



## US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY 2017

By  
**Mahrukh Khan**  
Research Fellow

Edited by  
**Najam Rafique**

January 2, 2018

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*

## 2017 NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY:



**I. protect**  
THE HOMELAND



**II. promote**  
AMERICAN PROSPERITY



**III. preserve**  
PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH



**IV. advance**  
AMERICAN INFLUENCE

In December 2017, President Trump issued his administration's National Security Strategy (NSS). The document was hailed as an American First National Security Strategy, translating President Trump's 'America First' rhetoric. The document presents an overview of the approaches US is willing to pursue to overcome its national and strategic interests.

The overall view of the document proposes the idea of usage of intense military, economic and political influence and might to meet America's short and long-term goals in the global competition. The document showcases US growing paranoia with multi-polarity, where its dominance is challenged by other growing and developing powers. It also displays an offensive US posture towards certain challenges and issues that the US sees as a threat to its global dominance.

The document is broadly divided into four main themes referred to as pillars of the document. The four pillars on which the document rests its case discuss current administration's domestic and international concerns and challenges. The 2017 NSS provides a much-awaited window to how the Trump administration views the world.

A deconstruction of the document basically divides the world for the US into five categories determining the nature and attitude of US towards each of them.

1. Allies or partners,
2. Like-minded partners,

3. Aspiring partners, and
4. Adversaries

### **NSS: Salient Features**

China and Russia are regarded as 'Revisionist Powers, while, North Korea and Iran are termed as 'Rogue Regimes'. The document repeatedly points finger at China and Russia of challenging American power, influence and interests, in order to erode American security and prosperity. The amount of stress that the document places on China and Russia is remarkable.

It repeatedly talks about China as a threat in almost all spheres. China is also singled out for its development projects categorizing it as an 'aggressive investment'. It is also accused of 'stealing US intellectual property', and 'cyber-enabled economic warfare', to say the least.

Similarly, the document indicts Russia of using subversive measures to weaken America, and its credibility and is categorized as 'the most significant existential threat to the US'.

It lays special emphasis on bigger military build-ups and puts forth the concept of building new and improved capabilities not just in the traditional realm of air, sea and land, but also in space and cyber space. The new strategy encourages to prioritize and modernize US nuclear forces and infrastructure, and construct better and bigger military hubs which will help the US to deal with its adversaries from a point of strength reducing previous administrations 'aspirational approach' to zero. At the same time, the document also suggests 'unilateral actions' against terrorists and their sanctuaries 'regardless of where they are'.

Simultaneously, the document stresses on 'shared burden' between US and its partners, of which President Trump has been vocal about since he took office. It talks about the importance of energizing alliances and partnerships around the world. The role of India in the region and around the world is also emphasized. The strategy promotes a deeper partnership with India whilst making a major shift from the Asian-Pacific concept to the one based on Indo-Pacific. The document highlights the US long-term presence in the South Asia through its military presence in Afghanistan.

The document puts forth some tough love for Pakistan. It identifies Pakistan as a country where the transnational and militant networks operate – referring to the Afghan-Pakistan border area. It also identifies Pakistan as a part of the threat to the US rather than a solution to the menace in the region. The document acknowledges Pakistan as a responsible nuclear country and encourages it to

demonstrate the same behavior. However, a nuclear conflict between Pakistan and US's major strategic partner India remains to be a major concern.

The document also encourages trade and connectivity in Central and South Asia by proposing economic integration to promote prosperity to bolster connectivity and trade.<sup>1</sup> Yet, it draws a stark line of conditions of trade between India and Pakistan. At the same time, US is criticizing China's growing influence in the region, whilst encouraging India to increase its economic assistance.

The tone should clear any existing doubts in Islamabad regarding the future of its relations with the US. Furthermore, the document conveniently discredits and disregard the sacrifices Pakistan has made over the past decade against terrorism.

The document bring nothing new to the table. The language of the document is not unknown to Pakistan. It talks about pushing and pressing Pakistan to increase its efforts in counterterrorism and target militant and terrorist networks that pose a threat to the US and its allies and partners like Afghanistan and India.

Pakistan has repeatedly asked the US to provide it with evidence against the so-called networks in order for Pakistan to take any military action. However, the US has failed to provide Pakistan with any substantive evidence.

In a nutshell, Pakistan and US relations will be dependent upon what can be assumed as 'obedience' from Pakistan and an apparent shift from Pakistan's closeness with China. The US has also put forth demands for Pakistan to become a country which is not engaged in destabilizing behaviors in the region<sup>2</sup> – referring again towards Afghanistan and India.

The NSS document remains un-pragmatic towards Pakistan, elevating the status of India, while distorting the balance of power in the region. It explicitly states that the structure of relationship between Pakistan and the US depends on how Pakistan performs at present. The document quite openly terms the future of Pakistan and US relations on Pakistan's willingness to assist the US in its counterterrorism efforts and abide by US demands and requirements.

Nonetheless, the only bit of restraint that the US have shown is because Pakistan serves as the shortest land route for the US army supplies for Afghanistan as it also plans to increase its military buildup in Afghanistan.

---

<sup>1</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

A close study of the document reveals it to be more of a rhetorical exercise instead of actually chalking out a strategy. It projects 'Trumpian Ideologies' and fails to outline a meaningful foreign or strategic policy, and at certain points, reflects on Trump administration's virulent likes and dislikes.