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Opinion
Paper



110/2025 10/12/2025

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From liberal hegemony to a doctrinal America First

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Abstract:

The 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) marks a turning point in U.S. strategic thinking. Although it maintains great-power competition with China as its central axis, the document reinterprets the notion of national security through sovereignist, identity-based, and geoeconomic frameworks that break with the liberal imaginary that has shaped U.S. strategy since the end of the Cold War. The NSS 2025 not only redefines priorities but also reflects the rise of a national-conservative coalition that has successfully translated its ideological preferences into state strategy. From a neoclassical realist perspective, the NSS illustrates how similar international conditions can generate different strategic responses depending on the ideas and actors that dominate foreign-policy formulation. This Opinion Paper analyses the political and intellectual antecedents of the strategy, examines its doctrinal and regional innovations, and assesses its reception among allies and rivals, as well as its broader implications for Europe and for the international order.

Keywords:

National *Security Strategy – United States – China – liberal international order – Trump – defence.*

How to cite this document:

COLOM-PIELLA, Guillem. *From liberal hegemony to a doctrinal America First*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 110/2025. enlace web IEEE y/o enlace bie[3] (consultado día/mes/año)

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Introduction

The National Security Strategies (NSS) of the United States are the highest-level doctrinal instrument within the country's strategic architecture. Since the passage of the Goldwater–Nichols Act of 1986, the White House has been legally required to submit to Congress, on a regular basis, a strategy that defines the ends it seeks to achieve, the means at its disposal, and the ways through which Washington intends to defend its national interests[1]. By virtue of their scope and ambition, NSS documents constitute the framework upon which second-order strategies – most notably the National Defense Strategy (NDS) – are built, guiding resource allocation and public policy in the fields of national security and defense[2].

Read as a series – from the first NSS in 1987 to those of 2017 and 2022 – these documents function as a kind of "strategic seismograph" that allows us to trace the evolution of U.S. strategic thought: from the liberal optimism of the 1990s, to the global war on terrorism after 9/11, and eventually to the return of great-power competition beginning in 2017[3].

Within this context, the 2025 National Security Strategy, published by the second Trump administration on 5 December, warrants particular attention[4]. It is a very brief yet highly political document that breaks with the technocratic tone of previous strategies, presenting instead a profoundly sovereigntist, civilizational, and revisionist vision of the role of the United States in the world. If the 2017 NSS reintroduced the logic of great-power competition, and the 2022 NSS reinforced the notion of a "decisive decade" between democracies and autocracies, the 2025 NSS departs significantly from the

[1] It is possible to find all National Security Strategies – with the sole exception of the 2022 document, which remained in effect de facto until last Friday – at the following webpage: Historical Office of the Secretary of War (n.d.). *National Security Strategy (NSS)*, available at: https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy

[2] In practice, however, not all administrations have adhered to the expected timetable, and the actual frequency of publication has been irregular. This reinforces the notion that each NSS should be read as a political and doctrinal milestone, rather than as a simple routine exercise.

[3] G. Colom-Piella, "Cambio y continuidad en el pensamiento estratégico estadounidense desde el final de la Guerra Fría", *Revista de Ciencia Política*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2013), pp. 675–692, 2013. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2013000300005

[4] The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2025. Available at : https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf

imaginary of the liberal international order and embraces a doctrinalized America First approach: a project that blends geopolitical realism, economic nationalism, and cultural identity, redefining both U.S. foreign-policy priorities and the very concept of national security.

Taking these elements into account, the aim of this Opinion Paper is to contextualize and analyze the strategy from a two-fold perspective. First, by reconstructing its political and intellectual antecedents: the 2017 and 2022 NSS documents, the *Project 2025* program of the Heritage Foundation, the *Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance* (INDSG) of March 2025, and the doctrinal influence of Elbridge Colby and his proposal for a denial strategy. Second, by examining the content of the 2025 NSS – its hierarchy of interests and theaters, its treatment of the Indo-Pacific and Europe, and its global implications – within the broader theoretical debates on neoclassical realism, liberal hegemony, and great-power competition.

1. Background: from America First to strategic reconfiguration (2017–25)

National Security Strategies do not emerge in a vacuum. Each NSS is the outcome of a political and doctrinal process in which ideas, interests, coalitions, and bureaucracies intersect, shaping which threats are prioritized, which regions are privileged, and which instruments of national power are mobilized. The 2025 NSS is no exception: it represents the culmination of a cycle initiated in 2017 under the first Trump administration, reformulated by Biden in 2022, and pushed forward with unprecedented clarity by the political and intellectual ecosystem surrounding *Project 2025*.

The 2017 NSS marked a significant conceptual rupture with previous documents. It was the first strategy since the end of the Cold War to state explicitly that the United States had entered a phase of strategic competition with China and Russia[5]. It rejected the liberal optimism of the 1990s and called for a return to realist fundamentals: power, interests, and great-power rivalry. It also introduced two themes that would reappear in 2025: criticism of European allies' free-riding and the need to rebuild the U.S. defense industrial base.

[5] J. M. Weaver, "The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States", *Journal of Strategic Security*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2018), pp. 62-71. Available at: http://www.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.11.1.1655.

The 2022 NSS, drafted by the Biden administration (2021–25), sought to restore the liberal framework, defining the moment as a *"decisive decade"* in which democracies needed to coordinate to contain authoritarian revisionism, manage China's rise, strengthen global governance, and invest in domestic resilience[6]. It articulated renewed alliances (such as NATO, AUKUS, and the Quad), attempted to reconcile great-power competition with the promotion and protection of global public goods (*global commons*), and was clearly situated within the tradition of liberal hegemony.

Against this backdrop, the 2025 NSS represents a frontal break. It relegates democracy promotion, questions the utility of multilateral institutions, and replaces liberal-universalist vocabulary with a sovereigntist, civilizational, and identity-based lexicon.

A second key element is Project 2025, an initiative led by the Heritage Foundation to provide a fully developed governing program for a conservative administration[7]. Its central document – *Mandate for Leadership 2025: The Conservative Promise*[8] – offers detailed reforms for all executive departments, including defense, national security, and strategic industry. In foreign and defense policy, it recommends designating China as the principal threat, re-centering the Western Hemisphere, tightening political control over the federal bureaucracy, strengthening the technological-industrial base of defense, and undertaking a deep revision of nuclear posture and energy policy. Much of the rhetoric and many of the priorities of the 2025 NSS – from its diagnosis of Europe's "civilizational decline" to its emphasis on reindustrialization, border control, and hemispheric primacy – closely mirror this program.

The third factor is the INDSG, signed by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth in March 2025[9]. Leaked to the press, this classified document functioned as an operational prequel

[6] S. Hamid et al., "Around the Halls: Assessing the 2022 National Security Strategy", *Brookings Institution*, 2022. Available at : https://www.brookings.edu/articles/around-the-halls-assessing-the-2022-national-security-strategy

[7] Although presented as a novelty, this document is part of a series of programmatic works produced by the Heritage Foundation since 1981. From Reagan to Trump, the various *Mandates for Leadership* have influenced Republican administrations to varying degrees.

[8] The Heritage Foundation, *Mandate for Leadership 2025: The Conservative Promise*, Washington DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2023. Available at: https://static.heritage.org/project2025/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf

[9] Signed by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth in March 2025, the INDSG is an internal document intended to provide, in the early phase of an administration, provisional guidance for defense and military planning until the approval of the National Defense Strategy (NDS). What makes the 2025 INDSG distinctive is twofold: first, its unusually explicit formulation of China as a threat; and second, the fact that several of the paragraphs leaked to the press reproduced verbatim formulations from Project 2025 (A. Horton and H. Natanson, "Secret Pentagon memo on China, homeland has Heritage fingerprints," *The Washington*

to the NSS: it clarified the hierarchy of threats and theaters to which the joint force should adapt, and codified the worldview of Project 2025. It designated China as the *"sole pacing threat"* and a Chinese attack on Taiwan as the *"sole pacing scenario"*, reinforced the defense of the U.S. homeland against migration, fentanyl, and hybrid threats, and explicitly accepted the need to assume greater risk in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa[10].

The fourth component is doctrinal. Since 2021, Elbridge Colby's book *The Strategy of Denial*[11] has become a central reference in Republican strategic circles[12]. Colby – currently serving as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy – argues that the primary objective of U.S. grand strategy must be to prevent China from achieving regional hegemony in Asia, and that the key is to adopt a military posture capable of denying a rapid *fait accompli* against Taiwan or the first island chain. To this end, he proposes prioritizing the Indo-Pacific, developing lethal, mobile, resilient forces, shifting more burdens to allies – especially Europeans – and redirecting the U.S. defense industrial base toward long-range, undersea, and unmanned capabilities[13].

Post, 29 March 2025. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/03/29/secret-pentagon-memo-hegseth-heritage-foundation-china).

[10] C. Starling-Daniels y T. Luetkefend, "Questions Congress should ask about DOD 'peace through strength' plan", *Defense News*, 16 April 2025. Available at: https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/2025/04/16/questions-congress-should-ask-about-dod-peace-through-strength-plan/

[11] E. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

[12] However, Washington's policy toward Iran shows that Colby's approach is neither the only one nor always the one that prevails in decision-making. In the debates surrounding the U.S. and Israeli strikes against Iran in 2025, several analyses note that the prioritiser camp associated with Colby sought – unsuccessfully – to limit the diversion of resources toward the Middle East in the face of more interventionist factions.

[13] Many of the ideas that Colby systematizes in this work are not new; rather, they form part of a long-standing continuity in U.S. grand strategy. From a realist perspective, authors such as John Mearsheimer have long argued that the objective of the United States is to prevent the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia – including East Asia – to avoid the rise of a peer competitor. This logic was already present in the Obama administration's *pivot to Asia*, which conceptualized the Indo-Pacific as a priority theater for managing China's ascent through a combination of diplomacy, forward military presence, and force rebalancing. Likewise, debates surrounding AirSea Battle or the response to China's A2/AD capabilities had already pointed – nearly a decade before Colby's book – to the need to reinforce long-range strike, penetration, advanced ISR, submarine platforms, and uncrewed systems to frustrate a potential Chinese *fait accompli* in the Western Pacific. In this sense, Colby did not invent either the priority or the capabilities; he condensed and organized them into a coherent framework that is particularly attractive to the current Republican coalition.

2. Analysis of the 2025 National Security Strategy

The 2025 NSS is a singular document within the U.S. strategic tradition. Rather than a technocratic exercise, it functions as a political–strategic declaration that seeks to redefine what national security is and what role the United States should play in the international order. At just 33 pages, its conceptual density is striking: it does not merely describe threats or identify priorities, but reformulates ends, ways, and means through a lens shaped by national conservatism and the America First worldview[14].

The text opens by distinguishing between what the United States wants "for itself" and what it wants "from the world". For itself, the strategy asserts that the country must preserve the survival of the republic, its "God-given natural rights," economic prosperity, and – here a significant innovation – the "cultural and spiritual health" of the nation. This identity-focused emphasis, which elevates immigration, demographic change, and cultural transformation to the level of strategic challenges, brings the NSS closer to approaches rooted in ontological security, which integrate collective identity into the definition of security[15].

Regarding the world, the NSS identifies five major vital interests: ensuring U.S. primacy in the Western Hemisphere; guaranteeing a free and open Indo-Pacific, with particular attention to the status quo around Taiwan; promoting a "free and secure" Europe, though reinterpreted through civilizational categories; preventing hostile hegemonies in the Middle East; and consolidating a global technological order governed by U.S. standards, especially in artificial intelligence, cyberspace, biotechnology, and outer space[16]. Notably absent are central references to democracy promotion, human rights, or multilateral governance, pillars of the postwar liberal international order.

[14] C. Villanueva, "*Análisis* de la nueva Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional 2025 de los Estados Unidos," *Revista Ejércitos*, 5 December 2025. Available at: https://www.revistaejercitos.com/articulos/analisis-de-la-nueva-estrategia-de-seguridad-nacional-2025-de-los-estados-unidos

[15] In general terms, ontological security refers to the need of an actor – including the state – to maintain a coherent and stable identity over time, enabling it to interpret the world and make decisions without falling into existential anxiety (B. J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State*. London: Routledge, 2008).

[16] E. Harding, "The National Security Strategy: The Good, the Not So Great, and the Alarm Bells", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Washington DC, 5 December 2025. Available at: https://www.csis.org/analysis/national-security-strategy-good-not-so-great-and-alarm-bells

As for the means, the NSS acknowledges the traditional pillars of American power – a dynamic economy, technological superiority, advanced armed forces, and a privileged geostrategic position – but assigns particular prominence to three vectors. First, reindustrialization: the strategy insists that there can be no military power or technological competitiveness without a robust, autonomous industrial base, in line with the literature on geoeconomics and state capacity[17]. Second, technological power, framed as the principal arena of 21st Century strategic competition. And third, factors such as cultural cohesion, demographic vitality, and border control, which are recast as strategic means rather than merely domestic policies.

The NSS also articulates a set of guiding principles that function as an implicit doctrine. Every decision must be evaluated according to a simple rule: whether it makes the United States "stronger, richer, and safer". This criterion recalls the Jacksonian tradition described by Walter Russell Mead, in which support for foreign ventures depends on their direct utility for the nation and with which Donald Trump explicitly identified[18]. Mead also highlights the link between the domestic identity of the "Jacksonian community" and the code of honor the United States adopts abroad – and identifies Jacksonianism as the strand of U.S. foreign policy closest to continental European realism.

The strategy further reaffirms the maxim "Peace through Strength", but in expanded form: strength is no longer solely military, but also energy-based, industrial, and cultural. It elevates national sovereignty as the supreme norm, exhibits deep skepticism toward international organizations, and advocates flexible, ad hoc cooperation with non-democratic regimes when interests converge.

At the same time, the 2025 NSS seeks to distance itself from the cycle of forever wars that defined the first decades of the 21st Century, stressing the need to prevent regional conflicts before they escalate and highlighting diplomacy and crisis management as central tools in scenarios such as Gaza, Ukraine, or the Sahel. Yet this rhetoric of

[17] Precisely, the literature on geoeconomics conceives industrial, technological, and financial policy as central instruments of state power (R. D. Blackwill and J. M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[18] W. R. Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*. Nueva York: Knopf, 2001, and J. Tovar Ruiz, "La doctrina Trump en política exterior: fundamentos rupturas y continuidades", *Revista CIDOB d´Afers Internacionals*, nºo.120 (2018), pp. 268-269.

prevention coexists with a highly competitive conception of the international order and an intensive reliance on economic and military coercion.

The treatment of alliances is perhaps one of the most contentious points. The NSS reaffirms the value of NATO and U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific, but introduces a dual conditionality: it demands a much stricter burden-sharing – citing defense-spending targets approaching 5 percent of GDP for some European allies – and suggests that Washington's support will also depend on ideological alignment with the administration's national-conservative agenda[19].

The regional organization of the strategy reflects a hierarchy distinct from previous administrations: the Western Hemisphere becomes the absolute priority; the Indo-Pacific remains the decisive theater but is subordinated to the defense of the "extended homeland"; Europe is treated primarily as a cultural space at risk rather than as a strategic actor; and the Middle East and Africa are placed in a secondary position, where minimal stability and geoeconomic competition take precedence[20].

In sum, the 2025 NSS redefines national security as the defense of sovereignty, identity, and internal cohesion, articulating a deeply political and cultural vision of security. From a neoclassical realist perspective, this strategy illustrates how a single international environment – the competition with China and the crisis of the liberal international order – can generate different strategic responses depending on who governs and which ideas and coalitions dominate in Washington.

3. Indo-Pacific, China containment, and the logic of the "Strategy of Denial"

Although the 2025 NSS places the Western Hemisphere at the top of its priorities, it acknowledges that the Indo-Pacific remains the decisive theater of the 21st Century,

[19] M. Price. "Trump's security strategy slams European allies and asserts US power in the Western Hemisphere", *Associated Press*, 5 December 2025. Available at: https://apnews.com/article/trump-security-strategy-europe-russia-america-first-068488ca7e6d1c92ccaddd1649958218

[20] However, in the Middle East the NSS seeks to shift from an approach centered on military interventions and crisis management to one based on "partnership, friendship, and investment," presenting the expansion of frameworks such as the Abraham Accords as the preferred avenue for stabilizing the region through shared economic interests rather than large-scale military deployments. In the case of Africa, the strategy explicitly advocates moving from a relationship based on aid to one centered on investment and growth. The underlying message is that prosperity and integration into global markets should become the main anchors of stability, in direct competition with China's offerings.

particularly due to the rivalry with China[21]. As previously noted, the strategy converges here with Colby's logic of a "strategy of denial": preventing Beijing from achieving a regional hegemony that would allow it to coerce allies, divide coalitions, and reshape the global order. Hegseth's INDSG, leaked in March 2025, is essential for understanding this dimension. The document defined China as the sole pacing threat and a Chinese attack on Taiwan as the sole pacing scenario, which implies organizing the joint force around the ability to fight – and, if necessary, win – a high-intensity war in the Western Pacific, even while accepting greater risks in other theaters.

The NSS adopts this logic and embeds it within a broader doctrinal framework: China containment is conceived not as a multilateral project to sustain a liberal order, but as a great-power competition among sovereign states. Operationally, the strategy calls for a force posture designed to deny China a fait accompli against Taiwan through long-range precision strike systems, undersea platforms, uncrewed systems, integrated air defense, and distributed sensor networks. This requires concentrating resources in Asia, strengthening interoperability with allies such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea, and improving the resilience of bases and lines of communication across the first and second island chains.

However, the NSS also introduces internal tensions. The administration simultaneously prioritizes hemispheric primacy and the containment of China, generating friction when allocating resources among the Indo-Pacific, the Middle East, and Europe. These tensions reveal that the "strategy of denial" does not fully dominate decision-making: it coexists and competes with other strategic traditions within the administration, reflecting an unstable balance between more interventionist approaches and those advocating strict concentration of effort in Asia. Additionally, the NSS complements this military logic with an explicitly geoeconomic reading of the Indo-Pacific: "winning the economic future" of the region is presented as the best way to prevent an open confrontation with China, deepening commercial, technological, and defense ties with partners such as Japan, South Korea, and India to maintain a "free and open Indo-Pacific" without relying exclusively on military deterrence.

[21] See, in this regard, a Chinese perspective on this issue based on recent speeches: F. Gao, "U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Eyes of a Chinese Scholar," *Inside China*, 8 June 2025. Available at: https://www.fredgao.com/p/us-indo-pacific-strategy-in-the-eyes

4. Europe, NATO, and the transatlantic drift

The treatment of Europe in the 2025 NSS represents an especially profound rupture. The document portrays the continent as a civilization in decline, threatened by mass immigration, demographic contraction, and the erosion of national identities, and depicts the European Union as a supranational structure that undermines state sovereignty and promotes "anti-democratic" agendas. At the same time, the NSS emphasizes that European stability requires allies who can "stand on their own two feet" and assume primary responsibility for their own defense. In this logic, the role of the United States is not to sustain military efforts in Europe indefinitely, but to enable Europeans to strengthen their capabilities and, in parallel, explore ways to maintain strategic stability with Russia – reducing escalation risks, including nuclear ones – without abandoning pressure on Moscow.

For the first time, a U.S. NSS explicitly suggests that Washington should "cultivate resilience" within Europe by supporting national-conservative forces that challenge the European integration project. This marks a shift from the traditional policy of reinforcing the EU as a pillar of the Western order to a strategy that, in practice, seeks to reconfigure the European political landscape along sovereigntist lines.

This redefinition has direct implications for NATO. Although the strategy formally reaffirms the value of the Alliance, the U.S. commitment is conditioned on allies assuming a much larger share of the military burden and aligning themselves with the administration's vision of sovereignty and order. Europe ceases to be a priority theater for U.S. security – as it was during the Cold War – and becomes a region in which greater risks can be accepted in order to free up resources for the Indo-Pacific and the Western Hemisphere.

The war in Ukraine is the paradigmatic case. In the NSS, the conflict is relegated to the background: it is not ignored, but mentioned only tangentially, as an issue Europeans must manage with U.S. support that is increasingly conditional and selective[22]. This narrative – combined with decisions such as pauses in military assistance to Kyiv – has

[22] G. Colom-Piella. "How wars end". *Documento de Opinión del IEEE*, no. 20, 2025. Available at: https://www.defensa.gob.es/documents/2073105/2320887/como_terminan_las_guerras_2025_dieeeo20_eng.pdf/684ca688-514b-78f8-87c9-75a9faa08cf3?t=1742373676412

fueled European debates over strategic autonomy and heightened the perception that the transatlantic link is more contingent today than at any time since 1949[23].

From a realist perspective, the reasoning is coherent: concentrating resources in Asia implies accepting greater risk in Europe. But from the standpoint of alliances, the NSS raises an uncomfortable question: to what extent can NATO remain sustainable if its members no longer share common values or strategic assessments?[24]

5. Conclusions

The 2025 National Security Strategy marks a turning point in the U.S. strategic tradition by consolidating a reading of the world anchored in great-power competition, regional hierarchy, and national primacy. In contrast to the more cooperative or normative interpretations that, albeit intermittently, had accompanied U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, the NSS embraces a return to power politics, assuming without ambiguity that international stability rests less on institutions and regimes and more on the United States' ability to impose costs, deny advantages to its rivals, and preserve its sovereignty against external influences. This shift is inseparable from the growing influence of the national-conservative coalition, which has succeeded in translating into strategic directives a worldview distrustful of multilateralism and critical of the structures of the liberal order.

Within this context, the de facto revival of the Monroe Doctrine occupies a central place. More than a historical reference, the 2025 NSS reinterprets it as a contemporary project of offensive hemispheric primacy, in which homeland defense, border control, pressure on extra-hemispheric actors, and power projection in the immediate region are framed as priority strategic missions. Combined with the logic of denial in the Indo-Pacific and defense-oriented reindustrialization, the document outlines a strategy aimed at maximizing the relative power of the United States, reducing the weight of normative

[23] C. Everts et al. (eds.). *Low Trust: Transatlantic Relations in the Second Trump Administration*, Chaillot Paper 187, París: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2025. Available at : https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/chaillot-papers/low-trust

[24] J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order", *International Security*, vol. 43 nº 4, 2019, pp. 7-50. Disponible en: https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342

considerations, and reinforcing the idea that security depends above all on strategic autonomy and coercive capability.

The result is a strategy more offensive, revisionist, and unconstrained than that of 2017. If the latter reintroduced great-power competition, the 2025 NSS elevates it to the organizing principle of both foreign and domestic policy. From a neoclassical realist perspective, it offers a paradigmatic illustration of how a single international environment can generate divergent strategic responses depending on which ideas, elites, and coalitions dominate the state apparatus. Competition with China, the erosion of the liberal order, and uncertainty about Europe are structural realities for all actors, yet not all administrations derive the same priorities or construct the same worldview. Early analyses in Washington – both critical and supportive – concur that the 2025 NSS consolidates a doctrinal rupture with the liberal-order tradition rather than a mere technical update of priorities.

For Europe, this shift constitutes a wake-up call that the continent nevertheless appears unable to heed. The 2025 NSS makes clear that Washington expects allies capable of sharing real burdens, not merely producing reassuring rhetoric. The European Union remains trapped between its self-image as a normative power – often accompanied by a certain sense of moral superiority – and its limited willingness to bear the material costs of power: persistent industrial deficits, slow decision-making, technological dependence, insufficient defense budgets, and deep internal divisions. Despite abundant rhetoric about strategic autonomy, Brussels has yet to demonstrate either the political will or the resources necessary to move meaningfully in that direction.

The 2025 NSS not only redefines the U.S. role in the international system but also forces Europeans to confront a dilemma postponed for decades: either they develop real capabilities to underpin their strategic ambitions, or they accept that their voice in the world will become increasingly irrelevant. In an international order marked by growing competition – where hard power has again become the primary language of global politics – the gap between the Europe it claims to be and the Europe it is capable of being has widened into an abyss. The 2025 U.S. strategy merely highlights this with uncomfortable yet unavoidable clarity.

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