



**BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION'S U.S.  
NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY:  
CONSIDERATIONS OF TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM**



Georgian Center for Strategy and Development  
Terrorism Research Center

Biden-Harris Administration's U.S. National Security Strategy:  
Considerations of Terrorism and Violent Extremism

Beka Parsadanishvili, Nino Lomidze, Giorgi Peikrishvili



2022

## Executive Summary

The adoption of the 2022 National Security Strategy by the Biden-Harris administration reconsiders existing approaches towards terrorism and violent extremist threats. While the document serves communication purposes, it advocates for significant transformation in counter and anti-terrorism efforts. While maintaining care for the Middle East and South and Central Asia, the document extends the U.S. attention toward the terrorism and violent extremism situation in Sub-Saharan and Central Africa. POTUS advocates for targeted anti-terrorist operations with precise airstrikes as an alternative to extensive military presence on the ground and supports the initiative to repeal outdated AUMFs. NSS provides an alternative to the current international partnership model in CT, advocating for a shift in roles and promoting the Partner-Led, U.S.-Enabled approach. According to NSS, POTUS stays alert towards homegrown extremism and domestic terrorism.

### How to Cite This Document:

Parsadanishvili, B., Lomidze, N. & Peikrishvili, G. (2022). Bide-Harris Administration's U.S. National Security strategy: Considerations of Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Georgian Center for Strategy and Development; Terrorism Research Center. Available at: [insert link here]

© 2022

Georgian Center for Strategy and Development (GCSD); Terrorism Research Center (TRC)

Beka Parsadanishvili, Nino Lomidze, Giorgi Peikrishvili

- ALL RIGHTS RESERVED -

## Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	4
Introduction	5
The New Georgraphy of Terrorism and Violent Extremism	7
Tightening the Belt: the U.S. Fight Atgainst Terrorism from Over the Horizon	7
Recognition of Outdated Authorizations for the Use of Military Force	8
Transforming the United States International Counter-Terrorism Partnership Model From the “U.S.-Led, Partner-Enabled” to “Partner-Led, U.S-Enabled”	9
The Recognition of Homegrown Extremism and Commitment to Implement the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism	10
On Again: Advancing Commonsense Gun Laws and Policies	11
Conclusion	12
Reference List	13

## List of Abbreviations

AUMF - Authorization for Use of Military Force

CT – Counter-Terrorist

ISIS - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

NSS – National Security Strategy (U.S)

POTUS – President of the United States

VE – Violent Extremism

WH – White House

## Introduction

Section 603 of the Goldwater-Nichols Act (Public Law 99-443) mandates the periodic adoption of the United States National Security Strategy (NSS).<sup>1</sup> The president of the United States (POTUS) and the White House administration share their national security vision with the executive body – Congress, via the NSS. The document determines the discussion in Congress about the use of resources per the security goals of the United States. Although NSS' general content serves communication purposes, the Goldwater-Nichols Act recognizes five primary goals:

1. NSS validates POTUS resource-related requests after communicating the vision to Congress.
2. The document notifies other countries about the U.S. security vision.
3. It raises awareness of the general public, including POTUS supporters.
4. NSS promotes cooperation of Congress representatives in foreign and defense policy.
5. The document outlines the POTUS agenda of national security.<sup>2</sup>

During the document review, the U.S. Congress discusses the defense capabilities against a broad spectrum of threats, that include violent extremism (VE), homegrown, international and transnational terrorism. Four White House administrations recognized VE and terrorism-related risks from 2002-2022. The National Security Strategies of the Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations carry several references to said threats:

**1. George H. Bush** administration issued National Security Strategy, built around the Bush concept of pre-emptive war, on September 17, 2002. The doctrine and NSS were rightfully influenced by the events of 9/11, recognizing that the posed security threats to the United States are not limited to authoritarian regimes (Iraq, Iran, etc.) but also include Islamist terrorist organizations (Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and others).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 99<sup>th</sup> United States Congress (1986). H.R.3622 - Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Library of Congress. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/3622>

<sup>2</sup> ^ Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The White House: George W. Bush (2002). The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Available at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>

2. The **Obama** administration refused to use the term “Islamic radicalism”, replacing it with “terrorism” as an umbrella concept to avoid stigmatizing coherent groups in the United States. NSS of 2010 recognized the importance of cooperating with the Muslim population in the United States address against the international terrorist organizations – (primarily) Al-Qaeda and Taliban. The document advocated for the social, economic, and political welfare provision in high-risk countries as the most-effective long-term measure for conflict resolution, assisting the countries with VE groups during insurgencies.<sup>4</sup>

3. NSS by **Donald J. Trump** partially contradicted Obama’s initiative to use terrorism as the umbrella term. Instead, the new administration nominated Jihadist organizations as the most dangerous terrorist threat to the United States. The 2017 NSS described violent extremists as fanatics who undermine the American way of living. NSS considered the Internet a haven for terrorist activity, providing terrorist organizations with new opportunities. NSS vowed to take measures against WMD terrorism through local, regional and international partnerships.<sup>5</sup>

4. Recent developments of 2021 in Afghanistan have served as the turning point for the **Biden** administration in formulating the new strategy for VE and Terrorism-related threats. The new NSS recognizes the changing nature of VE and advocates for the parallel transformation of counter and anti-terrorism measures of the U.S. After the Afghanistan withdrawal, the United States will focus on Africa, transforming the U.S. counterterrorism model from “U.S. Led, Partner-Enabled” to “Partner Led, U.S-Enabled. The document emphasizes its success in using advanced weaponry in anti-terrorist operations and the importance of working on outdated means of authorizing

---

<sup>4</sup> The White House: Barack Obama (2010). The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Available at: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/national-security-strategy-may-2010#:~:text=This%20strategy%20involves%20sturdy%20international,the%20core%20of%20American%20power.>

<sup>5</sup> The White House: Donald J. Trump (2017). National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

the use of force (AUMF). While acknowledging the threat of homegrown terrorism, NSS promotes advancing common-sense gun laws and policies.<sup>6</sup>

### **The New Geography of Terrorism and Violent Extremism**

The 2022 National Security Strategy reshapes the U.S. understanding of terrorism and violent extremism geography. The Biden administration considers terrorism and violent extremism **more ideologically diverse and geographically diffuse**.<sup>7</sup> While the 46<sup>th</sup> administration stays alert about the terrorism and VE situation in the Middle East and Afghanistan (despite the weakening of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and withdrawal from Afghanistan), NSS recognizes the threats have encroached around Sub-Saharan and Central Africa due to the massive migration of terrorist entities and their affiliates on the continent.

To prevent terrorism import to Africa, the United States plans to further invest in P/CVE initiatives on the continent. Biden administration under NSS voices its intention to confront corruption, lack of state accountability, weakness of the judicial system, and border security as the VE roots.

The new geography of terrorism and violent extremism refers to the malicious use of the Internet in spreading VE narratives. NSS supports a holistic approach and promotes the involvement of the civil society sector and innovative research mechanisms to address the circulation of violent extremist content online.

### **Tightening the Belt: the U.S. Fight Against Terrorism from Over the Horizon**

Ridiculous expenditures of the U.S. war in Afghanistan and the technical development of anti-terrorist operations have determined the perspectives of tightening the belt when conducting

---

<sup>6</sup> The White House: Joseph R. Biden Jr (2022). National Security Strategy of the United States. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> ^ Ibid.



anti-terrorist operations. The Biden-Harris Administration’s U.S. National Security Strategy of 2022 introduces a new approach to conducting military operations described as a fight against terrorism from over the horizon, which favors targeted attacks rather than full-scale military operations against terrorist and violent extremist group affiliates. Although targeted military operations (drone attacks, airstrikes, etc.) have become somewhat conventional on several occasions, such favoritism towards small-scale military operations will result in relatively low-cost anti-terrorist initiatives.

The United States’ confidence in successfully conducting small-scale, targeted operations against terrorist organization affiliates comes from previous anti-terrorist operations, including the assassination of the Al-Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

**The Killing of al-Zawahiri:**

*Ayman al-Zawahiri was the chief ideologue of al-Qaeda and one of the most wanted terrorists in the world, who contributed to planning the 9/11 attacks. While out of sight, Ayman al-Zawahiri coordinated al-Qaeda cells plotted a plethora of terrorist attacks in different parts of the world, provided operational guidance, and inspired others to attack the U.S. in every possible way. Ayman al-Zawahiri found his hideout in Afghanistan after the collapse of the Western-backed government. Al-Zawahiri’s hideout neighbored several Western embassies, determining the necessity of a delicate intervention. Ayman Zawahiri was on the balcony of the safe house in Kabul when the American drones fired at him from a two-mile distance without dealing collateral damage. The operation of killing al-Zawahiri once again reinforced the U.S. commitment to a continuous fight against al-Qaeda ISIS and other terrorist organizations, but not necessarily with large-scale military efforts.*

Such confidence in the “over the horizon” approach contradicts the 2017 NSS of **Donald J. Trump**, who accentuated which accentuated the urgency of “pursuing threats to their source” with direct action campaigns with allied forces against terrorist threats along with their sources of support, digital networks, and secure platforms.

**Recognition of Outdated Authorizations for the Use of Military Force**

The previously mentioned concept of Bush’s pre-emptive war determined the adoption of the new Authorizations for the Use of Military Force (AUMFs) after the 9/11 attacks. The Congressional Study Group on Foreign Relations and National Security criticized the Biden

administration on May 21, 2021, for Bush-era model usage because they served as the legal foundation for overseas operations, which [AUMF] the administration enacted before the Iraq intervention. The study group considered AUMFs outdated and numerous misused to find legal bases for wars, which contradicts the democratic will.

On June 17, 2021, the House of Representatives supported Barbara Lee's (Rep) initiative to repeal the 2002 AUMF against Iraq. According to the representative, as the AUMF had no operational purpose, it could be susceptible to abuse by any presidential administration. However, the 2002 AUMF is not the sole source of authorizing military activity. As shown by the strikes in Syria, Article II can single-handedly provide sufficient justification. At the same time, the case of the Syrian chemical weapons crisis has demonstrated that even after using article II, the lack of AUMF within congress has made Obama blink in the absence of congressional backing.

The recognition of AUMF being outdated in the Biden Administration NSS follows the thesis that as the country has no current ongoing military activities that rely only on 2002 AUMF, its abandonment would have minimum impact on the current situation. However, there are concerns amongst Republican senators who are worried about the repeal and the consequent reaction amongst U.S. partners and adversaries.

### **Transforming the United States International Counter-Terrorism Partnership Model From the "U.S.-Led, Partner-Enabled" to "Partner-Led, U.S-Enabled"**

The Biden-Harris NSS puts the United States existing international CT partnership model – U.S.-Led, Partner-Enabled under scrutiny. The new NSS brings an alternative Partner-Led, U.S.-Enabled model to the discussion table, significantly changing the perspectives of the U.S. foreign CT policy.

The new model reinforces Presidential support for U.S. foreign partners, contrary to the previous military-centric guideline with full-scale involvement of the U.S. military force on the ground. Such transformation will significantly decrease the United States' preeminent role in

combating terrorism globally but spotlights the multilayered American support toward the U.S. partner states.

The proposed transformation implies increasing the provision of allies with arms and infrastructure, strengthening their law enforcement and judicial systems, improving information-sharing practices, and augmenting their border control abilities.

The Partner-Enabled end of the new CT partnership model touches upon delicate problems of good governance and stabilization. Per the 2022 NSS, the U.S. will further promote economic development and political stability in partner countries to deter the roots of violent extremism and terrorism.

The transformation is more apparent when compared with the 2017 NSS, which builds upon direct action against terrorist networks. The previous model was military-centric, and the U.S. fitted the leading role in global counterterrorism missions. The new vision highlights the dominant part of the U.S. in confronting global challenges like terrorism, although the announced involvement in future confrontations against terrorist threats diverts towards assistance in political, economic, and social root causes of VE.

### **The Recognition of Homegrown Extremism and Commitment to Implement the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism**

The National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism was adopted in the aftermath of the January 6 Capitol attack (June 2021), solidifying the status of homegrown extremism and domestic terrorism as a prevalent threat to the U.S. security architecture.

The Bide-Harris administration's NSS reinforced its commitment to the core principles of the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism. National Security Strategy 2022 highlights the importance of [1] conducting domestic terrorism-related threat analysis, [2] hindering the recruitment of U.S. citizens to terrorist organizations, [3] foiling domestic

terrorist attack plans and preventing violent extremist activity, and [4] addressing long-term roots of radicalization.<sup>8</sup>

National Security Strategy urges Congress to minimize negligence of homegrown extremism and domestic terrorism, as such conduct only nourishes the issues. Instead, the Biden-Harris administration advises the authorities to abandon personal or political bias when dealing with the risks and threats posed by domestic violent extremist organizations.

### **On Again: Advancing Commonsense Gun Laws and Policies**

The gun control debate in the United States is one of the most heated and divisive issues in the country. For the past several decades, the death toll from the gun has amounted to thousands per annum. 2021 recorded 20 000 firearm homicides and over 26 000 suicides, including the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas.<sup>9</sup>

The second amendment of the U.S. Constitution equips U.S. citizens with the right to keep and bear arms but remains a barrier to commonsense gun laws and policies in the country. The right to keep and carry arms is not unrestricted, however. The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld some gun regulations, such as bans on the possession of certain types of weapons and on carrying concealed weapons, as well as restrictions on the sale of guns to specific groups of people, including individuals under eighteen years of age, convicted criminals, the mentally disabled, dishonorably discharged military personnel, and others. The U.S. Congress and state legislatures have the power to enact controlling legislation.

The foundation for gun control in the United States is federal law, but local governments, whether a state or city, have the authority to enact additional regulations. Some studies have

---

<sup>8</sup> The White House (2021). National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> CNN Health (2021). 2021 US firearm homicide and suicide rates were highest since the 1990s, CDC data shows. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/06/health/firearm-homicide-suicide-rates-increase-2021-cdc/index.html#:~:text=CDC%20researchers%20estimated%20that%20there,to%2044%2Dyear%2Dolds>.

suggested that jurisdictions with stricter gun laws, like California or Hawaii, had lower rates of gun fatalities.

Congress has debated gun control reform in recent years, usually soon after a high-profile mass shooting, like the one in Las Vegas in 2017 or the one in Parkland, Florida, in 2018. However, legislation has nearly never been successful in getting enough support. Unsuccessful proposals have called for restrictions on assault weapons, broader background checks, and the sale of firearms to those on federal watch lists for terrorism.

The most recent gun control bill signed by President Biden in June 2022 was the most significant reform in 30 years. It requires stricter controls on young buyers and encourages states to remove firearms from those considered a threat. Congress approved the legislation with bipartisan support. The reforms include:

- Stricter background checks for customers under-21.
- Federal funding of \$15 billion for mental health programs and school security.
- Encouraging states to implement laws that prevent high-risk persons from acquiring arms.
- Ban all convicted of domestic abuse from owning a gun.<sup>10</sup>

The common ground between Republicans and Democrats in the gun control bill gives hope for further advancement.

## Conclusion

The Biden-Harris administration's endorsement of the 2022 National Security Strategy reexamines current strategies for countering terrorist and violent extremist threats. The document promotes a substantial reconsideration in counter- and anti-terrorism operations despite serving communication goals. The paper increases U.S. attention to the terrorist and violent extremism situation in Sub-Saharan and Central Africa while retaining care for the Middle East and South and Central Asia. POTUS supports the effort to repeal out-of-date

---

<sup>10</sup> CNN Politics (2022). Biden signs bipartisan gun safety bill into law: 'God willing, it's going to save a lot of lives. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/25/politics/biden-signs-gun-bill/index.html>

AUMFs and favors focused anti-terrorist operations with pinpoint airstrikes as a substitute to a significant military presence on the ground. By encouraging a change in roles and the Partner-Led, U.S.-Enabled strategy, NSS offers an alternative to the present international partnership paradigm in CT. The POTUS maintains vigilance against domestic terrorism and homegrown extremism, according to NSS.

## Reference List

99<sup>th</sup> United States Congress (1986). H.R.3622 - Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Library of Congress. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/house-bill/3622>

The White House: George W. Bush (2002). The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Available at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>

The White House: Barack Obama (2010). The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Available at: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/national-security-strategy-may-2010#:~:text=This%20strategy%20involves%20sturdy%20international,the%20core%20of%20American%20power.>

The White House: Donald J. Trump (2017). National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

The White House: Joseph R. Biden Jr (2022). National Security Strategy of the United States. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

The White House (2021). National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>

CNN Health (2021). 2021 US firearm homicide and suicide rates were highest since the 1990s, CDC data shows. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/06/health/firearm-homicide-suicide-rates-increase-2021-cdc/index.html#:~:text=CDC%20researchers%20estimated%20that%20there,to%2044%2Dye ar%2Dolds>

CNN Politics (2022). Biden signs bipartisan gun safety bill into law: 'God willing, it's going to save a lot of lives. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/25/politics/biden-signs-gun-bill/index.html>