



National Security Strategy: U.S. Focuses on Relations with Asia and Europe

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The latest U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) points to the crucial importance of the Asia-Pacific region for U.S. interests and the stability of the international order. At the same time, one of the messages of this key document is reassurance of European allies regarding the American commitment to NATO and Euro-Atlantic security. The strategy traditionally puts an emphasis on the need for Europeans to strengthen the Alliance's conventional capabilities.

On 12 October, the White House published its National Security Strategy (NSS), which is a kind of commentary on the security policy assumptions of President Joe Biden and his administration. The NSS replaces the [Interim National Security Strategic Guidance \(INSSG\), published in March 2021](#). Progress on the new document by the National Security Council were much delayed due to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The guidance from the NSS soon will be expanded in the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and other Pentagon planning documents. Moreover, [Biden's priorities regarding the impact of climate change on U.S. national security were explained in a set of administration documents released in October 2021](#).

Challenges and Threats to the U.S. The NSS indicates similarities and differences in the nature of the threats from China and Russia to the U.S. Both are authoritarian powers and close partners in their confrontational approaches to the U.S., other democracies, and the existing international order. While Russia's war with Ukraine is a current threat to European security, China is the sole great power with growing global ambitions, capabilities, and opportunities to rival the U.S. The multi-dimensional Chinese-American rivalry is focused now on the Indo-Pacific region, but in this decade it will gain global scope. China is increasing diplomatic and economic pressure on its neighbours and potentially might be a direct military threat to Taiwan. However, the U.S. strategy document also stresses that there are still global issues in which both the U.S. and China should cooperate. This approach is visible in the

continuation of the U.S. policy towards China and Asia first demonstrated by the Obama administration with its "pivot to Asia".

The NSS concludes that Russia since 2014 has been implementing imperialistic policy towards its neighbours, and that the current aggression against Ukraine is further proof of this approach. Russia is not only destabilising the international order but also undermining democratic institutions in other countries, including in the U.S. It cites Russia as an "immediate and ongoing threat" to international peace and stability. The U.S. is united with NATO and the EU in support for Ukraine and making Russia's war "a strategic failure". The NSS also stresses the need to continue broad assistance to Ukraine and its integration with the EU. Moreover, the U.S. will deter military threats from Russia, and when necessary, will defend the NATO allies. At the same time, the document also indicates the U.S. willingness to preserve strategic stability and to continue the nuclear arms-control dialogue with Russia.

[Like the strategies of previous administrations](#), the new NSS presents quite a catalogue of persistent [transnational threats and challenges to the U.S.](#), its interests and its citizens. In order, it lists: climate change and energy security, global pandemics like COVID-19, food security, arms control and non-proliferation, terrorism, cyberthreats, and corruption and organized crime. The document clearly assumes the need for continued U.S. leadership in managing and countering these threats globally. It also notes the

evolving nature of terrorist threats to America. Al-Qaeda and ISIS are still present in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa. But the NSS includes a reminder of the first-ever National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, adopted by President Biden in June 2021.

U.S. Approaches to Asia and Europe. The NSS holds the thesis that the Indo-Pacific area is of special importance to the international order and U.S. interests, a view previously shared by the Obama and Trump administrations. It assumes the imperative of open access to the South China Sea and the development of further regional cooperation forums, such as the [Quad](#) (the U.S., Australia, India, and Japan) or [AUKUS](#) (Australia, the UK, and the U.S.). Both of these forums complement the network of U.S. bilateral alliances, as does U.S. cooperation with ASEAN and APEC. The NSS affirms the value of traditional U.S. military alliances in the region with Australia, Japan, South Korea, as well as with the Philippines and Thailand. At the same time, the NSS is not introducing any new elements into the bilateral relations with Taiwan. Issues of open access to and security of sea lines of communication will be one of the foundations of the “defense partnership” with India. As in the rest of the world, cooperation between the U.S. and Asian countries should cover issues of climate change and other transnational threats.

Comparing the texts of the Obama and Trump editions of the NSS to Biden’s, the latest document reflects more on U.S. policy towards Europe. Transatlantic relations are founded on democratic values, common interests, and historical ties. The U.S. is committed to collective defence through NATO and strengthening the partnership with the EU. The document reconfirms American support for a Europe that is “whole, free, and at peace”—policy implemented since 1991. As regards NATO, it stresses the need to strengthen the conventional potential of the Allies and the [American contribution to the Alliance’s nuclear deterrence mission](#). The NSS also indicates an expectation of growing European defence investments, capabilities, and contributions to the Alliance. The U.S. is supportive of European initiatives complementary to NATO. The document also notes the willingness of the U.S. to seek diplomatic resolutions in the South Caucasus and foster a stable partnership with Turkey. It also mentions the importance of U.S.-EU cooperation in the defence of democracy and human rights, investments, and technologies, and the key role of Europeans within the G-7 for the global economy.

Prospects and Conclusions. The publication of the new NSS was delayed compared with past administrations when traditionally this document is ready in the first year of the new presidency. In comparing the latest NSS with the Trump administration’s document, there is an equally strong accent on the protection of the “American way of life” and U.S.

global influence. On the other hand, Biden’s NSS confirms a full departure from Trump’s “America First” slogan and policy, which created tensions with allies and doubts about U.S. security guarantees. The Biden administration wants to stress the predictability of the American political-military commitment in NATO and the security of Europe. The latest NSS, like earlier Biden administration strategy documents, is signalling the pursuit of a balance in the great power competition and cooperation on global issues. It confirms the vision of policy presented during Biden’s presidential campaign and the text of the INSSG. In other words, it will not surprise U.S. allies from NATO. The de facto priority of Asia with challenges and threats from China has been for more than a decade part of the bipartisan understanding in the U.S. To meet the priorities of the Biden administration, NATO has already adopted [initiatives on climate change and new technologies](#). And when the newest [NATO Strategic Concept, which focuses on threats from Russia and the collective defence mission, is presented](#), the [allies will acknowledge growing challenges from China to the Euro-Atlantic area](#).

The NSS confirms that the Biden administration will continue its unprecedented support for Ukraine until Russia is ensured “strategic failure”, which might be understood in many ways, including a loss of offensive conventional capabilities. The document signals that U.S. allies and partners from Asia should commit to assisting Ukraine, with good examples of this effort from Australia and Japan; however, India remains an important outlier. At the same time, the U.S. is stressing that the engagement of European allies in the Indo-Pacific area may strengthen American security interests. This should be seen as signalling that strengthening regional security may set the background for strategic relations with the U.S. Moreover, the NSS is also clear in its suggestions to NATO allies regarding increased defence budgets and investments in conventional military capabilities, which are very neglected in many European states. Even if the Biden administration has so far not raised these issues in public, it is clear that the current contribution by some Western European allies to deterrence and defence of the Eastern Flank is still disproportionate to the U.S. forces present in the region. The document does not mention Poland, but in the context of its faster military modernisation, the country is in a favourable position within NATO and in bilateral military cooperation with the U.S. Moreover, the NSS is a positive continuation of the American goals in Europe, which are convergent with the interests of Poland. Of crucial importance for bilateral cooperation and NATO’s collective defence is the issue of “integrated deterrence”, which assumes the use of all instruments of civil and military power, as detailed in the classified NDS.