

TRUMP'S SECURITY STRATEGY TO PUT 'AMERICA FIRST': THE CONTINUANCE OF A UNIPOLAR WORLD SYSTEM

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Everly familiar to the Cold War days, President Donald Trump announced his 'America First' National Security Strategy (NSS) in mid-December. It is imperative, therefore, to uncover how Trump intends to maintain the unipolar world system. Posturing the United States to rise above the "revisionist powers" like China and Russia and to defeat the "rogue regimes" of Iran and North Korea was one of his stated objectives. He warned that "weakness is the surest path to conflict" and "unrivaled power is the most certain means of defense." He reprimanded the previous administration's "incomprehensibly weak deal with Iran" and criticized Obama's efforts to promote nation-building abroad while neglecting Americans at home. Therefore, he introduced his plan to protect prosperity at home and to ensure U.S. interests abroad.

The Four Pillars

Trump's National Security Strategy contained four pillars. The first pillar included protecting the American people, their homeland and their way of life. This pillar focused on two main topics: ending chain migration and combatting ISIS. Trump mentioned that building the wall would

secure the southern border of the United States and that ending the visa lottery program would close up loopholes in the immigration process. He reiterated the necessity to confront, discredit and defeat ISIS to prevent the spread of radical ideology to secure the nation. He reminded his audience that a nation without borders is not a nation; thus, he reclaimed the sovereignty he believed his predecessors compromised.

The second pillar was devoted to promoting economic prosperity. President Trump argued that economic security would translate into national security; he reasoned that cutting taxes would increase growth within the domestic economy, and that the bloating of the U.S. economy would encourage prosperity abroad. He cautioned, however, that he would only engage in trade based on fairness and reciprocity, and that he would take firm-action against unfair trading practices.

Third, Trump proposed that he would achieve international peace through strength. Modernizing the military was at the core of this pillar for two reasons. He said if the military does not have the resources and support that it desperately needs, it will not be able to prevent and to respond to threats to national security. He also said that expanding the military would create millions of jobs for Americans. He also acknowledged the importance of strengthening alliances to address economic and political threats.

The fourth and final pillar of his strategy aimed to increase America's influence abroad by unabashedly championing its strong values. He said he does not seek to impose the American way of life onto others around the world, but rather he hopes that the United States can lead the world in promoting common interests and fighting for a common cause. Trump wants to ensure the promulgation of strong, independent and sovereign nations that respect their citizens and neighboring states. Therefore, he hopes to instill "patriotism, prosperity and pride" in his country.

What is Missing?

Trump only briefly discussed combatting cyber security in his speech, even though meddling in the presidential election last year threatened the democratic values Trump preached about upholding. During his speech, he failed to explicitly condemn the Russians for interfering in the election, although he mentioned the need to toughen cybersecurity and acknowledged social media as a tool to spread propaganda. His reluctance to demonize the Russians could be motivated by his desire to ease tensions and normalize relations with the Russian president, which would be congruent with a comment he made about cooperation between the two countries. Trump praised the CIA's recent work in helping Putin and his government prevent a terrorist attack in St. Petersburg. Trump affirmed that this type of communication creates the type of partnership that protects both domestic and foreign interests.

Furthermore, it comes as no surprise that combatting climate change did not make it into Trump's NSS. As environmental degradation steadily moves up on international security agendas around the world, many leaders, including Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May, France's President Emmanuel Macron and China's President Xi Jinping, are faced with new challenges in reshaping climate change policy while the U.S. is absent.

The U.S. versus the World

The international community has expressed concern of the "imperialist nature" of this strategy, specifically Russia and China who were targeted in his speech.¹ The United States has now made it clear that its national interests literally trump all others. Assuming a realist stance is not abnormal for states, and it is routine for a president to reverse his predecessor's policies,

¹Reevell, C. (19 Dec. 2017). Russia calls Trump's national security strategy 'imperialist.' *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/International/russia-calls-trumps-national-security-strategy-imperialist/story?id=51882015>

especially with a shift in political party. The anomaly, however, is Trump. He does not have previous political experience, so his skills in diplomacy have not matured. He has criticized many world leaders and soured relations with former allies who now wish to keep the U.S. at arm's length, namely the U.K. and Germany. Disintegrating alliances only make the prospect of unified international security plans more fleeting. His unpredictable nature is unsettling when it comes to nuclear weapons negotiations, combatting terrorism and supporting NATO, all of which are at the core of international security.

The main takeaway from this strategy is that Trump has emphasized competition over collaboration, despite his promising utterances about strengthening alliances. Straying from Obama's multilateral approach to foreign affairs, Trump has declared that "America is in the game" and that it will win against its "tough and tenacious" rivals. He said he wants to form a partnership with other nations, but only one that protects the United States' national interests. As previously mentioned, this realist mentality is far from new in the international relations realm, but states have become increasingly disconcerted over the extent to which Trump has forced the United States to retreat from multilateral cooperation, such as involvement in the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Accord and his rebuke of NATO. Since the United States has been at the core of many international trade, development, economic and security policies, its regression on the international front could be catastrophic.

Although Trump's harsh rhetoric and exclusionary policies in the past have proven to be little more than bombastic, empty threats, the validity of his words in this new strategy will quickly be assessed as the drama in the Middle East and North Korea unfolds. The international community should take heed to his position and should not underestimate the capriciousness of

this world leader's policies. Trump has made it clear that he will do anything in his power to make America win again.

Full Speech: <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000005610816/trump-national-security-speech.html>