



PRESS RELEASE

According to a new FRIDE report

The 2015 US NSS is a strategy of the possible couched in the language of ambition

- *The 2015 National Security Strategy stresses America's restored strength, affirms the need for US global leadership, and a preference to wield power in concert with partners.*
- *The strategy confirms the US rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific and calls for a constructive relationship with China, but restates the American commitment to European security in the face of an aggressive Russia.*
- *The strategy seeks to chart a middle ground between the world as it is and the world the US seeks*

Madrid-Brussels, 13 February 2015 – The new US National Security Strategy (NSS) published on 6 February 2015 puts forward ‘strategic patience’ as the main principle for dealing with growing challenges. The vindication of President Obama’s foreign policy record and the reassertion of ‘an undeniable truth – America must lead’ (as Obama puts it in his introduction to the strategy) stand out.

‘**The NSS features strong elements of continuity with its 2010 predecessor**’, says Giovanni Grevi, FRIDE director and author of the report. It affirms the need for American leadership, acknowledges the limits of American power and confirms a preference to wield it in concert with others, where possible.

The defining message of the 2010 NSS was that, after two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a deep economic downturn, American leadership needed renewal. That would start from restoring economic growth. The 2015 NSS claims mission accomplished on this crucial score. According to the strategy, the US ‘is stronger and better positioned to seize the opportunities’ of the 21st century. America has recovered its economic strength, the US has become the largest producer of oil and gas in the world and well over 150,000 troops have left Iraq and Afghanistan.

The strategy stresses American resolve to lead ‘by example’ (promoting core values at home and abroad), ‘with capable partners’ (expanding both their number and capabilities) and ‘with all the instruments of US power’. The US military ‘must remain dominant in every domain’, but the strategy makes clear that the use of force will not be America’s first choice. ‘**The words ‘lead’ and ‘leadership’ are used almost as many times in the 2015 document as in the 2010 one (131 times against 153) but the latter is twice as long**’, explains Grevi.

Strategic patience frames the US approach to the key relationships with China and Russia. Conversely, prospects for strengthening the US-India ‘strategic and economic partnership’ are highlighted. Russia’s ‘aggression’ in Ukraine has triggered a marked shift from the aim to build a substantive relationship with Moscow in 2010 to the need to ‘deter’ Russia today. And yet, the US will keep the ‘door open’ to collaboration with Russia on areas of common interest.

‘In short, the 2015 NSS calls for a firm but incremental and inclusive approach to facing tensions and crises in key global regions. It warns against allowing ‘fear’ to result in over-reach, and allowing the immediate threats posed by ‘transgressors’ to define the regional strategies of the US’, reads the report.

‘The 2015 NSS seeks to chart a prudent middle ground between three strategic dilemmas facing the US’, says Grevi. First, the dilemma between accepting ‘the world as it is’ and pursuing ‘the world we seek’. Second, the tension between rejecting the ‘false choice’ between interests and values (as stated in the 2010 NSS) and recognising the need to make ‘hard choices’ between competing priorities (as stated in the new strategy). Third, the gap between robust, sometimes unilateral responses to immediate threats and the comprehensive, multilateral approaches required to manage long-term trends and challenges.

‘The ‘profound commitment’ of the US to a free, whole and peaceful Europe is also restated. If the US is the indispensable leader, Europe is its ‘indispensable partner’. NATO is the ‘hub’ of an expanding global security network and the US commitment to collective defence under Article 5 is ‘ironclad’’, explains the author. The question is whether Europeans and Americans will necessarily see eye-to-eye across the board in responding to these challenges and fostering a rules-based international order.

All in all, the 2015 NSS is simultaneously a response to sustained criticism of Obama’s foreign policy as too cautious, a consolidation of his strategic direction and practices, and an update of the US global posture to reflect evolving security challenges. **‘It is a strategy of the possible couched in the language of ambition’,** says Grevi. The strategic direction of the new strategy is broadly correct but the document could have benefited from less emphasis on the inevitability of American leadership and a better sense of priorities. The strategy seeks to strike a very difficult balance between overlapping strategic dilemmas. **‘Seeking to reconcile the ‘world as it is’ and the ‘world we seek’ is exceedingly difficult for international actors that aim to advance their particular interests and liberal values at once, torn between short-term needs and long-term aspirations’,** concludes the report.

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