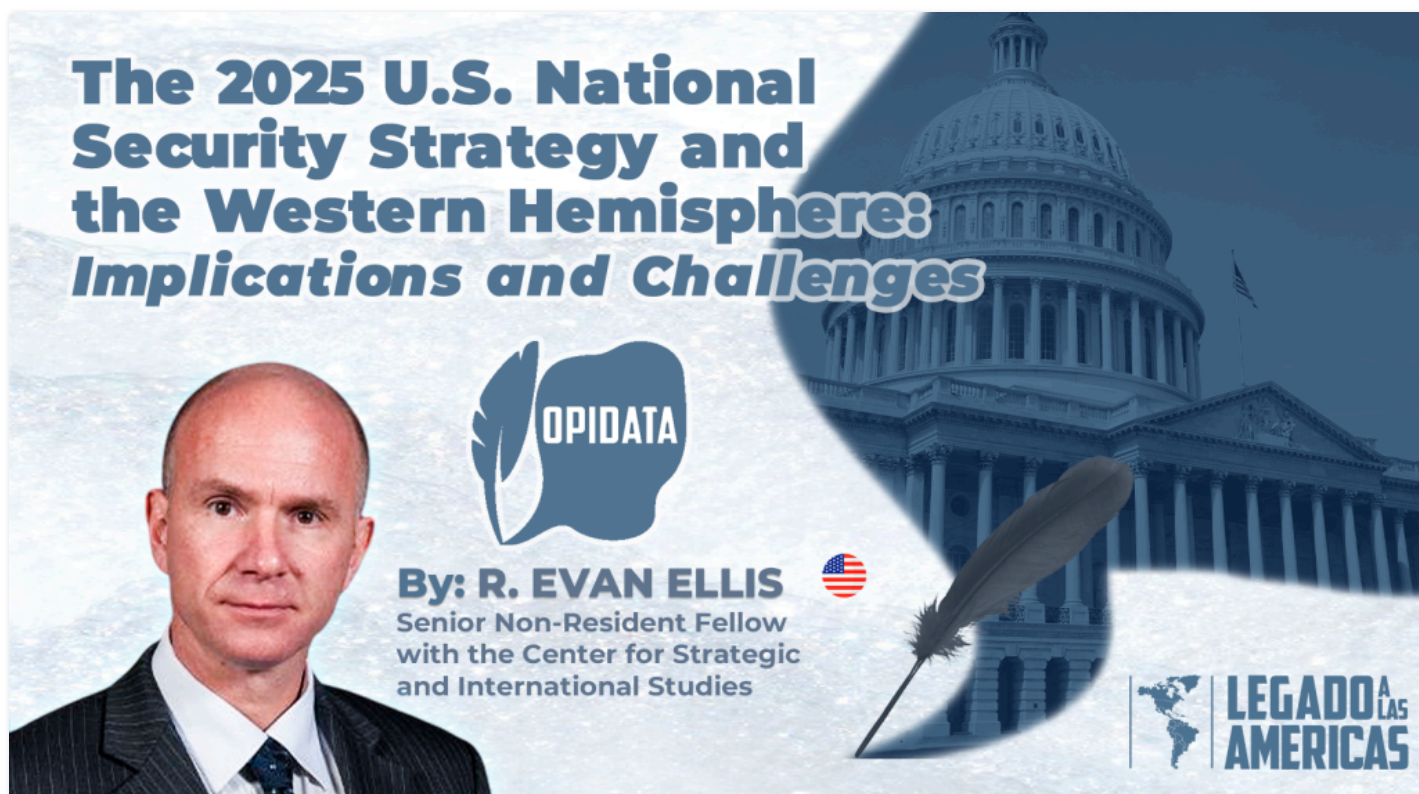




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"Si labor empeñosa exige los intereses materiales, empeño aún más valioso reclaman los intereses morales"
(Juan Zorrilla de San Martín)



NOTICIAS DESTACADAS

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The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy and the Western Hemisphere: Implications and Challenges

📅 diciembre 23, 2025 👤 Legado a las Américas

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the Western Hemisphere has returned to the center of the board, bringing with it opportunities, risks, and deep-seated tensions.”

On **December 4, 2025**, the Trump Administration released its new **National Security Strategy** (NSS). The document is traditionally produced at the beginning of each U.S. Presidential Administration, publicly setting out its approach to pursuing U.S. security interests through its global activities, and serving as guidance for more detailed, often classified documents by U.S. government entities, including the **National Defense Strategy** (NDS) and National Military Strategy (NMS).

The new NSS, produced in record time, provides a statement of official policies integrating and giving official policy status to the dramatic shifts in approach, tone, and priorities of the Trump Administration toward the world.

The new NSS is a departure from **earlier National Security Strategies** in many ways. It is notably critical about what preceded it; President Trump's introductory letter asserts that his Administration has brought the nation and the world “**back from the brink** of catastrophe and disaster...after four years of weakness, extremism, and deadly failures...” The NSS itself asserts that “American strategies since the end of the Cold War **have fallen short...**” The Western Hemisphere section of the strategy refers to prior “years of neglect” and refers to the “**failed law enforcement-only strategy** of previous decades” against drugs.

The new NSS is also more centered around personal attributes and initiatives of the President than was particular documents. It speaks, for example, of securing peace in conflict zones, as well as other goals by leveraging the President's abilities as a **dealmaker**, and gives the President's imprimatur for a “**Trump Corrolary**” to “**assert and enforce**” the Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere.

The new NSS arguably focuses less than its predecessors in leveraging traditional sources of soft power, such as identification with the U.S. democratic system and values, advocacy of human rights and social justice, or multilateral institutions as a basis for cooperating against systemic threats such as the advance of China. Instead, it emphasizes “**balance of power**” and “**flexible realism**” in guiding the choice of partners with whom the U.S. will work, independent of their attributes, presumably including their ideological orientation, levels of corruption, human rights record, and other problems.

Further moving away from the basis of prior documents in orienting ideological or values principles global in scope, the new NSS mentions of the PRC are much more focused on the Western



Europe, cast in morally neutral terms, need to be resolved in the interest of “**stability.**”

Global financial, commercial and technological interdependence, and climate issues are virtually absent from the discussion of the strategic environment that the U.S. seeks to navigate.

The NSS section on the Western Hemisphere, which appears first in the discussion of regional policies, is unprecedented in its length, in its discussion of dedicating more U.S. military forces to the region and using them in non-traditional ways, including fighting “illegal” and other unwanted immigration, human trafficking and drug flows (specifically mentioning the use of **lethal force** against narcotraffickers), and using the military to “**establish or expand access,**” not necessarily just in time of war.

The Western Hemisphere section is also unprecedented in its specific discussion of its intention to resist the military and commercial presence of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and other U.S. extra-hemispheric opponents in the region, and how it intends to use the tools of U.S. military cooperation and commercial partnerships to do so.

The prioritization of the Western Hemisphere in the document is strengthened the administration’s declared intent to “apply” and “enforce” the Monroe Doctrine in the region, although the original 1823 Monroe Doctrine was a **statement of solidarity** toward newly independent states of the hemisphere to resist European meddling and attempts at re-conquest. The NSS also proclaims a new “**Trump Corrolary**” to the doctrine, although it is not clear which part, or all of the section, is intended to constitute that “corollary.”

The Western Hemisphere section uses the terms “**enlist**” and “**expand**” to describe an approach in which the U.S. will work with “**regional champions**” which it will “**reward**” and “**encourage**” to support U.S. objectives including controlling migration, fighting cartels, and **supporting “nearshoring”** for the U.S. economy. By contrast to past Strategies, it does not claim to focus on advancing development, democracy or healthy institutions as objectives advancing US and regional security, but rather, “**tolerable stability.**” Indeed, the document does not speak of advancing values traditionally regarded as critical enablers of US security and commerce with the region such as rule of law, transparency, anti-corruption activities, and the protection of human rights, but rather working with governments “**broadly aligned with our principles and strategies.**” Rather, it explicitly recognizes the importance of engaging governments of “different outlooks” which “want to work with us.”

Assessment, Strengths and Risks of the New Approach



one of its most positive characteristics. The commitment of the U.S. to a **pragmatic approach** in selecting and engaging partners, the respect for their sovereignty, and the willingness to work with a range of governments are also each strengths of the new approach. In addition, the Western Hemisphere section of the document contains numerous useful concepts, such as a systematic, **National Security Council-led approach** for identifying critical infrastructure in the region, as well as its specific discussion of the use of a combination of commercial, security and other incentives to reduce PRC presence in those areas. The document's implicit recognition of the relationship between PRC commercial presence and strategically damaging **influence** is also important.

Despite these strengths, the new policy direction outlined by the document also implies a number of risks that should be taken into consideration by US policymakers in interpreting and implementing the document.

Although the new strategy usefully discusses leveraging the attractiveness of the US market, commercial partnerships, and US military and technology prowess as incentives for working with the US, it arguably de-emphasizes the attractive power of the U.S. as a champion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the fight against corruption and authoritarianism, or the attractiveness of the U.S. as a source of development based on the compassion and generosity that are seen by many in the region as a hallmark of the U.S. people and system. Indeed, the genuine U.S. effort to help the region, rather than just profit from it, has arguably distinguished the U.S. from the PRC. The new strategy arguably cedes this longstanding U.S. advantage to embrace an approach which ironically looks more like the self-interested posture toward the region pursued by the PRC and its companies, albeit with less diplomatic rhetoric, fewer loans, and fewer entities than that of the PRC, positioned to do the work in sectors such as telecommunications, electricity infrastructure and construction.

More broadly, the document moves away from a global, ideologically-oriented focus for countering adversaries such as China and Russia. Past documents have arguably been more rooted in principles that serve as a basis for organizing the strategic response to U.S. adversaries, and rallying others to the cause, such as a struggle against the advance of Communism, authoritarianism or aggression.

The new document notably makes almost no mention of Russia as a global adversary. The focus of prior U.S. National Security Strategies on supporting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and like-minded democratic allies of the European Union and Europe against aggression, is replaced in the new National Security Strategy by a Europe section which casts the problem as a Europe in **cultural decline**, and whose quarrel with Russia (rather than its resistance to Russian **depredations against Ukraine**), are cast as creating **instability threatening U.S.** interests.



shape the strategic environment to their own advantage.

The language of the document also regrettably gives material to anti-U.S. politicians and academics and rivals such as the PRC and Russia to use against the United States in international discourse, and to decrease partners trust in and willingness to work with the U.S. The document's previously noted proclamation that the U.S. primary goal is to be the "world's strongest, richest, most powerful, and most successful country," and that it seeks "pre-eminence" in the Western Hemisphere, are arguably unhelpful in fostering good-will and identification with U.S. values among our neighbors in the hemisphere and our partners globally. Indeed, instead of emphasizing the shared U.S. interest collaborating to advance the security and prosperity of the region in which the U.S. is physically located, the new Strategy speaks of working through surrogates ("regional champions") to assure an "tolerable" level of stability that does not threaten U.S. interests.

The document's statement about seeking sole-source contracts for US companies from partners who are most dependent on the U.S. is similarly problematic and vulnerable to being exploited by adversaries to sew negative opinions toward the US. Another such example is the document's declared intention to use the U.S. military against "cartels" (not necessarily just "terrorists"), including employing lethal force "where necessary."

Going even one step further, ironically, the new NSS may ironically provide material for legal action against current U.S. officials by future U.S. administrations which may take a different perspective on the legality of the use of lethal military force against the cartels.

A question raised, but left unclear, by the new Strategy, is how far the Administration intends to go in its declared intent to "wind down adversarial influence" in the Americas. The document explicitly mentions "ports," arguably referring to the port of Chancay, Peru, exclusively controlled by the Chinese logistics giant COSCO, and the operation of two ports in Panama by the Hong Kong-based firm Hutchinson. It is not clear whether the Administration intends to oppose the plethora of ports with Chinese capital in the region including those in Mexico, the Bahamas, Argentina, Jamaica, and Brazil.

Indeed, PRC-based companies have over \$203 billion in financial interests in the region, including in strategic infrastructure from telecommunications and data centers, to space facilities, to electricity generation and distribution, to financial services, to lithium, rare earth elements, and other critical minerals, to petroleum, and agriculture, among others. It is not clear how far the US can or will go in using its influence to push China out of them all.

With respect to Venezuela, while the NSS' stated disposition to use the US military to "defeat cartels" and establish or expand "access" in strategically important locations could be consistent with a



narcotrafficking and human trafficking flows, is also consistent with the indefinite continuation of **U.S. forces in the Caribbean** for lethal interdiction of drug boats, with a possible expansion to **land targets**, without action that would take down the Maduro regime.

It is unlikely that most U.S. partners in Latin America will openly speak critically of the new National Security Strategy, because of the perceived costs of criticizing the U.S. Administration, and the limited benefits of doing so, leading to the impression that the new strategy is being received positively in the region. Nonetheless the overall focus and tone of the new NSS **is regrettable**. It has many good ideas and makes important points. Yet the U.S. adopts a tone that seems likely to **offend and confuse its friends**, gives material to its adversaries, and unnecessarily cedes the strategic high ground of institutions and values at our own peril.

The current U.S. struggle to secure its national security interests within an interconnected world, like the previous U.S. struggle during the Cold War, requires the pragmatic and judicious use of military power. Yet U.S. interests will not be won solely on the battlefield, nor by aggressively pursuing a narrow concept of U.S. self-interest. Rather, it will be won in the hearts and minds of those worldwide who identify and align with the values of good that the U.S. has historically represented, and must continue to represent.

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This article is part of **Opidata**, the editorial platform of **Legacy to the Americas** for the analysis of key issues in the region.

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📅 noviembre 29, 2023



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📅 noviembre 1, 2023



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Quienes hemos decidido constituir el Movimiento Legado a las Américas, somos asociaciones nacionales y continentales, así como ciudadanos de 15 naciones, a los que nos motiva el unirnos para bregar juntos en una acción centrada en una Carta de Principios que nos son comunes, a fin de alcanzar la meta que nos hemos propuesto, la cual es un reavivamiento ético y cívico, y como resultado de este, una renovación y reforma en el campo político, económico y social. Podemos definirnos como un movimiento de conciencia.

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