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The Western Hemisphere in the new U.S. approach to National Security

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Abstract

This work argues that the transformation in the U.S. security posture under the Trump Administration is a function of reinforcing changes in leadership, strategies and policies, and relevant security bureaucracies which empowers the new leadership style. The new posture reflects a combined alteration of U.S. goals, priorities, means, and style. The new security posture involves a combination of enhanced emphasis on the President as protagonist, greater pragmatism in that policy, a de-emphasis on global competitions between systems or ideologies, an evolved focus on terrorism, an enduring expanded emphasis on the Western Hemisphere, increased emphasis on defense burden sharing globally, and greater attention to expanding and protecting the U.S. Defense Industrial and Technology Base. In the near-term, the new U.S. posture is likely to secure some successes against drug transits and international criminal organizations, while making some governments more reluctant to engage with the PRC in select military, space and technology domains. It may also increase strategic risk.



Palabras clave
Administración Trump
Hemisferio Occidental
Consejo de Seguridad Nacional
Estrategia de Defensa Nacional
Corolario Trump

Keywords
Administration
Western Hemisphere
National Security Council
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Trump Corollary

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Resumen:

Este trabajo sostiene que la transformación de la postura de seguridad de Estados Unidos bajo la administración Trump es consecuencia del fortalecimiento de los cambios en el liderazgo, las estrategias, las políticas y las burocracias de seguridad pertinentes, lo que confiere mayor poder al nuevo estilo de liderazgo. Esta nueva postura refleja una modificación integral de los objetivos, las prioridades, los medios y el estilo de Estados Unidos. La nueva postura de seguridad implica un mayor énfasis en el presidente como protagonista, un mayor pragmatismo en dicha política, una menor importancia a las competencias globales entre sistemas o ideologías, un enfoque más profundo en la lucha contra el terrorismo, un énfasis creciente y sostenido en el hemisferio occidental, un mayor énfasis en el reparto global de la carga de la defensa y una mayor atención a la expansión y protección de la base industrial y tecnológica de defensa de Estados Unidos. A corto plazo, es probable que la nueva postura estadounidense logre algunos éxitos contra el tráfico de drogas y las organizaciones criminales internacionales, al tiempo que genera mayor reticencia en algunos gobiernos a colaborar con la República Popular China en determinados ámbitos militares, espaciales y tecnológicos. También puede aumentar el riesgo estratégico.

Introduction

The U.S. Administration of Donald Trump has dramatically altered the U.S. approach to security, both in the Western Hemisphere and globally. Changes include a new focus on the U.S. near abroad, backed by assigning persons with an unprecedented amount of professional background in Latin America to U.S. State Department leadership positions, such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau. The Administration has also significantly increased the portion of U.S. military assets assigned to the Western Hemisphere. It has demonstrated a willingness to use its military assets to support border control, use lethal force against narcotraffickers, enforce sanctions against "*shadow fleet*" oil tankers,[2] and to capture Venezuelan de facto President Nicolas Maduro.

The U.S. has also significantly changed its traditional security discourse, decreasing emphasis on efforts to addressing "*root causes*" of internal security challenges in the region.[3] The new posture frames U.S. engagement in terms of "*America First*"[4] commercial and military cooperation, albeit in which partners may also benefit. The current U.S. Administration also shows a greater disposition than past governments to employ military action to advance its interests, including threats of such action, whether or not serious, against Canada, Panama, and Greenland, among others.[5]

The current U.S. Administration has shifted its objectives, priorities, means and style on security beyond the Western Hemisphere. It has significantly altered its posture regarding Russia and the War in Ukraine, Europe and NATO,[6] as well as

2 MARITIME NEWS. "US Seizure of Shadow Fleet Tanker Skipper Marks New Phase in Sanctions Enforcement," December 14, 2025. Available at: https://www.maritimenews.com/shadow-fleet/us-seizes-shadow-fleet-tanker-skipper.

3 U.S DEPARTMENT ARCHIVES. "FACT SHEET: Update on the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America," U.S. State Department archives, April 28, 2022. Available at https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Appendix-4-Progress-Made-in-Northern-Central-America-004767.pdf.

4 THE NEW YORK TIMES. "Trump is racing to redefine 'Americas First' in a time of war", April 10, 2026.

5 COLLINSON, Stephen. "Trump's threats to Greenland, Canada and Panama explain everything about America First," CNN, January 8, 2025. Available at https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/08/politics/trump-greenland-canada-panama-analysis.

6 SLATTERY, Gram and HOLLAND, Steve, "Trump weighs pulling some US troops from Europe amid NATO strains, official says," Reuters, April 9, 2026. Available at https://www.reuters.com/world/trump-weighs-pulling-some-us-troops-europe-amid-nato-strains-official-says-2026-04-09/.

adopting a much more skeptical posture toward global institutions such as the United Nations. It has criticized prior governments for involving the U.S. in "*forever wars*" without clear benefit to the U.S.,[7] yet has employed the military in multiple significant actions, particularly in Iran, as well as in Venezuela, Somalia, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Nigeria and the Caribbean.[8]

This work argues that the new U.S. orientation in security affairs is a profound, multidimensional shift, reflecting reinforcing dynamics between the orientation and style of the President, changes in the U.S. security bureaucracy, and a shift in U.S. policy objectives, priorities and means. Even with the U.S. war in Iran, which was ongoing as this work went to press, the current Administration is likely to continue focus the country's security policies on immigration, transnational criminal group activities in the region, and resistance to select PRC[9] activities, presence, and influence in the Western Hemisphere.

Change in Leadership Orientation

The current U.S. Administration has significantly shifted the direction of U.S. policy to de-emphasize the systemic competition between the U.S. and China,[10] and more broadly, of democracy versus communist and authoritarian regimes, rule of law and institutions.[11] It has also diminished the U.S. focus on Russia as a threat, and has contributed to its willingness to embrace transitional leaders such as Delcy Rodriguez in Venezuela.[12]

The new U.S. style of foreign policy has also arguably disrupted the predictability that many had come to expect from the more bureaucratic, institutional focus of previous administrations. That change has arguably impacted the way in which the international community sees and relates to the United States.

Changes in National Security Decision-making Structures

As a compliment to the new policy orientation, the new Administration has changed U.S. national security decision-making structures, accelerating the implementation of Presidential decisions.[13]

Under the Trump Administration, the National Security Council (NSC), has been significantly streamlined, and focused more on coordinating the President's decisions with others in the inter-agency process, and executing them.[14]

7 BATEY, Eve. "15 Months Ago, Donald Trump Promised 'I'm Not Going to Start Wars, I'm Going to Stop Wars'," Vanity Fair, February 28, 2026. Available at https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/donald-trump-peace-president.

8 VENTURA, Tiago. "From Iran to Venezuela, Here Are the Countries Trump Has Ordered Strikes on in His Second Term," Time, March 2, 2026. Available at https://time.com/7382074/countries-trump-has-ordered-strikes-on-second-term/.

9 People´s Republic of China.

10 "Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, February 28. 2024. Available at https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R43838/R43838.101.pdf.

11 See, for example, Richard A. Melanson, "Post–cold War Policy," Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy, Accessed April 13. 2025. Available at https://www.americanforeignrelations.com/O-W/Post-cold-War-Policy.html.

12 ESCOBEDO, Richard, "Trump administration lifts sanctions on Delcy Rodriguez, Venezuela's acting president", CBS News, April 1. 2026. Available at https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-administration-lifts-sanctions-delcy-rodriguez-venezuela-acting-president/.

13 BOWMAN Tom and ORDOÑEZ. Trump shrinks National Security Council in major foreign policy shakeup", NPR, May 23. 2025. Available at https://www.npr.org/2025/05/23/nx-s1-5409610/trump-national-security-council.

14 ELLIS, Evan. "The Counter-Cartel Summit," 2026.

Historically, the role of the NSC has varied greatly with the style of each occupant of the Oval Office, and the relations he has had with each of the Principals in the National Security process. Nonetheless, the to varying degrees, the role of the Director of National Security and his staff in coordinating the activities of executive organizations have historically given him and the NSC bureaucracy an important role in formulating that policy, in the name of coordinating its consideration and execution. The current Administration has significantly reduced the size of the NSC staff from its earlier level of over 200 persons,[15] and appointed individuals particular skills are as facilitators and action officers.[16] In the process, the changes have shifted the NSC role from shaping, to more purely coordinating and implementing policy.

The President's appointment of Marco Rubio as both National Security Director and Secretary of State further strengthens this tendency by ensuring that the NSC supports the State Department in policies, rather than introducing an alternative perspective.

As a complement to changes at the NSC, the Administration has also reoriented the State Department, with a smaller bureaucracy focused more on executing the President's policies rather than analyzing or filtering them. The Administration has substantially cut the size of the State Department bureaucracy, with a particular focus on the reduction of functional organizations,[17] and particularly in areas such as human rights, development, and environmental issues,[18] in which the inherent focus of those organizations could be at odds with the President's priorities.[19]

Within the Department of War (DoW) the most significant higher-level changes that have occurred in the current Administration involve personnel actions, more than the reformulation of organizational relationships, per se. These included the replacement of senior leaders to increase the degree to which those in the position are aligned with implementing the President's agenda. These include appointments such as Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, Undersecretary of War Bridge Colby, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Humire, among others. The shift also includes personnel changes on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, including retirement of the prior head, C.Q. Brown and his replacement by General Daniel Kane, and retirement of Army head Randy George.[20]

At the Combatant Command level, the selection of General Francis Donnovan to head U.S.

15 LEE, Matthew, MADHANI, Aamer and KIM Seung Min, "White House slashing staff in major overhaul of National Security Council, officials say", Associated Press, May 23, 2025. Available at https://apnews.com/article/trump-national-security-council-nsc-50ac71e10b9700a0c0e4266afc958cc3

16 See, for example, Lee Schlenker, "Former Air Force commando takes top LatAm job at NSC", MSN. Jun 19, 2025. Available at https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/former-air-force-commando-takes-top-latam-job-at-nsc/ar-AA1H0eis.

17 KELEMAN, Michelle. "Hundreds laid off in State Department overhaul", NPR, July 11, 2025. Available at https://www.npr.org/2025/07/11/nx-s1-5464673/state-department-rubio-job-cuts

18 RADIO FRANCE INTERNATIONAL. "US State Department to cut positions, rights offices" April 22, 2025. Available at https://www.rfi.fr/en/international-news/20250422-us-state-department-to-cut-positions-rights-offices.

19 MITCHELL, A. Wess. "The State Department Overhaul Is Long Overdue", Foreign Policy, July 8, 2025. Available at https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/07/08/state-department-reform-reorganization-cuts-trump-rubio/.

20 RADZIUS, Darius. "Three Generals Ousted as Pentagon Shakeup Hits War Command", Military.com, April 2, 2026. Available at https://www.newsbreak.com/news/4059641194554-former-air-force-commando-takes-top-latam-job-at-nsc Available at: https://www.military.com/daily-news/headlines/2026/04/02/army-chief-forced-out-iran-war-hits-new-phase.html.

Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), leveraging his senior command experience at Special Operations Command and all three Marine Expeditionary Forces, was, according to senior persons interviewed for this work, intended to strengthen the warfighting orientation at the Command.[21]

At the Army level, the merger of U.S. Forces Command, Army South and Army North into the new Western Hemisphere command is intended to strengthen the integration of the U.S. defense of the homeland with activities engaging with regional partners, including Canada, Mexico, and partners in Central America, the Caribbean and South America.[22] In a similar fashion, the Administration is reportedly considering changes to the U.S. Unified Command Plan which would, if taken forward, similarly integrate U.S. Northern Command and Southern Command, with similar objectives.[23]

Within SOUTHCOM itself, the Administration has taken a number of actions to facilitate the use of the military for specific largescale operations in the region. These include the creation of Joint Task Force Southern Spear[24] and Joint Task Force Counter-Cartel. The former facilitated U.S. counterdrug operations in the Caribbean basin, including the capture of de facto Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro. The later strengthened interagency and international coordination in going after designated narco-terrorist organizations, to include playing a role in the February 2026 elimination of Mexican Jalisco Nuevo Generacion (CJNG) cartel boss Nemesio Rubén Oseguera Cervantes ("El Mencho").

Other changes have been made in less visible, yet strategically important areas throughout the entire defense bureaucracy. These include personnel replacements in the Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps within the Department of War (DoW), done with the declared intention to shift the posture of entities providing legal reviews of military actions, from blocking actions identified as questionable by those reviews, to facilitating the decisions taken by the President and DoW leadership.[25]

Change in Strategy and Policy

The core of the change in posture of the U.S. on national security issues are arguably the changes in strategy and policy, reflecting and codifying the orientation of the President. The significant shift in the Administration's orientation appear in the principal U.S. national security policy documents, including the Natio-

21 Off-the-record interview, Washington D.C., April 2026.

22 WELCH, Carley. "Army stands up Western Hemisphere Command prioritizing homeland defense, consolidation," Breaking Defense, December 8, 2025. Available at https://breakingdefense.com/2025/12/army-stands-up-western-hemisphere-command-prioritizing-homeland-defense-consolidation/

23 OLSON, Wyatt. "Pentagon proposal to merge combatant commands draws criticism from GOP lawmakers," Stars and Stripes, March 20, 2025. Available at https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2025-03-19/combatant-commands-merge-plan-17201617.html

24 ARMY RECOGNITION. "U.S. Launches Operation Southern Spear as Naval Forces Build Up Off Venezuela," December 15, 2025. Available at https://www.armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/2025/breaking-news-u-s-launches-operation-southern-spear-as-naval-forces-build-up-off-venezuela#google_vignette.

25 NOVELLY, Thomas. "Hegseth orders 'ruthless' review of JAGs. Some see an attempt to evade accountability," Defense One, March 12, 2026. Available at https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2026/03/hegseth-orders-ruthless-review-jag-offices-some-see-attempt-evade-accountability/412076/.

nal Security Strategy (NSS)[26] and the National Defense Strategy (NDS).[27] Although they also are reflected in the U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command Posture Statements to the U.S. Congress,[28] among others.

Break with and Negative Orientation the Past

Both the NSS and NDS highlight the intention of the Administration to frame current policy as a significant break with a past, which is characterized in highly critical terms In his cover letter introducing the National Security Strategy, for example, President Trump says, "*After four years of weakness, extremism, and deadly failures, my administration has moved with urgency and historic speed to restore American strength at home and abroad…*" [29] In the memorandum presenting the National Defense Strategy, Secretary of War Hegseth similarly writes "*Previous administrations squandered our military advantages and the goodwill, and resources of our people in grandiose nation-building projects and self-congratulatory pledges to uphold cloud-castle abstractions like the rules-based international order…President Trump has decisively changed that…*"[30]

Emphasis on the Role of the President as Protagonist

The new NSS and NDS depart significantly from past versions of each strategy document in their emphasis on the role of the President, in a highly personalized fashion, in creating the content of U.S. National Security activities through his words and actions, including negotiations and executive decisions, in day-to-day leadership actions.[31]

Both documents are notable departures from prior versions, in the number of times that they mention the contribution of the President by name. The NSS invokes "President Trump" or the "Trump Administration" 27 separate times in a 33-page document.[32] By contrast, the 2022 National Security Strategy issued by the Biden Administration mentions the President's name only 5 times, of which four are attributions of quotes made by the President, not part of the actual document text, and not talking about the role of the President himself.[33] Similarly, the unclassified version of the current Trump Administration NDS invokes "President Trump" 47 times in a 34-page document.[34] Through such references, both documents suggest that the current Administration frames centers its strategies and initiatives on the words and

26 THE WHITE HOUSE, official website. National Security Strategy of the United States of America," December 2025. Available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf

27 The National Defense Strategy," Department of War, official website, January 2026. Available at https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF

28 Statement of General Francis L. Donovan, U.S. Marine Corps Commander, United States Southern Command Before the 119th Congress House Armed Services Committee," U.S. Southern Command, official website, March 17, 2026. Available at https://www.southcom.mil/Portals/7/Documents/Posture%20Statements/2026_SOUTHCOM_Posture_Statement_FINAL.pdf

29 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.* p. 1

30 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.* p. 1

31 MOYNAHAN, Donald, "Trump, Personalism, and US Administrative Capacity," Wiley Online Library, July 10, 2025. Available at https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/polp.70059?msockid=14354c7d48526ea532f45b4549f56f3b.

32 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*

33 National Security Strategy, U.S. National Archives, official website, October 2022. Available at https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.

34 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.*

actions of the President personally, by contrast to prior Administrations which cast the actions of the United States in more institutional terms.

De-Emphasis on Addressing Global Contributors to Strategic Threats.

The new U.S. security posture avoids deeply examining or proposing to address global sources of instability and other strategic challenges to the U.S., particularly those beyond the Western Hemisphere. It notably avoids a discussion of underlying social and economic causes of those problems, climate challenges, or other nature-centered risks such as pandemics.[35] No references to such phenomenon are included, for example, in the objectives-focused section of the NSS detailing what the U.S. "*wants from the world*".[36] The NDS makes the point more directly, stating that the new U.S. posture *"does not conflate Americans' interests with those of the rest of the world…It does not seek to solve all the world's problems"*.[37]

Pragmatism

Both the NSS and NDS highlight a disposition to evaluate pursuit of U.S. national interest in terms of tangible, near-term benefits to the country. The NSS notes that *"President Trump's foreign policy is pragmatic…It is not grounded in traditional, political ideology. It is motivated above all by what works for America…"*[38] The NSS explicitly notes the intention of the U.S. to move away from considerations of partner government performance toward the selection of partners based on their willingness to work with the U.S. in terms that benefit U.S. interests. It notes *"We will reward and encourage the region's governments, political parties and movements broadly, aligned with our principals and strategy. But we must not overlook governments with different outlooks with whom we nonetheless share interests and who want to work with us"*.[39] The NDS calls this posture *"flexible, practical realism."*.[40]

The new policy also shifts notably away from China and Russia as global rivals per se and departs from framing security challenges as a struggle against authoritarianism or communism.[41] The current NSS, for example, defines competition with China in primarily economic terms, promising to *"rebalance America's economic relationship with China, prioritizing reciprocity and fairness"*.[42]

In geopolitical terms, the strategy does not characterize the PRC as the principal threat vis-à-vis allies such as Japan, Korea or Australia in the Indopacific, but rather asserts the importance of preventing *"any competitor to control the South China Sea"*.[43] Nonetheless, U.S. clearly has China in mind in the NSS when, in its most specific

35 BUSBY, Josh and POLLOCK, Greg. "Trump's National Defense Strategy Tries to Imagine Climate Change Away," Foreign Policy, January 29, 2026. Available at https://foreignpolicy.com/2026/01/29/national-defense-strategy-climate-energy/
36 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
37 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.*
38 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
39 *Ibídem*, p. 16.
40 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.* p. 3.
41 ELLIS, R. Evan. "The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy and the Western Hemisphere: Implications and Challenges," Opidata, December 23, 2025. Available at https://legadoalasamericas.org/the-2025-u-s-national-security-strategy-and-the-western-hemisphere-implications-and-challenges/.
42 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
43 *Ibídem*, p. 24.

discussion of defense posture in Indopacific, it promises to *"erect a strong denial defense along the First Island Chain,"* although without explicitly mentioning Taiwan.[44] As a compliment, the NDS more specifically names the PRC as the principal problem in the Indopacific, yet asserts the need to deter China in the region *"through strength, not confrontation"*.[45] The NDS further asserts U.S. intentions to increase military-to-military communications with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to seek strategic stability working towards a *"decent peace"*.[46]

Beyond the PRC, the new U.S. defense posture significantly de-emphasizes Russia as a strategic challenge. The NSS, for example, does not characterize Russia's continuing invasion of Ukraine as aggression in which the U.S. has a key role in standing by NATO and other European partners to resist, but rather, a problem of Russia-European relations that the U.S. has a stake in "mediating" in the interest of continental stability. Indeed, the European section of the NSS does not begin with a discussion of Russian aggression against Ukraine, but rather, of U.S. concerns over Europe's cultural decline due to immigration and other factors, and the corresponding risk of *"civilizational erasure"*.[47]

In addition to the new perspective on global adversaries, the new U.S. security posture departs from the presumptions embedded in prior U.S. national security documents, of prioritizing and building strategy around fortifying international institutions, and supporting development, democracy, and an array of protections and benefits for individuals and disadvantaged groups. The NSS criticizes what it characterizes as actions by prior U.S. Administrations that *"lashed American policy to a network of international institutions, some of which are driven by outright anti-Americanism and many by a transnationalism that explicitly seeks to dissolve individual state sovereignty"*.[48]

Such criticism notwithstanding, the NSS does assert the Administration's desire *"to maintain the United States' unrivaled 'soft power' through which we exercise positive influence throughout the world that furthers our interests"*.[49] While the document asserts that U.S. believe in its own *"inherent goodness and decency"* is fundamental for such soft power,[50] it does not, however, address whether international goodwill might be undermined by a de-emphasis on U.S. support for institutions, international charitable activities, and the move to an *"America First"* posture.

In building relationships with partners in the Western Hemisphere and globally, the new U.S. posture emphasizes a more pragmatic approach.[51] The U.S. posture in the Western Hemisphere, as addressed in the NSS, is centers on the concept of *"Enlist and Expand"*. The U.S. indicates the intent to build on a network of *"established friends"* and *"regional champions"* willing to support the U.S. in advancing its objectives on issues such as countering irregular immigration and criminal groups to create an en-

44 *Ibídem*, p. 4.
45 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
46 *Ibídem*, p. 4.
47 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
48 *Ibídem*, p. 3.
49 *Ibídem*, p. 4.
50 *Ibídem*.
51 ELLIS, Evan. The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy, 2025.

vironment of *"tolerable stability"*.[52] The March 2026 invitation of a select group of U.S. partners to the *"Shield of the Americas"* Counter-Cartel Summit at U.S. Southern Command,[53] with a subsequent meeting of current and incoming elected leaders of the invited countries in the President's resort in Doral, Florida, arguably exemplifies the new orientation.

Reflecting the expanded pragmatism of the U.S. posture, the NSS indicates an intention to be less judgmental regarding those interested in working with the U.S. By contrast to previous U.S. policy which often restricted engagement with countries for questionable records on democracy, human rights and other issues, the new NSS asserts that the U.S. *"must not overlook governments with different outlooks with whom we nonetheless share interests and who want to work with us"*.[54] The NDS echoes such sentiment: *"Out with utopian idealism; in with hardnosed realism"*.[55] There is arguably ambiguity in the posture however, regarding the degree to which the U.S. will push back on countries also working with extra-hemispheric U.S. rivals in the economic, security, and other strategic domains, or criticizing U.S. foreign policy, while still seeking to work with the U.S.

The new U.S. pragmatism is further seen in the NSS emphasis on using mutually beneficial transactions from the U.S. private sector and associated U.S. investments and military cooperation, rather than traditional assistance or institution-building work, to *"expand"* the coalition of partners working with the U.S., and to discourage them from working with others.[56]

Targeted focus on Terrorism

By comparison to its predecessors, the current U.S. Administration uses an expanded concept of *"terrorism"* as a core security concept, albeit one which is also more selective than that used by prior administrations.[57] Cooperation against "narcoterroristas" is first in the list of what the NSS says the U.S. *"wants"* from the world.[58] It further highlights the importance of *"terrorism"* in the new U.S. security posture by uniquely citing it as a factor that could stimulate U.S. *"urgent attention" in "in an otherwise less consequential area"* of the world.[59] The NSS also argues that a key consideration that could elevate otherwise diminished U.S. strategic interests in the Middle East is that the region *"not be an incubator or exporter of terror against American interests or the American homeland"*.[60]

By contrast to previous U.S. security concepts, which highlighted terrorist threats from a variety of religious, ideology, nationalism and ideology-based

52 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
53 OLAY, Matthew. "Hegseth Promotes Regional Border Security, Signs Joint Security Declaration at Inaugural Counter Cartel Conference," U.S. Southern Command, official website, March 5, 2026. Available at https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/Article/4423347/hegseth-promotes-regional-border-security-signs-joint-security-declaration-at-i/
54 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
55 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
56 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
57 See, for example, "DOMESTIC TERRORISM: Additional Actions Needed to Implement an Effective National Strategy," General Accounting Office, April 2025. Available at https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-107030.pdf
58 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
59 *Ibídem*, p. 15.
60 *Ibídem*, p. 28.

groups,[61] the NSS and NDS focus attention almost exclusively on two types of terrorism: drug-centered criminal organizations (*"narco-terrorists"*), and *"Islamic"* terrorism. Indeed, the only two specific references to types of terrorism or associated groups made by the NSS, for example, are to *"narcoterroristas"* in the Western Hemisphere,[62] and the need to be vigilant against *"Islamic terrorism"* in Africa.[63] 16 of the 17 references to "terrorists" in the NDS similarly refer to either narcoterroristas or Islamic terrorists, aside from one generic reference to *"Foreign Terrorist Organizations"*. [64]

Shift in Geographic Threat Assessment

As previously noted, the move of the new U.S. security policy away from *"strategic competitions"*, global issues contributing to insecurity, or phenomenon such as climate challenges or the threat of pandemics, the new U.S. security thinking also redefines the level and character of the "threat" from each region of the world.

The new U.S. posture adopts a de facto hierarchy of regions, focusing primarily on the Western Hemisphere and Indopacific, then to Europe and finally to the rest of the world. Indeed, the NDS explicitly characterizes threats beyond the Western Hemisphere and the Indopacific as *"less important"* for the U.S.[65]

The new posture also assesses threats through a *"realist"* lens of the imperative of preventing any one actor from dominating key regions.

In the Indopacific, as noted previously, the U.S. looks at the challenge posed by the PRC in regional, rather than global terms, from both a strategic economic and military perspective. Four of six pages of the NSS discussion on the Indopacific focus on rebalancing trade and technology issues.[66] The discussion of the military challenges in the last two pages focus on the South China Sea and *"First Island Chain"*, but do not mention the PRC by name.[67] Even the NDS focuses on the economic importance of the Indopacific, representing more than half the global economy, more than military questions, for why the U.S. cannot allow *"any one"* country to *"dominate"* the region.[68]

In Europe, the previously noted U.S. move away from viewing Russia, with its ongoing invasion of Ukraine, as a global security challenge, has led to a substantial downgrading of the threat seen to the U.S. from the region, compared to assessments from prior documents.[69] The NSS, for example, suggests Europe overstates the threat it perceives from Russia. It argues *"European allies enjoy a significant hard power advantage over Russia by almost every measure except nuclear weapons"*.[70] Similarly, the NDS characterizes the threats emanating from Europe as being *"less*

61 SACCO, Lisa N. "Understanding and Conceptualizing Domestic Terrorism: Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, December 29, 2023. Available at https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47885.
62 National Security Strategy. 2025,*op. cit.* p. 5.
63 *Ibídem*, p. 29.
64 National Defense Strategy. 2006, *op. cit.*
65 *Ibídem*, p.4.
66 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.* pp. 19-24.
67 *Ibídem*, pp. 23-24.
68 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.* p. 10.
69 See, for example, National Security Strategy, 2022.
70 National Security Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.* p. 25.

severe" than the Indopacific, albeit *"more so"* for the nations of Europe. Russia is specifically mentioned in this section as a *"persistent but manageable threat to NATO's eastern members"*.[71] It makes no overt statement regarding Russian threats to the U.S. homeland beyond a reference to its possession of nuclear weapons.

Emphasis on the Western Hemisphere

The Western Hemisphere receives prioritization in the new U.S. security posture, as expressed through both the NSS and NDS, albeit in a geographically and conceptually limited fashion, linked to the security of the U.S. homeland. The NSS places the Western Hemisphere first among its regional section and dedicates relatively more space to U.S. security objectives in, and the approach to the region, as compared to its discussion of other regions.[72]

Within this regionally specific analysis, the NSS notes that the U.S. will dedicate relatively more military capabilities to the Western Hemisphere than in recent years, but also that it will use these assets in fundamentally different ways; they will be focused on control of U.S. borders, and actions against transnational criminal actors (TCOs), as well as defense of the homeland and strategic terrain against extra-hemispheric state adversaries.[73] Similarly, the NDS refers to a *"flood of illegal aliens"*, presumably through the Western Hemisphere, as one of the principal threats to the homeland.[74]

The NSS gives particular attention to preserving access to strategic terrain in the region and resisting corresponding influence by extra-hemispheric actors; it makes this the focus of what it calls the *"Trump Corollary"* of the Monroe Doctrine.[75] The document does not, however, go into detail regarding its concept of the nature of such influence, or what types of influence are regarded as unacceptable. [76]

Uniquely in the Western Hemisphere regional section of the NSS, the document discusses the U.S. intention to use commercial levers such as private investment and the U.S. Export-Import Bank, the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), and the Millenium Challenge Corporation, among other vehicles, to counter such extra-hemispheric presence and influence.[77]

Within the defense domain, the NDS goes further in detailing the prioritization of, and U.S. thinking regarding the Western Hemisphere. In the NDS, not only is the Western Hemisphere mentioned prior to discussions of other areas, but the Western Hemisphere portion is embedded within the discussion of defense of the homeland.[78] In the process, the document illustrates how, in the security domain, the Western Hemisphere is conceptualized in terms of its geographic relevance to the defense of the U.S. homeland.

71 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.* p. 10.
72 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*
73 *Ibídem*, pp. 15-19
74 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.* p. 8.
75 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.* p. 15.
76 ELLIS, "The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy," 2025, *op. cit.*
77 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.* p. 18.
78 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.* p. 16.

Within this framework, the NDS elaborates on the NSS concept of strategic terrain, access to which is to be protected, specifically mentioning Greenland, the *"Gulf of America",* and the Panama Canal.[79] Other strategic terrain such as ports and space ground facilities, as well as the Straits of Magellan, vital for the transit of large U.S. warships between the Atlantic and Pacific, are not explicitly mentioned, but neither are they explicitly excluded.

The conceptualization of the U.S. near abroad as key to protecting the U.S. homeland is also the foundation for Secretary of War Hegseth's statements regarding a *"Greater North America"* defense perimeter, encompassing the territory from Canada and Greenland, the United States, Mexico, Central America, and the northern portion of South America including Guyana and Suriname, Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador.[80] The concept is arguably not designed to assert a formal alliance or exclude or include any state therefrom, but rather, to call attention to the geography whose land and maritime characteristics, and associated control or denial to an adversary, are critical to the defense of the homeland.

Greater Burden Sharing

More equitable defense burden sharing, both within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and with other U.S. partners is another cornerstone of the new U.S. security posture. It is listed as the second U.S. priority in the NSS and discussed throughout the document.[81] The NDS calls burden sharing *"an essential ingredient"* of the U.S. strategy,[82] and devotes an entire *"line of effort"* to discussing how the U.S. will seek it with partners in each region.[83]

Although there is no definitive criteria regarding the level of equity considered acceptable in defense spending among partners, the NSS highlights the principle of partners in being *"principally responsible" for providing their "own defense".*[84] It thus implies that the level of partner expenditure should be a function of vulnerability of direct military aggression, partly a measure of geographic proximity to the threat, rather than based on broader measures such as the relative ability to pay or the strategic value of the alliance to the United States as the largest partner, from the perspective of geopolitical competition.

Strengthening and Protecting the Defense Industrial Base

The new U.S. security posture gives added attention to strengthening and protecting the Defense Industrial Base, including *"reshoring"* defense industrial supply chains.[85] The NDS devotes an entire *"line-of-effort"* to *"supercharging the defense industrial base,"* asserting that the Administration will *"reinvest in U.S. defense*

79 *Ibídem*, p. 19.
80 MSN.COM. "US unveils 'Greater North America' strategy under Trump's leadership," MSN, accessed April 12, 2026. Available at https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/world/us-unveils-greater-north-america-strategy-under-trumps-leadership/ar-AA1ZH17R.
81 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
82 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
83 *Ibídem*, pp. 18-21.
84 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.* p. 27.
85 *Ibídem*, p. 19.

production, building out capacity; empowering innovators; adopting new advances in technology, like artificial intelligence (AI); and clearing away outdated policies, practices, regulations, and other obstacles to the type and scale of production that the Joint Force requires for the priorities before us".[86]

Such attention is consistent with the broader orientation of the Administration regarding the importance of conducting more manufacturing and strategically vital technology activities within, or in the territory of friendly, reliable partners close to the United States. Indeed, the NSS mentions the strategic importance of the U.S. industrial base more broadly 19 times.[87]

Although the NDS also promises to support the revitalization of the defense industrial base of U.S. allies,[88] where production of critical items and components cannot be realistically be done within the U.S. itself, the concept is not clear on the principles of the balance between incurring costs to seek production in the United States, acquiring more from partners near the United States, and working with more distant, yet friendly partners in other parts of the world.

Although the NSS and NDS make multiple references to protecting the U.S. homeland, including the proposed "Golden Dome" aerospace defense system,[89] the unclassified version of the NDS does not explicitly address how to protect the defense industrial and technology base, and other assets, against emergent asymmetric threats including drones and other unmanned systems.

Implications and Challenges

The reinforcing effects of changes in U.S. leadership, bureaucracy, strategy and policy makes it likely that the U.S. security posture will increase the frequency of sudden shifts in substance and tone, at the initiative of the President. The U.S. posture is likely to continue to be more pragmatic in character than it had been in prior Administrations. It is likely to be more focused on the U.S. near abroad, albeit without neglecting other regions.

The new U.S. posture is likely to continue to emphasize military-led action against drug cartels, border control, combat of both narcoterroristas and islamic radicalism, and select pushback against the presence of the PRC in the region. Correspondingly, the U.S. is likely to continue to de-emphasize, without abandoning, non-reimbursable economic assistance, traditional multilateral institutions, and initiative.

In the Western Hemisphere, in the short-term, the new U.S. security orientation is likely to reduce drug transits across the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific via narcoboats, as well as overt collaboration with the PRC on security, space and sensitive technology projects.[90] Strong U.S. reactions to partners not cooperating or strongly disagreeing with it, including threats of tariffs or other punitive measures, may suppress open criticism of U.S. policies by many in the region and may strengthen coope-

86 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.* p. 5.
87 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*
88 National Defense Strategy, 2026, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
89 National Security Strategy, 2025, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
90 ELLIS, R. Evan. "China isn't retreating in Latin America -- it's recalibrating," United Press International, February 20, 2026. Available at https://www.upi.com/Voices/2026/02/20/latam-America-First-China-Western-Hemisphere/8761771620152/.

ration and/or endorsement by others. Over the longer term, however, the new U.S. posture may increase the risk of several undesirable strategic consequences.[91]

First, the increased orientation of Administration personnel and bureaucratic structures to rapidly, faithfully implementing decisions of the Executive, rather than providing alternative perspectives regarding risks and constraints, may increase the possibility of taking actions that unexpectedly produce significant adverse consequences, however capable the decision-making capabilities of the President. The strategic dilemma that the U.S. faces in Iran is arguably a case of such unanticipated negative consequences.[92]

Conclusion

The new U.S. orientation on security matters represents a significant departure from the goals, means, and style with which the U.S. has pursued its national objectives in the post-World War II era. The impact of those differences is magnified by the interaction between changes in U.S. leadership, its national security bureaucracy, and its security strategy and policies. In the context of an increasingly powerful PRC, the transformational effects of artificial intelligence and other technologies, and other changes, the impact of the new U.S. orientation on global security dynamics is likely to be as significant as it is unpredictable. The significance of such impacts, however, make of utmost importance a continued, objective assessment, and preparation for the changes that they may produce, from the perspective of all affected parties.

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