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## *The US National Defence Strategy: The return of History and the end of the utopian dream (2008-2018)*

### *Abstract:*

*After a decade without being distributed, Trump's administration has published this year a new National Defense Strategy. This document has as main purpose, to point out the main threats for the United States. Furthermore, with the Counter-terrorism Strategy publication ends its publication the great strategy documents. As we will see over this paper relevant, changes had taken place over the last decade, of 2008 National Defense Strategy regarding the two current documents.*

### *Keywords:*

*USA, foreign policy, defense, national defense strategy, realism.*

**\*NOTE:** The ideas contained in the Opinion Papers shall be responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense

## Introduction

After a decade of none being published, Trump's Administration has published a new National Defense Strategy this year. The main purpose of this official document is to detect U.S. main threats. There have been many changes during the decade between the last National Defense Strategy (NDS), regarding the current one.

First of all, the international context is not the same. After ten years of continuous investments on defense, both the Chinese government and the Russian are the most dangerous threats to the United States. Whilst it is true that they were mentioned in the last NDS. Although, both countries have confirmed in diverse scenarios their capabilities to counter American influence.

Secondly, Rogue-States. As China and Russia, Rogue-States are still on the top of the list. Despite of the advances of conversations with the North Korean government, his continuous provocations might lead to a regional crisis. In the Iranian case, is the other way around. After withdraw the agreement signed by the last Administration, it does not seem probable a less level of hostility in the very short-term.

Thirdly, terrorism. After almost two decades scarred by the fight against terror, the Department of Defense does no longer places it as the principal threat. This reflects the deep chasm that separates this Administration from the last one. While Obama's Administration was guided by Nye Jr. thesis, the current Administration has in Robert Kagan one of his preferred theoretic authors.

Finally, the economic outlook has also changed. In less than two years, the unemployment rate is in historical minimums<sup>1</sup>, the economic growth is also in the highest levels, and trade deficit continues to diminish. All these macroeconomic numbers have been favored by the biggest cut of taxes of American history what proves, once again, that Laffer was right.

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<sup>1</sup> Bloomberg. (Online) <https://www.bloomberg.com/quote/USURTOT:IND>

### ***National Defense Strategy (2008)***<sup>2</sup>

Months before the Presidential election, the Bush Administration drew up his last official document<sup>3</sup>: the National Defense Strategy (NDS). This document aims to identify the strategic-military objectives of the country and to define the threats which faces. After seven years fighting terrorism, the U.S authorities<sup>4</sup> draft this document about “lessons learned” in this struggle.

In the foreword<sup>5</sup>, the new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, states that next President will face “a world full of complex challenges” but also with “great opportunities”. Following previous versions<sup>6</sup>, NDS of 2008 sets the focus on America’s role as “beacon of light”<sup>7</sup> for those who fights for freedom and the spread of democracy around the globe as the most important end of the U.S. government.

After this statement of intent, the NDS outline the main challenges which United States faces:

- I. Violent transnational extremist networks.
- II. Rogue-states.
- III. Rising regional powers.
- IV. Space and cyber-threats.
- V. Natural and pandemic disasters and competition for resources.

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<sup>2</sup>Available (online) in:

<https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2008NationalDefenseStrategy.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Inside the above mentioned cataloguing they would place the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the current document (NDS).

<sup>4</sup> Under Bush Administration.

<sup>5</sup> Like President signs the foreword of the National Security Strategy, Secretary of Defense signs the National Defense Strategy’s one.

<sup>6</sup> National Security Strategy of 2002 and National Security Strategy of 2006. Available (online) on: <http://nssarchive.us/>

<sup>7</sup> *U.S. as beacon of light... for our allies, enemies and potential adversaries, our commitment to democratic values must be matched by our deeds. The spread of liberty both manifests our ideals and protects our interests*”. National Defense Strategy 2008, p.1.

First of all, transnational extremist networks<sup>8</sup>. This threat is which defines Bush's foreign policy. Such is the relevance of this transnational groups that reach to affect in the strategic environment, understood as "a global struggle against a violent extremist ideology that seeks to overturn the international state system"<sup>9</sup>.

Inside this group of transnational networks, the NDS outlines the risk of proliferation this networks in places where the power of the State is purely nominal. This type of State, so-called as failed States, are the perfect environment for these in order that these groups operate with freedom and have sufficient space for maneuver to suppose a threat for the neighboring States and the rest of the world.

But it is not those States are the only responsible for the increase of this threat. Though it is true that, the disability of these States develops the principal reason of the strengthening of the above mentioned transnational groups, also there exist other States that grant support to them to conscience. Those States are define by the Bush's Administration as "rogue-states"<sup>10</sup>.

Within this concept Iran and North Korea are included. Both countries pose a threat for the international system. On one hand, Iran sponsors terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq, and seeks to obtain nuclear technology. On the other hand, North Korea threatens his neighbors<sup>11</sup> and it is a destabilization focus for the region. Furthermore, carries out illegal activities, such as falsification of foreign currency or drug traffic.

Secondly, the NDS points out the threat that pose some more powerful States, being China and Russia the main countries mentioned in the document.

The first one is noted as a "one ascendant state with the potential for competing with the United States"<sup>12</sup>. This affirmation turns out to be determinant since it shows the worry of the American authorities in what concerns the continuous increase of the military

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to emphasize that, words like Islam or jihadism, they are mentioned not even once time during the whole text. The ambiguity of the term used in the text allows to extend the area of attention to not religious groups associated with the organized crime, which ends are economic and not politicians (terrorism).

<sup>9</sup> National Defense Strategy 2008, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> This concept already we can find it in the first Strategy of National Security of the Bush Administration in 2002. Available in <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Especially South Korea and Japan.

<sup>12</sup> "China is one ascendant state with the potential for competing with the United States", EDN 2008, p.3

capacities of the Asian country. However, in the document also is outlined the need to cooperate in other areas.

In reference to the Euro-Asian country, it is mentioned his “setback in the opening and the democracy”<sup>13</sup> This pose generates concern both, the United States and its allies (NATO) and his neighbors. In its turn, the renovation of his military equipment, the threats to countries that could admit American bases<sup>14</sup> and the greater relevance of nuclear weapons in Russian strategy<sup>15</sup> suggest that Russia seeks a “renewed influence and a greater international role”<sup>16</sup>. After a decade full of relevant international events, we can assert that this theory has been confirmed<sup>17</sup>.

Pointed out the main threats, the question that arises is: how face these challenges?

For the U.S. DoD the key is in resilience<sup>18</sup>. This concept, emphasizes the relevance that has acquired the risk of overreact to a threat.

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<sup>13</sup> “*Russia’s retreat from openness and democracy...*”. National Defense Strategy 2008, p.3.

<sup>14</sup> The purpose of these bases was to establish anti-missile systems. The first two bases were installed in Poland and the Czech Republic. These systems were the third leg of the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD), better known as << Anti-missile shield >> devised by President Bush. Available (online) in: <https://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/politica-exterior/el-escudo-antimisiles-de-bush-la-guerra-de-las-galaxias-ii/> y [https://elpais.com/internacional/2007/06/08/actualidad/1181253617\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2007/06/08/actualidad/1181253617_850215.html)

<sup>15</sup> It is not until the Military Russian Doctrine of 2014 is published, when the concept of dissuasion wide to non-nuclear measures. it is fundamental to emphasize that the own concept of strategic dissuasion is more wide than the western one. For Russia it is defined like <<coordinated system of military measures (included the nuclear weapon) and not military (policies, diplomatic, juridical, ideological and of another type) adopted consecutively or simultaneously with the aim to dissuade the military action with damages of strategic character>>. Moreover, the strategic dissuasion must be used in times of war and peace, which serves to blur the distinction between peace conditions or war so that all the options are always and without interruption on the table. In: MILOSEVICH-JUARISTI, Mila, “Zapad-2017: las maniobras militares rusas como ingrediente de la disuasión estratégica” Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 64/2017,4 de septiembre de 2017, available in: [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_es/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/ari64-2017-milosevichjuaristi-zapad-2017-maniobras-militares-rusia-disuasion-estrategica](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari64-2017-milosevichjuaristi-zapad-2017-maniobras-militares-rusia-disuasion-estrategica)

<sup>16</sup> “...suggest a Russia exploring renewed influence, and seeking a greater international role”. National Defense Strategy 2008, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> An excellent work of Mira Milosevic. In: MILOSEVICH-JUARISTI, Mila, “El proceso de reimperialización de Rusia, 2000-2016”, Real Instituto Elcano, Documento de Trabajo nº 11/2016, 16 de julio de 2016, pp. 7-12. Disponible en: <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/6a1149ad-2ed5-400e-8e0f-e40b1d5c6c4b/DT11-2016-MilosevichJuaristi-Proceso-reimperializacion-Rusia-2000-2016.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=6a1149ad-2ed5-400e-8e0f-e40b1d5c6c4b>

<sup>18</sup> According to the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (RAE) resilience means “capacity of adjustment of an alive being opposite to a disturbing adverse agent or a condition or situation”.

The operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown both to the government and the High Command that an overreaction can be as dangerous as inaction. Another “lesson learned”<sup>19</sup> is that in a strategic environment which distinctive features are interdependence and uncertainty, the civic - military cooperation is key for the success of any action<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, this cooperation has to be understood as a synergy of knowledge where civil authorities assume that political times in Washington are different in Baghdad and Kabul<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, military authorities have to assimilate that the defeat of the enemy does not suppose the end of the operation. The phase of post conflict is critical for the success of it.

To avoid these mistakes and reduce uncertainty, de DoD points out five fundamental objectives:

- I. Defend the Homeland: already in the Quadrennial Defense Review of 2006 it was emphasized that state actors did not have a monopoly on the use of force. This fact supposes greater uncertainty, both due to the increase in the number of actors operating in the international system, and to the fact that these “new”<sup>22</sup> actors are not governed by international law (which makes them more unpredictable and dangerous). For this reason, the Department of Defense must be prepared for both “conventional” threats (States) and for the “new” dangers. In this regard, the greatest threat to the United States is a possible chemical, nuclear or biological attack landed by these new actors<sup>23</sup>. But as the NDS highlights, in certain occasions the Department of Defense does not the best authority to handle this

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<sup>19</sup> For more detail in COLLINS, Joseph.J, “Initial Planning and Execution in Afghanistan and Iraq”, in: HOOKER,jr. Richard D., COLLINS, Joseph J., “Lessons Encountered: Learning from the long war”, National Defense University Press, Washington D.C., 2015.

<sup>20</sup> HOOKER,jr. Richard D., COLLINS, Joseph J., “Lessons Encountered...op.cit. p.7.

<sup>21</sup> For a good analysis about the intervention in Iraq, see: SKY, Emma. “Mission Still Not Accomplished in Iraq: why the United States should not leave”, Foreign Affairs, nov-dec 2017.

<sup>22</sup> The performance of non-state actors is not something new; Already in Antiquity, the Christian communities acted outside the Roman legality and carried out a multitude of actions: from peaceful civil resistance, to acts of sabotage against Roman institutions. Another good example of non-state actors (NSAs) were the great banking families of the Modern Age, whose influence and power became crucial to crown Emperor Carlos I of Spain, in THOMAS, Hugh. “El Imperio español: de Colón a Magallanes”, Planeta, Madrid, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Other plausible actions of these new actors could come from cyberspace. From the interruption of the trade, the service of light, water, the theft of sensitive information, etc.

type of situation<sup>24</sup>. All these threats generate a tension between the need for security and the requirements of opening trade and the defense of civil liberties. In short, we are facing the age-old debate between security and freedom<sup>25</sup>.

- II. Win “The Long War”: In this heading we see the impact that the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq had. It is also outlined the global threat that groups as Al Qaeda<sup>26</sup> suppose. The mentioned group, in spite of rejecting the globalization, uses it in his own benefit. In the struggle against this threat, there is assumed that:

*“This conflict is a prolonged irregular campaign, a violent struggle for legitimacy and influence over the population. The use of force plays a role, yet military efforts to capture or kill terrorists are likely to be subordinate to measures to promote local participation in government and economic programs to spur development, as well as efforts to understand and address the grievances that often lie at the hearts of the insurgences”<sup>27</sup>.*

And to be able to obtain this degree of knowledge, it is fundamental to strengthen the moderate voices, offering an effective “counter narrative”, from the Muslim<sup>28</sup> community itself that provides an alternative to the extremist vision and discredits it. Therefore, the key in the fight against these extremist movements “is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we help prepare our partners to defend and govern themselves”<sup>29</sup>.

- III. Promote Security: the best way to grant security is avoiding war, and a method for it is to strengthen the resilience of the international system. This section sets out China and Russia<sup>30</sup> “are important partners for the future and we seek to build collaborative and cooperative relationships with them”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> “Yet, in the long run the Department of Defense is neither the best source of resources and capabilities nor the appropriate authority to shoulder these tasks”. NDS 2008, p.7.

<sup>25</sup> This debate is one of the key axes of the new US administration

<sup>26</sup> This threat places to the same level that the communism or the fascism in the Cold War and in the Second World War.

<sup>27</sup> NDS 2008, p.8.

<sup>28</sup> In the case of Al Qaeda.

<sup>29</sup> NDS 2008, p.8.

<sup>30</sup> The main contenders of the U.S.

<sup>31</sup> NDS 2008, p.11.



- IV. Deter Conflict; deterrence is one of the angular pieces of the strategy of any actor. In the American case, influencing the military and political decisions of the adversary, making him see that the costs of his action are too big. In addition, in order that the above mentioned dissuasion is effective, it is necessary that this one bases on the credibility. This is, in the real possibility that USA is capable of answering effectively to any provocation or assault. Nevertheless, in the last years, the American dissuasion has remained obsolete, fruit of almost half century with the only adversary (URSS) whom to defeat. Before the variety of competitors and the diversity of forms of warfare that they can carry out, The United States “*must tailor deterrence to fit particular actors, situations, and forms of warfare*”<sup>32</sup>.

Once again, it highlights that “*Military capabilities alone, were, and are, no panacea to deter all conflict*”<sup>33</sup>. However, in the following sentence points out that “*deterrence must remain grounded in demonstrated military capabilities that can respond to a broad array of challenges to international security*”<sup>34</sup>. It also states, one more time, the necessity to improve resilience after been attacked<sup>35</sup>. Finally, it concludes that the U.S. “*must understand the potential for escalation from non-lethal to lethal confrontation, and learn to calculate and manage the associated risks*”<sup>36</sup>. This last sentence could be understood as criticism of the former Secretary of Defense<sup>37</sup>.

- V. Win our Nation’s War; in case prevention and dissuasion fail, the U.S. must be prepared for any conflict. In this epigraph it is necessary to emphasize this

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<sup>32</sup> NDS 2008, p.12. This will to adapt to the enemy we can find it in RUMSFELD, D. “Transforming the military”, Foreign Affairs, may/june 2002. Available (online) : <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2002-05-01/transforming-military>

<sup>33</sup> NDS 2008, p.11.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.12.

<sup>35</sup> “*We must build both our ability to withstand attack – a fundamental and defensive aspect of deterrence – and improve our resiliency beyond an attack. An important change in planning for the myriad of future potential threats must be post-attack recovery and operational capacity*”. NDS 2008, p.12. This last statement reflects the “back to reality” that it supposed to U.S. the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the later operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, both without signs of success. Those three facts have shown that even the greatest power is vulnerable.

<sup>36</sup> NDS 2008, p.12.

<sup>37</sup> Donald Rumsfeld was one the main supporters of the Iraq’s intervention. In WOODWARD, Bob, “Plan de Ataque: cómo se decidió invadir Irak”, Del Bronce, Barcelona, 2004.



sentence: “*Although improving the U.S Armed Forces proficiency in irregular warfare is the Defense Department’s top priority, the United States does not have the luxury of preparing exclusively for such challenges*”<sup>38</sup>. This fact is essential, due to show for the umpteenth time, the lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq. In spite of not rejecting the possibility of a conflict between states, it is assumed that is less probable. Nonetheless, the U.S has to be prepared to face any threat (asymmetric and/or hybrid war) any enemy (terrorist group, rogue state) and win.

After pointing out threats and goals, the last question which remain unresolved is which are the necessary actions to achieve the raised goals? The document notes 5 main actions.

First of all, shaping the choices of key states. In this regard, “*Although the role of non-state actors in world affairs has increased, states will continue to be the basis of the international order*”<sup>39</sup>. Through cooperation with these countries, the U.S. can achieve a more stable and pacific system. Hence, is essential to achieve that China and Russia<sup>40</sup>, became in stakeholders to maintain it.

In second place, prevent adversaries from acquiring or using Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)<sup>41</sup>. It stands out that “*... the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively in exercising its right of self-defense to forestall or prevent hostile acts by our adversaries.*”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> NDS 2008, p.13.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> It is also outlined that India should assume major responsibility, according to his economic and military growth.

<sup>41</sup> This section is the keystone of the foreign policy of Bush Administration. As can be seen in the first National Security Strategy of 2002 (the first one after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>), the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the acquisition of these by the rogue states became the America's greatest strategic concern. See: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> NDS 2008, p. 14. This affirmation is another of the defining features of the Bush administration. As an example, it is curious how the statement cited is almost identical to that used in the National Security Strategy of 2002: “*To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.*” NSS 2002, p.15.

The third action mentioned is based in add alliances and agreements. In that regard, it seeks to create more stakeholders in the missions which U.S. troops are involved. The U.S. government will promote cooperation with his allies through the creation of allied combined forces and transfer of military technology.

In fourth place, the Department of Defense points out the U.S. external dependency in many fields, particularly in the energetic sector. Moreover, such resources, key for world economy, are in conflictive areas and that the maintenance of the flow of the above mentioned goods is a strategic imperative for The United States. And for it, (U.S.) must fight against the proliferation of anti-access tactics that reduce the free flow of goods and the economic growth<sup>43</sup>.

Fifthly, it notes the need to unify efforts. According to the one who writes this paper, this action remains as the most important, since it emanates a high dose of self-criticism, pointing out the mistakes made in Afghanistan and Iraq: *“Iraq and Afghanistan remind us that military success alone is insufficient to achieve victory.”*<sup>44</sup> Later, self-criticism continues:

*“We must not forget our hard-learned lessons or allow the important soft power capabilities developed because of them to atrophy or even disappear. Beyond security, essential ingredients of long-term success include economic development, institution building, and the rule of law, as well as promoting internal reconciliation, good governance, providing basic services to the people, training and equipping indigenous military and police forces, strategic communications.”*<sup>45</sup>

This paragraph is crucial to verify how the main mistakes of the interventions were detected. Moreover, it is used the term of *“national power”*<sup>46</sup>, which was popularized by Hans Morgenthau. It includes geography, natural resources, industrial capability, military readiness, population, national character and morale and the quality of democracy<sup>47</sup>. As

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<sup>43</sup> This action is a clear allegation in favor of free trade and in opposition to any protectionism, both economic and political and social. The course of the current American administration (also republican) shows the drastic change that has taken place in the American society.

<sup>44</sup> NDS 2008, p.17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> See: MORGENTHAU, Hans J., “Politics Among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace”, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1948. P.73-105.

we can see, the scope of the term allows us to affirm that the American authorities have understood that the phases of stabilization and reconstruction (post-conflict) are so important as those of concentration and projection<sup>48</sup>

To sum up, the National Defense Strategy of 2008 supposes some kind of mea culpa and a recognition of the lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, this act of contrition limits itself not so much to the aims (defeat of the terrorism, conditions-rabbles, etc.), confirmed in the document, and since to the method used to obtain it.

### ***National Defense Strategy 2018***

Nevertheless, only a summary of the same one has been published, by what his analysis not only will be based on the own document but also on the declarations of the own General Mattis.

The most obvious feature of the document is extension; whereas his predecessor consisted of 23 pages, the summary of the current EDN scarcely covers the 11. This fact owes to that the Department of Defense has not published the totality of the EDN, something that happened in the previous one.

Another feature is his temporary context. The current NDS was published barely two months later the National Security Strategy came to light. This short period of time between both documents is not usual. Normally, it exists a year between them. This period, enables the Department of Defense include the positions of the Executive power with the strategic priorities considered by the DoD. This process allows bring together the political view (from the Administration), with the position of the public servants from the DoD. The fact that the above mentioned space of reflection has not taken place between both documents, it raises two possible explanations:

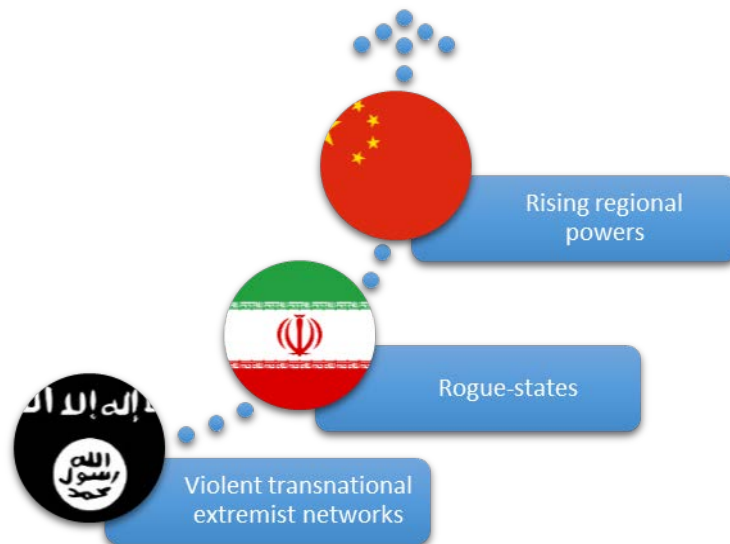
- The Department of Defense has elaborated the document following only the executive directives of the Trump's Administration. This would suppose that the Department has not had enough time to write the complete report, which included his own analysis.

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<sup>48</sup> In Iraq, the first two stages of the strategic planning (concentration and projection) had positive results, but the post-conflict phases were a failure. For a more detailed analysis, see: GUTIÉRREZ ESPADA, Cesáreo y GONZÁLEZ MARTÍN, Andrés, “*El conflicto de Irak II*”, Conflictos Internacionales Contemporáneos nº8, Ministerio de Defensa, Madrid, 2006, p. 141.

- A perfect tune exists between the Department of Defense and the Administration. With this tuning, the Department only would contribute small brushstrokes to the strategic panorama raised in the ESN.

Already in the introduction, Mattis<sup>49</sup> shows his general vision of the international system. Featured by a “...increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile...”<sup>50</sup>. Nevertheless, the central sentence which summarize the hole document is: “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”<sup>51</sup>. It is, without doubt, the best resume of the strategic thinking which predominates in the document. Unlike his predecessor, the NDS of 2018 overthrow terrorism as the main threat for The United States.



*Hierarchy of threats in the NDS 2018. Own production.*

With this new orientation, Mattis opts for an own vision of the realistic classic school. This choice, remains formed with the importance that it grants him to the struggle for power of the principal powers (state actors) reducing the relevancy of the terrorism (not state actors) in the national American safety.

<sup>49</sup> His designation like Secretary of Defense is the best demonstration of the recognized prestige that the General Mattis possesses. The result of the above mentioned voting was: 98 votes to favor, 1 in against and 1 abstention.

<sup>50</sup> NDS 2018, p.1.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

In his strategic environment description, Mattis points out China and Russia as the main “revisionist powers”<sup>52</sup>. Both “want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic, and security decisions”<sup>53</sup>.

Regarding China, Secretary Mattis states they (China and Russia) have chosen to be strategic competitors<sup>54</sup>. This has supposed the constant increase of the Chinese military budget, modernizing its equipment and coercing his neighbors with predator economics to reorder the Indo-Pacific region in its interest. In this respect, Mattis highlights the final goal of the NDS is “to set the military relationship between our two countries on a path of transparency and non-aggression”<sup>55</sup>. Nevertheless, if China does not share this aim, Mattis notes “we [U.S] will cooperate where we can and we will confront where we must”<sup>56</sup>.

Moreover, the current Administration keep its interest to cooperate with the Asian country in economy, mainly. However, this cooperation must be reciprocal, what it means China must reduce its commercial barriers. In this regard, Trump has pointed out that an unequal and unfair economical relation it is not feasible. The same critical view has been expressed by the President Trump before the EU and other countries (as Japan, etc.)

Turning to Russia, the Secretary of Defense notes how Russia is using new technologies to revert and discredit democratic processes in its vicinity (Georgia o Ukraine). Those actions seek to break NATO and change the balance of power in Europe and Middle East in its favor<sup>57</sup>. The last Russian interventions (Ukraine and Syria) underscore its current capability to operate either in its neighborhood or beyond.

Notwithstanding, Russia suffers several problems that reduce its relevance as threat. The most important is its economy. The enormous weight of commodities makes Russian

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<sup>52</sup> Concept mentioned by Robert Kagan in: KAGAN, Robert: “Backing into World War III”, Brookings, February 2017.

<sup>53</sup> NDS 2018, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> “Defending the Nation with Sec. Defense Jim Mattis”, Uncommon Knowledge, Hoover Institution, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2018. [online] <https://www.hoover.org/research/defending-nation-secretary-defense-james-mattis> .

<sup>55</sup> NDS 2018, p.2.

<sup>56</sup> “Defending the Nation... op.cit.

<sup>57</sup> To all this we must add the modernization of its nuclear weapons, making Russia as main threat to the stability of the international system.

economy dependent of the price of them, what supposes less autonomy. Furthermore, another strategic enablers as lack of exterior investment and the ageing of population makes Russia more vulnerable and less strong than China.

In summary, what it puts this two powers as the main concerns for the United States is its capability to weak the current international system from inside<sup>58</sup>.

After describing both revisionist powers as the main threat, the paper introduces “*rogue-states*”<sup>59</sup> as next concern. Like its earlier version, current NDS aims to North Korea and Iran as the main destabilizing agents in its regions.

The North Korean case is, *a priori*, which seems to have an earlier solution. After signing the agreement between Trump and Chairman Kim Jon-un, the end of the conflict appears possible. Until this agreement, North Korea was developing its missiles program. Under this program, the North Korean regime has developed some missile which range of action could reach American soil. The Hwasong-15, for instance, has this capability<sup>60</sup>.

On several occasions, Mattis has pointed out they were warned by last administration that North Korea would be the first crisis to deal with. A great demonstration was the first travel overseas of Mattis which had Tokyo and Seoul as destination.

Despite of the willingness between both. is too early to confirm the goodwill of the North Korean chairman. If it would be confirmed, there is no doubt that Trump would be achieve a tremendous success. In less than two years, the current Administration would have reverse the situation of the conflict. But also, if the agreement achieves its goals, it would mean a huge change in the balance of power of the region. China would lose influence in its neighbor and therefore in the region. This fact would benefit the U.S. and would strengthen the maritime belt which constrict nowadays the most populated country of the world<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> In this particular point, the NDS name the international system as *post-WWII*. From the point of view of the author of this paper, this denomination is not correct since the system which China and Russia want to subvert is not bipolar, but unipolar, surged after the end of the Cold War.

<sup>59</sup> Concept used in NDS of 2002, p.13.

<sup>60</sup> For more information: [online] <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/29/asia/north-korea-missile-tests/index.html>

<sup>61</sup> This belt goes from Korean peninsula to Vietnam, and includes Japan, Taiwan and Philippines.



Referring Iran, the NDS highlights that “*is competing with its neighbors, asserting an arc of influence and instability while vying for regional hegemony, using state-sponsored terrorist activities, a growing network of proxies, and its missile program to achieve its objectives*”<sup>62</sup>. Unlike North Korea, it seems that relations between Persian state and the U.S. do not have appearance to improve in the short term, at least<sup>63</sup>. That turns Iran as the most worrying concern after China and Russia.

After the revocation of the deal, Trump and his Administration has returned at square one. Expert of the weakness of the Persian economy, the U.S. government has taken the decision to not ratify the deal elaborated by the previous Administration. This decision, has exposed the divergence in western civilization. While the United States is withdrawing of the agreement, European Union still in. Both actors have a different vision of it. For the U.S. it does not possesses the necessary guarantees that assure Iran will never reactivate its military nuclear programme. For the European Union, yet, the agreement will allow Iran develop its economy and will reduce the animosity of the Iranian society against West. Such discrepancy puts Europe before a great opportunity to show its relevance as a key actor. Nonetheless, the EU should reinforce its efforts in Defense, not to mention deepen its unification process, specially homogenizing approaches on foreign policy.

This two threats, revisionist powers and rogue states use all of power dimensions to end with American hegemony. To address those attacks, Mattis asserts The United States must use its intimidation power (hard power) as its inspiration power (soft power)<sup>64</sup>.

One of the keys that arise from the document is the need to adapt to a scenario in steady change. Technology has changed battlefield, blurring it, expanding the fog of war for all the globe. On this point, Mattis outlines the relevant role of States which are “*the principal actors on the global stage*”<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> NDS 2018, p.2.

<sup>63</sup> In the interview, mentioned before, Mattis (note nº54) explains the Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington D.C, in a restaurant in Georgetown.

<sup>64</sup> With this asseveration, Mattis follows Joseph Nye Jr. as he points out that “*ignore the use of force and the relevance of security would be as ignore oxygen. In normal circumstances, oxygen is abundant and we do not pay attention to it. But when these conditions change, and we start to miss it, we cannot think in other thing*” in NYE jr, Joseph. “La paradoja del poder norteamericano”, Taurus, Madrid, 2003.

<sup>65</sup> NDS 2018, p.3. This sentence confirms the influence of classical realism on the current Administration.

Another powerful statement which confirm the realistic view that distils the document, consists in to affirm that “*it is now undeniable that the homeland is no longer a sanctuary. America is a target*”<sup>66</sup>. As the last NDS pointed out, the idea of invulnerability of the United States was buried through the rubble of World Trade Center. Without doubt, the superpower is aware of its limits.

After detailing the main threats which the United States has to face off, the document follows with the goals that the Department of Defense (DoD) pursues. Its guidelines are:

- Defending the homeland from attack;
- Continuing as the predominant military power.
- Assuring that the balances of power are in favor of the United States.
- Promoting an international system which provide security and prosperity.

In this regard, the U.S. has to have the strategic competition with China and Russia as a priority, which requires a sustained investment. Moreover, the DoD will continue the struggle against rogue states and terrorist groups.

Following the assumptions of Morgenthau, the NDS states that this competition with revisionist powers will require the “*seamless integration of multiple elements of national power-diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military*”<sup>67</sup>. To achieve this, the U.S. must be “*strategically predictable, but operationally unpredictable*”<sup>68</sup>. This locution resumes the international position of the U.S.: raise awareness its strategic aims (and its red lines) but keeping the unknown about its particular response with which will react before a determinate action. This is, preserve the surprise advantage, avoiding that the competitor can develop an effective counter-strategy.

To preserve this advantage on its rivals, the United States has to extend the space of

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Thereafter, the Secretary of Defense barely devoted some words to describe the role of Non State Actors on the global stage.

<sup>66</sup> NDS 2018, p.3.

<sup>67</sup> NDS 2018, p.4. This sentence is almost a copy of classification of factors which form national power did by Morgenthau in MORGENTHAU, Hans J. “Politics Among Nations. The struggle for Power and Peace”, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1948, pp. 80-105.

<sup>68</sup> NDS 2018, p.5.

competition to those fields where it exceeds them. To make it possible, the DoD is focused in three main lines of effort:

- I. Build a more lethal force; “*The surest way to prevent war is to be prepared to win one*”<sup>69</sup>. Following the pattern of the last National Security Strategy “*peace through strength*”, the U.S Armed Forces must be prepared to face an aggression in three key regions: Indo-Pacific (against China), Europe (against Russia), and the Middle East (Iran). Furthermore, the DoD will prioritize the modernization of key capabilities, as the renew of the nuclear triad or investment on Cyberdefense<sup>70</sup>. Another necessary pillar in this line of action is the attraction of talent. For the DoD is crucial to improve public-private cooperation, which will allow the private sector to contribute in a better way.
- II. Strengthen alliances and attract new partners<sup>71</sup>; the DoD has as priorities:
  - Expand and strengthen alliances in Indo-Pacific region.
  - Strengthen NATO: referring this, Mattis points out that it’s necessary to end with terrorist threat and Russian interference, but ads “*we expect our European allies to fulfill their commitments to increase defense and modernization spending to bolster the alliance*”<sup>72</sup>.
  - Form long-term alliances in the Middle East<sup>73</sup>; with the aim to avoid that the region become in a sanctuary for terrorists and will not be dominated by any hostile power to the U.S.
  - Preserve stability in the Western Hemisphere.
  - Supporting associations to address terrorist threats in Africa; working with local partners and European Union, mainly.

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<sup>69</sup> NDS 2018, p.5.

<sup>70</sup> In this topic, the NDS put the focus into create a “*Global Operating Model*” which improve versatility, flexibility of the Armed Forces to face a volatile security system.

<sup>71</sup> “*Nations with no allies do not survive. Our best advantage are our allies*”, statement made by Mattis in “Defending the Nation with... op.cit. min: 33:40.

<sup>72</sup> NDS 2018, p.9.

<sup>73</sup> Under Obama’s Administration, the number of allies in this region dropped out from 50 to 39. Nowadays, are 41, among which are two muslim nations. “Defending the Nation... op.cit. min.35

- III. Reforming the Department's (DoD) business practices: upon the proposal of the Secretary Mattis, the DoD is going to be audited for the first time in seventy years<sup>74</sup>. With a budget around seven hundred billion<sup>75</sup>, The Pentagon by itself, is the 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy. That being so, it turns imperative the reform of the DoD, with the aim that accountability and efficiency will be the maxims which govern The Pentagon.

### ***National Strategy for Counterterrorism***

The last official document published by Trump's Administration is the National Strategy for Counterterrorism<sup>76</sup> (NSFC). After a first approach, we can outline the great similarities with NDS published in February. Already in the introduction, President Trump points out the connection between terrorist groups and the States who sponsor them. This statement goes in the same direction as what is mentioned in NSS of 2017<sup>77</sup>. Hence, despite of the will to bring a new approach on fight against terrorism, the prescriptions that the NSFC outlines are the same as what were prescribed in the National Counterterrorist Strategy of 2011.

However, to sum up we can explain some genuine comments from the current NSFC.

Firstly, we can detect some confusion at the time to connect terrorist groups with a global reach and the network sponsored by Iran. Terrorism sponsored by Iran has a regional reach, fundamentally. Hezbollah, for instance, is a tremendous threat to Israel and Saudi Arabia, but it does not affect directly the territory of the U.S. In this regard, we can affirm that Iran has avoided, with success, use its "pawns" to attack directly American targets, albeit probably yes to its intermediaries.

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<sup>74</sup> "Defending the Nation... op.cit. min 35:40.

<sup>75</sup> After an increase around 61.000 million in 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Published on October, 2018. [online]: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Published on December, 2017. For a more detailed analysis: TORRES SOSPEDRA, Jorge: "La Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional de Trump: ¿reforma o revolución?", Asociación Areté, 27th June 2018. [online]:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/594a1b1ce6f2e1b67d763d70/t/5b335fa9575d1f26aa1d1fb3/1530093482286/PP22+-+La+estrategia+de+seguridad+nacional+de+Trump.+%C2%BFReforma+o+Revolucio%CC%81n%3F.pdf>

Secondly, in the document radical Islamists groups are noted as the main enemies for the United States. But it goes further, and it concretizes the threat to those groups that “*seek to conduct attacks globally...*”<sup>78</sup>. This might collide with the content of the previous paragraph. Instead, the document reaffirms the connection between global terrorism and the Persian country: “*We continue to face threats from Iran, the most prominent state sponsor of terrorism, through its global network of operatives and its ongoing support to an array of terrorist groups*”<sup>79</sup>.

Thirdly, is interesting to comment the concept of resilience. As almost every official document, the Counter Terrorism Strategy remarks the need that American society has to reinforce its capability to recover from any attack. Certainly, the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> represented a tremendous test to this ability.

Moreover, and continuing with the strategic thinking which predominates in the current Administration, the possibility to be attacked is real, and therefore is critical to overcome to any adverse situation as soon as possible.

Finally, the document adds another interesting development: the extension of the concept of “*national territory*”<sup>80</sup>. This new approach means go further of the border to persecute the enemies who want to use violence against the United States.

In brief, this strategy supposes a reaffirmation of the guiding principles already explained by Trump’s Administration in the NSS and the NDS.

## Conclusions

As we have seen, in the decade which is between the current National Strategy for Counterterrorism, the National Defense Strategy and the NDS elaborated by Secretary Gates in 2008, some significant changes. Among these, should be stressed:

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<sup>78</sup> National Strategy for Counterterrorism, p.1.

<sup>79</sup> Op.cit. p.1.

<sup>80</sup> “*This strategy differs from previous strategies in that it adopts a more agile and expansive approach that addresses the full spectrum of terrorist threats to the United States, including our enemies overseas and the people they seek to influence and mobilize to violence in the United States*”, National Strategy for Counterterrorism p.2.

1. Terrorism is no longer the priority; after September 11<sup>th</sup>, successive Administrations have pointed terrorism out as the main threat to the nation. However, the current NDS notes that the competition for power is between great powers as the principal challenge for Trump's Administration. This point turns evident the fact of Counterterrorist Strategy has been the last document to be published, nearly two years after of Trump's triumph.
2. The return of the States; connected with the last paragraph, the NDS envisages States as the main actors on the global stage, and barely name terrorist groups and another NSA (Non State Actors). It represents a great shift inside of the DoD because, in the last NDS (2008) terrorism was the first threat, relegating foreign powers to the third place. Therefore, both NDS envisage same threats but not with the same relevance.

Notwithstanding, despite of these changes, there are some points in common:

- I. All documents have the same aim: protect the nation and keep the global preeminence of the United States. This fact is transcendental to understand the U.S. idiosyncrasies. As Paul Pillar notes, NDS and the rest of official documents (NSS, NPR<sup>81</sup>), are a mix between political leadership and Department's bureaucracies<sup>82</sup>. Thus, it exists a reduced leeway for a revolution on the U.S. role on the global stage. In this regard, we can affirm the new NDS is less "*trumpist*" than the NSS and the NSFC. As an example, we cannot find the famous term "*America First*". Moreover, it is clear that the U.S. remained undaunted to keep an open and free international order<sup>83</sup>. This nuance is a clear exponent of the level of cohesion and coherence which DoD has.
- II. Both NDS highlights the same threats to United States, despite they differ about the relevance of each one. Both documents point out rogue-states (North Korea and Iran), great powers (China and Russia) and terrorist groups as the main challenges to American security.

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<sup>81</sup> Nuclear Posture Review.

<sup>82</sup> PILLAR, Paul R. "Unipolar Strategy in a Multipolar World" , The National Interest, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> GLICKMAN, Gabriel. "Back to the future: the potential of Great-Power conflict", The National Interest, Feb 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018.



In sum, the current NDS supposes a “realist turn” on the arguments maintained by DoD in 2008. As I tried to highlight throughout the paper, the current NDS follows the theoretical framework established by authors who belongs to the realist school, especially Robert Kagan. If we read all his work, specially his book “The return of history and the end of the dreams”<sup>84</sup>, we will check the similarities with the document elaborated by DoD. One of those similarities between both documents is the demystification of the Kantian fallacy about the “*perpetual peace*”<sup>85</sup> of which authors like Francis Fukuyama echoed<sup>86</sup>. Kagan criticizes that this vision is unable to recognize that progress is not inevitable<sup>87</sup> and states that the liberal order is the result of the victories on the Second World War and the Cold War. Likewise, he adds the following statement, which contains itself the strategic thinking of the current NDS:

“But those victories were not unavoidable, and do not have to be durable. Actually, the resurgence of great autocratic powers [China and Russia], along with the reactionary forces of radical Islamism has weaken this order and threats to weaken it more in the next years or decades”<sup>88</sup>.

And concludes his book, once again, with a disturbing reflection and surprise us:

“Reinhold Niebuhr, who always warned of the ambitions of the United States and its excessive faith on its power. He also believed, with a faith and ambition, that the world problem cannot be resolved if the United States do not accept all its quote of responsibility to solve it”<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> KAGAN, Robert. “El retorno de la historia y el fin de los sueños”, Taurus, Madrid, 2008.

<sup>85</sup> KANT, Immanuel. “Perpetual Peace”, Fq Classics, Minneapolis, 2007. In its book, Kant defends an international order which favors peace. This model would be based in democratic republics which will assumed the naturals (and antagonistic) human dispositions. That is its indissoluble gregariousness which makes the man lean to conflict. Nevertheless, Kant believes it is possible to avoid this natural disposition with a legal framework, something that have created several debates about if it is possible or not to constrict the human nature.

<sup>86</sup> FUKUYAMA, Francis. “The End of History?”, National Interest, 1989. In his work, the author points out that after defeating communism, mankind had reached to the top of its progress. At this moment, without other rival, the democratic (western) model will expand to the rest of the world and the “perpetual peace” will rule the world.

<sup>87</sup> KAGAN, Robert. “El retorno... op.cit. p. 159.

<sup>88</sup> Ibidem, p. 160.

<sup>89</sup> NIEBUHR, Reinhold. “American Power and World Responsibility”, Christianity and Crisis, 1943. [online]:

And continues:

*“Today, the United States share this responsibility with the rest of the democratic world, which is definitely stronger than in the end of the Second World War. The future international order shall be established by those who have the power and collective will to shape it. The question is if liberal democracies will meet the challenge”<sup>90</sup>.*

In contrast to the previous Administration, more inclined to idealist’s thesis<sup>91</sup>, the current one has chosen to avoid utopias and face the geopolitical reality from a (classical) realistic approach.

Now it remains to know if the rest of the free world assume the challenge.

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<http://providencemag.com/wp-content/uploads/American-Power-and-World-Responsibility.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> KAGAN, Robert. “El retorno... op.cit p. 160-161.

<sup>91</sup> Convinced that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”, posture which has been criticized for both sides of the political spectre. Quoted by Obama, this sentence was taken from Martin Luther King Jr, who took from the cleric Theodore Parker. Authors like Charles Krauthammer wrote that “the retreat of the American power has not brought nothing but geopolitical chaos and a tremendous human suffering (in Syria)”. But critics also came from liberal scholars as Shami Hadid. HADID, Shami. “Obama and the limits of Fact-Based Foreign Policy”, The Atlantic, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017. (online) <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/01/obama-foreign-policy/513380/> Both opinions mentioned on GLICKMAN, Gabriel, “Back... op.cit.