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FROM WAR ON TERROR BACK TO GREAT POWER COMPETITION¹

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Abstract

In this article, selected documents of American national security strategy (NSS) in the 2000-2018 period are analyzed in the light of Stephan Walt's "balance of threat" concept. Year 2000 was chosen as the starting point since 9/11 terror attacks correspond to a historic turning point in U.S. foreign policy, and the last NSS concerned is NSS 2017, prepared by the Trump administration. National Defense Strategy (NDS) documents are also taken into consideration, to further clarify the dominant trends in policy making. The aim of the article was to plot the evolution of key concepts and guiding principles in the NSS documents. It is seen that there has been a conceptual shift in the NSSs after the Cold War, where no great power existential threat was perceived, and the new threat definition was based on the Global War on Terror (GWOT). This new approach dominated the first NSSs of the new millennium, after the 9/11 terror attacks. However, in the last NSSs, there has been a return to the previous, threat-based approach, where competitor nation-states such as China and Russia are explicitly mentioned. It is concluded that there has been a conceptual return to the classical sense of great power competition.

Key Words: Balance of threat, National Security Strategy, GWOT, Structural Realism

TERÖRLE SAVAŞTAN BÜYÜK GÜÇLER MÜCADELESİNE GERİ DÖNÜŞ

Öz

Bu makalede, 2000 – 2018 döneminde yayımlanmış Amerikan Ulusal Güvenlik Strateji Belgeleri (NSS'ler), Stephen Walt'ın "tehdit dengesi" kavramı ışığında analiz edilmektedir. 2000 yılının başlangıç noktası seçilmesinin sebebi, 11 Eylül terör saldırılarının ABD dış politikasında bir dönüm noktası olmasıdır ve ilgili son NSS ise Trump yönetimi tarafından hazırlanan NSS 2017'dir. Politika oluşturma sürecindeki hâkim eğilimleri daha da netleştirmek için Ulusal Savunma Stratejisi (NDS) belgeleri de değerlendirilmeye alınmıştır. Makalenin amacı NSS belgelerindeki önemli kavramların ve kılavuz prensiplerin evrimini tasvir etmektir. Soğuk Savaş sonrası, herhangi bir büyük güç tarafından varoluşsal bir tehdidin olmadığı dönemin NSS'lerinde kavramsal bir değişim görülmektedir ve yeni tehdit tanımı Teröre Karşı Küresel Savaş (GWOT) temeline dayalıdır. Bu yeni yaklaşım, 11 Eylül terör saldırıları sonrasında, yeni milenyumun ilk NSS'lerini domine etmiştir. Ancak, son NSS'lerde geçmişteki tehdide dayalı yaklaşıma bir dönüş olduğu görülmekte, Çin ve Rusya gibi rakip ulus devletlerden açıkça bahsedilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, klasik büyük güç rekabeti anlayışına kavramsal bir dönüş olduğu sonucuna varılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tehdit Dengesi, Ulusal Güvenlik Stratejisi, GWOT, Yapısal Realizm

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INTRODUCTION

War, diplomacy and trade have been the most basic ways of establishing relation between states from history to present. For this reason, studies conducted in the field of security studies in the literature on international relations point to an important area. The realist theory is one of the most applied approaches in the context of the study of such issues as warfare, conflict, security, which fall within the area of interest of the field in question. With this understanding, in the light of the realist theory in this study; the balance of threat, which is one of the most useful concepts born from within realism and produced to explain conflicts, has been focused on. Based on the classical concept in question, efforts have been made to uncover the reasons behind the current conflicts, in which the great powers are involved. In line with this effort, National Security Strategy Documents and National Defense Strategy Documents have served as primary source, as these documents are the concrete instruments reflecting the efforts made by the states to balance the threat perceptions with the threat. In this context, national security documents that have been put forward by the great powers, and which have the characteristics of first-hand source have been used in the study. In accordance with this effort, 7 National Security Strategy Documents and 3 National Defense Strategy Documents published by the United States between 2000 and 2018. Since the 9/11 attacks in 2001 constitute a breaking point in global politics, the chronologically nearest preceding national security documents of the year 2000, have been taken as the initial reference point of the study.

American realist Stephen Walt, bringing the balance of threat argument to international relations, defines security studies as “the studies of the threat, and use of military force” (Walt, 1991). For Stephen Walt, alliances are triggered by imbalances of “threat,” rather than imbalances of “power.” He also argues that states constitute alliances mainly against threats which are a function of power, offensive capabilities, geographic proximity, and perceived intentions (Walt, 1987). From this perspective, NATO was formed originally to counter both the capabilities and threats risen by the former Soviet Union (Dowding, 2011). Unlike the concept of power, the concept of external “threat” includes “perceived state intentions” alongside more clearly realist variables like economic resources, military technology, and geography (Legro & Moravcsik, 1999). Taking into consideration Walt’s balance of threat functions, geographical proximity has not changed. It can be claimed that perceived intentions stemming from mainly China and Russia for the U.S. has become a decisive attribute of the threat function.

Even with the contingency plans of the Cold War era, the U. S. prepared its military forces to win two theatre wars in both Europe and the Pacific region and followed an offensive stance. After the Cold War era, with the maintenance of capability-based approach, the definition of threat remained anonymous, so as to include China and Russia into the liberal system. Moreover, following the 9/11 attacks, President Bush Jr. stated in the 2002 NSS that there was no more great power competition, they were all in this war on the same page (2002: 5). This statement also explains the U.S.’ approach towards its “former threats,” without any aggressive intentions. Although the U.S. deemed global terrorism a threat against which a force should be gathered, this gathering of force actually meant gathering a relative advantage of force against all threats and possible risks, including those without aggressive intentions.

With the elimination of the former Soviet Union threat in the Europe theatre, the U.S. used its military force in Afghanistan and Iraq during the Bush administration after 9/11 instead of focusing on the potential rising power China in the Pacific region. During the Presidency of Obama, the U.S. which had a positive approach to include China and Russia in the system enabled China to be a free-riser instead of seeing these two countries as a threat. However, during Trump's presidency, China and Russia were defined as threats. In the 2018 NDS (Joint Chief of Staff, 2018: 4) published in Trump's Presidency, it was stated that 'long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities.' It was also expressed that China and Russia took strategic advantage when the U.S. focused on Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 by improving their 'military capabilities and a force structure explicitly designed to challenge the U.S. dominance and increase their own international stature.' The U.S. has ignored the neo-realist balance of power concept, while China and Russia have exploited it. U.S. underestimated the rising power of China as the biggest threat, and ignored Russia's potential courses of action against its neighbors, mainly Ukraine. Rather, it focused on an ambiguous concept of "non-state actors" as the biggest threat which, in fact, had limited impact. The economic crisis in 2008 and the election of Obama facilitated this trend and provided enough opportunities to China to further extend its influence. This trend of China might be framed as "free-riser," thanks to the U.S.' "strategic atrophy" (Department of Defense, 2018: 1). These statements summarize the threat perception designation process according to realist theory explanations. The U.S. has acted differently from the neo-realist concept's main assumptions, while China and Russia have exploited it. This entails a return to the concept of great power competition, even if the recognition of the fact has not been easy. The American decision makers till 2018 focused on the non-state actors as threats, rather than state actor threats. There was not any existential threat against the U.S. but a limited terrorist attack. According to realist arguments, the U.S. might have weakened their potential rivalries such as China or Russia as written in the late American strategic documents. For the U.S., it is arguable that it has been a great threat assessment to underestimate China, second power in the international structure, as the biggest threat.

Due to the importance of technology in the capability-based approach, new competition is expected to be intense in the field of technology. Accordingly, the NDS 2018 requires adequate resources to position the United States in the great power competition. 'Adequate resources' remind us of economic power variable, and 'great power competition' implies both multilateral international structure and perceived great power threat/s.

The distribution of power in the international structure provided a playground for the U.S. to act unilaterally as a unique hegemonic power by the beginning of the 21st Century. There was not any conventional threat against the U.S., and it dedicated a considerable military effort in Afghanistan and Iraq under the name of GWOT. In the absence of any existential threat, the U.S. has overridden the balance of threat concept, when compared to the Cold War era. In addition to these strategic components; the preference might be another key attribute. For example, different American presidents prefer different strategies even though they command the same military capabilities. Crowley claimed that the U.S. President Obama was elected due to his opposition of the former Republican President Bush's war of choice in Iraq (Crowley, 2016). He also argued that Bush passed on three wars having unprecedented length and lacking popular support; the war in Afghanistan as "war of necessity," Iraqi War as "war of choice," and the war on terror, which was reframed by Obama against Al Qaeda and in a more limited style in contrast the Bush's policies (Crowley, 2016). Strategy documents provide ample data to understand the previous and present international structure and

perceived threats. Different American presidents prefer different strategies even though they command the same military capabilities. The Democratic Party President Clinton referred to the fact that he was ready for possible major battles on two different fronts and had also the capabilities to win them, in 2000 and 2001 National Security Strategy (NSS) documents published, even when there was no 9/11 attack, or the perception of any threat.

In fact, this situation shows that there is a path dependency in strategic threat assessments in the U.S. documents. The ability of the U.S. Armed Forces to win major battles on two major and different fronts has been constantly maintained since the Cold War era. In the documents, the threat assessment between these three groups is considered by taking different priorities into consideration. The military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq can be considered a temporary derailment in the process. These actions can also be compared to the elephant's fight against flies. In other words, although it is very difficult to get definite results in these asymmetric operations, they were tried by the American President of the period, George W. Bush. Though it was written that the 2006 NSS, the second NSS of the Bush era, put an end to the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, what happened in 2021 revealed the opposite.

1. AMERICAN STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

The U.S. has two main national security documents which are as follows: the National Security Strategy (NSS), and the National Defense Strategy (NDS). On top of the pyramid, the NSS under the President's responsibility gives directions and objectives for U.S. national security. In guidance of these directions, the NDS under Defense Secretary's responsibility elaborates on the Defense Department's strategic aims. NDS should be presented every four years to the U.S. congressional defense committees in classified form, with an unclassified summary. The national security and strategy documents mainly try to clearly identify external threats, allocate resources toward the pursuit of the national interest, and integrate a nation's means of power as logical-rationalist calculation of means and ends, input and output

Unilateral and self-referential military campaign led by the U.S. in 2000s has had negative effects and unintended consequences not only for the U.S., but also its allies and partners. There was not any existential threat against the U.S. but a limited terrorist attack. It could also be argued that the U.S. had not acted strategically because it did not succeed to designate threats properly and set priorities for its military resources. When focusing on rising China, the U.S. has to bargain to delegate Russian threat perception to Europeans and open some room in their area of interest for their neighbor regions such as Northern Africa and Eastern Mediterranean. During the Cold War era, the US had an approach of being capable of retaining simultaneous warfare both in Europe and Asia-Pacific, and offensive capability to win wars at the same time in these regions. There has been a continuity on mainly two possible war theatres against China and Russia from the 2000 NSS till the 2017 NSS, because the best way to survive is to be the most powerful state.

Following the Republican Party's 2017 NSS, the U.S. openly stated that it deemed Russia and China as threats. Thus, with an expansionist approach through its capability, the US kept on gathering its military power overseas without the need of an anonymous agenda to establish regional hegemony for its constant pursuit of security competition as if it were in a state of war (Mearsheimer, 1994).

2. THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

In the Title 50 (50 U.S. Code § 3043 - Annual national security strategy report), it is mandatory for the NSS to address five major components such as “worldwide interests, goals, and objectives”; “foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities”; “proposed short-term and long-term uses of the political, economic, military, and other elements of the national power”; “adequacy of the capabilities”; and “such other information as may be necessary to help inform Congress on matters relating to the national security strategy of the United States” (Lucas, 2015: 1). It is intended to give a framework to American institutions to implement security strategies to ensure American national interests. As the best examples of international relations documents, they are within the framework of liberal values, realist terms, institutional assets, international political economy issues, security and strategy matters enough to analyze all over the world. For example, NSS 2002 states some strategic principles, as such U.S. should invest time and resources into building international relationships and institutions; and U.S. should be realistic about its ability to help those who are unwilling or unready to help themselves (2002: 9). But in practice, presidents do not obey that yearly time schedule and they mostly are satisfied with one report during their tenures.

From 2000 till today, there are seven NSS Reports available to examine and analyze as presented below:

Table 1. The NSS Documents- 2000-2018

Year	Presidency	Title
2000	Bill Clinton	A National Security Strategy of the U.S. for a New Century
2001	Bill Clinton	A National Security Strategy of the U.S. for a Global Age
2002	George W. Bush	The National Security Strategy of the U.S.
2006	George W. Bush	The National Security Strategy of the U.S.
2010	Barack Obama	National Security Strategy
2015	Barack Obama	National Security Strategy
2017	Donald Trump	National Security Strategy of the U.S.

There are similarities between Clinton’s and Obama’s preferences, which are quite different from Bush’s and Trump’s preferences. Clinton and Obama prefer a multilateral approach in defense and security matters while focusing on the economic agenda first. The threats in NSSs analyzed might be categorized in three groups. In the documents, the threat assessment between these three groups is considered by taking different priorities into consideration. In fact, the Trump’s NSS, which is different from the others, has been indirectly included in all documents since 2000. In Trump's tenure NSS, it can be said that China, India and Russia, which are considered as great powers are in the first layer; Iran, or, rogue states located in the Middle East region and North Korea located in East Asia are in the

second layer, and terrorism is in the last layer. The U.S. policy makers between 2000's and 2010's prioritized unconventional non-state threats, contrary to the traditional great power politics, but lost their energy and resources at the time. Threat perception of related NSS documents are shown on two tables presented below;

Table 2. Threats defined on NSSs

2000	It is very important that traditional country/opponent/bloc threat was not mentioned in the document. Instead, it used 'potential enemies,' 'adversaries' including state or non-state actors, and terrorists. "Our potential enemies, whether nations or terrorists, may be more likely in the future to resort to attacks against vulnerable civilian targets in the United States." (1999: 16) The weapons of mass destruction seem the most dangerous threat of all. "Weapons of mass destruction pose the greatest potential threat to global stability and security. Proliferation of advanced weapons and technologies threatens to provide rogue states, terrorists and international crime organizations." (1999: 2)
2001	President Clinton mentioned in the preface of NSS 2001 that while entering the new millennium there was no overriding external threat to the U.S., with the presence of the 'history's most powerful military ready to defend' American interests around the world (2001: Preface). He addressed new national security challenges, and "contemporary threats such as the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, terrorism, and international crime." (2001: Preface)
2002	Instead of threat, the Cold War term 'enemy' was employed. "The United States of America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach. The enemy is not a single political regime or person or religion or ideology. The enemy is terrorism." (2002: 5) "For a long period of time, there will be fighting on many fronts against a particularly elusive enemy... Afghanistan has been liberated; coalition forces continue to track down the Taliban and al-Qaida. But it's not just the battlefield that the U.S. is going to fight terrorists on. With cells in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and throughout Asia, thousands of trained terrorists remain at large." (2002: 5)
2006	The first sentence of the 2006 NSS that 'America is at war' is very descriptive. There is an assessment of the NSS 2002 in the document. It is stated that defeating terrorism requires a long-term strategy and new enemy has the global outreach (The White House, 2006: 8). While continuing the war on terror, the U.S. focused on the spread of democracy in 'Broader Middle East'. As 'front lines in the war on terror', it is mandatory to win the battles in Afghanistan and Iraq (The White House, 2006: 12).
2010	There was no state threat. In reverse, the search for cooperation with China, Russia, and India was welcomed. "There is no greater threat to the American people than weapons of mass destruction, particularly the danger posed by the pursuit of nuclear weapons by violent extremists and their spread to additional states" (2010: 4)
2015	This NSS is expansive in its calls for economic, cultural, and technological openness. Globally, the U.S. has stepped beyond the big ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that over the past decade have characterized so much of American foreign policy. There is a significant risk of the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. The escalating cybersecurity threats, Russia's aggression, the accelerating impacts of climate change, and the spread of infectious diseases gave rise to global security anxieties.
2017	It was stated from "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 its allies and partners." First, great power competition returned, namely China and Russia started to reassert their regional and worldwide impact. (The White House, 2017: 25) Changes in the regional balance of power had global effects and challenge the interests of the United States. Then, the most dangerous threats nearest to those were posed by North Korea and Iran related to WMD.

2.1. NSS 2000

The 2000 NSS is a document prefaced by U.S. President Bill Clinton. Referring to the fact that the United States is an independent nation, the document also touched upon the role of the U.S as the leader of democracy in the world. Although there are more threat words in this NSS compared to other NSS, the threats are quite different from conventional threats. Considering that many international crises have been left behind during the post-cold war transition period, the focus on the future and opportunities has been underlined. Besides the fact that Russia has been aided economically for development, the documents have also indicated that the defence budget is planned to increase to \$112 billion including the time between 2000 and 2005 in the last ten years, and that the amount needs to be used for the modernization and the needs of the defense stated. Despite the fact that the US Armed Forces are the most powerful army in the world and there is no perception of any nation state threat, it is an organization that competes with and renews itself. Due to the inability to fully identify possible future state threats, the application of technological developments to the defense industry gives the U.S. Armed Forces the advantage of the force multiplier, makes a great contribution to the country's economy, and leads to greater resource pressure on possible competitors. The capability of having the power to fight on two fronts at the same time and win wars is the most important capability of the U.S which has maintained it since the Cold War. In addition, nuclear deterrence capability, which also came from the Cold War, remains as an intimidating capability for other states around the world.

The most important criterion for using military force is the threat to the U.S. national interests. In this case, if necessary, the US Armed Forces can also act alone. Although the document contains mostly liberal concepts and strategies, a statement mentioned in the preface is quite meaningful in theoretical terms. Through the statement it is indicated that it will not be enough for the U.S. to have the most powerful army to be safe, and that military threats against the U.S. or the world should also be limited (2000: III). According to the neo-realist theory, you have to prevent your possible opponents from gaining power while maximizing your own power. However, the document does not mention any potential military threats. It has been mentioned that some countries have the capability of threat for their neighbor countries without actually revealing the names of these countries. In addition to this, non-state threats, technological threats, especially weapons of mass destruction technology, the failed states threat, and environmental and health threats are mentioned in the threats section. It is mentioned that the key to being safe in the country is to follow an active strategy in the world, and after that, an offensive strategy has been identified. All elements of national power are needed to follow this strategy. In the document, which does not specify a certain priority geographically, the entire world has been divided into sub-regions and analyzed that way. In this context, Europe and Eurasia, East Asia and the Pacific, Middle East, North Africa, Southwest and South Asia were evaluated together while The Sub-Saharan Africa and the Western Hemisphere were evaluated separately.

2.2. NSS 2001

The 2001 NSS is the last strategy document of US President Bill Clinton. It bears quite a lot of similarities with the previous 2000 NSS. The note which says that attention should be paid to relations with China and Russia is interesting because it is unlike the previous NSS of 2000. Because the text is longer than the previous one, more threat and capability statements have been included in the document. In the document, which does not specify a certain

priority geographically; the entire world has been divided into sub-regions and analyzed that way. The issues of preparing for the uncertain future and focusing on science and technology have been discussed together.

2.3. NSS 2006

The 2006 NSS is the second and final security document of the U.S. President Bush. The United States' fight against terrorism has been compared to its long-standing struggle during the Cold War. The developments that took place between the previous the 2002 NSS and the 2006 NSS have been summarized and decisively stated in the document. In this context, the fact that the tyranny was overthrown in Iraq and that the Taliban tyranny was replaced by an elected administration in Afghanistan and the developments in Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan have been positively explained in the name of democracy. This region is notable as the geographical region of the 'Wider Middle East' and the neighboring geography of Russia. Iran, Syria, North Korea, Cuba, Belarus, Burma, and Zimbabwe, which are clearly indicated to be experiencing tyranny, can be considered as new possible target countries.

Statements of capabilities in the document have been involved as the prevention of the skills of terrorists to achieve a nuclear weapons capability, the need of Special Forces capabilities in addition to conventional capabilities, and post-transition capabilities after failed states. And with this, it can also be assumed that the priority is the fight against terrorism.

2.4. NSS 2010

Obama, opposing Iraqi War, stated in the foreword that the U.S. ended one war in Iraq and refocused on Afghanistan. As the top security priority, it is stated that there is no greater threat to the American people than weapons of mass destruction, particularly the threat posed by violent extremists in pursuit of nuclear weapons and their dissemination to additional states (2010: 4). It was stated in the NSS 2010 that the U.S. would continue to deepen its partnership on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect with other centers of power in the 21st Century, including China, India, and Russia (2010: 11). The NSS 2010 had 'a four-part plan (Kugler, 2011):

- Guarantee good alliances,
- Establish collaboration with other centers of power of the 21st Century,
- Strengthen institutions and collaboration processes,
- Maintain broad cooperation with regard to key global challenges'

There were also options offered to Iran and North Korea against nuclear armament program: to accept denuclearization or isolation from the international community. (Kugler, 2011) There is a noticeable emphasis on multilateralism: By pursuing its interests within multilateral forums such as the United Nations, not outside them, the U.S succeeded in the post-World War II period (2010: 12). A dedication to renewing its economy, which serves as the wellspring of American power, was at the core of the U.S. efforts. (2010: 2). The U.S. was fighting two wars with several thousands of men and women deployed in harm's way by the United States, and hundreds of billions of dollars committed to supporting these conflicts.

(2010: 8) It was also stated that in the fields that are essential to the strength of America, the U.S. is emerging from underinvestment. (2010: 9). Priorities like education, electricity, science and technology, and health care have not been sufficiently improved by the U.S. (2010: 9). Implying the preference for multilateralism and the limits of unilateral action, the document stresses avoiding acting alone. With other primary centers of influence, including China, India, and Russia, as well as increasingly powerful nations such as Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia, the United States was seeking to develop deeper and more successful partnerships (2010: 3).

In order to strengthen American national capacity, the U.S. military must maintain its conventional dominance and the nuclear deterrence capability of the U.S., as long as nuclear weapons remain, while seeking to increase its ability to defeat asymmetric threats (2010: 14). Where force is required, it will continue to do so in a manner that represents its values and enhances its legitimacy, pursuing broad international support, working with institutions such as NATO and the United Nations' Security Council (2010: 22). The primary focus is on the domestic agenda and economic matters first, and then on the international agenda, in a cooperative manner. Obama tried to move away from the previous atmosphere of conflict and prioritized the economy agenda at home. This tendency gave the opportunity to China to rise without any effective limitation, and Russia to act freely in its geographical vicinity.

2.5. NSS 2015

NSS 2015 was issued in the second term of Obama as a shorter document. It was nearly 30 pages (29 main and two foreword pages). There is a path dependency with the first one stating that the rising economic strength of America is the cornerstone of its national security and a vital source of its international power. (2015: Preface) NATO was the world's leading multilateral alliance, strengthened by the U.S.' historic close relations with the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Canada. (2015: 7). The U.S. retained all options for achieving the goal of preventing the development of nuclear weapons by Iran (2015: 11). It kept its door open to greater collaboration with Russia in areas of mutual interests (2015: 25). There is a significant risk of the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons. The escalating cybersecurity threats, Russia's aggression, the accelerating impacts of climate change, and the spread of infectious diseases gave rise to global security anxieties. There is an acceptance that the U.S. is not strong enough to overcome threats and risks by acting unilaterally.

The 2015 NSS called for "collective action" and promotion of "international rules and norms" to ensure security and order against threats, and rejected extensive military occupations of foreign societies and unilateral interventions aimed at regime change, nation-building, or similarly ambitious goals reacting to the failed attempts to reshape countries such as Russia, Iraq, and Afghanistan over the past 25 years. (Goldgeier & Suri, 2016) The U.S. stepped beyond the large-scale ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that over the past decade characterized so much of the American foreign policy. Compared to the nearly 180,000 troops that the U.S. had in Iraq and Afghanistan when Obama took office, now America had less than 15,000 troops stationed in those countries. It paints an image of U.S. influence as multinational and resurgent, but largely focused on free markets, democracy, and human rights. The text explicitly condemns widespread foreign-society military occupations and unilateral actions aimed at regime change, nation-building or equally ambitious objectives as such.

2.6. NSS 2017

The 2017 NSS is a document that contains radical changes in comparison with the previous ones. In this document, it has been criticized that attempts of the U.S. to turn its competitors to reliable partners by including them in the international system over the past two decades, have failed. Although the intentions of the neo-realist theory's assumptions were initially good, it has been emphasized that the potential for change and the use of power could change according to the emerging new distribution of power, and because of this, the 'great power competition' period has returned. Instead of approaching the competition between states on a periodic basis, it is aimed to maintain the superiority that the U.S. has on an ongoing basis. In fact, this also requires strategies that are more prone to offensive realism. It is noted that the U.S. will ensure peace only with force, but the importance of acting jointly with allies and partners, and ensuring their fair burden sharing is also emphasized. Although external balancing is an indispensable element of great power competition, there are no concrete statements about how this will show itself in Europe. It is aimed to do balancing in the Asia-Pacific region by increasing quadrennial cooperation with Japan, India and Australia. In fact, the addition of the UK to the cooperation with Australia through AUKUS has been an interesting development when it is evaluated together with BREXIT. It is mentioned that economic security is also a national security issue, and it has been noted that the U.S. will not remain silent about economic abuses from now on, and the country will give importance to economic cooperation with countries which share the same ideology.

It is also important to note that the U.S. Armed Forces have been reduced to the lowest number of personnel since 1940, and the supply of new weapons systems has been severely limited, while threats have been increasing. Russian Federation and China were offered to take advantages of opportunities as long as they supported democratic norms and values such as human rights, rule of law and market economy. 2017 NSS was different from others particularly in which it was stated that China and Russia were revisionist powers. The distribution of power has changed from 2000 to 2018 so that global security should be assured with collaboration and necessitates multilateral approaches including bargaining and defining new roles. NATO will continue to be the main asset for European security.

3. NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

The NDS is issued by the U.S. Department of Defense is intended to clarify how DOD can support the President's National Security Strategy. The National Defense Strategy (NDS) acts as the capstone paper of the Department. It flows from the NSS and advises the Military National Policy (Department of Defense, 2008).

3.1. NDS 2005

It was 24-pages long, excluding the foreword and the executive summary. It faced radically distinct problems from those encountered in the Cold War and previous eras by the American defense system (Department of Defense, 2005: V). The international community got the greatest opportunity since the rise of the nation-state in the seventeenth century, as reported in the President's National Security Strategy, to create a world, where major powers engaged in peace rather than constantly planning for war (Department of Defense, 2005: 5). 'The possibility of renewed great power competition' was underlined concerning China and Russia. (Department of Defense, 2005: 5). While the security challenges of the 20th Century

emerged from strong states embarking on aggressive paths, the main dimensions of the 21st Century may emerge in, and emanate from comparatively weak states and ungoverned regions, globalization and the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Department of Defense, 2005: 1). North Korea, on the other hand, is presenting conventional, irregular, and devastating threats at once (Department of Defense, 2005: 3). In the war on terrorism, a modern strategy was clear (Department of Defense, 2005: 2). International alliances proved to be a central source of the strength of the United States so that shared values, the collective understanding of risks and the pledge to cooperation offered much more defense than could be accomplished by the U.S. alone (Department of Defense, 2005: 4).

It was mentioned in the document, as some of the challenges, that while the U.S. had no global peer, it would have rivals and enemies—both state and non-state; risks could be differently viewed globally, even among its closest allies, and unity would be difficult to achieve. (Department of Defense, 2005: 6)

Even though U.S. President Bush does not identify China and Russia as threats within the 2002 NSS and the 2006 NSS, Pentagon's warnings against China and Russia are obvious in the 2005 NDS. Pentagon also points to the risk that the great power competition period might start again. From this perspective, it can be deduced that Pentagon did not take into consideration the U.S. President's priorities, but it had to give a mandatory support, because the strategy documents of the Bush era emphasized that this transformation had been determined through a top-down approach.

3.2. NDS 2008

There was a path dependency in order to redefine new threats. With aggressive transnational terror networks, aggressive states armed with weapons of mass destruction, increasing foreign forces, new space and cyber threats, natural and pandemic disasters, and growing rivalry for capital, the United States, its alliances, and its partners face a variety of challenges (Department of Defense, 2008, p. 1). New commands (integrating Space and Strategic Commands, creating Northern and Africa Commands) structures were created by the Department since 2001. The fact that the U.S. military forces are deployed as per regions at the command of the combatant commanders shows that it does not tolerate even the regional hegemony. Established a regional command center in Africa, on the other hand, can be interpreted as a caution also against China's expansion.

State actors no longer had a monopoly on the disastrous use of aggression (Department of Defense, 2008: 7). Including communism and imperialism before it, the militant extremist philosophy opposed the international system's laws and institutions (Department of Defense, 2008: 2). It was argued that the world order was equally challenged by rogue states such as Iran and North Korea: The pursuit of nuclear technologies and enrichment capability by Iran posed a serious security threat in an area which is already fragile, and significant nuclear and missile proliferation risk for the U.S. and other responsible foreign partners was also raised by the North Korean regime. (Department of Defense, 2008: 3)

The risk of challenges from stronger states must also be considered by the U.S., particularly against China the U.S. needed to hedge its potential 'full range of long-range strike, space, and information warfare capabilities' in addition to its conventional military

capabilities. (Department of Defense, 2008: 3). This paragraph emphasizes the potential of China as a global opponent against the U.S. hegemony.

Russia was seeking ‘renewed influence’ so that it started to take a more aggressive military approach, such as renewing long-range bomber flights, withdrawing from the conventions on weapons control and force reduction, and also challenging target countries hosting future U.S. anti-missile bases. (Department of Defense, 2008: 4)

A multilateral solution was stated as a presumption that the United States, and particularly the Department of Defense, cannot win the ‘Long War’ or resolve other security issues alone successfully (Department of Defense, 2008, p. 23). China and Russia were also significant potential allies, and the U.S. seeks to establish collaborative and cooperative ties with them. (Department of Defense, 2008: 11) India was required to assume greater responsibilities in line with its rising commercial, military and soft power (Department of Defense, 2008: 14). It can be deduced that the U.S. intended to conduct containment policy with India against China at that theatre. Even though U.S. President Bush does not identify China and Russia as threats within the 2002 NSS and the 2006 NSS, it is obvious Pentagon’s warnings against China and Russia in the 2005 NDS and 2008 NDS. Pentagon also points to the risk that the great power competition period might start again.

3.3. NDS 2018

Different from the previous ones, 2018 NDS was published as a summary, and thus was 11-pages long. The U.S. policy was articulated by this unclassified synopsis of the classified 2018 National Security Strategy, and in tandem with a strong constellation of alliances and partners, a more lethal, robust and increasingly inventive Joint Force could sustain stability by strength. (Department of Defense, 2018: 1) Power is considered as an ends, and there is also a call for sustaining alliances and partners for a multilateral approach.

It was claimed that the U.S. is emerged from a time of “strategic atrophy,” mindful of the depletion of its competitive military edge. (Department of Defense, 2018: 1) States were the world’s key players, but non-state actors are still disrupting the defense climate with highly advanced capabilities. (Department of Defense, 2018: 3)

The re-emergence of long-term, geopolitical rivalry rooted from what the National Security Strategy defined as revisionist powers, namely China and Russia, was the key threat to U.S. stability and security (Department of Defense, 2018: 2). It was claimed that by seeking nuclear weapons or supporting terrorism, rogue regimes like North Korea and Iran continued to destabilize regions, and across all aspects of influence, both revisionist forces and rogue governments are fighting (Department of Defense, 2018: 2).

The Department intended to continue its efforts to discourage and fight rogue regimes like North Korea and Iran at the same time (Department of Defense: 4). While a strong focus was put on improving the NATO Trans-Atlantic Partnership, in the face of their mutual security challenges, the U.S. wanted European allies to uphold their promises to increase defense and modernization investment to strengthen the alliance (Department of Defense, 2018: 9). The transformation necessity was also stressed in the document, but this time in the opposite direction from action against terrorism to policies in compatible with the great power competition.

CONCLUSION

National strategy documents may not forecast the future with a hundred percent accuracy. It might be deduced that strategy documents are not sacred documents, and they always change according to the international structure, mostly in accordance with the balance of power concept as Realist scholars have assumed. In this study, we can conclude that American threat perceptions within designated time frame in this article falsifies this assumption. Since the U.S. is a global power, it should best implement external balancing with different partnerships and alliances in different regions assuming great powers as main actors in international relations. It might be claimed that American military force planners have been focused on two major theatres, Europe and Indio-Pacific, and the priority was shifted from Europe to the latter one. Even with the contingency plans of the Cold War era, the U.S. prepared its military force to win two theatre wars in both Europe and the Pacific region, and followed an offensive stance, while Europe followed a defensive strategy restricted to its continent. This is where the biggest difference in the Transatlantic Alliance originates. With the elimination of the threat of the former Soviet Union in the Europe theatre, the U.S. used its military force in Afghanistan and Iraq during the Bush administration after 9/11 instead of focusing the potential rising power China in the Pacific region. During the Presidency of Obama, the U.S. which had a positive approach to include China and Russia in the system enabled China to be a free-riser instead of seeing these two countries as threats. Whereas, during Trump's presidency, China and Russia have come to be seen as concrete threats.

In the American documents issued between 2000 and 2018, there has been a continuity of emphasis on mainly two possible war theatres against China and Russia. From the Cold War till the present day, the U.S. Armed Forces have been preparing to be ready and win at two major theatres at the same time against former Soviet Union in Europe and against China in Indio-Pacific. Nevertheless, American Presidents did not overtly identify China and Russia as threat until the 2017 NSS. Trump defined in the 2017 NSS three main sets of threats as follows; the revisionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and transnational threat organizations, particularly jihadist terrorist groups. Between the years of 2000 and 2017, even though the U.S. contingency plans foresee two main theatres: Europe and Pacific, the U.S. military engagement in first Afghanistan and then Iraq might be accepted as the additional “half” theater thanks to the advantage which the unipolar international structure provided to the U.S. All the NSSs of the U.S. contain issues in the world that no country can handle alone, and also the solution of problems with alliances. Therefore, although it is emphasized that external balancing, which has become a habit since the Cold War, is preferred, it is also included that the U.S. can act alone to protect its national interest if necessary, in the NSSs. Due to the global deployment of the U.S. Armed Forces, the whole world is included in the geographical proximity, but we have found that Europe and the Asia Pacific region stand out as the main priority. However, it is in the documents that the Asia Pacific region has been the primary region between Europe and Asia Pacific since the Obama era while Afghanistan and Iraq came to the fore on the Middle East axis during the Bush presidency.

The 9/11 terrorist attack that the U.S. was exposed to, on its own soil, had different effects on the Transatlantic Alliance. The U.S has gone through a major transformation in its strategy and security documents. First of all, the definition of threat has been changed and while states should be considered as the main actors as it was proposed in neo-realism,

“terrorism” has been determined as a threat. Also, it was aimed to change the conventional war-based structure of the U.S. Armed Forces by switching from a threat-based planning to a capability-based approach. The NATO alliance supported the military operation in Afghanistan by implementing Article 5 for the first time in its history. The Afghanistan and Iraq operations carried out by the then U.S. President Bush, besides being highly costly, also destabilized the countries of the region in a way that would be very difficult to reverse. Terrorism might be a disturbing matter, but contrary to what is written in strategy documents, it cannot be the most dangerous threat. Armed forces, including nuclear forces and large air force fleets, cannot be easily transformed and employed against a terror threat. That is why they must design a specific response to that kind of threat, which should be constructed in a different manner from others and limited in number to avoid unintended consequences. There wasn't a survival or direct security threat to the U.S., but a limited terrorist attack. The economic crisis that affected the entire world in 2008 worsened the situation. With the election of Obama as the President of the U.S., a normalization process occurred and, the U.S. has turned its priority from Europe to the Pacific Region due to the changing international power distribution.

During the U.S. occupation in Afghanistan and Iraq, China rose to the rank of the second prominent international actor in the world, while Russia had the opportunity to heal its wounds through a limited and realist strategy. The resurrection of the Russian Federation and the rise of China have seriously alerted the authorities writing up the American strategy and security documents. NATO's expansion strategy in Europe was blocked by Russia, first in Georgia, and then in Ukraine. Obama succeeded to overcome this differentiation through a multilateral strategy and diplomatic means preference rather than military power. Nevertheless, Trump has fanned the flame, and the new international distribution of power requires collaboration and bargaining in order to balance the rising power, China.

It seems that, after many years, the U.S. acts in the line with realist projections one more time, and each actor should be very prudent and taking care of itself in their preferences and policies. Russia annexed Crimea by force, which was regarded as the peak point of Russia's increasingly aggressive behavior. China, on the other hand, while steadily expanding its naval and air force capabilities, adopted a more assertive rhetoric over issues of conflict, such as Taiwan and South China Sea. It can be argued that the growing tendency towards revisionist actions and rhetoric as such, on the part of Russia and China, have been the main reason behind the altered threat perception of the U.S. observed in the relevant documents. The last NDS (NDS 2018) states that “long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities”. It is also stated that China and Russia have exploited the competitive advantage while the U.S. was busy, first in Operation Desert Storm in 1991, and then in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, through developing their military capabilities and a force structure specifically designed to challenge the U.S.' influence and increasing their own international stature. To conclude, the superiority of the U.S. in the world as a military power still continues. However, the distribution of power, which was unipolar after the Cold War, has evolved into a multipolar structure with rising potential competitors such as Russia and China. Accordingly, the national strategy documents examined, show a clear transition from a focus on global war on terror into a revival of great power competition. It reminds us realism will lead most of the time in the long run.

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