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THE SECURITY OF NATO'S EASTERN FLANK IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

BEZPIECZEŃSTWO WSCHODNIEJ FLANKI NATO W KONTEKŚCIE NOWEJ STRATEGII BEZPIECZEŃSTWA NARODOWEGO USA

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Abstrakt. The aim of this article is to explicate the assumptions of the new U.S. National Security Strategy and to provide a forecast of its potential implications for NATO's eastern flank security environment. The main research problem is formulated as the following question: what is the significance of the new U.S. National Security Strategy for the security of NATO's eastern flank? In order to address the primary research problem, it was analytically disaggregated into two subsidiary research questions. The first one is formulated as follows: what constitutes the essence of the new U.S. National Security Strategy? The second addresses the following issue: what potential impact might the new U.S. National Security Strategy have on the future security dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe? The following main hypothesis has been adopted: it is assumed that the current United States National Security Strategy, representing a radical departure from Washington's long-standing foreign policy line pursued over recent decades, will significantly affect the dynamics of processes occurring within the security environment of NATO's eastern flank. Furthermore, it is assessed that the implementation of the strategic assumptions by the United States may intensify the engagement of CEE states in the development of autonomous (national) and regional defence capabilities, as well as in the broad integration of the region, with a view to enhancing interoperability and military capabilities in the areas of deterrence and defence. The findings of the research indicate that the assumptions of the new U.S. National Security Strategy constitute an outgrowth of the long-term implementation of the political concept of "America First", leading to a relative narrowing of the scope of U.S. national interests and a limitation of external resource engagement beyond designated priority areas. It may therefore be concluded that the assumptions of the U.S. National Security Strategy are likely to exert a substantial influence on the redefinition of the strategic objectives of NATO's eastern flank states. These states may increasingly seek to autonomously develop and expand operational capabilities that have hitherto been provided by the United States, to intensify bilateral and regional security cooperation, and to pursue the institutionalisation of U.S. investments and defence commitments within the Central European security environment. The research methodology applied in this study comprises critical analysis and evaluation of the literature, systems analysis, reasoning, synthesis and prognostic method.

Abstrakt. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest eksplanacja założeń aktualnej Strategii Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Stanów Zjednoczonych oraz dokonanie prognozy jej wpływu na bezpieczeństwo wschodniej flanki NATO. Główny problem badawczy zawiera się w formie pytania: jakie znaczenie dla bezpieczeństwa wschodniej flanki NATO ma aktualna Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Stanów Zjednoczonych? W celu rozwiązania głównego problemu badawczego, konieczna była jego fragmentacja na dwa problemy szczegółowe. Pierwszy z nich brzmi następująco: w czym wyraża się istota nowej Strategii Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Stanów Zjednoczonych? Drugi problem badawczy wyraża się w formie następującego pytania: jaki potencjalny wpływ na przyszłą dynamikę przestrzeni bezpieczeństwa Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej może mieć nowa Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego USA? Przyjęto następującą hipotezę główną: przypuszcza się, iż aktualna Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego Stanów Zjednoczonych, stanowiąca radykalne odejście od przyjętej linii polityki zagranicznej Waszyngtonu od dekad, w znaczący sposób wpłynie na dynamikę procesów zachodzących w przestrzeni bezpieczeństwa wschodniej flanki NATO. Ponadto ocenia się, iż realizacja przez Stany Zjednoczone założeń strategii może zintensyfikować zaangażowanie państw wschodniej flanki NATO na rzecz budowania autonomicznych (narodowych) i regionalnych zdolności obronnych oraz szerokiej integracji Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w kontekście zwiększania interoperacyjności oraz możliwości militarnych w zakresie odstraszania i obrony. W wyniku procesu badawczego ustalono, że założenia nowej Strategii Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego USA są wypadkową wieloletniej realizacji politycznej koncepcji „America First”, co powoduje dążenie do zawężenia interesu narodowego Stanów Zjednoczonych oraz ograniczenia zewnętrznego zaangażowania zasobów państwa poza priorytetowymi kierunkami. Należy stwierdzić, iż założenia Strategii Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego USA mogą prawdopodobnie silnie wpłynąć na zmianę celów strategicznych państw wschodniej flanki NATO, które będą dążyć do: autonomicznego tworzenia (rozwijania) brakujących zdolności operacyjnych, które dotychczas zapewniały Stany Zjednoczone, rozwijania szerszej współpracy bilateralnej i regionalnej w dziedzinie bezpieczeństwa oraz próby zakotwiczenia amerykańskich inwestycji i zobowiązań obronnych w przestrzeni środkowoeuropejskiej. Metody badawcze wykorzystane w pracy to: krytyczna analiza i ocena literatury, analiza systemowa, wnioskowanie, synteza oraz prognozowanie.

Keywords: U.S. National Security Strategy, NATO's eastern flank, military security, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, threat development forecast.

Słowa kluczowe: Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego USA, wschodnia flanka NATO, bezpieczeństwo militarne, Sojusz Północnoatlantycki, prognoza rozwoju zagrożeń.

Introduction

In general terms, a national security strategy constitutes the entirety of the theoretical and practical dimensions of the state's holistic activity aimed at achieving objectives within the security domain, most often of a general nature and with long-term effects. Moreover, it represents a field of national strategy responsible for planning, programming, and employing the state's potential in order to attain a level of operational readiness to counter threats. The process of preparing and developing a national security strategy consists in formulating conclusions on the basis of strategic analyses and making strategic choices regarding the use of necessary and adequate methods, tools, and means of national security. It may be stated that, in democratic states, a national security strategy is closely correlated with the direction of the security policy adopted by the state leadership and goes far beyond perceiving security strategy solely in military terms. The strategy, in broad terms, illustrates where and what actions should be undertaken in order to achieve the

fundamental strategic security objectives, which simultaneously constitute operationalized national interests (Balcerowicz, Pawłowski 2002, pp. 130-132).

The National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS) is a periodically prepared, overarching document drafted by each U.S. presidential administration, most often during the first year in office. It characterizes the subjective international security environment, defining key areas of state engagement and the foreign policy priorities adopted by the United States in a given period. Each president imparts a distinct character to the document, therefore successive editions contain significant changes. The NSS serves as a reference point for planning the use of instruments of power for institutions and agencies involved in U.S. security. The National Security Strategy is the foundational document upon which lower-level strategic documents of greater specificity are developed - the most important of these being the U.S. National Defense Strategy, the preparation of which is the responsibility of the United States Department of War. It specifies the security objectives contained in the NSS and concretizes the use of force with regard to the employment of military instruments (Harding 2025).

The European security space has, for centuries, constituted a point of reference and a core element of U.S. foreign policy. It therefore remains an obvious fact that strategic issues related to the impact of the security situation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) on U.S. interests are present in each successive edition of the U.S. National Security Strategy. For decades, through the engagement of diplomatic, economic, and military instruments, the United States—varying the intensity of its involvement and the prioritization of specific problem areas—has exerted and continues to exert a significant influence on the shaping of the security environment on the Old Continent (Bacevich 2007, pp. 47-49). During the Cold War, the Soviet Union served as the principal adversary of the United States. Paradoxically, this clear strategic situation facilitated the identification of priorities and centers of gravity in U.S. security policy, as it allowed for the selection of effective political and military instruments to pursue clearly defined objectives related to containment and the building of strategic superiority over the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Sarkesian, Williams, Cimbala 2013, pp. 12-14). At the moment of the collapse of the former empire, the ex-Soviet republics and satellite states found themselves in a grey zone of security. The United States quickly identified the necessity of extending a form of protection to the states of Central and Eastern Europe in order to strengthen the integrity of countries that had freed themselves from Moscow's politico-military influence and to enable their peaceful integration into the democratic Western world (Lugar 1994, pp. 15-17). The American establishment saw the success of the democratization and economic transformation as durable and forward-looking guarantees of peace. During the presidency of Bill Clinton, the direct linkage between U.S. *raison d'état* and engagement of the states of

CEE in the Euro-Atlantic integration was formally emphasized in the 1996 National Security Strategy (Brzeziński 1997, p. 73).

The security domain was envisaged as a catalyst for integration processes, understood as the incorporation of Central and Eastern European states into collective security frameworks. The states of Central and Eastern Europe, which exhibited the highest level of maturity following the political system transformation—Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary—were the first to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme in 1994. This NATO project was established on the initiative of the U.S. administration, and its essence lay in creating conditions for new members to attain full NATO membership and in formally sanctioning the accession process (Baker 1995, pp. 652-655). Participation in PfP enabled states to achieve the required level of interoperability and to meet NATO membership criteria, while in the meantime Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were also able, to a limited extent, to develop interoperability with NATO through participation in international operations, exercises, training activities, and defence sector development programmes. In 1999, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary obtained full membership in the North Atlantic Alliance (Riley 2025).

In light of the United States' direct involvement in the enhancement of security in Central Europe, it is necessary to analyze the measures undertaken by the United States since 2014. The illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation constituted a turning point for the entire North Atlantic Alliance, prompting extensive changes in both the direction and the level of engagement in the field of defence. In response, the United States adopted a comprehensive politico-military approach aimed at increasing financial, personnel, and military commitments in order to reinforce the American presence in Central and Eastern Europe. The administration of President Barack Obama launched in 2014 a dedicated initiative aimed at supporting the defence capabilities of the North Atlantic Alliance's eastern flank, known as the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). The essence of the ERI was to increase political and military capabilities to defend allies by the United States, primarily through increasing the presence of U.S. military and enhancing the interoperability of the U.S. Armed Forces with European partners. The ERI was incorporated into the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) category, that is, the portion of the Pentagon's budget dedicated to financing overseas operations (NSS 2015, pp. 25-26). The largest share of ERI expenditures was allocated to the redeployment of U.S. units from the interior of the continent to NATO's eastern flank, the costs of increasing both the quantity and quality of U.S. land force components in Central and Eastern Europe, the prepositioning of new weapons and combat assets, as well as the modernization of equipment and infrastructure (Unger 2016, pp. 11-16).

The operationalization of the broad concept of the European Reassurance Initiative (whose military engagement was codenamed „*Atlantic Resolve*”) in the

initial phase of the program resulted in an increased frequency of joint international exercises aimed at enhancing interoperability among allied armed forces, as well as the deployment of U.S. Armed Forces units to the states of NATO's eastern flank. Alongside the positioning of new forces, a partial relocation of operationally active units from the interior of the Old Continent to the CEE was also implemented. Between 2014 and 2020, within the framework of the programme, the United States committed forces and assets on NATO's eastern flank in support of Allied initiatives: Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and Tailored Forward Presence (tFP). Both plans aimed to increase the North Atlantic Alliance's deterrence and defence capabilities on the eastern border through the physical deployment of multinational military units and the development of the most urgently required operational capabilities (air and missile defence, battlefield logistics, command and control and multi-domain operations). The United States leads the Multinational Battlegroup deployed in Orzysz (Poland) as part of the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative, contributing a contingent of approximately 800 soldiers (USAREUR-AF 2025).

During the first term of President Donald Trump (2017–2021), the European Reassurance Initiative was expanded and significantly increased in funding (the 2017 budget allocation was four times higher than in the preceding year) and following President Trump's assumption of office, ERI was renamed to the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI). In the first year of President Trump's tenure, an Armoured Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) was deployed to Żagań, Poland, under the EDI framework - its presence is rotational and continuous. Also in the first half of 2017, a Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) was deployed in Europe to support the operational activities of the U.S. Armed Forces under Operation Atlantic Resolve. U.S. Combat Aviation Brigade units are deployed on a rotational basis to Europe in order to conduct medical transport exercises and to provide support during major multinational exercises. One of the CAB task forces is stationed in Powidz, Poland. A further manifestation of U.S. engagement in strengthening interoperability with the land forces of the Baltic States is the rotational, continuous presence on Lithuanian territory of two battalions (depending on the rotation: armoured cavalry, mechanized, or artillery units) from the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division. The primary purpose of the presence of U.S. Army units in Lithuania is joint training with the Lithuanian Infantry Brigade „Žemaitija”. Beyond enhancing interoperability, these units increase Allied deterrence and defence capabilities and help build a sense of security among the Baltic States' population. Toward the end of President Donald Trump's first term, in November 2020 in Poznań, the Forward Command of the U.S. V Corps in Poland inaugurated its operational activity. It constitutes one of the permanent military structures of the United States Armed Forces in Poland. The primary tasks of the command include the coordination of U.S. Army operations in Europe, operational planning, and the integration and synchronization of the activities of U.S. Armed Forces and Allied states within the theatre (Miszczuk 2024a,

pp. 24-26). An important aspect of shaping military interoperability among the CEE states was the appointment of senior officers of the Polish Armed Forces to key command positions within the line structures of U.S. Army operational and tactical formations (since 2021, a Polish two-star general has been the Deputy Commander of the US Army's V Corps. Between 2023 and 2025, a Polish one-star general served as Deputy Commander of the US 1st Cavalry Division).

The breakthrough event that altered the orientation of the U.S. administration was the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022. The escalation of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine became a vector for the intensification (both qualitative and quantitative), and acceleration of U.S. administrative actions aimed at strengthening NATO's eastern flank. As part of deterrence measures and efforts to reinforce the defence of NATO's eastern perimeter in February 2022, the United States deployed airborne units and an Armoured Brigade Combat Team to Poland. These units made it possible to build a potential capability to support the security in the south-eastern part of the NATO border, if required. Simultaneously, with U.S. support, a multi-layered air defence system was provided for key infrastructure used to deliver assistance to Ukraine. Following the escalation of conflict in Ukraine, the United States Armed Forces also increased the size of the contingent performing tasks within NATO's Multinational Battlegroup in Latvia to approximately 600 soldiers. After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, during the presidency of Joe Biden, the United States also increased its military presence in Estonia. From 2022 onward, battalion-sized task forces have been present in southern Estonia (Camp Reedo). The first two rotations were covered by the United Kingdom's Land Forces, while from 2023 U.S. Army battalions have supported the 2nd Infantry Brigade and the Estonian Defence League. The United States also supported Poland in the process of establishing and achieving operational readiness of the *POLLOGHUB* in Rzeszów—a logistics structure that collects and distributes approximately 80 % international military assistance to Ukraine. Another expansion of the U.S. military presence on NATO's eastern flank was the relocation, in August 2023, of the 1st Infantry Division Forward Command to Bolesławiec, Poland, from where it directs the majority of U.S. Army operations in Poland and the Baltic States. In March 2023, in Poznań, the first permanent U.S. Armed Forces garrison in Poland was established. U.S. Army Garrison Poland (USAG-PL) main task is to provide logistic support for U.S. Armed Forces operations in Poland and to oversee other forward-deployed U.S. military locations in Poland (such as Drawsko Pomorskie, Powidz, Skwierzyna, etc.). It is important to emphasize the United States' involvement in enhancing NATO's eastern flank operational capabilities in the field of missile defence. In November 2024, the U.S. Army's *Aegis Ashore* missile defence base in Redzikowo, Poland, became operationally ready. The installation is part of a larger U.S. missile defence engagement structure—the European Phased

Adaptive Approach (EPAA). In addition to Poland, elements of the system have been deployed at the southern edge of NATO's eastern flank, in Deveselu, Romania. The Romanian EPAA installation reached operational readiness in 2016. Beyond its political significance—demonstrating U.S. commitment and readiness to support collective defence on NATO's eastern flank—the Redzikowo base fills a gap in CEE states capabilities for defence against medium-range missiles (MON 2025).

In reference to the outlined problem, it should be stated that the foreign policy of the United States regarding the CEE countries is a broad and multidimensional field. The security of NATO's eastern flank is therefore influenced not only by U.S. actions aimed at enhancing the defensive capabilities of military forces, but also by economic investments, support for political processes, and positive lobbying on behalf of CEE within international security organizations. It is undeniable that the high dynamism and intensity of U.S. foreign policy anchored in the region has affected—and will likely continue to strongly affect—the Central European security landscape.

Current state of knowledge

The issue of contemporary American foreign policy concepts in relation to Central and Eastern Europe has been the subject of numerous studies. Among the most important works are those by the following authors: Zbigniew Brzezinski („The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives”), John Lewis Gaddis („The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, and Provocations”), John Mearsheimer („The Tragedy of Great Power Politics”), Derek S. Reveron, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, Mackubin T. Owens („US Foreign Policy and Defense Strategy: The Evolution of an Incidental Superpower”) and Michael Lind („The American Way of Strategy: U.S. Foreign Policy and the American Way of Life”). The publications mentioned above provide valuable insights into the American vision of the international order with regard to the CEE states and also organize knowledge concerning the role of these countries in American national interests. However, most of these works do not address the area of security, understood in terms of defence and military strategy. Based on these publications alone, it is not possible to accurately determine how U.S. military engagement should be structured to support the sustainable and partnership-based development of security for the states on NATO's eastern flank.

Despite the considerable number of publications concerning the new U.S. National Security Strategy, authors such as: J. Gotkowska and A. Kohut („The New US National Security Strategy: A Manifesto for a Sovereign America in a Multipolar World”), E. Harding („The National Security Strategy: The Good, the Not So Great, and the Alarm Bells”), or

R. Cook and V. Mekles ("What the 2025 US National Security Strategy Means for Transnational Companies, Investors, and Advisors: Takeaways and Recommendations"), these works address only fragments of issues related to the projection of U.S. military power in the region of NATO's eastern flank and do not provide a sufficient basis for drawing comprehensive conclusions regarding the future region's security architecture or the role and position of the United States in this domain.

There exist publications that partially examine projections of future U.S. military engagement on NATO's eastern flank, including works by: A. Kuź and Ł. Jureńczyk ("Poland's Strategic Situation in the Face of Potential Directions of U.S. Foreign Policy as a Key Context for Considerations about Acquiring Its Own Nuclear Weapons"), Ł. Jureńczyk ("The War in Ukraine and the Concept of a Permanent Base of the US Armed Forces in Poland"), S. Meitz ("Redefining the U.S. Military Presence in Europe: Implications for NATO's Eastern Flank"), the Centre for Eastern Studies ("Munich and What Next?: The Prospect of a Reduced U.S. Presence in Europe"), and V. Jack ("Europe Will Do Just Fine with Fewer American Troops, Says Top U.S. NATO General"). It should be emphasized that the knowledge contained in these publications requires supplementation and systematization. These works do not fully comprehensively address the current U.S. National Security Strategy, thereby necessitating a more rigorous research approach based on a problem-oriented and diagnostic analysis of the interrelation between the security of NATO's eastern flank and the strategic interests of the United States as articulated in the current NSS.

There is a clear paucity of comprehensive studies that provide a synthetic account of strategies and concepts for ensuring security by NATO's eastern flank states in the context of a reduction of the United States military engagement. While there are valuable contributions by authors such as: B. Berry (et al.), ("Defending Europe Without the United States: Costs and Consequences"), as well as works by E. Smolar („Uwarunkowania polskiej strategii bezpieczeństwa w epoce power politics”) and M. Bergman and O. Svendsen ("How Europe Can Defend Itself with Less America"), the aforementioned publications do not address proposed methods, mechanisms, or solutions recommended for implementation in the event that the United States relinquishes the maintenance of a military presence in Central and Eastern Europe.

In light of the arguments presented, it should be concluded that issues related to the security of NATO's eastern flank, in reference to the assumptions of the new United States National Security Strategy, constitute an important and timely research problem - not only at the local but also at the regional level. These arguments simultaneously serve as premises demonstrating the necessity of conducting research, whose results may contribute to the systematisation of knowledge concerning the subject of inquiry and possess practical utility.

Research methodology

The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the available literature allow for the assertion that the issue of NATO's eastern flank security is of particular cognitive interest due to the dynamic nature of political processes and the evolving distribution of military power in the CEE. In view of the above, and based on the presented problem situation, the focus of this study was placed on the security of NATO's eastern flank, examined in relation to the projected future engagement of the United States in the domain of regional security. The aim of the research underlying this article was to explicate the assumptions of the new U.S. National Security Strategy and to provide a forecast of its potential implications for NATO's eastern flank security environment. On the basis of an objectively existing knowledge gap, the main research question was formulated as follows: what is the significance of the new U.S. National Security Strategy for the security of NATO's eastern flank? This identified problem situation led to the formulation of the following specific research questions:

- What constitutes the essence of the new U.S. National Security Strategy?
- What potential impact might the new U.S. National Security Strategy have on the future security dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe?

The following main hypothesis has been adopted: it is assumed that the current United States National Security Strategy, representing a radical departure from Washington's long-standing foreign policy line pursued over recent decades, will significantly affect the dynamics of processes occurring within the security environment of NATO's eastern flank. Furthermore, it is assessed that the implementation of the strategic assumptions by the United States may intensify the engagement of CEE states in the development of autonomous (national) and regional defence capabilities, as well as in the broad integration of the region, with a view to enhancing interoperability and military capabilities in the areas of deterrence and defence. The research process was structured in three principal stages. In the preliminary stage, the study was conceptualized. The existing gap in knowledge regarding the subject was identified, enabling the formulation of the research problem. During this stage, the primary research question and the overall objective of the study were defined, and the research methods, tools, and techniques to be applied in the main stage were selected. The main stage of the research involved addressing the primary and specific research questions through the systematic application of the selected methods, tools, and techniques. Finally, in the concluding stage, the findings of the research were synthesized, and overarching conclusions were drawn.

In the research process, a synchronization of diagnostic and prognostic approaches was undertaken. Among the methods employed, particular emphasis was placed on the critical analysis and evaluation of the literature, systems analysis,

reasoning, synthesis and prognostic method. The use of critical literature analysis and evaluation allowed for the identification of the current state of knowledge in the available scholarly publications. This made it possible to define a cognitive gap within the field of study and, consequently, to determine the originality of the issues examined in the context of the existing literature. The systems analysis method enabled a comprehensive examination of the complex security situation on NATO's eastern flank, in which independent and diverse nation-states function as components of a complicated environment, supported by external actors. Deductive reasoning was employed to characterize the general assumptions of the U.S. National Security Strategy regarding the security of NATO's eastern flank, and to construct a research perspective aimed at identifying current challenges to the regional security architecture. Reductionist reasoning was applied in formulating forecasts concerning the potential impact of U.S. foreign policy assumptions on the security of NATO's eastern flank in the short- and medium-term perspective. Through the application of synthesis, the research problem was formulated, and the results of the study were summarized in the concluding section of the article.

This study did not address the full scope of U.S. engagement in support of Central and Eastern European states; rather, it focused on the analysis of key political, economic, and military measures through which the United States shaped the security of NATO's eastern flank. The research process did not examine all provisions of the U.S. National Security Strategy; instead, it concentrated on presenting synthetic conclusions directly related to the security issues of CEE, with particular attention to the role and position of the United States in this area.

The essence of the new U.S. National Security Strategy

The National Security Strategy of the United States, published on 4th December 2025, constitutes a coherent synthesis of the political concept of „*America First*“, which has guided the administration of President D. Trump since the outset of his term of office. The principal authors of the document are identified as Stephen Miller (homeland security domain), Marco Rubio (Western Hemisphere prioritization), Scott Bessent (strategic re-engagement in economic relations with China), J.D. Vance (the United States' approach toward Europe) and Robert O'Brien, Douglas Macgregor (The limitation of United States' presence outside of priority areas of interest). The document is widely regarded as a breakthrough, redefining the vectors of U.S. international engagement and representing an attempt to articulate a contemporary understanding of the national interest. For the first time since the collapse of the USSR, the United States explicitly renounces the role of a global hegemon responsible for maintaining the international order, opting instead to strengthen national sovereignty and to curtail engagement beyond those geographic

directions deemed of primary strategic importance to U.S. interests. According to the authors of the revised National Security Strategy, at the conclusion of the Cold War the American strategic establishment conducted flawed assessments across the cost–capability–effect spectrum. As a consequence, the assumption by the United States of the role of a “*global policeman*” over subsequent decades significantly exceeded its realistic capacity to perform such a mission. The document further emphasizes that globalization and the allocation of comprehensive national resources to the preservation of unrestricted free trade no longer constitute a strategic priority for the United States (IGA 2025).

The NSS places unequivocal emphasis on the primacy of homeland security. The new strategy elevates internal security to a central position across the political, military, economic, technological, cultural, and social domains. As the principal threats to the survival and development of the United States, the D. Trump’s administration identifies, first and foremost, armed aggression, influence operations, espionage, narcotics and human trafficking, cultural subversion, and cognitive operations aimed at undermining the psychological and societal resilience of the nation. The primary objectives of United States policy within the framework of the current NSS have been defined as: the restoration and maintenance of full operational control over border security and integrity; the strengthening of the resilience of critical domestic infrastructure and the preservation of the world’s most powerful armed forces through the development of credible nuclear deterrence capabilities and next-generation missile defence systems. Furthermore, the administration of President D. Trump places significant emphasis on the advancement of an innovative national economy. In this regard, specific objectives underscore the necessity of state-led reindustrialization and the reconstruction of the defence industrial base. The attainment of national economic objectives is also to be pursued through the development of closer bilateral relations with states across both American continents. This approach is intended to reduce the vulnerability of supply chains and to lower production costs in comparison with those associated with the Euro-Atlantic economic partnership. The new U.S. National Security Strategy significantly narrows the long-standing assumptions underpinning American foreign policy, which have remained largely unchanged since the late 1980s. Under the leadership of President D. Trump, the United States will pursue the prioritization of the nation-state concept, while simultaneously reducing its engagement in multilateral organizations. Within the conceptual framework of the D. Trump’s administration, the U.S. national interest is to be grounded in selective engagement, limited to those situations and regions that directly affect U.S. national security and are consistent with established foreign policy objectives. Where deemed necessary, the United States will demonstrate military capabilities and economic power in support of deterrence and strategic influence, in accordance with the principle of “*peace through strength*”. The United States is abandoning so-called “*endless wars*” and expeditionary operations whose relevance

to domestic U.S. interests is not perceived by the average citizen. It is assessed that the political concept of the U.S. administration, grounded in a shift toward national isolationism, places priority on those overseas engagements that produce clear and measurable effects on national security and economic interests. This approach is to be reflected in bilateral relations with states sharing comparable objectives and values, as well as in the deliberate restraint from engaging in democracy-promotion efforts in countries where such political systems are assessed as unlikely to achieve sustainability or effectiveness. In the assessment of the contemporary authors of the NSS, rather than expending economic resources through broad-based military and economic engagement, the United States should concentrate on the selective employment of forces and capabilities to sustain global and regional balances of power. According to U.S. strategic planners, the contemporary international system is characterized by asymmetric multipolarity; therefore, the priority for the United States should be the minimization of military involvement beyond national borders. At the same time, a vital U.S. national interest remains the prevention of the emergence of a dominant rival power. Consequently, any potential use of the armed forces must be underpinned by a military that is operationally ready, rapidly deployable, and capable of swift mobilization (Wang 2025).

The National Security Strategy also establishes a hierarchy of global regions according to their relative importance to U.S. national interests. The Western Hemisphere occupies the highest priority position. The administration of President D. Trump justifies this prioritization by directly linking U.S. homeland security to the situation in Central and South America. In the assessment of the U.S. administration, Latin America constitutes the primary source of illegal migration, transnational crime, and narcotics trafficking affecting the United States. Accordingly, the proposed remedy involves a decisive increase in U.S. economic and military engagement in the region. This is to be manifested through the expansion of U.S. military installations in Latin America, as well as the conduct of limited, targeted military interventions, with “*Operation Absolute Resolve*” in Venezuela cited as a model example (NSS 2025, pp. 15-16).

Asia ranks second in the hierarchy of the U.S. National Security Strategy. The strategy toward the Indo-Pacific is based on the restructuring of economic relations with China, which is perceived as the principal source of erosion of U.S. economic potential. In parallel, the sustained openness of Indo-Pacific trade routes is identified as a critical prerequisite for the success of U.S. external economic exchange. Accordingly, U.S. partners in the region—most notably Japan and the Republic of Korea—are expected to assume greater responsibility for strategic deterrence *vis-à-vis* China, particularly in the context of Taiwan (NSS 2025, pp. 19-24).

Europe occupies the third position in the hierarchy of U.S. strategic priorities in the short- to medium-term timeframe. The assessment of Europe’s current economic and civilizational condition within the document is

notably critical. The D. Trump's administration concludes that, notwithstanding the historically significant and enduring ties between the United States and Europe—including transatlantic economic interdependence, shared civilizational heritage, and cultural linkages—Europe is presently confronted with a multiplicity of structural challenges. The National Security Strategy underscores what the U.S. strategic establishment perceives as the detrimental effects of the European Union on the sovereignty of Europe's nation-states. In addition, the administration evaluates that the European Union's extensive regulatory framework restricts the operational freedom of the U.S. economy within the European theatre. The NSS further identifies Europe's security environment as being negatively impacted by irregular migration, heterogeneous levels of security commitment among states, constraints on freedom of expression, and the erosion of ethnic and national identities. Particular emphasis is placed on U.S. – Russian relations within the European strategic perimeter. In the short-term horizon, the United States seeks to maintain a strategic balance in Europe, primarily to mitigate the risk of armed conflict between NATO member states and the Russian Federation. It is noteworthy that the document does not characterize the Russian Federation as a direct threat or strategic challenge to the United States itself, but rather as an existential risk to U.S. allies in the region. Potential U.S. engagement in stabilizing relations with the Russian Federation is explicitly limited to diplomatic instruments; the current strategic posture excludes the employment of military force. The Strategy further notes that the resolution of the conflict in Ukraine serves the strategic interests of both the United States and its European partners. The Strategy directs U.S. European allies to assume increased responsibility for regional security affairs, while the political and military presence of the United States in the region is to be correspondingly reduced. A clear confirmation of the thesis regarding the rebalancing of the United States' physical contribution to European security is the planned reduction of U.S. Armed Forces stationed on NATO's eastern flank. In October 2025, the administration of President D. Trump announced the suspension of rotations of the 101st Airborne Division brigade based in Romania. In addition, the number of U.S. personnel deployed in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovakia is also set to be reduced. It is estimated that, as a result of the planned reorganization, approximately 3,000 U.S. service members will be withdrawn from Europe, reflecting a strategic shift toward greater responsibility for regional security being assumed by allied states. It is worth noting, however, that the U.S. Congress has exerted significant influence on the administration of President D. Trump to prevent a reduction of the U.S. Armed Forces stationed in Poland, which may indicate an increasing role for Poland as the primary location of U.S. troops on NATO's eastern flank in the medium-term perspective (Meitz 2025).

Potential impact of the new U.S. National Security Strategy on the future security dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe

The trend expressed in the U.S. National Security Strategy toward a shift in the President D. Trump administration's approach to the deployment of armed forces in Europe is materializing in real time. U.S. leadership intends to move away from a permanent, broadly-based military engagement on the continent—particularly along NATO's eastern flank—toward flexible, reduced forces capable of rapid redeployment, tailored to anticipated operational requirements and capabilities at the right place and time. This also serves as a clear signal to U.S. European partners regarding the expectation that they assume greater responsibility for regional security. This, however, should not come as a surprise, given the consistent emphasis throughout President D. Trump's second term on increasing European allies' accountability—both in terms of defence spending and in assuming responsibility for organic, European security. In light of the above, it should be expected that the United States will seek probably to maintain strategic deterrence capabilities over Europe (through the *Nuclear Sharing* programme), while in the domain of conventional deterrence, it will contribute but may not lead. In the assessment of the President D. Trump's administration, the challenges within the European security space rank third in terms of alignment with U.S. national interests. Operational requirements pertaining to the United States' own regional domain (the Western Hemisphere) and the Indo-Pacific will, in the short- and medium-term, demand increasingly significant engagement. It is undeniable that maintaining the current level of U.S. military presence in Europe entails substantial budgetary expenditures, and, consequently, public support for American armed forces' engagement in Europe—relative to Latin America and Asia—may be significantly lower.

The decision of President D. Trump's administration does not necessarily signify, for the states of NATO's eastern flank, the end of the "*transatlantic security dividend*" that for decades has been largely underwritten by the United States. The new security strategy explicitly indicates that, in the short- to medium-term perspective, the U.S. administration intends to pursue the closest cooperation in the fields of defence and the economy precisely with the CEE countries. Washington's sympathies are by no means sentimental; rather, they stem from President D. Trump's appreciation of the political commitment demonstrated by the NATO's eastern flank states to the fulfilment of allied obligations, their active enhancement of national defence at the strategic and operational levels, and certain cultural factors (a national culture strongly rooted in Christian civilisation and a robust ethnic identity). It is assessed that the CEE countries having previously assumed the role of a beneficiary of external military assistance, is increasingly becoming a co-creator of the security provision process in this part of the world—an arrangement that drives the dynamics of both defence and economic processes. In light of the prospective reorientation

of future U.S. engagement on the European continent, the states of Central and Eastern Europe must likewise reassess their strategic priorities, or, more precisely, undertake a redefinition of the external conditions that will shape these processes over the coming decade (NSS 2025, pp. 25-28).

It is assessed that a future security provision strategy for NATO's eastern flank, assuming a reduced level of U.S. military and defence engagement, should build upon the mechanisms developed to date and the capabilities already in place. At the political level, the countries should pursue close bilateral cooperation with the United States in the field of defence. Existing U.S. military installations—located primarily in Poland and other countries of the region—and the forces deployed therein should be leveraged to continuously enhance Allied interoperability. Similarly, it is essential to deepen cooperation between the United States and Central and Eastern Europe in the context of next-generation missile and air defence, particularly systems based on the *Aegis Ashore* architecture. Taking into account historical experience and contemporary trajectories of Washington's potential strategic choices regarding the prioritisation of military forces and resources deployed globally, it is advisable to consider several scenarios for the recommended developmental path of NATO's eastern flank with respect to enhancing defence and deterrence capabilities.

It may be argued that, in the short- to medium-term perspective, the essence of the most favourable course of action for the eastern flank members of the Alliance will rest on two fundamental concepts: first, the redefinition and revitalisation of regional security initiatives and partnerships and secondly: embarking upon a path toward greater autonomy in the domain of organic defence capabilities of NATO's eastern flank. It is assessed that, under each of these approaches, the United States could assume a supportive and mentoring role; in such a case, irrespective of the U.S. administration's stance toward international organisations—particularly the European Union—such support would have a tangible likelihood of success.

First, the CEE states should seek to impart renewed strategic momentum to regional cooperation frameworks, among which those of greatest relevance to regional security include the Three Seas Initiative, the Bucharest Nine, and the Visegrád Group. Notwithstanding the institutional and functional specificity of each of these formats, analytical focus should be directed toward a set of core functional domains that fundamentally condition state capacity and, by extension, constitute the structural foundations of deterrence and defence. Foremost among these domains is the development of bilateral and regional defence-industrial cooperation. It is assessed that increasing the scale and intensity of defence production within neighbouring states of the region would contribute to the shortening and consolidation of supply chains, enhance the resilience and sustainability of the regional defence-industrial base, facilitate technology and knowledge transfer, and support capital accumulation. These processes would, in turn, stimulate the economies of CEE states and, critically, ensure a higher degree of reliability and continuity in

the supply of armaments and ammunition, irrespective of external contingencies beyond the Central European strategic perimeter (Miszczuk 2023, pp. 40-42). In parallel, the deepening of cooperation in the field of cybersecurity constitutes a necessary complementary pillar. Such cooperation should aim at the systematic exchange of national best practices, the formulation of coordinated and interoperable cyber defence strategies, and the strengthening of regional capacities to prevent, deter, and respond to hybrid threats operating across the cyber domain. Third, an important area of action should be enhancing interoperability among CEE countries, with the potential involvement of a component of the United States Armed Forces. In this context, it appears appropriate to establish multinational tactical formations in the region, conceptually and functionally similar to the *Franco-German Brigade*, established in 1989. Permanent cooperation within such structures—including joint training, operational planning, and rotational duty—would facilitate the transfer of experience and the achievement of a high level of interoperability (Barry, Berrie, Boyd, Childs, Gjerstad, Hackett, McGerty, Schreer, Waldwyn 2025, pp. 21-23).

Within the domain of regional security cooperation, it is imperative to underscore the prospective advantages of enhancing collaboration between the states on NATO's eastern flank and the Nordic countries. These states not only share a comparable threat perception regarding the Russian Federation but also possess extensive expertise in the systematic planning and structuring of national defense in accordance with the "total defense" paradigm, thereby providing a substantive foundation for coordinated strategic and operational initiatives. Potential cooperation between NATO's eastern flank and the Nordic countries could encompass military, cyber, and technological domains, as well as energy security and strategic policy. Such cooperation might include joint exercises, capacity-building initiatives, infrastructure development, defense systems integration, research and development projects, and the protection of critical infrastructure, thereby potentially enhancing Alliance interoperability and regional security resilience (Szymański, Gotkowska 2025).

Particular attention should also be paid to improving the quality of civilian infrastructure, as it directly affects the operational use of armed forces. In fact, military transport capabilities rely on civilian assets—such as roads, railways, ports, and airports—for approximately 90% of operations (CCOE 2018). It is assessed that, in the context of national survival and development, the issue of security autonomy should be articulated clearly and unambiguously. Crucial in our part of Europe—regardless of the dynamics of current relations between Warsaw, Prague, Vilnius, and Bucharest on the one hand, and Washington on the other—is that the region possesses sufficient conditions and capabilities for self-defence in situations of military threat, both below the threshold of war and in the event of conventional aggression. The reasoning is straightforward: each state on NATO's eastern flank has less defence-industrial

capacity and military capability than the Russian Federation. Therefore, considerations of autonomy are not limited to individual nations but rather focus on building a synergistic framework of mutually reinforcing operational capabilities at the regional level. Drawing on experiences from the conflict in Ukraine, it can be concluded that the more resilient army—capable of effectively mobilising personnel and equipment—will prevail. A system of well-trained and properly equipped reserves will determine the balance of victory in protracted conflicts, which are increasingly multi-domain and reliant on advanced technologies (Ujházy 2018, pp. 4-10).

In the context of pursuing autonomy, it is also worth mentioning the potential debate over access to nuclear weapons for eastern flank members of the Alliance. The only realistic way to achieve this would be the inclusion of one, or, at most, two Central and Eastern European states in the *Nuclear Sharing* programme. Political options also exist for extending a French nuclear umbrella over the region; however, given political considerations—including the probably limited willingness of French elites to assume responsibility for CEE security—this option remains largely a matter of academic discussion (Miszczuk 2024b, pp. 137-138). It is widely assessed that, among the states of NATO's eastern flank, Poland demonstrates the highest degree of preparedness to meet the formal and technical requirements associated with participation in the *Nuclear Sharing* framework. This assessment is substantiated by the planned delivery of the first F-35A aircrafts to Poland in mid-2026. In their intended technical configuration, these platforms are designed to be compatible with nuclear weapon delivery systems. Accordingly, the attainment of full operational capability in the nuclear role would primarily require the completion of specialized training and certification processes for designated aircrews. With respect to infrastructural requirements related to the storage of U.S. nuclear weapons on Polish territory, the establishment of appropriate facilities would necessitate close institutional and technical cooperation with the United States. From a strategic perspective, the deployment of nuclear weapons on NATO's eastern flank is assessed as a potential enhancement of regional security. Such a deployment could contribute to the strengthening of European nuclear deterrence capabilities while simultaneously reducing the likelihood of military escalation by reinforcing deterrence credibility. The issue, however, must be considered within a broader political and legal context. Any implementation of a concept involving the eastward extension of *Nuclear Sharing* arrangements would require unanimous consent among NATO member states, with the exception of France, which remains outside the Nuclear Planning Group. At present, the primary legal instrument constraining discussions on the expansion of Nuclear Sharing participation is the "*Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*" of 1997. The Act contains a provision declaring the Alliance's lack of intent to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of member states admitted after 1997 (NATO 1997). Irrespective of whether NATO and the United States choose, in the

short- or medium-term, to intensify efforts aimed at the forward deployment of nuclear weapons to the eastern flank members of the Alliance, it remains essential to pursue measures that increase the number of dual-capable aircraft in Central and Eastern Europe countries. Equally important is the certification of both aircrews and platforms. These measures would enable participation in nuclear missions on an extraterritorial basis, including the delivery of nuclear weapons stored in another allied state. It is argued that, in the context of enhancing security on NATO's eastern flank amid a reduced level of United States engagement, the application of European Union instruments to strengthen the defence capabilities CEE states constitutes a potentially advantageous approach. This is particularly relevant with regard to the financing of the defence industrial base and the allocation of resources for defence purposes. Proposed measures in this domain may include, *inter alia*, the issuance of Eurobonds for defence-related expenditures, the adoption of regulatory frameworks mandating the maintenance of adequate armaments stockpiles, the relaxation of fiscal constraints for security-related spending, the facilitation of access to capital through the removal of restrictions on financial institutions, as well as the establishment of a dedicated financial institution to support European defence investments within the NATO framework (Ostanina 2025, pp. 2-8).

Another critical dimension in the pursuit of strategic autonomy for defence and deterrence within the region is the development of key military capabilities that have hitherto been provided by the United States, often referred to as strategic enablers. These capabilities include, in particular, strategic airlift, aerial refuelling, satellite-based geospatial intelligence, and the capacity to counter hostile missile and aerial threats. In a transitional context, such support could potentially be provided by another European state—either partially substituting U.S. capabilities or gradually assuming corresponding responsibilities—for example, the United Kingdom (Meitz 2025).

Another mechanism for enhancing the deterrence and defence posture of NATO's eastern flank is the establishment of a modern, highly trained personnel reserve system, for which conscription could constitute an enabling instrument. At present, a growing number of CEE states, as well as in the Nordic region, are undertaking initiatives aimed at the reintroduction of compulsory military service, while simultaneously providing for legally sanctioned alternatives, such as service in the healthcare sector or within civil defence structures. In parallel, Germany and France are developing military service programmes that, while formally voluntary in nature, resemble selective or hybrid conscription models in terms of structure and objectives. Structural personnel deficits within NATO armed forces, largely attributable to long-term demographic trends, represent a persistent challenge that necessitates systematic mitigation through comprehensive manpower generation and reserve-force development policies (Besch, Westgaard 2024).

Within the domain of regional security cooperation, the prospect of engaging in structured collaboration with Ukraine should not be discounted. Following the cessation of hostilities, Ukraine could provide partners on NATO's eastern flank with invaluable operational expertise pertaining to the employment of armed forces in conventional military operations, the safeguarding of critical infrastructure, and the enhancement of state resilience against both conventional and hybrid threats. Such collaborative endeavors ought to be predicated upon a rigorous, systematic "lessons learned" analysis, thereby facilitating the strategic incorporation of Ukrainian operational experience into broader Alliance planning, doctrine development, and capability-building initiatives. Potential cooperation between NATO's eastern flank and Ukraine could be envisaged as encompassing a broad spectrum of military, cyber, technological, and energy security domains, alongside strategic planning, thereby contributing to the enhancement of regional security and the augmentation of Ukraine's defense capabilities. In the military sphere, such cooperation might entail the conduct of joint exercises, structured training programs, and the systematic exchange of operational expertise in areas including air defense, anti-armor operations, and logistics, as well as advisory support for the modernization of Ukraine's Armed Forces and the integration of interoperable defense systems. Moreover, collaboration could be extended to encompass cyber and hybrid defense measures, including the protection of critical information infrastructure, the mitigation of disinformation campaigns, and the joint advancement of cyber defense capabilities. Finally, research, development, and technological initiatives—including programs focused on drones, surveillance systems, short-range missile systems, satellite technologies, and secure communications—could serve to enhance operational capacities while simultaneously facilitating the transfer of expertise in defense planning, mobilization, and comprehensive crisis management, thereby consolidating the foundation for sustained, coordinated, and empirically informed regional security initiatives.

Conclusions

The findings derived from the conducted research substantiate the claim that the new U.S. National Security Strategy constitutes a doctrinal articulation of foreign policy aligned with the *"America First"* paradigm, emphasizing a strategic reorientation of U.S. global engagement. The strategy significantly narrows both the scope and the substantive understanding of the American national interest, thereby directing U.S. foreign policy toward a model of restrained or moderate isolationism. According to the new strategic framework, existing vectors of international engagement are subject to recalibration, with primary strategic attention devoted to the Western Hemisphere

and the Indo-Pacific region. The research conclusions further indicate that, in the short- to medium-term perspective, the United States will endeavour to shift responsibility for the security of the Old Continent onto its European allies. Within this strategic construct, the United States is expected to assume the role of a mentor and systemic balancer, maintaining its strategic deterrence capabilities at an unchanged level, while simultaneously reducing the forward presence of its conventional military forces in Europe in response to newly defined regional priorities.

The empirical findings demonstrate that the provisions of the new U.S. National Security Strategy are of fundamental significance for the states comprising NATO's eastern flank. Most notably, the strategy effectively marks the definitive end—at any conceptual or political level—of the assumption among European elites that an external actor will indefinitely assume responsibility for the security of Central Europe. In the context of a potential reduction in U.S. involvement in European security mechanisms, analytical attention must be directed toward the strategic options available to states that, confronted with the partial withdrawal of a hegemonic power from a given sphere of influence, are compelled to reprioritize their national objectives. For NATO's eastern flank, such options are identified primarily in the development of autonomous defence capabilities, the intensification of bilateral security relations with the United States, and the strengthening of Central European regional security frameworks. These dynamics entail clear strategic implications, particularly the necessity of expeditiously reducing dependence on the United States in critical capability areas, including strategic air transportation, satellite-based intelligence, air and missile defence systems, and command, control, and communications capabilities. The research results further suggest that NATO's eastern flank states should pursue the enhancement of their defence capacities through deeper cooperation within regional initiatives, supplemented by additional measures such as diversification of arms procurement, relocation of defence-industrial production lines within region, and the expansion of intra-European Union defence cooperation. Paradoxically, a potential reduction in U.S. military forces and assets deployed in Europe may elevate regional leaders—most notably Poland—to a more privileged position within bilateral defence relations with the United States. Poland, as a state distinguished by high levels of defence expenditure, advanced military modernization, the development of allied interoperability, and robust defence cooperation with the United States, possesses the structural prerequisites to assume a leadership role among eastern flank members of the Alliance. This would entail a strategic transition from a security beneficiary to an active architect of defence policy on NATO's eastern flank. It is assessed that, contingent upon a favourable political climate between Washington and Central European capitals, the current U.S. administration will prioritize defence cooperation with states that are both ideologically and culturally proximate, and that demonstrate a clear understanding of the tangible relationship

between the development of defence capabilities and national power. In this context, particular attention should be given to the potential for U.S. support of emerging or deepened regional initiatives, for which the American administration may actively advocate within the international arena.

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