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# Strategic Digest

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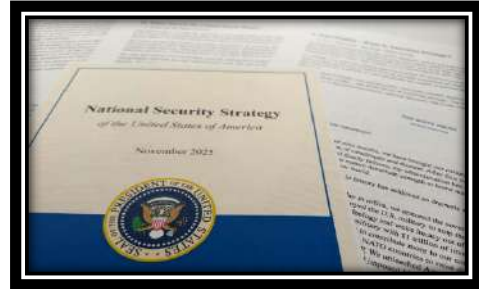
**Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy: Key Takeaways for India**

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## Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy: Key Takeaways for India

The 2025 United States National Security Strategy under the Trump administration represents a marked recalibration of American priorities, with important implications for India's strategic, economic, and security calculus. The document reflects a narrower conception of U.S. global engagement, a stronger reliance on geo-economic tools, and a distinctly transactional view of partnerships. For India, this evolving posture presents selective opportunities for cooperation but also structural risks of episodic engagement, where alignment is driven by immediate American interests rather than long-term strategic convergence. The core challenge for New Delhi is therefore not whether to engage with Washington, but how to ensure the durability and balance of that engagement



A defining feature of the strategy is the elevation of the Western Hemisphere as the principal arena of U.S. strategic attention. Issues such as migration, narcotics trafficking, and Chinese economic penetration in Latin America are framed as immediate national-security threats, while commitments beyond the hemisphere are to be managed selectively. This reprioritisation suggests a reallocation of U.S. diplomatic, intelligence, and military resources toward the Americas, accompanied by higher expectations that partners elsewhere shoulder greater responsibility for their own regional security. For India, this signals both opportunity and constraint. While Washington may welcome greater Indian maritime capacity and regional leadership in the Indian Ocean, New Delhi cannot assume sustained U.S. presence or open-ended support in Asia unless it demonstrably aligns with American objectives.

Economic statecraft occupies a central place in the new strategy. Industrial policy, supply-chain resilience, export controls, and market access are explicitly framed as instruments of deterrence and strategic leverage. Unlike earlier strategies that wove values, democracy promotion, and global public goods into the security narrative, the 2025 NSS foregrounds reciprocity and tangible returns. Tariffs, technology standards, critical-minerals partnerships, and selective market access are positioned as tools to influence competitor behaviour and discipline partners. For India, this creates a mixed landscape. On one hand, there is scope to extract concrete benefits through negotiations on defence co-development, co-production, predictable technology flows, and investment in Indian manufacturing. On the other, strategic cooperation is increasingly contingent on demonstrable commercial and economic gains for the United States, raising India's exposure to sudden policy shifts.

In defence and security terms, the Indo-Pacific remains relevant but is no longer the unquestioned centre of U.S. strategy. When addressed, the NSS reiterates familiar positions: opposition to unilateral changes to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, support for freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and endorsement of partnerships such as the Quad. However, these commitments are framed within a broader emphasis on burden-sharing and partner capacity-building rather than unconditional guarantees. Sustained forward deployments appear less assured unless partners offer clear reciprocity. For India, this reinforces a dual imperative: deepen

cooperation with the United States where interests converge, particularly in the maritime domain, while simultaneously accelerating indigenous deterrent and war-fighting capabilities to avoid over-reliance on uncertain external assurances.

China occupies a central place in the strategy, but primarily through an economic lens. Beijing is portrayed as a coercive economic competitor that distorts markets, weaponises interdependence, and exploits dominance over critical minerals and manufacturing ecosystems. This diagnosis closely aligns with India's own de-risking objectives and opens space for collaboration on supply-chain resilience, standards-setting, and critical-minerals initiatives. Yet a structural asymmetry persists. The U.S. focus on China is largely maritime and Taiwan-centric, whereas India's primary challenge is continental, centred on the Line of Actual Control and China's expanding influence in South Asia. Washington may therefore expect Indian support on Taiwan-related contingencies or broader Indo-Pacific initiatives without offering commensurate backing on India's core continental concerns, necessitating careful expectation management by New Delhi.

Transatlantic relations under the 2025 NSS are also recast in transactional terms. Europe is viewed mainly as a standards-setting and supply-chain partner and is expected to bear the primary burden of managing Russia and the protracted conflict in Ukraine. References to NATO, collective defence, and alliance management are notably muted, reflecting scepticism about Europe's contribution to shared security. This has generated unease among European leaders about the long-term credibility of U.S. commitments. For India, this shift presents both caution and opportunity. While uncertainty in transatlantic ties could complicate global stability, it also presents opportunities for India to deepen its engagement with European partners through alternative sources of technology, capital, and regulatory cooperation.

Taken together, the 2025 National Security Strategy marks a significant shift from earlier U.S. strategic frameworks. For India, the message is clear: cooperation with the United States should be pursued pragmatically, prioritising where alignment is natural and tangible, and avoiding where entanglement risks outweigh strategic benefits. In an era of selective American engagement, strategic autonomy supported by strong partnerships, rather than dependence, remains India's most reliable approach.

### **The European Union's Legally Binding Phase-Out of Russian Gas**

The European Union's decision to move towards a legally binding phase-out of Russian gas marks a watershed in its energy and geopolitical strategy. What began as an emergency response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has evolved into a structural reordering of Europe's energy system. By embedding the reduction and eventual elimination of Russian gas imports into binding legal frameworks, the EU is signalling that energy dependence on Moscow is no longer a commercial matter alone, but a strategic vulnerability incompatible with European security and values.

Prior to 2022, Russia was the EU's largest external supplier of natural gas, accounting for roughly 40 per cent of imports. This dependence reflected decades of infrastructure development, long-term contracts and a political assumption that economic interdependence would foster stability. The war in Ukraine fundamentally altered this calculus. Gas supplies were weaponised, prices spiked sharply, and flows through key pipelines were curtailed. In response, the EU adopted emergency measures to diversify supply, expand liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports, enhance storage coordination and reduce demand. By 2024, Russian gas accounted for a much smaller share of EU imports, though it persisted through LNG cargoes and limited pipeline routes.



The transition from crisis response to irreversible policy was consolidated on 3 December 2025, when the European Council announced that it had reached a provisional agreement with the European Parliament to phase out all Russian gas imports by 2027, formalising the European Union's commitment to ending its structural dependence on Russian energy. This agreement built upon the European Commission's legislative roadmap presented in May 2024, which sought to prevent any future return to Russian gas even after market pressures eased. Together, these steps transformed political intent into enforceable legal obligation.

Making the phase-out legally binding serves multiple strategic objectives. First, it aims to curtail a critical revenue stream that has historically underpinned Russia's state finances and war-fighting capacity. Although global energy markets limit the immediate financial impact, the loss of the European market deprives Moscow of its most lucrative and politically influential customer. Secondly, the policy enhances EU energy security by replacing a concentrated dependency with a diversified portfolio of suppliers and routes, reducing the scope for coercion. Thirdly, it strengthens coherence between the EU's energy policy and its wider foreign and security policy by embedding geopolitical considerations directly into market regulation.

The agreed roadmap follows a phased approach. From 2025, new long-term contracts for Russian gas, including LNG, are prohibited, while existing arrangements are subjected to enhanced transparency and oversight. In 2026, remaining short-term contracts are to be progressively wound down, accompanied by targeted safeguards for landlocked and highly exposed member states. By 2027, the EU intends to achieve a near-complete cessation of Russian gas imports, allowing only narrowly defined and time-limited exemptions in cases of demonstrable supply risk.

The economic and social consequences of this transition are uneven across the Union. Member states in Central and Eastern Europe, which were historically more dependent on Russian gas, face higher adjustment costs and greater infrastructure challenges. While significant investments have been made in LNG terminals, pipeline interconnectors and storage facilities, energy affordability and industrial competitiveness remain sensitive political issues. The EU has sought to mitigate these pressures through joint gas purchasing mechanisms, state aid flexibility and accelerated investment in renewables and energy efficiency, though trade-offs persist.

Critics argue that the strategy risks substituting one form of dependency with another. Greater reliance on LNG increases exposure to global price volatility and ties Europe more closely to external suppliers, while the renewable transition depends on critical minerals sourced largely from outside the EU. Environmental concerns also remain, as LNG has a higher lifecycle carbon footprint than pipeline gas. Supporters counter that legal certainty created by the phase-out accelerates investment in clean energy, hydrogen and grid modernisation, thereby reducing both emissions and long-term strategic vulnerability.

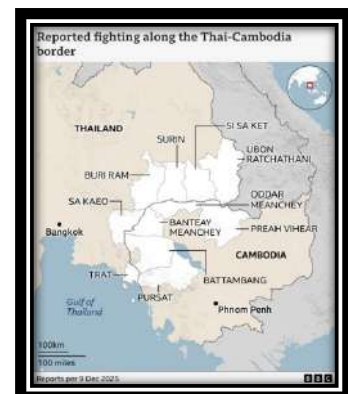
Beyond Europe, the decision carries significant international implications. For Russia, the loss of the European gas market necessitates a pivot towards Asia under less favourable commercial terms. For other energy exporters, it signals that access to the EU market is increasingly conditioned by political trust and regulatory alignment. More broadly, the EU's experience underscores how energy interdependence can become a strategic liability in an era of intensifying geopolitical competition.

Anchored by the December 2025 agreement and the 2027 deadline, the legally binding phase-out of Russian gas reflects a deliberate choice to prioritise strategic autonomy over short-term economic convenience. While implementation challenges remain, the EU has concluded that dependence on Russian gas is a risk it can no longer afford—and has chosen to codify that conclusion in law.

### Canberra's Strategic Balancing Act in the Age of Trump

The five-day Cambodia-Thailand border conflict in July ended, followed by the signing of a peace agreement during the ASEAN Summit in October. However, in early December, both sides have again resumed clashes along their border. The border conflict in July halted partly after President Trump threatened to withdraw the US from key tariff negotiations unless both countries agreed to stop fighting. The peace agreement signed between Cambodia and Thailand in Kuala Lumpur was negotiated mainly by Malaysia. President Trump oversaw the signing of the ceasefire that stipulated the withdrawal of heavy weapons, release of Cambodian POWs, and demining of border areas, monitored by ASEAN observers.

Despite the October deal, tensions continued simmering after Thailand suspended its implementation of the peace agreement in early November. On November 10, a Thai soldier was wounded by a landmine, leading Bangkok to suspend de-escalation measures. Thailand also accused Cambodia of violating the joint declaration by laying fresh landmines – a claim Cambodia vehemently denies. Thailand suspended all work on the peace deal which also included both sides withdrawing heavy weapons from the border in three phases, starting with rocket systems, followed by artillery and then tanks and other armored vehicles. Further, Thailand also halted the tentative release of 18 Cambodian prisoners of war captured during the five days July border conflict.





The latest round of conflict follows after a brief exchange of fire at multiple locations on the Thai-Cambodian border on December 7. In a televised address the Prime Minister of Thailand Anutin Charnvirakul, stated that the government had been closely monitoring the situation and had ordered security agencies to fully integrate their efforts to protect civilians and strictly defend Thailand's sovereignty. According Cambodia's Ministry of National Defence, at around 5 a.m. on December 8, Thai military opened fire on Cambodian military positions in the An Seh area of Preah Vihear province and at the Ta Moan Temple. Both sides have accused each other of first launching a sustained attack involving heavy weapons. The attack resulted in the death of at least one Thai soldier and injuries to eight others, while four Cambodian civilians were killed and nine others were injured.

The current Thai-Cambodian border conflict also marks the first time Chinese and Russian weapons have been involved. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Cambodia's military, which is far outsized by the Thai armed forces, has around 48 BM-21s and only six PHL-03 multiple rocket launchers. As per US military database, the PHL-03 can fire guided and unguided rockets with a range of between 70-130 km, while the BM-21 has a 15-40 km range. Thai military reports, stated that intelligence indicates Cambodian forces may use these two weapons to attack airports and hospitals within Thailand.

On December 8, Thailand's air force stated that it had deployed its aircraft to hit military targets after Cambodia mobilised heavy weaponry and repositioned its combat units. As per reports Thai forces deployed F-16 fighter jets to bomb Cambodian military facilities storing long-range artillery, including Chinese-made PHL-03 self-propelled rocket launchers and Russian-made BM-21 rocket launchers. On December 9, firing was reported in six of the seven Thai provinces, according to the Thai military, Cambodian troops fired heavy weapons, including BM-21 rockets, into civilian areas, and accused Cambodia of deploying special operations units and snipers to the border, of digging trenches to fortify positions, and encroaching into Thai territory in the coastal Trat province.

The October agreement overlooked the main problem: unresolved demarcation disputes originating from colonial-era maps. The stand-off seemingly results from differing views of a colonial-era map that marks their shared border. The prolonged conflict arises from conflicting interpretations of a 1907 French colonial map defining the 800-kilometre border, including regions around significant Khmer-era temples like Preah Vihear and Ta Muen Thom. This ambiguity led to a 1962 International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision awarding Preah Vihear temple to Cambodia, although Thailand continued to contest nearby land. Tensions flared again in 2008 when Cambodia sought UNESCO World Heritage status for the site, causing skirmishes that resulted in 20 deaths and displaced thousands. A subsequent ICJ ruling in 2011 again favoured Cambodia but did not resolve all contested zones, leaving the dispute unresolved. The current violence is the most intense since the five-day clash in July that resulted in at least 43 deaths and over 200 injuries. Furthermore, with elections in Thailand expected next year, the Thai government under PM Anutin is unlikely to adopt a soft stance on territorial matters.