

ESCALATING US-CHINA TENSIONS AND US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY 2022

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do
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Under the Presidency of Joe Biden, the White House released a new “National Security Strategy” on October 12, 2022.¹ While writing the introduction, the US President singled out China as America’s biggest geopolitical competitor and describes this decade as “decisive”² for the US-China rivalry. With the resolve to employ all its national resources and international partnerships worldwide, the new policy document mentions how the US will outmaneuver China and maintain a competitive edge over it.³

The US-China tensions are already at a simmering point and, with this new security strategy, Washington has only taken it a step further. Is US-China competition inevitable? Is there any cure for this geopolitical ailment? These are some of the questions that warrant a brief analysis of America’s new national security strategy and the thinking paradigm the US operates with – at home and abroad.

¹ “Fact Sheet: The Biden-Harris Administration’s National Security Strategy”, *The White House*, October 12, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/10/12/fact-sheet-the-biden-harris-administrations-national-security-strategy/>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The US National Security Strategy is a detailed yet comprehensive document. It is very clear in pronouncing its objectives: ⁴

- To proactively shape the international order;
- outcompete Beijing and constraint Russia;
- Cooperating on shared challenges (these include climate change, energy security, food insecurity, pandemics and biodefense, arms control and non-proliferation, and terrorism);
- Shaping the rules of the world (in the areas of technology, securing cyberspace, trade, and economics).

In order to achieve these US foreign policy objectives in the coming days, Washington announces to invest at home, in its national resources – as well as abroad – in its regional and global partnerships.

Beginning with an Introduction by US President Joe Biden, the White House document comprises of five parts: what the US administration is envisioning in terms of US-China competition; investing at home; the Biden-Harris global priorities; the US strategy by region; conclusion.

The US National Security Strategy 2022 came late as it was expected to be released in the last year. It is in sharp contrast with the “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance”⁵ that was publicized in March 2021 and prescribed cooperation with the great powers for American advantage. Though comprehensive and clear, the new US policy is no doubt a bit exaggerated in making its claims of reshaping the world order in a decisive battle of great power rivalry.

The Carnegie Scholar, Christopher S. Chivvis writes that the new US policy “echoes the unfortunate good-verses-evil tone of the former President George W. Bush’s controversial 2002 National Security Strategy.”⁶ Senior Fellow and Director of the Reimagining the US Grand Strategy Program at the Stimson Center, Christopher Preble dubbed the new US strategy “very ambitious.” In his point of

⁴ “National Security Strategy 2022”, The White House, October 12, 2022.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

⁵ “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance”, *The White House*, March 23, 2021,
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/>

⁶ Christopher S. Chivvis, “The Three Important Shifts Tucked Within the New National Security Strategy” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 13, 2022,
<https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/10/13/three-important-shifts-tucked-within-new-national-security-strategy-pub-88160>

view, the Biden administration's proposition that "the US can be prosperous and secure when the rest of the world is moving in the same direction is debatable, at best."⁷

Not only that the US new security strategy is ambitious in its practicalities, it also exposes the faulty thinking with which the US wishes to bring peace to the world, at large. Senior Fellow, Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings, Shadi Hamid points out this skewed ideology that the US administration applies and "instrumentalizes the democracy to produce good outcomes...this way of thinking can easily lead to incoherence."⁸ And this incoherence is evident in international order as well.

In the Introduction, President Biden writes that the world is at an "inflection point"⁹ and confronted with a myriad of challenges impacting the peace and prosperity of the American generations. He mentions that "his administration will seize the opportunities to outmaneuver the geopolitical competitors of the US."¹⁰ He termed China as the biggest geopolitical competitor of the US because of its intentions and capabilities to reshape the international order. Placing Russia second in the list of US rivals, Mr. Biden categorizes it as a competitor which lacks "across the spectrum capabilities" to bring change in the global order, hence, the policy is going to "constrain" Moscow.¹¹

The US National Security Document translated the ongoing great power rivalry in terms of a new Cold War that would take place "between democracies and autocracies."¹² It envisions a world that is peaceful and prosperous under the capable leadership of the US, which proved its mettle over time. It explains, unlike previous US administrations that dismissed the interests of the US citizen while engaging in the war overseas, this administration will give preference to the US nationals by building their future while, at the same time, indulging in competition with its rivals.¹³

According to Kishore Mehboobani, the radical shift from cooperation to decisively engaging in the great power competition came in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and China's increasing aggression towards Taiwan.¹⁴ Nowadays, it is a topic of debate among scholars of

⁷ Christopher Prebble et al, "Experts React: Biden Administration's National Security Strategy", *Stimson Center*, October 14, 2022,

<https://www.stimson.org/2022/experts-react-biden-administrations-national-security-strategy/>

⁸ Shadi Hamid et al, "Around the Hall: Assessing the 2022 National Security Strategy" *Brookings*, October 14, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/10/14/around-the-halls-assessing-the-2022-national-security-strategy/>

⁹ "National Security Strategy 2022", The White House.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "National Security Strategy 2022", The White House, pp: 6-20.

¹³ "National Security Strategy 2022", The White House.

¹⁴ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/31/biden-national-security-strategy-russia-china-geopolitics-competition-military-defense-spending/>

international relations: who is provoking whom in the US-China competition? Stephen Wertheim, the Guardian Opinion writer criticizes Biden's "bullish rhetoric on Taiwan" that has no security gains in sight.¹⁵

The biggest problem with the US policy is its offensive realist paradigm, which entails the overwhelming pattern of fear in the face of a rising power. The US and the neo-liberalist constructs – which shape the international orders and institutions – are blind to any eventuality other than 'another cold war.' Struggling with the perils of conflicts – Ukraine war, and the unfinished peace in Afghanistan after the hasty US withdrawal – and the wraths of Nature like flooding, scorching heat waves, and pandemics, the world is not in a position to afford another global conflict.

For long, the scholars of International Relations have been making a case for truly global and inclusive international relations is possible. And peaceful coexistence – even among the Great Powers – is not an impossible flight of imagination. Instead of western perspectives, it is time for International Relations to 'rethink itself' and devise ways for global peace and security instead of becoming paranoid by the rise of new powers.¹⁶

¹⁵ Stephen Wertheim, "Biden's Bullish Rhetoric on Taiwan Risks Provoking China with No Gain in Security", *The Guardian*, September 21, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/21/biden-taiwan-comments-china-war-independence>

¹⁶ Martin Griffiths, *Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Red Globe Press: 2011).