

Introduction

The Trump 2.0 Administration has accepted that strategic rivalry with China is here to stay. This conviction shapes the National Security Strategy (NSS) published in December 2025 and its operational translation in the National Defense Strategy (NDS) of January 2026. Both documents adopt a realist outlook and mark a break with the liberal internationalism that has dominated U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.

This realignment begins with the acknowledgment that the era of unipolar primacy is over. While the United States remains the world's leading power in absolute terms, its relative advantage has eroded. China's rise and its expanding presence across the Global South, combined with setbacks in the Middle East and deepening domestic social tensions, have exposed the limits of a global dominance strategy and the risks of military overstretching.

This article examines the NSS 2025 and the NDS 2026 together, arguing that the so-called Hemispheric Pivot forms part of a broader strategy designed to manage a prolonged rivalry with China through the consolidation of the U.S. hemispheric sphere of influence and 'shifting the burden' toward allies. To that end, it analyzes the core concepts of both documents, their place within the realist tradition — particularly in the formulations of Mearsheimer and Colby — and their implications for Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

Priorities and Lines of Action in the NSS 2025 and NDS 2026

As reflected in Table 1, the NSS 2025 and the NDS 2026 together constitute a coherent doctrinal framework in which the latter translates the strategic objectives defined by the former into operational and military terms.

The core of this new doctrine combines structural realism with national-conservative perspective on sovereignty. The NSS 2025 opens with a sharp critique of previous administrations, accusing them of having made "destructive bets on globalism and so-called 'free trade'", which it argues undermined the middle class and the industrial base necessary to sustain U.S. military preeminence. Under the maxim of "Peace through Strength," the NDS 2026 translates this political vision into an operational hierarchy aimed at maximizing military readiness for operations that prioritize concrete U.S. interests, as opposed to nation-building projects and so-called 'forever wars'.

Table 1 Comparative between NSS 2025 and NDS 2026

Area	National Security Strategy 2025	National Defense Strategy 2026
Core Philosophy	Offensive realism combined with the national conservative approach to sovereignty. The American elites' embrace of idealism, globalism, and so-called "free trade" undermined the middle class and the industrial base upon which U.S. economic and military preeminence depends.	Peace through Strength. A flexible realism that prioritizes interventions responding to concrete American interests. Criticism of "cloud-castle abstractions like the rules-based international order".
Security Approach	Ontological and civilizational security. Includes the "reinvigoration of American spiritual health" and frames migration, demographic, and cultural change as central strategic challenges.	Restoring the American "warrior ethos" and combat readiness to avoid endless wars. The objective is to prevent the " simultaneity problem " of conflicts on multiple fronts. Risk of a "Third World War"
Economic Security	The dispute with China over technology and supply chains is the key geopolitical contest of the 21st century. Reindustrialization with priority given to the "American worker".	National industrial mobilization to become the arsenal of the world. Reshoring of strategic industries to U.S. territory and large-scale adoption of AI.
Priorities and Lines of Action	Hierarchy of priority regions: 1. Western Hemisphere: securing U.S. primacy. 2. Indo-Pacific: the decisive theater as the world's economic center of gravity. 3. Europe: promoting security in civilizational terms. 4. Middle East: supporting Israeli and Arab allies to prevent Iranian hegemony. 5. Africa: interest limited to trade (natural resources) and prevention of Islamism.	Four lines of action: 1. Defense of the Homeland and the Western Hemisphere. 2. Deterring China through strength, not confrontation. 3. Increasing burden-sharing with U.S. allies and partners. 4. Supercharge the U.S. Defense Industrial Base.
Alliances	Rejection of multilateral institutions. Alliances conditioned on burden-shifting, reduction of the U.S. trade deficit, and alignment with national-conservative ideology.	Burden-sharing as an urgent solution to the simultaneity problem. The U.S. retains support in critical capabilities (nuclear). Asian allies must match the 5% of GDP military spending committed to by European countries.
Western Hemisphere	Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Denying access to the continent to "non-hemispheric competitors" (China) that pose a present economic disadvantage and a future strategic risk.	Territorial control of key areas: the Panama Canal, the "Gulf of America" and Greenland. Control of migration and drug trafficking at the continental level. Modernization of nuclear defense and defenses against missiles, drones (Golden Dome), cyberattacks and Islamist terrorism.
Indo-Pacific and China	The economic and geopolitical battleground of the 21st century. Recognizes China as an economic and military power. Transactional tone centered on trade and supply chains.	Deterrence by denial. Building a strong defense along the First Island Chain to maintain a balance of power in the Pacific. The Republic of Korea must assume conventional defense responsibilities against North Korea.
Europe	A civilization in decline. Questions the reliability of European Union given demographic and migration challenges. Interest in strategic stability with Russia.	Europe must assume responsibility for its own conventional defense ("NATO 3.0"). Russia as a persistent but manageable threat to Eastern European countries.
Middle East	Reduced priority for the Middle East. Support for Israel and key Gulf allies to expand the Abraham Accords.	Israel as a "model ally". Iran is at its weakest moment. A window of opportunity to establish a lasting peace.

The NSS 2025 represents a twofold conceptual break with the American doctrine that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War. On one hand, the substitution of liberalism by realism entails a marked reduction in references to the defense of 'democratic values' as a driver of foreign policy. On the other, the adoption of structural realism is filtered through the specific ideological lens of national conservatism, which adds a strong cultural and civilizational dimension (in a sense close to that developed by Samuel Huntington) to the concept of sovereignty. In this respect, the NSS approaches the idea of "ontological security" by incorporating the preservation of collective identity and the continuity of the "national way of life" as security concerns¹. This blurs the boundary between domestic and foreign policy. Social and political polarization in the United States appears implicitly as a national security problem that bears on the very concept of sovereignty. Viewed through the lens of national conservatism, that concept is projected onto the National Security Strategy, which no longer confines itself to physical security or territorial defense, but frames issues such as migration, cultural and demographic change, and drug trafficking as core state security challenges.

From this vantage point, it becomes possible to conceptualize the repositioning of the Western Hemisphere as the United States' highest strategic priority, alongside references to the "reinvigoration of American spiritual health" and the "restoration of the American warrior ethos" —elements that cannot be derived mechanically from realist theory. It is also from this concern with cultural dimensions that the strategy argues that Europe is a civilization in relative decline, in which transnational institutions —with the European Union explicitly named— would be weakening national identities.

This sets the stage for a significant shift in priorities relative to previous strategies. Although the Indo-Pacific is recognized as the world's primary economic center of gravity, the strategy toward China adopts a markedly transactional and less ideological tone. The administration accepts that it is not possible to immediately contain Chinese growth and prepares instead for a prolonged bipolar rivalry. The military objective is not to humiliate Beijing or seek regime change, but to establish a balance of power that allows for a "decent peace". The most significant departure from previous strategies is the reassertion of full dominance over the Western Hemisphere as the number one priority —displacing,

¹ COLOM-PIELLA, Guillem. *From liberal hegemony to a doctrinal America First. The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 110/2025.

for the first time in decades, the Eurocentric or Asia-first orientation. Through what is termed the "Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine", Washington seeks to deny access to extra-hemispheric competitors —referring to China and Russia— that seek to control strategic assets or deploy military capabilities on the continent.

As will be analyzed below, this shift is embedded within a broader strategic framework in which the contest with China cannot be resolved immediately, but first requires consolidating the U.S. sphere of influence. This logic translates into concrete territorial and operational objectives. The strategy explicitly highlights the imperative of securing control over enclaves that, by virtue of their capacity to deny military and commercial access to the Western Hemisphere, are deemed critical: the Panama Canal, the "Gulf of America" and Greenland. This new tactical priority has already produced tangible results, even before the new strategy was formally published. In 2025, the Panamanian government authorized the deployment of U.S. forces in the Canal zone and cancelled its Belt and Road Initiative commercial agreement. The opening of 2026 has been marked by the detention of Maduro and a subsequent arrangement with the Venezuelan government to limit Chinese access to that country, as well as sustained U.S. pressure to assert control over Greenland — a region of relevance for its critical minerals and its strategic position, key both to Arctic access and to the "Golden Dome" missile defense system that the Trump administration is seeking to establish, which could confer significant advantages in a potential new nuclear competition. From the tactical perspective outlined in the NDS, it is reasonable to expect that pressure over Greenland will continue, and that countries with significant Chinese presence —such as Cuba and Peru— may face increasing U.S. attention.

This entire realignment, which keeps the rivalry with China as the strategic backdrop while concentrating U.S. priorities on the American continent, carries two additional consequences. On the economic front, national security becomes inseparably linked to an industrial renaissance of historic proportions. The NDS 2026 issues an urgent call to "supercharge the U.S. defense industrial base" and position the United States as the "world's premier arsenal". This mobilization includes the reshoring of critical industries, the large-scale adoption of Artificial Intelligence and the protection of supply chains against Chinese penetration —the arena in which the decisive technological battle is being fought.

On the alliance front, the Hemispheric Pivot and the structural rivalry with China, compounded by the "Simultaneity Problem" —the risk of facing conflicts on multiple fronts with an overstretched military force— make 'burden-shifting' the central concept for understanding the Trump administration's alliance policy. In Europe, this translates into "NATO 3.0", in which European allies must assume primary responsibility for their conventional defense against Russia. In the Middle East, a similar logic applies: the alliance with Israel is reinforced as a "model ally", while regional integration among Arab states through the Abraham Accords is promoted to collectively counter Iran with a reduced U.S. footprint.

The gradual rise of realism

Without rigidly subscribing to any single systematic theoretical doctrine, the Trump administration's strategic realignment is consistent with the core tenets of structural realism. This theory understands the international order as an anarchic system structured by the balance of forces among great powers, which seek to maximize their relative military power in order to ensure their survival. Values play a secondary role here, and demographic and economic potential are only decisive insofar as they can be converted into military power —the true currency of the international system. The 2017 NSS already pointed in this direction, but the new strategy deepens the break by abandoning the language of "democracies versus autocracies" and the framework of the rules-based liberal order².

Mearsheimer, the theoretical father of neorealism, has presented since the early years of this century the most prominent intellectual counterpoint to American liberalism in foreign policy. The primary target of his critique was the "engagement" policy toward China, which he argued would allow Beijing to convert its economic growth into sufficient military power to contest U.S. hegemony in the Asia-Pacific³. The liberal assumption that economic interdependence would lead to political convergence had, in his view, underestimated the structural logic of power. China's industrial and naval development over the past decade⁴,

² MÁRQUEZ DE LA RUBIA, Francisco. *The United States National Security Strategy (2025): analysis and comparison with the NSS 2022*. Documento de Análisis IEEE 84/2025.

³ MEARSHEIMER, John. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Nueva York: W.W. Norton & Company.

⁴ PALMER, Alexander, CARROLL, Henry, y VELAZQUEZ, Nicholas, "Unpacking China's naval buildup". Center for Strategic International Studies, 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/unpacking-chinas-naval-buildup>.

combined with growing doubts about U.S. capacity to prevail in a protracted conflict in the Western Pacific⁵, have reinforced this reading.

Since Obama announced the Pivot to Asia in 2011, an intense debate has developed among American elites over how to respond to China's rise. Over the last years, this discussion has become intertwined with the problem of U.S. military overstretching. The withdrawal from Afghanistan demonstrated the dangers of the so-called 'forever wars'. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the regional war in the Middle East placed the United States at a strategic crossroads: sustaining a war effort across multiple high-intensity conflicts simultaneously. To this must be added the possibility of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the success of which would deal a strategic blow that could significantly undermine the U.S. position in the world's demographic and economic epicenter. Taken together, the United States faces the risk of having to confront two or more high-intensity conflicts simultaneously in a context of eroded social cohesion and diminished military supremacy.

The strategic debate in the United States proceeds from this crossroads, which within the Republican Party crystallized into three broad currents⁶: the 'primacists', more closely tied to the traditional Republican establishment, who favor maintaining an interventionist and preeminent role across the globe; the 'restrainers', with a strong base in the MAGA movement, who lean toward hemispheric isolationism; and the so-called 'Asia prioritizers', drawn from security think tanks, who argue—in line with realist theory—for concentrating resources on containing China as the primary systemic challenge⁷.

The strategic reorientation of the Trump 2.0 Administration reflects the reduced influence of the traditional Republican position in favor of restrainers and the Asia prioritizers. The NSS-NDS documents embody a combination of ideas from both currents: a geographical prioritization consistent with structural realism, applied through the national conservative lens of "America First", which frames the preservation of the 'American way of life' as the key to resolving the United States' social and political crisis. Thus, while the underlying priority of foreign policy remains the great-power rivalry with China, this broader strategic

⁵ JONES, Seth, "China is Ready for War". Foreign Affairs, October 2024. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/china-ready-war-america-is-not-seth-jones>

⁶ BELIN, Cèlia, RUGE, Majda y SHAPIRO, Jeremy. "Imagining Trump 2.0", European Council on Foreign Relations, 2024. Disponible en: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/imagining-trump-2-0-six-scary-policy-scenarios-for-a-second-term>

⁷ VELEZ-GREEN, Alex y PETERS, Robert. *The Prioritization Imperative*. The Heritage Foundation. 2024. Disponible en: <https://report.heritage.org/sr288>

framework is first applied to the American continent, where Chinese influence represents an urgent threat from the standpoint of national conservatism. Similarly, the security approach of the NSS is not a pure application of realism, but incorporates identity and cultural dimensions into the concept of security.

This serves to calibrate the postulates of realist theory. Mearsheimer argues that states are rational actors that respond to the international environment with whichever course of action best allows them to maximize their power relative to other states. This is necessarily a general proposition. At a greater level of analytical specificity, however, we see that states are not 'black boxes': their behavior is conditioned by coalitions of power, institutional inertia and social conflicts. This underscores that realist theory, despite its general analytical power, is not applied in a vacuum —its implementation is shaped by concrete political conditions⁸.

It is here necessary to highlight the role of Elbridge Colby in operationalizing the neorealist position in practice. The current Under Secretary of Defense is widely regarded as the intellectual architect of the new security and defense strategies, and is arguably the most influential figure among the 'China hawks'⁹. His work *The Strategy of Denial* (2021) can be read as an operational adaptation of structural realism to a context in which China has already consolidated its position as a great power. For Colby, the key question is no longer framed in economic terms —decoupling to slow China's rise is no longer viable given that China is already a great power and the degree of U.S. interdependence is too high— but in military ones. The so-called 'strategy of denial' toward China holds that the objective should not be to prevent Chinese growth, but to strengthen the military presence of the United States and its allies in Asia in order to deny Beijing the possibility of achieving regional hegemony through a rapid victory in the Indo-Pacific, particularly around Taiwan¹⁰.

Colby's strategic vision structures the doctrinal realignment of Trump 2.0, with the

⁸ MAJOR, Samuel. *La influencia de John J. Mearsheimer en la política exterior estadounidense de 2009-2021*. CESEDEN, 2025. URL: <https://www.defensa.gob.es/documents/2073105/3088525/esfas-ceseden-2025-la-influencia-de-john-j-mearhseimer-en-la-politica-exterior-estadounidense-de-2009-2021.pdf/47d16b44-21e4-94f9-5beb-10cc7de199b0?t=1765802232281>

⁹ This does not mean that Colby's vision is the only one shaping the decisions of the U.S. executive, as illustrated by the strike against Iran in June 2025. COLOM-PIELLA, Guillem. *From liberal hegemony to a doctrinal America First. The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 110/2025.

¹⁰ COLBY, Elbridge. *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.

underlying rivalry with China as the lens through which the entirety of U.S. foreign policy is to be understood. This does not mean that it posits a kind of 'frontal assault' against the Asian power. On the contrary, this strategy proceeds from the recognition that the United States cannot aspire to restore unipolar primacy, but rather to preserve a favorable balance of power in a scenario of asymmetric bipolarity.

On the military front, the prospect of direct confrontation with China runs up against the perception that Beijing holds a relative advantage in any conflict in the Pacific, given that its forces are concentrated there and that it currently enjoys a significant military-industrial edge. The objective of rebuilding the military-industrial base seeks to reduce this advantage, but will necessarily require an extended period of time to achieve. On the economic front, the idea of a 'direct assault' in the form of decoupling suffered a significant setback in the Busan negotiations of October 2025, when the United States opted to de-escalate its tariff pressure on China, in part in response to Beijing's demonstrated capacity to leverage its control over rare earth supply chains as an instrument of economic coercion¹¹. In this respect, the new NSS-NDS adopt a markedly more transactional tone toward China than their predecessors, reflecting the recognition that the Asian power has grown too much for a direct rapid confrontation¹². Colby has used the metaphor of a 'marathon' to describe the rivalry with China —meaning that it will be enduring and structural, not episodic. It would not be resolved in a single crisis (such as Taiwan), but over decades of relative power accumulation.

The doctrinal realignment of the Trump 2.0 Administration can thus be understood as the institutionalization of this realist reading: acceptance of great-power competition, geographical prioritization, consolidation of one's own sphere of influence and reduction of peripheral commitments. Within this framework, the Hemispheric Pivot does not replace the competition with China —it constitutes its prerequisite: first securing the continental 'rearguard' in order to sustain a denial strategy in the decisive theater of the twenty-first century. In this longer-term vision, the United States consolidates its sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere and seeks a balance of power in Asia, while

¹¹ CHAN, Kyle et al. *What happened when Trump met Xi?* Brookings Foundation. 2025. URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-happened-when-trump-met-xi/>

¹² DEL AMO, Pablo. *Elbridge Colby: "Estados Unidos no está preparado para una guerra de alta intensidad con China"*. Descifrando la Guerra. 2023. URL: <https://www.descifrandolaguerra.es/elbridge-colby-ex-asesor-del-pentagono-estados-unidos-no-esta-preparado-para-una-guerra-de-alta-intensidad-con-china/>

preserving its interests in Europe and the Middle East through a greater military role for its allies.

Burden-Shifting: The Counterpart of the Hemispheric Pivot

The concentration of resources in the Western Hemisphere and the Indo-Pacific necessarily entails a redefinition of the U.S. alliance framework. Europe and the Middle East, which since the Cold War have hosted the bulk of America's forward military deployment, are relegated to a secondary position. Faced with the risk of converging conflicts with its rivals, the United States is openly pressing its traditional allies to increase military spending in order to secure their own interests in their respective regions — "not as a favor to Americans, but for their own interests", as the NDS states. Since his first term, Trump has championed the notion of burden-sharing to push allied countries to increase their defense spending. The baseline expectation is that European countries raise their military expenditure to 5% of GDP —a target now also applied to Asian allies.

The NSS 2025 adds the notion of burden-shifting, which implies a deeper assumption by allies of military operations in their own regions. The most illustrative example is Israel, presented as a 'model ally' for its level of defense spending and its assumption of the primary military burden against Iran and the 'Axis of Resistance.' The regional war led by Israel over the past two years may have produced a particularly favorable situation for shared U.S.-Israeli interests, through the significant degradation of Iran's proxy network in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and to a lesser extent in Gaza and Yemen. To this can be added the high-intensity protests against the Ayatollah regime in early 2026, which some analysts have characterized as the most significant display of domestic weakness since the 1979 Revolution. This conjuncture was perceived by key figures within the administration as a window of opportunity to destroy Iran's deterrent capabilities — nuclear enrichment and ballistic missile programs —consistent with the NDS logic of reducing the Simultaneity Problem. The joint U.S.-Israeli strike of February 2026, of greater scale than the 'Twelve-Day War,' can be interpreted in this strategic key: the perception of a weakened Iranian government made it plausible that a relatively swift offensive could neutralize the Ayatollah regime as a regional power in the Middle East that compounds the multiple simultaneous fronts scenario. To this can be added the

possibility of weakening China's oil supply. A successful and brief offensive, together with the consolidation of the Abraham Accords between Israel and the Gulf states — led in this regard by the United Arab Emirates — would allow the Middle East to settle into an equilibrium stable and favorable enough to the United States to sustain a deep and lasting withdrawal of American forces. However, the Trump administration now faces the risk of being drawn into a prolonged regional conflict that, should it become a new forever war, would destabilize the broader strategic framework it has outlined and would aggravate precisely the Simultaneity Problem it sought to resolve.

The 'burden-shifting' logic is also applied to Europe: the United States will transfer to European countries the operational weight of NATO, so that they assume the conventional defense of the continent —above all against Russia, described as "a persistent but manageable threat to the countries of Eastern Europe". The central argument is structural: European NATO members far exceed Russia in economic scale and population, endowing them with sufficient latent military power to confront Moscow if translated into effective capabilities. Europe remains relevant, but its relative weight in the global economy is declining, which reinforces the Asian priority for Washington. This logic finds expression in what Colby himself, at the recent Munich Conference, termed 'NATO 3.0'. In his address, Colby argued that this third phase envisions "a NATO in which Europe is the primary conventional defender of the European theater, backed by American strategic power and global reach"¹³ —closer to the 'NATO 1.0' of the Cold War, grounded in 'uncompromising' realism and effective burden-sharing to defeat the USSR, than to the 'NATO 2.0' of the unipolar era, which is argued to have overreached its mandate by disarming the continent and focusing on defending a "rules-based international order" through out-of-area missions in which the United States provided the bulk of resources.

In both cases, burden-shifting does not imply abandonment, but rather a reconfiguration: the United States retains the strategic apex —nuclear deterrence and high-end conventional capabilities, such as the B-52s deployed against Iran— while allies assume the conventional management of their immediate environments¹⁴. This redistribution of

¹³ COLBY, Elbridge, *Remarks by Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby at the NATO Defense Ministerial*
URL: <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4404801/remarks-by-under-secretary-of-war-for-policy-elbridge-colby-at-the-nato-defense/>

¹⁴ This is also reflected in the "PURL protocol," adopted in 2025, under which Europe assumed responsibility for virtually

responsibilities frees up U.S. resources for the competition with China.

The Implications for Taiwan

The early steps of the strategy of denial are already observable in Asia. South Korea receives 'special status' in the NDS, focused not primarily on the rivalry with China but on assuming conventional defense responsibilities against North Korea. In this regard, Seoul has committed to raising its military spending from 3.5% to 5% of GDP and to assuming command of OPCON, the joint military coordination center with the United States on the Korean Peninsula¹⁵. In Japan —a cornerstone of the First Island Chain— the consolidation of Sanae Takaichi as Prime Minister can be seen as favorable to U.S. strategic objectives in the region, as the Japanese government has raised its military spending to 2% of GDP, has signaled willingness to revise the pacifist provisions of the Japanese Constitution and has spoken openly about defending Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack.

It is in the case of Taiwan, however, that the doctrinal realignment carries its most significant implications. The island plays a central role in realist doctrine: it occupies the center of the First Island Chain and divides the Pacific into two distinct theaters. A potential reunification —a non-negotiable objective for the People's Republic of China— would significantly alter the regional security architecture. This is compounded by the fact that Taiwan hosts the world's most advanced semiconductor fabrication facilities, essential for the production of high-technology chips.

The administration has maintained strategic ambiguity regarding a direct response to a Chinese attack, while simultaneously pursuing measures consistent with the logic of denial. These include the reinforcement of Taiwanese defense spending —with targets of up to 10% of GDP— encompassing the acquisition of one of the largest military equipment packages in the island's history, oriented particularly toward asymmetric defense capabilities, as well as pressure to diversify or reshore part of the production of

all trans-Atlantic military aid to Ukraine, both in the form of direct arms transfers and through the procurement of U.S. military equipment. At the Munich Conference, it was also announced that the principal NATO command centers in Europe will transition to European leadership.

¹⁵ WORK, Clint. *Beyond the Peninsula: What OPCON Transfer Means for the Indo-Pacific*. The Diplomat. 2026. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2026/02/beyond-the-peninsula-what-opcon-transfer-means-for-the-indo-pacific/>

strategic semiconductors to U.S. territory.

Taken together, it seems that, in the event of a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan, the U.S. response could not replicate the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis, when the United States was able to assert its naval superiority even in the Strait itself, off the Chinese coast. What the Trump strategy seeks is to reduce U.S. exposure in the event of a Chinese victory —by securing semiconductor supply and denying it to China— while raising the costs for Beijing. The military reinforcement of Japan and South Korea, or the preparation of Taiwan for a protracted resistance, could lead Beijing into the kind of attritional entanglement that Russia has faced in Ukraine —one that would squander its upward momentum.

At the same time, Trump's policy complicates the 'strategic patience' approach that Beijing has practiced toward Taiwan. Until now, Beijing has operated on the assumption that time was on its side, and that its growing economic, military and soft power would eventually allow for a secure takeover of Taiwan, potentially even by peaceful means. But if Beijing interprets the regional rearmament or the relocation of semiconductor production as signs that the window of opportunity is narrowing, the Chinese government may feel compelled to consider a preemptive move before losing its relative advantage in the region.

Conclusions

The 2025 National Security Strategy and the 2026 National Defense Strategy formalize a structural doctrinal shift in U.S. foreign policy. At the theoretical level, they consolidate a realist reading of the international system that abandons the liberal universalism dominant since the end of the Cold War and adopts great-power competition as the organizing principle of the world order. The legitimacy of external action is no longer anchored in the promotion of values, but tied directly to the preservation of relative power and national sovereignty.

At the strategic level, the rivalry with China is conceived as structural and long-term. Rather than seeking a restoration of unipolar primacy, the new doctrine accepts an asymmetric bipolarity and orients U.S. action toward the management of that equilibrium over the long term. The strategy of denial in the Indo-Pacific, inspired by contemporary

realist frameworks, is built on the reconstruction of the defense industrial base and the redistribution of burdens toward allies.

At the geopolitical level, the Hemispheric Pivot constitutes the most visible innovation: the consolidation of the Western Hemisphere as the primary strategic rear area. Control over critical enclaves —from the Panama Canal to Greenland— and the limitation of Chinese influence on the American continent appear as both the prerequisite and the tactical priority for sustaining competition in the decisive theater of the twenty-first century.

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