

2017 National Security Strategy: Question and Answer

1. How does this strategy put America First? Where is the America First in this Strategy?

- This strategy puts America first by looking at all challenges to our national security through the lens of four vital, national interests, or “pillars.”
- It balances the defense of American sovereignty with continued engagement with our allies, partners, and international organizations in line with our interests.
- It demands fair and reciprocal treatment of the United States in bilateral and multilateral arrangements.
- It holds that an America that is safe, prosperous, and free at home is an America with the strength, confidence, and will to lead abroad.

2. What's new about this strategy?

- This NSS prioritizes protecting Americans and the homeland against threats from hostile state and non-state adversaries. This includes the need for strong, secure borders – including a wall.
- This NSS clearly identifies that a strong U.S. economy protects the American people, supports our way of life, and sustains American power. As the President has said, ultimately economic security IS national security.
- This NSS is clear-eyed about competitors, recognizing the central role of geopolitical competition in international politics.
- This NSS recognizes that we are living through an era of rapid technological innovation – it confronts the realities of the cyber era and information statecraft.
- This NSS avoids overpromising, wishful thinking, and over-broadly interpreting America’s core interests.
 - Supporting democracy can be in the national interest, but we will not impose our values or way of life on others.
- This NSS retains U.S. commitment to international engagement and leadership, but we want to achieve the best outcomes for Americans and America. This means we will often pursue paths differently than previous administrations.
- This is not a theoretical document, a statement of wished for goals; this strategy is already being implemented and identifies priority actions for future efforts.

3. Where is there continuity with past national security policy?

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- The whole purpose of making America great again is to restore the power, purpose, and confidence we once had.
 - This strategy reflects the strengths of past successful bipartisan efforts to protect American interests.
 - But it updates both the ends and the ways we will pursue our interests to reflect the nature of 21st century competition, the challenges of the current economic environment, and new vulnerabilities to our homeland.

4. What is “Principled Realism?”

Principled realism has two components.

- It is **principled** because it is grounded in the realization that advancing American principles spreads peace and prosperity around the globe. We are guided by our values and disciplined by our interests.
- It is **realist** because it acknowledges the central role of competition in international politics, affirms that strong, stable, and sovereign states are the best hope for a peaceful world, and clearly defines our national interests.
- Principled realism gives us the confidence to act from a position of strength to pragmatically compete, guided by our principles yet disciplined by a focus on our vital interests.

5. What do you mean by sovereignty? Doesn't sovereignty suggest isolation or indifference to values and play into authoritarian arguments?

- We must take steps to restore our sovereignty. Every country has a right to control its own borders and make agreements in line with its interests. We are first and foremost accountable to our own people, to our Constitution and law.
- Threats from jihadist terrorists and transnational criminals emanate in part from states that are unable to exercise their sovereign obligation to control their territory. We want strong, sovereign states to protect against homeland threats.
- We know – as the President explained at the UN – that the most stable and resilient states are those accountable to their own people. States accountable to their own people are more likely to respect their neighbors' sovereignty and promote peace.
- Our focus on sovereignty should not be seen as agreement with those who distort the President's meaning of sovereignty.
 - It is not an affirmation of dictators acting with impunity within their own borders.
 - The opposite is true: dictators and repressive regimes violate the sovereignty of their own citizens.

- This administration is holding such dictators accountable in Venezuela, Cuba, Syria, and elsewhere.

6. Does this strategy ignore our allies by putting America First?

- “America First” does not mean “America Alone.”
- The strategy recognizes that all of the strategic challenges we face demand the joint actions of the United States and our allies and partners.
- Allies magnify our power, extend our influence, and help us confront shared challenges.
- Asking allies and partners to do more to confront shared threats is a recognition that strong alliances and partnerships can only endure if all parties are equally committed to shared endeavors.

7. How does this strategy square with the cuts to the State Department and USAID budgets?

- The President has been clear that we need diplomacy to protect our interests and we need to champion our principles and those we share with our allies.
- The NSS confirms this need, while also recognizing that effective diplomacy requires the efficient use of limited resources.

8. Why is there such an extensive discussion of military issues?

- The strategy is clear-eyed about the nature of the environment we are facing.
- We must acknowledge the investments strategic competitors have made in their militaries.
- We must ensure that our military remains predominant to achieve our diplomatic and economic goals. A strong military ensures that our diplomats are able to speak from a position of strength.

9. This strategy seems disconnected from the President’s previous comments – does he believe in it?

- This is the President’s strategy.
- Consistent with his clear words and strong actions, the strategy places an unprecedented focus on protecting the security of the American people and the homeland.
- It also places an unprecedented focus on achieving fairness and reciprocity in all of our economic and trade relations.
- This strategy builds on the President’s campaign speeches and pledges, and on his major foreign policy addresses as President: the speeches in Riyadh, in Warsaw, at the United Nations, in South Korea, and at APEC.

- The President remained involved throughout the process, beginning with his initial guidance and concluding with his personal approval of the document.
- This is also the first time that a President has personally announced and introduced the National Security Strategy. President Trump's personal commitment to this strategy could not be clearer.

10. Isn't this a cynical view of the world? Has America lost its optimistic vision for the future?

- The strategy is clear-eyed about the strategic landscape. Competition is an inescapable dimension of international politics, which we ignored for too long.
- However, the strategy is principled. It recognizes that our power is a necessary force for good to protect our principles and interests and those of our allies.
- This strategy also recognizes that America will work with our allies and partners to seek solutions that promote security, prosperity, and peace.

11. How does this strategy deal with the need to prioritize actions? How can we possibly do it all?

- The NSS prioritizes rebuilding sources of American strength – a recommitment to principle, restoration of U.S. sovereignty, revitalization of our economy, rebuilding of our military – to ensure we are prepared for the world as it is.
- The NSS lays out a strategy that can adapt to a changing security environment without losing sight of the essential sources of our strength or our interests.

12. What is Energy Dominance?

- Energy dominance means preserving and enhancing the United States' position at the center of the global energy system, as a leading producer, consumer, and innovator in the energy sector.
- Energy dominance allows us to boost U.S. competitiveness, create jobs, and improve the U.S. trade balance through increased exports of energy resources, technologies, and services.
- Through energy dominance, we also provide stability to the global energy market and help allies and partners become more resilient against those using energy to coerce.

13. Does this strategy presage a trade war on China?

- We have a broad relationship with China. We're always looking for ways to cooperate while protecting our vital interest.
- We flatly reject the notion that we can't both call China out on its aggressive economic behavior and seek their support for shared security goals, such as the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

- This strategy – finally – takes a realistic approach to China that puts our interests first.
- We’re confident that the American way of doing business – free markets, fair and reciprocal trade, adherence to high standards – will continue to attract global support as we continue to promote our principles.

14. Is this an NSC product or were the departments included?

- All of the executive departments and agencies participated in its development over the course of the last 11 months.
- All cabinet secretaries endorsed the strategy.
- The NSS is NATIONAL; it reflects a national vision and recognizes the importance of integrating all elements of national power.

15. We understand that the National Defense Strategy will be coming out soon as well. Is that too soon for the document to be rightly nested with the NSS?

- The NDS – along with other documents such as the Nuclear Posture Review and Ballistic Missile Defense Review – are being drafted in parallel with the NSS.
- These documents are fully supportive of and consistent with the President’s NSS.

16. Is this NSS signing up the U.S. for more open-ended conflicts that drain our resources?

- U.S. involvement anywhere will be measured by clear-eyed assessments and consideration of our ability to achieve desired outcomes.
- We have to consider not only which problems concern us, but also which problems we can solve.
- When we decide to engage, we’ll look for support from like-minded nations, because these issues are not just American concerns. And, when we choose to engage, a military response is not our default. We will use all elements of national power to achieve our objectives.

17. Is this strategy dependent on a particular budget number?

- It is not designed against a specific number, specifically not the President’s FY18 budget, which was submitted very early in the administration.
- However, a strategy without resources is a fantasy. Ongoing and future budget discussions are and will be guided by the President’s priorities, including as outlined in this strategy.

18. Is climate change still a security issue according to this NSS? If not, what has changed?

- The Trump Administration remains concerned with safeguarding the environment and on human impacts on the environment, as the President made clear in his announcement on the Paris Climate Accords.
- Our approach balances energy security, economic development, protecting the environment, and climate mitigation.
- We will address these issues with allies and partners in a way that does not cede our sovereignty or disadvantage American businesses.

19. This document talks about American influence. How do you square that with what many see as an abdication of American leadership via its withdrawal from major multilateral efforts where it was exercising or could exercise leadership - Paris Climate Accords, TPP, Global Compact on Migration, etc.?

- The President has maintained an aggressive schedule of visits, calls, and foreign travel to promote American influence.
- In each of these engagements with international partners, the President made clear his concern that America will not cede its sovereignty or be party to agreements that disadvantage American workers and businesses.
- We are committed to continued American engagement and leadership, but we want to achieve the best outcomes for Americans and America. We will pursue paths differently than our predecessors.

20. What about the rules based international order? Is this administration substituting promotion of U.S. interests at the expense of the rules based order?

- The strategy recognizes the value of the system that we helped create 70 years ago. We believe the system is still in our interests, but we believe it needs some reform. Simply saying “rules based order” does not focus on the reform of the order. Throughout we talk about economic relationships rooted in fairness and reciprocity, and faithful adherence to the rules.
- Rules based order depends on the will of the states to uphold the rules, punish those who fail to heed the rules, and modernize the rules where they no longer fit the modern world.
- We will compete in the organizations and forums that set the rules to ensure they remain true to their founding values.
- We understand that if we recede our adversaries will exploit the vacated space for their own good.