



Rethinking the Great Power Competition?

Inside Trump 2.0's National Security Strategy

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TRENDS 360

Welcome to the fifth edition of Trends 360, the bimonthly newsletter from TRENDS Research & Advisory. Each issue unpacks critical global developments shaping the international landscape, from shifting alliances and great power rivalries to emerging policy disruptions. This month, we focus on the newly released U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) under the Trump 2.0 administration.

Since 1986, Section 603 of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act has required each U.S. president to submit a classified and comprehensive NSS to Congress.¹ However, since 1987, successive administrations have published unclassified versions of the NSS, which serve as the principal strategic planning framework guiding the formulation and execution of U.S. foreign policy. These public reports articulate Washington's international interests, commitments, objectives, and policy priorities to Congress, the American public, and the international community.² While Section 603 mandates submission, there is no statutory requirement that future presidents adopt or retain their predecessors' strategies. As a result, NSS documents are inherently flexible and routinely revised to reflect their worldview, policy objectives, and threat perceptions.

¹ Office of the Secretary of War, "National Security Strategy," <https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/>. Accessed December 2025 ,8.
² Ibid.

The Trump 2.0 NSS departs from both the Trump 1.0 and the Biden administration's approach to the "great power competition" with China and Russia. Instead, the strategy looks toward Europe, warning of what it describes as "civilization erasure" due to mass immigration, regulatory constraints imposed by the European Union (EU), and the suppression of far-right speech and protest movements.³ At the same time, the NSS reinforces the administration's "America First" policy, reaffirmed throughout 2025, by renewing its commitment to the Monroe Doctrine to restore American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. The articulation of a "Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine" seeks to deny non-Hemispheric powers economic or military leverage within the Western Hemisphere. Although the great power competition is no longer framed as the sole focus of the administration, it remains on its radar, as the NSS reframes economic relations with China and adopts a more ambivalent stance toward Russia.⁴

³ The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump, November 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

The Trump Strategy

From the outset, Trump's 2025 NSS places complete border control and tighter immigration enforcement at the top of U.S. national priorities, delivering directly on a core campaign promise. Much of what follows aligns with traditional U.S. strategic concerns, including mitigating risks posed by natural disasters, foreign adversaries, and any threat capable of undermining the U.S. economy. To uphold "America First" interests and maintain dominance in future conflicts, the document's "what do we want" section—effectively a national security wishlist—underscores the ambition to secure the world's most lethal and technologically advanced military, including the addition of a \$175 billion Golden Dome.⁵

Likewise, a high priority throughout the entirety of the document is to maintain a dynamic and innovative economy, which the NSS states is not only the bedrock of the U.S.'s global standing but also foundational to the U.S. military—a common vantage point portrayed by his predecessors. To achieve this, the U.S. must ensure a robust industrial base, an innovative energy sector, and that the country leads the way in technological innovation.

While these ambitions do not significantly diverge from those of earlier administrations, the regional strategies that follow mark a sharp departure from Trump's 2017 NSS. This shift becomes especially evident when examining how the 2025 document frames U.S. interests across the Western Hemisphere, Russia, Europe, and China.

⁵ Mike Stone and Jeff Mason, "Trump selects \$175 billion Golden Dome defense shield design, appoints leader," Reuters, May 2025, 21, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-make-golden-dome-announcement-tuesday-us-official-says-20-05-2025/>.

On the Western Hemisphere



The 2017 NSS invoked a sense of unresolved tension and animosity with America's main strategic adversaries—China and Russia—stating that Beijing aims to lure the region into its sphere of influence, offering state-funded loans and investments, while Russia enacts Cold War-style tactics, propping up radicalized Cuban allies.⁶ The document claimed both nations are supporting the authoritarian government in Venezuela and aim to push arms and military arms sales across the region, undermining the sovereignty of regional democratic states.

⁶ The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump, December 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/12/2017/NSS-Final-0905-2017-18-12.pdf>.

While the 2017 strategy acknowledged challenges such as drug trafficking and illegal immigration, the attention given to these issues was limited compared with the 2025 NSS. The 2025 strategy places the Western Hemisphere at the center of U.S. national security, calling for a “readjustment” of American military posture to counter urgent threats, including illegal immigration, human trafficking, and narcotics flows. It argues that “years of neglect” necessitate a renewed commitment to regional stability while stating the era of mass migration is over.

A central feature of the new NSS is the explicit reassertion of the Monroe Doctrine, the 19th-century policy opposing external interference in America’s “backyard.” The document goes further, stating that the United States will “deny non-hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets in our hemisphere.” The NSS refers to this stance as the “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine, signaling a renewed emphasis on a pro-American posture in South America, one that places narcotics trafficking and immigration at the center of U.S. regional foreign policy.

On Europe



America's closest ally appears to be the sharpest target of criticism in the 2025 NSS, which warns that Europe faces the "prospect of civilizational erasure." This risk, the document argues, stems not only from economic decline, with European GDP falling from %25 of the global economy in 1990 to %14 today, but also from EU institutions that it claims are undermining political liberty and national sovereignty. According to the NSS, Europe's immigration policies are transforming the continent, generating social "strife," suppressing free speech, and weakening political opposition. These dynamics, it argues, are contributing to declining birthrates, a loss of "national identity," and eroding self-confidence. The rhetoric frames Europe itself as a greater long-term challenge to Western security than Russia or China, both of whom are treated with striking leniency in the document, marking a sharp departure from previous NSS editions.

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However, there is a notable tension within the NSS. While the document emphasizes that American soft power should "exercise positive influence throughout the world" and demonstrate respect for the diverse cultures, religions, and governing systems of other nations, its assessment of Europe adopts a decidedly more critical and interventionist tone. As one of America's closest partners, Europe's evolution into a multicultural, pluralistic region would ostensibly align with such stated principles.

In an 8 December 2025 interview with Politico, President Trump described Europe as "weak" and "decaying," attributing these trends to what he characterized as overly "politically correct" immigration policies. He warned that, without substantial course correction, many European nations risk becoming "not viable" or "unrecognizable" in the decades ahead. ⁷

The critique has already prompted pushback. EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius issued a pointed response, arguing that the U.S. appears more concerned with preventing a strong, unified Europe, one that might dilute American influence, than with the issues outlined in the NSS. ⁸

⁷ Full transcript: Politico's interview with Donald Trump, Politico, December 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/09/12/2025/donald-trump-full-interview-transcript-00681693?source=email>.
⁸ Chris Lunday, "EU defense czar accuses Trump of seeking to dismantle bloc's unity," Politico, December 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/andrius-kubilius-accuses-donald-trump-of-seeking-to-dismantle-eu-unity/>.

This tension is echoed in the report's suggestion that Washington should encourage "resistance" to Europe's current political trajectory and support "patriotic European parties" in restoring the continent to its former "greatness." Further inflaming tensions with its EU counterparts, 2025 signals the Administration aims to back EU politicians who support reviving European nationalism and right-wing elements that better align with Trump's own vision for Europe's future.

On the Middle East



The 2025 NSS introduces a noteworthy adjustment in how Washington engages its Middle East partners. It commends regional governments for their leadership in countering extremism and argues that the United States should move away from previous approaches that pressured partners, particularly the Gulf countries, to adopt political changes not aligned with their national contexts. As U.S. energy production continues to increase at all-time record levels as a net-energy exporter,⁹ the NSS commits to the U.S. historical infatuation with the region will recede.

⁹ Andrew Topf, "US natural gas output and demand to smash records in 2025," OilPrice.com, December 2025 ,10, <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Natural-Gas/US-Natural-Gas-Output-and-Demand-to-Smash-Records-in-2025.html>.

Trump, who has cultivated especially strong relationships across the Gulf, frames this as a return to a more respectful and interest-based partnership. The strategy underscores working with states “as they are” and deepening cooperation where priorities align. While this approach is likely welcomed in the region, it also parallels elements of China’s non-interference model, raising important questions about how Washington now balances strategic interests with the traditional values-based components of U.S. foreign policy.

On Russia



Following the release of the 2025 NSS, Russian spokesperson Dmitry Peskov described the document as a “positive step,” noting that the shifts in U.S. foreign policy are “largely consistent” with Russia’s vision.¹⁰ This response likely reflects the NSS’s broad policy direction toward Europe, particularly its call to “end the perception, and prevent the reality, of NATO as a perpetually expanding alliance.” Such a position marks a significant departure from decades of U.S. global engagement and could signal a weakening of the North Atlantic alliance’s traditional posture.

The decision to halt NATO enlargement is an unmistakable setback for Ukraine. With membership now off the table under the Trump administration, it remains unclear what alternative security guarantees Western partners will offer Kyiv.

Notably, most references to Russia in the NSS focus not on confrontation but on managing relations between Brussels and Moscow to restore strategic stability across the Eurasian landmass and prevent renewed conflict between Russia and European states. This represents a dramatic shift from the Trump administration’s 2017 NSS, which accused Russia and China of challenging “American power, influence, and interests” and attempting to “shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests.”¹¹

¹⁰ Burç Eruygur, “Kremlin says US National Security Strategy document ‘largely consistent’ with Russia’s vision,” Anadolu Agency, December 2025, 7, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/kremlin-says-us-national-security-strategy-document-largely-consistent-with-russias-vision/3764360>.

¹¹ The White House, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump, December 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/12/2017/NSS-Final-0905-2017-18-12.pdf>.

The removal of language labeling Russia as a direct threat aligns with the document's emphasis on "flexible realism," a strategy that frames future U.S. engagement with states—particularly those whose political systems differ from America's—as pragmatic rather than ideological. Washington's new posture toward Russia, therefore, reflects a broader reorientation in how the United States conceives its role in the international system in the post-Cold War era.

On China



Labeling its objective with China as the pursuit of a "mutually advantageous economic relationship," the Trump Administration has already taken steps in that direction. On 8 December 2025, just days after the release of the 2025 NSS, the Administration approved the sale of Nvidia's H200 AI chips to China, with one caveat: 25% of all sales would go to the U.S. government.

The announcement, made through the President's Truth Social platform, immediately drew criticism from lawmakers in Washington, who argued that providing such advanced technology could accelerate America's strongest technological competitor's capabilities.¹² This development is especially striking given that one of the NSS's central priorities is reaffirming American technological supremacy.

Alongside this economic recalibration, the NSS emphasizes maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific while strengthening deterrence to prevent conflict in what it calls "the next century's key economic and geopolitical battleground." For Taiwan, the NSS offers a measure of reassurance. The document identifies deterring conflict over Taiwan, whose dominance in global semiconductor manufacturing makes it strategically indispensable, as a top priority. It pledges to "preserve military overmatch" to counter potential Chinese "aggression."

Likewise, both the 2017 and 2025 National Security Strategy documents reaffirm U.S. support for stability in the Taiwan Strait and opposition to unilateral changes to the status quo. While the 2017 strategy explicitly situates U.S. policy within the established "One China" framework, the 2025 version places greater emphasis on deterrence, underscoring Washington's intent, together with its allies, to continue developing military capabilities designed to deny and deter "aggression" anywhere along the First Island Chain.

¹² Ed Ludlow and Maggie Eastland, "Trump's Nvidia H200 reprieve spurred by Huawei's AI gains," Yahoo! Finance, December 2025, 10, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/trump-reprieve-nvidia-h200-spurred-201757309.html>.

What's Next?

As the U.S. heads into an election year with the midterms just around the corner, expectations are low that any significant policy changes or newly signed legislation will arise, especially as speculation grows that Republicans may lose the House in 2026. Republicans currently hold a narrow 213-220 majority in the House and can afford to lose no more than three seats to retain control, yet more than a dozen races are already rated as toss-ups, with roughly three dozen districts expected to be competitive.¹³ This era, known as the 'lame duck' session, will undercut any major Trump initiatives, as politicians will now prioritize their reelection efforts and focus on their electorates in their home districts.



Trump will therefore utilize his power in ways that do not necessitate congressional approval. We can most likely expect the U.S. president to continue his focus on illegal migration, with a particular emphasis on so-called narco-states like Venezuela. Of course, his rationale may have more to do with regime change and securing national resources (e.g., oil). Still, such motivations are best treated as contested and attributed rather than definitive.¹⁴ Nonetheless, his political base approves of his tough stance on immigration and law enforcement.

¹³ David Morgan, "Republicans Risk Moderates, US House Majority, With No Healthcare Extension," Reuters, December 2025 ,19, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/republicans-risk-moderates-us-house-majority-with-no-healthcare-extension-19-12-2025/>.

¹⁴ Idrees Ali, Phil Stewart, Shariq Khan, and Marianna Parraga, "Trump Orders 'blockade' of Sanctioned Oil Tankers Leaving, Entering Venezuela," Reuters, December 2025 ,18, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/trump-orders-blockade-sanctioned-oil-tankers-leaving-entering-venezuela-16-12-2025/>.

Trump's early and aggressive stance on tariffs has already come back to haunt him, as the administration announced in early December 2025 a new bailout package for farmers, primarily for soybean farmers, as the Trump tariffs have undercut their businesses, since China is their biggest buyer.¹⁵ How will that impact his policy on ensuring an equally beneficial economic partnership with China? This question becomes critical in light of Trump's decision to sign the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), a must-pass piece of legislation that places new restrictions on U.S. outbound investment in Chinese technology and curbs federal contracts with Chinese biotechnology firms.¹⁶ While the NDAA preserves room for economic engagement, its provisions, notably those targeting sensitive technologies and supply chains, highlight the structural constraints facing any attempt to pursue a "mutually advantageous" economic relationship with Beijing, even as the administration signals openness to negotiations in the NSS.¹⁷

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Trump Administration announces \$12 billion farmer bridge payments for American farmers impacted by unfair market disruptions," (Press release), December 2025, 8, <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/08/12/2025/trump-administration-announces-12-billion-farmer-bridge-payments-american-farmers-impacted-unfair>.

¹⁶ Bochen Han, "Trump Signs Defence Bill Restricting Investment in Chinese Tech, Military Firms," South China Morning Post, December 2025, 19, <https://www.scmp.com/news/us/diplomacy/article/3336981/trump-signs-defence-bill-restricting-investment-chinese-tech-military-firms>.

¹⁷ Ibid.



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