

The New US National Security Strategy – “a corpse going to the grave”

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The US vision of its place in the world has changed since Obama’s administration published the previous US National Security Strategy in 2015. The US seemed confident two years ago of its leadership in the world: “The United States is stronger and better positioned to seize the opportunities of a still new century and safeguard our interests against the risks of an insecure world.” The President’s new *National Security Strategy* provides a vision and strategy for advancing the nation’s interests, universal values, and a rules-based international order through *strong and sustainable American leadership*. That view of US leadership is now dead, along with the Trans Pacific Partnership and US leadership in combating climate change.

On the 18th of December, 2017, Trump’s administration published its National Security Strategy, which presents the US as a falling nation that must take drastic action to put “America first” so as not to be beaten by its rivals. According to the new US National Security Strategy, “An America First National Security Strategy is based on American principles, a clear-eyed assessment of U.S. interests, and a determination to tackle the challenges that we face. It is a strategy of principled realism that is guided by outcomes, not ideology”. The document warns of an “erosion of American manufacturing over the last two decades” that “threatens to undermine the ability of U.S. manufacturers to meet national security requirements” and asserts that “there is no arc of history. *“I suggest to translate this as preordained path of history”* that ensures that America’s free political and economic system will automatically prevail. Success or failure depends upon our actions”. The US administration is calling for putting US economic interests first, which previous administrations have also done, but now there is a lack of confidence that the values and ideology of the US will automatically triumph, and a belief that massive military superiority is needed “to prevent enemy success and to ensure that America’s sons and daughters will never be in a fair fight”. How strange! Any great nation would seek military superiority, but only a dying one would admit to being afraid of “a fair fight”. Perhaps that is why North Korea’s foreign ministry responded to the National Security Strategy by describing the US as “a corpse going to the grave.”

North Korea’s President Kim said, “Although grave challenges that should not be overlooked face us, we neither feel disappointed nor are afraid of them but are optimistic about progress of our revolution under this situation.” President Trump’s National Security Strategy warns that the “rogue regime in North Korea” is “rapidly accelerating its cyber, nuclear, and ballistic missile programs,” and notes that Washington is “deploying a layered missile defense system focused on North Korea and Iran to defend our homeland against missile attacks.” However, the danger of North Korea has been used consistently in US policy to threaten and coerce China.

The major specific change over the previous strategy is the naming of China and Russia as nations seeking to: “shape a world antithetical to US values and interests”, such that “China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor” while “Russia seeks to restore its great power status and establish spheres of influence near its borders”. The threat from China is especially targeted by the new strategy: “China gathers and exploits data on an unrivaled scale ... It is building the most capable and well-funded military in the world, after our own. Its nuclear arsenal is growing and diversifying. Part of China’s military modernization and economic expansion is due to its access to the U.S. innovation economy, including America’s world-class universities.” While the Obama administration’s last National Security Strategy only mentioned intellectual property once, in terms of cybersecurity, the new Trump administration has focused heavily upon the need to defend intellectual property that is currently openly available “in diverse businesses as well as in universities and colleges” as a military necessity: “Losing our innovation and technological edge would have far-reaching negative implications for American prosperity and power.” How the US will succeed is not clear, since Trump abandoned years of previous US policy that aimed to contain China with regional economic alliances. Without as many friends as before, the US is relying now on dangerous provocations and the threat of nuclear war to bring a crippling crisis upon China before it is ready to face the US directly.