

Working Papers Coalition for Peace & Ethics



No. 12/1 (December 2017)

From Global to Fortress America; Thoughts on "National Security Strategy of the United States" (4 Dec 2017)

Larry Catá Backer¹

Abstract: On 4 December 2017 the Office of the President of the United States released its national security strategy going forward, Office of the President of the United States, [National Security Strategy of the United States](#) (4 Dec. 2017) (hereafter the "NSS"). "The NSS is intended to provide strategic yet prioritized guidance from which national security agencies base their own guidance documents, budgets, directives, and policies." (Micah Zenko, [Trump's National Security Strategy Deserves to Be Ignored](#), *Foreign Policy* (Dec. 18, 2017)). The President gave a speech at the unveiling of the new NSS ([Read Trump's full speech outlining his national security strategy](#), *WPSU* (18 Dec. 2017)). This essay considers the NSS in its own context and offers some thoughts on what it might reveal of the direction of U.S. strategic thinking under the current administration. It suggests that there is as much continuity as there are breaks with prior practice. But more importantly it brings to the surface and affirms a global trend that has tended to exist strong but submerged: the core principle of our national security strategy will rest on an "all around" policy of convergence of strategic forces--advances the basic strategic thrust of privatization of governmental efforts, responsibilities and objectives and the simultaneous governmentalization of private efforts coordinated for strategic advantage by the state. In that respect, the United States and China, for example, appear to have achieved a level of convergence as they form and adapt their strategic interests to the thrusts and counter thrusts of the other.



COALITION FOR
PEACE AND ETHICS

¹ W. Richard and Mary Eshelman Faculty Scholar Professor of Law and International Affairs, Pennsylvania State University.

NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

of the United States of America

DECEMBER 2017



Introduction

On 4 December 2017 the Office of the President of the United States released its national security strategy going forward, Office of the President of the United States, [National Security Strategy of the United States](#) (4 Dec. 2017) (hereafter the "NSS"). This is an annual report mandated under the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Department Reorganization Act of 1986 (amending [Title 50, Chapter 15, Section 404a](#) of the US Code). "The NSS is intended to provide strategic yet prioritized guidance from which national security agencies base their own guidance documents, budgets, directives, and policies." (Micah Zenko, [Trump's National Security Strategy Deserves to Be Ignored](#), *Foreign Policy* (Dec. 18, 2017)). The President gave a speech at the unveiling of the new NSS ([Read Trump's full speech outlining his national security strategy](#), *WPSU* (18 Dec. 2017)).

As expected, reaction ranged from silence to cautious neutrality to a range of negative expressions. An editorial in the India Times noted: "For India, the plan would be a roadmap guiding its expanding global engagement, identifying opportunities, and ensuring that it is cognisant of and equipped to address emerging challenges." ([US National Security Strategy: Or is it?](#), *The Economic Times* (19 Dec. 2017)). Predictably, "rejected unfounded accusations that belie facts on ground and trivialize Pakistan's efforts for fighting terrorism and unmatched sacrifices to promote peace and stability in the region." ([Pakistan rejects unfounded accusations made in US National](#)

[Security Strategy](#), *The International News* (19 Dec. 2017)). Likewise, "Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Ghasemi condemned the plans outlined in the newly released US national security strategy as futile efforts against Iran." ([US national security strategy futile effort for Iranophobia: Ghasemi](#), *Mehr News Agency* (19 Dec. 2017) ("What has been depicted in this unconventional text of no wisdom and realism is the repetition of the same baseless accusations and hallucinations a few hallucinated states of the region and US," reiterated the Iranian diplomat.")).

Chinese and Russian opinion inclined toward the negative. China's embassy in Washington had some choice words in response. "It is completely egotistical for any nation to put its interests above the common interests of other nations and the international community. It will lead to a path of self-isolation," the embassy said in a statement." (Scott Neuman, [Trump's National Security Strategy Angers China](#), NPR (19 Dec. 2017)). The Russian reaction was more nuanced.

A spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin told reporters today that the document had a "clearly imperial nature" and demonstrated a reluctance to abandon the idea of a "unipolar world." The Kremlin's reaction, however, was mixed. The spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said he saw "positive things" in the document, noting it expressed a view of U.S.-Russia relations shared by Putin: that the two countries should cooperate in areas where it suits their interests. (Patrick Reevel, [Russia calls Trump's national security strategy 'imperialist'](#), *ABC News* (19 Dec. 2017)).

Chinese official reaction, for publication, on the other hand, was content to see this as a return to the Cold War era. "A spokeswoman for China's foreign ministry, Hua Chunying, called on the U.S. to 'abandon its Cold War mentality and zero-sum game concept,' warning that failure to do so "would only harm itself as well as others.'" (Ibid.). The Russians, however, could not resist suggesting the speech was Orwellian. ([Trump's 'Orwellian' strategy speech: Triumph of the neocons?](#), RT (18 Dec. 2017)).

Some in the American elite, at war with the current administration since its election victory in 2016, shared some of those views. "This is a farce. On any one issue, President Trump and his team have several contradictory positions. That's what happens when your priority as president is to use foreign policy to throw red meat to your base while other cabinet members are scrambling to stop Armageddon." (Roger Cohen, Opinion: [Trump's National Security Strategy Is a Farce](#), *New York Times* (19 Dec 2017)). In a similar vein some suggest that "this foreign policy strategy is dead on arrival; it is plain impossible to execute such a strategy with a commander in chief who is neither capable of sticking to his word nor a believer in some of the document's most important principles." (Ilan Goldenberg, [Trump's National Security Strategy Is Dead on Arrival](#), *Newsweek* (18 Dec. 2017)). Others provided a more nuanced though cautious reaction (Thomas Wright, [The National Security Strategy Papers Over a Crisis](#), *The Atlantic* (19 Dec. 2017) ("It tries to convert the mundane into the language of nationalism, presumably playing to an audience of one. The lack of any overarching purpose, and the failure to explicitly embrace a U.S.-led, rules-based order, is an unwelcome break with 70 years of U.S. foreign policy.")). And still others offer their readers an NSS with a glimmer of hope (Daniel Fried, [Opinion: Why the Trump administration's National Security Strategy offers a glimmer of hope](#), *The Washington Post* (19 Dec. 2017)).

This essay considers the NSS in its own context and offers some thoughts on what it might reveal of the direction of U.S. strategic thinking under the current administration. It suggests that there is as much continuity as there are breaks with prior practice. But more importantly it brings to the surface and affirms a global trend that has tended to exist strong but submerged: the core principle of our national security strategy will rest on an "all around" policy of convergence of strategic forces--advances the basic strategic thrust of privatization of governmental efforts, responsibilities and objectives and the simultaneous governmentalization of private efforts coordinated for strategic advantage by the state. In that respect, the United States and China, for example, appear to have achieved a level of convergence as they form and adapt their strategic interests to the thrusts and counter thrusts of the other.



(Donal Trump; pix credit [here](#))

The NSS: Presidential Introduction

This is all very important opinion, to be sure, but there is some value to diving in for oneself. The NSS starts with a page and a half transmittal letter from the President. It is useful if only for providing the formal and official context within which it might be useful to read the 55 or so pages that follow. First, the president defined the parameters of his presidency, that is, his sense of why he was elected to office ("to make America great again" NSS, p. i) and its translation into a broad set of policy principles: "my Administration would put the safe , interests, and well-being of our citizens first. . . we would revitalize the American economy, rebuild our military, defend our

borders, protect our sovereignty, and advance our values." (Ibid.). He then explained his efforts to advance these priorities during his first year in office. That served as a prelude to the great insight that animates his own view of the world and the relation of the United States to it: "The United States faces an extraordinarily dangerous world, filled with a wide range of threats that have intensified in recent years." (Ibid.). These threats include nuclear threats by rogue regimes, radical Islamic terror groups, the success of rival powers in pursuing their own interests, porous borders (migration and trade), global criminal enterprises, free riding by U.S. allies, neglect of defense, loss of trust in government and faith in U.S. values. These challenges, he asserted are now being met. But they also require "charting a new and very different course." (Ibid).

That "very different course" is elaborated in the NSS, itself "a strategic vision for protecting the American people and preserving our way of life, promoting our prosperity, preserving peace through strength, and advancing American influence in the world." (Ibid., p.ii). This strategic vision is grounded in concepts of balance of power favoring the U.S. without losing sight of U.S. values, which have the capacity to "inspire, uplift, and renew," (Ibid). This "beautiful vision—a world of strong, sovereign, and independent nations, each with its own cultures and dreams, thriving side- by-side in prosperity, freedom, and peace" (Ibid), the President intends to pursue "throughout the upcoming year." (Ibid).

Of course, an introduction or a transmittal statement is neither policy nor law. Yet it is probably the most important commentary that exists on the NSS. Its importance derives from the authority of its writer. It will be the President whose own structures and approaches to interpretation will be crucial for defining terms and objectives, and for choosing among alternatives when the NSS must be applied to specific context. To that extent, at least, there is little point (except narcissism and politics) to waste a lot of time berating or belittling this or that in the approach or in the perspective of the President. Time is better spent a better understanding understanding the world view within which the NSS is framed and the likely way in which it is likely to be applied. That, at least, is clear than most commentary: this is styled a heroic presidency in which in a world that is increasingly hostile and closing in on the U.S. and a very specific self-conception of what that means (in terms of self-consciousness and way of life of a unitary polity), will save the United States from its past mistakes and from its present dangers. More importantly, its present dangers are a product, quite directly of its past mistakes--and at the core of those mistakes was the erroneous notion that the United States could lead the world by losing itself within this new world order (with a convergence of the United States into the world).

To save the nation, then, the NSS is crafted to first separate the United States from its global context (to "make America") and then to embed it back into the world as itself (to "make America great again"), not as a leader of global order in which states meld together in some way, but as a *primus inter pares* of a community of states. "An America that is safe, prosperous, and free at home is an America with the strength, confidence, and will to lead abroad. It is an America that can preserve peace, uphold liberty, and create enduring advantages for the American people. Putting America first is the duty of our government and the foundation for U.S. leadership in the world." (NSS, pp. 1). It is true that this represents a quite different approach from that which has been evolving since 1945--and with greater force since the 1990s--an approach that has been an aggressively guarded orthodoxy among policy, administrator and academic elites. That might

explain the unrelenting hostility--well beyond a disagreement as to premise and method. *And yet ironically--though with the greatest artistry--this U.S. NSS and the principles that underlie it, is perfectly in sync with the security strategies of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China.* Indeed, for the first time since the 19th century the great powers, China, Russia, and the U.S., are now all near perfectly aligned--each through its own institutional order is seeking to make themselves great again. There is, indeed, global convergence, but in a direction that would have been difficult to predict even five years ago.



(Pix © Larry Catá Backer 2017)

The NSS: Structure and Aims

The NSS is built on four (4) Pillars: (1) Self-protection (NSS, pp. 7-14); (2) Trade and prosperity (pp. 17-23); (3) peace through strength (pp. 25-35); (4) advance American influence (pp. 37-42). It is then augmented by the development of the NSS in a regional context (NSS, pp. 45-55). An introduction (NSS, pp. 1-4) and a conclusion (NSS, p. 55) pulls all of the preceding together. Let's work through each section critically.

The Introduction is most useful for its elaboration (Ibid., pp. 1-3) of the values referenced in the President's introductory comments. The Introduction styles the Strategic vision as "a clear-eyed assessment of U.S. interests, and a determination to tackle the challenges that we face. It is a strategy of principled realism that is guided by outcomes, not ideology." (NSS, p. 1). But of course,

there is always ideology, especially in the context of pragmatic methodologies (see, e.g., [here](#)). The principles that underlie the ideology that frames the pragmatism of the NSS are those that, until recently, there existed something of a consensus among national thought leaders, officials and powerful institutional stakeholders. These include conventional notions of popular sovereignty grounded in democratic republicanism and federalism as expressed through the federal constitution. It includes the system of legalization of rights and customary privileges. They are principles that are at once suspicious of government, yet which find government useful when it suits. These traditional principles have been battle tested (NSS, p. 2). But, in the NSS world view, that victory made the Americans lazy or overconfident in the 1990s (and not surprisingly at the moment when the logic of globalization moved the United States to embark on a project through which it would invest itself in a system that would order the world).

The United States began to drift. We experienced a crisis of confidence and surrendered our advantages in key areas. As we took our political, economic, and military advantages for granted, other actors steadily implemented their long-term plans to challenge America and to advance agendas opposed to the United States, our allies, and our partners. (NSS, 2).

This statement is both central to what is to come and highly controversial, at least in the sense that it suggests a narrative of the trajectory of the development of U.S. policy and its relationship to globalization very very different from the orthodox view that held sway until January 19, 2017. This is not to suggest that either narrative is "right" or "wrong", but rather that these crystallize the essence of the basic ideological premises that separates, in an irremediable way, the outlooks of the current administration and those of its predecessors and the elites that supported it. The old orthodoxy saw the world as a series of challenges that could be remedied as the U.S. oversaw the transformation of the system of states into a global system into which all states would be embedded. The current administration saw in that embedding the key evidence of the weakening and threat to the United States itself. In this world view,

China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. . . . At the same time, the dictatorships of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Islamic Republic of Iran are determined to destabilize regions, threaten Americans and our allies, and brutalize their own people. . . . In addition, jihadist terrorists such as ISIS and al-Qa'ida continue to spread a barbaric ideology that calls for the violent destruction of governments and innocents they consider to be apostates. (Ibid., p. 3).

It is in this context and to meet these challenges that the NSS is organized to meet the four critical strategic goals that are meant to put America first, and in the process, continue the process of spreading Americanism, but as an American rather than as a global product. "We can play a catalytic role in promoting private-sector-led economic growth, helping aspiring partners become future trading and security partners. And we will remain a generous nation, even as we expect others to share responsibility." (NSS, p. 4). To that end strengthening national sovereignty is the first duty fo the state. (Ibid). Oddly, and in an uncanny way, the first section reads like the Report to the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress of October 2017 (e.g., [here](#)). And the economic

program sounds like China's OBOR (see, e.g., [here](#)). By that I mean that the Introduction first offers a grand vision of the foundational principles of the Republic and then details the historical context in which those values were developed, tested and triumphed to the greater glory of the global community.



(Pix © Larry Catá Backer 2107)

Pillar 1 Protect the American People, the Homeland, and the American Way of Life

The first Pillar (Protect the American People, the Homeland, and the American Way of Life; NSS pp. 7-14) is at once the central element of the NSS and the most defensive element of the program. This is not an America that is pushing itself out from its borders; it is an America that seeks to build defensive barriers against hostile intrusion. The essence of this policy is nicely expressed in the opening paragraphs.

Americans have long recognized the benefits of an interconnected world, where information and commerce flow freely. Engaging with the world, however, does not mean the United States should abandon its rights and duties as a sovereign state or compromise its security. Openness also imposes costs, since adversaries exploit our free and democratic system to harm the United States. . . . Adversaries target

sources of American strength, including our democratic system and our economy. They steal and exploit our intellectual property and personal data, interfere in our political processes, target our aviation and maritime sectors, and hold our critical infrastructure at risk. All of these actions threaten the foundations of the American way of life. Reestablishing lawful control of our borders is a first step toward protecting the American homeland and strengthening American sovereignty. (NSS, p. 7))

Here is a policy in which the U.S. reaches out from behind higher walls. It is the inverse of the prior policy in which the U.S. would itself blend into and become the global system it itself would create for the *universalization of its own values and perspectives*, through a process of global legalization, juridification and norm making dependent on the U.S. (as global representative). That requires security built on open borders and a merging of the global and the local under the supervision of the U.S. Thus, under the old view of security, the U.S. would retain dominance by itself merging into the world. Under the new policy, the U.S. retains policy by projecting power from an autonomous and well defined space. This separation of the U.S. from its global environment, marks a substantial shift that requires the sort of changes to security policy manifested in the NSS. Borders have always mattered--but where borders marked space that could be managed under the old policy, under the new borders marked space that must be defended. The difference is subtle but critical to the understanding of the new approach.

Given this ideology and its principles, the construction of the NSS for marking and defending borders becomes central to the new strategy. Pillar 1 is divided into four (4) sections: (1) securing borders (Ibid., pp. 8-10); (2) projecting defensive power outward (Ibid., pp. 10-12); (3) cyber-security (Ibid., pp. 12-14); and (4) resilience practices (Ibid., pp. 14).

1. The NSS guidance on securing U.S. borders.

This strategy is itself divided into three (3) parts that differentiates three distinct sorts of threats--weapons of mass destruction (WMD), biological threats, and the threats of mass migration. *The response to WMD threats is to be met by a number of long and short term strategies.* These include four (4) basic long and short term strategies. *The first is focused on enhancing missile defenses.* The strategy is also careful to avoid suggesting offensive use, though of course, that capability is inherent in the nature of the necessary systems. "This system will include the ability to defeat missile threats prior to launch. Enhanced missile defense is not intended to undermine strategic stability or disrupt longstanding strategic relationships with Russia or China." (NSS, p. 8). *The second centers on bolstering efforts to detect and disrupt WMD.* If the first strategy is meant to counter projections of offensive weaponry from abroad, the second is meant to counter the deployment of such weapons from inside the U.S. This strategy will likely produce the greatest discussion within the U.S. as it is *likely to produce internal political conflict* between the understanding and application of principles of ordered liberty at the core of the American values the NSS is developed to protect, against the techniques and measures necessary to protect against

the destruction of those values by elements of our own society. The NSS appears to weigh the threat as more serious than the collateral effects on the application of ordered liberty concepts.

We will also better integrate intelligence, law enforcement, and emergency management operations to ensure that frontline defenders have the right information and capabilities to respond to WMD threats from state and non-state actors. (NSS p. 8)

This balancing is neither new nor particularly unique in our history. This is an old and quite contentious battle, perhaps as old as the Republic itself (see, e.g., [here](#)). And, indeed, the ideology of autonomy and defensive protection from enhanced threat makes the posture of the NSS with respect to internal intelligence and control almost inevitable. It is to the vigilance of the political branches and ultimately the courts, that such determinations will be tested and American values will ultimately be protected as official move to apply the NSS--and that is as it should be. *The third and fourth touch on countermeasures strategies.* These appear to affirm and enhance the strategies already well in place and well used by the U.S. by the Bush II and the Obama administration (e.g., "building on decades of initiatives. . . work with allies and partners to detect and disrupt plots. . ." (NSS, p. 8)). They will remain as controversial among certain elements of the Western global elites under the Trump administration as they were under the Obama administration, especially policies of covert operations and of targeted actions against individuals and institutions.

The response to biological threats is both simpler and more straightforward, yet more difficult. The NSS starts with the presumption (not irrational) that "[d]edicated state actors are likely to develop more advanced bioweapons, and these capabilities may become available to malicious non-state actors as well." (NSS, p. 9). This produces a three-part strategy. *Part 1* embraces a "detect and contain" strategy and focuses on disease control. There is a strong element of multi-lateral cooperation built into this strategy that is worthy of substantial support. *Part 2* focuses on enhancing support for biomedical innovation. Yet the nature of this support is to some extent oddly stated--"We will protect and support advancements in biomedical innovation by strengthening the intellectual property system that is the foundation of the biomedical industry." (NSS, p. 9). This is not so much a defensive strategy to protect the nation as it appears to be a measure designed to enhance the power of pharmaceutical production chains and their control by the apex enterprises that operate them. It is regrettable that the NSS in this respect missed an opportunity to avoid what appears to be an industry support measure in the context of a broad plan to meet substantial threats to the nation. Surely something broader (which might also be market enhancing) might have been in order--and certainly, as this is a matter of security, something undertaken by and for the benefit of the nation might have been usefully explored. *Part 3*, of course, focuses on response. Here the strategy is enhancement not innovation--though enhancement in this case might well be innovative if only to the extent response becomes more effective.

The response to the threat of migration is fairly conventional. Sadly, in a strategic area that is well deserving of a difficult national conversation--the political, economic, social and cultural effects of mass migration in an age in which assimilation is no longer a core value of the state, is entirely avoided. And yet that is at the heart of the policy and its unstated premise. Instead the NSS

continues the ancient and increasingly unhelpful premise about protection against undesirables (terrorists, and criminals) and avoids the larger issue that was for a brief moment put into play by the President himself. And yet that discussion is central to the construction of a useful set of strategies respecting migration and border control (NSS, p. 10). Instead we are presented with the usual border control methodologies, marginally enhanced, without a sounder principle for guiding its use and development. And yet that underlying issue is larded within the NSS strategy itself. Thus:

We will also reform our current immigration system, which, contrary to our national interest and national security, allows for randomized entry and extended-family chain migration. Residency and citizenship determinations should be based on individuals' merits and their ability to positively contribute to U.S. society, rather than chance or extended family connections. (NSS p 9).

Very specific approaches like this make little sense in the absence of a strategic policy about migration, though it is guided by the glimmerings of such a policy that lamentably remains hidden. That is a pity.

2. The response to pursue threats to their source.

This strategy makes concrete the implications of the prior policies by providing a basis for the defensive projection of U.S. power globally. The NSS strategies continue to build on and enhance many of the strategies developed or refined during the Bush II and the Obama administrations. Again, there is an emphasis on "detect and disrupt" strategies, with which one might have little to complain of (except of course in execution). These strategies were controversial during the Bush II and Obama administrations; they will remain controversial as applied by the Trump administration. But they do not represent a radical departure from a now long term pattern of U.S. policy. The only caveat would be in the context of methodologies. One might see in the overarching principles that guide NSS strategic choices a change to change both methodologies and the scope of action under these conventional tactics. But it is far too early to tell; prudence, however, might caution that it is useful to read this "pursue and destroy" policy carefully in light of the entirety of the Pillar 1 securing our borders strategy.

The strategy is divided into two parts (NSS, p. 10-11). The first focuses on Jihadist terrorists. The second looks to international criminal organizations. Interestingly, there is no overt strategy that looks to the pursuit of threats of so-called rogue states or state sponsors of either terrorists or those states which harbor international criminal organizations. That is a lacuna that is to be regretted given the ideological stance of this administration and the need for strategic transparency. that the NSS itself is meant to represent. The most interesting strategic elements are not the obvious ones--detect and destroy; strategic alliances to combat; disruption of financing and logistics--but rather in the acknowledgement of the strategic importance of culture and society. These will test the scope within which such strategic imperatives may be operationalized against the application of American values (at least within the United States). This includes strategies for denying

violent ideologies the space to take root by improving trust among law enforcement, the private sector, and American citizens. U.S. intelligence and home-land security experts will work with law enforcement and civic leaders on terrorism prevention and provide accurate and actionable information about radicalization in their communities. (NSS, p. 11)

These will test the boundaries of the protection of religious belief and practice, the reach of domestic intelligence to communities, and the extent to which the state may engage in counter-cultural activities touching on religious and other belief systems. More interesting would be the extent to which the U.S., could, consistent with other policy initiatives and consistent as well with the practices of the prior administration, to *privatize this objective*, while retaining strategic management. Similar difficulties will apply to internally directed NSS strategies targeting communities that are the focus of anti-drug and other criminal related activities (NSS, p. 11). The difficulties of adhering to the traditional private-public divide in this age of globalization is also expressed in the NSS, especially with respect to projections into markets and social engineering of popular tastes for activities and objects the state would prefer to suppress (NSS, p. 12).

3. *Cyber Threats.*

The NSS well describes the now commonplace premises of the power and threat posed to public and private institutions increasingly dependent for their activities and communication on computer and internet based platforms (NSS, p. 12). Here, curiously, the NSS strategies reflect the old Obama era notions of melding the U.S. within the global order for the normative management of a transnational system.

The Internet is an American invention, and it should reflect our values as it continues to transform the future for all nations and all generations. A strong, defensible cyber infrastructure fosters economic growth, protects our liberties, and advances our national security. (NSS, p. 13)

Ironically, those very values are now being challenged and may well be in transition within the United States itself (see, e.g., [here](#)). Such values, in this case, make for a quite slippery base for strategic determinations, other than protection of whatever it is that may be determined to be acceptable among American officials and the enterprises that may serve as key stakeholders and drivers of American "values" in this respect. Still, that would represent something of the preservation of the status quo before 2017. Translated into action strategies, there are few surprises--though the devil is in the detail. The emphasis is on defensible networks (a global objective), though here the broader issue is the extent to which the U.S. will provide equal security to its strategic partners (public and private) (NSS, p. 13). To that point what appears offered at the moment is information sharing and sensing (Ibid). Also emphasized is the overarching strategy (now seen in several places) of "deter and disrupt" (Ibid) and the construction of layered defenses (Ibid). Yet, as is likely in this area, the strategic initiatives more likely veil than reveal the actual

thrust of strategic thinking and action in this respect--and that is to be expected in this area. We do get a sense, though, of at least some of the publicly disclosable direction of strategic thinking.

4. American Resilience.

At first bluish, it was not clear what this meant, or how it was connected with the defensive strategic objectives of the NSS. But then by the time that one had gotten to this point--with the embedding of intellectual property protection, drug war and other quite specific domestic policy objectives embedded in the NSS that one could discern the ultimate *strategic objective* of a section like this one: *privatization of governmental obligation, and governmentalization of private defense efforts*. This ironically reflects strongly a pattern already well developed in the prior administration, though now directed at a different target and for a slightly different ends (see, e.g., [here](#)). For non-state institutions and individuals, "Resilience includes the ability to withstand and recover rapidly from deliberate attacks, accidents, natural disasters, as well as unconventional stresses, shocks, and threats to our economy and democratic system." (NSS, p. 14). As for the state, its principal obligation appears to be to preserve itself. "Federal, state, and local agencies must perform essential functions and have plans in place to ensure the continuation of our constitutional form of government." (Ibid).

Yet the strategy is not as simple minded as this might suggest. The reverse is true. The NSS strategy reflects the trajectory of American institutional approaches to activity--and their institutional self-preservation. It embodies the growing importance of risk management and surveillance cultures that have become deeply placed within private enterprises. It enhances cultures of compliance as well as the risk aversion and resource allocation imperative that these compliance and risk reduction cultures produce. These are not criticisms, merely observations of the inevitable coordination (and perhaps convergence) between public and private and between business culture and state policy already in a symbiotic relationship). That may be the most useful way of understanding the way in which the four priority actions will be operationalized: improving risk management, building cultures of preparedness, improving planning, and creating incentive to information sharing (NSS, p. 14).



(Pix © Larry Catá Backer 2017)

Pillar II: Promote American Prosperity

The Second Pillar is grounded in the strategies necessary to enhance U.S. development. It is centered on President Trump's statement of the principle, an ancient one perhaps, that economic security is national security. (NSS p. 17). In many ways it echoes that of other vigorous states seeking to develop its productive forces for the attainment of national, political, or ideological goals. One wonders whether it might be useful to read this Second Pillar Against Deng Xiaoping's notions of socialist modernization (see, e.g., [here](#)) but with American characteristics. And, indeed, in some significant respects, the discourse of American economic strategic thinking mirrors that of the Chinese of a generation ago--the notion of the need to catch up, of the loss of economic power and innovation, of the need to regain economic primacy as a centerpiece to the solidification of stability at home and the effective protection and projection of power abroad. This is not to suggest that the strategic approach is wrong, merely that it is neither uniquely American, nor in its own context unsuccessful. But it does represent a way of thinking about economic development substantially at odds with American strategic thinking of the last several generations.

But the divergence is not as complete as Mr. Trump's critics are fond of trying to point out. The current administration continues to cling to at least the fundamental assumptions that produced the current global order.

For 70 years, the United States has embraced a strategy premised on the belief that leadership of a stable international economic system rooted in American principles of reciprocity, free markets, and free trade served our economic and security interests. Working with our allies and partners, the United States led the creation of a group of financial institutions and other economic forums that established equitable rules and built instruments to stabilize the international economy and remove the points of friction that had contributed to two world wars. (NSS, p. 17)

Yet, where the current administration moves in a different direction is in its assessment of the current state of that project, and its ramifications for U.S. security (and, in a sense, in the integrity of the global system the U.S. established and administered).

The United States helped expand the liberal economic trading system to countries that did not share our values, in the hopes that these states would liberalize their economic and political practices and provide commensurate benefits to the United States. Experience shows that these countries distorted and undermined key economic institutions without undertaking significant reform of their economies or politics. They espouse free trade rhetoric and exploit its benefits, but only adhere selectively to the rules and agreements. (Ibid).

This serves as the core insight within which the Pillar II strategies are formed and articulated. In the face of this challenge the United States could have pursued one (or both) of two broadly stated approaches. *The first was to further engage and socialize "rogue" or "challenging" economies and actors to better socialize them into the cultures, practices and behaviors of the global system (and its values). That, essentially was the course undertaken by the Obama administration (whether the Obama administration managed this policy successfully will provide much material for academics for a long time to come). The second was to pull out of that system more (a concession that the system might itself be broken beyond repair) and pursue alternative strategies. That, itself could have been done by pursuing one of two broadly understood strategies. The first was to develop an alternative system. The Obama administration, weakly and with some internal doubts, also started to pursue this course. The TPP was its greatest vehicle (and in its European version also a concession by European elites of the need for alternative strategies to preserve the global system in a manner to their liking) (see, e.g., [here](#)). A small irony here, of course, is that the TPP might well have fit nicely into this Second Pillar strategy--but domestic politics of the current administration made that impossible. The second, which is reflected in this NSS, was to pull out of the business of system building itself (see, e.g., [here](#)).*

Within this context, Pillar II focuses on five (5) strategic objectives; (1) rejuvenating the domestic economy; (2) promoting reciprocal relationships; (3) enhancing innovation; (4) promoting and protecting the national security innovation base; and (5) energy domination.

1. Rejuvenating the Domestic Economy

With respect to its first set of objectives, rejuvenating the domestic economy (NSS, pp. 18-19), these strategies read more like the standard components of domestic policy debates than the articulation of strategies for the protection of American economic interests through rejuvenation strategies. That said, the reduction of regulatory burdens (Ibid., 18-19), tax reform (Ibid, p. 19), infrastructure development (Ibid), debt reduction (Ibid), and training programs for labor productivity enhancement (Ibid), all are both strategies and core issues of domestic politics. This is one area where the NSS sounds more like campaign sloganeering (suitable for both dominant political parties) rather than well-coordinated strategic initiatives designed to enhance U.S.

strategic global goals. That said, there is little to find fault with respecting the strategic principles. Yet the details and operationalization of each of these will remain extremely contentious within American politics. In that context, the *strategic value of those principles* becomes at best cloudy. And the NSS provides little practice guidance. The translation of objectives to regulation becomes enmeshed in internal politics--and that may not be the most propitious space for the elaboration of national strategies for activity abroad, precisely because it touches on core political debates within the polity.

2. Bilateralism: Promoting Fair Relationships

With respect to the second set of objectives, promoting free, fair, and reciprocal economic relationships (NSS, pp. 19-20), the NSS lays out the structures of an alternative basis for multilateral trade that avoids system building and is more closely aligned with national rather than global interests. *Indeed, we move from the construction of systems to the promotion of values.*

The United States distinguishes between economic competition with countries that follow fair and free market principles and competition with those that act with little regard for those principles. We will compete with like-minded states in the economic domain—particularly where trade imbalances exist— while recognizing that competition is healthy when nation share values and build fair and reciprocal relationships. (NSS p. 19).

And yet, in the promotion of values based global systems revolving around U.S. values, the Trump administration appears to open the door to system building as well. *But this is a system building that better resembles China's OBOR than it does the grand system designs of the TPP* (e.g., [here](#)).

The United States will pursue bilateral trade and investment agreements with countries that commit to fair and reciprocal trade and will modernize existing agreements to ensure they are consistent with those principles. Agreements must adhere to high standards in intellectual property, digital trade, agriculture, labor, and the environment. (NSS p. 20).

Still, the bilateral multilateralism of the NSS strategies does not also mean a wholesale abandonment of the current systems for global management of economic activities. The strategies also call for use of such institutions to counter unfair trade practices (when useful). Beyond that, though, the American strategic position is more unilateral with strategic partnerships--in areas of corruption control, and market coordination (NSS p. 20). In some ways, the central principle of the new NSS strategy is, indeed, "let's make a deal" or I go my own way (see, e.g., [here](#)).

3. Leadership in Research, Tech and Innovation.

With respect to the objective to enhance innovation (NSS p. 20-21), American policy continues unchanged--a combination of profiting from brain drain immigration to a targeted set of incentives for knowledge production.

The United States must continue to attract the innovative and the inventive, the brilliant and the bold. We will encourage scientists in government, academia, and the private sector to achieve advancements across the full spectrum of discovery, from incremental improvements to game-changing breakthroughs. (NSS p. 20).

Yet, the central principle is that the government will enhance innovation indirectly. The strategic goal is to privatize innovation ("The U.S. Government will use private sector technical expertise and capabilities more effectively." (Ibid., p. 21)) and then governmentalize its product, that is capture its value, to the extent that might be useful ("We must create easier paths for the flow of scientists, engineers, and technologists into and out of public service." (Ibid)).

4. The U.S.: National Security Innovation Base.

Privatized knowledge production (innovation) is then governmentalized (again) through the strategies embedded in the promotion and protection of the U.S. national security innovation base, objectives.

The NSIB is the American network of knowledge, capabilities, and people—including academia, National Laboratories, and the private sector—that turns ideas into innovations, transforms discoveries into successful commercial products and companies, and protects and enhances the American way of life. (NSS p. 21)

The focus is not on work like this consideration of the NSS, but work that ties in directly or indirectly to U.S. weaponry, technological innovation with conflict potential and weaponized economic innovation. "Technologies that are part of most weapon systems often originate in diverse businesses as well as in universities and colleges. Losing our innovation and technological edge would have far-reaching negative implications for American prosperity and power. (NSS p. 21). This is probably among the most important, and likely the most neglected of the NSS strategic principles. Its breadth and scope remain unclear. Its connection with the current system of U.S. control over the export of technology and knowledge inescapable. But one already sees the effects in the export regimes undertaken by the department of State and Commerce. It is likely that economic innovation will have an enhanced role as a weapon of trade in the years to come. Key here is to watch what happens at the [Office of Foreign Assets Control](#) (OFAC), the Commerce Department's [Bureau of Industry and Security](#), and the State Department [watch lists](#) (see, e.g., [here](#)). Here, at least there is some convergence with European policy and strategic initiatives (see, e.g., [here](#)). Yet here, again, what is offered is enhanced protection of intellectual property (NSS, pp. 21-22), greater control of migration, and data protection.

5. Energy Domination

Lastly, the strategic objectives around embracing energy dominance replays a domestic policy debate that goes back to the mid 1970s (NSS, pp. 22-23). Though worth reading, it suggests, more than anything else, that the debate that began in the early 1970s continues unabated and unresolved. It is true that the context is different. We speak to sustainability now. But the issue of innovation and energy independence as contentious now as it was a generation ago. We

continue the debate in its classical forms. What is clear is that the administration has definitively taken a very specific position that remains globally contentious:

Climate policies will continue to shape the global energy system. U.S. leadership is indispensable to countering an anti-growth energy agenda that is detrimental to U.S. economic and energy security interests. Given future global energy demand, much of the developing world will require fossil fuels, as well as other forms of energy, to power their economies and lift their people out of poverty. The United States will continue to advance an approach that balances energy security, economic development, and environmental protection. (NSS p 22)

The policy objectives include enhancing the ability of private enterprise to create fossil fuel related infrastructure that enhances American capability of exporting these commodities, and its protection (NSS p. 23). In addition, innovation is targeted to some specific forms: "nuclear technology, next-generation nuclear reactors, better batteries, advanced computing, carbon-capture technologies, and opportunities at the energy-water nexus." (Ibid).



(Pix © Larry Catá Backer 2017)

Pillar III: Preserve Peace Through Strength

The title of this third Pillar recalls [George Washington's farewell address](#) to the nation of the late 18th century. That is not a criticism but a reminder that some of what appears to be new strategies are actually quite old and well embedded within American political culture. But in addition, this Third Pillar is centered on the threat posed to the global order by China, Russia, the distinctive threats of rogue regimes and specifically North Korea and Iran, and groups of non-state actors

(ISIS and al-Qa'ida) that threaten order in their own way (NSS, pp. 25-26). Other states, notably Cuba and Venezuela, failed to make the list are no doubt not far from the conscious objectives of this Pillar.

1. Renew America's competitive advantage.

This Pillar effectively seeks to consolidate many of the principles of the first two Pillars and concentrate them in the context of the three distinct forms of contestants represented by challengers to U.S. hegemony (China and Russia); challengers to global order (Iran and North Korea), and challengers to the orderliness of the state system (ISIS and al-Qa'ida). To that end, the focus shifts from economic and cyber warfare to the capabilities of conventional military power.

Experience suggests that the willingness of rivals to abandon or forgo aggression depends on their perception of U.S. strength and the vitality of our alliances. The United States will seek areas of cooperation with competitors from a position of strength, foremost by ensuring our military power is second to none and fully integrated with our allies and all of our instruments of power. A strong military ensures that our diplomats are able to operate from a position of strength. In this way we can, together with our allies and partners, deter and if necessary, defeat aggression against U.S. interests and increase the likelihood of managing competitions without violent conflict and preserving peace. (NSS p. 26.)

But not just conventional military power. The NSS acknowledges publicly that we are all well beyond conventional warfare.

Repressive, closed states and organizations, although brittle in many ways, are often more agile and faster at integrating economic, military, and especially informational means to achieve their goals. They are unencumbered by truth, by the rules and protections of privacy inherent in democracies, and by the law of armed conflict. They employ sophisticated political, economic, and military campaigns that combine discrete actions. They are patient and content to accrue strategic gains over time—making it harder for the United States and our allies to respond. Such actions are calculated to achieve maximum effect without provoking a direct military response from the United States. And as these incremental gains are realized, over time, a new status quo emerges. (NSS 27-28)

These insights fold back on and augment much of the policy strategic objectives of the first two pillars but now more focused on their weaponization and the way in which that will inevitably require adjustment of the way in which the United States balances the application of its values to itself (the reason for all this work in the first place) and the objectives of engaging in action that will protect the state (and thus the space within which those values however reinterpreted may be peacefully exercised).

The administration identifies the critical impediments to its strategic initiatives--and they are not foreigners, but rather the apparatus of the U.S. government itself.

Our diplomatic, intelligence, military, and economic agencies have not kept pace with the changes in the character of competition. America's military must be prepared to operate across a full spectrum of conflict, across multiple domains at once. To meet these challenges we must also upgrade our political and economic instruments to operate across these environments. Bureaucratic inertia is powerful. But so is the talent, creativity, and dedication of Americans. (NSS p. 28).

And the solution offered again advances the basic strategic thrust of privatization of governmental efforts and the governmentalization of private efforts coordinated for strategic advantage. "By aligning our public and private sector efforts we can field a Joint Force that is unmatched. New advances in computing, autonomy, and manufacturing are already transforming the way we fight. When coupled with the strength of our allies and partners, this advantage grows." (Ibid).

2. Renew Capabilities

To that end, the NSS identifies six (6) specific areas of strategic development: military, defense industrial base, nuclear forces, space, cyberspace, and intelligence (NSS pp. 28-33). Each of these present challenges.

The strategic objectives of modernizing our military is broken out into five priority action fields (Ibid., 29). Beyond the concept of modernization (which remains unchanged since the 1940s), the strategic objective focuses on "commercial off the shelf solutions" (Ibid., p. 29). Yet that cannot be read in isolation--such an approach suggests, together with the strategic objectives of denying foreigners access to weaponizable technologies, that the market incentives to produce "off the shelf" product will be severely constrained without government subsidy--yet that defeats the purpose of the initiative. How the state will overcome this challenge remains to be seen. As for the rest--elimination of cost overruns, building capacity, improving readiness and enhancing full spectrum capabilities retains important long term policy objectives of several past administrations.

One cannot read the strategic objectives relating to the defense industrial base without considering [General and President Eisenhower's famous military industrial complex speech](#) (see, e.g., [here](#) ("We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together. ")). And that suggests that this initiative will be both contentious as a political matter and that its scope and content will determine its utility in line with American "values" (the ultimate responsibility to protect of the NSS). The NSS appears respectful, to some extent, of that counsel. It focuses on repatriation of industry with military application, of better management of supply chains that touch on military goods, and on the cultivation of "skills" (NSS pp. 29-30). These again intermesh with the more generalized strategic objectives of Pillar I and II. At the same time the administration has made clear its commitment to a string and effective nuclear capability. This will be contentious internally but less so beyond our European allies (or at least some of their elites) (NSS p. 30-31).

Likewise, the strategic commitment to space (NSS 31) is necessary and useful, both for its commercial and its military objectives. The United States is well advised to consider space the way it used to view the oceans--as a necessary and open space that facilitates economic activity and thus the openness of which must be protected. This is a point reiterated in the Fourth Pillar (NSS, p. 40) with respect to U.S. engagement in multilateral institutions. And yet there is a danger where the protection of space is also used to limit its access to our competitors. That is the way conflict is intensified rather than diffused. The complexities of maintaining open space while guarding against misuse will call for more than general principles. And it is as likely to spark conflict as the Chinese position on the control of a vast area of ocean is currently generating.

The focus on cyberspace and intelligence (NSS pp. 31-32). Here the strategic objectives include better criminalization of cyber activity and better attribution of cyber-attacks, with appropriate response. (though what exactly that response is to be remains unclear). But it is also focused on better data management and the use of big data to protect the national cyber structures and operations ("We will work with the Congress to address the challenges that continue to hinder timely intelligence and information sharing, planning and operations, and the development of necessary cyber tools." (NSS p. 32)). Cyberspace strategies meld imperceptibly with the needs of intelligence agencies (Ibid). Here the U.S. appears to be coming around to a big data based approach to managing data harvesting and its evaluation and use. This approach will cause some contention within the polity--issues respecting data collection, ownership, privacy and the like remain unresolved in this country. It is perhaps time to continue the conversation, though resolution will be elusive in the near term. That leaves a space open for governmental and industrial initiatives which will seek to "make facts" and in the process move the conceptual debates in particular directions. Whether elements of this administration or of the economic community have the vision and will to achieve those ends in the face of a relatively well organized intellectual elite with its own strongly held views, remains to be seen. For the moment, the focus of strategy is on the protection of data and analysis from thieves, the better management and use of big data (as a proprietary element of state power) and on better connectivity among the *data harvesting institutions of state and private sectors*. This last priority action ought to raise eyebrows--it provides a *concrete manifestation of the policy of Joint Force (Ibid., p. 28) that institutionalized the privatization-governmentalization principle to the ends of big data management*.

3. Diplomacy and Statecraft.

Beyond that, and in a nod to the primary focus of the previous administration, the NSS also considers the strategic value of diplomacy and statecraft, but now re-imagined (NSS, pp. 33-35). It recalls Hillary Clinton's [smart power speech](#), though now turned to somewhat different ends. Yet in this case the NSS appears to suggest a secondary or consequential role for diplomacy and soft power--directed from elsewhere and meant to serve as a means of projecting objectives out and directing data in, without necessarily having much authority to develop the objectives to which it is tasked to complete. Diplomacy and statecraft is divided into three (3) broad categories: competitive diplomacy, tools of economic diplomacy, and information statecraft.

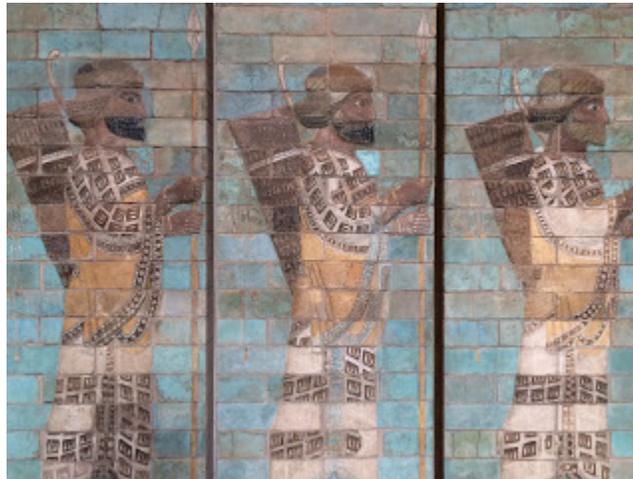
Thus, when the NSS speaks to competitive diplomacy (Ibid., 33)) it speaks to putting agents in the field and to serve as American mouthpieces in international forums and bilateral relationships. Note here the very careful distinction between international forums and relationships which are bilateral. There is an underlining here of the Administration rejection of multilateralism and its commitment to aggregated bilateralism. Beyond that, our diplomats are catalysts: "Diplomats must identify opportunities for commerce and cooperation, and facilitate the cultural, educational, and people-to-people exchanges that create the networks of current and future political, civil society, and educational leaders who will extend a free and prosperous world." (Ibid.).

Beyond diplomacy there is statecraft, what might once have been understood as softer power. Here the NSS speaks to the weapons of "economic tools" (NSS, p. 34).

Economic tools—including sanctions, anti-money-laundering and anti-corruption measures, and enforcement actions—can be important parts of broader strategies to deter, coerce, and constrain adversaries. We will work with like-minded partners to build support for tools of economic diplomacy against shared threats. Multilateral economic pressure is often more effective because it limits the ability of targeted states to circumvent measures and conveys united resolve. (Ibid).

This has a very specific strategic objective: it "enhances our security and prosperity by expanding a community of free market economies, defending against threats from state-led economies, and protecting the U.S. and international economy from abuse by illicit actors." (Ibid).

Information statecraft, on the other hand (NSS pp. 34-35) focuses on the strategic use of big data not merely as a military weapon but as an important economic weapon in trade. More important, though, is the insight of the NSS that there appears to be little distinction between the threat of information and analytics in economic or military application--they are two aspects of the same challenge (Ibid., 34). Here, China is very much on the minds of the NSS: it makes special reference to Chinese social credit systems and its big data management objectives as melding political and economic objectives (e.g., [here](#)), "China, for example, combines data and the use of AI to rate the loyalty of its citizens to the state and uses these ratings to determine jobs and more." (NSS p. 35). Russian and jihadist use of information is much more political or "cultural"--the jihadists use it to proselytize members and the Russians to manage mass politics outside its borders (Ibid, p. 35). Yet the "Priority Actions" are a disappointment in the face of the analysis suggesting its strategic importance. There is nothing here that suggests the building of U.S. social credit, informatics and big data capabilities to match or exceed those of their competitors. Indeed, the priorities suggest a 20'th century approach to one of the most important and transformative changes of this century. This is a very large gap in the NSS that the U.S. will regret in the coming years (e.g., [here](#)).



(pix Larry Catá Backer 2017))

Pillar IV: Advance American Influence

At first blush, this appears to be an odd strategy given the thrust of the first three Pillars and the underlying strategic philosophy at the hearty of the NSS: Upon closer reflection, however, what it suggests is not so much an oddity as a tilt from one form of *projection* of American influence to another. Whether this tilt is a good idea and whether it will work will remain to be seen. It is, however, a plausible policy choice in the policy context in which it is made. That framework emphasizes bilateralism ("Encouraging Aspiring Partners" NSS, p. 38), changing the approach to U.S: engagement with multilateral and international organizations (Ibid., p. 40), and advancing the American Internationale ("Champion American Values; NSS p. 41). These objectives are nicely integrated both with the Third Pillar (especially its diplomacy and statecraft objectives; "By modernizing U.S. instruments of diplomacy and development, we will catalyze conditions to help them achieve that goal." Ibid., p. 38) and in the Pillar I objectives of substituting values based engagement in place of systems in global institution or relationship building (NSS p. 39).

Yet the NSS takes it values less as a systemic imperative than other administrations.

The United States offers partnership to those who share our aspirations for freedom and prosperity. We lead by example. . . . We are not going to impose our values on others. Our alliances, partnerships, and coalitions are built on free will and shared interests. When the United States partners with other states, we develop policies that enable us to achieve our goals while our partners achieve theirs.(NSS, p. 37)

They recall, in a curious way, the approach suggested by George Bush (II) in his second inaugural address (see, e.g., [here](#)). And yet there is a tension here, because, indeed, it is also clear that the strategic objectives of the United States is to avoid entanglements with states whose values are inimical to ours--as the administration sees it. Ours is a "community of like minded democratic states." (Ibid., p.37). Economic interests are one thing--political values appear to be quite another. Though in the end there appears to be enough wiggle room for *Nixonian* realpolitik. This Pillar IV, then, is meant to provide a basis for distinguishing friend from foe and for promoting a certain approach to the exploitation of international arenas for the advancement of national interests.

1. Encouraging Aspiring Partners. The key element here appears to be the continuation of the American ideological project to encourage foreign national development along the lines of American principles of politics, society and economics. This, it is understood, has been good for business as well as politics.

Some of the greatest triumphs of American state- craft resulted from helping fragile and developing countries become successful societies. These successes, in turn, created profitable markets for American businesses, allies to help achieve favorable regional balances of power, and coalition partners to share burdens and address a variety of problems around the world. Over time, the United States has helped create a network of states that advance our common interests and values. (Ibid 38)

But patient partnering has been imperiled by the strategic interests of our most potent competitors, who market systems that the NSS views as both incompatible and threatening to both American business and politics. The core of the differences lies precisely in the organization of economic activity within these states. It is the dominant role of the state in the economic models of China and Russia that, for the NSS and this administration, marks them as distinct and incompatible with the trade and economic models that characterize American "values."

Today, the United States must compete for positive relationships around the world. China and Russia target their investments in the developing world to expand influence and gain competitive advantages against the United States. China is investing billions of dollars in infrastructure across the globe. Russia, too, projects its influence economically, through the control of key energy and other infrastructure throughout parts of Europe and Central Asia. e United States provides an alternative to state-directed investments, which often leave developing countries worse off. The United States pursues economic ties not only for market access but also to create enduring relationships to advance common political and security interests. (NSS p. 38)

It is not that China and Russia may not be committed to markets, it is that both are not committed to privatization of economic activity. *Thus, the core issue is not markets and markets based economies--but rather it is the composition of the ownership of enterprises in market economies*

(who owns and controls capital). The United States, facing [Markets Marxism](#) (see, e.g., [here](#)) must now determine whether it is compatible with the emerging global order. The Obama administration thought it might be; the Trump administration has taken the opposite view.

The question assumes economic and strategic importance as the choice among approaches to markets may determine the domination of the Chinese, Russian or American models among those states that are placed at key points within global production chains. And that is what this NSS initiative is all about--the protection of relationships with key national actors among developing states and the equally important protection of access to markets and to the protection of global production in ways that favor one apex state over others (for a discussion of the distinct varieties of globalization and its implications, useful in this context, see [here](#)).

Across Africa, Latin America, and Asia, states are eager for investments and financing to develop their infrastructure and propel growth. The United States and its partners have opportunities to work with countries to help them realize their potential as prosperous and sovereign states that are accountable to their people. Such states can become trading partners that buy more American-made goods and create more predictable business environments that benefit American companies. (NSS p. 39).

And thus, the priority action strategies, divided among policies for developing countries and those for fragile states. For the former there are strategies grounded in the mobilization of resources (development financing and the like--in direct competition to agencies like the [Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank](#) led by China; see, e.g., [here](#)); technology transfers of a limited sort; and World Bank like structural reforms (NSS, p. 39). For fragile states (Ibid., pp 39-40) the Americans promise to be choosier, giving "priority to strengthening states where state weaknesses or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland." (Ibid). This provide the base for legitimating continues presence in Afghanistan. But might it also have applied to Cuba and Venezuela. *The difficulty here is that the principle, in the face of unlimited strategic discretion, has effectively no basis for principled application.* On the other hand, as long as there is ultimate popular accountability, this may well be one of those areas where unbounded discretion is a positive, even in the U.S. context. Beyond that there are the traditional strategic measures--encouragement of regime change or reform ("The United States will prioritize programs that empower reform-minded governments, people, and civil society"(Ibid, 40)) and the efforts to advance coherence among the various departments with a hand in executing U.S. policy, including the alignment of public and private actors ("The United States must use its diplomatic, economic, and military tools simultaneously when assisting aspiring partners." (Ibid, p. 40)). At the same time these strategies are to be understood as a business venture ("We will place a priority on economic support that achieves local and macroeconomic stability, helps build capable security forces, and strengthens the rule of law." (Ibid)). And it is that blending of public policy and business sensibilities that mark these strategic objectives

2. *Achieving Better Outcomes.* This is one of the most telling and interesting of the objectives of Pillar IV. It starts on familiar ground--an acknowledgement that international and multilateral institutions are rule producing institutions with the power to affect American interests. "If the United States cedes leadership of these bodies to adversaries, opportunities to shape developments that are positive for the United States will be lost." (Ibid. p. 40). But from this consensus point springs a bit of divergence from traditional approaches. First, the U.S. means to use its participation not merely to protect its interests in multilateral rule making but also to protect its sovereignty (Ibid). But more importantly, the U.S. will now withdraw from full engagement with all such multilateral institutions, where, in accordance with its own assessments, the value of those institutions as a threat or benefit to American interests is not equal to the costs of participation or that advantage that participation garners for American opponents. More importantly, this Pillar IV serves its most important purpose by announcing that the United States will take a narrow and traditional view of the authority of international institutions and their rules to constrain or affect their own domestic legal order.

All institutions are not equal, however. The United States will prioritize its efforts in those organizations that serve American interests, to ensure that they are strengthened and supportive of the United States, our allies, and our partners. Where existing institutions and rules need modernizing, the United States will lead to update them. At the same time, it should be clear that the United States will not cede sovereign to those that claim authority over American citizens and are in conflict with our constitutional framework. (NSS p. 40).

And thus the form of the action priorities. The U.S. will focus on security and economic/trade/finance bodies, and will likely ignore to a greater or lesser extent the rest. (Ibid., pp 40-41). With respect to the United Nations, the NSS enshrines the administration's political positions with respect to U.N reform, accountability and a necessary reduction in American financial contribution (Ibid., 40). The U.S. will continue to work within the World Bank and World Trade Organization framework, but again principally to reform them. With respect to the IFIs, the strategy appears to encourage better competition against rivals like AIIB: "These reforms include encouraging multilateral development banks to invest in high-quality infrastructure projects that promote economic growth." (Ibid., 41). With respect to WTO, "We will press to make the WTO a more effective forum to adjudicate unfair trade practices." (NSS p. 41). To its mind, WTO reform is necessary to re-balance (see, e.g., [here](#)).

Beyond that, the U.S. strategic objectives mirror those of the U.K. in the 19th century and the U.S. after 1945: "to shape and govern common domains—space, cyberspace, air, and maritime—within the framework of international law." (NSS 41). Yet here, as well, there is a retreat from the movement, accelerated during the last administration and much beloved by global academic and institutional elites (in the West at least) that sought to construct international law and obligation as superior to and always embedded above and within the domestic legal orders of states. In its place there is a much more muted acknowledgement of the authority of international law, of international forums and of the international system *and an implicit rejection of international legalization that had gone substantially unchallenged by U.S. institutional and academic elites for at least a generation.* "The United States supports the peaceful resolution of disputes under international law

but will use all of its instruments of power to defend U.S. interests and to ensure common domains remain free." (Ibid). More problematically is the strategic objective of preserving a free and open internet (Ibid).

The problem, of course arises from the implications of the security and information surveillance objectives of the NSS itself, and its promise in Pillar IV to interdict speech and other activities on the web sponsored by terrorist groups and otherwise deemed a threat to the U.S. Not that this is the first time that objectives might clash in a multi objective document. Yet there appears no mechanism for resolving these conflicts and contradictions. That does not mean that there aren't methods; rather it suggests that such methods, like the decision making that underlie them, will be subject to an opaque and publicly unaccountable exercise of administrative discretion.

3. *Championing American Values*. This strategic initiative combines traditional elements of advancing the ideological project of global Americanization through law, economics, politics, religion, and social interaction, with a number of platforms and policies that reflect some of the most well-known assertions made by the President while he was a candidate for office. Much of the latter remains both contentious (that is does not reflect national consensus) and likely to ignite somewhat heated internal political and legal challenge. That is neither here nor there; every administration (including the last one) also faced this very issue. Yet that should be borne in mind in assessing both the scope and character of these sets of strategic initiatives in the context of a complex document.

With that in mind, the NSS provides a window on the political foreign policy priorities of this administration in the context of its ideological and normative agendas. The first touches on support for individuals but not states. This strategic initiative reaffirms the right of the U.S: to engage in regime changes and to use international norms when it advances U.S. interests.

We support, with our words and actions, those who live under oppressive regimes and who seek freedom, individual dignity, and the rule of law. We are under no obligation to offer the benefits of our free and prosperous community to repressive regimes and human rights abusers. We may use diplomacy, sanctions, and other tools to isolate states and leaders who threaten our interests and whose actions run contrary to our values. We will not remain silent in the face of evil. We will hold perpetrators of genocide and mass atrocities accountable. (NSS p. 42)

But make no mistake, such support will only be applied when it advances U.S: interests and when its mechanics are subject to substantial U.S. management. This is clear when this statement is read in light of Pillar III.

The second, again, touches on the U.S. conflict with terrorist organizations and especially those operating under cover of Islam, "to defeat jihadist terrorists and other groups that foment hatred and use violence to advance their supremacist Islamist ideologies." (Ibid). The third, continuing a long tradition of American foreign policy is to empower women and youth, though its expression in action remains unclear.

The fourth is probably among the more important of these initiatives--and reflects the outward projection of American internal politics.

We will advocate on behalf of religious freedom and threatened minorities. Religious minorities continue to be victims of violence. We will place a priority on protecting these groups and will continue working with regional partners to protect minority communities from attacks and to preserve their cultural heritage. (Ibid)

Read together with the others, it is not impossible to see in this initiative a strategic objective to protect Christian communities in states with non-Christian majorities. It may also be read as adding a stronger religious element to relations between the United States and non-religious, atheist and secular communities--from France to China.

The last is a commitment to continued humanitarian aid, but with a twist. "We will support food security and health programs that save lives and address the root cause of hunger and disease. We will support displaced people close to their homes to help meet their needs until they can safely and voluntarily return home." (NSS p. 42). The critical element here are both the tying of humanitarian aid to displaced persons to the larger issue of mass migrations (the "close to their homes" language) and what appears to be the avoidance of food and medicine transfers for more long term an institutional measures--though what they might be remains a mystery.



(pix Larry Catá Backer 2017))

The strategy in a Regional Context

It is in this final *section* that the NSS Four Pillar strategy is applied in a regional context, and the section of the NSS of greatest interest to U.S. allies and competitors. The focus again in on what appears for the U.S. administration to comprise the "big Four" threat states--China, Russia, North Korea and Iran.

China and Russia aspire to project power worldwide, but they interact most with their neighbors. North Korea and Iran also pose the greatest menace to those closest to them. But, as destructive weapons proliferate and regions become more interconnected, threats become more difficult to contain. And regional balances that shift against the United States could combine to threaten our security. (NSS p. 45).

But that only serves as a prelude to a more detailed consideration that follows, one that is divided by region.

1. Indo Pacific. The focus of this strategic initiative is, of course, China and North Korea. "China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda. " (NSS p. 46). Yet without the slightest acknowledgement of irony it suggests that this is all done to advance the national interests and the political aspirations of the Chinese state (Ibid). The reason this is curious, of course, is that the NSS itself is grounded on those very same principles and objectives. Yet there is no means provided to understand why American national aspirations ought to triumph over those of the Chinese. It is on this point that the prior administration had the better argument (though its ability

to capitalize on it and to actually assert the will to operationalize its aspirations fell far short of the mark). In the face of Chinese national interests, the only possible force that could claim an authority superior (not just equal) to it would be the advancement of international norms and structures, and international consensus. That, precisely, had been the ideological position of the Americans (though again not used as successfully as it might have). The Americans were good at this, even as they refused or fail to apply those standards to themselves. It is not clear what is gained by ceding that ideological space (and the ability to manage that consensus through the use of military and economic and social power) to advance national interest--even if the underlying ideology is appealing (especially to Americans). All that the Americans can offer is this: acceding to American interests will be less sovereignty crushing than acceding to Chinese interests.

China presents its ambitions as mutually beneficial, but Chinese dominance risks diminishing the sovereignty of many states in the Indo-Pacific. States throughout the region are calling for sustained U.S. leadership in a collective response that upholds a regional order respectful of sovereignty and independence. (NSS 46)

But that is hardly inspiring. For China, the move to the approach of this Administration implies an enormous concession--one grounded on the equivalence of national positions and national ideology. It will be interesting to see whether and if the Chinese capitalize on this. North Korea, on the other hand, is not a competitor but a threat. And that is a threat that the Americans can certainly use to enhance their strategic position in Asia--to the detriment of China, a point well made in the NSS (Ibid 46-47).

2. *Europe*. Beyond the almost cringe worthy reminder of what the Europeans owe the United States for rescuing them from *their near century long aggressive effort at suicide* (and to some extent worthy of reminder for a generation of Europeans that would prefer to re-imagine the 20th century) (NSS 47), the NSS offers some interesting strategic considerations. To the Europeans the United States has been generous--it offers them the opportunity to escape from vassalage to the United States (something some might not have thought prudent) but at the price of bearing a greater share of the responsibility for their own sovereign orders. Note the subtlety with which that bargain is offered:

The United States is safer when Europe is prosperous and stable, and can help defend our shared interests and ideals. The United States remains firmly committed to our European allies and partners. The NATO alliance of free and sovereign states is one of our great advantages over our competitors, and the United States remains committed to Article V of the Washington Treaty. (NSS p. 48)

The meaning changes with an emphasis on notions of "help defend," "partners," and "free and sovereign." But perhaps subtlety is overvalued in documents like this one. And yet all of this is recast in much more traditional terms--the Europeans serve as a trip wire against Russian ambition (Ibid); and the whispers of the [TTIP](#) are offered though not by name as a counter to Chinese ambitions (especially with respect to OBOR and Yuan internationalization, see, e.g. [here](#)). But this comes at a price: "We expect our European allies to increase defense spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2024, with 20 percent of this spending devoted to increasing military

capabilities." (Ibid id 48). This is, as the famous line from the [Godfather](#) reminds us, is strictly business.

3. *Middle East.* The Middle East brings us back to Iran and the jihadist movement, while characterizing the Israeli-Palestinian challenge as "the prime irritant preventing peace and prosperity in the region." (NSS p. 49). In a telling statement, the U.S. reveals its objectives clearly:

Today, the threats from jihadist terrorist organizations and the threat from Iran are creating the realization that Israel is not the cause of the region's problems. States have increasingly found common interests with Israel in confronting common threats. (Ibid).

Beyond that, the U.S. focuses on regional peace and stability "including through a strong and integrated Gulf Cooperation Council." (Ibid). And then a warning to Iran: "We will help partners procure interoperable missile defense and other capabilities to better defend against active missile threats. We will work with partners to neutralize Iran's malign activities in the region." (Ibid., p. 50).

4. *South and Central Asia.* Here the concern are Pakistan and Afghanistan, important especially given the American obsession with China.

We seek an American presence in the region proportionate to threats to the homeland and our allies. We seek a Pakistan that is not engaged in destabilizing behavior and a stable and self-reliant Afghanistan. And we seek Central Asian states that are resilient against domination by rival powers, are resistant to becoming jihadist safe havens, and prioritize reforms. (NSS p. 50)

But more important still is the announcement of partnership with India--something that has been a generation in the making. "We will deepen our strategic partnership with India and support its leadership role in Indian Ocean security and throughout the broader region." (Ibid 50). In this region, this will likely have profound long term effects. The shift in relations with Pakistan is notable for its transparency (Ibid).

5. *Western Hemisphere.* The Western Hemisphere poses substantial risks--criminal enterprises, migration, Russia. . . and (always) China (NSS p. 51). But here the U.S. offers a partnership between the U.S. and Canada to work through the issues of the rest of what is now reduced to *Latin America*. And that is the problem. The Latin Americans have always had a "mutual respect" problem. The Americans have never gotten the hint--even under the Obama Administration. Policy cannot be built on the images of those fun movies of the 1940s.50s or those horrific

ideological epics after the 1970s. And yet that appears to be the problem. So, the US. will isolate Cuba and Venezuela--hardly original nor successful (Ibid. 51). The threat to modernize trade agreements does not ring with the same positive overtones in Latin America as it does in Washington; and one wonders why these Republics might consider alternatives to the U.S: status quo. The problem for them is that they also operate from a position of weakness, and neither the Europeans nor the Chinese (much less the Russians) offer viable long term alternatives. It is in this context that the major strategic promise loses coherence:

We will build upon local efforts and encourage cultures of lawfulness to reduce crime and corruption, including by supporting local efforts to professionalize police and other security forces; strengthen the rule of law and undertake judicial reform; and improve information sharing to target criminals and corrupt leaders and disrupt illicit trafficking. (Ibid).

There is some comfort here. Little appears to be changed from prior administration in this NSS. The only exception was the last-minute thaw in relations with Cuba by the Obama administration--and there that was a mutual affair. Consider this another opportunity lost.

6. *Africa*. Africa is understood as a space within which the challenges to U.S interests are all well represented. This includes everything from fragile states, to Chinese expansion, to the problems of jihadist ideology and its consequences. Sadly, but not surprisingly, the United States again (as it did under the Obama Administration) offers much by way of hope and little by way of action.

The United States seeks sovereign African states that are integrated into the world economy, able to provide for their citizens' needs, and capable of managing threats to peace and security. Improved governance in these states supports economic development and opportunities, diminishes the attraction of illegal migration, and reduces vulnerability to extremists, thereby reducing instability. (NSS, p. 52)

Compare President Obama's Ghana speech 2009):

As for America and the West, our commitment must be measured by more than just the dollars we spend. I have pledged substantial increases in our foreign assistance, which is in Africa's interest and America's. But the true sign of success is not whether we are a source of aid that helps people scrape by - it is whether we are partners in building the capacity for transformational change. This mutual responsibility must be the foundation of our partnership. And today, I will focus on four areas that are critical to the future of Africa and the entire developing world: democracy; opportunity; health; and the peaceful resolution of conflict. ([here](#)).

And that, of course, represents the continuing and still unresolved challenge of Africa for those who would venture within that remarkable continent. And always, China: "We will support economic integration among African states. We will work with nations that seek to move beyond

assistance to partnerships that promote prosperity. We will offer American goods and services, both because it is profitable for us and because it serves as an alternative to China's often extractive economic footprint on the continent." NSS p. 52). Surely there must have been some way to make this more palatable.



(pix Larry Catá Backer 2017))

Recurring Themes

The NSS has not played a prominent role in discussion over the years. Though "under the [Goldwater-Nichols Defense Department Reorganization Act of 1986](#) . . . the President must submit a report on the national security strategy of the United States to Congress each year . . . especially in recent years, these reports have been made late or not at all." (See, [National Security Strategy Archive](#)). Indeed, between 2001 and 2016, an NSS was produced only five (5) times (see [National Security Strategy Archive](#)), though every President since 2001 has produced at least one NSS. This suggests both the relevance of the NSS process and its centrality to Presidential transparency on issues of security. It would be a mistake, however, to ignore this one. The 2017 NSS provides a glimpse not merely about the focus of the current Administration's foreign strategic focus, but more importantly it has opened a small window on the way in which the U.S. has begun to think strategically about its domestic resources in the context of its projection of power outward. It is becoming clearer that the old divisions between hard and soft power, between political, economic and social levers, and between public and private efforts is dissolving. The NSS reminds us that the United States, like other great powers today, is thinking strategy as an all around effort to which all sectors of society and all of the productive resources of the nation can be utilized. And within that complex of use, the techniques of managing strategic choices is also

changing--from command and control to management grounded in intelligence, in data, and in control of productive forces worldwide.

Indeed, the most important element of the NSS might be to provide a sense of those themes that appear to have captured the strategic imagination of high level officials. These then suggest the framework within which strategic decisions are weighed. In that context, it is worth moving beyond the obvious: the NSS, like most influential elements in the United States, focus on China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, Jihadist terrorists and international criminal networks. They then extend their gaze to secondary sites: Cuba, Venezuela, Pakistan, Afghanistan and so on, again the importance of which might be gauged by the extent of their coverage in official news sites that either amplify the voices of important stakeholders or reflect their fears, consensus or debates. Much more interesting are the concepts that appear to play a major role in the formulation of the NSS itself. Let me offer two prominent examples--the focus on information and on values.

1. Information. Information is mentioned at over 20 (20) times in the NSS. The NSS worries about the ability of Russia and China to "control information and data to repress their societies" (NSS, p. 2) and to spread "false information" (NSS p. 3). Technology and information is used by these actors to shift regional balances of power (NSS, 25). The NSS worries that the "contest over information accelerates . . . political, economic, and military competitions" among the great powers (NSS, p. 3). And the NSS implies that information, data and data analytics now serve as a means of warfare (NSS, 27-28) that must be countered in kind. Indeed, Russia is identified as a critical actor in the management of disinformation as "part of its offensive cyber efforts to influence public opinion" against which the U.S. must develop strategic countermeasures to "expose adversary propaganda and disinformation." (NSS, 35; also 37).

The NSS affirms American commitment to an "interconnected world, where information and commerce flow freely (NSS, p. 7). It is in the strategic interests of the U.S. to "advocate for open, interoperable, communications, with minimal barriers to the global exchange of information and services." (NSS, 41). The NSS notes the importance of having the "right information" to counter WMD threats (NSS, p. 8). Central to migration control is the need to "enhance our information collection and analysis" (NSS, 10). Institutional coherence and coordination is grounded on information sharing (Ibid). The suppression of radicalization efforts is dependent in part on the collection of "accurate and actionable information about radicalization" (NSS, p. 11).

Information is central to strategic initiatives around cyber security and cyber warfare. Information must be protected and safeguarded (NSS, p. 13), national information technology must be modernized (Ibid), information sharing is critical to the protection of infrastructure (Ibid), and this sharing must be seamless between governmental and private information gatherers and data holders (Ibid). Russia is using information to undermine the legitimacy of states and their governments, especially democratic states (NSS, 14), which requires a seamless partnership between government and private actors to gather and protect sensitive information (Ibid). Information is also property and property can be value maximized. Thus, the NSS seeks protection for proprietary information and legal tools to enhance protection (NSS, 21). At the same time information and data harvesting from American competitors must be enhanced and shared with value producing elements in the United States (Ibid). Yet sharing information has proven costly to

American interests in space, for example (NSS, 31), and its misuse has enabled international criminal organizations to enhance their operations and profits (NSS, 341-32). As a consequence, the NSS prioritizes improving cyber tools to "protect the integrity of data and information" (NSS, 32). And current legal restrictions must be reconsidered to enhance the ability of the state to harvest "timely intelligence and information sharing" (Ibid).

Like the Chinese, and Western business enterprises, the NSS urges strategic thinking around big data management and its use to manage events and behaviors, including meeting threats and competitors. The NSS posits that the U.S. intelligence community must be able to "gather, analyze, discern and operationalize information." (NSS32. More importantly, the NSS point to a principle underlying these strategic initiatives: "In this information dominant era, the IC must continuously pursue strategic intelligence." (Ibid)., At its limits this strategic initiative is bound to be contentious as it touches on issues of the relationship between the state, enterprises, and individual control of their own data. But for the moment, this principle is to be applied to protection of data against theft (Ibid) and to the better use of the "information-rich open-source environment to deny the ability of state and non-state actors to attack our citizens, conduct offensive intelligence activities, and degrade America's democratic institutions (Ibid). It is lamentable that this use of open source intelligence is so narrowly tailored. Lastly, intelligence and data sharing is again emphasized, without regard to status (Ibid). Thus, the expectation is that all elements of data gathering organizations--public or private, domestic or international, will contribute to the collection of data and sharing of intelligence and the product of their analytics. The extent of this sharing remains unclear.

Information is also a central element of "Information Statecraft" that is a critical element of Pillar III (NSS, 34 et seq.). There is a fear that American adversaries have weaponized information (Ibid, 34), while creating effective barriers to the penetration of competing information from outside. This weaponization will be enhanced as economic, personal and commercial information is blended together to contribute to analytics (algorithm, machine learning, and artificial intelligence) will change the character of and also increase American strategic risks (Ibid).

2. *Values.* American values are also mentioned over twenty (20) times. The President urges a core strategic mission of the U.S., mentioned over and over, is centered on the advancement of our values (NSS, i). The NSS urges confidence in our values (Ibid), and a recommitment to our values (Ibid). The President urges that American not "lose sight of our values" (NSS, ii). And, indeed, values form an important element of the Pillar IV strategy to advance American influence (NSS 41-44). As important, the NSS distinguishes between interests and values, two objects that tend to be treated together for most purposes. "We are guided by our values and disciplined by our interests." (NSS, 55).

The NSS assumes an interest in members of the global community or society to have the opportunity to share our values (NSS, 1); all benefit when the U.S. leads "in accordance with our interests and values" (NSS, 3). And, indeed, the NSS is guided by the premise that values are central to American strategic aims. Advancing American influence is the means to that end

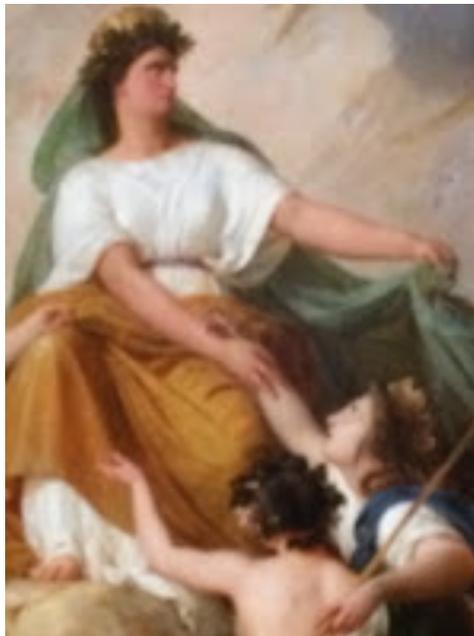
"because a world that supports American interests and reflects our values makes America more secure and prosperous." (NSS, p. 4). American values should infuse technology and mechanisms for global interaction--the Internet, for example, "is an American invention, and it should reflect our values as it continues to transform the future for all nations." (NSS, 13). Moreover it is important strategically to ensure that external threats not be "allowed to shake our shared commitment to our values." (NSS, 14).

Values provide the means of separating friend and ally from competitor and from enemy. Thus, for example, the NSS is based on a principle that "competition is healthy when nations share values." (NSS, 19). That provides a foundation for the strategic conclusion that "China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests." (NSS, 25). It follows that the U.S. must "raise our competitive game to meet that challenge, to protect American interests, and to advance our values." (NSS, 28). And our values determine the focus of our soft power against rivals and enemies. Indeed soft power--diplomacy, sanctions "and other tools" are to be used to "isolate states and leaders who threaten our interests and whose actions run counter to our values." (NSS, 42). Indeed, our values distinguish allies from adversaries, for example North Korea (NSS, 46), and serve as the fundamental glue that holds our European alliance together (NSS, 48).

Values, like information, is also central to "Information Statecraft that serves as an important element of Pillar III (NSS, 34). The weaponization of information has as a principal target the solidity of our values (Ibid). Necessary countermeasures, then, must be deployed, though such measures "will adhere to American values and expose the adversary propaganda and disinformation." (NSS, 35). At the same time values must be embedded in the "local voices" communications the Americans support (Ibid). In this context values must be constructed and advanced through public-private partnerships; indeed, "the private sector should lend its creativity and resources to promoting the values that inspire and grow a community of civilized groups and individuals." (Ibid).

Of course, the entirety of Pillar IV is focused on the development and transmission of American values (NSS, 37 et seq.). It embraces the notions of marketplaces of ideas, now transposed into global markets for values (NSS; 37), a concept with respect to which there is some consensus in the public and private spheres. It is this embrace of the notion of values in markets that make it possible to adhere to the notion that our strategic aims exclude the objective of imposing our values "on others" (Ibid) while simultaneous crafting a sophisticated campaign to promote those values globally. The U.S. joins many others in embracing this approach. Indeed the NSS sounds like a mission statement for popular global civil society elements when it explains the aim of championing "American values and offer encouragement to those struggling for human dignity in their societies." (Ibid., 38). To that end, a strategic objective of the Americans, carried over from decades of prior work, is to extend and maintain its "network of states that advance our common interests and values." (Ibid). Values also drive American strategic interventions in international organizations. They also serve as the basis for determining whether the U.S, will participate in such organizations or withdraw form them (NSS, 40).

It is in the context of the important strategic aim of championing American values (NSS, 41) that such values are defined. The definition is straightforward: "our respect for fundamental individual liberties beginning with the freedoms of religion, speech, the press, and assembly. Liberty, free enterprise, equal justice under the law, and the dignity of every human life are central to who we are as a people." (NSS, 41). The definition ought to be borne in mind, both as a baseline for national accountability, and as a means of distinguishing these values from those of rival camps. These values, thus defined, are offered as the foundation for reducing "the violence, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration that threaten our common security (NSS, 51). And thus the fundamental connection between values and interest: "America's values and influence, underwritten by American power, make the world more free, secure, and prosperous." (NSS, 55).



(Pix © Larry Catá Backer 2017)

Conclusion

The NSS seeks to characterize itself as both principled and pragmatic.

It is realist because it acknowledges the central role of power in international politics, affirms that sovereign states are the best hope for a peaceful world, and clearly defines our national interests. It is principled because it is grounded in the knowledge that advancing American principles spreads peace and prosperity around the globe. We are guided by our values and disciplined by our interests. (NSS, p. 55)

That takes a page from a number of recent International efforts that have proven successful (e.g., [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). It is meant to advance "America's values and influence, underwritten by American power [to] make the world more free, secure, and prosperous." (Ibid). This is not meant to be a national effort but a democratic one at least in this sense: "Together, our task is to strengthen our families, to build up our communities, to serve our citizens, and to celebrate American greatness as a shining example to the world." (Ibid). Only time will tell whether or to what extent these strategic initiatives will last, will be embraced, and will be successful at home and abroad.

But beyond that, the NSS has broken some new ground. Swirling around the ideology of constrained government and of free enterprise and a healthy widely dispersed capitalism lies the foundation of a future in which all of these concepts will be substantially revised. The NSS substantially advances a conceptualization of political society in which politics and economics have been fused, or at least necessarily coordinated. It posits a role for the state as a element in a more complex governmental unit, *the basic strategic thrust of which is the privatization of governmental efforts and the governmentalization of private efforts coordinated for strategic advantage*. Beyond much of the detail, the development of the idea of a Joint Force will bear watching in the future.