



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## POLICY BRIEF

### US National Security Strategy 2025

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### ABOUT US

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## US National Security Strategy 2025

by

Lalit Kapur

The Second Trump Administration's long-awaited National Security Strategy (NSS) was released on December 04, 2025. The strategy provides a compass for US foreign and security policies for the next four years, or until it is replaced by the next NSS. It marks perhaps the most significant reorientation of US foreign policy after 9/11, unambiguously rejecting the bipartisan internationalist framework that has guided Washington after the Cold War and fundamentally redefining the US posture towards Europe, Asia and the Indo-Pacific to advance unilateralist US interests.

NSS 2025 puts President Trump at front and centre, often in adulatory terms, effectively merging the national security strategy with US domestic politics. In his introduction, Trump claims to have brought the nation and the world back from the brink of catastrophe and disaster, moving with urgency and speed to restore American strength at home and abroad, and bringing peace and stability to the world. The strategy's introductory paragraphs find fault with the post-Cold War belief that permanent American domination of the world was in the best interests of the US. They highlight miscalculations in previous strategies, including US willingness to shoulder burdens that are not visibly connected to American national interest; overestimation of the ability to fund a massive welfare state alongside a massive military, diplomatic, intelligence and foreign aid complex; destructive bets on globalism and free trade that hollowed out the middle class and industrial base on which US economic and military pre-eminence has depended; and making the error of allowing allies and partners to offload the cost of their defence to the American people. Noting that it was Trump's first administration that had marshalled US strengths to correct course and begin ushering in a new golden age for the country, continuing along that path is described as the overarching purpose of the second Trump administration and the current NSS.

### What the US Wants

The first section of NSS 2025 deals with what the US should want. This includes protection of the country, its people, territory, economy and way of life from military attack and hostile foreign influence, as well as full control over borders, the immigration system and transportation networks through which people come into the country. No adversary or danger should be able to hold America at risk. The wish list includes the world's most powerful, lethal and technologically advanced military

to protect US interests, deterring wars and winning them quickly and decisively if necessary, and the world's most robust, credible and modern nuclear deterrent, and next generation missile defences. The world's strongest, most dynamic and most advanced economy, industrial base, energy sector and technology sector also form integral parts of the wish list.

## **Core Interests and Principles**

Vital and core foreign policy interests are identified as a Western Hemisphere that hews to US desires and is free from hostile incursion or ownership of key assets; reversing the damage foreign actors inflict on the US economy while keeping the Indo-Pacific free and open; supporting allies in preserving the freedom and security of Europe (while restoring Europe's civilisational self-confidence and Western identity); preventing an adversarial power from dominating the Middle East; and ensuring that US technology and standards drive the world forward. The previously held belief that European security constitutes a core US national interest stands rejected.

The national security strategy is unabashedly motivated by "America First". The basic principles driving it are described as focused definition of the 'National Interest', peace through strength, a pre-disposition to non-intervention, flexible realism in dealing with other nations, balance of power, and unapologetic protection of US sovereignty. According to the NSS, the US can no longer afford free-riding trade imbalances, predatory economic practices, and other impositions on the nation's goodwill that disadvantage its interests. It expects allies to spend far more of their GDP on their own defence, to make up for the enormous imbalances accrued over decades of greater spending by the US. It prioritises ending mass migration, protection of core rights and liberties, burden-sharing by allies, an end to long-standing conflicts, and economic security, including revival of the US defence industrial base

## **The Western Hemisphere**

Controlling immigration has been elevated to the central national security problem, with the declarations that the era of mass migration must end and that border security is a primary element of national security. NSS 2025 is clear: the Western Hemisphere is now the United States' top priority. This is a significant change from NSS 2017, where the Western Hemisphere was in fifth place, as a priority area, and from NSS 2022, where it was third.

The US will reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American pre-eminence in the Western Hemisphere, to protect the homeland and to protect access

to key geographies throughout the region. It will also enforce the Trump Corollary to the Doctrine by denying non-hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in the region. The US will seek to become the Hemisphere's economic and security partner of choice, while discouraging collaboration with others. It will enlist established friends in the Hemisphere to control migration, stop drug flows and strengthen stability and security on land and at sea. This means readjustment of its global military presence to address urgent threats in the Western Hemisphere.

## **Asia and the Indo-Pacific**

The largest section of the document, six of its 29 pages, concern US interests and interaction with Asia, and by extension the Indo-Pacific. This far outweighs attention given to the Western Hemisphere, Europe and the Middle East, and is a key signal about where the administration's priorities lie. The Indo-Pacific is described as among the next century's key economic and geopolitical battlegrounds, where the US must successfully compete to thrive at home.

Significant space in the NSS is occupied by China and its undesirable practices, both on the commercial and security fronts. The document clearly has China in mind when it calls for a robust and ongoing focus on deterrence to prevent war in the Indo-Pacific. However, China is no longer framed as a pacing threat or a systemic challenger with a vision of world order that is incompatible with US interests. Rather, it is seen as an economic competitor that has to be dealt with by rebalancing economic ties, while maintaining deterrence.

The NSS calls for a robust and ongoing focus on deterrence to prevent war in the Indo-Pacific. The intent is to maintain a favourable balance of power. "The US cannot allow any nation to become so dominant that it could threaten our interests. We will work with allies and partners to maintain global and regional balances of power to prevent the emergence of dominant adversaries". These words must, however, be weighed against "This does not mean wasting blood and treasure to curtail the influence of all the world's great and middle powers".

Going forward, the US will rebalance its economic relationship with China while ensuring trade is balanced and focused on non-sensitive factors. The first step towards this objective is described as ending predatory, state-directed subsidies and industrial strategies, unfair trading practices, job destruction and deindustrialisation, grand-scale intellectual property theft and industrial espionage, threats against supply chains that risk US access to critical resources including minerals and rare earth elements, exports of fentanyl precursors, and propaganda, influence operations

and other forms of cultural subversion. Next, the US must work with treaty allies and partners to counteract predatory economic practices. In parallel, the US must invest in research to preserve and advance advantage in cutting-edge military and dual-use technology, with emphasis on domains where US advantages are the strongest (undersea, space and nuclear) as well as others that will decide the future of military power (AI, quantum computing and autonomous systems).

On the security and stability front, deterring conflict over Taiwan, ideally by preserving military overmatch, is described as a priority. Taiwan's importance lies in its dominance of semiconductor production, as well as its critical geographical position in the First Island Chain. The US will maintain its longstanding declaratory policy on Taiwan, i.e. "the US does not support any unilateral change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait". This appears to be a softening from NSS 2022, which opposed any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side. The US will build a military capable of denying aggression anywhere in the First Island Chain. For this, the US will thus seek greater military access to allied ports and facilities in the region, while encouraging allies to spend more on their own defence and on capabilities aimed at deterring aggression.

The South China Sea (SCS) is described as a related security challenge. No potentially hostile power should be allowed to gain control over SCS sea lanes. This necessitates further investment in military, especially naval capabilities, but also strong cooperation with every nation that stands to suffer, including India and Japan.

Unlike in NSS 2017, where North Korea came in for mention 17 times, NSS 2025 does not talk of North Korea even once. Pyongyang has not been a priority for Washington since the inconclusive Hanoi summit of 2019. Similarly, there is no mention of China's inroads in the Indian Ocean in the NSS 2025. The inescapable conclusion is that the Indian Ocean now figures even lower in the US list of priorities.

India is mentioned four times in the NSS, including in President Trump's dubious claim of having negotiated peace between India and Pakistan. The NSS says, "We must continue to improve commercial (and other) relations with India to encourage New Delhi to contribute to Indo-Pacific security, including through continued quadrilateral cooperation with Australia, Japan and the United States (the Quad). In another mention, President Trump's May 2025 visit to Persian Gulf countries is said to have demonstrated the power and appeal of American technology, and America should similarly enlist European and Asian allies and partners, including India, to cement and improve its joint position in the Western Hemisphere and, with regard to critical minerals, in Africa. Finally, the NSS seeks cooperation with India to keep SCS



sea lanes open. NSS 2025 evidently regards India as a diplomatic challenge that must be managed rather than as a strategic partner in balancing Asia.

While for much of the past decade-plus India has been seen as a key counterweight to China and successive administrations have worked to improve relations with New Delhi, that vision of the relationship is now at risk. The imposition of 50% tariffs on India, in part for purchasing Russian oil and gas while China has been given a free pass for purchasing even a larger quantity of Russian energy products, has adversely impacted New Delhi and undermined bilateral trust. It would appear that a US national security strategy aimed at leaning on allies and partners to confront global threats is at the same time being undermined by US trade and tariff policy.

The strategy ends the Asia section by saying that preventing conflict requires a vigilant posture in the Indo-Pacific, a renewed defence industrial base, greater military investment by the US as well as allies and partners, and winning the economic and technological competition in the long term.

## **Europe and Russia**

Third in the order of theatres covered in NSS 2025 is Europe, which gets three pages for “Promoting European Greatness”. The NSS is most obviously derisive towards Europe and the EU. According to it, Europe’s economic decline is eclipsed by the real and stark prospect of “civilisational erasure”. The larger issues facing Europe include activities of the European Union and other transnational bodies that undermine political liberty and sovereignty, migration policies that are transforming the continent and creating strife, censorship of free speech and suppression of political opposition, cratering birthrates, and loss of national identities and self-confidence. This lack of self-confidence is most evident in Europe’s relationship with Russia: European allies possess significant hard power advantage over Russia by almost every measure except nuclear weapons. European relations with Russia are now deeply attenuated, and many regard Russia as an existential threat. Managing European relations with Russia will require significant US diplomatic engagement, both to re-establish conditions of strategic stability across the Eurasian landmass, and to mitigate the risk of conflict between Russia and European states.

Clearly, Russia is no longer seen as a challenger to American power, influence and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity, as it was under the first Trump administration. Nor is it seen as posing an immediate threat to the free and open international system, recklessly flouting the basic laws of international order as shown by the brutal war against Ukraine, as it was under the Biden administration.



NSS 2025 describes the negotiation of an expeditious cessation of hostilities in Ukraine as a core interest of the US. The Trump administration, however, finds itself at odds with European officials who hold unrealistic expectations for the war perched in unstable minority governments, many of which trample on basic principles of democracy to suppress opposition. It claims that a large European majority wants peace, but that desire is not translated into policy largely because of those governments' subversion of democratic process. It says that American diplomacy should continue to stand up for genuine democracy, freedom of expression, and unapologetic celebration of European nations' individual character and history. The American goal should be to help Europe correct its current trajectory, as the US needs a strong Europe to work in concert with and prevent any adversary from dominating the continent.

The NSS says broad US policy for Europe should prioritise re-establishing conditions of stability within Europe and strategic stability with Russia; enabling Europe to stand on its own feet and take primary responsibility for its own defence, without being dominated by any adversarial power; cultivating resistance to Europe's current trajectory within European nations; opening European markets to US goods and services and ensuring fair treatment of US workers and businesses; ending the perception and preventing the reality of NATO as a perpetually expanding alliance; and encouraging Europe to take action to combat mercantilist overcapacity, technological theft, cyber espionage, and other hostile economic practices.

## **The Middle East**

The fourth theatre in the NSS is the Middle East, which US foreign policy has long prioritised as the world's most important supplier of energy, has been a prime theatre of superpower competition, and was rife with conflict that threatened to spill over into the wider world. Today, however, energy supplies have diversified, with the US once again a net energy exporter. Superpower competition has given way to great power jockeying, with the US in an enviable position. Conflict remains, but is a lesser problem than before, with Iran having been greatly weakened by Israeli and US action. Even the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has seen progress due to a more permanent peace. The Middle East is thus no longer a focal point for US policy.

The US will always have core interests in ensuring that Gulf energy supplies do not fall into the hands of an outright enemy, that the Strait of Hormuz remains open, the Red Sea remains navigable, the region does not become an incubator or exporter of terror against the American homeland, and that Israel remains secure. These challenges can be addressed ideologically and militarily without decades of fruitless "nation-building" wars. There is a clear US interest in expanding the Abraham

Accords. But the days when the Middle East dominated American foreign policy are over. It is now emerging as a place of partnership, friendship and investment, a trend that should be welcomed and encouraged. Democratic values have been given a short shrift in relation to the region's monarchies and Islamist leanings.

## Africa

The last theatre mentioned in the NSS is Africa, where the US should look to partner with select countries to ameliorate conflict, foster mutually beneficial trade relationships, and transition from a foreign aid paradigm to an investment and growth paradigm capable of harnessing Africa's abundant natural resources and latent economic potential.

## Conclusion

NSS 2025 reflects the long-standing Trump view that the American system of alliances is one-sided and in favour of the allies. He wants the allies to assume primary responsibility for security and stability in their respective regions, with the US acting as a "convenor and supporter". For this, the US will bring pressure to bear on regional allies and partners to increase defence spending, with a focus on capabilities necessary to deter adversaries and protect the First Island Chain. The erstwhile burden-sharing project with allies has evolved into burden-shifting, anchored in the Hague Summit pledge by NATO countries to spend at least 5% of their GDP on defence.

Four key lines of effort have been identified for the US in the NSS: defending the US homeland and its hemisphere; deterring China through strength; increasing burden-sharing between the US and its allies and partners; and supercharging America's defence industrial base. This is largely an "America First and Last" construct in which mutuality of interests and shared benefits find little place, even as the nations of the world must contend with the strong undercurrent of unpredictability of US policies under President Trump.

In sum, NSS 2025 is unlikely to provide much comfort to US allies and partners, in Europe or in Asia.

It will more likely encourage countries to diversify partnerships, stand up for their national interests, and move in the direction of strategic autonomy.

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