

Trump on Russia: His Strategy Documents vs. His Meeting with Putin

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There has been a peculiar dualism about the Trump Administration's approach to Russia since its start. The President's tweets and personal public statements have been largely political – often repeating themes from his campaigns or defending his election from charges of Russian interference.

When he issued his new *National Security Strategy (NSS)* in December 2017, and then his new *National Defense Strategy (NDS)* in early 2018, some of his statements focused so much on his political themes that this indicated that he may have delegated responsibility for their contents rather than really reviewed them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson is famous for stating that, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," but the President's meeting with Putin may indicate that some consistency is still necessary. It has raised serious questions about what U.S. strategy really is at the Presidential level.

Certainly, key parts of his strategy documents and FY2019 defense budget request seem to take far harder stands on Russia than he did during his NATO Summit and visits to the United Kingdom and Russia and seem to reflect many of the views taken by his current critics.

The Warnings in President Trump's *National Security Strategy*

His *National Security Strategy*, issued with his personal signature, describes Russia as follows:

China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence... China and Russia are developing advanced (nuclear) weapons and capabilities that could threaten our critical infrastructure and our command and control architecture.

...A central continuity in history is the contest for power. The present time period is no different. Three main sets of challengers—the revisionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and transnational threat organizations, particularly jihadist terrorist groups—are actively competing against the United States and our allies and partners... Russia seeks to restore its great power status and establish spheres of influence near its borders. The intentions of both nations are not necessarily fixed. The United States stands ready to cooperate across areas of mutual interest with both countries...

Russia aims to weaken U.S. influence in the world and divide us from our allies and partners. Russia views the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU) as threats. Russia is investing in new military capabilities, including nuclear systems that remain the most significant existential threat to the United States, and in destabilizing cyber capabilities. Through modernized forms of subversive tactics, Russia interferes in the domestic political affairs of countries around the world. The combination of Russian ambition and growing military capabilities creates an unstable frontier in Eurasia, where the risk of conflict due to Russian miscalculation is growing...

China, Russia, and other state and nonstate actors recognize that the United States often views the world in binary terms, with states being either "at peace" or "at war," when it is actually an arena of continuous competition. Our adversaries will not fight us on our terms. We will raise our competitive game to meet that challenge, to protect American interests, and to advance our values...

Russia uses information operations as part of its offensive cyber efforts to influence public opinion across the

globe. Its influence campaigns blend covert intelligence operations and false online personas with state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or “trolls” ...Russia, too, projects its influence economically, through the control of key energy and other infrastructure throughout parts of Europe and Central Asia.

... Although the menace of Soviet communism is gone, new threats test our will. Russia is using subversive measures to weaken the credibility of America’s commitment to Europe, undermine transatlantic unity, and weaken European institutions and governments. With its invasions of Georgia and Ukraine, Russia demonstrated its willingness to violate the sovereignty of states in the region. Russia continues to intimidate its neighbors with threatening behavior, such as nuclear posturing and the forward deployment of offensive capabilities... The United States will deepen collaboration with our European allies and partners to confront forces threatening to undermine our common values, security interests, and shared vision. The United States and Europe will work together to counter Russian subversion and aggression.

The Warnings in His *National Defense Strategy*

His *National Defense Strategy*, signed by his Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, states:

Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security...Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors.

... Russia seeks veto authority over nations on its periphery in terms of their governmental, economic, and diplomatic decisions, to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor. The use of emerging technologies to discredit and subvert democratic processes in Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine is concern enough, but when coupled with its expanding and modernizing nuclear arsenal the challenge is clear.

Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department, and require both increased and sustained investment, because of the magnitude of the threats they pose to U.S. security and prosperity today, and the potential for those threats to increase in the future.

... A strong and free Europe, bound by shared principles of democracy, national sovereignty, and commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is vital to our security. The alliance will deter Russian adventurism, defeat terrorists who seek to murder innocents, and address the arc of instability building on NATO’s periphery. At the same time, NATO must adapt to remain relevant and fit for our time—in purpose, capability, and responsive decision-making. We expect European allies to fulfill their commitments to increase defense and modernization spending to bolster the alliance in the face of our shared security concerns.

An FY2019 Budget Request Based on these Assessments of Russia

The key portions of summary of the *Overview* to his FY2019 defense budget request state that,

This budget was formulated around the National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS) goals... The NDS prioritizes major power competition, and in particular, reversing the erosion of the U.S. military advantage in relation to China and Russia... The central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the *reemergence of long-term, strategic competition* by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers. It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model—gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic, and security decisions.

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diplomatic decisions, to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and to change European and Middle East security and economic structures to its favor. The use of emerging technologies to discredit and subvert democratic processes in Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine is concern enough, but when coupled with its expanding and modernizing nuclear arsenal the challenge is clear.

...Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department, and require both increased and sustained investment – not only to deter and if necessary confront aggression, but also to actively compete – because of the magnitude of the threats each pose to U.S. security and prosperity today. Concurrently, the Department will sustain its efforts to deter and counter rogue regimes such as North Korea and Iran, defeat terrorist threats to the United States, and consolidate the DoD's gains in Iraq and Afghanistan while moving to a more resource-sustainable approach.

...Competitor states, especially China and Russia, have narrowed DoD's military technological advantages, demanding the United States find new and innovative ways to fight in the future. China is now a strategic competitor, using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea. Russia has violated the borders of nearby nations and pursues veto power over the economic, diplomatic, and security decisions of its neighbors.

The President's Strategy and Budget Request Reflect the Collective Assessments of the U.S. Intelligence Community

It also important to note that the President's strategy documents and budget reflect the collective judgments of the entire U.S. intelligence community. Daniel R. Coats, his Director of National Intelligence has made his view clear on Russia's effort to interfere in the U.S. election, but he spoke for the entire U.S. intelligence community much earlier – on February 13, 2018 – in his annual testimony to Congress which presented a *Worldwide Threat Assessment* of the challenges to U.S. security.

His final statement for the record not only supported all of the statement in President Trump's strategy documents, it focused on many areas of advanced technology, cyber threats, space, and nuclear weapons:

The Broader Russian Threat

China and Russia will seek spheres of influence and to check US appeal and influence in their regions. Meanwhile, US allies' and partners' uncertainty about the willingness and capability of the United States to maintain its international commitments may drive them to consider reorienting their policies, particularly regarding trade, away from Washington...

In his probable next term in office, President Vladimir Putin will rely on assertive and opportunistic foreign policies to shape outcomes beyond Russia's borders. He will also resort to more authoritarian tactics to maintain control amid challenges to his rule.

Moscow will seek cooperation with the United States in areas that advance its interests. Simultaneously, Moscow will employ a variety of aggressive tactics to bolster its standing as a great power, secure a "sphere of influence" in the post-Soviet space, weaken the United States, and undermine Euro-Atlantic unity. The highly personalized nature of the Russian political system will enable Putin to act decisively to defend Russian interests or to pursue opportunities he views as enhancing Russian prestige and power abroad.

Russia will compete with the United States most aggressively in Europe and Eurasia, while applying less intense pressure in "outer areas" and cultivating partnerships with US rivals and adversaries—as well as with traditional US partners—to constrain US power and accelerate a shift toward a "multipolar" world. Moscow will use a range of relatively low-cost tools to advance its foreign policy objectives, including influence campaigns, economic coercion, cyber operations, multilateral forums, and measured military force. Russia's slow economic growth is unlikely to constrain Russian foreign policy or by itself trigger concessions from Moscow in Ukraine, Syria, or elsewhere in the next year.

President Putin is likely to increase his use of repression and intimidation to contend with domestic

discontent over corruption, poor social services, and a sluggish economy with structural deficiencies. He will continue to manipulate the media, distribute perks to maintain elite support, and elevate younger officials to convey an image of renewal. He is also likely to expand the government's legal basis for repression and to enhance his capacity to intimidate and monitor political threats, perhaps using the threat of "extremism" or the 2018 World Cup to justify his actions.

Pressure on the Ukraine and other States Near Russia

Ukraine remains at risk of domestic turmoil, which Russia could exploit to undermine Kyiv's pro-West orientation. These factors will threaten Ukraine's nascent economic recovery and potentially lead to changes in its foreign policy that further inflame tension between Russia and the West....Popular frustrations with the pace of reforms, depressed standards of living, perceptions of worsening corruption, and political polarization ahead of scheduled presidential and legislative elections in 2019 could prompt early elections. Opposition leaders will seek to capitalize on popular discontent to weaken President Petro Poroshenko and the ruling coalition ahead of elections in 2019.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine is likely to remain stalemated and marked by fluctuating levels of violence. A major offensive by either side is unlikely in 2018, although each side's calculus could change if it sees the other as seriously challenging the status quo. Russia will continue its military, political, and economic destabilization campaign against Ukraine to stymie and, where possible, reverse Kyiv's efforts to integrate with the EU and strengthen ties to NATO. Kyiv will strongly resist concessions to Moscow but almost certainly will not regain control of Russian-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine in 2018. Russia will modulate levels of violence to pressure Kyiv and shape negotiations in Moscow's favor...Russia will work to erode Western unity on sanctions and support for Kyiv, but the Kremlin is coping with sanctions at existing levels.

*...The Kremlin will seek to maintain and, where possible, expand its influence throughout the former Soviet countries that it asserts are in its self-described sphere of influence...*Russia views Belarus as a critical buffer between itself and NATO and will seek to spoil any potential warming between Minsk and the West. Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko will continue close security cooperation with Moscow but will continue to aim for normalized relations with the West as a check on Russia's influence.

Russia's continued occupation of 20 percent of Georgia's territory and efforts to undermine its Western integration will remain the primary sources of Tbilisi's insecurity. The ruling Georgian Dream party is likely to seek to stymie the opposition and reduce institutional constraints on its power.

Tension over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh could devolve into a large-scale military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which could draw in Russia to support its regional ally. Both sides' reluctance to compromise, mounting domestic pressures, Azerbaijan's steady military modernization, and Armenia's acquisition of new Russian equipment sustain the risk of large-scale hostilities in 2018.

Russia will pressure Central Asia's leaders to reduce engagement with Washington and support Russian-led economic and security initiatives, while concerns about ISIS in Afghanistan will push Moscow to strengthen its security posture in the region. Poor governance and weak economies raise the risk of radicalization—especially among the many Central Asians who travel to Russia or other countries for work—presenting a threat to Central Asia, Russia, and Western societies. China will probably continue to expand outreach to Central Asia—while deferring to Russia on security and political matters—because of concern that regional instability could undermine China's economic interests and create a permissive environment for extremists, which, in Beijing's view, could enable Uighur militant attacks in China.

Moldova's ostensibly pro-European ruling coalition—unless it is defeated in elections planned for November—probably will seek to curb Russian influence and maintain a veneer of European reform while avoiding changes that would damage the coalition's grip on power. The current Moldovan Government probably will move forward on implementing Moldova's EU Association Agreement against the will of openly pro-Russian and Russian-backed President Igor Dodon. Settlement talks over the breakaway region of Transnistria will continue, but progress likely will be limited to small issues.

Advanced Cyber, Nuclear, Space, and Missile Threats

In 2018, Russia will continue to modernize, develop, and field a wide range of advanced nuclear, conventional, and asymmetric capabilities to balance its perception of a strategic military inferiority vis-a-vis the United States.

Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea will pose the greatest cyber threats to the United States during the next year. These states are using cyber operations as a low-cost tool of statecraft, and we assess that they will work to use cyber operations to achieve strategic objectives unless they face clear repercussions for their cyber operations. Nonstate actors will continue to use cyber operations for financial crime and to enable propaganda and messaging...The use of cyber-attacks as a foreign policy tool outside of military conflict has been mostly limited to sporadic lower-level attacks. Russia, Iran, and North Korea, however, are testing more aggressive cyber-attacks that pose growing threats to the United States and US partners.

... *We expect that Russia will conduct bolder and more disruptive cyber operations during the next year, most likely using new capabilities against Ukraine.* The Russian Government is likely to build on the wide range of operations it is already conducting, including disruption of Ukrainian energy-distribution networks, hack-and-leak influence operations, distributed denial-of-service attacks, and false flag operations. In the next year, Russian intelligence and security services will continue to probe US and allied critical infrastructures, as well as target the United States, NATO, and allies for insights into US policy.

... Russia has developed a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) that the United States has declared is in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Despite Russia's ongoing development of other Treaty-compliant missiles with intermediate ranges, Moscow probably believes that the new GLCM provides sufficient military advantages to make it worth risking the political repercussions of violating the INF Treaty. In 2013, a senior Russian administration official stated publicly that the world had changed since the INF Treaty was signed in 1987. Other Russian officials have made statements complaining that the Treaty prohibits Russia, but not some of its neighbors, from developing and possessing ground-launched missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers.

.. All actors will increasingly have access to space-derived information services, such as imagery, weather, communications, and positioning, navigation, and timing for intelligence, military, scientific, or business purposes. Foreign countries—particularly China and Russia—will continue to expand their space-based reconnaissance, communications, and navigation systems in terms of the numbers of satellites, the breadth of their capability, and the applications for use.

Both Russia and China continue to pursue antisatellite (ASAT) weapons as a means to reduce US and allied military effectiveness. Russia and China aim to have nondestructive and destructive counterspace weapons available for use during a potential future conflict. We assess that, if a future conflict were to occur involving Russia or China, either country would justify attacks against US and allied satellites as necessary to offset any perceived US military advantage derived from military, civil, or commercial space systems. Military reforms in both countries in the past few years indicate an increased focus on establishing operational forces designed to integrate attacks against space systems and services with military operations in other domains.

Russian and Chinese destructive ASAT weapons probably will reach initial operational capability in the next few years. China's PLA has formed military units and begun initial operational training with counterspace capabilities that it has been developing, such as ground-launched ASAT missiles. Russia probably has a similar class of system in development. Both countries are also advancing directed-energy weapons technologies for the purpose of fielding ASAT weapons that could blind or damage sensitive space-based optical sensors, such as those used for remote sensing or missile defense.

Of particular concern, Russia and China continue to launch "experimental" satellites that conduct sophisticated on-orbit activities, at least some of which are intended to advance counterspace capabilities. Some technologies with peaceful applications—such as satellite inspection, refueling, and repair—can also be used against adversary spacecraft.

Russia and China continue to publicly and diplomatically promote international agreements on the non-weaponization of space and "no first placement" of weapons in space. However, many classes of weapons

would not be addressed by such proposals, allowing them to continue their pursuit of space warfare capabilities while publicly maintaining that space must be a peaceful domain.

Continued Efforts to Influence U.S. and Other Elections

Director Coats also provided a clear warning about Russian efforts to conduct influence campaigns:

The United States will face a complex global foreign intelligence threat environment in 2018. We assess that the leading state intelligence threats to US interests will continue to be Russia and China, based on their services' capabilities, intent, and broad operational scope... Influence operations, especially through cyber means, will remain a significant threat to US interests as they are low-cost, relatively low-risk, and deniable ways to retaliate against adversaries, to shape foreign perceptions, and to influence populations. Russia probably will be the most capable and aggressive source of this threat in 2018, although many countries and some nonstate actors are exploring ways to use influence operations, both domestically and abroad.

We assess that the Russian intelligence services will continue their efforts to disseminate false information via Russian state-controlled media and covert online personas about US activities to encourage anti-US political views. Moscow seeks to create wedges that reduce trust and confidence in democratic processes, degrade democratization efforts, weaken US partnerships with European allies, undermine Western sanctions, encourage anti-US political views, and counter efforts to bring Ukraine and other former Soviet states into European institutions.

...Foreign elections are critical inflection points that offer opportunities for Russia to advance its interests both overtly and covertly. The 2018 US mid-term elections are a potential target for Russian influence operations.

...At a minimum, we expect Russia to continue using propaganda, social media, false-flag personas, sympathetic spokespeople, and other means of influence to try to exacerbate social and political fissures in the United States.

Diplomacy Should Be Based on facts and Strategy, Not Personalities and Politics

President Trump did face major challenges in seeking larger defense contributions from Europe and to moderate tension with Russia. His mix of personal relations and a confrontational bargaining style is also not without its successes. Nevertheless, there are times when attention to detail and a more traditional approach to diplomacy and staffing key issues is clearly desirable.

The previous strategy documents and intelligence assessments clearly indicate this. They reflect the assessment of Russia that the U.S. should act on at its highest levels.

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