

The Western Hemisphere as the New Axis of U.S. National Security

The 2025 National Security Strategy and
the Monroe Doctrine in the 21st Century

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ISBN: 979-13-87860-59-2
Legal Deposit: M-17220-2026
Layout: CEU Ediciones
Printing: CEU Ediciones Printed in Spain

Published by: CEU Ediciones
Calle Julián Romea, 18
28003 Madrid | Spain
Phone: (+34) 91 514 05 73
Email: ceuediciones@ceu.es

The Fundación Universitaria San Pablo CEU is an entity registered in the Foundations Registry under No. 60 / Tax Identification Number (CIF): G-28423275.

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Executive Summary

The 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS), published on December 4, 2025, by the Trump administration, marks a fundamental strategic shift in U.S. national security policy. In a context of systemic competition with China and a reconfiguration of the international order, the document places Ibero-America and the Caribbean at the center of U.S. security priorities, gradually relegating the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East to a secondary position. The strategy revives and updates the Monroe Doctrine through the so-called «Trump Corollary», transforming the Western Hemisphere into an essential strategic perimeter for ensuring the United States' domestic stability, economic resilience, and global power projection.

Within this framework, the NSS 2025 identifies three interconnected principal threats to U.S. national security:

1. Narcoterrorism:

- Deaths caused by synthetic opioid overdoses reached a peak of approximately 80,000 in 2023 –more than thirty times the level recorded in 2012.
- The designation of Mexican cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) has enabled the use of military instruments, sanctions, and unilateral actions beyond U.S. borders.

2. Mass Migration:

- Considered a direct threat to social cohesion and governance.
- The immigrant population reached 53.3 million in January 2025, representing 15.8% of the total U.S. population.
- More than 8 million individuals are estimated to be residing in the country without legal status.

3. Influence of Extra-Regional Powers:

- Bilateral trade between Latin America and the Caribbean and China reached \$518 billion in 2024, nearly double the figure recorded a decade earlier. China has consolidated its position as the leading trading partner of several South American countries.
- More than half of the countries in the Ibero-American region participate in the Belt and Road Initiative, with Chinese loans exceeding \$145 billion between 2013 and 2021.

In response to these threats, the United States seeks not only to reduce direct risks to its domestic security but also to promote cooperation with countries across the hemisphere by fostering economic development, strengthening regional stability, and ensuring secure access to critical technologies and infrastructure.

To achieve these objectives, the strategy is built upon a pragmatic approach: «being a better friend to allies», «being tougher on enemies», and «maintaining pressure on partners». This approach translates into a redistribution of economic and diplomatic resources toward the region, a sustained increase in defense spending, and the use of military capabilities and trade pressure as tools of deterrence and influence.

Economically, the Western Hemisphere possesses exceptional strategic potential: its combined GDP exceeds that of East Asia as a whole, making it a natural counterweight to emerging powers and a key source of stability and resources.

In conclusion, the NSS 2025 not only redefines U.S. security priorities but also signals a historic shift in American grand strategy: first consolidating a stable, prosperous, and U.S. –aligned Western Hemisphere, and then projecting leadership and security on a global scale.

Introduction

The global order is undergoing a phase of structural reconfiguration, characterized by the weakening of unipolar hegemony and the emergence of a more competitive and fragmented international environment. The rise of new centers of power, particularly in Asia, and the intensification of great-power rivalry are reshaping traditional spheres of influence and compelling states to reconsider their relationships and strategies in order to safeguard their security and fundamental interests.

Within this context, the United States faces a central challenge: structural competition with the People's Republic of China, which is perceived as the only actor capable of challenging U.S. global leadership over the long term. Through a sustained strategy of economic soft power –based on the expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative, the financing of strategic infrastructure, and the consolidation of trade and technological networks– Beijing has achieved significant penetration over the past decade in regions such as Africa and the Asia-Pacific, as well as in areas historically associated with U.S. influence, including Ibero-America. This development is viewed as an erosion of Washington's global primacy, generating a systemic geopolitical competition.

In response to this new environment, the 2025 National Security Strategy articulates a comprehensive security approach that combines the reaffirmation of hard power –military, economic, and political pressure– with a selective reordering of strategic priorities, namely a greater emphasis on stabilizing the United States' immediate surroundings. Within this framework, the Western Hemisphere assumes renewed importance as an essential strategic perimeter for ensuring U.S. security, domestic stability, and resilience against external challenges.

Ibero-America and the Caribbean are recognized as strategically significant regions, possessing the potential for economic self-sufficiency, abundant critical resources, and the capacity to form a regional bloc capable of counterbalancing the rise of China and other emerging powers, provided that a stable hemisphere with aligned interests can be consolidated. In this context, the republican principle of «America First», established during Donald Trump's first term, is redefined in his second administration by emphasizing the necessity of cooperation with strategic allies whenever such cooperation contributes to the protection of U.S. interests: «America First, but not alone».

This report analyzes the evolution of the concept of national security in the 2025 National Security Strategy as a reflection of recent geopolitical changes; examines the contemporary reinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine

through the so-called «Trump Corollary» as the foundation for a renewed U.S. presence and cooperation in the Western Hemisphere; evaluates the reorientation of U.S. efforts toward consolidating a stable and cohesive regional bloc capable of addressing threats such as narcotics trafficking, irregular migration, and the presence of foreign powers within its sphere of influence; and concludes with a critical assessment from a Spanish perspective. In doing so, the report seeks to understand how the United States has adapted its instruments of power and both its domestic and foreign policies in this new era in order to preserve its strategic leadership in an increasingly multipolar world.

National Security in U.S. Strategic Doctrine

The United States has played a decisive role in shaping international political and geopolitical dynamics since the end of the Second World War. Although its external projection began to consolidate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was after 1945 that it assumed a central role in the construction of the international order, promoting the creation of institutions, alliances, and normative frameworks that have influenced the functioning of the international system to the present day.

In its interpretation of the world and its power dynamics, the United States has not merely reacted to the events of each historical period but has sought to guide their development according to a particular ideological and strategic vision. Throughout this process, national security has occupied a central position. It has served as the organizing principle of U.S. grand strategy, integrating military, economic, diplomatic, and technological instruments with the objective of preserving state power, ensuring domestic stability, and managing external threats.

1. Evolution of the Concept of National Security

National security constitutes one of the foundational concepts of states' domestic, foreign, and defense policies. In its classical formulation, it was primarily associated with protecting territory, population, and institutions against external threats that could jeopardize sovereignty, the survival of the state, or the security of its citizens. However, it is a dynamic concept¹, evolving alongside changes in the international system and shifting political priorities.

Over recent decades, the process of «securitization» has broadened the scope of national security to include issues not strictly military in nature, such as climate change, cybersecurity, pandemics, and supply-chain resilience. In other words, matters previously regarded as economic or social concerns have increasingly come to be treated as strategic issues under the umbrella of national security.

In the United States, this evolution and expansion of the concept can be clearly observed through the content of the various National Security Strategies (NSS) published to date². Since the enactment of the Goldwater-Nichols

¹ Holmes, K. R. (2015). *What is national security?* The Heritage Foundation.

² Chin, J. J., Skinner, K., & Yoo, C. (2023). *Understanding national security strategies through time*. *Texas National Security Review*, 6(4), 103-124.

Act in 1986, each president has been required to submit a comprehensive national security strategy to Congress on a regular basis. Over time, administrations began publishing unclassified versions, transforming these documents into instruments of both internal coordination and public communication, directed at domestic and international audiences alike. By 2026, nineteen strategies³ had been made public, each deeply shaped by its historical context and by the political orientation of the administration that produced it.

During the Cold War, national security was structured around nuclear deterrence and containment of Soviet communism. Under President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), this logic reached a particularly clear expression: increased defense spending, revitalization of alliances such as NATO, and strategic pressure on the vulnerabilities of the Soviet bloc. The concept of «peace through strength» encapsulated a vision in which military, technological, and economic superiority served as the ultimate guarantor of stability.

The presidency of George H. W. Bush (1989-1993) coincided with the collapse of the bipolar international system. The 1990 NSS redefined fundamental interests –protection of democratic values, economic prosperity, and international stability– and prioritized the orderly management of the transition toward a unipolar system through multilateral cooperation, as demonstrated during the Gulf War. This experience reinforced the view that international legitimacy and broad coalitions enhanced strategic effectiveness.

During the administration of Bill Clinton (1993-2001), the NSS expanded the concept of security by incorporating free trade and democracy promotion as pillars of stability. The underlying assumption was that globalization, development, and democratization would contribute to peace. Policies such as China’s integration into the global economic order and support for Russia’s post-Soviet transition reflected this logic. Consequently, national security ceased to be viewed exclusively through a military lens and became increasingly linked to economic interdependence and the expansion of liberal values. Nevertheless, the growing visibility of transnational threats –including terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and failed states– revealed that globalization also created new vulnerabilities.

These vulnerabilities became starkly apparent with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which marked a turning point for both the world and the United States. Under George W. Bush (2001-2009), the 2002 NSS redefined security around the global war on terrorism and introduced the principle of preemptive action, providing the strategic rationale for interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The 2006 NSS further developed this approach by linking national security to the active promotion of democracy, particularly in the Middle East, through the so-called «Freedom Agenda». Over time, however, the human, economic, and reputational costs of these interventions exposed the limits of expansive military engagement and political engineering as instruments of stabilization.

3 Available for consultation at: <https://history.defense.gov/Historical-Sources/National-Security-Strategy/>

With Barack Obama (2009-2017), a conceptual rebalancing occurred. The 2010 NSS incorporated economic, technological, energy, and climate dimensions, while the «Pivot to Asia» anticipated China's growing centrality in global geopolitics. The 2015 NSS reaffirmed the importance of multilateral leadership. National security came to encompass domestic resilience, climate change, and cybersecurity, reflecting the interconnected nature of challenges in a globalized world. This approach was also influenced by lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan, reinforcing the idea that security required a more balanced combination of diplomatic, economic, technological, and military instruments.

The 2017 NSS, published during Donald Trump's first term (2017-2021), declared the return of great-power competition as the organizing principle of national security. This marked a significant shift in geopolitical thinking and aligned with the political philosophy of «America First». China and Russia were identified as primary competitors, with particular emphasis placed on economic and technological rivalry. The 2018 Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework further consolidated this orientation. The strategy stressed economic sovereignty and the reassessment of foreign commitments deemed unnecessary or burdensome.

Finally, the administration of Joe Biden (2021-2025), in its 2022 NSS, characterized the decade as a decisive contest between democracies and autocracies. China was identified as the principal long-term competitor, while Russia was considered the most immediate threat following its invasion of Ukraine. The emphasis on domestic renewal and alliance strengthening reflected a synthesis of strategic competition and democratic cooperation.

Viewed historically, the evolution of U.S. National Security Strategies mirrors major transformations in world politics and demonstrates how changing circumstances shape interpretations of national security and, in turn, influence global geopolitical dynamics. During the Cold War, deterrence and bipolar containment were paramount; during the 1990s, stability became associated with globalization and the liberal international order; and after 9/11, attention shifted toward terrorism and asymmetric threats. Throughout these decades, the concept of security followed a clearly expansionary trajectory.

In the last decade, however, great-power competition has returned to the center of strategic analysis, inaugurating a new era of systemic rivalry. Within this context, and particularly since the beginning of Trump's second administration, a significant strategic shift has occurred: a departure from the expansive securitization of previous decades in favor of a more selective, pragmatic, and narrowly defined understanding of national security.

In response to this shift, and as a reflection of a specific political and partisan project, the latest National Security Strategy, published in 2025, introduces a significant turning point in the conception of American leadership.

2. National Security Strategy 2025: Reorientation Toward the Western Hemisphere

International relations are shaped by multiple motivations that interact within an increasingly complex global system. This environment, characterized by heightened tensions compared with previous decades, has encouraged a more pragmatic approach on the part of the United States. The current Trump administration has removed issues such as democracy promotion, liberal multilateralism, and climate change from the core national security agenda, focusing instead on the country's direct and vital interests. The 2025 National Security Strategy⁴, published on December 4, 2025, explicitly reflects this transformation in the hierarchy of American priorities.

The most significant element is the decision to place the Western Hemisphere –North America, Ibero-America, and the Caribbean– at the center of U.S. strategy after a period of relative neglect, while gradually relegating traditionally prioritized regions⁵ to a secondary position.

This continental shift stems directly from the principle of «America First», a cornerstone of Donald Trump's political program and an idea already visible, albeit more subtly, during his first administration. The strategy rests on the premise that the most urgent threats do not arise solely from global rivalries but also from external challenges that directly affect social cohesion, economic performance, and national governance. Domestic and foreign security are therefore viewed as closely interconnected. A pragmatic logic guides U.S. policy: protecting the nation from immediate risks while securing tangible benefits such as access to resources, strengthened alliances, and influence over geopolitically significant areas, all while promoting stability and mutually beneficial outcomes within the hemisphere. The approach might therefore be summarized as «America First, but not America Alone».

In this respect, the 2025 NSS departs significantly from President Biden's 2022 strategy. Whereas the earlier document framed competition in idealistic and liberal-internationalist terms, the 2025 version shifts toward a more pragmatic realism. The focus is no longer on defending the liberal international order but rather on ensuring a stable environment aligned with American interests. The document's tone reinforces this orientation: it is concise, considerably shorter than previous strategies, direct, and strongly nationalist, departing from the consensual language characteristic of earlier NSS documents and explicitly prioritizing American interests over broad ideological commitments.

4 Can be consulted at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

5 Arnal, J., et al. (2025). *Claves de la nueva Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional de Estados Unidos*. Real Instituto Elcano.

The strategy also proposes a global realignment of U.S. military deployments. Resources are to be shifted from other regions toward the Western Hemisphere on the grounds that military presence should correspond to the most pressing threats and maximize deterrent effect. This represents a significant departure from the first decades of the twenty-first century, during which U.S. presence in much of Latin America experienced various constraints and setbacks.

The hemispheric turn is also supported by a comparative assessment of economic capabilities. Taken as a whole, the Western Hemisphere constitutes an extraordinarily powerful economic bloc. According to data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the region's combined nominal GDP exceeded \$36 trillion in 2023, significantly surpassing that of East Asia –even when China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the ASEAN countries are included, whose combined total would barely reach \$27 trillion⁶-. Moreover, the average GDP per capita of the Western Hemisphere exceeds \$70,000, compared with approximately \$17,000⁷ in East Asia. From this perspective, the Americas could, if strategically coordinated, become an economic and geopolitical space that is larger, wealthier, stronger, and more self-sufficient than any competing block.

Nevertheless, realizing this potential faces substantial political obstacles. Although the Trump administration enjoys close relations with some governments in the region, many others maintain political orientations that differ significantly and may resist such a strategic reorientation. These political differences, combined with persistent security concerns, generate ongoing tensions. Such challenges are further complicated by the fact that several major Latin American economies count China among their principal trading partners, making it difficult to redirect economic ties fully toward Washington and reinforcing Beijing's role as a direct commercial competitor.

Consequently, a relatively stable, integrated, and strategically aligned hemisphere is viewed as a necessary condition for preserving the prosperity from which the United States can sustain its global position. Beyond the rhetoric of retrenchment, the strategy suggests a logic of concentrated competition: first secure the nation's own geopolitical perimeter, and then confront global rivalries from a position of greater strength.

6 Lubin, D. (2025). *The economics of the new Monroe Doctrine*. Chatham House.

7 Idem.

3. The Monroe Doctrine in the 21st Century and the Trump Corollary

The 2025 National Security Strategy explicitly embodies a contemporary reinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine⁸, originally formulated by President James Monroe in his annual message to Congress in 1823. Promoted by the current administration, this update, known as the Trump Corollary or the «Donroe» Doctrine, was explicitly set out in the presidential address of 2 December 2025⁹.

In its original formulation, the Monroe Doctrine established that the continent should not be subject to further European colonisation or intervention, and that any attempt to extend European political systems to the hemisphere would be considered a threat to the United States. In return, Washington adopted a position of non-interference in European affairs. It was, in essence, a doctrine designed to preserve US autonomy and prevent the restoration of colonial rule in the newly independent Latin American republics.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, however, this doctrine adapted to different historical contexts. The Roosevelt Corollary of 1904 transformed its originally defensive nature into an instrument of intervention, by legitimising direct US action in Latin America in situations of instability or breach of international obligations. Subsequently, during the «Good Neighbour» policy and, later, during the Cold War, the United States maintained the same basic idea: to prevent external powers, particularly Soviet communism, from influencing Latin American politics. In this way, the region was consolidated as an area of exclusive and priority influence for Washington.

In the 2025 NSS, this tradition re-emerges as a key priority of US foreign policy. The strategy maintains that, following a period of relative disinterest, the United States must «apply and enforce» the Monroe Doctrine to restore its pre-eminence on the continent. All of this is articulated by reviving the guiding principle of «Peace Through Strength», which emphasises deterrence through military superiority to achieve political stabilisation and prevent the interference of foreign influences. Today, this strategy translates into concrete measures: the maintenance of strategic naval bases that secure trade routes and maritime control; the deployment of troops in the Caribbean and key areas of South and Central America to respond rapidly to contingencies; and sustained defence spending.

Unlike the original formulation of 1823, which was directed primarily at European powers, the contemporary version is geared towards containing the strategic projection of global powers such as China. Thus, the hemisphere ceases to be merely a space to be protected from formal colonisation and comes to be conceived as a strategic sphere whose autonomy must be guaranteed. At the same time, the NSS 2025 explicitly adopts a pragmatic approach towards the regions governments. The strategy prioritises stability and functional cooperation over strict normative criteria, provided that these contribute to convergence with US interests.

8 Bethell, L. (2025). *The Monroe Doctrine in US-Latin American relations: And the 2025 Trump Corollary*. CEBRI-Revista, 4(16), 63-80.

9 Can be consulted at: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/message-the-anniversary-the-monroe-doctrine>

The focus is no longer on the ideological nature of regimes, but on the effects that certain political, economic or social dynamics may have on countries in the region and, directly or indirectly, on the well-being and stability of the United States.

In doctrinal terms, this reformulation entails the updating of a historical principle of delimiting spheres of influence, in this case under the pretext of defending national security. In other words, events occurring within the American continent may have effects on the internal security of the United States and, therefore, may be addressed directly by that country. It not only rejects the intervention or presence of non-hemispheric powers, but also reserves for the United States the capacity to act coercively if it considers its security to be under threat.

This approach fosters regional cooperation based on shared interests. By jointly managing the challenges that threaten internal stability, an environment conducive to bilateral economic security is created. Ultimately, this synergy ensures the United States preferential access to strategic resources on the continent, including hydrocarbons, critical minerals and rare earths.

This new Monroe strategy is thus structured around three lines of action within the framework of hemispheric cooperation¹⁰, with the aim of harmonising interests:

Firstly, «be a better friend to your friends». It seeks to strengthen relations with allies in the hemisphere, deepening bilateral ties with governments that share similar political agendas –such as Argentina, El Salvador or Paraguay– and, in turn, encouraging an increase in US direct investment in these countries.

Secondly, «be tougher on your enemies». As has been clearly evident in recent months, this involves adopting a tougher stance towards regional adversaries, which entails increased diplomatic, economic and political pressure on regimes such as those in Cuba, Venezuela or Bolivia.

And finally, the strategy envisages a policy of «tough love» towards those states which, whilst strategically important, are governed by leaders who do not fully share the US administration's conservative agenda; these include countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico.

This approach, underpinning the 2025 National Security Strategy, reflects a pragmatic application of the «America First» principle and an update of the Monroe Doctrine for the 21st century. The strategy seeks to forge relationships that serve both US security and the stability of the countries involved, combining security objectives, economic interests and geopolitical calculations.

10 Carafano, J. J. (2024). *A new Monroe Doctrine for the Western Hemisphere?* GIS Reports.

The new hemispheric priority as a reflection of the US situation

Donald Trump's second administration has accelerated a political and strategic redefinition that responds both to a changing international context and to a domestic situation that has been particularly delicate for the United States for over a decade. Against a backdrop marked by intense political polarisation (the LGBTQ agenda, interventionism, health crises, economic disparities...) and a perception of domestic vulnerability, the new direction positions internal consolidation and the protection of the immediate environment as prerequisites for any sustainable international projection.

This rethinking also has a clear political dimension, as it stands in stark contrast to the approach adopted by Joe Biden's administration. The current strategy proposes a stricter prioritisation of objectives and a greater emphasis on strengthening defence capabilities. It establishes a defined geopolitical sequence: first the Western Hemisphere, then the Indo-Pacific, and, at a later stage, Eurasia. Furthermore, it has driven a significant increase in military spending¹¹, accompanied by new recruitment campaigns in the armed forces. These measures seek to reverse historically low troop levels and reinforce deterrence and operational readiness in the face of potential scenarios of regional tension.

Within this context, the appointment of Marco Rubio as Secretary of State reinforces this strategic shift both symbolically and operationally. His Cuban-American background and his track record in Latin American politics confer upon him, in the eyes of public opinion, a particular legitimacy to articulate a hemispheric agenda centered on containing adverse foreign influences and rebuilding regional alliances. In recent months, moreover, there has been a notable increase in his popularity and influence both within the Republican Party and in more progressive sectors, establishing him as one of the figures with the greatest national profile compared to other leaders with less capacity for international coordination. His media visibility, his firm stance in discourse towards actors such as China, and his defence of a robust yet selective foreign policy have contributed to strengthening his domestic standing.

11 In the 2026 financial year, the US Department of Defence has \$1.43 trillion to distribute amongst its six agencies. In 2015, expenditure stood at \$633 billion. In other words, the current budget is 2.26 times larger than it was 11 years ago. Available for consultation at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?end=2024&locations=US&start=2010>

Consequently, the US strategy towards the Americas, as explicitly identified in the 2025 National Security Strategy, seeks to focus its efforts on three interrelated vectors of foreign threat: drug trafficking, irregular migration and the growing presence of foreign powers in the region.

1. Narcoterrorism and the opioid crisis

The evolution of the opioid crisis has ceased to be strictly a health issue and has become one of the central pillars of US security policy. Following more than a decade marked by widespread drug use across the country –mostly synthetic opioids and, in particular, fentanyl– and by unprecedented mortality figures, the phenomenon has come to be seen as a direct threat to the country’s social, economic and demographic stability¹². With Donald Trump’s return to the White House, the response has been intensified and reformulated: the crisis is no longer addressed solely through prevention and treatment, but also through deterrence, international pressure and coercive action. It seeks to tackle the problem at its source.

This substance has irreversibly transformed the demographics of mortality in the United States. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, deaths from synthetic opioid-related overdoses rose from 2,628 in 2012 to a historic peak of nearly 80,000 in 2023, an increase of more than thirtyfold in just a decade¹³. Since 2017, more than half a million Americans have lost their lives to overdoses linked to this substance¹⁴. By way of example, this figure far exceeds the cumulative number of US casualties in armed conflicts from the Vietnam War to the present day.

12 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (2026). *Combating the opioid crisis*.

13 Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2025) *Understanding the opioid overdoses epidemic*.

14 Saunders, H., Panchal, N., & Rudowitz, R. (2026). *Opioid overdose deaths: National trends and variation by demographics and states*. KFF.

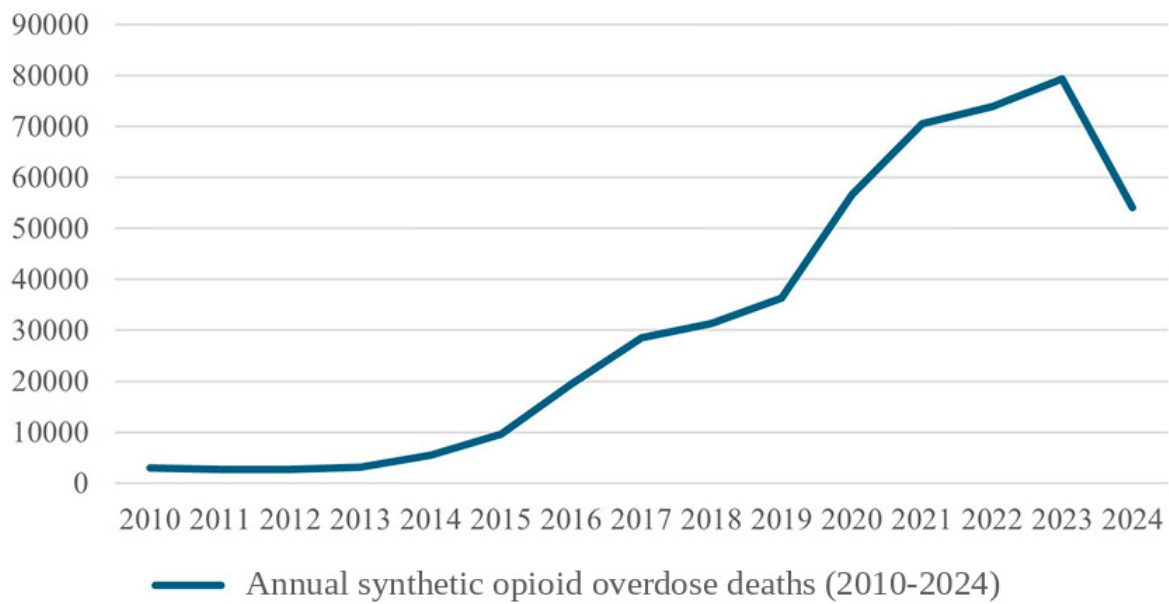


Chart produced by the author using data available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Although 2024 saw a significant decline –a reduction of approximately 24-27% compared with 2023¹⁵– fentanyl continues to be responsible for the majority of these deaths. The reduction is attributed to a combination of factors: intensified interdiction at borders and along maritime routes, market saturation, widespread distribution of naloxone, greater access to treatment and, in particular, the increase in aggressive military operations targeting supply chains since 2025. Despite this, fentanyl remains the leading cause of death among adults aged 26 to 44¹⁶, generating enormous healthcare costs and directly and dramatically affecting labour productivity, family cohesion and social stability in virtually every community across the country.

The deliberate adulteration of other street drugs –heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines, counterfeit pills mimicking drugs such as Xanax or OxyContin– with fentanyl, without any quality control, has exponentially increased the risk of both addiction and overdose. During the pandemic, between January 2020 and January 2021, overdoses from synthetic opioids rose by 55.6%¹⁷, driving an overall increase in opioid-related deaths. Because of these mixtures, thousands of users ingest fentanyl unintentionally, leading to addiction without prior consent and drastically increasing the likelihood of a fatal overdose.

15 Garnett, M. F., & Miniño, A. M. (2026). Drug overdose deaths in the United States, 2023-2024. NCHS Data Brief, 549. National Center for Health Statistics.

16 Wickizer, T. M., Goldstein, E. V., Mason, R., & Sharareh, N. (2025). The American fentanyl epidemic: Geographic variation in mortality and policy implications. *Health Affairs Scholar*, 3(7).

17 Drug Enforcement Administration Facts about Fentanyl.

However, the problem is not limited to domestic consumption but is closely linked to international production and transport networks. Both fentanyl and cocaine –two of the most widely used illicit drugs in the United States– originate mainly from abroad, and their production and distribution routes have been extensively documented by agencies such as the DEA, the State Department and various international organisations.

In the case of fentanyl, the primary source of the chemical precursors needed to synthesise this substance is concentrated in Asia, mainly in China and India¹⁸, where large chemical and pharmaceutical industries produce and export these substances with little regulatory oversight. From there, these precursors are transported to clandestine laboratories in Mexico, where cartels such as the Sinaloa and Jalisco Nueva Generación cartels convert them into high-purity fentanyl. Virtually all the fentanyl entering the United States is produced and distributed from Mexico¹⁹, crossing the southern border predominantly via land ports of entry in vehicles driven by US citizens or legal residents.

In contrast, the cocaine route –a drug that has also been consumed throughout the United States for decades– follows a different pattern: it is mainly grown and processed in Bolivia, Peru and Colombia; from there it is transported to ports in Ecuador or Venezuela and then shipped to Mexico²⁰. Once in Mexican territory, it crosses into the United States by land. Unlike in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Caribbean route predominated, today the main cocaine route is the Eastern Pacific, precisely because the increased naval and US military presence in the Caribbean has forced traffickers to shift their operations towards the Pacific Ocean. There are also clandestine air routes using light aircraft or drones, although these are much less frequent and account for a smaller percentage of the total volume transported.

The most significant change in US policy has not been merely operational, but conceptual. By explicitly characterising fentanyl as a «weapon of mass destruction» –a term used literally in the executive order signed by President Donald Trump on 15 December 2025²¹– Washington established a legal and strategic framework that blurs the traditional boundaries between law enforcement and conventional warfare. Equating drug trafficking with an existential threat comparable to chemical, biological or nuclear weapons represents a qualitative leap in national security doctrine.

The political starting point of this process of «securitisation» dates back to October 2017, when President Trump declared the opioid crisis a national public health emergency²². That measure initiated a process

18 Wang, C., Lassi, N., Zhang, X., & Sharma, V. (2022). *The evolving regulatory landscape for fentanyl: China, India, and global drug governance*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2074.

19 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2025). *Main heroin trafficking flows as described in reported seizures, 2020–2023*. In *World Drug Report 2025*.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/12/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-designates-fentanyl-as-a-weapon-of-mass-destruction/>

22 On 26 October 2017, Trump administration declared the fentanyl crisis a Public Health Emergency. This was renewed on 19 January 2018. In light of the mortality figures, the Department of Health and Human Services was authorised to launch a nationwide anti-drug campaign.

culminating in the 2025 NSS and the 2025 National Defence Strategy, where the phenomenon is redefined as «narco-terrorism».

This terminology is no accident: it reflects the United States' deliberate intention to deploy the full range of legislative and operational tools at its disposal against criminal organisations, in response to the increasingly aggressive shift in the tactics of drug trafficking groups. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in violence by the cartels, manifested in mass killings, kidnappings and extortion. These actions reflect a more direct strategy of intimidating the state and society, with the aim of controlling territories and trafficking routes and weakening institutions, which has turned drug trafficking into a genuine terrorist threat²³.

The most significant legal milestone in this area occurred on 20 February 2025, when the US Department of State designated eight key groups as Foreign Terrorist Organisations (FTOs) and Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs): the six main Mexican cartels (Sinaloa Cartel, Jalisco New Generation Cartel, Northeast Cartel –formerly Los Zetas–, Gulf Cartel, La Nueva Familia Michoacana and Cárteles Unidos), along with Tren de Aragua and Mara Salvatrucha.

This reclassification, initially driven by Executive Order 14157 of January 2025²⁴, radically transforms the operational landscape: it allows for the freezing of assets anywhere in the world, the prohibition of any financial transactions with these entities, the prosecution of banks, Chinese or Indian chemical companies, transporters or even government officials who facilitate their operations on charges of «material support for terrorism» and, most significantly, authorises the full use of military instruments against these actors.

Subsequently, the scope of this policy was expanded once again with the inclusion of other criminal organisations with significant regional impact, including the Cartel de los Soles, the Clan del Golfo, Barrio 18, Los Choneros and Los Lobos²⁵. This consolidates a new legal framework in which not only the major Mexican cartels, but also South American criminal organisations and Central American gangs, are subject to the comprehensive regime of sanctions and anti-terrorism legal provisions.

Under the logic of the 2025 NDS and the 2025 NSS, the United States explicitly reserves the right to carry out unilateral extraterritorial actions when hemispheric partners fail to demonstrate sufficient «will or capacity» to disrupt the flow of drugs and precursors into the United States.

23 International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2024). *The expansion and diversification of Mexican cartels: Dynamic new actors and markets*. En *The armed conflict survey 2024*.

24 Available at: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-14157-designating-cartels-and-other-organizations-foreign-terrorist>

25 Full list available for consultation at: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations>

This doctrine has rapidly moved from theory to practice through Operation Southern Spear, launched in November 2025: more than 44 kinetic strikes against vessels suspected of transporting drugs in the Caribbean and the Eastern Pacific, up to February 2026, resulting in the deaths of at least 80 suspected drug traffickers.

The most symbolic and representative case of US intelligence capabilities was Operation Absolute Resolve on 3 January 2026. US special forces captured Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores in Caracas in an operation of absolute precision. After being extracted from Venezuela and transferred to New York, Maduro faces charges of narco-terrorism and conspiracy to distribute fentanyl, among other offences. In parallel, Washington has promoted a process of democratic transition in Venezuela, maintaining open channels of communication with both María Corina Machado and interim President Delcy Rodríguez. The strategy combines judicial and military pressure with political incentives aimed at facilitating an institutional overhaul that severs the links between state structures and criminal networks, particularly the Cartel of the Suns.

Another example of the implementation of this policy is the action taken by Claudia Sheinbaum's government, backed by the United States, to neutralise Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, alias «El Mencho», leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. This took place within the framework of intensified coordinated efforts between Mexico and Washington against organisations smuggling fentanyl into US territory.

Taken together, this sequence of events reflects how narco-terrorism has become the primary threat in the Western Hemisphere, justifying a policy of zero tolerance and the normalisation of military capabilities against any state or non-state actor facilitating the entry of these substances.

2. Mass migration

Migration to the United States has been a historical constant, making the country one of the world's leading immigration destinations²⁶. Since 1965, more than 76 million immigrants have entered the country legally²⁷.

However, the high volumes recorded in recent decades have placed the migration issue at the centre of the US political agenda. Mass migration has featured prominently in public debate, particularly within the Republican camp, which has criticised what it considers an excessively permissive approach under recent Democratic administrations.

26 Natarajan, A., Moslimani, M., & Lopez, M. H. (2022). *Key facts about recent trends in global migration*. Pew Research Center.

27 Kramer, S., & Passel, J. S. (2025). *What the data says about immigrants in the U.S.* Pew Research Center.

During President Donald Trump’s second term, this issue has come to the fore. Not so much because of the aim to tighten immigration controls –a recurring theme throughout American political history– but because of the way in which these policies have been implemented.

Within the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement, control of immigration policy is seen as a fundamental element in the defence of state sovereignty, internal security and the preservation of political and social order. From this perspective, the tightening of border policies, the increase in control mechanisms and the prioritisation of national security have been presented as necessary tools to guarantee the country’s stability.

In quantitative terms, the United States is home to one of the largest immigrant populations in the world. According to recent data, since 2010 the number of immigrants residing in the country –defined as people born abroad– has remained consistently above 40 million.

By mid-2025, approximately 51.9 million immigrants were residing in the country, representing around 15.4% of the total population²⁸. This figure represented a slight decrease from the peak recorded in January of the same year, when the immigrant population reached 53.3 million people. To put this into perspective, this figure is equivalent to approximately 108% of Spain’s total population.

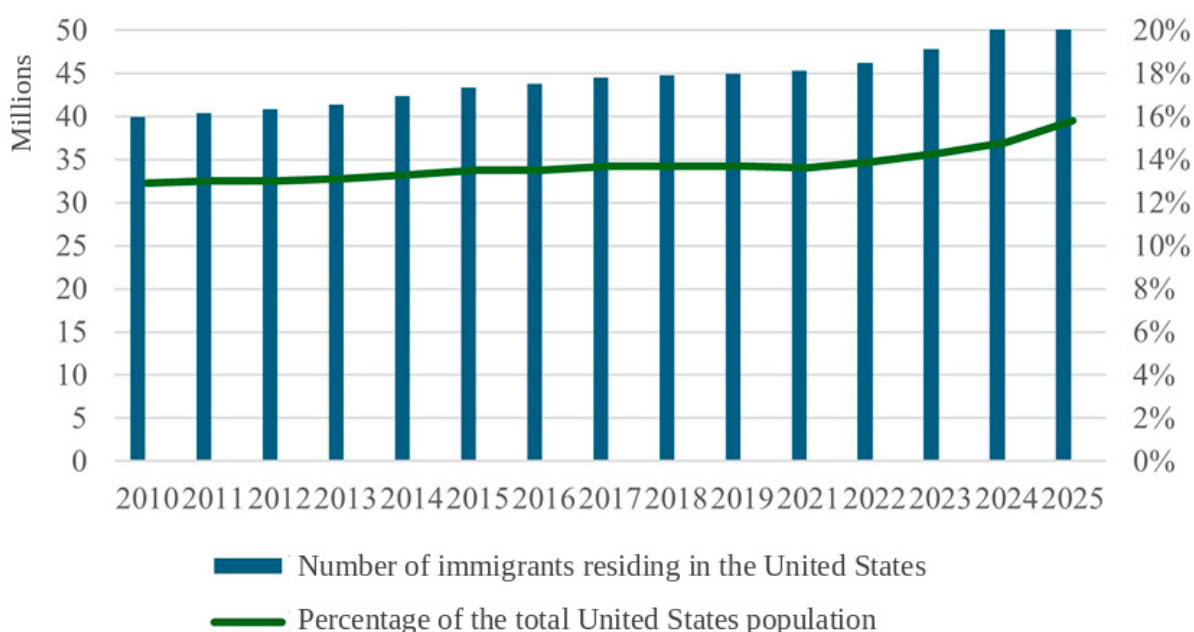


Chart compiled by the author based on data available from the Pew Research Center.

28 *Ibid.*

The composition of this population is diverse, although it shows a marked Latin American presence: approximately 52% of immigrants were born in Latin America, with Mexico as the main country of origin –more than eleven million residents– followed by significant communities from El Salvador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Honduras and Venezuela²⁹. Outside the Americas, the main countries of origin are India (6.1%), China (4.6%) and the Philippines (4.3%)³⁰.

The growth of the immigrant population during the first half of the decade has been particularly intense. Between 2020 and 2025, more than eleven million new immigrants arrived in the country, including a record high of over three million in 2023 alone. This rapid expansion has coincided with a significant increase in political and social debate regarding the impact of migration on security, the economy and social cohesion.

From a legal and administrative perspective, the immigrant population falls into several categories. In 2023, approximately 45% were naturalised citizens and 24% were legal permanent residents. In addition, there was a small percentage of temporary residents authorised to study or work. However, a significant proportion –around 26% of the total– consisted of unauthorised immigrants, whose presence in the country lacked full legal status³¹.

The unauthorised immigrant population reached an estimated peak of nearly 14 million people in 2023³². Within this group, approximately six million had some form of temporary protection from deportation, including asylum seekers, whilst nearly eight million remained in the country without formal legal protection³³. This diversity of status has shaped a complex and highly politicised immigration system, in which the distinction between regular, irregular and temporary migration is becoming increasingly blurred in administrative practice.

Despite recurring proposals for immigration restrictions or controls, the data show a high degree of institutional integration of the immigrant population. Almost half of them have acquired US citizenship, and a considerable proportion reside legally in the country on permanent or temporary permits.

29 Migration Policy Institute (2024). *Country of Birth for Immigrants in the United States, 1960-Present*.

30 Kramer, S., & Passel, J. S. (2025). *What the data says about immigrants in the U.S.* Pew Research Center.

31 Idem.

32 Passel, J. S., & Krogstad, J. M. (2025). *U.S. unauthorized immigrant population reached a record 14 million in 2023*. Pew Research Center.

33 Idem.

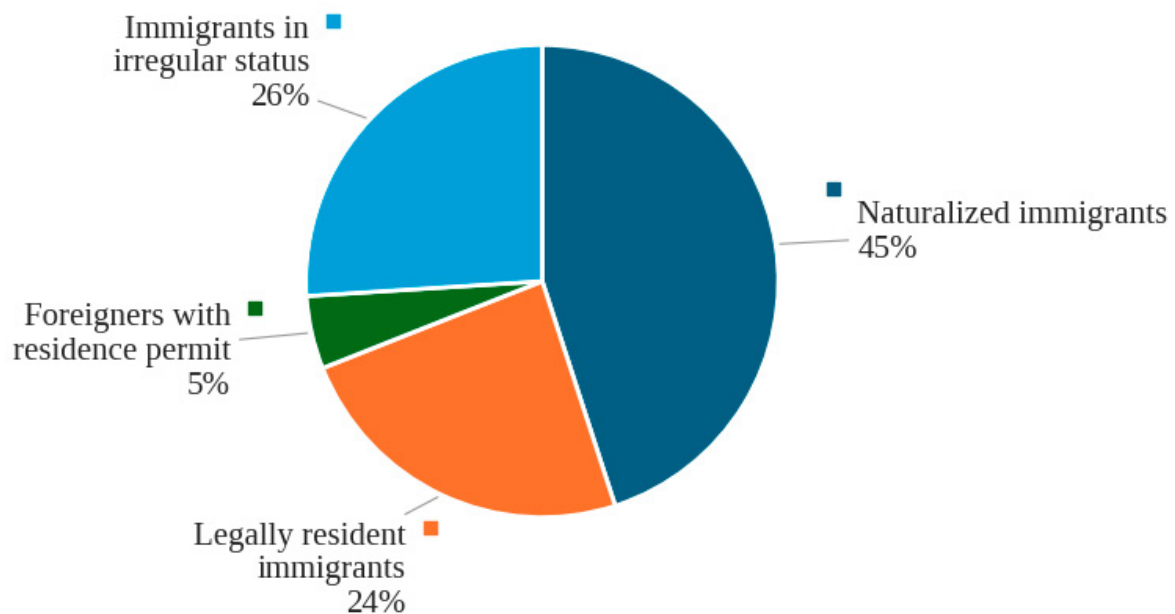


Chart created by the author using data available from the Pew Research Center.

In this context, under the pretext of a threat to US national security, President Donald Trump’s current administration has driven a significant shift in the way the state conceptualises mass migration, and irregular migration in particular. Far from framing it as an exclusively humanitarian or economic issue, the new strategic approach places it within the broader framework of security. This reinterpretation revolves around the concept of «weaponised migration», according to which massive and uncontrolled migratory flows can be used –intentionally or not– as vectors of pressure affecting internal stability, governance and the state’s capacity for territorial control.

From this perspective, the southern border is conceived not merely as an administrative boundary, but as a first line of defence against transnational risks, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, the infiltration of criminal networks, and the expansion of violent organisations. Within this strategic logic, the irregular entry of large numbers of people is also understood as a potential loss of sovereign control over who enters and resides within the national territory, which could hinder efforts to prevent the entry of individuals linked to criminal activities.

Irregular migration, in general, and at the US-Mexico border in particular, has become a defining issue on the national political landscape, contributing to growing social and electoral polarisation. In particular, the policies implemented in recent months have generated controversy both nationally and internationally,

regarding the use of immigration raids, the increase in detentions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and conditions in detention centres.

The political tensions surrounding this issue have also had institutional repercussions. Criticism of the Department of Homeland Security's handling of the situation led to the dismissal of Secretary Kristi Noem, who was replaced by Senator Markwayne Mullin. This change reflects the extent of public pressure surrounding the management of immigration policy, which has been subject to intense public scrutiny, particularly following episodes of protests, arrests and even clashes that have left several demonstrators injured.

During its second term, the Trump administration has sought to fulfil the promises made during the election campaign through a series of far-reaching reforms. Since the start of its term in 2025, numerous executive measures³⁴ have been adopted aimed at strengthening the enforcement of immigration law, expanding deportation capacities and limiting channels for irregular entry. These include the expansion of expedited removal procedures, the strengthening of ICE's domestic operations, the reactivation and expansion of the 287(g)³⁵ law enforcement cooperation programme between federal authorities and local police forces, as well as increased funding for the Border Patrol and immigration detention infrastructure.

With the aim of increasing deportations, the administration has mobilised additional federal resources, expanded the network of immigration detention centres and strengthened cooperation with various authorities. At the same time, political pressure has been exerted on jurisdictions considered «sanctuary cities», including the threat of withdrawing certain federal funds or launching investigations against officials who obstruct the enforcement of immigration laws.

Various studies have indicated that a policy of mass deportations could have significant economic consequences in the medium term. A sudden reduction in the immigrant workforce could exacerbate labour shortages in strategic sectors and push up production costs. Long-term research also suggests that, on average, immigrants tend to contribute more in tax revenue than they receive in public benefits over the course of their lives. However, from the political perspective of the current administration, these economic considerations are secondary to a different priority: the regularisation of the immigration system and the strengthening of state control over entry into and residence within the national territory, in the name of social cohesion, governance and the protection of American values.

34 Donald Trump signed 225 executive orders in 2025. Available for consultation at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders/donald-trump/2025>

35 The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 added Section 287(g) to the Immigration and Nationality Act, which authorises ICE to delegate to state and local law enforcement officers the authority to perform specific functions of immigration officers under its supervision.

Despite the controversies, the stricter enforcement of immigration policies has resulted in a notable decline in border crossings over the past year. After reaching record levels in 2023, encounters at the US-Mexico border fell sharply in 2024 and 2025, returning to levels comparable to those seen in previous decades³⁶.

Since Trump took office in January 2025, migrant apprehensions on the south-western border have fallen to historic lows: in the 2025 financial year, there were only 237,538 total encounters, the lowest figure since 1970³⁷. In the months that followed, the trend intensified: from February 2025, monthly Border Patrol encounters fell by between 90% and 96% compared to the averages under the Biden administration. As a result, preliminary estimates indicate that the immigrant population has begun to decline significantly since early 2025, possibly by as much as one million in the first half of the year³⁸, contributing to the first overall contraction in the total immigrant population in more than half a century.

This decline is due to a combination of factors, including the tightening of border control policies, the increase in deportations, the removal of certain temporary protections against expulsion, and the deterrent effect of the new policy framework. In line with the NSS 2025 and the Trump Corollary, Washington has made economic and security assistance conditional on effective cooperation on immigration control and the fight against organised crime, interpreting mass migration flows as vectors of hemispheric instability.

3. Foreign influence and control of strategic spaces

The NSS 2025 is symbolic and representative, both in form and substance, of the policies it sets out. The way in which rival powers are mentioned, as well as the choice of language used, reflects the new phase in global geopolitical dynamics.

Although the United States maintains tensions with various international actors, the main strategic concern is expressly focused on China. From the US perspective, it is the only country which, by maintaining its current pace of economic and technological growth, could establish itself as a systemic competitor capable of challenging US global primacy. On a secondary, yet symbolically comparable level, Russia and Iran stand out, their significance being linked more to their capacity to generate regional instability or collaborate within anti-Western networks of influence.

36 Gramlich, J. (2026). *Migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border are at their lowest level in more than 50 years*. Pew Research Center.

37 United States Border Patrol. *Total Encounter by Fiscal Year*. Disponible en: <https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Aug/US59B8~1.PDF>

38 Kramer, S., & Passel, J. S. (2025). *What the data says about immigrants in the U.S.* Pew Research Center.

Within the NSS 2025, Russia is treated in a relatively less confrontational manner than in previous strategies. The document avoids characterising it as a direct and immediate threat to US territory. Instead, it prioritises the need to resolve or stabilise the conflict in Ukraine, with the aim of restoring a certain degree of political balance in Europe. At the same time, the strategy also adopts a critical tone towards European allies, particularly towards members of the transatlantic alliance. It emphasises the need for Europe to assume greater responsibility for its own defence.

Thus, the US priority is gradually shifting towards competition with China. The document identifies the Asian country as the main strategic competitor, although the approach adopted is formulated primarily in economic, technological and structural terms.

China is presented as a highly influential economic power, but also as an actor dependent on external strategic resources, particularly in the energy sector. Unlike the United States, China has limited domestic oil and gas reserves, which forces it to secure its supply through global networks of trade, investment and infrastructure. From a strategic perspective, this dependence constitutes an element that the United States could potentially exploit in the event of conflict, by controlling or disrupting energy and logistics routes.

Within this geopolitical logic, the Western Hemisphere takes on particular significance, and, most notably, South America. The document implicitly suggests that the region must not become a platform for projecting extra-regional power, capable of strengthening Beijing's global position. In other words, China's presence on the American continent is perceived as an indirect threat to US national security.

Over the last two decades, China has built an increasingly deep network of economic relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. Bilateral trade between China and the region reached approximately \$510-518 billion in 2024³⁹, almost double the volume recorded a decade earlier. China has established itself as the second-largest trading partner of the Latin American region and the main partner for several South American countries. Four economies account for the bulk of this trade relationship⁴⁰: Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Peru, which represent approximately 76% of total trade between China and the region, with Brazil as the main partner, accounting for around 36% of bilateral trade⁴¹.

However, beyond trade, China has become a leading financial player in this subcontinent. Between 2013 and 2021, Chinese development banks –primarily the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China– disbursed more than \$145 billion in loans to Latin American governments⁴², making China the region's

39 Kiryakova, E., Jackson, K., & Nadin, R. (2026). *China's economic footprint in Latin America and the Caribbean*. ODI Global.

40 Inter-American Dialogue, & Boston University Global Development Policy Center. (s. f.). *Chinese loans to Latin America and the Caribbean database*.

41 Inter-American Dialogue. (s. f.). *China-Latin America commercial loan tracker*.

42 Kiryakova, E., Jackson, K., & Nadin, R. (2026). *China's economic footprint in Latin America and the Caribbean*. ODI Global.

largest bilateral creditor. Five South American countries accounted for almost 90% of these loans: Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador, which highlights the strategic nature of these financial relations⁴³. These investments and loans have enabled China to secure access to energy, mineral and agricultural resources essential for its industrial growth.

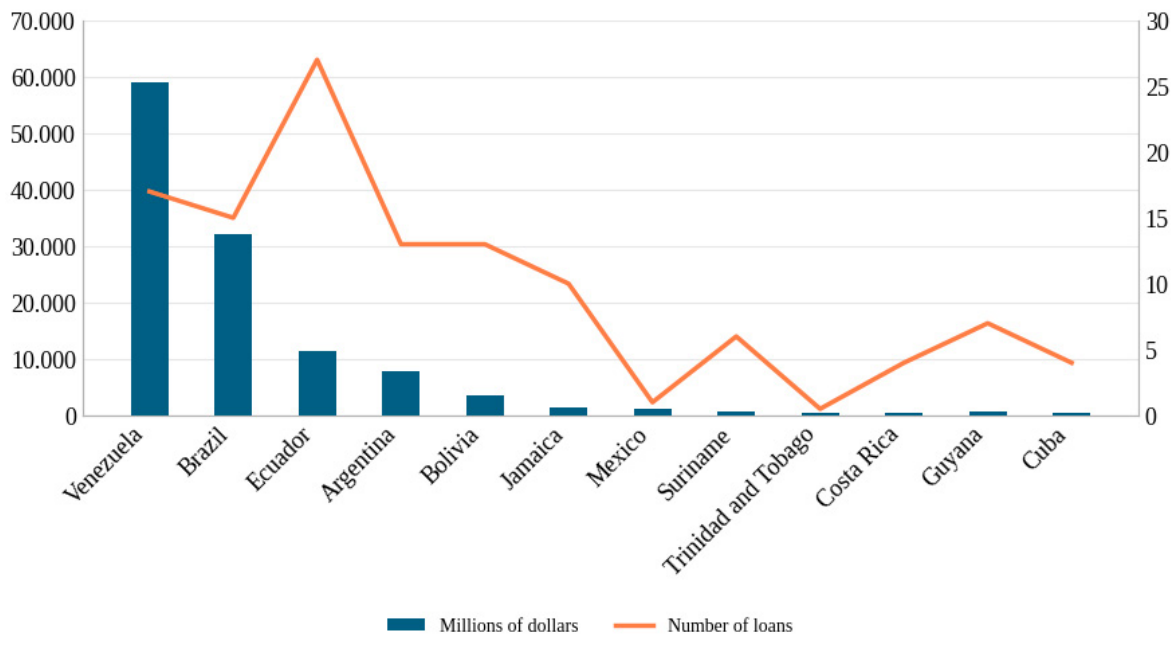


Chart produced by the author based on data available in The Dialogue - Database.

One of the main instruments of this expansion has been the «Belt and Road Initiative», also known as «The New Silk Road». Since 2018, more than half of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have joined this initiative, which promotes infrastructure projects, logistics connectivity and economic cooperation. Among the most significant examples is the port of Chancay in Peru, financed by the Chinese state-owned company COSCO. This mega-port is designed to become one of the main logistics hubs in the South American Pacific, reducing shipping times to Asia and facilitating the export of raw materials and agricultural products to the Chinese market⁴⁴.

However, from Washington's perspective, this type of infrastructure has dual-use potential, both civil and military. Assets such as commercial ports, logistics networks and digital infrastructure can acquire operational significance in contexts of international crisis, by facilitating the movement of goods, access to information and the continuity of critical communications. In this regard, more than three dozen ports across the Americas

43 Bruzzone, S. (2023). *Chinese financing in Latin America: From lending to governments to investing in company acquisitions*. Global Affairs and Strategic Studies, Universidad de Navarra.

44 Ellis, R. E. (2024). *Strategic implications of the Chinese-operated port of Chancay* (Working Paper Series n.º 42). REDCAEM.

have links with Chinese companies, which has raised concerns in the United States about potential implications for regional security and the resilience of logistics chains.

The technological dimension reinforces these concerns. Companies such as Huawei and ZTE have been involved in the development of 5G networks, telecommunications infrastructure, submarine cables and data centres in various Latin American countries. From the US perspective, this presence poses potential risks of cyber-espionage and possible use for military or intelligence purposes.

Strategically speaking, there is a rationale for China's interest and presence in the region. Through these investments, it pursues several objectives: firstly, it seeks to secure the long-term supply of critical resources. Latin America is home to the so-called «lithium triangle», comprising Argentina, Bolivia and Chile, which holds a significant proportion of the world's reserves of this mineral essential for batteries, electric vehicles and technologies linked to the energy transition. China has also become one of the main investors in copper mining in countries such as Peru and Chile⁴⁵.

Secondly, the region plays a key role in China's food security. To reduce its dependence on traditional suppliers such as the United States, Beijing has diversified its agricultural imports towards countries such as Brazil and Argentina, which have become major exporters of soya, maize and meat to the Chinese market⁴⁶.

Thirdly, China seeks to create markets for its own industrial and technological production. The financing of ports, railways and trade corridors facilitates the entry of Chinese products –ranging from machinery and electric vehicles to technological equipment– into Latin American markets.

From the perspective of US national security, the central issue is not limited to Chinese economic influence, but extends to the potential control of critical infrastructure, energy resources and logistics hubs that could affect global supply chains. In the event of a crisis (for example, concerning Taiwan), this network of economic relations could translate into greater Chinese influence over key economies in the Western Hemisphere. For this reason, the United States interprets China's expansion as a structural threat of a pragmatic rather than ideological nature.

In line with this interpretation, the US administration has adopted various measures to limit such influence in the Western Hemisphere. These include targeted sanctions against companies linked to projects deemed strategically sensitive, visa restrictions on officials or businesspeople involved in agreements with China, and diplomatic pressure on Latin American governments to review certain cooperation initiatives.

45 Baskaran, G., Hernandez-Roy, C., Ziemer, H., & Murgia, F. (2024). *Latin America: The world's copper stronghold*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

46 Roy, D. (2025). *China's growing influence in Latin America*. Council on Foreign Relations.

At the same time, Washington is promoting nearshoring policies, aimed at shifting part of industrial production from Asia to Latin American countries that are geographically closer and politically more aligned with the United States. These measures are accompanied by a «peace through strength» strategy, which combines economic incentives, security cooperation and a military presence on strategic routes across the hemisphere.

In short, the NSS 2025 reflects a growing concern that a hemispheric economic and logistical architecture might take shape in which the United States ceases to be the central player. Ultimately, the competition is not merely ideological, but also concerns energy, the economy, technology and, above all, geopolitics.

Conclusions

An analysis of the 2025 National Security Strategy reveals a significant shift in the United States' strategic orientation, which adapts historical principles to current conditions. In particular, as a result of geopolitical change and new balances of power, we see the return of a logic of spheres of influence –characteristic of the Cold War– albeit with one key difference: the aim now is to prevent external actors from consolidating structural influence in areas deemed strategic. From this perspective, the Western Hemisphere once again occupies a central place on Washington's strategic agenda, displacing priorities that for decades dominated US foreign policy.

This shift is largely due to a combination of two factors: the rise of China as a systemic competitor, on the one hand; and the political project driven by Donald Trump's administration, inspired by the principles of MAGA, on the other. In an increasingly competitive international system, US strategy posits the consolidation of the hemispheric perimeter as a necessary condition for sustaining its global leadership in the long term. The underlying premise is that only within a secure, prosperous and relatively aligned regional environment can the United States maintain its position as the predominant power. It is therefore interpreted as an «America First» policy, understood in the sense of prioritising the United States, but not of acting in isolation («not America Alone»).

In this context, the traditional Monroe Doctrine takes on new relevance and is revived through a novel interpretation. The 2025 NSS reinterprets it as an instrument designed to limit the presence of extra-regional powers on the continent, preserve US economic leadership and ensure access to strategic resources, particularly energy resources. This reinterpretation now legitimises the prioritisation of the hemispheric sphere over regions that, historically, have occupied a central place in US foreign policy, such as the Middle East or the Asia-Pacific.

A second key feature of the strategy is the deliberate reinterpretation of the concept of national security, which serves as the basis for greater involvement in the regional environment. Phenomena originating beyond the region's borders –primarily drug trafficking, irregular migration and the growing presence of foreign powers– are redefined as direct threats to internal stability, social cohesion and national sovereignty, taking the place previously occupied by issues such as climate change or international democratisation. The focus is shifting from liberal internationalism towards realism. This process of selective «securitisation» considerably broadens the range of available instruments –legislative, economic, diplomatic and military– making their application more immediate and flexible, whilst reviving the principle of «peace through strength» as the guiding principle of the strategy. In practice, this translates into a sustained increase in defence spending, a greater selective

military presence in the hemisphere and the normalisation of recourse to unilateral action when regional cooperation proves insufficient. In short, it marks a return to a foreign policy based on hard power.

However, this strategic reorientation faces significant structural constraints. The growing economic interdependence between various Latin American countries and China, the ideological diversity of the region's governments, and the internal political divisions within the United States itself hinder the full hemispheric alignment that Washington aspires to promote. Consequently, the viability of this strategy will depend largely on the Trump administration's ability to balance instruments of pressure with economic and political incentives that are attractive to the countries of the region, thereby fostering mutually beneficial and sustainable relationships over time.

Ultimately, the 2025 National Security Strategy does not in any way imply an abandonment of US international leadership, but rather its reformulation in more pragmatic terms. By prioritising the strategic consolidation of the Western Hemisphere, the United States seeks to strengthen its relative position vis-à-vis its main competitors and ensure that its immediate geopolitical environment remains a sphere of US dominance in the coming decades. Within this framework, hemispheric stability and cooperation are seen not only as central elements for regional security, but also as fundamental pillars for the projection of US power in the 21st century.

A critical view from the Spanish perspective

The strategic pivot towards the Western Hemisphere set out in the National Security Strategy 2025 does not operate in a vacuum, but is embedded in a transatlantic context that is already fraught with tension and undergoing structural reconfiguration. In this sense, the NSS 2025 acts as a catalyst: it intensifies existing dynamics and highlights limitations both in the relationship between the United States and Europe and in Spain's international position.

On the one hand, it confirms Europe's gradual displacement as a central actor in the US strategic architecture, alongside the European Union's difficulties in consolidating a coherent roadmap on foreign and security policy. On the other hand, it highlights the existence of a missed strategic opportunity in Latin America and the Caribbean, by revealing Spain's limited capacity to convert its historical, linguistic and cultural advantages into sustained geopolitical influence.

The US strategic reorientation impacts several pre-existing areas of tension: the deterioration of the transatlantic diplomatic climate, concerns over the simultaneous opening of multiple strategic fronts, the asymmetry in the perception of threats between Washington and Brussels, and the growing uncertainty associated with US domestic politics.

Firstly, the deterioration of the transatlantic climate is largely due to a dynamic of mutual mistrust fuelled by both political decisions and media narratives. Across broad sectors of European institutions and the media, an openly hostile view of Donald Trump has prevailed, which has significantly influenced European public opinion, generating reluctance towards key decisions by Washington in areas such as trade, security, migration and energy policy. However, the existing tension cannot be reduced to a mere problem of perception: US demands that NATO member states increase defence spending to 5% of GDP, the imposition of selective tariffs on European products, and particularly critical public statements about their European counterparts have tangibly contributed to eroding trust in both the political class and civil society.

These disagreements have been particularly evident with Spain. The clash between the US stance and the formally anti-militarist rhetoric of Pedro Sánchez's government –particularly accentuated by his coalition partner, Sumar– has led to a dynamic of noisy and unproductive public confrontation. The controversy arising from the apparent refusal to allow the use of the Rota and Morón bases for operations linked to the Iranian conflict not only strained bilateral relations but did so without yielding any clear strategic benefits for Spain.

This attitude, far from reinforcing strategic autonomy, has projected an image of inconsistency. Added to this is a foreign policy perceived as ambiguous, marked by engagement with actors such as China, Iran or the Chavista regime –through figures such as José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero– which, whilst reflecting sovereign decisions, have not necessarily proved wise and have contributed to eroding Washington’s confidence in Spain as a strategic partner.

Secondly, from a broader analytical perspective, the implementation of the NSS 2025 reveals a worrying tension between the consistency of the stated objectives and the actual capacity to execute them. In particular, the simultaneous opening of multiple high-intensity fronts poses a clear risk of dispersing diplomatic, military and economic resources, which may compromise the coherence of the overall approach. The joint intervention by the United States and Israel against Iran on 28 February 2026 is particularly illustrative in this regard. It reopens the debate on the doctrinal coherence of a strategy which, in principle, aims to prioritise the hemispheric sphere and avoid the recurrence of new «forever wars».

The risk of the Iranian conflict dragging on, its impact on energy markets and the possibility of further escalation create an environment of high uncertainty. Added to this is a growing, particularly critical international perception of Donald Trump’s political leadership in managing this conflict, particularly regarding strategic clarity, motivations and the consistency of the objectives pursued.

From this perspective, it is legitimate to question whether a greater focus on the Western Hemisphere –as implied by the theoretical framework of the NSS 2025– would have made it possible to consolidate more effectively the processes already underway in this priority region. This is the case with the political transition in Venezuela under the leadership of María Corina Machado, aimed at a definitive break with the remnants of the post-Chávez regime associated with figures such as Delcy Rodríguez, Jorge Rodríguez and Diosdado Cabello, whose progress towards democratic and free elections is increasingly under threat. Similarly, in Cuba, the persistence of the status quo under the leadership of Miguel Díaz-Canel and the historical influence of Raúl Castro reflects the limited capacity for transformation of the political system in the absence of sustained structural pressures.

Thirdly, the NSS 2025 highlights a clear divergence in the perception of threats between the United States and Europe. Whilst for Washington the central systemic challenge is China, for the majority of European countries the priority remains Russia. This asymmetry, largely determined by geographical proximity and immediate security concerns, explains the difficulties in fully aligning transatlantic priorities: whilst the United States is expected to maintain a sustained commitment to the conflict in Ukraine, the European Union is reluctant to become decisively involved in containing China. These discrepancies only serve to cast doubt on the cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance in the medium term.

Finally, to these external tensions –both new and existing– must be added a decisive internal factor: political uncertainty in the United States. The 2026 mid-term elections will be key to assessing the administration’s ability to maintain its agenda. The very real possibility of a weakening of domestic political support introduces an additional element of instability for the allies, who must gauge the degree of commitment to initiatives whose continuity is not fully guaranteed. This scenario is reinforced by perceptions of fragmentation within the Republican Party and, in particular, the MAGA movement, as evidenced by the recent resignation of Joe Kent or the dismissals of Attorney General Pam Bondi; Chief of Staff Randy George; and Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem; as well as by the deterioration of President Trump’s public image in the wake of recent controversies.

However, from a strictly Spanish perspective, the central aspect of this critique lies not so much in the effects of the new US strategy at the geopolitical level, but in how it highlights Spain’s inability, in recent years, to capitalise on its unique position in Latin America. The strategic repositioning of the United States highlights a missed historic opportunity.

In an international context characterised by the reconfiguration of spheres of influence, Spain, as the cradle of Hispanic culture, possesses a unique historical, linguistic, cultural and economic capital in Latin America that is unrivalled among other middle powers. Hispanic culture constitutes a distinctive relational asset, but its transformation into effective influence depends on its strategic institutionalisation, something that has not been consistently developed in recent decades.

As a result of this inaction –or, more precisely, of a Spanish foreign policy excessively conditioned by internal party politics and focused on priorities unrelated to this region– Spain has progressively relinquished its role as a natural bridge between Europe and the Western Hemisphere. This vacuum has been filled by actors with more clearly defined strategies: first China, through sustained economic diplomacy, and now the United States, with a more explicitly geopolitical approach. This shift is not merely symbolic, but has material implications: it affects the capacity to exert influence in strategic sectors such as energy, infrastructure, the financial system and telecommunications, where the Spanish business community started from a position of strength.

Furthermore, this development has prevented the consolidation of a structured relationship between Spain and Latin America, with the consequent weakening of its capacity for mediation both within the European sphere and in relations with the United States.

Within the framework of the European Union, Spain has repeatedly failed to capitalise on the opportunity to act as a bridge to Latin America, and has not managed to establish itself as the main channel of communication between Brussels and Latin American capitals. Specific examples of this weakness include the failure to drive forward strategic agreements such as the EU-Mercosur treaty, the lack of continuity in the EU-CELAC

summits, and a 2023 EU Council presidency that failed to articulate an agenda aimed at rebalancing European attention towards the South Atlantic, revealing an alarming lack of long-term vision.

At the same time, the relationship with the United States, which could have evolved into a framework of privileged cooperation –with Spain playing a structural intermediary role between Washington and Latin America– has lacked a stable strategic narrative. Far from establishing itself as a key operational partner, Spain has maintained an ambiguous stance that has limited its geopolitical utility in Washington’s eyes.

This leadership deficit and the missed opportunity in the Americas are particularly evident in the case of Venezuela. Spain was in a unique position to play a significant role both in facilitating a negotiated solution and in designing frameworks for democratic transition, owing both to its historical ties and its own experience of transition. However, this capacity for influence has been diluted by a lack of strategic continuity and a defined foreign policy, an opportunity which the United States has successfully exploited.

Ultimately, the lack of a pragmatic foreign policy vision should not be interpreted as a mere omission, but as a structural loss of standing in the medium and long term. In an increasingly realist international system, the inability to effectively project one’s own comparative advantages translates into a progressive loss of relevance.

In this context, the NSS 2025 must be understood, from the Spanish perspective, not only as a US strategic adjustment, but as a catalyst highlighting the need for a redefinition of Spanish foreign policy based on realism, coherence and the prioritisation of national interests. Only through this approach can Spain aspire to re-establish itself as a relevant actor in the Ibero-Atlantic sphere. Otherwise, the risk is not merely a loss of influence, but the consolidation of a structurally peripheral position within its own historical sphere of influence.

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ISBN: 979-13-87860-59-2

