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The Trump Administration's National Security Strategy

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Index

(1) Summary.....	3
(2) Introduction.....	3
(3) A hyper-competitive world	6
(4) Protecting the country.....	9
(5) Economic security is national security	10
(5.1) Technology and innovation	12
(5.2) Energy Dominance	14
(6) Peace through strength	16
(6.1) 'Capacities' and 'capabilities'.....	17
(6.2) Nuclear capacity and capabilities	18
(6.3) Outer space	20
(6.4) Cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence	21
(7) Promoting interests and values.....	23
(8) Conclusions.....	26

(1) Summary

At the end of 2017 the US published a new National Security Strategy (NSS), replacing the previous NSS of 2015 in record time.

This working paper analyses the new NSS. The US strategy now perceives a hyper-competitive world on the horizon, very different from that seen in decades past. The NSS argues that the US should be prepared to compete in the best of conditions, beginning with its domestic scenario. This paper focuses on the four pillars (areas of national interest) identified by the new NSS: (1) to protect the territory, sovereignty and the 'American way of life' of the US; (2) to promote the country's prosperity; (3) to preserve peace through strength; and (4) to promote US influence in the world.

The structure of this working paper is based on these same four pillars, but it also analyses the three broad categories of threats facing the US –at once military, political and increasingly economic– in the context of this geopolitical competition. China and Russia –characterised as revisionist powers that challenge the power, influence and interests of the US by attempting to erode its prosperity and security– comprise the first group. In the second group are the 'rogue regimes' –North Korea and Iran– that pursue the possession of weapons of mass destruction, support terrorism and destabilise. Finally, there is another group that includes transnational and other criminal threats, along with terrorism. Significantly, after more than a decade and a half, the fight against terrorism is no longer the top priority of US national security.

The new NSS aspires to move beyond 'leading from behind' to a deeper engagement with this increasingly tough global competition. The US will strive to regain its leadership in new technologies and innovation and to adapt to the new competition in cyberspace and outer space. This will be done while prioritising US interests under the heading of an 'America First' foreign policy and placing more emphasis on competition than on cooperation.

(2) Introduction

'America first', economic security, nuclear, space and cyberspace capacities in a return to geopolitical competition between great powers

The new National Security Strategy of the US is the latest of a series of documents devised by successive US Administrations that integrate foreign policy, national defence, international economic relations and development aid policy. This type of document is typically supposed to be, at least in theory, the culmination of a complex bureaucratic and inter-agency consultative process in which each participating entity establishes a series of objectives and priorities to contribute to national security. Furthermore, it also typically defines a common vocabulary for all of those charged with executing such a strategy, designing and pursuing specific sub-strategies and action plans, in turn linked to concrete budget appropriations and therefore based upon actually available resources. This is to say that everything that follows from the formulation of the strategy is what actually lends it coherence and significance.

Over time these NSS documents have become increasingly less relevant as they have become less precise, cliché ridden and overly ambitious. The strategies have tended to identify too many priorities (and therefore fix no clear priorities) without recognising any resource constraint (ie, the budget that the federal government has available to implement the strategic agenda). In this respect, the new NSS falls into similar traps to those of the past: it fails in its attempt to balance means with ends, overemphasising the latter at the expense of the former. Indeed, the Trump Administration submitted its budget requests to Congress months before it had finalised the new NSS. The strategic objectives that are established in any NSS lack real meaning until they are linked to, and supported by, the required military, economic and diplomatic means. Planning should therefore proceed in parallel with a realistic evaluation of capacities.

As with its predecessors, the objectives set forth in the Trump Administration's new NSS do not appear to acknowledge any specific material or political limitations. This also occurred under George W. Bush when the central objective of his 2006 NSS was defined as 'ending tyranny in the world'. On the other hand, Barack Obama established eight priority challenges, ranging from climate change and infectious diseases to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and failed states.

Not since 2002 –when George W. Bush's doctrine of preventive war made its appearance– has so much attention been paid to the publication of the NSS document. Growing doubts over the role of the US in the world –generated by a President who presents himself as 'disruptive' in the face of the traditional modes of approaching national security– has raised much interest. One should add, however, that the National Security Council of the US has tried to demonstrate a certain degree of coherence on international political issues, particularly since the arrival of the new National Security Advisor, H.R. McMaster, and in spite of the contradictions of US foreign policy during the Administration's first year.¹

The new NSS was something of a surprise. On the one hand, it is one of the longest NSS documents in US history –nearly double the length of the 2015 version–. It was also published before the Administration's first year had ended –always desirable but usually not possible given the difficulties inherent to its creation–. However, despite the credentials of H.R. McMaster, Dina Powell, Nadia Schadlow and Seth Center, doubts have emerged as to how much inter-agency coordination took place during the NSS's preparation (given the amount of time typically involved in the past, but also due to the complexity of the current international scenario). But these are not the only doubts. One of the principal problems facing the team which devised the strategy was that it had too little material to work on: there were no previous documents or keynote addresses by Trump on national security. Furthermore, the presidential transition was chaotic and in Trump's inaugural address he offered an overly dark picture of 'America First'. The subsequent departure of his first NSC advisor, Michael Flynn, and other changes at the National Security Council, left the NSC without a real team until March 2017. Nor should we forget the struggles between those in Trump's government who have been pushing his most radical impulses (ie, Steve Bannon, Sebastian Gorka and Stephen Miller) and

¹ Carlota García Encina (2018), 'Trump y el mundo: un año de política exterior', ARI nr 5/2018, Elcano Royal Institute.

those who are working to facilitate more traditional behaviour dynamics (ie, Jim Matthis, John Kelly, Rex Tillerson and H.R. McMaster).

The presentation of the new NSS was also unusual. It was publicly made by the President himself (something which is not normally done). For some reason, Trump wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to make an important policy address,² and it was widely expected to be in line with the new strategy. However, it turned out to be more of a campaign speech in which Trump laid out a list of the achievements of his first year as President and another of criticisms of the previous Administration. The disconnect between what Trump actually said and what is contained in the new NSS testify without much doubt to the problems facing his advisors in constructing an intellectual framework for Trump's 'America First' instinct and transforming it into a foreign policy doctrine. His words for China and Russia were notably soft. Although they represent potential rivals, Trump affirmed that he would seek opportunities for collaborating with them, and he even thanked Vladimir Putin for some less than significant gesture. Nevertheless, the formal NSS document is much tougher with respect to these countries, claiming that their objective is to transform the world in a way that opposes the values and interests of the US (NSS, 2017, p. 25).

There are also numerous contradictions between what Trump has said and affirmed both before and since moving into the White House, on the one hand, and the new NSS on the other. The President has called US 'exceptionalism' dangerous, while the new NSS affirms that US principles are 'the lasting force for good in the world' (p. 1). There are also doubts as to the possible common ground for 'sharing values and visions' through collaboration (p. 48), considering the odd transnational vision that Trump has of foreign policy. And if diplomats are 'indispensable for identifying and implementing solutions to conflicts in unstable regions of the world' (p. 33), the question arises as to why Trump has tried to gut the State Department.³ Even more significant: the NSS faces the difficult task of mapping out a strategic path for an impulsive decision-maker. Many of the most important decisions –from the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, to the non-certification of the Iran deal and the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel– have not been made as the result of a studied evaluation of options. Everything seems to indicate that there is a greater likelihood of Trump choosing the short-run perspective and pursue tactical victories, as opposed to any policy based on long-term priorities, as the NSS attempts to articulate.

In the end, the new NSS is an amalgam of traditional US national security culture with many purely Republican Party concepts, but it also includes angles which are uniquely Trump.

This is clear from the emphasis on China, Russia, Iran and North Korea, and on transnational threats like terrorism, which inevitably recall earlier US national security strategies. The NSS also maintains the perennial reference to the traditional US leadership role in the world –the notes are different this time around, but the song is the

² White House YouTube channel (2017), 'President Trump Deliver Remarks Regarding the Administration's National Security Strategy', 18/XII/2017.

³ Carlota García Encina (2018), *op. cit.*

same— and the standing commitment to prevent global disorder which would involve some cost to its interests and values. It also breaks down the world into regions, as in past strategy documents. The emphasis on the economic strength of the country reappears, along with US competitiveness and resilience —all elements contained in Obama's NSS from 2015—. Up to this point, the components of the national security strategy show a certain continuity that the US has maintained over the past decades. The emphasis on anti-missile defence, nuclear weapons and certain economic issues, like tax reform and deregulation is new but all these issues form part of the mainstream Republican platform. However, the focus on border security, immigration limits and trade policy, along with the absence of any concern for climate change and the 'America First' refrain are the clearest new 'Trumpian' elements of national security strategy.

(3) A hyper-competitive world

The new NSS begins with a description of a highly competitive world and the claim that the US has the right to pursue its own interests. The document underlines that the country possesses unmatched political, economic, military and technological advantages over the rest of the countries of the world. However, to preserve its advantages, the NSS claims that the US should become even stronger to compete more vigorously and to defiantly defend 'US sovereignty without apologies' (p. 1).

The brief introductory section on this new 'competitive world' —in which the allies are not even mentioned as partners— becomes the guiding thread of the document. It is a world in which China and Russian are challenging the power of the US and forcing a rethinking of the policies of recent decades, based as they have been upon the supposedly erroneous assumption (that the document assumes it to be) that collaboration with these rivals and their inclusion within international institutions and global trade has turned them into reliable countries (p. 3).

The document posits that there has been a return to the kind of great power competition that we have not seen in the world for at least 15 or 20 years. It argues that the US should be prepared for competition —if not necessarily outright warfare— with such geopolitical rivals who ignore the truth, the rules and the imperative to protect privacy in democracies; rivals who employ sophisticated political, economic and military campaigns and have enough patience to steadily benefit from minor strategic achievements (p. 28).

The US should therefore prepare itself to compete in the best possible conditions because, even despite its current strength, its advantage has been eroded as other countries make progress at its expense. As a result, the US will use all the tools of national power —political, economic and military— to ensure that the regions of the world are not dominated by a single power (p. 4).

But competition does not always imply hostility, nor does it inevitably lead to conflict. The document argues that if competition is adequately managed —with strength and confidence—, conflict will be avoided and peace will be promoted. Strength should be acquired through the protection of four pillars or areas of national interest: (1) protecting the 'homeland' and the 'American way of life'; (2) promoting national prosperity; (3) preserving peace through strength; and (4) fostering US influence in the world.

These four pillars of national interest are tightly bound together by cause-and-effect relationships. Nor is it a coincidence that the first two are centred on the domestic scene. The strategy's editorial team has attempted to reinterpret Trump's doctrine of 'go it alone-ism' to make it less objectionable and less vulnerable to criticism. As such, the 'Trump doctrine' does not abandon the world –as many would interpret it– but it does insist on a new way of relating to it, offering a perspective 'of principled realism that is guided by outcomes, not ideology' (p. 1). The doctrine springs from the conviction that to have a strong America, one must start by strengthening the country domestically. Only with a solid economy and security at home can one begin to think about preserving peace through strength and fostering US interests in the world (p. 17). The first two pillars are needed to secure the third and the fourth. As such, to successfully meet the challenge of revisionist powers like China and Russia, solid domestic fundamentals are required, not multilateralism.

In May 2017, the National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and the then Director of the National Economic Council, Gary Cohn, published a joint op-ed piece that was presented as a preview of the new NSS. In it they maintained that the world was not a 'global community' but rather merely a conglomeration of countries, non-state actors and businesses that competed to gain advantage over the others. They represented international relations as a zero-sum game, rejecting the Kantian notion of the 'global community' in favour of a Hobbesian 'state of nature', where countries compete for advantage over each other. In this way, the new Administration understands alliances as temporary alignments of interest, without intrinsic value for the US and, therefore, of little value for strengthening US power or influence, or for avoiding future wars. But if and when interests coincide, the door could be opened for collaboration with others to resolve problems and explore opportunities. In this op-ed, it does not appear that the Administration makes any distinctions between competitors, partners and allies,⁴ a language that differs as much from that of the previous Administration as it does from the European vision of a global order based on multilateral rules. It is not surprising that this preview fed doubts about the continuity of the US's traditional role as the guarantor of the liberal international order. Many European political leaders, including Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, have suggested that Europe should try to fill the leadership space left behind by the US by redoubling efforts to defend this international order.

Nevertheless, the formal NSS document, approved months later, does distinguish between competitors and partners, although there is only a thin line from one to the other. This allows for possible cooperation with China and Russia –seen as primary geopolitical competitors– on nuclear weapons, and at the same time, on the other hand, to still assert the claim that trade with the Europeans –the US's principal partners and allies– is often unfair for the US.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the new NSS is that it explicitly identifies the primary competitor countries as China and Russia, mentioning them more than 25 times.

⁴ H.R. McMaster & Gary D. Cohn (2017), 'America First Doesn't Mean America Alone', *Wall Street Journal*, 30/V/2017.

In recent decades Russia has invaded its neighbours, attempted to weaken NATO and fostered divisions in Europe. Vladimir Putin has also seen the relationship with the US and Europe as a zero-sum game: Russian interests cannot be ensured until the power of the US and NATO diminish. China, for its part, considers the US a power within the Indo-Pacific region whose influence it might contest but cannot eliminate. China unilaterally pressures its neighbours to obtain advantage in regional disputes, as in the South China Sea, but it typically stops short of explicitly violating territorial sovereignty or integrity, as Russia does.

Both these countries are characterised as revisionist powers that challenge the power, influence and interests of the US and attempt to erode its prosperity and security in a hyper-competitive world. The threat perceived from these countries is defined in terms of economic competition –in addition to military strength–. It is nevertheless surprising that in the letter from the US President serving as the Strategy's prologue, neither Russia nor China is mentioned at all: a mild tone like the one Trump used to refer to these countries in his public presentation of the new NSS document.

A few months before the publication of the US National Security Strategy, France released its Strategic Review of National Defence and Security.⁵ The new French strategy makes quite a similar diagnostic of the state of the world:⁶ geopolitical competition –in which Russia and China, with their global ambitions, are challenging the multilateral order–⁷ together with other important transnational challenges like terrorism, the return of military competition and the rising importance of the domain of outer space. But there is an important difference in the solution which France offers to deal with such problems. For the French, the key is insistence on the re-emergence of multipolarity, the need to strengthen the international order and the imperative to build European strategic autonomy in parallel to a reaffirmation of the Atlantic Alliance as a key strategic element in European security.

Nevertheless, the US is placing its strategic bet on the strengthening of national power and on putting its national interests first. The allies do not figure, as such, in this competition between great powers. And although at times the document appears to embrace liberal international ideology, previous strategies are not only not explicitly acknowledged but also rather often blamed as the cause of current problems. Indeed, the document makes no mention of the concepts of the 'liberal international order' or of an 'international order based on norms'. It refers to the 'post-war order' only once (p. 2) and in the second pillar, focused on the economic realm, the new document speaks of 'rules of order' (p. 17) and 'economic order' (p. 20). The new strategy also speaks of 'American principles' but without clarifying that these are also universal principles and values shared by other cultures, regions and peoples.

5 Présidence de la République (2017), *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale*, Direction générale des relations internationales et de la stratégie (DGRIS), Ministère des Armées, October.

6 Présidence de la République (2017), 'La compétition, d'abord économique et technologique, s'étend de plus en plus au domaine militaire', p. 17.

7 Présidence de la République (2017), 'La Russie mène ainsi un travail de contestation ou de blocage des institutions et instruments internationaux et promeut, lorsque ses intérêts sont en jeu, des instances régionales alternatives La Chine fait le choix, dans son voisinage, d'une posture privilégiant l'influence économique et les rapports bilatéraux', p. 18.

The picture the NSS paints of the liberal international order is, therefore, unequal, explicitly rejecting multilateralism but recognising the role of international institutions. It also appears to reduce the concept of the liberal international order by stripping away the content of one of the two adjectives at the expense of its 'liberal' aspect.

All indications seem to suggest that the Administration will continue to defend the current security order against the great power rivals, but it will not aspire to perpetuate the liberal international order. Even more, the preference of the US President for competition over cooperation does not mean that this Administration, or its NSS, will completely abandon the US role in global security. The US Navy continues to undertake exercises to guarantee freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, Washington maintains its refusal to recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea and recently it authorised lethal military assistance to the Ukraine, while the fight against the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) is yielding results. The US now promotes, in this regard, a minimalist international order over a more maximalist liberal international order.

(4) Protecting the country

The first pillar: to protect Americans, the country and the 'American way of life'

Although the Strategy recognises certain benefits of an interconnected world, the document emphasises that adversaries have taken advantage of a free and democratic system to harm the US, developing capacities that threaten millions of Americans (North Korea), stealing intellectual property (China), interfering in the domestic political process (Russia) or placing critical infrastructures at risk.

As a consequence, borders should be controlled and the immigration system reformed. Illegal flows should be controlled and choked off, critical infrastructures must be protected and state and non-state actors that utilise cyberspace to undertake campaigns contrary to US political, economic and security interests without having to physically cross borders must also be pursued. Anti-missile systems will protect the country against possible attacks, efforts to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction will be strengthened and terrorists will be hunted down on their own territory to prevent them from reaching American soil. This idea to pursue threats 'at their origin' is contradicted, however, by two other subsequent affirmations. On the one hand, the US commits itself to support fragile states, but only selectively (p. 39); on the other hand, it maintains that the government, despite its best efforts, cannot defend against all the dangers that threaten Americans (p. 14). This concession seems to serve as a justification for the emphasis on the pursuit of resilience within the population, on its capacity to resist and rapidly recover from deliberate attacks, accidents, natural disasters, social upheavals and other threats to the economy and democratic system (p. 14), a concept that had already appeared in the NSS in both 2010 and 2015.

It should be noted that the concept of resilience has become a powerful principle in the field of national and international security. Instead of promising 'total security', which is practically impossible to ensure in the current complex security environment, resilience accepts the possibility that disturbances and crises occur. It is not just an acceptance that 'things happen', but rather a question of how to resist and hold up when such disturbances and crises occur. The concept of resilience, therefore, challenges the

traditional role of the state as the sole, monopoly supplier of security. The reach and objectives of the NSS go beyond the government and military authorities and even aspire to reach beyond the security dimension by underlining the interconnection between the environment, demography and the social scene.

In this first pillar, the improvement of the US antimissile system appears as one of the top action priorities for protecting US territory, citizens and troops. Until now, the system has been focused on the threat emanating from 'rogue states' like North Korea and Iran, and not from Russia and China. According to the new formal strategy document, the focus will continue. Nevertheless, the most recent events suggest that there might be a change of focus in the future.

In March 2018 the Russian President announced that his country possessed technology that would allow Russian nuclear weapons to evade the US anti-missile systems.⁸ And to leave no doubt, he proceeded to successfully launch a new supersonic missile. This announcement and subsequent actions can be interpreted as a reaction to the strong focus the US has placed on its anti-missile efforts in the NSS. On the other hand, the top US military officials have been warning for some time that China has one of the most active and diversified anti-missile programmes. China has added mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles to its arsenal, improved its sea-launched ballistic missiles and progressed towards supersonic capabilities that could elude US anti-missile systems.

As a result, all indications suggest that a new US anti-missile policy will soon be formulated, and it will probably consider these missile threats represented by Russia and China, although it might not recognise them as direct threats aimed at the US. However, it could recognise that the technological progress of the two countries poses a risk if these and other new developments might end up in the hands of other countries, giving other competitors a greater incentive to develop increasingly sophisticated weapons. In any case, it would be an adjustment to the doctrine.

(5) Economic security is national security

The second pillar: promoting national prosperity by 'rejuvenating' the US economy to the benefit of the workers and companies

The strategy also springs from the idea that the new Administration has inherited an anaemic country, with stagnating salaries and wages, low productivity, weak job creation and an excessively regulated economy. This excessively dismal assessment of the status quo has been criticised by many for wilfully ignoring the economic recovery of the US during the final period of the Obama Administration.

The strategy presents an economic scenario that requires, therefore, 'rejuvenating' the economy and making it more competitive. The emphasis that Donald Trump placed on 'making America great again' during the primaries and presidential election campaign has now been directed precisely at the object of making the country more competitive.

⁸ Vladimir Putin (2018), 'Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly', President of Russia, 1/III/2018.

(cont.)

His insistence on being firm with China and on renegotiating many of the US's bilateral trade agreements reflects his desire to raise US competitiveness. This focus, of course, raises the risk that the US will slide into protectionism and isolationism, as appears to be happening now.⁹

The strategy aims to reduce regulatory barriers, promote fiscal reform, improve infrastructures –including energy and digital– and reduce public debt by restricting federal spending.

The fiscal reform is already underway:¹⁰ corporate taxes have been lowered from 35% to 21% with the expectation that the lower rates will attract multinational corporations and large foreign companies. At the same time, this tax cut provides an incentive for large US companies to repatriate their foreign-earned profits –IBM and Apple have already announced they will repatriate capital generated abroad– and a disincentive for their activity and investment to flow out of the US and into foreign economies, particularly given that regulations governing payments to foreign subsidiaries will tighten. Attracting economy activity back to the US would also increase investment in manufacturing and this would, indirectly, benefit small businesses. Nevertheless, there are many doubts over how to compensate for the resulting drop in tax revenue, especially in the short run.

The most critical voices see the tax reform as pure politics, lacking much justification from the real economy. They argue that the tax cut favours corporations to the extreme, along with the rich and those who have fervently opposed Obamacare (given that the fiscal reform repealed one of the key provisions of the healthcare reform of 2010 that had obliged all US taxpayers to have medical insurance or be punished with a fine). When the budget deficit balloons, the harshest critics maintain, the Republicans will then use it to justify spending cuts, especially in pensions and healthcare.

It is too early to assess the real impact of the fiscal reform that, at any event, will interact with trends in the international fiscal and tax environment. Many countries are reducing their tax rates, simplifying their tax codes and reducing direct taxes. Its ultimate effect will likely be mixed, but an authentic assessment of the fiscal reform must also consider the economic and budget policies of Washington.

The infrastructure plan is one of President Trump's star economic policies for the second year of his term. The deteriorated state of the country's transport and communications infrastructure is one of the central anomalies of a great power like the US. Trump's promise to invest US\$1 billion –US\$200 million from the federal coffers and the rest from private investment via 'private public partnerships'– has now become an 'incentive programme' in which states and local authorities will lead the projects, now having to reconsider how to raise funds for infrastructure investments. Many point out that such a system could easily leave metropolitan areas and even entire states without federal support for infrastructure development simply for lack of fiscal capacity.

⁹ Federico Steinberg (2018), 'Lo que hay que saber sobre la guerra comercial iniciada por Trump', *Comentario Elcano*, nr 19/2018, Elcano Royal Institute.

¹⁰ Carlota García Encina (2017), 'Trump entre la reforma fiscal y la seguridad nacional', *Elcano Blog*, 22/XII/2017.

The Administration has committed US\$200 million for infrastructures, according to its federal budget request for 2019, and it hopes that states and localities raise US\$1.5 billion in infrastructure investment over the next 10 years. The White House also wants to reduce the maximum period for the licensing and construction of public works to two years.¹¹ Some political groups and environmentalists argue that this will be achieved at the expense of the process of environmental analysis, lowering protection standards as a result.

To promote the economic prosperity of the country, the US will seek fair and reciprocal bilateral economic relationships. However, at the same time, the NSS underlines Washington's opposition to regional trade blocks (p. 19). This principle is consistent with some Administration decisions, including the US withdrawal from the TPP as soon as Trump arrived at the White House. According to the new Administration, the TPP would have diverted resources from the country, and weakened the US as a result, in the face of the growing competition/threat from China. Here, again, is the idea that to be able to stand up to the revisionist powers the US must be domestically strong. According to Trump, to have maintained the link with these partners and allies would have cost, in economic terms, far more than the benefits obtained from the TPP. The members of the TPP continue to forge ahead in the regional project without the US; meanwhile, global value chains are increasingly rooted in Asia, and China gains influence by favouring Chinese companies over US competitors.

Although Trump's priority in the second pillar of the NSS is on domestic strengthening as the key to allowing country to successfully face the increasingly hyper-competitive world in which we live, it is in this economic section of the NSS where the notion of working with 'like-minded partners' appears (p. 20) in the context of emphasising the need for fair trade. But it will be difficult to find countries who are also seeking an exclusively bilateral negotiation strategy that will help reduce the US trade deficit, one of the Administration's central goals. According to the US National Director of Intelligence, Daniel R. Coats, in his testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee last February: 'The uncertainties among allies and partners of the US with respect to the will and capacity of the US to maintain its international commitments could lead them to consider reorienting their policies, especially trade policies, in a different direction than the US'.¹²

(5.1) Technology and innovation

Washington will also attempt to preserve US leadership in research, technology and innovation by prioritising emerging technologies like nanotechnology and Artificial Intelligence (AI). At the same time, it will protect intellectual property from competitors who try to steal it, acquire it unfairly or otherwise obtain it illicitly.

¹¹ The White House (2018), "Legislative Outline for Rebuilding Infrastructure in America," The White House, February 2018.

¹² Daniel R. Coats, "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 13/II/2019

(cont.)

There is a deep sensation in the US that the country has progressively lost its advantage as a leader in science, technology and innovation relative to other countries, especially China. The data confirm this trend. According to statistics gathered by the US National Science Foundation,¹³ the US continues to be the global leader in science and technology, but the world is changing and in the face of the growth of other countries, the relative share of the US is eroding. In R&D, the US led global spending in 2015 with US\$496 billion (26% of the global total), while China was second, spending US\$408 billion (21%). China has expanded R&D spending quite rapidly since 2000 –at an average annual rate of 18%, compared with only 4% annual growth in the US–. Furthermore, Chinese R&D spending has been focused more on development than on basic (or even applied) research. This is one of the principal keys to the rise of China, and the flourishing drone market provides a good concrete example. The military development of drone technology during the 20th century by the US has been overshadowed in this century by Chinese companies refining and perfecting these unmanned vehicles. This has made China the largest producer of commercial drones, exporting much of its production to the US.

According to the National Science Foundation, if current trends continue China will surpass the US in national annual R&D spending at the end of this year.¹⁴ The US is also the largest manufacturer of high technology (with a 31% global share). This includes aerospace, semiconductor, computer, pharmaceutical and measurement and control instrument production. China occupies the second position, at 24%, more than twice its share during the last decade. Furthermore, for the first time, China has moved ahead of the US in the total annual number of scientific publications, with 426,000 studies published compared with only 409,000 in the US.

Back in 2013, Sunnylands (in Southern California) hosted the US President Barack Obama and the Chinese leader Xi Jinping. During this encounter, Obama showed Xi the evidence proving that China and members of its armed forces had been stealing industrial technology. The Chinese accepted the evidence and agreed that Pekin would not assist in technological theft in the future. But the promise has not been sufficient to stop the practice and the new NSS recommends new measures to address this. First, the strategy proposes a concept that until now has not been widely accepted: the National Security Innovation Base (NSIB), which refers to the 'American network of knowledge, capabilities and people –including academia, National Laboratories and the private sector– that turns ideas into innovations, transforms discoveries into successful commercial products and companies, and protects and enhances the American way of life' (p. 21). This foundational network should be protected above all from the efforts of China and other countries to steal US intellectual property. As a result, intellectual property is no longer considered exclusively an economic question; it is now also seen as a national security issue. Nevertheless, the strategy misses the opportunity to

¹³ National Science Board (2018), *Science & Engineering Indicators 2018*, National Science Foundation, 2018

¹⁴ National Science Foundation (2018), 'National Science Board Statement on Global Research and Development (R&D) Investments NSB-2018-9', News Release, National Science Foundation, 7/III/2018.

recognise that there is no 'US network' but rather a global network in which the US constitutes one of the central nodes.

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the US (CFIUS) protects intellectual property by inspecting foreign investments that could give other countries or foreign entities access to control over certain aspects of critical infrastructures. The growing concern for intellectual property could end up placing inspections on new industries and types of transactions that could affect national security. There have already been movements in this direction. For example, when President Trump blocked the purchase of a semiconductor company by a Chinese buyer last September, he cited 'the potential transfer of intellectual property to the foreign buyer' as the principal reason behind his decision.¹⁵ The inclusion of the CFIUS in the NSS and a focus on the need to strengthen it could be a sign that the Administration is open to this type of reform. It will also seek to restrict foreign technical personnel in the US, although no clarification is made as to which countries of origin would be affected, it appears to be directed completely at China.

(5.2) Energy Dominance

This second economic pillar of the new NSS also incorporates the concept of US energy dominance –stemming from its central position in production, consumption and innovation– and its potential to stimulate the economy. Again, the document paints a negative panorama of the energy industry, claiming that the sector has had its hands tied during the Obama Administration. What is certain is that oil production has grown by more than 70% since Barack Obama first arrived at the White House, and natural gas production by more than 30%. With respect to energy trade, the ban on oil exports was lifted in 2015 and the first exports of liquified natural gas occurred in 2016.

The Trump Administration is not only disposed to exploit its significant resources to the maximum in the quest for energy independence, but also to make becoming a hydrocarbon-exporting giant a central objective. The NSS underlines, in addition, the political will to direct energy resources to those countries forced to rely on a single supplier. The reference to the Central European countries and their relationship with Russia seems clear (p. 48). During his visit to Warsaw in July 2017, the President declared his intention to free Poland from the risk of being held hostage to a single energy provider.¹⁶ In November, in a demonstration of the solid intentions of both countries, the Polish company PGNiG signed a five-year contract to receive supplies of liquified natural gas from the US.

On the domestic front, one of Trump's first actions was to sign the two executive orders allowing the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines to proceed. At the end of the year he signed another order with the objective of reducing the importation of some 50 critical minerals, but which also opened the possibility of extracting metals and minerals

¹⁵ Donald Trump (2018), 'Order Regarding the Proposed Acquisition of Lattice Semiconductor Corporation by China Venture Capital Fund Corporation Limited', Executive Order, White House, 13/IX/2018.

¹⁶ Donald Trump (2017), 'Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland, White House, 6/VII/2017.

(cont.)

from the subsoil of federal lands. Clearly Washington seeks to increase its weight in a sector made up primarily of private companies that are moved more by profit than by politics, making any projection of 'dominance' somewhat hollow. On the other hand, energy dominance is an unnecessarily provocative term given that currently the US is benefitting from the existing system of global energy security.¹⁷

As might be expected from the US Administration, there is a lack of emphasis on climate change in the NSS. Indeed, the term, as such, does not appear in the document. On the contrary, it claims that the US will fight against what in conservative circles is called 'the anti-growth energy agenda' (p. 22) and refers to climate regulations that 'eliminate jobs'. The document claims that this agenda works against the economic and energy security of the US. The rhetoric on climate has clearly changed: rather than seeing climate change in national security terms, climate policies are viewed by the new NSS as threats to US interests.

Nevertheless, despite the omission of climate change from the strategy, in military circles it has become a widespread belief that climate change and environmental degradation present a wide array of security challenges. In 2003, during the George W. Bush Administration, a Pentagon report warned that climate change could provoke a 'desperate necessity for natural resources like energy, food and water' that could in turn unleash conflicts.¹⁸ In 2015, under President Obama, the Department of State studied the security implications of climate change, concluding that it 'could aggravate existing problems –poverty, social tensions, environmental degradation, ineffective leadership and weak political institutions– threatening the internal stability of many countries'.¹⁹ The current Secretary of Defense, Jim Mattis, assured the Senate during his confirmation hearing that this was a factor that must be taken into account. He claimed that climate change has an impact on the stability of some areas of the world where US troops operate that could affect US naval bases and have important consequences for the Arctic, a zone of growing strategic importance for many countries.

More than anything else, the exclusion of climate change from the new strategy is a symbolic gesture to Trump's climate scepticism. Furthermore, in December 2017, the president signed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) which claimed that 'climate change is a direct threat to the national security of the United States and it is impacting the stability of areas of the world where the armed forces of the US operate, and it has strategic implications for future conflicts; ...the Department of State should be prepared to incorporate the impacts of climate change into the evaluation of threats, assignment of resources and preparation.'²⁰ It also puts dozens of military bases in

¹⁷ Gonzalo Escribano (2018), 'La política energética de la presidencia Trump, año I', Comentario Elcano, nr 1/2018, Elcano Royal Institute, 11/1/2018.

¹⁸ Peter Schwartz & Doug Randall (2003), 'An Abrupt Climate Change Scenario and Its Implications for the United States National Security', The Pentagon, October.

¹⁹ Department of Defense (2015), 'National Security Implications of Climate-Related Risks and a Changing Climate', Department of Defense, 23/VII/2015.

²⁰ 115th Congress (2017), 'National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018', US Congress, November.

danger from rising sea levels. As such, the recognition that climate change is a direct threat to national security is an official position of the Administration.

(6) Peace through strength

The third pillar: peace will be preserved through the strength and reconstruction of the military so that it remains preeminent, continues to deter adversaries and, if necessary, is capable of fighting and winning a war

Once again, the idea is put forth that the US has not known how to keep up with the pace of change that has driven military competition in recent years. After the Cold War, for more than two decades Washington enjoyed uncontested military domination. Furthermore, the context of the moment allowed its domination to have a comparably low military and financial price. However, during more recent years the US has had to face many more tough military and geopolitical challenges than at any other moment of the past quarter century, and this has coincided exactly with a period of disinvestment in defence. The result, according to many, has been a crisis for US military primacy, as Washington's margin of superiority has shrunk and as a growing gap has emerged between commitments and capacities. If conflicts were to arise in certain key areas, the US could find itself incapable of maintaining current commitments or be able to do so only at prohibitive costs. But despite the dark prospect drawn by the Administration and the growing criticism of the current state of the US armed forces –from both think tanks and the Armed Services Committees of the Senate and the House– it is clear that the US continues to be superior in power to all the other countries of the world, although its power is becoming dangerously insufficient for a 'grand strategy' and the international order that it has until now supported.

And while military pre-eminence and capacities have decayed, the US has also remained strategically stuck. According to the most critical voices, this strategic insolvency has undermined Washington's alliances, creating doubts about the credibility of the US guarantee, weakening the deterrent effect and tempting adversaries to think that aggression might be successful, and perhaps even face no opposition.

The new NSS does not resolve the strategic stagnation of the US. It also erroneously puts Russia and China into the same category, on the one hand, and Iran and North Korea, into another. Not only is this inaccurate analysis, it is not useful.

The document also does not recognise the need to implement different strategies with each country to bring regional equilibrium back into balance. If, from the US point of view, Moscow and Beijing are seen to be the same in their actions and objectives, then the reasons why Russia and China maintain a distance between themselves fade from view. Such a vision is blind to the many divergences between the two countries; in the case of China, such a blindness strengthens the hard line in China and marginalises those Chinese who seek to work with the US, including with respect to North Korea.

Nor does the NSS resolve the debate engaged by previous Administrations –between overestimating the dividends of cooperation and downplaying economic and military competition between the US and each of these countries–. Previous Administrations

were slow to assess the balance between competition and cooperation while Russia and China have been increasingly assertive, particularly during Obama's second term.

The NSS does the same with Iran and North Korea, putting them together in the same category and labelling them 'rogue states'. This is somewhat reminiscent of the NSS of 2002 and the 'axis of evil'. Once again, a false equivalence is made between two countries that, while similar in some ways, are very different in others. The most obvious distinguishing factor is that North Korea is a more immediate threat while Iran is so only in the middle term.

The strategy says nothing new about Iran –it does not even mention the nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA)– or North Korea (although it has both capacities and intentions). The North Korean nuclear programme is focused on deterrence, domestic and international prestige, and on coercive diplomacy. While it is correct to be alert to the ambitions of Kim Jong-un and how these might evolve, the statements of the new NSS are simply hyperbolic and alarmist. The language used claims that North Korea has the capacity to kill millions of Americans with nuclear weapons and points to the futility of dialogue, implying that such a threat is imminent and imposing a distorted calendar for carrying out military actions against North Korea. The most recent events even point in the other direction.

Russia and China, first, and North Korean and Iran, secondly, together form the two principal groups of threats facing the US. Transnational and criminal threats, including terrorism, follow in a third category. It should be noted here that terrorism is no longer the cornerstone of national security, after having been so for a decade and a half. The US will continue the counter-terrorism campaigns currently underway, but strategic great-power competition, not terrorism, is now the priority. This notion is even more concrete and tangible in the National Defense Strategy, published shortly after the new NSS.

(6.1) 'Capacities' and 'capabilities'

The new strategy focuses on the modernisation of the US armed forces, an increase in their size, an improvement in their capabilities and their overall preparation for facing the three main groups of threats.

Russia and China have made significant military progress. Therefore, the US should seek a balance between, on the one hand, being prepared for a high intensity war with Russia and/or China and, on the other, trying to manage current low intensity conflicts by relying on high technology. In military terms, the US will have to choose between force strength and competence in technological development –that is, between capacities and capabilities–.

Capacity refers to the size of the force, while capability refers to its technological prowess and advantages. In recent years, increasing emphasis has been placed on the latter, and the consequent need to invest in research and development, while the idea of increasing the size of military forces has been relatively ignored. Now the US should

seek a balance between the two trends. In any case, this will imply a significant increase in defence spending.

The former Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates, argues that annual growth in defence spending of 3% to 5% is necessary just to maintain the current structure, keeping in mind that increases in operational and personnel costs are typically higher than inflation. If this real growth in defence spending is not obtained, inevitably there will need to be a cut in defence programmes.

Under the new Administration, it appears that growth in defence spending will be around 3% annually in nominal terms (including inflation). This means that the real growth will be around 2%. This is nevertheless insufficient to meet goals of increasing both capacities and capabilities. As a result, a choice will have to be made: first, between increasing the number of ships, marine corps effectives, airplanes, etc., and investing in cyber-capabilities and electronic warfare; and secondly, between investing in training for the immediate deployment of forces, or 'readiness' or in standing presence.

The result of this choice, or even a certain emphasis on one side at the expense of the other, can affect the modernisation, configuration, size of forces and preparation of the four armed services: the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Marines.

The budget question is therefore crucial. Unfortunately, only once during the past decade was the defence budget approved on time. Presently, it is still not known whether defence spending will be closer to US\$700 billion or US\$600 billion. Nevertheless, in the presentation of the National Defense Strategy –of which a short summary was declassified and published shortly after the new NSS–,²¹ Secretary Mattis placed more emphasis on the development of new capabilities and the immediate deployment of forces, than on expanding capacity and presence. It is therefore probable that more will be invested in innovation, modernisation and acquisitions than in increasing the size of forces. However, given doubts about the defence budget's ultimate size, ways to economise on some of the modernisation plans should not be ruled out. But innovations like the B-21, AI and robotics, new unmanned vehicles, space systems and electronic anti-cyber-attack systems, should be financed. Nevertheless, the F-35 programme, the ICBM modernisation programme and the Navy's ambition to increase the size of the fleet by 25% should probably be revised.

(6.2) Nuclear capacity and capabilities

The US will invest again in maintaining its nuclear arsenal and infrastructure, which the new NSS gives a central role. Nuclear weapons have played a preventive and deterrence role since the end of the Second World War, allowing for confrontations between the great powers –if not all conflict– to be avoided. But with time, especially since the end of the Cold War, the US has fallen behind on modernisation programmes, while other adversaries like Russia, China, Iran and North Korea have made significant progress.

²¹ US Department of Defense (2018), 'Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America', US Department of Defense, January.

(cont.)

The number and type of nuclear weapons in the US arsenal have fallen significantly in the past 40 years. Both the NSS and the Nuclear Posture Review,²² published in February 2018, insist on maintaining a safe and effective nuclear deterrent, modernising and, if necessary, replacing the strategic triad of nuclear submarines, strategic bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles.

But the issue is not only the numerical increase but also the role of the nuclear weapons themselves, understanding that the return to great-power competition increases dependence on them, as well as heightening their importance.

In 2010 the Obama Administration approved the latest Nuclear Posture Review with the explicit objective not only of reducing the number of nuclear weapons and renouncing the accumulation of new ones, but also of playing a role in the National Security Strategy, limiting the conditions under which they can be used. Barack Obama established that the only purpose of these weapons was to deter a nuclear attack against the US, its allies and US military forces. The implicit objective was that in this way other countries would also reduce in parallel their interest in having their own nuclear capacities and abandon their nuclear ambitions. Iran and North Korea were at the centre of Obama's non-proliferation agenda, which convinced Russia and China to cooperate on arms control and to impose sanctions approved and supported by the Security Council.

Nevertheless, the perspective was somewhat limited and, in general, the change in the structure of US forces and in their doctrine did not have very significant consequences around the world, except for the nuclear deal with Iran.

Under the Trump Administration there is a different focus. Nuclear weapons will only be used in 'extreme circumstances', but these could now include strategic non-nuclear attacks against the civilian population, cyberattacks against critical infrastructures and large-scale conventional aggressions (p. 30). While Obama promised not to build new nuclear weapons, Trump has rehabilitated sea-based, submarine-launched cruise missiles, as well as the construction of low-yield tactical nuclear weapons. All of this is oriented to the growing role of nuclear options –especially its de-escalation policy²³ within Russian military doctrine, Moscow's violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the growing nuclear capacities of China and North Korea, along with the possibility of nuclear terrorism. In this way, the publication of the new Nuclear Posture Review is justified as a necessary response to these changes in global security conditions.

²² Nuclear Posture Review, 2/II/2018, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>.

²³ Some time ago, Russian military doctrine incorporated the concept of 'de-escalation'. The idea is that if Russia must face a large-scale conventional attack that exceeds its defence capacities, it could respond with a limited nuclear attack. The threat of a limited nuclear attack would force the opponent to accept a return to the previous status quo. Such a policy is a re-emergence of the importance of nuclear arms in strategic defence. See Nikolai N. Soko (2014), 'Why Russia calls a limited nuclear strike "de-escalation"', *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 14/III/2014.

Other previous Presidents (not only Obama) had also attempted to depend increasingly less on this type of weapon, recognising its limited utility and instead focusing on the US comparative advantages in high-tech conventional warfare. To direct the competition towards nuclear arms where the US military does not have the same kind of comparative advantage as before, however, does not appear to be the most adequate policy. Furthermore, however one looks at it the implementation of the Nuclear Posture Review of 2018 would be extremely expensive and imply opportunity costs in the form of less money available for the preparation and immediate deployment of forces, and for investment in new non-nuclear capabilities.

In the new NSS, however, there is an important caveat relevant for avoiding any possible nuclear confrontation: 'To avoid miscalculation, the United States will conduct discussions with other states to build predictable relationships and reduce nuclear risks. We will consider new arms control arrangements if they contribute to strategic stability and if they are verifiable' (p. 31) A dialogue with China and Russia to avoid such miscalculations and to strengthen strategic stability seems to be the most intuitive priority, and this posture has been confirmed in the Nuclear Posture Review of January 2018. Evidence of this would be the return of Moscow to the INF Treaty, particularly if the Russians were prepared to extend the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) beyond its expiration in 2021.

(6.3) Outer space

The Trump Administration also will strengthen US space capabilities. Until now the space race has been primarily a question of national prestige, but outer space is no longer as benign as it once was. Both the technological and arms races have penetrated outer space, an increasingly key domain for military and economic interests of the world's countries, given the importance of communications via satellite. One should not forget, furthermore, that the notion that land, air, sea, cyberspace and outer space are separate domains is now obsolete.

Space policy should become more like nuclear deterrence strategy. If nuclear weapons can deter aggression, Washington would like to communicate the same message from outer space. And if the best way to avoid war is to be prepared for it, the new Administration wants to ensure that the country is prepared to wage and win this competition in all domains, including outer space.

According to reports circulating in Washington, China and Russia are developing potent anti-satellite (ASAT) weaponry. Until now, satellites have been most vulnerable to attacks on their operating capacity which take advantage of their signal latency (or delay) –as opposed to attacks on their very physical existence–. But China has already employed anti-satellite weapons on at least one occasion to destroy its own obsolete satellites, increasing the anxiety felt by Western countries because of China's growing capacity in the domain of outer space. China has invested significantly in the development of different launching systems for these types of missiles –from both land and mobile units– as well as in developing its space exploration programme. But China is not the only country developing its space capacities. Russia also has a wide network of satellites, as well as ASAT capabilities. Meanwhile, Iran and other countries have also

demonstrated sufficient capacity to interfere and to distort US satellite communications. Such satellite communications are fundamental for the conduct of military operations, given their key role in the recognition of, and communications between, US military units and weaponry.

Furthermore, behavioural norms (which already exist for the land, sea and cyberspace domains) must be established, particularly for the promotion of space commerce (p. 31). The space industry is set to grow considerably in the future; analysts project that it will *treble over the coming decades*. The US's economic advantages in the space sector could help support Trump's agenda. Even before the new NSS was released, he had shown signs of his interest in space: he reactivated the National Space Council²⁴ and announced that the country would once again send men to the moon, distancing himself from the positions and tendencies of previous Administrations.

(6.4) Cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence

Cyberspace and, more broadly speaking, cybersecurity has also been positioned –to an unprecedented extent– as a crucial element of the new National Security Strategy. The NSS has an important dose of realism when it confirms that the US does not currently dominate cyberspace: 'The spread of accurate and inexpensive weapons and the use of cyber tools have allowed state and non-state competitors to harm the United States across various domains. Such capabilities contest what was until recently US dominance across the land, air, maritime, space, and cyberspace domains' (p. 27).

Cybersecurity occupies a central position in the first three pillars of the NSS. The first pillar incorporates the Administration's vision on how cyberspace activity can contribute to US efforts to defeat jihadist terrorists (p. 11). The Internet provides a haven for terrorists and the NSS explicitly mentions the need to 'confront the challenge of terrorists and criminals "going dark" and using secure platforms to evade detection' (p. 11). To meet this challenge, the NSS recognises the need to work with the private sector.

In the first pillar, one also finds a section on how to 'keep America safe in the cyber era' (p. 12-13). It contains a familiar discourse on the threats to critical infrastructures and government networks, but the framing has evolved significantly with respect to the NSS of 2015. It prioritises the risks in six sectors: national security, energy, banking and finance, health, communications and transport. In contrast, the Obama Administration addressed 15 critical infrastructure sectors, probably much more difficult to take on than six.

The second pillar of the strategy includes the predictable fight against intellectual property theft by China. Similar rhetorical prose can also be found around the concept of the 'National Security Innovation Base' mentioned above. In this context, the Asian giant's actions are categorised by the NSS as 'cyber-enabled economic warfare' (p. 20). Although the NSS's language is much more assertive than in previous strategies, it offers no principles regarding how to win this type of war.

²⁴ Donald Trump (2017), 'Presidential Executive Order on Reviving the National Space Council', Executive Order, 30/VI/2017, White House.

It is worth noting that within this pillar there is an explicit connection between cybersecurity and prosperity. This is because, on the one hand, the US response to the challenges and opportunities of the cyber era will determine the future growth and security of the country. On the other hand, this pillar claims that 'economic and personal transactions are dependent on the "com world", and wealth creation depends on a reliable, secure Internet' (p. 18). These are significant words for business people, universities and other institutions, not only for the generation of wealth but also because cybersecurity is a clear and present danger for the economy of the country.

The third pillar of the NSS underlines the need to invest in rapid response capabilities against cyberattacks. It would have been ideal to have included reference to a cyber-force within the section on preparedness for immediate deployment of forces ('readiness'). If we recognise the need to have conventional and nuclear forces in a state of readiness for immediate deployment, then a cyber-force should be viewed the same way.

The criticism of Russian cyberspace activity is also found in this pillar, although the NSS previously states that 'actors such as Russia are using information tools in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of democracies' (p. 14). The cyber capabilities of Russia are characterised as 'destabilizing' (p. 26) and the document adds that 'through modernized forms of subversive tactics, Russia interferes in the domestic political affairs of countries around the world'. The great let-down, if widely expected, is that the document makes no reference at all to the campaign and elections of November 2016, nor does it prioritise the protection of the integrity of future US elections from cyber threats. It only makes veiled reference to the fact that some adversaries have attacked US institutions and that there have been attacks against the democratic system for which this very report recommends resilience.

Efforts to check Russia are highlighted in an interesting and creative section on 'information statecraft' (p. 34-35) which lays out very well the challenges posed by competitors to US interests through the use of information (it is striking that this section was not included in the fourth pillar which centres on the field of diplomacy).

It is precisely here where the new strategy makes one of its very few references to AI: 'Risks to US national security will grow as competitors integrate information derived from personal and commercial sources with intelligence collection and data analytic capabilities based on AI and machine learning'. China is set forth as the prime example of a competitor who even uses the tools of AI to evaluate the loyalty of its citizens. A second example, representing one of the main threats to the US, is found in the 'ideological information campaign' undertaken by terrorist groups to legitimate their narrative of hate. Third, reference is made to Russia's information operations to influence public opinion around the world. The NSS also speaks of shifting to the communications media and Internet companies at least part of the responsibility for policing the use of their own platforms to stop the promotion of ideas that spread hate and terror.

AI could facilitate new capabilities for information and disinformation campaigns by competitors. In 2015 the news broke that China was suspected of hacking the personal

data of four million public employees of the US government. The Russian government is also suspected of using personal information to attack US citizens with propaganda. After a weak response to the Russian intrusion into the US elections of 2016, the Treasury Department recently announced the imposition of sanctions on Russian businesses and citizens for their participation in the fabrication and dissemination of 'fake news'. In addition, the US also recently accused Russia of cyberattacks against critical infrastructure.²⁵ Meanwhile, as AI and automatic (machine) learning continue to mature, the value of private data will increase.

Currently there are no specific mechanisms to deal with the disinformation campaigns of state and non-state actors. However, there is a debate underway on how well-equipped government institutions are –like the Department of Public Diplomacy, Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)– to respond to foreign digital disinformation.

AI is also critical to the future of cybersecurity, as much to evaluate and monitor the vulnerabilities of computerised systems as for undertaking cyberattacks. It could also transform military forces: autonomous armaments, vehicles and places could fundamentally change combat missions. For this reason, in April 2017 the US Department of Defense initiated the Algorithmic Warfare Cross-Functional Team to move towards integrating AI into the software of armaments. On the Russian side, military modernisation programmes have unleashed an intense investment in the automation of the Russian armed forces.

The future will belong to countries that know how to navigate the technological seas that are AI. In the summer of 2017 China published its National Strategic Plan for AI.²⁶ In it, China announced that it would catch up with the US in 2020, surpass it by 2025 and become the global AI leader by 2030. The Chinese plan claims that AI will add 26% to the China's economy in terms of growth, on the one hand, and allow China to become a dominant military power on par with the US, on the other. The Plan also recognises, therefore, the essentially dual nature of AI and that the commercial and military ambitions of China in this realm will be one of the principal threats to US technological supremacy. In this regard there is another mention of AI in the strategy's second pillar when it refers to the maintenance of US leadership in research, technology and innovation (p. 20).

(7) Promoting interests and values

Through the fourth and final pillar, the NSS will promote US influence in the world because a world that supports American influence and reflects its values makes the US more secure and prosperous.

²⁵ United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team (2018), 'Russian Government Cyber Activity Targeting Energy and Other Critical Infrastructure Sectors', US Department of Homeland Security, 15/III/2018.

²⁶ Graham Webster, Rogier Creemers, Paul Triolo & Elsa Kania (2017), 'China's Plan to "Lead" in AI: Purpose, Prospects, and Problems', *New America*, 1/VIII/2017.

To promote US influence, the starting point must be to first create wealth internally and generate power domestically. 'America will lead again', Donald Trump claimed at the NSS presentation.

In contrast to what might be expected of a document that proclaims a return to the principle of realism, there are mentions –particularly in the fourth pillar on interests and values– of support for democracy, the defence of human rights and assistance to fragile states, if with restricting nuances.

These references to democracy appear above all to emphasise that it is a US value and not a universal one. Many would have expected explicit signs of US support for democracies which are threatened within this panorama of tough geopolitical competition that the NSS describes. In this view, the US leads in the world by example, but it will compete to protect itself, its values and interests, without imposing them on anyone. (p. 37).

The idea of leading by example is reminiscent of the Second Inaugural Address of George W. Bush. In it President Bush claimed that 'America will not impose our own style of government on the unwilling. Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way'.²⁷ For autocratic governments, the language of Trump is a sign of US retrenchment from supporting democratic voices.

The level of democratic ambition in the strategy is therefore far below that of its Republican predecessors. In the first NSS of Ronald Reagan, the claim that the US would seek 'liberty and prosperity... for us, our friends and those persons in the world who fight for democracy' was on the very cover of the document.²⁸ George W. Bush committed the US to support human dignity and the construction of democracy in his NSS; it argued that progress towards freedom and democracy was a central tool for defeating the ideology of jihadist terrorists. The Trump Administration has turned this relationship on its head: defeating the jihadist terrorists is the best mechanism for advancing human rights. Trump's interpretation is much less generous.

With respect to human rights –and the complete absence of the term from the NSS (there is only a single reference to the 'violators of human rights', on page 42)– it is possible to find some ideas related to the concept. There are references to 'human dignity' and 'individual dignity' and, in general, there is an attempt to link progress on human rights to advances in the economic agenda: 'Governments that respect the rights of their citizens remain the best vehicle for prosperity, human happiness, and peace' (p. 41). The document also underlines the importance of religious freedom and although it does not employ the term 'women's rights', it does affirm that 'Societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful' (p. 42).

The strategy also places attention on fragile states, claiming that 'political problems are at the origin of the fragility of many countries'. The point is made that threats emanating

²⁷ George W. Bush (2005), Inaugural Address, 20/1/2005, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=58745>.

²⁸ The White House (1987), National Security Strategy of the United States, NSS Archive, January.

from these countries are related to extremist violence and transnational crime, although the document does not offer any formulations or recommendations for a clear response to find solutions.

Despite the explicit rejection of multilateralism, the new strategy states that the US will continue to lead multilateral organisations to protect its interests and its principles. On the one hand, its leadership benefits everyone and, on the other, not to do so would be in detriment to its own interests. This is because there is also competition within the international organisations and the US should also defend its sovereignty and foster its interests and value within these institutions. The US will therefore not cede its leadership in the international organisations because its competitors would be able to take advantage of that. If, furthermore, the US is asked for a significant level of effort and support for such an institution, it will demand a proportional level of influence. Such cooperation must be just and reciprocal, as in commercial deals.

This pillar underlines the importance of allies and partners as a strength for the US. However, it appears that the US is placing less importance on the traditional allies and more on those new countries that wish to come closer to the US, aspirants that are fragile states seeking security and prosperity. To this end, the US will promote a new model of development, shifting from assistance through subsidies to another model that attracts private capital and does not promote dependence, because the US wants strong partners, not weak ones (p. 39). US development aid will prioritise countries that are aligned with the national interests of the US. But after a year in which the Administration has proposed to reduce multilateral commitments and aid to third parties, these words from the NSS throw much doubt on the importance of aid to current US foreign policy.

Once the NSS document has completed its description of the four pillars of national security, it devotes a short section to the application of the strategy in different regions of the world. First, both in position and importance, is the Indo-Pacific region where the threats have been clearly identified as Chinese revisionism and North Korean aggression. It is interesting to note the various cooperation and collaboration initiatives that have been emerging in Asia-Pacific: (1) Australia, India and Japan are trying to revitalise the maritime cooperation known as 'The Quad' (which once included the US); (2) India and Japan have intensified their bilateral relationship in many areas and most recently they have collaborated on an Asia-Africa growth corridor that many see in contraposition to the BRICS; and (3) the recent signing of the TPP-11 in Chile. While it would not be prudent to exaggerate the possible impacts of these initiatives, they do suggest a growing worry over the inconsistency of the US commitment to Asia-Pacific and the necessity to seek alternatives.

The second region of priority is Europe: there the return of Russia and its violation of the sovereignty of its neighbours is of concern to Washington. In this section there is the strategy's only reference to the EU as a partner (except for the mention of the Russian threat to the EU on page 25). Previous versions of the NSS (2010 and 2015) also mentioned the EU only infrequently, but it was referred to as an instrument for the promotion of peace, democracy and prosperity in Europe. In the new NSS, the EU is reduced to a mere partner on the economic front, in addition to being suspected of shady, unfair commercial practices.

Next comes the Middle East, where the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and the destabilising activities of Iran are considered two sufficient motives for maintaining the US commitment to the region. Separate sub-sections are devoted to South Asia, Latin America and Africa, there is a focus on the Indo-Pakistani relationship, the need to stop Islamic extremism and reconquer Kabul, and on the US will to support the countries of Latin America in the fight against organised crime. With respect to Africa, what is highlighted most by the NSS is its economic potential, above and beyond the problems of the continent and the vision which many have had of it until now.

(8) Conclusions

The new National Security Strategy of the Trump Administration faced the difficult task of squaring the vision of 'America First' with the strategic doctrine the US has maintained for the past 30 years. This attempted integration of principles and realism is not an easy one and only in part resolved when the document affirms that 'we are guided by our values and disciplined by our interests' (p. 55).

The document's evaluation of the state of the world, and of the current geopolitical competition between great powers, coincides with that of other countries. However, the US's manner of viewing this competition differentiates it: the US now sees a Hobbesian world where nations compete to gain advantage, where alliances are only a temporary alignment of interests and where the concept of the 'liberal international order' sees its 'liberal' essence weakened.

The objective of the strategy is principally to contain the emergence of China and Russia, and to achieve this the US wants to return to winning the strategic game. But the strategy only partially resolves doubts about how it will return to thinking strategically to use all the instruments of national power to compete not with one but with two great powers.

In this world –and with this return to geopolitical competition– the US wants to shift from 'leading from behind' to involving itself in this tough global competition where the threats are economic, and not just of military might.

The US has the conviction that it will only prevail over China and Russia with solid domestic fundamentals. To secure that, the US will seek economic prosperity, regain its technological leadership, defend its intellectual property and take geopolitical competition into outer space, while not losing sight of the technological tsunami of AI.

The fight against terrorism no longer is the top priority of US national security, and nor is its commitment to the allies any longer very clear. Those who expected an effective commitment of the US to democracy, human rights and global governance will lament the omission of most of these issues from the new NSS.

In the end, the new strategy is an amalgam of traditional US national security culture, Republican Party ideas and purely 'Trumpist' themes. But we cannot forget that everything that must come after the publication of the strategy –the budgets, sub-strategies and execution– is what will really give it meaning and coherence.

Will we finally understand Trump?