



## The Case for Deterrence: What the 2025 NSS Gets Right

By Curtis McGiffin

After ten months in office, the Trump administration has released [its 2025 National Security Strategy](#) (NSS), marking a clear shift toward an "America First" approach that emphasizes core U.S. national interests, economic strength, and strategic restraint overseas. At its core is a familiar axiom: peace rests on strength.

The national security strategy outlines the president's strategic vision and serves as the closest approximation to a U.S. grand strategy. It orients the POTUS' goals and associated efforts in foreign and defense policy within the executive branch and informs Congress of the POTUS' priorities and direction. The NSS declares what is important to America—its national interests, goals, and priorities—and emphasizes how the President envisions the use of America's diplomatic, informational, economic, military, and [technological instruments of power](#) to achieve or service those interests. The 2025 National Security Strategy is not the most comprehensive ever produced; that distinction belongs to the President's first [NSS in 2017](#).

The 2025 NSS identifies three core national interests that collectively shape U.S. strategy. First, it is the "balance of power," which focuses on U.S. security and emphasizes preventing any rival from gaining regional or global dominance that could threaten U.S. sovereignty or freedom of action. Second, a predisposition to non-interventionism, which reflects a desire to limit U.S. involvement in long-lasting or discretionary foreign wars, emphasizing restraint, burden-sharing, and deterrence over "fruitless 'nation-building' wars." Third, economic security, a key strategic goal, which requires the United States to maintain its position as the world's leading economy through balanced trade, secure access to essential resources, reindustrialization, energy security, and mutually beneficial economic ties with other countries. Collectively, these interests reveal a strategy that prioritizes American strength and strategic stability over "forever wars," while recognizing that economic vitality and security are inseparable from national power.

Only a strong nuclear deterrent will ensure these core national interests are both protected and advanced. The core idea of 2025 NSS is "peace through strength," asserting credible military power and the fear it projects as the best safeguard against conflict amid geopolitical turbulence and great-power competition. This NSS espouses a more realist disposition, unapologetically relying on deterrence to project strength in a world fraught with nuclear weapon expansion. President Reagan reminded us in 1986 that "Nations do not mistrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they mistrust each other."

The 2025 NSS clearly states on page three, "We want the world's most robust, credible, and modern nuclear deterrent." This is the engine of a U.S. balance of power policy—acting to prevent other states or coalitions of states from achieving dominant power over the U.S., thereby maintaining a balance between stability and security. Moreover, the NSS emphasizes that deterrence depends on maintaining U.S. military "overmatch." An abundant, modern, and resilient nuclear arsenal not only provides the military advantage sought but also does so at a lower cost than a conventionally armed force with equivalent destructive capability.

Next, instead of open-ended overseas wars or nation-building, the 2025 NSS frames military engagement as justified only when U.S. core interests are directly threatened. This predisposition to non-interventionism requires [maximum deterrence strategies](#) to prevent regional conflicts from escalating into large-scale wars that could "come to our shores, [which] is bad for American interests."



Moreover, empowering and enabling allies and partners—removing imperial perceptions of American behavior—by letting them lead, investing in their capabilities, and treating them as co-architects rather than subcontractors signals that America is not trying to dominate outcomes but to share responsibility. This creates economic value through burden sharing and arms sales, while fostering an equally shared commitment to security goals and deterrence. Capacity building is not short-sighted; it is a long-term investment in partnerships that advance the balance of power without relying solely on American taxpayers.

The 2025 NSS further stresses that economic security and vitality—one of President Trump’s central goals—requires a sustained focus on deterrence to prevent war in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. By creating the strategic space for economic expansion, successful deterrence enables reinvestment in the very capabilities that preserve it. This dynamic not only offers a long-term sustainment pathway for America’s nuclear deterrent force but also reinforces deterrence as the essential buffer between competition and conflict.

Finally, the NSS contends that durable deterrence rests as much on economic and technological dominance as on military power. By preserving America’s lead in high-tech innovation, increasing its industrial capacity, ensuring energy dominance, and securing reliable access to critical minerals, the United States reduces adversaries’ incentives to challenge it militarily while incentivizing a realignment of countries toward U.S. interests. At the same time, the strategy underscores that economic strength alone is insufficient; it must be coupled with a military that is rigorously recruited, trained, equipped, and modernized to remain the world’s most lethal and technologically advanced deterrent force, protecting U.S. interests and preventing conflict.

The 2025 NSS is far from “business as usual.” It embraces sovereignty, fairness, and balance of power, asserting that peace rests on strength—not wishful thinking, unchecked interventionism, or self-imposed restraint. The strategy states that “in the long term, maintaining American economic and technological preeminence is the surest way to deter and prevent a large-scale military conflict,” thereby framing deterrence not simply as a matter of nuclear or conventional force posture, but as the cumulative product of industrial capacity, innovation, and sustained national investment. Within this logic lies a clear call to expand and emplace a robust, modern, flexible, and resilient nuclear arsenal capable of deterring nuclear attack, averting major war, and safeguarding America’s national interests.

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