

The 2025 National Security Strategy: Confronting China, Russia, and America's Fiscal Future

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The United States faces a national security environment more dangerous and interconnected than any time since the end of the Cold War. The three primary threats we must prioritize in drafting the 2025 National Security Strategy are: strategic competition with China, managing the threat posed by Russia, and confronting the unsustainable trajectory of America's own federal budget. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for preserving U.S. security but also for maintaining positive global relations.

China represents the most significant long-term threat to American security. As Brands (2022) argues, China is approaching the peak of its power and may act aggressively before its demographic and economic strengths wane. China's activities in the South China Sea—militarizing islands, intimidating U.S. allies, and reshaping the balance of power without provoking open war—exemplify its dangerous incremental strategy (Mandhana, 2023). Additionally, China's technological espionage against U.S. industries, including the use of private firms like Alibaba and Huawei to aid its intelligence services, provides it with a critical advantage across military and economic domains (Dorfman, 2020). Moreover, China's economic integration with Russia, Iran, and North Korea has formed a loose anti-Western coalition that

undermines U.S. efforts to isolate authoritarian actors (Kendall-Taylor & Fontaine, 2024). If we do not prioritize countering China's rising influence now, we risk losing our ability to deter future conflicts.

At the same time, Russia remains a potent danger. While its conventional military capability has suffered serious blows in Ukraine, Russia is rebuilding alliances with China, Iran, and North Korea to offset Western sanctions (Kendall-Taylor & Fontaine, 2024). Russia's reliance on asymmetric warfare—cyberattacks, information operations, and proxy warfare—will persist as a destabilizing factor. As Kagan (as cited in Selden, 2025) warned, the failure to sustain U.S. leadership invites revisionist powers to test the international order. Ignoring Russia because of its battlefield struggles would be a catastrophic mistake.

The health of our federal budget directly affects national security. Sustained competition with China requires long-term investments in defense, technology, and alliances, but America's debt levels are reaching historic highs (Brands, 2022). Endless deficit spending weakens strategic flexibility, risks inflationary crises, and could ultimately force painful retrenchment. Strategic competition cannot succeed without a foundation of economic strength. Prioritizing these three issues is necessary because they intersect: China and Russia are strengthening each other against the U.S., and our ability to sustain competition depends on fixing our fiscal foundation.

This strategy will require increased defense spending relative to current levels, particularly in areas such as military modernization for cyber, space, and naval capabilities, industrial base investment to reduce dependency on Chinese-manufactured technology, and allied force development with partners like Japan, Australia, and the Philippines. However, it must be offset by domestic fiscal reforms: entitlement reform, discretionary spending caps, and

greater defense procurement efficiency. As Brands (2022) notes, competition with China "requires a coherent grand strategy" connecting security and economic planning. Thus, in gross terms, defense spending would rise moderately, but overall fiscal discipline must improve to prevent security vulnerabilities caused by debt crises.

This strategy fits squarely within Hamiltonian and Jacksonian traditions of U.S. foreign policy (Selden, 2025). It recognizes the essential link between economic vitality and national security and focuses on defending core American interests—physical security, economic prosperity, and deterrence of hostile powers—rather than engaging in expansive nation-building. It avoids neo-isolationism, which would invite Chinese and Russian expansion, while rejecting costly "forever wars" in areas of low strategic interest.

Diplomatically, the United States must strengthen existing alliances, counter China's influence operations by promoting transparency and democratic values, communicate deterrence clearly to adversaries, and manage escalation risks through backchannel communications. As Mead (as cited in Selden, 2025) emphasizes, "strategic hierarchy" must guide U.S. diplomacy. We must not treat every region equally but instead focus where vital interests are at stake.

One advantage of this strategy is that it focuses limited resources on the most existential threats. It also strengthens economic foundations critical for long-term competition and preserves flexibility, preventing unnecessary military entanglements. Anticipating criticisms, one might argue that this strategy could trigger an arms race with China and Russia. However, we are already in a competition. Failing to invest now invites greater costs later, just as U.S. inaction in the 1930s emboldened aggressors (Selden, 2025). Another criticism could be that the strategy risks neglecting non-traditional security threats like climate change or pandemics. While these

issues matter, strategic competition is the greatest risk to the international order itself. A final critique might claim that domestic fiscal reform is politically impossible. Difficult does not mean optional; avoiding fiscal reforms would doom long-term strategic competition.

In short, America's national security strategy for 2025 must prioritize confronting China's rise, managing Russia's destabilization, and restoring fiscal sustainability. These are the hard choices necessary to secure peace, prosperity, and U.S. leadership into the future.

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