



Political and
Geostrategic
OBSERVATORY
of the United States

THE 2025 NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: A DIFFERENT WORLDVIEW

Pierre-Yves Hénin / Professor Emeritus at Université
Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne

January 2026



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Pierre-Yves Hénin / Professor Emeritus at Université
Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne

PRESENTATION OF THE OBSERVATORY

Under the direction of **Romuald Sciora**, Associate Research Fellow at IRIS, the IRIS Political and Geostrategic Observatory of the United States aims to provide new insights into contemporary developments in the United States, particularly their impact on Franco-American cooperation, the European Union, and the wider world.

The Observatory is structured around several core activities: the publication of analyses, the co-publication of reference works, the production of video content, and the organization of events (conferences, roundtables, and symposiums) in France, the United States, and Canada.

Its main academic partners include **The Academy of Political Science**, founded by Columbia University in New York, the **Columbia-SIPA Urban and Social Policy Program**, and the **Raoul-Dandurand Chair in Strategic and Diplomatic Studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal**.

iris-france.org

 @InstitutIRIS

 @InstitutIRIS

 institut_iris

 IRIS

 IRIS - Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques

The publication by the White House on 5 December of the document on the "US National Security Strategy"¹ - or NSS2025 - has provoked many reactions, particularly with regard to the treatment attributed to Europe in this programme. It reveals, beyond strategic perspectives, a new vision of the world and the role of the United States in the coming years. This document, an expression of a "MAGA doctrine",² is a real ideological and political revolution compared to its predecessor, published by the Biden administration in 2022, the NSS2022³, which itself recorded a break due to the profound change in the international environment that was then required. While we can note the extent to which these documents are systematically, almost term by term, it is the divergence of their vision of the nature of American supremacy that we will examine here.

The nationalist Trump administration set as a central objective of its security strategy that "the United States must remain the strongest, richest, most powerful and most prosperous country in the world for decades to come." One might expect the internationalist Biden administration to be more restrained in asserting American supremacy. Quite the contrary. The Democratic president in fact stated the objective of defending and strengthening "American leadership... the need for which is greater than ever." These differing formulations point to a profound shift in the world view of the two successive presidents.

THE UNITED STATES AT THE HEART OF THE "RULES-BASED INTERNATIONAL ORDER"

For Biden, the place and means of exercising American leadership is the "rules-based international order." He echoed the words of the Obama⁴ administration's NSS2015, which was the first to use it, saying that "strong and sustained American leadership is essential to a rules-based international order that promotes global security and prosperity." This concept took over from the "liberal international order", the principles of which were enshrined and the main institutions set up between 1944 and 1949.

¹ The White House, *2025 National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>.

² Romuald Sciora, "After the Monroe Doctrine, Time for the MAGA Doctrine," *IRIS* (9 December 2025), <https://www.iris-france.org/apres-la-doctrine-monroe-le-temps-de-la-doctrine-maga/>.

³ Joseph R. Biden Jr., *The Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, October 12, 2022), <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

⁴ Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 6, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf.

Already, in wanting to build a world "safe for democracy", Woodrow Wilson had in fact favoured an international order favourable to American trade and investment, political isolationism then leaving Wall Street bankers to define de facto American policy towards Germany and therefore European balances. The post-World War II organization sought to remedy this situation by instituting national and international control institutions to regulate, while at the same time fostering, private initiatives. While it applied primarily to the "free world" during the Cold War, the "liberal international order" became a unipolar order in the period of American hegemony after the fall of communism. With the rise of criticism and the problems encountered by liberalism in the 2000s, it was effectively replaced by a "rules-based international order" opposed to Russian and Chinese practices. The systematic use of this concept has allowed the US authorities to circumvent the reference to international law by using a concept that is apparently similar but much more flexible than a legal concept with which they occasionally take some liberties under American exemptionalism⁵. The fact remains that this concept, which is losing momentum due to external contestations - by the countries of the South in particular - and internal contestations -⁶ by national populist movements, has favoured the development of multilateral relations.

Among the benefits brought to the United States by the institutions of the liberal international order, the NSS2022 noted that "the international financial institutions, notably the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, are also a force multiplier for our values and interests [... of which] we will strive to improve responsiveness to American priorities." This order also provided the framework for the status of the dollar, from which the U.S. budget and financial institutions benefit considerably. The preponderant share in the financing of NATO's defence spending has not gone without counterparts in terms of European orders to American industry favoured by interoperability standards and, more directly, by a preponderance in the military chain of command. The U.S. position in the liberal international order has also fostered the mastery of digital infrastructure and financial settlement networks, which has been described as an "underground empire."⁷

⁵ Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 6, 2015), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf.

⁶ Adler-Nissen, Rebecca, and Ayşe Zarakol. 2021. "Struggles for Recognition: The Liberal International Order and the Merger of Its Discontents." Cambridge University Press (CUP). doi:10.17863/CAM.54632.

⁷ Agathe Demarais, "A Stochastic Power: The Underground Empire of the United States, A Conversation with Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman," *Le Grand Continent*, 9 November 2023, <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2023/11/09/une-puissance-stochastique-lempire-souterrain-des-etats-unis-une-conversation-avec-henry-farrell-et-abraham-newman/>. *The Great Continent*

It is logical that this international order has been challenged by adversaries such as Russia and China; It is more surprising that it has been called into question by its main beneficiaries. In complete rupture with the neoconservatives, the national conservatives consider that this order is unfavourable to American interests, not only because of the financial cost of international commitments but also because of the imposition of constraints that undermine American sovereignty and the economy, particularly in environmental matters. On this basis, Donald Trump vigorously rejected American adherence to such a logic of international organization: "The time when the United States alone supported the world order like Atlas is over."

THE POST-LIBERAL WORLD, A SPACE FOR THE DEPLOYMENT OF SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

The Republican president's primacy that "the United States will remain the strongest, richest, most powerful, and most prosperous country in the world for decades to come" does not belong in an international order that he contests. From the perspective of pragmatic isolationism, his administration considers that, after the end of the Cold War, "the American foreign policy elites convinced themselves that the permanent domination of the United States over the entire world was in the best interest of our country. Yet the affairs of other countries concern us only if their activities directly threaten our interests." They overestimated America's capabilities and promoted destructive free trade. American objectives must be pursued for their own sake, in a world that is beyond Washington's leadership but where the United States must develop its power, in principle the first one.

The inescapable Carl Schmitt, who has attracted the attention of all contemporary authoritarianisms, including Trumpism⁸, has well analyzed the difference in perspectives. The German jurist and political philosopher, theoretician of authoritarian nationalism and at one time an official figure in the National Socialist regime, criticized the universalist liberalism of the League of Nations, which in his opinion led to the global monopoly of a power, in fact the United States. In a 1939 book, he opposed it with the recognition of large groups formed around regional powers. The pluralism of these *Großräume*⁹ would allow the coexistence of spheres of interest and cultural spheres "determining the new international law of the globe"

⁸ Roberta A. Adams, *Trumpism, Carl Schmitt, and the Threat of Anti-Liberalism in the United States: The Political Thought of Donald Trump and Trumpism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2024), ISBN 9781666952254. [Google Livres](#)

⁹ Jean-François Kervégan, *What to do with Carl Schmitt?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), <https://www.gallimard.fr/catalogue/que-faire-de-carl-schmitt/9782070135417>. [Gallimard](#)

and justifying the constitution and enlargement of *the Lebensraum* – of the living space – of the *Reich* in accordance with Hitler's program and a "German Monroe Doctrine" whose principle and, in 1941, still in 1941, he defended. For some authors, such as Susanna Hast¹⁰, the principle of spheres of influence¹¹ is justified as more favourable to the pluralism of a pluripolar world than a universal democratic order. Admittedly, the peripheral countries see their sovereignty limited, "the apparent space, emptied of territorial sovereignty, remains intact, but the real content of this sovereignty is altered". Lord Curzon, a British diplomat, former Viceroy of India and Foreign Secretary, was lucid when he wrote in 1908¹² that "protectorates are being transformed by imperceptible degrees into a diplomatic concept now known as spheres of influence".

It is difficult to characterize so clearly the contrast between the two power strategies pursued alternately by the American administrations, from Biden, heir to Wilson, whose attachment to the "rules-based international order" we will see, even as he notes a radical change in the international environment in the direction of a multipolar world, to Trump, who sees this power asserting itself mainly through the assertion of the influence of the United States in a competition between empires of which it must be the strongest, the richest and the most powerful. The "Trump corollary"¹³ to the Monroe Doctrine represents a considerable step backwards in proclaiming that "the American people—neither foreign nations nor globalist institutions—will always retain control of our destiny in our hemisphere." He thus joined the "[Theodore] Roosevelt corollary" of 1904, which claimed the right to intervene in the Western Hemisphere, and erased the commitment to renounce it made by Franklin Roosevelt in 1934 and respected until 1940, before at Yalta the same president promoted a reorganization of the world into regions controlled respectively by the three victors. His Cold War-era successors did not fail to intervene in Latin America, particularly in the 1970s to counter Cuban influence. Unlike the Charter of the League of Nations, Article 21 of which stipulated, at the request of American diplomacy, that "regional agreements, such as the Monroe Doctrine, which ensure the maintenance of peace, shall not be considered incompatible with any of the provisions of the present Covenant", the UN Charter did not address the issue, the illegitimacy of spheres of influence being apparent from its general provisions, which apply in particular to the

¹⁰ Susanna Hast, *Spheres of Influence in International Relations: History, Theory and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), ISBN 9781138245594.

¹¹ Pierre-Yves Hénin, "The Russian Offensive in Ukraine, a War for a Sphere of Influence," *IRIS* (June 2022), <https://www.iris-france.org/iris/loffensive-russe-en-ukraine-une-guerre-pour-une-sphere-dinfluence/>

¹² F. R. de Z. Curzon, *Frontiers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1906), <https://archive.org/details/frontiers03curzgoog>.

¹³ The White House, *America 250: Presidential Message on the Anniversary of the Monroe Doctrine*, presidential proclamation, 2 December 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/12/america-250-presidential-message-on-the-anniversary-of-the-monroe-doctrine/>.

regional agreements provided for in Article 52. In line with Trump's corollary, the NSS2025 develops an imperialist view of US domination of the Western Hemisphere. The intervention in Venezuela, with the United States announcing that it would run the country and that American oil companies would make more money than the intervention would have cost, goes beyond what could have been imagined. It illustrates how the so-called "Trump corollary" is merely a return to the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary, without taking into account the fact that the success of such a project is today far more uncertain than it was in the previous century.

CONTRASTING VALUES AND OBJECTIVES

The new vision of the world leads to a break in values and objectives. For the Biden administration NSS2022, the rules-based international order must be a space for affirming democracy and human rights, too: "the United States will continue to defend democracy around the world [...] and they will support universal human rights." They will also provide support to international organizations. China is the main adversary of the United States because it is "the only competitor that has both the intention of reshaping the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power necessary to achieve this goal", an order that Russia is only disrupting.

For the NSS2025 of the Trump administration, China is essentially an economic partner and competitor, whose methods are however questionable. More generally, "the American strategy has gone astray". Its principles "boiled down to lists of wishes or desired goals, did not clearly define what we want, but rather stated vague platitudes," vague platitudes in which one must understand the enunciation of values such as democracy and human rights. It has also been misguided by its attachment to multilateralism and international organizations. She has "tied American politics to a network of international institutions, some of which are driven by outright anti-Americanism and many by a transnationalism that explicitly seeks to dissolve the sovereignty of individual states."

There was also a radical break in pan-American politics. The tone has changed significantly from the Biden administration's NSS2022 to "promote democracy and prosperity in the Western Hemisphere" with which "it is essential to renew partnerships", particularly in the areas of the environment and health. For the NSS2025, the American objectives first and foremost overlap with domestic concerns, in terms of the fight against migration and drug trafficking, but also more global issues, in terms of security and the economy. To achieve these goals, "we will reward and encourage governments, political parties, and movements in the

region that broadly align with our principles and strategy" and the United States will strengthen its military presence in the hemisphere. They will not hesitate to impose onerous conditions of cooperation that are more a protectorate than a relationship between sovereign states: "the terms of our agreements, in particular with the countries that depend most on us and over which we therefore have the most influence, must be single-source contracts for our companies". Within NATO, too, it is possible to think that the new Europe, the result of "the growing influence of patriotic parties [which] is a source of great optimism", aligned with American values and interests, would constitute a major extension of the United States' sphere of influence, decisive for gaining the world's leading rank.

The difference in visions overlaps with cultural options and domestic political priorities. For the Democratic administration, immigration responds to the values and interests of the United States, "a destination of choice for talent from around the world" while "pluralism, inclusion and diversity are a source of national strength in a rapidly changing world". These are the two pet peeves of Trumpism, denounced from Trump's introduction to the NSS2025: "From my first day in office, we re-established the sovereign borders of the United States and deployed the American army to put an end to the invasion of our country. We have eliminated radical gender ideology and woke madness from our armed forces." Among the various occurrences of this position, the document asserts that "the success of radical ideologies that seek to replace competence and merit with favoured group status would render America unrecognizable and unable to defend itself." The American imperium is thus based on an occasionally aggressive nationalism and a cultural, even civilizational, identity that Europe is accused of having abandoned.

Undoubtedly, the scope of this document will depend on the ability of the MAGA movement to retain full power after the 2026 midterms and the next presidential election. In any case, the measures inspired by it will have left a lasting mark on international society and damaged the image of the United States.

Strategic expertise in complete independance



2 bis, rue Mercœur - 75011 PARIS / France

+ 33 (0) 1 53 27 60 60

contact@iris-france.org

iris-france.org



IRIS is one of the main French think tanks specialising in geopolitical and strategic issues. It is the only one to have the singularity of combining a research centre and a teaching centre delivering diplomas, via its IRIS Sup' school, a model that contributes to its national and international attractiveness. IRIS is organised around four areas of activity: research, publication, training and event organisation.