"The core logic of this Strategy, consistent with President Trump's historic and needed shift, is to put Americans' interests first in a concrete and practical way."

Yesterday evening, the U.S. Department of War published the National Defense Strategy (NDS) of the United States. This document operationalizes the main objectives outlined in the National Security Strategy released on December 4.

What follows is a brief analysis of the National Defense Strategy, focused primarily on its implications for Europe – and for Poland in particular – viewed through the lens of its relationship with the National Security Strategy and the broader priorities of U.S. security policy.

At the outset, it is worth emphasizing that, much like the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy is neither inherently beneficial nor inherently detrimental from Poland's point of view. It is written in a clear and consistent America First logic, repeatedly articulated by President Donald Trump, and serves one fundamental purpose: securing the interests of the United States. Beyond the introduction and conclusion, the document is structured around two core elements – an assessment of the security environment and a strategic approach built around four principal Lines of Effort.

The Security Environment: Global Priorities and Strategic Hierarchy

As in the National Security Strategy, the Western Hemisphere is identified as the primary area of U.S. strategic focus. In line with the Monroe Doctrine, supplemented by the Trump Corollary, it is to remain an exclusive sphere of American influence and the most important operational theater from Washington's perspective. Unlike the NSS, however, the National

Defense
Strategy defines this area with much greater precision, explicitly highlighting the Panama Canal,
the Gulf of Mexico, and Greenland as elements of critical infrastructure essential to U.S. security
and prosperity. The Western Hemisphere is viewed not only as a strategic area but also as a
source of direct threats to U.S. internal security, including illegal migration, narcotics trafficking,
and foreign terrorist organizations.

China – as in the National Security Strategy – is treated as the only serious peer competitor to
the United States, reinforcing a bipolar view of the international system as seen from
Washington. The NDS strongly emphasizes the need to maintain a balance of power in the
Indo-Pacific, a region whose importance stems not only from military considerations but from its
central role in global trade, supply chains, and technological competition. Deterrence in this
theater, coupled with the pursuit of a stable peace, is conceived as systemic rather than
episodic, making the Indo-Pacific the second key focus of U.S. defense strategy.

Iran and North Korea are addressed as distinct elements of the security environment, each
framed through the security of key U.S. allies – Israel in the case of Iran, and South Korea and
Japan in the case of North Korea. The emphasis here is not on constructing new theaters of
global confrontation, but on sending a clear signal that the security concerns of America’s most
important partners remain within Washington’s strategic focus.

Across these regions, the National Defense Strategy consistently advances one underlying
principle: **U.S. military engagement is to be selective, prioritized, and conditional, shaped**

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by a hierarchy of interests rather than by legacy commitments.

Europe: Burden Sharing and Conditional Commitment

More attention than in the NSS is devoted to Russia, though its assessment from the U.S.
perspective remains largely unchanged. Russia is portrayed primarily as a regional threat to
Eastern Europe, and the NDS explicitly assigns responsibility for managing this risk primarily to
Europe itself. To underscore this expectation, the document compares Russia's nominal GDP
with that of NATO members excluding the United States, arguing that Europe possesses
sufficient financial capacity not only to deter Russia but to assume real responsibility for its own
security. In this context, Germany is the only European state explicitly mentioned, with its
economic potential highlighted as exceeding that of Russia.

The recurring theme that ties Europe to the broader global picture is burden sharing. In the
National Defense Strategy, burden sharing is a foundational principle. European allies are
assessed primarily on their willingness to meet commitments and to assume responsibility not
only for their own security, but for the stability of their region as a whole. This expectation is not
framed abstractly. **The NDS directly links European credibility to fiscal decisions, pointing
toward defense spending levels approaching 5 percent of GDP as the emerging
benchmark for allies expected to assume primary responsibility for their own security.**
U.S. support is explicitly described as continuing, yet more limited and selective, a point the
document makes unambiguously.

This logic is reinforced in the strategic approach section of the document. While

deterrence of
China and defense of the U.S. Homeland clearly dominate the hierarchy of priorities, Europe
appears as a theater where American involvement is increasingly conditioned on European
performance. The NDS openly expects a wealthy continent to deliver on commitments made at
the NATO summit in The Hague and to concentrate primarily on continental security, which may
be interpreted as encouragement for certain European states to scale back ambitions beyond
their immediate region.

In practice, this reflects a shift from reassurance to delegation: Europe is no longer treated
as a primary arena of U.S. force projection, but as a theater where responsibility is transferred
rather than shared by default. U.S. military power is being deliberately prioritized elsewhere,
while Europe is expected to carry the primary burden for its own security.

Strategic Takeaways for Poland: A Frontline Ally's Perspective

Although the debate on the implications of the National Defense Strategy for Poland will
undoubtedly be extensive, below are three conclusions that, from a Polish perspective, I view as
the most critical. Taken together, they illustrate how I read the NDS in Warsaw – not as a
reassurance document, but as a framework of expectations.

1. **U.S. Engagement in Europe: Continuity with Conditions**

The United States is not withdrawing from Europe, but it will gradually reduce its level of
engagement. This is stated explicitly in the National Defense Strategy and applies not only to
Europe, but globally. While the exact scope and pace of any force reductions remain

unclear,
the direction is unambiguous.

For Poland, this means the need for proactive engagement rather than reactive reassurance-
seeking. Consistently communicating to Washington not only Poland's fulfillment of allied
commitments, but also its concrete role as a frontline state on NATO's eastern flank, becomes
essential. In an environment of selective engagement, relevance must be demonstrated, not
assumed. The window of opportunity will not remain open indefinitely.

2. From Security Consumer to Regional Contributor

The NDS makes clear that credibility within the alliance is increasingly measured by willingness
to assume responsibility. Poland must therefore be prepared to take on greater regional
obligations – both financially and in terms of coordination.

If Warsaw is to be seen as a credible partner rather than merely a beneficiary of U.S. security
guarantees, strengthening regional cooperation is indispensable. This includes continuing
initiatives pursued by President Karol Nawrocki in Prague, Bratislava, and Budapest, as well as
expanding them to other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. In parallel, deepening economic
cooperation with the United States, attracting U.S. investment, and supporting the presence of
Polish companies on the U.S. market remain critical components of this partnership.

3. Military Presence as a Variable, Not a Constant

A reduction in the U.S. military presence in Europe – in one form or another – should be treated
as a baseline scenario. Even if Poland is not directly affected, a smaller U.S. footprint will

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inevitably shape the broader security environment of Central and Eastern Europe.

In this context, modernization of the Polish Armed Forces, development of a domestic defense industry based on national competencies, meaningful technology transfer from the United States, and long-term integration into U.S. defense supply chains represent the most effective path from being a client to becoming a strategic partner. Poland's position as a frontline state on NATO's eastern flank gives this trajectory a structural, long-term character rather than a temporary one.

From a Polish analytical perspective, the National Defense Strategy should therefore be read less as a reassurance document and more as a framework of expectations tied to capacity, contribution, and cost.

The Sobieski Institute publishes commentary in both Polish and English to support the strategic debate at home and to present the Polish perspective to international partners.
Both versions of this text are based on the same data and conclusions but differ in style and emphasis, tailored to readers in Poland and in the international environment.

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