



TRUMP UNVEILS A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY THAT REFLECTS 'AMERICA FIRST' CAMPAIGN PLEDGE

Gp Capt Arvind Pandey
Senior Fellow, CAPS

Keywords: National Security Strategy, United States of America, Trump, America First

The Trump administration's National Security Strategy 2017- based on what the White House calls "principled realism" - marks a significant shift in emphasis from the past, presenting both a decidedly more pessimistic view of the world but nonetheless a markedly optimistic view of America's place in it.

In its opening preamble, President Trump asserts that the US is leading again on the world stage. He states that the whole world is lifted by America's renewal and the re-emergence of American leadership. But he speaks of "an extraordinarily dangerous world" where, perhaps in bygone era of the Cold War, rival powers are aggressively undermining American interests around the globe.

The strategy document itself is divided into four main pillars touching on all aspects of national power: diplomatic, economic and military.

The first pillar deals with protecting the American people, the homeland and the American way of life. This deals with a variety of threats from jihadist terrorism, to cyber security and stresses the need to strengthen border controls and immigration policy - a key theme of Mr Trump's presidential campaign.

The second pillar emphasises the need to "promote American prosperity". There is a lot here that is familiar Trump policy - the need to promote fair and reciprocal economic relationships; protecting US technical innovation and rejuvenating the domestic economy.

The third pillar deals with traditional military strength in its conventional, nuclear, cyber and space forces. This is uncompromising on the role of rival powers, noting that "China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to US values and interests".

The fourth pillar on advancing American influence redefines Mr Trump's central credo in surprisingly internationalist terms: "Our America First foreign policy," it asserts, "celebrates America's influence in the world as a positive force that can help set the conditions for peace and prosperity and for developing successful societies".

It argues that partners and allies are a great strength of the United States. The US, the document asserts, will continue to be engaged abroad, where it serves US interests to counter instability; places like Afghanistan "where state weaknesses or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland".

Relationship with India/Pakistan

Describing India as a "leading global power", NSS states that it will deepen America's strategic partnership with India and support its leadership role in Indian Ocean security and throughout the broader region. It continues to say that "We welcome India's emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defence partner".

We will expand our defence and security cooperation with India, a Major Defence Partner of the United States, and support India's growing relationships throughout the region, the NSS said, noting that its vision for Indo-Pacific excludes no nation.

India-US defence relationship was mentioned in the context of Indo-Pacific region, whereas it gave a very prominent role to India in South and Central Asia.

We will deepen our strategic partnership with India and support its leadership role in Indian Ocean security and throughout the broader region, according to the NSS which the White House said sets a positive strategic direction for the US that will restore America's advantages in the world and build upon our country's great strengths.

With an eye on China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the US administration said it will help South Asian countries "maintain their sovereignty" as China increases its influence in the region.

The NSS also seeks Pakistan to take decisive action against terrorists. The NSS said it will press Pakistan to intensify its counter-terrorism efforts, since no partnership can survive a country's support for militants and terrorists who target a partner's own service members and officials."We will insist that Pakistan take decisive action against militant and terrorist groups operating from its soil," it said.

The United States continues to face threats from transnational terrorists and militants operating from within Pakistan, the document said, adding that their other big concern was the

prospect for an Indo-Pakistani military conflict that could lead to a nuclear exchange. The United States will also encourage Pakistan to continue demonstrating that it is a responsible steward of its nuclear assets.

Trump doesn't consider climate change a threat

President Obama's 2015 national security strategy noted that "Climate Change is an urgent and growing threat to our national security, contributing to increased natural disasters, refugee flows, and conflicts over basic resources like food and water." The Trump administration's new national security strategy, on the other hand, doesn't mention climate change at all.

Hawkish Turn on China

China is mentioned 23 times in the document, almost twice as many mentions compared with the Obama administration's last version of the strategy and while the Obama strategy focused on engagement and cooperation with China, the Trump team concentrated on identifying the mounting threats posed by China and pledged that the United States would push back against them. It appears to signal an end to a long-standing approach to Beijing which sought to make China what Americans liked to call "a responsible stake-holder in international society".

Inside the strategy document, the administration lists China's strategies to expand

it influence abroad and affirms that it is the United States' responsibility not only to compete against those strategies but also to stop China from imposing its will on smaller countries all over the world and interfering in their political systems.

NSS describes both China and Russia as "revisionist powers" who want "to shape a world adverse to US values and interests."

Reactions by world community

The reaction by world community is along the expected lines based on how they are perceived and mentioned in the document.

Reacting to NSS, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying urged the US to "abandon its Cold War mentality and zero-sum game concept," warning failure to do so "would only harm itself as well as others." "China will resolutely safeguard its sovereignty, security and right to develop," she said. "No one should have the fantasy of expecting China to swallow the bitter fruit of harming its own interests."

- As the emphasis is on great power competition with China, the theatrics and actions may affect the existing US - China relations.

Reacting to NSS, Pakistan's Foreign Office, in a statement said the NSS 2017 has made certain unsubstantiated allegations against Pakistan.

“Pakistan rejects such unfounded accusations that belie facts on ground and trivialize Pakistan’s efforts for fighting terrorism and our unmatched sacrifices to promote peace and stability in the region,” the statement said.

- Pakistan may tend to have greater reliance on China for achieving its economic and political aspirations.

The Government of India has hailed the NSS and stated “We appreciate the strategic importance given to India-US relationship in the new National Security Strategy released by the US. As two responsible democracies, India and the US share common objectives, including combating terrorism and promoting peace and security throughout the world”.

- The Prudence by Indian Administration is not to get carried away with the positive mention in the document.

Conclusion

The document relies on “America first” policy and clearly lays down the path ahead for American strategic thinkers.

(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])

References

NSS 2017 available at <http://nssarchive.us/>

Views available at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/>