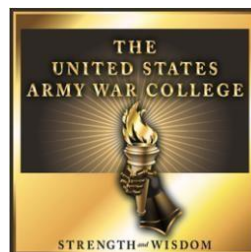


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Short Essay Annotated Example

The tenets of realism inform the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS). The document lays out a strategy of “principled realism,” framing the United States as a self-interested actor seeking power to secure its interests in an anarchic world. According to liberal international relations theory, this “America First” approach risks unwinding U.S. alliances and undervaluing the cooperative benefits of multilateral institutions.

Thesis – the overarching answer to the question that you were given.

1-2 sentences (in this case 2) providing the “road map” to the essay with all of the subordinate answers to the question that you were given (assertions)

The realist view that self-interested states compete in an anarchic world informs the NSS. Realists believe that international affairs is a Hobbesian struggle between states in an anarchic world.²

Assertion. Serves as your topic sentence and clearly reflects your own thinking; Should be the first sentence in a main body paragraph. It directly answers a portion of the question asked.

There is no global governance body to hold state actors accountable, so they must fend for themselves. The NSS’s theme of great-power competition echoes this element of realist theory. The document states that “there are growing political, economic, and military competitions we face around the world.”³ Authoritarian powers, such as China and Russia, seek to “erode American security and prosperity.”⁴

Support - Evidence supporting the assertion. This often starts with a definition – in this case the sentence beginning with “Realists believe...” Examples relate directly to the initial assertion and demonstrate how that assertion is accurate or worth considering.

Facing this threatening environment, the United States must compete with other state actors to secure its vital interests. The NSS adopts the tone of realist theory by positioning America as a self-interested state seeking security in a threatening world.

Analysis linking evidence to the assertion and overall thesis. Analysis addresses the “so what” or takeaway implications of the supporting evidence.

² Richard K. Betts, “International Realism: Anarchy and Power,” in *Conflict after the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace*, ed. Richard K. Betts (New York: Routledge, 2016), 66.

³ Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017), 2, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁴ Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 2.

The NSS also highlights the vital role that power plays in securing U.S. interests. Realist theorists emphasize power—in particular military power—as the determining factor in global affairs.⁵ As the Athenians stated in Thucydides’ Melian Dialogue, in the international arena “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”⁶ Power is a relative phenomenon in international relations. As the NSS describes, Washington’s competitors are rapidly making up ground on the United States.⁷ As such, the United States seeks to “preserve peace through strength”—a phrase that implies that power is necessary to secure U.S. interests. The administration intends to rebuild the American military and revise economic agreements that erode U.S. economic might. The NSS directly links the concept of power to America’s ability to secure its interests.

Assertion.

Supporting evidence for the assertion.

Analysis.

A risk of the NSS’s realist approach is that the administration overlooks the role democratic alliances play in countering authoritarian states. Liberal theorists argue that democracies do not go to war with one another.⁸ Democracies have a track record of fighting authoritarian states in defense of other liberal states.⁹ The authors of the NSS pay lip service to the benefits of alliances by stating that allies “magnify our power;” however, the predominant theme of the strategy is that

Assertion.

Supporting evidence for the assertion.

⁵ Jack Snyder, "One World, Rival Theories," *Foreign Policy*, no. 145 (November/December 2004), 55.

⁶ Thucydides, "Melian Dialogue," in *Conflict after the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace*, ed. Richard K. Betts (New York: Routledge, 2016), 70.

⁷ Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 3.

⁸ Michael W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," in *Conflict after the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace*, ed. Richard K. Betts (New York: Routledge, 2016), 154.

⁹ Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," 157.

Washington's cooperation with allies will be conditional.¹⁰ The strategy states that the United States will pursue "cooperation with reciprocity."¹¹

More evidence.

In his introductory letter, President Trump highlights his displeasure with U.S. allies' "unfair" burden-sharing and "unfair" trade practices.¹² The NSS sends mixed signals to U.S. allies. If the administration views competition with authoritarian states as a strategic priority, it should consider the liberal internationalist view that democratic allies are a source of strength, rather than a liability. The United States risks losing opportunities to advance its interests by antagonizing its allies in the NSS.

Analysis.

The administration also risks undervaluing the cooperative benefits of multilateral institutions. Liberal theorist Robert Keohane argues that multilateral organizations provide states with the opportunity to cooperate in areas of mutual interest.¹³ The Trump administration rejects this view of the world. The NSS states that the United States will "compete and lead" in multilateral organizations.¹⁴ It frames these institutions as theaters for competition rather than forums for cooperation. In doing so, the administration may foreclose opportunities to cooperate with allies and competitors alike.

Assertion.

Supporting evidence for the assertion.

Analysis.

¹⁰ Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 4.

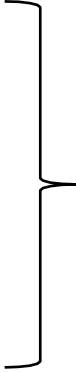
¹¹ Trump, *National Security Strategy*.

¹² Trump, *National Security Strategy*, ii.

¹³ Robert O. Keohane, "International Institutions: Can Interdependence Work?" *Foreign Policy*, no. 110 (Spring 1998), 82.

¹⁴ Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 4.

The NSS lays out a realist approach to regain relative military and economic power as adversaries seek to erode existing American advantages. In doing so, the strategy risks undervaluing the benefits Washington accrues from working with allies and through multilateral institutions. International relations theory provides a useful analytical framework for examining these critical issues of national security.



Short conclusion that briefly summarizes the key arguments of the essay. It also provides key takeaways for strategic leaders. About 10% of total word count.