



RESEARCH PAPER

Changing Security Threats and Global Realities: An Analysis of U.S. Presidential Doctrines from Bush to Biden

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development of the United States' presidential security doctrines under the Bush and Biden administrations in response to evolving international security threats and global realities. The article employs a qualitative research approach. It reveals that the sudden shock to security, like those that took place in the terrorist attacks on Sept 11, and the long-term structural changes, particularly the rise of China as a formidable strategic competitor, have a substantial effect on the presidential doctrines. The findings indicate that although the structures of the doctrinal rhetoric and policy tools have changed because of unilateral intervention into international affairs and the transition to multilateral interaction and combined security strategies, military preeminence and world leadership continue to be the powerful sources of our foreign policy. This change is a development in the perception of how international threats are operating in a globalized world. The doctrines of the future must be more liberal and situation-specific in sharing burdens with allies.

KEYWORDS Adaptation Strategies, Alliances, Doctrines, Great Power Competition, NSS, Security Threats, U.S.

Introduction

The United States experienced several different security threats since the beginning of the 2000s related to global terrorism as a result of the September 11 attacks, the development of China and Russia as powers, the threat of cybersecurity, the pandemic, and the security threats because of the climate change threat. George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Joe Biden are examples of each of them holding security and foreign policy doctrine as U.S. presidents.

The American presidential doctrine can notify the citizens and the other allied nations about what a given administration believes to be its national interest, and also cautions its potential opponents. Presidents can also chop the word as a shorthand to convey their understanding of how they can wield American power (Miller, 2024). The work categorizes prominence in the academic world, such as foreign policy analysis, security studies, and international relations, in that the paper addresses the academic era of the development of the security doctrines of the United States presidents, between George W/Bush and Joe Biden, and how both of them handled the threats and the international realities of their day (Schulenburg, 2023).

World affairs Compared to other domains, limited studies have been done on the evolution of presidential security doctrines in the United States in terms of threats

(Hepola, 2024). It is not an area of systematic research, blocking the discussion of the continuity and transformation of the US security policy. To achieve the intended objectives, the Bush Doctrine employs preemption, unilateralism, and the so-called extension of freedom. The Bush Doctrine was actually the reaction to terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, and has since adopted such basic concerns of the American way of war, military dominance, economic powerhouses, and the new multilateralism. The Obama Doctrine focused on alliances and diplomacy. The Trump Doctrine was based on national interests and transactional diplomacy, whereas the Biden Doctrine was based on rebuilding partnerships and nurturing global partners. It is partial, bound to the sources in the general circulation, and does not quantify in any degree the actual realities of the ramifications of such doctrines. The study does not cover the U.S. security policy before 2001, nor does it provide a sufficient examination of military operations. It is also focused on doctrinal and strategic policy analysis.

Literature Review

The examination of presidential doctrines of the U.S. has taken center stage in international relations and foreign policy research (Singh, 2024). Presidential doctrines are articulated opinions of plans that follow the American reaction to foreign threats, transformations in global strength, and new security circumstances (Johnson, 2024). These teachings are not just a verbal expression, but are echoing back to the deeper structural, ideological, and institutional impacts on the American grand strategy. U.S. foreign policy has undergone a grave transformation since the conclusion of the Cold War, when new security challenges substituted the traditional threats based on the state (Leoni, 2022).

The unipolarity of America during the period of the early post-Cold War, and the difficulty of retaining the world leadership without an enemy superpower (Prevost, 2024). Some writers emphasized the continuation of American primacy, and some backed the concept of globalization and interdependence that would curb unilateral power (Warren & Siracusa, 2022). It is upon this discussion that the intellectual foundation for understanding the doctrines of future presidents was laid, especially when the United States acquired the need to counter terrorism, regional instability, and the emergence of new powers (Genovese, 2025).

Among all external stimuli, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were what comprised a turning point in the security thinking of the United States. A significant volume of literature addresses the Bush Doctrine because of the reaction to this indescribable shock (Shar et al., 2024). Jervis says that the Bush administration certainly transformed the way people used to think about deterrence by encouraging preemptive military strike (Fishel, 2022). There is agreement between the scholars that the terrorism was staged as an existential danger that necessitated the application of force. Dueck continues by saying that the doctrine was a reflection of ingrained thought concerning American exceptionalism and that they needed to be the predominant military (Shabbir, 2025).

Unilateralism of the Bush Doctrine is also indicated by academic analyses. Researchers think that it was the mistrust of global institutions and alliances that saw the U.S. act the way it did in Iraq and Afghanistan (Cernat, 2025). Some scholars believed this was a logical approach to respond to the immediate world of threat, but scholars also believe that it compromised the legitimacy of the world and also deteriorated alliances (Wright, 2025). However, it is always established throughout the literature that the Bush

Doctrine served to tighten the meaning of military primacy as the most significant foundation of the foreign policy of the U.S (Tekin & Tekin, 2025).

With the election of Barack Obama, the adaptability of US foreign policy comes back into intellectual focus (Cho, 2025). Obama Doctrine is based on the restraint, application of multilateralism, and strategic recalibration (Culbertson et al., 2022). Nye investigates that Obama actually discovered the shortcomings of hard power applications, and concentrated on the instruments of soft power involving diplomacy, norms, and institutions (Culbertson et al., 2022). Mann follows suit in his writing that Obama had the desire to rebalance the US foreign policy, not with costly ground wars, and still have a global impact.

As well, there is a general insight into security by the Obama administration. Cyber threats and global economic instability, as well as climate change, were included in the national security discourse (Gambaro, 2024). According to scholars, this was an expression of the fact of realization that threats that existed were interconnected and could not be dealt with through the use of military force alone (Early, 2025). Although this has changed, research also notes that drone warfare and particularly targeted operations are oriented towards continuity in the regimens of coercion, which shows that the military equipment cannot be stopped just because it is within a multilateral structure.

The foreign policy of President Trump is pragmatic and not pragmatist, realistic and not realist, principled and not idealist, muscular and not hawkish, and restrained and not dovish (Zhu, 2024). Not untraditional, political ideology is actualized. It becomes inspired most by what serves America, or in two words, America First. President Trump has left his legacy as the President of Peace (Wyne, 2022). Moreover, to the incredible achievement of his first term when he made the Abraham Accords, this time around, President Trump has managed to rediscover his dealmaking skill and relied upon it to broker peace in eight conflicts all over the world in eight months of his second term alone, a feat never seen before (Akande et al., 2025). He brokered peace between Cambodia and Thailand, Kosovo and Serbia, the DRC and Rwanda, and an end to the war with Pakistan and India, Israel and Iran, and between Egypt and Ethiopia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and got all hostages alive home to Gaza (Koh, 2023). Preventing the escalation of regional conflicts to global wars that, in that way, bring down the entire continent will be worth the attention of the Commander in Chief of these states, and one of the priorities of this administration (Adelman et al., 2023). A world on fire wherein wars are dragged to our shores is not good for American interests. President Trump does not adopt normal diplomacy.

The National Security Strategy by President Biden is a way through which the United States will foster our vital interests and endeavor to develop a free, open, prosperous, and secure world. In order to accomplish these, we will:

- Invest in the underlying sources and tools of American power and influence
- Build the strongest possible coalition of nations to enhance our collective influence to shape the global strategic environment and to solve shared challenges
- Modernize and strengthen our military so it is equipped for the era of strategic competition

As this competition continues, the world is grappling with the impacts of cross-boundary effects of common problems, be it climate change or food insecurity,

communicable diseases, or inflation. These shared challenges are not fringe cases that are recommended to the second place regarding geopolitics (Sherin, A., 2023). They are directly involved in national as well as international security and ought to be handled as such. We have alliances and partnerships internationally, which are our strongest strategic assets, and we will enrich and modernize them in order to serve our national security. Biden's doctrine is concentrated on the strengthening of allies and collective security. The administration is threatened by authoritarian countries such as Russia and China, terrorism, cyberattacks, and climate threats. Biden's strategy puts a greater focus on diplomacy, alleviation, and encouragement instead of an extensive military response (Hepola, 2024).

The international cooperation is being promoted to address shared challenges, and this is an indication of the world in which interdependence and alliances are at the center of dealing with security threats (Schulenburg, 2023). The current literature tends to focus on any particular presidency alone, leaving room to conduct more explicit longitudinal studies of the relationship between the change of the doctrinally empowering formal strategy documents and operational practice to understand and track how transforming world conditions restructured the relationship between the new administration and its doctrinal priorities in relation to the previous one.

Material and Methods

This paper employs the qualitative method of research to examine how US Presidential doctrines have evolved between George W Bush and Joe Biden regarding the changing security threats and the reality on the ground across the globe. The study is founded on source materials, both primary and secondary. The peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and academic investigations on the foreign policy of the United States and the presidential doctrines constitute the secondary sources. Besides that, thematic content analysis is employed.

Results and Discussion

The analysis identifies key patterns in threat perception, strategic orientation, and doctrinal priorities across administrations.

Table 1
Doctrinal flexibility amid changing global realities, from post-9/11 unilateralism to multipolar competition, yet persistent U.S. leadership goals

President	Key Doctrine Features	Triggering Security Threats/Events	Core Policy Shifts	Continuity with Prior Eras
Bush (2001-2009)	Preemptive war, unilateralism, democracy promotion via regime change	9/11 attacks, rise of transnational terrorism	Shift from deterrence to prevention, Global War on Terror, Iraq/Afghanistan invasions	Rooted in post-Cold War primacy, but escalated interventionism
Obama (2009-2017)	Multilateralism, "light footprint" (drones, special ops), Asia pivot	Financial crisis, ISIS rise, China's assertiveness	Restraint from large wars; burden-sharing with allies, targeted counterterrorism	Retained Bush-era tools (surveillance, strikes) within liberal hegemony
Trump (2017-2021)	"America First" nationalism, trade confrontation, selective disengagement	China trade imbalance, alliance fatigue, and endless wars	Reduced multilateral commitments, tariffs on rivals	Upheld military dominance despite rhetorical breaks from globalism

Biden (2021-2025)	Integrated deterrence, alliance restoration, democracy vs. autocracy	Russia-Ukraine war, COVID-19, cyber threats, China tech rivalry	NATO recommitment	Blended Obama's multilateralism with Bush-style threat inflation
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Changing Definitions of Security Threats

The analysis indicates that U.S. presidential support for the doctrines is highly dependent on the world's security conditions at any given time. At the same time, terrorism under the Bush administration is at the top of the security agenda, as well as a weapon of mass destruction. Such dangers were being introduced as urgent and existential to justify preemptive military assault and unilateral decision-making. National security had a very limited understanding of non-traditional challenges and had a very limited military definition. The definition of security threats was significantly expanded during the Obama administration. Whereas terrorism was still on the agenda, interest turned to regional stability, cyber threats, climate change, and economic instability worldwide. Security continued to emerge as the universal world problem that required international collaboration rather than individual actions. The Trump regime also redefined the definition of threats by placing top priorities on economic competition, immigration, and strategic challenges from China. The security discourse shifted to nationalism, economic future, and control of the borders as the main aspects of national security. The emergence of China under the administration of Biden became the main organizing threat. This competition was brought to the multidimensional competition concerning the military power, technologies, economic influence, cyber capabilities, and ideological competition. Other core issues brought forward as national security concerns were climate change and cybersecurity.

Evolution of Doctrinal Approaches

The findings reveal that there are different ways of managing foreign policy and security issues by administrations. The Bush doctrine emphasized unilateralism, military action, and preventive force. On the contrary, the Obama Doctrine was a restraint, a multilateralism strategy, and reliance on alliances and international institutions. The Trump doctrine was more transactional and nationalist, and doubted the old alliance in favor of bilateral arrangements. Although there was rhetorical withdrawal, the United States still had strategic competition, particularly with China. The Biden Doctrine embodied a repetition of an alliance-oriented style of leadership with emphasis on the deterrence of groups and reaction to threats around the world. Nevertheless, it also had the feeling of continuity in US military capabilities and presence across the world.

Persistence of Military Primacy

Although there is an apparent difference in the rhetoric and professed priorities of the strategy, a closer examination shows that the top priority of the centrality of military power remains albeit to a large degree in the presidential doctrines of the U.S. Military supremacy was a publicly promoted fact under the Bush administration through massive interventions into Afghanistan and Iraq on the premise that excessive force was the key element of national security. Even though the Obama administration advocated diplomacy, multilateralism, and restraint, it did not undermine the value of military power. In its place, it maintained troop forward deployments, intensified drone attacks, and invested in advanced military technologies, which showed that deterring remained part of its main objectives. In the same vein, Trump may be a harsh critic of foreign

warfare and alliances, but the build-up of military strength, expanding nuclear arms in the nation, and more forces in strategic parts of the globe, such as the Indo-Pacific, suggest he still lacks alternative energy sources to hard power. The military dominance is still the cornerstone of the U.S. security policy under the Biden regime, either through implied deterrence of China and Russia or by maintaining the backing of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the alliances in the region.

Expansion of Security Instruments

The results indicate that there is a gradual diversification of the security instruments. The previous doctrines embraced the use of military power to very high levels, though the recent ones considered the incorporation of diplomacy, economic planning, technological advancement, cyber security, and climate programs as a major tool of national security. This change is a development in the perception of how international threats are operating in a globalized world.

Doctrines as Responses to Security Shocks and Structural Change

The results demonstrate that the policies of U.S. presidential respondents tend to be more adaptive measures to both shocks affecting the international system (sudden and abrupt shocks), and in the long run to structural changes happening in the international system. A good example of how strategic thinking can be swiftly changed due to a sudden crisis is the Bush Doctrine. The events of September 11 transformed the concept of perception of threats by the U.S. because it demonstrated the inefficiency of the traditional tool in deterring non-state threats. Terrorism ceased to be perceived as a threat but as a menace - an existential and immediate threat. In their turn, interventionist and preemptive policies of the Bush administration suggested that it could not wait until the threats were fully rolled out due to unacceptable costs. That is the reasoning behind the high pace of shifting to unilateral action and the mass military intervention, and how the shock can shorten the decision-making process as well as accelerate the doctrinal change process as it happens.

Comparatively, the growth of China is not a crisis, but a progressive and structural problem. The growing economic power of China, the modernization of its technological base, and the modernization of military forces have developed over the past few decades, and therefore, the policy makers of the United States could develop their doctrines gradually, and did not have to respond in a crisis mode. Others did not result in direct military confrontation, and this long-term problem stimulated long-term strategic competition, but this was focused on deterrence and alliance-building, as well as on economic and technological investment. The growing focus on partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, supply chain security, and innovation has become increasingly focused on the latest governments aimed at containing the development of Chinese power without disrupting the international system. This opposition indicates the applicability of the nature of peril in defining the doctrinal responses and reaction to the sudden shocks, which appear to incite quick, force-based solutions to the problem as compared to a systemic challenge, resulting in slower responses through long-term strategy and deployment of not only military but also other non-military sources of power.

Adaptation within Structural Constraints

Although the presidential ideologies of the United States depict the capacity to respond to the changing security conditions, the outcomes also reveal a lot of stability

with the help of structures and strategic stagnation. Throughout administrations, military dominance and the aspiration to dominate the world have been standard ambitions, irrespective of differences in ideological vision that are expressed by presidents. Such resistance might be explained by the existence of national security institution interests in the U.S. national establishment that are still influential, with the most notable ones being the Department of Defense, intelligence agencies, and military industries that are inclined to the preservation of military superiority and force projection on an international scale. Moreover, the obligation that comes with long-term commitment in alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and security arrangements in Asia will place a limit on how much of a doctrinal change should be involved because dropping out of such an agreement or a significant reduction will result in loss of credibility and deterrence. Another essential aspect is that strategic culture strengthens the long-held perceptions and beliefs of the United States in its role of dominating and influencing the international order. Consequently, administrations that concentrate on restraint or even have an administrative rhetoric based on isolationism continue to utilize military deterrence, forward deployments, and defense modernization. This trend confirms the slightly plausible propositions in the politics of the bureau; i.e., that the results of foreign policy are not simply a function of presidential whims, but rather, it is mediated by the process of negotiation, opposition, and continuity in powerful institutions and long-term strategy commitment.

Broadening of the Security Agenda

Among the major trends recognized during the analysis is the expansion of the security agenda that is not limited to the threats of a military nature. The introduction of cyber security, climate change, economic resilience, and technological competition is a wisdom in the form of knowing that contemporary security adversarial is interconnected and multidimensional. This transformation indicates that there is a change in the paradigm of viewing power solely as kinetic towards being integrated as security measures. Nevertheless, this development does not supplant military power but complements it, producing a less simple and multifaceted way of addressing the issue of national security.

Alliances and Multilateralism in a Competitive Order

The variations in the emphasis on alliances and multilateralism in the various US Presidential doctrines demonstrate a consistent shift in the preference for unilateralism and the necessity of cooperation in an international system that is competitive. Different alliances were under fire at one point in time, mostly in the Bush and Trump administrations, as being essential to the US freedom of action or what was considered an unequal burden. But within the strategy realities, allied cooperation was demonstrated again and again to be worthwhile. In the age of high-power competition, each and every state will not have the capacity to contain complex security issues on its own. Alliances are force multipliers because they combine military potential, pool intelligence, and even decentralize deterrence across regions making the cost and risk of solo action to be low. They also lend credibility to the practices by placing the U.S. actions within a group of actions and not the action of dominance, especially when trying to sustain international goodwill and discouraging the opponents.

In the condition of interdependence of the world, the associations also become an important part not only in the military sphere but also in other fields. The board of practices aimed at economic coordination, technological standards, collaborative

approaches to cyber security, as well as sector resilience, are increasingly dependent on trusted partnerships. This was particularly evident in the strategy competition with China, where coordination of allies in such activities as trade, technology control, and regional security became inevitable. The rediscovery of interest in alliances in the Biden administration is based on the understanding that to deal with the rise of China, it is necessary to act in concert and not to dominate. The fortification of the North Atlantic, the resurgence of alliance relationships within the Indo-Pacific, and the alignment of democratic allies are indicative of an appreciation that alliances can be played not only by the balance of rival power but also as a means to strengthen common norms and stability of the institution. All these explain why, regardless of the intermittent lack of belief in the usefulness of alliances, the employment of alliances has been a focal point and an essential component of the U.S. foreign policy within a competitive international system.

Conclusion

This paper set out to explore the development of laws by the U.S. Presidential doctrines between the Bush administration and the Biden administration against the understanding of the change in the security threat and the changing realities of the world. The results indicate that presidential doctrines are dynamic strategies that are products of short-term crises as well as the long-standing changes in the organization of the international system. The Bush doctrines were a response to the shock of the September 11 attacks and centered on preemption, unilateralism, and military intervention. Subsequent governments took changes in the threat context in stride by adding significantly more weight to diplomacy, multilateralism, economic strength, and alliance management.

Although there are dramatic contrasts of rhetoric and focus on priorities on the policy level, the analysis reveals that the application of military force as the foundation of the U.S. security policy has a great deal of continuity. The primacy of the military, deterrence, and projection of world power have been the core of the U.S. foreign policy in all governments and indicate a relatively stable institutional interest, commitments in alliances, and strategic culture. Meanwhile, the primary spectrum of national security was greatly extended to cover the issues that used to be traditional sources of concern, such as cybersecurity, climate change, pandemics, and technological competition. This growth is the realization of the fact that contemporary security issues are interconnected and cannot be addressed solely using military means.

The work also reiterates the immortality of alliances and multilateral collaborations, particularly in terms of great-power competition with China. Even though there have been administrations that expressed their skepticism on alliances, strategic realities have continued to turn them into force multipliers, legitimizers, and problem solvers. In general, the conclusions point to the fact that U.S. presidential doctrines can mostly be viewed as the result of adaptation and constraint, as the balance between responsiveness to the new threats and the continuation of the long-term strategic goals.

Recommendations

Effective and consistent communication to allies, enemies, and home audiences that has the potential to minimize misperception, enhance deterrence, and improve the credibility of the U.S. promises in a highly competitive global context. The U.S. security

policy must evolve mechanisms for better managing incidents of escalation, particularly around areas like cyber operatives, space security, and gray zone warfare. Since artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, and new technologies have been given a new significance, technological integration in the planning of national security a decade later should be more explicit. Defensive coordination, ethical regulation, and innovation links with partners may be oriented towards the creation of a strategic advantage and the reduction of systemic risks. Climate change treated as a security issue rather than a side problem. A better alignment in the coordination of civilian policymakers and the military leadership in their specific responsibility can enhance the coherence of doctrine and performance of policies. More open and civilian control and the competence of the military personnel can contribute to the fact that the instrument of military force is more likely to be applied to the actions that should correspond to the further development of a more extensive diplomatic and strategic victory. The doctrines of the future must be more liberal and situation-specific in sharing burdens with allies. Instead of selecting them based on what constitutes defense spending targets, it ought to be cooperative along the dimensions such as intelligence, cyber defense, logistics, economic security of the country, and its comparative advantages.

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