



US' National Security Strategy: A Russian Overview

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US President Donald Trump's address on the country's National Security Strategy (NSS) on 19 December has not been received well by Russia. In the speech, there was explicit mention of Russia and, at the same time, there were many places where without singling out Moscow, there were issues indicating a non-conducive relationship between Russia and the US.

The first reaction from the Russian side came on 19 December where the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the NSS was of an imperialist character and gives an impression that America was unwilling to give up the idea of a unipolar world. Russian President Vladimir Putin reacted to the document by saying that the NSS was aggressive and offensive. The relationship between Russia and the US has faced challenges since the Soviet Union period. However, leaders from both sides had tried to cooperate with each other. But, due to the basic issue i.e. their competition to dominate the world order at the core of their relationship, makes genuine cooperation with each other difficult.

This paper examines the areas of concerns that the NSS has raised in regard to Russia. It also points out the places where without mentioning Russia directly, one can grasp the US' attitude towards Moscow. This paper addresses these issues from Russia's perspective.

The 2017 US' National Security Strategy¹

Issues	Remarks on Russia (Direct and Indirect) in the NSS Text
World Order	<p>We learned the difficult lesson that when America does not lead, malign actors fill the void to the disadvantage of the United States.</p> <p>American principles are a lasting force for good in the world. Russia aims to weaken the US influence in the world and divide us from our allies and partners.</p> <p>After being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, great power competition returned. China and Russia began to reassert their influence regionally and globally. Today, they are fielding military capabilities designed to deny America access in times of crisis and to contest our ability to operate freely in critical commercial zones during peacetime. In short, they are contesting our geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favour.</p> <p>Moreover, deterrence today is significantly more complex to achieve than during the Cold War. Adversaries studied the American way of war and began investing in capabilities that targeted our strengths and sought to exploit perceived weaknesses.</p> <p>The United States must prepare for this type of competition. China, Russia, and other state and non-state actors recognize that the United States often views the world in binary terms, with states being either “at peace” or “at war,” when it is actually an arena of continuous competition.</p> <p>Overmatch (military) strengthens our diplomacy and permits us to shape the international environment to protect our interests.</p>
National Security	<p>US President Donald Trump said that “Rival powers were aggressively undermining American interests around the globe.”</p> <p>China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence.</p> <p>Three main sets of challengers—the revisionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and transnational threat organizations, particularly jihadist terrorist groups—are actively competing against the United States and our allies and partners. These are fundamentally political contests between those who favour</p>

	<p>repressive systems and those who favour free societies.</p> <p>China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests. Russia seeks to restore its great power status and establish spheres of influence near its borders. The intentions of both nations (Russia and China) are not necessarily fixed.</p>
Democracy	<p>The United States was born of a desire for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—and a conviction that <i>unaccountable</i> political power is tyranny.</p>
Militarization/Defence Capabilities	<p>America’s military remains the strongest in the world. However, US advantages are shrinking as rival states modernize and build up their conventional and nuclear forces.</p> <p>Many actors have become skilled at operating below the threshold of military conflict—challenging the United States, our allies, and our partners with hostile actions cloaked in deniability.</p> <p>We will preserve peace through strength by rebuilding our military so that it remains preeminent, deters our adversaries, and if necessary, is able to fight and win. We will compete with all tools of national power to ensure that regions of the world are not dominated by one power.</p> <p>China and Russia are developing advanced weapons and capabilities that could threaten our critical infrastructure and our command and control architecture. Enhanced missile defense is not intended to undermine strategic stability or disrupt longstanding strategic relationships with Russia or China.</p> <p>Russia is investing in new military capabilities, including nuclear systems that remain the most significant existential threat to the United States, and in destabilizing cyber capabilities.</p> <p>Ensuring that the U.S. military can defeat our adversaries requires weapon systems that clearly overmatch theirs in lethality.</p>
Mass Destruction Weapons/ Nuclear Deterrence	<p>The United States does not need to match the nuclear arsenals of other powers, but we must sustain a stockpile that can deter adversaries, assure allies and partners, and achieve US objectives if deterrence fails.</p> <p>Nuclear weapons have served a vital purpose in America’s National Security Strategy for the past 70 years. They are the foundation of our strategy to preserve peace and stability by deterring aggression against the United States, our allies, and our partners.</p> <p>Following the Cold War, the United States reduced investments in our nuclear enterprise and reduced the role of nuclear weapons in our</p>

	<p>strategy. At the same time, however, nuclear-armed adversaries have expanded their arsenals and range of delivery systems. The United States must maintain the credible deterrence and assurance capabilities provided by our nuclear Triad and by U.S. theatre nuclear capabilities deployed abroad.</p>
<p>NATO/EU</p>	<p>Russia views the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU) as threats.</p> <p>We will work with NATO to improve its integrated air and missile defence capabilities to counter existing and projected ballistic and cruise missile threats, particularly from Iran.</p>
<p>Cyber Security/Information</p>	<p>Rival actors use propaganda and other means to try to discredit democracy. They advance anti-Western views and spread false information to create divisions among ourselves, our allies, and our partners.</p> <p>First, our fundamental responsibility is to protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life. We will protect our critical infrastructure and go after malicious cyber actors.</p> <p>Adversaries target sources of American strength, including our democratic system and our economy. They steal and exploit our intellectual property and personal data, interfere in our political processes, target our aviation and maritime sectors, and hold our critical infrastructure at risk.</p> <p>Today, cyberspace offers state and non-state actors the ability to wage campaigns against American political, economic, and security interests without ever physically crossing our borders. Cyber attacks offer adversaries low-cost and deniable opportunities to seriously damage or disrupt critical infrastructure, cripple American businesses, weaken our federal networks and attack the tools and devices that Americans use every day to communicate and conduct business.</p> <p>The United States will impose swift and costly consequences on foreign governments, criminals, and other actors who undertake significant malicious cyber activities.</p> <p>Through modernized forms of subversive tactics, Russia interferes in the domestic political affairs of countries around the world.</p> <p>Russia uses information operations as part of its offensive cyber efforts to influence public opinion across the globe. Its influence campaigns blend covert intelligence operations and false online personas with state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or “trolls.”</p>

Economy/Economic Institutions	<p>American prosperity and security are challenged by an economic competition playing out in a broader strategic context.</p> <p>China and Russia target their investments in the developing world to expand influence and gain competitive advantages against the United States. Russia projects its influence economically, through the control of key energy and other infrastructure throughout parts of Europe and Central Asia.</p>
Sanctions	<p>Economic tools—including sanctions, anti-money-laundering and anti-corruption measures, and enforcement actions—can be important parts of broader strategies to deter, coerce, and constrain adversaries.</p>
Energy	<p>For the first time in generations, the United States will be an energy-dominant nation.</p> <p>As a growing supplier of energy resources, technologies, and services around the world, the United States will help our allies and partners become more resilient against those that use energy to coerce.</p> <p>The United States will support the diversification of energy sources, supplies, and routes at home and abroad.</p> <p>We will improve America’s technological edge in energy, including nuclear technology, next-generation nuclear reactors.</p>
Science and Technology	<p>To retain US advantages over our competitors, US government agencies must improve their understanding of worldwide S&T trends and how they are likely to influence— or undermine—American strategies and programs.</p>
Terrorism	<p>We crushed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorists on the battlefields of Syria and Iraq, and will continue pursuing them until they are destroyed.</p> <p>The United States also works with allies and partners to deter and disrupt other foreign terrorist groups that threaten the homeland—including Iranian-backed groups such as Lebanese Hezbollah.</p>
Space	<p>The United States must maintain our leadership and freedom of action in space.</p> <p>Others believe that the ability to attack space assets offers an asymmetric advantage and as a result, are pursuing a range of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons.</p>

<p>Other Issues</p>	<p><i>Eurasia</i> The combination of Russian ambition and growing military capabilities creates an unstable frontier in Eurasia, where the risk of conflict due to Russian miscalculation is growing.</p> <p><i>Europe</i> Although the menace of Soviet communism is gone, new threats test our will. Russia is using subversive measures to weaken the credibility of America’s commitment to Europe, undermine trans-Atlantic unity, and weaken European institutions and governments. With its invasions of Georgia and Ukraine, Russia demonstrated its willingness to violate the sovereignty of states</p> <p>in the region. Russia continues to intimidate its neighbours with threatening behaviour, such as nuclear posturing and the forward deployment of offensive capabilities. The United States will deepen collaboration with our European allies and partners to confront forces threatening to undermine our common values, security interests, and shared vision. The United States and Europe will work together to counter Russian subversion and aggression.</p> <p><i>Contest for Power</i> The contests over influence are timeless. Geopolitics is the interplay of these contests across the globe. But some conditions are new, and have changed how these competitions are unfolding. We face simultaneous threats from different actors across multiple arenas—all accelerated by technology.</p> <p>Authoritarian states are eager to replace the United States where the United States withdraws our diplomats and closes our outposts.</p> <p>During the Cold War, a totalitarian threat from the Soviet Union motivated the free world to create coalitions in defence of liberty. Today’s challenges to free societies are just as serious, but more diverse. State and non-state actors project influence and advance their objectives by exploiting information, democratic media freedoms, and international institutions. Repressive leaders often collaborate to subvert free societies and corrupt multilateral organizations.</p> <p><i>Value-Based System</i> We will continue to champion American values and offer encouragement to those struggling for human dignity in their societies. There can be no moral equivalency between nations that uphold the rule of law, empower women, and respect individual rights and those that brutalize and suppress their people. Through our words and deeds, America demonstrates a positive alternative to political and religious</p>
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	<p>despotism.</p> <p>Latin America Russia continues its failed politics of the Cold War by bolstering its radical Cuban allies as Cuba continues to repress its citizens. Both China and Russia support the dictatorship in Venezuela and are seeking to expand military linkages and arms sales across the region.</p>
<p>Optimism to work with Russia</p>	<p>Competition does not always mean hostility, nor does it inevitably lead to conflict—although none should doubt our commitment to defend our interests. An America that successfully competes is the best way to prevent conflict. Just as American weakness invites challenge, American strength and confidence deters war and promotes peace.</p> <p>Value-Based System Strategy of principled realism that is guided by outcomes, not ideology. We are also realistic and understand that the American way of life cannot be imposed upon others, nor is it the inevitable culmination of progress.</p> <p>Terrorism and other Crimes Even after the territorial defeat of ISIS and Al-Qaida in Syria and Iraq, the threat from jihadist terrorists will persist. They have used battlefields as test beds of terror and have exported tools and tactics to their followers. Many of these jihadist terrorists are likely to return to their home countries, from which they can continue to plot and launch attacks on the United States and our allies. US agencies and foreign partners will target transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) leaders and their support infrastructure.</p> <p>Bilateral Relations The United States stands ready to cooperate across areas of mutual interest with both countries.</p> <p>Nuclear Threats and Weapons To avoid miscalculation, the United States will conduct discussions with other states to build predictable relationships and reduce nuclear risks. We will consider new arms control arrangements if they contribute to strategic stability and if they are verifiable.</p> <p>Syria We will seek a settlement to the Syrian civil war that sets the conditions for refugees to return home and rebuild their lives in safe.</p>

Assessment

The NSS text highlights that America's problems with Moscow encompass all sectors—political, economic, defence and social – and extends across bilateral, regional and global levels. Given the tensed relationship between the two countries, one might be misled by the number of times Russia has been mentioned in the text.

In the text, Russia has been directly mentioned 19 times both accusatory as well as conciliatory. However, the number of times mentioned does not signify much. In the 1999 US NSS, Russia features 46 times, which spoke about the establishment of a working relationship between both the countries in every field post-Cold War. The nature of the language defining Russia in the later texts such as of 2000, 2001 and 2002 goes from a cautionary, trust building to a friendly, positive and trustworthy relationship by 2006². In the 2010 text, the focus was to build a stable, substantive and multidimensional relationship.

The language of the text changes in 2015 where it was antagonistic given the deterioration of the relationship between Russia and the US. In the 2017 one, in many sections, Russia has been alluded to in discussions at length. The number of direct and indirect mentions of Moscow underscores the importance of the ex-superpower in the context of US' national interests. The tone is confrontational yet at the same time a window to work together in the common areas was also kept open.

Russia's Reaction to the NSS

Russia's President Putin reacted to the document by saying that the NSS is offensive and aggressive from a military perspective. He said that the building of defensive structures, including the deployment of the missile defence system, by the US and Europe is offensive in nature. The violation of the 1987 Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles by the US is also not appreciated by Russia. Speaking at a Russian defense ministry meeting, President Putin on 22 December 2017 said that Russia should take into account the Western military strategies.³ He added that Russia has a sovereign right and all possibilities to adequately and in due time react to such potential threats. If necessary, the defence personnel were asked to submit feasible proposals on adjustments of documents of military planning and on promotion of the country's defense level.⁴

Russia has been vocal in expressing its dissatisfaction against US' unipolarity. At his annual press conference on 15 January 2018, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the US should realise that it is no longer the world's only superpower and should adapt to an increasingly multipolar world.

Both the countries see each other as adversaries trying to undermine the national security of the other. In the 2017 NSS, the US accuses Russia of undermining its security interests. Likewise, Russia too in its National Security Strategy, which was published in December 2015, states that the US and its allies are hampering Russia's independent foreign policy. The then head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States, Joseph Dunford said that Washington is afraid of

the capabilities of the Russian Federation.⁵ Hence, this fear of each other's national security being undermined poses dangers not only to both the countries but also to the world. Being the ex-superpowers they have not been able to let go competition of the Cold War period and the strategies of that time of creating camps and increasing their military hardware. One may argue that there are no remnants of that era because the 21st century is the world of multi-polarity. But the behaviour or actions of Russia and the US and the support of other countries to these two ex-superpowers sometimes highlights the contrary, thereby revealing remnants of that legacy. The difference at present is that the two countries work explicitly on the basis of national priorities and strategic partnership and not on ideology⁶. During the Cold War time too, countries had their national interests and priorities although they were marked by the capitalism and communism divide.

Since the time President Trump took office, there was positivity on ironing out the issues between Russia and the US. However, allegations about Russian interference in the US presidential elections that led to the election of President Trump have made it difficult for the American president to restore good relations with Russia⁷. The Kremlin believes that the US president is forced to make anti-Russian decisions under pressure of his national political opponents. It will be difficult for any leader in both the countries to cooperate in all sectors in an equal manner because of the inherent competition to be the sole superpower and dominate the other. The legacy of the Cold War which Russia and the US still carry makes it difficult to arrive at a basis for cooperation. There is a denial of the current Cold War because of the changing dynamics in the international order as there are other major players who have their influence. However, the behaviour and actions of Russia and the US in regard to each other or in the world cannot be ignored as it reflects their rivalry during the time of the Cold War such as in the case of Syria, Ukraine, North Korea, Iran and Afghanistan.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.

Endnotes

¹“National Security Strategy of the United States of America”, *The White House*, December 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> (Accessed on December 26, 2017).

²The years where US NSS was not produced—2003 to 2005, 2007-2009, 2011-2014 and 2016.

³“**Putin: New US national security strategy is offensive & aggressive, Russia must take note**”, *RT*, December 22, 2018. <https://www.rt.com/news/413961-putin-us-defense-strategy/> (Accessed on March 11, 2018).

⁴“**Putin stresses Russia has right to respond to US military buildup in Europe**”, *TASS*, December 22, 2017. <http://tass.com/defense/982544> (Accessed on March 10, 2018).

⁵US clarified to Russia that it did not see Russia as a threat in spite of the lack of agreement on a number of issues. “**Pentagon: Russia should not consider the US a threat**”, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, May 1, 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/01/05/pentagon-site-anons.html> (Accessed on January 10, 2017).

⁶For an example, Turkey a NATO ally since the Cold War times has come close to Russia rather than the US—though this may well be tactical and not strategic.

⁷Russia has faced this kind of situation of US' extension of friendship turning into an unpleasant and bitter affair under many American presidents such as former presidents George Bush Jr. and Barack Obama.