

## THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY IN THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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*The paper analyses the nature and role of the National Security Strategy within the national security of the United States of America in different historical periods of the country's development and international relations. The US national security strategies since the end of the Second World War up to the present day have been studied and, on this basis, it is concluded that today the scope of the strategy's purposes have been expanded, which further increases the importance and role of this fundamental document for the national security of the country.*

*Keywords: strategy; national security; USA; security environment; nuclear weapons;*

### INTRODUCTION

The national security of the United States of America is defined as a collective term encompassing both the national defence and foreign relations of the United States of America with the purposes of gaining: *“a military or defense advantage over any foreign nation or group of nations; a favorable foreign relations position; or a defense posture capable of successfully resisting hostile or destructive action from within or without, overt or covert”* (Doctrines for the Armed Forces of the United States, 2017, pp. GL-9 – GL-10, DOD, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 2019, p. 150).

The country's national security system was designed after the Second World War to meet the global security challenges at the time. Today we can summarise that this system includes the organisations, structures, and processes that govern decision-making, budgeting, planning and execution, and congressional oversight of national security activities (Dale, 2008, p. 1). A key element of that system is represented by national security strategic guidance documents. A fundamental document in the hierarchy of these documents is the National Security Strategy of the United States of America.

It is important to trace the role of the US National Security Strategy in different historical periods and especially today in the light of modern changes in the security environment.

### US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES FROM THE EARLY 1950s TO THE MID-1980s

The foundations of US national security were laid by the National Security Act of 1947. The Act reorganised the US government's military and intelligence agencies after the Second World War.

In 1947, the National Security Act passed by Congress mandated that the President deliver a comprehensive annual *“National Security Strategy Report”*. The goal was for the administration to inform the American people of the four elements of its foreign policy and national security thinking: the foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defence capabilities of the United States of America

necessary to deter aggression and to implement the US national security strategy; the proposed short-term and long-term uses of the political, economic, military, and other elements of the national power of the United States of America to protect or promote the interests and achieve the set goals and objectives; the adequacy of the capabilities of the United States of America to carry out the US national security strategy, including an evaluation of the balance among the capabilities of all elements of the US national power to support the implementation of the national security strategy; such other information as may be necessary to help inform Congress on matters relating to the US national security strategy (Pavel & Ward, 2019).

In fact, in the United States of America, from the early 1950s to the mid-1980s, strategic documents related to national security were issued periodically, usually at the beginning of the new president's term.

#### Presidential Directive NSC-68 "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security" (1950)

Based on the ideas and views of the American diplomat and historian George Kennan, on 14 April 1950, President Truman's National Security Council produced the first notable top-secret document – Directive NSC-68 "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security". It described in detail the Cold War strategic context, noted the intentions and capabilities of both the United States and the Soviet Union, and presented possible courses of action together with assessments (Dale, 2008, p. 2). The directive included not only military aspects but also political and ideological elements, with a focus on hard power, and in particular on the military forces perceived as necessary to deter the Soviet Union.

The document states that *"the military advantages of striking first require us to be constantly on the alert so that we can drop all our might on the enemy... In the initial phase of a nuclear war, the advantage of initiative and suddenness will be enormous"* (Perov, 1989).

#### Strategy of Massive Retaliation (1953)

After the inauguration of President Eisenhower in 1953 and a month-long review of national security policy, on 30 October of that year, the President approved the top-secret Directive NSC 162/2 "A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on Basic National Security Policy". The document presented a new strategy known as Eisenhower's "New Look" strategy.

The new strategy was announced on 12 January 1954 by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to the Council on Foreign Relations, where he stated: *"The main decision must be based first of all on our great ability to strike back immediately at places and with means of our own choosing"* (Sokolovski, 1971, p. 78). He added that the USA will defend its allies by applying *"deterrence through the power of massive retaliation"* (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2012, pp. 5-6). Thus, the new strategy became better known as *"Massive Retaliation"* as well as strategy of *"massive response strikes"*.

The new strategy (document NSC 162/2) emphasised both geopolitics and hard power as foundations for maintaining US values, America's way of life and for nurturing freedom abroad (Lettow, 2021).

According to the strategy, the USA will carry out Massive Retaliation and Instant Retaliation, and there being no forbidden (protected) areas where the enemy forces could hide from a nuclear attack.

The adopted strategy envisaged the preparation and conduct of a general nuclear war only against the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

Thus, the Eisenhower government adopted the first US nuclear strategy. The main idea of the strategy is the threat of use of nuclear weapons to be a strong deterrent factor.

#### Strategy of Flexible Response (1961)

In January 1961, President Kennedy came to power in the United States. As a result of the growing nuclear capabilities of the Soviet Union and the strengthening of the role of the *"vulnerability"* factor, a more realistic Strategy of Flexible Response was adopted the same year.

According to one of the creators of the strategy, General Maxwell Taylor (Chief of Staff of the Land Forces, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff since 1962), it implies a proportional use of military force commensurate with the scale of the danger (Taylor, 1961, p. 38). The new strategy provided the opportunity, if necessary, to wage a general and limited nuclear war with and without the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

In accordance with the strategy, the USA must maintain the combat capability of its forces at a level at which the enemy forces are likely to be. The priority targets of nuclear strikes will no longer be cities, but military sites. In addition, the strategy aims to force the Soviets to stop their aggression in the face of the threat of attacking their cities.

With the new strategy, President Kennedy's administration, and in particular one of its prominent representatives, Secretary of Defence McNamara, abandoned the idea of a *"massive retaliatory strike"* and adopted the idea of *"flexible and graduated response"*.

### National Security Strategy of Realistic Deterrence (1971)

On 20 January 1969, Richard Nixon took office as President of the United States of America. At that time, the Soviet Union was able to achieve approximate strategic parity with the United States. This forced the Nixon administration to make serious efforts to overcome the new strategic situation, to review US nuclear and conventional forces and strategic doctrine, to review its strategic priorities, such as defence plans, in response to the realities of the deteriorating US economy and the tightening of the federal budget.

Nixon adapted the country's foreign and defence policy to the new situation. He proclaims his so-called Nixon Doctrine, based on his strategy for peace, and its main elements or pillars – *"strength"*, *"partnership"* and *"willingness to negotiate"*.

Based on the Nixon Doctrine and the President's Strategy for Peace, the United States of America adopted the *National Security Strategy of Realistic Deterrence* in 1971.

The basic purpose of the new strategy was *"to provide, through strength and partnership, the security of the United States and its Free World allies and friends. Its aim is to discourage – and eventually to eliminate – the use of military force as a means by which one nation seeks to impose its will on another. It seeks to deter war, but ensures adequate capabilities to protect the [American] nation and its interests should deterrence fail"* (*National Security Strategy of Realistic Deterrence*, 1972, p. 2).

### Strategy of Limited Nuclear Options (1974)

The United States had been closely monitoring the development of the Soviet missile program. The first test in the Soviet Union in August 1973 of multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) on an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) – 5 years after a similar test in the USA, caused concern at the Pentagon.

At a press conference on 10 January 1974, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger described to journalists the threat looming over the US Minuteman ICBMs. According to him, the United States of America needed weapons of counteraction to allow reliable strikes on Soviet ICBMs. Schlesinger referred

to providing US Strategic Missile Forces with *"selective first nuclear strike"* capabilities based on a new type of war – the so-called *"Limited Nuclear War"*.

The changes to the US strategy were adopted by Nixon in a top-secret Memorandum NSDM-242 on policy for planning the employment of nuclear weapons, signed on 17 January 1974. It was hoped that the new strategy would be the basis for stopping the arms race and negotiations. In practice, as stated in the memorandum, this was not a major new change in the US nuclear strategy, rather an elaboration of existing policy.

The document included planning for *two types of nuclear weapons employment*: planning for *Limited Nuclear Employment Options* and planning for *General War*.

In relation to the novelty in the strategy – the planning of *options for limited nuclear employment*, the memorandum states that *"should conflict occur, the most critical employment objective is to seek early war termination, on terms acceptable to the United States and its allies, at the lowest level of conflict feasible. This objective requires planning a wide range of limited nuclear employment options, which could be used in conjunction with supporting political and military measures (including conventional forces) to control escalation"* (*National Security Decision Memorandum 242*, 1974, p. 2). These options would enable the USA to conduct selected nuclear operations and to communicate to the enemy a determination to resist aggression.

In addition, according to the memorandum, the options for limited nuclear employment should hold some vital enemy targets hostage to subsequent destruction by survivable nuclear forces, and permit control over the timing and pace of attack execution, in order to provide the enemy opportunities to reconsider his actions.

### Countervailing Strategy (1980)

In January 1977, President Carter's administration came to power in the United States of America. During his tenure, Carter issued a series of directives to prepare the USA for nuclear war.

The last of these directives, Presidential Directive 59 (PD/NSC-59) on Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy, signed on 25 July 1980, announced the new US Countervailing Strategy, which also set out a new policy (manner) of employment of the nuclear forces.

The directive was an important step in the evolution of US targeting policy for nuclear forces in a nuclear war and its impact on maintaining deterrence in the 1980s, especially in light of the growing Soviet arsenal of strategic weapons and their capabilities. It was stated that the most fundamental objective of US strategic policy remained nuclear deterrence. The directive included requirements, actions, principles and goals for the implementation of the new strategy.

The new directive stated that overall targeting planning appropriate to implement a Countervailing Strategy would result in a capability to choose to put the *major weight of the initial response on military and control targets*.

The following *categories of military targets*, with appropriate sub-options for different theatres, should be covered in planning for nuclear weapons employment: strategic and theatre nuclear forces, including nuclear weapons storage; military command, control, communications, and intelligence capabilities; all other military forces, stationary and mobile; industrial facilities which provide immediate support to military operations during wartime. In addition, pre-planned options, capable of relatively prolonged withhold or of prompt execution, should be provided for attacks on the political control system and on general industrial capacity (*Presidential Directive/NSC-59*, 1980, p. 3).

Thus, from the early 1950s to the mid-1980s, American presidents issued six strategic documents related to national security, bearing different names (1950, 1953, 1961, 1971, 1974 and 1980). To a large extent, their unclassified versions satisfy the idea of the National Security Act of 1947 to inform the American people about the basic elements of the country's foreign policy and national security.

## THE ROLE OF NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES IN US NATIONAL SECURITY FROM THE MID-1980s TO THE EARLY 2020s

### US National Security Strategies from the Mid-1980s until the End of the Century

The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act was passed in the United States of America in 1986. It gave a significant impetus to the development of the armed forces – increasing integration and changing organisation, training, staffing, command and control.

In accordance with the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the US National Security Strategy was to be presented to the US Congress and published annually. The strategy

was intended to be a report on the work done by the administration and to declare plans in this area. The document was to be produced by the National Security Council with the direct participation of the President (Belova, 2007, p. 67).

With the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the purpose of the National Security Strategy was changed to better reflect the changing global security environment.

Since the passage of the law to by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century new US national security strategies were developed annually (except in 1989 and 1992). The evolution of US strategies for the employment of nuclear forces continued through the 1980s, along with the development of the capabilities and precision of nuclear weapons in both the United States and the Soviet Union. The first US strategies during this period reflected both the ideological and military confrontation between the two countries as well as the ongoing process of reduction of the medium-range nuclear missiles and the economic stagnation of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War.

Since 1990, US national security strategies have taken into account the changes and uncertainties in the international security environment and the crises in the former communist countries. The new strategies adapted the military component of the US *“Big Strategy”* to changing threats and new military technologies. Moreover, they have provided continuity in areas such as deterrence, strong alliances, forward defence and force projection. They reflected the signs of *“political detente”* between East and West in the early 1990s, but the then existing uncertainty in the security environment was expressed in a series of questions posed in the strategies at the time that needed to be answered in the following years, in order to shape America's long-term security strategy for the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

National security strategies since 1993 have recognised the existence of a *“unipolar world”* dominated by the USA and shifted their focus from a global threat to regional challenges and opportunities as regional instability increasingly threatened US interests and security. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was also seen as a major threat to US security. To cope with threats, it was envisioned to maintain a robust overseas presence of US forces, no longer only as permanently stationed forces, but also as temporary deployments, multinational exercises, site visits and other activities based on bilateral agreements (*National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, 1994). As a result, the build-up of a qualitatively new type of force began – the so-called Response (Deployment) Force, which, if necessary, could deploy in a timely manner near a critical area.

### US National Security Strategies since the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century until the End of the Second Decade of the Century

In the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, US presidents did not often issue national security strategies.

The 2002 strategy took into account the domestic and international situation, and American views and intentions following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, as well as the ongoing multinational operation in Afghanistan and the war on global terror in general. Due to the complex nature of non-traditional threats, which makes them particularly dangerous, and in search of new approaches to countering them, the strategy emphasised the concept of *“pre-emptive war”* (preventive actions).

In 2006, President George W. Bush issued his second (and last for his two terms) National Security Strategy of the USA. Dictatorial regimes, which provided an environment for the spread of terrorism, were identified as a major threat. The biggest threat was considered Iran and required its nuclear program to be stopped. The armed forces were given great importance as a means of maintaining US hegemony, and the right to take pre-emptive military action, if required, against old or new threats, was reaffirmed. However, in the new strategy it was declared that the United States of America would not resort to force in all cases to pre-empt emerging threats. Its preference was that nonmilitary actions succeed.

The 2006 strategy for addressing regional conflicts included three levels of US engagement: conflict prevention and resolution; conflict intervention; and post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction (*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2006, p. 15).

The Obama administration also developed only two national security strategies (in 2010 and 2015) during its two terms. It is important to note that with his entry into the White House in 2009, Obama shifted the focus of foreign policy to increasing the role of international decisions, thus limiting the role of the United States of America in the world, which is visible in the 2010 strategy. It placed international terrorism as a major threat to the country and the disruption, dismantlement, and defeating al-Qa’ida and its violent extremist affiliates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and around the globe, as priorities. Russia, China and India were seen as major international partners, but the requirement to maintain US military superiority over actual and potential adversaries was reaffirmed.

The beginning of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw changes in international security relations, with renewed competition between the United States, on the one hand, and Russia and China, on the other. These changes are linked to Chinese activity in the East and South China Seas, as well as Russian actions in the Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 (Kamenarov, 2018). The mentioned events have strongly influenced the formation of official US policy.

In this regard, the 2015 strategy focused on America’s decision to rely on *“leadership achieved by setting a good example for others”* (in imposing core values at home and abroad), with *“appropriate partners”* (increasing at the same time their numbers and potential) and using *“all the tools of US power”*. The US military must remain dominant in every domain, but the strategy made it clear that *“the use of force should not be America’s first choice, but it will sometimes be the necessary choice”*. It was to be *“principled and selective”* and to have been seen as an element of a much broader toolkit (*National Security Strategy*, 2015, p. 8). The new strategy outlined the US approach to Washington’s key relations with Russia and China. The clash with Russia in the context of the Ukrainian crisis has led to a significant change – from the desire to build stable ties with Moscow contained in the 2010 strategy, to the need to *“deter”* Russia in the 2015 strategy, including through *“raising the price that Russians will have to pay for their behaviour”* and supporting the sovereignty of Russia’s neighbours. With regard to China, it is clearly stated that the USA is and will remain a *“Pacific power”*, emphasising the fact that tensions and risks in the Asia-Pacific region are growing (Grevi, 2015). Generally, the 2015 strategy set out ideas for a firm and comprehensive approach to tackle with crises in key regions of the world.

President Trump issued only one US National Security Strategy at the end of the first year of his term from 2017 to 2021. The strategy took into account the growing political, economic, and military competitions that the USA faces around the world. And also, that *“China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity”* (*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2017, p. 2).

Among the key challenges and trends affecting the US position in the world, the new strategy identified: revisionist powers, such as China and Russia, that use technology, propaganda, and violence to oppose the world against American interests and values; regional dictators who spread terror, threaten their neighbours and seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction; jihadist terrorists who stir

up hatred to incite violence against innocents in the name of wicked ideology and transnational criminal organisations that disseminate drugs and violence in our societies.

The strategy identified four vital national interests that the USA must protect in the competitive world: protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life; promote American prosperity; preserve peace through strength; advance American influence (*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2017, pp. 3-4).

These four vital interests in the strategy are also called “pillars”. These are the main principal sections of the document. Overall, the 2017 US National Security Strategy, enshrined in Trump’s “America First” doctrine, reflects changes in the international situation and security policy in the post-Cold War era.

Part of the criticism of the strategy is its definition of “more competition than cooperation”. According to analysts, the strategy reflects the fact that most of the resources needed by the USA, as well as its own economic activity, are not related to the Western, but to the Eastern Hemisphere and, in particular, to the Eurasian supercontinent. This important feature of the geography of American hegemony over the past few decades has determined the prevention of appearance of regional hegemonic power in one or another part of Eurasia as a key element of US national strategy (Kamenarov, 2018).

### The American National Security Strategy in the Early 2020s

The new US President Biden took office in January 2021. Just two months later, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, he issued the *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, entitled *Renewing America’s Advantages*. With it, the president conveys his vision for how America will engage with the world, because, as it is written, it cannot afford to be absent any longer on the world stage. The document was published even as work on a National Security Strategy had begun, which supposes that many of the ideas included in the Guidance will form the basis of future strategy.

The Guidance recognises that many of the biggest threats America faces respect no borders or walls, and must be met with collective action. It is defined that pandemics and other biological risks, the escalating climate crisis, cyber and digital threats, international economic disruptions, protracted humanitarian crises, violent extremism and terrorism, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons

and other weapons of mass destruction all pose profound and, in some cases, existential dangers (*Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, 2021, p. 7).

In addition, it is strongly stated that the distribution of power across the world is changing, creating new threats. China is defined as rapidly becoming more assertive and as the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system. It is considered that Russia remains determined to enhance its global influence and play a disruptive role on the world stage.

The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance states that ensuring US national security requires to: defend and nurture the underlying sources of American strength, including our people, our economy, our national defence, and our democracy at home; promote a favorable distribution of power to deter and prevent adversaries from directly threatening the United States and our allies, inhibiting access to the global commons, or dominating key regions; and lead and sustain a stable and open international system, underwritten by strong democratic alliances, partnerships, multilateral institutions, and rules (*Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, 2021, p. 9).

It is stated that the United States of America can do none of this work alone and will reinvigorate and modernize its alliances and partnerships around the world. The USA is envisaged to reaffirm, invest in, and modernize the NATO Alliance and its alliances with Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea – which, along with its other global alliances and partnerships, are America’s greatest strategic asset.

Moreover, it is stated that the United States will recognize that its vital national interests compel the deepest connection to the Indo-Pacific region, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere, and will recommit itself to its transatlantic partnerships, forging a strong common agenda with the European Union and the United Kingdom on defining the issues of the present day. Development of partnerships is envisaged in the Middle East with Israel, regional ones to deter Iranian aggression and threats, disrupt al-Qaeda and related terrorist networks and prevent an ISIS resurgence, as well as continuing to build partnerships in Africa.

In addition to recommitting to US alliances and partnerships, the USA, as stated, will move swiftly to earn back its position of leadership in international institutions, joining with the international community to tackle the climate crisis, COVID-19 and other shared challenges.

As the USA re-engages the international system, President Biden's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance defines that the USA will address the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons, will head off costly arms races and re-establish its credibility as a leader in arms control, which is the reason why the USA moved quickly to extend the New START Treaty with Russia. It is also planned to take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in US national security strategy, while ensuring its strategic deterrent remains safe, secure, and effective. In addition, readiness for a meaningful dialogue with Russia and China is stated on a range of emerging military technological developments that implicate strategic stability.

In advancing America's interests globally, smart and disciplined choices are envisaged regarding US national defence and the responsible use of the military, while elevating diplomacy as a US tool of first resort.

These are the main ideas in the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance of the new American president, issued, as stated in the document itself, at a turning point when the United States of America is in the midst of a fundamental debate about the future direction of world development. It is also concluded that no nation is better positioned to navigate this future than the USA.

The ambitious commitments made by US President Biden suggested that the new strategy would be presented by the end of the first year of his term. That has not happened by the autumn of 2022. The reasons are probably rooted in the great dynamics in international relations and the security environment over the past few years and the military aggression of Russia against Ukraine commencing in the spring of 2022, which do not allow the finalisation of the debate on global development and the formulation of precise texts, that would constitute the new US National Security Strategy.

In any case, in the last decade in the USA, the *National Security Strategy* has been defined as a "document approved by the President of the United States for developing, applying, and coordinating the instruments of national power to achieve objectives that contribute to national security" (*DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 2019, p. 150).

Experts believe that since the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are already six broad purposes for the US National Security Strategy: to outline the president's vision for America's role in the world; to highlight the President's top national security priorities; to broadly guide the resource allocation for the national security related departments and agencies; to articulate to friend and foe alike

the strategy and subsidiary national security policies of the United States; to justify the national security departments' and agencies' budgets with the Congress; and to inform the public debate and garner public support for US national security efforts (Pavel & Ward, 2019). Thus, today, as the scope of the purposes of the US National Security Strategy expands, its role in the country's national security is growing even more.

## CONCLUSIONS

The US National Security Strategy is a fundamental document of the country's national security. Based on it, a series of subsequent strategic documents are being developed, such as the National Defense Strategy, the National Military Strategy, the Nuclear Posture Review (the US Nuclear Doctrine), the National Homeland Security Strategy, the National Intelligence Strategy and many others.

A review of the various US national security strategies over the years shows that they have some common core elements, such as: endorsement by the head of government; accurate reflection of national values; clear articulation of national interests; declaration of strategic vision; and identification and assessment of future challenges (Du Mont, 2019). These are elements of most similar strategies around the world.

Since the passage of the mentioned Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986, American presidents have issued and presented to the Congress national security strategies virtually annually. After the end of the Cold War, the strategies were prepared as an unclassified document, which was made available to the public and provided an opportunity for public debate on all issues related to the national security of the country.

Thus, following the evolution of national security strategies and analysing their role in US national security, we can conclude that their formulation and proclamation seeks to achieve ever broader purposes – from analysing the security environment and the threats to the country to presenting the president's vision of the US role in the world and gaining public support for the declared priorities of the national security of the state.

At the beginning of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world is once again at a pivotal moment in the strategic competition between existing and resurgent Great Powers. In these circumstances, the new US National Security Strategy is expected with reasonable interest.

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