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Deals Over Democracy:

How Trump's Security Strategy

Reshapes US Foreign Policy

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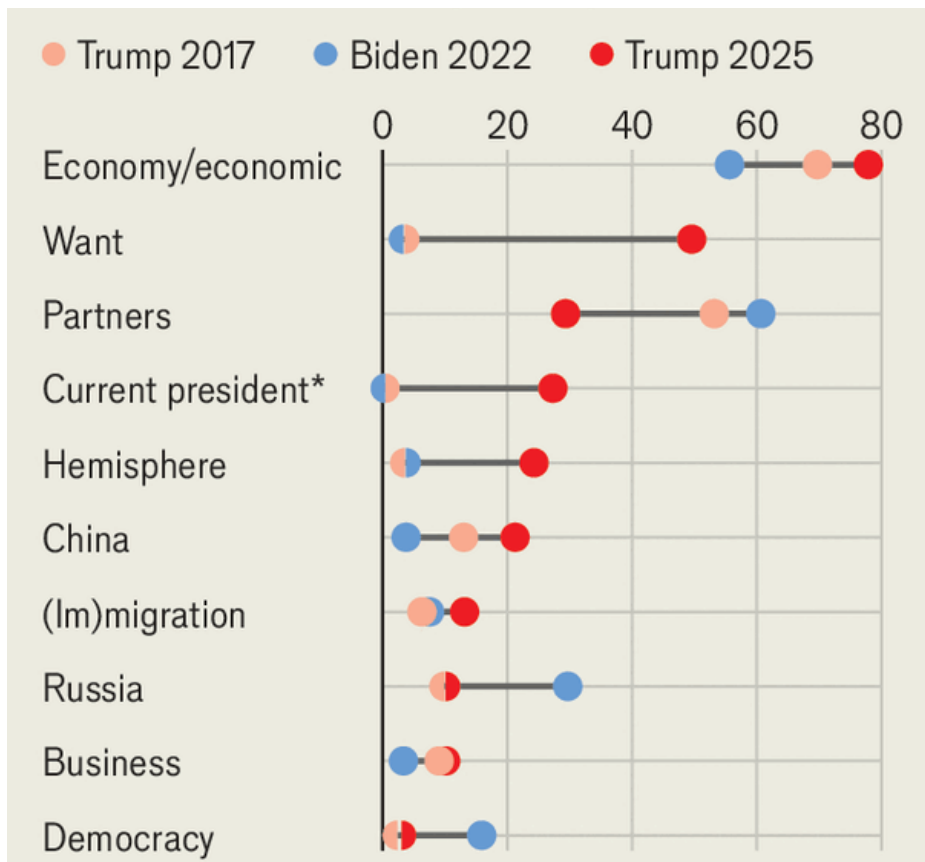
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Executive Summary

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- ✦ The 2025 US National Security Strategy reflects President Trump's worldview, rejecting isolationism while redefining US global engagement around power, economic advantage, and transactional relationships rather than shared democratic values.
- ✦ The strategy places renewed emphasis on the Western Hemisphere, particularly Latin America, framing migration, organised crime, and border control as core security threats.
- ✦ Europe is portrayed as politically unstable and culturally weakened by migration, with the document openly criticising European governments.
- ✦ The approach to Russia avoids assigning responsibility for the war in Ukraine, minimises Moscow's strategic significance, and aligns more closely with Russian narratives.
- ✦ China is no longer framed primarily as an ideological or strategic adversary, with the focus instead placed on economic competition, trade imbalances, and supply chains.
- ✦ The Middle East is described as a declining strategic priority due to reduced US energy dependence and perceived decreases in regional conflict, despite ongoing instability and continued US military involvement tied mainly to Israel's security.

Key Picture: National Security Strategy Document, mentions of selected key terms per 10,000 words



Source: [The Economist](#)

1. Key themes in the New Security Strategy

The White House has unveiled its national security strategy, a report that each US presidential administration publishes to outline its foreign policy goals. Mandated by Congress, the document is generally drafted by a committee, but it is issued under the president's name and often reflects how the sitting commander in chief understands and approaches global affairs. The document suggests that President Trump does not see the US as an isolationist power, but as a country that should remain actively engaged abroad. It presents the US as continuing to hold responsibility for global peace and prosperity, while setting out new priorities for how that role should be carried out. Most notably, it places renewed emphasis on the western hemisphere, with a pledge to restore American dominance in the region. Unlike recent strategies that focused primarily on countering China, the document identifies regional challenges such as **drug cartels and irregular migration** as the main threats facing the US.¹

The document highlights two further themes in Trump's worldview. First, it frames global politics as a struggle to **defend what it calls "western civilisation,"** which it portrays as being threatened by migration, liberal politics, and cultural change. The strategy strongly criticises European governments for their migration policies and treatment of far-right parties, suggesting that the US should play a leading role in protecting a shared US-European civilisational identity. Unlike past strategies that promoted the spread of liberal democracy worldwide, this document rejects that goal as unrealistic and instead focuses narrowly on shaping the future of Europe in line with Trump's own political and cultural views.² This has raised concerns among European allies.³

Second, the strategy places **heavy emphasis on economics,** prioritising industrial reshoring, trade policy, and limiting China's economic rise, while giving relatively little attention to traditional security concerns such as Russia's actions in Europe or Taiwan's democracy. Overall, it presents a highly **transactional approach to foreign policy,** in which economic interests outweigh democratic values, raising concerns among US allies that their security could be sacrificed if closer economic deals with powers such as China or Russia are seen as more profitable.⁴

1.1. Europe and Russia

The new strategy claims that Europe is experiencing "civilisational erasure" due to migration and is being led by "unstable minority governments" that undermine democratic principles to silence opposition. It even proposes **encouraging resistance within European countries** to what it describes as Europe's current direction. The document also specifies the type of resistance it supports, pointing to the **increasing influence of so-called patriotic parties** in Europe, a clear reference to the rise of far-right and anti-immigration movements.⁵

The national security strategy presents the rise of far-right parties in Europe as a positive development and suggests that the US should support opposition to current European policies. It also implies that **improving relations with Russia** is part of the solution to Europe's challenges, echoing views often associated with Russian narratives. The document claims that a majority of Europeans want peace but are being held back by unstable governments, without acknowledging Russia's role in the ongoing war in Ukraine.⁶

The text avoids assigning blame to Russia for the war in Ukraine. At the same time, it downplays Russia's position by presenting it mainly as a country fighting a war that many Europeans see as a serious threat to their security. Russia's desire to be recognised as a global power equal to the US is therefore ignored, and the key source of that claim to power, its nuclear weapons capability, is not mentioned.⁷

1.2. China

As discussed, the 2025 security strategy also marks a clear shift in how it addresses China. Unlike previous strategies that highlighted China as a major geopolitical threat or emphasised concerns about authoritarianism and human rights, the new document focuses almost entirely on **economic competition.** It no longer frames

China as a strategic or ideological rival. This change suggests a narrower focus on trade and commercial interests rather than broader political or security concerns.⁸

It highlights issues in the trade relationship with China, particularly the imbalance in Chinese exports to low-income countries compared to the United States. The document emphasises the need to rebalance this relationship by focusing on fairness and reciprocity to strengthen US economic independence.⁹

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The document also highlights the **risk of China using force to take control of Taiwan**, emphasising the island's importance as a leading producer of advanced computer chips and its strategic location in the Asia Pacific. It explains that control of Taiwan would strengthen China's military reach, improve its access to key maritime routes, and enhance its influence in the South China Sea, which is central to global trade. Consequently, preventing conflict over Taiwan is presented as a major priority, with the US seeking to maintain military superiority in the region while urging its allies to increase defence spending and take on a greater share of responsibility for regional security.¹⁰

1.3. The Middle East

The document argues that the **Middle East is no longer the United States' main strategic focus**, stating that the factors that once made the region central to US policy, such as energy dependence and constant large-scale conflict, have declined. It points to increased US energy production, reduced regional violence, a ceasefire in Gaza, and US military action against Iran's nuclear capabilities as reasons why American attention can shift elsewhere. The strategy presents an **optimistic vision of the region as a future hub** for cooperation and investment, including in advanced technologies, while maintaining strong US military commitments tied largely to Israel's security and an ongoing presence in Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf. However, this outlook contrasts with continued instability on the ground, including persistent Israeli military operations in Gaza and the West Bank, rising tensions in Lebanon, and ongoing violence that suggests the region remains deeply unsettled despite official claims of improvement.¹¹

1.4. Latin America

In relation to Latin America, the new strategy outlines an assertive approach that **seeks to re-establish clear US dominance across the region**. It places migration, organised crime, and border control at the centre of US engagement, proposing expanded military and naval deployments, targeted operations against criminal networks, and closer cooperation with selected regional governments. The strategy also stresses the importance of securing access to energy, mineral resources, supply chains, and key geographic locations, signalling a willingness to use American economic and military power to protect these interests.¹²

At the same time, the strategy reflects a **shift away from partnership-based policies toward a more coercive model**. Critics argue that it risks treating complex social and economic challenges, particularly migration, as primarily security threats, while offering limited attention to development, diplomacy, or regional stability. This approach departs from earlier US efforts that relied more on investment and negotiated cooperation.¹³

As a follow-up to this strategy, the focus on Venezuela reflects a broader revival of an interventionist approach to Latin America rooted in renewed claims of **US primacy in the Western Hemisphere**. Venezuela stands out because of its large oil reserves, strategic Caribbean coastline, and growing ties with rival powers, particularly China, which the strategy treats as unacceptable encroachment in the region. Within an explicitly transactional and power-driven framework, US actions prioritise control over resources, sea lanes, and political alignment rather than legal norms or democratic principles, rewarding compliant actors while punishing those seen as obstacles. The result is a fragmented regional response, with Latin American governments forced into bilateral dealings with the US, reinforcing a long-standing pattern in which the region is treated as a sphere of influence subject to coercion rather than collective diplomacy.¹⁴

2. Historical Comparison

The Trump administration's 2025 National Security Strategy stands out from previous US strategies in both tone and focus. While such documents typically outline threats posed by adversaries and describe how the US should address them, this one is notably more critical of traditional allies than of rivals. It strongly criticises Europe, claiming that certain domestic policies there are harming democracy and threatening its cultural foundations. In contrast, it offers minimal attention to challenges from China, Russia, Iran, or North Korea.¹⁵

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Trump's 2017 and 2025 national security strategies differ sharply, reflecting major changes in both personnel and priorities. The 2017 strategy focused on competition with Russia and China, seeking to balance US values with global power realities shaped through internal debate and the involvement of experienced officials and the broader bureaucracy. By contrast, the 2025 strategy emphasises **commercial interests and accommodation with authoritarian powers**, driven by a cabinet of loyalists with little internal resistance and a weakened bureaucracy. It displays clear **scepticism toward Europe**, downplays the importance of transatlantic ties, and prioritises practical deals and power over shared values, while promoting coexistence among major powers through non-interference. Despite closely aligning with Trump's personal outlook, the strategy contains unresolved tensions and internal inconsistencies that may limit its coherence and effectiveness.¹⁶

NOTES

¹ Andrew Gawthorpe, “What the US national security strategy tells us about how Trump views the world”. The Conversation, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://theconversation.com/what-the-us-national-security-strategy-tells-us-about-how-trump-views-the-world-271438>.

² Ibid.

³ Laurel Rapp, “Trump’s new national security strategy: Cut deals, hammer Europe, and tread gently around autocrats”. Chatham House, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/12/trumps-new-national-security-strategy-cut-deals-hammer-europe-and-tread-gently-around>.

⁴ Andrew Gawthorpe, “What the US national security strategy tells us about how Trump views the world”. The Conversation.

⁵ Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, “Trump’s new National Security Strategy picks a side. Hint: it’s not Europe’s”, *Monocle*, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://monocle.com/affairs/trumps-new-national-security-strategy-picks-a-side-hint-its-not-europes/>.

⁶ Carl Bildt, “Reading Trump’s National Security Strategy: Europe through a distorted lens”, European Council of Foreign Relations, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://ecfr.eu/article/reading-trumps-national-security-strategy-europe-through-a-distorted-lens/>.

⁷ Scott R. Anderson et al., “Breaking down Trump’s 2025 National Security Strategy”, Brookings, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/breaking-down-trumps-2025-national-security-strategy/>.

⁸ Jessie Yeung and Mike Valerio, “Trump’s security strategy is making a hard pivot on China. Why now?”, CNN, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/12/11/china/trump-national-security-strategy-china-taiwan-intl-hnk>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ali Harb, “Five key takeaways from Trump’s National Security Strategy”, Al Jazeera, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/5/five-key-takeaways-from-trumps-national-security>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Mariano Aguirre Ernst, “The ‘Trump Corollary’ in the US security strategy brings a new focus on Latin America – but it is a disordered plan”, Chatham House, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/12/trump-corollary-us-security-strategy-brings-new-focus-latin-america-it-disordered-plan>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Juan Zahir Naranjo Cáceres and Shannon Brincat, “Why is Trump so obsessed with Venezuela? His new security strategy provides some clues”, The Conversation, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://theconversation.com/why-is-trump-so-obsessed-with-venezuela-his-new-security-strategy-provides-some-clues-271530>.

¹⁵ Rebecca Heinrichs, “What Trump’s National Security Strategy Gets Right”, *Foreign Affairs*, accessed 15 December 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/what-trumps-national-security-strategy-gets-right>.

¹⁶ Laurel Rapp, “Trump’s new national security strategy: Cut deals, hammer Europe, and tread gently around autocrats”. Chatham House.