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Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on the Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy

(October 12, 2022)

Good afternoon.

Thank you, Dean Hellman and thanks to Paul Scharre, and the teams at Georgetown and the Center for New America Security for bringing us all together today. And Meghan, thank you for hosting our conversation, though I may want to wait until after the grilling to say thank you.

We have here before us today some of the sharpest foreign policy strategists in the country, many of whom I'm privileged to call friends.

We also have the next generation of national security leaders – the students. And, in some ways my speech today is a job interview because I, and my colleagues, likely going to be working for you all one of these days.

I also want to take a moment to recognize a team without whom we not be here today, starting with the Senior Director for Strategic Planning at the NSC Tom Wright, our former Senior Director who's now at DoD Sasha Baker and Rebecca Lissner whose joined the Office of the Vice President – the three of them were instrumental in putting together this National Security Strategy and I think we should all give them a round of applause. And I'd like to thank the leadership team of the NSC, Jon Finer, Liz Sherwood-Randall, Anne Neuberger, Jake Phillips, and Mike Pyle – a team that has seen us through an incredibly turbulent and challenging time, but also a time where we were able to see these meaningful strategic opportunities, some of which we will talk about in my remarks today.

And, then I'd just like to say that I'm very grateful to this community, in this room representing both the future and present of our national security enterprise. It really is incredible to have the counsel and the guidance and the support of so many people who helped shape the substance of the document we are releasing today.

Seventy-five years ago, in the summer of 1947, President Truman was flying home to Independence, Missouri on a C-54 transport plane nicknamed called the “Scared Cow” – sort of wish that’s what the still called Air Force One.

He’s sitting on the “Scared Cow” and nations in Europe are rebuilding from the rubble of the war, the Iron Curtain was falling, people everywhere were reckoning with the horrors of the Holocaust.

It was what President Biden would call an inflection point.

The post-war world – and America’s role in leading it – was only beginning to take shape.

And to make sure it did take shape in a way that represented America’s values and interests, on that very plane ride, Truman signed a law that required his administration to create a National Security Strategy—a blueprint for a new world—that the United States would build with nations around the globe.

In just a few years, guided by that first National Security Strategy, Truman would create the Marshall Plan and NATO, help Europe usher in a new era of integration, and set the terms for America’s engagement with the international community.

Today, our world is once again at an inflection point.

We are in the early years a decisive decade.

The terms of our competition with the People’s Republic of China will be set.

The window of opportunity to deal with shared challenges like climate change will narrow drastically, even as the intensity of those challenges grows.

So, we need to grasp our moment, just as Truman did his.

Today, the Biden Administration is releasing our National Security Strategy.

It touches on our plans and partners in every region of the world. It details the President’s vision of a free, open, prosperous, and secure international order.

And it offers a roadmap for seizing this decisive decade to advance America’s vital interests, position the America and our allies to outpace our competitors, and build broad coalitions to tackle shared challenges.

I'd encourage all of you to read it in full, and I hope there will be a thoughtful and robust discussion of it in the months ahead—where you agree, and where you don't.

Because the matters laid out in this document – and the execution of it – do not only belong to the U.S. Government. They belong to everyone who shares this vision worldwide.

And the stakes could not be higher. The actions we take now will shape whether this decisive decade is an age of conflict and discord... or the beginning of a more prosperous and stable future.

Simply put, we face two main strategic challenges.

The first is geopolitical competition. The post-Cold War era is over and a competition is underway between the major powers to shape what comes next.

The United States, we believe, is better positioned than any other nation in the world to seize this moment – to help set the rules, shore up the norms, and advance the values that will define the world we want to live in.

But, we are not on the field alone.

The PRC's assertiveness at home and abroad is advancing an illiberal vision across economic, political, security, and technological realms in competition with the West. It is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and the growing capacity to do it.

Meanwhile, Russia's war against Ukraine builds on years of growing regional aggression. Putin is making reckless nuclear threats. Willfully violating the UN Charter. Relentlessly targeting civilians. Acting with a brutality that threatens to drag us all back into the dark days of Soviet expansionism.

The second strategic challenge we face is the sheer scale and speed of transnational challenges that do not respect borders or adhere to ideologies.

Climate change, which is already destroying lives and livelihoods in every part of the world. Food insecurity, the energy transition. And now, as we know all too well, diseases and pandemics like COVID-19.

Our strategy proceeds from the premise that the two strategic challenges – geopolitical competition and shared transnational threats – are intertwined.

We cannot build the broad coalitions we need to out-compete our rivals if we sideline the issues that most directly impact the lives of billions of people.

Now over the last thirty years, at various points, American strategists declared geopolitics dead. At other points, like in the last Administration, cooperation on climate and other shared challenges fell by the wayside.

In this Administration, the Biden Administration, we believe we've come to a point where we can and simply have to tackle both on an equal plane: geopolitical competitions and shared transnational challenges.

So we are building a strategy fit for purpose for both competition we cannot ignore and global cooperation without which we cannot succeed.

Now the good and bad news is that the timelines for these two challenges align.

This is a decisive decade for shaping the terms of competition, especially with the PRC.

This is a decisive decade for getting ahead of the great global challenges from climate to disease to emerging technology.

The further good news is that — despite the obvious tensions between competing vigorously while also rallying cooperation — the basic strategic moves we have to make to prevail on both of these major challenges are also the same.

One, invest ambitiously and rapidly in the sources of our national strength.

Two, mobilize the broadest coalition of nations to enhance our collective influence.

Three, shape the rules of the road of the 21st century economy, from technology, to cyber to trade and economics.

This is how we will shape geopolitical competition to our advantage and it is how we will shape effective cooperation on those national challenges I just described.

Our approach encompasses all elements of our national power—diplomacy, development cooperation, industrial strategy, economic statecraft, intelligence, and defense.

So, let me take a moment to walk through each of these three main elements of the strategy.

First, we are replenishing the reservoirs of our national power through targeted, far-reaching investments.

A hallmark of the Biden approach is the integration of foreign policy and domestic policy and a focus on issues that spill out of these two traditional silos – supply chains, foundational technologies, the energy transition, even tax policy.

We are pursuing a modern industrial and innovation strategy to invest in our economic strength and technological edge at home, which is the deepest source of our power in the world.

Over the summer alone, President Biden signed the CHIPS and Science Act, an Executive Order on Advancing Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing Innovation, and the Inflation Reduction Act, the single largest investment in climate and clean energy solutions in history.

Alongside these investments, we are intensely focused on modernizing our military – the strongest fighting force the world has ever known – the foundation of our deterrence in a turbulent world.

And we are intensely focused on refurbishing our intelligence community as well, getting it the tools, it needs to succeed in a fast-changing world.

We must equip both our military enterprise and our intelligence enterprise for this era of strategic competition, while maintaining the capability to disrupt the terrorist threat to the American homeland.

The war in Ukraine, as many of you have come to learn, also highlights the need for a vibrant Defense Industrial Base – one that is capable of rapid mobilization and tooled for innovation and creative adaptation.

All of these steps we take at home are force-multiplied by another core source of our American strength – our alliances.

After a period of significant distance and disjuncture with our allies, we are now more fully in lockstep with our friends than at any point in recent history. If there's anything that's a true hallmark of Joe Biden's approach to the world, it is an investment in America's allies.

A few years ago, NATO was working overtime to justify its value proposition. Today, it is at its apex of its purpose and power.

The G7 was struggling for any consensus on how to operate. Today, it is the steering committee of the free world – whether on sanctions or energy security or delivering global policy.

That is through hard work the United States and fellow like-minded democracies and it's paying dividends in so many of the crisis we see around the world.

In the Indo-Pacific, we have reaffirmed our iron-clad commitments to our treaty allies lifted our alliances with Japan to South Korea to Australia to new levels of vitality and restored the Visiting Forces Agreement with the Philippines.

We've elevated a new partnership of democracies – the Quad – to help drive our vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. We've built a new transatlantic architecture for trade and technology cooperation with the European Union.

One of the things that we are doing as we strengthen our alliances is to drive more strategic alliance between the Atlantic and the Pacific.

We've launched an innovative and far-reaching security arrangement called AUKUS with the Australia and the United Kingdom.

We included, for the first time ever, the leaders of Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Australia, at the NATO Summit in Madrid this past June.

And we're working very closely with the European Union as each of us have formulated and now implementing our Indo-Pacific Strategies.

At a time when we need democracies and market economies around the world to work together, the United States has a key role to play in build out these collaborations.

Japan and South Korea's work with us to reroute surplus natural gas to Europe, Australia's contribution of weapons to Ukraine are examples of connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific is playing out in practice.

Now the world's major autocracies believe the democratic world is in decline.

They seek to advance a very different vision – where might makes right and technological and economic coercion squeezes anyone who steps out of line.

The last year alone has demonstrated the extreme shortcomings – indeed, the fundamental fragility – of this subversive vision.

And the Biden Administration has proven that a broad and powerful range of nations supports our vision of a free, open, prosperous, and secure world.

Even if our democratic allies and partners don't agree with us on everything, they are aligned with us. And so are many countries that do not embrace democratic institutions but nevertheless depend upon and help sustain a rules-based international system. They don't want to see it vanish, and they know that we are the world's best bet to defend it.

That's why the second strategic focus of President Biden's approach is mobilizing the broadest possible coalition of nations to leverage our collective influence.

Our goal is not to force our partners to fall in line with us on every issue. And we will not carve the world into rigid blocs.

As the president said in the UN General Assembly last month, "The United Nations Charter was not only signed by democracies of the world, it was negotiated among citizens of dozens of nations with vastly different histories and ideologies, united in their commitment to work for peace."

So we will work with any nation prepared to stand up for the values of the UN Charter.

That includes the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Last March, 141 nations voted to condemn Putin's war in the General Assembly. And only four nations stood up for Russia – Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea, and Syria.

I know which side of that I would want to be on – what side the United States is on.

This week – in fact today, in fact while this session is ongoing – the nations of the world will vote again overwhelmingly again to send another a strong, unmistakable message to Moscow that we reject its illegitimate and illegal acts of annexation as fundamentally inconsistent with the UN Charter.

The UN Charter also includes the freedom of navigation and overflight. So we stood up the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness – we're excellent at naming things in government by the way – which brings the Quad together with nations of the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean to address illegal fishing practices and build capacity to respond to disasters.

It's the world's democracies working with a diverse range of governments on shared challenges that promote a common vision consistent with the terms of the UN Charter.

We're trying these flexible, creative arrangements all over the world in creative, resourceful, entrepreneurial ways. Like I2U2, which sounds a bit ridiculous by name, but is actually a fascinating new partnership with India, Israel, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates to work together in areas like water, space, health, and food security to bringing the countries of the Atlantic Basin from Africa, from Europe, North America, South America together to cooperate on priorities like maritime security and the blue economy.

By the end of this year, in 2022 alone, the President would have hosted the leaders of the Americas, the leaders of the Pacific Islands, the leaders of ASEAN, and Africa in separate summits with a focus on practical problem-solving, from climate to food to energy to health.

The pace, scope, and sheer dynamism of our engagements does not give us much time to rest – but it is delivering.

And it is particularly deep and growing in the critical realms where competition will play out most acutely in the decades to come.

Foundational Technologies. Cyberspace. Trade and Economics. Investment.

That is why our third critical step to our strategy is to shape the rules of the road in these decisive domains, in this decisive decade.

A few weeks ago, I laid out the fundamentals of our work to preserve American and allied technological and scientific leadership for generations to come.

It tracks closely with what we just released in the National Security Strategy, including recharging the engine of American dynamism at home and deepening our partnerships abroad.

This includes making sure we are doing this in a secure and effective way – securing our critical infrastructure, advancing foundational cybersecurity for critical actors from pipelines to water, and working with the private sector to improve security defenses in technology products that you all are using everyday here at Georgetown.

We're investing in the technologies and industries of the future to ensure these investments will withstand the next global stress test, and our investments are only as good as the steps we take to protect them, which is why cybersecurity remains so central to the approach we are taking at the National Security Council and across our government.

We are enhancing our investment screening, by providing the first formal Presidential guidance to CFIUS in the history of that committee.

And we are making progress in addressing outbound investments in sensitive technologies, especially technologies and investments that would not be captured by export controls and that could accelerate the capabilities of our competitors in the most sensitive areas.

For example, last week, we launched significant, carefully tailored restrictions on semiconductor technology exports to the PRC, focused on advanced semiconductor manufacturing tools, the most advanced chips, and supercomputing capabilities.

These restrictions are premised on straightforward national security concerns. These technologies are used to develop and field advanced military systems including weapons of mass destruction, hypersonic missiles, autonomous systems, and mass surveillance.

Many of you have heard the term “small yard, high fence” when it comes to protecting critical technologies. The concept has been cited at think tanks and universities and conferences for years. We are now implementing it.

Chokepoints for foundational technologies have to be inside that yard, and the fence has to be high—because our strategic competitors should not be able to exploit American and allied technologies to undermine American and allied security.

Alongside these efforts in the technology realm, we are charting new arrangements to shape the economic rules of the road while protecting the interests of American workers.

The bottom line is that we can’t just fall back on traditional FTAs of the past.

We have to adapt. We have to cope with fragile supply chains, widening inequality, and the PRC’s emergence as both our most consequential competitor and our largest trading partner.

So, we’re bringing American workers and international partners to the table to create a more fair and agile set of economic relationships.

In June, in Tokyo, President Biden launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, which now includes fourteen economies, accounting for more than a third of global GDP.

The Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity follows a similar model. It’s designed to promote integration by charting new rules to govern trade in digital goods and services and to protect proprietary technologies. To establish early warning systems to identify bottlenecks in supply chains before they occur to set new standards on clean energy.

And President Biden's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment adopted at the G7 this summer will leverage the collective resources of the world's democracies to mobilize hundreds of billions of dollars for high-standard, sustainable investments in the Global South.

Each of these partnerships will be critical to hastening the clean energy transition, which has profound geostrategic consequences as the world weans itself off fossil fuels.

And, I know that National Security Strategies often get criticized for not setting priorities. And frankly as the United States, we can't be overly rigid about this because there's a lot happening in the world and that we got to be dealing with all of it, we have to keep our eye on more than one ball at one time.

The DPRK has not halted its forward progress.

Iran is still advancing its nuclear program and plotting harm to Americans.

Terrorist threats are more geographically diffuse than ever before.

The world is anything but calm.

But the document does recognize some core priorities. The PRC represents America's most consequential geopolitical challenge. Competition with the PRC is most pronounced in the Indo-Pacific, but it is also increasingly global.

From Day One of the Biden Administration, our approach has followed the same fundamentals that I have just described in the National Security Strategy, writ large:

Invest in the foundations of our strength at home.

Align our efforts with our network of allies and partners.

And compete responsibly to defend and advance our interests and those of like-minded nations.

Invest. Align. Compete. This is the framework that Secretary Blinken laid out in his speech on our China Strategy a few months ago.

We will engage constructively with the PRC wherever we can – not as a favor, and not in exchange for our principles – but because working together to solve common problems is what the world expects from responsible powers. And because it is in our interest.

In that spirit, the National Security Strategy also recognizes that the climate crisis is the greatest of all the shared problems we face. Without immediate global action during this decisive decade, global temperatures will cross the critical warming threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius. And after that – scientists have warned some of the most catastrophic climate impacts will be irreversible.

The United States will meet its global responsibility on climate, thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act.

And we will meet it on health, on food security, on arms control and nonproliferation.

Because we are steadfastly avoiding the temptation to see the world solely through the prism of strategic competition.

We will continue to engage with countries on their own terms.

We will always seek to defend, not dominate. To inspire, not impose.

And we will work with any nation that is willing to protect the rules-based order and uphold international law—in every region of the world no matter the country's size or so-called strategic importance.

A more integrated Middle East that empowers our allies and partners will advance regional peace and prosperity, while reducing the demands the region makes on the United States over the long term.

In Africa, the dynamism and demographic growth of the region make it central to solving every single significant global challenge we face.

And we will continue to revive and deepen our partnerships in the region that most directly impacts the United States more than any other: our own region, the Western Hemisphere.

This brings me to a thought that I suspect is on your minds, just as it is on mine.

And that is Ukraine.

In many ways, the strength to the international response to Russia's brutal, unprovoked assault – it's catastrophic shedding of the terms of the UN Charter – the way the world has come together to respond reveals President Biden's National Security Strategy in action.

From the moment we received the first intelligence reports in the fall and stood up a planning cell out of the West Wing, we were disciplined and determined in our strategic objectives:

To help Ukraine succeed as a democratic, independent, sovereign, and prosperous state, able to deter and defend itself against further aggression.

To avoid a direct conflict between nuclear superpowers.

And to ensure the international system emerges from this conflict stronger rather than weaker.

And seven months later, we still guided by these aims.

We wove together a coalition of nations to help Ukrainians defend their country with enormous military, economic, and humanitarian support.

We united the G7 to impose unprecedented economic costs that are squeezing Russia's key sources of critical goods and input for its economy.

We've worked closely with our European friends to address the global ripple effects of the war, from striking an energy supply deal that helped cut dependence on Russian gas to driving new investments in food security globally.

And we have put months of quiet work to help shepherd Finland and Sweden into NATO, proving that Putin's actions have only infused the Alliance with a sense of common purpose that has not seen in decades.

At extraordinary cost, with extraordinary bravery, the people of Ukraine can take enormous pride in knowing that Russia has gotten the exact opposite of what it expected.

And it is the bravery and courage of the people of Ukraine, with the support of the international community, that has pushed Russia back from aims it had set out with at the start of this conflict which was quite literally as President Biden has said "to wipe Ukraine off of the map."

At the same time, it is easy to remember how acute the risk of escalation has been throughout this conflict. How it was in those first few weeks and how real it remains.

And as National Security Advisor, the risk is never out of my mind.

We take the threats that President Putin is making to the international community and to Ukraine, itself, seriously as we have from the outset of this war.

We will continue to be both resolute and responsible in our actions in support of Ukraine's freedom, its democracy, its sovereignty, its territorial integrity.

We will not be intimidated. We will not be knocked off course. We will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Standing here today, nearly two years into the Biden Administration, it actually can be kind of hard to look all the way back to the first day on the job, a lot has happened since then. And it can be easy to look around and see that remarkable unity and resolve of the free world today, the way it has stepped up on Ukraine and so many issues, and say that was just the natural order of things.

But it's not necessary the natural order of things.

It takes work. It takes effort. It takes strategy.

And, against an array of steep, sharp, and dogged challenges, the United States – I believe – is today strategically well-positioned and – through our historic investments and unrelenting work we're doing, is growing more so month-by-month.

That doesn't just happen like a rubber band springing back into shape.

It is the culmination of the work over 21 months to bend and build the architecture of this National Security Strategy under the leadership of our President to replenish our reservoir of strength at home to rebuild and create our strategic and economic partnerships around the world and to meet every challenge we facing – whether geopolitical or transnational – from a situation of strength.

That is what we set out to do. That is what we are trying to do every day we have the honor to hold these jobs.

And I thank you very much for the opportunity to address you today.