

PERCEPTIONS

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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Era of Transition
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of the Turkish-US. Alliance under the Obama
and Trump Administrations
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Book Review

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Introduction: American Foreign Policy in an Era of Transition

Helin SARI ERTEM*

The fate of U.S. liberal hegemony has turned into a significant matter of debate especially in the last decade. Tiresome military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan and economic problems at home accompanied by the rise of China's global influence have triggered questions on whether Washington would continue to lead the world and if so, whether this would be the same leadership that the world has gotten used to. With the increasing number of alternative power centres, the world is going through an era of transition in which one can talk about "Easternisation" – in other words, a power shift from the West to the East. As a matter of fact, the world we live in is not anymore a unilateral, but a multilateral world. Under these circumstances, neither the former U.S. President Barack H. Obama, nor his successor Donald J. Trump could remove the suspicions that the U.S. might actually be facing a serious retreat from the global stage in the coming period.

In fact, the administrative style as well as the domestic and foreign policy preferences of President Trump have strengthened the claims that Washington is no longer the world's "hegemonic stabilizer" – mainly because the costs of this role have begun to outweigh the benefits. Trump's decisions such as the reconsideration of the U.S. position in NATO, rejection of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), suspension of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) talks and renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are some of the outcomes of his "America First" approach that prioritizes strong protectionism and isolationism in American foreign policy.

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As a result, it is not easy today to persuade Trump to initiate a foreign intervention, if the issue at point does not directly threaten the U.S. interests. Perceiving international relations often within a simple “us vs. them” dichotomy, Trump claims that the U.S. has done enough for both Europe and the Middle East and it is now the turn of the countries in these two regions to come forward and solve their own problems. It is worth remembering here that today the majority of American voters favour the use of less military force abroad and do not believe that foreign interventions make them safer.

This shows that Trump’s election as president is not a coincidence, but a strong sign of the loss of faith among the American public in the U.S. liberal hegemony, which does not exclude military engagements abroad. Criticizing policies that are directed at securing the other nations’ borders and spending trillions of dollars overseas, Trump signals a significant break from the liberal hegemonic establishment in Washington. For figures such as John. J. Mearsheimer, this is not surprising at all as U.S. liberal hegemony has already failed. In his latest book, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, for instance, he claims that the U.S. should look for a more restrained foreign policy as the world order is becoming multipolar. Of course, this does not mean that Washington will totally quit the idea of leading the world or interfering the domestic affairs of other countries. This is something against the grain of the U.S. foreign policy. However, it certainly needs a new grand strategy that better fits *realpolitik* and the American nation’s current needs and expectations.

The zeitgeist of our times, which is the rise of neo-nationalism and populism worldwide, challenges the practice of an American type of liberal leadership. In fact, the outcomes of decades-long U.S. involvement in external problems and Washington’s efforts to shape the world according to American values and interests are vague. Among the supporters of offshore balancing-like strategies, the U.S. is far from persuading foreign countries to become or remain as a liberal democracy. Latest statistics show that one-third of the world’s population lives in a backsliding democracy. Ironically, this includes the U.S. as well, which claims to be the pioneer of liberal democracy, and the declining trend in this country is worse than the trend in other countries. Consequently, this causes a certain level of suspicion about the future of the world as there has been a perceived relationship between peace and the number of countries governed with democratic principles. Another rising phenomenon also increases

the suspicions about the fate of the world. Experts warn about possible violent upheavals that might follow the rise of ethnic nationalism around the world. Today, national identities are getting much more visible either to resist the impact of globalization in general or the U.S. supremacy in particular. This tension certainly weakens the role that liberal hegemons attribute to democracy to narrow the gap between the countries with different identities, thus with divergent definitions of threat and interest.

This special issue is the outcome of an effort to understand the foreign policy dynamics of the U.S. in this rapidly changing global atmosphere. Through a multi-dimensional academic approach, it aims to examine the impact of various systemic, regional and domestic challenges on the course of recent American foreign policy. The six articles that contribute to this issue assess the foreign policy practices of the U.S. especially during the Obama and Trump eras, but do not exclude the historical background that continues to shape the country's current policies. All articles are based on the fact that we are going through a transitional era in which the traditional power distribution on the global stage is being remade. Here, China as a rising rival, and a "national security threat" as the current U.S. administration defines, is a significant determiner. To what extent the U.S. will tolerate Beijing's rise, or which means the American leaders will practice to slow down/stop this country will be extremely significant in this new era. The U.S. response to China's rise has already begun to influence its relations with other countries as neither the Americans themselves nor Washington could yet decide on a clear-cut strategy against Beijing. The majority of the American public still sees China as an economic competitor rather than an enemy, while the Trump administration has already begun to securitize this country. The lack of a comprehensive U.S. grand strategy to deal with the current realities of the world and the U.S. attempts to politically isolate itself from the affairs of other regions affect Washington's relations with its traditional allies in Europe and the Middle East.

To this end, the first article of this issue, by Helin Sarı Ertem and Radiye Funda Karadeniz, focuses on Turkey and explains how the Turkish-U.S. relations have deteriorated especially since the beginning of the civil war in Syria. Receiving mixed signals from the U.S., Turkey has gradually lost its confidence in its strategic partner. However, as the authors underline, this in fact is an outcome of the "foreign policy crisis" that the U.S. is going through, especially with the systemic changes triggered by Chi-

na's rise and the domestic confusion over the future route of the country. Thus, the article offers a reassessment of the Turkish-American relations in retreat, through a wider scope that elaborates on systemic changes as well as the regional and domestic challenges. The authors' portrait of the current Turkish-American relations clearly presents how the two sides are suffering from setbacks especially on issues related to security due to their diverging definitions of threat and interest.

The second article, written by Andrei Korobkov, aims at explaining the recent state of relations between the U.S. and Russia. Similar to the previous article, it underlines the impact of the global transfer of power from the North Atlantic to the Pacific, and claims that the collapse of the Eurocentric system is the main reason behind the ongoing tension between Washington and Moscow. Korobkov argues that although Trump considers Russia as a counterweight against China and a potential partner in dealing with religious fundamentalism, he could not move to a better ground with his counterpart due to his opponents' strong refusal of the rapprochement with Moscow. For Korobkov, this actually presents the Global North's inability to deal with newly emerging threats and pushes Russia toward China, while strengthening the hawks in Moscow.

The third article, authored by Georg Löfflman, focuses mainly on the Obama era, scrutinizing the discursive and practical reflections of his vision, which prioritized lowering the cost of American primacy through the "leading from behind" strategy. Relying on the examples of the military intervention to Afghanistan and the campaign against DAESH, the article satisfactorily explains how the Obama administration, in pursuit of burden sharing and remote controlling, shifted to covert operations, and the use of Special Forces and drones, to fight terrorism especially in the Middle East. This policy was again an outcome of the U.S. preference to prioritize the Asia-Pacific as a region of vital strategic interest. However, as Löfflman argues, this changing trend in U.S. foreign policy created questions about the U.S. leadership both at home and abroad.

The fourth article is written by Nicolas Alexander Beckmann and takes a closer look at the inter-American relationship in the Trump era. The U.S. has long been in a problematic relationship with its south. Latin American countries have huge concerns about Washington's efforts to continue its predomi-

nance in the Western Hemisphere, which has been viewed by U.S. leaders as a natural extension of American control zone. While the recent U.S. tension with Venezuela has brought the inter-American relations to the top of the regional and global agenda once again, Beckmann's article provides the readers with significant insights on the root causes of the tensions between the U.S. and Latin America, and assesses how the shift from Obama's pragmatism to Trump's aggressiveness brought back the bad memories of the past and revived the lack of trust felt for Washington. Interestingly, as Beckmann argues, it is again China, which might benefit from these tensions, as Trump's heavy pressure on the region pushes the Latin American countries closer to Beijing.

The fifth article, by Fatma Nil Döner, is a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Trump's rise to power and the economic aftershocks of the 2008 financial crisis at the global and domestic levels. By focusing on Trump's public speeches, U.S. National Security Strategy and budgetary documents, the author explores how Trump's "America First" strategy, which simply aims to control the flow of goods and people into the U.S., is being reflected in the political economy and foreign policy of Washington. The idea of constructing a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico is a part of this strategy. Trump has various other protectionist measures in response to the global financial crisis and structural shifts, and this has closer connections with the rise of alternative power centres such as China, Russia and India. However, as Döner argues, the Trump administration itself might speed up the demise of the global system by its isolationist policies that encourage polarization.

The sixth and the last article of this issue belongs to Rana İzci Connelly and focuses on the repercussions of Trump's environmental policies, which receive strong criticism from the opposition groups. The unique contribution of this article is its claim that Trump's highly opposed anti-environmentalist stance today is actually a continuation of the previous anti-environmentalist dynamics in the U.S. since the 1980s. After a brief historical analysis of American environmentalism in the last few decades, it aims to scrutinize the battles on environmental protection and climate change during the Obama and Trump eras. Underlining that only a few Republicans in the U.S. are willing to publicly accept and announce the impacts and anthropogenic causes of climate change, the author claims that sticking to the old geopolitical narratives and polluting industries would only deepen the isolationist trends in U.S. foreign policy. She argues that the "America first" strategy might signal not only glob-

al economic competitiveness and political leadership, but also a lack of U.S. involvement in fixing the environmental damage caused by the humans.

As guest editor, I would like to thank all the authors, referees and the editorial staff for their valuable insight and hope this special issue will be beneficial for those who try to understand the highly contentious and complex character of the current American foreign policy, which is being shaped by systemic as well as regional and local challenges including the rise of China, shifting centre of gravity in world economy, Syrian civil war and quest for a stronger American grand strategy. Certainly, the U.S. will not give up its global leadership role in the short term, but whether it will be able preserve it in the long term will be based on its ability to adjust itself to the changing global circumstances. Thus, this interesting topic will likely continue to initiate further academic discussions.

ARTICLE

Lost In Translation: A System-Level Analysis of the Turkish-U.S. Alliance under the Obama and Trump Administrations

Helin SARI ERTEM* & Radiye Funda KARADENİZ**

Abstract

Through a system-level analysis, this study argues that the recent divergences between Ankara and Washington deserve a macro-level approach as they are actually a direct outcome of U.S. confusion over its future direction. Looking for a new grand strategy that will determine the U.S. position in world politics, Washington keeps sending Turkey mixed signals and the two allies are often lost in translation while trying to gain each other's support to fulfil their national priorities. Different than various other studies on Turkish-American relations, this article makes a unique contribution to the field by focusing mainly on systemic variables while analyzing U.S. relations with Ankara, which have followed a fluctuating course during the Obama and Trump administrations. It argues that the deteriorating relations are actually a result of the American retrenchment in the Middle East and its pivoting to Asia due to the world's shifting center of gravity from the West to the East with the rise of China.

Keywords

Turkish-American relations, Syria, PYD/YPG, offshore balancing, surrogate warfare, China.

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Introduction

Since 2014, Turkish-American relations have gone through one of their worst times ever. Trying to understand the main dynamics of this tiresome era, many researchers studying Turkish-American relations have made individual or state-level analyses, focusing on the two countries' recent foreign policy discourses and practices to determine their divergences and convergences. This article, however, considers the fluctuating Turkish-American relations as a direct outcome of *systemic* challenges and changes, which are often ignored but actually quite explanatory. The study proposes that the uncertainty and division among the American public and the ruling elite regarding the role that the U.S. should play on the world stage in the coming years is actually the main reason behind the country's fading foreign relations, which are not limited to Turkey, but cover other strategic alliances as well. Actually what we are talking about is a "foreign policy crisis" in the U.S., which has been exacerbated by the election of pro-isolationist and reactive Donald J. Trump to the presidency. For that reason, the problem is much wider than is often acknowledged, and requires a deeper look at Washington and its place in global politics.

For the first time in near history, the center of the world economy is moving towards the East and the U.S. is trying to stop, or at least slow this shift of axis mainly led by China.

The U.S. has long been looking for a way out to overcome its problems provoked by "the rise of the rest,"¹ which has resulted in a power transition in the neo-liberal world order. For the first time in near history, the center of the world economy is moving towards the East and the U.S. is trying to stop, or at least slow this shift of axis mainly led by China.

Should the U.S. continue to lead the world? Does it have the necessary economic means to do so? Or as Paul Kennedy foresaw long ago, is it suffering from overstretch and has already begun to fall?² Answers to these questions are as divided as the American nation's future prospects for their country and consequently have a huge impact on American policy makers' indecisiveness about their country's current position in regions like the Middle East. U.S. President Barack H. Obama's years-long inaction in the Syrian civil war, and his administration's subsequent choice of the PYD (Democratic Union Party) and its armed wing the YPG (People's Protection

Units) as the most reliable and effective local partner there are certainly related to the idea of keeping the U.S. away from the costly problems of faraway lands, despite the risk of endangering the country's credibility in the eyes of its regional allies such as Turkey.

U.S. President Trump came to power in 2017 to “make America great again,” not by embroiling the country in excessive foreign engagements, but by politically and militarily isolating the U.S. from the outside world. To date, Trump has continued to follow the same path as his predecessor Obama, and has waged an indirect war in Syria. Despite the wider place Israel's security concerns occupy in the new American administration, Trump has continued

to refrain from a direct military involvement in the region and did not pursue the idea of a regime change in Syria until very recently. Similar to Obama, his primary agenda was to eradicate DAESH and for that, his administration has pursued

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“surrogate warfare” to decrease the possible losses of the U.S. This article argues that this policy preference cannot be evaluated without examining the economic and political bottleneck that the U.S. has been suffering from, especially since the 2008 financial crisis that has been exacerbated by China's rise and which has impoverished the Americans.

Through a system level analysis, this article will first focus on the current situation in the U.S. and assess how recent division among the American public about the future direction of their country affects U.S. foreign policy in general and its relations with Turkey specifically. This will automatically take us to the “American grand strategy” discussions during the Obama and Trump administrations, which require an in-depth analysis of both external and internal factors, while assessing the “leading from behind,” “offshore balancing” and “surrogate warfare” strategies of the American retrenchment. The article will then focus on the Syrian civil war and the PYD/YPG problem, the biggest crisis zone between Ankara and Washington as an extension of the Kurdish issue, one of the most sensitive topics in Turkish-American relations. After that, the paper will touch upon other contentious issues in mutual relations, some of which are still far from reaching a solution at the

time of this writing. These are the S-400 missile crisis, the Gülen issue, the disagreement regarding the F-35 jets, the Pastor Brunson case and the U.S. declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Finally in conclusion, the paper will examine the recent state of Turkish-American relations from a broader perspective and show how systemic influences limit Washington's range of motion and force it to shrink politically and economically, although this might eventually backlash and cause the loss of some traditional partners such as Turkey and the EU. In this way, the reader will have an opportunity to step back from populist daily arguments and see the current relations between Washington and Ankara from a broader perspective. Assessing the micro (state and individual-level) variables in Turkish-American relations together with the macro (systemic) ones will help the reader better understand that what the U.S. is actually going through is a "midlife crisis," in which its decreasing physical capabilities are consequently affecting its practices.

Lack of a U.S. Grand Strategy?

The future role of the U.S. on the world scene has long been a matter of dispute. What is being witnessed in this country in the 21st century is actually a "foreign policy crisis" in which the American public, and thus Washington, is unsure about how to move forward in an "increasingly complex, less safe and more unpredictable world."³ Recent American foreign policy signals a "navigation crisis" under the new circumstances of the 2000s. Questions about the grand strategies of Obama and Trump – if they had/have any, and to what extent they have shifted away from the general assumptions of the post-Cold War era strategy – have gained significant interest among intellectuals.

Here, it is necessary to explain what we mean by an "American grand strategy." Feaver defines American grand strategy as "the theory guiding the ruling cadre" and shaping "how they think about America's role in the world, what they think are the great challenges and opportunities confronting America, and how they're going to navigate them."⁴ By the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, American grand strategy assumed U.S. supremacy and defined the U.S. as the sole superpower; presidents George H. Bush, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush believed in the necessity of prolonging this superiority, which they saw as a must, both for the good of the world and

of the U.S.

However, as Feaver argues, Obama shifted from this belief and faltered to adjust the post-Cold War American grand strategy to the changing conditions of world politics. Obama is especially accused of being unable to deal with the increasing number of state-based and non-state-based actors threatening American national security.⁵ Believing that Obama actually shifted from “onshore balancing” in the Middle East to “offshore balancing,”⁶ Feaver finds this former U.S. president primarily responsible for the rise of threats like DAESH.⁷ The two leading neo-realists, Mearsheimer and Walt, however, epitomize the opposite camp. They see “offshore balancing” as a suitable grand strategy for the U.S. to practice in foreign crises such as the one in Syria.⁸ For them, staying as far away as possible from the local problems of the Middle East, as well as those of Europe and North Asia, the three “critical regions” for American national interests, would be the most appropriate option for Washington to preserve its global leadership. In their eyes, this strategy would require fewer human and financial resources, and allow Washington to focus on domestic problems. For them, this tactic was largely used by the U.S. during the 20th century, and, when abandoned, caused great failures such as Vietnam and Iraq. Although Mearsheimer and Walt argue that while Obama had actually returned to onshore balancing in his last presidential years to prevent the DAESH threat, he could not do enough to satisfy those who favoured a much more direct U.S. military involvement in regions like the Middle East in recent years.⁹

Political and intellectual circles both in and outside of Washington have long been discussing the same issue: To what extent should this superpower intervene in the outside world, and whether it should intervene at all. In fact, this has been the dilemma of the U.S. since its foundation. In his Farewell Address, America’s founding father George Washington called upon the nation to stay clear of entangling alliances which could endanger the survival of the new and fragile state. Although the economic and political rise of the U.S. to the world stage by the end of the 19th century allowed its rulers to intervene

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extensively in other lands, the question of whether the U.S. should directly get involved in outside problems remained before American decision-makers as their biggest challenge. This question formed the traditional tension between isolationists and interventionists.

Critiques about the Obama era are a part of this historical dilemma; certainly any presidential decisions taken on related issues are being shaped both by internal and external factors. In fact, Obama might be considered the first American president of the emerging post-American world, and subsequent American leaders might willy-nilly follow his path.¹⁰ But, is Obama the only one responsible for what is happening on the American side? What if the difficulties that the U.S. has recently faced are being caused by a macro reason, such as the U.S. being in an era of transition, prompted by both internal and external factors, within a rapidly changing atmosphere?

American Foreign Policy in Crisis

In his book *Divided America on the World Stage*, Wiarda points out that the problem of the U.S. might be deeper than what we see, and thinking that a certain president is the one who is responsible for the things that are going wrong might not be explanatory enough. Relying on some U.S. foreign policy observers, he writes:

As a nation, maybe we've lost our way, our can-do attitude; we are confused, uncertain, and deeply divided over the country's future direction, including over foreign policy... And if the voters and the general public are confused and divided, then why in a representative democracy would we expect our elected leaders to be any clearer in their policy decisions than the general public is?¹¹

The global environment is no longer the one that we faced right after the Cold War. The number of actors shaping the route of world politics is countless now. The rise of alternative powers, especially of China, is the main factor pushing the U.S. to reassess its long term strategy to remain the global hegemon. A resurgent Russia, a self-reliant European Union, an ascendant India and rival focal points such as Iran and North Korea are also on the radar of Washington, which is already suffering from an excessive number of new or re-emerging global problems such as terrorism, ethnic/religious conflicts, nuclear proliferation, energy demands, economic globalization and climate

change.¹² Similar to the changing external conditions, American political culture is in transition too.

The reason behind that transition might be the rising diversity and multiculturalism in the U.S. especially since the 1970s. Today, the American public is much more diverse and multicultural than ever. Its traditionally WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant) identity is fading; Hispanics and African-Americans are growing faster in population,¹³ and this changing social pattern might be one of the basic causes of having no central core of belief that can construct common U.S. foreign policy commitments.¹⁴ Yankelovich, for example, underlines how religious ideas and divisions had already begun to affect foreign policy preferences in the U.S. by the early 2000s.¹⁵ In fact, the U.S. is going through its highest level of polarization ever in the second decade of the 21st century. The priorities as well as the values and approaches of the Republicans and the Democrats are moving further apart every year.¹⁶ The ending of the Cold War and the loss of a common enemy like the Soviet Union or Communism, is another factor.¹⁷ “Global terrorism,” which the U.S. declared as a target after the 9/11 attacks, could not motivate and unite the American public as much as the Soviets did during the Cold War. This change is as influential as the rising religious/ethnic diversity among the American public. Since American political culture constitutes the context and parameter of the American foreign policy debate and the amount of support that can be received from the public,¹⁸ the transition era under the influence of the current polarization among the U.S. public and the lack of a uniting common enemy certainly cause confusion in the administrative circles of Washington, and consequently result in a loss of influence on the world stage. The more successfully the U.S. can adopt its political culture to the changing realities of the world, the better it will preserve its global hegemonic role.

Under these circumstances, can China turn into or be perceived as a strong common enemy that can re-unite America and stabilize its fluctuating foreign policy?

From Pax Americana to Pax Sinica?

Is Pax Americana, which was born after WWII, being replaced by Pax Sinica (Chinese Peace)? Is Trump using his famous “America First” motto just as a simple excuse to launch a global trade war against Beijing? Might that finally end the U.S.-led liberal international order? Will Washington continue to

isolate itself from the outside world to a great extent by disappointing its traditional allies in every single region?¹⁹ Answers to these questions cannot be evaluated without looking at the economic sphere first.

According to a PwC report, relying on the projected global gross domestic product of the countries by purchasing power parity, China will be the world's biggest and most powerful economy by the year 2050 (\$58.499 trillion), India will be second (\$44.128 trillion), while the U.S. will be 3rd (\$34.102 trillion).²⁰ For many, this significant shift in the world's economic centre of gravity, which Rachman calls "Easternisation,"²¹ actually signals the beginning of a "New Cold War" with the East's main actor, China, as Beijing's economic rise is expected to finally turn into a political and military threat.²² Here, it is worth remembering Henry Kissinger's monition about the hierarchical character of the Confucian belief that sees China [or the Chinese Empire] as the "centre of world order" and the "owner of everything lying beneath the sky." Kissinger claimed that whether American-Chinese relations will turn into a rivalry or a partnership will be the main determiner of the 21st Century world order.²³

The Trump administration is already on guard. It believes that China is seeking to advance its strategic interests across the world, while tipping the scales against the U.S.²⁴ For some, this might automatically cause a war, either hot or cold, between Washington and Beijing. Mearsheimer is among those who argue that the U.S.-Chinese power shift at the global level will soon bring a Cold-War like atmosphere:

It is clear from the historical record how American policy-makers will react if China attempts to dominate Asia. ... The U.S. can be expected to go to great lengths to contain China and ultimately weaken it to the point where it is no longer capable of ruling the roost in Asia.²⁵

Similarly, Buzan believes that China is at a turning point, and that some of the policies which have worked successfully for the last 30 years will not work for the next 30 and, as a result, the continuing "peaceful rise" of China will become much more difficult.²⁶

Washington is already aware of its economic shortcomings that might speed up China's rise. In the last 14 years, the U.S. GDP growth per year has not

passed 3%.²⁷ Despite the efforts of the Trump administration, which pushed the economic growth rate in the second quarter of 2018 to 4.1%, the U.S. still faces the risk of falling far behind the rising Chinese economy. Estimations that China will be the world's biggest economy in the near future push the U.S. to take some measures, such as Trump's rising tariffs for Chinese goods and pulling out of the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership) trade deal to cut Asia's, but mainly China's, intimidating growth.²⁸ Although American society still feels more concerned about China's economic strength (poll results making a 6% increase from 2017 to 2018 and reaching a level of 58%) in comparison to its military capabilities,²⁹ the Trump administration has already begun to "securitize" China in order to persuade the American nation that the Chinese threat is not only economical but also political.³⁰

Washington is already aware of its economic shortcomings that might speed up China's rise.

In October 2018, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence presented China as a "national security" threat by accusing it of committing various anti-American acts, ranging from meddling in the politics of the Western Hemisphere to violating the "free trade" and "open seas" principles that Washington traditionally favours. According to Pence, previous U.S. administrations had ignored the Chinese actions and even abetted them; thus, as he claims, the Trump administration is "ready to show the Chinese the American strength."³¹ Having made the biggest increase in the national defence budget since the Reagan era, the remedy of the Trump administration to stop or slow down China's global rise seems to rely on military terms by carrying a bigger stick, if not using it. With his giant \$717 billion 2019 defence budget, Trump aims to strengthen the U.S. military "like never ever before"³² to counter rising China. Chinese officials believe that the giant U.S. defence budget will damage bilateral ties, as it also includes Washington's plans to establish closer ties with Taiwan to protect it from a possible Chinese invasion, and to limit China's activities in the South China Sea.³³

Retrenchment from Middle East Commitments

As a result of increasing tension in the Asia Pacific region and the fatigue the years-long Afghanistan and Iraq wars have caused, the Middle East is not arousing the attention of U.S. policy makers as much as its allies in this region desire. The Trump administration's decision to pull out of Syria is the latest

outcome of that “shift of interest” in Washington. Regarding the problems of the Middle East, namely Syria, the U.S. expects its regional and local allies/partners to take on the responsibility to solve their own problems, while backing U.S. interests as well. In this respect, withdrawing from Syria is not only a physical but also a psychological retreat.

Trump’s announcement in early February to pull out of Afghanistan is another sign of this fact. Afghanistan is the longest-running war in which the U.S. army has ever been engaged, while spending 50 billion dollars a year. For Trump, the U.S. should get out of these endless wars and bring its troops back home.³⁴ In his interview with CBS, it is easy to see Trump’s weariness regarding the active and costly role the U.S. has been playing worldwide. Claiming that going into the Middle East was one of the greatest mistakes that the U.S. has ever made, Trump noted regretfully, “We’re protecting the world. We’re spending more money than anybody’s ever spent in history...”³⁵

Since the end of the Cold War and despite those who dignify American hegemony all over the world, the U.S. is claimed to be losing both its capability and desire to be everywhere and to deal with all threats. There are

As a result of increasing tension in the Asia Pacific region and the fatigue the years-long Afghanistan and Iraq wars have caused, the Middle East is not arousing the attention of U.S.

deep discussions on whether the American retrenchment is something ephemeral or permanent. Dobbins, for example, reminds us that “isolationism is a recurring

temptation of American foreign policy” and, when tested with new challenges, Washington prefers returning to the world stage quite strongly so as not to lose its global leadership.³⁶ Still, the U.S. has long been aware of the fact that it is difficult and even unnecessary to be the policeman of the whole world. Bill Clinton’s “selective engagement” strategy in the 1990s was an early announcement of that trend, but 9/11 turned things upside down and brought back an excessive U.S. engagement in the Middle East during the G. W. Bush era. Then came Obama’s decision to withdraw from Iraq and decrease U.S. visibility in the region despite the heavy pressure of its allies. As then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s 2011 contribution to *Foreign Policy* underlined, the future of politics would be decided in Asia, not in Afghanistan or Iraq, and the U.S. would be right at the centre of the action, investing most of its time and energy in this geography.³⁷ But would that be easy?

Although Trump believes that 99% of DAESH has been knocked out, Washington still has some concerns regarding the Middle East. “We have to protect Israel,” said Trump for example, while adding that they want to watch over Iran as well.³⁸ Many believe that the heart of the current U.S. agenda is not actually DAESH but Iran. Tehran’s rising influence in the region by using the power vacuum in Syria as well as Iraq certainly gets on the Trump administration’s nerves, especially when the matter in question is Israel’s security. Nevertheless, the U.S. is fully aware of the changing centre of gravity in world politics and does not want to risk its position by getting excessively involved in the problems of the Middle East. Even the increasing American pressure on Iran is claimed to be a part of the American strategy to contain China and Russia in the long-run.³⁹

Given all of these factors, this article considers the deterioration of Turkish-American relations within this broader, system-level perspective and claims that the fading relations between Ankara and Washington cannot be properly examined without reference to the U.S. tilt towards the Asia-Pacific due to the giant threat perception felt from China. In fact, the American preference to “lead Syria from behind” through “off-shore balancing” or “surrogate warfare,” despite Turkey’s huge concerns, is a micro reflection of this macro reality.

With the aim of gathering the necessary amount of energy and resources to focus on China, the last two American administrations aimed to decrease the number of U.S. troops in the Middle East and rely mainly on American intelligence officers and Special Forces in Iraq while withdrawing from Syria. However, despite Trump’s decision to pull out of Syria, which has not yet fully materialized, Turkish-American relations are still suffering from a deep lack of trust. This is mainly caused by Turkey’s mounting security concerns, especially regarding the fate of Syria and the PYD/YPG/PKK’s future role in the region, which have fallen on deaf ears in Washington. The two capitals are often lost in translation, unable to understand each other’s vital security concerns and the possible outcomes of the changing regional and global atmosphere. Under these circumstances, Washington-Ankara relations have presented an alarming picture, especially since 2014, mainly because of Syria but also due to various other problems. The next part of the article will explore the details of the deteriorating Turkish-American relations, focusing widely on the Syria and PYD/YPG problems, while briefly summarizing the other disagreements as well.

Turkish-American Relations at a Crossroads: Breaking Off or Re-Uniting through Syria?

The Turkish-U.S. alliance goes back seven decades, but has never been deprived of controversies. Nonetheless, both Turkey and the U.S. have generally valued their convergences above their divergences, attaching a particular importance to their strategic cooperation.⁴⁰ Bilateral relations, which have been tested several times both during the Cold War and afterwards, faced one of their biggest crises during the U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003, when the Turkish Parliament debarred U.S. troops from using Turkish territories to reach the north of Iraq. The anger of the G. W. Bush administration and its Neoconservative circle against Turkey due to this act, widely known in Turkish-American relations as the “1 March motion crisis,” caused great tension between the two allies and increased anti-American sentiments among the Turkish population, which has long been sensitive about the U.S. rapprochement with the Iraqi Kurds, and its alleged target of midwifing an independent Kurdish state in the Middle East.

Despite both sides’ subsequent efforts, such as putting into practice the Bush administration’s “Greater Middle East Project” to reform the region, mutual relations have never been fully repaired. For that reason, Obama’s attempts to regain the credit that Washington had lost in the Middle East during the G. W. Bush administration became a great source of hope for Ankara. The first years of Obama’s presidency reflected this positive atmosphere to a great extent. However, this mutually played “glad game” soon began to fade amid the rising challenges of the Arab Uprisings and the Syrian civil war.

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the security threats coming from its south. However, for a long time, the U.S. did not consider Syria or its neighbourhood a threat to its national security. At first the vital question for both Washington and Ankara was whether Assad should stay or go. Turkey was in favour of a real change in the governance of Syria that would strengthen the civilian power in this country and fulfil

the democratic demands of the people. However, as a middle-sized regional power, Ankara considered it important to receive the support of the U.S., a great power and a strategic partner that could shoulder an intervention in Syria and minimize Turkey's security concerns.

The U.S., however, had its own dilemmas. On the one hand the Obama administration was trying to detach itself from the problems of the Middle East (as well as Europe) and turn toward the Asia-Pacific region, where the new "Great Game" had already begun, with the above-mentioned rise of China and the continuing presence of Russia in the changing circumstances of the post-Cold War era. On the other hand, Washington was feeling the pressure of its allies, such as Israel and Turkey, asking it not to leave the Middle East. In addition, the increasing DAESH challenge in the region and in many Western capitals, where terrorist attacks were being committed one after the other especially by 2014, pushed the U.S. to declare DAESH a national security threat and start a fight against it.

Contrary to the Iraq War in 2003, Washington's strategy for dealing with the Syria crisis and DAESH was not to get involved in the region directly, but to "lead from behind" or "offshore balance" the threats by relying on partners and allies. This strategy would cost the U.S. less and decrease the number of American casualties, while keeping the superpower on track. However, leading from behind, offshore balancing, and proxy/surrogate warfare⁴¹ fell far short of satisfying the urgent expectations of America's traditional allies. As a result, the lack of sufficient U.S. support and decisiveness to topple the Assad regime, end the human tragedy in Syria and ease the refugee pressure that neighbouring countries had been suffering under since the beginning of the civil war increased the divergences between Ankara and Washington. The crack between the two deepened with the U.S. rapprochement with the PYD/YPG, the local partner of the U.S. in northern Syria, to eliminate the DAESH threat. Soon the U.S. surrogate warfare turned into a serious subject of dispute that revived the previous traumas and lack of confidence in Turkish-American relations.

Retrenching U.S., Offended Turkey

As the American public has been the major brake preventing a military intervention when an external problem is not a direct threat to U.S. security,

U.S. decision-makers often feel themselves obliged to persuade their public if they want to intervene abroad. Sending troops to faraway lands without any reasonable explanation is almost impossible for a country like the U.S. Experience has proven that interventions, especially military ones, which seem to bring positive outcomes in the short run, usually force the U.S. to deal with bigger and unexpected problems in the long run. However, the U.S. also has some commitments, and even if domestic circumstances make military intervention more difficult, decision-makers typically find a way to harmonize the “interests” of their country with its “values.” When the Arab Uprisings began by the end of 2010, the Obama administration preferred a “country by country” strategy, in which it had to make a choice between pushing for reforms and supporting repressive regimes. Public support for a military intervention in the problems of the Middle East was already low by the time the social unrest spread to Syria.

The strategy of “leading from behind,” which is attributed to famous South African leader Nelson Mandela and summed up as “putting others in front” while “shepherding them,”⁴² came into play under such an atmosphere. In this strategy, other actors, preferably regional ones, would act instead of the U.S. and decrease the reaction and the cost that would otherwise be incurred by Washington. Regional organizations and neighbouring countries, which feel the direct pressure of the uprisings, would come forward and take responsibility while the U.S., as the propulsive force, remained in the background. This strategy could also be called “offshore balancing,” whereby the U.S. pivoted away from Syria as much as it is possible and encouraged regional actors, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to solve the crisis.

This strategy seemed to be the perfect means with which to decrease the reaction against the American administration both from inside and outside, regarding American military interventions.⁴³ However, it was far from satisfying those who favoured a much stronger American presence in the Middle East. The hybrid strategy of “surrogate warfare” mentioned above was Obama’s means to muddle through this problem. On the one hand, this strategy aimed to prevent the U.S. from falling deeply into Iraq-like traps and stirring the anger of the American public. And on the other hand, it tried to make the U.S. continue to feel like a superpower, holding the remote controller in its

hand while offering relatively limited material and psychological support to its partners and allies in the crisis zones. In brief, it allowed the U.S. to detach itself from the problems of the Middle East with a small number of commitments that would not discomfort the American public at home and endanger the President's re-election potential.

While applying this "surrogate warfare," certain war functions would be outsourced to local partners who would help the U.S. achieve its strategic targets with smaller risks. In Syria, this has been the PYD/YPG whom, Washington thought, it could best rely on. By using the PYD/YPG as a surrogate in Syria, the U.S. aimed to achieve stronger international legitimacy, decrease the quantity of military equipment and personnel used, and provide certain military, linguistic, ethnic and cultural capabilities that it does not have as a foreign force in a completely unknown environment.⁴⁴

This tactical and temporary relationship, as Washington defines it, was not something totally new; it had been used by the U.S. military several times in the past, would also help Washington not leave Syria totally to Russia and Iran, two powers that indirectly strengthen China's global efficiency by targeting the U.S.' hegemonic role. However, this lucrative U.S. strategy brought about a serious handicap: namely ruining its relations with regional allies such as Turkey, where anti-American sentiments were already high.

Confidence Crisis Due to U.S. Support to the PYD/YPG

In 2014, Washington put into practice its idea of supporting the PYD and its armed wing the YPG as a surrogate force to fight against DAESH, which was finally declared as the "number one" threat against American security. Turkey, however, directly linked the PYD and YPG with the PKK, which it has been fighting against for more than three decades, and perceived the issue as a vitally important security threat to Turkey's national unity and territorial integrity. The disagreement between Ankara and Washington gradually turned the issue into a crisis and escalated the lack of confidence felt for the U.S. on the Turkish side.⁴⁵ The problem between the two allies on not being able to understand each other's national security concerns became obvious

In 2014, Washington put into practice its idea of supporting the PYD and its armed wing the YPG as a surrogate force to fight against DAESH.

once again. The U.S. prioritized DAESH, and Turkey prioritized the PYD/YPG as well as the PKK in determining their security strategies regarding Syria.

The U.S. has long been a matter of discussion in Turkey's national security perception. Taking root from the famous "Sevres Syndrome," which often triggers Turkey's mistrust for the West, the U.S. is far from being a reliable ally in the eyes of the Turkish people, who often tend to accuse Washington of threatening Turkey's national unity and territorial integrity, especially by using the Kurdish card. A 2018 poll conducted by Kadir Has University revealed that the majority of the Turkish public perceive the U.S. as the number one foreign country threatening Turkey.⁴⁶ For Özel, what lies at the centre of the recent Turkish-American tension is the Kurds.⁴⁷ Relying on a 2018 public opinion poll, he points out that 3 of the 4 problem areas the Turkish public determines in Turkish-American relations involve the Kurdish issue. These include the fight against terror (60.4%); the U.S. support to the PYD (36.2%) and the Kurdish policies of the U.S. in the Middle East (32%).⁴⁸

Although the main criteria that shape the Turkish public's mistrust for Washington are related to the Kurdish issue, the U.S. seems not to have paid the necessary attention to that, most notably in choosing the PYD/YPG as its local partner in Syria. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan repeatedly announced that, for Turkey, "the PYD and YPG are equal to the PKK,"⁴⁹ which both Turkey and the U.S. see as a terrorist organization. Washington defended itself by underlining several times that this was a tactical and temporary relationship which would be abolished when the DAESH threat was eliminated. Despite that, Ankara continued to have huge concerns, especially as to how the heavy military equipment given by the U.S. to the PYD/YPG forces would be collected back without targeting Turkey's security.

The U.S. priorities as a global power do not always coincide with Turkey's, which is a medium-sized, regional power.

This controversy reflects the two countries' diverging threat and interest perceptions in the Syrian civil war. The U.S. priorities as a global power do not always coincide with Turkey's, which is a medium-sized, regional power. This

divergence has been a significant problem in mutual relations, especially since the end of the Cold War.⁵⁰ To overcome their differences, the two sides tend to

compartmentalize their relations so as to cooperate on some issues while being at odds on some others. In this way, Ankara and Washington could at least keep the communication channels open and refrain from playing a zero sum game. However, with its multi-dimensional and multi-actor character, the Syrian civil war has complicated the practice of this formula to a great extent. When the uprisings began to escalate, Turkey first tried to persuade the Assad regime to make reforms, but then decided to support the Syrian opponents as Damascus chose to violently suppress the reform demands. Ankara was aware of the fact that a regime change in Syria could not be managed without the help of international society, namely the leading great powers such as the U.S. However, receiving this support was not easy. What Ankara could receive from the American side was a limited “train and equip” support for the opposition forces in Syria.

What finally split Ankara and Washington in Syria was the rise of DAESH both in Syria and Iraq. The extremely violent practices of DAESH, which began to target Western capitals as well, enlarged the scope of the conflict and pushed the Obama administration to choose its side much more clearly. Soon Washington approached the secular PYD/YPG, and distanced itself from the other opposition forces, some of whom are accused of being the extensions of radical organizations such as Al Qaida. This was a turning point in the course of the civil war in Syria as, from then on, there has been a much clearer polarization between Ankara and Washington regarding the Syrian conflict. The means and ends of the two countries, the so-called strategic allies, were diverging once again. For Washington, the number one target was to eliminate DAESH and the method it chose to achieve that aim was to engage in surrogate warfare using the PYD/YPG. For Turkey, the number one threat was the PKK (and the PYD/YPG, which it sees as the Syrian extensions of the PKK), and the method it chose was to prevent these groups from establishing a Kurdish political/military entity in and outside of Turkey in order to prevent a threat against its national unity and territorial integrity. A change in the governance of Syria automatically became a secondary target for Ankara and Washington, as it became much more difficult to see the consequences of a post-Assad Syria.

Since 2014, Turkey has tried every means possible to persuade Washington to cease the support it has been giving to the PYD/YPG as surrogates in Syria, but it kept receiving mixed signals from its counterpart. To overcome that, Ankara

approached other players in the region, namely Russia and Iran, and gradually drifted apart from Washington which turned a deaf ear to Turkey's security concerns. By the end of 2018, U.S. President Trump announced his decision to immediately pull out the American forces in Syria, which have been giving support to the PYD/YPG there in their fight against DAESH. However, due to various disagreements on the U.S. side, American troops in Syria have not yet fully withdrawn from Syria. By February 2019, the U.S. President has updated his withdrawal plan and decided to leave around 400 U.S. troops in Syria so as to counter balance the Russian and Iranian military presence in the region and continue the American commitment to the PYD/YPG. As of June 2019, it is difficult to check how many American troops are still active in Syria; however Turkey continues its negotiations with the U.S. to finalize the U.S. support to the PYD/YPG and establish a "safe zone" in the north of Syria, where Ankara and Washington can cooperate closely to stabilize the region. As seen, the answer of "quo vadis the Turkish-American alliance?" is strongly related to the two countries' capability of solving the PYD/YPG crisis and agree on a common Syria strategy. While the rising U.S.-Iran tension is making the issue much more complicated as Washington might continue to rely on PYD/YPG, this time to eliminate the Iranian influence in Syria after the decline of the DAESH threat, Turkish-American relations are suffering from other crises as well, including Turkey's S-400 missile acquisition from Russia and the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program. The next part of the article will briefly explain these additional problem areas in mutual relations.

Other Problem Areas in Turkish U.S.-Relations

The Acquisition of the S-400 Missile System from Russia

One of the recent divergences between Turkey and the U.S. is Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system from Russia. This problem, which seems to be a bilateral one at first sight, is in fact a multilateral problem that can be interpreted within the rising threat perception that the West, namely the U.S., feels for Russia (as well as China) as an alternative source of power that can speed up the "Easternization" on the world stage. As a matter of fact, the U.S. seems to perceive the S-400 issue as a "litmus test" to check whether the Cold War alliances and behaviour types are still valid and to determine which side Turkey is on.

Ankara has long been looking for alternative foreign sources to fulfil the technical requirements of its defence system. Dealing with various internal and external security threats and traumatized by the previous outside pressure, namely from Washington, in vitally important crises such as Cyprus,⁵¹ the country is aware of the fact that it should diversify its military equipment suppliers and gradually increase its domestic defence capacity.

As a country strategically located in a region where neighbouring states have ballistic missile capabilities, for years Ankara has desired to buy air defence weapons from NATO members with a condition that the agreement would provide the transfer of technology to build up its domestic defence industry. However no alliance members have been willing to transfer technology, as witnessed in the failed negotiations with Italy, France and the U.S.⁵² In the words of President Erdoğan, Ankara was “tired of waiting for another supplier.”⁵³ Therefore it had to search for partners from outside the alliance, such as China and Russia.⁵⁴ The recent S-400 crisis with the U.S. took place after Washington’s rejection of transferring technology to Turkey as part of a potential procurement of Patriot systems. Because of that, Ankara began seeking an alternative source for a high-technology anti-ballistic missile system. Its attempt to buy this system from China failed.⁵⁵ Looking for an alternative, Turkey signed an agreement with Russia to buy S-400s⁵⁶ and Russia is claimed to have promised Turkey joint production and technology transfer as part of the agreement.⁵⁷ This has made both the U.S. and other NATO members concerned.⁵⁸ U.S. officials have underlined the possibility of Russia’s receiving data about the F-35 program if Ankara uses both systems at the same time.⁵⁹ On these grounds, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that Washington was “seriously concerned over Turkey’s decision to buy the Russian S-400s.”⁶⁰

In response, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu underlined the importance of additional air defence coverage for Turkey by recalling the previous withdrawals of Patriot missiles by NATO members while Turkey was still under threat from Syria.⁶¹ He also reminded the U.S. that NATO protected only 30 percent of Turkish airspace, which shows the necessity of additional air defence systems for Ankara.⁶² In response to concerns that the “S-400 systems will detect NATO systems as a foe,” Çavuşoğlu stated that “Turkey is already sensitive about the issue and has set forth its conditions during the process of purchase.”⁶³ In addition, Turkey’s ambassador to

Washington, Serdar Kılıç, noted that Turkey's purchase of S-400s was not a threat to America, arguing that if the U.S. considered this system as a threat, it could work to alleviate concerns with a joint production of the Patriot system and technology transfers.⁶⁴

Ankara justifies its decision to buy S-400s on the basis of its own security needs and underlines that its decision to buy this system is based on technical and financial reasons.⁶⁵ Stating Turkey's urgent need to augment its national air defence, Çavuşoğlu once again underlined Turkey's commitment to NATO and various other European institutions.⁶⁶ Turkey's negotiations with the Franco-Italian EUROSAM consortium to develop a long-range air defence system simultaneously with the S-400 deal demonstrates Turkey's commitment to NATO.⁶⁷ However, all these efforts and statements did not change the U.S. stance on the issue. In its defence authorization bill for fiscal year 2019, the U.S. Senate proposed temporarily banning the supply of Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters (JSFs) to Turkey due to Ankara's S-400 deal with Russia. As of February 2019, S-400s are still a matter of discussion between Ankara and Washington and might further strain ties between the two capitals. Washington's latest offer to sell Turkey an advanced air-defence system seems not to have changed Ankara's decision to buy S-400s as well as American Patriots. The U.S. might choose to apply sanctions on Turkey if Turkey refuses to cancel the deal with Russia, a move which could further increase the fluctuations in Turkish-American relations as an extension of the global power struggle.

Clashes over the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program

Another point of divergence between Turkey and the U.S. involves the delivery of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jets to Turkey, which is linked to Turkey's above-mentioned purchase plan of the Russian S-400 missiles. As noted above, the U.S. Senate is attempting to use the issue as a means to increase the political pressure on Turkey in order to persuade Ankara both on the cancellation of the S-400 purchase and various other issues. Turkey, however, is holding its ground against these traditional types of U.S. efforts, which are not yielding the same results as they had during Cold War times. It is worth noting Turkish Presidency Spokesperson İbrahim Kalın's words that "no progress can be made with blackmails and threats of sanctions targeting Turkey."⁶⁸

As the largest procurement program in the U.S. Department of Defense, the F-35 Lightning II is a strike fighter aircraft produced in different versions for the U.S. Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy, and which promises significant advances in military capability. Eight nations are cost-sharing partners in the program with the U.S.⁶⁹ Turkey, along with 13 other NATO allies, has been a program partner since its inception in 1999, and some of the significant parts of the F-35 jets are being produced in Eskişehir, Turkey. Ankara, which is aiming to buy around 100 F-35s, received the delivery of the first jet in the U.S. in June 2018.⁷⁰ The F-35 aircraft was set to remain in the U.S. until November 2019 for the training of Turkish pilots.⁷¹ After Ankara's decision to purchase Russian S-400 missile defence systems, however, U.S. senators opposed the aircraft's delivery and in the defence budget bill approved in July 2018, the Senate demanded that the transfer of the F-35s to Turkey be stopped if Ankara insists on the Russian purchase.⁷²

On 13 August 2018, President Trump signed this senate bill, which includes the possibility of “an amendment prohibiting sales to Turkey of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jets until the Pentagon issues a report on Turkish-American relations in 90 days.”⁷³ The report was presented to the U.S. Congress on 9 November 2018 under confidentiality. Since then, Washington continues to signal practice of possible sanctions, mainly against the defence industry of Turkey, to persuade Ankara not to purchase S-400s. Despite the relatively constructive dialogue between Erdoğan and Trump at the G-20 Osaka Summit on 29 June 2019, the F-35 jets continue to be a point of divergence between the two capitals and similar to the S-400 crisis, the final decision of the U.S., though not yet clear, has the potential to affect Turkey's future relations not only with Washington but also with NATO. Further increase of tension with the Western alliance on these two issues could push Turkey further toward the East and strengthen its ties with Russia as well as China as alternative power circles.

Aftermath of the 2016 Failed Coup

The July 15, 2016 failed coup attempt by the Gülenist Terror Organization (FETÖ), which left 251 people dead and nearly 2,200 injured, and the developments in its aftermath significantly affected U.S.-Turkey relations. As Erhan and Siviş underline, the failed coup attempt affected the relationship in two ways. The first and the most important one has to do with the leader

Turkey has demanded Gülen's extradition as the mastermind of the failed coup; however, neither the Obama nor the Trump administrations have taken any step to fulfil this demand.

of FETÖ, Fetullah Gülen, who has been a resident in the U.S. since 1999.⁷⁴ Turkey has demanded Gülen's extradition as the mastermind of the failed coup; however, neither the Obama nor the Trump administrations have taken any step to fulfil this demand.

Turkey had already been asking for Gülen's extradition from the U.S. since the December 17-25, 2013 judicial coup attempt, implemented by FETÖ members both in the police and judiciary; however, it could not get any positive answer from the American side.⁷⁵ Ankara's call for Gülen's extradition intensified in the aftermath of the failed July 15, 2016 coup.⁷⁶ The U.S. State Department acknowledged in August 2016 that Turkey had formally requested Gülen's extradition for matters predating the coup attempt.⁷⁷ In addition to sending various files presenting evidence of Gülen's involvement in the latest coup attempt, Turkey continues its efforts to persuade the U.S. side for the extradition of Gülen to Turkey. Turkish Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gül's recent visit to Washington on 12 June 2019, where he met his counterpart William Barr and discussed the Gülen case, was a part of these efforts. However, the Trump administration is still far from taking a rapid step on this issue.

The U.S. inaction on this issue and on various other problem areas further increases the anti-American sentiments in Turkey. Some Turkish officials and media organs accuse the U.S. of having prior knowledge of, or involvement in, the July 15, 2016 coup attempt. Former President Obama rejected such accusations during his term, calling them "unequivocally false" claims that threaten Turkish-American relations.⁷⁸ Despite such statements from Washington, however, a public survey conducted in the aftermath of July 2016 shows that the majority of Turks believe that the U.S. supported the failed coup attempt.⁷⁹ According to a poll conducted by Kadir Has University in 2018, the majority of the Turkish public consistently tends to view Turkish-American relations as problematic, with dissatisfaction reaching its highest level at 79.3 percent.⁸⁰ The case of Gülen's extradition has become another means to check the "level of trust" in Ankara-Washington relations.

The Pastor Brunson Case

Another recent incident which increased tension in Turkish-American relations was the arrest of American Evangelical pastor Andrew Brunson in Turkey on December 9, 2016. Brunson was accused of espionage and having ties with terror groups. Due to health reasons, he was moved to house arrest in July 2018. Asking for Pastor Brunson's release, Washington imposed sanctions in August 2018 on Turkey's Justice and Interior Ministers as a reaction to Brunson's continued detention. Turkey gave a similar response to the U.S.; during the case, the U.S. was far from acting in harmony with the necessities of the so-called "model" of "strategic" partnership.

The tone of U.S.-Turkish relations grew more severe when the Turkish Lira lost 40% of its value against American dollar after President Trump's call on Twitter to increase tariffs on steel and aluminium and apply further pressure to the Turkish economy. In October 2018, Brunson was released from prison and returned to the U.S. This move was welcomed by Washington, and the U.S. automatically softened its relations with Ankara, though it would not be an easy task for either side to fully repair the confidence crisis they had endured.

Washington's Declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital

In December 2017, President Trump recognized Jerusalem (Al-Quds), the holy city of the three monotheistic religions – Islam, Christianity and Judaism – as the capital of Israel. As part of a global reaction to this move, 13 members of the UN Security Council voted in favour of a resolution calling for the rescinding of this decision, but the U.S., not surprisingly, vetoed this draft resolution. Nonetheless, the UN General Assembly condemned the decision, despite U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley's threat, that "the U.S. will think twice about funding the world body [the UN], if it voted to condemn Trump's decision."⁸¹ In May 2018, the Trump administration went further and transferred the American Embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem to put its previous decision into practice. This provocative action caused a great reaction both in Palestine and in the outside world. Considering it as a breach of international law, Turkey condemned the U.S. action and took side with the Palestinians, more than 50 of whom were killed and 2,700 injured by Israel in their protests against the Trump administration's transfer of its embassy to Jerusalem.⁸²

Condemning the U.S. provocations, Turkey organized emergency summits for the Organization of Islamic Conference both in December 2017 and May 2018. Turkish President Erdoğan underlined that they considered Trump's decision as null and void, while reiterating once again that "Jerusalem is Turkey's red line."⁸³ The status of the city continues to mark a point of divergence between Ankara and Washington, both on material and psychological bases, although the subject might sometimes lose ground in mutual relations, due to other sensitive issues, many of which are expressed above.

Conclusion

No one can deny that the 21st century is full of new challenges that might consequently change the existing status quo in world politics. In fact, this can be called a "transitory era," whose end might see a completely different world order, or at least a new power distribution. The U.S., considered to be the global hegemon of the post-Cold War world order, has long been feeling that its status might not be permanent. With the rapid rise of the

With the rapid rise of the BRIC countries in the last decade, American politicians are in an alert position, looking for various ways to stop or at least slow down the U.S. recession.

BRIC countries in the last decade, American politicians are in an alert position, looking for various ways to stop or at least slow down the U.S. recession. Although former President Obama and his successor Trump seem to have completely different administrative skills, they still have one thing in common: both of them are aware that the U.S. cannot be the world's policeman anymore, and both have consequently chosen to stay distant from the problems of regions such as the Middle East. As a matter of fact, they relied on similar strategies like "leading from behind," "offshore balancing" or "surrogate warfare," all of which in the end serve the aim of letting others solve their own problems and limiting the risky and costly political and military engagements of the U.S. in these regions.

In light of these factors, this article argues that the deterioration of Turkish-American relations in recent years cannot be fully assessed without taking these macro circumstances into consideration. In fact, the tension between Ankara and Washington is not an exception to, but rather just one part of this general trend. The U.S. is facing the huge risk of losing its world-wide status;

together with many other countries, its traditional allies, such as Turkey, are suffering from Washington's "navigation crisis," which complicates its foreign policy planning and practices. This, however, has not been caused only by outside circumstances, but also by the changing social structure inside the U.S. It is a well-known fact that the American public in general no longer shares the typical WASP characteristics, and no longer holds more or less the same worldview, considering foreign policy as a moral mission. On the contrary, the American society today is very much polarized and far from being united on what the country's top priorities should be, either domestically or abroad.

This, of course, affects countries such as Turkey, which are geographically distant, full of internal and external threats to their security, and require the support of their allies to eliminate these threats. Mounting divergences between Ankara and Washington in the post-Cold War era show us that the two allies have difficulty in the absence of a common threat such as the Soviets to harmonize their security agenda. As a matter of fact, they are "lost in translation," i.e. they have difficulty understanding each other's national security requirements under the changing global, regional and local circumstances. Washington wrongfully thinks that Turkey is the same country of the Cold War years and expects from it the same degree of allegiance, which is not possible anymore given the gradually strengthening position of Ankara on the world stage. Turkey's intensifying integration into the world economic system has certainly boosted its self-esteem and increased the number of its partners.

Ankara, on the other hand, continues to consider Washington as the sole superpower and ignores its decreasing capability while expecting it to fulfil all of Turkey's expectations, especially in the Middle East. In fact, problems such as the Syria crisis and the PYD/YPG/PKK problem, the S-400 missile purchase or the banning of the F-35 jets delivery, so on and so forth, all relate to the dwindling of American status at the global level, and reflect Washington's efforts to gain ground against the rise of China as well as Russia. The U.S. pressure on Iran too is considered to be a part of its strategy to contain Beijing and Moscow in the long run. Both the Obama and Trump administrations became aware of the fact that the U.S. should soon turn its face toward the Asia Pacific and refrain from deeper involvement in the problems of the Middle East or of Europe. "Let the others do their own job" has long been the motto of the Washington circles, who have already begun looking for means of gaining sufficient energy to deal with China.

Here the problem is that the U.S. has not yet found a “grand strategy” that is as firm as the “Containment Strategy” of the previous century, conducted against the Soviets. Instead, it prefers to establish “transactional relationships” with other countries, including Turkey. As Turan underlines, there is not any long-term cooperation between Washington and Ankara within the framework of a political community that is based on perceived common interests, and both sides need to adjust their mind-sets and behaviours as well as their rhetoric and policies.⁸⁴ Decreasing the emotional approaches in both capitals while increasing the wisdom would be helpful to retain a strong partnership and carry Turkish-American relations forward in the future on a much more fruitful and healthier basis.⁸⁵

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ARTICLE

Donald Trump and the Evolving U.S.-Russia Relationship

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Abstract

Donald Trump came to the White House with a desire to adjust U.S. foreign policy to the ongoing shifts in the international system. As a hardcore realist, he wanted to improve U.S.-Russia relations, perceiving the latter as an important counterweight to quickly-growing China and a potential partner in dealing with religious fundamentalism. Nevertheless, of all Trump's policy initiatives, this one has encountered the most resistance from entrenched American elites. Combined with massive propaganda campaign alleging Russian interference in the U.S. elections (that seems to target Trump no less than Russia), the President's opponents are pursuing an agenda that will have long-term consequences for both countries. The elite's refusal to recognize the scale and the potential consequences of the ongoing world power shifts and the consistent exaggeration of both the RF's power capabilities and the seriousness of its threat to Western interests create a distorted virtual reality, handicapping the Global North's ability to deal with newly emerging threats. These policies incrementally push Russia toward China, strengthen the hawks within Putin's inner circle, and lead to further conservative shifts in his foreign and domestic policies.

Keywords

U.S.-Russia relations, Eurocentric system, Global North, unimultipolar system, power politics.

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Introduction

The political crises evolving in Ukraine, East Asia, and the Middle East are just some of the testimonies to the qualitatively new, deep and rapid geopolitical shifts taking place within the international system. The Europeans' panicked reaction to the recent refugee flow from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); the quickly growing influence of extreme right populist political movements and parties; the conservative shifts in the policies of a number of governments, including many democratically elected ones; the conversion of some subversive international nongovernmental organizations (including openly terrorist ones such as al-Qaeda and DAESH) into world-scale political players, attempting to build their own protostate structures; as well as the unexpected consequences of the "colour revolutions" in the Middle East and the post-Soviet region, as well as some other political experiments of recent years, pose quite interesting and significant challenges for the international community. These challenges, taking place alongside the quickly growing influence of China and India and the formation and rapid functional expansion of such non-Western intergovernmental organizations as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and BRICS, represent just some of the links in a chain of events, marking the global shift of the world economic and political power centres from the North Atlantic to the Pacific Basin.

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The significance of the ongoing changes may be registered in the recent, feverish attempts by the U.S. to create new regional structures, first of all in the Pacific region that would exclude China and Russia and represent a counterweight to the SCO and BRICS. Especially indicative in this sense was Barack Obama's Transpacific Partnership (TPP) initiative that failed to get Congressional approval and was

later rejected by Donald Trump. The inconsistent and conceptually flawed policies of the Bush and Obama administrations in the Middle East along with Russia's increasing activism in that region have led to numerous claims that the world is witnessing an evolving crisis of the unipolar (or, in Samuel

Huntington's words, unimultipolar¹) system that was based on the U.S. and Global North monopoly and emerged with the end of the Cold War and the USSR's dissolution in December 1991.

The Collapse of the Bipolar System and its Consequences

The 1991 fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War and the bloc system resulted in some very serious and quite unexpected changes in the structure and the functioning of the world economic and political systems. First of all, the Second, Communist World has essentially collapsed, with its members joining the ranks of either the First (Capitalist) or the Third (Developing, post-Colonial) Worlds, which have evolved into the Global North and the Global South.

Second, within this new configuration, the Global South has turned out to be more vulnerable than it was during the Third World era: its members lost their ability to balance between the two major blocs and are facing now the monopolistic and quite monolithic Global North that is dictating the rules of the game.

Third, even though in most (though not all) cases, the major powers are not interested anymore in sponsoring the conflicts in the Global South, they frequently do not strive to stop such conflicts if they do not carry the threat of escalation or territorial expansion, or are located in regions that have no particular resource or strategic importance for them. The drastic contrast between the Western reaction to the simultaneous bloody ethnic and religious conflicts in the European Balkan states and Africa's Rwanda in the mid-1990s serves as a shocking illustration of this new post-Cold War geopolitical reality.

As a result, 'zones of hopelessness' are forming. Lacking adequate resources and infrastructure, and politically unstable, these regions thus receive neither state nor private external investments. Such zones are becoming breeding grounds for poverty, political extremism, military conflicts, and organized crime (including piracy and various types of trafficking), as well as source regions for mass refugee and migration flows. Many of these zones are also located in environmental risk zones – a fact that can further worsen the situation long-term by further stimulating large-scale emigration.

Deep changes have also occurred in the self-perception and policies of the Global North. The collapse of the Soviet Union was viewed there not just

as the West's political victory – it started to be considered as a confirmation of the First World's moral righteousness and the superiority of its economic and political model, perceived since then as the only right and possible one – and, following Francis Fukuyama's famous statement, discussion of 'the end of history' started yet again.² Respectively, the acceptance of the West's model became the necessary precondition for the admittance of Global South countries into the 'civilized' club. Again, as it happened already in 1492 (the starting point of European colonialism and worldwide domination) and 1878 (the Congress of Berlin's declaration of Western entitlement to the "uncivilized" territories), the former West has unilaterally taken upon itself the 'civilizing' mission.

In the economic sphere, this trend was expressed through the proliferation of the Globalization concept – essentially Westernization – the formation of the world economic system on the basis of the Liberal International Economic Order, the Bretton Woods model (in its revised, post-1971 form), and the Washington consensus. The IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO (formed on the basis of GATT) memberships have expanded drastically and have become essentially a necessary requirement for a state's international legitimization. Meanwhile, membership in these organizations required the introduction of radical market reforms and the opening up of their (frequently weak) national economies to international competition. Essentially, this meant the introduction of new limits on state sovereignty.

Even more radical changes were taking place in the political sphere. Starting with George H.W. Bush's New World Order doctrine, proclaimed during the 1990-91 'Desert Storm' operation in Kuwait, every American administration has declared the Western political model's universal applicability and claimed the right of the Global North to arbitrarily limit or completely reject the sovereign rights of 'faulty' states. The system that was formed at that time relied on the erosion of state sovereignty, the expansion of supranational governing mechanisms, and the further growth of the Global North's power. In his speech to the joint session of Congress in the wake of the military operation in Kuwait, President Bush stated:

We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation.

Out of these troubled times... a new world order... can emerge: a new era – freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice. A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak... America and the world must support the rule of law – and we will. America and the world must stand up to aggression – and we will. And one thing more: In the pursuit of these goals America will not be intimidated... Vital issues of principle are at stake... Vital economic interests are at risk as well... Recent events have surely proven that there is no substitute for American leadership. In the face of tyranny, let no one doubt American credibility and reliability. Let no one doubt our staying power.³

Under Bill Clinton, this trend was further expressed in the proclamation of the existence of universal human rights and common human values (which happened to be taken, nevertheless, exclusively from the Western conceptual vocabulary) and the claim that the U.S. would consider human rights violations in other countries as a matter of its strategic interest. This claim implied the right of the U.S. to arbitrarily limit or completely deny other countries' sovereign rights, as was done during the military operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Somalia. The same approach would be used to impose economic and other sanctions on states whose internal policies for various reasons did not correspond to U.S. wishes – in particular, Belarus, Venezuela, Serbia, Cuba, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, North Korea, Syria, Iran, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, and later, Russia, Uganda, and a number of other states.

Under George W. Bush, the U.S., relying now on the Democratic Peace doctrine, started to pursue policies of pre-emptive strikes, the selective forceful removal of authoritarian regimes deemed to be out of favour, followed by

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large-scale neoconservative political engineering – the imposition on the defeated and occupied countries of regimes that were presumably friendly to the West: peaceful, democratic, and pro-market.

Meanwhile, the political experiments in Afghanistan and Iraq, and then, in Libya, Egypt, and a number of other countries demonstrated the dogmatic character of this approach and the low reliability of its final outcomes: the refusal to take into account historical, religious, national, cultural, tribal, and other factors simultaneously

with the destruction of the traditional political, and not infrequently, civilizational structures has led to some truly catastrophic consequences. Of special importance was the policy of the Colour Revolutions, designed to overthrow unwelcome regimes through the sponsorship of militant opposition groups under the formal neutrality and non-interference of the Western governments. The complete state collapse in Libya and Somalia; the rapid destruction of state structures in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Ukraine; the crises in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen; and the civil war in Syria illustrate the danger and the unpredictable character of such policies.

Although President Barack Obama offered a very different face and image of the U.S. to the world, his policies, albeit with a lesser degree of enthusiasm, generally continued those initiated by the Clinton and Bush administrations. Obama's policies, meanwhile, had an additional twist, one that involved an attempt to significantly change the power balance in the Middle East. This strategy included the partial withdrawal of U.S. support for Israel and an attempt to return to the U.S. balancing act between the Sunni Arab regimes (first of all, Saudi Arabia) and the Shia Iran, that had been characteristic of U.S. policies in the region before 1979. Nevertheless, the Obama administration's incrementally increasing involvement in the conflicts in Libya, Syria, and Ukraine essentially had consequences similar to the previous Clinton and Bush administrations' policies.

In a similar fashion, the current worsening of U.S.-Russian relations that was grossly aggravated by allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S.

election, initiated by Hillary Clinton during her failed Presidential campaign, has had a serious negative impact both on U.S.-Russian relations and on Russian foreign and domestic policies. In February 2018, in the wake of the new Russian sanctions announcement, House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan stated:

...Russians engaged in a sinister and systematic attack on our political system. It was a conspiracy to subvert the process, and take aim at democracy itself. Today's announcement underscores why we need to follow the facts and work to protect the integrity of future elections.⁴

Ironically, among the unexpected results of this campaign were the emergence in the West of Vladimir Putin's public image as a Superman Almighty, Russia's increasing orientation towards China, the growth of anti-American and Western feelings among the Russian population, and the strengthening of the hawks' positions within Putin's inner circle and the Russian political establishment in general. Such recent actions as the International Olympic Committee's decision to ban the Russian state and a large number of Russian athletes from the 2018 Winter Olympic Games (eagerly characterized by Putin as "totally orchestrated and politically motivated"),⁵ the expulsion of Russian diplomats, and the official labelling of the state-funded Russia Today TV channel and Sputnik news agency as foreign agents in the U.S. immediately led to reciprocal moves by the Russian government and allowed it to rally Russian public opinion, label as foreign agents the Voice of America and Radio Liberty news outlets, and introduce bans on numerous internet sites – right at the time when Putin was preparing to run his fourth presidential campaign.

Meanwhile, the very emergence of the figure of Donald Trump serves as an important symbol of the erosion of the West-dominant world system that was predicted (or rather desired) by many academics and political leaders at the start of the current century. Characteristically, Putin claimed in his October 2015 speech at the 70th UN General Assembly meeting that:

We all know that after the end of the Cold War, the world was left with one center of dominance, and those who found themselves at the top of the pyramid were tempted to think that, since they are so powerful and exceptional, they know best what needs to be done... [Their actions] may result in the collapse

of the entire architecture of international relations, and then indeed there will be no rules left except for the rule of force. The world will be dominated by selfishness rather than collective effort, by dictate rather than equality and liberty, and instead of truly independent states we will have protectorates controlled from the outside.⁶

This perception of the evolving world power structure along with Russia's expanding military and economic capabilities, its growing irritation with the perceived violations by the West of the 1990s agreements and mutual understandings, including the EU and NATO's eastward expansion and alleged Western interference in the internal affairs of Russia and other post-Communist states (especially the Colour Revolutions in that region, viewed in Russia as its zone of traditional influence) became the foundations of Putin's foreign and domestic policies that turned out to be especially clearly visible during his third presidential term (2012-18).

Donald Trump's Foreign Policy: Prospects for a Change

The emergence of Donald Trump as a presidential contender in 2015 and his consequent victory in the 2016 U.S. elections are symbolic of the seriousness of the challenges (both internal and external) that the U.S. currently faces. Thus the study of the current U.S. policy towards Russia cannot be limited

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to a discussion of Donald Trump's unorthodox political views and behaviour, and should instead be based on an analysis of the countries' bilateral relations history, ongoing geopolitical changes, and Trump's wider strategy of

dealing with the erosion of the U.S. monopoly in the world political system. In contrast to most members of the U.S. political establishment, including Hillary Clinton and such dogmatic Cold War warriors as John McCain, Lindsay Graham, Bob Porter, or Marco Rubio, Trump and his senior political advisor (until August 2017) Stephen Bannon were willing to accept the notion that the world was quickly changing and that the U.S. had to adjust its foreign policies to the new reality and build a new strategy. In particular, Trump (in a

sharp contrast to the expansionist neoliberal Hillary Clinton) was not, at least initially, interested in getting involved in new military adventures abroad and would have preferred the U.S. to look increasingly inwards. Thus, the Trump phenomenon represents an attempt to grasp the evolving international order and adjust the goals and methods of U.S. foreign policy to the new political reality. Nevertheless, Trump's policies are encountering strong resistance from most of the traditional American elites.

The first steps by the Trump administration indicated a sincere attempt at a cardinal revision of U.S. geopolitical priorities: declaring the "America First" principle, espousing a return to a traditional understanding of the state sovereignty concept, proposing a less interventionist and ideologically motivated military policy, recognizing the ongoing geopolitical shift towards the Pacific region, and viewing China as the major and quickly growing political, economic, and military threat to the U.S. Trump (along with Bannon and such members of his original team as Sebastian Gorka and the short-term National Security Advisor Michael Flynn) insisted on the revolutionary modification of U.S. foreign policy goals, including deemphasizing the significance of NATO and Europe in general and treating Russia as a counterweight to China and a potential U.S. ally both in East Asia and in the Middle East. In particular, Steve Bannon claimed that:

The economic war with China is everything. And we have to be maniacally focused on that. If we continue to lose it, we're five years away, I think, ten years at the most, of hitting an inflection point from which we'll never be able to recover... One of us is going to be a hegemon in 25 or 30 years and it's gonna be them if we go down this path.⁷

As a businessman, Trump was looking first of all at the contemporary economic realities: at the beginning of 2016, the U.S. accounted for 24.32% of the world GDP; China, for 14.84%; while Russia, just for 1.8%. Even more important were the economic projections of that time, indicating that due to their faster rates of economic growth (respectively 6.7% and 6.6% in 2016 compared to the U.S.' 1.6%), the size of both China's and India's economies could exceed that of the U.S. within the first half of the current century.⁸ In one of his 2016 interviews, while running for office, Trump claimed:

The Soviet Union doesn't exist now it's Russia, which is not the same size, in theory not the same power... The point is the world is a much different place right now. And today all you have to do is read and see the world is, the big threat would seem to be based on terror... I think, probably a new institution maybe would be better for that than using NATO, which was not meant for that. And it's become very bureaucratic, extremely expensive and maybe is not flexible enough to go after terror. Terror is very much different than what NATO was set up for... I'll tell you the problems I have with NATO. No. 1, we pay far too much... Today, it has to be changed. It has to be changed to include terror. It has to be changed from the standpoint of cost because the U.S. bears far too much of the cost of NATO.⁹

Donald Trump's advisors also considered the globalization system, incrementally built in the initial post-Cold War period on the basis of such mechanisms as the World Trade Organization and designed to create economic advantages for the largest and (presumed at that time to be the) most effective U.S. economy, to be now more of a liability than an advantage for the U.S. In Trump's view, at present, this system benefits China instead of the U.S., and should be destroyed or at least modified significantly. This has further reinforced his desire to take steps aimed at weakening China (including the improvement of U.S.-Russia relations), and protecting the American industry and agriculture sectors from what he views as unfair competition, by rebuilding economic protectionist barriers, stopping the undocumented immigration of low-skilled workers (the number of undocumented migrants is estimated currently at around 11 million),¹⁰ eliminating the diversity immigration lottery, and cutting the scale of both family-based migration and refugee flow.

Clearly, the President is a hardcore realist, putting power considerations far above ideological or moral ones. Trump appreciates the scope of the structural changes taking place within the international system and sees China, not Russia, as the main U.S. rival and threat to American strategic interests. At the same time, declining Europe (especially the economically weaker and politically less stable former Communist states of Eastern Europe and most of the former Soviet republics) is perceived as a liability requiring huge expenditures and strategic guarantees on the U.S. part and, from Trump's perspective, unable to offer anything valuable in exchange. This is especially

important because Europe is no longer viewed as the ideological battlefield in the struggle against Russia, but rather as a political periphery. Thus the Europeans are being told to at least fulfil their legal obligations, contained in the NATO Charter, and to pay for their own defence. Indeed, in 2015, the U.S. spent 3.6% of its GDP on defence – the highest ratio of any NATO member (and by far, the highest total military budget in the world). That is almost double the target of 2% of GDP to which NATO members had all agreed in 2006. Meanwhile, by 2015, only five other NATO members had reached this threshold; in 2016, just four.¹¹ Along with the U.S., these were the United Kingdom, Greece, Estonia, and Poland.¹²

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Even more so, as both a political realist and a businessman, Trump is much less inclined than conventional politicians and ideologues to give large amounts of money or any political or military guarantees to the corrupt and unstable political regimes outside NATO. This creates significant problems for Eastern Europe and especially for Ukraine and Georgia, considering the developments in those countries over the last ten years. Simultaneously, this approach essentially undermines or completely eliminates some of the major areas of strategic and ideological contention between the U.S. and Russia.

Meanwhile, Trump's original conceptual design went even further, and was based on a willingness to repeat the Nixon/Kissinger political experiment of the 1970s, when the U.S. started to play the "Chinese card" against the USSR, this time playing Russia against China. In addition, he considered an active intelligence interaction and information exchange between the U.S. and Russia as the necessary precondition for any success in fighting DAESH and fundamentalism in general. In this sense, he viewed Obama's hostile policies towards both Russia and Israel as a total strategic failure.

Nevertheless, the developments of the first year of Trump's presidency, including the replacement of Michael Flynn by Herbert McMaster as National Security Advisor, the forcing out of Stephen Bannon and Sebastian Gorka, the sabotage of the White House initiatives in Congress, the Mueller investigation, and the all-out anti-Trump propaganda campaign, conducted

by the elite media, have led to changes in both the tone of the White House statements about Russia and in its practical actions. Indicative in this sense were the new sanctions, introduced or at least declared against Russia, the decision to sell lethal weapons to Ukraine on a limited scale, and the change in the tone regarding Russia, made in the President's State of the Union address to Congress on January 30, 2018:

Around the world, we face rogue regimes, terrorist groups, and rivals like China and Russia that challenge our interests, our economy, and our values. In confronting these dangers, we know that weakness is the surest path to conflict, and unmatched power is the surest means of our defense.¹³

Still, an analysis of the evolution of the sanctions regime indicates that Trump, as a political realist and a businessman, is much more interested in the economic aspects of sanctions; understanding that their removal is unrealistic under the current circumstances, the President is trying to achieve his own goals, aiming at the weakening of the competitors to American businesses. Thus, the current sanctions target Russia's oil, gas, and extractive industries, the heavy machine-building and military-industrial complex, and the financial sector. Characteristically, State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert stated in February 2018:

...this legislation and its implementation are deterring Russian defense sales. Since the enactment of the... legislation, we estimate that foreign governments have abandoned planned or announced purchases of several billion dollars in Russian defense acquisitions.¹⁴

Ironically, this State Department official added that there was no need for new sanctions "because the legislation is, in fact, serving as a deterrent," thus indicating once again that the economic aspects of sanctions are more important for Trump's administration than the purely political ones. This approach causes deep aversion on the part of the established political elites.¹⁵ In particular, Democratic Senator Chris Coons from Illinois, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, stated recently that "the president has not used tools the Senate gave him, [by the vote of] 98 to 2, to send a clear and unmistakable sign to Vladimir Putin and Russia" about the consequences of meddling in other countries' elections, with the administration being in no hurry to implement many of the envisioned sanctions.¹⁶

Trump's emphasis is on targeted, smart sanctions, oriented against Russia's political and business elites, particularly those belonging to Putin's inner circle. The sanction listing, published in January 2018, includes 210 Russian political and business elite representatives, among whom are all the members of the RF federal government and all Russian dollar billionaires.

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It seems that instead of the usual attempts to weaken the country's economy and create problems for the population in general, provoking public disobedience, the sanctions' goal now is to create feelings of instability and unpredictability specifically among the elites, stimulating their desire to either get rid of Putin or at least pressure him to soften his stance towards the West and allow some degree of liberalization within the country.¹⁷

Nevertheless, even these changes hardly prove the revision of Trump's general strategic plans in regard to Russia – they seem to be rather a tactical retreat in the face of strong resistance to his policies by the American elites. Meanwhile, the implementation of the revolutionary changes suggested by Trump initially would require some drastic alterations of the U.S. foreign policy and security strategy and tactics as well as significant personnel changes – people with a Cold War mentality will probably never be willing or able to accept the new conceptual approach.

Both Trump's strategy and tactics bring with them a number of serious challenges. First, it seems clear that Trump, viewing China as the major threat to U.S. interests, intends to destroy or at least significantly weaken those global institutions (such as the WTO and the regional trade agreements, including those that do not include China, for instance, NAFTA) that were formed or expanded during the last twenty-five years. In his view, these agreements and structures, designed initially to give advantage to the U.S., at present favour China and a number of other countries. He also seems to be willing to raise tensions with China in order to block its further advancement through some kind of a new "containment" policy. This seems to be a very risky strategy that could become a self-fulfilling prophecy by provoking an angry Chinese reaction. The new flexing of American muscles in East Asia has already resulted in a series of crises in U.S. relations with the nuclear North Korea – a development not only dangerous in itself but also likely to create new tensions in U.S. relations with neighbouring China and Russia.

Trump's Challenges

Ultimately, it is not clear to what extent the globalization process can be reversed, stopped, or even slowed down, or what the consequences of such attempts could be for the U.S. and the world economy.

Second, Trump's willingness to "contain" Iran could lead to a sharp increase in tensions with that country and in that region in general – ironically in a situation in which both states face a common threat in Sunni religious fundamentalism and could cooperate in its containment. In this sense, Trump's policy can further complicate U.S. relations with Russia and lead to the escalation of the conflict in Syria.

Third, Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and actions, along with his promised attempts to renegotiate NAFTA and other agreements, could lead to a serious worsening of U.S. relations with Latin America (first of all, Mexico), increase anti-American sentiments in the Western hemisphere, and have considerable economic consequences. Meanwhile, Latin America represents an important part of the very Pacific region that is becoming the centre of the world power. These actions create an opening for Russia, and, especially, China, for political, economic, and military expansion in Latin America.

Fourth, Trump's anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric, including the recent attempts to either cancel or tighten the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) will also weaken the U.S. position on the world-qualified labour and international education markets, in particular by diverting the flow of skilled, educational, and investment migrants from Muslim and Hispanic states to other countries, further provoking anti-American sentiments abroad, weakening the U.S.'s "soft power" capabilities, and creating new security threats, while simultaneously leading to the proliferation of xenophobia in the U.S.

Fifth, seeking the support of the military and trying to boost economic growth on the basis of government-generated demand, Trump is aggressively expanding the military budget. The expected \$716 billion figure for 2019 would increase Pentagon spending by more than 7% over the 2018 budget, and by more than 13%, over 2017, when the U.S. spent about \$634 billion on defence.¹⁸ This action will most probably provoke suspicion and similar moves on the part of major military rivals, first of all, China and Russia.

Finally, whatever Trump's strategic plans are, his operational codes are still a big unknown; specifically, how will he act under crisis conditions? The President intends to improve U.S. relations with Russia and to avoid any further U.S. involvement in military operations abroad. Both of those initiatives are wise. Still, the question is – what would happen if a serious conflict of interests – either national or personal – were to emerge, and it became an issue of pride (say, an assassination of a U.S. official abroad)? Both Trump and Putin are strong-willed, proud and stubborn political realists – and while they could probably understand each other and find a compromise behind closed doors, their inclination toward grandstanding in times of crisis could lead to a dangerous escalation of tensions.

And thus the question remains: does the President have adequate diplomatic and tactical skills in the foreign policy domain and will he be able to overcome the ever-increasing resistance to his reform proposals on the part of the unified opposition? This is especially important, considering the fact that Trump's opponents in the U.S. are ready to use any means available to discredit or hurt him in any way possible – even if their actions would simultaneously inflict damage on national interests (as in the cases of the Israel and Russia-related anti-Trump moves made by the Obama administration in its final days).¹⁹ Even more unusual were Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's attempts to get the U.S. intelligence and other special services involved in Clinton's claims that “all seventeen U.S. intelligence services” had proof of Russian involvement in the U.S. elections on Donald Trump's side.

In recent American history, there have been precedents of political pressure on the U.S. intelligence services – for example, George W. Bush's administration compelled the intelligence community to give false reports on the Iraqi nuclear program and Saddam Hussein's alleged link to al-Qaeda. Still, exercising pressure on the intelligence services in order to discredit one's political opponent inside the country (i.e. to pressure the intelligence services for a personal political gain), influence domestic public opinion, and thus change the internal policies of the incoming administration represents a principally new and dangerous precedent in American politics.

Trump's reform proposals represent a real threat to the entrenched interests of very influential political groups, actively working to prevent the foreign policy changes from happening and engaged in a complex of activities aimed at discrediting the President and intimidating his closest advisors and their families. Essentially, a very strange “alliance of convenience” has been formed

that includes leftist populist groups, the traditional liberal establishment, and hardcore right-wing politicians in order to discredit Trump's policies, turn public opinion against him, prevent the revision of the U.S. geopolitical priorities, and create a general feeling of instability in American society.

This coalition is comprised of a majority of the conventional elites, including the political establishment, the governmental bureaucracy, the "mainstream" media, the entertainment industry, the academic community as well as the globalist financial and IT business elites – essentially, the only elite groups supporting the President are the representatives of the "real sector" of the economy – conventional industry, first of all, manufacturing, and agriculture, quite favourably viewing his protectionist policies, and the military.

The goals of the opposition groups differ significantly: while the leftist opponents will resist any policies offered by Trump in order to delegitimize and weaken him politically, the right-wing Republicans whose mentality was formed during the Cold War are trying to prevent the conceptual change of the geopolitical orientation of U.S. foreign policy, specifically the shift from hostility toward Russia to cooperation with it. Finally, the foreign policy and security bureaucracy is against any significant reforms and sharp turns in policy goals and methods: these people remember very well the deep personnel cuts and structural reorganizations that followed the triumphal celebrations of the end of the Cold War twenty-five years ago.

These groups will keep trying to discredit Trump's policies, presenting them as inadequate, illegal and unconstitutional, and to block the passage of his legislative initiatives through Congress – both to prevent the implementation of these policies and in order to find/create a reason to start impeachment procedures, accusing the President of violating the law and the Constitution. Thus one can expect a further expansion of the anti-Trump campaign. This is a new and a very dangerous trend in American political life that can bring with it violence in the foreseeable future.

Tragically, U.S.-Russian relations have become a hostage to this anti-Trump campaign: first, due to the accusations crusade alleging Russian attempts to influence the U.S. elections and implying that the Trump campaign could be the beneficiary of such actions. Second, any White House reform proposals in both the domestic and the foreign policy arenas, including those involving U.S.-Russian relations, are meeting strong elite resistance. This state of affairs

was recognized in 2017 by Russia's Vladimir Putin, who stated with regret that relations with America had "become hostage to the internal political situation in the U.S... Certain forces use the Russian-American ties to solve internal political problems in the U.S... We are patiently waiting until this process in the internal political life in America will end."²⁰ Putin thus recognized that the issue was that of internal U.S. politics, with Russia having at present limited opportunity for showing its own initiative and changing the dynamics of bilateral relations.

Along with the changes in the geopolitical priorities and political style, Trump is trying to deal with this situation by pursuing an unconventional personnel policy, seeking people from outside the traditional political elite. Significant personnel cuts and structural reorganizations have taken place within the major intelligence, security and foreign policy governmental structures. Thus the White House is trying to lessen the influence of the established political elites and special interest groups in these spheres.

Still, only time will tell if Trump will manage to survive politically and implement his plans, including those in the foreign policy domain – the area in which he already accepted some degree of political compromise with the elites and significant revisions of his originally declared goals and policies.

Conclusion

A famous Chinese proverb states: "God protect you from living in the time of changes." It seems, meanwhile, that we and our close descendants are incredibly "lucky" – the Eurocentric system that has dominated the world for more than a half a millennium is starting to literally fall apart in front of our eyes. For the Europeans, who had established worldwide domination, simultaneously exploiting other regions and imposing on them their cultural, economic, and political models, the ongoing shift of the world power centre to the Pacific region represents a real systemic collapse. It signifies a decisive and irreversible loss of their positions in the world economic and political systems – a fact that their elites stubbornly refuse to recognize or accept. More than that: Europe continues, as it did in the 'good old' Colonial days, to live beyond its means, essentially ignoring the decline in its share in the world economy, refusing to establish control over its social spending, and continuously trying to impose its political will and cultural norms on others. Tragically overestimating its political, economic, and military importance and

consistently getting involved in international conflicts, e.g. Libya, Syria, and recently, Ukraine, the Europeans are further worsening their future prospects.

Meanwhile, for the two “continental” members of the world system, the U.S. and Russia, for all the differences in their economic and political structures and the gap of the economic and conventional military potential, this change is going to be painful, but they may be able to deal with it – their goal will be to “turn a head” – respectively, from the East to the West and from the West to the East. This will not be easy, especially because their main partners and/or opponents will increasingly be the states-civilizations with the multimillenia-long histories and non-European cultures, religions, and languages. This is going to be especially tough, considering the former’s messianic ideologies and their consistent, principal refusal to accept the others’ points of view and cultures as equal.

The relative weakness of Russia and the still essentially hegemonic position of the U.S. within the international system during the last thirty years overshadow the fact that they will have to work with each other in solving serious international issues and face the ever-growing China. Meanwhile, most of the established political elites in both countries (along with those in Europe) seem to be incapable of understanding these new realities or working toward finding a mutual accommodation. The West, in particular, refuses to see that sanctions and other anti-Russian measures lead to that country’s further alienation and are *de facto* pushing it toward an alliance with China – and this is a trend that neither the West nor Russia should welcome.

The current elite media campaign, aimed to a large extent against Trump, not Russia, creates a distorted virtual picture of the world that is completely separated from reality. Especially dangerous is the fact that its foreign policy results are essentially opposite to the desired ones: they push the Russian domestic and foreign policies further in an authoritarian and anti-Western direction, basically threatening the U.S. security interests. Under these circumstances, both the U.S. and Russia need to search for a political compromise (presuming some degree of mutual accommodation) and a new conceptual comprehension of the evolving international system configuration and their countries’ quickly changing places in it.

Endnotes

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ARTICLE

The Obama Doctrine and Military Intervention

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Abstract

This article examines the interplay of discourse and practice in American grand strategy under President Obama. A particular focus is the trajectory of military intervention, from the 'surge' in Afghanistan to the campaign against DAESH, and how competing discourses of hegemony, engagement and restraint have informed U.S. national security policy and the application of military power. The paper analyses how President Obama followed a post-American vision of hegemony intended to lower the financial and human cost of American primacy through burden sharing and 'leading from behind.' This strategy resulted in a recalibration of American military power that shifted its emphasis to covert operations, and the use of drones and Special Forces in combating terrorism, while ultimately prioritizing the Asia-Pacific over the Middle East as region of vital strategic interest to the U.S. Oscillating between limited engagement and extraction from the latter region however, undermined America's leadership position both at home and abroad.

Keywords

Grand strategy, national security, discourse, military intervention, Barack Obama.

Introduction[†]

On a trip to Asia in April 2014, President Obama employed a uniquely American baseball analogy to contrast the popular reflection of his foreign policy in Washington with his own definition of the 'Obama Doctrine:'

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You hit singles, you hit doubles; every once in a while we may be able to hit a home run. That may not always be sexy. That may not always attract a lot of attention, and it doesn't make for good argument on Sunday morning shows. But we steadily advance the interests of the American people and our partnership with folks around the world.¹

This careful appreciation for the scope and limitations of American power and influence in the world by the President of the U.S. renewed once more a virulent debate about Obama's grand strategy in the American media and among the U.S. foreign policy establishment.² In fact, shortly after his Asia trip, when an even more off-hand description of his basic foreign policy premise had become prominent, Obama announced a final drawdown of U.S. forces from Afghanistan until 2016. This was supposed to end America's longest-running war by the time the President would leave office in 2017, yet it also provided his critics with further evidence that a policy of geopolitical retrenchment lay at the heart of Obama's grand strategy.³

Partly to counter this prevalent criticism of his administration's retreat from American leadership, Obama presented a much anticipated declaration of the 'Obama Doctrine' on May 28, 2014 to the graduation class of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the same location where he had announced a substantial troop increase to Afghanistan five years earlier. As announced by the White House, the President would now, after having wound up the legacy of the Bush wars, finally offer his own strategic vision of national security.⁴

Far from a new or original interpretation of America's role in the world however, Obama used his West Point speech to reiterate a series of familiar themes that had been prevalent in his formulation of grand strategy ever since he took office in January 2009: the continued indispensability of American world leadership; a strong emphasis on cooperative engagement, increased burden sharing with allies and partners in support of a liberal international order; the end of America's decade of war; a more limited national security focus on counter-terrorism; and finally a prioritization of America's domestic renewal, greater concern with military restraint and the prudent use of American power abroad.⁵ As Obama explained at West Point:

America must always lead on the world stage. If we don't, no one else will. The military... is, and always will be, the backbone of

that leadership. But U.S. military action cannot be the only, or even primary, component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail.⁶

Far from a coherent strategic vision, the West Point speech revealed once more the inherent tension between the established hegemonic imagination of American exceptionalism and its foundation in military pre-eminence, and the countering discourses of ‘nation-building at home,’ and ‘leading from behind.’ Unable and unwilling to artificially dissolve this tension, Obama thus formulated a grand strategy that failed to deliver the coherent rationale and consistent narrative that most experts and commentators demanded of the ‘big picture’ of America’s role in the world.⁷ Obama’s presentation at West Point and the controversial reaction to it in the American media and expert circles, from *CNN* and the *New York Times* to *Foreign Affairs* and the *National Interest*, once again confirmed the intertextual connectivity, but also the hybridity and ideational complexity of the President’s geopolitical vision, which Obama himself had placed between the contradictory impulses of ‘isolationism’ and ‘interventionism.’⁸

Grand Strategy as Contested Discourse: Hegemony, Engagement and Restraint

Grand strategy operates as set of interconnected geopolitical discourses which establish constructs of national identity and link this ideational paradigm to a corresponding political practice in foreign and security policy. The meaning of a grand strategy, such as the ‘Obama Doctrine,’ extends beyond a rational calculation and equation of means and ends to produce national security against external threats; it functions as an internal identity performing discourse constituting a national sense of Self.⁹ Methodologically, the level of acceptance and political relevance of this social construction can be gauged through its reproduction as authoritative and legitimate by a multitude of influential discursive producers, ranging from government officials to academic experts and elite media outlets. It is this intertextuality that establishes grand strategy as a dominant ‘regime of truth’ in the sense of Foucault.¹⁰

The reconceptualization of grand strategy as discourse is derived from critical approaches that seek to widen and deepen understandings of international

The meaning of a grand strategy, such as the ‘Obama Doctrine,’ extends beyond a rational calculation and equation of means and ends to produce national security against external threats.

conceptualizations of the identity-security link. These basic discourses of American grand strategy can be identified as hegemony, engagement, and restraint respectively. They differed in their use of key representations of geopolitical identity and their interlinkage to different national security policies.

Hegemony represented the dominant strand of American grand strategy discourse under Obama. This widely shared and entrenched geopolitical vision – the default position of the U.S. foreign policy establishment – promoted the idea of the unique global leadership role of the U.S. as morally preferable and functionally essential. Frequently, such terms as ‘hegemony,’ ‘primacy,’ ‘indispensable nation,’ ‘American exceptionalism’ or ‘global leadership’ were used interchangeably to describe both the dominant position of the U.S. in world politics, and America’s special responsibility to continuously maintain the liberal international order that was established under U.S. stewardship following World War II.¹²

Ideationally, the hegemony discourse was anchored in the belief in American exceptionalism. This widespread and deep-seated, mythologized identity construct constituted America as a uniquely powerful entity and ‘chosen nation’ with a special role to play in history to guarantee the success of freedom and democracy in the world.¹³ Practically, hegemony was guaranteed through America’s economic status and, in particular, its unique capability for global power projection and military command of the global commons.¹⁴ The *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) of 2010, for example, stated that the U.S. remained the “only nation able to project and sustain large-scale operations over extended distances,” resulting in an unique responsibility for global leadership.¹⁵ A grand strategy of liberal hegemony thus entailed both the material preponderance and primacy of American power that was

to be perpetuated, and an activist political leadership role in world politics, committed to the global spread of Western democratic values and capitalist principles reflecting America's own liberalism and 'exceptional' identity.¹⁶

Underlying the engagement discourse in turn was the assessment that the U.S. was experiencing a period of relative decline, with its hegemonic 'unipolar moment' after the end of the Cold War giving way to a 'post-American world.'¹⁷ While the U.S. was expected to remain the most powerful actor in the international system for the foreseeable future, it was characterized as *primus inter pares* rather than a quasi-imperial colossus or unchecked global 'hyper-power.' Instead, the U.S. had to engage with rising powers to maintain a liberal order that could no longer rely on the sole leadership of just one dominant actor.¹⁸ Rather than the use of America's unmatched military power, this discourse emphasized diplomacy, economic interdependence, 'soft power,' and the importance of international organizations and multilateral institutions. High-profile U.S. government institutions like the National Intelligence Council (NIC), leading public intellectuals such as Fareed Zakaria and Zbigniew Brzezinski, and influential elite media outlets all promoted variants of engagement under Obama.¹⁹ Turning away from the singularity of American exceptionalism, a globally networked structure of interconnected levels of governance and economic openness dominated the geopolitical imagination in this discourse.

Restraint formed the third basic discourse of American grand strategy under the Obama presidency. This geopolitical vision stood diametrically opposed to grand strategies of neoconservative primacy, global leadership and liberal interventionism and thus the dominant Washington consensus on liberal hegemony. Closely associated with the realist school of IR, and such prominent neorealist scholars as John Mearsheimer or Stephen Walt, restraint was frequently articulated as grand strategy of 'offshore balancing' by associated scholars and think tanks.²⁰ While maintaining its position of regional hegemony in the Western hemisphere, the U.S. was advised to mobilize its military resources only when vital national security interests were concerned. Considering the underlying geopolitical imagination of the restraint discourse, instead of acting as the 'policeman of the world,' the U.S. was supposed to emphasize a domestic focus of 'nation building at home.' The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were characterized as a waste of financial and military resources and dangerous folly, fuelled by geopolitical visions of American omnipotence and exceptionalist hubris.

President Obama's strategic vision and conduct of national security policy responded to what he defined as the heightened complexity of world politics at the beginning of the 21st century.

President Obama's strategic vision and conduct of national security policy responded to what he defined as the heightened complexity of world politics at the beginning of the 21st century. Here, various economic, social, and political dynamics did not allow for coherent but overly simplistic narratives, supposed

to capture a nation's imagination and give purpose to its power. While not quite post-American, the 'Obama Doctrine' was characterized by a multiplicity of the aforementioned discourses and a fluidity of meaning. This discursive multidimensionality, however, was rejected outright by Obama's many critics on both the left and right. The

'Obama Doctrine' disappointed demands for a strategic course correction by critics of the Washington consensus, yet at the same time, Obama did not fully subscribe to maintaining the status quo and promoting the elite accord of liberal hegemony, resulting in the contradictory character of the Obama Doctrine that oscillated between hegemony, engagement, and restraint. This multiplicity was most strikingly on display in Obama's use of force.

Nation-building at Home, Covert Operations Abroad

President Obama reformulated the use of American military power for the pursuit of U.S. national security in significant ways, and by doing so partially redefined the meaning of America's global primacy. When Obama entered the White House, he inherited two ongoing wars; the one in Iraq, he had always opposed and characterized as the 'dumb war.'²¹ On February 27, 2009, Obama fulfilled one of his central campaign promises when he announced that all U.S. forces would leave Iraq by the end of 2011. Afghanistan, however, Obama had referred to as a 'war of necessity' that had been under-resourced by the Bush administration because of the distraction of Iraq.²² Obama intended to change this.

Shortly after his inauguration in January 2009, Obama authorized a troop increase in Afghanistan of 17,000 soldiers in response to an urgent request by the local commander of U.S. forces, General McKiernan, while an initial sixty-day review of the war launched by the White House was still underway.²³ As the *New York Times* observed, the war in Afghanistan would from now

on carry ‘Obama’s stamp.’²⁴ Following the sixty-day review, President Obama agreed to dispatch another 4,000 soldiers to Afghanistan to implement a counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy, and to ‘disrupt, dismantle and defeat’ al-Qaeda.²⁵ Input for the review also came from the influential Center of a New American Security that had been a staunch supporter of counter-insurgency operations from the outset.²⁶ The implementation of a strategy of counter-insurgency for Afghanistan by the Obama White House was also the result of an institutionalized exchange in the production of strategic knowledge via Washington’s ‘rotating door,’ linking the policy advice of think tanks and the policymaking of defence officials and security experts.

As a result of a more comprehensive three-month Afghanistan review, Obama then agreed to send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan in November 2009, bringing the total American troop strength there to just under 100,000. However, with the decision to ‘surge’ in Afghanistan, announced at West Point on December 1, 2009, Obama, at the same time, changed gear and set new priorities for the war, including a fixed date for the withdrawal of the American military presence there. As Obama declared:

We have been at war now for eight years, at enormous cost in lives and resources. ... And having just experienced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the American people are understandably focused on rebuilding our economy and putting people to work here at home.²⁷

Instead of victory through an open-ended counter-insurgency operation, Obama focused on an exit strategy that would allow the U.S. to start withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan from July 2011 onwards. After the end of 2014, U.S. troops would no longer serve in an active combat role, apart from a residual presence meant for counter-terrorism operations to keep a check on the remnants of the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As with the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq however, Obama would later have to partially reverse his decision, declaring in July 2016 that up to 8,400 American troops (instead of

Instead of victory through an open-ended counter-insurgency operation, Obama focused on an exit strategy that would allow the U.S. to start withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan from July 2011 onwards.

5,500 as originally planned) would remain in Afghanistan for the remainder of his presidency to train Afghan forces and support operations against al-Qaeda and other armed groups, including the DAESH. Overall, however, Obama switched to a strategy of ‘good enough’ in Afghanistan.²⁸

This shift in priorities from a full-scale application of primacy to greater military restraint was supposed to finally allow the U.S. to focus on ‘nation building at home.’²⁹ As Obama declared during his 2012 State of the Union Address: “Take the money we’re no longer spending at war, use half of it to pay down our debt, and use the rest to do some nation-building right here at home.”³⁰ Over the course of his presidency, and in particular his second term in office, Obama continued to emphasize his focus on ending America’s wars, not starting new ones, and to weigh his commitment to American national security against his domestic priorities of reforming healthcare, revitalizing the economy and putting the federal budget on a sustainable path. During the 2014 State of the Union address, Obama emphatically declared: “We must fight the battles that need to be fought, not those that terrorists prefer from us – large-scale deployments that drain our strength and may ultimately feed extremism.”³¹

Obama’s emphasis on military restraint, and the need to rebuild American strength at home, were directly linked to key arguments offered by prominent critics of the Washington consensus on liberal hegemony. As the realist Stephen Walt, for example, explained the grand strategy of offshore balancing: “That strategy – which would eschew nation-building and large onshore ground and air deployments – would both increase our freedom of action and dampen anti-Americanism in a number of key areas.”³²

The Cato Institute, an influential libertarian think tank based in Washington D.C. supporting restraint, echoed this sentiment: “We [the Americans] should reduce our military power in order to be more secure.”³³ When in September 2014 Obama announced a new U.S.-led offensive against the DAESH terror organization, which had conquered large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, he therefore made it clear that above all else, he wanted to avoid getting sucked back into the quagmire of Iraq.³⁴ While Obama declared a prolonged campaign to destroy the DAESH, including the formation of an international coalition to that effect, and announced U.S. air strikes in Syria, over the coming months he vehemently and repeatedly ruled out American

‘boots on the ground.’³⁵ Obama thus refrained from an active combat role for U.S. ground troops, yet thousands of U.S. soldiers would nonetheless return to the country. In presenting his strategy against the DAESH, Obama again reiterated the theme of burden-sharing that would allow the U.S. to once again ‘lead from behind:’

...this is not our fight alone. American power can make a decisive difference, but we cannot do for Iraqis what they must do for themselves, nor can we take the place of Arab partners in securing their region.³⁶

Obama was by no means an isolationist or pacifist. He repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to use military force unilaterally and decisively when he deemed it necessary for the vital interest of the U.S. – most notably with the violation of Pakistani sovereignty in the daring raid on Osama bin Laden in 2011. As Obama had declared in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in December 2009: “Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda’s leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism – it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.”³⁷

Obama’s strategic vision incorporated significant elements of realpolitik thinking and a realist concern for conserving America’s financial, economic and military resources, while voicing fundamental doubts over the efficacy of military interventions. This strong emphasis on restraint in Obama’s strategic thinking was also reflected in his frequently-stated admiration for Reinhold Niebuhr, a Protestant theologian, who had warned against Americans’ penchant for assuming a stance of moral superiority and their own innocence in conducting foreign affairs, instead of advocating a course of moderation and humility.³⁸

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Besides attempting to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama also followed a course of greater military restraint when he initiated a profound rhetorical and operational shift away from the strategic focus of George W. Bush’s ‘War on Terror.’ During a speech at the National Defense University

(NDU) in May 2013, one of the nation's prime locations for the senior military education of grand strategy, Obama declared a change in American counter-terrorism strategy that was widely perceived as an unofficial announcement of an end of the conflict.³⁹ As Obama explained in his speech, 'every war must come to an end:'

Neither I, nor any President can promise the total defeat of terror. ... Targeted actions against terrorists, effective partnerships, diplomatic engagement and assistance – through such a comprehensive strategy we can significantly reduce the chances of large-scale attacks on the homeland and mitigate threats to Americans overseas.⁴⁰

The President redefined Bush's global war into a strategy to manage an existing but not existential threat to the U.S.⁴¹ The speech, at the same time, implied that the U.S. would continue to rely on one particular instrument in America's counter-terrorism arsenal: drones. Under Obama, there was a marked increase in drone strikes against suspected terrorist targets in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries, such as Yemen and Somalia.⁴² These attacks with guided bombs and missiles against suspected terrorist targets, launched from remote-controlled, unmanned aerial vehicles, were credited by U.S. officials for having seriously 'disrupted and degraded' al-Qaeda and affiliated groups and their operational capacity. In the words of Obama: "Dozens of highly skilled al Qaeda commanders, trainers, bomb makers and operatives have been taken off the battlefield."⁴³

At NDU, Obama presented several criteria under which the U.S. was supposed to operate in relation to drone strikes and counter-terrorism policy. These included an existing agreement of cooperation between the U.S. and the country in whose territory the drones operated, the use of drones only where the insertion of special operations troops was not feasible, and the use of drones without host nation consent only if a government was either incapable of operating, or unwilling to operate against suspected terrorists. Drones were a stopgap measure, a tactical, technological solution to the symptoms of terrorism and violent extremism, not a long-term strategy to combat its root causes. Yet, the fact remained that the use of drones and other covert operations represented a powerful, if largely invisible expression of American primacy.

Violating the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other nations is fundamentally at odds with notions of cooperative engagement and mutual respect. The outrage the bin Laden raid produced in Pakistan over the covert infiltration of Pakistani territory in May 2011 triggered a political fallout that has never been fully resolved.⁴⁴ Furthermore, as McCrisken and Phythian have pointed out, Obama's use of drones raised fundamental questions over the "morality, legitimacy, accountability, and proportionality" of targeted killings and U.S. counter-terrorism policy in general.⁴⁵ According to Dennis Blair, former U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Obama's signature counter-terrorism policy was politically advantageous: "low cost, no U.S. casualties, gives the appearance of toughness. It plays well domestically, and it is unpopular only in other countries."⁴⁶

In combination with the emphasis on Special Forces, as highlighted by the assassination of Osama bin Laden by U.S. Navy SEALs, the suspected use of cyber technologies against Iran's nuclear program, such as the 'stuxnet' computer virus, and the comprehensive surveillance activities by the National Security Agency (NSA), revealed by the agency's former contractor Edward Snowden, President Obama reformulated the exercise of U.S. hegemony in surprising ways.⁴⁷ This also found a particular echo in American popular culture, from the Pentagon-supported and Navy-produced *Act of Valor*, to the immensely successful *Call of Duty* videogame franchise, which regularly featured the use of drones and U.S. special operations soldiers in global counter-terrorism campaigns. A prominent example was also Katherine Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* (2013) on the CIA's ten-year hunt for Osama bin Laden, which had official assistance from the White House to popularize what may be Obama's most significant national security achievement.

Yet Obama's aggressive counter-terrorism policy also counter-acted his pledge to seek a 'new beginning' with Muslim countries. According to opinion polls, in the Middle East hostility towards the U.S. was higher in 2013 than when Obama became President.⁴⁸ Aside from assurances by U.S. officials, inducing the President, that U.S. actions were 'effective' and 'legal,' and that drone targets would be carefully selected and 'collateral damage' kept to a minimum, no fundamental change of policy was likely to occur under President Obama. Remarkably, Obama was directly involved in approving the individual targets of drone strikes,⁴⁹ a personal participation of an American president in the details of military operations not seen since President Lyndon B. Johnson personally approved targets for U.S. air strikes over North Vietnam.

President Obama's vision of engagement attempted to balance a tacit appreciation for an emerging 'post-American world' with a continued emphasis on American hegemony and global leadership. A similar tension existed between the President's repeated insistencies that the 'tide of war' was receding and Obama's increased use of covert operations, drone strikes and secret intelligence assets abroad. While the era of large-scale American counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan was ending, the U.S. continued to wage a war from the shadows against suspected terrorists and their networks. These covert tools of American primacy demonstrated a continued reliance on unilateralism, and the global projection of military power in the pursuit of U.S. national security, but with almost no risk of American casualties, and

President Obama's vision of engagement attempted to balance a tacit appreciation for an emerging 'post-American world' with a continued emphasis on American hegemony and global leadership.

far fewer financial resources required. Practically, the use of these covert instruments of American power did fall in line with Obama's verdict that U.S. national security should be pursued more cost-

effectively, with less direct military involvement on the ground, and less burden on the American taxpayer. Obama therefore reoriented and recalibrated the use of force by the U.S., while simultaneously perpetuating the condition of permanent warfare under which the U.S. has operated in the post-9/11 environment.

Leading from Behind

The end of America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan notwithstanding, global leadership and military pre-eminence remained the basic tenets of the dominant American grand strategy discourse in Washington: a lens of geopolitical indispensability, national exceptionalism and military singularity through which America's global role was constructed in the eyes of elites and the public. A 2011 Pew research poll, for example, found that nine out of ten Americans, across party lines, stated that the U.S. either stood above all other countries in the world (38%) or was one of the greatest along with some others (53%).⁵⁰ At the same time, however, the geopolitical ambition and scope of the American leadership role were being scaled back under Obama, adding a further dimension of tension and inconsistency to American grand strategy. This tension was most obvious in Obama's 'leading from behind'

approach in the Libya crisis, and his response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

In publicly advocating U.S. involvement in Libya, the President once again invoked the image of American indispensability:

To brush aside America's responsibility as a leader and – more profoundly – our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances would have been a betrayal of who we are. Some nations may be able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries. The United States of America is different.⁵¹

The U.S. however, soon withdrew from the frontlines and let NATO, especially France and the United Kingdom, take the lead in operating militarily against Gaddafi and his forces.⁵² This new, more cooperative, and at the same time more limited and restrained approach would become famous as 'leading from behind.' The term was attributed to an unknown member of Obama's national security staff, and found a wide media echo, in particular after it featured prominently in an article published in the *New Yorker*.⁵³

The political and public reaction to 'leading from behind' was so vehement because the term seemed to encapsulate a new geopolitical vision, a new way the U.S. exercised its power and understood its hegemonic position in world politics. As Ryan Lizza, the author of the *New Yorker* article, put it: "at the heart of the idea of leading from behind is the empowerment of other actors to do your bidding..."⁵⁴ At the same time, as the advisor who coined the phrase admitted, this approach counteracted the dominant, popular imagination of America's world role and basic understanding of who the country was and how it acted: "It's so at odds with the John Wayne expectation for what America is in the world."⁵⁵ Under Obama, the global sheriff was looking for deputies. To Republicans 'leading from behind' represented further proof that Obama's vision consisted of diminishing American power in the world, and accepting American decline.⁵⁶ Although Obama never used the term 'leading from behind' himself, it seemed to fit with the geopolitical vision of America's changed role in a more interdependent world that he had laid out in successive statements and speeches. At the same time, the popular reaction to 'leading

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from behind' revealed the American public's great ambivalence over changes in the identity discourse.

There was a growing popular sentiment in the U.S. that questioned the country's extensive foreign commitments, and that demanded greater focus on domestic concerns. A much reported Pew research poll in 2013, for example, found that 52% of Americans were of the opinion that the U.S. should 'mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own' – the first time since 1964 that more than half the public held that view.⁵⁷ This result, and similar polls like it, were promptly denounced as signs of a dangerously increasing mood of 'isolationism' among the American people by proponents of the hegemony discourse in an attempt to discredit views suggesting greater American restraint on the world stage.⁵⁸ This included key elite media outlets like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, or the *Wall Street Journal*. As such, the public's endorsement of 'leading from behind' and policies of greater restraint also revealed a widening rift between the foreign policy establishment, including the mainstream American media, and the popular sentiment of many ordinary Americans. This rift would culminate in the candidacy and eventual election of Donald Trump to the presidency.

In trying to differentiate a policy of non-interventionism and military restraint from the stigma of isolationism employed by neoconservative primacists and liberal hegemonists, Obama was again reproducing key arguments forwarded by proponents of the restraint discourse. As Cato, for example, commented: "the public is neither isolationist nor misguided when it comes to foreign policy. Americans do not want to withdraw from the world; they just prefer not to try to run it with their military."⁵⁹ On May 28, 2014, Obama made his case for greater restraint at West Point:

Since World War II, some of our most costly mistakes came not from our restraint but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences, without building international support and legitimacy for our action, without leveling with the American people about the sacrifices required.⁶⁰

Obama's careful shift in perspective about the possibilities of America's role in the world, and the more limited meaning of military force, however, seemed

also to correspond with a certain generational change in popular attitudes toward American exceptionalism. A 2011 Pew poll found that only 32% of the Millennial generation in the U.S. thought their country was ‘the greatest in the world’ – compared to 72% of those between the ages of 76-83.⁶¹

Even more striking when considering the established mainstream consensus of U.S. foreign policy were poll results about the popular sentiments of Americans toward American leadership in the world, the sacrosanct mantra of the grand strategy discourse in Washington that Obama too was unwilling to breach. As Pew reported in August 2014, about 70 per cent of Americans favoured a ‘shared leadership role in the world.’⁶² Despite the majority of popular, formal and practical discourses that overwhelmingly stressed the exceptionalism and indispensability of American leadership in the world, and the paramount importance of U.S. military pre-eminence for peace, prosperity, and freedom, a clear majority of Americans seemed willing to accept a more restrained and less hegemonic role of their country in world politics. As an article in *Time* magazine concluded: “Simply put, Obama has given the people the foreign policy they want – one in which America ‘mind[s] its own business.’”⁶³ Obama himself acknowledged this national mood of retrenchment and restraint, when he directly quoted from a veteran’s letter addressed to him, during his nationally televised address on Syria on September 10, 2013: “This nation is sick and tired of war.”⁶⁴

But while in his Syria speech Obama reemphasized his focus to end America’s wars, not to start new ones, and to take aim at rebuilding the nation at home, he did invoke the image of American exceptionalism as a special responsibility for the U.S. to act abroad when its unique values were violated, as with the gas attacks attributed to the Assad regime in Syria. Yet Obama also went to great lengths to distinguish a possible military intervention in Syria from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, from the beginning ruling out the possibilities of ground invasion, regime change, or even a prolonged air campaign along the lines of the Kosovo or Libya examples. This limited and cautious link between American exceptionalism and the use of force that Obama demonstrated in his speech was ultimately completely severed, when Obama postponed seeking an authorization for military strikes from Congress; a vote he was likely to have lost. Instead, Obama opted for a diplomatic solution in accordance with Russia to get rid of Assad’s chemical weapons. Obama closed his remarks on Syria with the following statement:

America is not the world's policeman. Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong. But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death...I believe we should act. That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional.⁶⁵

The image of American exceptionalism in Obama's speech implied a special responsibility of the U.S. to commit its uniquely powerful military assets when its liberal values were violated; however, a policy that would demonstrate this failed to materialize. While President Obama had worked towards redefining American grand strategy toward restraint, engagement and multilateral cooperation, the country's geopolitical identity remained firmly linked to an image of American leadership and military pre-eminence: the use of force in defence of American liberal values and national interests. On Libya, Obama could reconcile this tension, encapsulated in the phrase 'leading from behind.'⁶⁶

On Syria however, the implied consequences for crossing the 'red lines' Obama set up in his speech did not result in military action by the U.S., and 'red lines' subsequently became a symbol for the perceived weakness of the U.S. under Obama among conservative critics, foreign policy experts and the media alike.⁶⁷ And even though a majority of Americans had favoured a diplomatic solution in Syria, the dominant impression was that Obama and the U.S. had been diplomatically outmanoeuvred by Russia.⁶⁸ A CBS/*New York Times* poll, for example, released on September 25, 2013, found that just 37 per cent of Americans approved of President Obama's handling of the Syria crisis.

The controversy over Syria indicated a fundamental tension prevailing in American grand strategy discourse on all levels, between an emphasis on engagement and restraint and policies reflecting this strategic vision, and a hegemonic imagination that continued to represent the country's geopolitical identity as the world's indispensable and exceptional leader. Obama's political rhetoric of American hegemony in turn produced expectations among elites and the public that the President's political actions would reflect this ideational paradigm.

Yet, the somewhat schizophrenic split in Obama's grand strategy, between continued American primacy and greater restraint in a post-American world

was also present within the American populace, which according to polls favoured diplomatic engagement, and was weary of further military entanglements abroad, but was also

critical of the perceived lack of American leadership and lacking resolve on the world stage. 'Leading from behind' seemed to quite accurately describe the mood of a majority of Americans when it came to their country's preferred role in the world, but the implication of a diminished status of the U.S. was resented at the same time.

The controversy over Syria indicated a fundamental tension prevailing in American grand strategy discourse on all levels.

The established nexus of elite opinion and conventional wisdom on American exceptionalism and liberal hegemony was ultimately most directly challenged by the political rise of Donald Trump and his eventual election to the presidency in November 2016. Trump, a real estate mogul and TV celebrity, had placed himself outside the political mainstream by advocating a nativist, protectionist, and nationalist-isolationist vision for the U.S. under the populist slogan 'America First.' On the campaign trail, Trump had repeatedly called for hard-line anti-immigration measures, an anti-interventionist foreign policy, and a protectionist, economic nationalism attacking mainstream media and the political establishment on both the left and right for failing ordinary Americans.⁶⁹ The key message in Trump's populist 'America First' discourse was that the U.S. would in future prioritize its own national interest above all else, since it had been taken advantage of by the rest of the world for decades.⁷⁰

Trump's ideas were almost universally rejected by the U.S. foreign policy establishment, which saw in him a dangerous outsider who threatened America's global leadership role from within. To these critics, Trump's neo-isolationist nationalism risked the unravelling of a liberal world order to a much larger degree than Obama's 'leading from behind' had done. Key foreign policy ideas voiced by candidate Trump, however, actually seemed to reflect realist ideas for offshore balancing. Trump, for example, had called the NATO alliance 'obsolete,' and suggested that the U.S. could withdraw its troops from South Korea and Japan, resulting in these countries providing for their own defence independently.⁷¹ Both Obama and Trump, then, challenged the Washington foreign policy establishment and the prevailing American grand strategy discourse by suggesting greater salience for realist ideas.

Given Trump's impulsive behaviour, lack of coherent political ideology or worldview, and notorious inconsistency between public announcements and policy outcomes, any talk of an actual Trump Doctrine or grand strategy is highly risky. Despite repeated indications that he favoured a non-interventionist foreign policy, for example, Trump did launch cruise missile attacks on Syria in 2017 and 2018 in retaliation for chemical gas attacks on civilians attributed to the Assad regime. Together with a modest increase in the U.S. defence budget and greater leeway for the Pentagon to conduct counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere, however, it can be said that Trump's approach to national security in his first year in office combined belligerent rhetoric and aggressive military posturing with a considerable degree of continuity in practice.⁷² In this, Trump was again not dissimilar to Obama, who changed the rhetoric of the 'War on Terror,' but kept most of its key practices intact.

Conclusion

Obama's vision of American grand strategy combined elements of hegemony, engagement and restraint, incorporating a set of competing and mutually exclusive discourses. Obama's simultaneous confirmation and contestation of such diverse discursive strands as multilateral hegemony, liberal internationalism, realist offshore balancing, military primacy, and American exceptionalism, made it impossible to assign the President's geopolitical vision a clear and distinctive label that would correspond to the narrative cohesiveness and clarity of purpose geopolitical strategists, foreign policy experts and media pundits expected of an American grand strategy.

While Obama did not holistically reorient the U.S. toward a grand strategy of offshore balancing, he did incorporate key elements of the restraint discourse in his strategic vision, in particular in his use of military power. In fact, over the course of his presidency restraint took on ever-greater significance, both rhetorically and practically, as expressed, for example in the withdrawal from Iraq and drawdown in Afghanistan, even if both decisions were later partially reversed to counter growing security threats. Obama used the image of American exceptionalism to advance policies actually designed to lessen the burden of American leadership, and to divert resources, both economic and intellectual, for domestic priorities, thus inverting the conventional linkage of exceptionalist rhetoric and hegemonic practices expressed through military

interventionism and the use of force. Yet, as the Syria episode illustrated, the identity of America as a leader in world politics and policies that counteracted this identity could not be bridged indefinitely within the existing paradigm.

The conflict between the rhetoric of American exceptionalism and the political practice of cooperative engagement and military restraint under Obama revealed the limits of reframing American grand strategy without also changing its underlying identity discourse. Americans' ongoing identity conflict over their country's role in the world manifested in the domestic controversy over the Obama Doctrine and ultimately paved the way for the rise of 'America First' under Obama's successor Donald Trump.

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ARTICLE

Inter-American Relations in the Age of Trump: How the U.S. Is Losing Its Grip on Its Volatile “Backyard”

Nicolas Alexander BECKMANN*

Abstract

Since the early 19th century, the U.S. has exerted strong political and economic influence over Latin America. The painful experiences of the Cold War, when the U.S. supported military dictatorships across the region, and assisted anti-communist forces in Central America, left deep scars in Latin America’s collective memory. This article claims that while the Obama administration undertook a series of measures to re-establish some trust, Donald Trump’s aggressive rhetoric against immigrants from Latin America, his Cuba Policy, and his threat of using military force in Venezuela have reinforced a negative image of the U.S. It also argues that threats of budget cuts for foreign aid and a protectionist trade policy are undermining the U.S. capacity to exert influence on its southern neighbours. This will most likely bring the region closer to China and other extra-regional powers, which have been increasing their profile there in recent years.

Keywords

U.S. foreign policy, Latin America, Cuba, Venezuela, war on drugs.

Introduction

Throughout his electoral campaign, the 45th president of the U.S., Donald J. Trump, appealed to and reinforced xenophobic stereotypes against immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries by calling them rapists and criminals. This rhetoric went hand in hand with his promise to

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During his first two years in office, Trump reinforced a negative image of the U.S. by repeating his anti-immigrant campaign rhetoric.

deport immigrants without legal status, and to construct a 'great wall' along the U.S.-Mexican border. During his first two years in office, Trump reinforced a negative image of the U.S. by repeating his anti-immigrant campaign rhetoric, reversing

the recent rapprochement between the U.S. and Cuba, and threatening to use the military to 'solve' the crisis in Venezuela. Furthermore, the CEO-turned-president championed an 'America first' policy with regard to trade deals and developmental aid, arguing that the U.S. had been taken advantage of by its trading partners and multinational businesses that have shifted their production facilities to Mexico and other low-cost countries. His hard-line positions mark a notable reversal of previous administrations' approach towards Latin America. For several decades, U.S. governments had tended to promote a discourse of unity and supported free trade, especially with those states that were willing to support U.S. efforts to combat the illegal drug trade and organised crime.¹

Some analysts have argued that Trump's hostility toward free trade in general, and Mexico in particular, could lead to a new wave of Latin American unity and integration.² This assertion is not entirely unfounded, but within limits. This article agrees that there is an opportunity for greater intra-regional trade and cooperation, especially between the major economies, such as those of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. However, as argued below, South American economies in particular are too similar in their reliance on the export of natural resources and agricultural products to be able to push their internal trade and integration to new heights.³

This article claims that the more likely scenario is an even deeper engagement with China, which has become the region's second largest trading partner and investor, as well as closer relationships with other extra-regional powers like Europe, Russia, India, and the Arab Gulf States. It also posits that another possible impact of Trump's presidency could be a renewed attempt to re-escalate the largely unsuccessful 'war on drugs,' as well as the combat of criminal networks that operate across the region. Such intent could push the U.S. and parts of Latin America even further apart. In recent years, demands from Latin America to end the 'war on drugs' have become more prominent, while several Latin countries have relaxed their drug laws. Before these points are elaborated in greater detail, the following section provides a brief overview of how inter-American relations have evolved over time.

The U.S. and Latin America: An Uneasy Relationship

The dominant feature of inter-American relations has always been the enormous asymmetry of military and economic power between the U.S. and its southern neighbours. Throughout history, this asymmetry has enabled the U.S. to promote its economic and military interests with little respect for the sovereignty and well-being of Latin America’s states and societies. This overarching characteristic has cemented the image of the U.S. as an imperial power, and Latin America as its ‘backyard’ or area of influence.⁴

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U.S. aspirations for regional hegemony were first declared in 1823 by President James Monroe. In a State of the Union Address, which later became known as the Monroe Doctrine, the president called upon the European states to suspend their colonial ambitions on the American continent. Moreover, he made it plain that any foreign intervention would be viewed as an act of aggression and would provoke a strong military reaction by the U.S.⁵ As the predominant power in the Western Hemisphere, in 1846 the U.S. attacked Mexico and took over approximately half of its territory. Furthermore, it started to expand its economic and political control over several Latin American countries, above all in Central America and the Caribbean, where it carried out numerous military interventions.⁶

The U.S. goal to exert strong levels of control over the Western Hemisphere reached new heights during the Cold War, when the U.S. and the Soviet Union were competing over power, influence, and ideology. As is well known, both sides perceived this confrontation as a zero-sum game.⁷ As a consequence, the U.S. adopted a strategy of containment, which aimed at freezing the expansion of the Soviet Union and communist forces. The so-called domino theory constituted an ideational framework that dominated U.S. thinking during the Cold War. According to this theory, once a country turned communist, its neighbours would follow sooner or later.⁸

Due to Latin America’s long history of economic inequality and social exclusion, which often erupted in pervasive social conflicts and political

instability, the region was considered particularly susceptible to Marxist ideas. The emergence of revolutionary movements and communist parties across the region exacerbated U.S. fears. Especially after the Cuban missile crisis, Washington acted as if Latin America constituted “a full-blown East-West confrontation,” and determined to prevent communism from taking root.⁹ Following the imperative that “democratic openness might allow the Soviet Union to gain foothold on the continent,” the U.S. supported military dictatorships in almost all Latin American countries.¹⁰ The exceptions were Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Venezuela. The support for military dictatorships and anti-communist forces came in multiple ways, including economic sanctions (mainly in Cuba, but also in Chile from 1970-73); the deployment of military troops (Dominican Republic 1965); the training and schooling of Latin American militaries to suppress and fight leftist guerrilla forces; the provision of military hardware and technical and financial support in order to carry out military coups (Guatemala 1954 and Chile 1973); and technical and financial support for right-wing guerrilla movements (Cuba 1961 and Central America throughout the 1980s).¹¹

Another area of U.S. engagement with the region has been the never-ending fight against the illicit drug industry. This development took off in 1971, after Richard Nixon identified illegal narcotics as a threat to U.S. national security

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and declared a ‘war on drugs.’ As the world’s primary producer and exporter of cocaine, Latin America came under strong pressure to enforce stricter drug laws. During the presidency of Ronald

Reagan (1981-89), the ‘drug war’ became a key element in U.S. foreign policy towards the region, and was put into practice through the application of military force to combat drug cartels, and to eradicate and interdict drug supplies.¹² To ensure the cooperation of Latin American states, the U.S. relied on a controversial, unilateral sanctioning mechanism known as the certification process. This mechanism allowed the U.S. to penalize governments that did not live up to its expectations in terms of deterring the drug trade.¹³ While the militarised strategy was at first partially successful in dismantling the largest trafficking organisations of the 1990s, the Medellin and Cali cartels, it failed to reach its goal of erasing, or at least significantly reducing, the size of the illegal drug industry.¹⁴ Instead, it facilitated the outbreak of large-scale drug-related violence.¹⁵ The most prominent cases are Colombia in the 1990s,

where the fight between drug cartels, the government, left-wing guerrillas, and right-wing paramilitaries, generated a record homicide rate of 80 killings per 100,000 habitants, and contemporary Mexico, where the violence surrounding the trafficking of illegal narcotics has been responsible for 80,597 assassinations since 2007.¹⁶

In Colombia, the fight against illicit drugs often overlapped with the goal to contain leftist guerrilla groups, especially the rural, Marxist, and originally pro-Soviet *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), and the more urban *Ejercito de Liberación Nacional* (ELN). These insurgencies not only pursued a revolutionary political agenda, but also controlled many of the coca growing and cocaine producing regions. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Colombia’s president Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010) framed the fight against these groups as part of the ‘global war against terror.’ His message was well-received in Washington, and the U.S. government rewarded Uribe with vast amounts of military aid. Under Plan Colombia, a \$6.1 billion aid program, designed to help the Colombian state to retake control over its territory, the Uribe government managed to fight back the guerrilla groups and provide new levels of security in the country’s largest cities, Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín.¹⁷ Moreover, coca cultivation was reduced from an estimated 163,300 hectares in 2000 to 62,000 hectares in 2010.¹⁸ While many analysts consider Plan Colombia as a major success, its critics point to the numerous human rights violations committed by the Colombian army and right wing paramilitaries; the pernicious environmental side effects of the aerial fumigation campaigns against coca crops; the displacement of millions of people fleeing from the violent confrontations between the different fractions; and the upsurge of illegal mining.¹⁹

Parallel to the fight against illicit drugs, the U.S. continuously promoted free trade and financial deregulation. In 1990, President George H. Bush launched the *Enterprise for the Americas Initiative* to stimulate free trade, support promising development projects, provide debt relief for countries willing to reform and deregulate their economies according to the ‘Washington consensus.’ At the time, pro-market governments were in power across the region, and eager to integrate into the world economy. The negotiation of the 1994 *North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA), which integrated the economies of Canada, Mexico, and the U.S., was a strong expression of the goal to liberalize trade.

While the policies of financial and economic liberalisation were relatively successful in combating inflation, most countries suffered from slow economic growth, rising inequality, and financial instability. The region's largest economies, Mexico (1994), Brazil (1998), and Argentina (2001) encountered increasing difficulties to repay their growing debts, and suffered from severe financial crises. Moreover, in the early 2000s, the region witnessed numerous social uprisings against privatisations, reductions of public spending and employment, and government corruption. Since then, leftist or left-leaning governments came into power in Venezuela (1999), Brazil (2002), Argentina (2003), Uruguay (2005), Bolivia (2005), Chile (2006), Ecuador (2007), and Nicaragua (2007). While Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay sought to maintain cooperative ties with the U.S., the governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and especially Venezuela advanced an aggressive anti-U.S. discourse. Plans from the early 2000s to create a *Free Trade Area of the Americas*, encompassing all countries in the Western Hemisphere except Cuba, were rejected by most governments either because of the unwillingness of the U.S. to reduce agricultural subsidies, or because it was seen as an imperialist project, seeking to gain cheap access to the region's resources. In its stead, the U.S., Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua established the 2005 *Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement* (CAFTA-DR). Moreover, the U.S. concluded bilateral trade agreements with Chile (2004) and Peru (2007), while negotiating similar agreements with Panama and Colombia.

Toward the end of the decade, states from Latin America maintained very different types of relationships with the U.S. Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay either aligned completely or accommodated themselves with U.S. power. Argentina's and Brazil's engagement with the U.S. can be described as limited opposition, while Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela defied the U.S. more directly (despite maintaining strong economic ties).²⁰

Inter-American Relations under Obama: From Hope to Pragmatism

When Barack Obama came into office in 2009, there was a sense of hope that he would pay greater attention to the region's concerns and sensibilities, and potentially reconcile some of the conflicts that prevented the Americas from

forming even closer ties. This hope was primarily based on Obama’s conciliatory style and rhetoric. His gestures marked a clear departure from his predecessor, George W. Bush, who was perceived by many as a strong advocate and agent of U.S. imperialism. The Obama administration organised several high-level visits, and announced various initiatives to the region, despite a highly complex domestic and international agenda. Moreover, from early on the new president proclaimed that he would seek a new beginning in the U.S. relationship with Cuba, and loosened some limitations on travel and remittances to the island. Notwithstanding the authoritarian nature of the Castro government and its continuing human rights violations, many Latin Americans see Cuba as a symbol of resistance against U.S. imperialism, and consider the trade embargo as a major injustice. For that reason, Obama’s new stance towards Cuba was welcomed by many states.²¹

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However, the high expectations and initial optimism soon gave way to disenchantment and frustration. During the first year of Obama’s presidency, two developments overshadowed the rest of his time in office. In the first place, the U.S. mishandled communication over a Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with Colombia, which allowed the U.S. to access and use seven military bases in Colombian territory. The DCA became public after the U.S. House of Representatives dedicated \$46 million USD to upgrade a Colombian military base in Palanquero, without any prior announcement. Despite the reassurances of the U.S. and Colombian governments that the bases would only be used for counter-drug and counter-insurgency initiatives within Colombia, the secretive nature of the agreement led to a wave of public outcry across the region. The governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador were quick to denounce Colombia as a traitor and argued that the agreement constituted a violation of South American sovereignty. Even the more moderate governments of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile expressed strong concerns over the DCA.²² Official U.S. planning documents, which revealed that the base in Palanquero could be used to respond to crises across the entire continent, catalysed fears that it might be utilised to combat targets outside of Colombia.²³ Although the Colombian Supreme Court ultimately declared the defence agreement unconstitutional, the episode reinforced the old pattern of fear and distrust in the U.S..

In the second place, the Obama administration's response to the overthrow and deportation of the democratically elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, added further fuel to the fire. Prior to the upheaval, the left-leaning president had initiated steps to change the country's 1982 constitution so that he could run for a second presidential term. On the day of a non-binding referendum on whether a constitutional assembly should be established, the military seized power, deported Zelaya, and named congressional speaker Roberto Michetti president. While the U.S. government officially opposed the overthrow, it never articulated support for Zelaya's return to power, and was reluctant to join the majority of Latin American countries, which demanded strong sanctions against the new Honduran government. Overall, the U.S. gave the impression of implicitly supporting what most considered a military coup. This wide-spread perception caused a lot of frustration across the region.²⁴

In the following years, Latin America was clearly not a priority for the U.S., whose foreign policy agenda was determined largely by developments taking place in the Middle East, Asia, and later on in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the Obama administration appeared to realize that fostering a common agenda would be difficult and time-consuming in a region with highly diverse interests, volatile electoral dynamics, and multiple views towards the U.S. In its stead, the Obama administration invested in bilateral relations with countries that were interested in closer cooperation, while largely ignoring countries that opposed the U.S.²⁵ Under this patchwork approach, the U.S. enhanced security cooperation to combat organised crime in Mexico and Central America under the *Merida Initiative*; concluded free trade agreements with Panama (2012) and Colombia (2012); and advanced negotiations to construct the world's largest regional trade area, the *Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement* (TPP), in which Chile, Mexico, and Peru were involved as well.

Opinion leaders on Latin America within the U.S. often criticised the Obama administration for being too passive about the erosion of democracy and growing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, despite launching a series of sanctions against the top government officials.²⁶ From a foreign policy standpoint, though, the relatively passive stance certainly helped to restore some trust and good faith in the U.S. However, it was towards the end of his presidency that Obama undertook two actions that paved the way for a more constructive relationship.

First, to the surprise of many, in 2014 Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced that the governments of the U.S. and Cuba would restore diplomatic ties and initiate further steps to ease 50 years of tensions. This decision was not only welcomed by the majority of Cubans living in the U.S., but also received widespread support from Latin America.²⁷ In the following months, both countries reopened their embassies, the U.S. eased travel and trade restrictions, and it removed Cuba from its list of terrorism sponsors. Moreover, in 2016 Obama visited the island and gave a keynote address to the Cuban people in which he urged both countries to continue reforms. Ultimately, as one of his last actions in power, Obama repealed the ‘wet foot, dry foot’ policy, which guaranteed Cubans that reached U.S. soil permanent residency. Once again, the move was welcomed across the region, given that citizens of all other countries faced much tougher obstacles in becoming U.S. residents.²⁸

Second, during the last year of his presidency, Obama began to declassify and share secret Cold War records with the governments of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. These documents brought new light to the role that the U.S. had played in supporting military dictatorships in all three countries. The policy was widely welcomed as an important step to advance the cause of human rights, as well as to redress and take responsibility for Washington’s support of political violence and repression during the Cold War.²⁹

Simultaneous to Obama’s actions, another development favoured closer inter-American ties. Several countries started to feel the negative consequences of the end of the commodity boom, and many leftist governments started losing popularity. Pro-business governments that sought closer cooperation with the U.S. came into power in several countries, and currently govern Argentina and Brazil, South America’s biggest economies. In summary, the prospect of a closer relationship between Latin America and the U.S. never looked as promising as toward the end of Obama’s presidency. However, these reasonable hopes were soon overshadowed by the election of Donald Trump in 2016.

The Repercussions of the Trump Presidency: Toward a New Antagonism

While most Latin American countries have not yet felt the anticipated negative repercussions of Trump’s presidency and strive for a pragmatic relationship

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with the U.S. government, more than two years into his first term it is fair to assert that Trump has done significant, and potentially long-lasting damage to the relations between the U.S. and its southern neighbours. As highlighted by a 2018 Gallup report, in the Americas the median approval rating of U.S.

leadership dropped from 49% in 2016 to 24% in 2017, 6 points lower than the global average.³⁰ Although the approval has risen by 6% in the following year, 53% of the respondents continue to disapprove of U.S. leadership.³¹ Three reasons help to explain this sharp drop.

First and foremost, since the beginning of his bid for the presidency, Donald Trump has run an aggressive campaign against immigrants from Latin America, calling them rapists and criminals, and revealed his plans to build a wall along the Mexican border, make Mexico pay for it, and deport undocumented immigrants. During his time in office, he showed no signs of moderation and substantiated his controversial plan of building a wall by declaring a national emergency along the Mexican border. Trump's often blunt xenophobia reached its climax when he referred to African nations, Haiti, and El Salvador as 'shithole countries,' questioning why so many of their citizens had been permitted to enter the U.S.³²

Second, both as candidate and president, Donald Trump toughly criticised his predecessor for his policy of rapprochement with Cuba, claiming that the U.S. had made too many concessions without getting anything in return. While younger Cuban-Americans and Cuban immigrants that had arrived in the 1990s favour closer ties and ending the controversial trade embargo, Trump's promise to take a tougher stance on the communist government helped him to secure the vote of older and conservative Cubans, which were crucial for his close victory in the state of Florida.³³ Addressing a crowd of Cuban Americans in Miami's Little Havana district on June 16, 2017, President Trump finally declared his administration's policy towards the island. His announcements to impose tighter restrictions on travel for U.S. citizens, and to prohibit business dealings with companies controlled by the Cuban military, which account for a large part of the country's tourism sector, were greeted with thundering applause, even though he kept some of Obama's changes in place.

Most importantly, he upheld the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, the reopening of embassies, and ending the ‘wet foot, dry foot’ policy. However, in August 2017 reports surfaced that several U.S. and Canadian diplomats working in Havana suffered from a mysterious sickness. As the symptoms of headaches, dizziness, hearing losses, and cognitive disorders appeared after the diplomats heard strange noises in their homes and hotel rooms, parts of the U.S. establishment advanced the hypothesis that these attacks were caused by some sort of health attack or sonic weapon. The Trump administration was quick to hold Cuba responsible, even though the Cuban government denied all wrongdoing, invited the F.B.I. to investigate, and most importantly lacks a clear motive. Subsequently, the U.S. reduced the embassy staff in Havana to half, ordered an equivalent reduction of the staff of the Cuban embassy in Washington, and issued a travel warning advising Americans not to travel to Cuba. Several analysts have compared Trump’s strong reaction to the Cuba policy of the Cold War.³⁴

Third, although Trump’s aggressive rhetoric against Venezuela’s president, Nicolás Maduro, and his support for the opposition leader, Juan Guaidó, have struck a chord with many South Americans, who experience on a daily basis the misery of the approximately three million Venezuelan immigrants who have fled the country, most of the region also fears a possible U.S. military intervention. While Venezuela’s economic collapse and President Maduro’s declining legitimacy have isolated the country within its own region, Trump’s continued assurance that ‘all options are on the table,’ once again, evoked the Cold War era when the U.S. employed troops to fight communist forces in Central America and supported military dictatorships throughout the region.³⁵

A direct and immediate consequence of Trump’s antagonist approach is that it has become much harder for both sides to maintain and extend cooperative ties. Latin American governments risk losing popularity when being perceived as too close, or even worse, subordinate to Trump. This dynamic is most evident in the case of Mexico. In August 2016, the country’s president Enrique Peña Nieto invited Trump to visit Mexico when he was still a candidate. The visit went down as a public relations debacle, with Peña Nieto facing nation-wide anger for giving the political tenderfoot an opportunity to look presidential, while failing to confront him about his incendiary remarks and proposals. Moreover, in January 2016 Peña Nieto cancelled a visit to Washington after it

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became clear that the new president stood by his plans to build a wall and renegotiate NAFTA.³⁶ In February 2018, Mexico's president called off another visit to the White House after Trump would not agree to back down publicly from his claim that Mexico will pay for the wall.³⁷ Although other Latin American countries are less constrained than Mexico, his interactions with the centre-right presidents of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Peru, looked more like damage control than advancing strategic partnerships.

What makes cooperation with the region even more difficult is that Trump appears to be reluctant to offer countries from Latin America favourable market access to the U.S. His 'America first' agenda led to the withdrawal of the ambitious TPP agreement, while pressuring Mexico to renegotiate NAFTA. As outlined above, trade agreements used to be one of the favourite tools of previous administrations to foster bilateral relationships and advance U.S. interests.

While Trump's agenda has set inter-American relations on a difficult path, it is still too early to predict the long-term impact of his proposals. So far, U.S. Congress has blocked several of Trump's proposals, thereby ensuring a certain degree of continuity. First, by denying funding for his controversial plan to build a wall along the Mexican border, it is unclear whether the president will be able to keep his most divisive campaign promise. Second, until now Congress has denied Trump to follow through with his proposition to cut foreign aid for the country's long-term ally Colombia by 35%.³⁸ Third, Congress still has to approve a new trade agreement between the United States, Mexico, and Canada (USMCA), which is set to replace NAFTA. While USMCA foresees tighter environmental and labour standards and imposes a quota on Mexican and Canadian automobile production, a congressionally mandated analysis shows that its impact on U.S. growth will be negligible. Hence, it is far from certain that Trump will be able ensure congressional support.³⁹ Until then, NAFTA will continue to regulate commerce between the three countries.

The fact that Mexico was able to accommodate Trump's protectionism and negotiate a new agreement, has so far protected the country from the potential repercussions of an interrupted trade relationship with the U.S. Since NAFTA

came into force in 1994, the Mexican economy has become highly dependent on commerce with its northern neighbour. From 1994 to 2015, Mexico increased its exports to the U.S. from \$51.2bn to \$309.2bn, constituting 81.24% of its entire exports, and about 27% of its GDP.⁴⁰ Hence, any serious disruption of trade with the U.S. carries the potential of devastating the Mexican economy. While it is unclear what will happen should the U.S. Congress reject USMCA, at least for now Mexico has managed to avoid the worst-case scenario.

Some analysts and policymakers have expressed optimism that the United States’ increasing protectionism will promote Latin American unity and economic integration.⁴¹ There certainly is a window of opportunity for the region to move closer together and establish new economic links. Mexico in particular will be eager to find new markets for its growing electronics sector. Moreover, other large economies like Argentina and Brazil are sufficiently diverse to gain from intra-regional trade liberalisations. However, most countries in the region are strongly dependent on the export of primary goods, including oil, gas, minerals, and agricultural products. The biggest markets for these products are not within the region, but in the U.S., East Asia, and to some extent Europe. Sharing similar export portfolios implies that even if Latin American countries do lower their barriers, intra-regional trade would not necessarily increase. The case of the *Pacific Alliance* exemplifies this point. In 2012, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru concluded negotiations for the new trade bloc. Even though its members eliminated the tariffs on 92% of all goods, trade between them has actually decreased since 2013.⁴² Unless the region develops a coherent plan to move beyond its current centre-periphery model of exporting primary goods, and establishes new ways to diversify its individual economies, the effects of trade liberalisation within the region will continue to be highly constrained. The more likely scenario in the short and medium term is increasing engagement with external actors, ranging from China to the European Union.

Many leading publications and experts have argued that China will be the main beneficiary of the U.S. retreat.⁴³ Data on trade and investment supports this argument. From 2000 to 2015, Sino-Latin trade has grown from \$12.5bn to \$234.7bn. China currently exports \$131bn to the region, and imports \$104bn worth of products from Latin America.⁴⁴ In 2015, the Chinese government signed a series of agreements promising to bring trade up to

\$500bn and increase investments from 85bn to \$250bn.⁴⁵ Furthermore, since the U.S. withdrew from the TPP, which was widely perceived as a geopolitical instrument to contain the influence of China in the Pacific Rim, Chinese leaders have wasted no time in initiating negotiations for a new agreement. In March 2017, ministers and high-level representatives of the states that formed part of the TPP, as well as China, Colombia, and South Korea, met for the first time in Viña del Mar, Chile, to discuss future trade relations.

However, not everybody in Latin America is excited about China's rising influence. A common criticism is that current trade patterns favour China more than Latin America. Iron, copper, oil, and soybeans constitute about three quarters of Latin American exports to China, while almost all of the imports are cheap manufactures. Many economists believe that these imports undermine domestic industries, and are partly responsible for the region's de-industrialisation. Moreover, when China's economic growth started to slow down in 2015, Latin American exports shrank, while imports from China remained stable. This created a trade deficit of \$27bn.⁴⁶ Despite these concerns, U.S. protectionism will make it easier for Chinese leaders to accomplish their strategic objectives in the Western Hemisphere. These objectives are not entirely economic, but also stretch into the realm of security. In March 2017, China opened a new space-monitoring base in Neuquén, Argentina, whose parabolic antennae are suspected to have some military uses.⁴⁷ Moreover, 11 of the 20 states that have full diplomatic relations with Taiwan are located in Latin America and the Caribbean. In June 2017, however, Panama became the latest of many Latin American countries to cut formal ties with Taiwan, stating that 'Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory.'⁴⁸

China is hardly the only external actor trying to improve its relationship with the region. In a 2017 visit to Argentina and Mexico, Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel campaigned for both countries to stay within the Paris agreement and commit to free trade, while offering new investments and trade opportunities. Moreover, since the early 2000s several states from the region have increased cooperation, and held regular summits with India, South Africa, and the Arab Gulf States. The most prominent example is the case of the BRICS (acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), which have held yearly summits since 2009 and have created a set of new institutions and cooperation mechanisms in the areas of development and finance. In the same period, Russia increased its profile in the region,

offering political support to regimes that are critical of the U.S., including Cuba and Venezuela, and selling military hardware to several states from Latin America.⁴⁹ It can be expected that the Trump administration’s protectionism and antagonism will facilitate and deepen these linkages.

While these developments are likely to weaken U.S. influence, the country still has strong interests in the region. Most importantly, the Western Hemisphere is home to a powerful complex of criminal organisations. This network is dominated by Mexican cartels, whose main revenue is the extremely lucrative drugs market in the U.S. At the same time, Central American street gangs like MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang, which cooperate closely with Mexican cartels, have managed to control large territories in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the so-called Northern Triangle.⁵⁰ These territories provide an important transportation route for Andean cocaine. In recent years, the Northern Triangle has become the world’s most violent region after Syria, with 15,000 killings per year. This unprecedented level of homicides is largely responsible for the 200,000 Central Americans that flee into Mexico each year, hoping to enter and stay in the U.S.⁵¹ While the Obama administration attempted to address some of the root causes of this growing humanitarian crisis, by financing justice and security reforms, as well as prevention and development programs, Trump has threatened on numerous occasions to withdraw foreign aid if Central American countries fail to stop the flow of migrants.⁵² At the same time, the Trump administration has made it clear that it wants to cut back the influence of organised crime, while promising a tougher stance on illegal drugs, including marijuana, whose use for recreational purposes has become legal in nine U.S. states.⁵³ Hence, many experts assume that Trump’s government may attempt to re-escalate the ‘war on drugs’ and militarize its foreign policy towards Central America.⁵⁴

A re-escalation of the ‘war on drugs’ has the potential to alienate the U.S. even further from the rest of the region. Much of Latin America has become tired of the futile military campaigns to combat the supply of drugs, which are responsible for far more deaths and damage than drug consumption. Furthermore, over the past decade, several countries from the region have advanced significant changes to their drug policies, including the decriminalisation of marijuana and other mood-enhancing substances (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico), the legalisation of medical marijuana or cannabis oil (Argentina, Chile,

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Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay), the self-cultivation of marijuana plants (Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Uruguay), and in the case of Uruguay, the legalisation of the production, sale, and recreational consumption of marijuana. Ultimately, in

Bolivia the government of Evo Morales (2006-), a former coca grower, implemented a new system of “social control” to regulate cultivations of the coca crop.⁵⁵ This change of direction will make it harder for the U.S. to project an aggressive counter-narcotics strategy beyond Central America.

However, Central America is not the only region that could be affected. From 2012 to 2016, Colombian coca cultivation exploded from 78,000 to 188,000 hectares, underlining the country’s role as the world’s principal coca producer and cocaine manufacturer.⁵⁶ The upsurge of coca cultivation comes at a crucial time for Colombia. After four years of negotiations, the country has started to implement a peace accord with the FARC insurgency. While several parts of the treaty have been implemented successfully, including the decommissioning of 7,134 weapons by the United Nations, colossal challenges remain regarding the governance of territories that were previously under FARC control.⁵⁷ In many parts of the country, armed groups, including former FARC fractions, have started taking over territories. It is evident that without external help the Colombian state will not be able to enforce its power in some of the remote regions that lack infrastructure, and whose hills and jungles provide generous safe havens for armed non-state actors. While the Obama administration granted Colombia a mild increase in foreign aid to help the country implement the peace accord, Trump’s 2018 and 2019 budget proposals planned to reduce aid to Colombia by about 35%. Although so far U.S. Congress has refused these cuts, it is possible that future aid will depend on a more aggressive counter-narcotics strategy, including the highly controversial aerial fumigation campaigns.⁵⁸ While the election of Ivan Duque as Colombia’s new president in June 2018 facilitated closer cooperation, there are significant legal and institutional obstacles, especially against the spraying of the crop desiccant glyphosate and its environmental side effects.⁵⁹

Conclusion

While this article has portrayed a pessimistic picture of inter-American relations under Trump, some effects of his presidency may actually facilitate more functional relationships in the future. First and foremost, Trump’s unconventional style of governance, including his disregard for established rules, procedures, and institutions, has inspired numerous comparisons to Latino-style populism.⁶⁰ For that reason, future U.S. presidents, state officials, and business leaders will have a harder time lecturing their Latin American counterparts on what democratic governance should look like. This could enable a stronger, and less politicised emphasis on issues of common interest in the areas of trade, migration, organised crime, infrastructure, and the environment. More importantly, as outlined above, the emergence of China as a major player in the region does not only bring benefits and will likely continue to cause frustration. This may draw some countries closer to the U.S., a nation that they know and understand much better than distant China. However, with China and other external actors increasing their profile in the region, the U.S. will have to bring more to the table to foster cooperative ties and advance its interests.

Overall, an increasingly multipolar world offers many new opportunities for Latin America, especially when the demand for commodities starts picking up again. However, if the region wants to move beyond its peripheral position of exporting primary goods, it should develop a clearer and better idea of how it wants to associate itself with the rest of the world, and what type of partnerships are useful.

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ARTICLE

Trump's Wisdom for the International Political Economy: A Way to Collective Carnage?

Fatma Nil DÖNER*

Abstract

This study intends to analyse the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency of the U.S. as a symptom of the economic aftershocks to the 2008 financial crisis at the global and domestic levels. In response to the financial crisis and structural shifts in the global economy, Trump is pursuing protectionist measures which are being legitimized domestically by applying exclusionary policies based on a logic of "us vs. them." By focusing on Trump's public speeches, U.S. National Security Strategy and budgetary documents, this study will explore how Trump's intention of "America First" resonates in the political economy and foreign policy plans of the U.S. It claims that the Trump administration, which faces a legitimacy crisis at home and abroad, will continue to be deeply affected by its policy decisions considering, first, protectionism versus openness in foreign affairs and second, equality versus efficiency in domestic politics. The Trump administration may also hasten the demise of the global system by its isolationist policies which encourage polarization.

Keywords

Trump, political economy, America First, international institutions, populism, legitimacy crisis.

Introduction

The 2008 financial crisis, also known as the "global financial crisis," is the most serious economic slowdown since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

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The contagion effect of the crisis started in the U.S., as the mortgage crisis spread quickly to the entire U.S. financial sector and then to the European markets. The pace of the recovery from the crisis has been unusually slow. Nevertheless, a decade after the Great Recession, the world economy is gathering speed considering world economic growth prospects and respective financial readjustment. Besides, the states have recently faced the same fundamental challenge: severe socio-political aftershocks of financial crises.

This study intends to analyse the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency of the U.S. as a symptom of these aftershocks in the form of a legitimacy crisis. In the global system, unfair trade, freeloading allies, and deep engagement; and in domestic politics, uneven distribution of gains have caused redistribution problems. In response to the financial crisis and structural shifts in the global economy, Trump is pursuing protectionist measures. For domestic politics, he proposes exclusionary policies based on a logic of “us vs. them.” This study will explore how Trump’s intention of “America First” resonates in his administration’s political economy and foreign policy plans by focusing on the National Security Strategy, public speeches, and the budgetary documents of the Trump era. Trump could use his capacity to motivate millions to support him for revising the unfair system, or on the contrary, he could increase polarization despite the challenges and constraints by institutions and diverse operational costs. Unfortunately, amelioration of the existing global and domestic redistribution crises in the political economy seems unlikely.

America First

The election of Donald Trump to the U.S. Presidency in November 2016 was the precursor of a new stance on the governance and political economy of the U.S. as well as its foreign policy inclinations.

The election of Donald Trump to the U.S. Presidency in November 2016 was the precursor of a new stance on the governance and political economy of the U.S. as well as its foreign policy inclinations. Speculation about his potential

grand strategy and change in policies arose even before the Republican primary elections. While Obama was maliciously being criticized for the absence of a grand strategy in his administration, recently even the possibility of a “Trump’s grand strategy” is disquieting. Even if the notion that Donald Trump has a grand strategy were debatable, a review of the president’s records

and claims points out the extent to which he intends to disrupt the principles of previous administrations especially on the U.S. political economy.¹

Nowhere has this disruption been more apparent than in Trump's "America First" vision. In his speech as a Republican presidential frontrunner Trump stated: "Americans must know that we're putting the American people first again on trade. So true. On trade, on immigration, on foreign policy. The jobs, incomes and security of the American worker will always be my first priority."² The "America First" slogan inherently attempts to control the flow of goods and people into the U.S. Trump's most famous campaign pledge, constructing a "big, beautiful wall" along the southern border of the U.S. with Mexico, fits exactly to this strategy. In addition, his intention to increase tariffs on imports especially from China, Germany, and Mexico, to end the U.S. involvement with multilateral and regional agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and to overcome the overburden of the U.S. in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are reverberations of the "America First" strategy. These radical policy ideas and proposals are confusing for U.S. citizens and people around the world alike, and it remains unclear how the political economy of the U.S. will be formulated, what the role of the U.S. in world politics will be, and whether the liberal international order will endure.

Since discussions of these ideas have risen inside and outside the U.S., epitomized by the threat of mercantilism, nationalism, and isolationism, the U.S. administration has tried to tone down its over-protectionist policies, at least in rhetoric. After Trump's meetings in Poland and at the Group 20 summit conference in Germany, National Security Adviser H. Raymond McMaster and the director of the National Economic Council Gary Cohn indicated in a *New York Times* op-ed that "America First is grounded in American values – values that not only strengthen America but also drive progress throughout the world. America champions the dignity of every person, affirms the equality of women, celebrates innovation, protects freedom of speech and of religion, and supports free and fair markets."³ In a similar vein, Trump told global business leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 26, 2018, "America first when it comes to trade but it does not mean America alone."⁴ These are the messages to calm down U.S. allies and to show them that the U.S. will not draw apart from liberal values that promote cooperation, competition, and respect for differences.

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Contradictory public releases and lack of details have produced vagueness and uncertainty about the “America First” strategy. However, despite the mixed messages, it is clear that this strategy is

not intended to undermine the global leadership role of the U.S. to work for the benefit of the global community. Instead, it refers to the idea that all nations have their own interests and henceforth the U.S. will take a more audacious approach to defend its own interests.

What if all countries were to follow this approach and put their interests first by running the risk of conflict as in the Hobbesian international system? Herein, Trump resuscitates an old concept, “mercantilism,” by challenging the existing political economic order and his predecessors, including Obama. Mercantilism, often called “economic nationalism,” describes a set of policies that determined the political power and economic relations of the states in Europe from the fifteenth century to the late seventeenth century. It referred to the notion of the nation-state as the most important economic actor in a system where states increased their power by the transfer of wealth consisting of gold and silver from overseas colonies to mainland Europe. The goal of mercantilism was to achieve a favourable trade balance by increasing exports and keeping imports as low as possible. From the beginning, these policies tended to promote protectionism and conflicts among rival powers that led to wars. This aggressive form of mercantilism operating on the basis of expansionism and war, especially over colonies, encouraged “beggar-thy-neighbour policies.”⁵ It is unsurprising, therefore, that in a mercantile system all instruments of state power could be operated to directly benefit the home-country despite the deprivation of other states.

In the context of the “America First” vision, political and economic nationalism, a zero-sum conception of international trade, and protectionism are inherited from mercantilism.⁶ Historically, mercantilist policies have tended to be revisited during times of cataclysm when states struggle to respond to an upheaval. In this case, the Trump administration needs to tackle the effects of the 2008 financial crises to increase employment, growth and investment rates, and to bring emerging global powers such as China into line. Such posturing is highly in parallel with Trump’s rhetoric of “making America great again.”⁷ Trade protectionism under mercantilist policies, as proposed by

Trump, can be implemented until domestic infant industries become entirely viable. Nevertheless, the core idea behind mercantilism that one country can develop only at the expense of other is treacherous. The aim of mercantilism, namely diminishing the wealth of neighbours as well as rivals, actually cannot be sustainable in the long run. How can a nation continue to make advances in exports where neighbouring nations have no capacity to import? It is not surprising that mercantilist periods are characterized by the frequency and intensity of warfare and result in economic recession.

Be they political economy or value-based, Trump's policy decisions threaten the open trade system and an international order based on the alliances system. The "America First" strategy has already traumatized the political economic and security ties that have sustained the liberal international order for decades. According to liberal theory, inasmuch as exchange by individuals free from government intervention will realize individuals' self-interests and simultaneously benefit the entire society, free trade between nations will foster wealth among nations as well. Therefore, in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith argues that the intention of statecraft should not be to injure competitors but to form a setting conducive to trade and interaction for collective well-being. Since the end of World War II, U.S. statecraft has served the international order on the basis of economic interdependence, multilateralism, and strategic alliance networks.⁸ After the Cold War era, the globalization process ultimately hastened financial flows and trade worldwide under U.S. leadership. An international order reliant on U.S. leadership was constructed on three primary sources: theory of comparative advantage, theory of economic interdependence among countries, and the protection of the U.S. from foreign threats.⁹ First, according to comparative advantage theory, when countries specialize in the production of particular goods and services considering their unique resources and conditions, exporting and importing countries will both benefit from trade. Each country can find buyers to deplete the surplus of its production and buy goods and services which are unavailable at home or found cheaper abroad (win-win situation). Second, it is believed that this specialization or division of labour among nations, where each nation depends on others for various economic variables such as goods, services, and financial flows in order to survive, promotes stable and peaceful international conditions. Trade relations tend to reduce the probability of war and conflict among states. Finally, far-reaching liberalization and open trading systems promote American power and interests and protect the U.S.

from foreign threats. In other words, the U.S. commitment to liberal values, international institutions, and regimes is a utilitarian tool it uses to pursue its own economic well-being and national security goals.

Few, if any, of these policies align with Trump's core views. His affinity for nationalist and protectionist approaches and a zero-sum logic of trade highly contradict the liberal policies of his predecessors regarding the U.S. involvement in alliances and multilateral agreements in order to guarantee financial, commercial, and security dominance globally. What if Trump's policies antagonize the values of allies and alliances? What does it mean for the political economy and foreign policy of the U.S.? After Trump's first year in office, the question that confronts his administration and the world is the same: can the policies offered by Trump sustain the U.S.-led international order while putting forward some revisions primarily about sharing the costs of building alliances – or could the U.S. dismantle the existing liberal system in the name of isolationist and protectionist policies at home? The following sections attempt to investigate the political economy strategies of the U.S. on the basis of official documents and public speeches regarding national security and trade.

National Security Strategy

In order to analyse how U.S. presidents see their country in the world and the missions they will undertake, it is necessary to scrutinize administrations' national security strategies. In the previous sixteen national security strategies, including Obama's, some common principles were exalted: the U.S. would not hesitate to wield its unrivalled power for the continuation of the liberal

Trump's new security strategy diverges from its predecessors on some significant points.

international order resting on strong alliances in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, free and open markets, and democracy.¹⁰ Trump's new security strategy diverges from its predecessors on

some significant points: the global leadership role of the U.S., the promotion of liberal values for the integration of rival powers such as China and Russia into the system, free trade policies, and the functioning of international institutions and multilateral agreements.

Trump launched his National Security Strategy on December 18th, 2017. This document has four pillars: protecting the homeland and the American

people, promoting American prosperity, preserving peace through strength, and encouraging American influence. First, to protect the homeland, the U.S. will increase control of the borders, revise immigration policies, and stop jihadist terrorists before they arrive and attack the U.S. Second, the Trump administration intends to stimulate the American economy and abstain from unfair trade practices that detriment America. Third, the U.S. will keep its image as a deterrent force by rejuvenating its military capabilities and demand its allies and partners to justly share the burden of collective security. Finally, the U.S. administration will promote American influence to protect American interests in any international organization.¹¹ In domestic policies, the Trump administration will focus on immigration and border control, increasing employment and promoting investment. Abroad, policies will be grounded on the challenges from “rogue regimes” in North Korea, Iran and the Middle East, and unfair trade practices and economic aggression in the world. At first glance, the Trump administration’s National Strategy seems consistent with the Obama administration’s 2015 Strategy. Both emphasize enhancing the security of the U.S. homeland against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, increasing economic prosperity, and achieving well-functioning multilateral agreements and institutions.¹² The existing similarities mainly arise from institutional constraints, the content of Trump’s strategy being less radical than his campaign speeches. Nevertheless, there are some nuances that will be investigated in following sections.

Trump’s Strategy mentions that “we treat people equally and value and uphold the rule of law” under Pillar IV. Nevertheless, in practice this does not happen to be the case. Trump’s own actions, such as his controversial statements against judges, the press and the media, ethnic and religious minorities, and gender equality violate these principles. Moreover, despite his emphasis on the role of diplomacy in the document, his statements not only about rivals but also allies overshadow the State Department and high-level diplomats in foreign policy. There are other areas such as education and research which are planned to be supported for innovation in the document but which have been disrupted directly or indirectly by budget cuts and travel bans. Continuing in this vein, the strategy document remains ambiguous in terms of both political economy and global engagement. Under the heading of ‘tools of economic diplomacy,’ it is stated that the U.S. will maintain its leading role in international financial forums to guarantee the security and prosperity of the U.S. by spreading free-market economy and by preventing threats, mainly

from state-led economies. Yet the policies of the U.S. political economy are seldom framed in ways that raise the U.S. leading role in global institutions. On the contrary, the new regime will be enhanced by Trumpian themes on the basis of protectionism and cost-benefit analysis in political economy and a new language of foreign policy.

New Motto: “The United States Seeks Strong Partners not Weak Ones.”¹³

The evolution of the Trump administration’s policies signals a new phase for the liberal system. There seems to be little room for the liberal institutionalism which used to be stimulated by international cooperation and the moral leadership of the U.S. on human rights and democracy in previous decades – at

The evolution of the Trump administration’s policies signals a new phase for the liberal system.

least in rhetoric. For instance, former president Clinton designed policies to contain U.S. rivals or competitors within the liberal system. The Clinton administration showed affinities for “maximizing chances that both Russia and China move toward greater internal openness, stability and prosperity, seizing on the desire of both countries to participate in the global economy and global institutions.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, Trump’s ideas break with these policies in important ways, asserting the failure of previous administrations’ beliefs that “policies based on the assumptions that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners.” According to Trump, “...this premise turned out to be false” and rival states keep defending anti-Western values and creating division and virulence in the international system.¹⁵

Trump’s bellicose approach is also reflected in his grievances about the disastrous deal-making of previous administrations. He addresses the failures of his predecessors, including Obama, stating that “they neglected a nuclear menace in North Korea; made a disastrous, weak, and incomprehensibly bad deal with Iran; and allowed terrorists such as DAESH to gain control of vast parts of territory all across the Middle East.”¹⁶ That is, America has been too weakly governed for decades.

Not stepping back from his pessimism, it is worth noting that such an approach to foreign affairs – in principle – is not unexpected or inconsistent. Back in

1987, during the end of Cold War, Ronald Regan called on Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall in order to bring peace, prosperity, and liberalization to Eastern Europe as a reverberation of rapprochement policies.¹⁷ Following this call, in September 1987, Trump paid to publish an open letter to the American people in *The New York Times* to urge weak American politicians to show “backbone” in foreign policy. Similar to his bleak worldview of today, Trump wrote in 1987 that other nations are taking the advantages of U.S. world governance to grow rich, benefitting from all the security and trade policies without any cost. In his conclusion, Trump urged U.S. politicians to “end our huge deficits, reduce our taxes, and let America’s economy grow unencumbered by the cost of defending those who can easily afford to pay us for the defence of their freedom. Let’s not let our great country be laughed at anymore.”¹⁸ Reagan was blamed for being feckless and hesitating to put America’s fist on the table. These comments were directed at Reagan in 1987; however Trump might say Obama also deserves this tone.

This strategic orientation is reflected with remarkable consistency in Trump’s political economy policies that intend to regulate the role of the U.S. in international institutions and multilateral agreements. The format and content of these policies articulate a new role for the U.S. that puts American interests and American security always first. Rather than expanding global prosperity and security, the U.S. should enhance its own affluence. As soon as Trump took office, he lost no time in taking necessary steps. He abandoned the TPP, which he had called a “horrible deal”¹⁹ during his campaign, is renegotiating NAFTA, the “worst trade deal in history,”²⁰ and is reviewing the conditions of the TTIP and even NATO. On this basis, his intention is to reconstruct America’s political economy and foreign policy through one-to-one deals and cost-benefit bilateralism.²¹

The TPP agreement was signed in February 2016 by twelve countries that border the Pacific Ocean, including the U.S., after six years of negotiation.²² This partnership aimed to encourage fair trade, deepen economic ties as in the EU, slash tariffs, and implement regulatory conditions. As Gilpin states, “every economic system rests on a particular political order, its nature cannot be understood apart from politics.”²³ Therefore, the aim of the Obama administration in signing the TPP agreement was to strengthen the U.S. position in the Asia-Pacific region and to balance the global rise of China’s economic and military sway. In spite of the fact that the Obama

administration promoted the TPP agreement as a geopolitical and economic strategy, opponents highly criticized the agreement for its possible detriments to U.S. investment and employment opportunities. In addition, the TPP was characterized as a deal for the interests of big companies and against national sovereignty. After his inauguration, Trump immediately pulled the U.S. out of the TPP agreement, believing that the U.S. would not engage in multilateral agreements in order to protect its allies at the cost of the vanishing domestic manufacture sector, declining investment rates, and increasing job losses.²⁴ Recently, when TPP members agreed to move forward without the U.S., Trump declared in Davos that the U.S. administration would re-evaluate the agreement if conditions could be “substantially better” for the U.S.²⁵

Other international treaties have also been in the scope of Trump administration. NAFTA, which almost came to an end in April 2017 with the threat of Trump pulling the U.S. out of the agreement, has remained in the rounds of renegotiation due to the personal attempts of the Canadian Prime Minister and the Mexican President.²⁶ Trump’s assault on NAFTA is apparent in his view of the disadvantageous position of the U.S., considering the effects on investment policies, unbalanced trade, and immigrant labour. Trump believes that in order to reduce the impacts of the unfair trade practices of the agreements and organizations such as NAFTA and WTO, the U.S. will need to increase unilateral tariffs on imports.

Even Obama, who maintained the conventional trade policy and global leadership role of the U.S. in the international order, had criticized NAFTA when he was running for the democratic presidential primary, especially against Hillary Clinton, describing the NAFTA agreement as “devastating” and “big mistake.”²⁷ Although Obama said, “I voted against NAFTA, never supported NAFTA, and will not support NAFTA-style trade agreements in the future,”²⁸ when president, Obama was not interested in adjustments to NAFTA. However, according to his administration’s strategic rebalancing strategy, the TPP and TTIP gained pre-eminence, considering China’s growing economic clout and Germany’s trade surplus. And despite the rising grievances of opponents, some members of the Republican Party supported Obama.²⁹ Trump has made no secret of his loathing for the TPP and TTIP, two cornerstones of Obama’s policy, and, as expected, after Trump’s inauguration Congress did not approve the TPP and the Trump administration abandoned negotiations with the EU on the TTIP.

Obama and Trump may hold very different opinions on collective action and multilateralism, but neither Obama nor Trump put forward a strategy to support the triumphalism of America to reshape the international order as in the Clinton and Bush administrations. Instead, the Obama approach sees the world as “it is” and deliberates on the advantages and liabilities of the international institutions and on reforms to make them more practical to bring about collective action.³⁰ In contrast to Trump, the Obama administration took responsibility “to uphold” the liberal internationalist order according to Obama’s National Security Strategy.³¹

In his repudiation of collective action, Trump also upset traditional allies on the other side of the Atlantic. EU leaders were hoping to revive their economies that had been hit by the crisis with the TTIP deal. The TTIP intended to cut tariffs and regulatory barriers to trade between the U.S. and the EU for companies in order to reach each other’s markets.³² The TTIP deal would include important sectors such as energy, pharmaceuticals, automotive, textile, finance, food, and the chemical industry. However, Trump took a determined step against the TTIP stating that the U.S. would not get involved in new deals which are discriminatory and raise new economic challenges for the U.S. Washington has already been worried about Germany’s trade surplus, which was 57 billion euros in 2016, and warned about exporting less, and importing and consuming more.³³

The ‘America First’ strategy promises to touch all areas from economic regimes to security alliances. Undoubtedly, Trump’s rhetoric on NATO being obsolete and outdated, his inconsistent position about Article 5 (an armed attack against one NATO member shall be considered an attack against all members) at the NATO Summit and in Poland, and his rapprochement with Russia, all raise the concerns about the continuity of the U.S. administration’s commitment to collective security and defence in Europe. Since the strategic Atlantic partnership is questionable, high level diplomats and security advisers have been shuttling between continents to reassure U.S. allies that NATO is the bedrock of transatlantic security.³⁴ Notably, Trump signalled his true intentions about NATO in his call for allies to meet their financial commitments to the alliance. Unofficially, European countries should contribute 2 percent GDP on defence. In July 2017, in his trip to Poland, Trump stated that “words are easy but it is actions that matter. And for its own protection, Europe, and you know this: Europe must do more. Europe must demonstrate it believes in its

future by investing in the defence of its future.”³⁵ Surprisingly, NATO allies contributed \$12 billion more for collective security after his tough warning.³⁶ In sum, Trump’s intention is not to withdraw the U.S. from NATO but to force European members to pay their fair share of defence expenses in return for the guarantee of protection set in Article 5.

At the core of Trump’s political economy, concerns about other countries’ disproportionate gains from multilateral agreements and cooperation are not confined to trade relations.

At the core of Trump’s political economy, concerns about other countries’ disproportionate gains from multilateral agreements and cooperation are not confined to trade relations, but also extend to security relations. From Trump’s viewpoint,

it is fair to say that the U.S. will not be restrained by any agreements costly to the U.S. or transfer wealth from the U.S. to other countries. In other words, prioritizing self-regarding objectives, Trump will not authorize deals that bring constraints rather than opportunities. The U.S. will not take exceptional responsibilities to guarantee the endurance of multilateral agreements in which an unfair share of the burden leaves the U.S. fragile and open to threats.³⁷ In the scope of the Trump administration, there is little room for the U.S. traditional leadership role of the past decades in international trade and security alliances. Rather than taking on the financial burden of interdependency, Trump’s vision for U.S. leadership involves forcing partners to take hard decisions, which they would not accept otherwise.

More broadly, according to the Trump administration’s National Security Strategy, “cooperation means sharing responsibilities and burdens.”³⁸ The strategy of cooperation with reciprocity will promote fair trade and sharing financial obligations. Such posturing inarguably prioritizes some partners as like-minded allies. The U.S. administration attempts to create enduring relationship with prosperous states, which “are stronger security partners who are able to share the burden of confronting common threats.”³⁹ Moreover, prosperous and sovereign states “can become trading partners that buy more American-made goods and create a more predictable business environment that benefits American companies.”⁴⁰ The Trump administration’s attitudes mean that other states, including long-time allies, should be more self-sufficient and responsible for their own decisions. In sum, the evidence suggests that the alliances will be less reliant on U.S. leadership and U.S. foreign assistance.

According to the Trump administration's revised political will, U.S. assistance should support principally its own national interests.

The Domestic Economy

Retaining the Trump administration's "America First" approach, the core of the U.S. political economy has been its willingness to spend more time, resources, and attention at home and less abroad. National Security Strategy Pillar II, under the heading "Promote American Prosperity," offers an economic program which "rejuvenates the domestic economy, benefits the American worker, revitalizes the U.S. manufacturing base, creates middle class jobs, encourages innovation, preserves technological advantage, safeguards the environment, and achieves energy dominance."⁴¹

A hallmark of the Trump administration's economic policy, and a departure from past practices, is to impose high tariffs on imports, especially those made by U.S. companies abroad in order to prevent outsourcing.⁴² Trump affirms that multilateral agreements on trade have encouraged U.S. companies to move their production to foreign countries with various incentives. According to Trump, outsourcing is responsible for the failure of business investment in the U.S. and vicariously increasing unemployment rates. Undoubtedly, stagnation since the financial global crisis in 2008 aggravated the political and economic problems. Stanford states that for a decade, real U.S. business investment has grown barely 1 percent per year, while the share of private investment in the GDP has declined by 2 percent since the rise of neoliberal policies in 1980. In contrast, the profit share of private business in the GDP has risen more than 6 percent for three decades. It means that private companies by and large reinvest into domestic projects less than their profits. Considering the increasing accumulation rate of financial assets in non-financial U.S. companies, they tend to increase their financial assets and holdings, rather than engage in direct investment.

In addition to Trump's intention to attract U.S. companies back into the country, the Trump administration will play with tariffs and other trade barriers in order to enhance domestic business. In a similar vein, imports from non-U.S. companies will also be restricted, as Trump hinted in his speech in Brussels, in May 2017, that "the Germans are bad, very bad... Look at the millions of cars they sell in the U.S. Terrible. We'll stop that."⁴³ Recently,

Trump’s policies to alter the general course of imports were articulated in his proposal to impose a 25 percent tariff on steel imports and a 10 percent tariff on aluminium.⁴⁴ As expected, the announcement sent a shock to the EU and other trade allies, who immediately threatened the U.S. by retaliating with their own weapon, trade barriers. Although the president tweeted, “trade wars are good and easy to win,” officials who are well aware of the upcoming dangers to the global political economy are working to alleviate the allies’ fears and calm down the president.⁴⁵

Despite the Trump administration’s intention to revitalize business capital spending in the U.S., however, it is not clear whether Trump’s presence will encourage or discourage investment in the U.S.

Another strategy is to make the U.S. more attractive to investment by offering high incentives for domestic and foreign capital. If you want to invest in the U.S., Trump stated in his Davos speech on January 26, 2018, “there has never been a better time to do business in America.”⁴⁶

Despite the Trump administration’s intention to revitalize business capital spending in the U.S., however, it is not clear whether Trump’s presence will encourage or discourage investment in the U.S.

Table 1: Trump Policies and their Possible Effects on Investment

Policy	Channel of Effect	Evaluation
Corporate tax cut or reform	Enhance after-tax profits	Unlikely to reduce rates as much as promised; impact on profits muted by loopholes; impact of higher profits on investment weak; may simply facilitate more corporate hoarding & dividend payouts
Trade policy; end or alter trade deals, penalize imports	Reduce offshore competition; motivate repatriation of investment	May slow outward migration of manufacturing investment; uncertainty posed by supply chain disruptions; unlikely to change fundamental pressures of globalization
Increase infrastructure investment	Stimulate aggregate demand; improve productivity & transportation	Major new spending (if approved) will accelerate aggregate demand; demand benefits partly offset by tax/user fee plans; focus of new projects may be narrow

Roll back energy and climate regulations	Open energy investment opportunities; reduce energy costs	Will allow major energy projects to proceed (e.g. pipelines, Alaska drilling); will reduce investments in renewables; energy prices not a major determinant of most investment
Financial deregulation	More freedom for financial innovation and speculation	Measures will enhance financial profits but not real investment; will fuel speculative and housing investments more than real capital
Monetary policy	Slower demand growth; higher interest costs	Trump's Fed appointments will reinforce emphasis on financial deregulation; impact on interest rates not clear but likely hawkish
Labour market and union policy	Reduce unit labour costs, enhance profitability	Measures will boost profit margins in production but suppress wages and hence aggregate demand; exacerbate household financial instability
Immigration restrictions	Reduce supply of skilled labour for innovation-intensive businesses	Technology sectors have been crucial to U.S. innovation and exports; their investments (and even presence) in U.S. will be hurt by restricted talent immigration
Expand military spending	More profit and investment opportunity for military contractors	New projects and larger margins will increase defence sector profits and investments
General aggregate demand	Increased sales, capacity utilization	New spending and larger deficits (if realized) may support stronger aggregate demand and employment conditions; offset by continued upward redistribution of income, user fees, and cuts in civilian program spending
General business confidence	Enhance willingness of firms to invest	Initial stock market rally seemed to indicate business confidence in Trump policy; may be undermined by erratic or unstable actions; enhancing business power may not translate into more business investment

Source: Jim Stanford, "U.S. Private Capital Accumulation and Trump's Economic Program," *Real World Economics Review*, No. 79 (2017), p. 83.

Some of the economic policies proposed by Trump during the election and after he took office are given in detail, along with an evaluation of their possible effects in Table 1. As is well known, the Republican tax plan is the centrepiece of Trump's economic program. It was unlikely to reduce the corporate tax from 35 percent to 15 percent as promised, but the tax bill does lower the corporate rate to 21 percent. The bill also regulates the tax

provisions of American companies abroad. These companies will no longer be excised for their earnings abroad; moreover, if they bring their income back to the U.S., their tax rate will be between 8 and 15.5 percent instead of 35 percent.⁴⁷ While wealthy investors like Trump will benefit more from the new law, among middle class taxpayers families will benefit from an expanded child tax credit. On the other hand, lower class families, especially single parents who barely gain enough to pay will be hit hardest.⁴⁸

According to Table 1, a pessimistic strand also runs through renewable energy sources and environmental policies. The energy industry endorsed Trump in the election, owing to his policy proposals to dismantle environmental regulations and protections throughout his campaign. He signed orders to allow construction of major new energy projects such as the Keystone XL and Dakota Access oil pipelines by blocking the Obama administration's environmental policies; opening and selling public land, including protected acres in national monuments, wilderness areas, and pristine lands for oil and gas drilling, and dismissing the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan (2015). Rolling back environmental regulations, Trump put forward energy supply security, employment opportunities, low electricity prices, and a possible rise in manufacturing sectors. While much of American business is celebrating Trump's reduction of environmental restrictions and the expansion of energy transition with a mixture of conventional fossil fuels such as coal, oil, gas, hydraulic fracturing, nuclear energy, and renewable energy (which looks vulnerable under Trump); simultaneously a seismic shift occurred in the U.S. energy sector.⁴⁹ Shale oil and gas are emerging as top energy resources in the U.S. By 2020, shale gas will account for 60 percent of gas production in the U.S.⁵⁰ If the U.S. dependency on external oil and gas resources is weakened by the shale revolution supported by "America First" policies, Bilgin argues that a major shift in the global order may occur with worldwide spillover effects.⁵¹

Another area in which Trump's bellicose approach in the political economy is reflected involves defence spending policies. As shown in Table 1, Trump committed to expand military spending, which will back up future investments for defence projects. Trump's budget promises an increase of \$54 billion in military spending with equivalent cuts in crucial areas such as social security, arts and sciences, environmental protection, and foreign aid.⁵²

Trump's strategy directly links political economy to defence. Since trade and economy policies have always been one of the main pillars of national security strategies, the Trump administration similarly equates economic security with national security and a good economy to a powerful military, as stated in his National Security Strategy: "a growing and innovative economy allows the United States to maintain the world's most powerful military and protect our homeland."⁵³ In a similar vein, Trump criticized Obama for weakening the military by weakening the economy.⁵⁴ Therefore, new investment and research will be mobilized for a solid defence industrial base and a vibrant domestic manufacturing sector for national security on American shores. Moreover, nuclear weapons over 30 years old are projected to be renewed. The defence industry will profit mightily from these incentives and significant investments, as will the "military-industrial-intelligence complex," but all around economic recovery and dynamism are unlikely to be achieved.⁵⁵

Why Does Trump Hate Globalization?

As explained in the previous sections, Trump's choice of the "America First" motto signals a new phase in the political economy of the U.S. In the post-war era, the U.S. aggrandized the organizing principle of the international order as the notion that the democratic states of the world can manage rule-based institutions and economic interdependency for global wealth, peace, and security. Nevertheless, Trump recently projected that the institutions will be reformed and the agreements will be renegotiated in order to better suit the benefits and interests of the U.S. Since the costs of collective action are not widely shared and unfair trade practices are on the rise, the U.S. will neither play the manager role of the global economy nor act as a global security provider. Instead of a multilateralism that is driven by principles of interdependency and global regimes on the basis of democracy and human rights, Trump embodies cost-benefit bilateralism and state-centric policies to pursue the political and economic interests of the U.S. His scepticism toward international institutions and any agreement that reduces the ability of the U.S. to control its own affairs are frequently shown in his speeches: "We will no longer surrender this country or its people to the false song of globalism. The nation state remains the true foundation for happiness and harmony."⁵⁶

Herein, it does not mean that the global order was perfectly functioning under the values of democracy and equality before the election of Trump, nor that

his election will result in the collapse of the ongoing system. Rather, as will be elaborated below, the liberal international order (i.e. globalization) has been in crisis and Trump has availed himself of already existing problems. The liberal international order or Pax Americana is fraying but, as Layne notes, “Donald Trump is a symptom of this, not the cause.”⁵⁷

The global economy, based on neoliberal policies, has promoted free markets, privatization, and the diminishing role of the state, and has deregulated financial systems over the last three decades. As a founder of new world order, the U.S. took advantage of its financial, security, and commercial dominance in the system. The dollar has long been the global currency and the U.S. has been the issuer of the world’s main monetary vehicle. Certainly, the U.S. does not need to worry about foreign exchange reserves or how to fund overseas military operations.⁵⁸ In addition, U.S. financial markets comprise a quarter of the global financial markets. Global foreign direct investment functions under the hegemony of the U.S. It is the largest recipient of foreign direct investment in the world. Last but not least, U.S. military capabilities far exceed those of its closest competitors such as Russia and China.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, gone are the claims that globalization benefits everyone: it is accepted now that globalization is making the rich richer and the poor poorer. Stokes, who elaborates on the liberal world order, criticizes the deepening income inequality under globalization and emphasizes that there are two main beneficiaries of the system: One is the rapidly industrializing economies of Asia, such as China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia; and the other is the richest global top 1 percent, one-half of which is American.⁶⁰

The U.S. used its overwhelming economic and military capabilities to spread open trade and free markets (its ideologically-driven mission) globally until the U.S. itself became a target of the inequalities of globalization. First, the economic and geopolitical centres of the world have shifted from Euro-Atlantic to Asia with the rise of its emerging powers. Japan, in its existential struggle, emerged as a power centre in the secure environment of the liberal order in less than three decades in the post-war era. The relative decline of U.S. power and the rise of China is currently a well-known fact. Moreover, the National Intelligence Council’s 2017 report, *Global Trends: Paradox of Progress*, provides a vivid illustration of how India will be the fastest-growing economy in the world during the next five years. Second, rising U.S. imports owing to open

trade agreements have resulted in declining employment and serial trade deficits in the U.S. Other challenges have also had paralyzing effects on the political and economic system of the U.S., such as the financial crisis of 2008, immigration, religious fundamentalism, wars in the Middle East that were directly or indirectly created by inequalities, competition, and exclusion originating from market-led globalization. Clearly, the global tension of exclusion and the lack of redistributive policies have not been problematized by the Trump administration. Rather, Trump is condemning the hegemonic role of the U.S. by asking why the U.S. exerts so much effort to sustain a global system that allows other centres of power to emerge and brings about higher security bills, greater monetary burdens, and lower economic benefits.

This critique of the financial burden undertaken by the U.S. in the international system was central and remarkably successful in Trump's election victory. The anti-globalization backlash has been so ably exploited by Trump owing to the populist onslaught in the U.S.⁶¹ At the Conservative Political Action Conference on February 24, 2017, Trump conveyed his message to ordinary people:

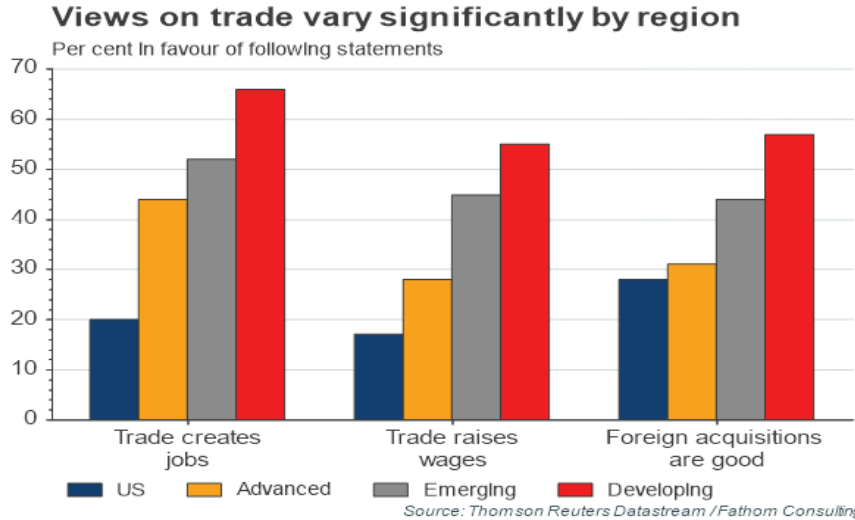
The anti-globalization backlash has been so ably exploited by Trump owing to the populist onslaught in the U.S.

Global cooperation... is good. It's very important. But there is no such thing as a global anthem, a global currency, or a global flag. This is the United States of America that I'm representing. I'm not representing the globe. I'm representing your country.⁶²

In other words, Trump appeals to the interests of the groups left behind by globalization. Among such groups, Trump had the highest ratio of the popular vote. As is well known, Trump received support mainly from two groups: non-college-educated white working class with low wages, and the manufacturing sector trapped by outsourcing and global competition. Figure I below shows public opinion about global trade. Among different regions of the world, the U.S. has the lowest ratio of people believing in the advantages of open-trade. In a similar vein to Figure I, Trump's discourse explicitly signifies the U.S. voters' sense of economic insecurity and their desire to be protected against the harms of globalization on the basis of competition.

Figure I: Views on Trade Vary Significantly by Region

Per cent in favour of following statements:



Source: <https://blogs.thomsonreuters.com/financial-risk/emerging-markets/emerging-markets-help-silence-globalization-doubts/> (Accessed 17 March 2018)

The election of Donald Trump has also revitalized discussions on the rise of populism in the world. Actually, the interest of scholars and policymakers on the populist rise had already started, owing to the fact that populist parties and leaders had achieved considerable success from South Asia to Latin America. Just before Trump was elected, the referendum on Brexit had vouched for the immense impact of the populist UK Independence Party (UKIP) and

The election of Donald Trump has also revitalized discussions on the rise of populism in the world.

its leader Nigel Farage in directing public opinion in the UK. The Trump case, however, is unique considering the victory of a right-wing populist leader in the hub of liberalism in a deep-rooted Western democracy.⁶³

Trump highlights economic anxiety systematically, in line with Right-wing policies, increasing polarization and targeting in domestic society, and bullying in foreign policy. Hall aptly describes this as “authoritarian populism” steeped in neoliberal forms of capitalism. According to Hall, authoritarian populism is “a movement towards a dominative and authoritarian form of democratic class politics” which originates in populist displeasure “which at a certain

point in its trajectory, flips over or is recuperated into a statist-led political leadership."⁶⁴ Another term that fits Trump policies is 'pluto populism,' in which a group of ultra-wealthy individuals rules or directs politicians for specific ideas and policies.⁶⁵ Ironically, the lower middle class with lower wages (older, less educated, less urbanized, less unionized) is in a rush to believe that Trump, who is among the richest global top one percent, will supposedly reverse the decline of U.S. workers and manufacturers.

In order to create populist consent, Trump, like other populist leaders, propagates an ideological fantasy among voters that the country is bombarded with threats within and threats from outside. In foreign policy it is the 'U.S. versus others,' in domestic policies 'us versus non-white ethnic minorities.' Being a *terrible simplificateur*, Trump acts as a utopian social engineer who decides what is best for the masses, and warns "others" inside and outside to know their place.⁶⁶

Another common characteristic that populist movements share is to separate ordinary innocent people from the corrupt elite. A specific mode of governance was established, fostering cultural and social anxiety among people, especially against the media and politicians. Little wonder that Trump plans to topple some media elites: "we have to look to new people. We have to look to new people because many of the old people, frankly, don't know what they are doing' even though they may look awfully good writing in '*The New York Times*' or being watched on television."⁶⁷ In addition, according to Trump, the political elites should be worrying because

for too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered but the jobs left and the factories closed.⁶⁸

According to Jacobsen and Alexander, what Trump owes to Obama and both Clintons is not less: drone warfare, bank and brokerage firm bailouts, corrupt politics, pampered market rhetoric, increasing military expenditures, mass surveillance and police state authority, and unemployment.⁶⁹ Such a policy crash instigated a state legitimacy crisis, a vacuum which has ensured a genuine opportunity for the Trump administration. Can Trump's populist policies bring the change that his supporters are hoping for? Will his policies alienate the lower middle class from the economic recovery or encourage corporate elites to resuscitate the system? Thus, Krugman questions how a populist leader can implement healthcare and social assistance cuts for state budgets

and still keep the support of the masses.⁷⁰ Moreover, authoritarian populism in the U.S. literally undermines the concept of democracy. A Freedom House 2018 Report emphasizes that under such governance democratic norms erode in domestic politics and foreign policy as well. The report points out that Trump's trips abroad rarely highlight any mention of the word "democracy;" rather, autocratic figures are praised.⁷¹ Ultimately, the propensity of the current administration in the U.S. to solve the problem of redistribution and democracy seems increasingly unlikely.

Conclusion

This article has outlined the Trump administration's nascent political economy strategy of combining isolationism, cost-benefit analysis, and bilateral agreements with a deep suspicion toward the liberal-institutionalist world order, which has been supported by the U.S. for decades. The Trump position rests on the assumption (not borne by facts) that the costs of sustaining the liberal world order far exceed the benefits to the U.S.; hence the intention is to ameliorate the perceived political and economic ills of the existing system by protectionist policies with a more realistic assessment. Actually, the "America First" approach is deconstructed in two parts: international and domestic. The reverberation of the international component into the domestic political economy remains relevant through populist policies indulging a motif of lost greatness and the need for redistribution. It is obvious that the voting masses that propelled Trump into the presidency feel the painful disparities of unfair trade practices and the hostile effects of competing emerging powers. In other words, Trump's anti-globalization rhetoric and populist policies have captured lower middle class Americans with a desire for a "white America first."

With the anchor points in trade, security, and foreign policy observed in this study, it is argued that the main problem is more than the resilience and adaptability of international institutions and the change in U.S. global leadership. The U.S. and other states in the global system face two grave dilemmas in terms of political economy strategies. The current leadership, facing a legitimacy crisis, will continue to be deeply affected by their policy decisions considering first protectionism versus openness in foreign affairs and second, equality versus efficiency in domestic politics. Among U.S. citizens, tension will rise between those who demand primacist American policies, and those who support more open, egalitarian, and diversity-promoting policies. Nevertheless, the Trump administration does not augur well for cooperation for the common good. Furthermore, the Trump administration may hasten the demise of the global system with its isolationist policies encouraging polarization.

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ARTICLE

Placing it in Context: The Changing Climate of U.S. Environmental Policy

Rana İZCİ CONNELLY*

Abstract

To many observers, President Trump's administration is a real environmental nightmare and represents a serious retrograde step for international cooperation on climate change. As this study argues, however, his zealous anti-environmentalist stance is not something new in American environmental history and can be regarded as the continuation of anti-environmentalist dynamics in U.S. politics since the 1980s. The study starts with a brief historical analysis of American environmentalism since the 1980s, then examines the battles on environmental protection and climate change during the Presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump in order to shed light on the future direction of U.S. environmental policy. Its focus is on climate change as the indicative and most encompassing issue of the day. The intention of the study, which covers the related discussions until summer 2018, is to understand the background and rationale behind policy responses rather than to comprehensively list individual policy decisions.

Keywords

American environmentalism, anti-environmentalism, climate change sceptics, climate change, fracking.

Introduction

While the question of whether and how the new U.S. government will come to terms with climate change still hangs in the air, international climate diplomacy is trying to find new ways to keep the Paris Agreement alive. This

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is not the first time that a government has decided to remove the U.S. from an international climate pact. The reason behind President Bush's rejection of the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 is almost the same as President Trump's reason for withdrawing from the Paris Agreement in 2017: it is unfair on the U.S.; China, India and other fast-growing economies should shoulder more of the burden in reducing their GHG emissions. Whether it be binding emission targets or flexible, voluntary targets, there is always something not quite right for the U.S. economy and competitiveness in the final form of the agreement. And the answer given to this claimed unfairness by the two administrations was also the same: until the burden is shared fairly worldwide, we will do our own thing.

The environmental policy of the Trump administration is in many ways nothing new, but rather is in line with the legacy of Republican governments since the 1980s.

Certainly, Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is not the only environmental commitment the U.S. government is challenging at the moment. This study argues that the environmental policy of the Trump administration is in many ways nothing new, but rather is in line with the legacy of Republican governments since the 1980s, which failed to appreciate the importance of environmental protection in responding to global challenges and disasters. Hence it is important to revisit specific controversies of the 1980s in order to understand current contentions at the federal level.

This study also espouses the view that anti-environmentalism in the U.S. is still alive and resilient – though deemed dead by many observers after the 1990s. It is well embedded in the political scepticism which has brought well-to-do outsiders to power. This might be very well the result of a deep-rooted faith in consumerism and growth in American political culture. It might also be a reaction to a lack of trust in experts, politicians and bureaucrats, given the scandalous events in the mid-1980s and 2000s – such as the mad cow disease scandal or “climategate.”¹ It might also be regarded as misreading U.S. economic competitiveness in the age of ecological crises. Clean energy investments are now vital indicators of global competitiveness. The International Environment Agency's (IEA) 2017 report states that energy generation from global renewables have become more competitive.² And American energy companies invested in

renewable energy in 2016 and the first half of 2017 despite the uncertainty and the activities of the fossil-fuel lobbies at federal level.³ All in all, anti-environmentalism has, since 1980, rested its case on self-interest and cynicism and has so far benefited a great deal from miscommunication and the uncertainty factor in science.

The role and power of the federal government are also part of this conflict. Presidential missions and visions undoubtedly shape policies. Nevertheless, the complex landscape of the federal government complicates such initiatives. Looking back at how environmental scepticism started to insert itself into the intellectual and political setting is essential to the understanding of current events. After offering a historical prelude, the environmental legacies of President Obama and President Trump will be analysed with a view to creating a better understanding of environmental politics in the U.S. As Richard Elliot Benedick clearly stated over 30 years ago, environmental issues and the national and international negotiations required to solve them are “complex, sensitive and often emotionally charged,” and “the environment is now every much on the United States foreign policy agenda.”⁴

Environmental History: Making Sense of U.S. Environmental Policy

Upon the publication of the *Draft Fourth National Climate Assessment* in 2017, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) chief Scott Pruitt stated that science was not something that should be thrown about to try to dictate policy, and claimed that the report should be peer-reviewed.⁵ The report that he questioned had been prepared by researchers at various federal agencies and had already been peer-reviewed. His attitude to the accuracy of the report, however, did not create any fresh, face-palming surprise. Already well known as one of the greatest climate sceptics in the U.S., no one had great expectations of him when he became chief of the EPA. His earlier comments on the agenda of the EPA had also raised concerns about the future role of the agency in protecting the environment. The way he describes the priorities of the EPA – acting as the cleaning-up agency – demonstrates a failure to understand the full challenge of environmental policy. It is clearly at odds with at least two of the basic environmental principles – polluter pays and prevention – as well as its original mission.⁶ However, the most shocking thing is not what he says but the fact that he has the platform as chief of the EPA to say it.

An ever-increasing environmental scepticism – and particularly climate scepticism – has long been observed within the Republican Party. The nonpartisan environmentalism of the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. seemed to come to an end in the 1980s.⁷ Growing environmental scepticism among Republicans started to cause significant polarization in Congress.⁸ The latest election has demonstrated that this tendency has peaked; climate scepticism is rampant not only among the ruling elite but also among supporters of

An ever-increasing environmental scepticism – and particularly climate scepticism – has long been observed within the Republican Party.

Republican Party at large. According to research conducted by Yale University, mapping the attitudes of the American public toward climate change

reveals six distinct groups, ranging from alarmed to dismissive. Results of this survey showed that while 64% of the alarmed tended to vote for Clinton, 61% of the dismissive preferred Trump.⁹ And even though most Republican candidates were worryingly silent if not sceptical on climate change during their campaigns, it was Trump's candidacy and then presidency which paved the way for environmental sceptics to enhance their positions firmly in the public space. Undoubtedly, Trump was not the first president to take an anti-environmentalist stance in the history of U.S. Even though some senior Republican politicians and the majority of their voters support climate action, it is not possible to talk about any positive change in the Republican Party position on climate change.¹⁰ Some even argue that the Republican Party is, itself, the main cause of resistance to climate action.¹¹

In the first two years of his presidency, Ronald Reagan's actions created a big uproar, and not only among Democrats. Many important figures in the Republican Party felt extremely uncomfortable about his policies. Believing that environmentalism had already gone too far, that it had been killing the competitiveness of the U.S. economy and limiting individual land-use rights, Reagan appointed very controversial figures (some of whom were very publicly anti-environmental) to important federal positions and took an openly resentful if not almost hostile attitude towards existing environmental legislation.¹² Nonetheless, in the longer term Reagan was not able to maintain his attacks on environmental legislation, and was forced to take a more respectful and cautious position towards the environment and to fire those controversial figures.¹³ Against this backdrop, in 1987 Reagan signed the

Global Climate Protection Act, and his successor George H. W. Bush felt the need, during his campaign, to emphasize that he would be an environmental president. Even so, Bush himself could not seize the opportunities to lead climate change negotiations.¹⁴ The seeds of scepticism that prevented the Bush administration from taking more action on environmental protection were well planted both before and during the Reagan era.

At this point, it is important to examine why President Reagan and his supporters were so critical about environmental legislation and did not follow his predecessor Carter's steps in promoting climate change science. Discussing the former point also requires asking how and when U.S. environmental policy lost its momentum and how the environment became such a contentious issue in American politics. According to some environmental historians, while preventing pollution had constituted the backbone of contemporary bipartisan environmentalism in the 1960s, a strong counter-environmentalism movement had started to develop in the 1980s. Complaining about environmental bureaucracy, questioning the rationale behind many environmental policies and legislation, framing environmentalism as a 'white collar middle class' privileged, elite movement can be considered as the key characteristics of this movement.¹⁵ This counter-environmentalism movement was also part of the New Right movement in which anti-communism and a passion for economic growth took centre stage.¹⁶ Counter-environmentalists have environmental concerns, but they believe that (on balance) progress is good for well-being, and that environmental problems can be managed through science and technology. They clearly loathe the pessimistic assessments of early environmentalists and believe that nature can adapt itself to changing conditions: human intervention is not new, nature recovers from instabilities, and we have better living standards.¹⁷ Hence, there is no reason to believe and act on the basis of catastrophic assessments.

Nevertheless, according to another environmental historian, American environmental history "is the history of a disaster."¹⁸ Disasters and related pessimism have great significance in the making of environmental policies all over the world. The Torrey Canyon disaster, the infamous London smog of the 1950s, and the fate of the Exxon Valdez are only a few to name in this respect. In order to prevent similar catastrophic events in the future, countries have started to employ more precautionary measures.

Wills underlines that the deep-rooted fear of the landscape in American environmental history has also shaped a “colonial mindset” which aimed to control wilderness and resources.¹⁹ This colonial mindset regarded nature in the new continent as wild and dangerous and as something which needed to be tamed. Traditional acceptance of natural abundance and unlimited progress also made things more complicated when modern, industrial and urban America was born. The continuous “downward spiral of nature” ends with the rise of artificial nature which was created for and by the entertainment industry and the media.²⁰ Nature then became an image and some other times an external threat to cope with. Briefly, over time most people have become alienated and disconnected from nature.²¹

Republicanism as a governance approach and ideology focuses on environmental issues only when they are perceived as challenging the liberty of its citizens. It has an anthropocentric motivation, but does not find it difficult to intervene in case of environmental pollution.²² It is against arbitrary intervention. Yet, ecological degradation can be regarded as a form of domination by some groups. In such cases public regulation might be deemed

Republicanism as a governance approach and ideology focuses on environmental issues only when they are perceived as challenging the liberty of its citizens.

necessary to promote the public good.²³ Earlier conservationist Republican presidents might have followed this way of thinking. President Reagan’s position in this context was regarded as anti-environmentalist and it was

believed even by his own party that such an attitude could not be (and was not) tolerated and had disappeared for good.²⁴ Nevertheless, the New Right movement which brought Reagan to power radically transformed the political landscape for environmentalism in U.S. Ironically, counter-environmentalists who flourished in this movement regarded themselves as outsiders, not establishment figures. They had great concerns over the suitability of applying uniform federal laws in widely different geographical regions.²⁵ Historically, the Republican Party never considered itself as neoliberal. Nevertheless, current developments show that its stubborn emphasis on individuals’ pursuit of self-interest as well as on the norm of non-interference increasingly strengthens its links with strong versions of capitalism which pose great difficulties in addressing environmental change.

Whether one counts the founding of the Sierra Club (1892) or the establishment of Yellowstone National Park (1872) as the beginning of American environmentalism, two themes constituted the basic concerns in this movement: protection of wild life and creation of public land free from the threat of development.²⁶ The urban bases of modern environmentalism tried to understand the interaction between nature and modern life.²⁷ The intellectual roots of environmentalism embraced the idea of progress but also showed their concerns about its direction.²⁸ Despite its spiritual and intellectual roots, modern environmentalism turned out to be a form of legal, scientific and administrative expertise.²⁹ Some also argue that the domestic focus of American environmentalism has not truly evolved in line with global challenges, and that rather than drawing attention to overconsumption, environmental organizations have underlined technological and regulatory measures to stop environmental problems.³⁰ Besides, unlike many of its European counterparts, the environmental movement in the U.S. could not establish strong links with other social movements.³¹ The environmental justice movement can be regarded as the only exception in this respect.³²

In many ways, global environmental change challenged the local sense of environmentalism. Certainly, the idea of a fragile earth has always been part of American environmentalism.³³ However, environmental identity in this vast country very much rests on locality. What is more, since domestic issues have more and more confronted global economic and environmental challenges, the U.S. position towards multinational environmental agreements has become lukewarm if not negative. Climate change requires in this respect full attention, since both adaptation and mitigation policies force societies to reconsider their life styles, economic development models and energy investments.

According to Paterson, the rivalry between low carbon future initiatives and carbon-based capitalism also makes it difficult for the U.S. to accept a level playing field with other economies.³⁴ He argues that despite growing support for wind and solar energy, there has been no significant constraint on growth depending on cheap fossil fuel use in U.S.³⁵ This can be partly explained by the U.S. position towards ecological modernization which was usually welcomed in many European countries as a way to achieve the third wave of industrialization – a non-carbon economy – to mitigate climate

change.³⁶ While the “wise use” movement and free market environmentalism have found wide acceptance in U.S., ecological modernization seems to have limited influence in political and economic circles.

From Obama to Trump: Climate Change and Global Environment

Climate change lies at the sensitive intersection of environmental protection and energy, so it is a hugely divisive issue.³⁷ Apart from that, climate change is always about the division of competencies and responsibilities between the states and the federal government, and about the “distribution of benefits.”³⁸ Hence, there is always the risk of polarization which might hinder federal government efforts to address domestic and international environmental issues.³⁹

Climate warming first emerged as an issue for the Domestic Policy Council in 1976. President Reagan signed the first federal climate change legislation: the Global Climate Protection Act in 1987. With this act, the State department was asked to develop an approach to address global warming and to establish an intergovernmental task force to develop a national strategy.⁴⁰ The U.S. enthusiastically joined in scientific and political debates and international cooperative efforts towards finding a solution to global warming. However, fault lines among the U.S. governing elite and between the U.S. and other industrialized countries had already started to emerge about the nature of international cooperation, especially regarding approaches, targets and timetables.

Even though the Kyoto Protocol was regarded as economically and environmentally sound by President Clinton in 1997, it was never approved by the Senate. In 2001, the George W. Bush administration announced its intention not to do anything with the Kyoto Protocol. In its view it would harm the U.S. economy, leading to higher energy prices and destroying economic competitiveness because developing countries did not have emissions targets. The administration regarded the protocol as unfair and feared that complying with it would cause turmoil in the energy sector. Some European partners considered this action as another sign of U.S. reluctance on multilateralism.⁴¹ Although the Kyoto Protocol had many flaws from the very beginning, it symbolized good will and a starting point for those who were willing to

proceed collectively in the years to come. After Bush's announcement, the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate was formed with a technological cooperation focus.⁴² It seems that the Bush administration did not want to look as though it were pursuing an inflexible and externally directed foreign policy approach in responding to the problem, but wanted to proceed in their own good way.

Prior to 1990, the U.S. had often acted as a leader in negotiating and ratifying international environmental agreements and protocols. Some argue that it was easy for the U.S. to act as a leading force since its environmental laws were more advanced than those of many other industrialized countries. This certainly made the U.S. comfortable in pushing international cooperation while evading domestic debates for treaty implementation and mostly enjoying large majority support in both congressional chambers.⁴³ Nevertheless, as the U.S. lost its momentum in environment protection, international commitments have seemed more burdensome on the economy. Every environmental legislation creates winners and losers if nature is regarded simply as a resource (as a "standing reserve" in Heidegger's phrase) and if there is not much emphasis on public good. It gets even more complicated when different states negotiate their needs and interests. Hence strong opposition in congressional chambers become inevitable when there are geographical differences in public opinion about a global challenge.⁴⁴ Socio-economic impacts – in different U.S. states – of an international environmental agreement on climate change further complicate the situation.

When Obama won the 2008 election, environmentalists were more optimistic. With the Obama administration, U.S. climate policy gained a more energetic voice on climate change.⁴⁵ In his first term, President Obama focused mainly on energy efficiency, renewable energy projects, good fuel efficiency standards on vehicles and green jobs. Notwithstanding the poor climate change legislation, the U.S. under his new presidency constructively engaged in establishing a common ground for post-Kyoto negotiations at the COP15, 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference.⁴⁶ President Obama's main attempt was to transform climate change rhetoric. He proposed a new 'green deal' to reframe discussions around climate change – focusing on benefits and opportunities rather than on the costs of climate action.⁴⁷ However, the Obama administration's various plans, including a cap and trade system, faced severe opposition in Congress.⁴⁸ In order to overcome these obstacles, President

Obama started using executive orders to proceed with climate legislation. The executive order on Federal Leadership on Environmental, Energy and Economic Performance was one of the most important executive orders that helped to reduce GHG emissions.⁴⁹ With this order, federal agencies were asked to reduce their emissions.⁵⁰ The Obama administration also began to develop an administrative approach to climate change, enabling the EPA and related agencies to take the lead in the development of a federal climate policy.⁵¹ These attempts were, however, not welcomed by the opponents of the Obama administration and instigated immense legal and political disagreements.

In his second term, President Obama seemed to be more determined to strengthen climate change legislation and action. In his State of the Union speech in January 2013, he sounded more confident and adamant about

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taking necessary measures in combating climate change. In March, the Climate Action Plan, which involved a leadership vision as well as mitigation and adaptation targets, was announced.⁵² The Clean Power Plan (CPP) was the backbone of this plan.

However, it caused great controversy over the role and authority of the federal government. It is important to note there are many differences and sometimes conflicts of interest with regard to economic, social and energy-related conditions among the states. Besides, at the federal governance level, Republicans in the Congress favour fossil fuel incentives since they often represent those states whose economy heavily depends on those industries.⁵³ In 2016, the Plan faced a judicial challenge and the case was brought to the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. The Court gave the EPA 60 days to review its position in August 2017.

In last days of his presidency, Obama rushed to provide conservation safeguards for public lands, cancelled a significant number of mining leases, as well as oil and gas leases in certain areas, and banned drilling in the Arctic ocean of Alaska.⁵⁴ Despite his committed engagement with environmental issues, however, President Obama's image as an environmental leader was shaken by his support for fracking.⁵⁵ Hydraulic fracturing of shale oil and gas (fracking) is a drilling technology used to extract natural gas from deep shale and coalbed methane deposits.⁵⁶ The mixture of water and chemicals used in the process alarms environmental groups and neighbourhood communities. The process

uses significant amounts of water and nearby aquifers face pollution from the chemicals used. It has been heavily opposed by environmentalists on the grounds of its ecological impacts and health related problems. From exploration to production and after, impacts such as lorry trafficking for transportation, contamination of groundwater supplies, the wastewater problem, land use, noise and air quality, fracking represents a real environmental nightmare for many people.⁵⁷ Supporters, however, underline the reliability of new technologies and argue for the importance of energy independence.⁵⁸

Some argue that the global economic crisis, energy insecurity and commitment for clean energy economy against old polluting coal plants forced the Obama administration to pursue a more pragmatic approach.⁵⁹ Fracking created jobs after the economic crash and seemed to be cleaner and to emit fewer pollutants than burning coal.⁶⁰ Moreover, the government planned to slash GHG emissions significantly between 2007 and 2013. And after the Fukushima nuclear accident which was caused by the tsunami following a big earthquake in 2011, fracking increased its popularity as the only reliable option for energy security. Thus, for many, fracking transformed the U.S. oil and gas sector and provided some kind of energy independence for the U.S. Some even argue that fracking has indirectly affected U.S. foreign policy and enabled the Obama administration to impose strong sanctions on the oil industry.⁶¹ Energy security is an indispensable priority for foreign policies all around the world. In this sense, self-sufficiency is important. Yet, this quick fix to reduce GHGs and energy security relies on U.S. dependence on consumption of energy and belief in the abundance of resources at home.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that other parts of the world still rely on imported fossil fuel. Even though reduced U.S. demand for such sources challenges the dynamics of the petro-geopolitics (reducing OPEC's power for instance) in certain regions, unexpected sources of conflict or turmoil might take place in other places. Such unrest might very well happen because of declining oil prices (as in the case of Venezuela) or threats to oil routes.⁶² However, it is also argued that Saudi Arabia is not willing to lose its swing power, thus trying to manipulate oil markets to make fracking unprofitable for the U.S. and to limit Iran's influence.⁶³ Hence focusing on international cooperation to reduce fossil fuels seems more important than reaching self-sufficiency on unconventional gas. Moreover, leakage of methane and other GHGs disturbed this equation very quickly. New federal rules to curb methane

emissions became necessary. These rules were released in May 2016. This was the missing part of Obama's climate strategy.⁶⁴

It is noteworthy to add that declining U.S. emissions might be the result of economic recession rather than shale gas and also that the U.S. still imports huge amounts of oil and oil products despite its shale gas adventure.

Then again, it is noteworthy to add that declining U.S. emissions might be the result of economic recession rather than shale gas and also that the U.S. still imports huge amounts of oil and oil products despite its shale gas

adventure.⁶⁵ According to the EIA (U.S. Energy Information Administration), in 2017, the U.S. imported around 10.14 million barrels per day of petroleum (79 % of it, crude oil), while exported about 6.38 million barrels per day.⁶⁶

Framing the Environmental Debate and the Trump Presidency

The emergence of the New Right and the constant 'impending disaster' themes of some environmentalist groups have tarnished the image of environmentalism. Environmental activists, organizations and even ordinary citizens with high environmental concerns have increasingly found it necessary to defend themselves against the charges of being overly pessimistic, anti-growth, and political extremists. Nevertheless, American environmentalism is not the only one suffering from the depressing nature of environmental news. All around the world, environmental groups, activists and scientists have been facing a backlash from mainstream environmental miscommunication.

In a consumption-based global society, no social movement – regardless of its underlying philosophy – is immune to scepticism. And when environmental scepticism becomes (or is conflated with) cynicism, every single discontent or uncertainty within the scientific community and among environmentalist groups might be seen as hypocrisy. Yet, the political landscape of a vast geography and global economic challenges as well as overwhelming (almost survivalist) faith in growth as part of the American dream have made everything more difficult for American environmentalists. The anti-environmentalist ideological language of the 1980s has set the tone for environmental politics and policies in the U.S. It is very difficult to defy the wide scale and deep impacts of such ideological infiltration at all levels of governance. President

Obama might have not been as successful an environmental leader as he would have liked. However, he made an effort to reframe the climate change and environment rhetoric around benefits and cooperation not costs or burdens.

Ironically, shortly after President Trump signed an infrastructure order which also reversed an executive order introduced by President Obama about risk-management standards in flood-prone areas in case of rising sea levels based on climate models, Hurricane Harvey hit the U.S. mainland in late August 2017.⁶⁷ Then, Trump underlined the necessity of speeding up infrastructure projects in response to decaying infrastructure, and complained about bureaucracy and regulations hindering efficiency, although he added that environmental safeguards would still be applied to projects.⁶⁸ At this point many started to ask about the extent to which climate change has triggered or intensified stronger hurricanes. Although identifying particular effects of climate change in specific incidents is difficult, nonetheless, scientists agree that rising ocean heat is likely to cause more intense and stronger storms.⁶⁹

Again, many ask whether extreme meteorological events can change individual or societal attitudes toward climate change. When Hurricane Irma hit Florida, Republican senator John McCain remarked that the climate might be changing and they had to take measures without harming the American people.⁷⁰ Tomas Regalado, Mayor of Miami, also called President Trump to talk about climate change.⁷¹ The president of the EPA, on the other hand, expressed the view that a discussion of the link between climate change and hurricanes was insensitive at such a time.⁷² According to recent research, public perception of climate and weather is usually conflated; moreover, climate change is usually regarded as identical with global warming. Thus, if there are record high temperatures, the public is more likely to believe that the climate is changing.⁷³ At this point, it is important to question to what extent politicians and bureaucrats who are responsible for taking decisions and shaping policies with far-reaching implications can distance themselves from such short-sighted perceptions.

Despite dissident voices, the issue of climate change is still a hot potato in the Republican Party. It seems that few Republicans are willing to publicly accept and announce the impacts and anthropogenic causes of climate change. Homeland security adviser, Tom Bossert, stated in a Monday briefing in 2017 that they would continue to take climate change seriously – not the cause of

Despite dissident voices, the issue of climate change is still a hot potato in the Republican Party.

it, but the things that they observed.⁷⁴ He also stressed that it was too early to establish a causal link between climate change and hurricanes.⁷⁵ Not only non-discussions on the attributions to climate change but also proposed policies how to deal with causes of climate change pose serious questions. McCain, for instance, was not denying climate change, but underlined the significance of nuclear power as the cleanest source of power.⁷⁶ This comment in a broader perspective relies on the traditional consumption and production culture as well as a long-held suspicion about the reliability and high costs of renewable energies. To illustrate, famous arguments against renewable energies such as “the wind does not always blow and the sun does not always shine” not only reveal the lack of trust in the possibilities for storage of renewable energies, but also a reluctance to consume less energy.

Consumerism, which affects land use, raw materials, and water use is at the heart of climate change. For instance, household consumption of processed foods requires both energy and water intensive processes. How cities are designed (pedestrian friendly cities, interconnected intercity transport systems or car-led cities and urban sprawl) also affect energy supply and demand processes. According to a relatively new study, richer countries have higher consumption rates and the U.S. is the worst in terms of per capita GHG emissions.⁷⁷ There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution.

Renewable energy is a dynamic sector which can provide a reliable source of energy in different geographies according to different needs and demands. In recent years, renewables have become more competitive and efficient due to innovative technologies. However, when renewables are being framed as alternative energy sources which would and should meet ever increasing demand for excessive energy use, then the point has been missed: renewables should operate in tandem with reduced use and not be used as an excuse for a failure or refusal to change behaviour.

The network of agencies and institutions which predicted the points of landfall and intensity of the latest hurricanes and storms clearly benefited from climate studies.⁷⁸ However, scientific staff and research capabilities which issued warnings are now under huge threat due to budget cuts which might jeopardize U.S. leadership global science.⁷⁹

When President Trump in June 2017 announced the intention of the U.S. government to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, there was a worldwide reaction. Nevertheless, this decision was not unexpected, given the rhetoric of the presidential campaign and the presence of his campaign chief (later White House strategist and senior advisor), Stephen Bannon, who is known for his support for alt-right movement and climate deniers. However, President Trump's transition team's request to name employees of the Energy Department who were involved in international climate meetings over the past five years caused a big shock to many.⁸⁰ In January 2017, the Trump administration issued an order banning the EPA from communicating with the public through any means of social media and press releases.⁸¹ Moreover, the word 'science' disappeared from EPA's Office of Science and Technology mission statement.⁸²

Trump also signed orders to back two pipeline projects, Keystone XL and Dakota Access, both of which had been halted due to huge protests in 2015 and 2016 during the Obama Presidency, and to terminate regulation aiming to protect waterways from coal waste. President Trump also proposed a budget cut in the National Parks Service and favoured more gas and oil extraction on public lands. In March 2017, he signed 'the Energy Independence Executive Order' which calls for reviewing the Clean Power Plan and reversing the moratorium on new coal mining leases on federal lands.⁸³ This order is clearly an attempt to weaken the clean energy and climate change initiatives of the Obama era.

When Pruitt asked what true environmentalism was, responses varied. Republicans drew attention to conservative ideas that pioneered environmentalism in the U.S., while others thought his attempt was only an act of political manipulation. His idea of using natural resources (including fossil fuels) to their full potential stirred once again the discussions of clean coal.⁸⁴ And at his State of the Union speech, President Trump claimed that his administration had ended the war against clean coal; he talked about the meteorological disasters that the country faced in 2017, but not climate change.⁸⁵

The current way of thinking in the Trump administration puts certain areas of wilderness in danger. For instance, the President's decision to withdraw federal protection from 2 million acres in Utah (The Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-

Escalante National Monuments) to allow hard rock mining in the area was regarded by some as a good investment for the future while others (mainly conservation groups and Democrats) saw it as a threat to cultural and natural heritage.⁸⁶ President Trump based his decision on a very old law (1872) and accused previous Presidents of overreaching federal powers for designating these areas containing rare flora and fauna as protected lands under the Antiquities Act. Now the land is open to claims from private companies and citizens to extract minerals. The Bears Ears is known for its uranium deposits. However, the low demand for and low price of uranium made this decision already economically futile.⁸⁷ The Grand Staircase-Escalante is, on the other hand, known for its coal reserves.⁸⁸

The idea of stewardship, through which Pruitt is trying to reframe or redefine environmentalism in the U.S., has a different meaning for environmentalists. It recalls a holistic approach as well as collective responsibility and action. The contrast between stewardship and viewing the natural world as simply a 'standing reserve' arises out of the interpretation of the injunction in the Bible for human beings to 'have dominion over the earth.' The dominant trend in contemporary Christian thinking on the environment, as in contemporary secular thinking on the environment, is that human beings should act as stewards, tending and caring for the earth. This view, in Christian circles, was forcibly expressed in the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015).⁸⁹ Both religious and secular views would unite in common opposition to any attempt to redefine stewardship as an injunction to open all areas of the sea and land to unrestrained exploitation.

Conclusion

Although Stephen Bannon is no longer President Trump's chief strategist, and Rex Tillerson is no longer the Secretary of State, no one can claim that climate sceptics have lost their battle. In the age of political mistrust, climate scepticism has significantly enjoyed and exploited the political culture in the U.S. Whether political or environmental, scepticism is certainly not a new phenomenon in politics. In last decade all over the world scepticism about politicians, bureaucrats, experts and scientists as well as social movements and activists has risen and in many cases resulted in a broad range of cynicism about the motives of scientists, experts and environmentalists. Ideological differences might also play an important role in how one sees the environment.

Such differences are usually more visible in party elites. A study conducted in 2001, however, displays how ideological attitudes in the public might affect environmental orientations too.⁹⁰ Results of the study might have been used as a case study on how support for environmentalism among the public has started to lose its non-partisan, all inclusive-embracing feature, and turned into something 'political.'⁹¹

Of course, environmental issues have always been political. They raise issues of justice, equality, rights and responsibilities, and our daily choices and future concerns. But they are also closely related with scientific expertise. Scientific evidence demonstrates how and why our lives are affected by any change in our relation with the environment. However, the uncertainty in which science finds the best place to flourish, has favoured the sceptics' position. Debates about the reality of climate change sit uncomfortably in the middle of this political environment, and claims that experts have exaggerated climate change for their own interests are very popular, particularly among neoliberal conservatives.

Climate sceptics have gained power in the media too. According to research examining climate scepticism in the print media in six countries; Brazil, China, France, India, the UK and the U.S. in 2007 and 2009/2010, the UK and the U.S. seemed to have the most climate-sceptic media in comparison with other countries.⁹² Recent studies also point out not only ongoing scepticism and denial in the U.S. media but also misinformation.⁹³ If an issue is in dispute, it seems that climate sceptics and even denialists gain more media coverage. Given that scientific knowledge on climate change has constantly improved, those contrarian attitudes or ignorance of climate/environment related news in the mainstream media are sources of great concern for the environmentalists.

One explanation for the popularity of climate scepticism might be that the public prefers to hear optimistic views about their future. It is a kind of reassurance against the possible worst-case scenarios. No one can argue that the communication of climate change to the wider public has been a success story. Some argue that we do not need more information, but rather interactive learning models which enable people to work with scenarios and develop their understanding.⁹⁴ However, this line of reasoning rests on the belief that public eschewing of climate change data is based on mutual miscommunication which can be reversed. Another explanation for the persistence and popularity

of the climate scepticism in the case of the U.S. might lie in the fact that well-organized, small think tanks, organizations and groups who are partly results of 1980s anti and/or counter environmentalist movement constantly fight to challenge environmental concerns.⁹⁵ Given the significant difference between the attitude of the U.S. mainstream media and its counterparts in other industrialized countries, this explanation seems very plausible. Yet, this explanation again emphasizes a false or manipulated collective attempt to affect public opinion and continue with business-as-usual scenarios in the age of climate risks.

Against this backdrop, President Trump has seemed to fuel a new wave of environmentalism in the U.S. since his inauguration. Environmentalists and environmentalism have managed to survive previous historical backlashes, not only in the U.S. but all over the world. At this point, environmental justice might be the key theme for the wake-up call for mainstream environmentalists in the U.S. All in all, Hurricanes Harvey and Irma showed that Trump's attitude towards the environment and existing environmental legislation is not in line with daily realities. Environmental policies and in particular climate change policies depend on political actions.

One might argue that current environmental issues and risks might force the Trump administration to change its attitude. Even if this will be the case, responses might only include a pack of technological fixes and short-term commitment to international efforts. A set of deeper normative issues have been challenging the U.S. energy, environment and climate change policies for a long time. Justice, equality and futurity are the key subjects at the core of these issues. However, a thorough discussion of them is beyond the limits of this short analysis. Without a proper response to those issues, the U.S. government's commitments to any multinational environmental agreement, but particularly, to climate change might be only *ad hoc* depending on the composition of Congress and the willpower of the President. It has become clear that the U.S. would have to explore and reinvent its conception of the common good in order to develop a coherent environmental policy.⁹⁶

Degradation of land, water contamination, and air pollution all threaten the survival and the quality of life on earth. Environmental change is a threat to the natural environment and human well-being, prosperity and security. Whether there ever was, now there certainly cannot be a sharp policy

distinction between environmental, economic, domestic and international domains. As Benedick points out, foreign policies are not anymore solely about borders but also transboundary issues.⁹⁷ And international cooperation on environmental issues can only be reached through coordination of foreign policies. The demand for energy and its supply plays an important role here. Throughout history, new energy sources have challenged the rules of the game in world politics. Now new energy landscapes require reformulation of foreign policies, new alliances and power structures. Sticking to the old geopolitical narratives and polluting industries would only deepen the isolationist trends in U.S. foreign policy. Once the pioneer for environmental legislation and a world leader, the U.S. is now acting as an environmental laggard, abandoning international accords and refusing to negotiate until other parties come up with better solutions. The 'America first' mindset might cost the U.S. dearly, not only in terms of global economic competitiveness and political leadership, but also in contributing to huge and irreversible human loss and environmental degradation and disasters and their attendant economic costs.

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BOOK REVIEW

Violent Non-State Actors and the Syrian Civil War: The ISIS and YPG Cases

By Özden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal and Ali Murat Kurşun (eds.)

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The 21st century commenced with an asymmetrical assault of a VNSA (Violent Non-State Actors) against the sovereign power of the U.S., and an asymmetrical backlash against this assault. The characteristics of the Westphalian world order, the Weberian state, as well as the wars that are being conducted and the international actors that engage in them have all begun to change. VNSAs, many of which have become especially visible with the U.S. occupation of Iraq, have gained significance as a new type of geopolitical actor that influences regional and global policies, especially after the Arab Uprisings and the Syrian civil war. In fact, the civil war in Syria has opened the Pandora's Box for all VNSAs. The growing turmoil, chaos and crisis in the Middle East has caused the rise of various VNSAs to the top of the global political agenda and aroused the interest of intellectual and military circles.

Violent Non-State Actors and the Syrian Civil War: The ISIS and YPG Cases seems to be born out of such a curiosity. As a well-written manuscript, which contains 11 chapters, each with in-depth analyses, it aims to explain various aspects of the emergence and expansion of VNSAs under changing global and regional circumstances. It focuses especially on the Syrian civil war and the two specific VNSAs involved in it, namely the jihadist ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), in other words DAESH (ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fil-'Iraq wa ash-Sham), and the YPG (People's Protection Units), while providing empirical, analytical and conceptual discussions of these two examples. Since it is not easy to comment on the multifaceted and multi-dimensional behavior of VNSAs, observing them empirically in the war environment where they act is important in understanding them. This book thus attempts to provide a

framework for understanding and positioning DAESH and the YPG within the framework of the Syrian civil war.

Even though VNSAs have existed throughout history, they have never had their current structure and influence while conducting quasi-state operations. During the wars in Iraq and especially in Syria, VNSAs have gone through a great transformation; they may be called “the new generation VNSAs” due to their changing nature, hybrid strategies, and the impact they have on state authority, the geopolitics of the region, and the world. Their evolution has also led to significant changes in the conflict and security literature as well as the international relations discipline. This transformation of VNSAs was most notable during the Kobani events in September 2014. These events proved that the war in Syria is not only between the regime and its opponents, but also between the VNSAs themselves, as every one of them pursued a different goal. It has also become obvious that the fight between these VNSAs is also between many other interfering regional and global actors.

Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War is one of the rare works that analyses VNSAs within the framework of the Middle East. Studies on VNSAs are generally factual and actor-oriented, and are conducted within the framework of general descriptions. In these studies, the theoretical, conceptual and empirical approach are not used and, consequently, it becomes difficult for the reader to understand and position these actors, which need to be examined on a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary basis. It is good to see that the contributors to this work have taken these issues into consideration and tried to assess the topic with an extensive approach. With this aim, they first conceptually classify VNSAs and point out the differences of DAESH and the YPG from previous VNSAs in the Middle East through a three-layered perspective, built on “actorness,” powerfulness, and effectiveness, which also give us the main sections of this manuscript.

In adopting this approach, the editors offer an appropriate way to understand the new generation of VNSAs, making a valuable contribution to the IR (International Relations) literature. While assessing the “actorness” of DAESH and the YPG, territorial dominance, geopolitical codes, independence and the ability to establish a community are used as useful parameters. Four of the book chapters are included in this first section. The second section, “Powerfulness,” on the other hand, focuses on the independent provision of finances and human resources, while offering an interesting chapter on the control of water resources. Finally the last section, “Effectiveness,” which contains five

of the book chapters, reflects on the global and regional connections, impacts and interactions of DAESH and the YPG with an up-to-date approach.

In the first section of the book, “Actorness,” contributor Akın Ünver examines the relationship between the “weak state” and the “powerful VNSAs” on the basis of DAESH and YPG dominance in the “No-Go Zones” in Syria. Hakan Mehmetçik and Ali Murat Kurşun scrutinize geopolitical codes of DAESH, relying on the concepts of autonomy, representation and influence, which were used by Ersel Aydınli before, and emphasize the regional and global impacts of DAESH as a new, non-state form of domination in the civil war environment. Özlem Kayhan Pusane examines the hybrid character and ‘actorness’ of the new generation of VNSAs on the basis of the YPG, which appears to be a non-state actor with quasi-state features. According to Pusane, as a complex, hybrid non-state actor, the PYD has the potential to compel the political unity of Syria in the future. Fred H. Lawson, on the other hand, claims that the mutual interactions of the VNSAs between security dilemma and conflict cycle have significance for building up their actions.

In the second section, “Powerfulness,” İbrahim Mazlum addresses DAESH as an actor which has control over water resources in Syria and Iraq, and claims that the Iraqi crisis and the civil war in Syria have shown the capacity of the new generation VNSAs to instrumentalize natural resources to gain power.

In the last section, “Effectiveness,” the reader can find the position of leading global powers such as the U.S., Russia and the EU, as well as regional ones such as Turkey and Iran, regarding the rise of DAESH and the YPG in the region. Helin Sarı Ertem relates the diverging and unstable attitude of the U.S. toward VNSAs to Washington’s pragmatic approach, and argues that this tendency pushed the U.S. to pursue “surrogate warfare” in the Syrian civil war by relying on the YPG to eliminate DAESH. According to Ertem, using one VNSA as a surrogate against another will increase instability in the region and thus -bring negative outcomes for the U.S. in the long run, such as ruining its relations with traditional allies including Turkey. Doruk Ergun asserts that the VNSA policies of the U.S. and Russia, which want to limit each other’s global impact without being party to an open conflict, are considerably pragmatic. Yonca Özer and Fatmanur Kaçar state that the EU countries are not able to pursue an effective strategy with regard to VNSAs due to their limitations of agency, and thus remain “paper tigers,” particularly in respect to counterterrorism measures. Özden Zeynep Oktav explains in detail how the rapid expansion of DAESH in Syria and Iraq has threatened Iran’s geostrategic

interests and that Iran has become “the last best hope” for the West, instead of being an alleged member of the “axis of evil” with regard to its attitude against VNSAs. Emel Parlar Dal theoretically and empirically examines how the Syrian Civil War has spread to Turkey through DAESH and the YPG, relying on the conditioning factors and diffusion mechanisms of this outcome.

As can be seen, every section of the book aims at presenting and understanding different components of the new generation of VNSAs, and offers clear arguments and theoretical frameworks for the DAESH and YPG cases. Moreover, the book offers a less state-centric approach. Disconnections and repetitions are refrained from and the book adheres to its assertion of providing new discussions on the new generation VNSAs.

Especially after the Arab Uprisings, the Middle East has fallen into an environment of chaos and disturbance that often reminds us of the pre-World War I atmosphere. When we look at this environment from a broad perspective, the most noticeable and effective change seem to be the countless number of VNSAs in the region. These VNSAs have eroded the international system based on the sovereignty and centrality of the state, and have endangered the future of the international system due to their hybrid character. The pragmatic approach of the major powers toward VNSAs and their intention to use them for their own purposes have significantly changed the balance of power in the region, increased conflicts and consequently, prolonged the wars in the region. The attitude to be pursued by the states and the international community against VNSAs is very important for the future. This makes new and qualified academic studies on VNSAs quite significant.

In this respect, *Violent Non-state Actors and the Syrian Civil War*, which addresses the emergence and expansion of VNSAs in the Middle East in multiple aspects, is a valuable contribution for students, academicians and researchers studying global politics in general and conflict, security, geopolitics and regional politics specifically. The theoretical, empirical and conceptual discussions in this book will further improve readers’ understanding of the contemporary political problems of the Middle East.

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A standard length for PERCEPTIONS articles is 6,000 to 8,000 words including endnotes. The manuscript should begin with an indented and italicised summary up to 150 words, which should describe the main arguments and conclusions, and 5-7 keywords, indicating to main themes of the manuscript. A title page should be attached to the manuscript, including the title of the manuscript, full name (s) of the authors, academic and/or other professional affiliations if any, complete mailing address, fax and phone numbers of the author to whom proofs and correspondence should be sent. The author is also expected to give a brief biography in a footnote at the beginning of the article. Perceptions also publishes reviews of new books or reports; 'book reviews' are usually around 700-1,500-words."

Manuscripts should be single-spaced written by Times New Roman regular font, 11 point throughout. Justified margins; top and bottom 3 cm, left and right 2.4 cm are required. Manuscripts should be numbered consecutively throughout the paper. Only the first letters of title words should be 'upper case'. Quotations should be placed within double quotation marks ("....."). Quotations larger than four lines should be indented at left margin and single-spaced. Use endnotes and avoid bibliography. British punctuation and spelling should be used throughout. Dates should be in the form 3 November 1996; 1995-1998; and 1990s.

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Books

John Smith, *The Book Title*, New York, New York Publishing Co., 1999, p. 100.

John E. Smith (ed.), *The Book Title*, New York, New York Publishing Co., 1999, pp. 100-102.

John Smith and Mary Jones, *The Book Title*, New York, New York Publishing Co., 1999, p. 100. Subsequent references should appear as: Smith, *The Book Title*, p. 100. In endnotes 'Ibid.' should be used where possible, but it should not be used where the previous note contains more than one source.

Articles in Journals

John Smith, "Article Title", *Journal Name*, Vol. #, No. # (Month Year), p. #.

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Articles in Edited Books

John Smith, "Article Title", in Mary Jones (ed.), *Book Title*, New York, New York Publishing Co., 1999, p. 100.

Newspaper Articles

Christopher Hooton, "Japan is Turning Its Abandoned Golf Courses into Solar Power Plants", *The Independent*, 21 July 2015.

Manuscript References

PRO King's Remembrancer's Memoranda Roll, E159/69, m. 78. BM Add. MS 36042, fo.2 (plural fos.). Four-figure numerals without comma or space: 2572. Titles of other record repositories, and names of collections of papers, in full in first reference: Scottish Record Office (hereafter SRO), Airline Papers, GD 16, section 38/82, April 5, 1844. Compton Papers, kept at the estate office of the Marquess of Northampton, Castle Ashby (hereafter CA), bdle. 1011, no.29.

Official Papers

Parliamentary Papers: Select Committee on Manufacturers (Parl. Papers, 1833, VI), 0.456. Subsequent references as: SC on ... (PP, 1839, VII), 00.2347.

Hansard (Commons), 4th ser. XXXVI, 641-2, 22 Aug. 1895.

Theses

For titles of published and unpublished theses use italics: John E. Smith, *Title of Thesis*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Name of the University, Year, Chapter #, p. #

Internet References

Azam Ahmed and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, "U.S. and Cuba Reopen Long-Closed Embassies", *The New York Times*, 20 July 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/21/world/americas/cuba-us-embassy-diplomatic-relations.html?ref=world&r=0> (Accessed 21 July 2017).

Title of Book Reviews

Türk Basınında Dış Habercilik (Foreign News Reporting in the Turkish Media), by M. Mücahit Küçükylmaz and Hakan Çopur. Ankara: SETA, 2010, 168 pages, ISBN 9786054023073.



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