**‘AMERICA FIRST’ NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF PRESIDENT TRUMP: COLLUSION OR A COLLISION**

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The US National Security Strategy under President Trump just hit the ground. It pledges revitalization of the American economy, rebuilding of its military, defending its borders, protecting its sovereignty, and advancing American values. During the first year of Trump in office, we witnessed his ‘America First’ foreign policy in action. Successful national security strategies usually transform into doctrine over the course of a given administration. Therefore, in the US, strategists, policy makers and internationalists have already declared it a “Trump Doctrine.”

America is facing a range of challenges and threats for the world order: development of nukes in the world, radical terrorist groups and porous borders around itself. Unfair trade practices had weakened American economy and exported their jobs overseas.

With changes, America is targeting North Korea. It’s mustering more allies in the Middle East especially Saudi Arabia with its 41 member Islamic Army. Jobs are coming back and its economy is growing. The present administration is making historic investments in the United States military. It is enforcing its borders, building trade relationships based on fairness and reciprocity, and defending America’s sovereignty without apology. A very blunt foreign, defense and domestic policy has been chalked out and adopted with a compromise of numerous stakeholders in the world. Bottom line of this National Security Strategy is that it puts America First.

Changes in a regional balance of power can have global consequences and enhance the US role as a super power. From security to economics, priorities have been changing from region to region. The definition of superpower is in a transition period. Stability is the corner stone of security. Stability may be taken in terms of high politics as well as low politics. Regional balances that shift against the United States could combine to threaten its human and national securities. The United States has learned that neither aspirations for democratic transformation nor disengagement can insulate it from the regions’ problems. Hence, need of the time is to be inclusive with a region-oriented approach. Instead of dictating countries what is right and what is wrong, America’s interest will be accommodated more by supporting regional countries for resolution of political and economic issues of the region. Being a country to contest others will diminish the US image as superpower. America deserves a superpower attitude. Becoming a competitor with regional countries of the world will dwarf its political acumen. The US role in a changing numerous regional balances of power must be that of a balancer rather than a party. The more it becomes a party, the more will it lose.

The new national security strategy is more competitive vis-à-vis America’s old adversaries. It allegedly states that China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. It also states that the two are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence. The Strategy also accuses North Korea and Iran as the destabilizing agents of the world order. This proves that the US competitors in the forthcoming times are China, Russia and former two members of Axis of Evil. Equating China and Russia with the archrivals of the US i.e North Korea and Iran will definitively prove counter-productive and detrimental to its interests in global arena. Engagement with rivals is the cornerstone of a successful strategy. Diplomacy, in the long run works. But equating economic partners and cautious friends with enemies will lash back.

Keeping in view Chinese grand strategy of ‘Belt and Road’ and interconnecting 62 countries of the region, its less understandable as to why and how China wants to make economies less free and fair. Even the US foreign investment in China is soaring with every passing day. To this date, the US investment in China is $ 92.48 billion. Moreover, in 2016, according to economic research firm Rhodium Group, China’s foreign direct investment in the U.S. soared to $45.6 billion—triple the total from the year before. And a strong pipeline of deals awaiting regulatory approval means the trend should continue. That is, unless politics gets in the way. Chinese-owned firms now support more than 140,000 jobs nationwide in the US, nine times as many as in 2009. Strategists say that US considers China as ‘a strategic competitor’. However, mentioning it along with Iran and North Korea means China is more than a strategic competitor for the US.

President Trump has made reversing or resisting globalization a cornerstone of his economic policies and ideology, issuing executive orders directing the executive branch to [hire and buy American](https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/18/presidential-executive-order-buy-american-and-hire-american), pulling out of trade deals such as the Trans Pacific Partnership, and promising to renegotiate NAFTA. But much of the economic activity being generated around the country comes because of globalization, not in spite of it. Globalization helped bolster economies around the world, including China’s, and is now allowing a class of wealthy people and companies from those economies to invest in the United States, creating jobs in depressed regions like Ohio.

President Donald Trump having Gen (retired) Jim Mattis as Defense Secretary, the highest-ranking civilian position in the Pentagon; retired Marine Gen. John Kelly as White House Chief of Staff; Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster as National Security Advisor; and Army Maj. Gen. Mark Inch as head the Bureau of Prisons; there will be four military generals serving in top positions normally held by civilians. Relatively speaking, that’s a lot. Several key National Security Council positions have gone to retired military officers as well. Questions have already been raised about whether too many generals and overall military influence risks tipping the delicate civil-military relations balance that has kept America strong. This also shows that the people from the Pentagon will be more in the company of the President than officials from the Department of State. This further means that the military solutions will be more on the President’s table than diplomacy. This may be witnessed by noticing iron clause in the Trump’s National Security Strategy. It pledges to preserve peace through strength by rebuilding its military so that it remains preeminent, deters its adversaries, and if necessary, is able to fight and win. It further affirms to compete with all tools of national power to ensure that regions of the world are not dominated by one power. The Strategy declares to strengthen America’s capabilities—including in space and cyberspace—and revitalize others that have been neglected. The Strategy is not silent for its allies. It extends full military support to the US friends. It also says, “Allies and partners magnify our power”. This is a clear support for countries like India, Saudi Arabia and Israel. However, the erstwhile friends like Pakistan must not be forgotten who made the US win the Cold War and the War on Terror.

South Asia and Afghanistan deserve a special focus of the US and great powers of the world. Weak governments encourage and strengthen terrorists. This challenges the writ of the state and hence states’ become feeble and a breading ground of miscreants. A region with three nuclear-armed states neighboring each other, South Asia becomes a region of attention for American policy makers. The United States continues to face threats from transnational terrorists and militants operating from Afghanistan where Dr Ashraf Ghani controls only 60% of his country and rest is either under the control of the Taliban or IS. ­The prospect for an Indo-Pakistani military conflict that could lead to a nuclear exchange remains a key US concern requiring consistent diplomatic attention. Though its thinking the unthinkable, the US diplomatic efforts are unbalanced and biased. It’s more tilted towards India than a balance between the two regional arch rivals. With the loss of man and money, Pakistan deserves enhanced economic and trade ties. For a peaceful world, regional disputes of the world warrant more consideration. Kashmir, Syria and Palestine are a few issues, which may disrupt peace of the world anytime. Hence, a special Under secretary of state towards resolution of the disputed territories is direly needed. This will ensure peace not only in South Asia but in the world at large. For Afghanistan, Americans need to boost the fighting strength of the Afghan security forces to convince the Taliban that they cannot win on the battlefield and to set the conditions for diplomatic efforts to achieve enduring peace. The middleman is needed so that the Taliban may be brought to the negotiating table. The Qatar Taliban Office needs a refurbishment. It’s a fact that the Taliban and the US in connivance with the Kabul regime have failed to win in Afghanistan militarily. Hence, it’s the high time that they focus on achieving peace via negotiations.

The National Security Strategy of the US is very hawkish and ambitious. For the first time, the US is in competition with small countries. They say America First. The question is when was America Second? America always remained on priority. It took the lead from the front because it was the leader of the world. But in this strategy, the US behaves as if it was compromised in the past. This diminishes its own stature. The architect of the strategy, President Donald Trump has not been descended from the moon. People of the US elected him in a very democratic process. He may commit mistakes and this he may do repeatedly. However, for China, the policy may be more of “Congagement” (a combination of containment and engagement) than targeting it as a hostile country. Pakistan’s sacrifices have been ignored in the strategy altogether. Pakistan has been a very important ally of the US during the war on terror. It’s the time that it must be paid back rather than vice versa. It’s now very clear that US and India have been closer to each other strategically. However, their growing relationship must not be at the cost of Pakistan. Pakistan is a country, which will never lose its geo-strategic importance. Hence, a revision of the strategy is direly needed.

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