



NAME THE GAME BEING PLAYED: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY FOR INDIA



Air Marshal KK Nohwar (Retd.)
Additional Director General, CAPS
01 January 2018

'America First' as the cornerstone of the US National Security Strategy, with a commitment to leave a stronger America for future generations, reflects the Trump Administration's resolve to meet the multifarious challenges facing not only his country, but the world, head-on. The necessity to 'preserve peace through strength' sums up what Teddy Roosevelt in 1900 had suggested, "Speak softly and carry a big stick". The 'big stick' (read latest weapons) has been promised by President Trump to his armed forces so that they always (reiterated thrice by the President in his message to the American people via the NSS) fight to win. Such a strong message in the NSS is possibly designed to dissuade certain nations – whose actions are inimical to American interests – from attempting to cause harm to Fortress America or its people.

The NSS reads like a Report Card of the achievements of the Trump Administration in the first year (almost) of its coming to power and lays down the way ahead. It projects the emergence of a stronger America that is willing to come to the assistance of its allies and partners and assume a leadership role in the South East Asian region; aimed at allaying the fears of nations in the region that have been traumatised by the increased flexing of military muscle by China. Strengthening of the 'Quad' – with greater involvement of Japan, India and Australia – appears to be aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation operations in the South of China Sea region, the build-up of Chinese infrastructure in the region notwithstanding.

While focusing on the need to build alliances – to counter the threat from the growing Russia-China partnership – the NSS prods the US partners (in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific) to play their part and be ready to 'increase its (India's) economic assistance in the (South Asian) region'. For its

1 | www.capsindia.org

NATO partners, likewise, it seeks greater participation and 'to modernize, acquire necessary capabilities, improve readiness, expand the size of their forces, and affirm the political will to win' – all aimed at countering the threat from a re-emerging Russia.

From events taking place in recent times on the technology front, it can be surmised that a lot of the bluster and confidence displayed in the wording of the NSS stems from the developments in niche areas that help the US maintain its technological edge over its competitors/adversaries. Developments in Space are being progressed with the recent announcement by NASA of Space Technology Research Institutes (STRIs) that will focus on development of technologies critical to manned space missions exploring deeper into our solar system. One such institute is CUBES (Center for the Utilization of Biological Engineering in Space) which will advance research into an integrated, multi-function, multi-organism bio-manufacturing system which will produce fuel, materials, pharmaceuticals and food in space, thereby doing away with the necessity of resupply from Earth. CUBES plans on utilising carbon dioxide as the base component for materials manufacturing. This will have relevance to carbon dioxide management on Earth. Could this be one reason why the Trump Administration is moving away from agreement on the Paris Accord; it probably feels that the ramifications of this research, when applied on a global scale, could possibly do more for control and management of CO2 emissions than what the Paris Accord sets out to achieve (purely my thoughts, here). Developments and research into Artificial Intelligence has also significantly boosted confidence of the US military to take on adversaries and the growing asymmetric threat from non-state actors.

The NSS pays glowing tributes to India and welcomes our '...emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defense partner'. While this may be dismissed by some as mere rhetoric – meant only to flatter Indian leadership – there is an underlying message in the statement for the world, and more specifically for those in our neighbourhood who harbour ill-will towards us. If nothing else, it conveys the readiness of the only superpower – presently – to 'partner' with us. This is an opportunity that would need careful consideration in view of the willingness of the US to expand its 'defense and security cooperation with India and support India's growing relationships throughout the region'.

In the regional context, while discussing South Asia, the NSS expresses the concern of the Trump Administration about an Indo-Pakistan military conflict leading to a nuclear exchange and which therefore requires their greater diplomatic attention. While the NSS calls on Pakistan to 'intensify its counterterrorism efforts', it insists on Pakistan taking 'decisive action against militant and terrorist groups operating from its soil'.

The National Security Strategy, while laying out the template for action by the US in the immediate future, succinctly also lays down the threat areas, the need for partnerships, and sends a strong message to its adversaries that the leadership position that US enjoys – both militarily and economically – will be maintained at all costs. For India, it is an opportunity to read the signs and decide on a future course of action that best suits its national aspirations. Of course, the strategic partnership that India has built up over the years along with the special friendship it enjoys with Russia cannot – and should not – be wished away. For a nation that is emerging as a ‘leading global power’ (as articulated by the NSS), India’s actions – while never compromising on its strategic autonomy – should not amount to running with the hares and hunting with the hounds.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Keywords: US National Security Strategy, US-India relations, defence trade, US foreign policy

