences are harmful to US national security, it alludes to China, and possibly Russia, as the so-called "non-Hemispheric competitors" making major inroads in Latin America. While any reader can certainly guess whom the administration is referencing here, the discursive choice to not specifically name China or Russia is an important indicator of the US's more conciliatory posture towards its geopolitical rivals.

It presents homeland defense from an immigration perspective, championing stability in the region through burden-sharing with regional allies, diplomacy, and trade. While this seems like a win-win vision for both hemispheres, it also calls for the "use of lethal force" against drug cartels, leaving the window ajar for future Venezuela regime change and continued unauthorized submarine strikes, if desired.

## Asia

Asia comes in second, really only mentioning the Indo-Pacific theater, predicting its rise as the "key economic and geopolitical battleground" in future years – a turn from Zbigniew Brzezinski's 1997 predication of Central Asia as the location for great powers vying for influence. It turns to correct past US foreign policy towards China based on liberal ideology which predicted that free trade would spur China's democratization and alliance with the West. As blatantly evident today, this has failed.

Trump's NSS instead asserts that through a mutually-beneficial economic relationship, without ideological strings attached, positive US-China relations are possible and desired. Approaching the relationship from Trump's characteristically business-mindset fashion, he does not think in zero-sum terms and abandons the past administration's "democracy versus autocracy" dichotomous idealism. He instead sees balanced trade relations with China as the pathway to peace between the two superpowers.



Ironically, this is reminiscent of democratic peace theory, something the Trump administration would likely adamantly disagree with. In short, democratic peace theory asserts that democracies are less likely to go to war due to economic interdependence that heightens the costs of war for both sides. This theory is subject to substantial ideological and empirical debates within academia (namely, that democracies are only less likely to go to war with each other), but nevertheless, perhaps economic interdependence without ideological conversion could foster peaceful future relations between the two nations.

Taiwan is then mentioned as remaining strategically important to US national interests, but again, due to realist considerations of semiconductor production and geopolitical positioning. There is no mention of Taiwan's democratic rights or grand notions of fighting Chinese authoritarianism. It makes clear that the US will support the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, strengthen the military deterrent to protect the First Island Chain, and prevent any peer competitor to control the South China Sea, calling for increased burden-sharing from its Japanese and South Korean allies.

## Europe

Coming in third priority, the Europeans are particularly unhappy with this NSS. Viewed as an extension of Vice President JD Vance's scolding at the Munich Security Conference, the NSS condemns the European Union for its economic and cultural decline, cited as the result of transnational organizations, loss of national identity, immigration policies, and censorship of free speech. The asserted prospect of Europe's "civilizational erasure" is viewed at worst, racist, and at best, unclear.

There are multiple ways to interpret the purpose of the European section. (1) These elements could just be ploys to get political buy-in by various political constituencies in the US, such as pitches to immigration hawks in the GOP base. (2) The US does not want European Union domination of Europe due to geopolitical strategy. While this may come as a shock to some, the US has not always supported the EU. Specifically, in its early formation, the US administration saw EU's (then the EC) security efforts in the 1990s and 2000s as a "dagger pointed at the heart of NATO." Finally, (3) the language is intentionally bombastic to trigger a reaction on the part of Europe, perhaps to heighten fear of abandonment and comply with US wishes. However, this could backfire and cause people in Europe to double-down on their EU identity rather than national identity - waving EU flags instead of French or German ones - which is exactly the opposite of what the administration wants.

While a continual theme of the administration is its non-interference with the ideology and domestic politics of different regimes (you don't have to be a democracy to get a deal with us!) - this openness is unfortunately and hypocritically not afforded to the Europeans. This leads to a larger question, namely, should the US, on national security grounds, care about the European Union's domestic politics? According to the Trump administration, yes, due to the deep transatlantic cultural ties and Western civilizational affinities.



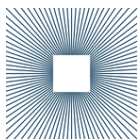
## The Middle East and Africa

The Middle East is listed as fourth in importance, followed by a measly three paragraphs for Africa. The Middle East's deprioritization is cited as the US becoming a net energy exporter and Trump's blossoming friendships with Arab partners. While combatting radicalism is still a priority, it condemns past policies of ideological and regime change as a "misguided experiment," instead calling for acceptance of the region's "traditions and historic forms of government" as they are. For the Africa section, the NSS largely condemns past foreign policies of spreading woke ideology and relationships built on foreign aid dependency.

## Conclusion

Like the rest of Trump 2.0, this NSS is unorthodox when compared with past NSS's and even when looking at Trump 1.0's NSS from 2017. The loudest critics come from Europe, rightfully lambasting the hypocrisy of prioritizing state sovereignty over its ideology everywhere but across the Atlantic. The Asia section is surprisingly jovial, departing from traditional Trump rhetoric posturing the rise of China as an existential threat to America - a welcoming optimistic indication that superpower conflict can be avoided through trade.

In Washington, realists and restrainers are generally feeling quite optimistic about this new "predisposition towards non-intervention" by setting a high bar for what constitutes military adventurism, thinking about war as a last resort when all other tools have failed. In theory, this will be conducive towards preventing future unwanted US interference in foreign countries, yet Trump's threats of regime change in Venezuela and air campaign against ISIS in Syria, suggests that Washington realists should be cautious before celebrating the NSS and change in official US foreign policy.



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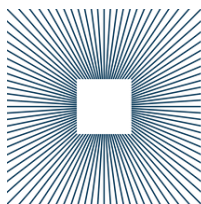


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