UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES THROUGH TIME

John J. Chin, Kiron Skinner, and Clay Yoo

Since 1986, Congress has required each president to write a national security strategy. How has this security document changed over the years, and where are the continuities and breaks between administrations? John Chin, Kiron Skinner, and Clay Yoo have mapped out the content and structure of the national security strategies that have been released since 1986 to answer these questions.

On Oct. 12, 2022, the Biden administration released its long-awaited *National Security Strategy*.[1] What's new in it, and how much is "old wine [strategy] in a new bottle"? More broadly, how can we assess continuity and change in U.S. national security strategies over more than four decades?

Section 603 of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 requires each president to regularly transmit to Congress a classified and comprehensive national security strategy, though since 1987 presidents have opted to instead publish unclassified national security strategies for public distribution.[2] Given that it typically acts as the "umbrella" strategy guiding other high-level U.S. strategy documents — including the national defense strategy, quadrennial defense review, and national military strategy — the national security strategy is *the* strategic planning document for the making and execution of U.S. foreign policy. It communicates, explains, and sells an administration's foreign policy objectives and priorities to Congress, the American public, and various foreign audiences. It also aims to cajole a sometimes-resistant national security bureaucracy itself.[3] Though presidents may ignore their own national security strategy, if any words matter, the words in this document do.

Although most new administrations have political incentives to emphasize change in their national security strategy vis-à-vis their predecessor (for President Joe Biden, this would amount to an "anything but Trump" political imperative), we actually observe several long-term trends that mark continuity or gradual change in the content and concerns of both Democratic and Republican strategies. The text of national security strategies thus provides a window into the contours and constants of American grand strategy. Although each national security strategy is a product of its time (and administration), we find that managing great-power competition is a perpetual theme in recent reports. As academic political scientists (Skinner and Chin) and an AI engineer (Yoo), we leverage both deep qualitative knowledge on U.S. foreign policymaking and quantitative text analysis and data visualizations to help put Biden's 2022 *National Security Strategy* in its comparative and historical context.

We proceed as follows. First, we qualitatively summarize the historical context and what is publicly known about the bureaucratic process (contributors, motivations, and debates) behind national security strategy documents from President Jimmy Carter through President Donald Trump.[4] Second, we address continuity and change across the organization of national security strategy documents. Finally, we present figures and descriptive statistics from an original quantitative dataset of the text of each of 23 national security strategy documents for the last

1 "National Security Strategy," The White House, October 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf. For media coverage, see David E. Sanger, "Biden's National Security Strategy Focuses on China, Russia and Democracy at Home," *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/12/us/politics/biden-china-russia-national-security.html.

2 The legal requirements for the national security strategy are codified in 50 U.S. Code §3043. For the text and legislative history, see https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/USCODE-2021-title50/USCODE-2021-title50-chap44-subchapI-sec3043/summary. Despite statutory requirements that this report be published within 150 days of inauguration and annually thereafter with the president's annual budget submission, accepted 21st-century practice (since the George W. Bush administration) has been to only publish one national security strategy per term. Though the 2022 *National Security Strategy* took unusually long to release (around 20 months compared to an average of around 12.5 months), Joe Biden in fact became the first president to meet the statutory 150-day deadline under Goldwater-Nichols with the publication of the 2021 *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*.

3 Alan G. Stolberg, *How Nation-States Craft National Security Strategy Documents*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012, 71–72, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11525. For a brief but useful discussion of the different audiences and (cross-)purposes for the national security strategy, see Don M. Snider, *The National Security Strategy: Documenting Strategic Vision*, 2nd ed., Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1995, 5–6, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/244/.

4 For an excellent review of the historical evolution of post-World War II strategic planning processes, see Paul Lettow, "U.S. National Security Strategy: Lessons Learned," *Texas National Security Review* 4, no. 2 (2021): 117–54, http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/13195. The preponderance of Lettow's analysis focuses on Cold War-era strategic planning, with only four pages covering post-Cold War presidencies from Clinton through Trump. By contrast, this article focuses only on national security strategy documents since 1977, with more comparative emphasis on the post-Cold War era.

45 years, from 1977 to 2022. Our approach builds on pathbreaking research using modern natural language processing and text data analysis techniques to "graph the grammar" of motives in national security strategy documents.[5]

Setting the Stage: A Historical Review of U.S. National Security Strategies, 1977 to 2017

The modern formulation and publication process for this document has its origins in the late Cold War. Earlier American presidents varied greatly in their strategic planning processes.[6] Although Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower developed strategy documents — such as George Kennan's "Long Telegram" (1946), Truman's NSC-68 (1950), or Eisenhower's NSC-162/2 (1953) — presidents from John F. Kennedy through Gerald Ford eschewed writing a comprehensive national security strategy of the kind that we might recognize today.

The unbroken line of national security strategy documents extending to today thus starts in 1977. PD/NSC 18 and the next three national security strategy documents were all classified, including Carter's 1981 "Modifications in US National Strategy" (PD 62) and Ronald Reagan's first two national security strategy documents from 1982 (NSDD 32) and 1986 (NSDD 238). Since 1987, 19 unclassified national security strategy documents have been published.[7] These include two by Reagan (1987 and 1988), three by George H. W. Bush (1990, 1991, and 1993), seven by Bill Clinton (1994 to 2000), two by George W. Bush (2002 and 2006), two by Barack Obama (2010 and 2015), one by Trump (2017), and two by Biden, if one includes the *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* published in March 2021.

Let us start to put the national security strategy text in context by briefly reviewing prior literature on the historical debates and the bureaucratic process behind each national security strategy document.

Jimmy Carter

At the outset of the Carter administration, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski commissioned Harvard professor Samuel Huntington (a friend and former co-author of Brzezinski, who shared an academic political science background) to spearhead a comprehensive study of the global (i.e., U.S.-Soviet) strategic balance and search for alternatives to the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of détente, resulting in Presidential Review Memorandum 10 (PRM-10).[8] Much as NSC-68 was crafted early in the Cold War to push a major arms buildup to counter the Soviet Union, Huntington and early contributors to PRM-10 hoped to "scare the Carter administration into greater respect for the Soviet menace."[9] PRM-10 identified adverse trends — such as a Soviet military buildup in the Persian Gulf — justifying a policy of "competitive engagement" and beefing up strategic capabilities to maintain "essential equivalence" with the Soviet Union.[10]

Presidential Directive 18 (PD-18) on "U.S. National Strategy," signed on Aug. 24, 1977, echoed PRM-10's call for the United States to maintain strategic parity with the Soviet Union. It also upheld the importance of NATO and U.S. forward defense in Europe and authorized new mobile forces that could respond to global crises. Carter's national security team was divided over the implications of PRM-10. According to Brzezinski:

> *One side preferred to limit our strategic forces to an assured destruction capability and to consider reducing our forces in Europe and Korea. ... The other side, on which I found myself, pointed to the momentum and character of Soviet military programs, the vulnerability of the oil-rich region around the Persian Gulf, and the growing Soviet projection of power in Africa, Southeast Asia, and possibly even the Caribbean. The final version of the PD reflected the NSC/Defense preferences*

5 John W. Mohr, et al., "Graphing the Grammar of Motives in National Security Strategies: Cultural Interpretation, Automated Text Analysis and the Drama of Global Politics," *Poetics* 41, no. 6 (2013): 670–700, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2013.08.003.

6 See Lettow, "U.S. National Security Strategy: Lessons Learned."

7 PDF copies of all 17 unclassified national security strategy reports from 1987 to 2017 are published online by the Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, at https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/.

8 The drafting of PRM-10 reportedly involved 175 people and 11 task forces across all of the national security agencies. See David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), 180. The full text of the *Comprehensive Net Assessment and Military Force Posture Review*, The White House, Feb. 18, 1977, is available at the Jimmy Carter Library, https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/memorandums/prm10.pdf.

9 Robert G. Kaiser, "Memo Sets Stage in Assessing U.S., Soviet Strength," *Washington Post*, July 6, 1977, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/07/06/memo-sets-stage-in-assessing-us-soviet-strength/079e53ff-0d84-48ba-81c1-b890f0412a5d/.

10 "Memorandum from William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski)," Sept. 3, 1980, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume I, Foundations of Foreign Policy, Document 156, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v01/d156.

> *for NATO and Korea, the NSC initiative for a Rapid Deployment Force, and a stalemate on the strategic forces issue.*[11]

In his last days in office, Carter issued two final presidential directives. Presidential Directive 63 (PD-63) outlined the outgoing administration's Persian Gulf strategy in detail, including efforts to create a rapid deployment force that could give teeth to the so-called "Carter doctrine."[12] In the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter had prominently used his 1980 State of the Union speech to commit the United States to defending its interests in the Persian Gulf by military force, if necessary.[13] Presidential Directive 62 (PD-62), "Modifications in US National Strategy," amended the 1977 strategy (PD-18) to be consistent with PD-63. PD-62 is unique among the documents we analyze because it is not a full-fledged, stand-alone national security strategy. Instead, before leaving office, Carter used PD-62 to pitch Reagan as the incoming president on continuing efforts to bolster deterrence of Soviet power and influence in the Middle East (and the Caribbean).[14]

Ronald Reagan

Reagan came into office with a unilateralist, messianic, and even Wilsonian vision.[15] From the beginning, opposition to the Soviet Union was central to Reagan's foreign policy thinking.[16] He was the quintessential "conservative internationalist," who ran for president rejecting both the realist Nixon-Kissinger détente policies and Carter's "liberal internationalist" and multilateralist policies.[17]

It was only in February 1982 (shortly after William Clark took over as national security adviser from Richard V. Allen) that a comprehensive strategy review was commissioned (NSSD 1-82).[18] This review was led by staffer Tom Reed, who understood Reagan's desire to have a more assertive approach than Carter's. When Reed asked Reagan what his "end goal" was for the Cold War, "Reagan repeated to Reed what he had told Allen several years earlier: 'We win, they lose.'"[19] With that mandate, Reed drafted Reagan's first national security strategy (National Security Decision Directive 32 or NSDD-32). At a National Security Council meeting convened to discuss a draft of NSDD-32 on April 16, 1982, Reed concluded about the new strategy: "The bottom line is we are helping encourage the dissolution of the Soviet Empire."[20] There were at least two tracks.[21] First, the United States would strengthen existing alliances[22] (especially NATO) and U.S. military investments to roll back or "reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence."[23] Second, the United States would seek to force the Soviet Union "to bear the brunt of its economic shortcomings, and to encourage long-term liberalizing and nationalist tendencies within the Soviet Union and allied countries."[24] Pressuring the Soviet system itself went beyond containment, to the chagrin of the State Department and Secretary of State Alexander Haig, but the idea originated with

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11 Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983), 177–78.

12 Prior to 1980, the Defense Department had dragged its feet in creating a rapid deployment force, but it was belatedly established in March 1980 and based out of MacDill Air Force Base. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 456. Also see William E. Odom, "The Cold War Origins of the US Central Command," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 2 (2006): 59, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925907.

13 Michael T. Klare, "Carter Doctrine," in *The Encyclopedia of War*, ed. Gordon Martel (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338232.wbeow096.

14 Issuing such directives as a lame duck was controversial within the administration. Secretary of State Edmund Muskie objected to issuing PD-62 and PD-63 and refused to review drafts. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 468–69.

15 George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 862–64.

16 Warren Cohen, *A Nation Like All Others: A Brief History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 205.

17 Henry R. Nau, *Conservative Internationalism: Armed Diplomacy Under Jefferson, Polk, Truman, and Reagan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), chap. 7.

18 In 1981, Reagan and his aides were reportedly preoccupied with dealing with the worst domestic economic crisis since the Great Depression. See Cohen, *A Nation like All Others*, 205.

19 William Inboden, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, the Cold War, and the World on the Brink* (New York: Dutton, 2022), 134.

20 William Inboden, "Grand Strategy and Petty Squabbles: The Paradox and Lessons of the Reagan NSC," in *The Power of the Past: History and Statecraft*, ed. Hal Brands and Jeremi Suri (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 162.

21 The "Reagan Doctrine," said Reagan counselor Edwin Meese, involved a military buildup, "engaging the Soviets on a moral plane," containing and rolling back aggression, and "developing a strategic defense initiative." Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 223.

22 "NSDD-32 emphasized the importance of allies perhaps more than any other national strategy document in American presidential history." Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 137. Yet NSDD-32 also called for more alliance burden-sharing, singling out "NATO members and Japan in particular as needing to increase their military spending" and deployments. Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 138.

23 "National Security Decision Directive 32, 'U.S. National Security Strategy,' 20 May 1982; NSSD 1-82 Study Attached, 'U.S. National Security Strategy,' April 1982, Top Secret," National Security Archive, accessed July 7, 2023, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/20310-national-security-archive-doc-25-national.

24 John L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 355. For skepticism on consensus in the Reagan administration behind a coherent strategy, see Melvyn P. Leffler, "Ronald Reagan and the Cold War: What Mattered Most," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 3 (2018): 79–81, https://doi.org/10.15781/T2FJ29W93.

Reagan, and was backed by Clark, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, CIA Director William Casey, and Attorney General Edwin Meese.[25] Reed would call NSDD-32 "The Plan to Prevail" in the Cold War.[26]

Like his 1982 strategy, Reagan's 1986 strategy continued to emphasize rollback and made clear that human rights would not be ignored, as the strategic competition between the United States and Soviet Union was also "in the realm of ideas and values."

NSDD-32 was followed up with a Soviet strategy (National Security Decision Directive 75 or NSDD-75) approved in January 1983, which was "a compromise between hard-liners in the National Security Council and pragmatists in the Department of Defense and the State Department."[27] Its main author was Richard Pipes, a hawkish Harvard history professor then serving as National Security Council Senior Director for Soviet Affairs.[28] NSDD-75 elaborated on NSDD-32's theme of U.S. pressure to "turn Soviet energies from expansion to internal reform."[29] Reagan's strategy "entailed pressuring the Soviet system on every front — military, economic, ideological, diplomatic — not only to exploit its weakness, but to produce a reformist leader" from whom Reagan could seek "negotiated surrender."[30]

As one of us has written, the Reagan administration — largely in response to growing and persistent terrorist attacks emanating from the Middle East — began to gradually develop a new grand strategy distinct from earlier Cold War strategies of containment.[31] By 1985, Reagan believed that his military buildup gave him a position of strength from which to negotiate with the Soviet Union (and for them to keep their agreements), leading him to launch nuclear arms reduction negotiations.[32] Reagan thus issued an updated national strategy, National Security Decision Directive 238, in September 1986, which was drafted under the supervision of then National Security Adviser John Poindexter. The 1986 *National Security Strategy* was the first to declare as an official goal of the national security policy the protection of the United States from a terrorist attack, mentioning terrorism for the first time in the context of countering "Soviet support and use of proxy, terrorist, and subversive forces." Like his 1982 strategy, Reagan's 1986 strategy continued to emphasize rollback and made clear that human rights would not be ignored, as the strategic competition between the United States and Soviet Union was also "in the realm of ideas and values."[33] Democracy promotion had become an important component of Reagan's grand strategy.[34]

Reagan published the first public national security strategy in January 1987. Prepared quickly in the wake of the passage of Goldwater-Nichols at the end of 1986 and in light of the Iran-Contra scandal then rocking the administration, the 1987 *National Security Strategy* did little more than document "current strategic thinking." It displayed "a strong emphasis on military instruments of power, almost to the exclusion of the others."[35] In addition, the 1987 National Security Strategy deployed the term "state sponsors of terror" for the first time. Reagan's final national security strategy, published in 1988, was prepared by Don Snider, an army officer tasked to

25 Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2006), 85.

26 Paul Kengor and Patricia Clark Doerner, *The Judge: William P. Clark, Ronald Reagan's Top Hand* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), 167.

27 Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 867. Interestingly, it is said that "Reagan was isolated from the NSC by White House advisors and his wife, Nancy, who feared that the ideologues who staffed it would reinforce his hard-line tendencies." Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 865.

28 Pipes was assisted by Roger Robinson. Kengor and Doerner, *The Judge*, 169.

29 Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 138.

30 Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 139, 141.

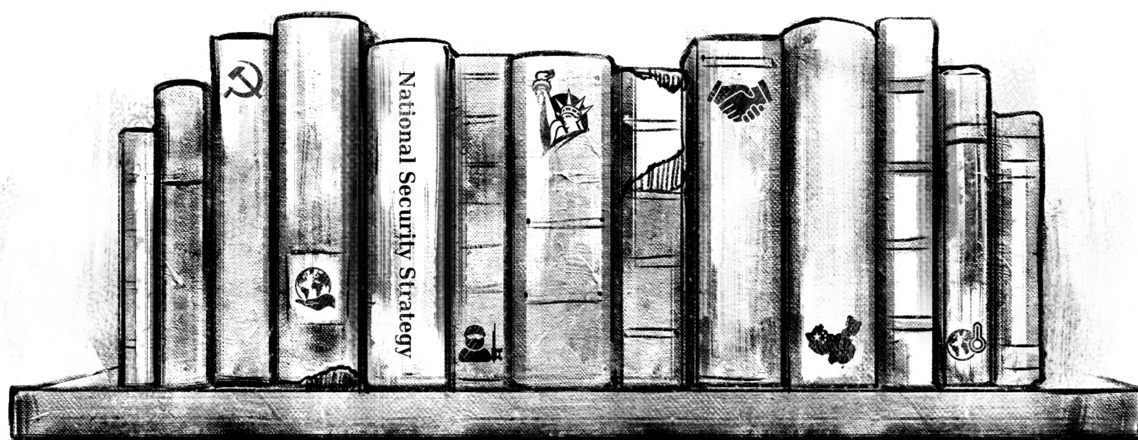
31 Kiron K. Skinner, "The Beginning of a New U.S. Grand Strategy: Policy on Terror During the Reagan Era," in *Reagan's Legacy in a World Transformed*, ed. Jeffrey L. Chidester and Paul Kengor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 101–23. One result was Reagan's elevation of the Carter-era rapid defense force into U.S. Central Command, the first new regional command in 35 years.

32 Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 895. As Henry Nau argues, "Ronald Reagan did not change his strategy from his first term to the second. He used the arms buildup in the first term to enable the arms reductions in his second." Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 57.

33 Inboden, *The Peacemaker*, 409.

34 Ionut Popescu, "The Intellectual Roots of Reagan's Foreign Policy," in *The Reagan Manifesto: "A Time for Choosing,"* ed. E. D. Patterson and J. H Morrison (New York: Springer, 2016), 17. The 1987 report's epigraph quotes Reagan: "Freedom, peace and prosperity … that's what America is all about … for ourselves, our friends, and those people across the globe struggling for democracy."

35 Snider, *The National Security Strategy*, 6–7.



the National Security Council. Snider identified two major changes between the 1987 and 1988 national security strategy reports. First, the 1988 report emphasized economic statecraft more, reflecting rising political concern with the twin (budget and trade) deficits. Second, the 1988 report was the first to present separate strategies for each region.[36]

George H. W. Bush

If Reagan was a hedgehog, knowing one (big) thing about how to win the Cold War, his successor was a fox, knowing many (little) things about how to adroitly manage its end.[37] Bush, his National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, and Secretary of State James Baker averred abstract global thinking and long-range planning.[38] But Bush came to office believing that "Reagan had gone too far both in his early belligerence toward the Soviet Union and his later cozying up to Gorbachev. … The administration thus took office clinging to traditional Cold War views and prepared to contain" the Soviet Union.[39] The rapid pace of change in global events from the outset of 1989 forced them into a reactive, tactical mode.

Bush's first *National Security Strategy* was drafted by National Security Council staff in late 1989 and early 1990 amid the fall of the Berlin Wall and negotiations over German unification. Published in March 1990, the *National Security Strategy* argued that revolutionary changes meant that the United States had to shape a new, rapidly emerging post-Cold War era, "one that moves beyond containment."[40] The 1990 *National Security Strategy* enumerated core U.S. national interests conventionally as follows: survival of U.S. democratic values and institutions; economic prosperity; and "[a] stable and secure world, fostering freedom, human rights, and democratic institutions."[41] Observers generally characterized this strategy — and Bush's foreign policy writ large — as a rather "cautious" response to great upheaval.

Scowcroft, a protégé of Henry Kissinger who saw

36 Snider, *The National Security Strategy*, 7.

37 The hedgehog-fox distinction alludes to a distinction famously made by British philosopher Isaiah Berlin. Even if he lacked "the vision thing," Bush "had the good sense to let history take its course." Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 862, 900–901.

38 Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 482–84.

39 Cohen, *A Nation like All Others*, 223.

40 Inboden, "Grand Strategy and Petty Squabbles," 15. The proposal to go "beyond containment" was introduced in a speech Bush gave at Texas A&M University in spring 1989, which had been drafted by National Security Council staffer and Soviet Union specialist Condoleezza Rice. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 904.

41 The term "fostering" here suggested a need for a "new world order" but also indicated that the United States would encourage, but not impose, democracy abroad. Bartholomew Sparrow, "Realism's Practitioner: Brent Scowcroft and the Making of the New World Order, 1989–1993," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (2010): 172–73, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24916037.

himself as a "realist,"[42] drafted NSC-45 in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, reiterating the Carter doctrine laid out in PD-62 and PD-63[43] and demanding Iraq's withdrawal. Although mostly completed by February 1991, the document was only published in August, in part due to pre-occupation with the Gulf War. The 1991 *National Security Strategy* argued that post-Cold War "international relations promise to be more complicated, more, volatile and less predictable." It cautioned against a retreat to isolationism *à la* the 1920s and 1930s. The Bush administration's final national security strategy, published in January 1993, was different from its predecessors insofar as it "was intended quite clearly to document the accomplishments of the past rather than to point to the way ahead." Like the 1991 *National Security Strategy*, it called for a shift from a strategy of containment to one of what was called from 1992 "collective engagement."[44]

Rather than the January 1993 *National Security Strategy*, it was the 1992 *Defense Planning Guidance* drafted by Defense Department officials Paul Wolfowitz, Scooter Libby, and Zalmay Khalilzad that made waves and was seen by many observers as the lasting strategy legacy of the administration. Although Scowcroft dismissed the draft *Defense Planning Guidance* as "arrogant," its approach of "choosing primacy" may have reflected Bush's belief in the need to use American power to promote American values abroad.[45] The draft Defense Planning Guidance was consistent with the view in the Department of Defense espoused by William Manthorpe, then deputy director of the Office of Naval Intelligence, that the United States should focus on the rise of the next "big threat" (e.g., major-power competition), not smaller threats (e.g., terrorism).[46] The 1993 *National Security Strategy* emphasized hegemony less, instead foreshadowing the Clinton strategy with a call for America to work toward making the 21st century an "Age of Democratic Peace."[47]

Bill Clinton

The Clinton administration's search for a post-Cold War strategy — what insiders called the "Kennan sweepstakes" — was led by a task force under National Security Adviser Anthony Lake.[48] National Security Council speechwriter Jeremy Rosner coined the term "enlargement" to denote the strategy of expanding the community of capitalist (liberal) democracies.[49] In addition to enlargement, "enhanced engagement" was pushed by advisers such as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Winston Lord to overcome the difficulties of a more confrontational policy of "principled engagement" of China. By 1994, Clinton made an "about face" on China policy, delinking human rights from China's most-favored-nation status (such linkage was imposed after the 1989 Tiananmen Square repression).[50] Soon after, the 1994 "En-En" document, the *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, crystallized this line of thinking. It was undergirded by a "liberal theory of history," which assumed that economic engagement (globalization) would drive economic development (even of potential near-peer competitors), that economic development would drive democratization (modernization theory), and that democratic enlargement would spur peace (democratic peace theory).[51] Thus, Russia was not a country to be contained but one to be aided in its "double transition" to a market economy and a democracy.[52] Likewise, Clinton's strategy from 1994 was designed to facilitate the gradual liberal-

42 Cohen, *A Nation like All Others*, 223; and Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 901.

43 Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 391.

44 Snider, *The National Security Strategy*, 8–9.

45 Hal Brands, "Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 2 (2018): 10–11, https://doi.org/10.15781/T2VH5D166.

46 On the Manthorpe Curve as a diagnostic tool of post-Cold War grand strategy, see Thomas P. M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 63–79.

47 Within the Bush administration, State Department officials drafted a rival end-of-term strategy to the Defense Department's, which was embdeded in a secret memo from outgoing Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleberger to his Clinton administration replacement, Warren Christopher. Derek H. Chollet and James M. Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars, from 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 46–50.

48 Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 65–66.

49 The strategy of democratic enlargment was first outlined by Anthony Lake in September 1993. Daniel Williams, "Clinton's National Security Advisor Outlines 'Strategy of Enlargement,'" *Washington Post*, Sept. 22, 1993, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/09/22/clintons-national-security-adviser-outlines-us-strategy-of-enlargement/8dac4844-ba80-4785-b4ea-27cea2db769e/.

50 On the terminological shift from "principled" to "enhanced" engagement, see Rothkopf, *Running the World,* 350. For the history of Clinton's policy of engagement, see James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Vintage, 2000), chap. 16.

51 On the liberal theory of history, see Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas that Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

52 See Stephen E. Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 405–9.

ization of the Chinese Communist Party regime.[53] This amounted to a grand strategy of westernizing Russia and China.[54]

Yet the Clinton strategy was not fully "idealist," nor did it abandon concerns of upholding a favorable military balance. In February 1995, Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye issued the *U.S. Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*, which limited force reductions to keep 100,000 U.S. troops in Asia.[55] This strategy called for bolstering America's defense alliance with Japan. The logic for doing so, as Nye put it, was Bismarckian and involved hedging against the possible failure of engagement:

> *As I looked at the three-country East Asian balance of power, it seemed likely that it would eventually evolve into two against one. By reinforcing rather than discarding the US-Japan security alliance, the United States could ensure that the Americans could afford to engage China economically and socially and see whether such forces would eventually transform China. Rather than turning to military containment, which would confirm China as an enemy, the US pursued engagement while it consolidated its alliance with Japan in the triangular balance, secure in the knowledge that if engagement failed to work, there was a strong fallback position. This strategy involved elements of liberal theory about the long-term effects of trade, social contacts, and democracy but it rested on a hard core of realist analysis.*[56]

However, in contrast to the Cold War containment strategies or the "primacist" strategy proposal in the 1992 draft *Defense Planning Guidance*, [57]the Clinton administration became increasingly concerned by mounting transnational and non-traditional threats. Facing crises of nation-building from Somalia to Bosnia to Haiti, Clinton feared a "coming anarchy" driven by poverty and state failure.[58] Clinton was an "anti-realist," according to James Steinberg, Clinton's second-term deputy national security adviser.[59] Democratic peace was the goal — the 1996 *National Security Strategy* used the term "democracy" or "democratic" more than 130 times.[60] More so than his predecessors, Clinton centered his foreign policy strategy on the power of "geo-economics" — one of his first acts in the national security space was to create the National Economic Council and several of his signature policies involved trade policy, including the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (which had been negotiated under Bush) and the establishment of the World Trade Organization. In short, Clinton "bet his presidency on globalization."[61] Yet, terrorism also rose in strategic importance during his tenure.[62] Clinton saw the United States as the "indispensable nation" and a force for integration in a liberal international order,

More so than his predecessors, Clinton centered his foreign policy strategy on the power of "geo-economics"...

53 For an early critique of the assumptions of the strategy of engagement of China since the Nixon administration, see James Mann, *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression* (New York: Viking, 2007).

54 Michael Mandelbaum, "Westernizing Russia and China," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (1997): 80, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1997-05-01/westernizing-russia-and-china. Though the assumptions here were widespread, many doubted that a strategy based on regime transformation or regime change would work. On the history of repeated failed Western efforts to change China, start with Jonathan D. Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisers in China, 1620-1960* (New York: Penguin, 1969). As noted below (see footnote 76), this strategic bet persisted under George W. Bush.

55 Ambrose, *Rise to Globalism*, 412.

56 Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Power in the Global Information Age: From Realism to Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–2.

57 On the 1992 draft *Defense Planning Guidance* as an expression of the "primacist" tradition of American foreign policy, see Nau, *At Home Abroad*, 51, 263.

58 Clinton sent a copy of Robert Kaplan's 1994 cover article in The Atlantic to his entire cabinet and senior foreign policy advisers. Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 100–101. See Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic*, Feb. 1, 1994, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/304670/.

59 Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 152.

60 Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 319.

61 Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 153.

62 Clinton signed PDD-62, "Protection Against Unconventional Threat to Homeland and Americans Overseas," which Nancy Soderberg called the first federal "integrated and comprehensive counterterrorism strategy." Nancy Soderberg, *The Superpower Myth: The Use and Misuse of American Might* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2005), 165.

and he viewed terrorists as forces of disintegration.[63] According to Sandy Berger, Clinton's second-term national security adviser, from 1998 the Clinton administration saw terrorism as "the dominant threat" facing the United States.[64]

Though Clinton published national security strategy documents annually after 1994, they were not widely anticipated, read, or debated — the Kennan sweepstakes had expired. The report's title was changed in Clinton's second term, with the title *National Security Strategy for a New Century* quietly replacing *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* in 1997. Clinton's final strategy — the *National Security Strategy for a Global Age* — was published in December 2000, right before the end of his second term. Rather than an attempt to shape strategy, it reads more as a "pat on the back" for a job well done, not all that dissimilar from Bush's 1993 *National Security Strategy*.

George W. Bush

The younger Bush's incoming national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, wanted to break what she saw as the cycle of the national security strategy as a "bottom-up bureaucratic exercise" that was not taken seriously inside or outside the administration. The first draft was written by Philip Zelikow with the aid of National Security Council staffers Michael Gerson and Steven Hadley, and speechwriter Michael Anton.[65] Rice took the lead in editing and composing the draft that "largely survived an interagency process piloted by Steve Biegun," the National Security Council's executive secretary.[66] Much like the Reagan doctrine confronted the Soviet Union on a "moral plane," the 2002 *National Security Strategy* cast the struggle against terrorism in stark ideological terms, one in which "we are ultimately fighting for our democratic values and way of life."[67] The 2002 *National Security Strategy* involved a blend of idealism and realism, encapsulated well in its stated goal of "a balance of power that favors freedom." The part of the 2002 *National Security Strategy* that got the most press (and criticism) was the elaboration of a strategy of unilateral preemption against imminent threats from terrorist "enemies of civilization."[68] Critics such as Brzezinski saw the 2002 *National Security Strategy* as the heir to the 1992 draft *Defense Planning Guidance*. The 2002 *National Security Strategy* reaffirmed the "essential role of American military strength" and, echoing the "primacist" thrust of the 1992 *Defense Planning Guidance,* argued directly that "[o]ur forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States."[69]

But the 2002 *National Security Strategy* was not "primacist" all the way down — its principal authors were Scowcroft-style academic realists, not neoconservative ideologues.[70] Instead, the 2002 strategy sought to put realism into the service of liberal ends. The means and tone of Bush's strategy differed from Clinton's in important ways, but Bush's *National Security Strategy* was also rooted in a "liberal theory of history."[71] Moreover, the 1992 *Defense Planning Guidance* was premised on the idea that the biggest threat to the United States was returning great-power competition. The 2002 *National Security Strategy*, by contrast, identified the greatest threat as nuclear terrorism, more generally called "the crossroads of radicalism and technology." It emphasized the cooperative engagement of other major powers, including Russia and China.

In his second inaugural address, Bush announced the so-called "Freedom Agenda," which was incorporated into the 2006 *National Security Strategy* drafted by Peter Feaver and William Inboden, leaders

63 Clinton reportedly "devoured" and frequently talked about the ideas in Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996). Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 247.

64 Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars,* 267.

65 For Zelikow's perspective on the 2002 *National Security Strategy* and innovations therein, see Philip Zelikow, "The Transformation of National Security: Five Redefinitions," *National Interest*, no. 71 (2003): 17–28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42895592.

66 Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown, 2011), 153.

67 Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 154.

68 The 2002 *National Security Strategy* was followed up with the 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, drafted in part by National Security Council staffer Adm. William McRaven. Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 155.

69 *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, September 2002, 30, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2002.pdf.

70 "[H]awks in the Pentagon and in Vice President Cheney's office hadn't been closely involved, even though the document incorporated many of their key ideas." James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 331.

71 "The ideals of Woodrow Wilson were to be revived, this time linked hand in hand with America's unprecedented military power." Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 329.

of the re-established strategic planning directorate.[72] The opening line of the 2006 *National Security Strategy* states: "It is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. In the world today, the fundamental character of regimes matters as much as the distribution of power among them."[73] Applied to the Middle East, the "final piece of the Bush Doctrine" called for abandoning previous U.S. preference for "stability over democracy." According to Rice, the Freedom Agenda "was not just a moral or idealistic cause; it was a redefinition of what constituted realism."[74] This brand of "American realism," reflected in the 2006 *National Security Strategy*, is distinct from the traditional "continental realism" advocated (and practiced) by the likes of Richard Nixon and Kissinger.[75] Just as Clinton's strategy of engagement was premised on the belief in America's ability to change Russia and China,[76] Bush's strategy was premised on America's ability to transform the Middle East.[77] The 2006 *National Security Strategy* thus shares the optimism of Reagan's strategy. Just as NSDD-32 sought to "rollback" Soviet communism, Bush sought to shrink the "freedom gap." Yet, the 2006 *National Security Strategy* also softened the controversial preemption statements from the 2002 *National Security Strategy* and was innovative in summarizing the goals of the 2002 *National Security Strategy* and the "successes and challenges" over the previous four years, as well as the "way ahead."

Barack Obama

Obama leaned on Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes to craft his administration's foreign policy messaging. Rhodes thus became the main author of the 2010 *National Security Strategy*,[78] under the direction of National Security Adviser Gen. James Jones and drawing on the Obama administration's *National Security Priorities Review*.[79] In introducing the 2010 *National Security Strategy,* Rhodes emphasized that the administration took a broad view of national security challenges, from ensuring the nation's global economic competitiveness to dealing with global climate change.[80]

In contrast to Reagan's or Bush's emphasis on military investments and unilateral action, the 2015 National Security Strategy "makes a case for U.S. multilateral leadership in the world, with an overriding emphasis on non-military forms of power."

The concept of "rebalancing" was central to the Obama national security team's view of its grand strategy.[81] The term "rebalance" or "rebalancing" appears five times in both the 2010 *National Security Strategy* and the 2015 *National Security Strat-*

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72 Lettow, "U.S. National Security Strategy: Lessons Learned," 150. They consulted with respected strategiests outside the government, including Steven Krasner, John L. Gaddis, and Eliot Cohen. For background on the drafting of the 2002 and 2006 national security strategies, see the case study on the United States in Alan G. Stolberg, "How Nation States Craft National Security Documents," in *Crafting National Security Documents: Country Case Studies and Comparisons*, ed. Ginnie Waylon (New York: Novinka, 2014), 48–62.

73 *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, March 2006, 1, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2006.pdf.

74 Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 325.

75 On continental realism and the evolution of U.S. foreign policy traditions, see Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 34–77.

76 George W. Bush largely kept Clinton's strategy of engagement vis-à-vis China. Robert Zoellick, Rice's deputy secretary of state, argued in a 2005 speech that America's goal was not to balance China per se but to make China a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system. Robert B. Zoellick, "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?" *NBR Analysis* 16, no. 4 (2005): 5, https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm.

77 Bush publicly praised Natan Sharansky's book *The Case for Democracy*, which, on its back cover (below a presidential blurb from Bush himself), contends,"The question is not whether we have the power to change the world but whether we have the will." See Natan Sharansky and Ron Dermer, *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny & Terror* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

78 David E. Sanger and Peter Baker, "New U.S. Strategy Focuses on Managing Threats," *New York Times*, May 27, 2010, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/28/world/28strategy.html. Interestingly, the term "national security strategy" never appears in Rhodes' memoir. See Ben Rhodes, *The World as It Is: A Memoir of the Obama White House* (New York: Random House, 2019). For a profile of Rhodes as Obama's long-time foreign policy voice and lead on national security communications strategy, see David Samuels, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign-Policy Guru," *New York Times*, May 5, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/the-aspiring-novelist-who-became-obamas-foreign-policy-guru.html.

79 Waylon and Stolberg, "Case Study: United States," 63.

80 *Open for Questions: National Security Strategy with Ben Rhodes, NSC, May 27, 2010*, YouTube, accessed Aug. 29, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFiAgK65Ni0.

81 James Mann, *The Obamians: The Struggle Inside the White House to Redefine American Power* (New York, Penguin, 2013), 340.

egy.[82] In a 2011 interview, Rhodes emphasized rebalancing as being about "getting beyond" the "forever wars" in the Middle East so as to shift more focus onto other regions and policy problems.[83] Signaling an end to Bush's "global war on terror," the 2010 *National Security Strategy* downgraded counterterrorism, which it says "cannot define America's engagement with the world." Another key element of "rebalancing" was the so-called "Asia pivot" or "Asia rebalance" — devoting a higher priority to the Asia-Pacific region and dealing with China.[84] Despite the adoption of a rhetoric of humility (in part to distinguish Obama from his predecessor), some elements of the 2010 *National Security Strategy* are consistent with Bush-era versions. For example, the 2010 *National Security Strategy* shares the optimism about the possibility of muted great-power competition and revives Clinton-era calls for "engagement" as a cornerstone policy.

The 2015 *National Security Strategy* did not elaborate much that was new or cohesive and went largely unnoticed. It identified a plethora of threats (as national security strategy documents have increasingly done since Clinton), but "avoids identifying the most and least important." In contrast to Reagan's or Bush's emphasis on military investments and unilateral action, the 2015 *National Security Strategy* "makes a case for U.S. multilateral leadership in the world, with an overriding emphasis on non-military forms of power." In contrast to the unrestrained optimism of the Reagan and George W. Bush national security strategies, the 2015 *National Security Strategy* was "restrained in its expectations for how the United States can influence military and political outcomes on the ground."[85] One notable element of the 2015 document was the elevation of "strategic patience" to one of Obama's general foreign policy principles.[86]

Donald Trump

National Security Adviser Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster hired Nadia Schadlow as his deputy to craft Trump's national security strategy. Immediately prior to joining the Trump administration, Schadlow wrote an article arguing that Trump should center (great-power) competition in his national security strategy.[87] As noted by Paul Lettow, the principal drafters of the 2017 *National Security Strategy* "believed that the United States was overdue for a national security strategy that focused on the challenges faced from China especially, as well as from Russia, and other, more regional rivals."[88] Their view was informed by China hawks outside of the administration such as Princeton politics professor Aaron Friedberg, who had long taken aim at the decades-old consensus around "engagement" of China.[89] The result was a nationalist or "America First" *National Security Strategy* that, uniquely among modern national security strategy documents, openly eschewed the liberal theory of history that undergirded engagement.[90]

Interestingly, it isn't clear that Trump understood the language in the *National Security Strategy* —included with the blessing of McMaster and Schadlow — about the strategy being "based on principled realism." When rolling out the *National Security Strategy*,[91] Trump stumbled over the phrase regard-

82 Two of the uses of this term in the 2010 National Security Strategy emphasize rebalancing the global economy to reduce trade deficits (see pages 4 and 32). One invocation is about rebalancing priorities: "We must rebalance our long-term priorities so that we successfully move beyond today's wars, and focus our attention and resources on a broader set of countries and challenges" (page 9). Another is about rebalancing military capabilities to excel at military operations other than war (page 14). The final reference concerns de-militarization: "[W]e must continue to adapt and rebalance our instruments of statecraft" (page 18). By the 2015 *National Security Strategy*, the term "rebalancing" had narrowed in meaning as shorthand for the "Asia pivot." For example, "We are rebalancing toward Asia and the Pacific while seeking new opportunities for partnership and investment in Africa and the Americas" (page 1).

83 Mann, *The Obamians*, 338, 341.

84 For more background on Obama's Asia-Paficic strategy, see Jeffrey A. Bader, *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012). Also see Kurt M. Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Hachette, 2016). Neither Obama-era national security strategy uses the term "Asia pivot," though the 2015 strategy mentions the "rebalance to Asia" and places a high priority on the Trans-Pacific Partnership in its Asia section.

85 James Goldgeier and Jeremi Suri, "Revitalizing the US National Security Strategy," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2015): 38, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2015.1125828.

86 Patrick Stewart, "Obama's National Security Strategy: New Framework, Same Policies," Council on Foreign Relations, Feb. 6, 2015, https://www.cfr.org/blog/obamas-national-security-strategy-new-framework-same-policies.

87 Nadia Schadlow, "Welcome to the Competition," *War on the Rocks*, Jan. 26, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/01/welcome-to-the-competition/.

88 Lettow, "U.S. National Security Strategy: Lessons Learned," 150.

89 Friedberg has critiqued Henry Kissinger for being an "unrealistic realist" in his embrace of China. See Aaron Friedberg, "The Unrealistic Realist," *The New Republic*, July 13, 2011, https://newrepublic.com/article/91893/henry-kissinger-on-china. For his most comprehensive critique of engagement, see Aaron L. Friedberg, *Getting China Wrong* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2022).

90 For a roundtable assessment of the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, see William Inboden, "Policy Roundtable: What to Make of Trump's National Security Strategy," *Texas National Security Review*, Dec. 21, 2017, https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-make-trumps-national-security-strategy/.

91 Erica Hendry, "Read Trump's Full Speech Outlining His National Security Strategy," *PBS NewsHour*, Dec. 18, 2017, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/read-trumps-full-speech-outlining-his-national-security-strategy.

ing principled realism, saying that the strategy was "based on a principle, realism."[92] He also veered away from some of the *National Security Strategy* messaging and instead gave a campaign-style speech suggesting a "domestically driven and Twitter-fueled approach to foreign policy."[93]

Peter Mattis called the shift from engagement to rivalry seen in the 2017 *National Security Strategy* an "historic break" in U.S. China policy, even if not "locked in either bureaucratically or politically."[94] One of us (Skinner), as the director of policy planning at the State Department from 2018 to 2019, sought to craft a new Kennan-style "X" article to guide the new China strategy.[95] Meanwhile, the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* likewise signaled that the Defense Department was "setting its sights on China and Russia," a shift that represented "the most significant departure in American defense strategy since the end of the Cold War."[96] Days before Trump left office, then-National Security Adviser Robert C. O'Brien declassified a 2018 *U.S. Framework for the Indo-Pacific*, which reportedly guided the administration's execution of the 2017 *National Security Strategy* in Asia and identified China as the leading national security challenge.[97] These moves echo Carter publishing modifications to the 1977 *National Security Strategy* right before leaving office in 1981 as a call to arms in the Middle East.

How Are National Security Strategies Organized?

To ground our understanding of national security strategies through time, we committed to do what few Washington insiders do when reading the national security strategy — we relied on modern data science. We hope that by bringing "hard" quantitative data to the typically "soft" qualitative debates surrounding these strategy documents, we can more precisely identify trends in continuity and change in U.S. national security strategy. Using some methods of natural language processing, we compiled a dataset of all 23 national security strategy documents from 1977 to 2022. These 23 documents total 899 pages of formatted text (less when pre-processed) and include nearly 16,000 sentences. Our primary approach to analyzing national security strategy text is to search for quantitative trends in topics, keywords, and regional priorities across national security strategy documents. This approach is similar to — and extends — the pathbreaking work by John Mohr and colleagues who brought natural language processing and text analysis techniques to "graph the grammar" of motives in earlier national security strategies.[98]

National security strategy documents often fall short of the mandate from Congress for a detailed document with clear articulation of national interests, means-end calculations, threat assessment, and review of needed capabilities (and budgets) to achieve strategic success.[99] But the modern documents do often follow a now set template around the articulation of national interests and regional strategies. This facilitates comparison over time. One key finding here is that the ordering of regional priorities has seen Asia rise and the Middle East fall since the 2010 *National Security Strategy*.

Breadth

As the international threat environment has become more complex, the breadth or scope of national security strategy documents has expanded. Carter's 1977 strategy, for example, was a slender 41 sentences (five pages) that was strictly about how to craft containment of the Soviet Union. As shown in Figure 1, the classified national security strategy documents (those prior to 1987) only referenced a handful of countries and regions, reflecting their relatively narrower scope, whereas unclassified national security strategy documents since 1987 reference an average of 52 countries across all regions.[100]

92 Peter Beinart, "Trump Doesn't Seem to Buy His Own National Security Strategy," *The Atlantic*, Dec. 19, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/nss-trump-principled-realism/548741/.

93 Mark Landler and David Sanger, "Trump Delivers a Mixed Message on His National Security Approach," *New York Times*, Dec. 18, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/18/us/politics/trump-security-strategy-china-russia.html.

94 Peter Mattis, "From Engagement to Rivalry: Tools to Compete with China," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 4 (2018): 81, http://doi.org/10.15781/T2H41K733.

95 Odd Arne Westad, "The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Are Washington and Beijing Fighting a New Cold War?" *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 5 (2019): 87, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-08-12/sources-chinese-conduct.

96 Hal Brands and Evan Braden Montgomery, "One War Is Not Enough: Strategy and Force Planning for Great-Power Competition," *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 80–92, http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/8865.

97 *U.S. Framework for the Indo-Pacific*, The White House, 2018, https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf.

98 Mohr et al., "Graphing the Grammar of Motives in National Security Strategies."

99 This is not for lack of words employed to do so, but the report often is "a cross between a speech and a check-the-box exercise." Lettow, "U.S. National Security Strategy: Lessons Learned," 120. Our data show that the length of national security strategy documents averages 714 sentences (43 pages long), but became longer following declassification in 1987. Clinton's 2000 *National Security Strategy* was the longest ever published at over 1,600 sentences (84 pages). Biden's 2022 *National Security Strategy* clocked in at just under 800 sentences (48 pages).

100 Their inclusion may be driven in part by knowing that regional audiences will be paying attention.

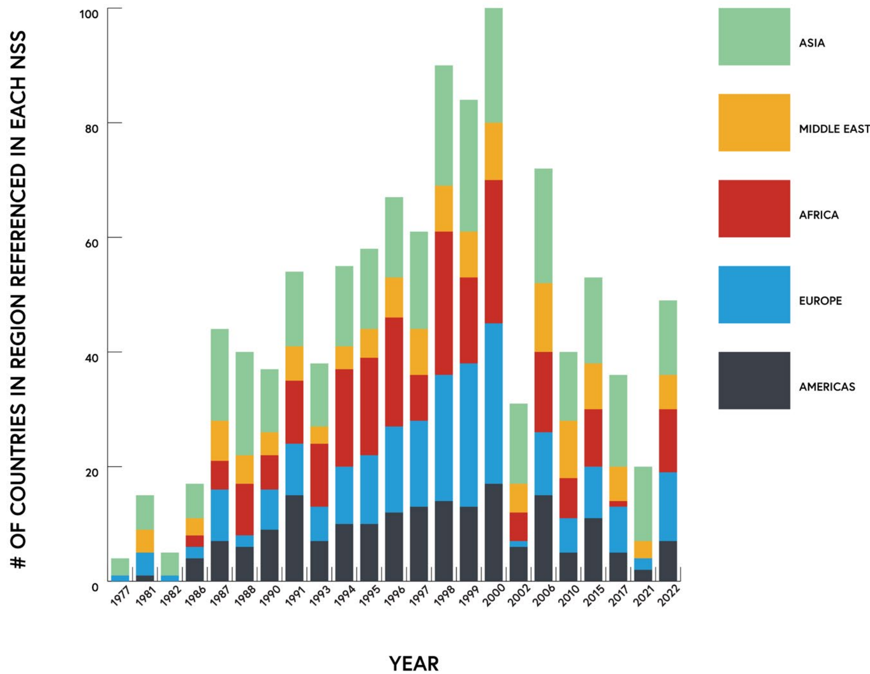


Figure 1: Number of Countries Referenced in National Security Strategies*, 1977–2022*

In March 2021, the Biden administration — even before its full national security team was assembled — unveiled an interim *National Security Strategy*, which was less comprehensive than a full report.[101] Biden's 2022 *National Security Strategy*, by contrast, is comparable in form and regional breadth to his predecessors', referencing more than twice as many countries as his 2021 interim guidance.

Organization

The presentation of information in national security strategy documents has evolved over time and often changes across and even within administrations. Some rhetorical features of national security strategy documents flow from their "speechified" form. For example, the 2022 *National Security Strategy* begins each of its main sections or parts (except the conclusion) with an epigraph/quote from the president. This practice was first introduced in George W. Bush's 2002 *National Security Strategy* and was repeated in Obama's 2010 national security strategy and Trump's 2017 national security strategy.

The number of sections in national security strategy documents ranges from a low of four (each of the Clinton national security strategies had an introduction, an enumeration of U.S. national interests, a review of regional strategies, and a conclusion) to a high of 11 (the 2006 *National Security Strategy* had nine substantive sections, one for each goal/objective, from "Champion Aspirations for Human Dignity" to "Engage the Opportunities and Confront the Challenges of Globalization"). The 2022 *National Security Strategy* has five sections, an introduction and conclusion sandwiching three substantive sections titled "Investing in Our Strength," "Our Global Priorities," and "Our Strategy by Region."

Interests

The last three strategies have been explicitly organized around stated vital U.S. national interests (pillars or lines of effort), which allows for direct comparisons across administrations. Obama's 2015 *National Security Strategy* was organized around four core interests: security, prosperity, values, and international order.[102] Trump's 2017 *National Security Strategy* was organized around four "pillars": homeland security, prosperity, investing in "peace through strength" (namely hard power and diplomatic capabilities), and advancing U.S. influence (through international institutions and soft power). Biden's 2022 *National Security Strategy*, for its part, is organized around three "lines of effort": investing

101 Thanks to a reviewer who notes that the interim guidance was useful to provide justification for Biden's first budget submission, but the cost was inclusion of mostly an "amalgamation of campaign material." *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance,* The White House, March 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf.

102 The 2010 *National Security Strategy* includes the same vital interests as the 2015 *National Security Strategy*, but all are enumerated in a single section rather than each having its own stand-alone section.

in U.S. capabilities and sources of influence (including U.S. industrial policy and democracy), diplomacy, and military modernization. These lines of effort, in turn, are directed at three global priorities: outcompeting Russia and China, galvanizing collective action on shared challenges, and shaping the "rules of the road for technology, cybersecurity, and trade and economics." Like in Obama's strategies, maintaining the "liberal international order" features prominently in Biden's *National Security Strategy*.

Regional Priorities

Carter's 1977 *National Security Strategy* was almost single-minded in its focus on maintaining "essential equivalence" in the balance of capabilities with the Soviet Union. Consistent with earlier Cold War strategies of containment, Carter's focus was first and foremost deterring Soviet aggression in Western Europe. The few references to countries other than the Soviet Union — China, India, and (South) Korea[103] are the only other countries mentioned — are primarily invoked only insofar as they were perceived to affect the U.S.-Soviet balance. Asia was the only other region to get any separate treatment. The relatively narrow Cold War focus on regional balances in Europe and Asia broadened with the 1981 *National Security Strategy* modifications. Reagan's first *National Security Strategy* in 1982 (NSDD-32) leaned into Carter's growing focus on deterrence in "Southwest Asia," which soon led to the creation of U.S. Central Command.

Since 1986, most of these documents include a summary of regional strategies, usually presented back-to-back in subsections.[104] The order of subsections may tell us something about the rise and fall of regional priorities, presuming that regions presented earlier in the document have higher priority.[105] In 1986, the regional order was as follows: Western Hemisphere, Western Europe/NATO, East Asia, Middle East/Southwest Asia, and Africa. This order was preserved in 1987, with the insertion of the Soviet Union/Eastern Europe after East Asia. In 1988, East Asia fell from third to fifth in the order of presentation, ahead of only Africa. In 1990 and 1991, the order was: Soviet Union, Western/Eastern Europe, Western Hemisphere, East Asia Pacific, Middle East and South Asia, and Africa. This marked the first demotion of the Western Hemisphere from first listing and the elevation of Europe to the top of all regional listings. In 1993, the order was: Europe, former Soviet states, Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. This was the first year that Africa was not listed last, and it was also the first time Asia was presented ahead of Latin America. From 1994 through 1998, the order was: Europe and Eurasia, East Asia Pacific, Western Hemisphere, Middle East and South Asia, and Africa. In 1999, North Africa was added to the Middle East, leaving the last region as Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2010, under the international order section, the order (roughly) was: Europe, Asia, North America, Russia, other G20 countries, and Africa. In 2015, the order was: Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East and North Africa, Africa, and the Americas. This was the first year that Asia got poll position, and the second time ever that Africa was not listed last. In 2017, the order was: Indo-Pacific, Europe, Middle East, South and Central Asia, Western Hemisphere, and Africa. In 2022, the order was: Indo-Pacific, Europe, Western Hemisphere, Middle East, Africa, and the Arctic. Asia has topped regional listings since 2010, suggesting that Obama's so-called "Asia pivot" has had a remarkable shelf-life. It remains to be seen whether the inclusion of the Arctic into the discussion of regional strategies will be an anomaly or the start of a trend.

Asia has topped regional listings since 2010, suggesting that Obama's so-called "Asia pivot" has had a remarkable shelf-life.

Another way to get a sense of regional attention within national security strategy documents is to count the share of sentences in each that reference a particular region or a country within that region. This measure is plotted over time in Figure 2.

We can see that most national security strategy documents in the Cold War and early post-Cold War period dedicated more attention to Europe and (East) Asia. There was a spike in attention to the Middle East in 1981, reflecting the amendments to

103 The three references to "Korea" in PD/NSC-19 do not actually clearly distinguish between North Korea and South Korea, but we infer that references to troop withdrawals and deterrence in Korea are principally claims about defense of South Korea.

104 The 2002 and 2006 *National Security Strategy* omit systematic separate enumeration of regional strategies.

105 Below we also consider alternative metrics of frequency of regional mentions in each national security strategy report.

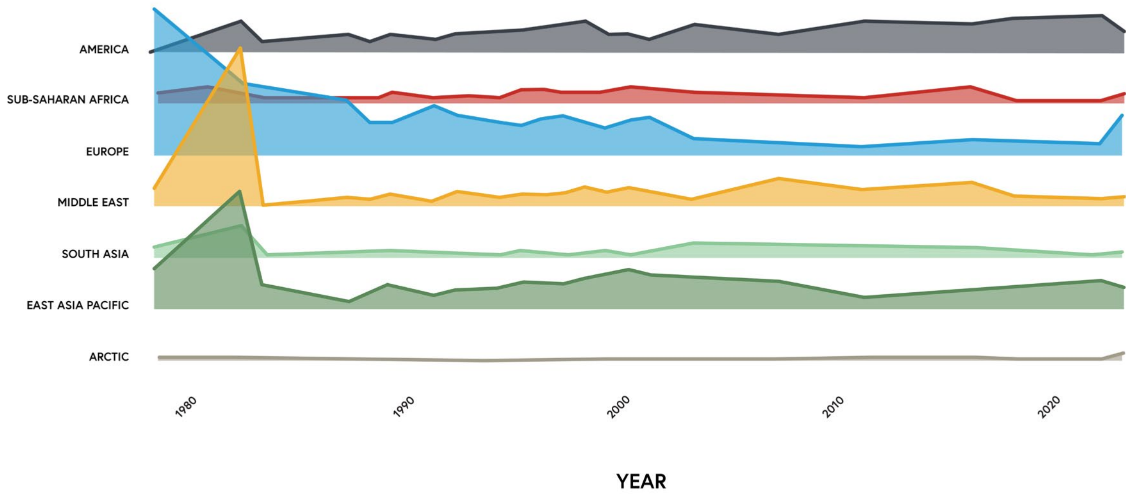


Figure 2: Regional References in National Security Strategies, *1977–2022*

the 1977 *National Security Strategy* to incorporate the Carter doctrine. During the global war on terror, references to the Middle East again outnumbered most regions in the 2006, 2010, and 2015 national security strategy documents, but the Middle East has dropped to fourth place since 2017. By contrast, East Asia became the top-referenced region in Trump's 2017 *National Security Strategy* and Biden's 2021 interim *National Security Strategic Guidance*. The Americas have received consistent attention. Overall, the Indo-Pacific has risen and the Middle East has fallen in priority in recent reports, reflecting a three-president trend since George W. Bush to bring an end to the "forever wars."

Putting Biden's 2022 *National Security Strategy* in Comparative Context

Although a comprehensive comparative text analysis of all national security strategies since 1977 remains to be written,[106] we highlight four key trends in the national security strategy text data that can help readers to put Biden's 2022 *National Security Strategy* in its proper historical and rhetorical context.

A Product of Its Time

Although national security strategies are supposed to communicate a forward-looking grand strategy, they are also reactive insofar as foreign policy objectives are often driven by events on the ground, which can slow publication as early drafts are overtaken by events.[107] Just as the George W. Bush administration scrambled to re-write the 2002 *National Security Strategy* in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, so too was Biden's national security team forced to call a halt in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[108] The first drafts that circulated in the White House in December 2021 had to be revised and updated significantly (personnel shakeups on the National Security Council also played a role in the delay).[109]

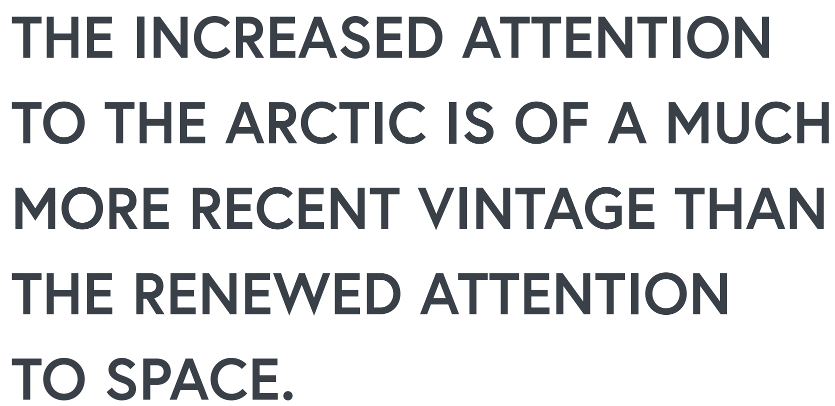
Russia's invasion of Ukraine has raised the strategic importance — or at least rhetorical importance, as proxied by the frequency of references — of both Ukraine and, interestingly, Taiwan. We can measure the frequency of mentions in each strategy that include keyword references to "aggression" (or "aggressive"), "invasion" (or "invade"), "Ukraine", or "Taiwan". The slim 1977 *National Security Strategy* refers to "aggression" four times, but always in the abstract sense of deterring aggression against NATO or South Korea. The term all but disappeared from the

106 Our historical review above goes some way in sketching out the assumptions, worldview, and context of each national security strategy, but reasons of space preclude us from a full-blown comparative text analysis here with side-by-side comparisons of all assumptions, enumeration of national interests and values, objectives, and explicit or implicit theories of victory (means-ends logic).

107 The time that it took each administration to publish its first, complete national security strategy is listed as follows in months since inauguration: Carter (7.17), Reagan (11.84), Bush I (13.32), Clinton (17.33), Bush II (19.89), Obama (15.32), Trump (10.36), and Biden (20.71).

108 Joe Gould, "White House Aims to Release Overdue Security Strategies within Weeks," *Defense News*, Aug. 1, 2022, https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/08/01/white-house-aims-to-release-overdue-security-strategies-within-weeks/.

109 Sanger, "Biden's National Security Strategy Focuses on China, Russia and Democracy at Home."


THE INCREASED ATTENTION
TO THE ARCTIC IS OF A MUCH
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THE RENEWED ATTENTION
TO SPACE.

national security strategy by 2010. Yet, references to "aggression" (15 mentions) and "Ukraine" (five mentions) spiked in 2015 in the wake of Russia's invasion of Crimea. Whereas the 2021 interim *National Security Strategic Guidance* never refers to "Ukraine" or "invasion", the 2022 *National Security Strategy* mentions "Ukraine" 31 times and "invasion" seven times.

A similar, if less stark, pattern can be seen with Taiwan. The 2021 interim *National Security Strategic Guidance* devotes only one sentence to Taiwan, saying merely that the United States would support Taiwan "in line with longstanding American commitments." The 2022 *National Security Strategy* devotes a full paragraph to Taiwan. This rhetoric is set against growing ambiguity over Biden's commitment to the "One China" policy and concern that "Taiwan could be next." The Taiwan Strait — the site of U.S.-Chinese crises in 1954, 1958, and 1996 — is again on the national security strategy radar as a global flashpoint.

The latest national security strategy similarly elevates previously "peripheral" regions as potential global flashpoints. In Part IV, the 2022 *National Security Strategy* includes novel regional sections for the Arctic and "Sea, Air, and Space," reflecting a broadening concept of regional competition. The increased attention to the Arctic is of a much more recent vintage than the renewed attention to space. Space policy featured prominently in national security strategy documents in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but references to "space" gradually declined under Clinton to a low of only one reference in the 2002 report. Space has had more coverage since 2010, with about 2 percent of sentences in each report since. Given that the Trump administration stood up a Space Force as a distinct armed service in 2019,[110] attention to space is unlikely to go away. Turning to the Arctic, whereas the 2021 interim guidance does not reference "the Arctic" at all and the 2017 *National Security Strategy* only refers to it once, it is mentioned 18 times in the 2022 *National Security Strategy*. Indeed, just days before releasing the 2022 National Security Strategy, the White House released its *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*,[111] which replaced the first ever such strategy from 2013 that the Trump administration had largely ignored.[112]

Getting Back to Great-Power Competition

It goes without saying that national security strategies during the Cold War, from 1977 through 1991, were largely focused on great-power competition with the Soviet Union. The thawing and end of the Cold War meant that early post-Cold War national security strategies saw a relatively deemphasized focus on major-power rivals and instead focused on growing non-traditional and transnational threats ("protecting against transnational threats" was included as a stated goal for the first time in the 1991 *National Security Strategy*). The transnational threat that has loomed largest in post-Cold War national security strategy documents, at least from the late 1990s, is terrorism. Osama Bin Laden's name appears in the national security strategy for the first time in 1998 in the wake of the East Africa embassy bombings. The Taliban is mentioned seven times in Clinton's 2000 *National Security Strategy* and is identified as a "serious threat" in part "for harboring Usama bin Ladin and other terrorists."[113] In the wake of 9/11, the 2002 and 2006 *National Security Strategies* elevate terrorism to *the* key security threat. The 2002 *National Security Strategy* identifies the Taliban and al-Qaeda as "enemies of civilization." As shown in Figure 3, references to "terror" (as well as "terrorist" and "terrorism") ballooned in George W. Bush's national security strategy documents, reflecting his administration's commitment to fighting the global war on terror and prosecuting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to a rather conventional Latent Dirichlet Allocation model that identifies 15 topics in national security strategy text, terrorism became the top topic in 2002 (sliding to second place in the 2006 *National Security Strategy*).

Terrorism language in the national security strategy declined in subsequent documents to levels closer to those of the 1990s. Whereas the 2006 *National Security Strategy* refers to "terrorism" a whopping 124 times, the last Obama national security strategy (2015) only had a quarter as many (33) such references. Since Obama, terrorism has never been higher than the fourth or fifth most mentioned topic, according to our Latent Dirichlet Allocation models. Following America's withdrawal from Afghanistan, terrorism once again is only one among a litany of "shared threats" (as the 2022 *National Security Strategy* calls them) that the United States and other states must confront, with the topic back at levels of the 1990s. The term "state sponsors of terror," first used in the 1987 *National Security Strategy*, became common in

110 "About Space Force," U.S. Space Force, accessed Nov. 5, 2022, https://www.spaceforce.mil/About-Us/About-Space-Force/.

111 *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, The White House, October 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Strategy-for-the-Arctic-Region.pdf.

112 In 2019, Trump's Defense Department issued America's first-ever Arctic strategy. But, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out to us, the 2019 strategy had been required by Congress and did not commit the department to providing additional resources or budget for Arctic deterrence. David Auerswald, "A U.S. Security Strategy for the Arctic," *War on the Rocks*, May 27, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/05/a-u-s-security-strategy-for-the-arctic/.

113 However, the warning is buried in the section on South Asia and not elevated to a global concern.

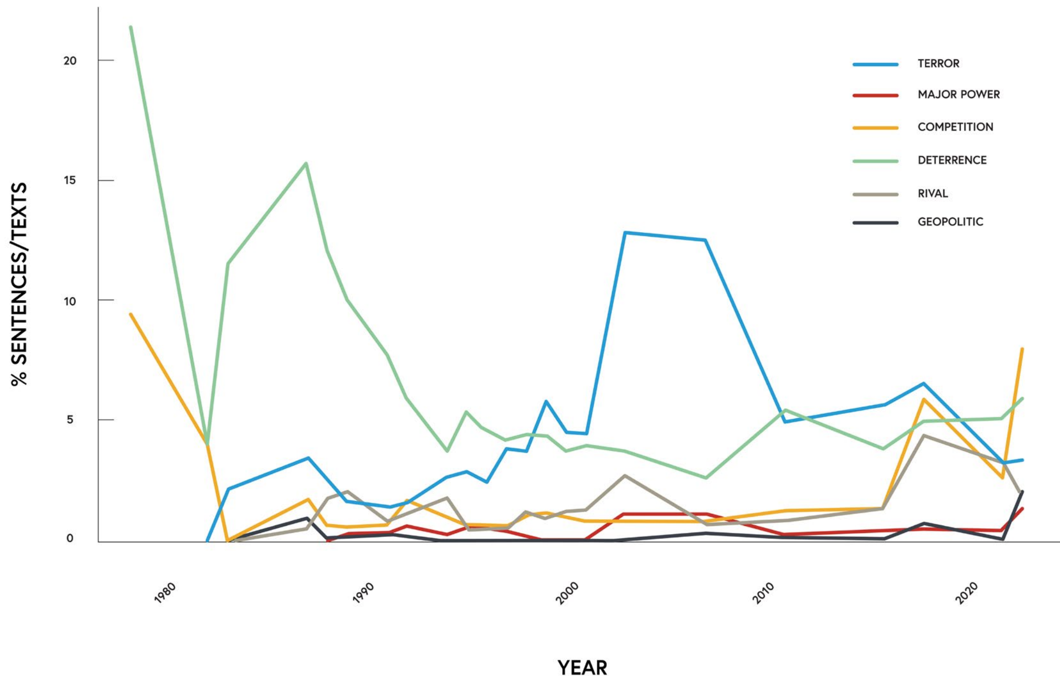

Figure 3: Terrorism vs. Great-Power Competition Terms in National Security Strategies*, 1977–2022*

national security strategy documents through 2006 but has not been used since (except in 2017).

As terrorism has declined in importance within national security strategies, major-power competition — of the kind that was central to the Cold War era — has risen in importance. The 2002 *National Security Strategy* all but wrote off great-power competition. As Bush put it in his preface:

> *Today, the international community has the best chance since the rise of the nation-state in the seventeenth century to build a world where great powers compete in peace instead of continually prepare for war. Today, the world's great powers find ourselves on the same side — united by common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos.*

The shift back toward great-power competition began with Obama and has only continued. The 2010 *National Security Strategy* was the first since 1997 in which the term "rival" (or its derivatives) was more frequently used than "terror" or its derivatives. Trump's 2017 *National Security Strategy* marked the first time in the post-9/11 period that references to major powers — Russia and China — exceeded those to Iraq and Afghanistan. With China and Russia framed as competitors challenging American power, the 2017 *National Security Strategy* explicitly called for rethinking the two-decades-long policy of "engagement" with rivals that was designed to make U.S. near-peer competitors "responsible stakeholders." However, Trump's *National Security Strategy* identifies Russia and China, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and jihadist terrorist groups as co-equal threats. As noted previously, the 2017 *National Security Strategy* elevated China and Russia as America's main challenges.

Given that the 2022 *National Security Strategy* draws on more liberal internationalist rhetoric than Trump's conservative nationalist "America First" rhetoric, it may be easy to overlook the similarities in strategy. Biden's 2022 *National Security Strategy* continues a strategy of geopolitical competition, elevating the threat from Russia and China. Though the 2022 *National Security Strategy* is careful to acknowledge "shared challenges" and claims that the United States "do[es] not seek conflict or a new Cold War," it nevertheless twice describes China as America's "pacing challenge." Though it mentions Russia more frequently than the 2017 or 2021 *National Security Strategies*, the 2022 *National Security Strategy* is clear in identifying China as "America's most consequential geopolitical challenge."

The 2022 *National Security Strategy* points to the 2022 *National Defense Strategy* for more details on the Biden administration's approach to national de-

fense.[114] The unclassified National Defense Strategy, released last October, echoes Trump's 2018 version in identifying China and Russia as "revisionist" rivals.[115] In an about-face from the 2002 *National Security Strategy*, the 2022 *National Defense Strategy* says: "The PRC [People's Republic of China] and Russia now pose more dangerous challenges to safety and security at home, even as terrorist threats persist." The 2022 *National Military Strategy* is equally alarmist: "Both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia possess the will and the means to pose an existential threat to our way of life. The PRC is our most consequential strategic competitor, modernizing its military and preparing to fight and win a war with the United States."[116]

A Familiar Pattern: Dealing with Russia and China

Despite the urge for each administration to brand its first national security strategy as innovative and different, we see remarkable consistency and explainable variation in the countries that gain the most attention and space in national security strategy documents. Table 1 shows the top five most frequently mentioned countries in each national security strategy. Through the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the most frequently discussed country by a large margin. Russia was first dislodged from the top spot in 1998 but returned to this prominent position in 1999–2002, 2015, and 2022.

Year	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
1977	Soviet Union (25)	S. Korea (3)	China (1)	India (1)	N/A
1981	Soviet Union (10)	Japan (5)	China (2)	Cuba (2)	Iran (2)
1982	Soviet Union (34)	Japan (2)	S. Korea (1)	N/A	N/A
1987	Soviet Union (272)	Japan (16)	Israel (8)	S. Korea (7)	Cambodia, Iran (7)
1988	Soviet Union (214)	Japan (20)	Nicaragua (14)	Iran (14)	Afghanistan, Pakistan (10)
1990	Soviet Union (93)	Japan (10)	China (6)	Germany (6)	Afghanistan (6)
1991	Soviet Union (97)	Iraq (19)	Japan (12)	China (7)	Kuwait (7)
1993	Soviet Union (31)	Japan (9)	China (5)	Cuba (3)	N. Korea, Australia, Angola, Iraq, Haiti, Kuwait, South Africa, Vietnam (2)
1994	Russia (32)	Japan (13)	China (10)	Iraq (10)	Bosnia (10)
1995	Russia (48)	Ukraine (17)	China (16)	Japan (13)	Bosnia (11)
1996	Russia (59)	Bosnia (25)	China (24)	Ukraine (21)	N. Korea (17)
1997	Russia (35)	China (18)	Iraq (12)	Japan (11)	Iran (10)
1998	China (54)	Russia (42)	Japan (26)	Iraq (24)	Iran (22)
1999	Russia (56)	China (38)	Japan (28)	Iraq (24)	N. Korea (17)
2000	Russia (68)	China (58)	Japan (37)	Kosovo (29)	Bosnia (26)
2002	Russia (23)	China (19)	India (16)	Israel (9)	Japan (6)
2006	Iraq (57)	China (30)	Afghanistan (18)	Russia (17)	Iran (16)
2010	Iraq (33)	Afghanistan (24)	Israel (21)	Russia (15)	Iran, Pakistan (14)
2015	Russia (14)	Afghanistan (13)	Iraq (12)	China (10)	Iran (9)
2017	China (36)	Russia (25)	N. Korea (17)	Iran (16)	India (8)
2021	China (17)	Russia (6)	Iran (4)	Afghanistan, Japan, S./N. Korea (2)	
2022	Russia (72)	China (60)	Ukraine (31)	Iran (8)	Taiwan, India (7)

Table 1: Top Five Countries by Number of Mentions Within Each National Security Strategy*, 1977–2022*

Note: Total number of references in *National Security Strategy* in parentheses. These totals include alternative names and adjectival forms, such as "Moscow," "USSR," or "Kremlin for the Soviet Union and Russia; "PRC," "Beijing," and "Chinese" for China; "Democratic People's Republic of Korea," "DPRK," and "Pyongyang" for North Korea; "Republic of Korea," "ROK," and "Seoul" for South Korea; "Tehran" for Iran; "Kabul" and "Afghan" for Afghanistan; and so on.

114 *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States: Including the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review and the 2022 Missile Defense Review,* U.S. Department of Defense, Oct. 27, 2022, https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF. For news coverage, see Joe Gould and Meghann Myers, "Biden National Defense Strategy Tackles China, Russia, Nuke Deterrence," *Defense News*, Oct. 27, 2022, https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/10/27/biden-national-defense-strategy-tackles-china-russia-nuke-deterrence/.

115 *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge,* Department of Defense, 2018, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf.

116 *National MIlitary Strategy 2022,* Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 2023, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/NMS%202022%20_%20Signed.pdf.

China has made the top five every year since 1990 except for 2010, and has claimed the top spot in two of the last three national security strategy documents. Japan, a U.S. ally, was traditionally one of the top-mentioned countries but dropped out of the top five in 2006 and has only reclaimed a top spot once since then (allies don't get as much attention in these documents compared to rivals and conflict zones). Iraq became one of the most frequently mentioned countries in the 1990s and became the most referenced country in 2006 and 2010, but it has dropped out of the top five since 2017. Afghanistan was rarely mentioned in the national security strategy before 2002 but became the second-most referenced country in 2010. It slid out of the top five in 2017 and 2022. Iran was a top-five most-referenced country intermittently through 2002 (1981, 1987, 1988, 1997, and 1998) but has claimed a top spot in every strategy document since 2006.

Since 2017, references to China and Russia have again exceeded those to Iraq and Afghanistan collectively, ending the 2006–2015 pattern and returning to historical pre-9/11 norms (see Figure 4). In the 2000s, many viewed the 1990s as an interregnum between the Cold War and the war on terror. But from the perspective of national security strategies, it is now the Bush-era global war on terror that appears to be the interregnum between the pre-9/11 era and what some observers are describing as Cold War 2.0.

Democracy Defense, Not Democracy Promotion

Despite the Wilsonian urge to make the world safe for democracy,[117] the centrality of democracy — and human rights — in U.S. foreign policy in general and within national security strategies in particular has ebbed and flowed over time. The word "democracy" never appears in either of Carter's national security strategy documents and appears only once in Reagan's 1982 *National Security Strategy*. Only with the 1986 *National Security Strategy* does protecting "the integrity of our democratic institutions" explicitly join the list of primary objectives of U.S. foreign and security policy. George H. W. Bush's 1993 *National Security Strategy* is the first post-Cold War strategy to explicitly adopt democracy promotion worldwide as a driving goal of the United States. Clinton's 1994 *National Security Strategy* was the first that fully centered democracy promotion and democratic "enlargement," however. Democracy (and human rights) became a top topic in national security strategy documents for the first time under Clinton (though the extent of this finding depends on the topic model). Though the term "enlargement" faded after Clinton's first term, "engagement" — Clinton's preferred strategy for promotion of both democracy and free markets — has had a longer rhetorical shelf-life, at least within subsequent documents (see Figure 5).

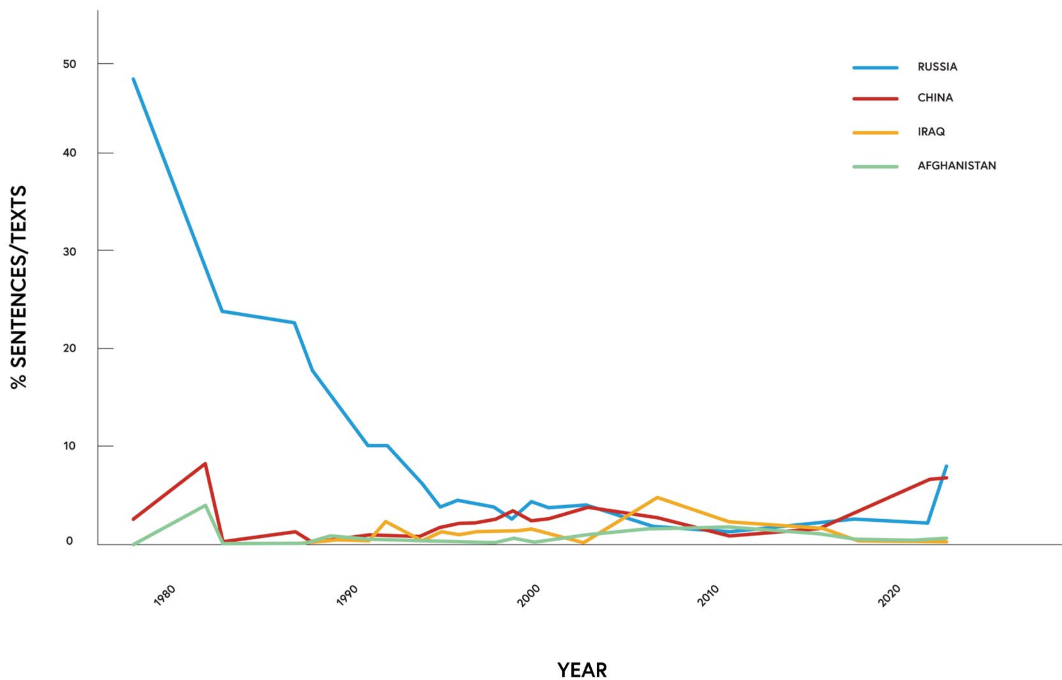

Figure 4: Number of Mentions of Select Countries Within Each National Security Strategy, *1977–2022*

117 Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy-Expanded Edition*, vol. 137 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), https://muse.jhu.edu/book/30492/.

The George W. Bush administration likewise put democracy at the heart of what came to be known after his second inaugural as the "Freedom Agenda." As noted by Alan Stolberg's excellent history, Rice "believed it to be key that the 2002 *National Security Strategy*, the first *National Security Strategy* of the post-9/11 world, should delineate the advancement of democracy and democratic institutions as vital U.S. national interests."[118] Democracy and human rights was the most frequent topic in Bush's *National Security Strategy* (ahead of terrorism). Democracy was, relatively speaking, de-emphasized by his first two successors, and did not crack the list of top-five topics under Trump (see Table 2). As shown in Figure 5, Trump's 2017 *National Security Strategy* made the fewest references to "democracy" (or "democratic") of any post-Cold War national security strategy document, though his strategy did include a section titled "Champion American Values."

Biden's 2021 interim *National Security Strategy* adopted a strong framing of competition between democratic and authoritarian great powers to shape the future of world order.[119] This comported with Biden's writings about defending democracy before coming to office[120] and his early push to convene a "Summit for Democracy," which he did in December 2021.[121]

The 2022 *National Security Strategy* retains an emphasis on protecting democracy and striving to make democracies demonstrate the superiority of the democratic way of life over its alternatives. The favored strategic buzzword in the 2022 *National Security Strategy* is "competition" (or "compete"), appearing 90 times, far more than prior favored terms such as "containment," "balancing," and the like, as shown in Figure 5. Biden's strategy amounts to one of "democratic competition." The Trump *National Security Strategy* also centered on (great-power) competition, with derivative terms appearing 42 times. By contrast, the 2015 *National Security Strategy* only refers to "competition" a handful of times.

President	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5
Jimmy Carter	Arms Control	Diplomacy	Military	Alliances / Deterrence	Defense
Ronald Reagan	Military	Soviet Union	Arms Control	Defense	Alliances / Deterrence
George H. W. Bush	Soviet Union	Military	Arms Control	Development / Finance	Security
Bill Clinton	Trade	Security	Drugs / Crime	Development / Finance	Peacekeeping
George W. Bush	Democracy / Human Rights	Terrorism	Security	Development / Finance	Trade
Barack Obama	Security	Technology / Investment	Democracy / Human Rights	Terrorism	Intelligence
Donald Trump	Intelligence	Technology / Investment	Security	Trade	Terrorism
Joe Biden	Technology / Investment	Security	Russia	Democracy / Human Rights	Intelligence

Table 2: Top Five Topics in National Security Strategies *in 20-Topic Latent Dirichlet Allocation Model, by President*

118 Stolberg, *How Nation-States Craft National Security Strategy Documents*, 77.

119 Admittedly, the 2017 *National Security Strategy* also discussed competition "between those who favor repressive systems and those who favor free societies." However, Trump himself was widely seen as cozying up to dictators and pressuring and criticizing America's democratic allies, undermining the *National Security Strategy* messaging. Biden's rhetoric signals provide distance with Trump's perceived shortcomings on democracy promotion.

120 Joseph R. Biden Jr, "Why America Must Lead Again," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (2020): 64–76, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-01-23/why-america-must-lead-again; and Joseph R. Biden Jr and Michael Carpenter, "How to Stand up to the Kremlin: Defending Democracy Against Its Enemies," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 1 (2018): 44–57, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2017-12-05/how-stand-kremlin.

121 "The Summit for Democracy," State Department, accessed Nov. 5, 2022, https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy/.

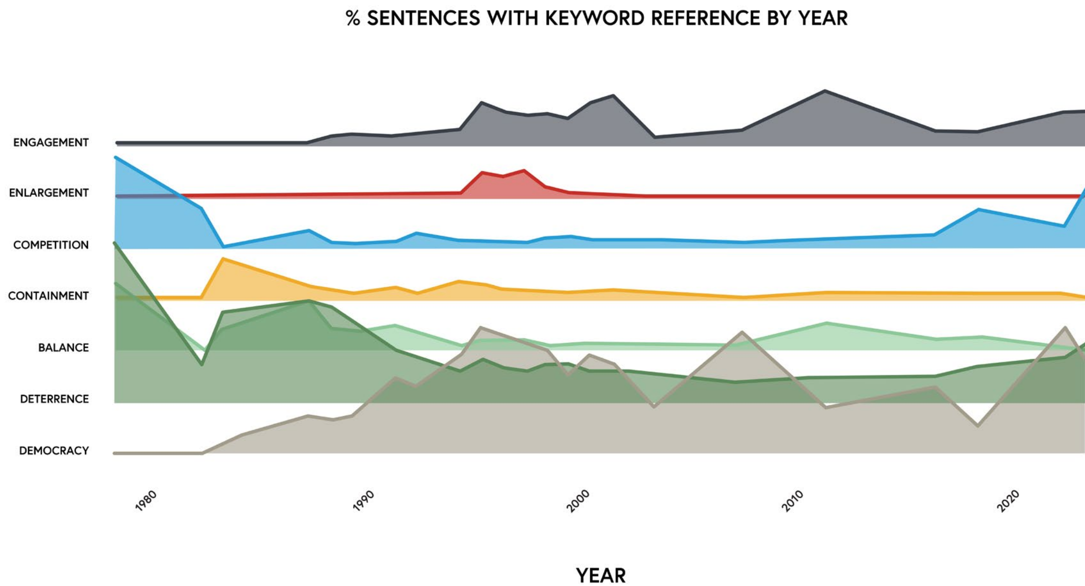

Figure 5: Democracy and Strategy Term Frequency in National Security Strategies*, 1977–2022*

Conclusion

As we have shown with an historical overview and quantitative text data on each national security strategy since 1977, the 2022 *National Security Strategy* represents a continuing trend — begun under Obama and ratcheted up by Trump — toward re-centering U.S. grand strategy in the 21st century around great-power competition with Russia and China. But the 2022 *National Security Strategy* also makes clear that the Biden administration will not allow "competition" to prevent the United States from cooperating with non-democratic powers when its interests dictate. In short, the 2022 *National Security Strategy*, as Emma Ashford notes, tries to "have it all."[122] It seeks to deter and outcompete non-democratic rivals even while gaining all the benefits of cooperation on "shared challenges" such as global climate change and pandemic preparedness.[123] Whether or not the Biden administration is able to deliver on this promise remains to be seen. In the late 1990s, before the strategic detour set off by 9/11, scholars at the RAND Corporation proposed a policy of "congagement" of China, a blend of containment and engagement.[124] If we are indeed in a new era of great-power competition, how to coherently operationalize such a mixed strategy is a task left for the authors of the next national security strategy.

John J. Chin *is a political scientist and an assistant teaching professor in the Carnegie Mellon Institute for Security and Technology at Carnegie Mellon University. He is the author of an* Historical Dictionary of Modern Coups D'état *(with Joseph Wright and David Carter, Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).*

Kiron K. Skinner *is the Taube Professor of International Relations and Politics at Pepperdine University's School of Public Policy and the W. Glenn Campbell Research Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. During the Trump administration she was the director of policy planning at the State Department and served on the U.S. Defense Department's Defense Business Board and the Defense Policy Board.*

Clay Yoo *is an AI engineer at Jona Health. His work focuses on applying machine learning and natural language processing technology to develop healthcare applications.*

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122 Emma Ashford, "Why the US Still Can't Have It All: Biden's National Security Strategy," *Just Security*, Oct. 14, 2022, https://www.justsecurity.org/83568/why-the-us-still-cant-have-it-all-bidens-national-security-strategy/.

123 Nadia Schadlow, author of the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, praises the identification of China as the major challenge but argues that the "focus on climate will make it harder to meet the threat from China." Nadia Schadlow, "Biden's National Security Strategy Is Undone by Fantasy," *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 23, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/bidens-strategy-is-undone-by-fantasy-national-security-china-climate-change-threat-beijing-white-house-ccp-11666549038.

124 Zalmay M. Khalilzad, et al., *The United States and a Rising China: Strategic and Military Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1999), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/MR1082.pdf.