



CENTRE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

DEFENCE WHITE PAPER PROJECT

Review of the United States
National Security Strategy,
2015

SANKALP MISHRA

EDITED BY: AAKRITH HARIKUMAR

About the author

Rayan V Bhagwagar is a Postgraduate student at the Jindal School of International Affairs.

About the Centre for Security Studies

The Centre for Security Studies (CSS) was established in 2020 as the Jindal School of International Affairs' first student-run research centre under the aegis of Prof Dr Pankaj K Jha. Researchers at CSS – through in-depth analysis briefs and events, reports, policy briefs and print publications – explore both regional and thematic topics in the broader field of international security studies. The concept of international security has been expanded to reflect not merely the study of state security, but also include topics like ethnic, sectarian and religious conflict; civil wars and state failure; cyber and space warfare; resource related security issues; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; defence economics and also the role of ethics or morality in the formulation of security policies. The complexity of these matters is what the Centre for Security Studies attempts to unfold. Please refer to www.cssjsia.com for further details, and follow the Centre's social media platforms for critical news and research updates:



www.linkedin.com/company/jindal-centre-for-security-studies/



www.instagram.com/css_jsia/



<https://twitter.com/Css Jsia>

Get in touch with us through email: css@jgu.edu.in

Important Disclaimer

All views expressed in this publication belong to the author and do not reflect the opinions or positions of the Centre for Security Studies. While researchers and editors at CSS strive towards any instances, CSS as an organisation does not take any responsibility for any instance of plagiarism committed by any authors. The onus to ensure plagiarism-free work lies with authors themselves.

WD2207019

The US National Security Strategy document acts as the primary document published by the US government, highlighting the strategic concerns of the state along with how the state shall function strategically in the given timeframe to secure its mainland from external as well as internal threats. The document comprehensively lays out the national security strategy of the state in a point-by-point manner and announces the larger security objectives of the state. The 2015 document, published by the Obama administration, is no different. From highlighting the role of the United States as the leader of the liberal international order to the significant withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, the document covers every key aspect of US national security from 2015. The document also provides an insight into the approach taken by the Obama government in the international arena, indicating implicitly the foreign policy practised by his administration. Herein, it is imperative to note the link between foreign policy and national security strategy. The 2015 document projects the less aggressive and diplomatic approach followed by Obama in the way it's written and how it hopes to achieve its objectives. However, the document goes beyond the approach of the Obama administration and covers key tenets of American policy in general as well. The document emphasises ideas of democratic transition, nuclear proliferation, economic interdependence, and America's zeal for leading by example. Reviewing the 2015 national security document not only provides context for the situation in 2015 but also helps analyse and compare the current US security strategy in the modern world.

The initial paragraphs of the document very well recognise the dynamic changes in the world order wherein it addresses the rise of China and India in Asia and America's constant tussle with Russia. The assumptions made in 2015 by the Obama administration regarding the rise of certain global powers, such as China, stand accurate in the context of the current world order. However, the tussle with Russia, which was prominent in 2015, now seems overshadowed or replaced by the contest with China. In this very context, the document tries to provide a framework for future American leadership and how America can continue to be the world leader by setting an example and leading with purpose. The emphasis on building new partnerships and seizing opportunities falls directly under the umbrella of leading with purpose. The 2015 document genuinely believed in cooperation and regional partnerships as the larger scheme for American leadership in the future. Although the transition in 2017 with Donald Trump coming to power challenged this larger scheme, which was propagated by the Obama administration and pushed for a more aggressive American leadership as the way forward. The election of President Biden in 2021 again turned the tide and established American leadership on principles similar to those preached by President Obama. As mentioned above, these variances in policy amongst three different administrations indicate how the administration in power is detrimental in formulating the strategy for the nation.

Focusing specifically on security challenges, the 2015 national security document mentions North Korea, Iran, and Russia as the major obstacles for the future. The question of nuclear proliferation, according to the American lens, is inherently tied to the disarmament of Iran and North Korea. The regime in North Korea is not only procuring weapons of mass destruction but also its autocratic functioning, which stands in contradiction to the American principles of democracy and freedom. The US views North Korea as a constant threat to peace and security and has continued to maintain a firm stance against the country till date. In the case of Iran, the situation is a bit more complex. Under the 2015 document, there is a constant press on negotiations as the way forward. However, Iran's repetitive attempts at sabotaging the negotiations acted as the major roadblock in reaching a comprehensive agreement. Iran's attitude towards the entire process led to a change in the American stance from 2015 to 2018. Under Trump's administration, the US security strategy viewed Iran as similar to North Korea and wanted the complete banishment of both states at one point. Nuclear proliferation has been a point of significance for US national security ever since, and the 2015 document reiterates the same. Moreover, given the current security environment in 2022, having a long-term nuclear policy is beneficial and necessary due to the ease of access to technology. Moving beyond the cases of Iran and North Korea, the American tussle with Russia is multifold and historical. The 2015 document lays special emphasis on the American tussle with Russia on the issue of terrorism, with the situation in Syria at the centre. The US government in 2015 stood in opposition to the Russian advances in Syria as they viewed Russian involvement as adding fuel to the fire. On several occasions in 2015, the American government accused Russia of supplying arms to the rebels and supporting terrorist causes. However, with the downfall of ISIS and the US taking credit for its destruction, the contest with Russia simmered down and put the US on a pedestal. The tussle with Russia highlighted another important aspect of American security strategy in 2015: terrorism.

In the 2015 document, the US government explicitly mentioned terrorism as a significant threat that needs to be countered for the establishment of long-term peace across the globe. The eradication of ISIS and its related outfits remained a top priority back then. The US involvement in Syria and Afghanistan indicated the same. Ever since the 9/11 attacks, the eradication of terrorism has been an integral part of the US security strategy. Additionally, countering terrorism falls in line with the long-term American policy of maintaining peace and security. The 2015 document expresses that the US government would go to any extent, if need be, to stop radical groups from disrupting peace worldwide. The same stance remains in 2022. However, the aggressive stance toward the Middle East emerging out of terrorism has changed from 2015 to 2022. The democratisation process in the Middle East mentioned in the 2015 document has lost steam in 2022 as the US government under Biden has stopped overemphasis on the region. The Middle East was the hotbed for American security strategy in 2015 due to the power politics the region had to offer. The US government viewed the Middle East as a breeding ground for emerging

democracies, with the US heading the process of democratisation. However, that strategy was short-lived once President Trump came into power. The politics of the Middle East also evolved and a strong anti-western sentiment took over, resulting in a counter wave against American aggressiveness. Unlike the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific region was not a hotbed back then. In 2015, the United States' Indo-Pacific policy was neutral and balanced. Even the 2015 security strategy document mentions the American policy of rebalancing the Indo-Pacific without any major disruptions.

However, it is to be understood that under the present geopolitical situation, the focal point of American policy lies in the stabilisation of the emerging Indo-Pacific region, which is emerging as a major player. It is under this pretext that American policy seeks to become a leader in this region through its idea of cooperative leadership through purpose by increasing regional cooperation and partnership. It is under this understanding that America wishes for major players in this region to tie up with American aims and support its idea of building a force in this region to reckon with. The South China Sea dispute, which was on the rise, was another important factor that served as the second tenet for the policy toward the Indo-Pacific region. It was at that very stage itself, around 2015 when there was an expectation that this dispute could boil down this deep when America had predicted such a drastic outcome. It is 2022 now and China has emerged as a major global power and is dominating the South China Sea dispute by handling it solely with its sovereign force. It is in light of this same development that America wants emerging players in the region to join them to bring in some form of stability and play the role of the balancing act in the region.

In addition to regional cooperation and partnerships, the 2015 strategy document also highlights the importance of strengthening international organisations. The US has always had significant stakes in international organisations. The entire discourse of economic interdependence that the United States leads stems from its strong presence in organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization. 2015 document, the Obama administration also mentioned strengthening and utilising international organisations for maintaining peace and security. The United Nations Security Council has been a playground for the US to legitimise its actions. Hence, it would be fair to argue that international organisations play an essential role in American national security strategy. Under the Biden presidency, too, the US approach towards international organisations remains the same due to his belief in accessing diplomatic channels as the primary means to resolve disputes.

Lastly, an integral part of American security strategy in 2015 was countering the threat of climate change. The Obama administration was actively against climate change and viewed it as a real threat to security. However, this stance soon diminished after Donald Trump's election as he pulled out of the Paris accord, changing the entire discourse of American security policy. Until 2016, America was seen as the leader in combating climate change with its constant efforts to reduce carbon emissions. In 2022,

with Biden coming into power, there is hope for revival and a vision for countering a threat such as climate change. Additionally, the 2015 document also indicates massive spending on cyber and space security, which are much newer forms of security threats. These go beyond conventional security threats and require innovative solutions. Hence, in 2015, America was focused on developing a strong cyber and space security regime to counter such unconventional threats.

Conclusively, it can be argued that from 2015 to 2022 the American security strategy has gone through several changes. However, the key tenets remain the same. The future of American leadership in today's security environment depends on its ability to adapt to the dynamic changes and counter the emerging threat of China. The Obama and Biden administration may show glaring similarities but the nature of the global order has evolved and requires resilience and committed leadership. Reviewing the 2015 document provides a solid backdrop for the future planning of American security strategy.