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Why Economic Security is National Security. Economic Determinism in the U.S. National Security Strategy 2025

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***Abstract*—The text analyzes the fundamental link between economic stability and national security, focusing on the 2025 U.S.[1] National Security Strategy. This strategy reaffirms the view that the economy is the foundation of power and that military superiority is impossible without a strong industrial base, technological innovation, and energy independence. Furthermore, it posits that economic sovereignty and the well-being of the American middle class are key to the nation's global influence and prosperity. The evolution of this concept is examined from the Reagan era to the present, highlighting the transition from globalism to economic nationalism under the "America First" motto.**

***Keywords*—economic security, national security, strategy, economic security strategy, national security strategy, national economic interests, industrial base, protectionism**

I. Introduction

A broad national security strategy is the course of action adopted following an assessment of the strategic environment. A widely cited understanding within academia posits that "the Strategic Concept aims to provide a consensual basis for the nation's objectives, priorities, instruments, and means within the politico-military context it will navigate over the next five to ten years. It may operate under various designations, such as national security strategy or concept, security and defense concept, or security and defense policy. What they all share is that in the contemporary world, the concept of defense is evolving and has become integrated into a broader concept of security" (van Eekelen, Willem F., 2010, p. 3). According to the U.S. Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, a National Security Strategy is "A document approved by the President of the United States for developing, applying, and coordinating the instruments of national power to achieve objectives that contribute to national security" (Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 2021, p. 156). Consequently, the National Security Strategy of a modern state constitutes a dynamic equation designed to ensure coherence between desired objectives and available resources by employing the most effective course of action.

II. Theoretical Frameworks and Contemporary Dimensions of the Securitization of the Economy

Representatives of the Copenhagen School, whose works have profoundly influenced security theory and practice, propose a comprehensive understanding of security and its strategic management. Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen conceptualize security strategy as a process of securitization and desecuritization. They advocate the foundational premise that national security is intrinsically linked to the state's capacity to continue functioning, as well as the resilience of society in the face of changes and threats. In this context, a Security Strategy represents the formulation of policies to manage the internal and external environment to avert or mitigate threats while preserving the core elements of the state and society (Buzan, Barry, & Hansen, Lene, 2009). Buzan's concept expands the traditional, force-centric understanding of security, demanding that strategy encompass measures across five primary security sectors: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental. Therefore, a National Security Strategy must be multisectoral, addressing all five

[1] U.S. - United States [of America]

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domains rather than focusing exclusively on military aspects.

Stephen M. Walt, an authoritative American foreign policy and national security expert renowned for his work in international relations theory and strategic analysis, outlines a distinct vision. He defines National Security Strategy as a framework for aligning available means with established ends. It must explicitly articulate the state's core interests, the threats arrayed against them, and the actions—predominantly political and military, but also economic—that will be undertaken to protect these interests, maximizing advantages while minimizing vulnerabilities (Walt, Stephen M., 2005). The approach adopted by Walt and other strategic analysts (often reflecting the Classical Strategic Triangle model) dictates that a strategy must incorporate the following components:

- Ends: What the state seeks to achieve and protect (national interests, fundamental values).
- Ways: How the state will achieve its objectives (political, military, economic, and diplomatic instruments).
- Means: The resources the state possesses to execute the ways (capabilities, budgets, human resources, alliances).

According to this model, the National Security Strategy represents a dynamic equation that must ensure alignment between desired objectives and available resources by applying the most effective course of action.

Evidently, economic issues are an inextricable component of any National Security Strategy. Consequently, Robert Gilpin, a leading scholar in international political economy, focuses specifically on economic security, defining its essence, scope, and strategic application. His approach is pivotal for understanding the nexus between economic realities and national security strategy. Economic security, according to Gilpin, is a state's ability to pursue its national economic interests—including economic prosperity, sustainable growth, and control over strategic resources—without being vulnerable to coercion or significant disruption by other states or non-state actors. Thus, an economic and national security strategy must aim to minimize external dependencies that could be leveraged against the state (Gilpin, R., 2003).

Susan Strange, another preeminent scholar of international political economy, emphasizes that structural power (the power to shape the rules of the game) is key to understanding the intersection of security and economics. In this context, her conception of state economic security involves freedom from the threat of severe economic damage, whether originating from natural forces, market dynamics, or the actions of hostile states and corporations. This necessitates an economic security strategy directed toward exercising power to shape the economic environment to the state's advantage—i.e., manipulating the foundational structures of the global economy that determine who wins and who loses. Strange's approach is broader than the traditional view, requiring economic security strategy to focus not merely on defense, but on actively shaping the global environment. Therefore, it must encompass elements related to control over four structural domains: the knowledge structure, the financial structure, the security structure, and the production structure (Strange, Susan, 1996).

The EU[2] Economic Security Strategy establishes the framework for current EU policy in this domain. This document delineates the EU's transition from a purely economic union to a geopolitical actor that places security at the core of its economic policy. "Security is a concept that has new and multiple dimensions. One of them is economic security. Economic security is vital to Europe's prosperity and its ability to shape the future... The EU's strategy must focus on mitigating risks, promoting competitiveness, and building partnerships to strengthen our economic security without seeking self-sufficiency" (European Economic Security Strategy, 2023).

According to the publication Policy Recommendations for U.S. Economic Security, economic security encompasses elements of the economy that influence stability, technological competitiveness, and resilience, each of which empowers the U.S. government to better protect national security and assert its international influence. "Sound economic security policies can help the United States prevent, mitigate, and recover from risks and shocks, such as wars, cyberattacks, pandemics, and natural disasters. To design effective economic security measures, U.S. policymakers must collaborate closely with the private sector to develop a shared understanding of risks and tailor appropriate solutions and strategies" (Policy Recommendations for U.S. Economic Security, 2025).

Consequently, "within the entire construct of national security, a distinct place belongs to economic security. Experience demonstrates that only a high level of economic security can serve as a guarantor of any country's sovereignty and independence, and as a guarantor of its stable and sustainable socio-economic development" (Velkova, L., 2015).

III. Economization - the new Paradigm in the American Security Strategy

The strategic documents adopted in 2025, including the new National Security Strategy of the United States of America, evidence the new approach of President D.

[2] EU - European Union

Trump's administration toward national security. Economic security, social protection, and the self-actualization of the nation's populace—underpinned by the "America First" principle—dictate a heightened focus on the economic aspects of national security. The diverse instruments employed to strengthen the country's industrial base are necessitated by a qualitatively new stage of interdependence and competition among global economic actors, encompassing trade, investment, technology, finance, and domestic economic regulation.

The United States reaffirms and will enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere. It declares intent to undertake targeted missions to secure the border and dismantle cartels, including the use of "lethal force" where necessary, to replace the failed, exclusively law-enforcement-based strategy of the past several decades.

Following a prolonged period of liberalization in the international exchange of goods and services, the Trump presidency is characterized by a shift toward protectionism, driven by the perception that the American market is "too open" to trading partners, constituting a "threat to national security." The guiding U.S. foreign policy principle of "America First" underscores priorities for managing economic competition with China. The Strategy frames China primarily as an economic challenge, stating that Washington will rebalance its economic relationship with Beijing by prioritizing reciprocity and fairness to restore American economic independence.

This period is marked by the tightening of foreign trade controls concurrently with the deregulation of the domestic economy, the activation of mechanisms to stimulate entrepreneurship, and the provision of financial and economic incentives to corporate and individual entities in the interest of economic and social security.

Economic growth is viewed as the primary engine of public welfare, and tax mechanisms are to be utilized to stimulate business activity and increase Americans' disposable income. This is grounded in the understanding that a nation unable to protect prosperity at home cannot project and protect its interests abroad. Utilizing systemic, historical, and comparative analysis of priority objectives across various periods of U.S. development allows us to identify the Trump administration's specific approaches in the current era of geopolitical, economic, and technological challenges. The reconceptualization of the role of the economy and economic policy within the national security strategy—and the provision of population welfare through the defense of the American way of life, compared to the approaches of previous presidential administrations—has today become one of the core principles of U.S. state strategy in the Trump era: "Economic security is national security."

The U.S. National Security Strategy specifically emphasizes the role of American economic power in national security, the nation's capacity to manufacture requisite products and systems, defense capabilities, and societal well-being. Underscoring the significance of this core principle in U.S. policy and the interconnectedness of economic and military security, Peter Navarro, Donald Trump's trade and manufacturing policy advisor during his first term, noted: "Only through American prosperity will there be the growth, resources, and technological innovations for the most advanced military force in the world" (Navarro, Peter, 2018).

National security issues have traditionally occupied a prominent place in U.S. presidential addresses. A pivotal milestone in documenting national policy priorities and identifying primary security threats was the National Security Act of 1947. Since 1950, the President of the United States was mandated to present an annual report to Congress outlining the goals and objectives of the nation's national security policy, identifying critical problems requiring resolution, and proposing the methods and means to address them (The National Security Act, 1947). The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of October 4, 1986, mandated the annual submission of this document; however, this requirement was subsequently modified, and the report is now presented less frequently.

IV. Economic Nationalism as a Security Doctrine

Comparing the approaches of previous presidential administrations to national security issues, P. Navarro observes that during the Reagan era, the prevailing concept was achieving peace exclusively through strength, with this strength focused on military power—"comprehensive and technologically innovative military dominance on land, at sea, in the air, and, of course, in the realm of 'Star Wars'" (Navarro, Peter, 2018).

During Ronald Reagan's presidency, the Strategy was promulgated twice. In 1987, alongside the aforementioned issues, a dedicated section addressed the U.S. position in the global economy, the international financial system, and the promotion of regional and global free trade agreements.

The 1987 U.S. National Security Strategy, presented by the Reagan administration, is a historical document that established the tradition of regularly publishing such reports. In it, the economy is not merely an adjunct but a fundamental pillar of national power within the context of the Cold War. The Reagan administration emphasized that U.S. security depends directly on the vitality of the American economy. A strong dollar and low inflation were viewed as instruments for projecting influence. The document argued that only a growing market economy could sustain the high defense expenditures necessary to deter the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Strategy championed "economic freedom" as an ideological counterpoint to communism and demonstrated the transition to "Peace through Strength," where economic superiority was deemed as vital as the nuclear arsenal (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 1987).

In February 2015, U.S. President Barack Obama presented another National Security Strategy to Congress, reflecting the strategic vision of the then-Democratic administration regarding the contemporary world order and the U.S. role within it. This strategy was a product of continuity, built upon the framework formulated in 2010. The Democratic government's successes were presented as a vector for the country's further development, resulting more in an adaptation of Obama's initial 2010 strategy to the changing international environment than an entirely new strategic vision. It was dedicated to the concept of national renewal and the restoration of U.S. global leadership by strengthening the foundations of American power and global influence. Thus, Obama embedded into the core of the National Security Strategy all the primary priorities of the concept of domestic strength as the bedrock of global influence: a robust economy, accessible education and healthcare, energy security, and innovation (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2015).

The 2017 National Security Strategy, during D. Trump's first term, identified four vital national interests: 1. Protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life. 2. Promote American prosperity. 3. Preserve peace through strength. 4. Advance American influence (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017).

The 2022 U.S. National Security Strategy, adopted under the Biden administration, placed economic aspects at the heart of its vision, framing them as an instrument for domestic renewal and geopolitical competition against authoritarian regimes, primarily China and Russia. The foundational economic pillars of this strategy included:

1. Investing in National Power (First at Home): The strategy explicitly states that domestic economic strength is a prerequisite for global leadership. This approach, termed "Bottom-up and middle-out," entails:

a) Modern Industrial Strategy: Unlike previous periods that relied heavily on the free market, the 2022 Strategy calls for strategic public investments in key sectors.

b) CHIPS[3] and Science Act & Inflation Reduction Act (IRA): These major legislative initiatives are cited as tools to build a resilient and modern U.S. industrial base, particularly in critical and emerging technologies like microelectronics, advanced computing, and biotechnology.

c) Strengthening the Middle Class: Economic prosperity is viewed as a driver of democratic vitality and societal cohesion, both critical for national security.

2. Shaping the Rules of the Global Economy: The U.S. seeks to work with allies and partners to establish 21st-century economic rules to ensure they serve democratic values and open markets rather than autocracies, through:

a) Technology Governance and Standards: The focus is on shaping global standards for critical technologies (AI[4], 5G/6G, cyber) and utilizing export controls (e.g., on microchips) to restrict adversaries' access to foundational American technologies.

b) Addressing Economic Coercion: The Strategy calls for building collective capacity to counter economic coercion (e.g., China's weaponization of trade).

c) Integrating Economics and Security: Economic policy is tightly integrated with foreign and security policy, viewing trade and investment through the prism of "democracies versus autocracies."

3. Securing Resilient Supply Chains: The Biden administration placed a strong emphasis on supply chain resilience, employing a multilateral approach, in contrast to the unilateral approach of the 2017 Trump Strategy:

a) Partnership and Diversification: The objective was to reduce reliance on single sources (especially China) for critical goods through cooperation with trusted allies (e.g., via the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework - IPEF).

b) Climate as an Economic Threat: Climate change was explicitly identified as a transnational threat with direct economic consequences—from impacts on agriculture and infrastructure to energy security. Investments in clean energy are viewed as a tool for economic advantage and security.

Despite elements of continuity, the new U.S. National Security Strategy (2025) stands in stark contrast to the last 30 years of American policy, transitioning from ideological interventionism and competition to prioritizing economic relations. While previous administrations assessed national security threats and economic challenges discretely, under both the first and second Trump presidencies, these are approached holistically. The trade practices of other nations are viewed as being just as dangerous to the United States as their military capabilities.

[3] CHIPS - Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors

[4] AI - Artificial Intelligence

This approach led to the recognition of the inadequacy of market mechanisms—which ostensibly should guarantee the nation's economic security and strengthen the U.S. global position—and the necessity of introducing measures to support domestic producers, shield the domestic market from foreign competition, and mitigate the risks of dependence on imported finished goods and raw materials.

Based on the premise that the United States is "too open" to its trading partners, with whom it is engaged in fierce economic competition, unprecedented measures were enacted to protect the domestic market from foreign economic actors—both private and state-owned. At the presidential level, investigations were initiated into the U.S. economy's reliance on imports of steel, aluminum, and other rare metals and products. Based on findings that American manufacturers had suffered substantial injury from these imports, significant tariffs were imposed.

The new National Security Strategy reaffirms the fundamental principle that economic strength is foundational to U.S. national security. It explicitly states that the greatest U.S. asset is its highly developed, dynamic, and innovative economy, serving as the bedrock of the American way of life. This necessitates stimulating new waves of American investment in the domestic economy. It underscores that domestic economic vitality, competitiveness, and prosperity are the vectors of American power and global influence, achieved through building the most robust industrial base in the world, capable of meeting production needs in both peacetime and wartime (specifically the defense-industrial base). The development of the most reliable and innovative energy sector is presented as a prerequisite for the U.S. remaining a net energy exporter, which is critical for economic growth and global leverage.

Addressing and identifying unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, and state-directed subsidies are framed as threats to the American economy and national security. The U.S. National Security Strategy elevates economic power as the foundation of security, directly linking national security to economic growth spurred by reindustrialization and deregulation in the energy sector.

Strengthening the industrial base and supply chain resilience of the U.S. manufacturing and defense sectors—particularly regarding semiconductors, critical minerals, and dual-use technologies—is tied to the identification of an extensive list of risks. These include the reliance of the national industry and the U.S. defense sector on imports of specific raw materials, rare-earth metals, and certain types of equipment and technologies (e.g., between 2013 and 2016, imports from China accounted for 78% of all rare-earth materials imported into the U.S. (Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States, 2018)).

In this manner, the Strategy formalizes the growing role of economic security as a central organizing principle of foreign policy, including the use of export controls and investment restrictions as national security instruments. The document diverges from the traditional internationalist consensus and repudiates "globalism" and "so-called free trade," which have "hollowed out" the American middle class and industrial base. It also envisions the utilization of tariffs to encourage the re-shoring of critical manufacturing.

The importance of America's technological edge in leading and critical technologies is identified as a vital priority for ensuring future economic and military dominance. Technological competition is viewed primarily as a struggle for power and security, rather than merely an economic issue. The focus is on preserving U.S. technological superiority, particularly in dual-use technologies such as AI, quantum technologies, and supercomputing. In this context, restrictions on the transfer of advanced technologies to adversary nations are mandated, and the imperative to protect critical economic infrastructure, including cybersecurity, is a pervasive theme requiring specialized attention.

The Strategy is distinguished by a revision of global economic relations and the consolidation of an approach rooted in economic nationalism and conditional hegemonism. Leveraging U.S. financial and technological advantages to build coalitions and shape 21st-century rules across all spheres of the global economy aims to achieve freer and fairer conditions for global trade through bilateral diplomacy. This often involves the threat of tariff measures to address trade imbalances and counter "predatory trade," intellectual property theft, and cyber espionage, especially from China. Emphasis is placed on conditional support for allies in Europe, urging them to assume greater responsibility for their own defense and eliminate mercantilism overcapacity, while simultaneously opening their markets to American goods and services. These aspects demonstrate a fundamental realignment toward "America First," where domestic economic flourishing is viewed as a direct and indispensable precondition for U.S. national security and global power.

V. Conclusion

The approach of the current U.S. presidential administration toward national security is characterized by a strong economic focus as the foundation for prosperity and the reinforcement of the country's global posture. While the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy initiated the reorientation toward an "America First" economy, the 2025 National Security Strategy deepens and radicalizes this approach, making economic self-sufficiency and sovereignty the central and nearly exclusive pillar of national security. This entails a narrower definition of the national economic interest, a profound emphasis on fortifying the American economy, and a geographic pivot toward the immediate U.S. neighborhood. Consequently, the new philosophy embedded in the December 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy validates the necessity of fully integrating economic security into national security.

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