

MICHAEL ANTON AND THE SECRET NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

Lawrence Freedman must have finished his post on the National Security Strategy before the latest news on it, which is that there's an even more alarming longer version.

Nevertheless, Freedman's observations about the process behind the document – that Michael Anton is thought to have started it, before he left in September, and Stephen Miller may have finished it – provide one possible explanation for why the document is so short, shoddy, and unenthusiastic about matters of standard policy.

It is worth reading the most recent NSS in its entirety. It is less polished than its predecessor, betrays little evidence of consultation, and is considerably shorter (33 as against 70 pages). It reads like time had run out and a deadline had been reached. It ends abruptly with a short discussion on Africa, this administration's least important region, without a proper conclusion. It was released without fanfare in the early hours of Friday morning, without a press conference, suggesting the White House was not sure what to do with it.

The first draft has been attributed to Michael Anton, who was the Director of Policy Planning in the State Department until September 2025, when he left. It may be that Stephen Miller, Trump's deputy chief of staff who represents the hardest line MAGA views, completed the document or at least oversaw its completion. This perhaps explains why, as Gideon Rachman notes, when restating standard policy positions, for example on Taiwan, the prose is 'dutiful' – 'one

senses that the author's heart is not in it.' Only on the civilizational issues and when praising Trump does it get fired up.

Much of the document seeks to give the administration's disparate policies, including those directed against DEI hires or climate change or immigration, some coherence and international relevance.

This hypothesis – that some of its unfinished nature arises from having its author, Michael Anton, depart before he finished would raise a bunch of questions in any case.

Politico first reported Anton's departure in August (so in the wake of the Anchorage summit), but said he would leave *once he finished* the National Security Strategy.

A senior Trump administration official and a Senate aide said Anton plans to depart this fall. The State Department later confirmed that he is leaving his post.

Anton, who directs the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, has been a low-profile but powerful presence with major roles on Russia, Iran and other foreign policy matters, including helping shape President Donald Trump's still-unpublished national security strategy.

With Secretary of State Marco Rubio also serving as the national security adviser, a handful of political appointees such as Anton and Counselor Mike Needham have taken on more of the daily responsibilities of running the State Department.

Anton is expected to leave as the Trump administration wraps up writing the national security strategy, of which he

is a lead author, according to the senior administration official. The official, and others, were granted anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

[snip]

The Senate aide and another person familiar with administration dynamics said that Anton had been frustrated by Office of Presidential Personnel Director Sergio Gor shooting down a number of his potential hires and officials with the Trump administration such as Pentagon policy chief Elbridge Colby freelancing on key issues.

Anton had tried to resign in the spring amid frustration with the foreign policy processes of the administration, but Needham refused to let him do so, according to the Senate aide and two other people familiar with the matter.

The aide and one of those people said Anton was frustrated after being passed over as deputy national security adviser in the reshuffle after the departure of former national security adviser Mike Waltz.

But he ended up leaving in September, months before the NSS was dumped onto the world with no notice.

Which makes the Defense One claim all the more interesting. There's a longer version of the NSS, which is even more inflammatory.

A longer version of the NSS, circulated before the White House published the unclassified version late Thursday night, shares the main points: competition with China, withdrawal from Europe's defense, a new focus on the Western Hemisphere. But the unpublished version also proposes new vehicles for

leadership on the world stage and a different way to put its thumb on the scales of Europe's future—through its cultural values.

It was even more hostile to the EU than the public version is.

Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Poland are listed as countries the U.S. should “work more with...with the goal of pulling them away from the [European Union].”

“And we should support parties, movements, and intellectual and cultural figures who seek sovereignty and preservation/restoration of traditional European ways of life...while remaining pro-American,” the document says.

It excluded European nations from the alternative to the G7 it proposed, a C5 composed of China, Russia, India, Japan, and the US.

His national security strategy proposes taking this a step further, creating a new body of major powers, one that isn't hemmed in by the G7's requirements that the countries be both wealthy and democratically governed.

The strategy proposes a “Core 5,” or C5, made up of the U.S., China, Russia, India and Japan—which are several of the countries with more than 100 million people. It would meet regularly, as the G7 does, for summits with specific themes.

Most interesting – and something to which I'll return – the unpublished version disavows hegemony.

The full NSS also spends some time discussing the “failure” of American hegemony, a term that isn't mentioned in the publicly released version.

“Hegemony is the wrong thing to want and it wasn’t achievable,” according to the document.

These are, at this point, just data points. The existing NSS is shoddy and illogical. Michael Anton was going to see it through to completion but did not. There is reportedly a longer version – could that be what Anton wrote? Or could that be why he left before it was finished?

And we’re left with something that could have been written by Russia.