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Review of the United States National Security Strategy 2022

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The National Security Strategy of the Biden- Harris Administration of the United States of America, published in October 2022, outlines the United States’s key security and defence concerns along with detailing their strategies to address these concerns. While it appears to be a statement of facts and institutional capacities, it reveals the underlying motivators, domestic factors and the ideological underpinnings of some of the USA’s key defence strategies and undertakings.

The purpose of this analysis is to identify the country’s key objectives and priorities for the year 2022, extrapolate them while placing them in their geopolitical, historical, and temporal contexts, and analyse the establishment’s response to these ever-evolving concerns. It also attempts to identify the implications of these postures and provide theoretical and practical recommendations.

The NSS is divided into five different parts. Part I discusses the competition for what comes next, detailing the vision and role of the United States in a changing world order. Part II details the United States’ investment in their strength and capacity building. Part III outlines their global priorities. It speaks of the various challenges before the United States in the new world order as well as their strategies to meet these challenges head on. Part IV addresses their region-specific strategies and elucidates their collaborative efforts across the Indo-Pacific, Europe, the Western Hemisphere or the Americas, the Middle East, and Africa. It also outlines their strategy in the Arctic and in sea, air and space. Part V concludes the NSS, restating the United States’s key obligations and objectives.

Part I acknowledges that the post-Cold War, unipolar order is giving way to what can now be referred to as a “multipolar” order, characterised by the presence of varied state and non-state actors as well as power differentials. However, the driver of all American strategies is their national interest- “to protect the security of the American people, to expand economic prosperity and opportunity, and to realise and defend the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life”¹. While the democracy versus autocracy argument persists across the document, it is particularly pervasive in this first part. The NSS paints the United States as a democracy as

¹ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

opposed to autocracies such as Russia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). By doing so, it clearly identifies the latter two countries as the USA’s geopolitical adversaries. The document makes a strong effort to paint the success of the democratic project at home as the direct antecedent of the nation’s success abroad. This line of argumentation is significant considering the repeated challenges to the democratic framework, as orchestrated by Donald Trump, that the country has experienced since 2020. It can hence be interpreted as an attempt to project a democratic image of the USA both at home and abroad. Continuing onward, the document goes on to identify the PRC as the USA’s most “consequential geopolitical challenge”². It then proceeds to outline the various security concerns of today- climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, economic challenges, energy crisis (which it ascribes to Russia’s weaponization of oil over the course of its invasion of Ukraine) as well as the new challenges posed by the ever- growing preponderance of the digital world.

America’s approach to these challenges is informed by the stance of “free, open, prosperous and secure international order”³. To forward this notion, the United States recognizes that its policy must involve an amalgamation of diplomacy, development cooperation, industrial strategy, economic statecraft, intelligence, and defence. Herein, it recognises that strategic public investments must be made in America’s workforce, and particularly in critical and emerging technologies such as microelectronics, advanced computing, biotechnologies, clean energy technologies and advanced telecommunications⁴. Another key element in the United States’ strategy are their alliances and partnerships around the world. These include the NATO, alliances in the Indo-Pacific, as well as traditional security partnerships elsewhere. These not only act as a deterrent to potential aggressors but also provide a platform to collaborate on shared challenges and objectives.

² Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

³ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

⁴ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

Additionally, Part I of the NSS acknowledges the increasing failure of the international order in addressing the most pressing challenges of our time. The United States pledges to work towards the restructuring of this international order and ensure that present injustices in the international fabric are addressed. However, it makes no tangible commitment to do so. It appears both in action and in statement to be *nothing more than* a statement. This can be attributed to the fact that the United States has no real incentive to reform the status quo, simply because it is one of the primary beneficiaries of its continuance. Notwithstanding this, the establishment reinforces its commitment to the upholding of the UN Charter and the universal rights of all citizens. However, in the light of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Israeli onslaught on the Gaza Strip, these commitments come to be questioned, and often disproved. These events have proven to the international community and ordinary citizens that even great powers like the United States are not immune to strategic, political and economic considerations, and this realization has come much to the detriment of the establishment.

Part II of the NSS details the United States' investments in building and reinforcing their capacities. This section is unique for its erasure of the delineation between domestic and foreign policy. The Biden Administration strongly espouses, as in Part I, that success abroad is contingent on sustainable success and stability at home. Economically, this entails- among other things- bolstering and strengthening the middle class.

A key feature of domestic investment in 2022, was the investment in public physical infrastructure. This comes in the aftermath of the catastrophic series of infrastructure failures across the United States in the early years of the pandemic. This resulted in stupendous loss of life and livelihoods for many and revealed serious shortcomings in upkeep and maintenance of key infrastructure such as roads, bridges and buildings. Investments have also been made in the realm of cyberspace to tackle the dangers that this ever- evolving sphere poses domestically and internationally to the United States.

The NSS also makes a commitment towards ensuring “fair, orderly and humane” immigration practices that align with the values and laws of the United States. The Administration is cognizant of the fact that migration has played a key role in the evolution and growth of the United States into the superpower that it is today. It acknowledges that the United States is home to “dreamers”

who change and shape the world. However, their commitment towards immigration seems more like empty promises than much else. The reality is that immigration has become an increasingly contested and debated issue within the United States, both politically and socially. The political right has qualified immigration as the key denigrator of American society and are actively working towards limiting access to American soil. In light of the upcoming elections in 2024, these issues have only gained greater traction. In addition, legislatively, any action, be it a bill or a law, aimed towards updating the existing immigration framework- be it for better or worse- will require bipartisan support, which is no easy feat to achieve. This is evident in the rejection of the recent Senate immigration compromise bill in February 2024. Moreover, if Donald Trump's presidency was any indication, his potential return to office also spells a poor future for accessible immigration to the United States.

Perhaps the most striking feature in this section of the NSS is the Administration's admittance that the democratic reputation of the United States has come under serious question over the last few years, both domestically and internationally. It makes reference to election outcome acceptance and adherence to democratic electoral practices. In addition to this, it also takes a strong stance in opposition to domestic terrorism and election interference. To this end, the Administration has announced a National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism. This line of discourse is significant when taking into consideration the events of the election season of 2019-2020. The January 6 riots shall forever be remembered as a scourge on the long democratic history of America. It shook the foundations of the democratic state, and for the first time there loomed large the possibility of the subversion of the democratic process. In addition to this, Donald Trump's vociferous campaign of election outcome denial has significantly strained the institutional mechanism and has resulted in the expenditure of millions in taxpayer dollars in the recounting of votes in states like Georgia and Wisconsin. Hence, a commitment towards renewing the democratic fervour in the United States does not exist in a vacuum.

The United States also reaffirms its commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This comes in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its unbridled promises of aggression (including nuclear aggression) towards the United States and its allies in Europe. This section also highlights the United States' regional commitments and partnerships, which include AUKUS, Five Eyes, Quad and others. Herein, the United States also signals its

attempts at integrating its different regional partnerships. To quote the NSS, “we want our Indo-Pacific allies to be engaged cooperatively with our European allies on shaping the order to which we all aspire, and by standing up to Russia and cooperating with the European Union and United Kingdom on our competition with the PRC. This is not a favour to the United States. Our allies recognize that a collapse of the international order in one region will ultimately endanger it in others”⁵. It is important to understand the geopolitical context within which this statement arises. The United States is now symptomatically presenting itself as a waning power failing to appropriately meet its commitments abroad. Rising calls for an inward-looking strategy from within the country has made it ever more difficult to justify increasing strategic and defence spending abroad. In fact, this is a strong rallying argument by the political right that is being received very well. It can hence be concluded that the American populace’s appetite to solve the world’s problems is on the decline, and a significant proportion of today’s electoral demographic would rather see these investments be directed towards themselves instead of bleeding abroad.

The following section of the NSS highlights the United States’ attempts to modernize and strengthen their military force. While much is said about the need for a combat-ready and proactive Defence Industrial Base, very little, if anything at all, has spelt out how this is to be achieved.

As stated in the Immediate Release of the US Department of Defence, the Defence Budget for the Fiscal Year 2022 amounted to \$752.9 billion dollars⁶. Some of the primary goals of this budget were to combat the challenges posed by threats such as climate change, the COVID 19 pandemic and extremism; to make choices fit to address evolving security concerns and threats; and lastly, to counter China through strategic defence investments. Yet again, we see the predominant consideration of China in the defence and security imaginations of the United States.

⁵ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

⁶ US Department of Defense. (2021, May 28). The Department of Defense Releases the President’s Fiscal Year 2022 Defense Budget. *US Department of Defense, Release*. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/release/article/2638711/the-department-of-defense-releases-the-presidents-fiscal-year-2022-defense-budg/>

The budget even focuses on the modernization and innovation of the US's capacities, including, but not limited to, nuclear capacities, missile capacities, naval capacities and others. The NSS also reaffirms the United States' commitment to their service members and their families. It hails them as the "backbone of America's national defence"⁷ and pledges to ensure their social and physical security and reintegration into society.

The Budget for FY 2022 lays out a 2.7% pay raise for military and civilian personnel and pledges \$8.6 billion for family support programs. The NSS hereby lays heavy emphasis on combatting suicide, sexual assault and harassment and other forms of abuse, as well as rooting out extremism within the ranks. The Budget additionally, has allocations for these attempts; however, their effectiveness is questionable. While the budget provides for the establishment of institutions such as the Defence Center of Excellence for Sexual Assault Prevention, Response, Education, and Training, the establishment has failed to lay down tangible measures to combat these challenges and ensure consequences for perpetrators.

It is vital to note that none of the information listed in this paragraph have been spelt out in the National Security Strategy and related documents. This raises questions regarding the efficacy and the transparency of the exercise of releasing documents of this nature.

Part III of the NSS addresses the United States' global priorities. It details the challenges that hostile states such as Russia and China pose to the US and the larger world order. It also elaborates on the Administration's collaborative strategy along issues of vital importance.

The NSS identifies China as the United States'- and the global world order's- most pressing opponent. It perceives it as a revisionist power with not only the will but the capacity to bend the international order to its will. The NSS makes references to the PRC's coercive economic power, its rapidly modernizing military and its increasing footholds in the Indo-Pacific to substantiate this point. The US's strategy to counter PRC is threefold- to invest in domestic capacities, to align with like-minded states, allies and partners to shore up a defence against China and to compete responsibly against the PRC to defend its interests. This line of thought is reminiscent to the US's

⁷ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

Cold War strategy against the erstwhile USSR and is telling of the psychological influence that the PRC exercises over the US. The battleground of the rivalry between the US and China is the Indo- Pacific, which China sees as its historical right. The US reiterates its solidarity with the Indo- Pacific states and corroborates their sovereign right to make foreign and domestic policy decisions.

This section further highlights the US's Taiwan policy. It is interesting to note the verbiage of said policy. While the US acknowledges its support for the One China Policy, it also assures assistance to Taiwan in maintaining its self- defence. This singular section is illustrative of the tenuous relationship between the USA and China and the balancing act that is employed in skirting outward full- scale aggression between the two.

There is also a degree of virtue signalling in the US's assurances to "manage the competition responsibly". The Administration pledges to work with the PRC on issues of common interest and paints this "concession" as a moral and principled approach to the conflict. However, reality proves that there is little about the US-China rivalry that is moral or principled. It is first and foremost a war of influence and economic significance. Hence, such assurances of cooperation must always be read in context to other key ideological and geopolitical considerations.

In contrast to the projections of the Cold War era, the NSS of 2022 paints Russia as a decaying power. However, it does not discount that it is an ambitious nuclear authority that is presently engaged in a full- scale armed incursion into a sovereign state i.e. Ukraine. It paints the Russian establishment under Putin as authoritarian and as violating citizens' human rights, suppressing opposition and engaging in strong censorship of information. This yet again draws back to the democracy vs. autocracy argument made earlier in this paper. In doing so, it paints Putin as a ruthless autocrat who enjoys little domestic legitimacy. This narrative also paints Russia as a "immediate and persistent threat to international peace and stability"⁸. This section proceeds to highlight the United States' commitment to Ukraine. It encourages Ukraine's integration into the European Union (EU) and pledges to deter the Russian offensive, particularly in the context of the usage of nuclear weaponry.

⁸ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

The subsequent section talks of the United States's strategy to cooperate on shared challenges. On the issues of climate and energy security, the Administration's strategy is to enact changes at home (which they ensure will result in well-paying jobs) and export their learnings and assistance to partners and allies abroad. The establishment acknowledges that their pandemic response was less than adequate and that pandemics are now a lived reality and possibility of life in the 21st century. Hence, to safeguard the population from future health crises and to mitigate the weaponization of potential biological tools, the United States has resolved to work on improving international institutions aimed at addressing global health concerns. However, it fails to look inward as well to solve this issue. The CDC and affiliated institutions' response to the COVID-19 pandemic left much to be desired. In addition, the rampant spread of misinformation and the general anti-vaccine sentiment in the United States contributed significantly to the exacerbation of an already pressing national and global crisis. Hence, in addition to endeavouring to reform global health structures, it would do well for the establishment to address the shortcomings in their healthcare institutions so as to neutralise the threats posed by these.

The NSS then addresses Arms Control and Nuclear Proliferation. The United States solidifies its commitment to “strengthening arms control and non-proliferation mechanisms”⁹, especially during times of conflict such as what we now find ourselves in. While the NSS restates the US's commitment to the various nuclear non-proliferation regimes, it fails to acknowledge that these are extremely discriminatory and much to the disadvantage to the countries in the Global South. This signifies a significant gap in the international efforts towards a “nuclear weapons free world”.

Lastly, this section addresses the concerns surrounding terrorism. The US remains committed to its fight against terrorism. However, there is a professed change in trajectory from a “US-led, partner-enabled” strategy to a “partner-led, US-enabled” strategy¹⁰. It acknowledges that countries such as Syria, Yemen and Somalia still serve as safe havens for terrorist actors and that this danger looms large in Afghanistan as well. However, it pledges to ensure that Afghanistan

⁹ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

¹⁰ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

will never again serve as a safe haven for terrorist attempting to act against the United States. This section also calls attention to the pressing challenge that domestic terrorism poses to the United States. It has promulgated the first ever National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism to better understand the challenges that are before the nation.

Finally, this section approaches the issue of gun violence in the United States. However, it does so in great brevity, thus failing to capture the true gravity of the crisis in American society. More Americans died of gun-related injuries in 2021 than ever before¹¹. However, there is an acute lack of bipartisan support for the redressal of the issue of access to firearms. The uptick in violence in civilian areas, especially in schools and neighbourhoods, has severely impacted the global image of the United States and has had far-reaching consequences for its soft power.

Part IV of the NSS details the United States' region-specific strategies. It talks of its approach in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, the Western Hemisphere, the Middle East, Africa, Arctic and space.

The United States is committed to an open and accessible Indo-Pacific where sovereign states can exercise their authority to self-determination. The US agenda is to reinforce the centrality of ASEAN and to increase ties with the Southeast Asian states. Quad, AUKUS, IPEF and APEC will assist in these endeavours. The US also reaffirms its iron-clad commitments to its Indo-Pacific partners, Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Thailand. However, in more recent months, these countries have begun to question the US's capability to protect them. In the face of increasing Chinese and North Korean aggression and the failure of the American military to successfully deter Russia from a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, countries like Japan are reconsidering their dependence on the US. In FY 2022, Japan saw a 65% increase in its defence budget¹². All of this is illustrative of the fact that faith in the US's protective capabilities is waning.

¹¹ Gramlich, J. (2023, April 26). What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S. *Pew Research Centre*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

¹² Tatsumi, Y., Kennedy, P., & Nagayoshi, K. (2024). *Japan's Strategic Future and Implications for the US-Japan Alliance* (Asia & Indo-Pacific). Stimson. <https://www.stimson.org/2024/japans-strategic-future-and-implications-for-the-us-japan-alliance/>

America maintains its commitment to a free, peaceful and whole Europe¹³. While it reaffirms its commitment under Article 5 of NATO, it also calls for its European allies to assume greater responsibility in the protection of the continent. This mirrors the political right's argument (whose foremost proponent is Donald Trump), however in a less vociferous and confrontational manner. Moreover, it promises to collaborate with European countries on matters of terrorism, climate change, democratization, food security etc.

Next, the NSS addresses the United States' commitments to the Western Hemisphere, more commonly known as Latin America and the Caribbean. The United States's interactions with this region are primarily on the grounds of migration; the US is home to an overwhelming majority of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants. Hence, the US's primary commitments to the region are to expand pathways for legal migration and to combat the illicit trafficking of individuals across the border. The US also benefits from the security and stability of the region, and actively assists partners in building transparent, inclusive, and accountable institutions. The Western Hemisphere also poses a serious security risk to the US and is a vulnerability. Hence, the establishment invests a significant number of resources to maintaining America's sphere of influence in the region.

Next, the NSS addresses the question of the Middle East. The US's interests in the Middle East are primarily economic and it also endeavours to ensure regional integration, peace, stability and compliance with the international rules- based order. The United States identifies Iran as its key adversary in the region and takes a strong stance against the Iranian establishment. It- in not so many words- calls for a democratic revival in Iran by the people against the oppressive regime. By far the most important concern that the US would like to mitigate in the context of the Middle East is the export of terrorism. It identifies Yemen, Syria and Libya as providing fertile ground for extremist breeding since they are highly unstable and insecure regimes. The question of Israel and Palestine is also addressed in this NSS. The United States stands committed to a Two-State Solution, but in the ongoing Israeli onslaught against Gaza, the US is perceived as a significant inhibitor of peace with its repeated and staunch support of Israel, which has often been to its own detriment domestically.

¹³ Biden- Harris Administration. (2022, October). *NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY*. The White House, Washington. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

The US seeks to advance its interests in Africa by collaborating strongly with the African Union, and the governments, civil societies, private sector and diaspora communities of the region. The United States continues to pledge investments in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa. The United States also strives to counter the inroads that the Russian Wagner Group and China are making into Africa. Hence, as has occurred often in history, Africa yet again becomes a playground for the world's powers to sort out their squabbles. Healthcare, digital infrastructure, food insecurity and the provision of clean energy are some of the dimensions along which the United States attempts to expand its ties with African states.

The Arctic is steadily emerging as a key source of contention between the United States and its adversaries. The NSS specifically identifies Russia's behaviour as destabilising the security of the region, creating new risks of conflict and hindering cooperation. While the United States reaffirms its commitment to honour tribal sovereignty and self- governance, increasing involvement of new actors in this once inaccessible part of the world proves dangerous for the sanctity of these communities and their subsistence strategies and way of life.

The United States' commitments to the protection of sea, air and space are little more than generic reiterations of international covenants and recognised institutions. This implies one of two things- it either means that the establishment has poorly gauged the significance of these emerging arenas of cooperation and, resultantly, conflict, or it is being rather tight lipped towards its strategy in these domains. Regardless, the NSS provides very little information to conduct an informed analysis of the United States' strategies in these domains.

To conclude, the National Security Strategy is illustrative of many facets of American defence and security. It serves as an important guide to discern and understand America's key defensive posturing. However, the NSS does fall short along a few lines. Primarily, it has summarily failed to paint an accurate picture of the defence and security realities of the USA by failing to disclose the budgetary allocations and financial logistics that underlie defence strategy. It reads more like a grand expression of aspirations and idealistic undertakings than a critical and factual statement of capacities and obligations. As has often been highlighted, documents like the NSS also tend to dilute the essence of what is crucial to "national security" since it paints virtually every alliance and objective that a country is partner to as essential to its survival. In reality, however, there exists

a hierarchy of priorities in the institution, and decisions are ultimately based on a cost- benefit analysis i.e. which objective and obligation is more important than the other? Lastly, and most importantly, policy makers, analysts and researchers must be aware of the fact that documents like the National Security Strategy are, at their core, political entities. They serve to propound a narrative, encourage a discourse, and paint a picture that is favourable to the individual or party in power. Hence, it can often fail to adequately communicate the complexities and the mediating factors involved in the promulgation of a national strategy for defence and national security.

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