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## The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States

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### **Abstract**

In mid-December, 2017, President Trump released his National Security Strategy (NSS). It is the keystone document that will provide the azimuth for prominent government leaders to guide them through the execution of core functions at federal departments, agencies and other governmental organizations in the months and years to come. It has 55 pages of content; it outlines essential issues that he and by extension, his National Security Council, see as of paramount concern for the United States. Broadly, the president looks to (1) protect the homeland, (2) promote U.S. prosperity, (3) leveraging strength to preserve peace, and (4) advance U.S. influence in the world (NSS, 2017, p. 4).



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# The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States

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### ABSTRACT

In mid-December, 2017, President Trump released his National Security Strategy (NSS). It is the keystone document that will provide the azimuth for prominent government leaders to guide them through the execution of core functions at federal departments, agencies and other governmental organizations in the months and years to come. It has 55 pages of content; it outlines essential issues that he and by extension, his National Security Council, see as of paramount concern for the United States. Broadly, the president looks to (1) protect the homeland, (2) promote U.S. prosperity, (3) leveraging strength to preserve peace, and (4) advance U.S. influence in the world (NSS, 2017, p. 4).

## INTRODUCTION

In mid-December 2017, President Trump released his National Security Strategy (NSS).<sup>1</sup> The keystone document will provide the azimuth for prominent government leaders to guide them through the execution of core functions at federal departments, agencies and other governmental organizations in the months and years to come. This article presents a summary of the NS. Most notably people that work in the defense sector, on issues pertaining to homeland security, and Foreign Service officers can benefit from this article. The NSS has 55 pages of content; it outlines essential issues that Trump and by extension, his National Security Council, see as of paramount concern for the United States. Broadly, the president looks to

1. *protect the homeland,*
2. *promote US prosperity,*
3. *leveraging strength to preserve peace, and*
4. *advance US influence in the world.*<sup>2</sup>

The federal organizations most affected by this strategy include three primary actors: the Departments of State (DOS), Defense (DOD), and Homeland Security (DHS). Historically, these departments have developed strategies of their own that comport with and help support the NSS. More pointedly, one can reference past editions of the Defense Strategic Guidance and National Military Strategies of the Defense Department, the Department of State and USAID Strategic Plan, and the Department of Homeland Security Strategic Plan and see connections to past versions of the NSS. Now that Trump has released his strategy, the departments need to get to work on their own plans. These plans in turn serve two primary purposes. First, they serve as marching orders for these mammoth actors, and secondly are used to help in the setting of priorities when preparing budget requests and their subsequent executions.

What are the implications for the three federal departments? President Trump has used the three of the four instruments of national power (diplomacy, military, and economic; information is excluded) to outline the direction and way ahead for this nation.<sup>3</sup>

## THE HOMELAND

First, the president identifies key threats to the United States; these include North Korea and its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction capable of reaching the United States, Iran's support of terror groups, jihadist

terror organizations whose ideology is directed against America and her citizens, and cyber threats.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the NSS addresses six priority risks; these include the following: national security, energy, finance and banking, safety and health, communications, and transportation.<sup>5</sup> There are implications for these three departments. DHS will be required to invest in infrastructure protection and hardening of key targets to make them less susceptible to physical attacks especially air and seaports, railways and roads, the telecommunications industry, and transit systems.<sup>6</sup> Other measures include sealing off entry points that are porous leading into the United States; these also include the creation of a wall and vetting those seeking entry to the United States.<sup>7</sup> The Department of Homeland Security will also be critical in assisting state and local governments to identify cyber threats and to help ensure resiliency of networks to exposure from nefarious state and non-state actors alike especially for communications networks, transportation, the financial and banking industries, and the health sector.

The Department of Defense will have to maintain strong diplomatic relations with South Korea, China, and Japan to show regional resolve regarding North Korea to help protect the homeland and will also be instrumental in garnering support among the four other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council all while seeking to castigate Kim Jong-un's regime. The Department of Defense will see itself involved in implementing a missile defense system and will be called to pursue transnational terror threats at their source.<sup>8</sup> The Department of State, DOD, and DHS will also be instrumental in working with other governments (state and local) to identify cyber threats and to help ensure resiliency of networks to exposure from state and non-state nefarious types alike and to share information with key allies throughout the world.<sup>9</sup>

## PROSPERITY

The Departments of State and Defense have a tall order in the promotion of American prosperity. The State Department will have the lead in negotiating trade agreements that are seen as fair to the United States; at a time when US growth has been averaging a prosaic 2 percent over recent years compared to China's double digit numbers, this is a tall order. Likewise, the navy under DOD will be key in keeping open sea lines of communication to foster free trade especially in the South China Sea where China has asserted greater influence in recent years.

## **PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH ABROAD**

The president has attested to what he calls preserving peace through strength showing the United States as still relevant on the global stage.<sup>10</sup> Trump identifies Russia and China as major challengers to the United States.<sup>11</sup> This has implications for both the Departments of State and Defense. The former should look to diplomacy to foment relations and alliances in Europe and Asia (for military basing rights, trade, and more) while engaging both countries to find common ground in order to help turn around the deterioration in the state of affairs that the world has seen in recent years regarding both countries. The latter should look to continue military exchanges and participation in show of force operations to demonstrate US capabilities and resolve.

Trump has concerns for Iran's sponsorship of terror organizations and the possibility it might renege on its agreement to stop uranium enrichment.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, DOS must apply pressure on the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency to keep the heat on Iran. Efforts should focus on compelling it to move away from terror support and from Iran going back to pursuing a nuclear weapons' development program.

The NSS states that North Korea has invested heavily in a ballistic missile program and has developed a nuclear capability. Aside from what was covered about this rouge regime in the Homeland section, DOD will have a role regionally in maintaining a real and enduring forward military presence in South Korea, Japan, and Guam and through the provision of missile defense capabilities throughout Northeast Asia. This both shows commitment and resolve to US allies.

Jihadist operating abroad is another major key concern. As Trump, and his federal departments look to implement the NSS, they need to figure out how they will apply pressure vis-à-vis economic means. Efforts can look to cut off funding, ways to use the military kinetically to take out terror command and control centers of gravity, and look to the State Department to leverage capabilities (diplomatic, military and economic) of friends and allies. Moreover, these efforts should focus on collectively prosecuting targets while simultaneously looking to help defeat the ideology through a successful campaign using information dispelling the falsehoods of jihadist messaging. Likewise, the Department of State will have to carefully and selectively allocate aid and support efforts to prevent countries from becoming weak or failed states that could harbor transnational jihadists particularly by supporting governments that are allied with the United States.

## **ADVANCING AMERICAN INFLUENCE**

The United States is looking to maintain its relevancy as a hegemonic power. Accordingly, it wants to counter emerging powers like China and Russia as they look to wrest power and influence from the United States. Likewise, the United States wants to decrease dependency of other nations on this nation's foreign aid.<sup>13</sup> The NSS also sees leveraging the DOS in constructing trade agreements with countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.<sup>14</sup> It also intends to use and leverage technology to complement diplomatic efforts abroad and would like DOS to support incentivizing reforms across the globe to include such organizations like the International Monetary Fund, Work Bank, and World Trade Organization.<sup>15</sup> Though the United States wants to remain the primary global actor, it desires holding other countries accountable and to have them share the financial burden when solving complex problems.

## **BREAKING DOWN THE NSS: REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

### ***Indo Pacific***

Though the United States is no longer pursuing the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), it is evident that Trump sees the viability of this region to help foster diplomatic relationships. This is imperative to help realize greater security and stability, and leveraging economic bilateral arrangements favorable to the United States with freedom of movement of commerce through this region. The administration may have to maintain forward military power in order to project influence as required (with a particular focus on defending South Korea and Taiwan).<sup>16</sup>

Here DOS and DOD will do the heavy lifting. China wants to emerge as a major power player and it only makes sense that it will leverage its advantages in its own back yard. The Chinese were looking at ways to counter the TPP when the Obama Administration was actively pursuing it and many nations are interested in multilateral trade agreements. DOS will have to sell why entering into bilateral arrangements with the United States can benefit them and DOD will have to continue its allocation of military forces in the region to stay relevant.

### ***Europe***

The European continent is rebounding from years of economic hardship,

and is seen by the Trump Administration as one of the world's prosperous areas with values similar to the United States. The strategy shows both Russia and China as influencers and the importance of leveraging our value similarities through diplomacy. The United States hopes to capitalize on opportunism with the United Kingdom (U.K.) by entering into bilateral economic arrangements with this country as the U.K. divests itself from the European Union (E.U.); it also wants to pursue economic relations with other E.U. nations as well.<sup>17</sup> Militarily, the United States would see the continued value of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and will press for member nations to contribute more financially to the alliance.<sup>18</sup>

Once again, this region affects both DOS and DOD more so than DHS. Diplomats will have to renegotiate some trade agreements as the U.K. moves out of the European Union. Likewise, the military will have to continue cycling units through many former Eastern European nations alongside other NATO units to hedge against the Russian military exerting greater influence in the region as has been noted by its recent forays into Crimea and Ukraine.

### ***Middle East***

The Middle East has experienced a share of destabilizing factors in recent years. According to the NSS, the focus will be on strengthening diplomatic relations to lead to favorable political outcomes in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere free of the Islamic State and other radical jihadists while simultaneously trying to keep Iran in check from becoming a major regional actor.<sup>19</sup> Economically, the plan calls for countries in the region like Saudi Arabia and Egypt to do more to help in modernizing regional economies and development.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the United States remains committed to counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations in the region to fight and defeat the enemy.<sup>21</sup>

The United States has had an enduring military capability in this part of the world for over 16 years. It is likely that due to instability in the region that the military will not be able to extricate itself anytime soon. Nevertheless, the diplomatic corps will have a key piece at ensuring that legitimacy of regional leadership grows while leveraging the capital of richer nations like Saudi Arabia and Egypt to help others from regressing into disorder.

### ***South and Central Asia***

The administration sees the relevancy of this region as well. It looks to



address issues of the inextricable linkages between Pakistan and Afghanistan and helping their political establishments maintain order, move away from corruption, and the in the case of Pakistan, to ensure the safety and security of its nuclear arsenal.<sup>22</sup> The strategy lends support to economic development and initiatives to lead to greater stability like leveraging India's economic power to help the Afghan people.<sup>23</sup> Militarily, the United States remains committed to fighting and defeating al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Islamic State.<sup>24</sup>

This nation has seen what happens when failed states prevail and transnational organizations are afforded sanctuary with an ability to plan terror attacks. The War on Terror originated in Afghanistan and if it and Pakistan digress, problems could become exacerbated especially if these evil doers are able to get their hands on nuclear weapons. The US military will do the heavy lifting in this region of the world.

### ***Western Hemisphere***

Closer to home, the United States plans to use diplomacy to isolate nations running counter to this nation's ideology.<sup>25</sup> The NSS calls for fair and reciprocal trade arrangements while also pushing for improvements of these nations' police and security forces; these underscore the economic and military instruments of power.<sup>26</sup>

Here all three departments are important but this is where DHS needs to get things right. The likes of border protection, immigrant screening, and the ability to keep out transnational criminal organizations are at the top of the list of concerns. The Department of Defense should be involved in helping train and advise security forces and DOS will keep shoring up relations in Central and South America to isolate nations running counter to the United States.

### ***Africa***

The administration calls for reformation of governance and the pursuit of initiatives that will lead to ending long-standing conflicts through diplomacy.<sup>27</sup> It wants to help improve access to jobs and individual wealth on the continent as well.<sup>28</sup> Finally, it will support counterterrorism efforts in this region while also looking to prevent sanctuary for those that are bent on hurting the citizens of the United States.<sup>29</sup>

The Department of Defense, like in the Western Hemisphere, will have a key role in training security forces to fight against insurgents and terror-

ists. Likewise, DOS will be critical in helping build a coalition of nations aligned with the interests of the United States in order to foster values similar to that of this nation.

## **IMPLICATIONS: DEVIL IN THE DETAILS**

The National Security Strategy is now in the hands of key government leaders of this country. The implications throughout the federal government are profound and most notably affect the Departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security, key leaders in these organizations, and their workforces. It will be costly and difficult. As the three departments look to move through their own planning to NSS execution, government leaders will have to make difficult decisions. They must come up with their own plans, prepare budgets, and provide direction and guidance to their workforces. This comes at a time when the United States debt is over \$20 trillion; NSS implementation will be beleaguered with challenges. The devil is in the details.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

John Weaver is an Assistant Professor of Intelligence Analysis at York College in Pennsylvania (USA), a retired DOD civilian from the United States' Intelligence Community, and has served as an officer in the U.S. Army (retiring at the rank of lieutenant colonel). Since entering active duty, he has lived and worked on four continents and in 19 countries spending nearly eight years overseas (on behalf of the US government). His experience includes multiple combat deployments, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, humanitarian relief and disaster assistance support in both conventional and unconventional/non-traditional units. Most recently, John has trained and certified multinational NATO reconnaissance teams based in The Netherlands, Germany and Spain for worldwide deployment in full spectrum mission sets. He has also personally led several reconnaissance missions throughout Europe, the Middle East and Asia (including multiple missions in Afghanistan); none of his team members have ever been injured or killed in the line of duty. He has received formal training/certification in the following areas from the US Department of Defense: Survival/Evasion/Resistance/Escape (high risk), communications equipment & communications planning (FM radio, land line & satellite communications,

encryption, and the use of cryptographic devices), digital camera use & digital photography courses, US Joint Forces Command joint intelligence course, US Special Operations Command counterintelligence awareness course (USSOCOM CI), US Joint Forces Command counterintelligence awareness training (USJFCOM CI), counterinsurgency course, joint anti-terrorism course, defense against suicide bombing course, dynamics of International terrorism, homeland security and defense course, the joint special operations task force course (JSOTF), defensive driving course, vehicle emergency drills (battle drills), composite risk management, and more. Additionally, he graduated from NATO's Combined Joint Operations Center course in Oberammergau Germany, the Air Command and Staff College, and the Joint & Combined Warfighting School. John earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in business management from Towson University in 1990, graduated from Central Michigan University with a Master of Science in Administration degree in 1995, earned a Master of Operational Arts and Science degree from the U.S. Air Force's Air University in 2004, and graduated from the University of Baltimore with a Doctorate in Public Administration in 2013.

## ENDNOTES

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