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EDITORIAL

Between a rock and a hard place: Trump's half-realist, half-mercantilist foreign policy in the Middle East

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KEYWORDS: Trump; Middle East; realism.

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President Trump has succinctly described the Middle East as a 'troubled place', a region 'whose fate lies in the hands of its own people', and where American vital interests are narrowly defined (Indyk 2018). US vital interests there, namely, fail to comprise the overthrow of dictators, be they Assad or Sisi, or stability through peace by bringing about an end to bloody civil and proxy wars as in Syria and Yemen. They mostly seem to revolve around US-defined key security threats: terrorism and the proliferation of WMD. The attitude by Trump has been described as the vindication of former President Obama 'leading from behind' approach that aroused so much criticism at the time of the intervention in Libya in 2011, *in primis* by Trump (Indyk 2018).

American foreign policy under President Trump in the Middle East and North Africa has been a policy rollercoaster, sometimes in line of continuity with policies adopted by the previous administration, sometimes with violent breaks from the past, sometimes apparently brought about by material interest calculations, other times supposedly driven by personal politics and symbolic gestures. All this has happened without a clearcut grand strategy, but rather though *ad hoc* decisions and policy U-turns, and, in bureaucratic politics' terms, with different parts of the administration contradicting one another, notably State Department and the White House.

In May 2017, despite Trump's declaratory policy on the US disengagement from the region, the President's first destination as a foreign trip was Saudi Arabia. The media coverage initially insisted on the extremely good chemistry between Crown Prince Bin Salman and President Trump, later delving into the narrative by both sides of an extremely fruitful meeting, which reinforced the US-Saudi alliance for Riyadh on the international stage and which was held by Trump as an economic success in terms of new trade deals signed. The visibility, enhanced status and prestige enjoyed by the Saudi monarchy, also thanks to the shared vision of the region, emboldened the Saudi and Emirati leadership who declared a blockade against Qatar. While President Trump seemed reluctant to condemn the unilateral move by the two Gulf countries against another Sunni Gulf country, fellow member of the

Gulf Cooperation Council, under the insistence of then Secretary of state Tillerson, the US timidly tried to push the two sides to negotiate, without any success (Wintour 2017).

The biggest reversal of previous policies has notoriously been on Iran, where the July 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed by Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany) has been unilaterally decertified by Washington in October 2017.

On the now defunct Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), President Trump has discursively stood by a two-state solution and the importance of a diplomatic way out, but on the ground the US Embassy has been moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May 2018, in a unilateral move which was decided despite the lack of negotiations or any promise by Israel of restarting them. After increasingly strained relations between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government, at least since 2012, Trump has emboldened the Israeli government and has legitimized more belligerent stances vis-à-vis the Palestinians (Entous 2018).

On Syria, after the fall of Raqqa and the weakening of the Islamic State, as a consequence of years of military engagement by an international coalition created by former President Barak Obama, Trump has taken the merit for this and has focused attention on the country's stabilization in the medium term, *de facto* accepting the physical and political survival of President Assad and the continuing role of Russia, acknowledged as kingmaker of the country's future.

In North Africa, US diplomacy has rewarded a military dictatorship and its authoritarian leader, bestowing upon President Sisi the aura of a grand leader, while funds for democracy assistance earmarked for Tunisia have been diminished (Miller & Ruffner 2018). In Libya, the Trump administration has not steered away from the Obama 'leading from behind' approach and has limited itself to targeted airstrikes against ISIS, refraining from playing any role in favoring an agreement between the Government of National Accord (GNA) in the west and the House of Representatives (HOR) based in Tobruk and its ally General Khalifa Haftar in the east (Mezran 2017).

Given the seemingly chaotic, *ad hoc*, arbitrary individual decisions taken by the White House on Middle Eastern affairs, expectations that the new US National Security Strategy (NSS) would have shed light on the future approach and would have spelled out a definition of threats, interests and ensuing US policies, were misplaced. In December 2017, a new US NSS was adopted, which contained many references to the MENA region and how the US should best deal with that 'troubled place'. The 2017 NSS has coined 'principled realism' as framework of reference for US foreign policy, emphasizing the coherence between Trump's catch all slogan, Make America Great Again, and 'America First', a zero-sum foreign policy, impinging on multilateral cooperation. Despite sounding a realist recipe enhancing disengagement and the reduction of costs and risks, it falls short of calling for a full-fledged realist offshore balancing option. This would represent today the most coherent realist approach for US foreign policy. In order for the US to remain the only great power in the Western hemisphere, Washington would get involved only in three areas, Europe, East Asia and the Persian Gulf, three regions of key importance in the global balance of power. In each of these regions it would try to avoid the emergence of a regional hegemon or of another great power dominating regional politics (Walt 2018). In the Middle East, offshore balancing would mean burden-sharing among regional players in terms of providing for security, avoid getting bogged down in regional conflicts, rivalries and in sectarian dynamics. The rationale for foreign policy behavior would be balance of power, rather than ideology, mercantilism, promotion of values, arbitrary intervention aimed at regime change.

Differently from that, in the 2017 NSS formulation, 'principled realism' foresees various forms and shapes of 'competitive engagement', in those circumstances where the US primacy needs allies to maintain or promote its interests. The NSS is articulated around four pillars: protect America homeland, citizens and way of life; promote American prosperity; preserve peace through strength; and advance US influence worldwide. The transactional approach, whereby the US must be compensated for what it has contributed to the international system or to its allies, is easily identifiable, but it resonates more with a revanchist attitude rather than with

mercantilism. Namely, mercantilism, in its basic formulation, states the subservience of the economy to the state and its interests. As such, it is never indicated as policy compass for the administration's global role. In the strategy, despite the call for a 'principled realism', there is little reference to values or norms. The defence and the promotion of US interests are equaled to commercial interests, on whose altar previous policies, alliances, historical record, can be easily reversed and overturned.

Since his election to the Presidency, Trump has strengthened ties with Israel, even at the expense of upending the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, has stepped up cooperation with Russia to de-escalate the war in Syria, and has reinforced the alliance of the US with Sunni Gulf states against Iran. By doing so, as briefly noted, President Trump has strongly endorsed the Saudi-Emirati gambit to isolate Qatar, thereby contributing to a rapprochement between Qatar and non-Arab regional players, first and foremost Turkey and Iran, who have supported Qatar economically and have pledged to step up their military and defense cooperation, should the need arise. Even most importantly, Trump has decertified the Iranian nuclear deal, a deal whose making had taken over a decade of international negotiation and whose implementation was being assured by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Although the decision to reverse the deal unilaterally did not cause its final demise (ICG 2017), it has triggered a chain reaction of negative consequences. It has strengthened hardliners in Tehran, worsened the economic prospects of the country and of the population that was eagerly awaiting for the lift of economic sanctions, diminished the credibility of the US commitment to international agreements, and incentivized Iranian attempts to capitalize on its current influence in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen. It has also legitimized the Saudi stance in the changing regional balance of power vis-à-vis the Iranian one, taking an explicit stand in a regional highly polarized rivalry, something which is not consistent with a purely realist understanding of US foreign policy in the region. In part, the reversal of the JCPOA was ideologically linked to undo Obama's legacy in international diplomacy (Ahmadian 2018). Beyond reversing the greatest foreign policy achievement of the Obama administration, Trump's policy has been driven by three goals.

First, Trump has been intent on countering or pushing back Iran's regional presence, through isolation and containment (Geranmayeh 2018).

Second, it has tried to limit or halt the gains for Iran derived from the JCPOA, adding as reasons beyond 'the flawed' nature of the deal -never explored- the regional role of Iran as a destabilizing force. The Saudi narrative, depicting the Islamic Republic of Iran as exporting terrorism and instability throughout the region, unequivocally shifting the blame on Tehran and inflating the perceived threat has become the US line. To its regional role, Tehran has been accused of aggressive intentions linked to the development of its ballistic missile program. Both issues (i.e., Tehran's regional role and the missile program) had been kept separate from the nuclear negotiations by the Obama administration and the international community, pertaining to different dossiers and blocking diplomatic negotiations on the nuclear program (Ahmadian 2018).

Third, Trump has reinvigorated traditional alliances (Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but also Sisi's Egypt), against Obama's attempt at rebalancing, away from automatic alignment with Saudi Arabia and acting more as an interlocutor rather than its defender.

This rapid overview of Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East seems to suggest, as a preliminary assessment, that neither offshore balancing nor the so-called 'principled realism' can encapsulate the range of erratic policy choices adopted by the US administration in the region. The two approaches -mercantilism and realism- emphasize the importance of the autonomy of the state, and argue against capture by lobbies or particularistic interests. On the one hand, offshore balancing is premised on the preservation of balance of power, the avoidance of the emergence of new regional hegemons or the escalation of intra-regional tensions in key geopolitical areas. Both share a *Realpolitik* reasoning but do not completely overlap. On the other hand, mercantilism has greatly evolved over the last three centuries. From the 18th and 19th century, it focused on wealth as a means to power, on relative gains, on the importance of the trade balance, incentivizing the rise of exports vis-à-vis imports and of exports of manufactured goods (and imports of commodi-

ties) (Drezner 2010). In the 20th century, nationalist economic policies traditionally advocated for by mercantilists, especially in times of crisis, either by emergent economies or by great powers in decline, came under the spotlight with the rise of a globalized economy, leading to a de facto analytical rejection by realist thinkers of mercantilist prescriptions (*Ibid*). In other words, the combination of two paradigms, realism and mercantilism, does not fit hand in glove. Over time, realists have by and large advocated liberal economic policies rather than nationalist and protectionist ones.

Examples of such incoherence from a realist perspective include the intensification of regional tensions and conflicts as a consequence of specific US stances. This occurred when Trump sided with the Saudi-Emirati axis against Qatar in May 2017, leading not only to realignment between Turkey and Qatar, but to a split in the GCC and its potential break-up, with smaller GCC members as Kuwait and Oman trying to mediate the dispute. None of these policy turns were forecast by the US administration or sought after and their consequences, a deteriorating intra-GCC stalemate and reinforcement of non-Arab regional powers in the Gulf, mostly Iran, could undermine US long-term regional stability priorities. Similarly, from the vantage point of ensuring regional stability as an offshore balancer, the unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran did not serve US purposes. Moreover, the overthrow of the JCPOA was premised on Iran's behavior in issues non-related to the nuclear program. These were used to justify a highly coercive attitude by the US intended at stirring domestic unrest and eventually leading to regime change, i.e., a revisionist approach and an anti-status quo goal. And yet, realism does capture some of the Trump policies in the region, if intended in broad terms, as inspired by laying emphasis on material power and national interests, as far away as possible from idealist conceptions of foreign policy or of inter-state relations. Some of its decisions seem however to have been inspired or motivated by mere economic and commercial interests, as Trump's declaration at the Riyadh summit indicated, by referring to over 110 billion dollars' worth of contracts with Saudi Arabia for arms' imports.

Despite the inaccuracy of Trump's claim - there was actually no deal, no contracts signed, but letters of interest by potential Saudi buyers, which, moreover, dated back from the Obama administration (Riedel 2017)-, linking his support of Saudi foreign policy to supposed commercial gains for the US military industry could be read as a mercantilist foreign policy, where however diplomacy and foreign policy are subjugated to commercial gains not for the state as a whole but for key lobbies, such as the industrial-military complex.

Interestingly, the political capital acquired by Trump with Saudi Arabia or Israel after the move of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a highly symbolic gesture which has led to Palestinian protests, the deterioration of relations between Palestinian and Israeli leaders, failed to show an immediate advantage for the US. But subsequent events, such as the recent request to Saudi Arabia to increase oil production in the wake of sanctions against Iran and Venezuela (Al Monitor 2018), or the change in the composition of military aid to Israel, where for the first time the Israeli army has been asked to buy more from US military industries rather than from domestic ones, thereby significantly increasing the cost of procurement (Even & Hadad 2018), might signal the desire to accumulate political capital with traditional allies, exerting leverage at other points in time when the need arises.

Trump's foreign policy in the Middle East represents a unique combination of mercantilism, realism, personalized politics that, most remarkably, is likely to be shaped by structural and contingent factors more than strategic and political intentions. In other words, the combination between mercantilism, unprincipled realism, personal politics is likely to further generate chaos as it follows no coherent set of guidelines or strategy. If disengagement form the MENA region had been on the radar for quite some time and had formulated as a goal at least already under the Obama presidency, the personalized realist mercantilism by Trump risks empowering belligerent leaders in the region, from Saudi Arabia through Israel to Egypt, waging wars or intensifying repression of domestic dissent, while providing only sectoral benefits to selected US economic or industrial sectors, especially the industrial-military one, devoid of any national strategic orientation.

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SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

Trump's Grand Strategy and the Post-American World Order

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ABSTRACT

The election of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States paved the way to a period of uncertainty about whether the US continue to play the role of main supporter and operator of the current rule-based international order. On the one hand, the 2016 elections signalled a fundamental erosion of the bipartisan consensus on the American post-war grand strategy, based on free trade, advancement of democracy and military primacy. On the other hand, Trump's victory represents a moment of sudden and largely unexpected eclipse for liberal internationalism and a rejection of Wilsonian ideas. Writing a year and a half after Trump's inauguration, this special issue analyses the main elements, discourses and values that are characterising the American foreign policy after 2016, proposing a preliminary evaluation of the potential effects of the Trump administration on the international order, looking at different regional theatres.

KEYWORDS: Donald Trump; International Order; Grand Strategy; Jacksonianism; Amoral Transactionalism.

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1. International order and American grand strategy before Trump

The election of Donald J. Trump to the Presidency of the United Stated unleashed a new period of uncertainty about the role of the United States in the contemporary international order. Writing a year and a half after Trump's inauguration it is not completely clear if the United States are willing and able to continue to play a leadership role in upholding and consolidating the current international order, its rules and norms as well as the international institutions associated to it.

Domestically, the 2016 elections demonstrated the erosion of the bipartisan consensus on the key cornerstones that underpinned the American grand strategy in the post war era: (1) the maintenance of military primacy rooted both into quantitative and qualitative military superiority and a strategy of deep engagement, characterized by a global offshore presence and a global system of alliances; (2) the consolidation of a "global open door policy", embodied by the promotion of a multilateral rule based economic order; (3) and finally policies aimed at advancing democracy and human rights. Previous partisan debates on grand strategy mainly concerned the means through which these objectives should be achieved rather than questioning the overreaching objectives of the US grand strategy. Before Trump, no other administration put in doubt the idea that the current liberal international order should be considered both beneficial for the United States, its interests and its security as well as for the global stability and prosperity (Ikenberry 2012; Brands 2016).

Up to the Obama era, each administration promoted a vision of the American role in the world firmly rooted in those three principles, even if each administration put them into practice in different ways (Brands 2014; Campbell 2016; Drezner 2011; Brooks, Ikenberry and Wohlforth 2012). In the security side each administration continued to pursue the consolidation and the expansion of the qualitative and quantitative advantage over its potential adversaries coupled with the need to maintain and deepen its network of alliances and security partnership through the globe which allow a global forward deployed military presence (Posen 2003; Thornberry, Krepinevich 2016).

On the economic front the global "open door policy" was never put in doubt, even if different Presidents put in place substantially different strategies to promote it. The Clinton administration worked to consolidate and enlarge global international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. Moreover, it promoted new forms of multilateral agreements such as NAFTA. The Bush Administration concentrated more explicitly on bilateral trade agreements such as those with South Korea, Australia, Singapore and Chile. The Obama administration put more emphasis on multilateral regional free trade agreements such as the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investments Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans Pacific Partnership (Drezner 2014; Kirshner 2014; Norloff 2010).

From the point of view of norms and values, the US led international order has been associated with a liberal project aiming at spreading democracy, human rights and rule of law. Especially in the post-Cold War era the US international action has been inspired by ideas that put the centrality of the individual and his rights above the rights of the state. In the security realm the promotion of the practice of humanitarian intervention in the 1990s and the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect in the early 2010s is indicative of this trend (Weiss 2016). More broadly the Wilsonian ideas and the beliefs that the American role in the world should remain inspired by promotion of democracy, freedom and rule of law remained, at least until recently, a core element of the US national narrative (Ikenberry 2009, Ninkovitch 2001; Cox and Inoguchi 2000).

After the Cold War era, the bipartisan agreement over these three basic foundations of the US foreign policy as well as a wide bipartisan consensus on liberal internationalist principles marginalized those who promoted different interpretations of the US interests, and particularly those who did not consider the maintenance of the current international order as highly beneficial for the United States.

2. Breaking with the past? In search of a Trumpian grand strategy

Trump's election led to question all the main assumptions associated with the post-war US foreign policy, starting from the necessity to consolidate the current international order, the need to maintain the current network of security alliances, the necessity to preserve a multilateral and open economic order, and the normative imperative to promote freedom and democracy abroad.

In the year following Trump's election several commentators described his approach to foreign relations as a dangerous mix of oversimplification of complex issues and isolationist impulses, lacking any strategic coherence or design (Zenko and Friedman 2017; Leffler 2017). Trump uses to describe himself and his presidency as a moment of total rupture vis-à-vis precedent administrations and more generally, regarding American foreign policy's traditions. Nevertheless, during the first half of the Presidency some coherent elements have emerged both in ideational and in strategic terms. His rhetoric, based on a sort of nostalgia for a presumed American golden age, tends to break with the ideational consensus regarding the nature and the role of the US in the international system. According to the president, the United States are neither the "city upon a hill" to be protected, nor a benign force for international peace and prosperity; they are rather an exhausted Titan that needs to become "great again". Through the empirical analysis of different foreign policy domains and areas of intervention, one of the purposes of this special issue is to decode the normative and ideational pillars of Trump's international action, wondering if it is effectively creating a new American approach to international affairs.

2.1. Reviving the Jacksonian tradition

In a first attempt to define Trumpian foreign policy, we start by noticing that under the ideational point of view the mainstream Wilsonian narrative appears to be substituted by a selective appropriation of ideas belonging to what Walter Russell Mead called Jacksonian tradition. This tradition, referring to Andrew Jackson, the 7th President of the United States between 1829 and 1837, is generally con-

sidered to be the ideological antithesis of Wilsonianism and liberal internationalism. Nevertheless, it must be remarked that in the post-Cold War context an unexpected "alliance" between elements of the Jacksonian and the Wilsonian traditions was established (Mead 1999); in this sense, the "freedom agenda" (Abrams, 2017) pursued by George W. Bush as part of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) efforts, seemed to represent the most significant example of this unusual marriage.

Trump's rise however seems to have signed the demise of alliance between Jacksonianism and Wilsonianism. On the one hand neo-conservatives opposed the rise of Trump within the Republican Party, and harshly criticized his "America First" (Cohen 2017; Kristol, 2017). On the other hand, Trump has considered neo-conservatism as driven by the same flawed logic that led the US to embark into unnecessary conflicts, causing the loss of blood and taxpayers' money. Neo-conservatives are eventually another manifestation of those elites, who underestimated the needs of the US citizens.

The intellectual inspiration of "Trumpism" appears to be directly linked to Jacksonianism. In particular Steve Bannon, the main ideologue of the Trump campaign and former White House Chief Strategist, constantly drew parallels between the figures of the two Presidents, promoted Jacksonian ideas and even suggested Trump to read about Jackson (Tharoor, 2017; Jones and Khoo 2017).

As Mead argued Jacksonianism appears "the least impressive in American politics, the most deplored abroad and the most deplored at home" (Mead 1999, p.6), despite this tradition constituted a significant element for the American political thought, especially for conservative Republicans. The key feature of the Jacksonian tradition is as Albertazzi and McDonnell have argued, pitting "a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous others" (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2007, p. 7). The transformation of the Republican Party during the last two decades as well as the financial crisis favoured the re-emergence of Jacksonian populism, up to the point that it became an essential ideological tool during the 2016 Presidential campaign. Trump's election can be interpreted also as a revolt against the liberal establishment of the North East, embodied by Hillary Clinton.

Trump, despite being himself a member of the North Eastern financial elite, managed to mobilize the resentment generated by the financial crisis, especially among white Christian conservative inhabitants of rural areas. Partly moving away from this interpretation of Trump as a Jacksonian president, in his contribution for this special issue Cozzolino (2018) explores the existing tension between the figure, the message and the actions of president Trump. Analysing the domestic and international political economy of the administration, the author suggests that Trumpism can be conceived "as a combination of longstanding patterns of supply-side and pro-business oriented macroeconomic policy and welfare state retrenchment, with a neo-mercantilist trade policy and belligerent militarism" (Cozzolino 2018, p.68).

Nonetheless, it is clear that Trump's populism embraces Jacksonian ideas in a number of ways. Firstly, the liberal international order, the institutions and the policies associated to it are the political expression of the liberal North Eastern elite. As a consequence, they reflect its values, its ideas as well as its distance from the "people". Ultimately, from this point of view, to "Make America Great Again" it is necessary to reverse policies inspired by the Wilsonian and liberal elite: among them cosmopolitanism, multilateralism, free trade, globalization, and liberal internationalism.

Secondly, coherently with the Jacksonian approach, Trump tends to oversimplify problems. This tendency is another typical feature of the Jacksonian tradition, what Mead has defined "sharp distinction in popular feeling between the inside of the folk community and the dark world without" (Mead 2001, p. 236). This Manichean division produces an image of a hostile world in which cooperation is very difficult, interaction with other states is transactional and international institutions are simply a limit to each state's sovereignty and pursue of self-interest. In such a world the objective of the US leadership should be to promote the national interest, narrowly identified with security and economic growth. On the contrary the current international order and its institutions have led to a form of exploitation of the US economy and the American people.

These themes clearly emerged in the National Security Strategy published in December 2017:

"When I came into office, rogue regimes were developing nuclear weapons and missiles to threaten the entire planet. Radical Islamist terror groups were flourishing. Terrorists had taken control of vast swaths of the Middle East. Rival powers were aggressively undermining American interests around the globe. At home, porous borders and unenforced immigration laws had created a host of vulnerabilities. Criminal cartels were bringing drugs and danger into our communities. Unfair trade practices had weakened our economy and exported our jobs overseas. Unfair burden-sharing with our allies and inadequate investment in our own defense had invited danger from those who wish us harm" (The White House 2017b, p. 1).

This quasi-Hobbesian vision of the world leads to a square rejection of the moralism associated with liberal internationalism, including the idea that the US should actively promote human rights and democracy abroad. In the famous speech he delivered at the UN general assembly on September 2017, Trump advocated the centrality of sovereignty as an answer to most of the current international problems, reversing the Wilsonian idea that the US should be aimed at transforming the international order to make "the world safe for democracies". At a moment he asserted that

"we do not expect diverse countries to share the same cultures, traditions, or even systems of government. […] In foreign affairs, we are renewing this founding principle of sovereignty. As President of the United States, I will always put America first, just like you, as the leaders of your countries will always, and should always, put your countries first" (The White House 2017a).

Many of Trump's proposals represent the expression of the resentment of his supporters with the socio-economic transformations that affected the United States in the last decades, from the emergence of a multicultural society, the delocalization of economic activities, the transition to a post-Fordist economy. For these reasons his mix of Jacksonian populism, protectionism and isolationism appears particularly appealing for the "losers of globalization". Those who suffer the conse-

quences of the rapid transformation of the social economic structure of the American society are most likely to reject the main tenets of the liberal internationalist consensus, such as democracy promotion, and "open door" trade policies. Trump's continuous emphasis on the necessity to abandon "bad deals" is a consequence of those feelings. As he stated in the same speech to the UN General Assembly:

"the American people were told that mammoth multinational trade deals, unaccountable international tribunals, and powerful global bureaucracies were the best way to promote their success. But as those promises flowed, millions of jobs vanished and thousands of factories disappeared. Others gamed the system and broke the rules. And our great middle class, once the bedrock of American prosperity, was forgotten and left behind, but they are forgotten no more and they will never be forgotten again" (The White House 2017a).

2.2 "Amoral transactionalism" and the new American priorities in international affairs

Jacksonianism as an intellectual tradition helps identifying priorities but does not necessarily provide a clear guidance for foreign policy and grand strategy. Nevertheless, the Jacksonian inspiration contributed to set a list of priorities that have been influencing how the Trump administration understands the American role in the world and especially what the main priorities and threats are.

The first threat is considered to be the presence of unfair trade pact and other international agreements that allegedly contribute to erode the American productive base. As a consequence, the Trump administration has actively worked to block trade agreements under negotiation, stalling the TTIP and retiring the US from the TPP, and calling for a renegotiation of existing pacts already in force, as the KORUS and the NAFTA.

International trade agreements are considered, albeit against any statistical and empirical account, as detrimental to the US interests. Again, in the December 2017 National Security Strategy it is explained that:

"We stood by while countries exploited the international institutions we helped to build. They subsidized their industries, forced technology transfers, and

distorted markets […] The United States helped expand the liberal economic trading system to countries that did not share our values, in the hopes that these states would liberalize their economic and political practices and provide commensurate benefits to the United States. Experience shows that these countries distorted and undermined key economic institutions without undertaking significant reform of their economies or politics" (The White House 2017b, p. 17).

Furthermore, the Trump administration has introduced tariffs and trade restrictions both on allied countries and on other major economic partners such as India and China.

The relationship with China has appeared as a second priority for the Trump administration. However, on the relations with Beijing the administration has not been able to produce a coherent approach. At the beginning of the mandate Trump promoted an apparently hard line approach vis-à-vis Beijing, inspired by advisors such as Peter Navarro, the new director of the National Economic Council and author of the book "Death by China", who underlined in an article published on *Foreign Policy* to return to a Reganesque policy of "peace to strength" – an expression that resounds also in the National Security Strategy - in Asia, with particular reference to Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea (Navarro 2016).

The approach to China has conversably evolved throughout the first year, in particular after the summit with the Chinese President Xi Jinping at Mar A Lago. On the one hand Trump has continued bashing China both for unfair practices and for not contributing to solve the North Korean problem. On the other hand, Trump has consistently underlined the fact that he has nurtured a special relationship with Xi and has praised his successes in governing China.

If international trade agreements and the relation with China lie at the heart of Trump's "anti-status-quo" rhetoric, the current administration seems to consider Radical Islam as the most dangerous threat to the physical security of American citizens. Radical Islam – or again, Islamism or Islamic Terrorism – is described as "the primary transnational threat Americans face" (The White House 2017b, p. 10). In this sense, Islamic Terrorists do not only represent an existential danger for the

United States, but they also constitute a "civilizational" threat (Brands and Kohl 2017, p. 2). As stated in the National Security Strategy, "America […] is fighting a long war against these fanatics who advance a totalitarian vision for a global Islamist caliphate that justifies murder and slavery, promotes repression, and seeks to undermine the American way of life" (The White House 2017b, p.10).

This "clash of civilization" discourse proposed by Trump is somehow reviving the radical rhetoric and the strategic approach that characterised the 2002 National Security Strategy – the document that laid the foundation for the Global War on Terror declared by George W. Bush (Feaver 2017). In this domain, the approach pursued by the current administration is clearly pointing at reversing Obama's legacy, and consequences can be observed in different policy areas.

Firstly, the open and reiterate use of Islamism and its cognates, for identifying terrorist groups and the wider category of the "enemy", clashes with the refusal of the former president, to employ the expression "Islamist" when discussing about terrorism (Diaz 2016). Moreover, initiatives such as the "Muslim ban", or an insisted anti-Islam rhetoric employed by president Trump, seem to suggest that the American administration tend to consider Muslims in general, as potential allies or supporters of extremists (Brands and Kohl 2017).

On the other hand, the region where this revolved approach is showing its main impact is the Middle East. In this context, categorizing the Trump approach as based only on a civilizational interpretation of the situation appears somehow troublesome. For example, Trump seems not to make any distinction among Shiites or Sunnis, or to take into consideration other potential dynamics of conflict affecting peace and stability in the region. In the Middle East the US are rather implementing an approach based on a categorization of the actors along an "enemy-foe" distinctive line, characterized by a variable geometry. This can explain the strong rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and its allies, and the American support to the blockade against Qatar, one of the anti-Saudi protagonists of the "new Middle East Cold War" (Hanau Santini 2017). Conversely, the Trump administration has not hesitated to show its open opposition to Iran, one more time considered as a rogue

state supporting Radical Islamism (The White House 2017b). In accordance with one of his most famous promises of the electoral campaign, in May 2018 Trump has unilaterally withdrawn the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal. This decision reaffirmed-Trump's will to break with Obama's legacy, and it rejuvenated the traditional antagonistic approach towards Tehran, which had characterized US-Iran relationships after 1979. At the same time, this decision appears as a risky strategic move for different reasons. On the one hand, it raises doubts about the trustworthiness of US diplomatic engagement towards non-allied countries. On the other hand, it threats to favour a rapprochement between Iran and Russia, consequently strengthening a coalition whose agenda seems to be clearly in contrast with American interest in the area (Mousavian 2018). Once again, oversimplification and delegation to allies – seen as a way to reduce costs and share the burden – characterize Trump's initiatives in foreign policy.

The belief that the current international order, considered the intellectual product of a distant, liberal Wilsonian elite, is harming the interests of the United States, associated with a relatively clear list of threats and Trump's own "business like" understanding of international affairs, has generated what Brand and Kohl (2017) have labelled "amoral transactionalism". This approach is defined by a few key prescriptions. Firstly, the United States should cut deals with any state that have similar interests, regardless of their values and political system. Security commitments as well as established roles in multilateral institutions should not be considered a given and immutable. On the contrary they should be considered a subject to negotiation. As a consequence, the US commitment to defend key international partners such as NATO members, Japan or South Korea should be reciprocated by "due payments". This can entail a more balanced burden sharing in terms of military expenses, a more favourable trade relation in favour of the United States, a re-negotiation of an established economic agreement. This leads to degrade both NATO and the alliances with Asian partners from the cornerstone of international stability to a potential bargaining chip to obtain economic or political advantages.

The first consequences of this approach to alliance relations have started to emerge, both in Europe and in Asia. In Asia the abandonment of TPP has opened an unprecedented window of opportunity for China to expand its own economic influence, through the promotion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Belt and Road Initiative (Dian and Menegazzi 2018). On the European side the consequences are probably less visible. So far, the most relevant development is probably the approval of the PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) in the field of defence. According to the European External Action Service's website, PESCO is a "Treaty-based framework and process to deepen defence cooperation amongst EU Member States who are capable and willing to do so". Translated from the European bureaucratic language, it means that PESCO aims to be a decisive step for developing an intra-European institutionalized mechanism of cooperation in the security and defence domains. The potential new capacities that PESCO should allow developing are not presented as in competition with other frameworks such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the possible creation of a common European defence force is not even mentioned or hypothesized. Nevertheless, PESCO still represents a renewed ambition from the EU. It should promote – at least in a medium to long term – EU's self-defence and power-projection capacities and autonomy (De France et al. 2017).

3. US allies and the "crisis" of the American leadership

The international responses generated by the American "amoral transactionalism" could be seen as the first signals of a wider and deeper "crisis" of the American leadership. In fact, one of the defining features of the US-led international order is the high degree of consent and cooperation of allies and partners. In the security realm, the post war American engagement with the international order has been characterized by the development and the maintenance of a vast network of alliances connecting Washington with key players in Europe and Asia. While in Europe, through NATO, the United States promoted collective security and a high

degree of institutionalization, in East Asia it promoted a network of bilateral "hub and spoke" alliances (Cha 2016; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002; Sloan 2005).

European and Asian allies have played a fundamental role in supporting the creation and the maintenance of the US-led international order. Allies enabled the United States to project power in distant theatres, providing their territory for overseas bases; they shared, even if unevenly, the costs of security provision; they renounced to part of their political independence to align themselves with the United States. Given these premises, there is a first set of questions - concerning the impact and the consequences of the Trump administration in international politics – which structured this special issue. Firstly, we and our authors asked whether the Trump administration is leading to or accelerating the decline of the US global leadership. Consequently, another issue to be tackled concerns the possible rise of a post-American international order. Thirdly, focusing the attention on partners and allies, it should be inquired whether they are trying to fill the vacuum generated by the perceived decline of the US commitment, or again caused by the decline of US legitimacy and perceived reliability as global leading power. In this sense, acknowledging that one year and a half is probably a too short delay for identifying structural and longstanding changes, some signals can be intercepted.

Within this collection of works, three different articles tackle the question of how some of the strongest and most reliable allies and supporters of the US-led international order, are dealing and responding to the Trump presidency. On the one hand, Atanassova-Cornelis (2018) describes the strategy of "hedging" currently implemented by Japan in the Asia-Pacific; as she convincingly demonstrates, even if hedging cannot be considered a "new" strategy for Japan, the Asian country has accelerated and furthered this approach, as a consequence of a changed risk assessment linked to the US perceived declining commitment. On the other hand, Fassi and Zotti (2018) and Pareschi (2018) analyze the European and the British response to Trump. With regards to the European Union, Fassi and Zotti (2018) underline that Trump's presidency represents a potential threat within the "Transatlantic Space", as it is expanding the ideational and normative divide separating the two

shores of the Atlantic Ocean; in turn, this could lead to unexpected consequences on a European polity, which was already in crisis before Trump. Concerning the United Kingdom, Pareschi (2018) highlights the unprecedented and challenging situation created by the Brexit-Trump double shock. May's government is struggling to define a new strategy and finding a new role for a would-be "Global Britain" both in the trade and in the security domains. Given this context, a reinforced UK-US axis would represent only one – and not necessarily the more feasible – solution for a power in quest of a new identity and a new position within the international system.

On the whole, what emerges from our case studies is that the Trump's presidency is already influencing the behaviour of some of the most important US allies. Japan, the EU, and even the post-Brexit UK have started to consider the idea that US engagement and leadership in international affairs could not endure as a taken-for-granted fact in the future. This is pushing those powers to react, by developing and reinforcing internal capacities, or by looking for new international partners. At the same time, these consequences are posing new and unexpected challenges, which could undermine US allies' internal cohesion or threat regional security in key areas – particularly in the Asia-Pacific.

The major diplomatic initiative of the first half of Trump's presidency, the Singapore summit with North Korea, clearly made these tendencies emerge. While the *détente* with Pyongyang represents a positive development for the entire region, the way in which it has been negotiated might endanger the long-term solidity of the US-led alliances in the region. Trump mentioned that the summit with Kim Jong-un was functional to a future withdrawal of the US forces based in Korea, and conceded a freeze of joint military exercises in the peninsula without consulting the allies on the matter. These statements alimented South Korea's and Japan's fear of abandonment and created new doubts on the durability of the US led international order (The White House, 2018).

4. How Trump can affect the international order?

With regard to the academic debate, the uncertainty generated by Trump's approach to foreign relations represents a crucial test for different theoretical positions on the nature of the international order and its capacity to resist radical changes of strategy promoted by the leading state.

Advocates of a strategy of deep engagement such as John Ikenberry, Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth (Brooks et al. 2012) have argued that the US role remains indispensable for the security and the stability of key areas of the globe, such as Europe, the Middle East and East Asia. A decline of the US presence and commitment would lead to instability and possibly to conflict. Moreover, a retrenchment of the United States could favour Russia and China, that as a consequence of the decline of the US influence would expand their economic and political influence.

This interpretation is coherent with the main tenet of the theory of hegemonic stability, which argues that for the international order to be stable and open, the presence of one actor able to unilaterally provide public goods is indispensable. Consequently, the decay or the voluntary retreat of the hegemon would unleash a period of competition between great powers, instability and even generalized conflict (Kindleberger 1973; Gilpin 1981; Wohlforth 2009).

This idea is shared also by liberal theorists such as John Ikenberry, who has repeatedly underlined the indispensability of the American role, as stabilizer. Differently from the point of view of realists and supporters of the hegemonic stability theory, they underline also other key features of the current international order that would be put in jeopardy as a consequence of US retreat. The post war international order did not simply provide stability, it created an open rule economic system as well as several multilateral arrangements for dispute resolution. Moreover, the liberal order favoured the diffusion of democracy and the protection of human rights.

From his point of view Trump is then considered a frontal attack on the liberal order. Ultimately US retrenchment, promoted according to Trump's ideas,

would not only make the world less stable but also more inhospitable for the Western values of freedom, rule of law and free trade (Ikenberry 2017).

In the academic debate this position has been criticized both by realists and by liberal institutionalist and constructivists. Among realists the most significant criticism of the strategy of deep engagement comes from supporters of off shore balancing, such as Posen, Mearsheimer and Walt. They argue that the costs of the US post-Cold War strategies vastly exceed the benefits they have generated (Posen 2013, 2014; Walt and Mearsheimer 2016). On the contrary a strategy of off shore balancing would help reducing the costs of the US strategy while preserving the Nation's vital security interests. From this point of view military interventions should be limited to achieve clearly defined political objectives, and carefully consider the possible costs. Consequently, the US should never resort to war either to protect non-vital interests in areas of the world that are not strategically crucial, nor pursue idealistic objectives, such as promotion of democracy or protection of human rights. Realists also highlight that a more restrained strategy would diminish the possibility of the rise of an anti-hegemonic coalition aimed at balancing the US "unipole" (Layne 1997; Posen 2014).

It is important to underline that none of the proponents of off-shore balancing are Trump supporters, nor they appear to appreciate Trump's style in foreign policy (Walt 2017a). However, many of them underline that some of Trump's ideas on foreign policy make strategically sense from a realist perspective. Examples are advocating a fairer burden sharing, abandoning state building efforts (Walt 2017b).

Other significant alternatives to predictions based on the necessity of a deep engagement strategy are promoted both by liberal institutionalist as well as constructivists scholars. These interpretations move from one crucial consideration, namely that the United States and its global role are not indispensable for the stability of the current international order. From this perspective, institutions can play a post hegemonic function, creating incentives to international cooperation even if in presence of a reduction of the role and the influence of the global hegemon (Snindal 1985; Keohane 1984; Milner 1998).

Constructivist scholars substantially agreed on this conclusion, expanding the debate on the possible consequences of a decline of the American leadership. The diffusion of institutions and shared norms, from a constructivist point of view might prevent conflict and instability, creating incentives for the edification of a post hegemonic global order (Reus-Smith 1997; Barnett and Finnamore 2004).

Another significant contribution to this debate comes from critical IR scholars. Their argument is rooted in a Gramscian conceptualization of hegemony. From their point of view the idea of the US as "Indispensable Nation" for the world's stability and prosperity has become part of the common sense. This is not because it is an indisputable and objective truth. It is rather a product of the hegemonic power of the United States. The hegemonic power can lead other actors to believe that their interests are aligned with those of the hegemon, even if in reality they are not. At the state level, according to Gramsci, hegemonic power prevented the working class from rebelling against the capitalist classes. For Gramscian IR scholars, the US hegemony has produced the idea that the American interest and the interest of the other stakeholders of the global order are identical (Cox 1983; Cox 1987; Naber 2010; Hopf 2013).

The most influential analysis associated with the idea of the non-indispensability of the US has been proposed by Amitav Acharya (Acharya 2014). According to Acharya the United States lost part of their capacity to produce order. Despite this a "post-American order" is not necessarily more conflictual and less stable. On the contrary a "multiplex" order is likely to emerge. In a multiplex world different powers can provide public goods, lead several different types of global and regional international institutions, rooted in a plurality of ideas and governing principles (Acharya 2014). The multiplex role envisaged by Acharya entails two different layers of international cooperation. On the one hand global institutions will continue to provide a necessary venue to tackle global issues, even if the US and Western power would see their influence decline. On the other hand, other regional institutions will express the ideas and the power of rising actors, in particularly in Asia

and in the developing world. The Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank is for instance considered a first manifestation of this "multiplex system" (Acharya 2015).

Acharya's idea of multiplex connects the debate on the US role in the international order and the debate on the future of regions in a possible post-American world. From his perspective, new forms of regional order are key component of a future decentred and normatively plural order (Acharya 2014).

This position appears to be a theoretical compromise between two key arguments present in the debate on regional orders and regionalism: regions as stumbling blocks or building blocks for the global order.

Generally speaking, the debate around and about the role of regions and regional orders within the wider international system has been a ubiquitous, but nevertheless underexplored topic. On the one hand, the focus on the processes of regionalization – mainly bottom-up processes of economic interdependence within a given regional space (Fawn 2009) – has confined the regional studies to a "low politics" dimension. On the other hand, the adoption of the European Community (then Union) as the main object of analysis and inquiry has imposed a middle-range research agenda to the field, unable to produce general theories about the international order (Söderbaum 2016) – even if some exceptions existed, as demonstrated by Karl Deutsch's work on security communities (1957). After the end of the Cold War a renewed ambition has characterized the study of regions in International Relations. In particular, new analytical frameworks and lines of inquiry have emerged, leading to the so-called "New Regionalism" approach (Bøås et al. 2003; Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998; Söderbaum and Shaw, 2003). Starting from the assumption that the new wave of regionalism emerging from the mid-1980s should be connected to the wider structural changes affecting the global system (Söderbaum 2016), several scholars began to explore the question, whether regional orders were a further expression of economic globalization and hegemonic influences (Gamble and Payne, 1996), or rather a positive shaper of global order (Hettne et al. 1999). This issue is still at the center of the debate, strongly influencing research agendas on regions and regional orders.

The idea of regions as building blocks of the global order is advanced by authors as Peter Katzenstein. He considered East Asia and Europe the two pillars of the American Imperium. The partnership between the US and the former enemies of World War Two Germany and Japan, have constituted a fundamental element of stability of the global order (Katzenstein 2005). Another relevant analysis pointing in this direction is the theory of pluralistic security communities, which identified in the Trans-Atlantic alliance, built on shared norms and values one of the key pillars of the contemporary international order (Adler and Barnett 1998).

Other theories consider regional orders as stumbling blocks for the global order. From this point of view, if a region promotes institutional arrangement rooted in exclusively local norms and interests and they manage to isolate themselves from external influences, this can create severe damages to the resilience of the global order (Buzan and Waever 2003; Varynen 2003; Acharya 2009)

This dialectic between building and stumbling blocks represents another relevant observation point for the contributors of this special issue, since it enables to analyse how the US hegemony is supported, mediated or resisted in different regions. Moreover, it allows connecting regional dynamics with the evolution of the international order. More specifically, we asked our contributors to discuss two main questions, namely (a) if the perceived decline of the US leadership is leading to disorder or to the rise of different types of political order, based on forms of regional or global cooperation, alternative to the US hegemony, and (b) if the perceived retrenchment of the US is causing instability or exacerbating existing security dilemmas within the different regions. Fassi and Zotti (2018) and Pareschi (2018) tackle these issues with respect to the European continent, while Atanassova-Cornelis (2018) elaborates on the Asian theatre starting from an analysis of Japan's new strategic posture. In his article Guida (2018) proposes a preliminary evaluation of how Latin America is trying to cope with Trump's aggressive unilateralism towards the continent. In a region shaped by significant – and partly unexpected - political changes as much as by dramatic humanitarian crises, Trump's actions seem to be characterized by a deep incoherence coupled with the tendency to militarize

those issues, such as migration and narco-trafficking, raising some interest within his electorate.

To conclude this introduction, we focus on two preliminary considerations. On the one hand, with regards to the foreign policy implemented by the new administration, it is probably necessary to distinguish between a contingent disorder and a middle-term "normalization". The rhetoric employed by president Trump aims to show his will to break with the past and with previous strategies planned and implemented by the "establishment". Moreover, the fast and chaotic turnover of many important members of the administration during this first years is contributing to augmenting this feeling of chaos and disorientation, both among allies and potential challengers of the American leadership. Nevertheless, as our authors convincingly demonstrate, it is still possible to identify strategic and behavioural patterns that are reproducing previous approaches and apply specific ideational basis. In this sense, when distinguishing rhetoric from action, the Trump administration does not appear as a revolutionary moment, which is redefining norms and power relations in the international system.

On the other hand, it is possible to identify some of the early consequences of Trump's policies. Firstly, in the realm of security, several key allies, in Europe and in East Asia perceive the Trump administration as unreliable and prone to sudden changes of policy. As a consequence, most of them have started to contemplate strategic scenarios in which they have to adapt to a decline of the US commitment and influence. In the realm of trade and economic governance, Trump has reversed the effort led by the Obama administration to reaffirm the "network centrality" of the United States, making Washington a new hub for several new generation trade agreements such as TTP and TTIP (Slaughter 2012).

Finally, the new emphasis on sovereignty and the abandonment of the Wilsonian consensus has taken a toll on the effort to promote democracy and rule of law in the developing world (Carothers 2018).

Non-democratic powers such as China and Russia seem to be the actors that are benefiting more from Trump's policies. Beijing and Moscow are ready to

fill the vacuum the United States is opening, not just in terms of short term influence, but also in terms of competition to determine which key normative principles will govern the international order in the next decades.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Trumpism as *nationalist neoliberalism*. A critical enquiry into Donald Trump's political economy

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ABSTRACT

The article provides a critique of Trump administration political economy. The argument of the paper is that Trumpism can be conceived as a combination of an economic-nationalist vision of international trade relations and a strengthening of neoliberal macroeconomic policy at home. More specifically, while the global projection of the new US administration follows a 'zero-sum game' and conflictual vision of the international trade, with respect to the domestic arena the budget documents for 2018 and beyond demonstrate a strong commitment in favor of businesses and top incomes, e.g. in terms of welfare cuts, labor policy and tax reform. At the same time, while social expenditures decreased, the spending for defense programs increases. The article argues that Trumpism represents a further evolution of neoliberalism in terms of fiercer neoliberalizing policies combined with elements of economic nationalism – thus, Trumpism as nationalist neoliberalism.

KEYWORDS: Trumpism; Neoliberal nationalism; Militarism; Neo-mercantilism; Taxation.

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1. Introduction

In International Political Economy (IPE) scholarship, economic nationalism (or neo-mercantilism) and neoliberalism are usually conceived as two opposite poles, with Marxism featuring as the third main theoretical tradition (Gilpin 1987). In particular when it comes to international trade, there is a clear-cut partition between neo-mercantilism and neoliberalism; if the first posits a conflictual and 'zero-sum game' vision of international trade relations, the second, especially as theorized by liberal institutionalist theory (Oye 1986; Kehoane 1989), sees trade in light of a 'win-win' approach and as the vehicle to attain international cooperation, peace and prosperity (more in paragraph 2). Read with these categories, the political economy of Trump administration appears to be a renewal of a neo-mercantilist spirit, which shows increasing distrust towards global trade and aims at the reindustrialization of the country. But are we really entering in a new mercantilist era? This study, departing from conventional IPE categories and analyzing jointly the foreign and domestic political economy of Trump administration, put forward a more nuanced and dynamic vision of Trumpism as increased neoliberalization (Brenner et al. 2010) combined with economic nationalist elements at policy and discourse level. From this, it follows the definition of Trumpism as *nationalist neoliberalism*, conceived as a further evolution within the neoliberal order. The category of neoliberalism is used here heuristically to explain both the electoral success of Trump and the defining features of Trumpism, thus framing: (I) the historical phase of capitalism whose contradictions have been instrumentally and effectively exploited by Trump's populist rhetoric; (II) the 'domestic side' of the macroeconomic policy of Trump administration (see paragraph 4). On the other hand, the (re)introduction of the category of neo-mercantilism helps us to frame the economic nationalist elements of the US administration, concerning in particular international trade.

The electoral success of Donald Trump occurred after several decades of trade liberalization, rampant social inequalities (Piketty 2014) and a widespread crisis of legitimation of the traditional political elites. Trump achieved to champion, through the use of the populist imaginary and rhetoric (Chako & Jayasurja 2017), a

part of US society increasingly marginalized and impoverished. The electoral campaign was indeed centered on the 'American worker' and the reindustrialization of the country, winning support especially in those inner areas of the US exposed to international trade competition and severely hit by unemployment, loss of population and economic crisis. Since the admission of China in the World Trade Organization, for instance, the trade deficit of the US grew from $83 billions to $370 billions, determining the loss of 7 million jobs in the manufacturing sector and leading employment to fall from 18.9 million jobs to 12.2 million (Munro 2016).

The harmful effects of free trade agreements on a part of the US society partly explains the social origins of Trump election. According to a research by Autor et al. (2016) based on congressional elections from 2002 to 2010, there is an increasing political support to republican conservatives, and generally non-moderate politicians in areas exposed to deindustrialization, international trade and job losses, namely where local labor market features as the main driver of political polarization. More specifically, trade-exposed areas with a white population tend to replace democrats or moderate republicans with conservative republicans, while areas with a minority-dominated population tend to vote to radical democrats or socialists. To a relevant extent, as noted by Mark Munro (2016), 'The Rust Belt epicenter of the Trump electoral map says a lot about its emotional origins, but so do the facts of employment and productivity in US manufacturing industries'.[1]

Therefore, the appeal to the 'American worker', reindustrialization and job creation, along with the condemnation of bad trade deals for the US, proved to be the key in order to win electoral support – as Trump's populist rhetoric was entirely addressed to the victims[2] of the manufacturing crisis and the outsourcing of production. Nonetheless, if this briefly sketched picture can be conceived as the general context in which the electoral success of Trump could take place, the question at stake is to understand to what extent the pro-worker rhetoric reflects an overall

[1] The Rust Belt is the chain of states from Great Lakes to Midwest, namely those states hit by deindustrialization, increasing unemployment and loss of population: 'Of the 10 states hardest hit by manufacturing jobs loss in that decade, eight of them went for Trump.' (Alden 2017).
[2] See Samuels, 2017 for a Lacanian oriented analysis of the rise of conservatives and Donald Trump.

macroeconomic policy that really reverts the neoliberalization tendency of the last decades or, on the contrary, is just the ideological cover of the intensification of the neoliberal program *with new features*.

In order to do so, the study takes into account the overall political economy of Trump administration: on the one hand, the analysis zooms in on the questions of the renewal of the national interest through revising trade policy and trade agreements. On the other, the paper reviews the macroeconomic policy that emerges from the budgetary documents for 2018 and the policy projections for the whole mandate. The aim is to reconstruct the foundational aspects of Trumpism combining these two perspectives.

The paper is organized as follows: next paragraph discusses the conceptualization of Trumpism as both economic nationalism and neoliberalization. The following two paragraphs (3 and 4) analyze the political economy of Trump administration with specific reference to trade policy and domestic macroeconomic policy documents. Eventually, the conclusion recaps the definitional features of Trumpism as militarist and economic-nationalist version of neoliberalism.

2. Trumpism as combination of tougher neoliberalization and economic nationalism

Trumpism is conceptualized here as a combination of elements of economic nationalism and increased neoliberalization. Rather than conceiving the two as opposite modalities of economic governance, I maintain that they are two intertwined segments of the current stage of the trajectory of neoliberalism as *historical* period. In other words, Trumpism displays at the same time an economic-nationalist projection concerning international trade – in this case departing from the multilateral trade policy that has long dominated US trade agreements (*contra*, see Morrison 2017) – and a strengthening of the neoliberal-oriented macroeconomic policy at the domestic level – in this case coherent with the last decades of US neoliberalization processes.

Let's start from the neoliberal dimension. Neoliberalism is a historical phase of capitalism, an ideology, and a set of institutional and political processes aimed at strengthening and broadening the rule of capital, especially finance, through state power (Harvey 2005; Saad-Filho & Johnston 2005; Duménil & Lévy 2011; Bruff 2014; Tansel 2017).

In historical terms, neoliberalism arose from the crisis of the Keynesian mechanism of capital accumulation in the mid-1970s. The years 1978-80 were the turning point for the establishment of the neoliberal paradigm, with the US paving the way (Harvey 2005).[3] The first key event in the rise of this macroeconomic paradigm was the monetarist-oriented macroeconomic policy inaugurated by Paul Volker, head of the Federal Reserve, in 1979 (Saad-Filho 2010). Fighting inflation at the expenses of employment – which, consequently, started to decrease from that period – became the main policy target among central bankers. With regard to the political dimension, in 1979 Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of the UK, and in 1980 Ronald Regan was elected as US President; both these governments pursued a fierce anti-labor policy and a market deregulation program, especially with respect to finance, with the objective of extending market mechanism to as many social sectors as possible – e.g. health, pension, public services and education – through privatization programs. In more theoretical terms, as Alfredo Saad-Filho put it, neoliberalism 'combines an accumulation strategy, a form of regulation of socio-economic reproduction and a mode of exploitation of and social domination based on the systematic use of state power to impose, under the ideological veil of non-intervention, a hegemonic project of recomposition of the rule of capital in each area of social life' (2010, p. 100).

The neoliberal phase of capitalism is historically characterized by two interlinked global tendencies: the increasing power of finance and the rise of social

[3] Outside what is conventionally understood as the West, neoliberalism made its appearance after the Pinochet coup in Chile, which overthrew the legitimate and democratic government of Salvador Allende in 1973. The Fascist regime of Pinochet, backed by the US, can be regarded as laboratory of intensive application of neoliberalizing policies. David Harvey interprets also the liberalizing policy under Deng Xiaoping in China, 1980, as neoliberal (2005, p. 1).

and economic inequalities, which affected the overall quality of democracy (*inter alia* see Solt 2008; Cole 2018). In regard to economic inequalities, Thomas Piketty has demonstrated that from the late 1970s and the 1980s there is an unprecedented rising of the top household income (2014, p. 48) and a growing gap between higher and lower incomes (see also Atkinson & Piketty 2010). In particular, Piketty stressed that when the annual average of yield based on income capital (profits, shares, rent, etc.) grows faster than the average growth rate of national income ($r > g$), we witness to the rising of income inequalities (2014, p. 680). In the US, for instance, after the equalitarian trend of the 1950s and 1960s, from 1977 to 2007 the richer 1 percent of top incomes seized the 60 percent of the growth of national income, while 'the other' 90 percent was left an average income growth rate of 0.5 percent per year (2014, p. 454; see also Duménil & Levy 2011). If capital income skyrocketed, wage incomes have been stagnating throughout the neo-liberal period. As matter of fact, from the same period real wages started to decline, along with the rise of the unemployment rate, 'with the vast majority of American workers experiencing wage stagnation while those at the top rung of the economic ladder reap the benefits of growth in productivity' (McNicholas et al. 2017, p. 1). As reported by Andrew Glyn, 'US real wages at the bottom (first decile) did not grow at all between 1979 and 2003' (2006, p. 117), favoring the concentration of wealth in top incomes. In this regard, with respect to wage differentials 'the median compensation of workers to the salaries of CEOs increased from just over 30 to 1 in 1970 to nearly 500 to 1 by 2000' (Harvey 2005, p. 16).

A key feature of Trumpism concerns taxation. The policy objective is decreasing taxes to wealthy households, coherently with neo-liberal doctrines which postulate that this kind of tax policy triggers 'trickle-down' effects on the society as a whole through improving the spending and investing power of those who have the capacity to do it. The reality, however, is that tax reform, especially during the 1980s, played a fundamental role in the increase of income gap and social inequalities, as the taxation system is the hallmark to assess how progressive or regressive is the income distribution within a country. In this regard, from the early 1980s there

were several major reforms[4] that modified the overall tax scheme and income distribution. Eight months after Ronald Regan became President, the Economic Recovery Tax Act (1981) dramatically lowered top incomes and corporate tax (Lynn 1996, p. 95). Kasten et al. (1996, p. 29) reported that the high-income families in the top 1 percent of income distribution benefited the most from tax reforms of the 1980s, due to the effective-tax-rate (ETR) decrease in absolute and relative terms. The reduction of taxation for top incomes augmented the level of income inequalities, to the extent that 'two-thirds of the absolute increase in the Gini coefficient between 1969 and 1989 occurred between 1980 and 1989. The rise of inequality [...] is further evidenced by a decline in the share of income received by the bottom three quintiles of families and a corresponding increase in the share going to the top two quintiles' (Lynn 1996, p. 97-8; see also Saez & Piketty 2003; Atkinsons & Piketty 2010, for more recent analyses of the trend).

The analysis carried on so far should be integrated now with another category, namely neo-mercantilism, in order to grasp the ruptures inaugurated by Trump administration with respect to trade policy, conceivable as the pivot of an economic nationalist agenda. It is worth stressing that economic nationalism is more than a policy: it is a mind-set based on a conflictual vision of international relations and a political rhetoric. In this last regard, Donald Trump proved to be able to appeal to the 'losers of globalization' and to those left behind by international liberal trade regime policy in order to fuel consensus. Or, seen in another way, to portray the US as structurally harmed by international trade (more in section 3).

In theoretical terms, economic nationalism – also labeled new protectionism, economic nationalism, statism (see Gilpin 1987, p. 31-34) – posits that increasing the national volume of economic activity through the accumulation of wealth and resources is functional to the increase of the power of the state: wealth and power are the ultimate ends of state politics. The state is the main actor of the international system, first because 'States create the international social, political and

[4] In the 1980s there were five major reforms of tax policy: the Economic Recovery Tax Act (1981), the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act (1982), the Deficit Reduction Act (1984), the Tax Reform Act (1986), the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (1990) (see Kasten et al. 1996).

economic arrangements in order to advance particular sets of interests' (1981, p. 25); second, because the structure of the international system reflects the relative power distribution among dominant powers, so that the overall objective of the state is to preserve and/or increase its relative position in the global system characterized by 'a recurring struggle for wealth and power among independent actors in a state of anarchy' (Gilpin 1981, p. 7; cf. Keohane 1984). In other words, economic nationalists conceive the increase of the relative share of wealth, influence and power of one state as correspondent to the relative decreasing of another state's share. This perspective implies a conflictual view of international relations, rather than one based on the possibility of fruitful international cooperation like in the liberal institutionalist tradition (cf. Keohane & Nye 2012). As international relations are marked by endemic conflict, relative gains, insecurity and asymmetry, self-sufficiency – rather than economic cooperation – is the main goal of state policy. The core of self-sufficiency is linked to another key element of economic nationalism: industry. Industry is at the same time the vehicle to attain economic growth – and thus political strength – and, above all, to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce the pressure of external forces. Closely interlinked to the objective of re-industrialization, protectionism is one of key strategies to protect domestic industry against the 'invasion' of foreign goods; neo-mercantilist governments thus 'pursue protectionist and related policies to protect their nascent or *declining industries* and to safeguard domestic interests' (Gilpin 1987, p. 33; emphasis added). As we will see in next section, Trump's electoral campaign was based on the objective of the reindustrialization of the country and on the portraying the US as the looser of the global liberal trade regime; on the other hand, the first decisions of Trump administration concerning trade were based on the repeal of multilateral trade agreements in favor of a policy turning to bilateral agreements.

Concluding, Trumpism can be conceptualized as the combination of neoliberal macroeconomic domestic policy with neo-mercantilist elements concerning international trade, within an overall *revanchist* discursive strategy aimed at portraying the US as structurally harmed by the international liberal trade regime, in the at-

tempt to 'make America great again' through a protectionist-oriented policy (Morrison 2017). After the conceptualization of Trumpism in general terms, the next two sections enquire the specificity of the political-economic strategy displayed by Trump administration in terms of trade policy and macroeconomic domestic policy.

3. The first side of Trumpism: international trade relations

International trade figured in the top priorities of Trump administration, especially due to the US current account deficit of $463 billion.[5] 'Horrible trade deals – Trump wrote in the Budget scheme of 2018 – from prior administrations have stripped wealth and Jobs from our Nation'.[6] The first act of the White House, issued in January 2017, was pulling out the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) negotiations.[7] The move, symbolically relevant, has manifested the new course of the US trade policy and the unwillingness of the US to bear the costs of its global hegemonic position. Soon after the withdrawal from negotiations, the White House released three executive orders aimed at reviewing the question of foreign trade and trade deficit, and to relaunch the industrial base of the country.

The first[8] of these orders was issued on 31 March 2017. The President urged all the executive departments and agencies of the Country to prepare a report on: (I) the entity of trade deficits and the causes of trade deficits; (II) unequal burdens and unfair discrimination against US commerce; (III) the effect of trade relationship on manufacturing and defense industrial base and (IV) wage growth and employment; (V) trade practices impairing national security. The second executive order[9] strengthened the policy-making direction of the first. The aim was to protect

[5] Data in Scott, 2017b.
[6] US Government, Office of Management and Budget, 2017a.
[7] White House memorandum available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/23/presidential-memorandum-regarding-withdrawal-united-states-trans-pacific (accessed on 3 November 2017).
[8] See the Presidential Executive Order Regarding the Omnibus Report on Significant Trade Deficits, available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/31/presidential-executive-order-regarding-omnibus-report-significant-trade (accessed on 3 November 2017).
[9] See the Presidential Executive on Establishing Enhanced Collection and Enforcement of Anti-dumping and Countervailing Duties and Violations of Trade and Custom Laws, available at

the revenue of the US against dumping practices of importers. 'As of May 2015, $2.3 billion in antidumping and countervailing duties remained uncollected [...] it is therefore the policy of the United States to impose appropriate bonding requirements, based on risk assessment, on entries of articles on entries of articles subject to antidumping and countervailing duties, when necessary to protect the revenue of the United States' (*ibid*). In terms of policy implementation, this executive order urged all the executive agencies concerned, to develop a plan in order to cover importers that put at risk the revenue of the US and to enforce antidumping and countervailing liability through appropriate legal measures. At the same time, it aimed to develop a strategy aimed at (I) combating violations of United States trade and customs laws for goods and for enabling interdiction and disposal, including methods other than seizure, of inadmissible merchandise entering through any mode of transportation; (II) ensure the timely and efficient enforcement of laws protecting Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) holders from the importation of counterfeit goods. Eventually, in terms of repression, high priority is given 'to prosecuting significant offenses related to violations of trade laws'.

The third executive order is even more meaningful in terms of economic-nationalism and neo-populist mind-set. It is meaningfully titled *Buy American and Hire American*.[10] The order is particularly important as it covers several issues like industrial growth, trade relations, immigration, and protectionism for US goods. The aim of the order is 'to promote economic and national security and to help stimulate economic growth, create good jobs at decent wages, strengthen our middle class, and support the American manufacturing and defense industrial bases' through the maximization, by the executive branch, of the use of goods, products, and materials *entirely produced* in the United States. At the same time, 'in order to create higher wages and employment rates for workers in the United States, and to protect their economic interests, it shall be the policy of the executive branch to

https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/03/31/presidential-executive-order-establishing-enhanced-collection-and (accessed on 3 November 2017).

[10] See the Presidential Executive Order Buy American and Hire American, available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/18/presidential-executive-order-buy-american-and-hire-american (accessed on 3 November 2017).

rigorously enforce and administer the laws governing entry into the United States of workers from abroad'. In this last regard, there is a clean-cut relation between economic interests and immigration policy. The 'hire American' policy is indeed related to the development of new rules and issue new guidance 'to supersede or revise previous rules and guidance if appropriate, to protect the interests of United States workers in the administration of our immigration system'.

From the three executive orders issued by Donald Trump emerges how trade is crucial in terms of reduction of trade deficit, protection of the industrial manufacturing and defense base, GDP and employment growth. Trump himself stated that 'for most of our nation's history [...] American presidents have understood that in order to protect our economy and our security, we must protect our industry' (Financial Times 2017). As noted earlier in the paragraph, the first action taken by the new President was to withdraw the US from TTP; afterwards, the North-Atlantic Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came also under fire, as Trump expressed several times the aim of revising the agreement, in particular to re-impose tariffs and review the 'rules of origin', namely the specification of whether, and to what extent, the components of a trade good belong to the US and/or the NAFTA area – in this regard, Chinese products would be particularly damaged. In this last regard, China is the main concern of the new administration in terms of international trade relations. According to the estimations of the International Monetary Fund for 2015 (see World Economic Outlook database 2016), China has accumulated a trade surplus of $600 billion, more than the half with the US.[11] Trump, besides accusing the Chinese to cheat with currency, namely to draw upon currency manipulation practices (BBC 2016), proposed to raise the tariff on Chinese imports to 45 percent.

Many of the proposals, however, so far remained limited to circumscribed matters. In fact, a trade war in such an integrated world economy would definitely not be an easy task, especially after the massive outsourcing of the manufacturing

[11] According to the Foreign Trade Bureau, just in 2016 the trade deficit was $347 million. Data across many years available at https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html (accessed on 3 November 2017).

production of the past decades. China currently holds the leadership in the global production chain of the high-end technology products (e.g. computer industry, biotechnology, aerospace and nuclear technology). According to a report by the Economic Policy Institute,[12] 'in 2015, the United States had a $120.7 billion deficit in advanced technology products with China, and this deficit was responsible for 32.9 percent of the total US-China goods trade deficit' – with further harmful outcomes in terms of wage stagnation and job losses, quantified in 3.4 million from 2001 (when China entered in the World Trade Organization) to 2005, 74.3 percent in manufacturing industry.

It is worth stressing, moreover, that Trump administration did not show a repeal for trade as such: rather, these first few months of trade policy display a preference shift from multinational agreements to *bilateral* ones (Fabry 2017; see also Noland et al. 2017). This can be partly explained by Trump's mind-set, characterized by an aggressive and leadership-oriented stance towards negotiations and agreements (see, for instance, Trump's book *The art of the deal*; see also Capehart 2015), to detriment of a cooperative and multilateral approach. In this regard, the Presidential memorandum of withdrawal from TTP (see fn. 8; emphasis added) also urged to 'begin pursuing, wherever possible, *bilateral* trade negotiations to promote American industry, protect American workers, and raise American wages'. As noted by McNicholas et al. 'as bilateral trade agreements are more likely to be ratified than multilateral ones, we are likely to see more trade agreements ratified as a result of the President's directive' (2017, p. 9-10; see also Chacko & Juayasurja 2017, p. 5).

So far, the trade policy of the Trump administration has shown a neo-mercantilist vision especially with respect to international treaties (TTP, NAFTA). On the other hand, (I) the strategy of pursuing bilateral agreements will likely be the direction of the economic-nationalist projection of Trumpism in the international level; (II) the tariff policy so far has been far less timid if compared to the usually much-vaunted statements of Donald Trump, and a trade war would actually harm the US first, given also the type of goods imported from China. According to the

[12] See Scott, 2017a.

analysis made by Noland et al. (2016, p. 26-34), a full trade war scenario with Mexico and China – through raising the tariffs respectively to 35 percent and 35 percent on nonoil products – would led to inflation and stock market decline, in turn determining a higher cost of debt and equity, economic depression and rising unemployment up to 4.8 million jobs in the private sector.

Concluding, the pathway of a neo-mercantilist vision concerning trade policy has been traced, and it is likely that will constitute the overall orientation of the future international trade agreements.[13] It should be also noted that the great absent from Trump's narrative are the US multinational corporations, which have largely benefited from the outsourcing of manufacturing production towards China and other developing countries. In this regard, the international trade policy of Trump administration is complemented by a strategy aimed at the repatriation of multinational corporations via tax reduction, and boosting investments through a thorough supply-side pro-businesses macroeconomic policy. Next section zooms in on the domestic side of Trumpism.

4. Budget cuts, welfare and tax reform, increases of defense expenditures: Trumpism as aggressive neoliberalism

Recalling from the analysis of trade policy, employment and American working population appeared to be on top of Trump's concerns (see the *Buy American and Hire American* executive order). To a relevant extent, the appeal to the impoverished (white) working and middle-class, along with the reindustrialization of the country was the key narrative of Trump's winning electoral campaign. The question, though, is to understand to what extent the first year of his mandate, and the macroeconomic policy projection in the near future, is coherent with a pro working-class politics or, on the contrary, can be conceived as the ideological cover of fiercer neoliberalization programs. In order to do so, this section analyses the budg-

[13] According to Fabry (2017) there will likely be in the future two possible scenarios concerning trade: (I) an aggressive economic-nationalist agenda based on the repeal of international agreements and trade war, or (II) a protectionist policy with limited disruption, based on anti-dumping policies, and ad-hoc targeting of enterprises, and bilateral negotiations.

et documents for the year 2018 and beyond. Afterwards, the remaining sub-paragraphs takes in specific account the welfare reform, the reform of taxation, and the labor policy.

The Budget Document for the fiscal year 2018, titled *A New Foundation For American Greatness* (see fn. 7; see also the Budget blueprint *America First. A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again*), provides essential information in order to understand the overall political-economic address of Trump administration. The main aim of the Budget policy for 2018 is to balance the federal budget and boost economic growth, given the growth of the government debt and a persistent stagnant economic situation. 'The new Administration inherited an economic situation in which the United States is $20 trillion in debt and yet at the same time dramatically undeserving the needs of its citizens due to a broken, stagnant economy' (Budget document, p. 8). Also productivity, the Trump administration laments, has achieved a historical low peak, averaging 0.5 percent from 2011 to 2016. The sources of the economic stagnation – worsened by the Great recession started in 2007-8 – are detected in five main elements:

(I) Unfair trade policies, which have determined trade deficits and stripped jobs and wealth;

(II & III) Burdensome Federal regulations and Permitting process. Environmental federal regulations (issued especially by independent agencies) and the general regulatory state are sources of added costs and a slowdown of business activity. The same applies for Permitting process: major infrastructure projects have to pass through federal agencies for reviewing potential impacts on safety, security, community, and the environment. According to Trump administration, 'the legal requirements and processes for the permitting and review of major infrastructures projects have developed a siloed and ad-hoc way', delaying the timing of approval of the projects.

(IV & V) Business tax and low business investment. According to the new administration, corporate tax in the US is the highest in the OECD countries, with a tax rate of 38.9 percent against the average 24.7 percent in the OECD (though, the

weighted average to GDP is 31.39 percent[14]). Especially due to the differentials in corporate taxes with developing countries, 'businesses will have the incentive to locate overseas' (Budget document, p. 7), thus determining a steady decreasing of business investments.

The outline of the sources of poor growth and job losses allows us to get to the core of Trump's economic vision, unsurprisingly aggressively committed towards business and market. Burdensome constraints to business activity and corporations – whether in terms of excess of regulations or corporate tax – along with bad trade deals, are identified as the key problems of the US economy, to be adjusted through a supply-side oriented agenda. More specifically, the economic policy outlined by Trump administration can be conceived as a mix of budget cuts, welfare state reform and deregulation – indeed, the only sector benefited from spending increases is defense policy.

Following a clear-cut neoliberalizing program, the main aim of the Budget document and the related *Major Savings and Reforms* document[15] is to reduce the global role of the government through a program of budgetary cuts and reduction of social welfare, namely 'an aggressive set of program elimination, reduction, and saving proposals that redefine the proper role of the Federal Government' (New Foundations, p. 12). Along with spending reduction, moreover, Trump administration planned also to reduce the civilian workforce employed in the federal government, to reform agencies and federal programs, and to reform public employment through the introduction of managerial criteria (New Foundations, p. 14).

With specific respect to budgetary policy, the Document plans a reduction of federal spending equaling $3.6 trillion – aiming to achieve the balanced budget in ten years. According to the *Major Savings* document, in 2018 the spending reduction equals to $57.3 billion cuts in discretionary programs ($26.7 billions in program elimination and $30.6 billions of reductions). Importantly, the only sector concerned by increases in spending is defense, as the Budget Blueprint included a $54

[14] See Pomerleau and Potoski, 2016.
[15] US Government, Office of Management and Budget, 2017b.

billion increases for 2018, compensated by the spending reduction in non-defense programs (New Foundations, p. 12). In terms of federal programs elimination, the sectors mostly concerned (millions of $) are Education ($4.976), Health and Human Services ($4.834) and Housing and Urban Development ($4.123). With respect to discretionary reductions (millions of $), the sectors hit by budget cuts are State and USAID ($10.674), Health and Human Services ($6.720), Education ($1.527), Energy ($2.154), Housing and Urban Development ($2.042), Transportation ($1.733), Labor ($1.419) and Environmental Protection Agency ($1.175).

This overview of the general budgetary policy and the vision underpinning the role of the government with respect to social programs, defense policy and business activity aims at laying emphasis on the aggressive neo-liberal agenda put forward by Trump administration. In order to close the circle, the next sub-paragraphs zoom in on the welfare reform, tax reform and labor policy.

4.1. Welfare reform and the repeal of Medicaid program

Many social welfare programs are planned to be reduced or eliminated due to the spending cuts planned by Trump administration in the years to come. Particularly concerned by budgetary reduction is the Health and Human Services sector, a key segment of the reform of welfare policy. For instance, the budget blueprint for 2018 stipulates the elimination of programs and agencies such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Community Services Block Grant, the Low Income Home Energy. Spending reductions concern also the National Institute of Health Topline, the Food and Drug Administration Medical Product User Fees, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the Child Support Enforcement Program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Medicaid, the healthcare reform issued by Obama administration that has extended the health insurance program, has been cut off along with a number of other federal health programs like Medicare, Exchange subsidies, the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program. The aim of the repeal of Medicaid is ‘to create a free and open healthcare market’ and ‘to empower States to make decisions that work best for their markets’

(New Foundations, p. 9), earning savings equal to $70.000 millions between 2018-2021 and $610.000 millions between 2018 and 2027.

The welfare policy reform is likewise important in order to shed light on Trump's vision of social relations. To a relevant extent, Trump administration consider those living on welfare programs as '*dependent* on the Government' (New Foundations, p. 10; emphasis added), so that through tightening the requirements of the eligibility to welfare programs, people are forcibly pushed to return to the job market again. More specifically, Trump administration proposals entail a series of reforms to tightening the eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). Moreover, the reform provides also for the introduction of the Social Security Number valid for work in order to claim for the EITC and the CTC. In relation to this last welfare program, the current law stipulates that also individuals without the CTC are entitled to such benefit, whereas under the proposed reform just those who are authorized to work in the US can claim for EITC and CTC. The reform of disability programs also follows a similar rationale, namely the reduction of the overall social spending and promotion of the labor force participation of disabled people, introducing 'new program rules and require mandatory participation by program applicants and beneficiaries' (New Foundations, p. 11). In quantitative terms, the federal government has imposed mandatory savings proposals for Disability Programs equal to $8.839 millions between 2018 and 2022 and to $72.454 million until 2027.

4.2. Increasing the income gap: tax reform scheme

A New Foundation for American Greatness requires a new approach to how we tax, regulate, and support American worker and job creators (New Foundation for American Greatness, p. 6)

As already mentioned in this section, the main economic problem detected by Trump administration is the excess of burdensome taxation – on corporations and personal incomes – and regulation, which constraint business activities and prosperity. Generally, despite the rhetoric about the 'American worker', the tax reform policy of Trump administration is a new and fiercer step in the direction of an overall taxation scheme that increasingly favors top incomes – given also that the projected modification of the overall tax revenue is linked with the reduction of expenditures concerning welfare programs as Medicare and Medicaid.

The vision of the White House with respect to taxation is that a 'comprehensive overhaul to our tax code will boost economic growth and investment' (New Foundations, p. 13), creating also new jobs. In other words, the strategy for economic growth and job creation passes through the liberation of the forces of capital. At the same time, the aim of the administration is to make the US 'a more attractive business environment' (*ibid*), through a fiscal dumping strategy aimed at bringing back corporations and high incomes – in this case, the proposal is favoring the repatriation of profits made overseas by multinational corporations without penalties or additional taxes. Among the tax reform proposals for instance, there is the end of the minimum tax, the repeal of the 3.8 percent Obamacare surcharge on capital gains and dividends, and the abolition of death tax. The reform scheme passes thus through three main policy instruments: (I) the reduction of the tax rate on businesses; (II) the elimination of the special interest tax break to lower the tax rates for businesses; (III) the repatriation of the overseas profits without incurring additional taxes (New Foundations, 2017, p. 14).

Specifically, the proposed reform of the taxation structure as emerged by the joint work of the White House and the Senate Financial Committee[16] provides a new taxation scheme for individual incomes and corporations. With respect to individual incomes, the current system is made of seven rates and income thresholds (adjusted on single filer, joint filers or head of household). The proposed restructuring of the tax scheme, likewise grounded on a structure of seven thresholds, delivers an overall reshuffle/diminution of the structure of the rates (see Table 1). With respect to corporations, the reform (among other provisions) lowers the corporate income tax from the current 35 percent rate to 20 percent from 2019; eliminates the alternative minimum tax; enacts deemed repatriation of currently deferred foreign profits, at a rate of 10 percent for cash and cash-equivalent profits and 5 percent for reinvested foreign earnings (Walczak and El-Sibaie, 2017).

Table 1 - Projected Tax Reform of Trump Administration

Current tax rates for head of household	Tax rates for head of household after 2018 Reform
10 % not over 13.350	10% not over &13.600
15% = $13.350 to $50.800	12% = $13.600 to $51.800
25% = $50.800 to $131.200	22.5% = $51.800 to $60.000
28% = $131.200 to $212.500	25% = $60.000 to $170.000
33% = $212.500 to $426.700	32.5% = $170.000 to $200.000
35% = $426.700 to $444.550	35% = $200.000 to $500.000
39.6% over $444.550	38.5% over $500.000

Source: Senate Financial Committee. Available at https://www.finance.senate.gov/taxreform

The new reform, at the same time, doubles the estate tax exemption from $5.6 million to $11.2 million; increases the standard deduction to $12.000 for single filers to $18.000 for heads of households and to $24.000 for joint filers; eliminates

[16] See in particular the bill *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* released by the Senate Financial Committee, 10 November 2017.

the additional standard deduction and the personal exemption. According to calculations, the tax reform would allow to $1.5 trillion tax cut over 10 years (New York Times, 10 September 2017), that is to say reducing further the federal budget and likely increasing the government debt. Above all, as stated by Jacob Kirkeegard (2017), the tax reform will render the US tax system, already one of the more regressive among OECD countries, even more regressive, therefore increasing income inequalities.

4.3. Working-class rhetoric and anti-labor policy reality

As noted earlier in this section, the Department of Labor (DOL) suffered from $1.419 million budget cuts, and several agencies and programs were hit by spending reductions or program elimination.[17] Despite the political emphasis on the 'American worker' outlined in the trade policy, the budget blueprint for 2018 provides for the elimination of the DOL's international labor grants and the reduction of the Bureau of International Labor Affair, which ensures that trade agreements are fair for US workers (see *Major Savings and Reform*, p. 60). In terms of program's elimination, the Unemployment Insurance Solvency Standard was suppressed in order to burden the States alone for the funding of the unemployment insurance. Trump urged the DOL to review also the Fiduciary Duty Rule, aimed at improving the workers' rights to be informed when financial advisers are paid a commission to steer clients towards specific investments – namely, when there is a conflict of interests. With respect to regulations, the new administration blocked the Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces Rule. As stated by McNicholas et al. (2017, p. 3)

> *The rule required companies applying for federal contracts to disclose violations of federal labor laws and executive orders addressing wage and hour, safety and health, collective bargaining, family medical leave, and civil rights protections. Currently, there is no effective system for distinguishing between law-abiding contractors and those that violate labor and employment laws.*

[17] For a thorough reconstruction of the first months of Trump's labour policy, see in particular McNicholas et al 2017.

Trump administration blocked also a DOL resolution assisting the Individual Retirement Account (IRA), a retirement scheme set-up by local government for private-sectors workers when employers do not offer a workplace retirement plan. The IRA plan provides workers with the automatic enrolment and deduction in retirement schemes administered by local government. In terms of workplace safety, the White House delayed the effective date of a rule aimed at limiting the workers' exposure to beryllium in the workplace, one limiting the permissible exposure to crystalline silica in the construction industry, and another aimed at protecting miners' safety and health. Eventually, Trump administration blocked also the resolution Workplace Injury and Illness Recordkeeping rule, aimed at improving the employers' obligations to keep records of workplace injuries and illness (*ibid*, p. 4), and proposed a rule (5 December 2017) to allow employers to legally pocket workers' tips for estimated $5.8 billion (see Shierholz et al. 2017).

5. Conclusion: Trumpism, *senile disorder*[18] of neoliberalism?

The analysis made in the previous sections has sought to shed light on the contradictory core of the political economy of Trump administration by looking at the overall picture and taking into account the budget policy, taxation and welfare reform, as well as at the international economic relations and defense policy. The first side of Trumpism can be conceived as the strengthening of the neoliberal pathway: the macroeconomic strategy to boost economic growth and employment is thoroughly committed to a supply-side oriented policy made of tax cuts on corporations and top incomes, and on the reduction of regulations for business activity. The plunge of taxes – a proper fiscal dumping strategy, given the extent of the cuts (see paragraph 4.2) – is also conceived as the necessary step to repatriate profits made above by multinational corporations. In the same direction, the budgetary documents and the spending decisions reveal the effort to reduce dramatically the role of the government in terms of expenditures for welfare and other sectors, e.g.

[18] The quote is adapted from a polemical pamphlet by Lenin, *Left-wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*.

education, health system, environment, employment insurance. The strengthening of the neoliberalization process concerns also the budgetary and welfare policy, in particular due to the reduction of budgetary expenditures for welfare programs and agencies, and to the negative vision associated to welfare as such.

If the role of the government with respect to wealth redistribution, education and welfare is shrinking in terms of spending magnitudes, on the side of trade and defense it is moving towards an increasing nationalist and militarist orientation. In fact, the second side of Trumpism concerns the international economy and the defense policy, two aspects of Trump's redefinition of the national interest. If from the 1930s the US national interest was linked to a liberal international rule-based order, this belief has been actually reverted with Trump administration. As seen in paragraph 2, the trade policy inaugurated by the White House is based on a conflictual and zero-sum game vision of the international trade. This does not imply, however, a total repeal of trade, also due to the potential cost of a trade war. Rather, this belligerent stance will be likely translated in the prevalence of bilateral trade agreements fast-tracked[19] by the White House, and an increasing unwillingness to bear the costs of the US (post?) global hegemonic role. The economic nationalism is part of a broader strategy in which the military and defense also have a prominent role. In this regard, the Trump administration has diverted to this sector $54 billions from non-defense spending, stressing the role of military defense of US borders and promising also 'a focus on overt power through the expansion of the navy in the Asia-Pacific' (Chacko & Juayasurja 2017, p. 5).

Coming to the conclusions, in theoretical terms, the article has sought to use IPE categories dynamically, employing them to shed light on Trump administration political economy *in the making* and to stress its intrinsic contradictions. From the empirical analysis, Trumpism emerges as a combination of longstanding patterns of supply-side and pro-business oriented macroeconomic policy and welfare state retrenchment, with a neo-mercantilist trade policy and belligerent militarism.

[19] The 'fast-track' is a procedure aimed at speeding-up the approval of bills concerning trade agreements through cutting down debate and/or filibuster, amendments, and other special procedures (Shapiro 2006).

So far, it is hardly to speak about a renewed 'military Keynesianism' (cf. Chacko & Juayasurja 2017): rather, it seems to be the dawn of a military and economic-nationalist neoliberalism. This implies that the shift towards a nationalist-oriented discourse and policy can be compatible, as seen for instance with respect to taxation and fiscal policy, with the trends that have characterized the neoliberalizing patterns over the past decades. On the global side, the US will be likely unwilling to bear the costs of the international liberal trade regime as emerged in the post-WWII era, possibly rewriting, in the forthcoming years, the international rules concerning trade agreements and commercial relations – that is to say, a foundational aspect of global politics.

However, Trumpism is characterized by another and deeper contradiction: it is a populist capitalization of the structural contradictions of neoliberalism and of the crisis of legitimation of the traditional political elites, and, at the same time, a strengthening of those (neoliberal) patterns which have determined economic imbalances and social unrest – yet, intertwined with new nationalist elements. This occurs, moreover, within an international order increasingly characterized by systemic instabilities. As such, rather than leading the US away from the current political and social crisis while providing also a source of stability for the architecture of the international order, the Trump administration will likely exacerbate and accelerate the manifold crises of our time.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Simul stabunt, simul cadent: The US, the EU and the liberal international order in the Trump era

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ABSTRACT (max 150 words)

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States was perceived by many observers as a threat to the international liberal order. This paper sets out to contribute to the debate by focusing on the role of a specific component of this order: the relationship between the United States and the European Union. The question addressed is whether the potential transformations experienced by the element of the transatlantic relationship due to the 'Trump effect' are liable to have a substantial and distinctive impact on the wider order. Using the lenses of the security community approach, we point out variance and convergences in interests, interaction, institution and identities of the two partners, and to what extent the advent of Trump has actually – or is likely to – impinge on each of these categories, and how this affects the foundations of the international liberal order.

KEYWORDS: Liberal Order; Donald Trump; Transatlantic relations; Security Communities; European Union.

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Introduction

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States was presented by a number of American and foreign observers as a watershed in the international role of the country, and a potentially fatal incident for the political arrangement that had underpinned world politics since the end of World War II (Adelman 2016; Rachman 2016). More than one year into the Presidency, a number of disrupting promises and projects have in fact been scaled back, put on hold or just forgotten. Yet, the current administration's volatile platform, inconsistent foreign policy agenda and off-centre approach to decision-making continue to be cause for concern and scholarly interest. Several rules, institutions and practices apparently undisputable have been impacted by Trump's extemporary revisionism, so that not even one of the most cherished outcomes of the foreign policy commitment of the United States (US) and its allies – the liberal international order (LIO) – seems immune to what may be called the 'Trump effect' (Speck 2016; Niblett 2017; Nye 2017).

The prospect of a substantial transformation, if not the collapse, of the fundamental arrangement of contemporary international society has been mainly looked at either from a broad perspective (i.e. Colgan & Keohane 2017; Ikenberry 2018) or focusing on US foreign policy and its role as the leader of the LIO (i.e. Stokes 2018; Brattberg & Kimmage 2018). This paper seeks to contribute to the debate by identifying and elaborating on the role of a significant component of the liberal order: the relationship between the US and the European Union (EU). The question addressed in this work is whether the transformations experienced by this very special relationship as an effect of the advent of Donald Trump are liable to have a substantial and distinctive impact on the LIO.

The US-EU relationship is assumed here to be one of the main routes of the transatlantic interaction, not least as a result of the former's role as an external regulator of post-war European integration and an enduring model/counterpart of the process in the subsequent decades (Peterson 2016). The choice to focus on the institutional embodiment provided by the European Union does not negate that re-

lations with single European states and the thick network of international organisations other than the EU remain vital channels of transatlantic engagement in a number of crucial areas. For example, there is little doubt that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), even with its significant shortcomings, remains the main forum for consultation on Euro-Atlantic security and strategic issues – also (but not only) as a result of EU member states giving precedence to their bilateral relations with the US over EU-US co-operation (Keohane 2018). Nor does the assumption blank out the lack of interest, if not the plain disdain, that US policymakers have periodically shown towards the Union and the integration process (Cowles & Egan 2016). Still, no matter how obscure or contested, the EU and the integration process have retained a central role within the wider transatlantic relationship insofar as America and Europe have mutually behaved not only as a highly-institutionalised subset of the international system, but (also) as a something resembling a political community, implying a comparatively high relevance of ideational as well as material aspects and the pursuit of some form of integration. This is also the result of the major post-World War II foreign policy initiative of the US, designed not only to induce or prevent specific behaviour or orientations in particular actors (mainly governments), but also to influence or even shape Europe's political, legal, economic, social, security and other underlying *structures*, in order to alter the very foundations of the Old World's social and political processes – instead of just influencing *behaviour*. In a sense, the EU can be conceived as the upshot of the structural component of the US transatlantic foreign policy, which manifested most conspicuously in the Marshall Plan (Keukeleire & Delreux 2014). In fact, the European Community/Union is far from being just the brainchild of post-war America, designed to serve without fault its interests – already the Kennedy administration took steps to counter undesirable effects like the European Community (EC) common tariff on US export, not to mention the Nixon administration ill disposition towards the EC's increasing coordination capabilities. Already in the Seventies, the relationship started to partly develop into a partnership, at first with mainly rhetorical, and somewhat inconsistent commitments, and then in progressively more substantial

ways. Also in response to the progressive emergence of the Union's international agency, the US have been constantly adjusting the structural/relational rationale underlying their engagement with the EU, which has come to be (perceived as) a pivotal component in terms of scope and polity format within the wider European integration process, even in light of the pre-eminent NATO framework (Fichera & Hänninen 2014).

In particular, the Union appears to have been a major reference point, either as a conduit or an active partner in the exercise of American leadership in the creation and operation of the transatlantic community, at least to the extent that the US has aimed – and sometime managed – to fashion relationships with and between European countries so that interactions become more substantive beyond mutual interest-based cooperation. Hence, the relationship between the EU and the US is examined as a distinctive element of the transatlantic 'pluralistic security community' – that is, a configuration of interests, identities, interdependence and institutions that interact with each other in ways that solve the security dilemma between its members, creating dependable expectations of peaceful change (Deutsch et al. 1957; Adler & Barnett 1998; Peterson 2016).

The other assumption of the paper is that the transatlantic relationship – with the EU-US nexus at its core – is the pivot of the multiple liberal order established after the Second World War, and the stepping stone to the global order emerged after the end of the Cold War (Ikenberry 2012). The idea is that, through the encompassing framework provided by the transatlantic security community and the constitutive connection with the US, the EU has become a local advanced realisation – and, to some extent, an agent – of the transatlantic effort to uphold and advance liberal principles, such as multilateralism, rule-based action, economic and social openness, in the international sphere.

Based on these premises, the paper sets out to investigate whether and how the revisionist orientations of the current US foreign policy – and in particular Trump's unabashed, if inconsistent, antagonism to principles and policies informing the relationship with the EU and the transatlantic security community – poses a

specific threat to the LIO. Following this introduction, the paper is composed of three sections. Section one looks into the conceptual premises of the allegedly revolutionary repercussions of the 'Trump effect' by outlying a criterion according to which the effect of the Trump presidency on the US-EU relationship can consistently be seen as a crisis – as opposed to 'ordinary' transformation. Section two sets out to assess magnitude and modes of the Trump effect – i.e. the actual risks it generates to the transatlantic relation, especially in light of the traditional role of leader played by the USA within the transatlantic community. More specifically, this section investigates the relationship between the Union and the United States through the lenses of the security community approach, in order to point out variance and convergences in interests, interaction, institution and identities of the two parts; in particular, the paper assesses whether and to what extent the advent of Trump has actually – or is likely to – impinge on each of these categories. Finally, section three focuses on how the impact of Trump on the relationship between the United States and the European Union affects in turn the foundations of the LIO.

1. Trump and the ubiquity of crisis

The presidency of Donald Trump has recurrently been associated with the notion of 'crisis'. Even before his election, Trump had been indicated as a symptom of a 'deeper systemic crisis' affecting large sectors of the American society (Ahmed 2017). Today, the President's intolerance for rules has being increasingly recognised by scholars and the public to be on the verge of a constitutional crisis (Jurecic & Wittes 2018). Trump's foreign policy has also been thought of in these terms, despite the relative 'good luck' that has characterised his first year in office (Cohen 2018). Even without any of the tense situations brewing across the globe having reached a major meltdown (yet), the mix of belligerent rhetoric, erratic and revisionist views and chaotic decision-making have been regarded as enough evidence of the critical conditions – generated or aggravated by the current administration – in which current US foreign policy develop (Price 2017; Smith & Yalowitz 2017).

Today's turmoil in traditional US alliances is frequently indicated as evidence of the alleged climacteric generated by the Trump administration. In January 2018, the New York Times published an article by its regular opinion writer on Germany titled *Is the Trans-Atlantic Relationship Dead?* (Sauerbrey 2018). According to the article, the doomsday prospect has several adherents in Germany's political elites; even Chancellor Merkel is reported to have had contingency plans devised to face the possible breakdown the American leadership and reliability. On the other hand, a number of German experts and policymakers – e.g. the authors of the 'Trans-Atlantic Manifesto' (Berger et al. 2017) – have deemed the crises serious but not fatal, and urged to hold fast to a relationship that is to remain crucial to the LIO in the foreseeable future, as well as the legitimacy of the Germany's role as a leader in Europe. An analogous debate about whether the presidency of Trump marked or not a turning point in transatlantic relations has flourished on the other side of the Atlantic as well (Pifer 2017; Schulster & Karnitschnig 2017). Admittedly, even before the advent of Trump, there has been no shortage of analyses and commentaries concerned with the crisis affecting the relationship between Europe and America, as well as the tenability of the liberal order that hinges to a still significant extent on it. In fact, the term crisis has been so pervasive that it may even be regarded as an expression of the 'spirit of the time'. Nonetheless, ubiquity comes with a high degree of vagueness – and the risk of becoming just a trope. A few preliminary clarifications are therefore needed in order to establish whether the notion is in fact adequate and of any analytical use in identifying the conditions of the US-EU relationship.

Without going into the manifold conceptual subtleties of the notion, a crisis can be defined as a transitional phase during which the *modus operandi* of a political system or community differs markedly from the functioning in normal times. This definition posits a subjective point of view in determining the presence of a crisis, which depends on policy makers experiencing 'a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions'

(Boin et al. 2005, p. 2). Whereas the failure of the social and political orders experiencing a crisis is not inherent to this definition, 'threat', 'uncertainty' and 'urgency' are key components of it. Thus, in addition to an idea of abrupt transformation, a crisis also implies an element of risk for established institutions – formal and informal – whose control capacities are under stress (Guiraudon et al. 2015).

Based on this conception, the Trump effect meets the criteria for being consistently considered a critical factor to the US-EU relationship, but only with a number of qualifications. The US and the EU have virtually no life-sustaining system in common (e.g. infrastructures that, if compromised, may induce a sense of existential precariousness among the population) and at least some of their respective core values are not only exclusive to each of them, but even incompatible with one another – e.g. the role of government in the national economy and its responsibility to its citizens, as evidenced by the ongoing debate on Obamacare. This reduces the internal cohesion of the US-EU relationship as a proper community, making it comparatively more prone to collapse compared to a closer-knit community, but less exposed to a proper existential crisis. Still, conceptions, practices and values relative to safety and security, (partial) economic and social openness and prosperity, the common international status and integrity as 'the West' have been construed, protected and advanced to a great degree through mutual exchange. Making disparaging remarks about the European Union, derailing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership talks, embracing authoritarian figures like Putin, withdrawing from the Iran Nuclear agreement, levying tariffs in steel and aluminium, but also calling NATO obsolete and hesitating before reaffirming the Article 5 commitment: these all are policy directions which violate the values embedded in the institutions and practices constituting the US-EU relationship (Binnendijk 2018). Moreover, they break the tacit 'rules of the game' that so far have mediated between, on the one hand, explicit formal structures and prescriptions regulating relations among the US, the EU and its member states, and on the other the uniqueness of the integration processes underway and the asymmetries in terms of power as well as polity and policy solutions between the transatlantic partners. It was this

set of rules that allowed for the viable coexistence of formal rules of sovereignty equality (between Western countries and with the rest of the world), the establishment of functional regimes, special relationship, structural interventions to coexist as well as the exercise of American leadership in the European and transatlantic space. The clear disregard of the current administration for these rules of the game is what makes today's tension look like a crisis. In seemingly denying the experience of the EU – and the expectations that have emerged from an established pattern of behaviour – the US administration 'gaslights' the relation: it not only challenges the 'obligations' that have arisen for the EU out of the US's reliance on those patterns, but also calls into question the 'normality' of the Union for harbouring such expectations (Kratochwil 1989). If, according to the abovementioned definition, the seriousness of a crisis is proportional to the system's stability, Trump's attack to the 'rules of the game' of transatlantic interaction lends weight to the thesis that the President is a critical factor for the transatlantic and the global order, rather than just a turbulent epiphenomenon contingent on structural changes determining the actual state of affairs.

As displayed by a recent Pew Research Centre poll conducted among a sample of 387 thought leaders, Trump and his administration rank very high among the biggest challenges for the Transatlantic Relationship across the American/European divide according to roughly a quarter of the surveyed (basically a tie with economic and trade issues) (Stokes 2018). The functional and symbolic value of the transatlantic relation has been beset by any number of setbacks and inconsistencies throughout the decades, the most recent instances being the severe break in the US-EU relationship over the 2003 Iraq war – with the US's upheaval of the 'alliance determines the mission' principle and the EU member states painfully taking sides with (and being called names by) the US – and President Obama's political and diplomatic retrenchment. Again, the discontinuity of the Trump presidency lays is the determination (and lack of care) with which nearly every basic assumption – even the basic American support of the European project and the legitimacy of the US relationship with it – can be the object of occasional contestations, if not a radi-

cal revision (Szabo 2017; Golino 2018). The current transatlantic tensions do threaten the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of the US-EU relationship, in spite of the resilience of the NATO architecture. The current administration's actions are causing uncertainty 'the likes of which the world has never be seen before' in Trumpian terms The President communication excesses (e.g. bashing of Germany) and disdain for diplomacy, his radical and at the same time changeable policy agenda (for instance on trade tariffs), the promotion of foreign-policy personnel sharing his hawkish views and lack of experience (as is the case with the appointment of Mike Pompeo as new Secretary of State), as well as the quite open support to illiberal movements and governments across Europe (Sloan 2018) are all elements that escalate unpredictability – which is the antithesis of the 'constitutional aim' of the EU as well as, to a lesser degree, the transatlantic community at regularise relations within its borders and with third states. In this sense, even 'good news' – such as the US increasing funding for the European Deterrence Initiative, the redeployment of US troops to Eastern Europe and NATO Battle Groups in the Baltic States and Poland – while in compliance with the shared value of (common) security, add to the perception that, even when not directly threatened with hostile remarks or measures, the relationship is exposed to the risk generated by intemperance and lack of predictability.

2. The EU-US relationship and the transatlantic security community

Having established that there are grounds to discuss a crisis, and that it pertains to the risk fuelled by high uncertainty rather than the threat of unilateral withdrawal and immediate collapse, we may delve into the scope of the crisis, that is, the impact of the Trump effect on specific areas whose interplay can direct the intrinsically hazardous transformation of the US-EU relationship towards a range of possible outcomes. In analysing all the critical junctures that have punctuated the relationship between America and Europe since the end of the Second World War, Jones (2004) also observes the components of the relationship and come to the conclusion that until the crisis over the intervention in Iraq, all crises are 'crises of will',

that is, times of intense distress on account of divergences among actors in capabilities, values and expectations. Since the death knell has tolled so frequently for the transatlantic relationship without ever bringing it to an end, one might wonder if the latter had better be regarded as being not so much affected, but rather 'constituted' by a continual series of crises, each leading to a more or less conspicuous rearrangement of its components (e.g. balance of power, strategic rationale, identities and values). The security community theoretical angle is adopted in order to ascertain in what sense the current crisis, unlike past instances, may also be traced back to a cyclical phase, or if there is any sign of something resembling a 'quantum shift' in the complex US-EU relationship.

Even taking as read that the transatlantic order is in critical conditions due to the Trump effect, one may still wonder whether the toilsome reappraisal of the partners' mutual engagement also impinges on their ability and willingness to purse their common purposes. A realist take would make short work of the problem, arguing that changes are only critical as long as they generate serious repercussions for the actors' interests.

Without ruling out the importance of material power and the maximisation of groups' and/or governments' utilities, the analytical approach first designed by Deutsch (1957) and then further developed by Adler and Barnett (1998) has emphasised that the transatlantic relationship should be conceived as more than a traditional alliance or the outcome of (economic) interdependence as, despite its pluralistic nature, the transatlantic relationship has attained the characters of a community (Adler & Barnett 1998). The conceptualisation as a (security) community alters what counts as a fundamental aspect or a principle that, if altered, may trigger a genuine crisis, as opposed to contingent features, no matter how consequential. Closer to the postulates of social constructivism, the security community approach assumes that shifts in the material power balance are mitigated, or magnified, by institutional and ideational factors. Elements like security-based interests and rational calculation of collaboration's costs and gains are important, but their meaning depends on discursive construction. This is relevant in assessing the *momentum* of the

'Trump effect', for it alters the otherwise clear hierarchy between, on the one hand, long-term structural factors that might permanently damage the basic conditions of systemic – as opposed to social – Europe-America interaction, and on the other hand, cyclical factors expected to generate meaningful but transient disruptions of US and European/EU policymaking and reciprocal influence. Clearly, divergences in capabilities, political polarization, economics and leadership are transient compared to imbalances triggered by geography, demographics or the availability of resources (Wickett 2018). Still, although they operate on a much more limited temporal dimension, the former factors can hardly be underestimated as their impact reverberates on the communal setting within which US-EU relationship has developed over the decades, that is, the specific social setting within which meanings have been associated to both structural and cyclical factors.

In the next sub-sections, the impact of orientations and actions of the Trump administration is measured based on the four categories singled out by Risse in his more comprehensive assessment of the state of the European-American relationship in the 2010s prior to the US presidential election: interests, interdependency, institutions, identity (Risse 2016).

2.1. Interests

Even in a sophisticated relationship such as security community, conflicts of interest are accepted as long as they are liable to be solved peacefully. For this to happen, said interests – 'expressions of preferences held by political actors over states of the world (preference over outcome) or the means to achieve goals (preferences over strategies)' (Risse 2016, p. 23) – must remain, if not common at least mutually compatible, no matter how stark their divergence. Hence, in order to establish whether expected conflicts of interest have been escalating into a full-blown crisis due to the advent of the Trump administration, the breadth of the range of contentious issues and their closeness to what either side considers to be core business has to be investigated (Risse 2016).

Trade policy is an area where mechanisms to manage US-EU conflicts of interest have been exposed to the highest pressure. Already during the Obama administration, a string of gridlocks had effectively led the negotiation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) come to a standstill (Erikkson 2016). It is with the come into office of the Trump administration, though, that the discussion of the comprehensive bilateral deal has been suspended *sine die* and amid unpleasant accusations of the EU (Germany) trying to rip-off all-too-tolerant America. Admittedly, the tariffs imposed thus far by the US are still far from a full-blown trade war, leaving some latitude for normal reconciliation processes to catch up. On the other hand, Trump's general anti-globalisation stance has been affecting not only prospective exchange volumes, but the core interests of US-EU trade relations. The promise to defend American jobs and production from the harmful effects of globalisation at all costs amounts to a challenge against the principles of trade openness and fair competition upon which the international liberal (economic) order has rested since it was created – and largely based on the transatlantic pivot. US-EU relations have long been ridden with controversies and mutual accusations of protectionism, but these had never been informed before by an explicit – if simplistic – vision of the international trade system as a zero-sum game, where relative gains outclass absolute ones.

Despite the European Commission's exclusive competence in this area, divergences internal to the EU also complicate resolution processes, for not only differentials in trade power translate into the EU interests to overlap unevenly with those of each member states, which can influence outcomes (and/or undermine the Commission's effectiveness) relative to those commercial sectors where the decision-making process involves the national level of government. The Trump effect's here manifests in Trump presenting and dealing with the Union as though it was a mere 'vehicle' of Germany's interests, also trying intermittently to play post-Brexit UK against the bloc – only to making sudden U-turns on both positions.

As for the potential clash of interests in the security area, the Trump administration has turned policy issues until then routinely managed (often at the ex-

pense of an effective coordinated action) to become a source of unsettling uncertainty if not open contention. In this regard, Russia's case is emblematic as the country's ties with the US – though much more complicated than Trump's pro-Russian stance alone may suggest – have become a source of discord with and within the EU. The US's unpredictable framing of strategic relations with Russia, combined with divergences in other areas, appears to create a context unfavourable enough to offset persistence of common strategic interests among the transatlantic partners. The tendency to subordinate even structural foreign policy issues to domestic party politics considerations, and the more or less explicit support to Eurosceptic positions within the EU (counter to US diplomatic tradition) make the identification of (each partner, and common) interests even more complicated.

A conceptual overhaul by the Trump administration of core interests in terms of outcomes and strategies has also played a role in driving a wedge between the traditional partners. The withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal has been premised on a notion of national interest defined in terms of mutual exclusion *vis-à-vis* the other countries' and the international community. Indeed, that notion of national interest seems to be incompatible to any trade-off between the US leadership within the transatlantic alliance on the one hand, and the anchorage provided by the 'international presence' of the Union, and its member states, on the other (Bretherton & Vogler 2006). This makes the asymmetry that has always been ingrained in the Atlantic alliance a critical factor, which spread throughout the European security system binding together NATO and the EU by means of institutions, norms and cooperative/competitive communitarian relationships (Cornish & Edwards 2001; Simòn 2013).

2.2. Interdependency

Even in front of significant shifts in the interest structure, it is reasonable to expect interdependency to keep up the *momentum* of cooperation and integration within the US-EU relationship, at least on a merely functional level. Given their deep interconnectedness and the costs associated with potential incongruities, the

integrated complex of the European single market and the US may appear relatively isolated from the effects of 'extrinsic' changes. Indeed, the current US administration seems able to produce a significant impact on structural factors too, especially the balances underlying the distinct 'competitive interdependency' at play between the US and the EU (Damro 2016). The complex integration between the American and the European economies and their combined global influence have been coupled by an underlying competition between the two parties, each endeavouring to project their respective trade policies and regulatory systems (especially since bilateral preferential trade agreement became the new standard after the failure of the WTO's Doha Round). Today this balance is put at risk by the neo-mercantilist approaches embraced by the US administration and some European government. According to these conceptual and policymaking trends, regulated competition, apart from some short-term benefits, no longer compensates for the costs of interdependence, and economic competition, in order to be authentically 'fair', has to be conditional on the pursuit of national interests (Wright 2016; Ahmed & Bick 2017). Whatever its specific content, national interests are assumed to be better advanced through bilateral relationships, as these do not imply the establishment of institutions and inter- or supra-national bureaucracies that end up pushing 'globalism-inspired' normative agendas, which are inevitably at variance with the primacy of the people's will. This shift in the fundamental understandings of international economic relations indicates that the material and substantial aspects of the transatlantic relationships are in fact tightly intertwined with the domain of ideology and identity, although they mostly 'emerge' irrespective of whether and to what extent they are formulated in theoretical forms. Arguably, what under many aspects is merely a rhetorical means aimed at achieving immediate political goals and economic gains can also be regarded as a simplistic expression of a new set of values and conceptions about the national and international politics.

2.3. Institutions

Institutions can be conceived as a set of permanent but flexible structures of rules that prescribe, enable and constrain the actors' conduct based on criteria of appropriateness (Keohane 1989; March & Olsen 1989). US-EU institutions have not taken over the wider transatlantic setting; in fact, their mutual behaviour is intertwined with a sophisticated and diverse institutional framework, including formal organisations equipped with their own bureaucratic structure, like NATO, whose inter-organisational relationship with the EU is regulated by a well-structured, if strategically ineffective, regime (Græger 2016). Other formal institutional venues are periodic high level meetings like the yearly US-EU summit, as well as a high number of ministerial level meetings between the US Department representatives and their EU counterparts, complemented by reciprocal liaison relationships in areas spanning from intelligence and counterterrorism to trade. The operations of these formalised structures are fleshed out through the day-to-day activity of a host of groups of officials, from ministerial to work level, who, in doing so, play a big role in constantly re-shaping interactions according to the transatlantic community's underlying rules. One step further towards the informal end of the transatlantic institutional framework is an array of policy networks of experts, academic, civil servants, international organisations officials and state and non-state actors. These networks served as a necessary complement to formal intergovernmental cooperation and made inroads even into sensitive policy areas like regulation and intelligence (Pawlak 2010). Astride the formal-informal divide lays also the host of bilateral relationships that the US prefers to entertain with individual (groupings of) member States rather than the EU as such in specific policy area – especially those where the EU has relatively little competence. Clearly this is a delicate aspect, as the option of privileged access to the US has frequently been the consequence not only of diverging goals and capabilities among EU governments, but also an instrument used in a 'divide-and-rule' game played by America.

At least to some extent, this partially multilateral, partially bilateral institutional set-up is the result of a pragmatic 'division of labour' among partners with partly diverging strategies and capabilities, one that has resulted conducive, in its

own way, to normative expectations and patterned behaviour (the 'rules of the game' underlying US-EU interaction). On the other hand, the tension between the bilateral dimension and the commitment to multilateral structures also reflects the enduring dilemma between 'Atlanticism' and 'Europeanism', which, while being typical of the integration process since its outset, has undergone a distinctive development since the advent of Trump.

The picture is actually more nuanced than one would infer from the President's boastful rhetoric. For instance, despite the new administration's apparent non-adversarial attitude towards Russia, the US does not seem to have lost its allure in the eyes of Central Europe EU members, other staples of the Atlanticist party (Tamkin 2017). These countries' enduring trust in the US may be due to the fact that, despite Trump's apparent warmth towards s Putin, the US military and political deputies have taken decisive steps against Russia, in accord with their European counterparts as well as the traditional principles of deterrence (De Luce et al. 2018). Yet, an unbroken military engagement through NATO structures does not necessarily imply the good health of the corresponding security community. NATO may well be phasing from a community into a military alliance, which would still provide protection against external threats –especially traditional understanding of threats, as it is the case with the Russia – while leaving countries free from burdensome institutional limitation to their newly cherished sovereignty.

In fact, aside from traditional favour for America and NATO, support for Trump in Central Europe member states may also be credited to a widespread sympathy for the nationalistic and populist views informing the American President's agenda, despite the latter being at odds with the values of multilateralism underlying the transatlantic relationship (Sjursen 2004). Trump's political platform is highly relatable for voters and political entrepreneurs responsible for the powerful Eurosceptic turn in the young Central European democracies, still unsettled by the sudden transition from communist regimes and comparatively less prosperous than longer-standing member states. The question is not about the transatlantic community becoming more pluralistic, but rather the extent to which the Trump effect is

impinging on the behaviour patterns and the ensuing recognition of mutual expectations underlying any institutional setting, pluralistic or amalgamated that it might be. However, one can already pinpoint some evidences of this shift by focusing on the institutional aspect. The controversy stirred by Trump about the NATO members being 'in debt' lays bare his transactional understanding of the transatlantic institutions (and foreign policy in general) and seems to have spurred ramifications in the institutional remit of the EU. The President of the European Commission's call for a European army or the European Defence Union in the 2017 State of the Union address, or the President of the French Republic's proposals for a new intervention force, a EU defence budget and the freedom to serve in any member state's army were presented with a discernible timing , and that at least indicates that the troubles in the relationship between NATO and the EU, though not new, are today increasingly pressing concern among policymakers and publics (Valasek 2017).

2.4. Identities and values

Ideational and normative aspects have been frequently called into question in the effort to comprehend the Trump presidency. A largely irrational aversion to (central) government, a deep resentment against liberal elites, upwardly mobile minorities and immigrants, and a heightened perception of white, small town and rural America as being left behind by the powers that be: these are some of the identity politics factors that, combined with economic and material aspects like new trade balances, technological development and de-industrialization, have been frequently pointed out to account for the unexpected ascent to power of Donald Trump as the champion of the so-called 'cultural backlash' (Sawhill 2016). On the other hand, the unpredictable behaviour of its members, a constantly unstable make-up and the lack of a clear ideological foundation make it hard to single out a set of ethical and identity markers informing the action of this administration, or the extent to which this conduct represents genuine ethical orientations and self-images of American society – as opposed to being nothing more than the resultant of forces pulling in different directions, all in response to a conveniently vague political platform.

Against this uncertain backdrop, what needs to be assessed here is whether the Trump effect can be classified as a very intense manifestation of a deep(ening) but thus far manageable divide between the identities of the US and the EU, or if instead the present administration is stretching the chasm to the point of provoking permanent consequences.

Until the dawn of the Trump era, the US and the EU had generally acted 'as if' their mutual relationship were, for better or worse, different from any other association. This is in line with the notion of identities according to the security community approach: collective expressions of what is special about a particular group, its core values, social habits and codes of behaviour, and, more broadly, anything that contributes to identifying the group as distinct from 'out-groups' (Abdelal et al. 2009). Being (perceived as) special has never really implied for the transatlantic security community to be undisputable. Admittedly, hypocritical support, open criticism or even deliberate neglect have hardly come so far as to dismiss this 'togetherness' as inconsequential (Jones 2004). On the other hand, there is also evidence that 'a sense of mutual indifference (if not resentment) has been gathering steam' among members for years (Risse 2016, p. 34).

In determining whether Trump effect may drive mutual alienation trends towards their breaking point, or alternatively trigger – if only by reaction – a new awareness of commonalities long taken for granted, one has to face the traditional methodological difficulties of coming up with valid indicators of the 'sense of community' underlying the transatlantic relationship. The US-EU nexus condenses – not without some distortion – many of the crucial issues relative to the transatlantic community identity at large (i.e. the link between liberal ideas and the role of the state in the economy, or how national identification is conceived and practiced on either side of the Atlantic). One aspect that makes this component of the transatlantic ideational relationship significant is that the US, aside from encouraging or actively advancing the establishment of European institutions, has also been serving as an archetype of integration, an ideal reference point that has not only been used for comparative purposes, but has also shaped discourses and prompted support or

opposition to the integration process. Evidence of the impression left by the ideal of the American integration on the EU identity, is the resilience of the notion of the United States of Europe. Not only the idea has endured the establishment of policy-making systems based on functionalist and intergovernmental models but it has also become a trope periodically reactivated in political debates – e.g. recently by the European Liberal Party as the true ultimate goal of integration, or by Eurosceptic groups, that have used it as a straw man to argue for the untenability of the same process. Yet, while the US and the EU share the constitutive value of creating unity from a plurality of polities (reproducing the idea of the latter following the 'standard model' of integration provided by the former), there is also a significant divergence in the *polity ideas* providing legitimacy to each process (Jachtenfuchs et al. 1998). While the US orders the relationship between plurality and unity through a paradigmatic federal solution, the Union's polycentric arrangement draws its legitimacy from a complex combination of different polity ideas – intergovernmental cooperation, economic community, policy network and, to some extent, federal union as well – whose ratios change across levels of governance and policy areas. The pluralistic nature of the transatlantic security community has traditionally allowed for a diverse range of polity ideas to underpin its institutional and functional setting, and provided a favourable environment for a non-state polity like the EC/EU to develop and become a part of the community in its own right, alongside with its member. Admittedly, America's support for the European integration odd experiment has never been unconditional or uncontested, given the distance between the two historical experiences, and the great difficulty of the majority of the American public – and elites too – in conceptualising and relating to Europe's attempt at a different practice of sovereignty (Sbragia 2005). Yet, America's long-time reservations about the legitimacy (and viability) of the EU as a partner – and an international actor *tout court* – have seemingly found a formidable outlet in an administration that establishes who has a *just* claim to a relationship with the US based on much less nuanced and inclusive criteria. Even compared with this long history of incomprehension, wariness and latent antagonism, the stance of Trump's America stands out

for its proud lack of interest into, verging on overt hostility towards, the conceptual and practical subtleties of the EU political processes.

Again, the fluctuating and hyperbolic register used by a President with an erratic behaviour with complete lack of public office experience, exacerbated by an inconsistent communication strategy, advises supplementary caution in distinguishing mere verbal excesses from the manifestation of significant shifts in how the US conceives of itself in relation to the EU. With that in mind, expressions and practices seem to be more than mere blunders and indicate a significant ideological divergence to be in place. The current administration has hardly held back its frustration for being supposedly 'taken advantage of' by the EU, a subject very inconvenient to deal with due to its cumbersome decision-making processes, and often at cross purposes with the US.[1] Underlying this position is the idea that the Union openly defies the belief that 'the nation-state remains the best vehicle for elevating the human condition' – trumping any other instruments, international organisations and human rights protections included – as claimed by Trump in his address to the UN General Assembly.[2] Leaving aside Trump's characteristic incoherence, the Presidential statement contains what seems the maximum concession that a policy posited on a Jacksonian-inspired primacy of America's interests and views can grant to international cooperation. Provided that 'all responsible leaders' have abided by the obligation to respond to their own citizens, nothing prevents them from coordinating in order to further their respective fellow nationals' conditions. The declaration signals a conceptual distance from the process of inter-/supra-national institutionalisation at the base not only of the EU's identity, but also of an important part of America-Europe relationship, with the benevolent American oversight of the integration experiment.

Admittedly, the extent to which the Jacksonian populist principles informing the Trump administration can be equated with a revival of the nation-state as the fulcrum of America's foreign policy is not clear (Mead 2017).Indeed, if one fo-

[1] "Working on major Trade Deal with the United Kingdom. Could be very big & exciting. JOBS! The E.U. is very protectionist with the U.S. STOP!" Trump tweeted.
[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDCqaJpim0Y.

cuses on the social background of Trump's ascendency , deeds and identity of his presidency can also be traced back to neoliberal trends that had already influenced the previous administrations. However, from an institutional point of view, when the President claims as he did at a recent rally in Michigan, that the EU 'sounds so nice' but it was 'literally formed to take advantage of the United States *and I don't blame them'* he delivers two blows (Scotto Di Santolo 2018). First, he downgrades the European integration project to a mere instrument of (unfair) commercial policy aimed at wringing 'one-sided deals, where the United States gets nothing in return'.[3] In particular, this reductionist vision limits the identity of the EU as a 'regulatory state', so that the objection against the legitimacy of a bureaucratic entity to intrude upon the nation-state combines, with the aim of deregulating domestic economy and increase private-sector incentives in order to unleash economic growth (Pfaltzgraff 2017). Moreover, the profiteering profile attributed to the trade policy of the EU negates its role as promoter of sophisticated trade agreements.

Second, he ultimately negates the communitarian nature of the transatlantic relationship as a whole, within which the EU served as a sort of 'leading edge'. In doing so, the Trump Administration disregards well-entrenched (albeit shifting) mutual expectations about the special status of transatlantic relationship in the foreign affairs and the role played in it by the EU, achieved after decades of intense dialogue and interaction. In Trump's eyes, there is no transatlantic pattern nor tacit rule of the game that the US is not fully entitled to dismiss. Again, current changes in the transatlantic relationship are better investigated in light of the revision already started by Bush and carried on by Obama, which under many aspects also amounted to plain reduction of commitment. Even so, the Trump effect is a turning point in as much as it generates a collapse of the mutual social pressures that served as the sole safeguard against the incentive of each member to deny the existence of a understanding about the character of their relationship.

[3] *Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, New York, 19 September 2017, viewed 9 July 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>.

3. The Trump effect on the liberal international order through the crisis of the US-EU relationship

The strand of US transatlantic foreign policy that resulted in the establishment of the EU and the US-EU relationship has frequently been associated with an overarching strategy of 'order building' pursued by the US based on the international dimension of the principles of liberalism (Sørensen 2006; Howorth 2010; Ikenberry 2012; Peterson 2018). The post Second World War incarnation of the LIO hinged on a binding strategy implying the use of a variety of instruments, spanning from territorial occupation and reintegration of defeated nations, to security alliances, legal agreements, economic interdependence and openness. Institution, connections and values granting substance and meaning to the order have varied across the decades and local actualisations. Although adaptability and endurance were given priority over internal coherence, staples of the order were a preference for rule-based international relations, multilateral institution, the modernizing virtues of free market and social open-ness. Within this varied setting, the West, based on its deep political and institutional ties and shared values and identities, acted as the anchorage of a much wider international order. The special position of the West was not just the corollary of America's hegemony, largely posited as the necessary condition to the establishment of the order (Stokes 2018). Besides providing legitimacy to the world leader, the 'political thickness' of the Western community also provided a quantum of orientation to an otherwise extremely diverse system of states, transforming it into a more cohesive unit, of a potentially global reach, guided by a set of goals and values, but still flexible enough to even tolerate on its (ideological) outskirts authoritarian regimes – at least as long as they adhered to the anti-communist canon essential to any possible international actualisation of liberal principles. The EU has been a particularly advanced variant of the latest incarnation of the LIO, initially contingent on the neutralisation and integration of defeated Germany, and later to the maintenance and promotion of the most advanced version of the liberal principles index: firm support for multilateral institutions and norms; open markets and trade liberalisation; cooperative approaches to security;

and human rights and democratic values. In its constitutional connection with the US, the EU has stood out as a particularly sophisticated policy configuration – the thickest component of the politically dense part of the LIO, in a sense – that has foreclosed a return to the dynamic of anarchy just shy of the breach of the equally legitimate principle of national sovereignty (Ikenberry 2012).

The notion of LIO – and the end thereof – has made a dramatic comeback at the centre of public and scholarly debates when Donald Trump's victory became a plausible result of the election. As a result, the crisis of the LIO – its dramatic transformation into an illiberal version of itself, or its demise – has come to be a popular interpretation of the unprecedented conduct of the US government since the new President came into office (Nye 2017; Shake 2017). Traditional arguments about 'the crisis of the transatlantic relationship' were brought together and conflated with the more fundamental issue of the potential collapse of the international societal arrangement that had held sway over the last six decades or so.

It is worth pointing out once more that focusing on the consequences of the emergence of Trump politics has only to do with research design and does not imply that the EU is just a helpless recipient of the US administration's excesses, with no agency of its own in the current development of the LIO. In fact, as argued by Smith and Youngs (2018), the EU's record in defending the liberal order looks increasingly mixed in some policy areas. While still relatively strongly imbued with liberal principles, in recent years the Union's own approaches to global order and international challenges have turned to a more 'selective or contingent liberalism' (*Ibid.*). According to the authors, the latter is not just a conceptual compromise between interests and values aimed at more effective policies, in keeping with the 'principled pragmatism' introduced with the 2016 EU Global Strategy.[4] The category of 'contingent liberalism' indicates the preparedness of the EU and its key member states to devise 'policies that broadly defend liberal order but through tactics that are more eclectic, opportunistic and flexible than was previously the case'

[4] *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, June 2016, http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en.

(Smith & Youngs 2018, p. 55). This reassessment by the EU's of its own understanding of, and commitment to, the LIO has been generating effects that differ across policy areas. Yet, relations with the US and its hegemonic role constitute one of the cases where the EU's orientations appear to be increasingly contingent upon instrumental calculations of its own strategic and economic interests, rather than compliance with normative principles and images of self.

If that is so, the revisionist approach is far from being a prerogative of the Trump administration. Nonetheless, for analytical purposes only, the last part of the paper is focusing on how America's actions and ideas are likely to affect the role of EU-US connection in maintaining, adjusting, but also undermining the LIO. In order to do so, divergences and convergences are identified between the US and the EU in interests, interdependence, institutions and identities that may generate a significant impact on the order.

As previously established, the more long-term interests are, the more impervious they become to changes in comparatively less structural aspects like the turnover of public office, even top ones. Indeed, common 'geopolitical' interests can be denied or neglected, but hardly altered (Wickett 2018). At the same time, even material interests need certain basic understandings to become viable. According to the liberal order literature, during the Cold War era the US and the EC gained clear complementary benefits from the LIO. The rule-based nature of the latter provided America with legitimacy and deferred the decline of its hegemony, while offering the EC and its member states access to the leader and reassurance about its benevolent intentions, necessary conditions to the European experiment of supranational integration. With the extinction of the common threat posed by the Soviet Union, the LIO was successfully re-set and enlarged, based on the prospect that pro-globalisation policies would provide citizens and companies across the world with sizeable benefits in terms of prosperity and life opportunities.

Arguably, it is in the aftermath of this transformation that the deep roots of the Trump effect are to be found, and the divergence between the EU and the US starts to increase (Burgoon et al. 2017). Until not long ago, the two partners

pursued their largely common or overlapping interests and fashioned their interaction based on a set of fundamental shared assumptions about the benefits of openness and liberalisation, which clearly did not rule out occasional contrasts, but ensured a somewhat interactive formation of preferences. The reckless politicisation of these shared assumptions by Trump with his 'politics of insecurity' is arguably among the main reasons for the crisis of the updated, globalising version of the LIO (Rojecki 2016). Singling out the LIO for failing to make good on its promises of prosperity, security and fairness has allowed Trump to tap into the sense of insecurity and disappointment of those who feel 'betrayed' by globalisation and seek solace into the idealised prospect of a 'great-again America'.

Part and parcel of this 'populist' strategy is the wrecking of the transatlantic relationship, whose mere economic inconvenience comes to a head and becomes a matter of making justice of 'normal' people(s) until now prayed on by globalised elites. The Trump administration acts under the assumption that national interests are eventually always incompatible, and therefore each country has a logical and moral obligation to give priority to their own at any cost. Consequently, the attack against an aberration like the EU is waged not only blasting its supranational institutions, symbols and its very *raison d'être*, but also encouraging the member states (i.e. like-minded movements within them) to follow suit and fight for their own interests.

As for divergence between the two transatlantic partners' approaches to regional and global institutions, the poor conditions of the US-EU relationship may have specific reverberations on the LIO. This is particularly true as far as the multilateral dimension of international institutionalisation is concerned – a feature that, while not essential to every local reification of the order, was essential to its overall functioning (Ikenberry 2012). The transatlantic community has served as a 'controlled environment' where the US's coordination with the national policies of other countries – especially non-bilateral ones – could be 'practiced' based on a pre-existing common historical and political background. In general, the transatlantic dimension has acted as a stepping stone to more inclusive institutional settings lack-

ing such 'substantive' backup, but equipped with principles designed to order relations among those states (Ruggie 1992). This is particularly true when the attention is focused on the relationship between the US and the EU, given the active promotion of multilateralism carried out by the latter (Jørgensen 2006). If the American hegemon's engagement in multilateral institutions has been traditionally ambivalent, Trump's scepticism and blunt hostility to structures that are regarded as restraints on the rightful exercise of American power may have an impact that overwhelms the inherent resilience of US-EU institutional framework (Stewart & Forman 2002). In fact, the ultimate effect on multilateralism of the impact of Trump's transactional, business-like approach to international relations may have an ambiguous effect. The EU (or those member states still committed to the integration process) may be encouraged to step forward and invest more effort in upholding the multilateral ideal and institutional realisations (Lehne & Grabbe 2017). However, this also entails the risk – depending on a myriad of contingencies, not least the US President's unpredictability – of undermining the EU's integrity, with some 'splinter' member countries seeing the multilateralism championed by the EU to be out-of-touch and engaging into the pursuit of their interests in ways that bypass or even defy norms and practices of the LIO. Then again, even a solid EU might find itself at cross purposes with the fundamentals of the order, at least to the extent that it pushes towards 'contingent liberalism'. The risk in this scenario recalls old questions about the consistency of the EU as a 'normative power' (Manners 2002), as such pragmatic means might not measure up to the very LIO principles they were traditionally supposed to be protecting and advancing.

Along this line of reasoning, a move like the withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – the so-called Iran Deal jeopardizes the only available instrument to monitor the country's nuclear programme and regional hegemonic ambitions, aggravating the remaining signatories' attempt to rescue the agreement with a tangle of primary and secondary sanctions that are going to hit European companies as well (Nephew 2018). Combined with the firm preference for bilateral deals and contacts, often outside a clear legal, principled or even con-

ceptual framework, the decision also risks unravelling the viability of institutional solutions as such, creating an incentive for other countries – EU members included – to opt out in favour of less demanding (and more instable) alternatives.

An analogous situation emerges with regard to the (economic) interdependence between US and EU, even more exposed to the administration's transactional bilateralism. In general, decision-makers are exposed to powerful structural pressures from leading sectors of the American economy to preserve and adjust any version of the LIO that allow them to continue to profit with national and foreign demands and remain integrated in global value-chains. Structural links and path dependencies jar with Trump's promise to put ordinary Americans first and 'drain the swamp'. The TTIP negotiations' freeze is representative of how interlocked the state of the transatlantic relationship and the LIO are (Korteweg 2017). In fact, the bilateral dimension of the partnership promoted by the EU (a preferential trade agreement to all ends and purposes) is *per se* just another manifestation of the enduring incongruity of European protectionism and the multilateral aspiration to an unreservedly liberal international trade system. The debates triggered already in the Nineties within the World Trade Organisation about this tension resulted in the notion of multilateralism and regionalism being complementary rather than alternative instruments for the management of complex interdependence. The tension between the two dimensions was to be resolved by the EU by applying the 'deep integration' model whereby market access liberalisation is underpinned by a robust set of rules and standards (Lamy 2002). As mentioned in section two, the novelty brought in by Trump's opposition to the TTIP is not so much economic nationalism (which would favour state interventionism), as the intention to dismantle market regulatory functions at national governments, international and supranational level in the name of unbundled mercantilism formulated in terms of national security (Ahmed & Bick 2017). In doing so, not only the US administration denies a distinctive function and feature of the EU, but also undermines the Union's role as one of the focal points of the rules-based global trading order, and offers a convenient excuse to free-trade sceptics in the EU to push their agenda. Even if the net result of deregulation *cum*

mercantilism was an increase in exchanges and protection of local production, and securing the right of governments to pursue reasonable policies, the erosion of the rule-based component of transatlantic interdependence would affect the LIO as a whole. The US-EU economic interdependency is still more open to (though not always compliant with) the compensation of third countries' needs and global externalities than it is reasonable to expect from any alternative national or regional pivot of the global trade systems like China (Schmieg 2015). Each in its own (variably inconsistent) way, the US and the EU have remained until today the relatively most reliable upholders of the rule of law at the base of the international economic order (Eckhardt & Elsig 2016). Whether the EU alone would be up to the same task seems at least uncertain if not improbable, given the powerful push for alternative (not necessary opposite) arrangements coming from emerging trade powers.

As for the effects on the LIO of the change of the US-EU relationship's identity and values, a number of them have been already touched upon while dealing with the other three categories. Multilateralism, for instance, is not only an institutional means of resolution of controversies, but has also served as the fundamental principle of the EU in its international action (Lucarelli & Manners 2006). As a fundamental feature of the EU international identity defined by contrast and affinity with the US, the principle has in turn determined the identity of the entire security community based on the normative standards provided by the LIO. The same goes for market regulations, economic openness or common interests, whose structural functions within the community depends on *meanings* that relate to values and principles of the LIO. Nevertheless, especially in times of 'crisis', ideational factors cannot be expected to unilaterally inform behaviour, as in fact practices have a reinforcing/undermining effect on them. Accordingly, to the extent that transatlantic partners retain a leading role in the current international order, sparser and less principled cooperation and openness between them affect the overall effectiveness of the order itself to orient behaviour as well as its normative value – i.e. the capability of bringing about meaningful and just conducts.

As mentioned, the US-EU relationship has lately appeared as a very delicate locus for the development of 'populist' resentment (Wright 2017). The processes of inter- and supra-national integration that resulted into the transatlantic security community, and the LIO-based values more or less consistently ingrained in it, are among the favourite object of criticism – and most effective sources of consensus – of political forces like President Trump and Eurosceptic parties. The frustrations of large sectors of the population against liberalism and internationalism are organised by populist movements whose rhetoric and arguments echo each other across the Atlantic. In that framework, Western institutions seem to be perfect targets and scapegoats: on the one hand, the EU, conceived as it is as a technocratic tyrant, or the mere vessel of German hegemonic strategies and fraudulent schemes at the expenses of the US; on the other hand, NATO and the values of transatlantic solidarity in general, attached as they are to a liberal model. In establishing a radically different set of political and economic priorities for America and Europe, populist movements and parties envisage a bona fide post-liberal and post-democratic international order. This is evidenced by the occasional, but not always extemporaneous utterance of positions that openly question the liberal and democratic values – e.g. Donald Trump's admiration for the now virtually limitless permanence in office of President Xi of China, or Victor Orban's death notice of liberal democracy (Walt 2017). On a day-to-day base, the diffusion of anti-establishment sentiments and discourses fuels intolerance towards principled practices like compromise, open debate and respect for the rules. It also chips away at both the efficiency and the legitimacy of liberal democratic systems upon which the LIO relies, especially in its Atlantic core (Peterson 2018).

Conclusions

To date, the presidency of Donald Trump has proved singular enough to raise as many questions concerning its impact on American and world politics, as those regarding the very analytical instruments through which such repercussions can be investigated. As it has been argued, in tumultuous times, International Relations theory may turn out to be just ill-suited to international politics apparently

poor in macro-tendencies, and have to give way to less-far-reaching foreign policy analysis (Peterson et al. 2016). Moreover, the perennial social science problem of the relation between structure and agency seems to have found in the incumbent US administration a strong case-study (Stokes 2018). If, on the one hand, Trump may well be regarded as the product of particular political, social and economic conditions, on the other hand the homeostasis of the structural factors underlying the liberal international order has been significantly impacted by his come into power. One may admit that, in the evolution of US foreign policy, agency has gathered relative weight compared to structure; still, agent-level factors like the presence of a professional US foreign policy community with generally conservative views and powerful constraints on presidential prerogatives also tend to mitigate the changes in long-term trends generated by the behaviour of people in positions of power (Peterson 2018). Yet, even though the idea that Trump has done little more than seizing the anti-globalisation sentiments the moment they were becoming ripe and turning them into a successful political platform, his character-defining quirkiness can hardly be overlooked (Clementi et al. 2018). Without putting too much emphasis on this aspect, the paper has argued that Trump is the expression of anti-establishment sentiments and a bitter disappointment in the 'failed promises' of the liberal (international) order, especially in its post-Cold War configuration – sentiments that run deep into the American population and resonate with analogous views in Europe. Yet, the paper has also argued that, having been able to tap into this widespread discontent, Trump has brought in an unprecedented level of unpredictability that – combined with his open disdain for long-established rules of the game underpinning interactions with other international actors – has already thrown into crisis the relationship between the US and the EU. To the extent that Trump does undermine this fundamental transatlantic connection, he can have a really critical impact on the LIO at large.

Neglecting or even impairing the US-EU connection does not necessarily lead to the complete demise of the current international order – as the rejection of spheres of influence, the protection of open global commons and against strategic

competitors, and the preservation of stability remain among the Trump administration's main foreign policy goals (Brattberg & Kimmage 2018). Nevertheless, disregarding as bluntly as the Trump administration does the complex, sometime even cumbersome, relationship with the EU amounts to disavowing at once two main accomplishments of the diverse LIO's incarnations: the redefinition of basic conceptual and political premises of relations among states based on the principles of liberalism (of which the EU was the most advanced experiment, constantly promoted and/or overseen by the US), and at the same time the favourable reception of an array of diverse domestic and regional arrangements of those values coexisting within the framework provided by the LIO and the value-laden transatlantic security community within it.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

At a Crossroads or Business as Usual? British Foreign Policy and the International Order in the Wake of Brexit-Trump

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ABSTRACT

In 2016, the Brexit-Trump watershed resulted in two consecutive shocks for British foreign policy, which under the May governments has been rearticulated around the goal to forge 'Global Britain'. This article discusses how the 'Global Britain' strategy may play out in two broad international domains – trade and security – to elaborate on implications for the international order. The analysis especially elucidates the dubious feasibility of compensating 'hard Brexit' with free-trade agreements around the world, and the pitfalls of extrication from the EU as regards common foreign policy, data-sharing and sanctions policy. Trump's election is argued to bring about a more protectionist trade environment while facilitating the prospect of a UK-US trade deal, which however compels the British government to uneasy balancing acts. Finally, an interest-oriented Global Britain about to face diplomatic overstretching and economic difficulties is suggested to have turned into a more precarious defender of the rules-based international order.

KEYWORDS: United Kingdom; Brexit; Trump; Global Britain; international order.

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1. Introduction

In the eyes of pundits and ordinary citizens alike, the Brexit referendum qualified alongside the election of Donald Trump as the defining political moment of 2016. Hailing the British vote from his Scottish golf resort of Trump Turnberry in its aftermath – in stark contrast with the stances expressed in London by President Obama in April – the then Republican nominee linked it with his own campaign in the name of a common will to 'take the country back'. The two eye-catching events have been widely read – not just framed by radical right political actors – in conjunction, having brought into the limelight an array of undercurrents spanning other European democracies. Rising populism, resentment against globalisation, anti-establishment sentiments, identity politics, nativism and sovereignism have all been ascribed to that *Zeitgeist*, engendering a sense that time-honoured logics now provide weaker guidance.

Other than as an internal challenge to liberal democracy, the developments of 2016 were viewed as casting a shadow over the American commitment to the liberal international order (e.g. Bunde & Ischinger, 2017), in a context liable to become subject to 'a diversification of preferences among the [major powers] concerning the functioning of international institutions and fora' and thus the global order (Sus, 2017, p. 117). The director of Chatham House alluded to a 'demise of Anglo-American economic leadership' brought about by popular demand for control, reversing liberalisation and leaving room for competing powers to promote their regional models (Niblett, 2016).

In fact, like a couple of rocks thrown into a pond, the combination of the EU referendum and the American presidential election perturbed the multiple linkages among the UK, the US, the EU and some of its member States, with political and economic repercussions onto the international environment. This article aims to contribute to the debate on the resilience of the international order by specifically elaborating on the likely features of British agency in the wake of Brexit-Trump. To that end, it discusses how the two shocks – consecutive but discrete, especially in terms of international politics – have reshuffled British foreign policy, now called to

tackle head-on, against an unsettled backdrop, a tangle of economic, diplomatic and security-related issues.

Besides being predicted to substantially weaken Britain's economic prospects in the medium-to-long term, the Brexit scenario gave rise to variously nuanced understandings. It was interpreted, for instance, as a blow to the hard and soft power of both the UK and the EU, affecting their capabilities and reputation in areas such as development policy and enlargement (Smith, 2017) or sanctions policy (Keatinge, 2017), and leaving both weaker vis-à-vis external challenges (Freedman, 2016). Furthermore, Brexit was portrayed as a military and diplomatic loss for the EU (Smith, 2016; Whitman, 2016b), but also as British self-removal from influencing EU decision-making and a renounce to the 'multiplier' effect of the EU clout (Lain, 2016; Smith, 2016; Whitman, 2016b).

The possibilities for Britain to adopt a more comprehensive approach in its foreign relations (Chalmers, 2017a), while distancing itself from unwanted aspects of EU security (Lain, 2016), were measured against expected difficulties in re-establishing external policies across domains (Whitman, 2016b) – a massive undertaking when simultaneously having to cater to the Brexit process and to a re-orientation of global trade strategies (Ricketts 2016) – and against the risk of a counter-productive 'pivot to Europe' prompted by negotiations on extrication from the EU (Bew & Elefteriu, 2016). Brexit was alternatively suggested to increase EU security dependence on NATO (*ibidem*), to facilitate bolder European moves towards defence integration, but also to unveil related intra-EU dissonance (Lain, 2016; Whitman, 2016b).

Months later, Trump's triumph grafted itself onto this already elusive landscape and changed calculations. It was argued to contain in the short term the post-Brexit reputational damage undergone by the UK, however without concealing diminished diplomatic and economic usefulness of Britain in American eyes (Wilson, 2017; Rees, 2017) and enhanced 'potential for estrangement' between Europe and the US (*ibidem*, p. 569). The similarity of British and European positions in terms of security dependence on the US (Oliver & Williams, 2017) pointed to a rationale for

an EU-UK *rapprochement*, and alignment dilemmas were foreseen for Britain in the event that the US ended up uniting European countries by trying to trample on their interests, e.g. on the Iran nuclear deal (Smith, 2016) or regulatory standards (Niblett, 2016). Sterner American removal from European security was alternatively predicted to spur EU security developments even more, compounding British disconnection (Whitman, 2017), or to strengthen Britain's hand in the Brexit negotiations, by making its cooperation appreciate (Munro, 2016).

With several outcomes yet to unfold, degrees of uncertainty and multiple interpretations linger on, and the sequence of the two recent shocks hinders proper disentanglement of their analytically separate effects. Anyway, an immediate consequence of the Brexit referendum must be factored in: British international agency after Brexit-Trump – and its significance for the international order – are now linked to a reframing of British foreign policy, enacted by the May governments, around an existential quest to forge 'Global Britain'. Hence, the article draws from primary sources – official documents released by the British government, speeches held by the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary – alongside secondary literature.

The first section recapitulates the predicaments of Britain in the post-1945 international order, briefly dwelling on the relevance of national identity. Consistent with two main concerns presented in Theresa May's Florence speech, the second and third section refer to two broad international domains – trade and security – in which the impact of Brexit is contextualised with reference to the *status quo ante*. The fourth section updates the picture of British prospects on the basis of the 'enter Trump' scenario. The fifth section binds the threads, by connecting the likely features of British agency to their relevance for a changing international order.

2. Britain and National Identity in the Post-1945 Order

Laying the groundwork requires touching upon the place of Britain in the international system since World War II, also to recall how national identity has been a long-term source of disquiet. Throughout the seventy-year span the UK has

broadly abided by 'a privilege for Anglo-American relations, with NATO as corollary; insular reserve towards the European continent; a maintained global presence with special preference for the Commonwealth; a policy based on pragmatism rather than principle; and, finally, a liberal belief in international trade' (Bratberg, 2011, p. 331).

The main interpretative pillar was provided by Churchill's doctrine of the 'three circles', whereby Britain was to receive – or rather maintain – its exceptionalism from its position at the crossing of the Commonwealth, the Anglo-American special relationship and Europe. Without prejudice to interpreting the 'three circles' as a necessary, future-oriented redefinition of national identity (Wallace, 1991), their uneasy coexistence has caused the doctrine to be seen as a balancing act actually obfuscating fundamental questions (Bratberg, 2011). At any rate, a geopolitical malaise was soon certified by the Suez crisis, harshly forcing a recognition that the heyday of British power had gone; by the withdrawal from military bases 'East of Suez', following the 1967 devaluation of the pound (Hill, 2018); and by the application for membership of an increasingly successful European integrated market, presented amidst economic difficulties only to be vetoed twice by De Gaulle. Hence the famous quote pronounced in 1962 by Dean Acheson, whereby 'Great Britain has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role', and which went on (as reported by Oliver, 2016, p. 1325) by contending that

> *[t]he attempt to play a separate power role apart from Europe, a role based on the 'special relationship' with the United States and on being the head of a 'commonwealth' which has no political structure, unity or strength – this role is about played out.*

Obviously, determinants of British power had not simply vanished. In the world of the Cold War, permanent membership and veto power at the UN Security Council added to a key role in the Western alliance. Cultural, political and military closeness to its keystone country remained enshrined in the mythical, almost ahistorical notion of the 'special relationship'. Prominence as a large State in Europe, the status of nuclear power, the prestige of British armed forces and diplomats up-

held confidence in the standing of a country whose role in Second World War had, after all, validated national pride.

As a peculiar subset of foreign policy – European policy – entered the domestic political struggle, British ruling elites framed the decision to join the European communities as 'a continuation, rather than a transformation, of the political order [and] a way of stabilising and strengthening pre-existing conceptions of British interests and identities in the wake of imperial decline' (Gifford, 2008, p. 53). A long-standing connection arose between the European policy of the UK and national identity, with Euroscepticism sharpening 'as "Europe" became something to mobilise against in order to construct and assess conceptions of British national identity and alternative projects for national renewal' (*ivi*). Meanwhile, despite their manifold – if not unproblematic – contributions to the integration process, successive British governments maintained a 'Janus-faced approach' (Oliver, 2017, p. 522) entrenching utilitarian caution, not positive commitment, as the dominant narrative in internal debate.

In the early 1990s, Wallace detected – and attributed to the political elite, at a time when aggregate pro-European attitudes among British citizens amounted to an all-time high – 'an underlying crisis of national identity: a self-image which does not fit our daily experiences and interests, and which differs more and more widely from the image which others have of Britain' (Wallace, 1991, p. 68). Cuttingly remarking that a number of past British resources were not in place anymore – the second reserve currency in the world, high technology leadership, a first-rank industrial power, a large merchant fleet, etc. – he concluded that

[i]f we are to escape from a posture in which successive British governments are pulled reluctantly backwards towards closer European political integration, babbling of sovereignty and past centuries as our economy loses autonomy and our society becomes more multinational, then we have to set about redefining the self-image and the sense of national purpose which lie at the root of foreign policy (Wallace, 1991, p. 75).

In itself, the bond between national identity and the definition of foreign policy is no news. In a nutshell, conceptions of national identity can be argued to

inform the interests to be pursued, and to be in turn (re)constituted by their furthering (Edmunds *et al.*, 2014), so that 'grand strategy' definitions of foreign policy are ultimately about national identity itself: 'the sources of national pride, the characteristics which distinguish a country from its neighbours, the core elements of sovereignty it seeks to defend, the values it stands for and seeks to promote abroad' (Wallace, 1991, p. 65).

However, and additionally, the connection has now acquired in Britain a much tighter character, given the nexus of both elements with the European issue. As regards the arrow going from identity to European policy, oft-cited insights about a significantly identity-driven 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe & Marks, 2009) apply well to the British case, where identity is in fact salient among both public opinion and the political elites. If anything, this linkage has been strengthened in recent times by vociferous political entrepreneurs in UKIP and the Conservative Party. Furthermore, the Conservative, Brexit-friendly government emerged from the earthquake of the referendum, has reframed its mandate to deliver Brexit as implying a 'hard Brexit', thus building from European policy the foundations of a 'Global Britain' platform, which is going to constitute a powerful shaping force in British foreign policy in the oncoming years.

3. 'Global Britain' and Trade: Plans for Damage Limitation

Beyond an abrupt fall of the pound and a slowdown in the annual GDP growth rate to about 1.5%, no ominous developments have marred the British economy. However, no major unfolding of Brexit has occurred yet, either. In view of expected relocations of investments and disruption caused to supply chains – with Britain headed for exit from both the customs union and the Single Market – long-term predictions of British economic prospects remain grim (Portes, 2017). Limping economic credibility can restrain the international leverage of a country: perceptions matter, not least insofar as they determine the strategic context of negotiations (Oliver, 2017), and a risk exists that Brexit becomes 'the latest instalment in a narrative of decline that has been building up' (Bew & Elefteriu, 2016, p. 3).

Alternatives to Single Market membership had been considered in the Review of the Balance of Competences: a comprehensive audit on the appropriateness of the EU-UK distribution of powers, launched by the coalition government in 2012 and published in 2014 without drawing official conclusions. The Review considered six alternative EU-UK trade settlements: 'going it alone' or WTO terms, a free-trade agreement limited to goods or also encompassing services, customs union membership like Turkey, EEA membership like Norway, a bundle of *ad hoc* agreements like Switzerland. With option six being unfeasible, customs duties would go with option one, while non-tariff barriers in the form of 'rules of origin' would still accompany option two and three. Option four would hinder an independent trade policy but also fully guaranteed single market access, while option five, allowing both, would leave the UK with no say over the development of the single market itself (Emerson, 2016, pp. 70-71). Towards the latter, therefore, 'any post Brexit option is damage limitation, so the overall impact of Brexit in terms of trade relations depends what the UK can achieve through an independent trade and investment policy' (Smith, 2017).

Echoing calls for Britain to embrace 'a global strategy for trade that repositions the UK at the heart of the world's free-trade economy' (Bew & Elefteriu, 2016, p. 3), the May governments – featuring a newly created Department for International Trade entrusted to leading Brexiteer Liam Fox – have largely framed 'Global Britain' around trade. In fact, a narration whereby the UK would prosper once freed from the shackles of the protectionist European bloc, by trading with the culturally akin nations of the Commonwealth and the fastest-growing economies of the planet, had been employed by pro-Leave politicians, seemingly nursing hopes of reaching better deals than those made available to the much wider EU market. Related talks, which must also provide for replication or renegotiation of dozens of international trade-related agreements concluded through the EU, have to be handled in parallel to the phases of Brexit negotiations, with Britain however unable to formally conclude trade deals before leaving the EU in March 2019.

Speaking at the 2016 Conservative Party conference, however, Boris Johnson claimed he could 'think of few more positive forces in the global economy than the world's fifth richest economy', espousing an intention to 'become the global champions and agitators for this phenomenon' (Johnson, 2016) that was equally sponsored by May at a Republican Party conference in Philadelphia in January 2017, when she reiterated the wish to 'act as one of the strongest and most forceful advocates for business, free markets and free trade anywhere around the globe' (May, 2017b). According to her Lancaster House speech, delivered ten days earlier,

> *Countries including China, Brazil, and the Gulf States have already expressed their interest in striking trade deals with us. We have started discussions [...] with countries like Australia, New Zealand and India. And President Elect Trump has said Britain is not "at the back of the queue" for a trade deal with the United States, the world's biggest economy, but front of the line (May, 2017a).*

Provisionally leaving aside Trump's US, British prospects with the Anglo-Saxon world seem to be a mixed bag. Following a political decision taken in 2015, the launch of EU negotiations with Australia and New Zealand was announced in September 2017. However, while in 2017 Australian Prime Minister Turnbull had appeared to prioritise a deal with the EU, his Foreign Minister recently embraced a more eager stance towards post-Brexit talks, subject to enhanced visa opportunities. With CETA having reached the ratification stage after seven years of negotiations, Prime Minister Trudeau referenced it as the basis – though not an immutable one – for Canada-UK talks, hoped to lead to 'an even better or larger or more impactful deal' (Stoddart, 2018).

Similarly, a deep, recent EU-South Korea agreement raises again the question of how much Britain could afford to drift away from EU market law, rather than base new deals on 'piggy-backing on what the EU has achieved' (Emerson, 2016, p. 33); provided that the counterparty does not actually wish to ground negotiations on more restrictive bases as regards services (Hix & Jun, 2017). Japan, expected not to reveal to the UK bargaining positions 'for example over services and technical barriers to trade [...] that might undercut its negotiating position with the

much bigger EU' (Emerson, 2016, p. 33), has apparently coupled political openness towards Britain with scarce alacrity, agreeing in December 2017 the terms of a free-trade agreement with the EU.

Brazil, caught in a spiral of internal political and economic destabilization before an impending general election, seems at least at present an unlikely candidate for swift talks. While Indian Prime Minister Modi was duly courted at the Commonwealth summit in April 2018, India – engaged in its own negotiations with the EU, credited with a protectionist position services-wise and with a wish to secure concessions on UK-bound immigration (*ivi*; Adler-Nissen et al., 2017) – has shown tangible caution.

Courted by past and present British governments in relation to investment in infrastructure (e.g. the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station) and industry (Oliver, 2017), China is negotiating with the EU on investment but not on free trade and is argued to have economic strengths complementary to those of Britain (Yu, 2017; Yueh, 2017), that could consequently exploit promising negotiations as an *atout* on the European table (Yueh, 2017). However, following dissimilar arguments, the EU would be worried by Chinese market penetration, which it would counter with more extensive 'rules of origin' and anti-dumping measures (Emerson, 2016). Thus, arguing that the future UK-China economic relationship will depend on the future UK-EU ones (Oliver, 2017) looks plausible.

Finally, a reported British interest in entering the Trans-Pacific Partnership – which however raises scepticism, primarily because of geographic distances and limited volumes of trade (Hare, 2018) – seemingly vindicates an earlier remark whereby, against a trend of regional agreements in the making, 'Britain is rather unusually leaving one and embarking on bilateral trade deals' (Yueh, 2017, pp. 57-59). The need to secure a favourable future economic partnership with the EU could indeed prompt a paradoxical 'pivot to Europe'. In March 2018, May's Mansion House speech – devoted to this very topic – notably portrayed 'Global Britain' as a country 'which thrives in the world by forging a bold and comprehensive economic partner-

ship with our neighbours in the EU; and reaches out beyond our continent, to trade with nations across the globe' (May, 2018b).

4. 'Global Britain' and Security: How Much Extrication from the EU?

On security, an appropriate point of reference is the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, revising a 2010 predecessor 'widely perceived to [have been] a Treasury-led, cost-cutting review that resulted in major personnel and equipment cuts' (Brooke-Holland & Mills, 2016, p. 5). With one scholar having even regarded the 2010 SDSR as the end of the 'great power' status – as it 'effectively ended the UK's ability to deploy, long term, the sort of force used in the Gulf Wars in 1991 and 2003' (Gaskarth, 2014, p. 580) – austerity-oriented retrenchment and limited diplomatic drive towards the crises at the European borders in the following years attested to a dimmer British international agency (Aragona, 2015; Chalmers, 2017a). The 2015 SDSR published by the new Cameron government marked a kind of 'expansionary' move, e.g. by envisaging an enhanced budget for equipment commitments.

Its 'Allies, partners and global engagement' section approached first the Euro-Atlantic area and, within it, NATO, 'at the heart of the UK's defence policy' (HM Government, 2015, p. 50) in terms of guidance over decisions. Singling out the US, France and Germany for coveted deepening of security relationships, the document highlighted the 'unparalleled extent of UK-US cooperation on nuclear, intelligence, diplomacy, technology and military capabilities' (*ibidem*, p. 51) and a British preference for related interoperability, joint planning and training. The references to France included the close relationship built through the 2010 Lancaster House Treaty, a new Joint Expeditionary Force and equipment collaboration. Ambitions concerning the EU – modestly mentioned (Lain, 2016; Lain & Nouwens, 2017) after other European partners and intergovernmental groupings, in relation to the UK-commanded Operation Atalanta and other CDSP missions – merely aspired to closer EU-NATO coordination and to EU reforms in line with Cameron's renegotiation pledge. In fact, considering the 2015 and the 2010 SDSR alongside

other government core documents, such as the 2010 and 2015 National Security Strategy, Whitman (2016a, 2016b) read the referendum result as 'facilitating the acceleration of a trend', since 'the two recent Conservative-led governments had already sought to re-calibrate Britain's place in the world to "de-centre" the EU from the UK's foreign policy' (Whitman 2016b: R43-R44).

Recent speeches by May and Johnson convey an assertion that even in this day and age '[t]he objective elements of British power are unchanged' (Bew & Elefteriu, 2016, p. 3; Ricketts, 2016), be it in relation to the economy, soft power or hard power. At Lancaster House, in Florence and at Mansion House the Prime Minister consistently claimed that, whatever the UK-EU relationship, strong fundamentals would always lift Britain: 'a legal system respected around the world; a keen openness to foreign investment; an enthusiasm for innovation; an ease of doing business; some of the best universities and researchers you can find anywhere; an exceptional national talent for creativity and an indomitable spirit' (May, 2017c). A climax in the Foreign Secretary's cited 2016 speech was built around 'the gentle kindly gunboats of British soft power' (Johnson, 2016). From Jeremy Clarkson to J.K. Rowling, from the English language and the BBC to a diaspora of several million citizens supposedly making Britain the most 'formidable exporter of human talent', Johnson listed all sorts of assets ensuring that 'in expressing our values [...] Global Britain is a soft power superpower' (*ibidem*); on another occasion, he added the 'youngest and fastest-growing population of any major EU economy' and the 'best [universities] in the world, with just one Cambridge college responsible not just for more Nobel prizes than France but indeed for more than Russia and China combined' (Johnson, 2017). Both his further claim that 'with 2 per cent of our GDP spent on defence we will be the leading military player in Western Europe for the foreseeable future' – and his praise for 'the world's most superb intelligence services' and 'finest diplomatic service' (Johnson, 2016) – were reiterated in May's Florence speech.

Arguably, such remarks served another post-Brexit need: 'demonstrat[ing] (to allies and foes) that Britain is now even more open (for business), engaged (in

global politics) and committed to international security (as an active and burden sharing partner in NATO)' (Bew & Elefteriu, 2016, p. 3). In this vein, May's proposal of an unprecedentedly broad and deep UK-EU strategic agreement, 'provid[ing] a comprehensive framework for future security, law enforcement and criminal justice co-operation' (May, 2017c), was fleshed out at the Munich Security Conference in February 2018, where she restated that 'Europe's security is our security' (May, 2018a). Johnson, too, guaranteed continuing commitment 'to all kinds of European cooperation at an intergovernmental level' and boasted that 'there are some ways in which we will be liberated to be more active on the world stage than ever before' (Johnson, 2016). Moreover, in her speech in Philadelphia, May painted a 'future that sees us step up with confidence to a new, even more internationalist role, where we meet our responsibilities to our friends and allies' (May, 2017b):

> *It is why Britain is the only country in the G20 – other than yours – to meet its commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence, and to invest 20% of that in upgrading equipment. It is why Britain is the only country in the G20 to spend 0.7% of gross national income on overseas development. It is why my first act as Prime Minister last year was to lead the debate in Parliament that ensured the renewal of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent. And it is why the Government I lead will increase spending on defence in every year of this Parliament. It is [...] why we have agreed to send 800 troops to Estonia and Poland as part of NATO's forward presence in Eastern Europe (May, 2017b).*

Commitment after Brexit, anyway, requires 'Global Britain' to address a key security-related conundrum, namely the degree to which it seeks structured integration into EU decision-making and implementation procedures, as opposed to formal detachment from CFSP and CSDP venues (Whitman, 2016b). The other side of the coin is European partners' uncertain willingness to grant it 'special roles', with a bespoke settlement standing in contrast to 'standard' arrangements, e.g. occasional alignment with common EU positions and a Framework Participation Agreement respectively (*ibidem*; Wright, 2017; Martill & Sus, 2018).

On foreign policy, the Review of the Balance of Competences largely reflected a majority view whereby working through the EU was in the best interest of

Britain, due to its effect as a 'multiplier' of national influence, also via its economic weight. The problem of extrication would be compounded by multi-layered interdependence between the CFSP and non-CFSP policies in sectors such as trade, energy, border management, etc., with which the external relations of the UK are intertwined (Emerson, 2016; Smith, 2016; Whitman, 2016b). This interdependence was deemed to force post-Brexit Britain 'to work hard to ensure that its policy inputs are not an afterthought to the results of US/EU dialogue' (Chalmers, 2017a, p. 6).

As to sanctions policy, where the UK is a leading European actor, newfound autonomy would be ineffective in practice: discrepancies would offset it through multiplied compliance costs for financial institutions and the private sector, while the overriding priority of concluding trade deals could subject it to conflicts of interests (Keatinge, 2017; Keatinge *et al.*, 2017). As to development aid – where Britain starts as a strong contributor to the European Development Fund and the EU budget (Smith, 2017; Chalmers, 2017b) – its influence in regions sensitive to the economic leverage of the EU would be jeopardised, possibly including even those areas of Eastern Europe that, besides being sympathetic to British EU-related attitudes, are harbouring a British protective deployment in the framework of the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (Chalmers, 2017a, 2017b; Bew & Elefteriu, 2016, 2017; Wright, 2017).

Concerning defence, Britain has distinctively shifted from the co-proponent of the 1998 Saint-Malo declaration to a recalcitrant laggard (Whitman, 2016a). Its political and military investment in a common European approach has unrelentingly dwindled (Heisbourg, 2016; Black *et al.*, 2017; Hadfield, 2018; Martill & Sus, 2018; on the causes, see Rees, 2017; Wallace, 2017), leading it to doggedly prevent actual deployment of the EU Battlegroups or the establishment of a EU Headquarters (Whitman, 2016b; Lain & Nouwens, 2017). By extricating itself, the UK – whose planning is not based on the CSDP (Whitman, 2016a; Hadfield, 2018) – was reputed not to lose much more than its share in EU-level decisions over defence cooperation (Whitman, 2016b; Black *et al.*, 2017), also because intergovern-

mental ties to European partners remain strong. And yet, Britain will have to deal with an additional dossier: '[d]efence has emerged as a central theme of the EU's response to Brexit' (Black *et al.*, 2017, p. 145; Martill & Sus, 2018), spurring the launch of a European Defence Fund, a Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, and an 'embryonic operational headquarters' (Wright, 2017, p. 37). The most crucial initiative, a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) envisaged by articles 42(6) and 46 TEU, was established in December 2017 featuring 25 of the EU member States: this 'marks a major turning point', although one whose value will depend on continued political commitment and adequate resource endowments (Fiott *et al.*, 2017, p. 53; Billon-Galland & Quencez, 2017; Black *et al.*, 2017; Wright, 2017; Martill & Sus, 2018).

More immediate trouble arises from EU-level information-sharing and judicial cooperation mechanisms, (Ricketts, 2016) which Britain partakes in, and which it was often instrumental in advocating and designing, in line with its recognised capabilities on intelligence data gathering and analysis (Lain, 2016; Keatinge *et al.*, 2017; Curtin, 2018). Such mechanisms include Europol and its Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA); the Schengen Information System 2 (SIS II); the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS); the Passenger Name Record Directive (2016); and the Prüm framework (see Lain & Nouwens, 2017). The preservation of existing arrangements, essential for internal security against transnational threats, has been regarded as 'too big to fail' (Black *et al.*, 2017; Hadfield, 2018), but according to the compelling arguments presented by Lain & Nouwens (2017) the Brexit process will especially endanger British access to the Prüm framework, SIS II and ECRIS, thus enmeshing the UK in yet another set of negotiations.

While, in November 2016, the British government duly announced an opt-in to the new Europol Regulation (Curtin, 2018) – thus retaining Europol membership at least until Brexit – debate on retaining the other planned opt-in to the Prüm framework exposed lasting tensions within the ruling party, especially over the judicial control role of the ECJ. Significantly, in February 2018 May recalled the contri-

butions of the UK to the European Arrest Warrant, Europol, SIS II and passenger data management, expressing a wish to protect ongoing cooperation: her Munich speech even included a reference to acceptance of the remit of the ECJ in case of future British participation in EU agencies (May, 2018a).

5. Enter Trump: Threats, Opportunities and Uncertainty

The foreign policy of 'Global Britain', given the American weight and role in the international system at large, hinges on how the stances taken by the Trump administration will impact on it. These depend, in turn, on an 'America First' outlook whose strategic cohesiveness has been discussed at length, often presupposing that a unified 'grand strategy' across areas of foreign policy remains practicable (Dombrowski & Reich, 2017). Two open letters, signed by dozens of Republican foreign policy notables during the 2016 party primaries and the presidential campaign, respectively accused Trump of 'swing[ing] from isolationism to military adventurism within the space of one sentence' (Adelman *et al.*, 2016) and belittled his very understanding of vital national interests, diplomatic challenges, alliances and foundational democratic values (Ayer *et al.*, 2016). Enduring ambiguities are still reflected in a tendency to divine the orientations of his administration from penchants exhibited by Trump's unstable team of advisers and top-level officials (Munro, 2016; Bew & Elefteriu, 2017; Oliver & Williams, 2017; Wilson, 2017).

Anyway, Trump's posture has been identified in many ways: as 'unilateralist' (Haines, 2017); as a 'foreign policy ideology based on 19th century, sovereigntist principles' (Oliver & Williams, 2017, p. 2); as a 'different view of America's role [...] that prizes loyalty and pro-activity in US allies above all else' (Bew & Elefteriu, 2017, p. 12); or as the idea that 'Washington would be better off handling its interactions with the other countries on a case-by-case transactional basis, making sure it "wins" rather than "loses" on each deal or commitment' (Nye, 2017). Although not to be conflated with Trump's actions once in office, his campaign 'reject[ion of] the network of institutions that the United States had worked to create since the Second World War' – and his view 'that the United States should be motivated by its own

self-interest and not by its principles or sense of obligation as a hegemonic power to maintain the international order' (Wilson, 2017, p. 552) – were enough to lead some observers to the gloomy conclusion that 'Trump's quest is nothing less than ending the US-led liberal order and freeing America from its international commitments' (Wright, 2016).

What is clearer is that the global economy is not shielded from the 'America First' approach. The protectionist turn exemplified by the recent *querelle* on steel tariffs potentially entails the resort to trade wars (Niblett, 2016; Wilson, 2017) and a global 'return to an era of more selective and transactional trade deals' (*ibidem*). At a time when it urgently craves free-trade agreements, Britain is confronted with the risk of a more unstable and adversarial international trading environment:

> *[w]hile [Trump] might leave an opening for Britain (albeit one Britain is not necessarily guaranteed a good deal over, given there are no special relationships in trade negotiations), [his protectionist approach] risks much larger damage to the wider open global trading system that Britain remains a committed member of. Britain's hopes of securing global trade deals depends on the rest of the world being open to such approaches (Oliver & Williams, 2017, p. 9).*

In fact – and here a direct 'Trump effect' on the Anglo-American relationship is ushered in – the 'Global Britain' strategy would ideally feature the US as the very first country with which to stipulate a highly symbolical free-trade deal. After her quoted words at Lancaster House, May restated right away at the mentioned Republican conference British eagerness to pursue talks, hailing the priority given to the deal by the new administration and seeking to frame the topic in Trump-friendly, globalisation-wary, interest-stressing ways.

Indeed, Trump himself has publicly and repeatedly backed the initiative. At a bilateral meeting at the G20 summit in July 2017, for instance, the president claimed he expected a 'very, very big deal' to see the light 'very, very quickly' (Bienkov 2017). A few weeks later, a handful of tweets backed up the remarks, e.g. 'Working on major Trade Deal with the United Kingdom. Could be very big & exciting. JOBS!'. According to Oliver & Williams (2017), however, while the prospect

of an agreement is not bereft of substance, whether Britain is accorded a favourable one is an altogether different question. In November 2017, US Commerce Secretary Ross emphatically deplored EU regulatory and health standards and urged Britain to align to American ones; and a polemic on American chlorine-cleaned poultry, symbolising the eventuality of lower food standards on British markets, reminds that even a prospective deal is no political 'magic bullet' for the UK (Wigle, 2017).

As regards international security – while Britain is expected to partly maintain its usefulness for the American ally, also by retaining influence outside the European neighbourhood (Chalmers, 2017a) – its role as an efficient diplomatic bridge with Europe is endangered (Black *et al.*, 2017; Rees, 2017). If there is still a bidirectional core to the 'special relationship' – beyond various kinds of military benefits (Rees, 2017) or easiness of access (Wilson, 2017) for Britain – it lies in 'links in three core areas: intelligence, Special Forces, and nuclear weapons [...] that are protected from tensions and arguments elsewhere, for example the vagaries of presidential and prime ministerial relations' (Oliver & Williams, 2017, p. 5). For May, following the dilemma noted by the two authors, closely embracing Trump's choices would widen gaps with European partners on issues such as the Paris Agreement or the Iran deal, but positioning the country at a distance may cause politico-economic retaliation and a blow to the 'core' (*ibidem*).

The British leadership has certainly sought to show receptivity to a key issue: a neglect of the NATO defence spending benchmark on the part of the European countries, bluntly and controversially framed by Trump as a debt incurred by European allies that should have paid for their protection. Portrayed by former National Security Adviser McMaster as 'tough love' (Dombrowski & Reich, 2017, p. 1026), Trump's stance towards NATO is argued to have 'highlighted rather than created the structural rift between the US and Europe' (ten Brinke, 2018), turning out to be 'the extreme voice of a chorus of US politicians who have warned Europeans that the United States will not eternally assume the lion's share of the transatlantic defence burden' (Bunde & Ischinger, 2017, p. 27; see also Bew & Elefteriu,

2017). Thus, May's speech in Philadelphia stressed Britain's good record, also in comparison to other EU countries:

> *I call on others [...] to join us in that effort and to ensure they step up and contribute as they should. That is why [...] I have already raised with my fellow European leaders the need to deliver on their commitments to spend 2% of their GDP on defence – and 20% of their defence budgets on equipment (May, 2017b).*

Delivered shortly after Trump's election, the speech tellingly reveals a troubled balancing act insofar as it pays lip service to his orientations while maladroitly redefining some of them in partial retractions, e.g. on an 'interests first' line or on substantive issues like the Iran deal. Just like the *volte-face* in Johnson's tones after Trump's victory (Hope *et al.*, 2016), May's words testified to British decision-makers' need to make the most out of the unpredicted scenario, even appeasing Trump as much as possible (Wilson, 2017). In fact, May was the first head of government to visit Trump as President-elect, immediately inviting him to a State visit. The event has not taken place yet – reportedly amidst fear of mass protests – but the Conservatives' posture seems to have reaped some benefits, in the form of Trump's upholding of UK-US closeness, praise for his relationship with May and openness to a free-trade deal. Moreover, some commentators have extolled May's influence in getting him to commit to being '100% behind NATO' (Bew & Elefteriu, 2017).

However, the relationship visibly reached sudden, awkward lows. In March 2017, the then press secretary of the White House took up a Fox News analyst's comments accusing the British intelligence service to have spied on Trump at the behest of President Obama during the presidential campaign. In June, after the London Bridge terrorist attack, the president twice tweeted against the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, forcing the Prime Minister to criticise his statements as 'wrong'. In November, Trump retweeted three anti-Muslim propaganda videos originally posted by the deputy leader of the far-right Britain First, then responded to May's inevitable criticism by scathingly tweeting: '@Theresa_May, don't focus on

me, focus on the destructive Radical Islamic Terrorism that is taking place within the United Kingdom. We are doing just fine!'

More crucially, no British influence could apparently restrain Trump from deciding to move the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, withdraw from the Paris Agreement or repudiate the Iran deal. Overall, it is arduous to dispel the perception that the American president is holding most of the cards, with British ministers reduced to occasional, mild criticism lest they alienate the necessitated ally. Furthermore, a decision by the US Department of Commerce 'to impose a punitive 219 percent tariff on the Canadian aircraft manufacturer Bombardier – potentially placing thousands of British jobs at risk in a Northern Irish factory [...] – was a textbook example of how a big player in global trade will often ruthlessly pursue its own interests and grind down smaller partners, even supposedly close allies' (Cooper, 2017).

Finally, a 'known unknown' of the Trump presidency (Oliver & Williams, 2017, p. 10) concerns the president's relationships with Nigel Farage and other British figures through Steve Bannon, formerly head of Breitbart and White House chief strategist. Farage, who had addressed the crowd at a Trump rally in Mississippi in August 2016, met him hours after his election at Trump Tower, where he had reportedly gone to meet Bannon. Shortly afterwards, Trump unprecedentedly tweeted: 'Many people would like to see @Nigel_Farage represent Great Britain as their Ambassador to the United States. He would do a great job!'. Bannon's apparent fall from grace does not remove unknowns on the meaning of linkages tying Trump to him, to Farage and the likes of Arron Banks, high-profile donor in UKIP and then on the Leave side; Robert Mercer, Trump donor and founder of Cambridge Analytica, whose dubious activities have recently brought all these names to public attention; and possibly, WikiLeaks mastermind Julian Assange and Russian connections (e.g. Cadwalladr, 2017a, 2017b).

6. Britain and the Rules-based International Order

After disentangling the constellation of matters at stake for 'Global Britain', leveraging it, for an appraisal of the likely agency of the UK within an international order in flux, requires a note of caution. Speaking about the 'international order' is not unambiguous, nor can notions of a 'liberal' and a 'rules-based' international order be instantly equated. Some realism-inspired accounts actually contend that a 'rules-based' order only exists in the strategic documents and rhetoric of major powers, not in reality: each one of them 'has on occasion significantly violated international law, or rejected the rulings of international courts', *in primis* the US (Porter, 2016).

A reasonable counterargument states that '[t]he test of whether there is a rules-based international order is whether the norms affect state and state actors' behaviors, not whether one hundred percent compliance is achieved' (Bracknell, 2016); and the US may be seen as having 'displayed a general preference for democracy and openness' after 1945 despite the several 'cynical self-interested moves [made] along the way' (Nye 2017). However, one question remains: which are the 'rules' that are constitutive of the 'order'? The 'thickness' and integral properties respectively ascribed to a 'rules-based' and a 'liberal' international order may differ, leading to diverging insights about its resilience, its acceptance on the part of China (Porter, 2016; Nye, 2017; Yu, 2017) and so on. According to a somewhat 'maximalist' definition,

> *[t]he liberal international order is based on the three-fold principle of sovereignty, non-intervention, and a comprehensive prohibition on the use of force to alter borders. [...] Maintaining an open, non-discriminatory world economy is a second principle upon which the Western liberal world order rests. [...] A third principle building the basis of Western liberal order is the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy (Schwarzer, 2017, p. 24).*

Generally speaking, conflicts between these principles could be eased in directions that render the international system less 'liberal' though still 'rules-based'. (Oliver & Williams, 2017; Oliver, 2017), while discussing contemporary threats to the 'liberal world order', seemingly compared rules to the boundaries of a boxing

ring, where rising powers promote a new transition to a previous, sovereignty-based version of the current order.

> *Much consternation between powers like the US, China, and Russia have been over the "rules" of the international system. Russia and China prefer a more sovereignty based system akin to the 19th century, whereas the last three US administrations have sought to rewrite the rules of the system. A Trump White House will see the US move to policies that coincide better with the Sino-Russian world view. For those that believe in the rights of individuals this would be a big blow, but a win for realists (Oliver & Williams, 2017, p. 4).*

As has been outlined, Britain has been straightforwardly associated – and has associated itself – with the post-1945 liberal order having arisen in the West, and the institutions having articulated and extended it. Yet the content of fundamental 'rules' has implications: for instance, the 'longstanding supporter of the norms of sovereignty and non-intervention so central to international law (and order)' was said to have become a 'revisionist' power in 1998-2003, 'over whether international criminal law and human rights conventions should be upheld over legal norms of sovereignty and non-intervention' (Gaskarth, 2014, p. 572). In any case, it is 'embeddedness' in the international order that has consistently allowed the country to 'punch above its weight' (Wright, 2017). Hence the claim – though overly non-utilitarian in its wording – that 'Acheson's famous aphorism [...] is arguably belied – at least in part – by Britain's long-standing commitment to multilateralism and the maintenance of a rules-based multilateral system' (*ibidem*, p. 6).

Accordingly, the 2015 SDSR remarked that membership of a dense network of international institutions places Britain 'at the heart of the rules-based international order' (HM Government, 2015, p. 14). The section entitled 'Strengthening the rules-based international order and its institutions' evoked the British contribution to shaping and expanding 'the norms that govern use of force, prevent conflict, advance human rights and good governance, promote open and fair international trade relations and support freedom of navigation' (*ibidem*, p. 60). It mentioned in sequence the UN, international financial institutions, the ICJ and the ICC, sanctions governance, counter-proliferation, human rights, humanitarian law and

women's rights. One passage stated that '[o]ur long-term security and prosperity depend on the rules-based international order upholding our values' (*ibidem*, p. 62).

While the 2015 SDSR predated Brexit-Trump and the May governments, May's Florence speech contained a plea for 'likeminded nations and peoples to come together and defend the international order that we have worked so hard to create – and the values of liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law' (May, 2017c). May's official discourse, anyway, consistently featured a precarious conflation of interests and values. The proposed European security partnership was justified on the grounds that '[a]ll of us share interests and values in common, values we want to see projected around the world' (May, 2017a), and later referred to as a 'new partnership of values and interests', meant 'to promote our shared values and interests abroad' (May, 2017c). A convoluted attempt to bind commitment and Trump-friendly non-interventionism at the Republican conference serves as another example:

> *It is in our interests – those of Britain and America together – to stand strong together to defend our values, our interests and the very ideas in which we believe. [...] The days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image are over. But nor can we afford to stand idly by when the threat is real and when it is in our own interests to intervene. We must be strong, smart and hard-headed. (May, 2017b).*

And in the opening of the Munich speech, the conflation imbibed the rules-based international order itself:

> *The fundamental values we share – respect for human dignity, human rights, freedom, democracy and equality – have created common cause to act together in our shared interest. The rules-based system we helped to develop has enabled global cooperation to protect those shared values (May, 2018a).*

On the future relationship of 'Global Britain' with either Trump's outlook or the substance of the international order, these words offer little in the way of calibrated guidance. Towards the former, they convey rhetorical balancing, rather than strategic criteria to be followed when push comes to shove. Furthermore, they fit –

and seemingly extend to the latter – a proneness of contemporary British official discourse, noted by Gilmore (2014), to adopt a clichéd merger of interests and values: 'a convenient means of packaging British foreign policy to appeal to a wide range of constituencies' (*ibidem*, p. 555), which arguably signals hesitation in investing political capital. In sum, in order to sketch British international agency in the wake of Brexit-Trump, it seems judicious to ground reflections in the shock-induced sets of issues highlighted in previous sections, 'corrected for' the 'Global Britain' strategy.

At present, Britain can hardly escape an overwhelmingly reactive posture. Risks of diplomatic and bureaucratic 'overstretching' approach certainty, especially in view of recent, austerity-laden retrenchment having affected State capabilities. Negotiations in Europe concern a withdrawal agreement, transitional arrangements and a future EU-UK economic settlement; and also the status of the UK vis-à-vis the CFSP, the CSDP and information-sharing mechanisms; plus augmented bilateral diplomacy, indispensable to make an indirect impact while not being 'in the EU room' anymore (Whitman, 2016a). Worries about an unwanted 'pivot to Europe' appear justified – as the slight redefinition of 'Global Britain' in May's Mansion House speech may imply – which spells trouble for the lengthy, complex trade talks to be held with extra-European economies.

Additionally, courting the American ally remains an ostensible priority, not least to shore up the prospects of a feasible – but not necessarily advantageous – free-trade deal, which forcefully poses the problem of 'regulatory alignment' with the standards of either the American or the European market. On international security, alignment dilemmas exist but currently appear less pivotal, and the American outlook – while requiring the UK to comply with the NATO defence spending threshold and showcase reliability – should allow 'Global Britain' to revolve around narrowly defined national interest and to continue a trend of relative aloofness from international crises. This would resonate with Trump's own 'ideological' approach, with nation-centred public attitudes that emerged in the Brexit referendum and with a more general public wariness towards military interventions. However, in case of

sudden American adventurism or unilateralism, a less autonomous British ally would be directly exposed to Trump's foreign policy vagaries.

In the short term, therefore, Britain can be regarded as an inward-looking and overburdened power, uneasily balancing between Europe and America. 'Ordinary' international commitments will surely remain in place, out of internationalist conviction as much as a continuing need to show openness in a situation in which – for the first time ever – in 2017 the UK failed to secure the election of a British judge to the bench of the ICJ. However, while Britain is entangled in its cluster of talks and balancing acts, the wheel continues to spin, which might unsettle negotiating equilibria at any step (Wright, 2017). Furthermore, a new international crisis would severely put the response capacity of the British State to the test, especially regarding the political capital and the availability of resources available for major foreign policy initiatives.

In the medium term, the constellation of circumstances for Britain will presumably entail a pronounced economic slowdown. Differently from information-sharing against cross-border threats or selective intergovernmental defence cooperation, single market access is the crux of the tug-of-war with the EU and, thus, likely to be curtailed. Despite the favour shown especially by some Anglo-Saxon countries, 'Global Britain' – forced to appeal to the political will of rising powers and medium-rank economies, many of which are already negotiating with the EU – will hardly be able to call the shots, also losing the EU economic clout at a time when Trump-propelled protectionist measures may spread out across the global trading system. Such a turn may take years to unfold, but so would many of the British trade talks, also because 'the service sector [...] is the most difficult area to open up' (see Hill, 2018, p. 189, also for an overall assessment of the viability of 'Global Britain'). Furthermore, the details of prospective trade deals could catch the eye of the British public opinion – comprising large numbers of Leave-backing citizens wary of rapid socioeconomic change – which reminds of an unsteady 'imperative to conclude beneficial agreements with other states while simultaneously main-

taining political electability in the face of increasing domestic nativism' (Houston & Briggs, 2017, p. 1).

Finally, economic hardship can be expected to 'spill over'. With national foreign policy centred on the effort to deliver 'Global Britain', an independent British sanctions policy is potentially crippled by conflicts of interest. The curtailing of State capabilities would not be reversed and – beside damages to Britain's international credibility – repercussions on the defence budget could counter, inter alia, the defence-leveraging opportunities expected from the 2015 SDSR provision to establish defence staffs in the Middle East, Asia-Pacific and Africa (Black *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, so far as British foreign policy remains closely bound to national identity and to longings for 'taking back control', more structural, extensive pooling in the defence domain, e.g. with European partners, may not be electorally defensible.

While Britain is suggested to be likely to turn into a more precarious defender of the rules-based international order, in the short and medium term, a final note touches upon the 'liberal' side of the latter. Embracing narrowly interest-based attitudes, or holding on tightly to Trump, are not the only routes through which Britain might come to weaken it by coming to prioritise more traditional, sovereignty-based rules. Indeed, the existential quest for 'Global Britain' via free-trade deals may come to take precedence over considerations about certain rules of the international system, e.g. on human rights.

7. Concluding Remarks

This article contributes to the debate on the resilience of the international order, focusing on the British case and elaborating on the likely features of the international agency of the UK in the forthcoming years. To that end, it details how the position of Britain has been affected by two recent, consecutive shocks – the Brexit referendum and the election of Trump – plus a third factor, namely the rearticulation of national foreign policy around the goal to forge 'Global Britain' under the May governments.

Firstly, contextualizing the 'Brexit effect' and the 'Global Britain' strategy in relation to the trade domain, the analysis elucidates the dubious feasibility of compensating a form of 'hard Brexit' with a series of bilateral free-trade agreements. Secondly, international security issues further underline how the UK is compelled to take on negotiations on multiple tables, dealing with the pitfalls of extrication from the EU as regards common foreign policy, data-sharing and sanctions policy. Discussing the 'Trump effect' separately, the article considers the eventuality of a more protectionist global trading environment alongside the prospect of a feasible – but not necessarily even-handed – UK-US free-trade deal, whose pursuit however constrains the British government to attentive accommodation.

In conclusion, one of the few certainties regarding contemporary Britain is that the country will be primarily concerned about its own 'security and prosperity' in the immediate future. In the short run, the UK will strive to maintain 'business as usual' as to its international commitments, but the challenges of overstretching of its civil service and uneasy alignment between the EU and the US are likely to force it into a reactive posture. In the medium term, chasing after free-trade agreements against a difficult economic backdrop, 'Global Britain' will be engaged in an existential quest holding sway over – and constraining – its foreign policy, e.g. sanction-wise. All in all, an interest-oriented Global Britain is likely to offer a more limping and less deliberately consistent contribution to the maintenance of either the 'liberal' or the 'rules-based' international order.

Certainly, venturing to express predictions is even thornier than reflecting on the arrays of issues at stake for British foreign policy. After all, Brexit alone was deemed likely to represent the 'great[est] test of the law of unintended consequences' (Freedman, 2016, p. 12): while the flow of events goes on, even the possibility of unforeseen interplays among the existing constellations of circumstances – e.g. in relation to multiple sets of negotiations bound to take place in parallel (Oliver, 2017) – should not be overlooked. Furthermore, this piece of research focuses on the factors of upheaval arguably endowed with the highest orders of magnitude, but other variables may play a part, too. The 'Global Britain' platform, for instance, is

the brainchild of a Conservative government whose own stability cannot be taken for granted. Equally, the medium-term state of affairs hitherto outlined would be affected by a second Trump term, as opposed to other scenarios.

Finally, while this article provides a mere sketch of the distinction between a 'liberal' and a 'rules-based' interpretation of the extant international order, one avenue for further research requires comprehensively tracing the related interpretations given by the British ruling elite. A constructivism-inspired perspective, focusing on the 'role orientations' they envisage for Britain – whether 'Global' or not – in the wake of Brexit-Trump (Gaskarth, 2014; McCourt, 2014), could surely help elucidating which elements and which 'rules' of the international order would be prioritised.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reconceptualising the Asia-Pacific Order: Japan's Response to Strategic Uncertainties in the Era of Trump

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the perceived US unreliability, especially under the Trump administration, is influencing the security policy behaviour of Japan – one of America's core allies in the Asia-Pacific. By applying Kuik's conceptualisation of hedging, the article explores Tokyo's responses to two major strategic uncertainties in the Asia-Pacific. These are associated, on the one hand, with the sustainability of the US security commitments, and, on the other, with future Chinese intentions, especially in the realm of maritime security. The article also assesses the impact of uncertainties on Japan's conceptualisation of Asia-Pacific strategic order in the Trump era. The article argues that the Trump-generated strategic uncertainties have intensified Japan's long-standing concerns about the durability of America's regional engagements thereby magnifying Japan's China anxieties. This has stimulated Japan's rethinking of Asia-Pacific strategic order. While Japan now appears to have reluctantly accepted the prospect of a diminished American role in the region, or of a 'post-US' regional order, it has steadily resisted to consider a more prominent Chinese role in the evolving order.

KEYWORDS: Strategic uncertainty; hedging; Japan; United States; China.

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1. Introduction*

It is a well-known argument that Japan is one of the strongest supporters of the US-led security order in the Asia-Pacific. This order has been underpinned since the Cold War by a set of bilateral military alliances between America and several Asian countries, also known as the 'hub-and-spoke' security system. China's growing capabilities and regional influence over the past decade have increasingly called into question the continuity of the US-centric arrangements. Anxious about Beijing's future strategic intentions, regional players, including notably Japan, have called for a deeper American engagement. At the same time, worries about the sustainability of the US security commitments in the Asia-Pacific have become more palpable across the region. Perceptions of America's relative decline have steadily grown since the 2008 financial crisis. The Donald J. Trump administration's unpredictable and transactional foreign policy has further heightened these uncertainties. In the meantime, regional perceptions of Chinese assertiveness in pressing its territorial claims in the East China Sea (ECS) and South China Sea (SCS) have grown since 2010. As the People's Republic of China (PRC) has continued to expand its influence on regional economic and security relations, and has pushed forward with its military modernisation and maritime expansion, the question about the future of Asia-Pacific strategic order has become all the more salient across Asia.

Keeping with the thrust of this special issue, this article examines how the perceived US decline and unreliability are influencing the security policy behaviour of one of Washington's core allies in the Asia-Pacific, namely, Japan. The article does so by exploring Tokyo's response to two major strategic uncertainties in the Asia-Pacific in the context of the shifting geopolitical environment. On the one hand, there are broad concerns in the region about the continuity of the US security commitments, and, on the other, there are anxieties associated with future Chinese intentions, especially in the realm of maritime security (Atanassova-Cornelis and Van der Putten 2015). The purpose of the article is twofold: firstly, to examine how Japan has responded to these inter-related uncertainties since the early 2010s and,

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especially, since the second Abe Shinzo administration (2012-present). Secondly, to assess the impact of uncertainties on Japan's conceptualisation of Asia-Pacific strategic order in the Trump era. As the focus is on how Japan perceives uncertainties, the perceptions of Japanese leaders and political elites in the context of state-to-state relations are emphasised. Conceptually, the analysis is based upon the concept of 'hedging' (Kuik 2016), which refers in this article to a state's policy options that simultaneously aim at reducing risk and maximising gain in its relations with a bigger power or a competitor; this behaviour exemplifies the primary response to strategic uncertainties by Asian-Pacific countries.

The case of Japan is particularly relevant for understanding how regional players adapt to a perceived US decline and growing Chinese influence in the Asia-Pacific. Japan – a treaty ally of the US, relies heavily on America for its defence. At the same time, it also depends on China in the economic area and is vulnerable as a maritime nation, to some extent. Regional worries about China are largely driven by the PRC's maritime security behaviour, and Japan is no exception. Tokyo's concerns associated with China have progressively intensified since 2012, as a result of its territorial dispute with Beijing in the ECS.[1] Concomitantly, this has increased Japan's uncertainty about the US security commitments.

The article is structured as follows. It first conceptualises hedging and examines the pertinence of this concept for the paper's objectives. The discussion then looks at Japan's uncertainties associated with the US and China respectively. This is followed by an analysis of Japan's responses to the two uncertainties with reference to hedging policies. Before concluding, the paper reflects on Japan's conceptualisation of the evolving Asia-Pacific order in the Trump era.

2. Conceptualisation of hedging

[1]The dispute concerns maritime delimitation and sovereignty over five islands, known as *Senkaku* in Japan and *Diaoyu* in China. These territories are under Japanese administration, but are separately claimed by China and Taiwan. In 2012 the Japanese government nationalised three of the four privately-owned islands. This led to a major deterioration in Japan-China relations.

A number of studies over the past decade or so, some of them reviewed below, have examined Asian responses to uncertainties with reference to hedging. For example, stressing the uncertainty of intentions, Medeiros (2005) has analysed US and Chinese policies towards one another, defining them as mutual hedging. His analysis points to engagement and institutional binding policies, on the one hand, and to realist-style balancing, such as the strengthening of alliances and alignments with various Asian players in tandem with national military build-up, on the other. McDougall (2011) has examined the strategies of East Asian states in response to China's rise through the framework of 'soft balancing', i.e. the pursuit of political and diplomatic initiatives, and accommodation, using this framework to emphasise the coexistence of different approaches within hedging. Similarly, Thayer (2014) has underscored the mixed strategies pursued by Southeast Asian countries to address US-related uncertainties, including comprehensive engagement through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and varying degrees of hedging and indirect balancing. Finally, Park (2011) has argued that the US and its Asian-Pacific allies have utilised the hub-and-spoke security system as a hedge against uncertainties associated with the evolution of an undesirable multilateral order in Asia.

A common point in the above-mentioned studies is the element of uncertainty in response to which states choose hedging. Indeed, given the uncertain regional environment, the Asian states' hedging behaviour is not really surprising.[2] Hedging is also typically utilised to examine the complex nature of Asian states' alignment behaviour located on the broad spectrum between bandwagoning and balancing, and involving a mix of various forms of cooperation and competition. The problem with most conceptualisations of hedging is that they define it in a loose way, i.e. as including anything between cooperation and competition. Essentially, this means that there is no, or little, variation in Asian states' behaviour.

This article applies Kuik's (2016) definition of hedging. In contrast to the other authors, Kuik seeks to unpack this concept by developing a set of 'constituent components' of hedging, which include military and non-military (economic and

[2] I thank Park Jae Jeok for this remark.

diplomatic) elements. As his model examines the 'micro level', it allows for a better understanding both of the chosen policy options and variations in state behaviour (over time or in a region). Kuik's analytical model is particularly useful for the purposes of this article. Indeed, the objective is to identify Japan's specific policy choices as it adapts its security policy behaviour (at the micro level) and thinking about Asia's strategic order in response to its US- and China-associated concerns. It should be pointed out that Kuik's model was developed as a framework for examining the responses of smaller states, i.e. ASEAN players, to China-associated uncertainties. To be sure, in terms of resources and capabilities Japan is not a small state. At the same time, there are inherent limitations associated with Japan's security role. These are based, on the one hand, on domestic legal and institutional constraints related to the use of force, especially stemming from the interpretation of Article 9 of Japan's 1947 Constitution,[3] and, on the other hand, on external constraints related to Japan's dependence on the US for security. Given these limitations, the pursuit of a single policy option in a highly uncertain strategic environment would be both risky and costly for Tokyo. While not commensurable with the smaller ASEAN players, Japan is nevertheless vulnerable in the Asian-Pacific context of changing power configurations and shifting threats. The main aspects of Kuik's approach are briefly reviewed below and applied later in the paper.

Hedging is understood here as an 'insurance-seeking behaviour' on the part of a sovereign actor that simultaneously seeks maximisation of returns and risk reduction in its interaction with a bigger power or a competitor (Kuik 2016). One of the defining characteristics of hedging, as stressed by Kuik (pp. 5-6), is that it is deliberately ambiguous in character and includes contradictory policy options pursued towards the stronger power: some of these approaches indicate its acceptance, while others point to its rejection. A hedger's main objective is thus to avoid choosing a

[3]Article 9, or the 'peace clause', renounces the threat or use of force for settling international disputes and commits Japan to non-possession of war potential. The interpretation of Article 9 is that it permits possession of a military force for individual national self-defence, but prohibits Japan's participation in collective self-defence arrangements. Since 2014 a limited exercise of the right to collective self-defence has been allowed.

side in an uncertain strategic environment. Policies that seek maximisation of returns are 'economic-pragmatism', 'binding-engagement' and 'limited-bandwagoning'; thus they typically emphasise the strengthening of economic ties and institutionalisation of relations by means of politico-diplomatic engagement with the bigger power, both bilaterally and multilaterally.[4] Risk-reduction options include, what Kuik (p.6) defines as, 'economic diversification', 'dominance-denial' and 'indirect-balancing', or 'economic, political and military hedges', respectively. They refer to various non-military and military approaches designed to diversify ties and avoid dependence, as well as to constrain the competitor in a more indirect way.

Kuik's model of returns-maximising and risk-reduction policies is close to Hornung's (2014) broader conceptualisation of hedging as 'soft' and 'hard', respectively. In the former case, the emphasis remains on power-acceptance and cooperation, but does not exclude, for example, some form of military hedging (or indirect-balancing). In the case of hard hedging, power-rejection and competition are dominant, yet some returns-maximising acts such as economic or diplomatic engagement remain present. All in all, as hedging is composed of various policy choices, it makes conceptual sense to consider it as a 'broad strategic orientation' rather than a single strategy (Kuik 2016).

Two important caveats should be made here. Firstly, the analytical focus of this article is on Japan's alignment choices vis-à-vis the two great powers, i.e. the US and China. In other words, the particular interest of this paper is to demonstrate how some of the constituent components of hedging identified by Kuik are increasingly relevant for Tokyo in the current Trump era, as Japan concurrently addresses its US- and China-related uncertainties.

Secondly, it should be noted that actors' hedging behaviour evolves over time, meaning that hedgers do not pursue all hedging options at all times or to the

[4]This article does not strictly follow Kuik's conceptual configuration of the different constituent options of hedging, because the present analysis also focuses on Japan's US-associated uncertainties as a separate driver of hedging behaviour. Therefore, the discussion examines only those options that are relevant for Japan as it concurrently responds to both uncertainties.

same degree (Kuik 2016). From this perspective, a special attention in this article is given to three hedging approaches. They have emerged as important constituent components of Japan's hedging behaviour (towards the US and China) since the late 2010s and have become especially pronounced in recent years. The first is Japan's pursuit of defence self-reliance in tandem with a strengthened US alliance. The second component consists in Japan's strategic diversification policies in the form of bilateral non-treaty alignments between Japan and some ASEAN states, as well as India. The final approach includes Tokyo's multilateral initiatives and policies towards ASEAN, and (collective) hedging acts pursued within multi- and minilateral settings. As the deepening economic interdependence has increased the costs for states of using military-based foreign policy instruments to undermine their rivals' power advantages, regional players now increasingly focus on competition within multilateral institutional settings 'without war' (He 2015a).

3. Japan's US-associated uncertainties

Japan has had long-standing concerns about the US security commitments in the Asia-Pacific. There are two fundamental dimensions to these uncertainties: the first is related to the sustainability of America's Asian-Pacific engagement, while the second dimension concerns the US-China relations (Atanassova-Cornelis and Van der Putten 2015). The relative weakening of the US influence in Asia following the 2008 financial crisis, unease about the sustainability of Barack Obama's 'rebalance' and worries generated by Trump's Asia policy have underlined Japan's more specific short- to medium-term concerns.

Japan, due to its position as the more dependent partner in the bilateral alliance, has had long-standing anxieties about 'abandonment' amid possible US disengagement from Asia (Ashizawa, 2014). Washington's past strategic policy shifts, such as the Nixon shocks of the 1970s, drove such fears. With the end of bipolarity and Soviet collapse Japanese strategists contemplated such an abandonment scenario in the 1990s. However, it was the 2008 financial crisis that intensified Japan's worries about the sustainability of the US military commitments due to the growing

fiscal and economic constraints in the US, especially cuts in America's defence spending. The strategic 'rebalance' of the Obama administration, officially announced in early 2012, was not able to sufficiently reassure Japan. Tokyo's concerns about Washington's ability to fund the rebalance remained until the end of Obama's term in office.[5] Japan's uncertainties were shared by many countries in the Asia-Pacific. Indeed, Obama's policies were not completely successful in achieving the desired reassurance and trust across Southeast Asia either, and anxieties about the (staying) economic and military power of the US remained lingering in the region.[6]

Many Japanese strategists have openly doubted America's ability and willingness to sustain its medium- to long-term security involvement in the region (Wallace 2013). More specifically, Tokyo's acknowledgement of Washington's commitment to the alliance has not eliminated its worries that the US might be reluctant to engage in a conflict 'that does not directly threaten' American interests (Tatsumi and Wan, 2015), for example, in relation to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. The rise of Chinese power and the implications this has for the US security commitments to Japan and, more broadly, to the Asia-Pacific reinforce Tokyo's anxieties. Indeed, while Japan (similarly to some other Asian states) relies on the US for security protection against the prospect of a more hostile China, it is also economically dependent on the PRC, thus vulnerable to the uncertainties of great power politics. All in all, the difference between Japan's present US-associated uncertainties and those of the 1990s stems from China's changed regional position. Whereas in the early post-Cold War years the PRC was not considered as a challenger to America's dominance in the Western Pacific, as it is now.

Although American retreat from the region is unlikely in the short to medium term, Washington's decision to accommodate Beijing remains a distinct possibility. Given Japan's security overreliance on America, Japanese strategists are particularly concerned about such a scenario, which could mean a certain degree of

[5] Interview with Kotani Tetsuo, Tokyo, November 2015.

[6] Author's personal communications and interviews in Jakarta, Singapore and Tokyo in 2015.

Sino-US strategic understanding at the expense of Tokyo.[7] Japanese worries include a possible US decision not to intervene in a Senkaku/Diaoyu contingency on Japan's behalf, either for fear of negative repercussions for US-China relations or because of the high costs for the US that confronting China's 'anti-access, area-denial' (A2/AD) capabilities might entail (Hughes 2016). Sources of these Japanese anxieties already were the Obama administration's emphasis on engagement with the PRC, especially in 2009-2010, as well as signals sent by Washington suggesting that America was increasingly doubting its own ability to defend its allies in the Asia-Pacific. For example, China's military modernisation was said to 'threaten America's primary means of projecting power and helping allies in the Pacific' (Gates 2010).

Under the Trump administration regional concerns have only grown across the Asia-Pacific. Indeed, Trump's tendency to view security alliances from a 'transactional' perspective and his objective to cut 'deals' benefiting the US generate worries in the region that Washington might decide to sacrifice the security interests of its partners in return, for example, for economic gains with Beijing (Huxley and Schreer, 2017). The US withdrawal from the *Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)* agreement in early 2017 and the persistent lack of clarity about the Trump administration's Asia-Pacific strategy, especially regarding China and North Korea, have reinforced Japan's 'abandonment' concerns. The president's rhetorical shifts on China, from threatening Beijing with a 'trade war' to emphasising 'friendly' relations with the PRC and then labelling it a 'strategic competitor', are making Japan nervous. Tokyo's fear of abandonment is now associated with a possible reduction in the US commitment to Japan not due to American withdrawal from Asia *per se*, but due to a shift in Washington's China policy. In the short term, it is feared that such policy change may presumably occur in the wake of a US-China (trade) bargain under Trump. Similarly, the geopolitical uncertainties on the Korean Peninsula amid the on-going inter-Korean rapprochement and, especially, Trump's sudden shift towards dialogue with North Korea reinforce Japan's sense of insecurity.

[7] Author's interviews with Japanese officials and scholars in Brussels in 2015 and in 2017, and in Tokyo in 2015.

At the same time, Japanese strategists have recognised that the alliance with Japan has remained a main pillar of America's continuing regional involvement. The Obama administration's reaffirmation, on numerous occasions, that 'our [US] treaty commitment to Japan's security is absolute, and Article 5 covers all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku islands' (Asahi Shimbun, 2014) was a clear manifestation of the continuing value the US attached to its alliance with Japan. For its part, early on in office, the Trump administration tried to reassure Tokyo of America's commitment to its Mutual Defence Treaty with Japan. Jim Mattis, the Secretary of Defence, visited Japan on his first foreign trip and underscored that 'Article 5... is understood to be as real to us today as it was a year ago, five years ago - and as it will be a year, and 10 years, from now' (Asahi Shimbun, 2017b). Similarly, President Trump himself has reiterated a long-standing US position that the US is 'committed to the security of Japan and all areas under its administrative control' (The New York Times 2017). These developments may have eased somewhat Japan's initial uncertainties about the Trump administration, although Tokyo's abandonment concerns remain.

Japan's worries about the durability of the US security presence in the region are shared by some ASEAN states (Kuik, 2016). Indeed, there is in varying degrees regional apprehension in Southeast Asian capitals regarding Beijing's strategic objectives in light of its military modernisation, and especially due to its recent behaviour in the SCS disputes. Fears of a future reduction of American security presence (or of Washington's retreat from the Asia-Pacific altogether) arguably generate regional anxieties, for US disengagement would most likely lead to Chinese domination. While Japan considers this as unacceptable scenario, many Southeast Asian states do not embrace the idea of a China-led regional order either.

4. Japan's China-associated uncertainties

Regional China-associated uncertainties include long-term worries about the PRC's future strategic intentions and how it will use its growing military power, and more specific short- to medium-term anxieties about Chinese maritime security objectives

in the region (Atanassova-Cornelis and Van der Putten, 2015). These Japanese and Asian anxieties have grown in response to the PRC's perceived assertiveness since 2010 in pursuing its territorial claims in the China Seas. However, it is Japan's doubts about Washington's willingness, and increasingly about its ability, to continue maintaining its defence commitments to Japan (and broadly its regional engagement) that arguably magnify Japan's China-associated uncertainties.

Japan's concerns about the PRC's strategic intentions in Asia have progressively increased since the early 2000s. A perceived lack of transparency on the PRC's national defence, as well as the double-digit growth of its defence spending in the post-Cold War period have driven the 'China threat' perception in Japan. As the tensions over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands have escalated since 2012, Japan's wariness of its neighbour has become especially pronounced. For example, the 2013 strategy documents of the Abe administration, namely the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Defence Programme Guidelines (NDPG), described the PRC's security behaviour, especially China's military modernisation, and its intensified activities in the seas and airspace around Japan, as an 'issue of concern for the international community, including Japan' (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2013a, 2013b). Japan's political discourse on China has been dominated by a perception of the PRC's unilateralism in seeking to change the maritime 'status quo by coercion' (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2013b, p. 8), disregarding international law and infringing upon the freedom of navigation.

At the same time, Tokyo's specific concerns about Chinese 'attempts to unilaterally change the status quo' in the ECS (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, p. 24), and its intrusion into, what Japan considers the territorial waters and airspace of the Senkakus, have grown concurrently with wider geopolitical worries. The latter include China's alleged 'plans to further expand the sphere of its maritime activities' into the Pacific Ocean and objectives of sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) defence (Ministry of Defence, 2015a, pp. 47-48). This alludes to Tokyo's anxieties about the PRC's possible control of trade routes and maritime domination in the SCS and beyond.

Japanese uncertainties about the PRC's growing military power are primarily related to China's expanding naval and air military capabilities. Of particular concern for Japanese strategists is China's rapid development of A2/AD capabilities, notably its anti-ship ballistic missiles (Gronning, 2014), and the overall deployment of short- and intermediate-range missiles. Especially the missiles aimed at Taiwan are multifunctional and hence can target Okinawa or be used in a Senkaku/Diaoyu contingency.[8] As the Chinese navy is developing capabilities to control the 'near seas' (within the 'first island chain'), its A2/AD strategy has led to worries in Tokyo that the ultimate objective of the PRC's military modernisation is China's future domination of maritime East Asia (Atanassova-Cornelis et al., 2015). In the short term, Japanese strategists worry that China's A2/AD strategy would deny the US access to the western Pacific and hence a possible intervention in a Senkaku/Diaoyu contingency to assist Japan. Additionally, the sea lanes crossing the ECS are crucial to Japan's trade and energy imports. Should the PRC acquire control of this maritime space, it would be able to block trade routes that are strategically critical for Japan. This, in turn, could have potentially devastating economic (and security) implications for this island nation.

Japan's China anxieties are shared by countries in (maritime) Southeast Asia. There, too, have been long-standing concerns about the objectives of China's military build-up and its broad geopolitical ambitions. The growing tensions in the SCS since the early 2010s have led to more specific fears of future Chinese hegemony. In particular, SCS claimants have been alarmed by the PRC's construction activities on islands and reefs, as China expands its presence in the heart of maritime Southeast Asia. This has echoed Japan's own anxieties in the ECS.

While the Obama administration had limited success in curtailing China's maritime advances in the SCS (Huxley and Schreer, 2017), the administration initiated and conducted on a regular basis Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs). This was backed by strong diplomatic reassurance of allies and partners in the region, both at the bilateral and multilateral level, of the US commitment to

[8] Author's interview with Dr. Simon Chang, Taipei, September 2012.

maintaining free and open SLOCs. Not surprisingly, Obama's policy was embraced by Japan. The US under Trump has continued FONOPs. Trump's emphasis on seeking a 'free and open Indo-Pacific region' now broadens the US security engagement in Asia to include India, including though the framework of the reinvigorated Quadrilateral Meeting (Quad) of like-minded democratic nations,[9] and is a response to China's growing maritime presence (Lee and Lee 2017). Japan has welcomed this US initiative, especially as the Quad was initially articulated by Abe in 2007.

5. Hedging in Japan's bilateral relations with the US and China

Japan's first major response to strategic uncertainties is to embrace military-based approaches, with a particular focus on maritime security in the ECS. These policies simultaneously aim at returns-maximisation with the US and risk-reduction in regard to China. Japan has increasingly emphasised the pursuit of defence self-reliance by means of strengthened military capabilities and responsibilities. This has included a growing defence budget under the Abe administration, steady acquisition of capabilities to deal with potential ECS contingencies, as well as an overall expansion of the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) security role in terms of both geographical focus and missions.

The growing tensions with China over the Senkaku islands have prompted Tokyo to prioritise Japan's maritime defence in the framework of the country's overall national defence strategy. The emphasis is increasingly being placed on enhancing Japan's own naval power and achieving 'maritime supremacy and air superiority' (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2013a, p. 7) in order to respond to potential ECS contingencies. This has included the acquisition of military hardware such as Osprey transportation aircraft and amphibious assault vehicles, which can be used for retaking islands under foreign occupation, as well as the strengthening of Japan's Coast Guard. The defence budget has now seen five consecutive years of

[9] The Quad includes Japan, the US, India and Australia.

rise since fiscal year 2013.[10] The budget for 2018, with an expected increase of 2.5 percent from 2017, is set to mark the sixth straight annual increase. The priority expenses reflect the Abe administration's main security concerns – China and North Korea, and its corresponding security objectives, namely to ensure the 'security of seas and airspace surrounding Japan', to respond 'to attacks on remote islands' and 'to ballistic missile attacks' (Ministry of Defence, Japan 2017).

Increasing its defence self-reliance has proceeded in tandem with a strengthening of Japan's military alliance with America. The purpose is to ensure the US defence commitments to Japan, while also offsetting the security risks associated with China. In 2014, the Abe Cabinet reinterpreted Article 9 of the Constitution. Provided that 'Japan's survival is threatened' as a result of 'an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan', Japan is now allowed to exercise its right to collective self-defence under strict conditions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). This means that, theoretically, the SDF will be able to defend US troops and assets from aggression. This move is important as a hedge against US abandonment, for it involves expansion of Japan's commitments to its American ally and is a demonstration of Tokyo's willingness to reciprocate (although restrictions do remain). The reinterpretation is all the more significant given the domestic legal difficulties associated with a full-scale constitutional amendment. The perceived lack of security options arguably feeds Japan's fear of abandonment.

In a similar vein, it was the logic of binding-engagement (a returns-maximising option) - i.e., to bind the US to the alliance and further institutionalise bilateral ties - that underpinned Japan's willingness to seek a revision in 2015 of the *Bilateral Defence Guidelines*. Following from the 2014 Cabinet decision, the new guidelines allowed the SDF protection of US military assets, envisaged enhanced operational coordination and interoperability between the allies, and removed the geographical limitations on Japan's security missions (Ministry of Defence, Japan 2015b). They also covered US-Japan cooperation at the regional and global levels, for example, for securing the safety of SLOCs and maintaining maritime order. Al-

[10] 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014.

though not explicitly stated, the message was one of a strengthened joint deterrence of China's naval expansion in Asian waters. While Japan's current shift to south-western defence and focus on the Tokyo-Guam-Taiwan strategic triangle is aimed at reinforcing the SDF's surveillance of the vital SLOCs converging in this area, it also enhances Japan's support for the US presence in the Western Pacific (Patalano, 2014). In turn, this behaviour is consistent with Tokyo's policies aimed at keeping Washington engaged in Japan's security through the approach of binding-engagement.

The legal basis for the above-mentioned changes regarding Japan's security role was laid out in the 2015 security legislation of the Abe administration. In spring 2017, amid the rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula, the Maritime SDF helicopter carrier Izumo was deployed to escort a US Navy supply ship off the Pacific coast of Japan. This was the first instance of the implementation of the security legislation. It was a highly publicised mission of Japan's protection of the military assets of its US ally and was meant to send an important signal to the Trump administration of Japan's firm commitments to the alliance. Japan's anxiety about US abandonment surfaced during the 2015 Diet deliberations of the new security legislation, when Abe stated that 'if Japan did not protect US Navy ships, and one was sunk leading to the death of many young sailors, the ties of the Japan-US alliance would receive a decisive blow at that precise moment' (as quoted in Asahi Shimbun, 2017a). The strengthening of Japan's defence capabilities and responsibilities within the alliance has, therefore, served a dual purpose of reducing the risk of US abandonment, now especially salient under the Trump administration, while increasing Japan's ability to constrain the PRC (individually and together with America).

As to Japan's China policy, during the Cold War and much of the 1990s it was pursued primarily within the framework of economic and diplomatic engagement of the PRC (Hornung 2014). Some political and military hedging was gradually implemented in the 2000s. Japan's growing uncertainties about the PRC, especially in the maritime domain, have driven a change in Tokyo's policy towards Beijing over the past decade (noticeably since 2010). There has been a palpable reduc-

tion in Japan's pursuit of returns-maximising options in favour of risk-contingency acts.[11] Japan has placed a stronger emphasis on responding 'firmly and in a calm manner to the rapid expansion and intensification of Chinese activities on the sea and in the air' (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2013a, p. 11). To this end, Tokyo has stepped up the various risk-contingency measures, which have included implementing the military hedge (defence self-reliance and strengthened alliance with the US) alongside political and economic hedges, as discussed in the following sections. Importantly, as Tokyo has increasingly come to question the reliability of Washington's security commitments at a time (and because) of growing anxieties about Beijing's behaviour in the region, the various approaches have played a dual role for Japan to hedge against both US- and China-associated uncertainties.

At the same time, as Japan does not perceive China as an imminent military threat, it has deliberately chosen to adopt a more ambiguous rhetoric centred on the term 'concern', and has supplemented the military hedge by binding-engagement policies (Vidal and Pelegrin, 2017). For example, the 2013 NDPG points out that Japan 'will promote security dialogues and exchanges with China, and will develop confidence-building measures (CBMs)' in order to prevent accidental clashes (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2013a, p. 11). To this end, Japan has pursued a binding-engagement policy towards China at the bilateral level in various ways. The meetings between Abe and Xi on the sidelines of multilateral gatherings, Japan-China foreign ministerial meetings, and the bilateral security dialogue have promoted institutionalisation, kept the channels of communication open and stabilised the bilateral relations. CBMs in the maritime domain, notably the 2017 agreement for an implementation of a hotline between defence officials, have aimed at reducing the risk of accidents at sea. Other examples of binding-engagement acts are Abe's recent diplomatic overtures to Xi, such as Japan's suggestion for a possible inclusion of the PRC in the 'free and open Indo-Pacific region' (The Japan Times, 2017). In the spring of 2018, the two sides also agreed to resume mutual high-level

[11] Hornung (2014) provides a systematic analysis of the changes in Japan's China policy from soft hedging to hard hedging.

visits of leaders and the high-level Sino-Japanese economic dialogue. US-associated uncertainties under Trump are arguably a driver of Japan's latest diplomatic embrace of China. The recent rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula adds to these dynamics.

6. Strategic diversification: Japan's bilateral relations with Asian countries

Japan's second major response to strategic uncertainties may broadly be identified as a diversification policy, i.e., away from the US and China (Atanassova-Cornelis and van der Putten, 2015). This includes reinforcement of the existing, or the establishment of new, bilateral (comprehensive) strategic partnerships with other players in the region, especially in maritime Southeast Asia and with India. Being a distinct form of alignment (Wilkins 2012), these partnerships are generally non-binding in nature and do not identify another state as a 'threat', and are also multidimensional. They allow hedgers to implement concurrently various risk-contingency options vis-à-vis bigger powers. As discussed below, the pursuit of politico-diplomatic and economic initiatives is often paralleled by the enhancement of military ties between the hedging states.

Japan's strategic diversification in the Asia-Pacific, also defined by some scholars (Wallace, 2013) as a 'strategic pivot South', has gradually become a prominent feature of Japanese foreign and security policies from the late 2000s on. Tokyo has prioritised enhancing bilateral economic, diplomatic and defence ties with nations geographically located 'south' of Japan's primary sphere of its geostrategic interests in Northeast Asia (ibid.). Many Southeast Asian countries, as well as India, have reciprocated by embracing Tokyo's overtures. These bilateral engagements have included both non-military and military components, such as diplomatic visits, high-level summits and defence talks, military exchanges and exercises. Tokyo has also signed economic partnership agreements (EPAs), for example, with the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and India, and has increased its foreign aid provision to India and Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, for infrastructural projects (Wallace, 2013).

Japan's pursuit of strategic diversification has been markedly accelerated under Prime Minister Abe. The Abe administration has sought enhanced defence cooperation and security dialogue, in particular, with the Philippines and Vietnam. A *Strategic Partnership* was signed in 2011 With Manila, while the 2009 Strategic Partnership with Hanoi was elevated in 2014 to an *Extensive Strategic Partnership*. Both countries have territorial disputes with China in the SCS and share Tokyo's concerns about the PRC's geopolitical ambitions in the region. Both of them have acquired patrol boats from Japan. Additionally, Japan has conducted joint search and rescue exercises with the Vietnamese coast guard, and joint naval drills with the Philippines in the SCS. By providing military equipment to ASEAN states to enhance their coastal defence, Japan has pursued maritime security cooperation in the SCS (Hughes, 2016). As states in Southeast Asia increasingly respond to China's maritime advances in the SCS with growing defence budgets and naval build up, Japan is now an indispensable partner for maritime capacity building of these nations.[12] Consistent with the risk-contingency logic is Japan's focus on deepening its defence relations with the ASEAN states. Tokyo thus seeks to diversify its security partners in Asia, without jeopardising its alliance with Washington. At the same time, by cultivating its ties with Southeast Asian nations (both bilaterally and multilaterally with ASEAN), Japan also attempts to reinforce the regional role of America and thereby maintain the US-led alliance system in the Asia-Pacific (Sahashi, 2016), in line with the gains-maximising option.

The logic of hedging against multiple uncertainties is also present in Japan's deepening political and security ties with India. In 2014, the Japan-India relationship was upgraded to a *Special Strategic and Global Partnership*. Japan's relations with India have been particularly important to Tokyo from the perspective of the evolving trilateral US-India-Japan maritime security cooperation and in the context of the 'free and open Indo-Pacific' concept, promoted by the Trump administration. Japan is now a full member of the annual *Malabar* maritime exercises, conducted by the Indian and US navies in the Indian Ocean. In September 2017, the three countries

[12] Author's personal communications and interviews in Jakarta, Singapore and Tokyo in 2015.

agreed to collaborate for the development of strategically important ports and other infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as to work together for maritime capacity-building of the coastal nations in the area. By engaging India, Japan manages the risks associated with China's growing regional role. At the same time, as Tokyo enmeshes Washington in trilateral and quadrilateral frameworks that include New Delhi, Japan also seeks to reduce the risk of possible US disengagement.

As the above discussion illustrates, the pursuit of strategic diversification in the case of Japan is associated with its China-related uncertainties in so far as Tokyo seeks to reduce the risks of potential Chinese hegemony in the Asia-Pacific in the medium to long term. At the same time, forging stronger ties with various Asian-Pacific countries is also relevant for addressing Japan's concerns about the reliability of the US regional commitments, notably, in the Trump era. Thus, as observed by Ciorciari (2009), while these limited alignments seek to manage the risks associated with a rising threat (especially China), they also seek to reduce the risks related to overdependence on an ally (the US), as an ally 'may prove unreliable'. Importantly, these approaches are particularly useful to the hedgers, such as Japan, for these policies do not explicitly target any particular state (such as the PRC). This will not be acceptable to many Asian states due to their economic interdependence with China. Nor do limited alignments jeopardise Japan's respective ties with its US ally. This means that Japan can continue to pursue returns-maximising options with both the US and the PRC.

7. Multi- and minilateral dimensions of Japanese hedging

The final major aspect of Japan's responses to strategic uncertainties includes its multilateral initiatives and policies, and (collective) hedging acts pursued within multi- and minilateral settings in the Asia-Pacific. Japan's approach to multilateral mechanisms has largely followed the logic of binding-engagement vis-à-vis the US, and dominance-denial thinking with regard to China.

In the framework of Japan's engagement of ASEAN, both at the bilateral level with individual countries and collectively with the organisation, Tokyo under

Abe has noticeably boosted its economic cooperation with, and investment in Southeast Asia. This has included increased foreign aid assistance to the region with a focus on improving Southeast Asia's disaster relief capabilities, funding transportation infrastructure and assisting the region's development. Observers point out that Tokyo's stepped-up engagement of ASEAN is a response to Beijing's growing diplomatic and economic influence in the region, including through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).[13] To be sure, Japan's economic initiatives in Southeast Asia cannot be compared with China's BRI in terms of either scale or (expected) impact. Tokyo's efforts, therefore, aim at reinforcing Japan's economic and geostrategic importance for ASEAN states rather than competing with Beijing. In this way, Japan attempts to minimise the risk of exclusion from various multilateral (economic) arrangements, and hedge against possible Chinese domination and coercion. This has become all the more important to Tokyo in the wake of the Trump administration's withdrawal of the US from the TPP. Indeed, Beijing now seems to be filling the vacuum left by Washington by pushing for the conclusion of a major multilateral FTA in the Asia-Pacific, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Abe's leadership role in moving forward the TPP agreement after America's withdrawal, i.e., in the form of TPP-11,[14] is an example of Japan's economic hedge against both China and the US in search of diversified trade and investment ties.

Japan has endeavoured to utilise specific multilateral initiatives with ASEAN, and various regional multilateral mechanisms as political (dominance-denial) and military (indirect-balancing) hedges against China. Tokyo, for example, has sought to create a unified stance with ASEAN by jointly emphasising the importance of the rule of law in dealing with territorial disputes in Asia and for ensuring freedom of navigation (Hughes, 2016). This push for a common Japan-ASEAN stance on maritime challenges reflects the progressive domination over the past decade of security concerns in Tokyo's Asian diplomacy as a result of the growing

[13] Author's interviews in Tokyo, November 2015.

[14] The TPP-11, known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), was signed in March 2018.

'China threat' perception in Japan (Sahashi, 2016). By aligning with ASEAN on issues related to maritime security, Japan attempts to reduce both the political (and legal), as well as military risks associated with China's growing maritime presence. Through its relations with ASEAN Tokyo thus attempts to constrain Beijing in an indirect way. To be sure, Japan understands well the obstacles it faces in seeking a unified stance with ASEAN. In particular, as the ASEAN members that are not involved in the SCS disputes and/or are closely aligned with the PRC, such as Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, do remain wary of becoming a part to any anti-China regional coalitions.

Japan under Abe has continued to extend its support for the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ASEAN DMM+). On the one hand, this has served a purpose of binding America in order to keep the US 'in' the Asia-Pacific (Ashizawa, 2014), consistent with the returns-maximising logic. From this perspective, both Abe and the ASEAN leaders evaluated very positively President Trump's attendance of the ASEAN meetings in the fall of 2017. Trump's presence at these meetings eased somewhat regional concerns about US disengagement from the multilateral arena, which had gradually grown after America's withdrawal from the TPP. Collectively, ASEAN has endeavoured to enmesh both the US and China in regional (security) configurations, including the EAS and the ADMM+. By having both powers participate in these configurations, ASEAN has sought to ensure Washington's commitments to the region, while concurrently engaging and socialising the PRC (He 2015b).

On the other hand, both Japan and the ASEAN states have implemented dominance-denial measures by using regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific to prevent Chinese domination (Kuik, 2016).[15] For example, ASEAN states have resisted Chinese efforts for a leadership role in, and exclusive membership of, the EAS, centred on ASEAN+3 (Sutter 2010). This converged with Japan's push in 2005 to include Australia, New Zealand and India in the expanded EAS. As argued by Kuik

[15] Some authors, such as He (2015a), define this behaviour as 'institutional balancing'.

(2016, pp. 9-10), ASEAN's behaviour is a clear demonstration of the two sides 'of the same institutional coin': engaging the PRC in regional institutions to encourage a larger role for Beijing (binding-engagement), while simultaneously pursuing political hedging (dominance-denial) to limit and check Beijing's influence.

Although throughout the 1990s, Japan did pursue binding-engagement policies towards China via multilateral ASEAN-led frameworks, it is the risk-contingency logic that has increasingly become a driver of Japan's China policy. Multilateral mechanisms are now employed by Tokyo for the purpose of Japan's political hedging against the PRC and less so as a tool of engagement. In contrast, Tokyo attempts to tie down the US in regional multilateral arrangements so as to ensure America's regional engagement, while concurrently utilising this engagement as a political hedge against China. A case in point was the joint US-Japan position on the maritime territorial disputes in the SCS, which was articulated in a number of multilateral fora during Obama's term in office. The newest high-level dialogue, the Quad, now revived by Trump, strongly supported by Abe, and embraced by India and Australia, is the latest example of regional hedging responses to uncertainties associated with both the US and China. The Quad is a binding-engagement act for Japan in so far, as it seeks to enmesh America in minilateral settings with like-minded democratic nations along shared geopolitical interests. But it is also a manifestation of political and military hedging vis-à-vis Beijing, for the Quad's promotion of free trade and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific represents an indirect way of offsetting China's growing regional influence. It should be noted, however, that the Quad's future role in addressing Japan's uncertainties remains an uncertainty in itself. On the one hand, the unpredictability of the US Asia policies, under the Trump administration, raises the question of how serious Washington may be about moving beyond Quad's declaratory statements towards formalised cooperation on the ground. On the other hand, strategic divergences among the Quad members exist and will remain, especially concerning the PRC, while four-way security collaboration is still largely in the making.

8. Japan and Asia-Pacific strategic order

Japan's pursuit of hedging in response to a perceived US unreliability at a time of growing Chinese influence is not an exceptional security behaviour in the Asia-Pacific region. Many other regional players, including states in Southeast Asia (Kuik, 2016), have embraced hedging in order to adapt to the changing strategic environment. As one of the strongest supporters of the US-led security order in the Asia-Pacific (Sahashi, 2016), even to the point of exceeding Washington's own commitments,[16] Japan's behaviour deserves a particular attention in any discussion of Asia's future strategic order.

In the first place, Japan's hedging behaviour suggests that Tokyo may have embarked on reconceptualising its vision of strategic order in favour of a model that is inclusive of the US, but no longer US-centric. Given Japan's long-standing unwillingness or inability to consider a 'post-US' regional order with reduced American role (let alone a US disengagement from Asia) (Ashizawa, 2014), this may signify an important change in Japanese strategic thinking in the long term. Driven by Trump's unpredictability and growing US-associated uncertainties, Tokyo is likely to accelerate its efforts for laying the groundwork for a security architecture that does not rest on American primacy. Hence, Japan's defence self-reliance, and bi- and minilateral (security) arrangements with other Asian players are expected to gain prominence in Japanese policies in the years to come.

Secondly, what seems to remain a constant in Japan's conceptualisation of future regional order is its reluctance, and even resistance, to include the PRC in the emerging order or to face the prospect of a more prominent Chinese role in order building (Ashizawa, 2014). Tokyo's continuing emphasis under Abe on risk-reduction measures in its policies towards Beijing supports this observation. To be sure, Abe's most recent diplomatic overtures to Xi indicate an increased attention to binding-engagement. This appears to be Japan's response to Trump-generated uncertainties and is consistent with Japan's hedging behaviour. In contrast to many

[16] Such a view was expressed by a Japanese scholar during an interview with the author, Tokyo, November 2015.

Asian states, including ASEAN members, that encourage a certain Chinese role in regional order building through binding-engagement policies via multilateral frameworks, Japan is, as Sahashi (2016) argues, 'more assertive...in its desire to guard against increasing Chinese influence.' ASEAN does converge with Tokyo though on the adoption of dominance-denial measures in order to prevent an exclusive Chinese leadership in Asian multilateral organisations. Furthermore, to reduce the risks associated with the PRC's growing maritime security presence, Japan and Asian players continue to support and facilitate Washington's regional involvement under Trump, both at the bilateral and multilateral level.

Finally, by creating a web of bilateral and multilateral strategic alignments Japan seems to be hedging against the emergence of an order along the lines of a Sino-American condominium or, as conceptualised by Zhao (2014), of a bilateral power-sharing arrangement. This scenario represents for Tokyo 'the worst case' (Ashizawa, 2014) of an imaginable Asia-Pacific future. It is arguably one of the major uncertainties associated with the future of Sino-US relations, especially in the context of the transactional and unpredictable US foreign policy of the Trump administration.

The Asia-Pacific security order remains fluid with some contradictory and competing trends. On the one hand, Japan's and other Asian states' collective hedging acts through multilateral mechanisms reinforce the ASEAN-led system of interconnected regional institutions. This keeps the channels of communication open and promotes cooperation on various issues, including security. The existing multilateral groupings help Asian states cope with strategic uncertainties by easing US-China rivalry, and binding both Washington and Beijing to the region (Atanassova-Cornelis and van der Putten, 2015), while simultaneously mitigating hegemonic ambitions.

On the other hand, reflective of the contradictory nature of hedging itself (see, Kuik, 2016), order building through inclusion and cooperation in the framework of multilateral institutions is concurrently being challenged by the regional players' pursuit of bilateral, minilateral and exclusive arrangements. Japan, for one,

recognises the limitations of the various ASEAN-led organisations for addressing regional states' strategic uncertainties about both China and the US. In particular, this concerns the inability of these mechanisms to 'restrain', what Tokyo sees as, Beijing's assertive behaviour in pressing its territorial claims in the China Seas. Japan, therefore, implements various risk-reduction options towards the PRC by stepping up bilateral (with the US, India and the ASEAN states) and exclusive of China (such as the Quad) approaches to order building. As multilateral mechanisms are unable to sufficiently offset Japan's US-associated uncertainties, and more so in an era of Washington's turn away from multilateralism under Trump, bilateralism and minilateralism will likely remain prominent in Tokyo's policies. Japan's pursuit of multilateralism, therefore, is set to coexist with various other, including non-US centric, approaches to order building.

9. Conclusion

This article has examined how Japan has been adapting its security policy behaviour to the perceived US decline and unreliability, especially under the Trump administration, at a time of growing strategic uncertainties about China's regional and maritime security intentions.

Japan's US-associated uncertainties have represented long-standing concerns. These have become more acute with the relative decline of America and due to a growing perception since Trump came to power of a weakening US leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. A particular concern for Japan is the possibility of a shift in US China policy towards accommodation; this amid a transactional deal or some kind of a bargain under Trump. Japan's China-associated uncertainties include worries about the PRC's long-term regional intentions, and concerns about Beijing's maritime security objectives, especially in the China Seas, in the short to medium term. Importantly, it is Japan's doubts about Washington's willingness, and increasingly about its ability, to continue maintaining its defence commitments to Japan

(and broadly its regional engagement) that magnify Japan's China-associated uncertainties.

Japan's hedging behaviour has sought to offset the China-associated security risks and ensure the continuing US defence commitments, while also preparing Japan for a possible 'abandonment' scenario. Under Abe, Japan has tended to de-emphasise binding-engagement policies towards the PRC. Instead, Tokyo has stepped up the risk-reduction measures through political, economic and military hedging. It has pursued both non-military (i.e., economic-diversification and dominance-denial), and military-based approaches. Japanese hedging against the US-associated uncertainties has followed primarily the logic of gains-maximisation by emphasising binding-engagement policies. These are seen in Tokyo's reinforcement of the alliance under Abe, especially underscored since Trump came to power, and in its efforts to keep Washington committed to the region via mini- and multilateral frameworks. Binding the US in this way has also served a purpose of reducing Japan's China-associated risks, especially in the realm of maritime security, for the US has acted as a counterbalance to the PRC's (political and military) power.

At the same time, in line with the risk-reduction logic, Tokyo has pursued (albeit to a lesser extent) economic diversification and incipient indirect-balancing policies towards Washington, in order to minimise its vulnerability in case of US abandonment or a Sino-US strategic accommodation. This behaviour is manifested in the palpable augmentation of the SDF's capabilities and responsibilities, and in Japan's growing defence partnerships (or limited alignments) with the ASEAN states and India, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Japan's risk-reduction policies vis-à-vis the US are likely to become more prominent in the Trump era.

All in all, the Trump-generated strategic uncertainties have intensified Japan's long-standing concerns about the durability and sustainability of America's regional commitments. This has stimulated a shift in Japan's vision for the Asia-Pacific strategic order, which has hitherto largely rested on US-centric approaches. In particular, Japan now appears to have reluctantly accepted the prospect of a diminished American role in the region, or of a 'post-US' regional order. At the same

time, up until now Japan has steadily resisted to include the PRC, or to consider a more prominent Chinese role, in the evolving order. Tokyo's latest diplomatic overtures to Beijing, not least as a response to uncertainties reinforced by Trump, may be a harbinger of change in the relations between Asia's two largest economies. For now, the regional strategic order remains fluid with some competing trends. Yet, this is a sign that the Asia-Pacific is preparing for a new era, with or without the US.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Donald Trump and Latin America

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ABSTRACT

Beyond the rhetoric and the very deep contradictions that seem to characterize the Trump administration, events seem to suggest that US continental politics will be characterized by the attempt to abandon or, at least, supersede some of the pillars of US foreign policy in Latin America since the post-Cold War. Security threats remain essentially the same, as is the tendency to establish privileged relationships with key partners in the region. What seems to have changed is trust in multilateral institutions and agreements, in the promotion of democracy, and, more generally, in that combination of hard and soft power which, since the end of the 1980s, was considered by US policy makers as the main way to preserve the 'liberal hegemony'. These things have been abandoned in favor not of a withdrawal from the continental scenario, but of a definitively unilateral and aggressive approach. It is difficult to predict what the effects of all this will be on the Latin American countries. The Trump administration's choices could even open paths unthinkable until now.

KEYWORDS: Trump; America First; Latin America; Strategy; Hegemony.

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1. Introduction

After the late nineteenth century, when the Monroe Doctrine,[1] was converted from a negative 'veto' towards the interference of the powers of the Old World into a positive claim of US interest in the 'stability' of Latin America, the influence of United States in the region grew progressively and relentlessly, starting with the Central American and Caribbean area.[2] From that point on, the use of a combination of hard and soft power – with a clear predominance of the first – by US administrations, with its use or threat of using military and economic measures to impose certain actions and behaviors, represented the norm; just as constant was the predilection for a one-sided approach in place of looking for shared interests (Weeks, 2017). A partial exception in this sense came with the 'Good Neighbor' policy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which, based on the principle of non-intervention in Latin American affairs and on the commitment not to resort to force, tried to revive inter-American relations and re-qualify continental organization after decades of misunderstanding and conflict. A policy which, in the long run, yielded its fruits, considering that between 1939 and 1945 it led to the strengthening of the inter-American system and the definitive sanction within it of US domination.[3]

However, the various US administrations that have followed over time, quite independently of their political color, have considered the subcontinent as a sort of 'backyard' and an area of exclusive influence, and used different tools (diplomatic, economic, military) to exert pressure on the Latin American countries

[1] Beginning with one of the first and most famous works published on the Monroe Doctrine (Perkins, 1927) much has been written on the subject. Among the most recent works we mention: Kasson, 1985; Dangerfield, 1986; Murphy, 2005.

[2] Works related to the beginning of the American penetration in Latin America are numerous. Regarding the first interventions, military and otherwise, in the Caribbean and Central American area between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, among the most recent works of a general nature we mention: Lafeber, 1993; Langley and Schoonover, 1995; Langley, 2002. Regarding US economic penetration in those years and the competition between the United States and Great Britain in the area we mention, among others: Pletcher, 1998; Leonard, 1999; Healy, 2001.

[3] On the policy of 'Good Neighbor' and, more generally, on the foreign policy of the Roosevelt administration see, among others: Gellman, 1979; Fejes, 1986; Pike, 1995.

in order to affirm and consolidate their hegemony, obstructing, at the same time, the penetration of foreign powers in the hemisphere. And from the perspective of Washington's policy makers, the 'backyard' has often represented essentially an economic opportunity and a potential threat to US national security (Weeks, 2015). This approach has meant that Latin America, from the United States' perspective, has been displayed, in various phases, through the distorting lenses of global struggles such as those against Nazi-fascism, communism, terrorism or drug trafficking, while, at other times, it simply did not form part of the priorities of the White House's political agenda. This approach is emblematic of the United States' perception of the subcontinent, a perception conditioned by the conviction of being a superior nation in economic, political, military, social and cultural terms, and based on its effective centrality in the inter-American system from the years of the Second World War up to the present day (Schoultz, 2009).[4]

If during the Cold War, even in Latin America, the United States subordinated all foreign policy issues to the bipolar conflict, with the collapse of the communist threat at the end of the 1980s, the White House, then occupied by Ronald Reagan, began to shift its attention towards new priorities.[5] Among these, in particular, as well as the traditional security pillar – which was now under attack from new 'threats', such as drug trafficking and illegal immigration – the US began to include the promotion of free trade at the economic level, and the strengthening of democracy at the political level – considered not as an end in itself, but as a tool to promote long-term stability and order – and governance (soft power). All the ensuing administrations, whether Republican – Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush – or Democratic – Bill Clinton and Barack Obama – although in the context of very different approaches, have adhered to these fundamental programmatic lines.

[4] There are numerous works that have reconstructed the inter-American relations in the long run and from a historical perspective. Among the best known are: Connell-Smith, 1974; Langley, 1989; Niess, 1990; Smith, 1996; Schoultz, 1998; Gilderhus, 2000; Longley, 2002; Langley, 2003.

[5] On inter-American relations and, in particular, on US policy in Central America during the years of the Reagan presidency, see, among others: Carothers, 1991; LaFeber, 1993; LeoGrande, 1998.

The overcoming of the bipolar conflict was managed by George Bush (president from 1989 to 1993), who found himself closing the still open fronts inherited from the Cold War period, especially in the Central American area. Here, the Republican president alternated diplomacy (as in the case of Nicaragua and Salvador) and hard power (as in the case of Panama, where the White House authorized the first unilateral US invasion of a Latin American country since the 1920s in order to remove the dictator Noriega). During the Bush administration, efforts were increasingly made to strengthen the spread of democratic regimes in the region, considered an indispensable precondition for the stability of the area. Emblematic, in this sense, was the approval of Resolution 1080 by the Organization of American States (OAS) which established, among other things, 'the immediate convocation of a meeting of the Permanent Council in the event of any occurrences giving rise to the sudden or irregular interruption of the democratic political institutional process or of the legitimate exercise of power by the democratically elected government in any of the Organization's member states'.[6] These efforts continued with even greater intensity during the presidency of Bill Clinton (1993 to 2001), which went as far as sending US troops to Haitian soil (this time under the aegis of the UN) to restore the democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In fact, during the Democratic president's two terms, the region did not seem to pose particular problems to the stability functional to the interests of Washington: the number of 'democratic' governments was now increasing, and these seemed to adhere without particular difficulty to the structural adjustment plans sponsored by the US Treasury and advocated by the International Monetary Fund. Macroeconomic stabilization, liberalization, privatization and deregulation, the pillars of the development paradigm imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions under the 'Washington Consensus', seemed to have been definitively affirmed almost everywhere and without particular obstacles.

[6] The text of the resolution can be consulted at the link: http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/agres1080.htm

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico, was emblematic of the new US economic strategy towards the area in the early 1990s. Promoted by the administration of George H. W. Bush, the agreement aimed at promoting an area of free trade among member countries through the elimination of tariffs and other trade barriers, and was approved by the US Congress a year after Bill Clinton entered the White House. In fact, during his mandate the Democratic president tried to go even further than this, trying to lay the foundations for an area of free trade that would embrace the entire continent; the project foundered mainly due to the growing distrust of many Latin American countries, worried that this would only increase economic dependence on their northern neighbor.

It was probably during the Clinton administration that some new menaces to US security in the region took on the shape of 'serious internal threats'. In reality, elements of strong continuity in US foreign policy towards Latin America between the eighties and nineties can also be traced on this front, starting from the threat posed by drug trafficking. From the time of the Reagan administration, in which the principle was established that the fight against drug trafficking should be among the tasks of the North American army, up to Clinton's Plan Colombia, the approach to the question on the US side was based essentially on a militarization of the problem, which, among other things, has led to constant increases in military spending, imbalances and degeneration of various kinds at local level (from corruption of public institutions and control agencies to the growth of paramilitary organizations without restraints), and new forms of interference in the affairs of the Latin American countries.[7] Continuity was the constant trait also in terms of immigration, seen in turn increasingly as a threat rather than a resource. Here, rather than through the adoption of coherent strategies, Washington's management of the issue was characterized by 'ad hoc' solutions strongly influenced by the pressures of internal public opinion and economic powers. This has produced interventions that

[7] On the theme of the fight against drug trafficking in Latin America, see, among others: Bergman, 2016; Youngers and Rosin, 2005; Walker, 1996; Santana, 2004.

have led to a policy of ever greater firmness towards illegal immigration, which the state has attempted to contain both by acting on North American companies and by enforcing greater control over land and sea borders, as well as by differentiated treatments both among national immigrant groups and within the same groups.[8]

Another constant of the US presidencies that followed in the immediate post-Cold War – with the not inconsiderable change of approach represented by the Obama administration – was the maintenance of the hard line against the 'historical' enemy, Cuba. Although, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the military, political and ideological influence of communism in the hemisphere had reached its historical minimum, Castro's regime did not cease to pose a threat to the security of the area for US policy makers. On the contrary, probably in the belief of being able to give the final blow to the communist government of the Caribbean island, and under the pressure exerted by the powerful anti-Castro lobby of Miami, during the presidency of George H. W. Bush the United States assumed a particularly harsh approach, culminating in Congressional adoption of the Cuban Democracy Act, with which the trade embargo in force for over 30 years was substantially strengthened. This hard line continued during the Clinton years, with the Helms-Burton law approved by Congress in 1996, intensifying the embargo against the island, and confirming, among other things, the prohibition of trade with the island for US companies.

During the presidency of George W. Bush (2001-2009), the pillars of US strategy towards the hemisphere remained virtually the same; what did change was the new administration's approach. Also as a result of the terrorist attacks of 11 September, the Bush administration was characterized by an intransigent and strongly ideological unilateralism and by the attempt to impose a North American agenda on the whole area. The United States brought back schemes that had seemed obsolete, replacing the fight against communism and subversion, which had characterized the period of the Cold War, with that of international terrorism. The

[8] On the topic see, among others, Mitchell, 2010.

new administration was characterized, in fact, by a marked lack of interest in the difficulties encountered by the country's southern neighbors (as in the case of Argentina, plunged into a deep economic crisis in December 2001), by the use of typical hard power practices (as in the case of the coup d'état in Venezuela, which led to the temporary overthrow of President Hugo Chávez), by the use of an iron fist against 'threats to national security' such as immigration (for instance, the construction in this period of the barrier along the border with Mexico, the so-called 'wall of shame') and drug trafficking (where military aid to Colombia was accentuated to conduct a struggle that had been reclassified as a 'war on terrorism'), and by a predilection for bilateral agreements with a few countries deemed to be of particular strategic importance such as Mexico, Brazil, Canada, Chile and Colombia, rather than more extensive agreements (it is not a coincidence that it was during these years that the Free Trade Area project of the Americas finally stopped).[9]

During the Bush years, inter-American relations, already at historic lows for some time, seemed to reach a point of no return. The 'neoliberal' programs of the nineties had weighed heavily on most Latin American countries, bringing with them social devastation, misery, and impoverishment of the middle and working classes. The failure of neoliberalism, between the 'Lost Decade' and the 'Washington Consensus' – also symbolized by the worst performance in terms of long-term economic growth for most Latin American countries in more than a century – made sure that the anti-US sentiment resumed its strength and the first signs of intolerance towards North American power began to appear. The so-called progressive cycle of the beginning of the century, with the coming to power of leaders like Lula da Silva in Brazil, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and, a little later, presidents like Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, seemed to be

[9] On inter-American relations during the years of George W. Bush see, for example: Bodemer, 2003; Fuentes, 2004; Prevost and Oliva Campos, 2007.

the response to this widespread discomfort in most of the populations of Latin America.[10]

Not surprisingly, the administration of Barack Obama, following its establishment in January 2009, was faced with the difficult task of re-evaluating inter-American relations, which rarely in the past had been so marked by distance and lack of communication, and to recover the 'lost space' between Washington and the continent, even in the face of strengthening political and economic ties among Latin American countries and extra-continental preoccupations, starting with the European Union and China. Indeed, the abandonment of the thesis of the 'Axis of Evil' and of an aggressive style in favor of a greater use of the typical 'soft power' tools, the declarations regarding the need to create continental cooperation and the appeals to a multilateral approach to the problems of common interest – in short, the realistic approach that seemed to characterize the Democratic administration from the beginning – were perceived by many analysts, but also by a few Latin American leaders, as encouraging signs on the road to requalification of inter-American relations. However, beyond the initial good intentions, even the Democratic presidency soon proved not to have either a global vision or an overall strategy for the region that would move in this direction, showing itself also substantially indifferent towards the United States' southern neighbors, apart from issues considered urgent for US security – starting with immigration and drug trafficking. The objective of normalizing relations with Cuba was an exception, even if the gradual attempt at rapprochement never resolved the central issues, beginning with the embargo on the Caribbean island. Therefore, Obama's presidency did not mean a reversal of the course in US policy towards Latin American countries. The political line of Washington, evidently well drawn before the advent of the Democratic president, was once again characterized by the propensity to manage 'emergencies', by the persistence of a substantial hostility towards 'traditional'

[10] Much has been written in recent years on the progressive cycle in Latin America. See on the topic, among others: Castañeda and Morales, 2009; Ellner, 2014; Webber and Carr, 2013; Weyland, Madrid, Hunter, 2010.

enemies, and by the predilection, with all due respect for multilateralism, for privileged relations with few partners, such as Brazil, Mexico and Colombia. Undoubtedly, Obama, favoring persuasion backed up by the use or the threat of the use of force, helped to improve some relationships and, above all, the image of the United States among its Latin American neighbors. However, even during his administration the US continental agenda, unchanged for decades, remained essentially the same, still based on the pillars of free trade, security and the promotion of democracy, albeit in the context of a re-balancing between strength and diplomacy in the direction of a clearer recourse to the instruments of 'soft power' – as well as through the adoption of a new pragmatism on the international scene, considered necessary also in light of the overexposure of the early 2000s.[11]

Since the arrival of Donald Trump in the White House in January 2017, analysts, scholars and commentators of various kinds have not had an easy time trying to predict and decipher his foreign policy strategy, and not only in Latin America. Trump's impromptu press releases, his apparently contradictory decision-making, the use of a style that would seem to be the product of improvisation, have been some of the factors behind the difficulty of discerning between concrete projects and mere propaganda, a difficulty that has made the task of deciphering the real intentions of the executive, in the Western hemisphere and elsewhere, challenging, to say the least. According to some scholars, the Republican administration seems to be characterized by an explicitly 'anti-strategic' approach, the result of a worldview that would favor a sort of doctrine of 'tactical transactionalism', that is, a foreign policy structure not governed by particular guiding principles but based on a strongly improvised leadership style, unprecedented in recent history, 'that seeks discrete wins (or the initial tweet-able impression of them), treats foreign relations bilaterally rather than multi-dimensionally, and resists the alignment of means and ends that is necessary for effective grand strategy' (Zenko and Friedman, 2017). In short, the 'Trump

[11] On these aspects see, among others: Lowenthal, Piccone, Whitehead, 2009; Lowenthal, Piccone, Whitehead, 2011; Weisbrot, 2011.

Doctrine', in this perspective, is nothing more than a set of principles, some of them operative, others simply theoretical, held together by a preference for 'tactical victories' rather than a broader vision, based on a zero-sum world view and a transactional understanding of American foreign policy devoid of moral or ethical considerations (*ibid.*). Other analysts have argued that, while it should be considered full of contradictions, rather confusing and not without potentially harmful and worrying effects, the foreign policy of the new administration is driven by a real grand strategy. Starting with a series of US security priorities, including threats posed by radical Islam, disadvantageous trade agreements, and China's increasingly dominant economic position, the new administration is aiming to deliver its 'great strategy' of America First, founded essentially on four key pillars: economic nationalism, 'extreme' homeland security, 'amoral transactionalism' (i.e. an approach based on the need to 'cut deals with any actors that share American interests, regardless of how transactional that relationship is, and regardless of whether they share — or act in accordance with — American values'), and 'a muscular but aloof militarism' (Kahl and Brands, 2017).

Other scholars have meanwhile speculated about the inauguration of a new great strategy by Trump, defining it in terms of 'illiberal hegemony' (Posen, 2018). In short, breaking with his predecessors, the new US president will eliminate much of the 'liberal' from the hegemony that, at least since the end of the Cold War, Democratic and Republican administrations have pursued strategically; a strategy that was hegemonic in that the United States aimed to be the most powerful state in the world, and at the same time liberal as the United States sought to transform the international system into an order based on precise rules, managed through multilateral institutions and aimed at transforming other states into market-oriented democracies that traded freely among themselves. In this perspective, the Trump administration would limit or completely abandoned many of the pillars of that liberal internationalism aimed at guaranteeing US hegemony, without renouncing, however, a coherently hegemonic security policy, as confirmed by the

constant attempts to maintain the economic and military superiority of the United States and maintain the role of 'security arbiter' for most regions of the world (*ibid.*). And it is from this standpoint that it seems necessary to start shedding some light on Trump's policies in Latin America. The aim of this paper is to highlight how Trump's first year and a half in office is bringing with it a partial, though important, deviation from some of the pillars of US foreign policy in Latin America since the post-Cold War. Security threats remain essentially the same, as does the tendency to establish privileged relationships with key partners in the region. What seems to have changed, even at a rhetorical level, is the level of trust in multilateral institutions and agreements, in the promotion of democracy, and, more generally, in that combination of hard and soft power which, since the end of the 1980s, was considered by US policy makers as the main way to preserve hegemony. This approach, which favors not a withdrawal from the continental scenario, but a definitively unilateral and aggressive approach that looks only to protect US interests, in some ways recalls the years of the George W. Bush presidency.

2. Democracy promotion and multilateralism

Analysts, the media and public opinion in general only had the opportunity to get a clearer idea of what the main lines of Trump's foreign policy may be almost a year after his assumption of office, with the publication, in December 2017, of the National Security Strategy document (NSS). Even after the publication of this document, there remains a great deal of uncertainty about what the main lines of foreign policy of the new US government will be, and this not simply because the NSS can only be considered indicative of US strategy up to a certain point – it is quite rare to come across cases of presidencies which, in their concrete action, have slavishly adhered to the provisions of their various national security strategies – but also and above all because, in the case of Trump, at least until now, the difficulty of discerning between concrete planning and mere propaganda is almost

insurmountable, making the task of deciphering the executive's real intentions difficult, to say the least, both in Latin America and further afield.

As some analysts have stated, the NSS of the current government rests on a vision of the international system that could be defined as 'Hobbesian': 'Trump's international order is anarchic, characterized by scheming and aggressive rival powers and ruthless non-state actors' (Leffler, 2017). In this pessimistic vision of the international system, struggle is considered the fundamental component of the competition between states, a competition in which only the strongest survive (*ibid.*). In such a 'competitive world', characterized by the presence of threats emanating from non-state actors (jihadists and international criminal organizations), revisionist powers (China and Russia), and rogue dictatorships (Iran and North Korea), the United States is therefore called to rethink its policies of the past two decades, 'based on the assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners' (National Security Strategy, 2017). On the contrary, the tasks of what currently remains the principal world power can only be: 'protecting the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life'; strengthening control of borders and reforming the immigration system; 'promoting prosperity'; preserving peace and rebuilding US military so that it remains preeminent, deterring adversaries, and if necessary, fighting and winning. In addition to the traditional goals of protecting the homeland and promoting economic prosperity, the Trump administration's strategy appropriately emphasizes 'preserving peace through strength' and 'advancing American influence in the world'. It is a vision of the world in which actors are in constant struggle with each other and that, therefore, requires an aggressive approach, which may suggest that the new administration intends to definitively put aside the 'soft power' that characterized the Obama presidency – considered weak and inept – to resort to the so-called 'hard power' tools. The starting point for the realization of all this is of

course the economic strengthening of the nation: economic prosperity is the key to power and security (*ibid.*).

This pessimistic view of the international context is, of course, also applied to the regional framework. In fact, within the National Security Strategy of December 2017 it is stated that the Western Hemisphere must defend itself against illegal immigration, violence and drug trafficking perpetuated by transnational criminal organizations – including gangs and cartels – that threaten the common security, and challenge the presence of authoritarian and hostile governments such as those of Venezuela and Cuba, as well as the ever deeper penetration of powers such as China, which is allegedly trying to pull the region into its orbit through state-led investments and loans, and Russia, still dominated by the logic of the Cold War and always ready to financially and militarily support the communist dictatorships of the area. In light of this, the US goal is identified in the construction of 'a stable and peaceful hemisphere that increases economic opportunities for all, improves governance, reduces the power of criminal organizations, and limits the malign influence of non-hemispheric forces' (*ibid.*). How to achieve all this? The National Security document does not say much about it, besides the need to consolidate close diplomatic relations with the key countries of the region (without even mentioning the names of these countries), isolate the hostile governments of Cuba and Venezuela, modernize trade agreements and reinforce economic ties with the region (although in the context of bilateral trade agreements, it is pointed out). These are undoubtedly rather vague formulations, confirming that the Republican administration – whether through incapacity or through lack of interest, although for now the question is moot – has few original ideas, and that these are far from clearly defined, and not at all specific about how to deal with the problems and 'threats' that arise at the regional level.

However, besides this, if it is true that the security priorities remain substantially the same, as well as the emphasis on the importance of privileged relations 'with key countries in the region', what seems to have diminished is the

need to support multilateral regional institutions and promote values of freedom and democracy in the area – even a merely rhetorical defense of these notions is now absent. Looking at the previous presidencies, it is possible to affirm that not even the National Security document produced by the Bush administration, which certainly did not stand out for the centrality of Latin America in the foreign policy agenda, much less the promotion of a multilateral approach to problems of common interest, was as negligent on these points. There, at least on paper, reference was made to the need to 'work with regional institutions, such as the Summit of the Americas process, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Defense Ministerial of the Americas for the benefit of the entire hemisphere', a 'democratic hemisphere where our integration advances security, prosperity, opportunity, and hope' (National Security Strategy, 2002).

The situation is even clearer if we examine the actual conduct of the current Republican administration during its time in government so far. In terms of strengthening diplomatic relations, the conduct of the executive has been to all intents disastrous, and not only because of how slowly Trump proceeded to appoint his experts in the key positions of the administration and in the field. The way the administration has managed and is managing the Cuban question, the Venezuelan crisis and the relationship with Mexico – that is, only as internal security problems – and, more generally, the hard line that it is pursuing on the front of immigration, are obviously undermining relations not only with the nations in question or with the Central American countries, but, to an extent, with all the states of Latin America. At the same time, this approach has been accompanied by aggressive rhetoric, such as that of President Trump, made up of continuous expressions that are poorly chosen, offensive, and arguably racist – as, for instance, to name only one of the most recent examples, a statement allegedly made by Trump about Haitians ('why should the US accept immigrants from shithole countries') [12]; language that communicates something verging on contempt for Latin Americans, and which, to

[12] '"Shithole" wasn't the most offensive part of Trump's Haiti comments'.

a certain extent, recalls the times United States, with Theodore Roosevelt, attributed to themselves the task of watching over the hemisphere and carrying on a civilizing mission justified by their alleged racial superiority. Such rhetoric can only promote the dissemination among the populations of the subcontinent (and among their governments) of those old feelings of hostility towards the bulky 'neighbor' that the Obama administration had at least understood it was necessary to overcome.

But what is even more important is that during this period Trump has remained silent on many issues that have affected the region, for example, just to mention one of the most recent, the serious democratic crisis that has affected Honduras, which saw the American government turning a blind eye despite the fact that the country in question represents an important partner of Washington in the fight against drug trafficking and illegal immigration (Shifter, 2017). Secondly, the new administration has been contemptuous of regional multilateral bodies. With respect to this last point, a great stir was caused, for example, by the absence of the ex-Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson – the only foreign minister in the region not to be present – at the meeting of the Organization of American States (OSA), held in Cancun in June of last year, an absence officially justified by the need for the head of US foreign relations to deal with a simultaneous crisis in Qatar. And this, despite the fact that on the agenda of the meeting of the OSA there was, among other things, a resolution presented by Mexico and Argentina against the 'enemy' Nicolás Maduro government in Venezuela. This was followed by Trump's decision to cancel his participation in the Summit of the Americas in Lima, Peru, officially because he was involved in the management of the Syrian crisis. By sending deputy Mike Pence instead, Trump achieved a historical record: he was the first president of the United States to miss the Summit since 1994. It was a particularly emblematic and significant way to demonstrate the orientation of the new administration in terms of hemispheric cooperation. Not only that, but Trump took more than a year to designate his ambassadors in some 'key' countries in the region and identify new leaders for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. And all this does not seem

to be just the result of the 'traditional' lack of interest of US administrations towards a 'pacified' area. It must be said, however, that Trump has so far personally met several Latin American leaders. Among these: the Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, to discuss the need to strengthen trade relations with Peru and other countries of the Asia-Pacific region; Argentine President Mauricio Macri, to address bilateral and regional issues, including the situation in Venezuela; and Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos, who allegedly asked the US president to renew US aid (the $450 million approved by Congress at the request of the Obama administration) for the Colombian peace process for next year – a rather difficult goal to achieve, also in light of the drastic cut in the aid budget for developing countries planned for 2018 – and to continue to support his country in the fight against drugs. After his speech at the United Nations in September, Trump also met the president of Brazil, Michel Temer, the president of Panama, Juan Carlos Varela, and again the presidents of Colombia and Peru, to discuss the economic growth of the region and the situation in Venezuela. All this shows not only the predilection of the Republican president for bilateral relations, but also the tendency to select only those issues considered 'emergencies' for the security of the United States – an element, it must be said, characteristic in part also of the Obama administration and certainly of the Bush presidency. On this basis, there has been a will to establish few agreements with those countries considered relevant on the strategic level (with the exception, of course, of Mexico). This is largely in continuity with the previous administrations. In fact, since the Bush presidency, and also that of Obama, nations like Brazil – important for its economic weight and its regional power dimension – Colombia – central in the fight against drug trafficking but also in the sphere of the containment of Venezuela – and, secondarily, countries such as Chile, which are particularly dynamic on the economic level and considered strategic in terms of relations with the Asia-Pacific region, have been able to boast privileged relations with the United States. With Trump (although it must be said that the process started under Obama), to the above group of 'friendly' countries has been added

Argentina, following the Kirchner period and the rise of the liberal conservative Macri. In other words, the list of 'friendlies' consists of all those countries with right-wing or center-right governments. But the point of the matter is that in the case of Trump's administration, it would not seem that we are dealing only with the 'traditional' disinterestedness of the US presidencies in the area (which approached an apex during the years of George W. Bush); nor are we dealing with yet another case of 'good intentions' with respect to the possibility of a new course of inter-American relations, only for it to be denied by the policy actually implemented (as in the case of Obama). What the current North American executive appears to be doing is abandoning, even at a rhetorical level, 'democracy' promotion and governance (soft power) as foreign policy goals, with relative trust in the use of multilateral institutions to tackle problems of common interest (trust, it is worth clarifying, that, as we saw with Bush Senior and Bill Clinton, never meant the abandonment of an interventionist approach and the typical tools of hard power). In practice, the current administration seems to be abandoning some of the pillars of the US hegemonic strategy in the area following the Cold War.

A clear picture of the priorities of the Trump administration in Latin America emerges, moreover, from the budget requests presented by the White House to the Congress in the last two years, with relatively drastic cuts in aid to the area (cuts that Congress rejected). In the last of these budget proposals, in fact, regarding the fiscal year 2019, if on the one hand, as will be seen later in this paper, the White House asked for an overall 22% increase of the budget of the Department of National Security compared to 2017, on the other hand it requested a reduction of aid to development assistance and health assistance programs to Latin America of about 36%, as well as a cut in funding to the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Aid that, among other things, has in recent decades been a pillar of US policy aimed at strengthening the institutions and democratic governments of the region (Isacson, 2018). The dissemination of 'U.S. culture, language, traditions and values to the

world, popularizing the "American Way" and influencing opinions and policies', was, in fact, the center of the soft power policy aimed at guaranteeing US hegemony through the objective of promoting democracy and governance, and, from the beginning of the nineties, support for economic development and social programs through an agency like USAID played a major role in this sense (de la Fuente, 2017).

3. A halt to free trade?

As Barry Posen has pointed out, the other fundamental aspect of the 'illiberal hegemony' to which the Republican administration aspires is abstention from multilateral trade agreements, a product of mistrust towards free trade and, therefore, the treaties and institutions that facilitate it (Posen, 2018). As we have mentioned, since the beginning of the 1990s the United States laid the foundations for the creation of a free trade area with Latin American states. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which gave life to an area of free trade between the United States, Canada and Mexico through the elimination of tariffs and trade barriers, and approved by the US Congress at the beginning of the Bill Clinton administration, should have been only the first step towards a future hemispheric area of free trade stretching from Alaska to Argentina. The goal, of course, was to increase the dependence of the Latin American countries on the United States, or, to put it another way, represented another fundamental element, the economic one, according to US policy makers, of the strategy aimed at guaranteeing US hegemony in the region. Therefore, its importance for the various US administrations that have followed since then, regardless of their political color, has always gone well beyond merely commercial aspects, affecting diplomatic, security and North American leadership issues. Bill Clinton attempted to go even further than NAFTA. The first Summit of the Americas in Miami, in 1994, in which 34 nations of the continent – with the exception of Cuba, which was not invited – met to discuss issues of common interest, as well as issues such as strengthening

democracy, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the fight against drugs and related crimes, focused very much on the realization of a Free Trade Area of Americas (FTAA) (Feinberg, 1997). The project, as is well known, would definitively run aground in the following years due to several factors, including the fear, on the American front, that it could damage the national economy and, on the side of several Latin American partners, including Brazil, that it would increase the dependence of their economies on the United States. However, for 'the first time in the history of inter-American relations, the ideal of economic cooperation was grounded in a reality that signaled hemispheric convergence toward market economy and electoral democracy' (Arashiro, 2011, p. 3).

Two decades later, among the decisions of the current US administration during its first year of management, that of reviewing NAFTA stands out.

Since the election campaign, Trump has questioned the agreement, calling it 'the worst trade agreement ever', which has done nothing but harm US workers and businesses. Immediately after assuming the presidency, he started negotiations with Mexico and Canada to review the agreement considerably (he also promised to use the ongoing negotiations to force the Mexican government to pay for a wall along the border). In reality, NAFTA has always been the object of divisions and contrapositions. Its supporters have always said that it is an agreement that has fostered millions of jobs. Its detractors have sustained the exact opposite: that the agreement in question is the basis for a decline in employment in the United States and wage stagnation in some sectors, due to the delocalization of production activities and the trade deficit that it led to. Others have pointed out that all the positions that have loomed over the agreement stem from the wrong questions, because the importance of NAFTA is essentially political. They consider it to have codified an existing order, and put the official seal on a trade regime that had been in place for more than a generation and would continue without a formal agreement (Cowie 2017).

And in this, internal issues are undoubtedly a determining factor. It is evident that Trump, since the electoral campaign, has become the spokesman for that part of the population that has been particularly affected by the effects of the international economic crisis and convinced of the fact that 'many of the evils that afflict the advanced economies are attributable to the integration process with emerging economies and to the pressures coming from these' (Magri 2017). Without going into too much detail, it may suffice to recall the way in which the American businessman presented himself, right from the Republican primaries, to the US electorate: using simple, direct and aggressive language, Trump portrayed himself as the successful self-made man, anti-systemic, critical of bureaucracy but also of Wall Street, unrelated to the logic of the Parties, who promised to 'make America great again' by defending the interests of Americans over everything, creating job opportunities and protecting the nation from external interference and, in particular, from the invasion of migrants. In short, as has been widely argued, he relied on the most basic desires and fears of a part of the white population, poorly educated, culturally conservative and worried about its economic condition. Its growing conservatism may well have been fuelled by economic frustration (Griffin and Teixeira, 2017).

This part of the population, increasingly concerned by social, economic and cultural changes taking place in American society, looked and still looks with hostility at the effects of globalization, at immigrants, at minorities in general, and is particularly sensitive to trumpet calls and slogans, including the fight against illegal immigration, the security of the borders, the protection of the national economy and, more generally, the defense of the nation against external threats (including free trade agreements that are disadvantageous for the 'North American worker'). All of these formed the pillars of the US tycoon's election campaign.[13]

[13] However, it must be said that, according to some surveys (Gallup and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs), if it is true that the percentage of Republican voters critical of international trade grew considerably in the months leading up to the presidential elections, probably also in response to the Trump's stance on international trade agreements, between October 2016 and mid-2017 the percentage of Republicans convinced that international trade favored the US economy increased by

But at the same time, Trump's attacks on NAFTA and the pressures for its revision are undoubtedly the product of the administration's lack of confidence in multilateralism and, on the other hand, a preference for bilateral trade agreements, which in the opinion of the new president are easier to control and enforce. In short, even here a clear desire can be seen emerging to abandon the path of liberal hegemony, which, from the end of the Cold War to the present, has been based on international security, economic institutions, free trade, human rights and the spread of democracy, not as values in themselves, but as tools (of soft power) to attract others 'to the cause' (Posen, 2018).

The decision to pull the United States out of negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), taken soon after Trump's arrival in the White House, is another clear demonstration in this regard. It should be pointed out, however, that the United States has always been rather wary of multilateralism, for various reasons; above all, because of the difficulty in carrying out the necessary transfers of sovereignty, and the high negotiating power they have enjoyed for decades and, therefore, for the temptation to take advantage of bilateral negotiations in specific situations. However, despite the resistance in question, the development of multilateralism and international institutions in the last half century owes much to American support (Magri, 2017). And this, of course, is as true in Latin America as it is elsewhere. Hence the concern of many analysts regarding Trump's decision to abandon the TPP negotiations, the common market project that would have included most of the Latin American countries facing the Pacific, plus Australia, Japan and Vietnam. It began during the presidency of George W. Bush and was carried out by the Obama administration with the purpose, among other things, of countering growing Chinese influence in the region. Trump's decision could definitively challenge decades of US leadership within the liberal international order, as well as, of course, its own hegemonic position in the hemisphere. The

about 20 points (Mutz, 2017). More generally, several public opinion polls conducted by organizations such as Gallup, the Pew Center, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs have highlighted how the Republican base is quite divided on issues such as free trade, even if Trump supporters remain the majority who believe that NAFTA is negative for the United States (Dueck, 2018).

penetration of China in Latin America in recent years is, indeed, an incontrovertible reality, whose underlying motivations are many and range from exclusively economic interests to broader geopolitical objectives. For the Asian giant, Latin America constitutes a sufficiently large and relatively stable market from which to import raw materials and food products and where it might export its finished products, as well as the ideal area to direct its investments (China has pledged to invest $250 billion in the region by 2019). On a geopolitical level, moreover, for China, the continent between the Atlantic and the Pacific could be a strategic point for commercial expansion towards the rest of the world. For the Latin American countries, on the other hand, which in turn require capital and technology and who, in the vast majority of cases, are eager to expand their economies in directions that make them less dependent on the United States, relations with China represent an obligatory passage for their approach to Asia. Thus, within a few years, China has become the main trading partner of Brazil, Chile and Peru and, in the immediate future, it could establish itself as the main partner of the entire region, definitively undermining the United States and the European Union.

Nonetheless, in a move indicative of the tendency towards fluctuation and self-contradiction of this Republican administration, as well as of how thoroughly its definition of foreign policy is conditioned by internal politics, it should be noted how, in the course of 2018, Trump reopened again to the possibility of a return of the United States to the negotiations for the TPP, and ordered senior management officials to evaluate this option (Taylor, 2018).

4. Hard line against traditional security threats

In Trump's campaign rhetoric, defined by some analysts as the obvious expression of a 'right-wing populism' (Martinelli, 2016; Oliver and Rahn, 2016), a place of absolute importance was occupied, as is well known, by the relations between the United States and Mexico. The hostile comments about that country, the pressures exercised to involve it in the containment of northbound immigration

and Trump's promise to the American public to charge the neighbor the costs of the necessary construction of the border wall – even if this entailed modifying the US Patriot Act antiterrorism law to use part of the remittances of Mexicans present in the United States – were indeed central components of his campaign. Thus, in the announcement of his candidacy in June 2015, the Republican candidate used harsh expressions against the neighboring nation, accusing Mexico of 'ripping off the US more than almost any other nation',[14] of getting rich thanks to bad commercial agreements with the United States and with the billions of dollars in remittances sent from illegal immigrants in the United States. Trump has gone even further, accusing Mexicans in general of being drug traffickers, criminals and rapists (Ye Hee Lee, 2015). The strengthening of control over national borders and a new immigration system were thus defined as fundamental for national security, for the economic prosperity of the country and for the guarantee of the rule of law.

After the electoral victory, Trump continued along this line, signing, a few days after assuming the office of president, an executive order for the construction of the wall and continuing to argue that it should be paid for by Mexicans, even as he asked the US Congress to finance the ambitious project (on Twitter, Trump wrote 'the Great Wall…will be paid back by Mexico later!').[15] Congress, however, has not allocated any funding for the continuation of the project during 2018, and its future remains mired in controversy, given both the meager advantages it would provide in the fight against illegal immigration (not to mention drug trafficking, which, according to experts, would not be hampered in the least by the artificial barrier), but also because of the high costs its implementation would entail for American taxpayers (from 12 to 21 billion dollars) – the Mexican government, it might be added, has continued to maintain that it has no intention of contributing to the costs. In 2017, therefore, no significant progress was made on this front, even if the administration identified some companies and commissioned them to

[14] 'US election 2016: Trump defends wall on Mexico visit'.
[15] Trump's comment on Twitter: https://twitter.com/i/moments/817339187594752002.

build prototypes on which the building of the future barrier would be based. Despite this, Trump has continued to reiterate that the wall will be built, and argue that the solution to somehow charging the costs to the Mexican government would continue to be among the fundamental objectives pursued by its administration. In short, both during the election campaign and after his assumption of duties in the White House, through aggressive rhetoric, Trump aimed, firstly, to carry forward some of the promises made before the election, but above all to preserve the consensus of his ultra-conservative electoral base and of Republicans in general, without considering in the least what the consequences of his actions and his statements could be, both in terms of relations with a traditional US ally in the region like Mexico, and on the balance of the Latin American area.

A similar analysis can be made about the hard line adopted against illegal immigrants in the United States, another pillar of Trump's electoral program. The promise of the electoral campaign to deport 11 million illegal immigrants has resulted, among other things, in an expulsion order against 800,000 migrants protected by Barack Obama's 'Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals' (DACA) program – a deportation which mainly affects Latin Americans and which was temporarily blocked by decision of a federal judge – and in the proposal, at the beginning of 2018, to suspend the 'temporary protection status' (TPS) given to nearly 300,000 Salvadoreans about seventeen years ago, following an earthquake in 2001 (and this because the emergency situation in their country of origin, which justified the adoption of the provision, would be terminated). The same fate may soon be in store for over forty thousand Haitians, to whom TPS was awarded following the earthquake of 2010, and about sixty thousand Hondurans and two thousand Nicaraguans, forced to leave their respective countries in 1998 following the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch.[16]

Beyond the 'humanitarian' aspects of the problem, which are far from irrelevant or secondary – starting with the reality of expelling people who have lived

[16] 'Let the Salvadoreans stay. America's decision to strip 200,000 people of their right to remain is a mistake—unless it spurs broader immigration reform'.

in the United States for almost twenty years, and who have built their homes there – what impact could such solutions have on relations with the United States' southern neighbors? The impact will certainly not be positive. Mexico was therefore the emblem of the use of continental themes as an instrument of internal consensus, but also testifies how immigration, perceived by US policy makers to be one of the main threats to national security from the beginning of the nineties to today, continues to be at the forefront of the concerns of the North American government, which, however, is approaching the issue today with a style of extreme firmness and almost no willingness to dialogue that is very reminiscent of the management of George W. Bush. This is a fairly clear change of direction compared to the soft actions implemented by the Obama government. In fact, at the beginning of his mandate, the Democratic president, by defining the US system on the subject 'broken' and notoriously 'dysfunctional', had repeatedly supported the need for important reform; and yet, even if he repeatedly stated his commitment on this front publicly, for several years, no proposal ever arrived before the Congress. This was the situation up to the first two years of his second term, 2012-2014, when he presented two programs on the subject (the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents), with the aim of granting a 'temporary truce' to about 4 million illegal immigrants living and working in the United States, protecting them from so-called deportation, i.e. from the practice of forced repatriation (Masters 2016). Following his arrival in the White House, Trump has repeatedly reiterated the need to change legislation that represses illegal immigration and make it much more difficult to find shelter in the United States, and has gone so far as to cancel DACA and repeatedly threaten to leave NAFTA if Mexico does not make a clear contribution to increase border security. Moreover, as indicated in the national security document, illegal immigration 'burdens the economy, hurts American workers, presents public safety risks, and enriches smugglers and other criminals' (National Security Strategy, 2017).

Even here, however, it is sufficient to look at the White House budget proposals for 2019 to make clear the perception of how the administration considers immigration: that is, essentially as a security problem, a serious internal threat on which to intervene, with drastic solutions:

> *Building the Wall, Dismantling Transnational Criminal Organizations, and Enforcing Our Immigration Laws. The Budget reflects my Administration's serious and ongoing commitment to fully secure our border, take the fight to criminal gangs like MS-13, and make our immigration system work for Americans. The Budget provides funding for a wall on our Southwest border and additional resources for law enforcement at the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice. The Budget also funds an increase in the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers, Border Patrol agents, and immigration judges to improve enforcement at the border and within the United States.*[17]

Specifically, the plan would include: '$1.6 billion for construction of the border wall and $782 million to hire and support 2,750 additional law enforcement officers and agents at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)'; and '$2.5 billion for detaining up to 47,000 illegal aliens on a daily basis'.[18]

Compared to the other security priority, drug trafficking, although this was indicated in the national security document as a threat – along with terrorists, criminal cartels exploit porous borders and threaten U.S. security and public safety (National Security Strategy, 2017) – and although the administration is putting pressure on countries like Mexico and Colombia to do more about it, the White House budget 'proposes to cut International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) assistance to both countries' (Isacson 2018). Even in the fight against drug trafficking, the administration seems to be more focused on the internal front and, in particular, on the 'impenetrability' of the border, rather than

[17] Office of Management and Budget, Budget of U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2019: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/budget-fy2019.pdf.
[18] *Ibid.*

on the countries in which the drugs originate. This is demonstrated by a '$44 million investment in new Non-Intrusive Inspection technology at Ports of Entry, which is used to examine cargo and conveyances for contraband and weapons of mass effect' and 'an increase of $42 million, funded by both fees and discretionary appropriations, to enable CBP to screen inbound packages at express consignment carrier facilities such as FedEx, UPS, and DHL'.[19]

5. Iron fist against continental enemies

The demonstration of the fact that the Republican administration has no intention of taking refuge in a sort of 'isolationism' but, on the contrary, aims to continue its role as international 'security referee', comes from the positions and initiatives taken at the continental level towards 'traditional' enemies such as Cuba and Venezuela. Indeed, it is probably the field in which the US government has been most demonstrably active in recent months, repeatedly showing its muscles and adopting a hard line.

For President Obama the normalization of relations with Cuba constituted a central objective of foreign policy in Latin America, an undertaking whose value was strongly symbolic. The mission to recover the 'lost space' from Washington in the subcontinent – in the end never accomplished – necessarily passed through a re-conquest of the trust of the southern partners, which had collapsed especially during the years of George W. Bush, when relations with the neighbors of the South reached an historic low-point. Cuba should have been the center of this strategy, because over fifty years of uncompromising conduct towards this country had resulted in the partial isolation of the United States on the continent over this issue. Hence the acceleration given to the process of opening up with the Caribbean island during Obama's second term – a process that came to a halt when faced with the decisive stumbling block of the embargo. This attempt at reconciliation probably also responded to Obama's desire to close at least some of the critical

[19] *Ibid.*

fronts on a global level, thus leaving behind a less 'problematic' political agenda, as well as the fact that the overcoming of hostilities with the 'historical enemy' of the area would have probably been the main success achieved by the Democratic administration in eight years – and thus a key part of the president's historical legacy

However, the subsequent Republican administration immediately decided to use the Cuban issue to mark a clear difference between them and the 'passivity' and weakness that, in their view at least, had characterized the Obama administration. Indeed, even before taking office Donald Trump had demonstrated a desire to reverse the process initiated by the Democratic president, who, in his opinion, had done nothing but strengthen the communist regime and the military elite in power on the Caribbean island. The exultation with which Mike Pence greeted, in November 2016, the death of Fidel Castro, 'el líder máximo', at the age of 90, through the usual message via Twitter – 'The tyrant Castro is dead. New hope dawns'[20] – was further confirmation of the new orientation of the White House in this regard. It was a political line subsequently reaffirmed by Trump, who repeatedly declared that he wanted to put an end to the attempts made by the previous administration to normalize relations between the two countries, at least until all political freedoms and human rights were restored in Cuba. The new approach to the 'historical enemy' did not stop at the rhetorical sphere, but it translated into a series of concrete measures that, in a few months, practically ended up eliminating most of the progress made on this front starting, in particular, from 2014. Using as justification alleged and unspecified 'acoustic attacks' against the staff of the US embassy in Havana between August and September 2017 – attacks denied by the FBI, which, after investigating, has argued that there was no evidence of action against US diplomats – the Republican administration ordered a massive reduction of its diplomatic personnel stationed in Cuba, expelled Cuban diplomats and stopped the processing of visas for Cubans trying to reach the United States. These measures were followed by the application of restrictions on the possibility of

[20] Available at: https://twitter.com/mike_pence/status/802557437786066944.

US citizens to travel to the island and to do business with various Cuban companies and agencies that are supposed to be related in some way to Castro's government, and went hand in hand with the attempt to involve numerous continental partners in the isolation of the Cuban regime. In short, while supporting the need for a recovery of economic freedom in Cuba, Trump demands the adoption of measures that, in practice, affect, among other things, the tourist industry on the island and the nascent private sector, While appealing to the importance of the contribution of the Latin American partners in the 'shared endeavor' to ensure that 'the people of Cuba and Venezuela can enjoy freedom and the benefits of shared prosperity' (National Security Strategy 2017), the White House does everything it can to inflame those old hostilities that had led numerous countries in the area to move away from the northern giant.

The revival of a manifestly aggressive attitude towards the traditional enemies of the United States at the continental level has emerged even more clearly in the management of the Venezuelan crisis. It is not a coincidence that the Venezuela of Nicolás Maduro, like Cuba, occupies a position of absolute importance within the National Security Strategy of the new administration. With their governments that 'cling to anachronistic leftist authoritarian models that continue to fail their people', and supported economically and militarily by nations like Russia – which continues its failed politics of the Cold War by bolstering its radical allies on the continent – and China – which 'seeks to pull the region into its orbit through state-led investments and loans' – Cuba and Venezuela are among the main threats to the common security of the continent, next to violence, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration (National Security Strategy 2017). The goal of isolating these countries in order to favor regime change within them has been a priority of the United States in the Western hemisphere. A priority that Trump has shown to have very clearly in mind since his arrival at the White House.

Regarding Venezuela, even during the Obama presidency, after some initial attempts to 'stabilize' relations between the two countries, the United States

continued along the furrow traced in previous years, if not even worsened during the presence of Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State. Soon, in fact, the concern that dominated during the years of George W. Bush prevailed – regarding, in particular, the ever closer links between the Bolivarian government and Cuba, the links of the Latin American country to nations like Russia and China, the difficult relations with one of the main US allies in the region, Colombia – and the Democratic administration continued to support the Venezuelan internal opposition economically and politically. This support culminated, after Chávez's death, in the failure to recognize the result of the presidential elections of April 2013, which determined the victory of Maduro, and in the definition of Venezuela as a threat to the region.

However, unlike his predecessor, Trump did not waste much time in using a heavy hand against the country in question. Driven by his former rival in the Republican primaries, the ultra-conservative senator Marco Rubio, Trump resorted to various measures with the purpose, practically declared, to hasten the fall of the Bolivarian government. The first measures, adopted no more than a month after the mandate, were aimed at targeting individual Chavist officials, whose visas were blocked and whose bank accounts in the United States were frozen. After the convening of the National Constituent Assembly, in July last year, by the government of Maduro, the first economic sanctions arrived, with the White House Treasury Department adopting an executive order that prohibited US financial institutions from buying and selling bonds issued by the government of Caracas and by the state oil company of the Latin American country. Subsequently, Venezuela (along with North Korea and Chad) was added to the 'black list' of countries (majority Muslim) whose citizens were banned from entering the United States. The prohibition from travelling to the US, in the case of Venezuela, was officially justified by the fact that the government of this country would not cooperate in verifying whether its citizens represented a threat to national security or to public

security in the United States, and would be limited to the officials of the Chavist government and their families.

But Trump in the case of Venezuela went even further. Defining the Venezuelan as a 'corrupt regime [that had] destroyed a prosperous nation by imposing a failed ideology', the president has come to affirm that the United States has many options for Venezuela, 'including a possible military option if necessary' (Oliphant, 2017); a statement that has, however, provoked, as is easy to imagine, the negative reaction of many governments, both Latin American and non-Latin American (even by those manifestly hostile to the Bolivarian government or who had been significantly critical of it, such as those of Brazil or Chile). Hence the idea, increasingly widespread among analysts, that the hard line adopted by the administration against Caracas may represent a sort of unexpected gift made by the US president to Maduro, in deep crisis for some time.

6. Consequences and perspectives

Beyond the rhetoric, often of low level, and the very deep contradictions that seem to characterize the Trump administration, events seem to suggest that US continental politics will be characterized by the attempt to abandon or, at least, supersede some of the pillars of US liberal hegemony, including the promotion and strengthening of democracy in the area, multilateralism in the economic sphere – something that, if we are to be honest, was always spoken about more than it was actually practiced – and a combination of soft and hard power, with clear preference given to the latter. In short, it is possible that a marked unilateralism – with relative abandonment of openings in the direction of hemispheric cooperation on shared challenges such as trade, the environment and immigration, which had characterized the Obama administration – a greater militarization of issues and a more aggressive and ideological approach will be some of the prevailing features of the continental politics of the Trump government.

It is difficult to predict what the effects of all this will be on the Latin American countries. The disinterestedness and contempt shown by the administration will have no other effect than to encourage neighbors to progressively distance themselves from Washington, in similar fashion to what happened at the beginning of the 2000s during the Bush administration. The same hard line adopted by the Republican administration against Cuba and Venezuela, barely masked, this time, by resorting to rhetoric about the defense of human rights (Trump would hardly be credible on this front) could even favor rather than damage the 'historical' enemies of the United States in the area, giving them new vigor. At the same time, the political and economic penetration of rivals like China constitutes a real 'threat', the real challenge, at this stage, to a US leadership already in difficulty on the continent; a threat that actions taken by the US government can only facilitate. Likewise, it is indisputable that Russia is trying to make progress in the area, in particular by intensifying its diplomatic and economic relations with Cuba, with the aim, it has been claimed, of keeping the island in its orbit 'precisely at the time when the United States has returned to Cold War policies, intending to freeze the island out' (Sabatini and Naylor, 2017).

Certainly, however, there is currently no block of forces in Latin America capable of proposing alternative and autonomous routes with respect to the United States. The 'progressive cycle' that began between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the millennium and which has had great weight in the last fifteen years in the subcontinent seems to have come to the end of its journey, paving the way for the return of the neoliberal right. This is what has happened in Argentina, Brazil, and, in part, in Chile, and what could also soon happen in Venezuela, where, apart from the economic warfare of international imperialism and of internal oligarchies, the left and center-left governments, radical and moderate, have paid and are paying the price for not being able to free themselves from dependence on the main national resources and not being able to impose adequate structural measures that would transform the countries in the long run. Despite this, it is not

excluded that things cannot change very soon. The Trump administration's choices could even open to the Latin American countries scenarios unthinkable until now.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Making Of Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy And The Rise Of The Post-Cold War Order, by Hal Brands. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016, p. 480.

Justyna Janicka
Bournemouth University

The unipolar moment is the rise of the United States to sole superpower of the world after the end of the Cold War. The U.S. dominated the world as no state did. Brands' book becomes a remarkable reflection on the United States' standing in the world and an eye-opening account that challenges the pervasive and now tired notion that America is on the decline.

In *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post–Cold War Order*, Hal Brands presents an impressive and comprehensive analysis to better understand the unipolar moment in the 1990s and explains why it is necessary to trace America's ascent back to historical phenomena in the 1970s. It challenges many widespread notions about the lead-up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly the deep structural shifts within global politics occurring in the 1970s and the role of President Jimmy Carter.

At the heart of Brands' analysis is an examination of three-decades, where he argues that U.S. foreign policy rebounded from a disastrous war in Vietnam, oil-price shocks, and increasing volatility in the Middle East. In the shadow of the third

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wave of democratization, Brands notes that the decline of the Soviet system, the globalisation and a free market strategy revitalised the U.S. economy and enlarged its global dominance. U.S. policymakers embraced them to U.S. advantage. For example, the Carter Administration lacked a consistent and coherent foreign policy orientation. By contrast, Reagan helped bring an end to the 46-year-old Cold War, through a combination of hostile, anti-communist rhetoric and a massive arms buildup followed by skillful diplomacy and disarmament. Finally, Brands acknowledges George H.W. Bush's achievements in foreign policy issues such as negotiating the reunification of Germany, helping to ease the end of the Soviet domination, prosecuting the Persian Gulf war.

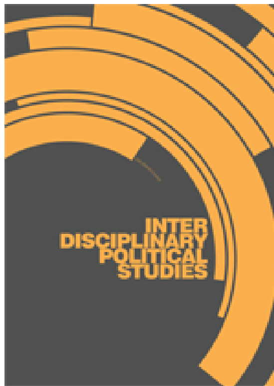
"Making the Unipolar Moment" also explains about Soviet decline, nuclear competition, culmination of neoliberal economic policies, and Third World conflicts. Brands stresses the use of economic, military and political power and the exercise of diplomacy. However, Brands recognises that United States foreign policy encompasses many failures and shortcomings. For example, he argues that Reagan left a complicated arms control legacy behind and systematically disregarded human rights and democracy in his policies.

Central to Brands's account is that it was a combination of structure - that turned global affairs sharply to U.S. advantage - , and strategy that ultimately led to an era of American supremacy. Herein lies the importance of the book. He demonstrates how external international factors influence foreign policy and provides a detailed account of the role and effect that foreign policy has on decision-making. Brands confirms that America has pursued an ambitious and deeply engaged grand strategy meant to shape the global order during and post-Cold War period.

American domination is based on the fact that it is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself.

Overall, Brands' research and sound analysis produce a very valuable study that fills an important gap in the historical knowledge of American foreign policy and the emergence of US preponderance during the latter half of the twentieth century throughout all six chapters. At a time when American grand strategy often seems consumed by crisis, this books provides an invaluable guide to thinking about both the recent past and the future of America's role in the world.

Justyna Janicka



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BOOK REVIEW

American Hegemony and the Rise of Emerging Powers: Co-operation or Conflict, by Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr. and James Parisot. New York: Routledge, 2018, pp. 227.

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This edited volume develops a multidisciplinary approach to address the debate on US hegemony and (re)-emerging powers in world politics that has been dominated by the "declinist perspective." Responding to what they view as the analytical limits of "partial lenses" that blind us to the more complex processes at work in international politics, most of the authors follow Regilme and Parisot's thesis in the opening chapter and show that scholars come to differing and at times opposite conclusions due to the use of various theoretical perspectives and geographical emphases. Thus, "particular perspectives that focus on American economic decline or continued military strength may view the question of potential decline differently" (p. 6). Similarly, scholars who are specialists in particular regions tend to generalize "based on events in their area". With this as a point of departure, the subsequent chapters examine the purported decline of American hegemony from a variety of theoretical perspectives and empirical examination drawn from a wide range of geographical coverage.

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Regilme and Parisot's book is part of a growing literature attempting to assess the implications of the rise of new powers from the non-Western world for the U.S. strategic position globally and for the liberal order. Over the past two decades at least, international relations scholars have developed a variety of views about the emergence of a "post-American world," a "post-Western world" or a process of "Easternization" of world politics. Nonetheless, in reexamining this topic, the standard practice for most scholars and policymakers has been to portray the Sino-American relationships as "the central drama" of contemporary international politics. It is to the editors' credit, however, that they instead extend the focus of their book to other emerging powers such as Russia, India, Turkey and South Africa, as well as transnational actors, whose rise to international status challenges U.S. hegemony in many important regards. In addition, they do not seek to bolster a particular thesis or embrace alarming arguments often heard in the public discourse about the epic rivalry between the U.S. and emerging powers. Unlike the vast majority of international relations scholars who believe the relative decline of U.S. power means an inexorable transition from order to chaos, most of the authors included in this volume are far less pessimistic.

Most importantly, the debate on American hegemony and emerging powers, as presented in this book, provides us with several key insights. In particular, the books highlights the importance of the "perceptions of power" and "discourse" in trying to make sense of U.S. hegemony and the same holds for global cooperation and conflict. In addition, while emerging powers are portrayed as often "revisionist," and their ascension at times belligerent, the book successfully shows how, under the current Trump administration, the tendency of the US to withdraw from its global security and political commitments may create a cloud and uncertainty among long-standing allies in global politics (p. 217).

The book covers not only theoretical issues related to the topic of American decline and rising powers. It is divided into three main parts. Part I deals with the above-mentioned analytical and theoretical perspectives and issues pertaining to American hegemony vis-à-vis rising powers. Part II in turn focuses on the challenges and opportunities brought in by the emergence of rising powers in the non-Western world to American hegemony, particularly in the area of the transnational and global political economy. Part III adopts a more comprehensive, global scale approach to examining the status and future of American hegemony vis-à-vis emerging powers and security struggles in various world regions, particularly in East Asia.

Jeff Bridoux's analysis highlights the role of ideational factors in making sense of US hegemony, and his conclusion converges with the book multidisciplinary approach. Bridoux examines how various intersubjective conceptions of power are produced, focusing on two complementary variables that need to be combined. First, what is needed is an analysis of how US decision-makers perceive US power and the power status of its closest rivals such as China and Russia. Second, equally important is how the decision-makers of challengers to US hegemony perceive US power, as well as how their own country's power (p.35). Put differently, one may argue that what Bridoux observes is that US hegemony and the US-led world order is what both US decision-makers and their rivals across the emerging world make of it.

In line with Bridoux's approach, Michiel Foulon takes issue with both the substance and the theoretical basis of America's grand strategic response to the rise of China. True to the pedigree of neoclassical realism, his main idea is that both "unit-level" variables and "structural" factors can be deployed as part of an explanatory framework for international politics. In his analysis of "trade and security in US

grand strategy," Foulon rejects the dichotomy between economic and security questions as it is often the case in most conventional treatments of great power relations. Foulon criticizes "traditionalist realists" such as Mearsheimer, whose materialist conception neglects perceptions in explaining state behaviour. By exploring in particular "the security and strategic losses from US trade with China," Foulon arrives at the conclusion that the US is in decline and that the domestic pressures and systemic factors of American decline endure even amidst the seemingly transformative Trump administration (p. 10).

However, as other chapters in the book illustrate, the notion that the US "still holds the aces" in its poker game with emerging powers like China remains a crucial part of the Western approach to those countries, even despite the sustained economic growth of many emerging markets. For example, in his description of US hegemony, Sean Starrs begins by challenging the idea of the end of the "American century." He suggests instead it "is only now being realized, after half a century of growing pains and challenges" (p.76). At a time when the Trump administration labels China as a "strategic competitor" and some analysts are warning that China and the US are "destined for war," Starrs seems to have none of it. He insists instead on the prevalence of harmony and the prospects for cooperation between the US and the emerging powers. Among the many pieces of evidence that he offers are the fact that China and other emerging powers from the Global South have now renounced their "anti-capitalist position" and that the emerging institutions established by the emerging powers (the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRICS New Development Bank) are usually framed as complementary to existing institutions. Whereas the election of Donald Trump and the 2016 Brexit vote appear to have forced the assumptions of American decline, Starrs believes that the

integration to the global economy of emerging powers from the Global South only indicates the "end of the beginning of the American century."

There is little doubt that this edited volume stands as a major contribution to IR and will become a significant point of reference in the field. Its interdisciplinary approach and many case studies surely provide the basis for fertile debate across the field. However, there are many aspects where one could take issue with *American Hegemony and the Rise of Emerging Powers*. For example, it would be interesting to know how emerging powers in the Global South position themselves as the U.S. is struggling to reassert its hegemony and mould the international agenda. This is one unexplored area that may leave some readers hungry.

Roromme Chantal

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BOOK REVIEW

By More Than Providence. Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783, by Michael J. Green. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, pp.760.

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In *By more than providence*, Michael J. Green provides a rich historical account of America's grand strategy towards the Asia-Pacific, explaining all the dimensions of its foreign policy from the late 18th century to Barack Obama's Asian pivot. The book is written in an entertaining style and is rich in details and biographical elements to provide context to the strategic thought of the many statesmen, such as John Quincy Adams, Theodore Roosevelt, Alfred Thayer Mahan, John Hay, Matthew Calbraith Perry or Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who have crafted America's geostrategic policies towards the Asia-Pacific. The book is organized in fifteen chapters, each starting with a narrative account of the period under study and ending with a welcome reflection on the strategic legacy of the key actors introduced in the chapter. Green shows that while World War II was decisive in the consolidation of the United States' strategy in the Pacific, the American reach to the re-

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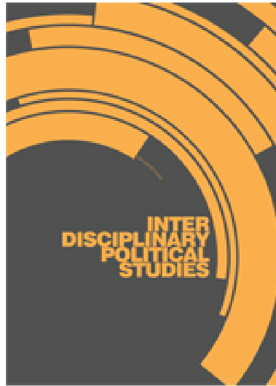
gion largely pre-dated World War II, and began with the travels of merchants, missionaries and naval officers in the late 18th century.

The book explains America's Pacific strategy through defensive realism, as America sought to protect itself against threats to its territorial security and gain access to trade routes in order to spread goods and ideas in the region. Green identifies five tensions characterizing American foreign policy towards Asia across the centuries he considers. Firstly, American strategic thinking had oscillated between Europe or Asia as its vital terrain of foreign affairs. Secondly, the construction of a grand strategy in the Pacific has repeatedly been weakened by an oscillation between China and Japan, and between the adoption of a continental or a maritime policy. Should the United States become a maritime power in Asia, and therefore concentrate on balancing against a potential threat from another maritime power like Japan, or should they concentrate on the threats coming from the Asian continent, and particularly China? A third tension lies in the definition of America's defensive line against potentially hegemonic powers in the region. Fourthly, America's grand strategy in the Pacific has been challenged by tensions between two objectives aiming to secure an ideational environment favorable to American influence in the region: support for self-determination versus support for the diffusion of democratic values. Nowhere was this clearer than in the United States' strategy in the Philippines, where American leaders swung back and forth between anti-colonialism and universalism. Finally, America's grand strategy in the region was split between protectionism and free trade.

Green concludes that despite its unevenness, American grand strategy in the Pacific has been effective, contributing 'in the aggregate to a more prosperous and just Asia-Pacific region' (p.541). The book provides little evidence to support

this general claim. The arguments waver between realism and liberalism. In the conclusion, Green reasserts the prominence of a realist vision of the Asia-Pacific, dismissing regionalism and transnational challenges and arguing for the persistence of a state-centered approach to international politics in the region. But he also seems to support a liberal strategy and advises policy-makers to maintain American power in the Asia-Pacific through the spread of democracy and free trade. For instance, rather than introducing a pivot to Asia, they are exhorted to overcome the tension between Asia and Europe to cooperate with the latter and support liberal democratic norms in the Asia-Pacific. He argues that most states in the region enthusiastically support democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and that there is no competing model currently available to Asian states. Therefore, the United States should continue to support civil society, good governance and free trade to protect US strategic interests. The landslide 2016 election of President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and the subsequent election of U.S. President Donald Trump cast doubts on Green's prescriptions.

Perhaps scholars or students of International Relations adopting critical perspectives and interested in the global economy might regret that the book focuses on Great Power politics and largely ignores the role that the region has played in the global diffusion of American capitalism. Green prefers to emphasize geostrategic factors instead of imperialism or ethnocentrism to explain American expansion in the Pacific, notably in the Philippines and China: 'the strategy was essentially determined by interest in *power*' (p. 103). Yet, since Green essentially relies on a realist perspective, he treats power as a category that is not itself subject to inquiry. Despite these limits, the book is an excellent contribution to studies of American foreign policy and the international relations of the Asia-Pacific.



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BOOK REVIEW

US Power in Latin America: Renewing Hegemony, by Rubrick Biegon. New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 208.

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US presence in Latin America has been challenged by New Left movements from the early Cold War era up to the late 1990s and early 2010s, as "Pink Tide" governments rose across the continent. While several policy-makers attribute the United States' geopolitical decline to the emergence of the New Latin Left (NLL), Rubrick Biegon follows a different path. The author of *US Power in Latin America* proposes the study of hegemony "as a unified, asymmetrical social relationship combing material and ideational elements of coercion, consensus-building and ideological legitimation" (p.2).

Biegon aims to show how the US has sought to renew its hegemonic position in the Americas through an open-ended, non-linear process (p.3). The *US Power in Latin America* is an effort to utilise a neo-Gramscian, historical materialist and interpretivist approach to the study of US hegemony in Latin America. The book also takes into account theoretical and analytical tools from different traditions and disciplines in an attempt to reinvigorate the perspective on the US involvement in the region. For that purpose, Biegon adopts textual (discourse and content) analysis

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methods to study official documents and statements of the US, international organisations, as well as Wikileaks sources.

Biegon's main argument is that there is a continuity in the US presence in the Americas since the Monroe Doctrine era. Occasional variations reflect shifts caused by different Latin American states and regional organisations that do not change US policy in a radical manner. Thus, the US sought to protect its hegemonic position in Latin America through four different forms of power: structural, coercive, institutional and ideological.

Hegemony is perceived in Gramscian terms, meaning that the dominant group rules on the overlapping spheres of political society through coercion, and of civil society through consent. Traditional international relations approaches focus on state power capabilities and institutional dominance, and often underplay economic production and the multiplicity of the hegemonic relation. Contrarily, the author bases his analysis on the material and ideational aspects of reality that form the asymmetric and dynamic social relation between the hegemonic power and the subordinate actors. In this sense, Biegon forms his approach on Gramsci's hegemony and builds on the work of Robert Cox, Susan Strange and Robert Gilpin.

In this framework, the NLL governments constitute a counter-hegemonic challenge to the US establishment. The book offers a typology of the NLL based on their opposition to the neoliberal paradigm. There is a differentiation between the overtly anti-neoliberal radicals, and the moderates that implement social policies within neoliberalism. Despite categorisations, one way or another, all NLL governments attempt to strengthen state authority by challenging the dominant, free market Washington Consensus dictated by the US through redistributive and developmentalist policies. What is more, Latin American governments "have committed

themselves to a common agenda of economic diversification, regional integration, and development policies that spur not just growth but equality" (p.13).

For each of the abovementioned forms of power (structural, coercive, institutional and ideological), Biegon explores a specific expression of the US hegemony in Latin America.

For the analysis of structural power, the author examines the US trade policy in the NLL age. He illustrates a clear picture of the US structural power established and maintained through international and regional organisations, structures and norms, and the contesting counter-hegemonic attempts of the NLL governments to create and sustain alternatives to the dominant normality of neoliberalism.

For the coercive power he goes through the US military strategy in the region and its adjustment as a response to the rise of the NLL. The analysis accentuates the turn from the Bush administration "War on Terror" to Obama's "Smart Power." The former had signalled the outright confrontation of guerrilla groups characterised as narco-terrorists, while the latter initiated a turn to a "smarter" use of power packaged in a soft cell. Biegon claims that changes in the use of coercive power, not only do not shake down the argument of a continuous US hegemonic policy but also strengthen it.

When it comes to institutional power, he examines the traditional, hegemonic role of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in comparison to its policy turn under the leadership of the leftist José Miguel Insulza. Despite the fact that Insulza positioned himself in the moderate side of Latin Left, the US were initially concerned about his "soft hand" on radical NLL leaders. Additionally, the rise of new, contesting regional organisations challenges the existing hegemonic order and signifies Latin America's new regionalism.

As for the ideological power, Biegon goes into the construction of the narrative of "false, radical populism" in US diplomatic and policy discourse. He presents the dominant narrative under which American hegemonic normality characterises every alternative and contending policy as populist. All "nationalist," "leftist," "socialist," "Bolivarian," "pan-Latin American" and "anti-imperialist" ideas and values are stigmatised as populist. In this way, US officials' public statements set and renew the discourse of hegemonic normality, and at the same time try to repel the appeal of the populist construct that threatens American ideological power. Although populism is by no means a new concept in Latin America, the US uses the ambiguity of the term in order to create a narrative of a political, economic and security threat descending from outdated visions of undemocratic, violent demagogues.

Biegon concludes that despite transformations in US-Latin America relations, the US remains hegemonic, and that whether or not unipolarity is in decline, the fluidity of power does not point to much enthusiasm for a post hegemonic future. Unlike the overall critical analysis followed throughout the book, the conclusion seems to follow an old-fashioned historical materialism that does not offer much in terms of theoretical innovation.

Overall, Rubrick Biegon's pluralistic approach is robust. His focus on the interweaving, overlapping forms of power and the fluidity of the social process of hegemony creates an informed view of the subject-matter. What is more, the *US Power in Latin America* is a fresh, interdisciplinary effort to study a domain and a region that has long been dominated by hard International Relations, security and strategic analyses. So far, most researchers of the NLL and US power have focused on the anti-hegemonic, anti-neoliberal struggle of the leftist governments (Artz,

Chodor, Levitsky & Roberts Ludlam, Panizza, Silva), while others follow the liberal tradition (Fukuyama) or argue for a US neo-imperialism (Chomsky and Grandin).

On the one hand, given the theoretical richness, the understanding of US politics in the region, and the solid argument of hegemonic continuity, it is somewhat disappointing as Biegon refrains from offering his insights on the near future of the US-Latin America asymmetrical relation. On the other, he raises questions for further research such as the ways in which the Chinese involvement in the region will challenge US hegemony and the impact of the election of Donald Trump on the US hegemonic policy.

US Power in Latin America is highly recommended for those interested in the Gramscian hegemonic theory and in neo-Marxist approaches in International Relations and researchers of patterns in the US hegemonic power. On the contrary, the book does not offer much to those interested in the rise of the NLL.

Beyond the US and Latin America, the main theoretical contribution of the book lies in the analysis of the discursive domination of the hegemonic normality over the anti-hegemony "through common sense understandings [that] serve the leadership position of the dominant group" (p.30) and the efforts of the counter-hegemony to challenge it. This dimension is usually stacked under the "soft power" label and sets aside for the benefit of more pragmatic, resource-based analyses of international politics. For that reason, traditional approaches fail to grasp the overlapping nature of different forms of power and the economic relations that lie in the basis of hegemonic asymmetry. This leads to conclusions with limited analytical power. Either in the case of the "pied pipers of populism" (p. 150) in Latin America, or in the rise of the European (right or left-wing) populists there is a need to synthesise new theoretical tools and to experiment with interdisciplinary interpretive

schemes in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena. The *US Power in Latin America* by Rubrick Biegon definitely points in this direction.

Nikolaos Pasamitros

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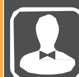
INTER DISCIPLINARY POLITICAL STUDIES

editors



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