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Policy Report

**The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy and the Imperatives for
Recalibrating the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

January 2026

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Framing the Policy Problem

The 2025 National Security Strategy of the United States should be regarded not merely as a policy document, but as an indication of a redefinition of the United States' role in the international system. The document reflects America's "strategic fatigue" with the costly pursuit of global leadership and its shift toward a model in which U.S. national security—drawing on the Monroe Doctrine—is defined primarily in terms of geography, borders, the domestic economy, and a strategic focus on the Western Hemisphere.

For the Islamic Republic of Iran, the central question is not whether the document appears to contain hostile rhetoric toward Iran. Rather, the more pertinent issue is the position Iran occupies within this redefinition and the implications of that position for U.S. conduct and Iran's foreign policy choices. Superficial readings of the 2025 document—whether interpreting it as a return to maximum pressure or dismissing it as inconsequential—could lead to decisions whose medium- and long-term costs for the country may prove irreversible.

The central policy question guiding this paper may therefore be formulated as follows: In light of the published U.S. National Security Strategy and the discernible shifts reflected therein, how should the Islamic Republic of Iran recalibrate its foreign policy to safeguard its national security and advance its national interests?

Analytical Framework: From Global Security to a Monroe Doctrine–Based Conception of Security

The 2025 document should be analyzed as part of a broader historical trajectory. In the post–Cold War era, the United States regarded itself as committed to preserving and managing the global order, although this commitment assumed different practical forms during and after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the costs of protracted wars, intensifying competition—particularly with China—and domestic crises have gradually eroded this outlook. The implicit return to the logic of the Monroe Doctrine—namely, prioritizing geographically vital spheres and avoiding unnecessary global commitments—can be understood within this broader context.

Within this strategic logic, threats are prioritized according to their geographical proximity and direct impact on domestic security; American ideology and values give way to cost–benefit calculations; and actors opposed to the United States outside the Western Hemisphere are not necessarily regarded as existential adversaries. Accordingly, Washington's approach toward such actors must be carefully calibrated.

It should be noted that, under this strategy, and by leveraging the United States’ military capabilities—particularly its technological superiority—the operational priority in countering threats has shifted away from conventional warfare and large-scale military operations toward sudden, rapid, high-intensity, and effective strikes. Illustrations of this shift can be seen in the attacks on Iran’s nuclear facilities, including those carried out during the Twelve-Day War, as well as in the operation to abduct the Venezuelan president. This approach may be likened to a “sledgehammer strike.”

Europe in the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy

In the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy, Washington’s approach toward its European partners is neither hostile nor explicitly disparaging; it is, however, distinctly unsentimental, instrumental, and conditional. Although this shift in tone and status is not accompanied by harsh or insulting rhetoric, in practice it amounts to a downgrading of the strategic standing of European partners in U.S. calculations. It is for precisely this reason that many European elites perceive it as “humiliating.”

In earlier documents, particularly the 2022 National Security Strategy, European partners were still regarded as part of the United States’ strategic “we.” In the 2025 document, however, this conception has effectively been abandoned. Europe is no longer viewed as an equal strategic partner of the United States, but rather as a costly security domain that must either assume responsibility for its own security or recede from Washington’s strategic priorities. Within this framework, the United States defines the scope and extent of its commitments not on the basis of historical ties or shared values, but according to cost–benefit calculations.

The NATO security pact is not repudiated in this document; it is, however, reduced from an “alliance grounded in political solidarity and shared values” to a “conditional security contract.” From the perspective of Trump’s America, European security should not be treated as a “free good,” and each member must pay its fair share of the costs of collective defense. For Europe, which had grown accustomed over several decades to a U.S.-guaranteed security umbrella, this shift in perspective amounts to a downgrading of Europe’s standing, priority, and position in the United States’ strategic calculations and prioritization.

In the 2025 document’s hierarchy of threats and strategic priorities, the Western Hemisphere ranks first, China is defined as a systemic competitor, and Europe is reduced to a manageable issue. From Washington’s perspective, this approach is rational and grounded in strategic prioritization.

China in the 2025 National Security Strategy of the United States

The 2025 document identifies China as the “sole competitor” capable of posing a long-term, structural challenge to American power and order, rather than being merely a regional or transient threat. In other words, the United States views China as a rival capable of presenting challenges not only in the security sector but also in economic and industrial competition, as well as the very architecture of the global order. This approach indicates that Washington continues to perceive the rivalry with Beijing as a “systemic challenge,” although, unlike previous documents, it does not frame this competition in purely confrontational-ideological terms.

In similar documents from previous years, the rivalry with China was often described with an emphasis on values—framing it as “democracy versus authoritarianism”—and as a long-term threat to the liberal international order. In the 2025 version, these value-based emphases have somewhat receded, and the focus has shifted toward the operational and economic dimensions of the competition:

- Economic competition and supply chains;
- Efforts to bring strategic industries back to the United States;
- Concerns about China’s position in global trade.

In the 2025 document, the United States states that its primary priority is security in the Western Hemisphere and along its own domestic borders; accordingly, certain extra-regional threats—including China and Russia—are not treated as matters of the highest order. This does not mean that China has been removed from the list of threats facing the United States; rather, it indicates that Washington’s approach to competition with China has changed. The United States has moved away from a willingness to engage in direct confrontation or full-scale military conflict with China, while economic containment, preventing Chinese dominance over critical production and supply chains, and preserving technological superiority remain firmly on the agenda.

Russia in the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy

In the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy, Russia’s status has undergone a conceptual downgrade, yet it has achieved functional stabilization. In this document, Russia is defined neither as a structural rival on par with China, nor as an imminent existential threat to U.S. national security; rather, it is envisioned as a disruptive, costly, and partially contained actor that must be managed rather than “defeated.”

In previous documents—particularly the 2022 strategy—Russia occupied the center of gravity in the U.S. National Security Strategy. The war in Ukraine, viewed as a direct threat to the European order and an explicit challenge to the liberal order, had transformed Russia into an “acute threat.” In the 2025 document, however, this positioning has visibly shifted. While the war in Ukraine remains important, it is no longer the axis around which U.S. national security is defined; consequently, Russia has been downgraded from a central threat to a regional issue with manageable consequences.

This shift does not imply a normalization of conduct toward Russia; rather, it stems from a “cold strategic assessment”: the United States views Russia as a power capable of destruction, but lacking the capacity to construct an alternative order. Unlike China, Russia is neither the economic engine of the future order, nor a technological competitor, nor an appealing model for others. Consequently, Washington regards it more as a “debilitating security problem” than a civilizational or structural rival. In the 2025 document, U.S. policy toward Russia rests on three pillars: first, containment and gradual attrition without entering into direct military confrontation; second, shifting the primary burden of confrontation—particularly in Ukraine—to Europe; and third, preventing a deeper strategic alignment between Russia and China that could disrupt the balance of the broader competition.

A critical point is that in this document, Russia has ceased to be an independent subject of U.S. foreign policy; instead, it has been relegated to a variable within the broader U.S.-China rivalry. Washington’s primary concern is not Russia itself, but rather how Moscow’s actions might bolster or undermine China’s position. Consequently, while the containment of Russia remains a strategic objective, its outright defeat is no longer considered a focal point of U.S. policy.

From a tonal perspective, the 2025 document’s approach toward Russia is cold, pessimistic, and devoid of any conciliatory language, yet it also lacks the overtly confrontational spirit of earlier documents. Russia is depicted neither as a potential partner nor as an adversary worth major investment in order to defeat. This framing relegates Russia to the status of what may be termed a chronic second-tier threat: a threat that must be contained, but not at the cost of diverting U.S. attention from more vital priorities.

In conclusion, the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy demotes Russia from the center stage but does not eliminate it from the strategic equation. Russia is no longer the axis around which American security is defined; rather, it has become a component of the European security backdrop and a disruptive variable in Washington’s broader

competition with Beijing. This downgrade is not a gesture of trust, but a sign of calculated deprioritization—a shift with profound implications for Europe, the Eurasian security order, and even Iran’s strategic calculus.

Middle East and Israel’s Security: In the Middle East section, the document makes clear that the region is no longer at the top of the United States’ strategic priorities, as America is now a major energy exporter and its dependence on the region’s oil has declined. Nevertheless, Israel’s security remains a “red line” and one of the core national interests of the United States, and Washington insists that this strategic partner must be defended against regional threats.

It is also critical to note that Iran has not been downgraded to a lower priority alongside the broader Middle East. In other words, within the context of this document, the twin issues of ‘Israel’s security’ and the ‘Iranian threat’ must be decoupled from the general issues of the Middle East.

Waterways and Maritime Security: The document suggests that safeguarding the freedom of navigation through strategic chokepoints—specifically the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and the sea lanes of the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea—remains indispensable to U.S. interests and global energy stability. This stance is part of a broader effort to ensure the unhindered flow of energy and commodities in global commerce. Nevertheless, the approach to addressing direct threats has evolved; it now prioritizes multilateral security arrangements and collaboration with regional and international partners over a large-scale and costly military footprint in the region.

Although the official text of the U.S. National Security Strategy prioritizes the Indo-Pacific and the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea as part of the strategic competition with China, the document’s underlying analysis reveals that the United States remains committed to keeping maritime transit routes open and secure worldwide, including the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, and the Strait of Hormuz, given their fundamental role in global trade and energy security. This perspective demonstrates that, despite the anticipated reduction in direct U.S. military presence in the Middle East, the strategic significance of these maritime zones remains tied, first and foremost, to America’s own economic and national security.

Ultimately, the U.S. National Security Strategy seeks to balance a commitment to safeguarding freedom of navigation and preventing disruptions to global energy and trade routes with a strategic overarching focus on critical waterways, the preservation of Israel’s security, and the reduction of permanent military commitments in the Middle East.

Iran in the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy

In the document, Iran continues to be presented as a regional destabilizing actor; however, what is more significant is what the document does not contain: no explicit military action plan, framed as a long-term strategic necessity for the United States, no broad diplomatic initiative, and no costly political investment with respect to Iran. This omission is itself meaningful: Iran is portrayed as a threat, but not as an immediate or overriding strategic threat. In strategic terms, this new position drives U.S. policy toward three characteristics:

- indirect containment rather than direct confrontation;
- delegation of containment responsibilities to regional allies;
- adoption of a strike-based approach rather than a costly and time-consuming war of attrition, should direct confrontation become necessary.

The current status quo could potentially persist for years, such that the need for a decisive, direct military confrontation—in the form of a large-scale, comprehensive, and prolonged war—might never arise as a primary catalyst. At the same time, the attrition resulting from the continuation of this state of affairs appears increasingly unnecessary.

Practical Implications for Iran's Foreign Policy

This new situation has several practical implications: any potential direct U.S. military action against Iran would be sudden, while the risk of indirect, covert, or inadvertent confrontation would remain fully present. In the event of any unrest, or any other sufficiently credible pretext, effective and swift military intervention cannot be ruled out. Sanctions pressure will continue; there is no basis for expecting its easing, and, at the same time, the attrition of the Islamic Republic of Iran at little or no cost would produce a one-sided war of exhaustion, thereby creating the conditions for any subsequent U.S. initiative—and possibly that of the Israeli regime—whether in the form of advancing anti-Iran regional initiatives or resorting to military action against the Islamic Republic. Any action that ties Iran to the U.S.-China rivalry would significantly heighten Washington's sensitivity. More than before, Iran's regional behavior is assessed through the lens of its ability to impose costs on the United States, rather than as an existential threat. In such a setting, Iran's conduct can alter its position within this hierarchy of threats, either to its advantage or to its detriment.

Scenario I: Escalating Threat and Tension, and Increasing Confrontation to Reclaim Priority

In this scenario, Iran seeks to turn itself once again into a threat that cannot be ignored by increasing regional or nuclear pressure.

Motivations and Expectations: increasing Iran's weight in U.S. strategic calculations; creating short-term psychological leverage.

Costs: the risk of returning to a cycle of escalation and punishment; lending justification to a tougher containment policy; increasing economic and security costs.

Assessment: This scenario would likely transform Iran, without any guarantee of a durable gain, from a second-order threat into a more costly problem.

Scenario II: Strategic Passivity

In this scenario, Iran merely treats the lowering of its priority in the hierarchy of U.S. strategic threats as a success and refrains from active engagement.

Motivations and Expectations: reducing short-term friction; waiting for the threat to pass and the deadlock to ease; avoiding immediate risk.

Costs: loss of initiative; loss of future opportunities and horizons; the possibility that opposing parties may no longer remain in their current positions; reinforcement of Iran's reactive and passive posture vis-à-vis the actions of other actors; the growing role of rival actors in shaping the surrounding environment; entrenchment of a condition of economic attrition.

Assessment: This scenario would likely leave Iran in a reactive position, while eroding its room for maneuver, expanding the role of rival actors in shaping its surrounding environment, and perpetuating economic attrition without securing any meaningful strategic gain.

Assessment

This scenario postpones military confrontation, absent the intervention of other factors such as pressure from the Israeli regime. At the same time, however, the opposing parties—particularly the Zionist regime—would seize the initiative; in practice, the other side would not necessarily align itself with a decision to preserve the status quo. This, in turn, would place the Islamic Republic of Iran in a position of having to respond rather than shape developments proactively.

Scenario Three: The Active Recalibration of Foreign Policy on the Basis of Reduced Priority and the Management of Differences

In this scenario, Iran accepts its designation as a second-order threat and uses it as an opportunity to manage its differences with the United States through a smart, comprehensive, and phased initiative.

Key Components

Refraining from costly actions; drawing on regional capacities to reduce tensions and manage differences; exercising careful management of sensitive dossiers; leveraging Iran's position in Sino-U.S. competition without entering that rivalry in the absence of a strategic payoff; and expanding diplomatic engagement at both the regional and extra-regional levels.

Advantages

A reduced likelihood of direct confrontation; greater economic and political room for maneuver; and the possibility of gradually managing external pressures.

Risks

Domestic misinterpretation of the concept of de-escalation; the need for complex institutional coordination; and susceptibility to miscalculations by aligned actors.

Policy Recommendation

Within the framework of the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy, which designates the Islamic Republic of Iran as a threat regardless, the most desirable path for the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy—rather than escalating tensions or accepting strategic passivity—is to design a comprehensive, phased, and symbolic political initiative. The logic of this initiative should be predicated on the assumption that the core issue in Iran-U.S. interaction is not a lack of technical or legal solutions, but rather the asynchronous political needs of the two parties: Washington seeks a swift, low-cost, and domestically presentable achievement, while Iran needs to break the cycle of attrition from sanctions and security uncertainty without crossing fundamental red lines.

In this framework, it is recommended that Iran, instead of entering into a protracted process of attrition or increasing costly actions, pursue a symbolic political agreement with phased implementation, proposed through acceptable intermediaries, that is limited to a de-escalation of hostility and a mutual withdrawal from the "active enemy" narrative. Such

a calculated exploitation of the logic of American “Monroe Doctrine” security would transform Iran from a potential security issue into a political and manageable one.

The advantage of this approach lies in its exploitation of the opportunity presented by the logic governing America’s 2025 document: the U.S. strategically seeks to reduce costly extra-regional commitments and lacks the appetite for protracted engagement or significant political investment in the Iran file, although sudden and impactful strikes remain within the U.S. administration’s available options. On the other hand, Trump has thus far achieved no foreign or domestic policy successes and, with the midterm elections looming, is eager for a symbolic victory. A symbolic, low-detail agreement would allow Trump to declare “achieving peace with a long-standing adversary,” while simultaneously creating the necessary legal and political framework for Iran to reduce sanctions pressure and contain risks. The شرط (condition) for the success of this path lies in the conscious design of the agreement at the political level, the delegation of technical details to multilateral and time-bound mechanisms, and the management of the domestic narrative based on “actively adjusting relations to serve national interests,” rather than an ideological redefinition of relations.

Final Conclusion

In summary, the U.S. National Security Strategy 2025 signifies a redefinition of the United States’ global role and its transition to a “Monroe Doctrine” of security; a logic wherein priorities are organized based on geography, cost-benefit analysis, and direct threats to U.S. internal security. Simultaneously, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to be perceived as a regional destabilizing factor, subject to a pattern of indirect containment, attrition-based pressure, and, if necessary, limited, sudden, and effective military actions.

The continuation of this situation, without a classic war, can lead to the gradual erosion of the country’s economic, security, and political capacities and the loss of windows of opportunity. Therefore, neither escalating tensions nor strategic passivity is an appropriate response to the new conditions; rather, the rational approach is the active adjustment of foreign policy through the design of limited, symbolic, and phased political initiatives that also leverage the logic of the U.S. 2025 document, enabling the management of security risks, the reduction of attrition-based pressures, and the preservation of national interests without crossing fundamental red lines.