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Rethinking the International Order and Imperial Isolationism: The Perspective of the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy

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Abstract

The 2025 United States National Security Strategy (NSS) emerges within an extremely complex framework, shaped, on one hand, by shifts in the American domestic economy and politics and, on the other, by a volatile global geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape. The 2025 NSS is a pivotal document, providing at least a partial clarification of Washington's approach to navigating contemporary challenges across both domestic and international spheres. This analysis aims to provide a concise evaluation of the 2025 NSS within the broader context of the international order's reconfiguration—a process that gained momentum as early as the first Trump administration. To this end, my objective is to synthesize and elucidate, based on the NSS text and supplementary sources, the U.S. vision regarding its foreign policy and security priorities, while simultaneously highlighting nuances that have remained under-examined within the expert community.

Keywords: United States, National Security Strategy, Europe, imperial neo-isolationism.

¹ This publication draws exclusively on open-source materials. The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the institution.

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INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT, AIMS, AND OBJECTIVES

On December 4, 2025, the White House released the new [National Security Strategy](#) (NSS) of the United States. This is the first such document issued by the second Trump administration and is intended to be a [continuation of the security strategy](#) adopted during the first Trump term in December 2017.

Mandated by Section 603 of the [Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act](#) of 1986³ and typically prepared by the National Security Council, the National Security Strategy embodies the U.S. executive branch's vision regarding broad strategic objectives and the definition of the national interest. It identifies threats and outlines the core tenets of foreign, economic, and security policy. In essence, the strategy's purpose is to minimize vulnerabilities while simultaneously maximizing the capacity to achieve objectives, based on a rigorous assessment of the prevailing security environment.

Nevertheless, the NSS is a **consultative and legally non-binding document**; it articulates a broad strategic vision that signals policy intentions but does not mandate specific actions.

In accordance with the aforementioned legislation, the NSS must address five major areas:

1. The global interests, goals, and objectives vital to the national security of the United States;
2. The foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities of the United States necessary to deter aggression and to implement the national security strategy;
3. The proposed short-term and long-term use of the political, economic, military, and other elements of national power to protect or promote national interests and to achieve the strategic goals and objectives of the United States;

³ Amending the [National Security Act](#) of 1947.



4. The adequacy of the capabilities of the United States to carry out the national security strategy (including an evaluation of the balance among the capabilities of all elements of the national power of the United States to support the implementation of the national security strategy);
5. Such other information as may be necessary to help inform Congress on matters relating to the national security strategy of the United States.

Once drafted (in both classified and unclassified versions), the NSS must be submitted to Congress on the same date the President submits the budget proposal for the following fiscal year. Upon reaching Congress, the NSS is evaluated and subsequently serves as a benchmark for drafting necessary foreign policy and defense legislation, such as the [National Defense Authorization Act](#) (NDAA), which must pass annually through both chambers. Consequently, Congress possesses the capacity to reshape the original vision of the NSS⁴, at times steering it in directions distinct from the executive's intentions – a fact of paramount importance regarding the document recently presented by the White House. Indeed, following the publication of the new U.S. NSS, Congress adopted the [NDAA for Fiscal Year 2026](#), a document that stands in direct contradiction to the 2025 NSS on several points, such as support for NATO and European allies and preventing the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the continent. Specifically, the legislation prohibits reducing the number of American military personnel below 76,000 – given that approximately 85,000 soldiers are currently stationed there (see Sec. 1225, pp. 853-861) – while also implementing the [Baltic Security Initiative](#) and continuing the provision of \$400 million in assistance to Ukraine, among other measures.

The trend observed in the NDAA 2026 is by no means accidental; it reflects the prevailing sentiment of the vast majority of the American electorate. The [Reagan National Defense Survey](#), conducted by the Ronald Reagan Institute between October 23 and November 3, 2025, indicates that American public opinion does not align with the isolationist views expressed in the 2025 NSS. Support for greater U.S. involvement on the international stage rose from 57% in 2024 to a significant 64% this year. Furthermore, a breakdown of this support by partisan affiliation provides a striking picture: MAGA Republicans who support increased U.S. engagement represent an overwhelming 79%, while Republicans as a whole back this

⁴ Specifically through the work of the various committees involved in deliberating on the aforementioned legislation, such as the Senate Armed Services Committee.



active posture at a rate of 75% – representing increases of 18% and 16%, respectively, compared to 2024.

The 2025 NSS emerges within an exceptionally intricate context, shaped, on one hand, by shifts in the American domestic economy and politics and, on the other, by a volatile global geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape. This environment is marked by the stagnation of the peace process in Ukraine, escalating tensions in the Caribbean⁵, and the intensification of Sino-American competition amidst the trade wars initiated by the new Trump administration in April 2025. From this vantage point, it is a pivotal document, providing at least a partial elucidation of Washington's strategy for managing contemporary domestic and international challenges.

The present analysis aims to provide a concise evaluation of the 2025 NSS within the broader framework of the international order's reconfiguration, a process that traces its origins back to the first Trump administration. To this end, my objective is to synthesize and clarify – drawing from the NSS text and supplementary sources – the U.S. vision regarding its foreign policy and security priorities, while simultaneously highlighting nuances that remain under-examined within the expert community.

THE PILLARS OF THE NEW AMERICAN STRATEGIC VISION

The 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) represents a distinct rupture from previous U.S. security strategies, including that of the first Trump administration (the [2017 NSS](#)), which it purports to continue and expand upon. The document aspires to establish an entirely new vision, intended to align with the realities of the contemporary multipolar world, while abandoning the iteration and adaptation of the model that has historically dominated American strategic thought.

The 2025 NSS suffers from the absence of a core component of any strategic document: a clear [Strategic Environment Assessment](#) (SEA). This would entail a systematic evaluation of geopolitical, military, economic, and informational factors, among others, that may pose potential threats to U.S. interests and overall security. Furthermore, the NSS lacks a concluding section to provide a clear overview of how the threats and opportunities identified within the document are translated into necessary requirements, or into compelling narratives (for allies,

⁵ The present article was drafted prior to the U.S. military operation on January 3, 2026, which resulted in the arrest of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.



competitors, and domestic society alike) that justify the selected policy trajectory and instill confidence in the United States' ability to navigate the complexities of the contemporary security landscape.

What the 2025 NSS does provide, however, is a critical assessment of how previous administrations—viewed as manifestations of a politico-ideological and economic elite – chose to manage the preeminent global status of the United States in the post-Cold War era:

Our elites badly miscalculated America's willingness to shoulder forever global burdens to which the American people saw no connection to the national interest. They overestimated America's ability to fund, simultaneously, a massive welfare-regulatory-administrative state alongside a massive military, diplomatic, intelligence, and foreign aid complex. They placed hugely misguided and destructive bets on globalism and so-called "free trade" that hollowed out the very middle class and industrial base on which American economic and military preeminence depend. They allowed allies and partners to offload the cost of their defense onto the American people, and sometimes to suck us into conflicts and controversies central to their interests but peripheral or irrelevant to our own (2025 NSS, 1-2).

The aforementioned quote clarifies the point of departure for the new American strategic planning: the abandonment of liberal-internationalist logic as a consequence of its perceived economic and politico-military bankruptcy, alongside a global reprioritization of American interests (see also Thrall & Friedman, 2018). The 2025 NSS seems to overtly declare that the U.S. has overextended itself (see Kennedy, 1987; NSS 2025, 12) and that a correction of the previously dominant vision is imperative to prevent a profound crisis of American power in the 21st century. In other words, the 2025 NSS implicitly asserts that a Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) is unnecessary as long as the primary threats to security originate internally – as the cumulative result of flawed domestic and foreign policy decisions – thereby prioritizing the resolution of internal issues over external ones. This appears to be the reason why the 2025 NSS is primarily concerned with discussing 'where we want to go' and 'how,' while neglecting 'where we are,' and why the concept of 'Great Power Competition' (prominent in the 2017 NSS, drafted during the first Trump administration) is entirely absent throughout the text.

1. The Binary Rethinking of the National Interest

From the outset, it must be stated that the 2025 NSS presents itself unmistakably as [a manifesto of an ideological vision, rather than merely a pragmatic strategic document](#). All



previous security strategies I have examined (starting with the 1987 edition during Ronald Reagan's second term)⁶ possess an implicit ideological component, stemming from the historical and institutional-political American ethos rooted in the era of the Founding Fathers (see Howe, 1970; Zinn, 1990); however, none are drafted in such overtly partisan and ideological terms. The logic structuring the strategic vision of the United States originates in President Trump's unorthodox approach to foreign policy, synthesized in a paragraph that manages – whether intentionally or not – to express the exact opposite of its apparent intent: President Trump's foreign policy thinking is non-ideological precisely because it is... ideological (a fact that also explains the phrasing 'realistic without being realist'):

President Trump's foreign policy is pragmatic without being “pragmatist,” realistic without being “realist,” principled without being “idealistic,” muscular without being “hawkish,” and restrained without being “dovish.” It is not grounded in traditional, political ideology. It is motivated above all by what works for America—or, in two words, “America First.”

From this perspective, the 2025 NSS projects domestic U.S. polarization onto its foreign and security policy vision, while simultaneously abandoning the bipartisan consensus that has hitherto defined this type of document – so crucial not only for the United States but also for the international community over the last eighty years. In fact, the 2025 NSS reflects a specific evolution occurring within American domestic politics: the rise of President Trump's MAGA movement. This movement represents an ideological break from the dominant tradition within the two major parties (Republican and Democrat), which has been characterized by political liberalism, multiculturalism, and a foreign policy centered on the promotion of democratic values, respect for human rights, and free trade through multilateral institutional arrangements. For the first time in a very long period, MAGA offers an ideological alternative articulated around the 'America First' principle, characterized by political illiberalism, Christian ethno-nationalism (translated into *civilizationism* at the foreign policy level), and a profound skepticism toward multilateralism, institutions, alliances, and international organizations (see also Kirk, 2020; Nicolescu, 2025).

⁶ Accessible at the link <https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/>, with the exception of the NSS from Joe Biden's 2021–2025 term, which is suspiciously missing from the Department of Defense (DoD) website, but can be found at: <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

Thus, while it appears to correctly identify several shortcomings of previous strategies, the 2025 NSS not only repeats but amplifies the very aspects it criticizes in its predecessors, albeit from a different ideological perspective: that of *America First*. The text is dominated by bombastic and sycophantic language and exaggerations, applying an ideological filter to relations with allies and justifying certain positions through the Orwellian use of concepts such as 'democracy,' 'patriotic,' or 'free speech.' Simultaneously, the 2025 NSS is the first such document to feature '[alternative facts](#)' (such as [a non-existent war between Egypt and Ethiopia](#), specific claims regarding the climate crisis, or the alleged undermining of democratic processes in Europe that supposedly hinders the realization of European peoples' aspirations for peace in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict), conspiracy theories (such as the 'Great Replacement' theory⁷; see also Sedgwick, 2024), and discursive elements associated with a cult of personality, traits more characteristic of hybrid or authoritarian regimes than of advanced democracies.

In this context, **the American national interest is conceptualized along two major dimensions – economic and identity-cultural** – which serve as the ideological bedrock of President Trump's 'America First' political project: “The United States must maintain the strongest economy, develop the most advanced technologies, boost the cultural health of society, and possess the world's most capable military” (NSS 2025, 9). The **2025 NSS places economic and energy security at the heart of the national interest**, framing them as crucial for “the survival and safety of the United States as an independent and sovereign republic”:

We want the world's strongest, most dynamic, most innovative, and most advanced economy. The U.S. economy is the bedrock of the American way of life, which promises and delivers widespread and broad-based prosperity, creates upward mobility, and rewards hard work. Our economy is also the bedrock of our global position and the necessary foundation of our military (2025 NSS, 3-4).

Five major strategic areas of interest are identified within the economic security dimension: the rebalancing of trade relations, financial sector dominance, reindustrialization, energy dominance, and the protection of advantages in innovation, high technology, and intellectual property.

The first one – the rebalancing of trade relations – represents perhaps the most critical point of President Trump's economic agenda, dating back to before his entry into politics. The primary objective is the protection of American workers and industries through the

⁷ The prime example of this is the assertion that the U.S. will prevent the “cynical manipulation of our immigration system to create voting blocs loyal to foreign interests within our country” (NSS 2025, 10).

implementation of an agenda aimed at rebalancing trade relations by reducing the trade deficit – the driving factor behind the initiation of the global economic war on April 2, 2025, as part of the so-called '[Liberation Day](#).' The Washington administration contends that the trade deficit originates from unfair economic practices employed by U.S. trading partners, such as protectionist barriers against American products, dumping, and other measures.

In essence, the 2025 NSS unequivocally signals that the threat or employment of economic warfare has become a legitimate weapon in the U.S. security arsenal, contingent upon the (rightful or [flawed](#)) perception of bilateral trade balances. This paves the way for the **tactical use of economic pressure to achieve political objectives** (e.g., alignment with U.S. interests), a concept that permeates the entire strategic vision of the 2025 NSS.

Furthermore, the alternative use of the concept of *soft power* (see Nye, 2023) within the strategy must be understood in this specific light – as a form of diplomatic and economic pressure aimed at advancing American interests and countering foreign influences. In the 2025 NSS, although seemingly linked to both economic and cultural aspects, *soft power* is in practice exclusively connected to the economic dimension; the cultural elements entail merely an assertiveness regarding U.S. history and identity, as I will discuss below.

The identity-cultural dimension along which the American national interest is reconceptualized – a feature unique to this document – posits 'American spiritual and cultural health' as a vital U.S. interest, without which 'long-term security is impossible' (NSS 2025, 4). The U.S. departs from the hitherto shared bipartisan identity vision, according to which the essence of Western civilization is defined by its liberal-democratic values, replacing it with a nativist, American-centric, and ethno-cultural one⁸ (see Young, 2017). This involves the **[securitization](#) of an ideological and partisan discourse**, through which the American strategic vision of international relations is subsequently filtered, generating a **cultural-ideological double standard in the evaluation and conduct of relations with U.S. partners**.

⁸ Hence the persistence with which the 2025 NSS addresses the issue of migration as a threat to the national interest. This matter is too broad to be fully discussed within the scope of the present analysis; thus, I will limit myself to noting that the United States represents a unique case (as a nation of immigrants), and that illegal migration there results from a complex array of factors which include both internal developments within Latin American states and also institutional deficiencies in the U.S. that allow economic migrants to [exploit lax political asylum laws](#) to remain in the country. This state of affairs has been exploited by a segment of the American political spectrum which, rather than seeking to reform the legislative framework for a genuine management of the problem, viewed it as an opportunity to turn it into an electoral stake to tip the scales during elections. Driven by this [partisan logic](#), various bills introduced in Congress – [some](#) with broad bipartisan support – fail to pass, thereby perpetuating a manufactured crisis that could be resolved relatively easily through the political will of both parties.

Thus, on the one hand, in its relationship with Euro-Atlantic partners, the U.S. declares its openness to exporting or generalizing domestic [culture wars](#) across the entire Western space as a form of '[civilizational war](#).' The 2025 NSS does not limit itself to merely demanding that European allies assume a larger share of the NATO defense budget; rather, in the name of ensuring long-term cooperation, it calls for the resolution of certain domestic policy issues identified as threats to Western identity. To this end, because 'Europe remains strategically and culturally vital to the United States' (NSS 2025, 26), the strategy proposes a diagnosis of the ailments plaguing the Old Continent, grouped under the umbrella concept of 'civilizational erasure'⁹—transnational constructs (i.e., the European Union) that undermine political freedom and sovereignty, [over-regulation](#) that stifles trade, migration policies (which transform the continent and generate conflict within European societies), censorship, declining birth rates, and a loss of identity and self-confidence (NSS 2025, 25). This is, in fact, a reiteration of President Trump's thesis (that [the EU was created to undermine the United States](#)) and the core arguments of the [speech delivered by Vice President J.D. Vance](#) at the Munich Security Conference in February 2025 (see also Buchanan, 2002).

The conclusion of American strategists is clear: if these trends continue, “the continent will be unrecognizable in 20 years or less,” with some NATO members becoming “majority non-European” (p. 27). Consequently, it remains “unclear whether certain European countries will possess militaries and economies strong enough to remain reliable allies” (p. 25). The solution offered is a form of imperial ideological interventionism expressed in Orwellian terms, reminiscent of Steve Bannon's political agenda for Europe [expressed in a 2018 interview](#) and echoed by President Donald Trump in a [Politico interview](#) conducted a few days after the launch of the 2025 NSS:

American diplomacy should continue to stand up for genuine democracy, freedom of expression¹⁰, and unapologetic celebrations of European nations' individual character and history. America encourages its

⁹ This represents, once again, a projection of American domestic issues onto the international stage, reflecting the ideological anxieties generated within certain U.S. political circles by shifting demographic trends – specifically, the fact that [White Americans will cease to constitute a majority of the population](#) before the middle of the century (see also Krosh et al., 2022). Hence the persistence with which the MAGA movement and – by extension – the Trump administration have embraced certain iterations of the 'Great Replacement' theory, seeking to translate them into public policies, particularly in the realm of migration (see also note 6).

¹⁰ This serves as an apt illustration of the '*doublespeak*' (see Orwell, 1983; Ostrom and Haltom, 2018) regarding democracy, rights, and civil liberties employed in the 2025 NSS. It remains unclear what the authors of the 2025 NSS define as 'authentic democracy'; however, *ipso facto*, they imply a contrast with an 'inauthentic' democracy, thereby reflecting the national-populist vision of *America First*. This vision pits the 'democratic people' against an 'authoritarian cabal' of political elites—the 'enemies of the people' (see also Löfflmann, 2021). Similarly,



political allies in Europe to promote this revival of spirit, and the growing influence of patriotic European parties indeed gives cause for great optimism. (...) We want to work with aligned countries that want to restore their former greatness (2025 NSS, 26).

Thus, although the 2025 NSS unequivocally declares that the United States is abandoning the export of liberal-democratic values and the interventionism aimed at supporting them, it simultaneously reveals a profound interest in **exporting or 'encouraging' ethno-cultural and identity-based values where it deems necessary**, as is the case within the sphere of traditional Western allies. The central objective appears to be [the active undermining of the European project](#) by supporting 'sovereigntist' populist movements, with the aim of dismantling or at least weakening the European economic and political bloc.¹¹ This would facilitate the individual renegotiation of American economic interests on the continent on relatively unequal bilateral terms with European states, particularly concerning the [regulation of tech and social media companies](#). While the 2025 NSS correctly identifies some of the challenges facing European economies, its overall diagnosis – filtered through the ethno-populist ideology of the second Trump administration – is [fundamentally flawed](#). Consequently, the envisioned interventionist and [transactional](#) tactics also prove misguided and could become counterproductive in the medium to long term, **likely having a negative impact on the very American interests they intend to protect and promote**.

On the other hand, regarding relations with non-European or non-Western actors, we observe the adoption of a **culturally relativistic vision** in which the U.S. asserts its own identity while “simultaneously respecting the religions, cultures, and systems of government of other countries.” This refers to the 'flexible realism' approach (or 'realism without being realist,' as mentioned above) professed by the 2025 NSS, according to which:

U.S. policy will be realistic about what is possible and desirable to seek in its dealings with other nations. We seek good relations and peaceful commercial relations with the nations of the world without imposing on them democratic or other social change that differs widely from their traditions and histories. We recognize and affirm that there is nothing inconsistent or hypocritical in acting according to such a realistic assessment or in maintaining good relations with countries whose governing systems and

'freedom of speech' is utilized in a specific key, strictly tied to the U.S.-EU relationship and intended to protect major American Big Tech actors against European regulations. In this regard, the new Washington administration leverages 'freedom of expression' as a pretext to criticize European digital legislation (specifically the [Digital Services Act](#) and the [Digital Markets Act](#)) for 'censorship' and the 'taxation of American companies.' Simultaneously, the use of this terminology reflects a specific facet of the so-called U.S. culture wars, centering on the [perceived censorship of 'conservative voices'](#) within the American online environment.

¹¹ Which is the United States' [most important trading partner](#), while the U.S. is [the primary destination for European investment](#).



societies differ from ours even as we push like-minded friends to uphold our shared norms, furthering our interests as we do so (2025 NSS, 9).

This *selective cultural non-interventionism* enables the U.S. to practice conditional engagement or disengagement while simultaneously instrumentalizing and projecting its own political values and identities to advance its politico-economic agenda on transactional terms.

2. American Imperial Neo-Isolationism

As noted above, the 2025 NSS is an abrupt and unequivocal departure from the liberal logic adopted during the Cold War era, coupled with a repositioning along the lines of a distinct form of isolationism aligned with the so-called 'Trump Corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine¹². However, while the original Monroe Doctrine was anti-imperialist and primarily focused on early American expansionism (from the Atlantic to the Pacific), the 'Trump Corollary' represents something entirely different: the assertion of a sphere of exclusivity in which the U.S. acts not merely as a regional policeman ensuring order, but as an active, interventionist, and even expansionist hegemon. It unilaterally assumes the right to dictate to hemispheric nations with whom they may or may not conduct business, thereby regulating their international economic relations.

¹² Enunciated in 1823 in [President James Monroe's seventh annual message to Congress](#), it was originally an anti-imperialist doctrine based essentially on three principles: it proclaimed the end of European colonialism in the Western Hemisphere (*de facto* prohibiting European powers from establishing new colonies in the Americas); the principle of non-interventionism, stating that European powers should no longer interfere in the internal affairs of the former colonies in the Americas; and the doctrine of reciprocity, asserting that the U.S. would not interfere in European affairs. The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, presented in his [messages to Congress in 1904–1905](#), saw the U.S. assuming international police powers in the hemisphere (to ensure order), thereby implicitly asserting U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere; it was initially directed against the so-called 'gunboat diplomacy' of Great Britain, France, and Italy in Venezuela (1902). The Roosevelt Corollary was, in fact, the practical consequence of the 1903 [Platt Amendment](#) regarding Cuba. In 1933, President F.D. Roosevelt renounced these police powers, adopting the '[Good Neighbor Policy](#).' Following World War II, the [Charter of the Organization of American States](#) (OAS) was adopted, signed in Bogotá in 1948. Chapters 4 and 5 affirm the non-interventionist clause: establishing collective security in the Americas and decreeing that no country shall intervene (militarily or politically) in the internal affairs of any other country.

It also must be reiterated that, while the 2025 NSS generally appears to eschew the combative rhetoric characteristic of its predecessors – wherein rivals and competitors such as China or Russia were explicitly named –, this does not imply that the document is any less assertive. In fact, the 'Trump Corollary' seems specifically articulated to neutralize Beijing's interests throughout Central and South America:

we want a Hemisphere that remains free of hostile foreign incursion or ownership of key assets, and that supports critical supply chains; and we want to ensure our continued access to key strategic locations (2025 NSS, 5).

3. The Vision of the International Order

The unilateral abandonment by the U.S. of its own liberal international order, established at the end of World War II, is not, however, accompanied by a clear articulation of the emerging order. Nevertheless, the 2025 NSS foreshadows a return to a world of spheres of influence, somewhat akin to the interwar and pre-war periods of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. The best indicator in this regard is the document's prioritization of various global regions in relation to American interests; their structuring offers a relatively clear perspective on the overall vision the U.S. holds regarding its international involvement and its understanding of the global order's rearrangement. The ordering of American priorities thus appears to follow **a logic of concentric circles, moving from the most critical region to the least**: the Western Hemisphere, the Indo-Pacific region, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. This represents a pivot not toward the Indo-Pacific and competition with China – as previous security strategies asserted – but toward the immediate proximity of the Western Hemisphere. Given that I have already addressed the relationship with European allies, in the remainder of this section I will briefly discuss several points raised by the 2025 NSS regarding the other regions:

The Western Hemisphere – conceptualized as a zone of direct and uncontested U.S. hegemony and a space of economic exclusivity¹³, where a significant portion of supply chains and strategic resources necessary for the American defense industry will be repositioned. U.S.

¹³ The American strategy toward the Western Hemisphere bears a striking – and most likely unintentional – resemblance to the so-called 'Monroe Doctrine for Asia' advocated by the Japanese Empire during the Second World War, as articulated through the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere' and the principles adopted at the Greater East Asia Conference in November 1943 (see Piegzik, 2019, 247-9).

relations with countries in the region will be recalibrated based on two objectives: **'enlistment and expansion'**¹⁴ (NSS 2025, 16). As mentioned above, although not identified by name, China is undoubtedly the adversary the strategy intends to combat within the Western Hemisphere:

Non-Hemispheric competitors have made major inroads into our Hemisphere, both to disadvantage us economically in the present, and in ways that may harm us strategically in the future. Allowing these incursions without serious pushback is another great American strategic mistake of recent decades (2025 NSS, 17).

Under the *'Enlistment'* chapter, the strategy prioritizes – beyond a reconsideration of military presence in the region which, among other things, entails securing 'access to strategically important locations'¹⁵ – commercial diplomacy as a means to strengthen its own economy. This is achieved through the same transactional instrument previously mentioned: the threat of economic warfare as a tool to secure bilateral economic arrangements advantageous to the United States, particularly regarding supply chains and the 'repatriation' of manufacturing industries to countries within the region (NSS 2025, 16-17). The authors of the strategy contend that 'Enlistment' will prove highly effective not only in enhancing hemispheric security and creating benefits for the parties involved but also in curbing the ability of non-hemispheric competitors to expand their influence in the region – a highly debatable premise.

'Expansion' entails identifying strategic points and resources within the hemisphere to be protected or exploited by the United States alongside regional partners, 'to make both neighboring countries and our own country more prosperous' (NSS 2025, 17). Simultaneously, 'external influences' will be countered by demonstrating the hidden costs of cooperation between hemispheric nations and external actors, as well as by 'utilizing the levers available to the U.S. in the financial and technological fields to induce these states to reject such assistance.'¹⁶ These measures are coupled with the active involvement of the Washington state apparatus in identifying opportunities for strategic acquisitions and investments for American private companies. The document clearly specifies the aspiration for American economic agents to hold monopolistic positions, particularly in countries that 'depend most heavily' on

¹⁴ The dual framework entails the 'enlistment' of regional allies to counter specific security threats (such as migration and drug trafficking) and to enhance regional security and stability, while 'expansion' refers to the cultivation of new relationships alongside the consolidation of the U.S.'s status as a preferred economic and security partner.

¹⁵ Which, given the history of President Trump's stances since 2017, can be interpreted with a high degree of certainty as primarily targeting the Panama Canal zone, Venezuela, and Greenland.

¹⁶ Thus, applying the same transactional logic of the threat of economic warfare previously mentioned.



the U.S. (NSS 2025, 19). The American stance toward the region (and beyond) is expressed in terms that are both extremely clear and deeply concerning, given that the United States has abdicated its role as the leader of the democratic world:

The choice all countries should face is whether they want to live in an American-led world of sovereign countries¹⁷ and free economies or in a parallel one in which they are influenced by countries on the other side of the world (2025 NSS, 18).

The vision articulated in the 2025 NSS explains a series of U.S. actions in the Western Hemisphere since President Trump took office – ranging from the redeployment of U.S. Navy assets from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean to the so-called 'War on Drugs' that specifically targets Venezuela (and potentially Colombia and, indirectly, Cuba). It also provides a much clearer perspective on the recent seizure of the oil tanker in the Caribbean, [the active support](#) – both electoral and via a [\\$40 billion](#) aid package – for Javier Milei in Argentina, the direct political backing of a specific candidate in the [Honduran presidential elections](#), and the resolution of the [Panama Canal 'issue'](#) in early 2025. Simultaneously, the threat to Greenland (and, by extension, to Denmark and U.S. European allies) is becoming extremely real, as confirmed by a recent report from the Danish military intelligence services, which [identifies the U.S. as a potential security risk](#) to Denmark. This is further underscored by the appointment of Jeff Landry as U.S. Special Envoy to Greenland, who has openly stated that he serves in a 'position to [make Greenland part of the United States.](#)'

This represents an extremely muscular affirmation of American hegemony in the hemisphere, likely aimed at aligning regional regimes with the U.S. and opening their economies (whether by force or otherwise) to American investment. The broader question, however, remains: what signal does this behavior send to revisionist states within the international system, such as Russia or China, regarding their own regional aspirations?

The Indo-Pacific Region – the U.S. position here appears to be guided by the mantra 'from competition to cooperation and conflict deterrence.' While the 2017 NSS centered on rivalry with China, this approach seems to have been abandoned in the 2025 NSS: the U.S. gives no indication of an intention to provoke China in economic or military terms – quite the opposite. American strategists openly acknowledge that the tariff lever is ineffective in the

¹⁷ Of note is the formulation: 'sovereign states and free economies,' rather than 'democratic states and free economies' (see note 8). In this regard, the phrasing 'sovereign states' is deliberate.

relationship with China; following the initial tariffs adopted by Donald Trump in 2017, Beijing managed to adapt by strengthening its control over supply chains in developing countries and by increasing its exports to them, which doubled between 2020 and 2024¹⁸. Meanwhile, exports to the U.S. fell from 4% of GDP to just over 2% (NSS 2025, 20). Under these circumstances, while recognizing the vital strategic importance of the region, Washington proposes a reconsideration of Sino-American economic relations on mutually beneficial grounds and in sectors that do not fall under the purview of the American strategic security imperative. Furthermore, the 2025 NSS provides a list of grievances regarding its relationship with China (see NSS 2025, 21), illustrating the continued influence of Peter Navarro's thinking on decision-makers within the second Trump administration (see Navarro, 2017). At the same time, the emphasis placed on the partnership with India, Australia, and Japan (the 'Quad') appears to be merely rhetorical, given that India has been driven by Donald Trump's recent tariffs¹⁹ to [reassess its regional relationships](#). Similarly, the imposition of [10% tariffs on Australia](#) and [15% on Japan](#) does not serve to solidify the idea of a robust U.S. strategic relationship with its Indo-Pacific partners, quite the contrary.

The Middle East – the 2025 NSS proposes a strategic deprioritization, coupled with bilateral cooperation on transactional and culturally relativistic grounds that favor American national interests in both economic and military spheres. Simultaneously, it affirms a firm desire to expand the [Abraham Accords](#) as an institutional framework capable of guaranteeing regional stability and cooperation. However, the strategic assessment according to which

the days in which the Middle East dominated American foreign policy in both long-term planning and day-to-day execution are thankfully over – not because the Middle East no longer matters, but because it is no longer the constant irritant, and potential source of imminent catastrophe, that it once was (2025 NSS, 29).

This appears to be more of an aspirational expression along the lines of the '[power of positive thinking](#)' – a concept in which the American president firmly believes – rather than a pragmatic understanding of regional realities.

¹⁸ Moreover, in the first eleven months of 2025, despite the tariffs imposed by the United States, China recorded a [trade surplus of \\$1 trillion](#).

¹⁹ Since late August 2025, Indian goods and services have been subjected to 50% tariffs – [higher even than the 47% rate imposed on China](#). Added to these tariffs are [the H-1B visa crisis](#) regarding highly skilled workers and President Trump's claim to have mediated the de-escalation of the India-Pakistan conflict in the summer of 2025, a [claim disputed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#).

Africa – plays the most insignificant role in the framework of the 2025 NSS, despite the document elsewhere recognizing the strategic importance of developing markets for the broader goal of regenerating and growing the American economy. The document directly, and in certain respects correctly, attacks previous administrations for their preoccupation with the 'export of liberal ideology' (NSS 2025, 29) to the continent. Instead, it proposes²⁰ limited, bilateral cooperation determined by U.S. interests regarding strategic resources and the alignment of African partners with the American economic agenda (*ibid.*). This is perhaps the most significant 'oversight' of the 2025 NSS: the fact that Africa in particular, and the developing world in general, represents a crucial stake in the context (whether formally acknowledged or not) of Sino-American competition – much like the former Third World did for the USSR and the U.S. during the Cold War. Given that China enjoys not only economic but also diplomatic primacy – benefiting from [long-standing good relations established with African nations](#) during its UN admission campaign in the early 1960s, which have since evolved into the pillars of a partnership highly beneficial to Beijing both economically and politically at the UN – the U.S. decision to recalibrate interactions with African actors on purely transactional grounds appears to be a strategic abandonment of global competition and an implicit recognition of China's preeminence on the continent.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2025 NSS both confirms and elucidates the predictions I formulated in the early spring of 2025 (see Nicolescu, 2025) regarding the **U.S. adoption of an imperial isolationist model**, inspired by Jacksonianism and the exemptionalist school. The U.S. is advancing an extractive and transactional hegemonic model (see Nye, 2014), structured across three primary levels: **economic-financial, military and security, and [ideological-cultural](#)**. It is grounded in an approach focused on the American domestic politico-economic sphere, which views foreign policy primarily as an instrument of domestic policy rather than an autonomous domain of statecraft.

²⁰ Following the suspension or cancellation of [critical humanitarian and medical aid](#) provided by the U.S. to African nations, particularly through USAID, and [the expiration of the African Growth and Opportunity Act](#) (AGOA) on September 30, 2025 – with the American side having expressed no desire to renew the agreement as of the writing of this analysis.

The essence of this new vision lies in the **rethinking of the national interest in terms of domestic politico-economic gain, which is subsequently translated into power on the international stage**. This is an expansionist model regarding the control over resources and supply chains, founded on the concept of 'strength'²¹ espoused by President Trump throughout his career and on a specific political vision focused on maximizing economic gains, coupled with the unilateral abandonment of international institutional arrangements that might hinder the achievement of strategic goals. Consequently, U.S. strategy is shifting from providing unconditional security guarantees to allies toward offering conditional guarantees – typically within strictly bilateral and transactional relationships that yield consistent benefits for the American side and require the alignment of the involved actors with U.S. interests.

- U.S. economic security is the centerpiece of the 2025 NSS, conceptualized as the repatriation of strategic production sectors critical to the defense industry, coupled with securing control over supply chains and resources essential to these industries by locating or relocating them within states or regions aligned with or controlled by the U.S. The achievement of these security objectives will rely on leveraging U.S. financial primacy (specifically aimed at maintaining [the dollar as the global reserve currency](#)) and on the use of 'soft power' in an entirely new sense²²: that of the transactional threat of economic warfare in U.S. bilateral relations. From this perspective, the United States intends to close the strategic gap of the American military-industrial complex relative to its global competitors. The fundamental issue, however, lies in how the 2025 NSS proposes to manage this challenge. The imperial isolationist model put forward by the 2025 NSS may prove to be more than counterproductive in the medium to long term, insofar as future Washington administrations remain willing to maintain this trajectory.
- **The 2025 NSS operates on the 'too big to ignore' assumption** (appearing in the document, for instance, as a *'position of strength'*), which may prove to be a strategic vulnerability in the medium to long term, undermining the very central aspirations

²¹ This entails the active application of the elements of national power in international interactions, specifically through the employment of force – in military or economic terms – or the threat thereof to generate political or other gains, or for the mere imposition of will. For this reason, Donald Trump believes that previous presidents were either weak or incompetent: a great power must wield its power rather than resort to dialogue with partners and competitors alike. Consequently, Trump views the recourse to diplomacy as an implicit indicator of weakness, inconsistent with the United States' status as a great power.

²² A usage that is entirely divorced from the term's original meaning

expressed in the document. According to this premise, the U.S. is – both economically and militarily – too large to be disregarded; (inter)dependence on the U.S. constitutes the basis that motivates and provides (in the view of American strategists) the guarantee for the success of transactional foreign and security policy actions in relation to allies and competitors alike. For example, abandoning cordial relations based on a community of shared democratic values with European allies and adopting a stance centered on politico-ideological and economic intervention – aimed at [changing European regimes](#) to align them with the American vision (an *'align or else!'* model, akin to a suzerain-vassal relationship) – could have major repercussions in an entirely different arena: **the strategic rivalry with China**. The U.S. cannot withstand (especially economically) the competition with China while alienating its European allies. In the same vein, the evolution of the economic war with China demonstrates that President Trump's *'too big to ignore'* assumption is flawed. Following the October 2025 meeting with Xi Jinping, the U.S. lowered tariffs from 57% to 47%, while China [rescinded some of the countermeasures](#) taken in response to 'Liberation Day' (specifically regarding soybean imports and rare mineral exports). In practice, President Trump has returned to the status quo of early 2025, with the exception that Chinese restrictions on rare minerals will now be strictly limited to a one-year period (which may represent significant negotiating leverage for Beijing as the U.S. midterm elections approach in November 2026).

- Simultaneously, the **U.S. is abandoning the political identity** it has held for the last century: classical (universalist) liberal democratic values are giving way to a particularist, American-centric, and isolationist cultural-ideological vision. From this perspective, it is crucial to emphasize that **liberal-democratic regimes and support for them are no longer a priority for the United States** on a global scale. If, until now, the United States was synonymous with democratic rights and freedoms, American strategists will henceforth associate the nation with the concept of power and strength based on a sovereign-nationalist and illiberal worldview. The long-term implications of this strategic decision will be profound, encouraging the emergence and normalization of illiberal and authoritarian regimes lacking societal oversight of domestic and foreign policy decisions. This will implicitly lead to an increased risk of

global military conflicts within the broader context of the international order's realignment.

- The new document suggests the **initiation of a novel security arrangement within the Euro-Atlantic space** (and likely a parallel one for the Indo-Pacific), concisely identified as a 'responsibility-sharing network, with our government playing the role of organizer and sustainer' (NSS 2025, 12). The document elaborates, stating that this arrangement will be based on *“targeted partnerships that utilize economic tools to align incentives, share burdens with like-minded allies, and insist on reforms that anchor long-term stability. (...) The U.S. will be prepared to assist – potentially through more favorable trade treatment, technology transfer, and military procurement – those countries that willingly assume greater responsibility for security in their own region and align their export controls with those of the U.S.”* Correlated with the repositioning toward Europe discussed above, this concept illustrates how the U.S. envisions restructuring relations with its Western partners (and beyond) through a transactionalism rooted in the *'too big to ignore'* assumption, designed to force allies into alignment. This involves: increasing allies' involvement and burden-sharing regarding regional security; aligning with the ideological vision of [illiberal Christian ethno-civilizationalism](#); and aligning with American economic interests by 'opening' their economies and adopting U.S. export policies (i.e., accepting American economic primacy). This entails replacing the existing alliance system (NATO) with a model in which **the U.S. establishes a network of client states** that submit – more or less voluntarily – to American political and economic will and interests, while their formal sovereignty and independence remain uncontested (see McCormack, 2018, 45).
- **Europe between Scylla and Charybdis** – Conditioning European security beyond increased military contributions (by introducing ethno-culturalist and economic-commercial elements), within the context of the unilateral dismantling of the liberal international order and the transition to a world of spheres of influence, places Europe in an extremely delicate position, caught between American aspirations and Sino-Russian ones. The options for the Old Continent's nations are relatively limited – either a centrifugal movement of narrow national interests, which would lead Europe into a situation akin to the first half of the 20th century (though in a completely different, far more unfavorable context for European actors), or a centripetal movement that

understands continental security as indivisible and transforms Europe into an autonomous pole of power, clustered around the liberal values it historically generated. What Europeans must realize is that the ideas expressed in the 2025 NSS will not vanish with the end of President Donald Trump's second term; quite the contrary. Just as the Tea Party movement did seventeen years ago (see Blum, 2020), the MAGA and *America First* currents will have a profound long-term impact on the Republican Party and, by extension, on how the United States conceives its vision of international relations—particularly in its dealings with traditional allies.

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