

Marco Clementi · Matteo Dian
Barbara Pisciotta *Editors*

US Foreign Policy in a Challenging World

Building Order on Shifting Foundations

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Preface

This book concludes a research project devoted to studying one of the most intriguing issues in current international relations: the role of the US in the spatially fragmented and highly uncertain contemporary international system. The book attempts to answer at least two fundamental questions: how has the US adapted to such a peculiar strategic environment? To what extent is the US still producing and sustaining order—and what kind of order—at the system level and within the different regional subsystems?

This project has grown over time and has been discussed over the last two years, especially in the panels we organized, to this end, at the Italian Political Science Association conferences in Cosenza (10–12 September 2015) and Milan (15–17 September 2016). Many colleagues participated in these panels in person and others contributed to the project remotely. We thank them all for their highly appreciated scholarship and kind availability.

The project resulted in a volume consisting of four parts. Part I deals with global issues and investigates what the US has done to defend its system-level interests, as well as the fundamental norms and practices on which it built the international order during the Cold War. Parts II–IV deal with the most strategically relevant contemporary regional subsystems: Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific. These investigate the US posture towards these regions; the policies the US has taken to face the most relevant challenges in each of them; and whether, and if so how, these policies have been mutually influential with one another and with global policies.

The US presidential elections took place when our journey was almost over. We factored the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America into the book, combining an issue area perspective with an overall review. Firstly, we asked our contributors to comment on how the Trump presidency could conceivably change the claims they were advancing in their chapters, which were devoted to considering specific aspects of US foreign policy. Secondly, we concluded the book with a chapter that placed President Trump against the backdrop of the US traditional foreign policy culture and posture, in order to grasp what

impact he could have on the basal guidelines of the US grand strategy, as well as on the international system.

We thank the authors of this edited volume for engaging so astutely with the unexpected change in the US leadership. Even though, at the time we are writing—early February 2017—the assessment of President Trump’s foreign policy remains a matter for speculation, we are confident that the contributions of our authors offer useful insights into, and reflections on, the prospects for the US and the US-led international order. Of course, the responsibility for any remaining shortcoming rests solely with us.

Pavia, Italy
Bologna, Italy
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Barbara Pisciotta

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Introduction: US Foreign Policy in Front of Global Uncertainty and Regional Fragmentation

Marco Clementi and Barbara Pisciotta

1 Looking for One's Place in the World

Today, the United States is stronger and better positioned to seize the opportunities of a still new century and safeguard our interests against the risks of an insecure world. [...] America must lead. Strong and sustained American leadership is essential to a rules-based international order that promotes global security and prosperity as well as the dignity and human rights of all peoples. The question is never whether America should lead, but how we lead (White House 2015, p. i).

The introduction to the last *National Security Strategy* (NSS) of the Obama Administration, published in 2015, opens on this optimistic note. According to the document, the United States (US) retains its capacity to lead and is still able to sustain and strengthen the foundation of the liberal international order it has promoted since 1945. America's strength, according to the 2015 NSS, springs from the vitality of its economy, the investments in science and technology, the openness of its society. Moreover, the American role is described as indispensable for the durability of the international order itself, as well as for the promotion of the values of democracy, freedom and human dignity on a global scale.

This is in stark contrast with the America represented by President Trump, whose inaugural address offered a picture of the country and of its international role that was entirely at odds with that of Obama.

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For many decades we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry, subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military. We've defended other nations' borders while refusing to defend our own and spent trillions and trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay. We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength and confidence of our country has dissipated over the horizon (Trump 2017).

How is it possible for two presidents of the US hold such divergent visions of the state of the nation, and of its relationship with the world, in such a short distance of time? Has America's position actually worsened so fast and so severely? In fact, we know that the US economic performance has recently improved and the country is slowly but steadily overcoming the global financial crisis. In economic terms, the US has been doing much better than the EU countries and some of the so-called emerging powers, like Russia. In political and military terms, the US is still the leading nation of the Western world and the most and best armed state on earth. True, the US is in trouble in settling several important crises that are wrecking many regions of the world. Still, it is difficult to see what kind of global challenge would likely endanger the US existential security and international peace. Why, then, such a great variation in the representation of the country?

Several domestic factors are relevant in this regard. Among them, of course, is the fact that the two leaders have contending political values and principles; and they represent different domestic groups, whose interests relate differently to the external environment. The polarization of American political culture and competition, increased by fundamental social and political transformations, and put on stage by the 2016 primary and presidential elections, do matter as well. The populist revolt against the political establishment is very important too, because Trump chose to distance himself as much as possible from the bipartisan consensus on the role of the country in international affairs and on the traditional guidelines of US foreign policy.

Yet, we think there is something more than this. There is a substantial uncertainty in contemporary international relations that further complicates the assessment of the relationship between national interests and international dynamics. It could also be this fundamental ambiguity that widens the spectrum of the plausible domestic representations of the position of the US in the international system. Several international factors combine to yield this result.

To start with, power realities are among the most fundamental factors to cause great uncertainty in contemporary international relations, by influencing both US foreign policy and the strategic environment it aims to address. With reference to the former, the focus goes on the formidable capabilities of the US in terms of military, economic and broadly defined ideational, or soft, power. Despite the rise of competitors such as Russia and China, and the process of sequestration enacted since 2011, the US maintains by far the largest military budget in the world.

Moreover, sixth among the first ten nations with the largest military budget are treaty allies of the US. At the system level, this is the unusual power concentration by which some scholars have classified the contemporary system as unipolar, in structural terms (Wohlforth 1999; Ikenberry et al. 2011). What should be noted in this regard is that unipolarity exerts, to a lesser extent, the *shoving and shaping* force that system polarity is thought to exert on the great powers and international competition (Waltz 1979). In a unipolar situation, the unipole meets indeterminate — or very weak — system incentives and constraints (Mowle and Sacko 2007; Ikenberry et al. 2011). Accordingly, contemporary US foreign policy is expected to have a considerable freedom of action and, in turn, possibly head towards diverging directions (Jervis 2011; Snyder et al. 2011).

With reference to the strategic environment, the focus is on the capabilities of the US competitors, namely of the great powers that could bring the most dangerous traditional challenges to the US security and to the stability of the American-led order. China and Russia are the most relevant actors in this regard. In terms of resources, demographic weight, rising military capabilities, China surely appears to be the most formidable competitor for American primacy. The People's Republic has surpassed the American GDP (in power purchasing parity) in 2014. Its military capabilities are rapidly expanding, leading several commentators to state that Beijing aims to achieve the status of regional hegemon in Asia in the foreseeable future (Friedberg 2012; Yoshihara and Holmes 2011). Russia is less equipped from an economic and demographic perspective. Nevertheless, in the past decade Putin has returned to promote an assertive foreign policy, restarting the country's military modernization and returning to play in relevant theatres such as the Middle East, Central Asia, and South East Asia (Allison 2013; Hill and Lo 2013; Trenin 2016). According to some scholars, tension with these countries could significantly soar. The crisis in Ukraine showed the Russian discontent with the current European security settlement, with particular reference to the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (McFaul et al. 2014). The rise of China could trigger a large-scale security competition and even conflict, causing Washington and Beijing fall into a *Thucydides trap* (Allison 2012; Goldstein 2015; Rudd 2015). The fact is that the definition of the US posture towards these countries has not been easy at all. It has been complicated by the great uncertainty about the pace of these states' relative growth and, consequently, about the likely outcomes of these trends, in terms both of international standing and revisionist or status quo attitudes (Buzan 2004; Welch Larson and Shevchenko 2010).

The differential growth of great powers calls into play another important factor of ambiguity in contemporary international politics: the possible in-stability of the US position and role. No matter how powerful the US has become, the possible decline of the country would impair its ability to defend itself and the international order it has built. According to some scholars, the US may have completed its hegemonic cycle (Gilpin 1981; Kennedy 1987; Modelski 1987) and the combination of fiscal constraints and geopolitical overstretching would be the clearest

evidence of this outcome. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq stimulated a debate on the end of the American era and the beginning of an apolar or post-American, post-Western world (Zakaria 2008; Ferguson 2011; Kupchan 2013). The apparent impossibility for the US to disentangle itself from the quagmires of the Middle East appeared to be a clear symptom of the tendency to overexpand security concerns and to blur the differences between fundamental challenges and secondary theatres (Snyder 2003; Layne 2011; Altman and Haass 2010). The global economic recession offered another seemingly clear indication of America's hegemonic decline (Burrows and Harris 2009; Lelong and Cohen 2010; Stiglitz 2010).

In sum, power realities are suggesting that the direction of US foreign policy cannot be taken for granted; the relationship between the US and its most powerful competitors is a decade-long work-in-progress with no clear prospect either for cooperation or conflict; the durability of the primacy and leadership of the US itself is at stake. All these factors combine to make contemporary international relations particularly uncertain and unpredictable. Furthermore, all are necessarily magnified by certain traits rooted in the contemporary conflicts.

In this regard, the most important factors to consider are the diffusion of non-state violence and intra-state conflicts. International and transnational terrorism, internal wars and insurgencies, separatist movements, piracy, organized crime, etc., alone or in combination with one another, are complicating and compromising the results of security policies because they jeopardize the strategic logic by which traditional deterrence and conflict-resolution mechanisms work in the contemporary system. In truth, these phenomena are not novelties of the present time. On the contrary, we know that the Cold War produced a steep rise in the occurrence of civil wars and of conflicts fought by non-state belligerents, as well as a relative decline of traditional inter-state wars (Väyrynen 2006; Human Security Research Project 2011). However, a fundamental novelty exists in the combination of these phenomena with the global strategic architecture, or rather, the lack of it. The point here, is that these phenomena significantly affect inter-state competition and the international order by producing results that are no longer filtered and prioritized by a global competition that unifies the contemporary system in strategic terms.

In this regard, the last factor of international uncertainty we are briefly short-listing is also important. This is the growing autonomy of regional dynamics and theatres. Since 1989, the overall process of economic globalization has further developed, together with deepening processes of strategic and economic regionalization (Lake and Morgan 1997; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Paul 2012). Regionalism — namely, the divergence of patterns of action at the regional level — is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon that can bring about mixed results, either contributing to the stability of the global order (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995; Adler and Barnett 1998) or weakening and fragmenting it (Lake and Morgan 1997; Acharya 2009; Goh 2013). In either case — this is what we want to emphasize — the results are highly uncertain and depend on factors that also change from one region to another. Thus, the resulting spatial fragmentation of the international system is likely to complicate and make more uncertain the US global influence,

be it in political, military or economic affairs, as well as the US ability to produce and protect the international order.

Thus, contemporary international relations show a great complexity that has hindered the coherent definition of the US grand strategy and has changed it frequently and significantly. We could say the contemporary US is experiencing an ongoing process of strategic adaptation that is the most telling evidence of the great ambiguity and uncertainty through which the country perceives and represents its position and role in the world. Consequently, no contemporary president could have the same confidence in the country's posture towards international politics as that of John F. Kennedy, who, during his inaugural address, stated: "America shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, and oppose any foe" (Kennedy 1961).

2 Structure and Content of the Book

This book aims to gain an understanding of how the US has adapted to a strategic environment made extremely complex and ambiguous by a combination of uncertainty in its fundamental factors and fragmentation of its regional subsystems. To this aim, it investigates US foreign policy in the context of certain relevant global issues and in the most important contemporary regional settings.

The first part of the book focuses on some of the most relevant global issue areas to investigate US foreign policy at the system level, and its possible change. This part also asks whether, and if so how, US global policies have taken into consideration the contemporary processes of regionalization. The remaining parts of the volume deal with the most strategically relevant contemporary regional subsystems: Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific. These parts aim to investigate the US choices concerning current issues that are core to specific regional dynamics; to relate these policies to the global US posture; and, ultimately, to assess whether they have positively contributed to safeguarding the international order in the different regional theatres.

It could be said that this book adopts a two-level perspective, since it aims to offer insights into both global and regional US policies. It also adopts a multiplicity of perspectives, since it aims to offer insights into a variety of regional settings. Consequently, we hope that this book will contribute to understand how the US has dealt with the challenge of matching global interests to regional dynamics; the extent to which the US has produced different — possibly inconsistent — economic and security goods in different regional theatres; and, the extent to which the US is still producing order at the system level and within the different regional subsystems.

Part I starts with the core issue of the multilateral frameworks by which the US institutionalized the post-45 great hegemonic bargain (Ikenberry 2001). Carla Monteleone considers the Obama administration's approach towards multilateralism. She underlines that the US is still attaching a core strategic value to the

universal multilateral institutions of the Western order. Yet, overall, the efforts to reform them have been too limited to effectively accommodate the emerging regional powers, thereby contributing to the development of new mini-lateral initiatives at the regional level, such as, for instance, the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, which might weaken the stability of the American order in the long term.

Arlo Poletti, Eugenio Cusumano and Stefano Ruzza focus on free trade and the freedom of the seas respectively: namely, on the basal norms of economic and geopolitical openness on which rest the prosperity and global influence of a hegemonic power. Arlo Poletti considers the factors that drove the US to bargain a mega-trade agreement such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). By paying particular attention to the expected distributive effects of the TPP and alternative trade frameworks, he underlines the US strategy to either exclude China from the current trading system or to include it under terms more favourable to the US itself. The competitive logic underlying this regional mega-trade agreement — he concludes — could have ended up strengthening, rather than weakening, the global trade regime.

Eugenio Cusumano and Stefano Ruzza analyse US policies in the face of the substantial resurgence of piracy, with a specific focus on the wide Gulf of Aden region, as a case of global public good provision. The analysis shows that the US has promoted antipiracy operations, committed substantial resources for safeguarding the freedom of the seas, and successfully supported the involvement of the private sector in the provision of maritime security. Notwithstanding a favourable multilateral burden-sharing deal with European countries — Cusumano and Ruzza conclude — the US actually seems to be indispensable to the provision of this hegemonic function.

The chapter by Rupal N. Metha and Rachel E. Whitlark focuses on the changing nature of the threat of nuclear proliferation, in relation to the struggle to acquire nuclear latency (namely, the ability to develop nuclear weapons), rather than nuclear weapons themselves. Such a strategic shift — they suggest — makes non-proliferation policies much more difficult, and calls into play a much larger population of countries. The US leadership is still the core asset in the production of this security public good but — the authors suggest — the US has to revise its non-proliferation policy in order to tackle both kinds of proliferation, and possibly play one against the other to bargain with new likely proliferators.

Marco Clementi closes the part on global issues by focusing on the stability of the US primacy and leadership. The chapter investigates whether, and if so how, the US strategic discourse has related the perception of national decline to the overall process of regionalization. Clementi suggests that, apart from the Global War on Terror proposed by Bush Jr., the post-89 US grand strategy has assumed the salience of the decline-regionalism nexus. The conception of decline changed, but the perception of national decline steadily influenced the US regional policies, in turn contributing to the overall process of regionalization.

Part II concentrates on the European continent and addresses both the evolution of transatlantic relations and the thorny relationship with Russia. David G. Haglund

focuses on the role of ethnic identity in US foreign policy. Haglund's investigation goes back to the US grand strategy debate at the time of World War I, moves on to the Cold War period and, ultimately, considers the role of ethnic identity in the definition of contemporary American national identity and its vision of transatlantic relations. He counterintuitively concludes that the relevance of ethnicity has lessened over time, and is now limited to the Anglo-American *special relationship* and the role the latter can play in transatlantic relations.

Andrea Locatelli and Andrea Carati focus on the military dimension of transatlantic relations. Locatelli deals with military capabilities and underlines the US efforts to safeguard its global military superiority via high military expenditures, steady innovation in procurement policies, and doctrinal adaptation. This policy of global primacy has left behind not only possible challengers and competitors, but also the European allies, with the partial exception of the UK and France. The increasing asymmetry in capabilities between the two shores of the Atlantic — he argues — is endangering the effectiveness of the transatlantic alliance. Carati observes that the power gap between the US and the NATO members draws a boundary between the global interests of the US and the regional interests of the secondary allies, thereby influencing the political dimension of NATO and the actual use of capabilities in military operations. He considers the military interventions in Afghanistan and Libya and suggests that regional considerations are relevant in NATO global operations; and, that the global power of the US can reduce the commitment to collective security of European allies.

Barbara Pisciotta analyses the causes of the clash between the US and Russia over the Ukrainian question and suggests a connection with the three aims pursued by US foreign policy in post-communist Europe since the 1990s, namely the promotion of democracy, the expansion of the EU and the enlargement of NATO. Despite America's evident military and economic superiority, Russia has continued to constitute a potential challenger, in terms of revisionist power, particularly since Putin's rise to power.

Part III focuses on the most conflictual contemporary regional complex — the Middle East — in order to assess the US contribution to regional stability and reform, and the relevance of the region to the US domestic political process. Marco Pinfari underlines that the US approach towards the Middle East shows a substantial continuity with the late 1970s' Camp David paradigm, by which the state-centred resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the key to the stability of a region lacking in both a regional hegemon and effective multilateral institutions. He discusses the reasons why this paradigm has been put under strain by recent developments, including the diffusion of fundamentalist terrorism, the overall growing role of non-states actors, the effects of the Arab springs and the Syrian civil war. Even though these developments have greatly complicated the US role in the region and its relation with regional powers — Pinfari concludes — the US seems to remain the undisputed final arbiter of regional disputes.

The role of non-state actors is a core issue of Oz Hassan's chapter, which focuses on the main bottom-up means by which the US tried to support democratic governance in the region: the Freedom Agenda for the Middle East and North Africa

devised by the G.W. Bush administration after 9/11. Hassan reviews the rationale and the difficult implementation of the Freedom Agenda from its origins to President Obama. He underlines that the process of institutionalization of the Freedom Agenda has been severely hampered by the Arab Springs and the related collapse of the overall regional security architecture, thereby damaging the credibility of the US as a democracy promoter in the region.

Marina Calculi also considers the undeniable relevance of non state actors in the Middle East dynamics, while examining the US strategy and policies in the Syrian crisis. She debates the issue of the US retrenchment from the Middle East in relation to the global decline of the country, and maintains that President Obama theorized the Islamic State as a major threat to the US security and followed Bush Junior's war on terror track. Consequently — she concludes — the US is still engaged in the region, even though the means of this engagement has shifted from classical warfare to shadow wars, consisting in undercover operations and support to proxy non-state belligerents.

Edoardo Baldaro's chapter considers how the US drew the boundaries of a new regional security complex — the Sahara-Sahel region — and turned it into a front of the Global War on Terror. The US pursued an integrated approach between institution building and counterterrorism and based both on regional partners — acting as proxies — and an effective division of labour with some selected European allies, especially France. Baldaro argues why the US should be considered the crucial actor at the regional level, notwithstanding the fact that the strategy failed to bring stability to the region, and that other extra-regional powers, such as the EU or even China have a stake in it.

Marco Morini analyses the relevance of the Middle East issue in the 2016 American presidential campaign. After describing the early campaign's international context and the past and current public opinion's perception of foreign policy, he discusses the primary candidates' proposals on the Middle East. He suggests that the Middle East dynamics have been relevant to all the candidates, who often linked it to other issues, such as immigration and terrorism.

Part IV focuses on the Asia-Pacific region and aims to highlight the mutual influence between regional and global dynamics. In the first chapter, Matteo Dian disentangles the power, institutional and normative dimensions of the Pivot to Asia as a means of redrawing the boundaries of the fastest growing region of the international system. According to Dian, the core US goal is to consolidate a Trans-Pacific form of regional order rooted in Washington's leadership and free market capitalism, as well as to prevent the rise of Sino-centric regional order, based upon the Chinese leadership and state capitalist practices.

Axel Berkofsky and Simone Dossi focus on two dimensions of the US-China relationship that relate to global commons and which thus have effects on both regional and global competition. Berkofsky investigates the US Freedom of Navigation Military Operations in the South China Sea as a means of upholding the regional status quo, in the face of Chinese territorial claims, and to reaffirm the freedom of the high seas in the face of the Chinese restrictions on the transit of military vessels. He emphasizes that China has not been deterred by the US policy;

on the contrary, China has claimed that the militarization of the occupied islands is a reaction to what it conceives more as display of force than innocent — or lawful — passage. The US presence in the South China Sea can fuel a security dilemma situation; yet — Berkofsky underlines — no other extra-regional or regional powers (e.g. Japan) have so far been willing to contribute to those regional and global public goods.

Dossi aims to investigate another kind of global commons, namely the cyberspace. In order to grasp the Chinese and US perceptions of cyberwarfare and their mutual influence, he considers Chinese governments' white papers on national defence, Chinese debates in academic journals, and US strategic official documents. On these bases, he maintains that cyberspace remains a highly ambivalent domain and argues about the impact it can have on changing the relative power distribution between the two countries and on the future of the US-led international order.

All in all, the above chapters of Part IV show that the Asia-Pacific region is rife with sources of conflict and instability, and that the US-China relationship is basically competitive. According to John C. Hemmings, if one looks at the diplomatic alignments by which the US has pursued regional security, a more optimistic conclusion can be drawn. Hemmings considers the evolution of the US-Japan-Australia trilateral relationship — from Bill Clinton to George W. Bush, and ending with Barack Obama — and suggests that the US has steadily dealt with the regional security dilemma combining China-engagement with alliance-integration. It has tried to integrate and socialize China into regional and global frameworks, so as to turn it into a responsible stakeholder, as well as attempting to normalize the regional role of its allies and to devise burden-sharing solutions. Thus, in Hemmings' view, the US has chained its allies while promoting a security community approach at the regional level.

3 The US Adaptation to Uncertainty and Fragmentation

This introduction cannot do justice to the implications to be derived from the above contributions. However, some concluding remarks on the fundamental questions that have nurtured this book are possible. Let us remember that these questions deal with the strategic adaptation of the US to the complexities and ambiguities of the current international system; and, with the US leadership in the present times, namely the actual US contribution to provide the basal common goods on which the international order rests.

With reference to the first point, one could underline that the US strategies and behaviours show a substantial variation depending on the issues, alignments and regional settings. For instance, the US has struck effective burden-sharing deals with the European allies in safeguarding the freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aden, and in the coordination of the Western intervention in the Sahara-Sahel. Conversely, in the Asia-Pacific, the US has played a leading role much more assertively. It has used resources and influence to build a region-wide security and

economic architecture, via the Pivot to Asia and the TPP. Notwithstanding the process of alliance integration with Australia and Japan, it has neither delegated nor shared the naval military operations through which it is trying to deter Chinese territorial expansionism. While acting as the *leading country* in the Asia-Pacific, the US has become a *leading from behind* country in the Middle East, where it has delegated certain military functions to allies and proxy belligerents on the ground, and has left significant freedom of action to regional competitors like Russia.

Of course, such a variation substantially responds to the specific mixture of historical legacies, current stakes on the ground and regional powers' strategies — be they enemies or friends — that feature in the different issue areas and regional theatres. However, what we want to emphasize is that this variation does not seem to have featured in the overall US foreign policy goals. This variation could be seen as the differential adaptation of the US means to keep pursuing the same fundamental goals. Contemporary US foreign policy would, accordingly, show a clear line of continuity with the past.

A few years ago, Kitchen maintained “the geography of United States foreign policy [...] completed its post-Cold War shift of focus — from Europe to Asia, via a Middle East detour” (2014, p. 72). According to a zero-sum logic, these words could mean that the US sailed from Europe to Asia, passing by the Middle East. Yet, they could also be read to mean that the continuity of the American project called the US to focus on Asia rather than on the Middle East. In other words, the contemporary US might be not in the midst of a geopolitical journey from one regional subsystem to another, but simply in the process of strengthening and expanding the post-45 international order.

After securing the values, norms and practices of the liberal order in Western Europe, the US expanded them to Eastern and Central Europe. These chapters suggest the US has tried to uphold them in the face of soaring competition with Russia. They also suggest it has tried to expand and settle them where the sources of international influence could give the highest power returns to the US, as well as nurture the development of alternative principles of international legitimacy and organization.

In this regard, one cannot but note that the contemporary US has continued to make of multilateral institutional frameworks the means to include and socialize new actors into the existing order, both at the universal and regional level, and to exert its tamed superior power at the same time. The US has continued to prevent the adversarial militarization of the global commons and to actively safeguard the openness of the global commons. This is necessary for the smooth working of an international integrated system and for global political and military influence. The US has tried to make Asia similar to Europe, by promoting the basic liberal principles of free trade, democracy and human rights; and by supporting the development of overlapping political, security and trade communities.

Therefore, one could conclude that the US has adapted to the contemporary strategic environment by tailoring its means to different situations and regions while pursuing the same long-term ends. Yet, tailored means do not necessarily imply effective results. With reference to the US contribution to the international order,

we should note that the above chapters illustrate and claim that the US policies have not always been successful.

The reform of the Western universal international institutions has been too limited to accommodate the emerging regional powers. The US non-proliferation policy needs a revision to keep nuclear latency under control. China has not actually been deterred by the US Freedom of Navigation Operations. The US intervention has not increased the stability of the Sahara-Sahel region. The US ability to broker the Arab-Israeli conflict has recently diminished rather than increased. The US efforts to support democratic governance in the Middle East has been short-lived. The US posture towards the Syrian crisis has been highly ambiguous and uncertain. In sum, to say the least, the actual US contribution to the international order at the system level, and within the different regional theatres, is not out of the question. Consequently, the US could face a situation where it is willing to produce the international order but is not fully able of doing so. In such a situation, the prestige of the country as the leader of the system could fade, thereby contributing to the (domestic and international) perception of national decline.

Against this conclusion, one could underline that the US is actually and effectively producing common goods in some issues and regions such as, for instance, the defense of European and Asian allies or the antipiracy operations. But, what is most noteworthy in this regard is the fact that the contributions to this book are arguing that the US is still the indispensable nation, even when and where its policies are failing or not fully successful. This is either because of the lack of regional hegemons in the Middle East, or because the possible regional leaders, such as Russia in Europe and China in Asia, could have revisionist postures towards the international order. This is also because the closest US allies, such as NATO members, are lacking in both capabilities and commitment to substantially share the burden of the global and regional common goods of the liberal international order. The US dilemma, in this regard, is that primacy itself is a requirement of the US indispensability; but, it contributes both to making the international order much more uncertain and reducing the commitment by which the closest allies of the US support it. In this sense — and thus twisting Huntington's phrase (1999) — the current US is a *lonely superpower*.

It is against this puzzling backdrop that Donald Trump's leadership came to the fore. But, with what consequences for US foreign policy and, in turn, for international relations? Each contribution to this book elaborates on the impact that the Trump administration could have on the specific issues investigated. Matteo Dian's concluding chapter offers an overall assessment of this topic and argues why President Trump is likely to reject the foundations of the US foreign policy guidelines and undermine the liberal international order that sustained the American hegemony and international stability alike, according to the bipartisan élites that devised it and defended it for decades.

It is difficult to anticipate the consequences of such a fundamental break with the long-standing American tradition of liberal internationalism, short of expecting that they will be universal. This relates partly to the difficulty of keeping under control

all the pieces of such a complex puzzle and partly to the fact that some pieces are missing.

To start with, it is not clear which of the keywords President Trump has emphasized to distance himself from the US political establishment will be turned into actual fundamental foreign policy goals. Nor is it clear what means the Trump administration will use under what specific circumstances. It is also worth noting that the ambiguity over the future basal foreign policy guidelines is great not only because the Trump administration is in its infancy, but also because there is great uncertainty about its factors and direction. In fact, it is unclear what strategic thinking will inform the Trump foreign policy guidelines, or how the Trump administration will balance the populist ideologues and pragmatists who compose it. The quick and sudden U-turns President Trump made on certain core issues of current international affairs serve to magnify this overall unpredictability.

In sum, this introductory chapter has argued that US foreign policy has been much complicated by the considerable uncertainty of contemporary international dynamics. It has also underlined some of the most relevant *external* roots of this overall ambiguity. The concluding chapter suggests that the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America has further complicated US foreign policy by greatly increasing the *internal* factors of foreign policy uncertainty, too.

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Part I
The US Amidst Global Influence and
Regional Dilemmas

Spatial Fragmentation of, and US Support for, the Main Multilateral Institutions of the Western Order

Carla Monteleone

Abstract The growth of China-led minilateral initiatives mostly of a regional character has challenged the main multilateral institutions of the Western order and, ultimately, US authority. Faced with a progressive delegitimation of the institutional architecture that it promoted after World War II, the US, under the Obama administration, has acted to defend the existing main multilateral institutions of the order (UN, IMF, WB and WTO), attributing them with a strategic role. More than being radical, though, the reforms enacted have been incremental and pragmatic, but always imperfect. More importantly, they have not altered US influence, which is exercised mostly through informal means. This, however, has left room for dissatisfaction and more reform requests, but has added credibility to threats to use the alternative organizations created at the regional level, and this risks undermining not only the existing universal multilateral institutions, but also the existing American-led institutional order.

1 Introduction

The growth of the so-called rising powers has amplified reform requests of the main multilateral institutions of the liberal international order promoted by the United States (US) with the support of its Western allies at the end of World War II, and expanded after the end of the Cold War: United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/World Trade Organization (WTO). However, even when reforms have been agreed, consent towards the reformed institutions has not increased, and initiatives suggesting contestation have been taken. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the New Development Bank (NDB), the Chang Mai Initiative, the Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA), are just a few of the many

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recent minilateral initiatives created by the rising powers, in particular China, that have been presented as a response to the unresponsiveness—at times outright ineffectiveness and unrepresentativeness—of universal institutions such as the IMF or the WB that had *already* been reformed (see, among others, Patrick 2015). However, the promotion by the US of minilateral inter-regional free trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), both of which risk undermining the WTO, the organization that has most successfully adapted to power shifts, signals that a discontent, evident during the 2016 presidential election, is also present in the US.

All of this indicates a widespread dissatisfaction with the main institutions of the current American-led international order, and a potential delegitimation of the order itself. While some of these initiatives maintain an inter-regional character, others, and in particular the AIIB, are regional in character and potentially capable of redefining institutional roles and power relations in specific areas, leading to a spatial fragmentation of the international order, and potentially pointing towards a “multiplex world”, that is, a composite world in which the American-led liberal hegemonic order is declining regardless of whether or not America itself is declining (Acharya 2014).

It remains to be seen whether the new initiatives will substitute or remain complementary to the existing universal institutions of the American-led liberal hegemonic order, but they already constitute an alternative path for dissatisfied coalitions. However, while attention has been paid to the challenges posed by the rising powers to the American-led liberal international order, less attention (among exceptions, see Vezirgiannidou 2013) has been paid to the promoter of that order and those institutions: the US. Indeed, the US reaction to the creation of the AIIB, the new China-led development bank for Asia, and its decision not to become a member of the new organization, and to request its traditional allies to do the same—a request followed only by Japan—indicate an American unease towards these new initiatives, but also a weaker support from the countries that traditionally backed the American-led liberal international order. It is therefore worth exploring whether, in view of the current power shift (both in terms of rising powers and the decline of its traditional allies), but still preeminent, the US is supporting the institutions of the international order it promoted, and keeping them relevant, or if it is renegotiating the institutional order.

After analysing the theoretical aspects of the relationship between the US and the main institutions of the American-led liberal hegemonic order, the chapter will identify the role played by the universal multilateral institutions in relation to the US, focusing on the National Security Strategies (NSSs) of the Obama administration (the administration that has so far been most affected by the power shift) as well as on the US commitment to support and/or reform them. The chapter will then investigate the current relationship of the US with the four universal multilateral organizations (UN, IMF, WB and WTO), analysing the US position on their reform: whether it opposed, promoted or consented to the reform; the outcome; and what it means for US influence within these institutions. It will be shown that important differences between the four international organizations are present,

but also that, in view of an increasing delegitimation, and despite domestic constraints, over time the US has become more assertive in its defence of the existing institutions, trying to enlarge its otherwise weakened coalition to consent to pragmatic but imperfect adaptations, rather than far-reaching reforms.

2 The US and the Institutional Order

The organization of the international political system promoted by the US with the support of its Western allies at the end of World War II represents an innovation, compared to previous orders (Ikenberry 2001).¹ It is based on leadership sharing, a system of rules and multilateral universal institutions, yet it promotes American interests and values. This is reflected in the four main universal institutions. The UN project was basically an American creation (Puchala 2005, p. 573). In the financial and development areas, the structure, location, and mandate of the IMF and WB were determined by the US (Woods 2003, p. 92). In the trade area, the US played a leading role in GATT negotiations and promoted its transformation into the WTO in the 1990s (Sen 2003, p. 116). Thanks to special privileges and factors related to governance, funds and personnel, in these institutions the influence of the US on decision-making outcomes has traditionally been remarkable.

The US combined its hegemonic role with multilateral institutions to share transactional costs and give the hegemonic structure a greater stability (Attinà 2011, p. 97). By choosing an international order based on multilateralism, the US created legitimate and durable rules and institutions capable of promoting its interests, while reassuring weaker states of power restraint by the dominant state. These rules and institutions moderated power asymmetries, and, over time, path dependence and the growth of institutional dividends made institutional change more difficult (Ikenberry 2001, 2011).

This innovation was made possible by the domestic character and preferences of the US (Ruggie 1993), but also by an environment in which norms of self-restraint in the use of force by states, democratic practices, a world public opinion, norms of sovereign equality and universal participation, and the principle that legitimate authority is based on reciprocally binding agreements that should be equally applied to all members started being diffused (Ikenberry 2001; Modelski 2008; Finnemore and Jurkovic 2014; Reus-Smit 1997; Hurd 2007). Once established, multilateral institutions have introduced formal procedures in the government of the global political system that have transformed the political organization into an institution-based leadership organization and, through agreed procedures for collective decision-making, have linked formal-legal institutions, political legitimacy and democracy (Attinà 2008, p. 125). This creates the expectation that within multilateral organizations decision-making processes should be(come) inclusive

¹The terms organization and order will be used interchangeably.

and democratic. The relationship between the US and the current main institutions of the American-led order is then subject to pressures deriving from changes in material factors, especially power shifts, but also from institutional and normative factors, taking place at both the domestic and the international level.

Besides being a hegemon, the US is a great power. This creates a role tension. When no real challenger is on the horizon, it is more difficult for the US to sacrifice its short-term interests in favour of long-term ones (Cronin 2001). The US has always tried to build its institutional order, avoiding real restraints on its policy autonomy and political sovereignty, and to gain as much policy discretion as possible, while locking in weaker states (Ikenberry 2003), and hegemony provides the US with the privilege of instrumental or pragmatic use of multilateral organizations (Foot et al. 2003). However, the recently more frequent US recourse to unilateralism has been traced to structural factors: the end of the Cold War and the greater difficulties for American Presidents to resist parochial groups and veto players who oppose multilateralism at home. These structural factors are an obstacle towards American re-engagement with multilateral institutions, and allow—at most—fragmentary and incremental adjustments in different areas and institutional venues (Skidmore 2005, 2012).

Over time, this risks undermining the already weakened institution-based leadership order. But, whether and how the US should promote institutional reforms in view of power shifts is highly debated. According to Brooks and Wohlforth (2009, 2016), because the US is still in a position of strength and lacks immediate competitors, it should reform international institutions now that it can still persuade other states to adapt the existing institutions to the new challenges. But, this opportunity will not be available for long. Others are more sceptical that this is possible. Some believe that unipolarity is already over, so the US is no longer capable of organizing the international system: it has neither the credibility nor the legitimacy to do so, and rising powers have no interest in locking themselves in now, as they will shortly be able to reshape the international system and construct an order that reflects their interests, norms and values (Layne 2012). Others share the assumption of unipolarity, but believe that the US cannot reform international institutions now because there are no systemic reasons for weaker states to cement US power advantage into a new institutional order (Voeten 2011), or that being a unipole is not a sufficient reason to reform the institutions (Legro 2011). Schweller (2011) argues that the conditions for the US to reform the international institutions no longer exist because we have already entered a delegitimation phase, in which practices of soft balancing and criticism of the existing order are undermining and challenging the legitimacy of the hegemon's right to rule, and its established order. Finally, once in place, international organizations gain autonomy and authority (Finnemore and Barnett 2004), making attempts at reshaping them more than difficult.

Whether the new multilateral and regional organizations should be taken as an indicator of contestation in the transition from a hegemonic to a post-hegemonic era, and whether they can undermine the existing multilateral institutions, are widely-debated topics. Brooks and Wohlforth (2016) minimize the contestation element. They believe that the rising powers are only asking for an increased status

requiring minor changes to the existing order, and that initiatives such as the AIIB do not threaten the order's basic arrangements of principles. Other scholars acknowledge an element of contestation. Although there is no alternative yet, more states are seeking voice and authority, asking for a seat at the table. And the struggle for the revision of political hierarchy is taking place *both* within the main institutions of the current international order and within regions. In this respect, both the reform requests of the old institutions and the creation of the new ones, such as the AIIB, are forms of contestation. However, the non-Western states that are contesting US authority still do so operating *within* the postwar multilateral system (Ikenberry 2015a, b).

A third group of International Relations (IR) scholars emphasizes the contestation component of the new institutions. It is believed that the rising powers are already challenging the pecking order, and that they ask for a new consensus on the ordering rules that define legitimacy based on their own conceptions regarding what constitutes a legitimate order (Kupchan 2012). The analysis of Barma et al. (2007, 2013, 2014) indicates that an increasing fragmentation of the international order already exists. According to them, the growing connectedness of the non-Western world has led from contestation to competition, because the non-Western world does not recognize itself in terms of Western values, and is acting to protect its own values and interests. Institutions such as the AIIB are not substitutes for the Western-led multilateral institutions of the liberal world order and do not replace it yet, but they will shortly become an alternative. Their creation has been related to institutional competition for global governance (Ratner 2014): in the case of the AIIB, China was forced to bypass existing international institutions, because its voting share at the IMF was not commensurate with its position in the global economy. But, this was just the last move in a long list of Chinese efforts to create institutions that exclude the US and its allies. Accordingly, it would make no sense for the US to resurrect the post-World War II institutions, in which it has lost leverage anyway. On the contrary, the US should try to acknowledge the challenge; let non-Western initiatives that complement US interests live; be open when it opposes them; and seek to shape them from within, when possible (Barma et al. 2007, p. 29, 2013). Acharya (2014) agrees with Barma, Ratner and Weber that the representation of the global character of the American-led liberal hegemonic order is somewhat a myth and that the American world order is coming to an end, and that it cannot be reconstituted. In a decentred, complex and multidimensional world, new actors, besides the rising powers, are relevant, and the US can only try to accommodate, rather than coopt, all of them. But, it will have to adapt to a new multilateralism that is less conducive to American power and purpose, and to a new order made and managed in a more diversified, complex and decentralized way. Indeed, Patrick (2015) claims that both the G.W. Bush and Obama administrations have already tried to treat the rising powers as responsible stakeholders that could be integrated smoothly into the existing Western liberal order. And failed. This eventually led the US itself to an increasing use of minilateral solutions that remain inadequate for solving global problems.

Minilateralism does not necessarily undermine multilateralism in the short term, and may actually complement it. The new minilateral institutions could then be considered part of regime complexity and forum shopping: nothing really new (Voeten 2014). However, long-term consequences of the widespread adoption of minilateral initiatives are less predictable, especially if they were deliberately promoted to delegitimize universal multilateral institutions. Interestingly, American and Chinese brands of minilateral initiatives show some differences. American minilateralism is normally inter-regional or global, but ad hoc in nature, and tends to substitute multilateral organizations when they cannot act or when a minilateral solution is more effective. On the contrary, the strand of minilateral initiatives promoted by China has mostly a regional character, and points towards a stabilization of alternatives to multilateral organizations at the regional level under Chinese leadership, and therefore to the redefinition of institutional roles and power relations at the regional level. By exercising leadership in these initiatives, China builds support for an alternative to an order that, at the regional level, has seen Japan as the main actor. It also enlarges its supporting coalition, making it costlier for the US to operate in the area, and creating the preconditions to project this support also into the existing universal multilateral institutions in which China is asking for a greater role. In this respect, it seems to be in opposition more to American authority as expressed through existing multilateral organizations than to multilateralism per se, and therefore points towards a potential spatial fragmentation of the international order, allowing China regional preeminence and autonomy from existing multilateral organizations that it cannot control. The new minilateral initiatives have a significant bargaining leverage in relation to existing universal multilateral organizations because they add credibility to dissatisfied actors. Indeed, the use of newly created institutions to challenge existing ones when dissatisfied coalitions are present, and change is difficult, has been described as a common phenomenon (Morse and Keohane 2014), and institutions facing severe competition have been found more prone to reflect changes in state interests and power (Lipsky 2015a): it is the threat of exit, and therefore the existence of outside options, that justifies the distributional change so that the organization can reflect power changes over time. This is the reason why changes in the WB (which in its area has 28 competitors) are easier than changes in the IMF (which in its area has six competitors). Therefore, the AIIB will hardly undermine the WB (Lipsky 2015b), but can support its change. The importance of alternative organizations to support the credibility of threats during the negotiations phase, and promote institutional adaptation on account of power shifts, has also been highlighted by Zangl et al. (2016), who also note that the result of adaptation will be imperfect, because institutions can only adjust in a path-dependent manner.

These strands of literature suggest that, in view of the ongoing contestation and delegitimation process, it is important for the US to decide whether it wants to maintain the existing institutions, but it also suggests that serious obstacles exist. The creation of new organizations is a contestation of the current multilateral institutions of the American-led liberal hegemonic order, but this contestation takes place unevenly, leaving the possibility of outside options in some areas more than

in others. Eventually, should it succeed, institutional adaptation would be imperfect and its chance of being favourable to the US would depend on the American capacity to create a stronger coalition within the organization.

3 Multilateral Institutions in the US Security Strategy

Variations in US attitudes towards multilateral institutions have always been present, but the G.W. Bush administration is generally associated with having the greatest distance towards them. Less acknowledged is the fact that over time it re-engaged with multilateral institutions and, once it became evident that new powers were rising, it tried to integrate them within the existing institutions (Patrick 2015). However, it is the Obama administration that has so far had to deal with the effects of power shift the most, so it is useful to focus on this administration and analyse the changing role of multilateral institutions in its security strategies.

Coming after the Bush administration, Obama put US re-engagement with multilateral institutions at the centre of his programme (for a different view, see Skidmore 2012). Being aware of global challenges, his rhetoric was very supportive of the existing universal multilateral institutions, but acknowledged the need to adapt them to the new reality (Obama 2007a). Rebuilding and reform of multilateral institutions (in the case of the UN *far-reaching reform*), thanks to the US capacity to widen support towards them and to turn the rising powers into real stakeholders, was presented as an integral element of US leadership (Obama 2007b)². In this early view, the importance that Obama attributed to the existing multilateral institutions, their reform and the involvement of a broad support coalition, was clear. Indeed, when announcing his national security team, Obama (2008) referred to the need to have global institutions that work to face global challenges, and to the UN as being indispensable and imperfect, indicating that commitment to multilateralism meant commitment to reform the existing multilateral institutions. During this speech, he also announced the return of the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations to the position of member of the cabinet, and as an integral member of his team. Another initial important symbolic action was the payment to the UN of US arrears that had accumulated between 2005 and 2008, and the payment of the 2009 peacekeeping obligations in full, because the US could not otherwise lead from a position of strength (Rice 2009). This was a remarkable change, considering that arrears payment has traditionally been a thorny issue in US-UN relations (Smith 2004; Rosenthal 2004). Nevertheless, in September 2015 the US owed peacekeeping dues for 2014 and 2015 totalling more than \$2 billion, and still owed its 2015 dues to the UN's regular budget (Fitzgerald 2015).

²Interestingly, though, he only mentions weak Secretariat management practices, overextended peacekeeping operations, and resolutions condemning Israel passed by the UN Human Rights Council.

Given the increasingly *sovereignist* Congress (Drezner 2012), it has been extremely difficult for Obama to undertake bold multilateral initiatives, because to bypass the Congress the only option left was to use presidential or executive agreements (Skidmore 2012; Bellinger 2012). Indeed, partisan polarization, and conservatives' propensity to oppose treaties has led to a higher propensity of the Obama administration to use executive agreements (Voeten 2012; Peake et al. 2012; Peake 2016). However, this *stealth multilateralism* (Kaye 2013) signals a feeble domestic support that weakens the US position when it comes to reforming multilateral institutions. Domestic opposition makes it more convenient for US administrations to invest in forms of informal cooperation or minilateralism rather than engage in far-reaching reforms of the existing universal multilateral institutions (Skidmore 2012; Patrick 2014, 2015). Nevertheless, the Obama administration attributed a strategic role to multilateral institutions.

Comparing the two NSSs of the Obama administration, released in 2010 and 2015, a potential evolution in its attitude toward multilateral institutions emerges. The structure of the two documents might suggest an attention that is fading away: the 2010 NSS is considerably longer than the 2015 one, and it dedicates an entire paragraph of the section "International Order" to strengthening institutions and mechanisms for cooperation, while the same section of the 2015 NSS is organized around regions and alliances. However, the content of the 2015 NSS is less rhetorical and more incisive, and the part concerning multilateral institutions comes before those on alliances and regions, and frames them.

The 2010 NSS introduces the restructuring of international institutions in the section "Renewing American Leadership—Building at Home, Shaping Abroad", going back to the post-World War II international order building experience, strictly linking institutional reforms to American leadership and making it instrumental to American leadership. In the introduction, there is awareness that the international architecture of the 20th century needs to be restructured and adapted to respond to the new threats. But, it is also stressed how important and useful it has proven to be over time. It is considered "destructive" (White House 2010a, p. 3) to walk away from the existing international institutions, and a priority to strengthen them to face global threats that no country alone can solve. Reform efforts should make the international institutions more representative, and therefore give voice but also responsibilities to the emerging *powers*, thus suggesting that accommodation of the new great powers – more than a move to democratizing the institutions – is what the US will try to achieve. The document also stresses the importance of reaching reform together with like-minded nations. Coupled with the attention towards allies and partnership, this suggests the intention to make reforms together with the traditional European and Japanese partners (those who must sacrifice the most). In the section "International Order", dedicated to strengthening institutions, the importance of *leading* global efforts to modernize the infrastructure of international cooperation is stated up front. Again, reference is made to an intent of accommodating emerging powers, rather than to a more general increase of representativeness and responsiveness of the current institutions. Reform towards increased effectiveness is the other important point. The UN receives great attention: the US

supports reforms that improve the management of the organization, but also reform of the Security Council to enhance its performance, credibility and legitimacy. The strategy also mentions that the US is renewing leadership in the WB and IMF, leveraging US engagement and investments in these institutions.

The 2015 NSS puts much greater stress on American leadership and strength in a context in which power is shifting. In the introduction, while reference is made to a rule-based international order, to be advanced by US leadership, international institutions are only mentioned in passing, after state partners, non-state and private actors, and along with regional organizations (White House 2015, p. 3). The UN appears again in the section on “Security”. Here, the Obama administration pledges to bolster the capacities of the UN, as well as those of regional organizations. It promises to meet financial commitments, and to press for reforms in the area of peacekeeping. In the section on “Prosperity”, the G-20 is a vehicle to *reinforce* the core architecture of the international economic and financial system. The WTO is explicitly addressed. The US reaffirms its commitment to governance reforms of the IMF and WB to make them more effective and representative. Explicit reference is made to the importance of the TTIP and the TPP, that together would put the US at the centre of a free trade zone covering two-thirds of the global economy. The change in perspective of the US, though, becomes clear in the “International Order” section, in which the post-World War II institutional architecture is defined as essential and still crucial, and the US pledges to continue to embrace it. But, it is also acknowledged that it has never been perfect, and aspects of it are increasingly being challenged. The causes of stress are identified in resource demands, competing imperatives among member states, and the need for reform in some policy and administrative areas. Strengthening and modernization of the institutions is explicitly referred to, but no mention is made of thorough reforms, nor of the need to accommodate emerging powers. Given that the strategy places US leadership in the context of the existing architecture, strengthened but not thoroughly reformed, it is a defence of those existing multilateral institutions that have “served us well for the past 70 years” (White House 2015, p. 23; contra, see Davidson 2015).

A comparison of the two NSSs reveals a changed attitude of the US. Multilateral institutions gained a strategic importance. But, the need to reform them to accommodate the rising powers seems to have left room to a much more defensive stance of the existing institutions, to be marginally, not thoroughly, reformed to *adapt* to the current needs, in terms of responsiveness to global problems more than to voice requests.

It is too early to figure out whether the existing universal multilateral institutions will have a strategic role for the Trump administration, and very few indications are available so far. The new administration will act within an already weakened order, and it has already declared that several elements of the Obama strategy will change. Attention to sovereignty, as opposed to internationalism, and tendency towards isolationism, may clash with support to the existing multilateral institutions. Indeed, the WTO—but also the TPP (now cancelled) and the TTIP—has already come under attack, and speculations circulate regarding a possible US membership of the AIIB. And the choice of a politician with no foreign policy experience and not close

to the new president as US permanent representative to the UN might be an indicator of a limited interest in the UN. Nevertheless, the choice of somebody known for a capacity to mediate, rather than that of more favoured hawkish candidates, Trump's interest in keeping dialogue with Russia and China open, and the US history of instrumental use of existing multilateral institutions, suggest that we should not yet preclude—among others—the possibility of a selective engagement with multilateral institutions.

4 The US and Reforms of the Multilateral Institutions

The issue of reform is crucial to understanding the US position towards multilateral institutions. It is, however, important to understand what kind of reform the US asks for and what it allows, and whether there is a common or different pattern in each of the four institutions (UN, IMF, WB and WTO). Accordingly, each of these will be analysed separately. The description of reform will be preceded by a brief account of existing analyses of US influence on them.³

4.1 *United Nations*

The UN is the organization that is most present in the NSSs of the Obama administration, as a pillar of its security strategy, and it was the main pillar of the post-World War II American-led international order. It is also the organization that attracts the highest number of reform requests. Especially under attack is the Security Council (UNSC), for its restricted membership and the veto power of its permanent members. The dynamics in the two bodies are remarkably different. While in the initial years the US enjoyed a vast support in the General Assembly (UNGA), which it used to overcome stalemates in the UNSC, starting with the decolonization process and the entrance of new members, it progressively lost support to the point of becoming progressively marginalized. While the US voting cohesion in the UNGA on votes that the US deems important is not as low as in earlier times (in 2006, for instance, it was 27.2%), in 2015 it was 43.2%: the US has trouble getting its initiatives approved, and often finds itself in a minority group (Department of State 2006, 2015). Quite a different situation exists in the UNSC, where the US, together with its European allies, is not only the decisive coalition, but in recent years has dramatically increased its control of the Security Council's agenda-setting and decision-making outputs (Monteleone 2015). Other means of influence are the budget and personnel. If, over time, it has managed to reduce

³The present work will not focus on all the many possible sources of influence (Cox and Jacobson 1974).

Table 1 Contributions to the UN regular budget of the top ten contributors approved by the UNGA on December 23, 2015

Member state	Percentage
United States	22
Japan	9.680
China	7.921
Germany	6.389
France	4.859
United Kingdom	4.463
Brazil	3.823
Italy	3.748
Russian Federation	3.088
Canada	2.921

Author's elaboration from A/RES/70/245, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/245. Accessed 10 September 2016

Table 2 Contributions to UN peacekeeping of the five permanent members approved by the UNGA on December 28, 2015

	Effective rate in 2015	Effective rate in 2016
China	6.6368	10.2879
France	7.2105	6.3109
Russia	3.1431	4.0107
United Kingdom	6.6768	5.7966
United States	28.3626	28.5738

Author's elaboration from A/70/331/Add.1, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/331/Add.1. Accessed 10 September 2016

its contributions, the US is still by far the main contributor to the UN budget (Tables 1, 2), has traditionally used the payment of its dues and arrears as a leverage (Smith 2004; Rosenthal 2004), and still does (Sengupta 2016). As for personnel, the US has by far the largest permanent mission and comprises five ambassadors, one of which is for management and reform only (Table 3). This allows it to gain more influence, especially in the agenda setting phase (see, among others, Panke 2013). Another means of influence is related to the US special position (shared with the other permanent members) when it comes to the selection of the Secretary General.

As already mentioned, the US permanent mission at the UN has a very high rank diplomatic profile, and one of the five ambassadors deals exclusively with UN reform and management, evidence of the importance of the issue. Nevertheless, the US has shown no interest in governance reform of the UN. It has in the past agreed with the possibility of enlarging the Security Council to a few members, possibly of its choice. Clinton favoured Germany and Japan, Bush focused on Japan only, and Obama in 2010 promoted the possibility of India, without engaging too much

Table 3 Top 20 permanent missions to the UN by size, June 2016

Permanent mission	Units of personnel
United States	157
China	87
Russian Federation	84
Germany	76
Japan	51
United Kingdom	43
Nigeria	38
France	37
Brazil	36
Republic of Korea	35
Saudi Arabia	30
Senegal	30
Venezuela	29
Vietnam	28
Turkey	28
Italy	26
Spain	26
South Africa	26
Egypt	25
India	20

Author's elaboration from ST/PLS/SER.A/306, <http://www.un.int/protocol/sites/www.un.int/files/Protocol%20and%20Liaison%20Service/bb305.pdf>. Accessed 10 September 2016

(Bosco 2015). The Obama administration has declared to be open, in principle, to a “modest” expansion of both permanent and non-permanent Council members⁴. But, the US has never asked for it, and has always stated, as a precondition, that enlargement should not impact effectiveness. It also considers (like China and Russia) that it is non-negotiable for permanent members to abandon their veto power. That is why, at the end of the day, it is happy with no reform, like China and Russia. Nevertheless, as Bosco (2015) highlights, this is the most requested reform, and, although the US would have no qualified majority in the UNGA to pass its own reform, it could eventually face one promoted by some other state that wins the required two-thirds majority of the UNGA, and it would have to pay the very high political cost of using its veto power on a proposal that has gathered broad support. In the meantime, the US is allowing informal procedural reforms of the UNSC to reach greater effectiveness.

⁴Statement by Ambassador Rosemary DiCarlo in the General Assembly Plenary Debate on the Security Council Annual Report and Reform, New York, November 15, 2012, reported in Blanchfield (2015, p. 2).

Conversely, the US has shown great interest in reforming the managerial aspects of the UN and in reducing its contributions. In this respect, the Obama administration has continued along the same lines as the Bush administration. As effectively summarized by Nossel (2016), UN reform for the US centres heavily on ensuring the responsible use of US funds, and, despite a dedicated ambassadorial position and its rhetoric, Washington has not been serious about deeper UN reform. This attitude resonates with political documents (including the NSS) and speeches. Since the beginning of Obama's mandate, explicit reference was made to spending US money wisely, containing the growth of the UN budget, and increasing efficiency and accountability. Accordingly, in 2010 the US successfully fought to preserve the mandate of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and to reform how the UN undertakes "administrative and logistics support for UN field operations (the Global Field Support Strategy) to capture efficiencies within peacekeeping operations and improve the UN's capacity to support complex field missions" (White House 2010b). In 2011, UN Reform included UN arrears; budget discipline; UN peacekeeping; oversight and accountability; transparency; human resources reform (White House 2011). These were better articulated in 2012, and concerned: containing the growth of the UN budget and pressing the issue of efficiency and fiscal accountability at the UN (the issue of reduction of US contributions being the most important point); boosting transparency and advancing oversight and accountability throughout the UN system; promoting an effective UN (US leadership has been instrumental in advancing a reform of how the UN undertakes administrative and logistics support for UN field operations, in streamlining contractual arrangements within the UN, and in harmonizing conditions of service for field-based staff across the various organizations in the UN system); and—new item—promoting integrity (the US fought to prevent "abusive governments seeking leadership positions at the UN"; prevented reimbursement for troops who have been repatriated for disciplinary reasons; and fought for "all worthy non-governmental organizations" to have access to the UN) (US Mission to the UN 2012b). Indeed, economy, accountability, integrity and excellence are the four key pillars of the UN reform agenda of the US (Table 4) (US Mission to the UN 2012a). No major change in the position of the Obama administration on UN reform has since been registered (Blanchfield 2015, pp. 7–9).

All in all, this seems to be a domestic-looking reform agenda, one that speaks to the Congress and American public opinion, rather than to the world. It does not aim at changing either the rules—especially the decision-making rules—or the roles, and certainly not the function of the UN as a pillar of the American-led international order. It is also a very conservative agenda: while using the rhetoric of reform, the US allows the organization to slowly and incrementally adapt, but it keeps the structure as it is; and it may grant some governance reforms, but does not promote them. The most important reform, concerning the UNSC, is not addressed. All of this points to a preference to keep the organization as it is, because it is already conducive to US interests.

Table 4 Pillars and goals of the UN reform agenda of the US

Pillar	Goal/action
Economy	• Bring discipline and restraint to UN budgets
	• Shrink the bureaucracy and right-size of UN staff
	• Bring private sector sensibility to the UN
	• Deploy 21 st -century information technology
	• Reform the budget process
	• Revitalize the ACABQ
Accountability	• Strengthen internal oversight
	• Increase transparency throughout the UN system
	• Encourage a broader global “UN Accountability Community”
	• Improve UN procurement processes
	• Open the doors on UN websites
	• Lead by example
Integrity	• Forge a new coalition to improve HRC membership
	• Require criteria for member states to hold leadership positions
	• End peacekeeper misconduct
	• Stop discrimination against Israel
	• Fight for fairness in the Fifth Committee
Excellence	• Overhaul the human resources system to reward performance
	• Deploy the right people to the right place at the right time
	• Unify assistance and programme delivery
	• Trim outdated “Mandates”
	• Create a culture of evaluation for effectiveness

Author’s elaboration from US Mission to the UN (2012a)

4.2 *IMF and World Bank*

The influence of the US on the IMF and WB has traditionally been very high (Woods 2003; Oatley and Yackee 2004; Dreher and Jensen 2007; Stone 2008, 2011; Kilby 2009; contra, see Lyne et al. 2009). Woods (2003) has traced US influence within both the IMF and the WB in formal and informal elements and her analysis remains valid as of today (in the case of the IMF, confirmed by Stone 2011). According to Woods (2003), the US influences the two organizations through their financial structure, formal and informal processes shaping the use of resources, staffing and management, and formal structures of voting and power. In practice, all of them are strictly related. In both organizations, the US is by far the biggest funder and this is reflected in the decision-making process, and particularly in the number of votes available (Table 5).⁵ Almost all the other major shareholders

⁵Both the IMF and the WB pool the resources of their members and use that capital to fund lending to members in need, so they are less dependent than the UN on contributions for their operations.

Table 5 Distribution of quotas and votes in the IMF as of September 11, 2016 and WB (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD) as of August 29, 2016

State	IMF quota (%)	IMF votes (%)	State	WB (IBRD) quota (%)	WB (IBRD) votes (%)
US	17.47	16.54	US	17.48	16.54
Japan	6.49	6.16	Japan	7.54	7.15
China	6.42	6.09	China	4.86	4.62
Germany	5.61	5.33	Germany	4.40	4.19
UK	4.24	4.04	UK	4.12	3.92
France	4.24	4.04	France	4.12	3.92
Italy	3.17	3.03	India	3.19	3.04
India	2.76	2.64	Russia	3.03	2.89
Russia	2.72	2.60	Saudi Arabia	3.03	2.89
Brazil	2.32	2.23	Italy	2.63	2.52

Author's elaboration from IMF, <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/memdir/members.aspx>. Accessed 11 September 2016; and WB, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BODINT/Resources/278027-1215524804501/IBRDCountryVotingTable.pdf>. Accessed 11 September 2016

are traditionally close allies of the US, and the potential competitors have limited weight. This makes it easier for the US to gather support in both organizations. Interestingly, this is already the result of a major reform (see below) and leaves the US veto power on the most important decisions regarding major changes (requiring 85% majority). US contributions to the WB are still the biggest, but they are less essential for the functioning of the organization. Nevertheless, as in the IMF, its quota provides the US veto power over the most important decisions (requiring 85% majority). However, the US influences the WB, also thanks to the funds it provides to the IDA, and thanks to co-financing and trust funds. Although over time other elements have also been identified as influential in the decision-making process, leading to lending decisions (among others, Chwieroth 2013; Nelson 2014), and although literature is clear in not confusing it with full control (Stone 2008), “the record of lending from both institutions strongly suggests a pattern of US interests and preferences” (Woods 2003, p. 103). Besides the formal decision-making process, another informal way of pressure concerns the auto-selection of proposals: senior managers of both the WB and the IMF would hardly present recommendations risking US disapproval (Woods 2003, p. 107). Staff selection plays an important role, too. While nationality has diversified over time, staff recruitment has traditionally favoured staff educated in economics in Western, especially American universities, favouring *intellectual monocropping*, that tends to have an important influence on the programmes (Evans and Finnemore 2001; Nelson 2014). Indeed, as of today, despite a greater attention to the problem in both organizations, the IMF staff is heavily biased towards American nationality (Table 6), and the staff are predominantly educated in American or European universities (Table 7). In the case of the Economist programme, the main entry

Table 6 Top ten nationalities in the IMF staff, 2015

Nationality	Percentage
US	23.1
UK	4.4
China	4.4
India	4.3
France	4.1
Germany	3.1
Canada	2.8
Italy	2.6
Brazil	2.1
Japan	2.1

Author's elaboration from IMF (2015, p. 58–64)

Table 7 Educational diversity in the IMF

Region/country where the university is located	Bachelor degree (%)	Master's degree (%)	Ph.D (%)
Africa (sub-Saharan)	4.7	2.1	0.8
China	4.3	1.5	0.9
East Asia	7	1.7	0.6
India	5.1	2.6	0.3
Asia (other)	1.6	1.1	0.3
Transition countries	4.5	5.4	3.6
France	2.9	6.9	4
Germany	1.5	2.8	2.7
Italy	1.8	–	3
United Kingdom	6.7	11.7	9.9
Europe (others)	6.2	7.8	8.5
Middle East and North Africa	3.1	1.2	0.3
United States	37.3	46.7	62.6
Canada	3.5	3.6	2.3
Other Western Hemisphere	9.7	3.5	0.3

Author's elaboration from IMF (2015, p. 50-51)

point to the organization, staff are educated in American or European universities only (Table 8). As for top management, it is customary that the President of the World Bank is a candidate favoured by the US, while the managing director of the IMF is a candidate favoured by West European members. Interestingly, both Lagarde (French) and Kim (American) have been reconfirmed at the helm of the two organizations, this time with little or no competition nor discussion. The final way of influence concerns the executive boards. In these, all members are represented, but not all are present, and only the biggest contributors have a single seat each. Although they tend to operate by consensus, the voting power of member

Table 8 Economist programme 2015

Region where the university is located	Percentage
Europe	55 (25% of which in the UK)
US and Canada	45
Other regions	0

Author's elaboration from IMF (2015, p. 42)

states is taken into account in determining the result, so it is “a key ‘behind-the-scenes’ element in decision-making” (Woods 2003, p. 111). In combination with a very large delegation, that allows the US to garner support, this heavily influences decision-making outcomes. In the IMF, this also means that the US is usually the only active participant (exceptions are France and the UK, normally on the American side) (Stone 2011, p. 57).

As these data reflect a post-reform situation, it is useful to see what kind of reform has been approved and what has been the US position towards it. The IMF, as the organization with the fewest recorded changes and the least number of challengers (Lipsy 2015a), received many calls for reform, especially after the 2007 financial crisis. The first changes had taken place in 2006, with the decision to increase quotas from underrepresented countries such as China, South Korea, Turkey and Mexico, and in 2008, with financial and governance reforms to regain credibility and legitimacy. This led, in 2010, to the adoption of a reform package that included a doubling of quotas and a shift towards emerging countries, which allowed emerging countries more influence in the decision-making process and imposed a change in the composition of the executive board to increase representativeness. The adopted reforms have reduced the decision-making power of European countries, which were overrepresented, and allowed China to become the third shareholder after the US and Japan, while India, Russia and Brazil entered the top ten list of shareholders (Table 5).

However, besides the rhetorical emphasis on the rebalancing of the IMF to increase representativeness of developing countries, many scholars (among others, Wade 2011; Woods 2010; Lesage et al. 2013) have highlighted that the change has been minimal, and that those who controlled the IMF still do. The voting shares of the developed countries that were already controlling the decision-making process have been reduced from 57.9% to 55.3% (Wade 2011, p. 364). In the case of the African countries, voting shares have been reduced from 5.9% to 5.6% (Wade 2011, p. 364). The US has reduced its quotas, but it is still the only country with veto power on the most important decisions, while Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the so-called BRICS) do not have enough shares to veto decisions, even when acting as a bloc (Lesage et al. 2013, p. 11). According to Woods (2010, p. 56), the biggest winners of the reform were South Korea, Singapore, Turkey, China, India, Brazil and Mexico, so countries considered close to the US benefitted too, and “the results do little to offset the perception of emerging economies that the IMF is mostly a US organization”.

Reconstructing the US negotiating position, Lesage et al. (2013) argue that, coming after the financial crisis, the US had a strong preference for boosting international liquidity, but was aware of the need to involve the emerging powers. This also fitted well with its intentions to renew the institution and preserve its mission. The reform would have been disadvantageous for the European members that were over-represented, but not so much for the US, which, despite being under-represented would have maintained its veto power, a non-negotiable point. So, the reforms would have led to a stronger institution still led by the US, and in which the emerging members would have been induced to internalize US-promoted monetary rules and norms (Lesage et al. 2013, p. 14). Accordingly, the US pressed its European allies to make the biggest sacrifices and maintained an institution in which it has great influence. Moreover, as highlighted by Stone (2011), the US influences the IMF mostly through its informal power, so it may well have been more interested in ceding formal power, provided this did not affect its informal power. However, the US Congress stalled ratification until December 2015, so the reform was implemented only in February 2016. This has also caused a delay in another quota review, now set to conclude by October 2017 (Treasury Department 2016, p. 5), and it is considered one of the causes behind the Chinese decision to promote the AIIB. It remains to be seen whether more far-reaching reform requests of the IMF will emerge. Interestingly, in 2016 the only minor obstacle between Lagarde and its second term was the excessive attention dedicated to European countries, but she was reconfirmed nonetheless.

Reform requests had also been addressed to the WB, which responded in 2010 with an important set of reforms. The US played a major role in the reform of the WB. According to Vestergaard and Wade (2013), however, the reform allowed Western states to retain their dominant voice. Before the reform, the US (alone) and European countries (collectively) had veto power on the most important decisions, and the most advanced economies (Part I countries) — not the beneficiaries of the Bank loans (Part II countries) — had more than half of the votes. After the reform, the share of developing and transition countries increased from 42.60% to 47.19%, while the share of developed countries reduced from 57.40% to 52.81%, leaving the latter group the majority (Vestergaard and Wade 2013, p. 153). What is more important, the WB obtained this result by reclassifying high-income countries (such as South Korea, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Hungary, Poland and Kuwait) as middle-income countries, rather than by carrying out a major reform of the quotas. So, according to Vestergaard and Wade (2013, p. 153), the reality is that “the voting share of developing countries (in the proper sense of the term) increased from 34.67% to only 38.38% while the developed (high-income) countries retained more than 60%”. Moreover, the few gains made by developing countries were eroded by non-compliance, with a promise by several high-income countries not to subscribe to the full amount of shares they would be entitled to, and by the inability of the low-income countries to subscribe in full to the increase in the amount of shares to which they are entitled (Vestergaard and Wade 2013, p. 154). European countries as a bloc, and Japan as a single country, were the biggest losers in the reform. However, by subscribing to unallocated shares, “*Japan, Germany, and*

Canada have more voting power today than they had prior to the voting reforms, and the loss of voting power incurred by United Kingdom and France in the voting reform has been almost fully reversed” (Vestergaard and Wade 2013, p. 159). China, Brazil and Turkey are the countries which gained the most. Russia should have lost quotas, but it managed to maintain its position by threatening to block the reform process. According to Vestergaard and Wade (2015, p. 7), the final result is that today developing countries have less voting power than that agreed in the 2010 reform. They also highlight that this lack of real reform (in both the WB and the IMF) causes frustration in non-Western countries, to the point of considering the exit option (Vestergaard and Wade 2015, p. 10). In this respect, Kim’s lack of competitors for the position of President of the WB can be taken as a sign that there is both less pressure for a change and a lack of interest in the organization, given the now existing alternative options.

With the reform, the US has maintained its veto power and predominance in the organization. The US is now “*reviewing* [emphasis added] options for improving governance structures so as to reflect the growing weight of emerging markets in the global economy” (Treasury Department 2016, p. 10). Indeed, in 2015 the WB launched another shareholding review to discuss a possible redistribution of voting power in 2017 and “The United States strongly support this roadmap, believing that these discussions will help make the World Bank even more representative of global realities” (Treasury Department 2016, p. 12). Other US priorities include: “(1) enhancing IDA’s effectiveness in fragile and conflict-affected states, supporting private sector development and jobs, promoting opportunities for women and girls, and mobilizing domestic resources); (2) advancing the discussion on the proposals to leverage IDA’s equity; (3) advocating for our strategic priorities, including climate resilience and crisis response; (4) pressing for a successful conclusion to the shareholding formula negotiations; (5) reaching consensus on a more effective and up-to-date environmental and social safeguards framework; and (6) urging adoption of a World Bank-wide evaluation policy to better support learning and accountability” (Treasury Department 2016, pp. 13–14).

4.3 WTO

Analysing the GATT in the 1970s, Curzon and Curzon (1974) distinguished between the most influential developed countries of North America, Western Europe, and Japan, on the one hand, and the less-developed countries, on the other. They also warned that influence in the GATT was related not just to a country’s share of world trade, but also to the balance between protectionist and free trade forces in the domestic political arena. This warning is still valid today, and it helps better understanding the US position.

The WTO is in a different league, in comparison to the previously analysed organizations. First of all, it is the prosecution of the GATT, but it is also a *new* organization, born in 1995. Secondly, decisions are made by consensus, and the

governance formally leaves less room for influence (here the US has no veto power). Thirdly, starting from the 1970s, the negotiation rounds saw the EU and then Japan becoming as relevant as the US, and therefore oftentimes the emergence of competition among allies. However, in the Doha round it became evident that the US is not capable of exerting as much influence as before, even when acting in concert with the EU. Fourthly, China and Russia have joined the organization recently (2008 and 2012 respectively). Fifthly, rising powers share with the US the basic assumptions regarding international trade, and therefore learnt the rules of the organization immediately, and play by these rules. Sixthly, it has better adapted to changes in economic—especially trade—power, including all the rising powers, and has been less subject to reform requests. As a paradox, the progressive reduction of US influence within the WTO, together with the creation of a deadlock in negotiations of the Doha round launched in 2001, have reoriented the American interest towards unilateral solutions in the form of free trade agreements (FTAs).

Nevertheless, the WTO is normally considered a pillar of the American-led hegemonic order. Its consensus decision-making process has been defined as “organized hypocrisy in procedural context”, because it hides power differences to legitimize its outcomes (Steinberg 2003, p. 342). Indeed, in the previous rounds, the US and the EU have managed to dominate the agenda-setting process. As Sen (2003) highlights, the US played a prominent role in promoting and defining the scope and evolution of the GATT, and then in promoting its transformation into an international organization — defining its architecture — in the 1990s. More importantly, the defining principles of the GATT/WTO originate in US practice, so “The identity and functioning of the WTO are, partly, a manifestation of US structural power” (Sen 2003, p. 130). This means that, while formally the US is a member with no special status or powers, it has informally managed to exert some influence.

Sen (2003, p. 131) identifies US channels of influence in the sensitivity of the WTO bureaucracy to US views; its unspoken veto over appointment of the WTO general director and key staff; its capacity to be an effective negotiator thanks to its capacity to navigate complex legal systems; and its administrative capability to deal with the global economic agenda. Another vehicle of influence can be found in the accession process to the organization (Stone 2011, pp. 97–102). The process is led by the leading exporter of each product. This means that the US and the EU are the main participants. The accession process cannot be invoked as a pretext for extracting concessions, but the US and the EU are the only members who may violate that norm. Another element of structural power for the US is provided by the great size of its economy, particularly its market, that has traditionally allowed it to control the agenda and achieve its objectives by partially exiting or threatening to do so (Stone 2011, p. 94). This has enabled the US to influence the previous negotiating rounds. Finally, while not all countries have the legal and financial capabilities to recur to the very articulated Dispute Settlement Mechanism, and must choose when to initiate a dispute, the US can easily do that, and indeed it is the first initiator (Table 9), and it has a high success rate.

Table 9 Top ten WTO members involved in disputes, 1995–2015

	Complainant	Respondent
USA	109	124
EU	96	82
Canada	34	18
Brazil	27	16
Mexico	23	14
India	21	23
Japan	21	15
Argentina	20	22
Korea, Republic of	17	15
China	13	34

Author's elaboration from WTO, http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/anrep_e/anrep16_chap6_e.pdf. Accessed 12 September 2016

In the case of the WTO, the main reform request has involved the demand by India and Brazil to be included in the so-called Quad, the core negotiation group during negotiation rounds traditionally made of the US, EU, Japan and Canada. Indeed, the Quad was highly influential because it prepared WTO decisions and de facto set the agenda. According to Zangl et al. (2016), the US and the EU initially resisted the change until the Seattle failure of 1999, when for the first time a WTO ministerial conference did not manage to reach an agreement. That failure revealed that to save the WTO, institutional reforms were needed. Negotiations were “hard-nosed”, and the US and the EU both threatened to withdraw and focus on bilateral trade agreements outside the WTO (Zangl et al. 2016, p. 181). Brazil and India managed to create support coalitions favouring change, while the US and the EU made attempts at dividing them. But, in 2004 the latter had to accept the greater support for the two developing countries, and therefore replaced Japan and Canada with India and Brazil. Another meaningful change concerns the head of the organization, as for the first time a Brazilian candidate was appointed in 2013.

Nevertheless, the institutional change did not break the deadlock of the Doha round. It remains to be seen whether the WTO has adapted better than the other organizations to changing conditions (Narlikar 2010) and now registers a form of reformist multipolarity that grants it great stability (Efstathopoulos 2016). In the meantime, the deadlock has caused the US to start negotiating the TPP and the TTIP, and to consider them strategic. Still, until recently the US has declared itself to consider the WTO a “vital” aspect of its trade and investment policy, to support the expansion of WTO membership, and to be interested in strengthening the WTO's core functions (WTO 2014, p. 4). It has also claimed that it is firmly committed to preserving and enhancing the WTO's rule (WTO 2014, p. 6, 8). Indeed, the negotiations on environmental goods agreement promoted in 2014 by the US within the WTO framework are an indicator that the American interest toward the institution is still present. But, a stalled WTO would be of limited value for the US. The two FTAs may be an important element during negotiations because they signal a credible exit

option. They also set higher standards whereby, if the two agreements were to enter into force, they would be capable of imposing themselves *de facto* on other countries, even if the WTO managed to overcome its deadlock. Nevertheless, they also risk undermining the WTO (Hartman 2013). It remains to be seen whether the US will retain this strategy, as both the 2016 presidential candidates had declared to be against the two FTAs, and Trump has also declared himself to be against the WTO, thus signalling a potential return to protectionism.

5 Conclusions

In the short term, the growth of minilateral alternatives to the existing main universal multilateral institutions does not pose an existential threat to the existing international order. While minilateral institutions can complement universal multilateral ones, and be of support in providing effective *ad hoc* solutions to specific problems, they are hardly a substitute when it comes to identifying solutions to global problems. Still, they pose a challenge. The regionalization of minilateral organizations, such as the AIIB promoted by China, is a negotiating tool to gain leverage within the existing universal institutions, in order to attain an increasing role (both through the existence of credible alternative options and through the creation of a larger supporting coalition), and as a way of redefining institutional roles and power relations at the regional level. It is a signal that, should decision-making processes of universal multilateral institutions remain non-inclusive of the rising powers, spatial fragmentation of the order might ensue. However, as long as the major powers are interested in keeping a role in the universal multilateral institutions, the latter remain more relevant arenas for global competition. But, some of the regional minilateral initiatives that have been promoted signal a potential loss of interest in those arenas where major actors are underrepresented, and in that they pose a challenge to the American authority on which the current international order is based.

In its history, the US has had an intermittent relationship with multilateral institutions. However, in view of the progressive delegitimation of the institutional architecture that it promoted after World War II, and ultimately its authority, under the Obama administration the US has acted to defend the existing order. Despite more reformist claims, the reforms of the main universal multilateral institutions promoted by the US tend to be limited, and only partially responsive to power shifts, moving towards pragmatic but incomplete adaptation—when inevitable—rather than far-reaching reform. The approved reforms have also reflected a reshuffling of the traditional coalition supporting the US, now weakened, and the inclusion of new members. Most importantly, the informal means of influence of the US remains intact.

Although still dominant, the grip and influence of the US on the four universal institutions is no longer homogeneous. The WTO is the institution in which the US has lost influence the most, and it is also the one in which it may eventually lose its

role as indispensable actor. This is the reason behind the attempt at creating its own unilateral alternatives, now jeopardized by the Trump administration. The IMF and WB are the institutions where China-led regional multilateral initiatives might erode US influence the most. The UN is the universal institution in which China is greatly investing to increase its role, and it is also that in which the US is most entrenched, and where it promotes managerial but not governance reforms.

The US is at a crossroads. Promoting deeper reforms leading to a greater inclusiveness of the other major powers in the crucial decision-making processes might keep the order, but it would be a less American order. Keeping the stronghold on the institutions might be beneficial in the short term, but in the long term it risks making them irrelevant, and ultimately this too might erode the American-led order. The candidate Trump has expressed a third option: abandoning them because they are no longer conducive to American interests. But, it would hardly be surprising if, later into his administration, he chooses otherwise.

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Containment Through Trade? Explaining the US Support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership

Arlo Poletti

Abstract The chapter discusses the political-economic factors driving the US government's decision to embark in negotiations for a mega-trade agreement with key Asian partners such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The main argument advanced in this paper is that this strategy was motivated by concerns about the changing relative balance of economic power and, consequently, by the potential prospects for improving the US' relative economic position in the international economy due to the trade and investment diversion effects of the TPP. Evidence for the expected distributive effects of the agreement, the historical unfolding of events and policymakers' motivations, and lobbying by key domestic interest groups lend support to this view. The paper concludes by speculating about the TPP's implications for the stability of the multilateral trading system.

1 Introduction

On 4 October 2015, 12 Pacific Rim countries concluded negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the largest, most diverse and potentially most comprehensive Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) yet. The TPP began as a quadrilateral agreement between Brunei Darussalam, Chile, New Zealand, and Singapore known as the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement. However, this small trade agreement, that covered barely 1% of global GDP, had an openness clause whereby excluded countries could negotiate accession, and in February 2008 the United States (US) announced that it would join the negotiations on finance and investment, and explore full accession. Once the US declared its intention to seek full membership, other countries jumped on board. In 2010, formal negotiations began with Australia, Peru, Vietnam, Malaysia and the US, while negotiations with Japan, Canada and Mexico followed suit in 2011.

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The TPP is part of a broader trend in international trade relations, one characterized by a consistent and steady increase in the number, scope, and depth of PTAs in the last two decades (Dür et al. 2014). However, the TPP stands out in the broader landscape of existing PTAs. Altogether, the TPP's signatories account for around 38% of global GDP and 24% of the aggregate share of world exports. But, it is not only its economic size that makes the TPP different from existing PTAs. The TPP is different from its predecessors because of its systemic ambitions (World Bank 2016). While existing PTAs are either smaller in size or regionally concentrated (e.g. EU and North American Free Trade Agreement), the TPP is explicitly global in conception and scope, with a potential to affect trade rules and flows well beyond its area of application and, ultimately, to shape the architecture of world trade (Winters 2015).

Two other such agreements—usually referred to as mega-regional trade agreements—are currently being negotiated: the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the US, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) between the ASEAN countries, Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. Negotiations for the former were launched in 2013 largely because of the EU's fears of economic and political marginalization that could be brought about by the TPP (Winters 2015) and they are nowhere near completion, due to strong domestic opposition in the EU and, more recently, to the uncertainty caused by Brexit. Negotiations for the latter began in 2011 because of China's reaction to the US initiative and to counterbalance its influence in the region (Yong 2013). Negotiations concerning both trade initiatives, however, are still ongoing and the political-economic dynamics that underlie them are, to a significant extent, endogenous to the TPP. Understanding the politics of the TPP is therefore crucial not only to comprehend the motivations driving one of the most important initiatives in contemporary international trade relations, but also to appreciate the evolution of the international trading system at large.

This chapter investigates the political-economic factors driving the US government's decision to embark on negotiations for a mega-regional trade agreement such as the TPP. The main argument advanced here is that this strategy was motivated by concerns about the changing relative balance of economic power and, consequently, by the potential prospects for improving the US relative economic position in the international system. More specifically, the chapter contends that the TPP stems from the US desire to either exclude China from the design of the 21st-century trading system, or include it under terms more favourable than those available under status quo conditions or alternative scenarios. All PTAs, but especially those, like the TPP, that are extensive in size, scope, and depth, entail significant negative externalities for non-members, most notably in the form of trade and investment diversion (Baccini and Dür 2015). The TPP is therefore particularly attractive for the US, because it enables it to increase trade with its Asian member-partners, while simultaneously imposing significant material costs on excluded China. In addition, precisely because it worsens China's default condition of the status quo, the TPP increases the US leverage in its interactions with China over the definition of the future architecture of global trade governance.

Overall, and irrespective of China's response to it, the TPP represents the best alternative for the US to increase its relative gains vis à vis China in international trade relations.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I briefly review the relative gains debate and connect it to existing political-economy analyses on the effects of PTAs. This section highlights how, under certain conditions, PTAs can indeed serve the trading nations' aim to improve their gains relative to rival states. Second, I carry out a plausibility probe of my argument by: (1) developing a brief analysis of the expected distributive effects of the TPP and alternative trade strategies; (2) offering a brief historical overview of the events that led the US government to start the TPP negotiations and tracing US policymakers' self-declared motivations; and (3) considering the explanatory power of alternative accounts that focus on the role of domestic trade-related interests. Third, I speculate about the possible implications of the TPP for the existing structures of multilateral trade governance, suggesting that the TPP may end up strengthening, rather than weakening, such architecture. The conclusion summarizes the main findings of the paper and identifies possible avenues for further research.

2 Relative Gains and the Political Economy of Trade Agreements

The so-called absolute-relative gains debate stands at the centre of the international relations theory. Such debate started out because of realists' reactions to the publication of Keohane's *After hegemony* (Keohane 1984), the book that inaugurated the influential agenda on international institutions. For these realists, obstacles to cooperation not only lay in the existence of powerful incentives to defect from mutually advantageous agreements, but also in states' preoccupation with their relative capabilities (Grieco 1990; Mearsheimer 1994). This important realist challenge spurred an intense controversy which led to a convergence between realism and liberalism around a common set of epistemological premises, assumptions, and research questions. Ultimately, both realists and liberals came to agree on the view that this debate should not be about what to assume about states' utility functions, but rather, about identifying the conditions under which concerns about relative gains vary (Grieco et al. 1993).

The aim of this chapter is not to develop new theoretical insights into this debate; nor it is to empirically assess the validity of existing propositions about the factors that may lead to significant variations in states' sensitivity to relative gains concerns. More humbly, I am interested in ascertaining, empirically, whether a particular trade policy strategy, in casu the US decision to lead the TPP negotiations, can be plausibly ascribed to US relative gains concerns vis à vis China. Scholars and policy analysts have been engaged for more than a decade now in a normative debate on how the US should manage its economic relations with China.

These positions fall largely within two broad categories: those who believe that increasing patterns of economic interdependence, trust, and transparency are the best way to minimize the chances of conflict with rising China, and conversely, those who advocate policies of containment because they conceive of the continued increase of Chinese relative economic power as the greatest long-term challenge for US national security and economic interests (for an excellent review of these literatures see Christensen 2006).

However, logically prior to any normative debate about the desirability of the TPP, is an attempt to empirically ascertain whether such strategy can be characterized as one of engagement or containment. Doing so requires engaging in two sets of activities. On the one hand, it is important to identify a set of empirically observable implications for each perspective and then ascertain whether observed outcomes are consistent with them. On the other hand, because observed outcomes may be consistent with more than one explanation, it is crucial to discount the plausibility of potential alternative explanations.

To explain in more detail what meeting these challenges means in the specific context of the analysis of the TPP, a brief incursion into the political-economy of trade agreements is in order. The concepts of trade creation and trade diversion introduced by Viner (1950) are critical to understanding the distributive effects generated by trade agreements. Because members of a trade agreement eliminate/reduce tariffs against each other, while continuing to levy tariffs against imports a third country, they produce two effects. On the one hand, they create trade between PTA members because some of the goods produced domestically may become uncompetitive with respect to those produced by other PTA members. On the other hand, they divert trade, in that goods produced by a PTA member can become cheaper than those previously bought from outsiders. The harmonization of investment rules that has become a key feature of so-called 21st-century trade agreements (Baldwin 2014), can have a similar effect by making it easier for multinational corporations to invest in PTA members than in outsiders' markets. In sum, the most important feature of PTAs is that they are discriminatory: while they create new trade between signatories, they simultaneously decrease trade and investments between signatories and the outside world (Baccini and Dür 2015).

This brief discussion clearly suggests how PTAs can serve as an effective tool to improve a country's economic position relative to others: not only can a country increase its welfare by engaging in cooperative agreements with other countries, but it can simultaneously worsen the default condition of the status quo for non-PTA members. But, showing that the TPP entails costs in the form of trade and investment diversion for China does not suffice to corroborate the relative gains argument. Logically, for the argument to hold, two further conditions need to be met. First, and more obviously, one needs to show that alternatives to the TPP that could have brought about greater absolute gains were available to policymakers. Second, and perhaps most importantly, it is crucial to be able to show that the TPP strategy was chosen precisely with a view to containing China's rise of relative economic power. When it comes to the empirical analysis of trade policy, the potential for problems of observational equivalence between relative gains-related

arguments and theories that concentrate on the domestic distributional conflicts is very high (Moravcsik 1997). Tracing actors' preferences, motivations, and patterns of political mobilization is therefore crucial to discounting the possibility that the TPP was chosen among existing alternatives that could bring about greater gains because of the political influence of powerful domestic constituencies.

3 A Brief Empirical Analysis of the US Politics of TPP Negotiations

In this section, I present different sets of evidence to make a plausible case that the US decision to push forward TPP negotiations was motivated by a desire to contain China's economic growth. Using a combination of congruence testing and process tracing (George and Bennett 2005), the following subsections show that: (1) the TPP strategy was chosen in the presence of alternative policy strategies that could have brought about greater absolute gains; (2) the relevant trade-related interests in the US were indeed motivated by concerns about the steady increase of China's relative economic power; and (3) alternative explanations do a poor job in accounting for observed patterns of policymaking.

3.1 The Distributive Effects of TPP and Alternative Scenarios

Trade can contribute to economic performance by increasing productivity and giving producers and consumers access to a greater variety of goods at lower prices. It also stimulates competition and encourages technology and investment flows. Institutions that sustain cooperative efforts aimed at liberalizing trade are important because states face ever-present incentives to renege on trade liberalization commitments, either to improve their terms to trade relative to other trading nations, or to satisfy demands for protection that arise domestically (Poletti and De Bièvre 2016). Trading nations have long pursued these benefits within the governance system of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)-World Trade Organization (WTO), but in recent years such multilateral trade negotiations have ebbed, and mega-regional trade agreements have been deemed by some countries as a realistic alternative to move forward and further reap the benefits of trade liberalizations.

The TPP is the first mega-regional trade agreement to have been concluded in the last two decades. The TPP's disciplines for the liberalization of trade among members are deep and far reaching. As for traditional tariff trade liberalizations, the TPP immediately eliminates three-quarters of nonzero tariffs on entry in force and 99% when fully implemented. Moreover, the TPP disciplines members' regulatory

practices, including comprehensive rules for service trade and investment; improves mechanisms for setting food standards and assessing the conformity of products with them; strengthens intellectual property rights (IPRs); includes comprehensive rules on labour and environmental protection; sets new standards for access to telecommunication networks; limits restrictions on cross-border data transfers; improves trade facilitation; and devises an effective dispute settlement mechanism to address disputes that may arise over the implementation of common rules (Petri and Plummer 2016).

In order to provide a first-cut assessment of whether the TPP can be described as a strategy of “containment”, I proceed by presenting evidence of its likely distributive effects. In particular, I review existing studies that have estimated the welfare, trade, and investment flows effects of the TPP, focusing in particular on such effects for the US and the China. In 2012 and 2016, the Peterson Institute of International Economics (PIIE) conducted comprehensive studies, employing a Global Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model, of the TPPs potential macroeconomic effects. In 2012, the PIIE estimated that the TPP would yield an annual increase in real incomes in the US of 78 billion dollars (0.4% above the projected baseline), largely driven by a 124 billion annual increase in exports (4.4% above the baseline), and that it would yield an annual increase in outward Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) of 169 billion and inward FDIs of 47 billion (respectively 1 and 1.9% above the baseline) (Schott et al. 2013). The most recent study revised these figures upwards, estimating that the TPP would increase annual real incomes in the US by 131 billion (0.5% above the baseline) and that annual exports would increase by 356 billion (9.1% above the baseline) (Petri and Plummer 2016).

Both studies consistently show that the TPP would also incur significant costs for China, the most important Asian trading partner excluded from the agreement. Indeed, 2013 estimates suggest the TPP bringing about an annual decrease of real incomes by 46.8 billion (0.3% below the baseline), largely due to an annual export decrease of 57.4 billion (1.2% below the baseline). More recent estimates show that China’s losses might be less substantial, although they remain significant. In such studies, the TPP is estimated to bring about an annual decrease in real income of 18 billion (0.1% below the baseline) and a small increase in annual exports by 9 billion (0.2% above the baseline).

In short, these studies clearly show that the TPP could be expected to lead to a change in relative economic power, increasing gains for the US while simultaneously bringing about significant costs for China. But, perhaps more critical, from the perspective of ascertaining whether the US trade strategy can be defined as one of containment, are estimates of the likely distributive effects of alternative trade strategies. The PIIE not only assessed the likely welfare effects of the TPP, but also estimated the gains and losses of alternative scenarios, including one in which the TPP-track and other intra-Asia PTAs were to lead to the hypothetical creation of a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP), a potential new mega-regional trade agreement involving the US, China and Japan, the three trade superpowers in the region. The numbers here are impressive. Relative to 2013 estimates on the TPP, a hypothetical FTAAP would bring about almost four times as large an annual real

income increase for the US (266.6 billion, 1.31% above the baseline), and a five times as large annual exports increase (575.9 billion, 20.5% above the baseline). However, China's numbers under this scenario are even more impressive. Such estimates suggest that a FTAAP scenario would yield an annual real income increase for China by 678.1 billion (3.93% above the baseline), driven by an impressive annual export increase by 1505.3 billion (32.7% above the baseline).

In short, while the US could have pursued a strategy of inclusion of China in its Asian trade policy strategy, it opted for one that excludes China. The figures provided above show that the former could have brought about much greater absolute gains than the latter. However, in the former scenario, absolute gains would have been even greater for China, leading to a further worsening of the US relative economic power. These very basic findings are in line with the characterization of the TPP as a political strategy of containment of China. It is important to mention that such a broad-based strategy of inclusion of China in a large trade block with all relevant Asian trading partners was not just a theoretical possibility. A few years earlier, confronted with the same problem of how to deal with China's economic rise, US policymakers seriously considered a strategy of inclusion. In 2006, for instance, the US formally proposed to the members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP). President Bush suggested at the Hanoi APEC summit in November 2006 to work towards an APEC free trade agreement, with a view to assuring Asian governments that they had disposed of an alternative to processes of regional economic integration dominated by China, and that they could rely on the US continued willingness to exercise a stabilizing role in the region (Hoadley 2007; Terada 2012). The proposal was received coldly by other APEC members and in the end negotiations failed to get off the ground. However, it is important to stress that the possibility of creating an Asian-wide trade block was given serious consideration by US policymakers as a possible response to the perceived risk of being excluded from a China-led process of economic integration in the region.

3.2 A Brief Overview of Events and Policymakers' Motivations

The characterization of the TPP as a strategy of containment towards China can be further corroborated by briefly considering how the US decision to lead the TPP negotiations emerged, and by tracing key policymakers' self-declared motivations.

As mentioned above, the US officially started negotiations for the TTIP in November 2010, together with a number of other Pacific countries. In the preceding years, the US had negotiated several PTAs with Asia Pacific countries—Chile, Peru, CAFTA, Singapore and Australia—and had pursued economic cooperation with all regional stakeholders within the framework APEC. As Barfield (2016) notes, the period between the end of the Cold War and the mid-2000s was one

characterized by economic goals taking priority in the making of US trade policy, while China's subsequent economic and political power was still just in the horizon. During this period, trade relations with China were still seen largely through the lens of a strategy of integration, the prevailing US approach towards China since the 1970s (Blackwill and Tellis 2015). As epitomized by the US support for China's accession to the WTO in 2001, the US strategy in this period was consistently shaped by a desire to integrate China in the international economic system.

A number of factors, however, seem to have contributed to shifting the US strategy into one of consistent balancing of China's rise, as means of protecting both the security of the US and its allies, and the position of the US at the apex of the global hierarchy, by preventing changes to its relative power. In the background loomed the effects of the financial crisis, the rapid expansion of the Asian economies, and the stalemate of the Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations. But, most importantly, what determined Obama's administration decision to support the TTP seems to have been the deteriorating diplomatic and security conditions in the Asian region. Three sets of issues played a particularly important role in this context. First, in 2009, North Korea heightened tension in the Korean peninsula and threatened South Korea by conducting nuclear tests, and then shooting off two rounds of short-range missiles across the Sea of Japan. Pressure mounted immediately for a show of support for South Korea, resulting from the administration's own accounts in a decision by the US President to announce a goal of completing negotiations on the stalled US-South Korea PTA (Barfield 2016).

Second, in this period China had hardened its attitude and diplomacy on a raft of disagreements and conflicts with its East Asia neighbours. In May 2009, just after the Obama administration took up office, Beijing published a map of South China containing nine dashed lines in a U-shape that laid claim to the majority of this maritime area, subsequently clashing repeatedly with its neighbours inside this self-proclaimed perimeter—particularly the Philippines and Vietnam. In addition, the PRC grew bolder in contesting the claims of South Korea and Japan, respectively, in the Japan and East China Seas.

Finally, in a move whose reverberations are still rippling outward, in July 2012, the PRC starkly intervened in the deliberations of ASEAN foreign ministers. Behind the scenes, Beijing diplomats leaned heavily—and successfully—on Cambodian officials to block the publication of a joint communiqué alluding to the clashes in the South China Sea and calling for a united ASEAN front on these issues.

While the Bush administration had already started thinking about a *return to Asia*, these sets of factors intensified the perception that time was ripe to upgrade the US role in the Asia Pacific region, raising the region's priority in US military planning, foreign policy and trade policy (Manyin et al. 2012). As a result, the Obama administration came to formalize the so-called “pivot” to Asia, a policy strategy based on two pillars: a military and security one based on a rebalancing US military forces towards Asia, and an economic one based on a more aggressive trade policy embodied in the TPP. Secretary of State Clinton's decision to take her first trip abroad to Asia, rather than to Europe, as was the tradition, was meant to

symbolize this strategic shift. In an effort to show the credibility of the US commitment towards Asia, in 2010 the US took a firm position on the fractious maritime issue—and steadfastly refused to back away from this position, despite a drumfire of criticism from Beijing (Barfield 2016). But, the most important substantive capstone of the US pivot to Asia came with President Obama’s nine-day trip to Asia in November 2011, during which he solemnly declared: “As President, I have, therefore, made a deliberate and strategic decision—as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends” (US Government 2011a).

The brief historical narrative developed so far lends support to the view that a combination of changing structural conditions and heightening tensions with China provided a stimulus for the US administration to push the TPP forcefully forward. An analysis of US key policymakers’ self-proclaimed objectives further corroborates this view. In what is perhaps the most systematic exposure of her views about the US pivot to Asia, Secretary of State Clinton boldly declared at the APEC Leaders’ meeting in November 2011, that the 21st century would be America’s Pacific century, justifying such a statement by arguing:

What will happen in Asia in the years ahead will have an enormous impact on our nation’s future, and we cannot afford to sit on the sidelines and leave it to others to determine our future for us [...] And there are challenges facing the Asia Pacific right now that demand America’s leadership, from ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea to countering North Korea’s provocations and proliferation activities to promoting balanced and inclusive economic growth. The United States has unique capacities to bring to bear in these efforts and a strong national interest at stake (US Government 2011b).

A few days later, President Obama further elaborated this view, making a clear the causal links between a strategy of rebalancing and the TPP by stating:

Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation, needless suffering or human progress [...] My guidance is clear. As we plan and budget for the future, we will allocate the resources necessary to maintain our strong military presence in this region. We will preserve our unique ability to project power and deter threats to peace [...] And with Australia and other partners, we’re on track to achieve our most ambitious trade agreement yet, and a potential model for the entire region — the Trans-Pacific Partnership [...] We stand for an international order in which the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all people are upheld. Where international law and norms are enforced. Where commerce and freedom of navigation are not impeded. Where emerging powers contribute to regional security, and where disagreements are resolved peacefully. That’s the future that we seek (US Government 2011a).

Over time, the US administrations have become even more explicit in arguing that the TPP stands at the intersection of the US diplomatic and security strategies and its broad economic goals in Asia. In 2014, the US Trade Representative (USTR), Michael Froman, explicitly argued,

in the 21st century, the oldest and strongest strategic argument for trade — its contribution to the U.S. economy — has only grown stronger. Increasingly, though, economic clout is a key yardstick by which power is measured and a principal means by which influence is

exercised. Today, market changes are watched just as closely as military maneuvers, and decisions in boardrooms can matter as much as those made on battlefields (Froman 2014).

And to clarify how the TPP fits in the context of the above conceptualization of US trade policy, a year later he stated:

TPP is a critical part of our overall Asian architecture. It is perhaps the most concrete manifestation of the President's rebalancing strategy towards Asia. It reflects the fact that we are a Pacific power and that our economic well-being is inextricably linked with the economic well-being of this region — the home to some of the largest and fastest growing economies of the world and the home to what is expected to be the largest middle class in the world. The TPP's significance is not just economic, it's strategic — as a means of embedding the United States in the region, creating habits of cooperation with key partners, and forming a foundation for collaboration on a wide range of broader issues (Froman 2015).

Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, further stressed this point in a recent speech, arguing:

TPP also makes strong strategic sense, and it is probably one of the most important parts of the rebalance, and that's why it has won such bipartisan support. In fact, you may not expect to hear this from a Secretary of Defense, but in terms of our rebalance in the broadest sense, passing TPP is as important to me as another aircraft carrier. It would deepen our alliances and partnerships abroad and underscore our lasting commitment to the Asia-Pacific. And it would help us promote a global order that reflects both our interests and our values (US Department of Defense 2015).

This brief review of policy statements by key US officials suggests that the US political elite shared the concerns of those who feared that, without a trade strategy of containment, China would continue along the path to becoming a conventional great power with the full panoply of political and military capabilities, all oriented towards realizing the goal of recovering from the US the primacy it once enjoyed in Asia, as a prelude to exerting global influence in the future (Blackwill and Tellis 2015).

3.3 What About the Domestic Politics?

The evidence presented so far makes a plausible case for characterizing the TPP as a strategy of containment of China's growing role in the international economic system and within the Asian region. The *relative-gains* argument, focusing exclusively on states as the relevant actors in international politics, overlooks the role that powerful domestic constituencies can play in shaping states' trade policy strategies. Neglecting the role of these domestic actors however, can be problematic from an empirical standpoint, because observed outcomes can be equally accounted for by explanations that focus on such domestic political processes. To be more specific, a trade strategy that maximizes relative, rather than absolute, gains may have nothing to do with states' preoccupations with the distribution of relative power in the international system, but instead may be driven by powerful

protectionist forces that manage to capture policymakers. The endogenous trade tariff literature has long noted that the preferences, and organizational and political action by domestic interests matter in shaping trade policy outcomes, showing how special interests can systematically bias trade policy towards protection, irrespective of whether trade liberalization increases the aggregate welfare of societies or not (Grossman and Helpman 2001). In short, when empirically assessing the plausibility of the relative gains argument, the possibility that such an argument is observationally equivalent to explanations that focus on the role of domestic organized constituencies, needs to be accounted for (Moravcsik 1997). Logically, in this context, this would mean showing that the TPP cannot be fully traced back to the preferences and political influence of organized societal stakeholders and, therefore, that systemic factors, i.e. relative gains concerns, have played an independent causal effect. And this is of course difficult, because ideally one would need to analyse such groups' preferences on the TPP and alternative trade strategies, while only preferences over the TPP can be traced, given that alternative trade strategies did not materialize, i.e. FTAAP. With this caveat in mind, I briefly review the preferences of domestic trade-related interests over the TPP, and then conduct a brief counterfactual exercise to try and deduce what their preferences over alternative scenarios would look like.

The TPP negotiations have, from the very beginning, been broadly supported by US business groups. Business Roundtable supported the agreement from the very start and recently Chairman Tom Linebarger described the TPP as a “significant agreement that will promote U.S. economic leadership and much-needed U.S. growth and jobs by expanding U.S. trade opportunities and setting strong new rules for international commerce” (Business Roundtable 2016). The American Chamber of Commerce similarly supported the deal throughout negotiations, deeming the prospective agreement as an opportunity to “boost economic growth, provide new opportunities for small businesses, and enhance job creation in the U.S. and the other TPP nations” (US Chamber of Commerce 2016). Similar enthusiastic statements in support of the TPP have been released by the association representing farmers' interests, the American Farm Bureau Federation (2015), the National Small Business Association (2015), and the National Retail Federation (2015). While initially quite tepid about the prospective agreement, the National Association of Manufacturers also greeted the successful conclusion of negotiations with enthusiasm (National Association of Manufacturers 2016).

The TPP negotiations have also attracted criticism. The confederation of US trade unions, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) for instance, has consistently and vocally opposed the agreement (AFL-CIO 2016). The most vocal opposition to the agreement, however, has come from various types of civil society organizations claiming that it would harm social, consumer and environmental justice (Citizens Trade Campaign 2016).

The TPP received wide support from key business constituencies, but was met with vocal resistance by civil society organizations skillfully engaging in the strategic use of social media to shape and vocalize constituency preferences, a configuration of the domestic political trade conflict that is quite typical of trade

agreements that reach deeply into practices of domestic governance such as the TPP (Young 2016). The ability of these groups to make their voice heard and weigh politically is witnessed by the recent decision by pro-TPP business groups to ramp up their lobbying efforts to target undecided Congress members, and thus secure approval of the TPP in Congress. However, the fact that the TPP was met with opposition by organizations representing civil society interests is not sufficient for discounting mainstream political-economy accounts of trade policy as fully implausible. In the end, all these accounts share the view that, given the collective action problems groups face when deciding to mobilize politically, the trade policymaking process is largely skewed in favour of concentrated interests (Olson 1965).

In order to weaken the domestic politics argument, and thus make a stronger case for the relative gains argument, one would need to show that, while supporting the TPP, business groups had a stronger preference for alternative trade strategies. As mentioned above, tracing preferences with respect to such alternative strategies is difficult because the US idea of supporting an Asia Pacific-wide trade agreement, the FTAAP, never got off the ground and was soon replaced by the TPP strategy. However, it is reasonable to argue that business preferences would have been equally, if not more, supportive, of a strategy of trade liberalization in the Asian region that included China.

China has emerged in recent years as a key hub in the context of so-called Global Value Chains, that is processes of production increasingly fragmented and dispersed across different jurisdictions (Gereffi et al. 2005). As a result of an improved and more efficient telecommunications and transportation infrastructure, trade and investment liberalization, along with greater competition, have significantly shifted the final assembly of many categories of US consumer goods to China, with components and parts supplied by several other Asian economies. Thus, the economies of the US and China have experienced a dramatic increase in their level of interdependence as a result of these processes of globalization of production (Nanto 2010).

This evolution has important consequences for the politics of US-China trade relations. In general, the integration of countries in Global Value Chains (GVCs) greatly increases the domestic support for trade liberalization, not only because it increase opportunities to access foreign markets, but because it also lowers the costs for imported inputs (Eckhardt and Poletti 2016). In other words, GVCs change the domestic political conflict over trade policy and increase trade liberalization preferences because import-dependent firms—goods-producing firms for which imports play a pivotal role in the production process (Eckhardt 2015)—become key political players next to traditional exporters. These dynamics are particularly relevant in the context of US-China trade relations because in recent years more than 80% of US merchandise exports and imports has taken place within global networks of production and distribution that have China at their core (Bernard et al. 2005).

With these considerations in mind, it thus seems eminently plausible to argue that the observed business support for the TPP should be equally, if not more intensely, observed in a scenario in which the US were to push forward a trade

strategy in the Asian region that included China. While this counterfactual exercise does not definitively disconfirm a domestic politics explanation for the TPP, it lends support to the view that domestic pressures alone can hardly account for why the US decided to exclude China from its Asian trade policy strategy.

4 Implications for Global Trade Governance

Systematically engaging with the normative debate on the desirability of different strategies to cope with rising China is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, its findings are of some relevance to those involved in such debate. In particular, the observation that the TPP is part of a broader strategic shift, centred on the idea that the US should actively seek to contain China's rising power, begs the question of what the implications for existing structures of multilateral trade governance of such strategy are. Whether PTAs are building or stumbling blocks for the multilateral trading systems has been hotly debated for years (Ravenhill 2008). The signing of the TPP and the ongoing negotiations concerning other mega-regional trade agreements make this question even more compelling. Can the WTO continue to play a role as an institutional forum to effectively pursue negotiated multilateral trade liberalization, or should we come to terms with the idea that PTAs, and mega-regional trade agreements in particular, will be the only hothouses where tomorrow's negotiated trade liberalization are going take place?

One way of addressing this question is to ask whether there are mechanisms to ensure that trade liberalization commitments undertaken in these trade agreements will be compatible with existing WTO commitments. The answer to this question is clearly negative. While it is true that trade liberalization commitments undertaken in mega-regional trade agreements can have a *public good* character, in that they can generate benefits that can also be appropriated by non-members (Pauwelyn 2015), it has been widely noted that existing rules and political dynamics in the WTO do not allow for an effective monitoring of the consistency between WTO and PTA rules (Mavroidis 2015; Winters 2015). For all its relevance, however, this debate obscures the fundamental question of whether mega-regional trade agreements can generate political dynamics that are, in the long term, instrumental to reviving the centrality of the WTO as a governance system that can effectively foster negotiated trade liberalization at a multilateral level. This is a crucial question for International Relations theorists because it directly speaks to the debate on the political foundations of the post-World War II multilateral order.

Some commentators argue that mega-regional trade agreements do not bode well for the WTO. Winters (2015, pp.15–16), for instance, argues that mega-regional trade agreements are likely to “leave the world trading system fractured and discriminatory [...] undermining what has been one of the major triumphs of the post-war settlement”.

While it is impossible at this stage to fully anticipate the consequences of these agreements, I argue that there is more ground for optimism than the above

interpretations suggest. And it is, in fact, precisely the discriminatory nature of the TPP, and potentially of other mega-regional trade agreements, which provides room for such optimism. The TPP's likely implications for the multilateral trading system will depend largely on China's response to it, which, in turn, will critically hinge on the severity of the negative distributional consequences of the agreement. In abstract, China's possible responses to a mega-regional trade agreement such as the TPP include: investing even more political capital in pushing forward a rival block such as the RCEP; the unilateral adoption of TPP rules and standards; joining the club; or a multilateralization of TPP rules via a comprehensive WTO agreement (Aggarwal and Evenett 2015). The choice China will make depends largely on how much the TPP worsens the default condition of the status quo for China. Paradoxically, the more the TPP hurts China, the weaker its bargaining position, and the greater the likelihood that it will be willing to pursue a strategy of constructive engagement with its main trading partners (Dür 2007).

Given the concentration of China's exports and investments in countries such as the US and Japan, with which it has not yet signed a PTA, respectively the first and third largest markets for Chinese exports and the most important investors from the developed economies, China is obviously the TPP's major loser (Deardoff 2014). Moreover, the interconnectedness of China's economy with the TPP members' economies, in the context of global value chains, makes it unlikely that the creation of a rival block, e.g. the RCEP, will be seen as a viable alternative to fully offset the TPP's losses. Given this constellation of distributive effects and political alternatives, multilateralizing the rules of a mega-regional trade agreement such as the TPP might therefore plausibly end up being the most effective strategy for China, allowing it to get something in exchange for taking on the TPP's provisions (Aggarwal and Evenett 2015).

Anecdotal evidence suggests the plausibility of this view. Chinese elites promoted China's entry in the WTO—a political move that epitomizes China's strategic shift from multilateral sceptic to multilateral champion in the second half on the 1990s—also as a response to what they perceived as a US power politics attitude in the region (Christensen 2006). Xiatong (2015) considers Chinese reactions to mega-regional trade negotiations that exclude China, such as the TPP and the TTIP, and reports key Chinese trade officials claiming “the regional trade arrangements that we are now discussing might be multilateralized [...] the pendulum of trade liberalization might swing back to multilateralism at the end of the day” (Sun 2013, quoted in Xiatong 2015, p. 122). In a similar vein, Eliasson and Garcia-Duran (2016) report evidence suggesting that China and India consented to the WTO trade facilitation agreement when they realized that the TPP was being concluded, as well as when the EU systematically engaged in PTA negotiations with their Asian partners. Of course, the possibility remains that China will decidedly move towards strategies of confrontation that might ultimately undermine the multilateral trade governance structures. However, given the importance of the TPP members' markets for China, and their increasing interpenetration of global value chains, I believe that strategies of constructive engagement within the existing multilateral order are more likely to materialize.

5 Conclusion

This paper aimed to make a plausible case that TPP is part of a broader strategic shift in the US approach towards China, one that prioritizes containment over integration. In a recent report titled *Revising US Grand Strategy Toward China* and published by the Council on Foreign Relations, Blackwill and Tellis (2015, P. 4) note that, “because the American effort to integrate China into the liberal international order has now generated new threats to U.S. primacy in Asia—and could eventually result in a consequential challenge to American power globally—Washington needs a new grand strategy toward China that centers on balancing the rise of Chinese power rather than continuing to assist its ascendancy”. Sustaining the US status in the face of China’s rising power, according to the report’s authors, would require, among other things, “creating new preferential trading arrangements among US friends and allies to increase their mutual gains through instruments that consciously exclude China” (Ibidem: 5).

This paper has shown empirically that it is precisely this view about how the future of US-China relations should evolve that has influenced the US decision to strongly support negotiations for an ambitious, comprehensive, and deep mega-regional trade agreement such as TPP up until the last presidential elections. Such an agreement was viewed by the Obama administration as consistent with a strategy of containment or rebalancing of China because it would enable the US and its Asia-Pacific allies to increase mutual gains, while simultaneously imposing costs on China. To put it more succinctly, the TPP was devised with a view to increasing US relative gains *vis à vis* China.

At the time of writing, the presidential race ended with the surprising victory of Donald Trump. In line with the critical stance he took on the TPP and other free trade agreements throughout the campaign, in a statement outlining his policy plans for his first hundred days in office, Donald Trump vowed to issue a note of intent to withdraw from the TPP “from day one”, calling it “a potential disaster for our country”, and aiming for a shift towards the negotiation of “fair bilateral trade deals that bring jobs and industry back” (The Guardian 2016). And on his fourth day in office President Trump kept his promises, signing an executive order formally ending the US participation in the TPP after discussing American manufacturing with business leaders (The Washington Post 2017). This article has shown that a retreat from TPP may actually turn out to weaken the US capacity to compete against China in the global economy. Mr. Trump’s himself on many occasions throughout the electoral campaign bashed China on trade and currency issues and identified in China’s economic competition one of the main dangers for domestic industry growth. And yet, he decided to stick to its promise to withdraw from one of the only policy instruments that can effectively contain China’s growing economic power. There are already signs that China may take full advantage of the American trade policy shift. As the New York Times reports, the RCEP, the China-led rival trade pact that aims to excludes Washington from the Asian region, is already getting new attention from countries such as Peru and Malaysia who signed TPP

and now plan to focus on trade negotiations with China (The New York Times 2016). More generally, those who advocated the US withdrawal from TPP overlook its potential in fostering international stability by putting political pressure on China to play a key role in revitalizing existing multilateral trade institutions.

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United States Antipiracy Policies: Between Military Missions and Private Sector Responsabilization

Eugenio Cusumano and Stefano Ruzza

Abstract This chapter analyses the antipiracy policies introduced by the United States (US) in the face of the substantial resurgence of piracy occurring in the first decade of the 21st century, with a specific focus on the wide Gulf of Aden region. The analysis assesses how much the US is able and willing to defend the freedom of the seas. The main conclusion is that, thanks to burden sharing and private sector engagement, the US has been capable of providing such a protection at limited cost. In the frame of the theory of hegemonic stability, this means that the US has been able to contain overstretching, while still delivering a global common good. The chapter is structured as follows. Section 1 introduces basic elements of international order at sea, linking them to US antipiracy operations in historical perspective. Section 2 analyses the US maritime sector of the late 2000s/early 2010s, with a specific focus on the US merchant fleet and on the impact of piracy off the Horn of Africa on it. Section 3 summarizes the US approach to maritime security in the post-9/11 world. Section 4 considers the US role in military antipiracy missions, while Sect. 5 focuses on US engagement with the private sector meant to “re-sponsabilize” it for the delivery of its own security. The final section of the chapter summarizes the main findings and draws the conclusions.

1 Introduction: The US, Liberal Order at Sea, and the Struggle Against Piracy

International order at sea can be summed up by Hugo Grotius’ notion of *Mare Liberum*. The high seas are an anarchic space where every vessel has the right of innocent passage, and freedom of trade rests on this freedom of movement. State

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jurisdiction on the open sea is minimal and applies to vessels only (Grotius 1609; Thomson 1994). Anarchy does not mean absence of order though, as freedom of navigation and trade have to be guaranteed in the face of a variety of threats coming from states and non-state actors alike. Grotius' liberal argument stands even when put in a realist frame, as it costs less to defend free movement (and free trade) than to attempt achieving hegemony on the seas. Hence, state interests can be seen as a force tempering anarchy at sea (Murphy 2007). It is not coincidental that Alfred Mahan considered defence of free trade as the first task of a navy, and conceptualised sea power as dependent on the presence of both a strong navy and a large merchant fleet (Mahan 1890; McMahon 2016). The line between defending free trade at sea for one's own and benefitting the international community as a whole is naturally blurred, as it is obvious that if a state gets the most out of free trade, defending it on behalf of everybody also means pursuing its own national interest. In short, it could be said that the maritime domain allows for framing of a maritime security discourse (Bueger 2015), where the protection of liberal order, the defence of self-interest and the pursuit of power can easily go hand in hand.

It is easy to see why freedom of the seas has traditionally been important for the US, a country that borders two oceans and was born out of a colony dominated by the supreme maritime power of its time: Britain. The US eventually developed first into an independent insular power and later into a global superpower, but relied heavily on maritime trade throughout their history. The US Navy was officially established on 13 October 1775, but then disarmed after the War of Independence, mostly for economic reasons. Hence, the newborn US soon found itself in need of defending its merchant fleet from both state and non-state threats. To this end, first the US Congress allowed merchant vessels to carry arms in order to fend off raiders and privateers (largely French). Then, in the early 19th century, the US Navy was relaunched. The reason for this rebirth is directly related to the most classical threat posed against merchant vessels: piracy. The return of the US Navy was due to the need to confront Barbary pirates and privateers threatening American merchant ships in the Mediterranean (Carafano 2012; McKnight 2012; Murphy 2007; Naval History and Heritage Command 2015). Antipiracy operations conducted by the US Navy in the West Indies a few years later (1817–1825) further exemplify the importance of the nexus between a capable navy, the protection of freedom at sea and the fight against piracy in US history. With the declining role of pirates and privateers in the late 19th century, the US Navy progressively shifted its role to the projection of naval power, giving substance to Mahan's vision (Carafano 2012; Murphy 2007). This shift, however, did not imply that its merchant fleet was no longer in need of protection. Rather, it meant that the main threat posed against it came mainly from other states (i.e. navies) instead that from non-state actors (i.e. pirates). An excellent example is provided by the US involvement in World War I, which occurred in response to Germany's indiscriminate submarine warfare.

The beginning of the 21st century brought about a rebirth of piracy, especially off the Horn of Africa and in the Gulf of Aden, where 851 attacks—amounting to 45% of all incidents recorded globally in the period—occurred between 2008 and 2012 (Chalk 2016, p. 123). How did the US react to this resurgence of piracy? This

question relates directly to the main focus of this volume, as the US reaction to local disorder—i.e. piracy and maritime crime in the Gulf of Aden and adjacent waters—is linked to the protection of the international order at sea. But, it can easily relate to US vital interests as well, since in 2011 US foreign trade accounted “for about 14.7% of global waterborne trade (in metric tons)” and “46.9% of U.S. foreign trade, in terms of value [...] was moved by vessel” (US Department of Transportation 2013, pp. 6–7). Furthermore, given the minimal jurisdiction in force on the high seas, the fight against piracy necessarily brings into focus issues of international engagement, cooperation and partnership. The US has been part of two of the three main coalitions fighting piracy off the Horn of Africa (CTF-151 and Nato Ocean Shield) and actively coordinated with the third (the European Union mission EUNAVFOR Atalanta). The US engagement was not only directed towards state actors, as American state institutions reached out to the private sector in a so-called “responsabilization” effort. This move was meant to make the private sector an active part in the struggle against piracy as well.

All of this is particularly interesting to read in the frame of the theory of hegemonic stability (THS). THS posits that hegemonic powers can uphold order by providing common goods. Freedom of the seas is a case in point. At the same time, hegemonic powers have to pay the costs for such an endeavour, while other states pay a limited share (or free ride entirely). The price paid for the protection of goods, of which the hegemon is the prime but not the only beneficiary, may become a reason for its own decline (Kindleberger 1973; Gilpin 1981; Snidal 1985). As will be shown, in fighting piracy the US has engaged in multilateral cooperation and coordination, along with norm entrepreneurship concerning the role of private security companies (Krahmann 2013). These two lines of action allowed to contain the costs paid by the US for the protection of the freedom of the seas as a global common good.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section analyses the US maritime sector, with a specific focus on the US merchant fleet and the impact of piracy off the Horn of Africa. By assessing how much the US is directly affected by Somali piracy, this section allows us to put US antipiracy efforts into perspective and to better evaluate the extent to which the US involvement in antipiracy activities is influenced and shaped by direct concerns. Section 3 summarizes core elements of the US maritime security policy of the 2000s, with a specific focus on freedom of the seas, the need to counteract piracy, the importance of international cooperation and how to embed the private sector in the provision of maritime security. Section 4 considers the role and involvement of the US in the frame of military antipiracy missions, while Sect. 5 focuses on US engagements with the private sector. Both these latter sections share the leading questions, i.e. how large is the magnitude of US antipiracy efforts; what is the extent to which the US is carrying the burden of antipiracy policies worldwide; and how much this is reduced by delegation and burden-sharing. Finally, Sect. 6 draws the conclusions and summarizes the main findings of this chapter, linking them back to the book’s overarching questions.

2 The US Merchant Fleet and Its Exposure to Piracy

The US-flagged merchant fleet used to be very large, but after the end of World War II it started to decline steadily (McMahon 2016; US Department of Transportation 2016). In the years 2008–2013, it ranked twentieth worldwide in terms of deadweight tonnage (DWT), averaging approximately 12 million DWT (UNCTAD 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). This figure, however, no longer tells of a global maritime trading power. Already in 2007, out of 7200 container ships worldwide, only 89 were US-registered, in comparison to 1250 in Europe and 860 in Greater China (Gapper 2011). Moreover, there are no US firms among the top 20 operators of container ships, as listed by UNCTAD in its annual reports on maritime transport (UNCTAD 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013).

Today's US merchant fleet is divided into two parts. The smaller part has an international vocation, while the largest one is dedicated to domestic business only. In 2011, of 60 US-flagged tankers, 54 were meant for exclusive intra-US use. In the same year, of 720 ocean-able US-owned ships, only 193 were US-flagged, and of these, only 96 were operating internationally. All in all, only about 2% of foreign trade is conducted on ships flying the Stars and Stripes (US Department of Transportation 2011a). This disparity between a larger domestic fleet and a residual international one is due to the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, also known as the Jones Act. This act mandates that “any vessel transporting goods or passengers between two points in the United States or engaging in certain activities in US waters must be US owned, US built, and US crewed”, and of course US-flagged (AMP 2016). The rationale behind the act was the protection of strategic assets indispensable to resupply and support US military expeditionary capabilities (Frittelli 2015). While the Jones Act achieved this goal, it did nothing to stop the substantial decline of the international side of the US-merchant fleet, marginalized by the lower costs of its foreign-flagged competitors (US Department of Transportation 2011b).

The predominance of a domestic vocation in the US-flagged merchant fleet, however, necessarily implies that US merchant vessels have been marginally exposed to piracy. Table 1 shows the number of attacks suffered by US ships

Table 1 Pirate attacks against US-flagged vessels, 2007–2014

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Attacks against US-flagged vessels	1	5	4	4	5	2	2
Off the Horn of Africa	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	1 (25%)	3 (60%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)
Against Maersk Alabama	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	2 (40%)	0 ^a (0%)	0 (0%)

Authors' elaboration from IMB (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013)

^aThe vessel attacked off the Horn of Africa was the MV Maersk Texas, owned by the same company that owned the MV Maersk Alabama

between 2007 and 2013, as reported by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB). The vast majority of attacks occurred in the Wider Gulf of Aden region, where Somali pirates increased their power-projection capabilities by using mother ships permitting them to travel up to 1200 nautical miles from Somali Coasts (US Navy 2016). The number of attacks is not too different from those suffered by more internationally active merchant fleets, like Germany, Norway and Britain (Cusumano and Ruzza 2015, p. 113). However, most of the incidents encountered by US vessels were minor (IMB 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). Even more notably, a substantial percentage of piracy attacks off the coasts of Somalia has concentrated repeatedly against the same vessel: the MV Maersk Alabama, attacked six times in 5 years. The two incidents occurred in 2009 are related, as they happened during the same transit. These two incidents are also quite famous, as they led to the kidnapping of Alabama's captain, Richard Phillips, later freed by the US Navy. Interestingly, in 2012 another US-flagged ship owned by the same company (Maersk) suffered an attack. Maersk, a Danish firm, is the leading service operator of container ships worldwide (UNCTAD 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). It could be said that piracy hitting US-flagged vessels off the coasts of Somalia has been an issue for Denmark as much as for the US.

Even if the US-flagged merchant fleet is relatively small and does not carry a substantial amount of commodities shipped from and to the US, this does not mean that the US has no interest in defending the freedom of the seas or containing piracy off the Horn of Africa. It has already been noted that US foreign trade rates account for about 15% of global waterborne trade (in metric tons) and that about 47% of US foreign trade (in value) was moved by vessels in 2011 (US Department of Transportation 2013, pp. 6–7). Fuel and oil are the most important commodities both for import and export, accounting for 22% of trade cargo in terms of value in 2011 (Chambers and Liu 2012, p. 2). These figures show the importance of waterborne trade for the US, no matter what flag is flown by the vessels carrying these goods in and out of the country. Furthermore, the US-controlled merchant fleet, ranging between about 40 and 60 million DWT (depending on years) is approximately four to five times worth the US-flagged fleet in terms of DWT (UNCTAD 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). US owners tend to register their ships abroad to contain costs, with a general preference for the Marshall Islands (UNCTAD 2010, p. 42). The very nature of maritime trade implies that different countries' interests are affected at the same time: US-flagged vessels may be Danish owned, while vessels under other flags may be the property of a US firm.

Unsurprisingly, the promotion and protection of free trade is a constant feature of all the National Security Strategies released between 2002 and 2015 (White House 2002, 2006, 2010, 2015). More specifically, the 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) makes a direct reference to the need to safeguard global commons, seas included. Global commons are defined as “shared areas, which exist outside exclusive national jurisdictions” and are “the connective tissue around our globe upon which all nations' security and prosperity depend” (White House 2010, pp. 49–50). It is possible to draw a direct analogy from Grotius' classical notion of *Mare Liberum* with today's conceptualization of international waters as global

commons. Interestingly, piracy is generally absent or marginalized in NSSs, with the notable exception of the most recent one (2015), where it is stated that the “United States has an enduring interest in freedom of navigation” and that it “seek [s] to build on the unprecedented international cooperation of the last few years, especially in the Arctic as well as in combatting piracy off the Horn of Africa and drug-smuggling in the Caribbean Sea and across Southeast Asia” (White House 2015, p. 13).

To summarize, it could be said that even if the US is no longer among the most prominent shipping actors, it still has a solid interest in protecting freedom of navigation, given how much it depends on seaborne trade and the strategic importance attached to its sealift capabilities. At the same time, due to the fact that a substantial part of this trade involves, or is in the hands of, non-Americans, the impact of piracy on the US is mostly indirect and the interest to contain it is not a top US concern. Hence, on the one hand, addressing piracy requires the US to cooperate with other actors (e.g. since the US cannot possibly introduce legislation effective for vessels not flying the Stars and Stripes). On the other hand, the externalization of US maritime interests leaves room for delegation. The next two sections focus on the efforts made by the US, directly or indirectly, to fight the last upsurge of maritime piracy. This is meant to assess how much of this effort the US took on directly on its shoulders and how much was instead delegated.

3 The US Approach to Maritime Security in the 2000s

The maritime domain has been increasingly framed as a dimension of security in the post 9/11 foreign policy discourse (Bueger 2015). In order to assess the role and commitment of the US in antipiracy activities, it is vital to recall some essential steps that framed the US notion of maritime security and defined policies pertaining to countering piracy. Four elements are of particular interest: *The National Strategy for Maritime Security* (2005), the idea of a “thousand-ship navy” (TSN) or “global maritime partnership” (GMP) (2005), the naval strategy of 2007 and the antipiracy policy of 2008.

The Department of Homeland Security released *The National Strategy for Maritime Security* in September 2005. Along with classical threats from states, it obviously included terrorism, but also covered other issues like transnational crime and piracy. The document recalls the need to protect the freedom of the seas and the right to innocent passage, although it still covers piracy in a quite generic fashion. Two aspects of the strategy need to be put under the spotlight. First, the appeal to an enhanced international cooperation to face new and old challenges, as this is an element that returns constantly in all the following documents and ideas. Second, the need to embed security into commercial practices. The core notion here is to induce private owners and operators of facilities to incorporate security practices into their ordinary routines, in order to deploy them as a first layer of security against non-traditional threats.

The TSN notion was first introduced in the autumn of 2005 by Admiral Michael G. Mullen, the US Navy's Chief of Naval Operations, during the Seventeenth International Seapower Symposium at the Naval War College. In his words, "the United States Navy cannot, by itself, preserve the freedom and security of the entire maritime domain. It must count on assistance from like-minded nations interested in using the sea for lawful purposes and precluding its use for others that threaten national, regional, or global security" (Ratcliff 2007, p. 45). Hence, a "thousand-ship navy" means an increased level of cooperation among countries interested in preserving seas as a global common, against the full spectrum of threats, both traditional and non-traditional. However, it does not refer to navies alone, as it also includes other governmental assets (from coast guards to customs agencies) and private actors (ranging from NGOs to shipping enterprises) active in the maritime domain. In the words of two US Admirals, "policing the maritime commons will require substantially more capability than the United States or any individual nation can deliver. It will take a combination of national, international and private industry cooperation to provide the platforms, people and protocols necessary to secure the seas against the transnational threat" (Morgan and Martoglio 2005, p. 15). In a nutshell, the TSN could be framed as a multilateral whole-of-society approach applied to maritime security. The concept, also labelled "global maritime network" or "global maritime partnership" has been officially reiterated several times and has been explicitly included in the naval strategy of 2007 (Carmel 2008; Ratcliff 2007; US Navy 2008).

In 2007, the new US maritime strategy was released, the first after the end of the Cold War. Called *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, it was also the first to be unified, integrating Navy, Marines and Coast Guard. It stressed elements of international cooperation and partnership that resounded with the notion of TSN/GMP. This latter is explicitly recalled in the document: "the Global Maritime Partnerships initiative seeks a cooperative approach to maritime security, promoting the rule of law by countering piracy, terrorism, weapons proliferation, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities" (US Marines, US Navy and US Coast Guard 2007, p. 11). The notion of the high seas as global commons is an overarching feature of the 2007 strategy, along with the importance of protecting seaborne trade. At the same time, national interest is considered "best served by fostering a peaceful global system comprised of interdependent networks of trade, finance, information, law, people and governance" (US Marines, US Navy and US Coast Guard 2007, p. 4).

Finally, in 2008 the National Security Council (NSC) released its antipiracy policy, named *Countering Piracy off the Horn of Africa: Partnership and Action Plan*. According to Rear Admiral Terence E. McKnight, first commander of the CTF-151 (a US-led military counter-piracy operation that took off in 2009), the US started to be seriously concerned by piracy after the MV Golden Nori incident in October 2007. While the MV Golden Nori was neither US-flagged, nor owned or manned by US citizens, it carried chemicals that were considered to be potentially dangerous in the wrong hands. Fearing a piracy-terrorist nexus, the commander of the Fifth Fleet deployed assets to keep the Golden Nori under constant check,

although the vessel was eventually freed after the payment of a ransom (McKnight 2012, p. xvii). The White House had already approved a *Policy for the Repression of Piracy and Other Criminal Acts of Violence at Sea*, in June 2007, hence a few months before the MV Golden Nori incident. This policy explicitly frames piracy as an activity that “interferes with freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce, and undermine regional stability”. It also states that “responsibility for countering this threat does not belong exclusively to the United States”, calling on the need to engage with states and both international and regional organizations to maximize the number of assets engaging in piracy-repression operations (White House 2007). The NSC policy implements both the national strategy for maritime security of 2005 and the policy for the repression of piracy and other criminal acts of violence at sea of 2007, relating them specifically to piracy off the Horn of Africa. The document states clearly that the “United States will not tolerate a haven where pirates can act with impunity; it is therefore in our national interests to work with all States to repress piracy off the Horn of Africa” (NSC 2008, p. 3). It also recalls once again the need for “coordinated multilateral cooperation” (NSC 2008, p. 7), along with the need to collaborate with the private maritime sector, in order to reduce its vulnerability to piracy.

In concluding this short review, it should be mentioned that in April 2009, immediately after the MV Maersk Alabama incident, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made an announcement about US counter-piracy initiatives, which once again recalled the need for a multilateral and coordinated response, together with the opportunity to enable the shipping industry to self-assess and self-address gaps in their security (Clinton 2009; Warner 2010).

4 Military Antipiracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden and the Role of the US

Reactions to Somali piracy were limited and ad hoc until 2008. In 2005, Italy was the first country to deploy a military frigate in an antipiracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, due to her substantial maritime interests (Cusumano and Ruzza 2015). In late 2007, Canada, Denmark, France and The Netherlands answered a call from the World Food Programme to escort its shipments through dangerous waters, a duty then taken over by two brief NATO missions, Allied Provider and Allied Protector (Bridger 2013, p. 2; NATO 2016; WFP 2008). As previously stated, 2008 was the year of the boom of piracy off the coasts of Somalia (see Table 2), hence it was also the year from which a substantial and coordinated international answer began to emerge. Starting in June 2008, with Security Council Resolution 1816, the UN enacted a number of acts condemning piracy, and allowing states to enter Somalian territorial waters in order to fight piracy and armed robbery at sea.

In August 2008, the Maritime Security Patrol Area (MSPA) was established specifically to counteract piracy, using the military multinational assets already

Table 2 Attacks and attempted attacks attributed to Somali pirates

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Number of attacks/attempted attacks	51	111	218	219	237	75	15
Against US-flagged vessels	1	0	4	1	3	1	0

Authors' elaboration from IMB (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013)

deployed in the region (Gortney 2009, p. 9). More specifically, the resources employed were drawn from the Combined Task Force 150. CTF-150 was established in 2002 in the frame of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a US-led multinational partnership born as a spinoff of the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT). More than 30 states have taken part to CMF operations to date, but while CMF assets are multinational, its leadership is steadily in US hands as it is:

commanded by a U.S. Navy Vice Admiral, who also serves as Commander US Navy Central Command and US Navy Fifth Fleet. All three commands are co-located at US Naval Support Activity Bahrain. [...] Deputy commander is a UK Royal Navy Commodore. Other senior staff roles at CMF headquarters are filled from personnel from member nations, including Australia, France, Italy and Denmark (Combined Maritime Forces 2016).

CTF-150 mission was (and still is) essentially to conduct maritime security operations, with a special focus on hindering terrorist activities. Hence, its main focus is not combating piracy. The idea of the MSPA was developed by the staff of Vice Admiral William E. Gortney, then commander of the CMF (hence also commander of NAVCENT and of the US Fifth Fleet) (Combined Maritime Forces 2016; Schaeffer 2009). Soon after the introduction of the MSPA, the CMF also introduced an Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) for civilian vessels transiting in the area, in order to complement the MSPA and make transit as secure as possible (Gortney 2009, p. 13). Along these first multinational efforts, several countries have operated their own antipiracy missions in the wide Gulf of Aden area, including China, India, Iran, Japan, Korea, Russia and Saudi Arabia (Bridger 2013, p. 2; Gortney 2009, p. 3). However, the largest part of military antipiracy endeavours to date has been conducted by three international missions launched between 2008 and 2009: EUNAVFOR Atalanta, Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) and NATO Ocean Shield.

The first to be established was EUNAVFOR Atalanta, launched in December 2008 with headquarters located at Northwood, United Kingdom (UK). The operation is currently running, and its mandate was extended in November 2016 to last until December 2018. Atalanta deploys about four to six vessels at a time, although numbers have been higher in the first stages of the operation (up to ten) and may of course be revised in the future. The shared administrative costs of the mission have been over 11 million \$ in 2011 and 2012, a figure that has decreased to around 7 million \$ in 2016 (OBP 2012, p. 26, 2013, p. 14; EUNAVFOR 2016). This excludes the costs of vessels and military assets deployed, which is borne by the

states (and not straightforward to calculate). In parallel to Atalanta, the European Union is conducting two other missions, which, even if not aimed directly against piracy, attempt to deal with its root causes in a more comprehensive fashion. These are EUTM Somalia, training Somali security forces, and EUCAP Nestor, working on African militaries' capacity-building with a special focus on coast guard duties.

In January 2009, CTF-151 was established by the CMF (Sterling 2009; US Navy 2009a). It was meant to be able to take over the activities conducted *ad interim* by CTF-150. The mandate of CTF-151 has been defined as follows:

In accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolutions, and in cooperation with non-member forces, CTF 151's mission is to disrupt piracy and armed robbery at sea and to engage with regional and other partners to build capacity and improve relevant capabilities in order to protect global maritime commerce and secure freedom of navigation. [...] In conjunction with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union Naval Force Somalia (EU NAVFOR), and together with independently deployed naval ships, CTF 151 helps to patrol the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) in the Gulf Aden (Combined Maritime Forces 2016).

CTF-151 was the first mission in which the US deployed warships specifically tasked to counter piracy. At the start, it deployed three US vessels under the command of Rear Admiral Terence E. McKnight (Sterling 2009; US Navy 2009a; Weitz 2011, p. 58). CTF-151 had the opportunity to intervene in favour of a US-flagged merchant very soon, as it took charge of the operations related to the MV Maersk Alabama incident. The specific antipiracy focus of CTF-151 allowed for non-NATO and non-EU countries unwilling to take part in CTF-150 (a mission not meant specifically to engage with pirates) to find an appropriate venue for their contributions (Weitz 2011, p. 158). CTF-151 naturally had to coordinate and deconflict with other missions active in the region. According to VADM Gortney, all the other forces engaged in antipiracy operations in the area had been communicating with CMF, thereby avoiding incidents and allowing cooperation whenever possible. RADM McKnight expressed satisfaction as well (Gortney 2009, pp. 12–13; US Navy 2009b). CMF also created and funds a working group called SHADE (short for “Shared Awareness and De-confliction”) to ease operational coordination between actors active in the region (Gortney 2009, p. 13; Weitz 2011, pp. 157–158). The administrative costs of CTF-151 have been estimated at around 5.5 million \$ for 2011 and 2012 and at 4.9 million \$ for 2014 (OBC 2012, p. 26; OBC 2013, p. 14; OBC 2015, p. 17).

NATO Ocean Shield was established in August 2009, with command located at Northwood (UK), like Atalanta. Given the decline in piracy incidents in the wider area of Gulf of Aden, the mission was terminated on December 2016, although NATO still maintain situational awareness (NATO 2016). Ocean Shield deployed 68 vessels in total on rotation basis, and up to seven at the same time, with an average of four to five between its establishment and June 2014, when the number was reduced to just one ship at a time. The US has been the single largest contributor of vessels (15), followed by Turkey (13) and Denmark (9) (Allied Maritime Command 2016). The administrative costs of Ocean Shield have been about 5.5 million \$ for 2011 and 2012, then down to 1.4 million \$ for 2014 (Ocean Beyond

Piracy 2012, p. 26; Ocean Beyond Piracy 2013, p. 14; Ocean Beyond Piracy 2015, p. 17).

The deployment of a multilateral naval mission played an important role in curbing piracy off the Horn of Africa, first and foremost by disrupting attacks. After 2011, piracy incidents drastically declined, as shown in Table 2. However, this development was only not due to the multilateral mission. Another relevant factor came into play in 2011, when the international shipping industry opted for the use of armed guards on board merchant vessels, a practice that soon became widespread (as explained in the next section).

What does this picture of military multilateral antipiracy operations in the wide Gulf of Aden region tell us about US foreign policy? In order to answer this, two factors should be considered: the degree of US direct material commitment and the venues for international cooperation they promoted. Regarding the former, the US has been involved in two major missions out of three, mobilizing a significant amount of assets in both cases. CTF-151 command infrastructure is American, and the inception of the operation was entirely conducted by US vessels. Throughout the duration of NATO Ocean Shield, the US has been the first contributor per number of vessels. It could be argued that Europe (intended as both the EU and the sum of its member states) sustained a larger share of the effort, as it covered all the administrative costs of one of the three major missions (the more expensive of the three), deployed assets in all three, mobilized more vessels in total (when the contribution of all member states is summed up), and pursued a comprehensive approach in dealing with piracy by operating EUTM Somalia and EUCAP Nestor along with participating in naval antipiracy operations. However, European countries are certainly more affected by piracy in the Gulf of Aden, as more European vessels (in terms of flag and ownership) transit in these dangerous waters. When this element is factored in, the US contribution appears more than proportional to the amount of direct US interest at stake.

Moving to coordination and cooperation, all three multilateral missions were technically open, meaning that any willing country could contribute them. However, as it is easy to imagine, EUNAVOFR Atalanta saw participation mostly from EU countries, while NATO Ocean Shield involved mostly NATO member states (although there were a few exceptions in both operations). CTF-151, however, has been able to reach out to a variety of non-EU and non-NATO states, including Australia, Bahrain, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Thailand, United Arab Emirates (OBP 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). To state it differently, the US initiated and led counterpiracy mission provided the possibility for an integration of efforts that would have not been available otherwise. The fact that CTF-151 was under US command obviously precluded the inclusion of China or Russia, which deployed their assets independently. However, SHADE also provided a forum for coordination to actors not willing to integrate their efforts, and saw participation from these countries as well (Erickson and Strange 2013).

5 “Responsabilization”: Bringing the Private Sector into the Struggle

Military missions are essential, but they are just one of the two pillars in the struggle against piracy, the other being the maritime private sector. This refers to a vast range of actors, including ship owners, operators of ports, seafarers and shipping enterprises. As it has been already seen, the role of the private sector has been mentioned several times in US policy documents and concepts pertaining to maritime security. Two steps of that story need to be recalled, in particular. The first is the introduction of the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS) in 2002, and the second the previously-mentioned *National Strategy for Maritime Security* of 2005. The ISPS mandates a set of measures and requirements to be applied and followed directly by the private sector, with the aim of enhancing ship and port security. Its introduction was advocated by the US after 9/11, with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopting it on December 2002 (Cullen 2012). The ISPS has been defined as a “technique of indirect security governance [...] designed to shift the state’s *direct* management of maritime security risks [...] into an *indirect* form of security governance focused on extending its reach by managing the security behaviours of other, private sector actors” (Cullen 2012, p. 28). This involvement of the private sector in maritime security governance, also known as “responsabilization” (Spearin 2010), is consistent with the US tradition in terms of a widespread and diffused model of security governance labelled as “liberal”, where the state is not the only security provider (Krahmann 2010). Interestingly, the ISPS had a “norm cascade” (Krahmann 2013) effect, since it was later integrated into the security regulation and practices of many states. Getting back to the US, the *National Strategy for Maritime Security* of 2005 follows the path traced by the ISPS, as it includes a paragraph significantly entitled “Embed security into commercial practices”. It states that “private owners and operators of infrastructure, facilities, and resources are the first line of defence for their own property, and they should undertake basic facility security improvements” (Department of Homeland Security 2005, p. 18). In order to achieve this, the national strategy also recalls the need to implement key national and international regulations, including the ISPS.

This general approach extended to US-flagged ships as well. In June 2006, the US Coast Guard enacted the Maritime Security Directive (MARSEC) 104-6, requiring merchant vessels about to transit the high-risk area (i.e. the waters of the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean) to file and submit a vessel security plan (de Nevers 2015; USCG 2006). This move anticipated a similar one made later by the international maritime industry with the introduction of their “best management practices” (BMPs) in February 2009. These are a set of practical guidelines directed towards the owners, masters and crew of merchant vessels transiting through piracy-affected waters, and meant to reduce and help to manage related risks.

Interestingly, the US anticipated the international maritime industry in regulating the use of armed teams on board civilian vessels too. Technically speaking,

US-flagged ships are subject to the same permissive laws about firearms that are in force on US soil. Hence, it has always been possible for owners or masters of those ships to carry weapons and embark armed guards. However, there is a long and consolidated international tradition that goes against arming crews on merchant vessels on the basis of safety, security and legal reasons. This tradition has also been largely followed by the US maritime sector, although there are reports of some American shipping companies (including Maersk's US subsidiary) resorting to armed guards on board their vessels at least since May 2009 (i.e. 1 month after the MV Maersk Alabama incident). Then, in July 2009, the United States Coast Guard issued the Port Security Advisory (5-09), which introduced and detailed guidelines for armed security personnel taking service on board US-flagged civilian ships (de Nevers 2015). Under US rules, armed guards on board US-flagged vessels need to have no other duties (to upkeep the distinction between guards and crew), and they can resort to force only in self-defence, defence of others, the vessel, or property (de Nevers 2015, p. 155). The cost of a private armed team deployed in the high-risk area has been estimated between 20,000 and 100,000 \$ per transit, depending on number of personnel, type of service and company (Spearin 2010, p. 556).

The international maritime community reached a similar conclusion only in 2011, 2 years after the US. Up to their third edition, the BMPs suggested the use of unarmed defence measures, while discouraging the use of weapons and armed teams. This approach was revised in 2011, a year that saw piracy attacks reach their peak. The fourth iteration of the BMPs finally opened to the use of armed guards as an integrative security measure and provided pertinent guidelines. The IMO endorsed this policy change. It should be noted that many European countries only revised their laws and regulations in 2011 as well. Following this general change of attitude on armed security, the use of armed guards on board merchant vessels became widespread (OBP 2012, p. 17). As Table 2 shows, from 2012 onward the number of attacks attributed to Somali pirates dropped significantly.

It could be argued that the early opening of the US toward the use of armed guards on board merchant vessels is a case of norm entrepreneurship, which in turn paved the way for a norm revision at international level (Krahmann 2013). Before the introduction of Port Security Advisory (5-09), a positive perception about the involvement of armed security providers had been stated several times by the most senior US officers. Notably, VADM Gortney in November 2008 declared that "companies don't think twice about using security guards to protect their valuable facilities ashore. Protecting valuable ships and their crews at sea is no different" (Spearin 2010, p. 554). In an interview published in a few months later, he specifically suggested the use of armed security teams on board vessels as "the coalition does not have the resources to provide 24-h protection for the vast number of merchant vessels in the region. The shipping companies must take measures to defend their vessels and their crews" (Schaeffer 2009, p. 23). The words of his deputy commander, Royal Navy Commodore Tim Lowe, are along the same lines: "as long as private security firms stick to the rule of law, it could be a good thing. Having an armed sentry on the deck is quite a good deterrent factor" (Schaeffer 2009, p. 23). Last, but not least, in April 2009 the Naval War College held a

workshop on countering maritime piracy. In its closing remarks, it is stated that “the civil shipping industry should take a greater role in protecting merchant vessels, including integrating passive design measures that make it more difficult for pirates to board a ship. In some cases, this means that provision of private armed security may be appropriate” (Kraska 2009, p. 142). These opinions resonate with those expressed by other experts affiliated with the Naval War College and with the Heritage Foundation, as they stated that the blue water vocation of the US Navy made it difficult to adjust to constabulary duties, including fighting crime in territorial waters (Eaglen et al. 2008; Ratcliff 2007). In 2011, the US government put one more step forward, as it started to encourage the use of armed guards (de Nevers 2015, p. 158), while RADM McKnight, CTF-151 first commander wrote, “it is time for the maritime community to take responsibility for their own security and free our navies to defend our freedoms on the high seas” (McKnight 2012, p. xvi).

6 Conclusions

The picture of US antipiracy activities outlined in the previous paragraphs allows us to evaluate the importance of the US in protecting freedom of the seas and to weigh the relative price they pay for it. Of course, seas and their freedom are of the utmost importance for Washington, not just for military concerns but also in economic terms, given the amount of seaborne foreign trade that reaches or leaves US soil. On the base of this premise, it is not surprising to observe that the US has committed a significant amount of resources in antipiracy activities. It should be enough to recall that the US has provided the greatest number of vessels in the frame of the NATO operation Ocean Shield, and that CTF-151 was born out of their initiative. The provision of maritime security that stems from US activities can be framed as a global common good from which the whole international community benefits. At the same time, it is noteworthy to recall that the costs to the US for the protection of this global common good have been contained in two ways: through multilateral burden-sharing, and through the involvement of the private security sector.

As of the first—multilateral burden-sharing—it could be said that the amount of international interest intrinsic in the maritime shipping sector has naturally given rise to a relatively high degree of multilateral engagement. Europe and China have larger merchant fleets than the US, so piracy has been a greater threat to them than to the US. The US-flagged merchant marine, on the other hand, is relatively small and has not been particularly affected by piracy in the wide Gulf of Aden area. When this has happened, as in the MV Maersk Alabama incident, it has also affected the interests of other countries (in this case, Denmark). This overall state of affairs has led the EU running its own naval mission (Atalanta) and China (among others) deploying naval assets independently. Yet, the EU cooperated tightly with the US, while China at least coordinated her efforts and participated in multilateral forums. In short, it could be said that multilateral burden-sharing reflects shared

interests in the maritime domain and that the US has actively sought to ease burden-sharing, through the introduction and upkeeping of multilateral frameworks like CTF-151 and SHADE.

Moving to the second element, the US made active efforts to “responsabilize” (Spearin 2010) the private sector for providing its own security in the maritime domain. This began with advocacy in favour of the ISPS back in 2002 (Cullen 2012). After this, the US anticipated both the international community and the private maritime sector in providing guidelines to ships transiting in the high-risk area (in 2006) and in regulating the use of armed private guards on board merchant vessels (in 2009). This aspect of US policy has two dimensions: domestic and international. Domestically, security responsabilization is coherent with the US liberal security governance tradition (Krahmann 2010), as US ship owners are left free to decide about their own security needs and how to best address them. The sentiment expressed by high-ranking naval officers and senior experts is that responsabilization is a cost-effective policy decision, since it frees up resources that would otherwise need to be employed to protect merchant vessels. The international side of reponsabilization further support this rationale. The US relies heavily on seaborne trade, but it could not introduce regulation on non-US-flagged ships. Hence, it engaged in norm-entrepreneurship, introducing rules and practices that were conducive to a larger acceptance of the role of private armed security on board merchant vessels. This move is consistent with what the US already did with regard to the role of private military and security companies on land (Krahmann 2013).

It is straightforward to link what has been observed about US efforts aimed at containing Somali piracy to the theory of hegemonic stability. The US pays a substantial cost for the protection of the global common good known as freedom of the seas. This is justified by its heavy reliance on seaborne trade. At the same time, this costs is lower than it could be, due to both burden-sharing (eased by the amalgam of interests in the commercial maritime domain) and to responsabilization. Hence, by limiting the price of the bill it pays to uphold freedom of the sea, the US has been able to contain its decline. In other words, it could be said that:

the real reason why most international waterways remain safe and open and thereby facilitate the huge explosion of global trade we have seen — is that the American Navy acts as the guarantor of last resort to keep them open. Without the global presence of the US Navy, our world order would be less orderly (Mahbubani 2009, p. 105).

While correct, Mahbubani’s words reflect just part of the story. When looking at the struggle against Somali piracy, it is possible to say that the US has been able to preserve the safety of maritime waterways thanks to elements other than its navy, and specifically by enabling the mobilization of naval resources from other maritime powers and by reframing international norms in a way that “responsabilizes” the private sector, making it bear at least a part of the costs of maritime security.

The latest election of Donald Trump as US President may fundamentally reshape US foreign policy, calling into question the role of the US in supporting those norms, institutions, and organisations that used to be considered as cornerstones of the international world order, such as free trade, NATO, and European integration.

The short timespan between Trump's election and the writing of this chapter and the erratic and somewhat contradictory first statements of the president make it difficult to assess the future evolution of US support for freedom of navigation. To be sure, Trump's commitment to increasing defence spending would certainly be beneficial to the navy too, thereby increasing its maritime patrolling capabilities. In an extreme scenario, however, a US retrenched into a new isolationism and less committed to promoting free trade may reduce or completely stop their efforts to protect common goods such as freedom of navigation. Yet, the tight connection between seaborne trade and US national interests make such a scenario implausible. While the overarching features of US antipiracy policies will probably remain unaltered, Trump's election may have a substantial impact on both its key pillars.

Firstly, the increasingly vocal criticism of allies' free riding may persuade other countries with a strong interest in maritime trade to take on a larger share of the costs of maritime security. On the other hand, however, the President's aggressive rhetoric, the declining commitment from the US to multilateralism, and the purported willingness to drastically cut funding for international organizations may reduce its present ability to mobilize and coordinate other countries' multilateral maritime military efforts. Specifically, while the prospect of re-engaging with Russia may encourage Moscow to increase its contribution to protecting certain global commons, including freedom of navigation, cooperation with other actors with a stronger interest in safeguarding seaborne trade such as the EU and China may become more problematic or simply impossible. By contrast, the policy of responsibilizing the private sector and adopting a permissive or openly supportive stance towards the employment of private security aboard vessels, is likely to remain unscathed or further increase. According to recent allegations, Erik Prince—CEO of the now defunct infamous private security company Blackwater—is among the President's close advisers (Scahill 2017). As Prince attempted to arm private patrol boats to escort merchant vessels (Brown 2012), his presence within Washington's decision-making circles suggests that private security companies' involvement in future antipiracy efforts may grow in the future. Hence, future US efforts to ensure the freedom of navigation may be based on replacing a reduced ability to broker and coordinate an international multilateral military response by means of greater private security sector involvement. Due to legal uncertainty, reduced accountability, and practical risks associated with the use of private security companies on land and at sea alike, this policy may be problematic for both maritime security and the international liberal order at large.

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Shaping the Next Phase of US Non-proliferation Policy

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Abstract Throughout the Cold War, a major challenge to international security came in the form of states that were interested in developing operational, second-strike nuclear weapons capabilities outside the confines of the non-proliferation regime. The expectation was that this challenge would continue in the post-Cold War environment. Yet, despite North Korea's nuclear advances and growing arsenals among other existing nuclear weapons states, new weapons proliferation has remained rare. Indeed, we argue that the next wave of 'proliferation' may come not in the form of new weapons proliferation attempts, but rather may stem from states interested in pursuing and acquiring nuclear latency—dual-use enrichment and reprocessing technologies (ENR) that precede the development of nuclear weapons. This issue is of crucial importance given the obvious connections between latency and weaponization—absent enrichment or reprocessing capability, arguably the most important step in the nuclear pathway—a state cannot indigenously produce nuclear weapons or nuclear energy. It is also significant given that, since the dawn of the nuclear era, nearly thirty states have, at some point in their history, possessed the technologies that provide nuclear latency. Despite this, political science has not systematically and comprehensively analyzed the potential impact of nuclear latency on these states' propensity for a variety of other behaviours critical for international peace and security of concern to both scholars and policy makers alike. This chapter addresses these gaps in scholarship and examines the dynamics of nuclear latency. It concludes with a discussion of potential policy recommendations for the United States as a global non-proliferation leader in the 21st century.

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1 Introduction

Since the Second World War, the United States has been a global leader on a variety of fronts—rebuilding the post-war political environment, creating the liberal international economic order, and spearheading the creation of the institutional architecture which has been foundational to the 20th and 21st centuries. A key element within this landscape, and one that has pervaded subsequent American presidencies, is leadership on nuclear non-proliferation (Gavin 2012). Historically, non-proliferation has focused on weapons—disarmament, arms control, and preventing new nuclear weapons acquisitions. To that end, the US has been at the forefront of limiting the global supply of dual-use technology helpful for nuclear weapons production. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the effort expanded to a joint US—Russian partnership to secure loose weapons and fissile material, in Russia specifically, but also around the globe. Since the terror attacks on September 11th, 2001, these efforts shifted somewhat from a state-centric global approach, to one which engaged issues raised at the intersection of weapons of mass destruction and organized international terrorism. Throughout this effort, the United States has looked to state and institutional partners within the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations, and the Nuclear Suppliers Group on these most pressing global issues. Despite early predictions to the contrary—President Kennedy famously warned, in a speech at American University in June 1963, of a world of 20 or 30 nuclear weapons, —the American-led effort has been an overwhelming success. Instead of these projected 20 or 30 nuclear weapons states, today’s landscape features merely nine.

In light of the above non-proliferation victories, one major danger looms large and potentially underappreciated in the changing international environment: the danger is complacency in thinking that the non-proliferation job is now done. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. To be sure, new states may over time seek indigenous nuclear weapons programs—perhaps going the route of Saddam Hussein or Moammar Qaddafi instead finding success instead of failure (Braut-Hegghammer 2016), but the potential for such developments is relatively small given the overwhelming majority of states have taken measures—either institutional or technical—to foreclose this possibility, and many others lack the scientific, technical, and developmental infrastructure to make a serious effort. Of course, new leaders and new generations may have views that run counter to previous ones, but still the population of concern remains relatively small. Beyond “traditional” weapons pursuits of the variety that droves of National Intelligence Estimates explored throughout the decades, a separate but still significant potential challenge to the nuclear non-proliferation regime looms: the dedication the world has witnessed to non-proliferation may fade into the background. This potential eventuality is especially dangerous because of two relatively recent developments: first, a new era of American retrenchment, should such a move develop following the inauguration of President Trump in January 2017, and the codification of a state’s right to enrichment as enshrined by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

(JCPOA)—the nuclear deal inked by the permanent five members of the Security Council, Germany, and Iran in 2015. As we argue below, the Iranian nuclear program (as an example of the broader phenomenon of nuclear latency)—largely recognized by the international community as legitimately maintaining nuclear latency offers nuclear aspirants a potentially successful pathway to a more advanced nuclear program and, more worrisome, to masking, until an opportune moment nuclear weapons ambitions.

In what follows below, we make the case that the global community must pay much more attention to nuclear latency given how a larger population of states (32 as compared to 9) maintains this capability or has historically. We briefly describe how the success of supply-side restrictions have enabled states to pursue a different route from the clandestine nuclear weapons path, to one at least relatively sanctified by the international community—the path of nuclear latency or access to materials and technology that can be used to develop nuclear weapons. We describe what latency is and what its current international landscape looks like in light of the JCPOA and the 21st century. We present preliminary implications on both the potential determinants and the consequences of nuclear latency from our own research (Mehta and Whitlark 2016, 2017a, b). We also raise several important questions, stemming from this preliminary research, that demand further investigation to better understand the impact of this technology on the changing non-proliferation regime in the next century. We conclude by arguing that, especially in light of the changing international landscape, where the US and its traditional partners may be considering withdrawing from global non-proliferation leadership, the world community must pay more attention to latency and related nuclear issues rather than less moving forward.

2 Proliferation Dynamics in the 21st Century: Why Latency?

Though decades of scholarship has focused on the links between nuclear weapons and deterrence, compellence, war, and dispute initiation, there is a huge gap in scholarly understanding of how nuclear latency relates to these same critical issues. Inherent in the ambiguity of these decisions is that states may either pursue nuclear latency as a precursor to nuclear weapons, or pursue latency as an end in itself, in lieu of nuclear weapons acquisition. Due in part to this uncertainty, it remains unclear just what the relationship(s) is between nuclear weapons possession, the drive towards and possession of nuclear latency, and broader interstate relations (including conflict and bargaining dynamics). Specifically, recent scholarship suggests that nuclear latency may have similarly important effects on alliance dynamics between patron and protégé states, on bargaining outcomes given the inherent uncertainty and ambiguity of latency as a potential state posture, and on conflict initiation and duration—but these areas remain to be fully explored (Mehta and Whitlark 2016, 2017a; Fuhrmann and Tkach 2015).

Second, in addition to gaps in the theoretical understanding of the strategic impact of nuclear latency, there are important policy motivations for examining the spread of nuclear latency, especially in the context of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that was signed in 2015 between Iran and the international community, ostensibly to prevent the development of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. The JCPOA enshrines in Iran a right to nuclear enrichment—a point previously ambiguous and contested within the nuclear non-proliferation community. The effects of Iranian possession of such capabilities have begun to be explored elsewhere, but the larger impact of latency requires more attention. The Iranian case is merely the first instance demonstrating the relevance of the proposed scholarly endeavour. In the aftermath of the signing of the JCPOA, analysts and academics have raised questions regarding whether Iran pursued latency as a hedge to nuclear weapons, or sought latency as an acceptable outcome in and of itself. Similarly, there is interest in considering what, if anything, the international community could have done differently in the 13 years since the program was revealed to the world, to affect a different outcome. Likewise, there are present concerns over the implications of the JCPOA globally, to the extent that it has codified directly or indirectly a right for Iran and other states to enrich, and just what this might mean for the proliferation landscape as a whole.

Specifically, the acceptance of latency in Iran may encourage other states—either with civilian or nuclear weapons ambitions—to mirror Iran’s nuclear history. This would be understandable given that previous nuclear aspirants have suffered external military attack when their programs have raised weapons proliferation concerns. Iran today has acquired latency—as we argue a critical component in the nuclear production pathway—but perhaps more importantly this latency offers a springboard to *either* industrial scale nuclear energy export capacity or future weapons pursuits. Other states, recognizing that Iran was able to achieve this feat as a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, may very well take heed in order to build a similarly sophisticated program and avoid the most significant risks of counter-proliferation coercion and damage. Thus, if nuclear latency constitutes the next wave of ‘nuclear proliferation,’ in light of the JCPOA, new proliferants may be more willing to go the way of Iran as it conferred some degree of legitimacy to its nascent and ambiguous nuclear program, provided technology sanctified by the world community, and may have prevented Iran from becoming like Iraq and Syria and targeted for preventive attack by the United States, Israel, or both.

Should other states follow in Iran’s footsteps, it will be terribly important for the world to understand how and why we arrived at this point. It will also be critically important to understand just what the implications of latency are for the international security environment writ large. Should they be less problematic than the spread of nuclear weapons, then the international community could ultimately decide that in exchange for foregoing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, it may be willing to accept more *de facto* latent states who develop ENR technology for civilian-only purposes. Having made this decision, however, it would then be critical for the international community to understand what weaknesses, if any, exist in the JCPOA that can be exploited by Iran and other potential nuclear aspirants

looking to gain from the agreement's loopholes for their own proliferation or advantage. More broadly, therefore, Iran can be understood as potentially the first of many states bringing issues of nuclear latency to the fore and when this happens, the currently poorly understood features inherent to latency will become only more salient and consequential over time.

Lastly, beyond the substantive and empirical reasons to focus on nuclear latency articulated above, there is also a practical development which makes this research particularly relevant and timely. Specifically, over the last 10 years, the release and creation of new data on critical steps in the proliferation process now allows scholars to investigate topics and ask questions previously foreclosed given the lack of appropriate data with which to work. The existing literature describes nuclear latency rather broadly as the time required before a state can acquire nuclear weapons following a decision to do so (Sagan 2010). In addition, as Sagan notes, past attempts at measuring the time to nuclear "break out" have been limited, and, as a result, the effects of latency have been poorly understood. Nuclear latency represents a state's capacity to indigenously manufacture a nuclear explosive device, and it is the product of technological capabilities such as enrichment facilities and raw material such as uranium ore. By combining these with scientific and engineering know-how, states that wish to do so can acquire a nuclear weapon. The release of time-series data to better capture these details of a nuclear program, has facilitated additional analyses into many critical questions, including those addressed here. Using this admittedly still crude proxy, the aim in what follows is to shed light on the pre-acquisition stage of nuclear decision-making by investigating these critical steps along the proliferation pathway (Fuhrmann and Tkach 2015; Meyer 1984; Stoll 1992; Jo and Gartzke 2007).

The growing interest in nuclear latency is well-rooted in the existing scholarship on nuclear weapons and international security which has centered on two major questions: how do nuclear weapons affect the structure of the international system and why do states pursue nuclear proliferation (Thayer 1994; Sagan 1996; Betts 1993; Campbell et al. 2004)? The early theoretical literature and more recent empirical literature examined how nuclear weapons could be used, and how they can affect the balance of power among nuclear states and between nuclear and non-nuclear states (Russett 1989; Huth and Russett 1993; Organski and Kugler 1980; Kugler 1984; Jo and Gartzke 2007; Gartzke and Kroenig 2014; Rauchhaus et al. 2011). Recently, this literature has evolved to focus on how nuclear weapons can impact their possessors' ability to deter and compel behaviour among allies, adversaries, or more generally, and how nuclear weapons are useful for enhancing a state's bargaining advantages in the international system (Beardsley and Asal 2009; Kroenig 2013; Sechser and Fuhrmann 2013; Gartzke and Jo 2009; Sechser 2011).

The second strand of scholarship on nuclear weapons sought to examine why states proliferate, to investigate the variation in this behaviour, and to forecast which states are the most likely new proliferators (Sagan 1996; Solingen 1994, 1998; Jo and Gartzke 2007; Singh and Way 2004). These scholars argued that states pursue nuclear weapons for various reasons including the acquisition of power to increase internal security, organizational or bureaucratic interests, or enhanced

prestige in the international community. Recent empirical studies have attempted to distill some of these initial theoretical findings by identifying the primary determinants of nuclear proliferation (in terms of both demand-side capability to build viable weapons and supply-side assistance from other nuclear states), isolating the mechanisms linking proliferation and conflict onset, and analyzing the effect of nuclear weapons on dispute initiation and/or bargaining outcomes and interstate relations more broadly (Rauchhaus et al. 2011; Sagan 2010; Bleek and Lorber 2014).

Recently, however, the literature has moved beyond these two immediate questions to focus on related, and equally important externalities of nuclear weapons proliferation, including issues of non-proliferation/counter proliferation, alliance dynamics, sensitive nuclear assistance, and force posture (Singh and Way 2004; Jo and Gartzke 2007; Bleek 2010; Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014; Fuhrmann and Kreps 2010; Bleek and Lorber 2014; Reiter 2014; Narang and Mehta 2017; Narang 2009, 2013; Gartzke et al. 2014; Gartzke et al. 2017; Fuhrmann and Kreps 2010; Whitlark 2017; Gerzhoy 2015; Miller 2014; Bell 2016). The proliferation of nuclear scholarship focusing on these dynamics has yielded important, and previously unknown, second and third-order implications about how nuclear weapons have impacted interstate relations.

3 The Next Wave of Proliferation: The Causes and Consequences of Nuclear Latency

3.1 Causes of Nuclear Latency

While the majority of the early quantitative analyses of the causes of nuclear weapons proliferation (Singh and Way 2004; Jo and Gartzke 2007; Bleek 2010) have examined how a diverse array of drivers and inhibitors can affect a state's willingness and ability to pursue or acquire the bomb, comparatively less work has examined the decisions to pursue the acquisition of nuclear technology and materials prior to weaponisation. Such an analysis is necessary given that the proliferation of nuclear latency is distinct from weapons proliferation, primarily because these technologies have plausible non-military uses, especially the production of fuel for power reactors. With few exceptions, proliferation scholars have generally assumed that states acquire such facilities as part of a strategy of "nuclear hedging," in which the ability to produce fissile material is meant to serve the purpose of "maintaining...a viable option for the relatively rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons" (Sagan 2010). Together, these facts suggest that the drivers and inhibitors of weapons proliferation may have similar, if not identical, effects on the spread of ENR capabilities. However, it is possible that there are separate drivers and inhibitors of latency beyond that which determines proliferation. Additionally, the

implications of latency may be different than the implications of weapons proliferation itself. Without in-depth investigation of these dynamics independently, however, scholars have previously not understood the true impact of this technology on the international system, and effective avenues for curbing its proliferation.

Our research takes a step forward in addressing this issue by directly examining state motivations for the acquisition of nuclear latency. Although latency represents a continuous spectrum of capabilities, for the sake of parsimony our analysis collapses this range and analyzes the acquisition of latent capability as either the presence or absence of operational uranium enrichment or plutonium reprocessing capabilities. We do so by exploring the impact of security drivers compared to energy or capacity drivers. This mirrors previous analyses which have distinguished *opportunity*, or environmental constraints or potential for a country to manufacture nuclear weapons and *willingness*, “a set of factors leading to the eagerness of a country to possess nuclear weapons,” including emerging threats in a security environment (Sagan 1996; Singh and Way 2004; Jo and Gartzke 2007).

In conducting a cross-section, time-series analysis of the factors that may persuade states to pursue this initial step of acquiring nuclear technology, our results reveal that the determinants of states’ pursuit of nuclear latency are only somewhat similar to those that drive states toward *weapons* acquisition (Mehta and Whitlark 2017b). First, our research suggests that for some states the decision to acquire nuclear latency may be driven, in part, by economic and industrial opportunity and the desire for energy independence. More importantly, however, as previous scholarship suggests that security concerns are often paramount for nuclear weapons proliferation (Sagan 1996; Singh and Way 2004; Jo and Gartzke 2007), this may *also* be the case for latency (Mehta and Whitlark 2017b). Providing evidence to suggest that latency, like nuclear weapons proliferation, is primarily driven by security concerns may help to focus on better political and diplomatic avenues for managing the expansion of latency technology, and potentially, curbing the demand for acquiring dual-use technology that could ultimately be utilized to manufacture nuclear weapons. These findings thus make important strides in deciphering how the proliferation of this nuclear technology corresponds with or deviates from that of nuclear weapons and can inform how policymakers may adapt or adjust policy to manage the development of this technology (especially as a precursor to nuclear weapons). For example, if states are pursuing nuclear latency due to the presence of nuclear rivals or other security threats in the region, the international community may decide it is fruitful to prevent the spread of ENR technology and/or establish nuclear-free zones that seek to reduce security (even nuclear weapons) threats in already tense regions. Further, by continuing to examine the role that security concerns may play in driving states to proliferate this type of technology, it is critical to ensure that nonproliferation policy that includes preventing the spread of nuclear latency does not motivate states to go further down the nuclear pathway to acquire nuclear weapons.

3.2 *Consequences of Nuclear Latency*

Beyond those factors that drive states toward latency, it is also critical to understand how the proliferation of nuclear latency itself impacts international relations. Identifying the consequences of nuclear latency has vital implications for international relations scholarship, as it moves beyond its analysis into the implications of nuclear weapons. By identifying the political, economic, and strategic consequences of nuclear latency, we can better understand the range of international outcomes that affect the security of the United States, its allies, and the broader international community. Elsewhere, our research conducts an in-depth examination of these impacts by analyzing how nuclear latency developments may affect domestic and international political processes (Mehta and Whitlark 2016, 2017a). The research employs a statistical analysis on the universe of nuclear latency cases to establish patterns across a variety of important outcomes. There are two main ways to think about these developments and why they are consequential. First, theoretically the acquisition of nuclear latency can generate uncertainty about a state's intentions and may ultimately yield a powerful bargaining chip for the state to use against both adversaries and allies. Related, latency may serve as a costly signal about a state's desire to change the status quo, and alter how both states in a dyad view the likelihood of conflict (including preventive war) and/or the probability of settlement of an on-going dispute. Second, although the spread of nuclear weapons has slowed empirically, the spread of technologies that facilitate nuclear weapons acquisition has not, and eighteen countries now operate ENR facilities or have adopted a hedging posture (Fuhrmann and Tkach 2015).

Especially in light of the fervent reaction to Iran's development of a substantial uranium enrichment capacity—including the promise by Saudi Arabia that it will procure sensitive fuel-cycle facilities of its own (Sanger and Parker 2012)—ENR facilities may continue to proliferate in the coming years. The spread of the technical capacity to indigenously produce fissile material for nuclear weapons to a greater number of countries may magnify the effects of nuclear latency on regional and international security and bargaining, making it more important than ever to understand these effects and the conditions when they operate.

For example, if nuclear latency exacerbates the propensity for war among a certain class of states but not another, then policymakers can selectively focus their efforts to contain the spread of sensitive fuel-cycle facilities to the former, while allowing the latter to proceed with ENR operation. Conversely, if latency actually reduces conflict propensity, then policymakers may want to tailor their efforts toward states with clear nuclear weapons ambitions, rather than states that are merely hedging by becoming latent. In other words, by understanding the conditions regulating the effect of latency on international security and state behaviour, policymakers can better target their efforts and help manage the proliferation of this technology.

It is similarly important to understand the extent to which the acquisition of latency is tied to alliances throughout the international system. By providing

insights into how US allies bargain with Washington for resources, these analyses will give policy practitioners the opportunity to evaluate whether their current approach to latent allies serves US interests and, if not, whether there are ways to adjust that approach without sacrificing either US non-proliferation objectives or allies' security. It is important that policymakers understand the conditions when both allies and adversaries gain bargaining advantages in negotiations with the United States, or other states in the international system. Especially to the extent that the moral hazard concerns inherent to alliance considerations operate where latency is a factor (Lake 1996; Narang and Mehta 2017), this is of both theoretical and policy significance. By examining the intersection of both technical and political decisions to pursue nuclear latency and a strategy of hedging, as well as the consequences of this capability for international security and politics, we are better able to understand how this new form of proliferation may affect war and peace, states' decision-making, and US foreign policy. This focus is especially salient in the context of nonproliferation policies that may encourage the rise of a set of new latent nuclear states that could conceivably use the bargaining leverage that results to achieve political aims and change the status quo. It may also yield new opportunities or tools (or novel applications of existing tools) for those states interested in limiting this type of technological transfer and acquisition.

To this end, we examine how the proliferation of nuclear latency impacts interstate relations between its possessors and the international community. Similar to previous scholarship that examines the consequences of nuclear weapons proliferation, our research also finds mixed effects for the impact of nuclear latency on international relations. Unlike the development of a fully-operational nuclear deterrent, the proliferation of nuclear latency may actually provide few benefits to its possessors, in spite of the heavy costs associated with its development. While a nuclear latent capability does not dramatically assist in allowing states to change the status quo either by deterring aggression or settling disputes, it may actually make its possessors more emboldened to initiate disputes. Furthermore, latency seems to offer little in terms of bargaining leverage for foreign assistance while it may actually invite states to be targeted with economic sanctions if they invest in an ENR capability. Indeed, the few benefits that latency may confer are primarily aimed at states that are not allies of the United States. Our research reveals that some non-allies of the United States may actually receive somewhat more preferential treatment and benefits after their pursuit of nuclear latency perhaps as part of the United States counterproliferation strategy to prevent the acquisition of nuclear weapons. This largely suggests that it may be unwise for most states to pursue latency—both because the actual benefits may be far less than those expected or hoped for, and because the risks of provoking the scrutiny and pressure of the international community could be substantial. Though Iran did avoid preventive military attack, the past decade did involve significant financial suffering and economic degradation given the extensive sanctions campaign waged by the global community. States that attempt to emulate this model face a spectrum of potential negative consequences—some of which Iran suffered, and others it did not. These dynamics should be useful for the United States as it considers the range of

counter-proliferation tools it has at its disposal for countering the spread of nuclear latency, should it desire to do so. This process begins with understanding why states might pursue latency in the first place, and includes describing the potentially limited benefits and substantial costs which might result from the pursuit itself and the ultimate acquisition.

Unsurprisingly, there are many critical questions that are left unanswered about how this next phase of nuclear technological proliferation will impact international relations. Despite the headway the preliminary research into this topic makes in understanding the general motivations for acquiring this type of technology, either as a substitute for or as a precursor to acquiring nuclear weapons, much more work remains regarding which types of states pursue latency and for what reasons or logics. Specifically, it remains unclear just what are the strategic motivations for states pursuing the acquisition of a nuclear latent capability, as a goal in and of itself or as a mid-point along the road to nuclear weapons. Future research must explore the causal mechanisms underlying geopolitical or security motivators for such endeavours. So far, it appears that states pursue nuclear latency as a means of shifting the balance of power with potential adversaries by creating uncertainty about their ultimate objectives. In other words, states may pursue nuclear latency as a means of revealing or articulating an ambiguous nuclear policy that provides strategic benefits and an enhanced bargaining position. Having a better understanding of these dynamics—why states pursue latency and what they seek to gain—will reveal significant insights useful for countering this dynamic in the international system writ large. Especially to the extent that there are more potential burdens than benefits available for states who head down this path, this is a valuable finding which can be usefully communicated at multiple points in a country's nuclear story.

4 Conclusion

Nuclear latency, as a precursor or substitute for nuclear weapons acquisition, creates 'a threat that leaves something to chance' that may have significant repercussions for interstate dynamics. By understanding the conditions when the proliferation of nuclear latency can reduce or increase the likelihood of security competition and interstate behaviour, especially with regard to the propensity to take on additional risks, US policymakers can better design policy interventions meant to reduce the incidence of war. Indeed, there is much that remains poorly understood or under-explored regarding nuclear latency. While the above presents preliminary findings, it really only just begins to skim the surface into the dynamic processes involved in this arena. Indeed, we suspect that there are different types of states who pursue nuclear latency for very different reasons and understanding these state types and discovering the patterns of their pathways is of critical importance in order to gain additional insights into the phenomenon. Improving our understanding of such issues is also paramount, as it will offer key understandings into modern

nuclear pursuits and ways in which the United States and its likeminded international partners can wrestle with and seek to counter this technological diffusion should they rededicate themselves to the effort.

Investigating these issues highlights the important role that the United States plays in the global non-proliferation regime, especially with regard to countering the spread of nuclear latency considering its dual-use nature as a stepping stone to nuclear weapons. The complex nature of nuclear latency makes it a critical international security issue and also worthy of academic and policy scrutiny as it imbues difficulty into the associated strategies concerned states should deploy subsequently. What are the best counter proliferation tools for responding to nuclear latency and other related forms of emerging technologies in the 21st century which are characterized by significant uncertainty of technology and intentions? It may be the case that the US and the international community writ large can and should rely on similar tools previously useful for countering weapons proliferation. On the other hand, it could also be the case that the uncertainty intrinsic to the dual-use nature of nuclear latency development demands a new examination of potential policy levers (including a variety of positive and negative inducements). As both the phenomenon of nuclear latency acquisition and the ensuing interaction between concerned states and the pursuer or possessor of latency is dynamic and strategic, the scenario becomes increasingly complex and demands greater investigation about the changing nature of counter nuclear proliferation (both among latency and weapons proliferators). By understanding the conditions when the spread of ENR facilities can reduce or increase the likelihood of security competition and interstate behavior especially with regard to states' propensity to take on additional risks, US policymakers can better design policy interventions meant to reduce the incidence of conflict associated with this nascent technology. It is therefore necessary to understand how the proliferation of nuclear materials, technology, and civilian energy programs (prior to or instead of weaponisation) is related to more traditional security interactions, how states view these technical strategies as part of their broader security posture, and how nuclear latency has an impact on international relations and security. Presently, too little is known about these issues and this weakness hamstrings the ability to design smart policy tools for maximum impact. The time is thus now, for the relevant communities to take a close look at the above and the many interrelated issues which latency engages.

One particular point here is worth noting. Elsewhere (Mehta and Whitlark 2017b), we find that a state's nuclear reversal—i.e. decision to roll back and dismantle a prior nuclear weapons program—is likely to increase that same state's potential to acquire nuclear latency. Indeed, this makes sense given that previous scholarship has argued that states retain latency partially to mitigate the costs of publically renouncing the weapons option or giving up all nuclear pursuits entirely (Levite 2003; Mehta 2017). If states that reverse their weapons programs or renounce the bomb option seem to regularly seek investment instead in high levels of latent capabilities, this may indicate that incentives for hedging may drive states to maintain such nuclear infrastructure. This suggests a somewhat counterintuitive possibility for non-proliferation policy: leading states in the international arena

interested in curbing weapons proliferation may be able to encourage the pursuit or possession of nuclear latency—either instead of weapons pursuit in the first place or as a suitable off-ramp for dismantling the weapons capability. Seen in this light, latency may suit the needs of both sides in a bargain—the nuclear aspirant retains some of its advanced nuclear infrastructure as opposed to having to dismantle it entirely, and the non-proliferation community manages to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. It is not far-fetched to think that patron states in the international system—the United States in particular—would be inclined to pursue this scenario either as part of bi or multi-lateral non-proliferation negotiations, via military assistance agreements, or simply as a counter-proliferation inducement to encourage the abandonment of a weapons pursuit. This is but one underappreciated possibility worth exploring further as a potential tool for forestalling or dissuading a state otherwise inclined towards the full weapons option. Concerned members of the non-proliferation community should take the opportunities created by nuclear latency to investigate new and complimentary strategies for stemming the flow of nuclear weapons.

The world is changing. Political movements in the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere are encouraging the leaders of the liberal international order to focus their attention at home and give up the mantle of leadership they have carried for the better part of 70 years. These changes have potentially negative consequences for the international landscape as a whole, as well as specifically for the goal of nuclear non-proliferation. It is not immediately clear who the future global leaders will be, nor to what extent they will desire to uphold and expand the non-proliferation regime which previous generations have worked tirelessly towards. The risks of such a shift are significant, especially to the extent that the next wave of nuclear proliferation focuses on nuclear latency and seeks to model itself after recent Iranian success.

These risks are especially salient for the United States. Since 1945 and the introduction of nuclear weapons, the United States has carried the mantle of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons beyond the nuclear club of the permanent five members of the United Nations Security Council. Largely consistently over time, consecutive US presidents have committed to and lauded curbing nuclear weapons proliferation. This was particularly evident during President Barack Obama's recent administration that saw a renewed commitment to nuclear arms reductions and weapons disarmament, and even the rhetorical aspiration of a world without nuclear weapons, all of which were signalled clearly in his tenure with 2009's Prague Speech. In addition to working to reduce the US's nuclear arsenal, the Obama administration also took a firm stance toward monitoring and enforcing nuclear treaty violations, such as the Russian Federation's purported violation of the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty, and Iranian violations of a series of UN Security Council Resolutions and its Non-Proliferation Treaty membership obligations. Indeed, during the 8 years of the Obama administration, US leadership in non-proliferation was steadfast and unambiguous.

The election of President Donald Trump raises questions about whether the US will continue its role as a non-proliferation leader and will maintain its commitment

to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to other states in the international community. During his campaign, President Trump demonstrated a dangerously blasé attitude towards nuclear matters suggesting that nuclear proliferation was “going to happen anyway,” and that “if Japan had that nuclear threat, I’m not sure that would be a bad thing for us” (Gerzhoy and Miller 2016). President Trump’s apparent encouragement of nuclear weapons proliferation to allies such as Japan, South Korea, and even Saudi Arabia raises severe doubts about the US’s desire to remain a non-proliferation leader under a President Trump. Furthermore, if the US actively encourages the spread of nuclear weapons, it may similarly be willing to provide sensitive dual-use nuclear technology for latency that could ultimately be used to develop nuclear weapons, with or without the approval of the international community. While President Trump has asserted that this would be good for the United States, the majority of scholarship (and more than 70 years of US foreign policy) reveals the dangers of nuclear proliferation to US national security and international security writ large (Sagan 2010).

In addition to increasing the number of states, and potentially non-state actors, with access to nuclear weapons that could be used for a variety of deterrent and compellent motivations, the spread of nuclear weapons, technology, and latent capability may lead to a new era of uncertainty, arms races, and other forms of destabilization in the international system. As Miller and Gerzhoy note, “nuclear ‘domino effects’ have not been common historically. But that’s largely because of determined US efforts to stop them.” By encouraging both horizontal and vertical proliferation among established nuclear weapons states (such as the United States and Russia) and suggesting the need to develop nuclear weapons among verified non-nuclear weapons (but highly latent) states, this new administration’s provocative approach to non-proliferation may result in a set of unforeseen and negative consequences for the United States, its allies, and the global system.

Alternatively, one can imagine a scenario where the rhetoric of the campaign trail remains merely rhetoric, and the Trump Administration instead pursues a non-proliferation policy much more similar to those of previous administrations. Nevertheless, in this still highly uncertain international environment, it is reasonable to speculate that there will be some new wave of nuclear proliferation. The next wave of ‘proliferation’ may come not in the form of new weapons proliferation attempts, but rather may stem from states interested in pursuing and acquiring nuclear latency. As highlighted above, it is necessary to examine the strategic consequences of this underappreciated and underexplored technology in relation to others that may populate the 21st century landscape. As the above demonstrates, there is much remaining to be done as the non-proliferation landscape shifts and evolves in the 21st century and it is incumbent upon more states in the international system to assume the mantle of non-proliferation, hopefully in conjunction with the United States and not in opposition to them.

These technological changes, coupled with dangerous modernization debates and decisions being taken in the US, Pakistan, and North Korea, among others means that despite more than 70 years passing since the only two uses of nuclear weapons, the nuclear landscape is growing more complicated and not less. New

risks of new proliferants pursuing novel pathways, the modernization of current nuclear arsenals, and a lack of clear global leadership on nuclear matters and otherwise could offer a recipe for disaster. The United States and its allies must continue to lead. Especially given the consequences of an increasingly complex nuclear world, it would be a mistake for the work that has come previously to be squandered for future generations.

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The Stability of the US Hegemony in Times of Regional Divergence

Marco Clementi

Abstract This chapter focuses on the relationship between the possible US decline and the growing divergence of political dynamics at the regional level. It investigates contemporary US strategic discourse in order to understand whether it has theorized the decline-regionalism nexus and, if so, with what policy implications. To this aim, the chapter develops a theoretical framework to classify the different conceptions of decline and sketches the different causal paths by which declinism and regionalism could influence one another. The chapter maintains that, short of Bush Junior's Global War on Terror, the decline-regionalism nexus has steadily influenced US contemporary foreign policy. In particular, it maintains that the regional policies adopted by the US to answer the perception of national decline, and thus keep its global influence, contributed to the overall process of regionalization. However, the kind of decline the US perceived did change and revealed the decline-regionalism nexus differently related to the hegemonic role of the country.

1 Introduction

The 2016 presidential election has offered an opportunity to reflect on the international role of the US and on how domestic politics can influence its direction and efficacy. Of note is the fact that the Democratic and the Republican candidates' agendas diverged to an unprecedented extent, and that the latter outspoken isolationism has challenged the fundamental features of the US international posture (Friedman 2016). Also of note is the socioeconomic malaise and lack of confidence in the political system that scholars and commentators alike listed among the keys to Trump's doubly unexpected success at the primary campaign and at the presidential election. In David Brooks' words (2016), the primary "election [...] has reminded us how much pain there is in this country [...] 75 percent of Trump voters say that life has gotten worse for people like them over the last half century. [...] A

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record number of Americans believe the American dream is out of reach". The electoral campaign has also revealed the extent to which the issue of decline has become part of the domestic narrative on the international role of the country and its related costs. As represented by Trump, the US is a country that is in dire need of recovery because it has a shrinking economy and is being encompassed by migrants, threatened by enemies, overburdened by international commitments and exploited by allies (Haberman and Sanger 2016).¹

All in all, the electoral process has brought a disturbing America to the fore: a country frustrated and characterized by decreasing bipartisanship in foreign policy and shrinking confidence in its results. If the "chorus of foreign policy observers bemoaning the United States' supposed strategic incompetence" is right (Drezner 2011, p. 57), it should be concluded that certain important domestic factors are exacerbating the US shortcomings in clearly defining its foreign policy priorities and setting the main international crises. The world would accordingly be (more and more) out of US control. Simply (more and more) out of control, if it is felt that the international order is an American one.

We have already seen such a picture. "Farewell to the American dream?", asked Michael Cox in observing that, after 1970, "the end of economic certainty reduced confidence in the idea of the USA as a material dream, [and] an associated erosion of political authority weakened the institution of the state itself" (2001, pp. 316–317). "After all, [as for the trust in government,] the sharpest decline occurred four decades ago in the late 1960s and early 1970s, not in the most recent decade" (Nye 2015, p. 90). Nor are novelties the possible external consequences of the domestic mixture of economic and political crises: after 1970, "[t]o many on the inside at least, it appeared as if the nation no longer had a system capable of devising a serious or coherent global strategy" (Cox 2001, p. 318).

The fact that the presidential election has shown it is again "decline time in the US" (Joffe 2009, p. 21) does not mean the US is *actually* declining. On the contrary. Think of the unparalleled military capabilities the US controls in both quantitative and qualitative terms; think also of the clear lead the country has in productivity, high-tech innovation and knowledge production. The issue is very controversial, of course. This chapter does not attempt to debate if "This Time It's Real" (Layne 2012, p. 203). Nor does it aim to offer an exhaustive review of the different waves of *declinism*: the vast array of arguments and counterarguments the literature has been amassing for decades to debate the possible instability of the US leadership.² This chapter aims to inquire whether current *declinism* has taken a distinctive form in having drawn nourishment from a strategic feature of post-89 dynamics: the regional fragmentation of the international system.

¹It is difficult to assess the extent to which Trump's success resulted from a large popular consensus about the decline of the country. However, it is noteworthy that such a picture did not cause a backlash against the Grand Old Party candidate, thereby revealing its plausibility in the domestic political debate.

²For excellent reviews of this topic, see for example, Cox (2001, 2007), Joffe (2009), Brown (2013) and Nye (2015).

The end of the Cold War triggered deepening processes of strategic and economic regionalization (Lake and Morgan 1997; Buzan and Wæver 2003; Paul 2012). Consequently, the US had to come to terms with the increasing autonomy of political dynamics across different regions and with the resulting complexities in the nexus between the global arena and the plurality of regional arenas. In turn, the US ability to pursue its foreign policy goals and to produce the international order has increasingly depended on the extent to which the country is able to manage regional dynamics effectively and to keep under control the interactions among different regions. On the one hand, therefore, by greatly complicating the US global influence and ability to produce and protect the international order, these developments could contribute to the decline of the country. On the other hand, the decline of the country could further erode the US ability to tackle the global consequences of regionalization processes.

Thus, declinism and regionalism are not only core issues of the scholarly and policy analysis of contemporary international politics. They could also be relevant to one another. This chapter attempts to understand whether they have influenced one another, together with the terms of this possible interaction. The structure of the chapter is as follows. Firstly, I will focus on the US decline and offer a typology of its meaning, in order to grasp the theoretical and empirical implications of the different uses of the concept. Secondly, I will focus on what kind of relationship the literature has established between regionalism and the possible decline of the US. On these bases, I will move on to scan US foreign policy: in particular, I will ask whether, and if so how, the US strategic discourse has theorized the decline of the country as a possible driver of regionalism; and, vice versa, if it has theorized regionalism as a possible driver of decline (and the particular conception of the US decline). I will then try to understand what all this could mean in terms of the current and future stability of the US hegemony.

2 The US Decline: A Framework for Analysis

The debate on the US international role has focused very much on the issue of decline. Triggered by arguments about the intrinsic instability of unipolarity, contemporary declinism has been further nurtured by arguments about the likely consequences of specific US foreign policy choices and by expectations about power transition at the system level.

In the early 1990s, the unusual power concentration that benefitted the post-Cold War US was depicted as an exceptional and transient situation leading, sooner than later, to power diffusion and multipolarity. As a consequence, the lonely superpower was to be downgraded to an ordinary great power status. According to neorealist scholarship, this outcome would result from standard balance of power mechanisms. Waltz (1993, p. 77) reiterated that “[h]egemony leads to balance, which is easy to see historically and to understand theoretically. That is now happening, but haltingly so because the United States still has benefits to offer and

many other countries have become accustomed to their easy lives with the United States bearing many of their burdens". In a similar vein, Layne (1993, p. 7) affirmed that "the 'unipolar moment' is just that, a geopolitical interlude that will give way to multipolarity between 2000 and 2010. [...] In a unipolar world, systemic constraints-balancing, uneven growth rates, and the sameness effect-impel eligible states (i.e., those with the capability to do so) to become great powers". No matter how friendly the relationship was between the *eligible* states and the US, Kupchan (2002, p. 42), some years later, maintained that "American primacy [...] is already beginning to diminish. And the rising challenger is not China or the Islamic world but the European Union. [...] An ascendant EU will surely test its muscle against America".

As the new century unfolded, it became increasingly evident that the Global War on Terror (GWOT) was not stabilizing the so-called Greater Middle East. The Vietnam scenario was conjured up to reflect the crises in Afghanistan and Iraq and the keywords of the Bush Junior's grand strategy were targeted as possible factors of international instability and American weakness. For instance, Nye (2003, p. 65) argued the US strategy was doomed to failure because it focused "too heavily on military power alone" and downplayed alliances and international institutions. Similarly, Ikenberry (2006) maintained that the unilateralist turn would worsen the US ability to manage the current crises and cripple the American international order. Mann (2003) spoke of the American imperial militarism and argued why it would create a backlash against the effectiveness of antiterrorism policies and America itself.

Finally, the unexpected duration and shortcomings of the military operations abroad also raised doubts about the US ability to sustain its international presence. According to hegemonic and power transition scholarship, this inability would result from the drain of the financial resources necessary to match the US international commitment, thereby leading to the American fiscal crisis (Calleo 2009). The impressive growth of possible challengers, China in particular, of course, added seemingly crystal-clear evidence of the US vanishing leading position.

The debate about the possible decline of the US was very varied during the Cold War and thereafter. As I said, I do not want to delve into it. What does matter, here, is to underline the variation in the definition of the concept. Different conceptions of decline can yield different consequences about how and why regionalism matters for the US. Thus, it is important to specify as clearly as possible the theoretical meanings adopted by the notion. In this regard, at least three conceptions can be observed. Layne offers a very clear point of reference to sketch the first meaning of the term (2012). He connects the dots of different waves of declinism by maintaining that, in fact, the US decline is a decade-long process which goes back to the late twenty-first century. In his view, current developments such as "the Great Recession [...] or the shift in global power" are "the culmination of decades-long processes driven by the big, impersonal forces of history" (Layne 2012, p. 204). As to the causes of these processes, he distinguishes between two drivers [...], one external and one domestic. The external driver of US decline is the emergence of new great powers in world politics and the unprecedented shift in the center of

global economic power from the Euro-Atlantic area to Asia. [...] Domestically, the driver of change is the relative—and in some ways absolute—decline in America’s economic power, the looming fiscal crisis confronting the United States, and the increasing doubts about the dollar’s long-term hold on reserve currency status (Ibidem, p. 204).

One might ask whether Layne is defining decline as the long-term process that is currently culminating or, rather, the outcome of this long-term process driven by the above external and domestic factors. In any case, for my purposes, Layne’s picture is very useful in underlining that decline can be theorized in purely material terms and related to the capabilities—mainly economic resources and, in turn, military resources—which the US produces and commands.³

This meaning can be furthermore clarified by distinguishing “two quite different concepts: a decrease in relative external power, and domestic deterioration or decay. The first is relative decline and the second is absolute decline” (Nye 2015, p. 20). “One declines absolutely if one becomes less wealthy and capable measured against one’s own present capacities; one declines relatively if those with lesser capacity than oneself draw closer, or those with greater capacity pull further ahead” (Quinn 2011, p. 806, fn.12). So, in the case of absolute decline, the US decline consists in the reduction of national capabilities.⁴ Relative decline results from the differential variation of those capabilities in respect to other countries.⁵ In its purest material form, decline means the US is becoming poorer; yet, declinism usually argues that the US economy is growing less than the economy of other countries: in this sense, the US decline means the US is losing positions.

The meaning of the term changes if we call into play the relational definition of power: if we conceive of power as the actual ability to exert influence, namely, to use one’s resources to change others’ behaviours (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950; Dahl 1957; Baldwin 1979, 2016). This concept of decline relates to the possible decreasing US ability to pursue its goals by influencing the behaviours of other actors, together with the course and results of international events. In this sense, the concept is often used to comment on the shrinking influence the US would exert on the rising powers—for instance in international organizations; or on its own allies—for instance in the division of labour in common military operations. Of course, this meaning often informs the idea that America is increasingly less able to effectively set or solve the international crises in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria or elsewhere.

³The material conception of decline is further made clear by considering that “[t]he two most important indicators of whether new great powers are rising are relative growth rates and shares of world GDP” (Layne 2012, p. 205).

⁴No matter what happens to other countries, in theory, absolute decline would also take place if the US competitors declined in absolute terms as well.

⁵In between the two, one might also conceive of *subjective* absolute decline, when one is experiencing decreasing growth rates but is keeping one’s position with respect to competitors: in this case, the decline would neither be absolute (because one is still growing) nor relative (because one’s position is not decreasing with respect to others). Thus, decline would be a perception of national loss resulting from a lower growth rate.

Of course, decline in material terms can be a factor of decline as actual influence: “to the extent that the relative power of the United States declines, its ability to affect its environment through its actions must decrease, with implications for what it can realistically hope to achieve through any strategy” (Quinn 2011, p. 803). However, this does not mean the former is a necessary condition of the latter. In fact, the US weakening influence could result either from a worsened ability to exploit the same amount of material assets (for instance because of structural domestic changes); or from external changes complicating foreign policy. For instance, the great freedom of manoeuvre associated with unipolarity could make the US foreign policy highly unpredictable (Ikenberry et al. 2011). Furthermore, system changes not reducible to polarity could produce similar results. This would be the case, for instance, for “the dynamics of globalization that are increasingly changing the systemic environment”, because “[t]he magnitude and velocity of flows of capital, goods and ideas take place increasingly outside of the control of governments” (Kitchen 2012, p. 86).⁶

Finally, a different notion of decline results from focusing on America’s role rather than on American power. This conception is relevant to those scholars who think the core trait featuring in contemporary America is its being the *hegemon* of the international system, in Gilpin’s terms (1981); or the *leader* in Ikenberry’s (2001); or the *default power* in Joffe’s (2009). In this regard, decline calls into play the ability of the US to produce the common goods that legitimate the superior position of the country and maintain the international order. Thus, the US would not decline by necessity because of shrinking capabilities or rising difficulties in influencing some international actors and/or processes. It would decline because of a loss of prestige. “In international relations, prestige is the functional equivalent of the role of authority in domestic politics”; it “has a moral and functional basis” and refers “primarily to the perceptions of other states with respect to a state’s capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise its power”, especially in “the ordering and governance of the international system” (Gilpin 1981, pp. 30–31).

This is what scholars usually mean when emphasizing that the American *era* is withering. Some of them commenting on the decline of the US hegemony. “In the Great Recession’s aftermath [...] the economic foundation of the *Pax Americana* has crumbled, and its ideational and institutional pillars have been weakened” (Layne 2012, p. 204). Others point at the rise of alternative leaders, such as China, possibly emerging as a regional hegemon and rebuilding the international East Asian order along norms and principles different from those informing the Western order (Kang 2007).⁷

This conception of decline asks scholarship to distinguish between the US policies that are (considered to be) necessary to keep the international order,

⁶In general, these changes relate to the interactive density and capacity of the international system. On these elements of the international system, see, for instance, Buzan et al. (1993) and Snyder (1996).

⁷On the dynamic relationship between the declining American hegemony, and the potentially rising Chinese hegemony, see for example, Schweller and Pu (2011).

fulfilling hegemonic tasks that result in common goods; and those that are not, being ordinary power relations that involve the most powerful actor of the system. Of course, this is not an easy task and the literature abounds in competing views on US foreign policy and its systemic outcomes. Still, scholars who hold this conception of decline need to draw this distinction, besides showing the declining ability or willingness of the US to carry out hegemonic functions.

To sum up, the notion of decline can have at least three meanings and these draw different pictures of the US. The US would become less capable—in absolute or relative terms—if decline referred to national resources. The US would become less influential if decline refers to the control on specific international actors and events. The US would be less and less the leader of the system if decline referred to the ability and willingness to produce the international order.

I have already mentioned these conceptions can be autonomous or mutually dependent. They can also form a comprehensive theory of the US decline.⁸ Above all, these conceptions can combine with one another and possibly result in different implications for the US and the international system. For instance, it should make a considerable difference if the US were to lose prestige, being unable to keep the international order, because of an actual reduction in national capabilities or because of the increasing complexity and difficulty of hegemonic tasks.

On these bases, it is now possible to offer a theoretical framework to distinguish between the different types of decline. This typology results from combining two analytical dimensions. The first deals with the kind of power declinism calls into play and distinguishes between capabilities, influence and prestige. The second deals with the kind of change that is at stake and distinguishes between decline in absolute and relative terms. Table 1 shows the six resulting types of decline.

The first row of this typology merely draws the distinction between the absolute and relative conceptions of material decline. *Decay* means that the US economic performance is decreasing and the overall amount of national capabilities is shrinking. *Diffusion* relates to the fact the US is losing ground with respect to its competitors and thus is being reached. In military terms, this type of decline would relate to a balancing dynamic and result into the restoration of a more symmetrical distribution of capabilities.

The remaining types of decline consist not of material resources but social relations. Both the exercise of influence and of *authority* implies a relation of causation between a powerful actor and a subservient actor (or group of actors). Consequently, decline has an inherently relative nature in these cases: the decline of the powerful actor (or of the leader) cannot but mean that its position is worsening in respect to someone else, namely the subservient actor(s). Yet, the declining influence or authority of the US can take place in times of shrinking national capabilities or in times of rising challengers. So, it is important to keep the

⁸According to the hegemonic stability theory, the relative decline in the US capabilities would couple with rising costs of influence and reducing returns from the international order, in turn leading to overconsumption of national resources and vanishing hegemony (Gilpin 1981). See also Kennedy (1987).

Table 1 Types of decline

Kind of power/Kind of change	Absolute change	Relative change
Capabilities	I. Decay	II. Diffusion
Influence	III. Weakness	IV. Resistance
Prestige	V. Insolvency	VI. Contest

distinction among the two under control in order to grasp the possible outcomes they might produce for international competition.

Therefore, if the focus is on influence, we can distinguish between *weakening* and *resistance*. The former takes place when the diminishing influence of the US results from shrinking capabilities; the latter, from the faster growth of secondary states. Decline as weakening conveys the idea that the US is losing its ability to get what it used to get in the past. Resistance means that secondary actors getting closer to the US are resisting US influence more successfully.⁹

Conversely, if the focus is on prestige, we can distinguish between *insolvency* and *contest*. In the insolvency type, the reducing ability to produce common goods and keep the international order combines with the absolute decline of hegemonic capabilities, as happened with the UK at the beginning of the last century. In this case, what is leading to the loss of prestige is the actual inability to honour the great hegemonic bargain and, in particular, to satisfy the interests by which the secondary states accepted as legitimate the hegemonic order (Ikenberry 2001; Clark 2011). In the contest type, the hegemon loses its prestige because another country is successfully competing to create a new international order on different ground, thereby assuming the hegemonic role. In this case, a competition for leadership is underway, either at the system level or the regional level.

3 Regionalism and the Issue of Decline

In the previous section, I tried to frame the different conceptions of decline. In this section I will focus on the phenomenon of regionalism in order to sketch what kind of relationship the scholarship has established between the possible decline of the US and the ongoing processes of regionalization. To this end, it is necessary to underline the concept of regionalism itself has been highly contested, up to the point that it has been associated to processes yielding opposite results: either integrative or disruptive of the international order (Väyrynen 2003).

On the one hand, the development of political dynamics at the regional level has been thought to fill the regions “with substance such as economic interdependence, institutional ties, political trust, and cultural belonging” (Väyrynen 2003, p. 39).

⁹I borrow the concept of resistance from Schweller and Pu (2011), for whom resistance is the strategy to inflict costs to the hegemon by actors who want to change the terms of the power exchange in their favour.

From this perspective, regionalism has been mainly theorized as a particular path to new forms of international integration and institutionalization (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995).

On the other hand, scholarship has emphasized that regionalization processes have led to the divergence of political practices (Lake and Morgan 1997). “The end of the Cold War has reduced the effects of the global system on regional security dynamics and national decisions” (Väyrynen 2003, p. 28), thereby substantially affecting the rules and patterns of interaction at the regional level. Thus, in the economic domain, “the possibility that regional trading arrangements block multilateral free trade” has been lively debated (Ibidem, p. 33). In the political domain, it has been underlined that the end of the Cold War led to “a restoration of regional sovereignty” and to the establishment of “several regional powers dominating their geographical areas” (Rosecrance 1991, pp. 373, 375).

It is noteworthy that the integrative conception of regionalism was fully consistent with the early 1990s’ optimistic prospects about the end of history (Fukuyama 1992). Even though the decline of the US was debated at the time (and actually expected by some scholars), the lack of major global threats or rivalries and the development of globalization combined to strengthen the US-led international order and to expand it across the regional subsystems. Therefore, from an integrative standpoint, declinism and regionalism would not influence one another in the contemporary system.

If we focus on the disruptive consequences of the processes of regionalization, a different conclusion can be drawn. Insofar as divergent political dynamics translate into inconsistent rules of behaviour and patterns of action in different regional settings, regionalism can contribute to raising international tension, if not to triggering open conflicts. And, this outcome turns out to be all the more relevant because in such a regionally differentiated world, “[d]espite its material superiority and local political commitments, the United States (or any other external power) is unable to effectively control regional security processes” (Väyrynen 2003, p. 28). Thus, from a disruptive standpoint, the decline of the US seems to be called into play by the processes of regionalization. Several possible casual paths are at stake in this regard.

First of all, regionalism can contribute to the US decline if it increases the burden of security policies. This seems to be the case because the divergence of regional dynamics has affected the costs and complexities of the security goods the US has had to produce. While the global Cold War security dilemma greatly simplified the US security posture, and allowed the country to produce security goods that could be jointly consumed by allies and partners (Lepgold 1998; Yost 1998), after the Cold War, the strategic fragmentation of the international system led “to security situations [that were ...] markedly different from region to region” (Binnendijk 2016, p. 2): it led to a plurality of partially independent regional security dilemmas (see for instance Åtland 2014; Liff and Ikenberry 2014). As a consequence, the post-89 US security policies have differentiated across regional subsystems, depending on the demands of regional partners and allies, and the revisionist policies of regional competitors and challengers.

Regionalism can also contribute to the US decline if it increases the costs of global control. As emphasized by Cox (2007, p. 651), “[d]ecline [...] does not just happen because a major power loses a regional war. It also occurs when other actors either begin to play by a different set of rules—something that Europe is increasingly trying to do—or play by the same set more effectively. Here we come, inevitably, to China”. In a similar vein, Kitchen affirmed that the “emergence of regional multilateralism as a systemic norm provided an institutional forum that could be used to make it more difficult for extra-regional hegemony to dominate” (2014a, p. 86).

The relationship between regionalism and the US decline is not a one-way path, yet, because the US decline itself can strengthen or even stimulate the processes of regionalization: here, the standard causal mechanism deals with the scarcity of resources resulting from the decline of the country. For instance, Layne has suggested that, “[f]irst, as the United States spends less on defense, China (and other new great powers) will be able to close the military power gap with the United States. Second, the United States’ ability to act as a regional stabilizer and a guardian of the global commons will diminish” (2012, p. 201). Thus, the US decline would reduce the resources that are necessary to play the hegemonic role at the regional level and result both in less manageable regional dynamics and enlarged freedom of action for regional powers.

Also, the policies the US may adopt to react to its possible decline could increase the variation of political dynamics at the regional level. For instance, Krieg has pointed out that the US has recently developed the concept of “surrogate warfare” in order to achieve strategic and operational goals in times of rising budget constraints and decreasing domestic political support towards military operations overseas (Krieg 2016).¹⁰ This innovation has been adopted in the Middle East and, as a consequence, “[r]egional partners have begun to question US superpower status [...] America has shifted from being a guarantor of security or a protector to being a partner, assisting local surrogates to take over responsibility to provide security in their own backyard [...] Yet, in Asia, the US is trying to retain its superpower status against adversaries such as China, which themselves have explored new means of furthering their interests without resorting to major combat operations” (Ibidem, pp. 112–113). Thus, a decline-driven, regionally-tailored policy innovation would end up in widening the gap between patterns of interaction in different regional subsystems.

Lastly, it is also possible to think that regionalism has stabilizing effects on the US role. The divergence of patterns of interaction at the regional level could widen the strategic distance between different regional subsystems, thereby either reducing the spread of threats and narrowing the scope of security spillovers (Lake and Morgan 1997) or making possible US global challengers less threatening because of

¹⁰Krieg defines war by surrogate as “a patron’s externalization, partially or wholly, of the strategic, operational and tactical burden of warfare to a human or technological surrogate with the principal intent of minimizing the burden of warfare for its own taxpayers, policy-makers and military” (2016, p. 99).

the strategic dispersion that would result from the partial autonomy of the different regional subsystems.¹¹

All in all, it seems that the relationship between the present and future role of the US and the fragmentation of the post-Cold War international system is two-way and mixed. The current processes of regionalization can contribute both to the US decline and the US stability. In turn, the possible decline of the country can increase the regional variation of patterns of action. In the next section, I will ask whether US foreign policy has explicitly theorized this mutual influence, and, if so, how it has addressed it.

4 US Foreign Policy Under Obama: Decline as a Source of Changing Regional Priorities

The consensus view of the scholarship is that the issue of decline has significantly nurtured the strategic thinking of President Obama. A few quotes will suffice to illustrate this point. Gerges noted that “[i]n contrast to his conservative opponents, Obama and his aides had a vivid sense of American decline relative to the new rising powers” (2013, p. 305). Kitchen commented on the factors of that sense (2012, p. 147): “the driving force behind the Obama administration’s resort to realism is a recognition that military overstretch, financial crisis, economic malaise and reputational attrition have left the United States unable to address issues in the economic, environmental or security spheres without international co-operation”. Vezirgiannidou emphasized that “relative US decline is well documented, and even accepted in certain quarters, including by President Obama himself” (2013, p. 638). In fact, as a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, President Obama unambiguously pointed to the issue of decline as a challenge the country had to tackle to renew its role in the world:

The American moment is not over, but it must be seized anew. To see American power in terminal decline is to ignore America’s great promise and historic purpose in the world. If elected president, I will start renewing that promise and purpose the day I take office (Obama 2007, p. 4).

The strategic documents issued during the Obama administration confirmed that the decline of the country was an issue that deserved close attention. The 2010 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) named decline twice in relation to both domestic “standards of living” (White House 2010, p. 28) and “federal funds for research” (Ibidem: 30). The 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) offered a more focused idea of what decline could mean to the country.

¹¹According to this causal path, regionalism would equal power diffusion in softening international competition (Deutsch and Singer 1964).

Not surprisingly, given our responsibilities as a global power, the strategy articulated in the QDR preserves the “ends” articulated in the Defense Strategic Guidance of 2012 as they are considered necessary to protect the core interests of the United States. With our “ends” fixed and our “means” declining, it is therefore imperative that we innovate within the “ways” we defend the Nation (Department of Defense 2014, p. 59).

Reductions in our capacity are unlikely to be completely mitigated by increased reliance on our allies and partners. We expect more from our allies even as their military power is mostly in decline, particularly relative to potential threats. Our effort to build new partners—a core competence of each of our Services—will be made more difficult by our own declining force structure (Ibidem, p. 63).

These quotes clearly show that, according to the Department of Defense (DoD), the US decline consisted in lessening means to carry out foreign and security policies up to the point of making it more difficult to strike efficient burden-sharing solutions with allies and new partners. A decrease the 2014 QDR related not only to fiscal uncertainty and budget constraints (Ibidem, p. 27), but also to the responsibilities borne by the US as a global power: namely, the leadership role that prevented the US from making the *ends* shrink according to the *means*.

If the 2014 QDR stated the US had to innovate its security policies in order to deal with such a difficult situation, the NSS issued by the Obama administration towards the end of the second presidential term stated that the job was well done (White House 2015). The 2015 NSS read as a proud claim of leadership. It emphasized what the US had done to tackle international challenges and what the US leadership would look like in the future. It stated that the US was not declining but leading “from a position of strength” (Ibidem, p. ii). It was the most powerful and prosperous country in the world and was necessary to the security and prosperity of the world:

[a] strong consensus endures across our political spectrum that the question is not *whether* America will lead, but *how* we will lead into the future. First and foremost, we will **lead with purpose**. American leadership is a global force for good (Ibidem, p. 2). [...] We will **lead with strength**. After a difficult decade, America is growing stronger every day. [...] We will **lead by example**. The strength of our institutions and our respect for the rule of law sets an example for democratic governance. [...] We will **lead with capable partners**. In an interconnected world, there are no global problems that can be solved without the United States, and few that can be solved by the United States alone. (Ibidem, p. 3) [...] We will **lead with all the instruments of U.S. power**. Our influence is greatest when we combine all our strategic advantages. [...] We will **lead with a long-term perspective**. Around the world, there are historic transitions underway that will unfold over decades (Ibidem, p. 4, emphasis in the original);

the safety of the American people and advance our national security interests must begin with an undeniable truth—America must lead. Strong and sustained American leadership is essential to a rules-based international order that promotes global security and prosperity as well as the dignity and human rights of all peoples (Ibidem, p. i).

Against this backdrop, it comes as no surprise that the term “decline” occurs, in the 2015 NSS, not in relation to the country itself but in relation to the factors of its weakness. So, the US energy security is advancing because the country’s “dependence on foreign oil is at a 20-year low-and declining” (Ibidem, p. 5) and,

“[c]onsumption has declined, reducing our vulnerability to global supply disruption and price shocks” (Ibidem, p. 16). So, the US environmental security is advancing, given “America is leading efforts at home and with the international community” and “[o]ver the last 6 years, U.S. emissions have declined by a larger total magnitude than those of any other country” (Ibidem, p. 12). One might think that the very strong emphasis, in the 2015 NSS, on the reliability of the US international role is revealing a still vivid sensitivity to the issue of national decline. An echo of this sense can be found in the stated awareness that national resources (and therefore national influence) are limited:

As powerful as we are and will remain, our resources and influence are not infinite. And in a complex world, many of the security problems we face do not lend themselves to quick and easy fixes. The United States will always defend our interests and uphold our commitments to allies and partners. But, we have to make hard choices among many competing priorities, and we must always resist the over-reach that comes when we make decisions based upon fear (Ibidem, p. ii).

On balance, the 2015 NSS offered a very positive assessment of the achievements to renew American leadership. However, the issue of decline did matter in the 2016 presidential election and marked the presidential inauguration day—the day when the “American carnage stops” (Trump 2017)—to mean the international role of the country can hardly be taken for granted, at least at the domestic level. In any case, it does not matter whether that assessment was too optimistic. What has to be underlined here is how the US reacted to that sense of decline, and therefore how the US got the main factors of its decline. In this regard, the consensus view of the literature is that the issue of decline affecting the Obama administration resulted from the failure and raising costs of the Bush Jr. GWOT in the Middle East.

“That the United States’ difficulties in Iraq form the first pillar of the declinist position now represents the received wisdom” (Kitchen 2014a, p. 81). Fiscal problems and economic decline led Obama to reduce “the nation’s commitments abroad, especially in the Middle East, where they had extended beyond vital national interests” (Gerges 2013, p. 300). The decrease in the level of ambition in the Middle East resulted “from the convergence of various trends, chiefly the need for fiscal prudence, intervention fatigue in the wake of difficult experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan and a desire to rebalance towards Asia” (Juneau 2014, p. 48). “The administration essentially diagnosed two core problems of American hegemony: a resource base limited by economic malaise and a lack of legitimacy stemming from the Bush administration’s rhetoric and certain policies” (Kitchen 2014a, p. 88). “The result has been a dramatic shift in the spotlight of American leaderships towards Asia” (Kitchen 2012, p. 147). All these points are illustrated through the words by which Obama’s Secretary of State had cleared the rationale behind that fundamental shift in regional priorities—the so-called Pivot to Asia:

As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point. Over the last 10 years, we have allocated immense resources to those two theaters. In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values. One of

the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise—in the Asia-Pacific region. [...] The Asia-Pacific has become a key driver of global politics. [...] At a time when the region is building a more mature security and economic architecture to promote stability and prosperity, U.S. commitment there is essential. It will help build that architecture and pay dividends for continued American leadership well into this century, just as our post-World War II commitment to building a comprehensive and lasting transatlantic network of institutions and relationships has paid off many times over—and continues to do so (Clinton 2011).

To sum up, the Obama administration's strategic thinking assumed the challenge of decline. It theorized it as the decrease in the US power resources to exert international influence and it related this absolute material phenomenon not only to the capability to defend the nation, but also to the sustainability of the US leadership and the US ability to produce international stability at global and regional levels. According to the theoretical framework offered above, the decline that the Obama administration sought to reverse would be a case of *insolvency*: a situation that takes place when the absolute decline of national capabilities combines with the shrinking ability to produce common goods and keep international order.

Furthermore, the Obama administration perceived this type of decline as strictly interacting with regional dynamics, and the choices it made accordingly contributed to regionalism. The shortage of international capabilities resulted mainly from regional dynamics in the (Greater) Middle East. The US reacted to that shortage by giving strategic priority to another regional subsystem—the Asia-Pacific—according to a kind of zero-sum power logic, whereby finite power resources had to be invested where they give the highest return. Consequently, the strategic relationship between the (Greater) Middle East and global competition faded, thereby releasing regional factors of political dynamics and increasing the room for manoeuvre of regional actors.

5 Change and Continuity in the US Approach Towards the Decline-Regionalism Nexus

The Obama administration changed US foreign policy in many respects. To name but a few, multilateralism again became a keyword of American diplomacy; the readiness to engage in overseas military operations left place to the *leading from behind* concept; dialogue with Iran was resumed to deal with the nuclear issue; the relationship with Cuba gradually normalized. This chapter is suggesting that, even though much less evident, the nexus between the role of the country and regionalism also changed.

The strategic thinking of the Bush Jr. administration was nurtured by a great confidence in American primacy and a clear focus on global dynamics. As to the former, the words with which the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States* begins are very telling: “[t]he United States possesses unprecedented-and

unequaled-strength and influence in the world” (White House 2002, p. 1). As to the latter, it is worth recalling the DoD’s vision as stated in the *Global Defense Posture Review* (GDPR) approved by President Bush in 2004.

The DoD detailed the policies to take region by region according to a synopsis including Europe, the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Africa and the Western Hemisphere. Yet, the 2004 GDPR core strategic innovation was the focus on global threats, and it conceived regions as geographical subsystems to unify in a single global security strategy. Regions were relevant in the vision of the DoD because the boundaries between them had to be erased—and thus could be erased—in the light of global dynamics.

In the Cold War years, we focused on threats to specific regions and tailored our military presence to those regions. Now we are dealing with security challenges that are global in nature, relationships that must address those challenges accordingly (e.g., Japan’s involvement in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, or NATO’s involvement through the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan), and defense capabilities that must be global in reach. We need to improve our ability to project power from one region to another and to manage forces on a global basis (Henry 2006, p. 20).

It can be said that the same assumption of global homogeneity featured in the way Bush pursued his most representative foreign policy aspiration: to “actively work to bring the hope of democracy [...] to every corner of the world” (White House 2002, p. v). It is true that, with the passing of time, the US realized “freedom cannot be imposed; it must be chosen. The form that freedom and democracy take in any land will reflect the history, culture, and habits unique to its people” (White House 2006, p. 5). Yet, what seemed to be out of the question was that the evolutionary path of failing regimes and/or regime-change had to head towards Western forms of democratic governance.¹²

Kitchen has convincingly argued why “the Bush administration’s approach to leadership derived from overestimating the capacity of American power to shape global realities alone” (2012, p. 147). The other side of the coin could be that the Bush administration underestimated the strategic relevance of regionalism. In one sentence, that GWOT mismanaged the nexus between the stability of the American leadership and the variety of regional strategic dynamics. In this regard, the Obama administration made a U-turn: it explicitly theorized that nexus and drew policy implications at both the global and regional levels. If so, one might wonder whether this change did actually make a comeback. Did the Obama innovated US foreign policy by establishing that nexus? Or was it Bush Jr., to divert it from the traditional route by denying its previously recognized salience?

¹²In this regard, it is noteworthy that after 9/11, different countries in different *corners of the world* were turned into instances of the same homogeneous threat to the US security via the notion of *failing* or *failed* states (Call 2011): “America is now threatened less by conquering states than by failing ones” (White House 2002, p. 1); “[m]any governments are at fragile stages of political development and need to consolidate democratic institutions—and leaders that have won democratic elections need to uphold the principles of democracy (White House 2006, p. 3).

To start with, it has to be acknowledged that the Asia-Pacific region had been depicted as a core strategic concern for the US well before the Pivot to Asia (Sutter 2015). It was not in 2011 and it was not Obama's Secretary of State who wrote that "America's destiny lies no less across the Pacific than the Atlantic. We have fought three major wars over the past half-century in the Asia-Pacific theater": it was George H.W. Bush's Secretary of State in 1991 (Baker 1991/1992, p. 1). At that time, moreover, many pieces of the current decline-regionalism puzzle seemed to be already in place: the awareness that global dynamics and challenges did not erase regional differences and patterns of action; the relevance of the Asia-Pacific to both the US and the world economic growth; the relation between the stability of the Asia-Pacific region and the stability of the overall American international order.

"[G]lobal factors for change are playing themselves out in Asia amid the region's particular historical, cultural and political circumstances" (Ibidem, p. 2). "Unlike Europe there has been no single threat commonly perceived throughout the region. Instead, there is a multiplicity of security concerns that differ from country to country and within the subregions of this vast area" (Ibidem, p. 5).

"[M]uch of the ferment in Asia is a product of the region's unique and dramatic economic success. [...] Throughout the 1980s East Asia led the world in the innovations of a new economic age. [...] As a result the combined economies of East Asia are now roughly equal in size to that of the United States" (Ibidem, p. 2); the "Asia-Pacific region is now America's largest trading partner" (Ibidem, p. 4).

Sustaining American engagement in East Asia and the Pacific is vital to U.S. interests—not just in the region, but to the international system we are trying to forge (Ibidem, p. 17).

Thus, from the very outset of the contemporary system, the US administration had a clear sense that regional dynamics in the Asia-Pacific could affect the prospects of national security and leadership. It also had a clear sense of what to do next: to strengthen the security "architecture of U.S. engagement in the region" (Ibidem, p. 4) and to make of the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation process (APEC) a means to stimulate trade and economic interdependence so as to foster "greater regional cohesion" (Ibidem, p. 6). It was President Clinton, though, who actually made of APEC the emblem of the US engagement in Asia.¹³ At the 1993 Seattle APEC meeting, he stated the reasons why the Asia-Pacific was so important to the US and to the world:

Change is upon us. [...] Communist expansionism has ended. At the same time, a new global economy of constant innovation and instant communication is cutting through our world like a new river, providing both power and disruption to the people and nations who live along its course. [...] Our security in this new era clearly requires us to reorder our military forces and to refine our force structure for the coming years. But our national security also depends upon enlarging the world's community of market democracies [...] And more than ever, our security is tied to economics. [...] We must engage the world's fastest growing economies. [...] The fastest growing region, of course, is the Asian Pacific,

¹³He also complemented it, at the multilateral level, by supporting the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF): a regional security framework to promote confidence-building measures (Kan 1997; Goh 2013).

a region that has to be vital for our future, as it has been for our past. A lot of people forget that we began our existence as a nation as a Pacific power (Clinton 1993).

A few months later, the Clinton administration added the last piece of our puzzle: the issue of decline. In fact, contrary to President H.W.G. Bush's strategic documents, which failed to consider the issue at all (White House 1991, 1993), Clinton's first NSS explicitly related the US engagement in the Asia-Pacific to the decline of the country, by emphasizing the need to enhance American competitiveness.

Our primary economic goal is to strengthen the American economy and reverse the decline in American competitiveness that plagued our international economic performance for over a decade. The first step toward that goal was reducing the federal deficit and the burden it imposes on the economy and future generations (White House 1994, p. 15).

At the time, even though the Cold War had just ended with a clear winner, the country was perceived to decline because of economic problems such as federal deficit, unemployment, low incomes. Accordingly, domestic economic revival became the "Clinton administration's top policy priority" (Kan 1997, p. 119). On the basis that "[m]uch of our trade deficit problems today are the result directly of slow economic growth abroad" (Clinton 1993), Clinton supported economic regionalism as a means to national and world growth. This strategy applied to the Americas, via the North Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), that Bush had signed in 1992 and that came into effect in 1994 when Clinton pushed it through the Congress. It also applied to Asia, via APEC:

APEC can complement our Nation's other efforts to open world trade. It can provide a counterbalance to our bilateral and our global efforts. If we encounter obstacles in a bilateral negotiation, we should be able to appeal to other APEC members to help us to resolve the disputes. If our efforts to secure global trade agreements falter, then APEC still offers us a way to expand markets within this, the fastest growing region of the globe (Clinton 1993).

To sum up, as with Obama's, Clinton's foreign policy was significantly influenced by the perception of national decline. The issue was differently theorized, however, because the Clinton administration saw decline as a matter of relative growth. The decline Clinton sought to reverse was the loss of competitiveness that the US was suffering in relation to European and Asian countries. That gap could endanger US military primacy in the long term,¹⁴ but the strategic environment of the early 1990s was particularly friendly to the US, given the lack of major threats and revisionist powers. Therefore, the issue of decline did not call into play the US leadership and the fundamental values of the American order. It limited itself to putting at stake the American share of the world growth. Thus, the decline threatening the US under Clinton could be classified as a case of *diffusion*: a

¹⁴The 1994 NSS clearly emphasized the link between national competitiveness and national security: "We are structuring our defense R&D effort to place greater emphasis on dual-use technologies that can enhance competitiveness and meet pressing military needs. We are also reforming the defense acquisition system so that we can develop and procure weapons and materiel more efficiently" (White House 1994, p. 15).

situation that takes place when the US primacy is undermined by the faster material growth of competitors.

As with Obama's foreign policy, that of Clinton eventually established a clear connection between the issue of decline and regionalism. In fact, in order to curb the risk of decline, Clinton launched the *New Pacific Community* concept (Kim 1996) and supported regional trade agreements. Thanks to those steps, the US could benefit from the burgeoning growth of the Asia-Pacific region, maintain its own competitiveness and, consequently, its global leadership. To manage decline and the process of globalization, the US itself became a factor of regionalism.

6 The Decline-Regionalism Nexus and the American Hegemony

This chapter has investigated the role of the decline-regionalism nexus in contemporary US foreign policy. According to this enquiry, the post-89 US strategic discourse is showing a line of continuity in theorizing decline as a factor of regionalism. From the first Clinton administration at the end of the twentieth century to the last Obama administration well into the 21st, the US grand strategy has reacted to the perception of national decline by revising its regional priorities and policies and, in turn, has contributed to the overall process of regionalization. The Asia-Pacific region has been the exit point of this geographical strategic shift since the very beginning. Therefore, the main discontinuity in contemporary US foreign policy would not be Obama's Pivot to Asia. It would be the GWOT of Bush Jr., with the related emphasis on the sustainability of American primacy, undervaluation of regional differences, and focus on the Middle East as the contemporary global arena.

This chapter has also offered a theoretical grid by which to frame the notion of decline. According to this framework, the decline-regionalism nexus took a different form under Clinton and Obama. Clinton's push towards regionalism in the Asia-Pacific had to increase American competitiveness and thus to prevent—or reverse—the decline of the country in terms of power diffusion at the global level. Obama's shift to the Asia-Pacific had to put the US back on the rails by removing the risk of insolvency that resulted from the overconsumption of national capabilities and the underproduction of national and international security. Even though both Clinton and Obama recognized the salience of the nexus, this distinction is now revealing the nexus differently in relation to the hegemonic role of the US.

The Clinton administration aimed to position the country where power could be accumulated faster, so as to make the US capable of leading as it had done before: namely, to expand the American order by producing the same hegemonic goods. Accordingly, the support to economic and political regional frameworks in the Asia-Pacific did not detract attention from other regional theatres such as the Americas and, above all, Europe. Clinton's remark at the 1993 APEC meeting in Seattle solemnly stated these points:

If you look at the end of World War II and the success that flowed from it, that didn't happen by accident. Visionaries like Harry Truman and George Marshall, George Kennan, Dean Acheson, Averell Harriman worked with other nations to build institutions like NATO, the IMF, the World Bank, the GATT process. [...] these people had the vision to see that collective security, expanded trade, and growth around the world were in the interest of the ordinary American citizen. We now have to bring the same level of vision to this time of change. We've done that through our vote for NAFTA. We will do so again at the NATO summit this January, where I will recommend a new partnership for peace to draw Central and Eastern Europe toward our community of security. And we're working to build a prosperous and peaceful Asian-Pacific region through our work here with APEC (Clinton 1993).

Also Obama's Pivot to Asia did not limit to a more efficient and sustainable use of power resources but called the US prestige into play. Yet, the change in regional priorities realized by the pivot meant that the core hegemonic security goods the US had claimed it was producing via the GWOT had to be subordinated to different security goods. If insolvency called the sustainability of GWOT into play, the Pivot to Asia called a different priority of hegemonic goals into play. And, the zero-sum logic accompanying the risk of insolvency raised the concern that the US faced a regional trade-off, by which the presence in a regional setting could not but mean distancing itself from the others: that the US could not afford to head in different directions at the same time.

As I have earlier underlined, one could think the Pivot to Asia downgraded the strategic relevance of the Middle East for global competition and allowed US competitors at the regional level, like Russia, to define the stakes of regional competition. But, it seems the US is still offering a security guarantee to its allies and upholding the European political order in the face of the soaring tension with Russia;¹⁵ and, the Obama administration reaffirmed the strategic relevance of Europe. The 2015 NSS tellingly stated these regional priorities: it reaffirmed the US engagement in the Middle East and North Africa (White House 2015); declared that the "United States maintains a profound commitment to a Europe that is free, whole, and at peace" (Ibidem, p. 25); and stated that the "United States has been and will remain a Pacific power" (Ibidem, p. 24).

Therefore, it is debatable that the rising military, diplomatic and economic engagement in the Asia-Pacific came at the expense of Europe. Rather, the Pivot to Asia has been a power accumulation strategy (Kitchen 2014b). It aimed to secure the capabilities the US needed to make sustainable its indispensability at the global level, to promote the American international order and to produce different hegemonic goods in different regional settings.

Yet, this is not to say that Obama's Pivot recast the issue of the US decline as a problem of diffusion. In contrast with the late 1990s, the more the US stated the strategic centrality of the Asia-Pacific, the more it implicitly recognized China was going to become a global challenger. And, of a new type, because China was not

¹⁵See, for instance, the US role in sanctioning Russia on the Ukrainian crisis; and, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's resolve to secure the Nordic-Baltic region.

only catching up with the US in material terms, but also competing for leadership. In fact, while integrating more and more into the American international order, China has been developing economic and political frameworks built on alternative principles, rules of behaviour and basal political goals (Acharya 2004, 2009; Kang 2007; Goh 2013), and trying to increase its soft power by playing both high politics and low politics (Nye 2015; Tse 2013).

If so, the possible decline of the US in the years to come would take the form of a *contest* rather than of diffusion: the loss of the American prestige would result from the rising prestige of a country that is building a competing version of the international order. This unprecedented challenge would very much complicate the stability of the American hegemony because the US would face a double challenge: to win in terms of relative material growth and to provide a set of collective goods that fit the needs of allies and prospective partners better than those provided by China.

In this regard, the Trump administration would substantially influence the prospects of American leadership. Trump's words and early deeds suggest that the current administration is going to dramatically change the fundamental goals and means of American foreign policy. Walter Russel Mead has finely expressed the extent and historical meaning of this change.

“For the first time in 70 years, the American people have elected a president who disparages the policies, ideas, and institutions at the heart of postwar U.S. foreign policy. No one knows how the foreign policy of the Trump administration will take shape, or how the new president's priorities and preferences will shift as he encounters the torrent of events and crises ahead. But not since Franklin Roosevelt's administration has U.S. foreign policy witnessed debates this fundamental” (Mead 2017).

It is not possible, here, to delve into Trump's foreign policy in light of the US tradition. Two comments will suffice to emphasize the novelties that lead us to the conclusion. Firstly, Trump has strongly emphasized that the US national interest lies in developing bilateral relationships which are thought to maximize the returns of the US bargaining leverage. Thus, trade relations will have to be reset on bilateral terms after abandoning Obama's mega trade agreements in the Asia-Pacific and Europe; and, security relations will have to be reset in order to make the allies share the burden of their own defence. Yet, we know that multilateralism has been intrinsic to the American hegemony and has contributed to stabilize it over time. We also know that, even though it has steadily shaken the relations between the US and its allies, the burden-sharing issue is the other side of the coin of the US leadership, since the asymmetrical distribution of the burden of security has always mirrored the asymmetrical distribution of influence on security policies.

Secondly, Trump has clearly stated the US national interest lies in protecting American firms and jobs. It is difficult to understand how this priority will be turned into specific policies and to what extent the latter could impair free trade principles and practices. Yet, we know that economic openness and free trade have been the keys to American wealth and prosperity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries alike. We also know that since 1945, the US grand strategy has assumed that

“economic openness [... is] an essential element of a stable and peaceful world order” (Ikenberry 2001, p. 186).

In sum, it is unclear whether Trump’s agenda will fit the unfolding challenges of the international system and secure the American *primacy*. Yet, it seems clear that some important elements of this agenda are inconsistent with what made the American *leadership* possible. Consequently, these elements could jeopardize the security and economic goods that motivated the US allies to take part in the American international order. Accordingly, they could change the power relationship between the hegemonic state and the secondary states, thereby making the US power superiority more threatening than legitimated (Gaddis 2004; Ikenberry 2006). If these elements translate into clear strategic choices, we might conclude that the US is still commanding hegemonic capabilities, but lacking in the hegemonic will, as it was between World War I and World War II (Kindleberger 1973). If so, the Trump administration would be hardly able to take part in the possible contest for leadership with China, and to prevent—or reverse—the national decline that it is so blatantly evoking.

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Part II
Europe and Transatlantic Relations

What's in a Name? Walls, Immigrants, Ethnicity, and the Issue of US-Transatlantic Relations

David G. Haglund

Abstract Taking as its point of departure the 2016 presidential election in the US, this chapter aims to trace the contours of the American debate over ethnicity and the “national identity” as that debate has been said to have an important bearing on the country’s foreign policy decision-making. Emphasis here is upon American foreign policy toward the transatlantic community of states. Three periods are analyzed, in reverse chronological order: (1) the post-Cold War period (1991 to the present); (2) the Cold War period; and (3) the period between the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 and America’s entry therein in April 1917. Despite the widespread belief that ethnicity has become, over time, a more important factor in US policy toward Europe, this chapter concludes otherwise, and shows that the height of ethnic “influence” over US European policy was reached a century ago, during the searing “culture wars” that raged over whether America should enter the European balance of power by intervening in the War. To the extent ethnicity continues to condition US European policy today, it has much to do with the geopolitical institution known as the Anglo-American “special relationship”.

1 Introduction

In early July 1943, as the Allies were preparing to invade Sicily in what was code named “Operation Husky,” Lt. Gen. George S. Patten delivered a remarkable speech intended to stoke the fighting spirit of soldiers under his command in the US Seventh Army. “When we land,” Patten told his troops, “we will meet German and Italian soldiers whom it is our honor and privilege to attack and destroy. Many of you have in your veins German and Italian blood, but remember that these ancestors of yours so loved freedom that they gave up home and country to cross the ocean in search of liberty” (Gorer 1948, p. 23).

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Patten's exhortation was tinged with a war-inspired emotionalism that would today (though maybe not tomorrow) strike us as being quite out of place; nonetheless, his words, *mutatis mutandis*, address a near-constant refrain among many who study American foreign policy, toward Europe no less than toward any other geographic region. Indeed, they speak to an interrogation that never does seem to go out of fashion—an interrogation into the presumed linkages between America's ethnic makeup and its foreign policy orientations. For as long as anyone can remember, America has been a very "multicultural" place, although that particular rubric is a fairly recent addition to the country's political lexicon (Takaki 1993; Lacorne 1997). In an earlier age, a century or so ago, what we today refer to as multiculturalism was usually called "cultural pluralism," by which was really meant "multiethnicity" (Kallen 1970). Whatever words we choose to describe the phenomenon, the question is always the same: is there something about America's ethnic makeup that mightily conditions its foreign-policy orientations? Can we say, to resort to formalistic language employed by many students of international relations (IR) and US foreign policy, that America's behaviour abroad is best comprehended by reference to a "second-image" level of analysis placing emphasis upon the qualitative makeup of its *demography*, rather than to either "third-image" (systemic) or "first-image" (individual) variables (Waltz 1959)? Sometimes, it is even maintained that the "influence" of ethnicity upon foreign policy demands a creative melding of the second with the first image, on the grounds that societal (second-image) phenomena require being "operationalized" by individual policy-makers, who are nothing if not transmission vehicles for collective identities forged at the level of society. Other times, the leader can be said not to represent collective (social-psychological) values of ethnic provenance, but just the reverse: narrow and "parochial" interests rooted in his or her own biographical experience. In these instances, ethnicity counts not because of its "essence" as a second-image distillation, but because of its first-image, and maverick, derogation from the so-called national ethos.

Apropos this latter contention, let us take a recent case that presumably goes to the very core of US ties with transatlantic allies—namely, the "Anglo-American special relationship" (hereafter AASR). Ethnicity made a controversial entrance into the transatlantic discussion of "Brexit," in the run-up to the British referendum on continued EU membership, held on 23 June 2016. It did so because some of the pro-exit militants smarted from the insistence of President Barack Obama that, all things considered, America would much prefer that Britain remain a part of the European Union. One of those militants, Boris Johnson, Britain's current foreign secretary, interpreted Obama's preference not in terms of any "rational" desire of Americans to want to see a like-minded country like the UK stay anchored in the EU, for reasons related not only to the longstanding US objective of trying to foster as much EU "atlanticism" as could possibly be arranged, but also because of a conviction that the AASR would be healthier with Britain inside rather than outside of the European geopolitical tent, because Britain itself would be healthier inside, and as a result, a stronger partner for America. But for critics such as Johnson, Obama's thinking on Brexit betrayed a hostility that had been coloured profoundly

by ethnicity—in his case, ethnic identity stemming from the president's Kenyan roots. In this analysis, Johnson was seconded by fellow Brexiteer Nigel Farage, who opined that the president's Kenyan ancestry instilled in him an abiding distrust of Britain traceable to the latter country's colonial record in Africa, accounting in Farage's mind for Obama's being the most anti-British [!] president ever (Shear and Erlanger 2016; Shirbo 2016).

Now, one can attempt, as I will do at the end of this chapter, to adumbrate a less controversial, and certainly more defensible, connection between ethnicity and the quality of Anglo-American relations, one that really requires none of the bold, almost "genetic," form of argumentation advanced by our two excitable Brexiteers. For, no matter how bizarre the Johnson-Farage version otherwise may be, there is a well-established corpus of scholarly writing that grapples seriously with the question of whether a country's "ethnic identity" might be said to predispose it toward certain foreign-policy options, and to foreclose certain other ones—and if so, why this should be the case. And there is assuredly an ample record of how debates over *American* identity can be held to be pregnant with meaning for the country's relationship(s) with European, and other, states. In the following section of this chapter, I address the general question of ethnic identity and US foreign policy, as a prelude to the ensuing inquiry into US policy toward Europe. After that discussion, the third section of the chapter zeroes in how ethnicity might be said to condition US policy toward the transatlantic alliance, an institution that some have argued required (and possibly still requires) the existence of an Anglo-American special relationship as its chief architectural buttress. I conclude by suggesting that, with the one important exception of the AASR, the role of the "ethnic variable" in US foreign policy toward Europe, as elsewhere, has been vastly overstated in the past several years.

2 Off the Wall? The Debate Over the "Culture Wars"¹

Anyone following the most recent presidential election campaign in the US cannot help but be impressed with how unusual it was. Not only did both major-party candidates, the Democrats' Hillary Clinton and the Republicans' Donald J. Trump, turn out *each* to have surprisingly high "unfavourability" ratings (something rare in US political history, where at least one of the contenders can usually lay claim to being reasonably popular), but the country's immigration policy continued throughout to be a bone of contention that was gnawed on with gusto by the GOP candidate, who time and again promised that, if elected, he would build a wall on America's southern border with Mexico and, for good measure, somehow get the Mexicans to pay for it. These rodomontades came when net migration between the

¹Portions of this section of the chapter are based upon my book, *Ethnic Diasporas and the Canada-United States Security Community*. See Haglund (2015).

North American neighbours had been clearly reversing for some time, with more Americans heading to Mexico, legally, each year than Mexicans arriving into the US (Cave 2013; Massey 2009; Meacham and Graybeal 2013). More to the point, they came at a time when numerous analysts of the American electoral scene were warning of the unwisdom in any candidate's deliberately alienating the large and growing bloc of "Latino" voters.

Just when it appeared as if the Republicans had realized that demographic variables were weighing against the party's interests in federal, or at least presidential, elections, their candidate threw caution to the winds and seemingly delighted in inviting a considerable part of the American demographic fabric to reject him.² Some onlookers felt sure that the Latino voters in the US would rise to the opportunity, and so overwhelmingly turn against the Trump candidacy as to guarantee the election for Clinton. Symbolizing just this expectation was a publicity campaign mounted by the Service Employees International Union, which a few weeks prior to the balloting ran an ad picturing Latinos standing, arms linked, in front of the White House, with one of the group reminding Trump that "we have 27 million votes," to which the sympathetic narrator intoned, "[a]nd together we are the wall between you and the presidency" (Corasaniti 2016).

We now know how effective that "wall" turned out to be; though Trump predictably received a small share of the total Latino vote, it was not smaller than the share garnered by Mitt Romney in his 2012 run for the presidency; surprisingly, it was larger, if only slightly so. "Latino power" could not keep Trump from the White House, partly because the electoral heft of the community was overestimated prior to the election, and also partly because many Latinos (nearly 30% of those voting) cast their ballots for the GOP candidate. Yet even if the presumed impact of certain ethnic constituencies upon the electoral fortunes of national candidates can be overblown, it still remains the case that "identity" (including and especially ethnic identity) did factor into the race for the presidency, even if no one can be quite sure exactly *how* it did so. Many will tell you, and they will not be wrong in so doing, that Donald Trump's shocking victory (at least in the electoral vote, which is all that really matters) owed much to the power of "white" identity (Painter 2016), itself consequence if not cause of the latest manifestation of what has been called, with reason, the "culture wars."³ This latter term is thought to have application to the contestations that pit one group of identity-bearers (the "progressives") against another group (take your pick, the "nativists" or the "reactionaries") over the very meaning of American-ness, with the former argued to be supporters of "inclusion" and the latter of its antonym, "exclusion." And while ethnicity is hardly the only identity marker to figure in this contestation, it is a very important one. And it is the one upon which I focus in this chapter.

²On the GOP's troubled relationship with the topic of immigration reform, see MacGillis (2016).

³For more than two decades, this label has been applied to contestations over the meaning of cultural diversity for American identity (Gitlin 1995).

Specifically, I want to trace the contours of the American debate over ethnicity and the “national identity” as that debate has been said to have an important bearing on the country’s foreign policy decision-making, with emphasis upon its foreign policy choices as they affect the transatlantic community of states, which has in its own right been such a central pillar of the entire post-Second World War liberal order. In developing the analysis, I will take the story of culture wars back through time, and will touch upon events and debates associated with three major geopolitical events: the First World War, the Cold War, and more recently, the post-Cold War period. But there is more to the debate over immigration than just the culture wars, as undoubtedly important as these have been since at least the early years of the 20th century.

There is a no-less important *structural* aspect of the immigration question as it relates to American foreign policy, even though this side—let us call it the “quantitative” side—of the demographic ledger is routinely overlooked in the current heated climate. Simply put, in the absence of the very aspect of American society, immigration, that has done so much to fuel the culture wars at intermittent moments over the course of the past century, it is unlikely that the US would ever have amassed the “aggregate capability” (aka “power”) it clearly enjoys in the international system today. And without that capability at its disposal, the US would scarcely have loomed as such an “order”-inducing country over the past century as the editors and contributors to this volume possibly believe it has been, and might continue to be. So before embarking on our “qualitative” survey of the impact of America’s demography upon its foreign policy, let us tarry briefly over some quantitative aspects, starting with the most important of them all: population size.

It is hardly unusual for scholars of IR to express an interest in demography, which for our purposes we can take to refer to the systematic analysis of populations—their size, their distinctive characteristics, and their propensity to move around, both within the boundaries of territorial units and, importantly, beyond those boundaries (Howe and Jackson 2012). Periodically, we are told that “demography is back” (Economist 2012)—as if somehow it had gone away. But it never did vanish from the curiosity cupboards of scholars, even if it cannot be denied that certain periods, such as the present, do feature a heightened emphasis upon the relationship between postulated demographic variables, such as migration, and international security (Sheffer 2003; Esman 2009; Shain and Barth 2003). One need look no further than the refugee crisis roiling European politics today to realize just how much the scholarly (and other) interest in demography reveals a concentration upon the qualitative side of things—a concentration that undergirds much of the analysis in my own chapter. Still, a useful springboard into that discussion can be (indeed, logically *must* be) provided by a few quantitative observations.

To say that the qualitative aspects of demography may have eclipsed in scholars’ imaginations the quantitative ones is not the same as to say that the latter have been regarded as rather pedestrian objects of study, unworthy of sustained attention. There never has been a time, not even with the obvious impact of refugee crises

upon European security starting with the ending of the Cold War,⁴ and re-emerging over the past few years, when it could be said that scholarship on demography was totally bereft of studies appealing to the quantitative aspects of population. To the contrary, population size, and the implications associated therewith, constituted the primary concern of more than a few researchers. This had been so not only among demographers themselves, but also on the part of IR specialists investigating the linkages between population size and security. Realist theoreticians, in particular, have been highly attentive to the important contribution that population size can make to a state's power, and for so many realists, power is, and has to be, the master variable factoring into their scholarship. One analyst, during the latter stages of the Cold War, developed a memorable quantitative means of measuring aggregate capability. To this analyst, Ray S. Cline, the size of a country's population constituted a key feature of its "critical mass," this latter being symbolized by C in the following formula: $P_p = (C + E + M) \times (S + W)$. The other expressions stood for "perceived power" (P_p), "economic capability" (E), "military capability" (M), "strategic vision" (S), and "will to implement the strategic vision" (W) (Cline 1977).

Equations such as Cline's might these days seem a bit contrived, and may no longer be in fashion among specialists in international security, but the particular demographic variable (critical mass) that figured in the formula remains very much on people's minds, especially if they happen to be adherents of "power-transition" theory who ponder the distressing (to them) systemic implications of China's widely mooted "rise." Its robust annual growth in GDP over the past three decades aside, what most captures the attention of such theorists is China's sheer demographic heft, its 1.25 billion people being largely responsible for the country's current power ranking, with all that some think this must imply for the future course of Sino-American relations (Rosecrance and Miller 2014; Coker 2015).

Other research of a quantitative demographic kidney has concentrated on the size not of individual countries, with its bearing upon their aggregate capabilities, but on the total population of the planet, with its postulated challenges to the "carrying capacity" of Mother Earth, held by not a few observers to have far too many children to support in a proper manner. The so-called demographic "limits to growth" could be resultants of resource shortages, or of environmental constraints, or of a combination of the two. Many writers inclined to dwell upon both the shortages and the constraints have found little difficulty in spinning theoretical forecasts of impending resource conflict, even "resource war," between states, with China once more figuring centrally in the forecasts, just as it does in the worries of power-transition theorists (Klare 2002; Kaplan 2012; Friedberg 2011; Calder 2012; Moyo 2012; Burgess and Beilstein 2013). To say again, this line of inquiry is hardly a novel one; we need but recollect the pessimistic projections made a generation or so ago by a school of "Malthusian" interpreters of demographic

⁴For the sparking of interest in demographic aspects of security following the Cold War, see Loescher (1992, 1993), Hockenkos (1993), and Baldwin-Edwards and Schain (1994).

trends, all convinced that the world had far too many inhabitants to remain a sustainable habitat.⁵

Somewhat ironically, perhaps, Samuel Huntington himself weighed into the quantitative aspect of America's demography by calculating what it would have meant for the country had all immigration ceased in 1790, at the time of its infancy as a republic. His conclusion is more than instructive for IR realists everywhere, and not just in the US. Writing in the early part of the previous decade, and basing his figures on the federal census of 1990, Huntington (2004, pp. 45–47) partook in a bit of counterfactual analysis to arrive at the conclusion that an immigrant-free America after 1790 would have had fewer than half the people of the “real-world” America of 1990: 122 million Americans would have dwelt in that alternative America, as opposed to the 249 million inhabiting the real one in 1990.

I noted that it was perhaps “ironic” that Huntington's name should be associated with such a dramatic differential in American population size. There are a couple of reasons for the irony. One is that Huntington, very much a (classical) realist in his stress upon the “national interest” as representing the lodestar for effective foreign policy, could hardly have been indifferent to the demographic feature discussed above, Cline's notion of “critical mass.” Indeed, it is and must forever remain an open question whether the “alternative America,” which would have been a country half the size of the real-world America, could ever have risen to a position of primacy in the international system. It seems doubtful that it could have, merely on logical grounds, for no matter how attractive a country's value set might appear to others, its “soft power” must ultimately depend upon its “hard power” for its extensibility—else Canada would be one of the world's leading powers today. But this is not the whole of the irony, or even the bulk of it; instead, what is interesting in this context is that when we ponder the presence of demographic variables in the scholarly output of Huntington, we are much more impressed with what he has to say on the *qualitative* side of the ledger. And what was it that he *did* say?

Basically, he said two things. The first, and for my purposes in this chapter, the most important thing he said was that in the post-Cold War era, ethnic diasporas based in the US were effectively distorting—better, perverting—the very meaning of the American national interest, thereby guaranteeing not just a more complex policy-making arena, but one in which American choices, relating to Europe as well as other regions of the world, would be necessarily suboptimal ones. This distorting effect, he warned, was as new as it was troublesome, and stemmed largely from the fact that in a “threatless” era such as the decade following the disappearance of the Soviet Union, American foreign policy would become the plaything of nefarious special interests (not just ethnic diasporic “lobbies,” but also commercial ones) (Huntington 1997).

⁵See, inter alia, Ehrlich (1968), Heilbroner (1975), Day and Taylor Day (1964), and above all Meadows et al. (1972). For critical assessments of that era's Malthusians, see Haglund (1986), and Finlayson and Haglund (1987).

What the demise of the Soviet Union did, according to Huntington and many other observers at the time, was twofold. First, it took the lid off ethnic tensions that had been kept more or less in check during the decades of bipolar ideological struggle that we recall as the Cold War. Now, if ethnicity is a contested concept in IR (Bulmer and Solomos 1998), much more so is the notion of *ethnic conflict*, which itself has done so much to reignite interest in diasporas' assumed impact upon America's foreign policy, as well as upon global and regional (including European) security. Ethnic conflict can be interpreted in a couple of contrasting ways. Some scholars hold it to be a manifestation of elite manipulation of ethnic groups for reasons having little to do, in the end, with cultural differences themselves, and everything to do with sinister elite preferences. In the words of one of those who are skeptical that the notion of ethnic conflict adds very much to our understanding of reality, if "ethnic war" is supposed to connote a kind of Hobbesian struggle of "all against all and neighbor against neighbor, [then] ethnic war essentially does not exist." Instead, what is often mistakenly identified as pent-up communal hatred finally getting uncorked is "something far more banal: the creation of communities of criminal violence and pillage," inspired by non-ideological thugs (Mueller 2000, pp. 42, 53). Other analysts, however, put the emphasis not on manipulative elites but on cultural cleavages themselves; these scholars are sometimes called "primordialists," because they have little difficulty believing that animosities between culturally distinct groups can—and will continue to—spill over into violent clashes precisely because of the cultural differences.⁶

The second manner in which the Cold War's ending figured into Huntington's (and many other scholars') calculations of the importance of US-based ethnic diasporas was a function less of the "demand side" (i.e., the uptick in ethnic conflict, caused by whatever reason) than it was of the "supply side," to wit of the presence of numerous ethnic constituencies in the US at the very moment when many were deeming the international system to have become a "unipolar" one. As the Cold War was winding down during the latter part of the 1980s, a key advisor to Mikhail Gorbachev, Georgi Arbatov is said, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, to have remarked to an American interlocutor, "we are going to do a terrible thing to you. We are going to deprive you of an enemy" (quoted in Friedman and Mandelbaum 2011, p. 13). During the so-called "post-Cold War decade," it looked as if Arbatov's prophesy was ringing true, with the result being, in Washington, that foreign policy specialists began to busy themselves with a new pastime, the "Kennan sweepstakes," so named because of the search for a replacement master concept in foreign policy that might provide the kind of yeoman service to which George Kennan's notion of "containment" had for so long been put, a vade mecum for referencing America's "true" national interest (Dumbrell 2012; Brown et al. 1997).

⁶For a reminder of the ongoing capacity of ethno-nationalism to foment violence, see Muller (2008). For critiques of the Muller thesis, as well as the latter's rebuttal of same, see Habyarimana et al. (2008).

Thus the second impact of the Cold War's ending on debates over US foreign policy: in eliminating bipolarity itself, and elevating America to the rank of "sole surviving superpower," it apparently gave, as so many argued, enhanced importance to the struggle for influence over the country's foreign policy debates, in the process magnifying the leverage that would accrue to interest groups skilful and fortunate enough to gain sway over decisions taken in Washington. Who could gainsay the enhanced stakes, in a land that had suddenly and indisputably become in *relative* terms what it had been in absolute terms for some decades, the undisputed most powerful actor on the world stage?

It was in this new policy setting that Huntington began to direct his intellectual salvos at the parochial interests that he now thought to be shaping America's conception of the erstwhile national interest. His was scarcely the only voice raised in opposition to the degradation of that vaunted interest. Running a close second to the political scientist, Huntington, was the economist, James Schlesinger, for whom "it can scarcely be said that we have a foreign policy at all" (1997, pp. 3–4), so convinced had he become that subsequent to the disappearance of the Soviet Union the principal questions animating foreign policymaking related to the most effective way ethnic constituencies could get America's backing for their particular demands. But it was Huntington's jeremiads that we mostly recall from that era, specifically, his 1997 article in *Foreign Affairs* that laid down the markers for the new policymaking environment, one that had him recommending that America's foreign-policy makers should fundamentally retrench, and deliberately adopt a very modest profile for fear that anything more ambitious would be too easily contaminated by the special interests. He thought such a downsized foreign policy not only to be wiser, but also safer, for America, because the "de novo mobilization of ... resources from a low base, experience suggests, is likely to be easier than the redirection of resources that have been committed to entrenched particularistic interest" (Huntington 1997, p. 49).

But could a country like America really pull in its foreign policy horns, scaling back its widespread network of alliances and the commitments associated therewith? Many scholars thought doing this would be an impossibility, to say nothing of a betrayal of America's own values. Indeed, at a time when startling epistemological turns in IR were mimicking the geopolitical revolution that had culminated in the ending of bipolarity, a new breed of "constructivist" policy intellectual was rising, reminding all and sundry that policymaking need not proceed in a vacuum just because the threat had vanished. Instead, there was another handy vehicle for transporting the concept of the "national interest"; it was the idea of "identity" (Checkel 1998; Pasic 1997; Dickstein 1993). This latter concept would be elevated to a prominent position in constructivist accounts of international outcomes, occupying for these theorists a position as central as that long held by "power" for a certain kind of realist theoretician; identity would be the core organizing concept for realism's challenger, endowing shape to cognition and signification to interests (Hopf 1998). What held for IR theory writ large, applied even more to the subsidiary realm of foreign policy analysis—especially as this pertains to the US. One scholar, John Ruggie, even predicted that in the new

threatless era that had resulted from the disappearance of the Soviet Union, America's ideological identity, what he called its "inorganic nationalism," would henceforth serve to provide guidance to policymaking, as a more than adequate replacement for the now-vanished threat (Ruggie 1997, p. 112).

Ruggie would not lack for company in foreseeing the emergence of identity as the surrogate structuring vessel for threat, imparting meaning to interests. No less a realist than Huntington himself hopped on the identity bandwagon, expounding not just in the aforementioned *Foreign Affairs* article, but more comprehensively in the last book he would ever publish prior to his death in 2008, the central place that the concept occupied in the making of America's foreign policy. Unlike Ruggie, who believed that America's ideological identity pointed in the direction of an ongoing foreign policy coherence and international leadership—and this because a key component of the intellectual genetic code of its inorganic nationalism was argued to be a commitment to "multilateralism"—Huntington took a dimmer view of what identity held in store for America and its role in the world.

Thus in *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Huntington was only too willing to acknowledge the centrality of the constructivists' core concept, revealing himself, in the book's opening pages, to be in thorough accord with their insistence upon identity's structuring impact upon interests: "We have to know who we are before we can know what our interests are," he insisted (Huntington 2004, p. 8). But instead of taking comfort from the power of inorganic nationalism to keep American foreign policy focused upon a coherent national interest, Huntington worried that an increasingly "multicultural" (especially Latino) America was going to render nugatory a central ingredient of the country's *organic* nationalism, with the result being incoherence in policymaking, or worse. Optimists might take comfort from America's multilateral "ideology," and even be able to convince themselves that their side had won the Kennan Sweepstakes by discovering in "engagement and enlargement" (viz., of liberal democracy) the new master concepts of American foreign policy in the post-threat era,⁷ but Huntington's own reading of that ideology, or "creed," was decidedly less sanguine. He worried very much that America's "ostensibly secular" political creed (what others, such as Ruggie, might call its inorganic nationalism) was really predicated upon ideational values that privileged *cultural* (i.e., organic) values, the two most important of which being Anglo-Protestantism and the English language, such that Anglo-Protestant culture was the "paramount defining element of American identity" (Huntington 2004, p. 62).

Hence the dilemma, to Huntington, one triggered in large measure by the rise in significance of diasporas the post-Cold War era, themselves a reflection of the demographic changes set in motion by the 1965 reform to American immigration policy, heretofore privileging immigration flows from Europe but henceforth welcoming immigrants from the erstwhile Third World (now usually referred to as the

⁷Optimistic assessments in the post-Cold War decade include Deudney and Ikenberry (1993/1994), Ikenberry (1996), and Ruggie (1992).

“global South”) (Dinnerstein and Reimers 1999; Daniels 1990; Hutchinson 1981). Nowhere outside of America could or did these ethnic interest groups have such prominence, and this only partly because of the country's international primacy. True, being the sole surviving superpower mattered, but even more important was America's historic role of having been, and continuing to be, an immigrant-receiving country. The upshot of the two trends was clear, and to Huntington highly disturbing (2004, pp. 285, 291): “American politics is increasingly an arena in which homeland governments and their diasporas attempt to shape American policy to serve homeland interests.... The more power the United States has in world politics, the more it becomes an arena of world politics, the more foreign governments and their diasporas attempt to influence American policy, and the less able the United States is to define and to pursue its own national interests”.

3 Ethnicity and the Transatlantic Relationship

America's culture wars might, at first blush, seem to have little to do with the country's relations with its European allies. But upon closer examination, almost the opposite could be said—that they have *everything* to do with transatlantic relations. After all, it is not unusual to discover that the identity struggles pitting Americans against each other can often appear to be disputes over the very meaning of “Western” values in today's highly diverse American society, with those values sometimes regarded by their critics as simply being another way of saying “Eurocentrism,” which to many minds, at least in North America, is a somewhat sinister notion. And it therefore follows that, if *this* is what the culture wars are really about, then their outcome looks to be full of meaning for US-European ties. According to this way of regarding matters, to the extent that the “inclusionist” camp (as defined above) triumphs over the “exclusionist” one, then one might expect to see a continued lessening of American geostrategic interest in the Old Continent, *pari passu* the ongoing diversification of the country's ethnic mix—an expectation that, as we saw above, looks to be central to the manner in which Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage conceived of US “intervention” in the Brexit debate. Reverse the equation, and assume the exclusionists to be winning the latest round, as exemplified by the election of Donald Trump, then it might follow that the November 2016 election results were good for US-transatlantic relations.

Now, to state the manner in just this way, with its supposedly logical suppositions and equally logical extrapolations, leads us to the rather bizarre assertion that a Trump administration must turn out to be beneficial for Europe. In the bargain, we could add that the new president really does like Europeans so much that he even marries them! But, of course, outside of Slovenia perhaps, Europeans have not yet shown themselves to be particularly overjoyed with the November 2016 results—or at least, *some* Europeans, because in the enlarging swathe of the Old Continent infatuated with “illiberal democracy,” the Trump election has been quite well-received, all things considered (Lyman 2016). Be this as it may, it is worth

stating the obvious, and repeating a point raised earlier in this chapter: with one important exception to be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter, there is, today, no obvious and necessary correlation between America's ethnic "identity" and its grand strategy toward the transatlantic region. There used to be, in the early part of the twentieth century and then again in the Cold War era, a correspondence worth noting between ethnic diasporas in the US and transatlantic political outcomes. But, paradoxically, rather than the Cold War's ending having energized ethnic politicking in the shaping of US policy toward Europe, it appears that since the demise of the era of bipolarity, American ethnicity has mattered far less to the country's European "vocation" than it once did. As the much-commented "pivot" to Asia reveals, it may well be that there has been a relative diminution in America's geostrategic interest in European affairs (as many, especially in Europe, like to claim), but if so it has very little to do with US demography, and much more to do with a conviction that Asia will, in the twenty-first century, represent what Europe once represented in the twentieth and preceding centuries—the fulcrum of world power. In short, the focus on Asia reflects a commitment to realist principles, rather than a defection from them.

So let us see how the story of "influence attempts" made by ethnic diasporas has unfolded—or, perhaps better, has been thought to unfold—during three illustrative eras over the past century. Working in reverse chronological order, these are (1) the post-Cold War period (1991 to the present); (2) the Cold War period; and (3) the period between the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 and America's entry therein in April 1917. *Pace* the legions of analysts who are certain that ethnicity possesses a strong conditioning effect upon US foreign policy, one that has only grown more potent with the passage of time, I am going to show that the reality has been the reverse, certainly when it comes to assessing how ethnic diasporas might have affected the "national interest," above all in matters appertaining to European and transatlantic security.

Any number of cases could be highlighted to adduce a meaningful connection between demography and foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. Ones that spring to mind in this regard include the debates about the "Israel Lobby," about the role of Armenian-Americans in the struggle for control over Armenia's foreign policy, and of course, the long-running inquiry into the impact of the "Cuban Lobby" on US policy toward Castro's Cuba (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006, 2007; Foxman 2007; Zarifian 2014; Haney and Vanderbush 1999). Given that only one of the above trio actually can be said to concern Europe—and even then, only if we stretch the geographical definition of the Old Continent so as to make it include a country, Armenia, that is actually located in *Asia*, I am going to turn the spotlight elsewhere, and shine it upon one very important transatlantic security issue about which it has sometimes been said US-based ethnic diasporas played a large role during the post-Cold War period: the expansion (or if the reader prefers, enlargement) of NATO.

Most analysts concede that NATO's decision to grow during the 1990s was motivated by a number of factors, among them by far the most important being a desire, through NATO enlargement beyond the 16 members at the end of the Cold

War to an indeterminate number (possibly even including a democratic Russia), somehow to expand the European “zone of peace.” For sure, even analysts who accepted the fundamental strategic logic of expansion were sometimes prone to noting the supplemental stimulus to the enterprise provided by US-based ethnic communities in certain metropolitan areas, whose votes were thought harvestable by politicians astute enough to plump for their ancestral homeland’s being embraced within the enlarging NATO (Goldgeier 1999; Asmus 2002).

If very few scholars made of ethnic diasporas their central “explanatory variable” in deciphering the enlargement puzzle, there was at least one Western leader who thought the puzzle could *only* be explained by reference to the ethnic vote. That politician happened to be the Canadian prime minister at the time of NATO’s first post-Cold War round of expansion, announced at the Madrid summit in July 1997. This was the historic summit at which the alliance issued invitations to join to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. In an unguarded moment while alliance leaders were waiting for their group official photo to be taken, Jean Chrétien let it be known to two colleagues standing close to him, the prime ministers of Belgium and Luxembourg, that the real explanation for NATO’s enlarging lay in Bill Clinton’s “short-term political reasons.” Unaware that his words were being picked up by a nearby (and very live) Radio Canada microphone, Chrétien said enlargement had “nothing to do with world security—it’s because in Chicago, Mayor Richard Daley controls lots of votes for the Democratic nomination” (quoted in Harris 1997).

Discernible within the prime ministerial comment, suffused as it was the equal doses of confusion (it was the 1998 midterm elections not the 2000 presidential nomination that should have been mentioned) and cynicism, there was the unspoken subtext that Polish-Americans in the Chicago area were assumed to be a powerful electoral bloc, one that would likely be decisive in the upcoming Congressional elections of 1998. Its somewhat idiosyncratic tone to the contrary, what the Canadian prime minister said did reflect one of the presumed “home truths” about US electoral politics—namely, that ethnic constituencies were potent blocs of votes, available to be given to the most attractive bidder (Levy and Kramer 1972). And in foreign-policy terms, the assumption was that attractiveness varied in direct proportion to the number of nice things a politician could promise to do on behalf of the ancestral homeland (save in the case of the Cuban-Americans, for whom attractiveness inhered in a politician’s promise to punish the Castro regime). But to say again, as the most recent US presidential election demonstrates, caution is always advised before anyone leaps to the conclusion that the “ethnic vote” *will* determine outcomes.

Nevertheless, it is only a matter of common sense to calculate that candidates for office in American politics (and elsewhere) will look for votes wherever they might find them, and there can be little doubt that during the Cold War—the second of the eras canvassed here in reverse chronological fashion—policymakers made a point regularly of highlighting how American decisions corresponded favourably with the preferences of certain ethnic constituencies. This is not the same, though, as stating that it was the constituencies’ preferences that decreed the policy choices. For instance, there is a very strong case to be made for the “marketing” of

anti-Soviet policies in packages that were wrapped in a way guaranteed to please ethnic constituencies. We have already noted one such ethnic lobby (a non-European one) whose preferences regarding US policy toward Castro's Cuba were more than satisfied by a succession of administrations determined, for reasons independent of the Cuban-American preferences, to adopt a harsh tone in diplomacy with the Communist island's government; in this case, rather than the diaspora shaping US foreign policy, it was the policymakers who were utilizing ethnic lobbies to promote policies chosen for reasons deducible from the national interest (Auten 2006).

This was hardly an uncommon feature during the Cold War, when Washington would so often make a point of publicizing (indeed, flaunting) its anti-Soviet positions before audiences made up of ethnic communities whose "ancient affections" inclined them to reward actions intended to make things harder for the Soviet masters who were presiding over the political fortunes of their kinfolk, back home. This was a far cry from the pattern of ethnic politicking in the earliest of the three periods addressed here: the period of years leading up to American entry into the First World War and extending into the interwar decades. This earlier era is generally (and in my estimation, correctly) seen as marking the highpoint of ethnic diasporic political activity with an impact not just on US foreign policy, but especially on the policy toward Europe. As Tony Smith explains, "[o]ne need not argue ... that ethnic prejudices were the primary, much less the sole, determinant of much of American policy to conclude that they nonetheless had an important influence, usually neglected in the literature, not only on American policy toward specific countries but on the general cast of America's role in world affairs.... The result was a substantial drag on American involvement in European affairs from the 1910s through the 1930s that it is impossible today not to find regrettable" (Smith 2000, pp. 53–54).

Now, it may be one thing to claim the ethnic groups have never had more "influence" over American policy toward Europe than they possessed in those years a century or so ago, but it is a far different manner actually to gauge the impact of their influence attempts. To the extent that analysts have paid attention to ethnic lobbying before, during, and shortly after the First World War, it is an authorial consensus that the impact of those influence attempts was to keep America out of the European balance of power—or at least to delay its entrance into that balance, and once in, quickly to drag it out again. What George Sylvester Viereck wrote back in 1930, apropos the efforts made by two large ethnic lobbies to keep America neutral after 1914, could still pass muster as the received wisdom today. Commenting on the German-American lobbying efforts, which were mightily abetted by Irish-American political energies applied to similar objectives but for different reasons, Viereck noted those "activities were most intense in the spring of 1916. The pressure thus exerted was a powerful factor in staying our declaration of war until 1917" (Viereck 1930, p. 259).

Perhaps. But there is another way of assessing the impact of the anti-British lobbies during those turbulent, and emotionally charged, years in America. In trying to answer questions about diasporic "influence," we would be well-advised to

consider the “principle of the opposite effect.” Counterintuitive as it might seem, one really can ascribe a great deal of influence to the diasporic lobbying activities of the Irish- and German-Americans between August 1914 and April 1917—save that the impact of their lobbying efforts was rather not what the anti-Allied groups were seeking. It might make more sense for us to steer clear of the conventional wisdom that assumes America’s two huge diasporas were able to *delay* the country’s entry into the war, and ask a different question instead: did the two diasporas stimulate pro-British feeling among the majority of American citizens, themselves of English (or, more accurately, British) descent? Recent scholarship on the role of “emotion” in foreign-policy decision-making suggests that there may be something to another thesis propagated by Samuel Huntington, namely the idea of “civilizational rallying,” such that we could say that the home-front “culture wars” between 1914 and 1917 may well have moved majority public opinion from its classic default position of *political* Anglophobia (else what was the point of the Revolution?) to one of support for American involvement in the war, on Britain’s side. And it did this because the majority of Americans, who after all were British-descended a century ago, frankly got tired of hearing from the Irish- and German-Americans how debased, and fundamentally anti-American, *English* civilization was. As Walter Russell Mead rightly observes (2008, pp. 34–35), political Anglophobia did not, and could not, translate into cultural Anglophobia, for “[e]ven at the height of their war of independence, Americans did not believe that British civilization was an evil civilization; it was recognizably their own civilization and therefore obviously good.”

If this is so, then the culture wars of 1914–1917, representing the apogee of ethnic lobbying activism in the US, not exceeded at any time since, had profound, albeit short-term, implications for America’s relations with the Europeans. They contributed mightily to bringing, for the first time, the country into the European balance of power, even if they could not keep the US committed to European security during the isolationist interwar years, when the wartime period of emotion-laden civilization rallying had ended. The question now before us is whether there is likely to be any tangible connection between American demography and the future of transatlantic relations. I think there is, as I explain below.

4 Conclusion: The AASR and the Future of Transatlantic Relations

I end this chapter where I began it, by isolating two elements: the AASR, and the question of whether, and if so how, ethnicity might be said to shape American policy toward the international system, with special focus upon Europe. The place to begin this conclusion is with one of the most profound insights ever expressed by the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, who in commenting upon the state of transatlantic relations during the latter part of the 19th century descried an eventual

Anglo-American alliance as representing nothing other than the “logic of history”—and this simply because the US and the UK shared a common language (quoted in Clark 1958, p. 2).

To be sure, the category to which we give the label “ethnicity” has hardly been *terra incognita* for students of the AASR, irrespective of whether they happen to put the emphasis upon “race” or language as the “ethnic” marker of greatest significance (see, respectively, Vucetic 2011; Bennett 2003/4). The point is that ethnicity, whatever we take it to mean, has mattered for a long time among many scholars who contemplate the meaning of the AASR. Consider the judgement of Christopher Hitchens, who paid homage to the common stock of cultural symbols that were both language-dependent and politically significant aspects of Anglo-American relations, called by him the “common stock of allusion and reference—one might call it the unacknowledged legislation—which underlay the ways in which people thought and responded, and the ways in which they made up their minds,” regarding the AASR (Hitchens 2004, pp. 44–45).

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of interest, among some scholars of IR, in the role that “emotion” might be said to play in interstate relations. Significantly, much recent work on emotion and IR can be associated with theorists whose paradigm of choice is a constructivist one, and while it would be rash to conclude that there is any consensual policy (or normative) message emanating from these theoreticians, it is clear that they tend to be dismissive of arguments, ventured by many realists, to the effect that geostrategic institutions such as NATO and the AASR must face an uncertain future whenever the “threat” that brought them into being vanishes. Indeed, what was being said by many realists about NATO in the aftermath of the Cold War’s ending a generation ago was echoed, nearly verbatim, in respect of the AASR (Coker 1992). Neither institution was expected to have much of a future ahead of it, which is why the latter’s track record over the past quarter-century has led some analysts to liken it to that of Lazarus, showing an uncanny knack for returning to life after being pronounced dead (Marsh and Baylis 2006).

Although for the most part in this chapter I have sought to debunk the fairly widespread view that US-based ethnic diasporas *have* been achieving the sort of influence over US foreign policy that Huntington, Schlesinger, and others feared they were attaining, there is a real sense in which ethnicity, even if not conveyed by any detectable “diaspora,” *does* matter a great deal for transatlantic relations. This is why the recent group of theorists who have been expanding the bounds of inquiry along frontiers that were once thought conceptually inhospitable for IR students—frontiers that in particular have been skirting difficult terrain associated with “emotionalism” (Crawford 2000; McDermott 2004; Ross 2006; Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Coicaud 2014)—have injected a new and fascinating element into the scholarship on the AASR, and by extension, on America’s transatlantic relations more broadly construed.

For what this research does is to call into question the distinction that once used so regularly to be drawn between “rationality” and emotion, and in so dissolving the barriers hitherto so prominent a feature in IR analysis, not excluding that

appertaining to the AASR, the research has opened up new vistas upon topics that used to be thought, to put it mildly, rather strange. One such topic, of course, is the notion of “friendship” between states, something usually relegated to the category of exotic species by scholars smitten with the familiar dictum associated with Palmerston, about states having no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests (Berenskoetter 2007; Sasley 2011). For reasons linked with assumptions of “we-feeling” among “kin countries”—no matter what may be said to be the emotional bonding element of greatest significance (and here one could do much worse than to reflect upon the Bismarckian observation cited above)—the roots of this collective identity can be found imbedded in a the fertile soil of ethnicity, especially as this latter gets conveyed and reinforced through shared language, and all the “unacknowledged legislation” associated therewith.

If this is so, then, an interesting paradox suggests itself, one that goes to the heart of the interrogation presented in this edited volume, which is very much focused upon whether, and if so how, America can continue to play the role of energizing force behind the liberal international order. The paradox inheres less in the “geostrategic” meaning of the American vote of November 2016 and more in the significance of the British vote of nearly five months earlier, to leave the European Union. To the extent the “emotion-in-IR” scholarship is valid, this suggests that the strategic implications, both for the transatlantic and, by extension, the Western (liberal) world order of the past 70 or so years, need not be so bleak as they are commonly assumed today. Irrespective of whether the “pivot” to Asia continues to be a feature of US grand strategy, the fundamental solidity of the AASR—which, to say again, owes its existence in some meaningful way to transnational collective identities of an “ethnic” provenance, will inevitably contribute to America’s remaining an important factor in European security affairs, notwithstanding the degree to which Britain itself may (or may not) *formally* be linked to the European project.

Britain, geographically, *is* in Europe. And America, its culture wars with their decidedly anti-European undertones to the contrary notwithstanding, will continue, to play a critical part in transatlantic security relations, if for no other reason than because the AASR has proved to be such an invariant “geo-epistemological” feature of its strategic culture.

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Too Far Ahead? The US Bid for Military Superiority and Its Implications for European Allies

Andrea Locatelli

Abstract Since the early 1990s, the US has made an unprecedented effort to keep—and actually increase—the military superiority gained during the Cold War. Buzzwords like “Revolution in Military Affairs” and “Defence Transformation” have marked the American defence policy at the turn of the century. To put it bluntly, this commitment was epitomized over the years by constantly high defence budgets, but most importantly by a procurement policy markedly inclined towards innovation and an ongoing attempt at doctrinal adaptation. On the other hand, America’s European partners have been mostly reluctant to follow the US example: not only they have kept their budgets to a minimum, but (with a few exceptions) they have also shown little interest in innovations. As a result, the power asymmetry between the two shores of the Atlantic has grown to the point of endangering the effectiveness of the Transatlantic alliance. The aim of this chapter is threefold: firstly, to illustrate the US defence policy in the past 25 years; secondly, to ponder how NATO has been affected by this; thirdly, to discuss the problems this state of affairs entails for the US and its allies.

1 Introduction

Since World War II, Western European states have been America’s closest allies. The transatlantic partnership, with the exception of a few (mostly French) diplomatic quibbles, grew stronger over the Cold War years, nurtured by the Soviet threat and the benefits of extended deterrence. To the surprise of just a few scholars (Mearsheimer 1990; Waltz 1993), the demise of the Soviet Union did not lead the United States (US) to downgrade its long-standing presence and rush away from Europe. On the contrary, Eastern European states have been eagerly included in the

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closest ring of friends, as epitomized most clearly by NATO's succeeding rounds of enlargement (closely followed by the European Union (EU) enlargement process).

While the transatlantic partnership remained as the main pillar of the US-centered liberal order (Ikenberry 2001, 2006), two enduring myths have prospered since the early 1990s: the first was the incoming decline of the US as the unipole of the system (Kupchan 2003; Zakaria 2008); the second was the expected downgrade of the US military presence in Europe as a result of Washington's reorientation to East Asia (Henry 2006; Driver 2016). Certainly, in recent years the rise of competitors like China has been growing as a top concern in US foreign policy circles. However, there is still very weak evidence of either an American decline or a farewell from Europe (see, among many others, Beckley 2011/12; Binnendijk 2016). So, after a 70-year-old partnership, Sir Michael Howard's famous claim about NATO—an "unhappy successful marriage"—still holds (Howard 1999).

However, as with most enduring marriages (especially those based on convenience rather than love), endurance depends on the partners' capability to please each other—or, in economic terms, exchange benefits (Olson and Zeckhauser 1966; Morrow 1991, 1993). This is one of NATO's most widely recognized merits: from its foundation, onwards, the alliance served as a framework for the US and European states to trade protection versus influence—a task that remained fundamentally unaltered after the demise of the Soviet Union (Press-Barnathan 2006). The question arises as to whether the transatlantic partnership is still a viable and effective tool to promote such a bargain. To put it differently, what are the challenges facing this partnership, and what are the strategies that the US and Europe consequently need to design in order to keep the alliance alive and kicking?

These issues have been widely explored in the literature. Particularly in the wake of the so-called transatlantic rift that followed the 2003 US war on Iraq, many authors questioned whether the crisis was the result of bad policies or deeper forces (see, among many others, Lindstrom 2003; Moravcsik 2003; Lundestad 2008; Rynning 2005; Sloan 2005). In this chapter, we take a slightly narrower perspective, as we aim to investigate how diverging trajectories in US and European defence policies can affect the transatlantic partnership.

In more detail, we will discuss one of the major questions that informs this volume: what is the relationship between the US global foreign and defence policy and its regional approach towards Europe? In tackling this issue, we will point to a seeming dilemma for the US: in a nutshell, we argue that Washington's attempt to keep its unipolar position within the international system has been followed by an ambitious, costly, and aggressive defence policy—one, to be sure, that none of the European partners could afford or emulate. The end result is that the US is still the indispensable power in the European context, and this comes at a price for Washington. The issue at stake here is not just the long-debated free-riding/burden-sharing issue (i.e. Europeans underspending in military issues since they have guaranteed access to US assets): one way or the other, NATO managed to survive almost 70 years without addressing this imbalance, so it is hard to expect that it will be a problem now. Unfortunately, the reason for concern is

different, and probably more daunting: by developing cutting-edge military capabilities and novel operational concepts, the US has nurtured the so-called capabilities gap: is this gap doomed to weaken the alliance? If so, how to tame its impact on the Transatlantic partnership?

In order to tackle these questions, we will proceed as follows: we will start with a broad survey of the US defence policy since the end of the Cold War. In particular, we will highlight the main sources of continuity and achievements in terms of procurement and strategic posture. We will then see how the American defence policy has shaped the parallel evolution of NATO's adjustment. Finally, we will discuss the implications of the gap for both shores of the Atlantic.

2 America's Post-Cold War Defence Policy: A Compulsion to Achieve?

The US defence policy in the past 25 years has been marked by a radically ambitious project: to shape the features of warfare according to its own preferences; or, to use a metaphor—to model the face of war at its own image. While Washington's foreign policy remained—with the exception of the first Bush administration (Daalder and Lindsay 2003)—clearly status-quo oriented (Mastanduno 1997), the defence policy designed and implemented by the Pentagon had a neatly revisionist flavour (Locatelli 2012): since the early 1990s, top American strategists nurtured the idea that Washington's technological superiority in military issues might be used not just for improving efficiency in war, but also for bringing about a qualitative change in the way war is fought. In other words, not just to preserve the American military primacy, but actually to increase that superiority up to a point that would deter potential adversaries (and friends alike) from competing with the US.

The origins of this belief can probably be traced back to the release of a non-classified document, almost 25 years ago, by the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) (Watts 2011, p. 1). The report argued that military technology was a key component of the American victory over the Soviet Union and it suggested that a Technical-Military Revolution was taking place at the time: in other words, technological innovation was altering the conduct of war, and the US could grasp its benefits more than anyone else. Indeed, this idea had been circulating in defence circles and beyond for quite some time: ironically, it was as early as the late 1970s that Soviet military planners realized that—regardless of the nuclear balance—had they failed to keep pace with the US military technology, they would lose the Cold War. What gave new life to this doctrine in the early 1990s was the lesson learnt from the 1990/91 war with Iraq (Cohen 1993; for a critical assessment see Biddle 1997).

The unprecedented success witnessed in Iraq led both policymakers and analysts to speculate on a purported Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) (for more detailed

discussions, see Sloan 2002, 2008; Locatelli 2010). Driven by top officers within the Pentagon—especially Andrew Marshall, the influential head of ONA—a lively debate emerged on the possibility of riding the ongoing revolution. Those arguing in favour of the RMA claimed that the new capabilities made available by Information and Communication Technologies might eventually “lift the fog of war”, as admiral Owens (2000) put it (for a vocal critique see Gray 2002). Needless to say, the allure of this promise was that by lowering the risks and costs of armed conflicts, the US would easily bring to bear its influence on a global scale.

In their attempt to fully realize this transformation, the American armed forces launched a wave of initiatives aimed at boosting not just weapon-systems technology, but also military doctrine and an organizational framework. This was clearly coherent with the early definitions of the RMA (Krepinevich 1994), that emphasized the need to go beyond mere technology. As a result, since the 1993 Bottom Up Review, the Pentagon has promoted a demanding effort to invest in new weapons, test new operational concepts and—perhaps most challenging—reform the very same structure of the armed forces (Shalikhshvili 1996; Shelton 2000). By the turn of the century, most of these efforts fell short of their target. However, unquestionably the RMA had an impact on the procurement programmes and upgrade of existing systems. A remarkable amount of resources was allocated to Research and Development (R&D), leading to enormous progress being made in critical assets, like precision-guided weapons, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and command, control, communication, computer, intelligence, surveillance and recognition (C⁴ISR).

The RMA floated around in the US defence circles and academies as a buzzword until the turn of the century. It lost momentum for several reasons: in part, for the inconsistencies sharply highlighted by its opponents; and in part for the opposition and conservatism of military branches. Most likely, however, it was made suddenly obsolete by the tragic events of 11 September, 2001. Indeed, the very same rise of al-Qaeda could be read as the empirical failure of the RMA: in the end, the US had spent almost ten years building up the most powerful and fungible military ever, but this could not prevent the most dreadful attack on American soil. Starting from that experience—or better, from the lessons learnt in the following military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq—the reforming process entered a new phase, emphatically labelled “Defense Transformation”.

The threat of international terrorist organizations and the harsh requirements of insurgency operations swiftly dismissed some of the RMA promises. Although the US forces proved effective in dismantling al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan and toppling Saddam Hussein, after the end of conventional operations insurgents showed the hard way in which asymmetric, low-technology tactics could frustrate the American attempt to stabilize both theatres. The most direct consequence of these parallel experiences on US defence policy invested the operational doctrine, as shown most clearly by the 2006 edition of the *US army field manual*, explicitly devoted to counter-insurgency.

The Defense Transformation phase did not really represent a U-turn from the RMA doctrine. Actually, most of its proponents kept their faith in the purported

revolution and gave the term *transformation* a very clear meaning: to adapt the armed forces to the current strategic context—a context, needless to say, shaped by the ongoing revolution in military affairs. From an academic perspective, this body of literature does not hold much potential, being founded, as it is, on a tautological argument. Nonetheless, it is hard to exaggerate its impact on the American defence policy, especially during the first Bush administration, when the term became a sort of mantra (Rumsfeld 2002). As for the RMA, limits of space prevent us from providing a detailed account of the vision underlying the Defense Transformation idea and its policy prescriptions. Two features, however, deserve consideration for our purposes.

The first tenet of Defense Transformation does not really mark a point of discontinuity with the previous RMA doctrine: it concerns the role of Special Operational Forces (SOF)—i.e. highly-specialized, high-tech and readily deployable units. To be clear, this kind of contingent is far from new, as witnessed by the establishment of the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) as early as 1987. However, it was in Afghanistan, with *Operation Enduring Freedom*, that they have been used most extensively—and, according to the proponents of Defense Transformation, with impressive results (Rumsfeld 2002, p. 20; for an opposite view see Biddle 2013). In this context, SOF have been used to locate targets for precision strikes and, equally relevant, as a force enabler for the heterogeneous Northern Alliance.

More generally, SOFs include units from all services specifically trained for (often secret) sensitive missions, like rescue operations in hostile environments or assault on high-value targets. From this perspective, then, SOFs can be seen as a peculiar form of precision strike, or better as an on-the-ground contribution to airborne bombing (Sloan 2008, p. 28). In the broader picture of Defense Transformation, SOFs represent the answer to the army's need for mobility and power projection, as requested by the RMA model: on a digitalized battlefield, the argument goes, heavy platforms and large numbers of troops are going to become obsolete, as they suffer for the long-lasting firepower/mobility trade-off.¹ SOFs, in contrast, come in smaller sizes, have a leaner line of command, use technologically advanced weapons, and are highly specialized. In the words of general Peter Shoomaker, SOFs provide “an array of expanded options, strategic economy of force, [and] ‘tailor to task’ capabilities” (quoted in Spearin 2006, p. 58).

The second issue brought about by Defense Transformation is counter-insurgency. This arguably adds the main conceptual innovation to the previous RMA doctrine: in fact, while the RMA focused exclusively on conventional warfare, the lesson learnt on the battlefield since 2001 was that the US was facing a different kind of enemy, perhaps related to a sovereign state, but most likely made of so-called “irregulars”. As a result, the issue quickly gained central stage—both in the Pentagon's official documents and scholarly publications—as

¹Incidentally, this argument was one of the main reasons why after *Desert Storm*, the USAF saw its prestige and influence soaring within the Pentagon, to the detriment of the US Army.

witnessed by the plethora of terms developed in those years to describe this new face of war² (Hammes 2004; Barnett 2004; US Department of Defense 2001, 2006; US Army 2006).

It would be barely conceivable, and probably fruitless, to go through this literature here. What matters for our purposes is that, after the apparent successes with Saddam and the Taliban, the US defence policy had to adjust to the changing situation on the field. To be blunt, the vision of war developed up to 2003—and the capabilities that came with it—proved inadequate. In fact, the insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq were in a sense the opposite of the US military, and that difference made them an uncomfortable adversary. Just to recall their main features:

- 1) The insurgents have been using very basic technologies (e.g. the Improvised Explosive Devices, IED) and still they could infer significant losses to US troops (in Iraq only, the death toll since 2003 exceeds 4400 casualties).
- 2) Following Mao's advice, guerrilla fighters find fertile ground among civilians, where they can hide and loot resources.
- 3) They do not have a short-term military objective, but a political long-term goal—long enough to be measured by decades, or even generations (Hammes 2004).

In the face of this challenge, the main response of the Pentagon was to adjust its military doctrine. Unsurprisingly, lacking adequate technologies to fight this kind of war, the Pentagon focused its attention to doctrine: in particular, its effort aimed to review the operational concepts used by the forces on the field following a holistic approach. The main output of this process was the 2006 US Army's *Field manual FM 3-24*. The manual, whose main architect was General Petraeus, defined counter-insurgency operations as “military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency” (US Army 2006, pp. 1–1). In its holistic approach, the document brought to bear the experience of middle-to-lower ranks and developed a number of policy prescriptions on how to deal with the insurgents. It is not possible here to appraise the quality of the manual, nor to assess its impact on the ground. What matters most for our purposes is how this doctrinal review downgraded the centrality of combat operations in the US defence policy, to the benefit of non-military components in counter-insurgency operations.

The final stage of the US defence policy since the end of the Cold War is represented by the 2014 offset strategy. Similar to the steps that came before, the term—probably doomed to become a top buzzword in defence circles for some time—is not a name for any official initiative, as it gathered momentum after a speech held by Deputy US Secretary of Defense Robert Work (2015). So far, the only step undertaken by the Pentagon has been a memorandum released in November 2014, whereby then Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel called for a “broad,

²Just to name a few: Military Operations other than War (MOOTW), fourth-generation warfare, insurgents, irregulars.

Department-wide initiative to pursue innovative ways to sustain and advance our military superiority for the 21st century” (US Department of Defense 2014, p. 1).

It is probably too early to claim that we have entered a new phase in the attempted transformation of the US forces. Nonetheless, for its focus on technological innovation and doctrinal rethinking, the Third Offset Strategy seems clearly in line with the purpose originally charted in the early RMA treatment. What is new here is a fundamental assumption: while at the turn of the century the US could take for granted assured access to the global commons and, virtually, any place on earth, this is no longer the case. Countries like Russia and, most importantly, China, have developed Anti-Access, Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities, and even non-state organizations (i.e. ISIS) could devise low-tech tactics to hinder US expeditionary potential (Martineau 2014). So, we do not need to speculate on the contours and outcome of this final initiative: what matters for the US and its European allies is that most likely American Armed Forces will be committed to another leap forward.

In conclusion, regardless of the different colours of the past seven administrations, it seems plausible to argue that the US defence policy after the Cold War has been marked by a clear logic: the ultimate target of the Pentagon in the long run has been constant over time, and it has had to do with Washington’s hegemonic position within the international system (Brands and Feaver 2016, p. 95). In a word, from George H. Bush to Barack Obama, the Pentagon set a very ambitious target: at the minimum, to keep its military superiority for as long as possible; at the maximum, to develop a new way of war—one that could prevent potential adversaries (and friends alike) from competing with the US. This is witnessed most clearly by the sheer size of the defence budget: as late as 2010—i.e. two years into the financial crisis, US military expenses exceeded 698 billion dollars—i.e. 43% of world military expenditure (SIPRI 2011, p. 183). Furthermore, in the first decade of the century—i.e. even during the years of the occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq—roughly 30% of the budget was allocated to Investments (i.e. research and development (R&D), plus procurement, and weapons upgrade) (Harrison 2011, pp. 72–73).

This trend has been slightly revised in recent years, due largely to domestic constraints: firstly, the 2011 Budget Control Act set statutory budget caps; secondly, the Republican-dominated Congress brought budgetary negotiations with the White House to a stalemate (as in the case of the 2013 federal-government shut-down). The end result is that in absolute terms the US defence budget is still in a class of its own (in Fiscal Year 2016, the departmental budget request approached US\$600bn), but the ratio over Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been declining from 4.63 in 2010 to 3.27 in 2015 (IISS 2016, pp. 31–32). Macroeconomic data aside, the two-decade-long efforts to keep the doctrinal and technological edge lead us to the conclusion that the US framed its own defence policy with a global view. In the next section, we will see how this global approach translated into NATO’s policy.

3 NATO's Defense Policy After the Cold War: Echoing the US Tone?

Since the early 1990s NATO has been at the centre of many scholars' attention, for the demise of the Soviet Union had purportedly removed its own reason d'être. Indeed, both in academia and in policy circles, pundits and policymakers came to agree that NATO had to transform to survive the post-bipolar order: in a word, NATO had to go "out of area, or out of business". And this is what NATO did: it embarked on a lengthy, incremental, unsystematic process of reform, that led the alliance to: (1) expand its own membership (from 16 members in 1991 to 28 as of today); (2) develop new functions (from deterrence and defence to expeditionary and post-conflict missions); and (3) deploy in out-of-area theatres (Afghanistan being the main case in point). The reform process has also witnessed a handful of "new" strategic concepts (in 1991, 1999, 2010), a plethora of transformative initiatives (some of which will be discussed below), and intra-allied tensions (as in the case of the first round of enlargement, in 1999) (Goldgeier 1999).

NATO's reform has been debated at length elsewhere (see, among many others, Mayer 2014; Hallams et al. 2013; Webber et al. 2012; Rynning 2005), so it would be redundant to go through the process here. Rather, our purpose is to discuss the extent to which NATO's strategy was shaped by the US defence policy, and in particular how the transformative effort has been injected into the Alliance. For sake of brevity, we will limit our discussion to three instances of US-led reforms within NATO.

The first initiative dates back to the late 1990s, with the 1999 Defence Capability Initiative (DCI) (Sloan 2002, p. 86 ff.), then renewed in 2002 with the NATO Defense Transformation Initiative (NDTI) within the broader framework of the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC) (Terriff 2013). The DCI absorbed the RMA-inspired model of expeditionary, mobile, global range forces required to achieve full spectrum dominance. As Elinor Sloan reminds us, even if the idea was officially launched at the Washington summit, in April 1999, it was originally an American proposal (Sloan 2008, p. 77). On paper, the stated purpose of the DCI was to equip NATO forces with a technologically advanced weapon-system. However, the tacit goal was to address the current capability imbalances made evident by the war in Kosovo. All in all, the DCI listed up to 58 capability goals, divided into five broad categories.

The main limitation of this initiative was the lack of clear procedures for its implementation. In fact, no NATO member made specific commitments, nor were monitoring measures established. In a word, All NATO countries agreed that they would benefit from procuring the assets foreseen by the DCI, but none acted accordingly. Being a failure almost impossible to hide, in 2002, at the Prague Summit, NATO leaders agreed to downgrade their ambitions. In place of the DCI, the NDTI identified eight specific areas, and assigned to each an individual country (eight in total) to take responsibility for pushing forward the particular process. Following the leadership of this single state, several other countries grouped,

according to their strategic interests, with a view to developing peculiar competences in one or more of these areas. The end result of the NDTI was, then, to promote pooling and specialization.

It is difficult to properly assess the merits of this initiative. However, after more than 15 years, it is safe to say that, despite some progress being made in a few areas, the gaps that inspired it are basically unchanged. In terms of policymaking, and in contrast with the DCI, most NATO members expressed more than a rhetorical commitment. However, the procurement programmes that would make NDTI successful remained for the most part unrealized, largely as a result of European governments' inability to allocate adequate funds in the long term (Meyer 2003, p. 93).

The second initiative was merely organizational in nature. Allied Command Transformation (ACT) was also launched at the 2002 Riga Summit and was operational by mid-2003. One of the main issues for NATO in adapting to the new security context was to reform its structure in order to make the decision-making process smoother and more coherent with the newly-found goals of expeditionary warfare. In the words of its first commander, US admiral Gianbastiani, its role was "to be the forcing agent for change within the Alliance and to act as the focus and motivating force to bring intellectual rigor to the change process" (quoted in Terriff 2013, p. 97). There was therefore a substantial coincidence between NATO's need for reform and the RMA emphasis on organizational adaptation. As Sloan points out, "for NATO the most significant changes have been in the area of organizational transformation and specifically in the creation of Command and Control structures oriented towards rapidly deployable force projection" (Sloan 2008, p. 79).

In this way, ACT represents a good example of policy isomorphism: its same location in Norfolk (VA), close to the US Joint Forces Command—one of the leading agencies in the US military transformation effort (Burwell et al. 2006, p. 2)—was intended to foster cooperation with it and spread the transformative agenda within NATO. In particular, drawing from the lessons learnt in Kosovo, it was supposed to promote flexibility and interoperability. While lacking any real power to impose the modernization on NATO member states, ACT was conceived, by its promoters, as a vehicle of socialization and circulation of better practices. In fact, being a nonoperational command, its daily business consisted (and it still does) of organizing conferences, simulations, exercises and joint training in order to bring about the transformation that the US was struggling to achieve. In this sense, it was met favourably by the main European partners—although for different reasons. The UK, probably the staunchest supporter, saw ACT as a way of restoring Western cohesion after the Iraqi crisis. France understood the opportunity for modernization that ACT would offer. Germany, probably the most lukewarm supporter of the reform, appreciated the potential for force modernization but embraced only half-heartedly the expeditionary agenda embodied by the ACT (Simón 2013, p. 203).

Finally, the third initiative that we can trace back to the transformational turn in US defence policy is the creation of the NATO Response Force (NRF)—a "coherent, high-readiness, joint, multinational force package" aimed to be

“technologically advanced, flexible, deployable, interoperable and sustainable” (Song 2016, pp. 127–128). This idea, which gained momentum after the experience in Afghanistan, was officially approved at the Prague Summit in 2002. In the initial plans, NRF contingents were conceived in the order of about 25,000 joint units (i.e. from all services of the armed forces); they were supposed to be highly deployable (within a period of five days’ notice) and sustainable for at least 30 days. The NRF was essentially multinational in nature, as it was composed of “troops from several pools of multinational task forces based on the principle of rotation” (Ivanov 2011, p. 124).

Full operational capability was declared in 2006, at the NATO Riga Summit, but early deployments of NRF components date back to 2005, in the wake of *Hurricane Katrina* and the earthquake that struck Pakistan. The implementation phase, however, proved much more difficult. This happened for many reasons, but mainly for the lack (or shortage) of critical land infrastructure, differences in national legislations on the use of the military, and the concurrent development of the European Battlegroups initiative (Lindstrom 2007). After the Riga Summit, it was used on the ground on just a few occasions.

For our purposes, this initiative was relevant because it was also intended to provide NATO forces with an opportunity for socialization—i.e. a way for US concepts to spill over to other NATO countries (a clear concern in the eyes of some European states, like France) (Song 2016, p. 128). Since the demanding operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere have diverted NATO countries’ forces from the NRF, it seems that this effort has now come to a dead end. However, the joint experience in Afghanistan has supplanted this role. In other words, by taking part in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), NATO armies developed both a shared lesson in counter-insurgency and common practices (Sloan 2008; Terriff 2013).

The discussion above does not purport to be exhaustive, as it highlights just the tip of the iceberg. According to many analysts, beyond these macroscopic policy initiatives, the US shapes NATO in its everyday business. In fact, in Mark Webber’s (2009, p. 50) words “almost every major change has been the consequence of American action and no change has been possible without American support”. Many studies drawn from different theoretical approaches confirm this view: this is admittedly not surprising from a realist perspective, given its focus on power and competition (Press-Barnathan 2006; Walt 2009, p. 117); but institutional theories too (Hofmann 2011; Schimmelfenning 2016) reach a similar conclusion when they stress the institutional isomorphism between NATO and the European security architecture; finally, critical approaches, like the Gramscian take developed by Kempin and Mawdsley (2013) argue that the ideational nature of US dominance has shaped NATO policy preferences not via coercion, but through the socialization of a transnational class of actors [see also Flockhart (2004) and Gheciu (2005)].

In conclusion, there is plenty of evidence showing how NATO’s policies in the past 25 years mirror the tenets and ambitions designed in the US defence policy. Different strands of literature have abundantly shed light on the channels through which this influence is transmitted to its members throughout the alliance. In fact,

the American call for transformation has been one of the enduring issues in transatlantic relations since the end of the Cold War. As we will discuss in the next section, European states displayed a mixed response: while some tried to catch up (or at least, to adjust to the American way of war), many others remained idle, either for lack of resources, or on account of other domestic constraints. The effects of such a mismatch between the US tilt for innovation and European conservatism are explored in the next section.

4 Europe's Dilemma, America's Problem: Follow at a Distance, or Fall Behind?

As we have seen, the US has made military primacy its priority for the past quarter of a century. With its particular focus on technological innovation, the Pentagon has nurtured and shaped the evolution of conventional warfare. Furthermore, it pushed its European partners to follow its lead via NATO. In many respects, this policy paid off, as it granted assured and uncontested access to the global commons (oceans, air, space and cyberspace) (Posen 2003), and virtually any place on earth. The flip side of the coin is that by doing so, Washington has dug a divide within NATO between its own forces and all the other partners (Terriff et al. 2010; Locatelli 2007; Yost 2000/2001). In particular, as witnessed by joint operations like Kosovo and Libya (and, in a similar vein, the Russia–Ukraine war), compared to the US, European armies lack critical assets like strategic airlift and air-to-air refuelling; suffer through limited availability of precision-guided munitions and UAVs; and rely on deficient C⁴ISR structures. In a word, they are not good for conventional high-intensity operations.

So, what is the impact on the alliance of the transatlantic capabilities gap? Is it beneficial, detrimental, or a combination of the two? At first sight, this problem is actually old wine in new bottles, since the asymmetric nature of the transatlantic partnership is as old as the alliance itself (Sandler and Hartley 1999: Chapter 2). However, it is an underlying issue that periodically emerges as a source of tension among allies, mainly in the form of US calls for more active contributions on the European side. Throughout history, this issue has been a source of crisis and contention, as witnessed most vividly at the time of the 2003 Iraq war—recall Robert Kagan's (2002) critique of Europe, i.e. that Europe could afford to be pacifist thanks to its free-riding on the US. In general, however, it has been managed diplomatically and without severe frictions, as happened during the Obama administration, when America's gradual withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq was balanced by the deployment of additional European troops (Hallams and Schreer 2012, pp. 318–320). So, if we frame the capabilities gap in terms of burden-sharing, it is safe to argue that its effect is neutral: it can be beneficial, as long as it provides the allies with a bargaining space, but it can also prove detrimental, as it depends on NATO leaders' sensitivity to costs and benefits (Locatelli and Testoni 2009,

pp. 353–354; Press-Barnathan 2006; for a broader theoretical perspective, see also Morrow 1991).³

Beyond the burden-sharing issue, there is more than meets the eye: the problem is as much about strategy and politics as it is about economics. This point is nicely captured by Hans Binnendijk, in a recent RAND publication. In his words:

There is potential tension between the need to keep a reassuring U.S. military presence in Europe and the need for European nations to share more of the defense burden. To the extent that the United States reassures, Europe has the opportunity to free-ride. That tension cannot be solved by U.S. troop withdrawals [...] Greater burden-sharing will need to be stimulated in other ways. Europe is beginning to understand that defense burden imbalance needs to be corrected, but continued U.S. pressure will be required. Europe is awakening to the challenge posed by Putin, but Europe cannot return to a sole focus on common defense and disregard its crisis-management responsibilities in the Middle East. Europe also needs to play a more active role in Asia. The policy challenge for the United States is how to encourage its European partners to seize this larger role without appearing to be weakening the U.S. commitment to European defense at the same time (Binnendijk 2016, pp. 95–96).

The dilemma highlighted here holds for both the US and European partners. As Binnendijk put it, for the US the point is how to keep its commitment to Europe *and* provide incentives for a European more autonomous capability as a security provider: put bluntly, how to make Europe less dependent on US assets when it comes to dealing with security in its own backyard (as represented by Ukraine and the MENA region). From the European perspective, the reverse is the problem: how to maintain the American protection *and* avoid paying an unbearable price (either in terms of defence expenditure or loss of autonomy).⁴ In other words, the current gap implies that European states depend on the US for most of its military operations—probably all of them, with the exclusion of low-intensity conflicts, such as peacekeeping.

Taken to the extreme, as some commentators noted, should the gap become too deep, an interoperability problem would emerge. Evidence of this problem has appeared sporadically from Iraq to Libya: for instance, in Kosovo, in order to communicate with comparatively obsolete European communication systems, US forces had to resort to legacy systems, and in some cases even pass information in the clear (Peters et al. 2001, pp. 55–58). So, the consequences of the interoperability problem might be severe, both at the political level and on the battlefield. In fact, the end result might be that multinational operations could eventually become riskier than exclusively American missions; also, as a direct consequence, the US might prefer to act alone, to the detriment of the multilateral principle on which NATO was founded; finally, European armies willing to contribute could be left

³The uneven share of the burden implies a sort of trade between the US and European states: Washington “sells” security to Europe and pays a price for it mostly in terms of defence budget; in contrast, Europe pays for the security granted by Washington by conceding the US decision power within NATO.

⁴As for the burden-sharing issue, here too we can relate the problem to broader theoretical concepts. In particular, this looks like a case of entrapment/abandonment dilemma, where the US risks being entrapped in European issues, and Europe fears being abandoned by the American protector.

with the only, unpleasant, option of performing human-intensive operations (i.e. “boots on the ground”) (Locatelli 2007, pp. 142–143; Schake 2002, p. 18; Appathurai 2002).

It is, therefore, necessary to take the interoperability problem seriously. Suppose that one day European allies were unable to perform some critical functions (or, for that matter, they could not be seen as reliable partners in America’s eyes): this would mean that Europe had become totally dependent on the US for its own security, and the autonomy-security trade-off discussed above would hardly make sense: to put it bluntly, the US would become a sort of monopolist security provider, and might fix whatever price it pleases to protect its partners. So, for Europe, the question would be: even taking the US protection for granted, are we willing to sacrifice our own autonomy and subject ourselves to the whim of Washington? For the US, in contrast, the question would be: whatever influence we might wield in Europe, is it worth the risk of an open-ended commitment, whose costs might be severe?

However, this scenario seems unrealistic: for all of European limits, the recent experiences in post-conflict operations have shown that today’s warfare is not just high-tech and firepower. As we have seen with the discussion on Defense Transformation, counter-insurgency requires, most importantly, doctrinal innovation, an aim shared by most European armies (Galbreath 2015; Coticchia and Moro 2015). Moreover, within Europe, states like Great Britain and France proved to have the wherewithal to follow the American lead, so it is unlikely that they will let the interoperability problem get out of hand. Third, the Third Offset Strategy may provide Europe with enough capabilities to *edge* against, if not to *defeat*, its neighbouring rivals (Simón 2016; Fiott 2016), which means that both sides of the Atlantic have a clear interest in sharing the benefits of this achievement. Last but not least, NATO itself has launched initiatives aimed at increasing interoperability, like the Connected Forces Initiative (Deni 2016). In conclusion, then, there is scant possibility that the capabilities gap may engender a major interoperability problem: with a minimum of cooperation and effort on the part of Europe, it can be properly managed.

These reasons of concern notwithstanding, it is possible to argue that the gap may be beneficial for the transatlantic partnership. Of course, turning the gap into an asset would also require European policymakers to be wise in their defence policy. But there are at least three reasons why this might be the case. First and foremost, bridging the capability gap would require a disproportionate effort on the part of Europe. Even if European states could take advantage of economies of scale (something that would require bringing military cooperation to an unprecedented level), the amount of investment required would make their defence budget soar. Considering the current state of affair of the European integration process, it is very unlikely that European states will commit to military cooperation anytime soon. Moreover, the effects of the financial crisis on the economies of Southern European states have been so devastating that it is hardly conceivable that many of them would increase their military spending. So, the only alternative left is for European countries to work with a view to preventing the gap from spinning out of control. After all, considering Europe’s limited strategic ambitions, lagging behind the US in military affairs can be considered as an acceptable solution.

Secondly, in the light of the newly-found assertiveness of Putin's Russia, bridging the gap could increase tensions with Moscow. Indeed, in its relations with the Eastern neighbourhood, for the past two decades the EU has been pretending to be a conflict-averse civilian power (Telò 2006; Sjørusen 2007): until the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war, Europe's strategy, based on economic incentives, was met with favour (or at least indifference) from Moscow. Paradoxically, should European states try to bridge the gap, Russia might perceive this attempt as an aggressive defence policy—so confirming Putin's purported fears of encirclement. Relying on NATO (i.e. the US) may not be an optimal solution, but it is certainly the best option available (Paszewski 2016, p. 128; Simón 2014).

Thirdly, the final reason for optimism is the potential for the US and Europe to specialize their capabilities in different functions (Locatelli and Testoni 2009). In very general terms, NATO might benefit from the US specializing in high-intensity conflicts and Europe in low-intensity scenarios (Schake 2002, pp. 13–14; Thomas 2000, pp. 72–78; Springford 2003, p. 1; Binnendijk and Kugler 2002). Although the current turbulence in the Southern and Eastern front is probably calling Europe to prepare for conventional defence, such division of labour between allies seems coherent with their own systemic pressures: on the one hand, the US, being the only world superpower, is called to preserve its primacy and interests on a global scale; on the other, European states can claim, at most, a regional status, thus limiting the range of challenges to their own interests. In conclusion, different areas of expertise might benefit the transatlantic partnership, as it would make the allies more interdependent from each other.

Admittedly, for these considerations to hold, a few assumptions must be upheld. In the first place, they make sense only if the US and European states agree that cooperation is better than unilateral action. Should the US unilaterally embark in war-like operations, as happened in the 2003 war with Iraq (or, less likely, should a number of European states wage war without the American support), the benefits of the gap would likely fade away. Secondly, to make the division of labour work, both sides of the Atlantic would need to agree on which missions they wished to undertake: if they failed to do so (once again, the Iraq war being a landmark case), they would lack a proper strategy to pursue their political goals. In this case too, however, the problem would not be the capabilities gap per se, but the diverging strategic visions embodied by the Bush administration and countries like France and Germany.

In conclusion, by claiming that the gap can be beneficial for the alliance, we do not intend that it will automatically make the transatlantic partnership stable and lasting: as in real marriages, there is probably no recipe for that. However, promoting some sort of specialization in (partially overlapping) competences between the US and Europe will increase the costs of unilateral action as well as the benefits of cooperation. In fact, it is a way to make Europe attractive in Washington's eyes and give Europe a voice capability in military planning. Policymakers may decide to disregard this argument, but if they did so, they would likely pay a price they cannot afford.

5 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have argued that the in the past 25 years the US defence policy has been marked by a clear line of continuity: keeping the edge in military technology has been the lodestar of the past four presidents. This choice may appear reasonable, and responsive to the peculiar status of the US, as the only superpower left in the current international system. In other words, facing the prospect of eventual decline, strategists and military planners in Washington have laid the foundations for a stable and long-lasting unipolar moment. In this initiative, they embarked on an ambitious reform process—as we have seen, one that is still underway.

Whether these efforts will be successful in preserving the American hegemonic position on a global scale is beyond our purpose (and probably impossible to assess). However, as argued most forcefully by Barry Posen (2003), it certainly gave the US an unprecedented advantage vis-à-vis any peer competitor: the command of the commons. In a word, the US military strategy provided the country with unrestricted access to any place around the globe—or it did so until recently.

In relation to the European theatre, such a global vision arguably produced unintended consequences. The US superiority in military issues has left behind not only enemies and potential peers, but also friends and partners. European states—with the partial exception of the UK and, to a lesser extent, France—have been almost immune from the American fascination for technology and innovation. Such a persistent reluctance to invest in high-tech weapon systems has many origins, but it boils down to economic constraints and different strategic priorities with respect to the US. No matter why, the transatlantic relationship has been put under considerable strain for many years by the purported capabilities gap. In the previous section, we discussed the main challenges that the gap poses to the US–Europe partnership. We also argued that for all the risks involved, it provides a reason for cooperation between the two shores of the Atlantic. Thus, it will be up to policy-makers and diplomats to grasp the benefits and eliminate the quibbles that it might generate.

Unfortunately, a number of events in 2016 cast a shadow on how capable and effective western leaders will be in managing the transatlantic partnership. In late June, the British voted for Brexit, thus deepening the crisis within the EU. Perhaps most importantly, by the time this chapter was concluded, America had just shocked the world with the election of Donald Trump as President of the US. Both events (and the likely spread of nationalist and populist parties across Europe) hold the potential to squeeze the bargaining space to zero and tear apart the alliance. This is probably not the case with the UK, since London will come to rely on the US even more than now. Nor will it be the case for Eastern European Countries, with their much-needed US protection from Russia. But it may well be the case of France and South European countries.

In the end, however, the future of the transatlantic partnership rests on US leadership. After a flamboyant campaign, strewn with provocations and imbued

with the nationalist motto “make America great again”, the foreign policy vision of the president-elect is still far from clear. As Dana Allin (2016, p. 244) wrote in a recent piece, Washington’s commitment to NATO is unlikely to fade overnight: for one thing, even a Republican-dominated Congress would not look upon a retreat from the alliance with favour. But still, one of the arguments that paid off the most in the electoral campaign was to line up the European partners and ask them to contribute more actively to the alliance. In this respect, there is no doubt Trump will follow words with action—indeed, this is what any US president has been doing for the past 60 years. But two variables will determine the future of the alliance: the first is *how* Trump is going to relate with Europe—whether he will pretend to act as a benign or predatory hegemon—and what will he do in case he does not get what he wants from Europe.

Former presidents showed a remarkable degree of moderation (in retrospect, even the purported unilateral turn of the first Bush administration was markedly liberal compared to Trumps’ declarations of intent). In a nutshell, they came to the conclusion that, regardless of their different strategic priorities, the US and Europe have a common interest in keeping their marriage alive. We do not know yet if Donald Trump and his advisors will share this view. Nonetheless, as a businessman, he should know well that a bad deal is often better than no deal at all. And, as a family man, he should also remember that divorce does not come cheap.

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Global Outreach and Regional Consequences: The Impact of US Interventionism on Transatlantic Relations

Andrea Carati

Abstract In the post-Cold War scenario, a contradictory relationship between a renewed globalization and the emergence of resilient processes of regionalization has emerged as one of the defining features of the current international system. In this context, marked by unipolarity, the US plays a decisive role, since it is the only actual global actor in the international arena and, at the same time, it is forced to manage multifaceted strategic competitions in different regions. The chapter focuses on a specific aspect of how this ambiguity is shaping US foreign policy and transatlantic relations. The main argument suggested is that the unipolar condition has three main effects on regional alliances: (a) it makes the alliances with the unipolar state more sensitive to regional dynamics; (b) it increases the effects coming from the asymmetry of power between the unipolar state and the allies; and (c) it poses the issue of credibility attached to allies' commitment in starker terms. The chapter then assesses these expected effects against two of NATO's interventions: in Afghanistan and Libya. Both cases seem to confirm that allies tend to attach greater importance to regional considerations, that secondary allies suffer from a greater capacity of the US to go it alone or go with less institutionalized coalitions of the willing, and that the credibility regarding the allies' commitment to collective security is undermined by the unpredictability of the unipole behaviour.

1 Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the international system has been marked by two contradictory dynamics: the acceleration of globalization's processes and regionalization. On the one hand, the collapse of the USSR and the overcoming of bipolar division freed the globalization potentials thus far restricted within the Western bloc. On the other hand, superpowers' disengagement at global level allowed new

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and growing autonomy at regional level. The United States (US) has both suffered from, and contributed to, such a contradictory course. The unprecedented global outreach of the US foreign policy—as a consequence of the unipolar moment—did not turn into a consistent hegemonic order. Conversely, notwithstanding the purpose of fostering a global liberal order, the US has progressively played different roles in diverse (and increasingly autonomous) regions. As a result, from a strategic viewpoint, the presence of the US in every region remained the only aspect genuinely global in the current international system.

One of the policy areas where the ambiguous relationship between the US global strategic posture and the regional dynamics appears more vividly is that of foreign interventions. From the mission in Somalia to the air campaign over Libya, every single intervention that the US has undertaken since the end of the Cold War has had an extra-regional—if not a global—strategic meaning from the Washington perspective. However, at the same time, each has had regional consequences, often unintended or unexpected. The present chapter delves into this gap between the US global outreach and the regional consequences of military interventions, focusing in particular on the impact of US interventionism on the transatlantic relations and NATO.

The main argument proposed is that the unipolar condition has (at least) three main effects on regional alliances: (a) it makes the alliances with the unipolar state more sensitive to regional dynamics; (b) it increases the effects of the asymmetry of power between the unipolar state and the allies; and (c) it more starkly poses the issue of credibility attached to allies' commitment. NATO has been affected by these impacts, and this is particularly apparent in the case of military interventions.

Accordingly, the chapter is organized as follows. The first section presents an overview of the globalist attitude that shaped US interventionism after the end of the Cold War. The aim is to stress the way the US understood almost every military mission not just as a limited and regionally-oriented policy but, rather, framing the interventions in terms of a broader, or entirely global, strategic view. The second section explores the global outreach due to the unipolar position and the effects this has on regional alliances. The third and final section is devoted to the empirical investigation of two of NATO's interventions, in Afghanistan and Libya. Here, the purpose is to assess the expected effects—drawn from the analysis presented in the second section—and illustrate the tensions between the regional dynamics and the US global outreach.

2 Liberal Internationalism and Interventions: The US Missions Abroad After the End of the Cold War

US global internationalism is deeply rooted in the American culture and clearly predates the end of the Cold War. Its origins date back to the American exceptionalism and the so-called *Manifest Destiny* (Stephanson 1996) and it has affected US foreign policy since World War I. In fact, President Wilson, World War I and its

aftermath are usually presented as the start of the American international engagement in world politics (Ninkovich 2001). Finally, the experience of World War II—particularly during the months of neutrality—nurtured the global perspective that thereafter shaped US foreign policy, during and after the bipolar confrontation (Santoro 1992).

Notwithstanding some neo-isolationist impulses, that remained sporadic and uninfluential in the foreign policy community (Posen and Ross 1996/1997), the end of the Cold War epitomized the American exceptionalism and confirmed the role of the US in the world as an “indispensable nation” (Huntington 1999, pp. 37–40). In this context, the strategy of liberal hegemony ended up shaping the US foreign policy of the last 25 years (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016; Fontaine and Kliman 2013; Posen 2013). Indeed, liberal internationalism has been both the backbone and the predominant continuity of the US strategy. A number of ideas or traditions are persistently affecting the foreign policy community in Washington—from neo-isolationism to selective engagement, from Jackson to Jefferson heritages (Posen and Ross 1996/1997; Russel Mead 2001). However, the strategy of liberal hegemony emerged as the essential and prominent aspect of the US foreign policy that both Democrats and Republicans pursued from the end of the Cold War. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt critically described what they call the grand strategy of liberal hegemony in this way:

This approach holds that the United States must use its power not only to solve global problems but also to promote a world order based on international institutions, representative governments, open markets, and respect for human rights. As “the indispensable nation”, the logic goes, the United States has the right, responsibility and wisdom to manage local politics almost everywhere. At its core, liberal hegemony is a revisionist grand strategy: instead of calling on the United States to merely uphold the balance of power in key regions, it commits American might to promoting democracy everywhere and defending human rights whenever they are threatened (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016, p. 71).

It is worth noting that the key tenets of liberal hegemony have been shared by both Democratic and Republican administrations and that the global vision entailed in such a strategy has affected the US foreign policy and interventions abroad. Despite the differences, often remarkable, between the Clinton, G.W. Bush and Obama administrations, the underlining roots of liberal hegemony gave the US strategy a steady globalist approach (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016).

Bill Clinton was probably the most internationalist of the post-Cold War presidents. His foreign policy was strongly inspired by the collective security vision of international politics—namely the idea that international peace is indivisible and it is a vital interest for the US to be engaged in world affairs through international institutions, military presence overseas and, whenever necessary, through the use of military force (Posen and Ross 1996/1997, p. 23). From this point of view, *A national security strategy of engagement and enlargement* (White House 1996) is the most telling document, exposing its internationalist and global approach. The idea that the US emerged from the end of the Cold War as the “indispensable nation”, to keep international stability, was a central tenet of Clinton’s self-representation of world politics (Huntington 1999; Walt 2000).

Such a global view had an impact on the US interventions in the 1990s, particularly in the Balkans. Both the US-led military campaigns in Bosnia and Kosovo responded to security concerns outside the US core national interests: the American national security was not in peril in any way. Indeed, it was fairly evident that the drivers of the US military engagement in Europe moved beyond traditional reasons for the use of force and that both interventions had a broader meaning for NATO and for the rising notion of crisis management (Yost 1998). Although, at the time, the future evolution of NATO was for the most part unpredictable, it was clear that the US was pushing the alliance to take charge for extra-European—and possibly global—duties (Mowle and Sacko 2007). This role for NATO was consistent with the administration's global vision of cooperative security, particularly in light of the emerging inadequacy of the UN in upholding the international stability (Walt 2000). Besides the incipient role of NATO in the post-bipolar scenario, it should be stressed that the nascent concept of crisis management embraced by the US had an inner global meaning in itself, since the essential concern behind the concept was that of developing capabilities not tailored for a specific country or region, but for intervening wherever a crisis appeared at a global level. Finally, NATO's interventions in the Balkans had, from the Washington perspective, another global dimension concerning the promotion of human rights and democratic institutions. The pretended lack of egoistic interests motivating the use of force paved the way for the ethical justification of the military operations (Chandler 2002). And the more that ethics entered into the picture, the more interventions transcended their local or regional motivations to encompass a global connotation.

Conversely, before 9/11, G.W. Bush and key administration figures like Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld relentlessly deplored the American engagement abroad, the undue commitment to international institutions and the use of force for secondary crises, peace-keeping or state-building (Gurtov 2006). During the electoral campaign and his first months in office, G.W. Bush and his supporters lamented the waste of military and political resources for misguided interventions in the Balkans. However, as we know, 9/11 deeply changed their minds and the Bush administration turned out to be one of the most interventionist in American history.

The essential point to be stressed is not that the Bush administration perpetuated a US global commitment because of its protracted military interventions overseas (even though is an important part of it), but that the response to 9/11 was not regionally focused. Rather, it was eminently global, and such a globalist reaction was rooted in the liberal hegemony view shaping the US vision of international politics (Desch 2007/2008). As Tim Bird and Alex Marshall pointed out, after 9/11, in the US administration: “[t]here was a strong sense that the attacks were a manifestation of wider global forces and linkages” (Bird and Marshall 2011, p. 47). As a result, the military action against Afghanistan was not considered enough, but only one theatre in a wider battle. Accordingly, the military response should not be framed as a limited revenge on a particular terrorist group, but instead as a global campaign against a global phenomenon. In this way, the war on terror downgraded regionally-focused strategic considerations in favour of a global commitment.

Thus, the grand strategy of liberal hegemony and the US international engagement have remained intact even in the Bush years (Posen 2013, p. 16). Military interventions within the framework of the global war on terror offer undisputable evidence, but that is not the only factor. Equally important is the ideological dimension underpinning these interventions. Some scholars noted the influence that liberal internationalism and Wilsonism had on G.W. Bush's foreign policy (Ambrosius 2006; Desch 2007/2008). Others revealed a mixture of traditions shaping the vision of world politics in the administration, comprising neo-isolationist temptations, hegemonic purposes and Wilsonian ambitions (Russell Mead 2001). Furthermore, it should be noted that the interventions in both Afghanistan and Iraq exceeded their pure strategic and military goals. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's defeat and the downfall of al-Qaeda left a place for a broad range of political and idealistic aims: the promotion of democratic institutions, the improvement of standards in human rights, infrastructural investments, financial aid and several others (Carati 2015). In Iraq, the military campaign had an even broader strategic meaning that went beyond the toppling of Saddam Hussein and the war on terror. The ultimate goal in this case was the ambition of reshaping the entire Middle East, starting with the Arab Peninsula, and building a functional democratic state in its geopolitical pivot, Iraq. That ambition—clearly stemming from a liberal internationalist view—took for granted the fact that the post-conflict state-building would be an easy task and, more importantly, that a democracy into the heart of the Peninsula would have spread political stability, fostered economic development, created political pressure on authoritarian regimes in the region, enfeebled Islamic extremism and even favoured a peaceful settlement in Palestine (Dalacoura 2005). In a nutshell, G.W. Bush was more deeply influenced by the liberal hegemony vision than his electoral campaign seemed to reveal.

Finally, the presidency of Barack Obama persisted and reinforced the liberal hegemony strategy. He promised and pursued a multilateral approach to foreign policy, marking a sharp break with the unilateralist approach of the Bush years. Obama proposed to lead a new American engagement “based upon the recognition that ‘the global challenges we face demand global institutions that work’” (Skidmore 2012, p. 43). His article, which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* during the electoral campaign in 2008, is very close to a sort of liberal hegemony manifesto (Obama 2007). The title of the first section—“Common security for our common humanity”—is especially revealing, and the assumption that American security is inextricably linked to that of the world could not be more obvious. The point is stressed even more clearly in the sections titled “Rebuilding our partnerships” and “Building just, secure, democratic societies”: once again, the indivisibility of peace and international security is meant as the inescapable starting point of the American engagement in world politics.

The strategy of liberal hegemony was revealed also by Obama's ambitions. As some noticed, “[b]y his own account, Obama sought nothing less than to bend history's arc in the direction of justice and a more peaceful, stable world. [...]. He has been trying to shape a new liberal global order with the United States still in the lead” (Indik et al. 2012, pp. 29–30). Nonetheless, it should be noted that his

globalist view, inspired by a liberal hegemony, had been pursued through diplomatic and political means rather than a military engagement. Ending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and “leading from behind” in Libya, were signs of military self-restraint rather than an interventionary attitude. In other words, unlike Clinton and G.W. Bush, the globalist vision of liberal hegemony in Obama’s foreign policy did not directly turn into military operations overseas. Conversely, his cautiousness in the use of force, to a certain extent, seemed to contradict the US re-engagement in upholding a global liberal order. Yet, as we will see in the final section of the chapter, the US intervention in Libya was not as subordinate as the “leading from behind” formula seems to suggest; nor was it completely devoid of a globalist outlook.

3 The Unipolar Moment and the US Global Outreach: The Impact on Regional Alliances

The liberal ideals underpinning the US grand strategy since World War II not only survived after the end of the Cold War but they have been bolstered by the unipolar position that the US came to occupy in the 1990s. The ideological dimension of the strategy of liberal hegemony was accompanied and reinforced by the material dimension: the unprecedented asymmetry of power in favour of the US. In other terms, unipolarism had the effect of strengthening the liberal hegemonic view on foreign policy and, consistently, of emphasizing the globalist approach to world politics. However, the unipolar nature of the system brought about several ambiguities concerning both the strategy of liberal hegemony and the actual cohesion of the post-bipolar global order.

In one of the most authoritative studies on the consequences of unipolarity, John Ikenberry, Micheal Mastanduno and William Wohlforth identify a number of contradictory effects regarding the behaviour of both the unipole and the secondary states (Ikenberry et al. 2011). On this unipolar behaviour, they pointed out four ambiguous effects: (a) *revisionism v. status quo*: while the concentration of power should make the unipole a “satisfied” state, aiming for the status quo, unipolarity could also present incentives for revisionism due to its greater freedom of action; (b) *provision of public goods*: the concentration of power eased the burden of producing international public goods (lowering the relative costs) but at the same time an unthreatened unipole has relatively fewer motivations to produce them; (c) *control over outcomes*: on the one hand the unipole is more capable and owns a greater ability to control outcomes; on the other hand (precisely because of the huge asymmetry of power), it may easily elicit counterbalancing initiatives and suffer the problems of legitimacy; and (d) *domestic politics*: the lack of credible threats to the unipolar hegemony allowed domestic politics and partisanship to enter into foreign policy decision-making. While, in the bipolar context, domestic politics was constrained by international imperatives, in the case of unipolarity, with less at stake in

foreign policy, the parochial positions and societal demands have a greater effect on the foreign policy agenda (Ikenberry et al. 2011, pp. 13–20).

All these ambiguities are intertwined with the processes of regionalisation and, in turn, lead to the contradictory relationship between the global outreach attached to US foreign policy and the increasing autonomy of regional complexes. The more expectations of secondary states on US engagement in international politics waned, the greater the importance of regional dynamics. In other words, while the US superpower offers no indications about the revisionist or status quo policies, the commitment to producing international public goods, or the American capacity to shape the world, the secondary states have been forced to reframe their security concerns and, consequently, geographical proximity has gained a renewed importance in their calculations.

In this regard, it is no wonder that the post-bipolar scenario has witnessed the re-emergence of regional contexts that the Cold War geopolitical order removed or downgraded (Buzan and Wæver 2003). From Caucasus to South Asia, from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East, regional dynamics gained renewed autonomy. Strategic interactions in one region became progressively independent from those of the others, and the only global actor, playing a role in every region, has been the US. Therefore, from a strategic perspective, the only genuine global aspect of the post-bipolar system remained the American capacity to wield influence in every region at a global level. Here is the paradox: in the last 25 years, US foreign policy emerged as the only political, strategic and ideological element eminently global in a world increasingly fragmented in autonomous regions. On the one hand, the globalist vision of the world shaped the American international posture in an unprecedented way; on the other hand, world politics has been progressively losing its global cohesion out of processes of regionalization and fragmentation. While during the Cold War what happened in other regions mattered—because it could have affected the bipolar confrontation at a global level—in the current international system, what is at stake in one region does not necessarily concern the strategic interactions in another region. In this sense, the post-bipolar system is strategically, diplomatically and politically less global than that of the Cold War, precisely when the American posture expanded its global outreach.

Investigating in depth the implications for US foreign policy due to this paradox is beyond the scope of this chapter. The purpose is much narrower, i.e. delving into the impact that paradox causes for a regional alliance like NATO, focusing on the activity on which the alliance has been more active: the military interventions. The first step is to consider what types of effects unipolarity can have on regional alliances in general and, on that basis, briefly assess NATO's evolution and the challenges it faced after the end of the Cold War.

Two premises are needed first. Even if unipolarity is taken for granted, the argument presented in this chapter evades a pure structural reasoning and does not aim to question the upcoming rise of multipolarism, or the lack thereof. Unipolarity is used just as a brief and broad notion underlining a remarkable asymmetry of power between the US and other states—meaning that the current structure of world politics can be described as unipolar, since the US has the world's largest economy

and possesses the most powerful military capabilities (Wohlforth 1999). In any case, the following propositions about the impact of unipolarity on alliances could remain sound even in the context of a strongly asymmetrical multipolar world. In short, it is the considerable disparity in the distribution of power at the global level that counts, rather than the unipolar structure per se. Secondly, it should be noted that the literature on alliances in unipolar systems is underdeveloped, since for the most part it has dealt with alliances in the bipolar and multipolar systems (Walt 2011, pp. 102–105). This is due to the fact that unipolarity is a novel condition in international politics and, more significantly, the abovementioned ambiguities concerning the unipole's behaviour.

Although, compared with bipolar and multipolar systems, a unipolar distribution of power presents a lower margin of predictability about the behaviour both of the unipole and of secondary states, we can infer at least three possible effects on alliances from unipolarity: (a) a higher degree of influence from regional dynamics; (b) a greater impact from asymmetry of power when, the unipole is part of the alliance; and (c) a greater concern about the credibility of allies' commitments.

3.1 Alliances and Regional Dynamics

The first effect can be deduced from the description of unipolarity already presented. In contrast with the Cold War, the current international system does not have only one, overriding and global strategic confrontation. The diplomatic interactions at regional level are no longer hierarchically shaped by the dominant strategic environment—i.e. the conflict between the two superpowers. In this regard, constraints upon alliances stemming from the bipolar strategic logic—or more generally due to a higher security priority at a global level—have faded or disappeared. As a result, because what is at stake at the global level counts less, the regional concerns have become increasingly more important within alliances. In other words, the unipolar state is freer and more unpredictable about the level of its international engagement in different regions and, consequently, the secondary allies tend to reframe their security concerns, giving priority to regional threats.

Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that in the last 25 years, NATO has suffered from strains between allies, often emanating from regional considerations or, more precisely, from the divergences in the national perspectives on regional v. global priorities (Carati and Frappi 2009). The debate regarding the geopolitical focus of the alliance between a “global NATO” and a Eurocentric alliance is a telling example in this regard (Hallams et al. 2013). While the US pushed for a more flexible and globalist organization, several European allies resisted the pretended global outreach to keep a limited and regionally focused posture. Even more revealing are the regional priorities expressly claimed by the allies in a manner unthinkable during the Cold War: for instance, the centrality of the Mediterranean basin asserted by Italy and France; the security guarantees relentlessly demanded by

the new Eastern allies concerning their protection from Russia; or the American effort to make Afghanistan a strategic priority for NATO allies.

3.2 *Alliances and Asymmetry of Power*

The central feature of an asymmetric alliance is the presence of one member which is a great deal more powerful than the others. The result is that the reciprocal promise to militarily assist other allies turns into another type of exchange: the powerful member trades security for obedience and loyalty. NATO and the Warsaw pact are cases in point: in both cases, superpowers offered security and, in exchange, weaker allies relinquished part of their sovereignty. But what happens to asymmetric alliances when a bipolar system shifts toward a unipolar?

Stephen Walt noted that the asymmetry of power between the superpower and secondary allies has different effects in a unipolar system, compared with a bipolar one (Walt 2011). The lack of an overarching global threat brings about a greater freedom of action for the unipole and, consequently, a slighter necessity of minor allies. As a result of the unipolar condition, Walt noticed, “the United States has no great power rivals, less need for allied support, and thus a greater capacity to go it alone. To the extent that allies are needed [...] the unipole has a greater ability to pick and choose among different alliance partners” (Walt 2011, p. 10). Hence, while in the bipolar system asymmetric alliances were more structurally determined, in the current international context, by contrast, structural constraints upon the unipole are either lacking or negligible. In the post bipolar environment condition, institutionalized alliances are no longer necessarily consistent with the strategic priorities of the US, that could prefer the flexibility of ad hoc coalition of the willing rather than standing organizations.

NATO suffered from the greater capacity of the US “to go it alone”, in many ways. The alliance’s marginalization after 9/11, and the US decision to launch a unilateral operation in Afghanistan (*Operation Enduring Freedom*), backed by a coalition of the willing, is the most telling example. It should be noted that the controversy between NATO and alternative ad hoc partnerships is not just the result of the unilateralist approach adopted by the Bush administration, but rather, of a more constitutive problem stemming from a new structural condition. In addition, the ambitions of European states to build alternative defence arrangements—with the aim of reducing their dependence on NATO and the US—are signs of a diminished reliance on the US commitment to European security. Although the European efforts on defence have so far produced very poor results, and while NATO remained the backbone of European security, prospects that the alliance could be sidelined by occasional, temporary and flexible coalitions led by the US is an issue of great concern for European countries.

3.3 *Alliances and Credibility*

As a result of the first two effects, the credibility of allies' commitment in a unipolar system is more vulnerable. The increasing importance of regional dynamics dwindles the unipole's allegiance because it is an "outside" player and it suspects that it will be entrapped by others' security concerns. On the other side, from the secondary states' perspective, weaker members tend to mistrust the unipole's commitment, because of the lack of expectations about its foreign policy and international ventures. Furthermore, with regard to the asymmetry of power, Stephen Walt underlined that, "because the unipole has less need for allies, its partners have more reason to doubt any pledges it does make" (2011, p. 112). Similarly, David Skidmore argued that, compared with the Cold War system, at present the West is devoid of a single, supreme threat to face and that has disruptive consequences for alliances' cohesion. In his words, "the absence of a shared great power threat has undermined the institutional bargain between the United States and allied states" (2012, p. 43).

Also in this respect, NATO in the post-bipolar system is a case in point. The indivisibility of security has persistently been confirmed in the last 25 years in every NATO summit, but beyond diplomatic statements it is pretty clear that such indivisibility is no longer rooted in the reality of international rivalries (Hallams et al. 2013). While during the Cold War it was not even necessary to question who was the enemy, the alliance's rationale, and the commitment of its members, in the unipolar system all these three aspects are questioned. Therefore, it is no wonder that NATO's countries suffered more than in the past from the double risk of abandonment (for secondary states) and entrapment (for the unipole) (Walt 2011, p. 113).

4 **NATO's Interventions in Afghanistan and Libya: The Impact of US Global Role upon a Regional Alliance**

Investigating NATO's interventions in order to assess the abovementioned effects has its limitations: we cannot compare the alliance's military operations with ones undertaken during the Cold War, since NATO did not launch any military intervention during the bipolar confrontation. Thus, a thorough comparison is not possible. Nevertheless, delving into US-led intervention in the post-bipolar context is still worth exploring, because military operations are the most critical circumstances in which strategic strains among allies appear more plainly. In this regard, NATO's operations from *Deliberate Force* in Bosnia (1995) to *Unified Protector* in Libya (2011) are valuable test cases for assessing the renewed regional focus of the allies, the impact of asymmetry of power between them, and the concerns arising from their commitments.

For reasons of space, the remainder of the chapter will focus on two interventions: in Afghanistan and Libya. Although a broader analysis, including NATO's interventions in the Balkans, might be more comprehensive and revealing, the focus on Afghanistan and Libya may nonetheless be meaningful for our purposes. Indeed, from a methodological point of view, they can be understood as "most-different" cases. If *similar* effects, due to constant elements such as the unipolar distribution of power and the global outreach of US foreign policy, can be ascertained from *different* cases, the causal significance of those effects is strengthened. Interventions in Afghanistan and Libya are considerably different in three ways. First, they diverge from a geographic and geopolitical standpoint. Second, two radically different security threats were involved: a potential vital one coming from terrorism in Afghanistan and a secondary—if not negligible—one in the internal crisis in Libya. Third, the US and NATO approaches to the interventions were dissimilar—in particular, the Bush and Obama administrations could not be more different in their conduct of foreign policy. Therefore, it is worthwhile exploring how the expected effects on alliances underlined in the previous sections are present, or not, in such different circumstances.

5 US and NATO in Afghanistan

The US-led intervention in Afghanistan seems to confirm the first two effects—a remarkable influence of regional concerns and the impact of asymmetry of power on alliances—and presents mixed outcomes with regard to the credibility attached to allies' commitments.

Compared to other US-NATO operations, the intervention in Afghanistan is the one that shows more plainly two conflicting drivers behind US foreign policy: its global outreach v. regional fragmentation. The American reactions to 9/11 have been eminently globalist: the Bush administration immediately framed the terrorist attacks in terms of a global threat (Bird and Marshall 2011; Carati 2015). Consistently, and not surprisingly, the administration launched a war on terror that was purposefully named *global*. The terrorist attacks perpetrated by a transnational organization based in Afghanistan, able to hit a "far enemy" on the other side of the world, and potentially everywhere, were understood as a confirmation of globalization, and in particular, the deadly violent side of it. From this perspective, not only was al-Qaeda interpreted as a global actor (rather than just an Afghan-based group with a transnational network), but an expression of a broader menace—terrorism—which transcended al-Qaeda and, as such, was even more global in nature.

The global outreach of the US war on terror has been present both at an operational level and in the American narrative. On the political and strategic side, military operations in Afghanistan were considered just one theatre of a broader battlefield at a global level, to be accompanied by a wide-ranging effort—from the containment of the so-called "axis of the evil" to allies' mobilization in every

region, from the planning of war in Iraq in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to huge intelligence and special forces programmes (Clarke 2008). The narrative related to the war on terror was consistently global: besides the interpretation of 9/11 as the tip of the iceberg of a global terrorist threat to the US, reading the attacks as acts of violence against the American way of life framed the battle between the US and its enemies in post-territorial terms, as a global ideological conflict.

No other US and NATO intervention had such a global focus and extra-regional strategic significance. However, the same global commitment, in which every NATO member state declared itself to be on the side of its strongest ally, was complemented, and to a certain extent contradicted, by remarkable regional implications. In light of the global stance behind the intervention in Afghanistan, it is particularly noteworthy that regional concerns for the allies arose prominently and affected the alliance approach. Among others, two aspects are especially revealing: the debate over a “global NATO” and the quarrel between old and new member states.

The fact that the US pushed for NATO’s global projection—consistent with the new global dimension of the American foreign policy—was not surprising. Neither was the European resistance unexpected. The debate over a global NATO v. a Eurocentric alliance, in a sense, was a likely consequence of the US reactions to 9/11. But, the general opinion was that the debate was essentially rooted in the exceptional circumstances of the Afghan war and in the unilateralist attitude adopted by G.W. Bush. Instead, NATO involvement in Afghanistan represented a litmus test of the rising, regional concerns emerging from the unipolar context. The US was asking its partners not only to intervene in Afghanistan, but to completely reconceptualise the alliance’s rationale. Or, more precisely, to revise its core territorial basis. A great deal more than the operations “out of area” in the Balkans, the intervention in Afghanistan completely overturned the importance of regional/global threats perceived by member states. A clear and shared hierarchy about the territorial priority accorded to Europe during the Cold War years left room for an ambiguous discrepancy between the US necessity to be ready for a global engagement and the European concerns about abandonment (Hunter 2002). The debate over a global NATO was not just an occasional and temporary dispute; rather, it was a sign of a more constitutive shift in the alliance as a consequence of the new international scenario—i.e. the absence of a shared global threat, and the end of Europe as the central stage in a global rivalry (Skidmore 2012).

Similarly, Donald Rumsfeld’s argument comparing the “old” Europe—meaning conservative and not ready for a global engagement—and a “new” Europe—one more willing to follow the US in its global ventures—cannot be reduced to a unilateralist attitude or arrogance (Sedivy and Zaborowski 2004). Behind the distinction between old and new member states, there was neither a different approach to security nor a diverse loyalty to the US. The essence of this distinction was an unprecedented regional focus of European allies. The old partners defended the Eurocentric nature of NATO not because they were conservative, but because they realised all too well that the US global outreach downgraded the regional significance of Europe, and they could only trade (and occasionally support) US global

engagements for what could be preserved of the NATO's commitment to European security. The old Europe, in this sense, was neither idle nor unable to adapt to the new post-bipolar system. On the contrary, it understood that NATO's assignment to regional security was at stake in an unprecedented manner. The new partners followed the same logic, albeit with a feigned greater devotion to the US: they traded their global duties on the American side for a renewed *regional* commitment to the US in Europe against Russian assertiveness. In other respects, their apparent global engagement was essentially driven by a regional concern.

The intervention in Afghanistan was also a revealing case of how the asymmetry of power played a remarkable role within the alliance. No other NATO operation displayed the American will and capacity to go it alone in the post-bipolar environment in clearer terms. The "coalition of the willing" format sidelined the institutionalized alliance from the start: the US-led operation *Enduring Freedom* was built around the idea that the strategic goal must shape the coalition and not vice versa (Rumsfeld 2002). There were no sharper terms to make clear how the undisputed American position at a global level gave it a greater freedom of action that NATO could not unduly constrain. It is worth stressing the fact that such a marginalization of NATO came when, for the first time, the alliance invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (Rynning 2012). Precisely when allies formally pledged their military assistance, they were set aside. In addition, it should be noted that even when NATO was involved in the feigned post-conflict mission in 2003, *Enduring Freedom* kept undertaking autonomous operations, often in contrast with—if not openly against—the NATO-International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) tasks (Carati 2015).

Once again, it would be a mistake to reduce the US marginalization of NATO to the unilateralist approach of the Bush administration. The effects of the renewed importance of asymmetry of power in the unipolar context are more profound. In fact, while Obama's strategy for Afghanistan, launched in 2009, was welcomed as a return to NATO and multilateralism (and in part it was), the so-called *Af-Pak strategy* was essentially a robust re-Americanisation of the mission in Afghanistan (Bird 2013). Around 100,000 US troops out of 140,000 contributed by approximately 40 countries, the strict control of the command's chain (less pronounced when the American mission *Enduring Freedom* was prevalent), and the prescribed strategic revision to reframe the operations, in counterinsurgency terms, ended up making ISAF essentially an American mission. In a nutshell, although the disproportion of the US contribution has been a constant feature of NATO missions, the role of the US in Afghanistan after Obama's strategy has no equal. As such, the experience in Afghanistan revealed an unprecedented US sway over the alliance, at first sidelining it and later re-engaging it in the name of a pervasive re-Americanization.

Finally, on the effects concerning credibility, the consequences of the American global approach in the unipolar context are unclear. On the one hand, it is fairly evident that the US in Afghanistan had less need for allies and so, as Walt suggests (2011), its partners doubted the American commitment to NATO. Besides the debate upon global NATO, which is also telling in this regard, the mission in

Afghanistan proved how the *casus foederis* was no longer attached to a clear and shared threat—as during the Cold War years. It was not the actual presence of an undisputed enemy that cemented the Alliance’s cohesion. Rather, it was a strategic decision and, as such, the outcome of a political bargaining among allies. This is the essential novelty that emerged from the intervention in Afghanistan, undermining the credibility among allies: the prospect that NATO is no longer motivated by the actual strategic environment, but it depends on a volatile political negotiation.

On the other hand, it should be recognized that in the 9/11 aftermath, NATO disclosed a surprising amount of cohesion. Several aspects confirmed the alliance’s persisting efficiency: the invocation of Article 5 immediately after the terrorist attacks sent a clear political message of unity; the US decision to belatedly involve NATO in the post-conflict mission in Afghanistan was a sign of the reliability it was still representing for the US, and more generally for the international community; the fact that ISAF has been the most demanding mission in NATO’s history, and that European allies significantly contributed, in relative terms, more than in any other intervention, is meaningful (Auerswald and Saideman 2014). In other words, even though terrorism was not necessarily a coalescing menace, the US unquestionably led the intervention, and the global stretching of NATO’s engagement was problematic, nonetheless the mission in Afghanistan consolidated the idea within the alliance that it was still a reliable instrument—without *credible* alternatives—in the hands of member countries. In conclusion, while from the European perspective the half-hearted mission in Afghanistan had ambiguous effects concerning the credibility of the US commitment to European security, from the American point of view it was manifest that when the US decides on multilateralism, NATO is still the best tool to hand.

6 US and NATO in Libya

The intervention in Libya in 2011 seems to confirm all the effects expected from the unipolar system on alliances. The renewed regional focus among allies is partially overshadowed by the fact that, unlike in Afghanistan, the intervention had a regional emphasis from the start. Yet, regional concerns produced unprecedented policies that had no equal in past NATO operations and were unthinkable during the Cold War. Secondly, the asymmetry of power affected the mission in two ways: on the one hand, the role of the US in the intervention amplified the unpredictability of American engagement in NATO missions; on the other hand, the military operations proved that the US is indispensable for the alliance even when the initiative comes from Europe and, therefore evidenced the greater freedom of action of the unipole. Finally, while in the case of Afghanistan the allies’ commitment was partially confirmed, the intervention in Libya exposed an exceptional divergence over allies’ participation and motivation.

Operations *Odyssey Dawn* and *Unified Protector* had, for the most part, a regional character. Unlike the US and NATO missions in Afghanistan—where

Central Asia was only a part of a broader picture, i.e. the global war on terror—the intervention in Libya was largely motivated by a local crisis with no immediate international or global implications. Indeed, in this case the incongruous relationship between the US global outreach and regional implications is less apparent.

However, US motivations were not entirely devoid of global justifications. Looking at the US debate on the way to intervention reveals how an overall division shaped the decision-making. This was between those who opposed the military action (e.g. Robert Gates and more generally the US Defense Department) and those who called convincingly for military action (e.g. the ambassador to the UN Susan Rice, Senator John Kerry, and the unofficial but influential expert Samantha Power). The reasons for the opposition were the lack of a clear strategic goal, the absence of vital interests at stake, and the risks of overstretching, in light of the *long war* undertaken in Iraq and Afghanistan (Chivvis 2014, pp. 44–47). On the other side, the motivations stated by President Obama and Hillary Clinton, which eventually led to the intervention, were based on humanitarian concerns, promotion of democracy and the responsibility to protect civilians (Weissman 2016). For instance, it is worth noting how Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, initially sceptical about the military solution and close to Robert Gates’s position, changed her mind: while strategic and regional considerations made her cautious, the universal and moral duty to act against a massacre led her to the final decision (Chivvis 2014, pp. 55–56). Likewise, President Obama, similarly prudent about the use of force, eventually resolved on intervention justifying it on ethical grounds because otherwise, “the democratic values that we stand for would be overrun [...] and] the words of the international community would be rendered hollow” (quoted in Gertler 2011, p. 3). In brief, the rationale behind the US decision to intervene had, even in this case, an extra-regional, universal significance. Indeed, while the conflicting relationship between the US global outreach and regional connotations was not as remarkable as that in Afghanistan, nonetheless, it was not entirely absent.

Nevertheless, where regional concerns exist, at least two aspects regarding the allies’ commitment to the intervention (or the lack thereof) point to the unique role played by regional considerations on that occasion. Primarily, for the first time, a NATO mission started off with an unexpected and astonishing initiative from two European allies, France and the UK. Their motivations had unambiguous regional drives (Chivvis 2014, pp. 34–37). In addition, in the days before the first military actions there was a widespread uncertainty about how the operations would be undertaken: whether by an Anglo-French-led coalition, by a mission under the auspices of the EU Common Security and Defence policy, or by NATO (Michaels 2013). This was a sign of how NATO suffered from—and was belatedly involved in—individual initiatives driven by self-interested motivations, rather than being the institutional body where partners share a collective concern and plan a common policy.

Second, in the days after the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (legitimizing “all necessary means” to act to protect civilians in Libya) was passed, member states were sharply divided into different camps: some, like the US and the UK, pushed to bring the military operations under NATO command; some, like

Germany and Poland, opposed the intervention; others, like France, were in favour of the intervention, but resisted the idea of involving NATO (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2014; Chivvis 2014, pp. 72–76; Gertler 2011). Regional considerations were at the heart of such divergences: the US had no vital interests at stake in the region and decided for a minor role; Turkey, which was initially against military action and eventually changed its position, was concerned by its investment in Libya and its forgoing relations with Qaddafi, and wanted to oppose the French diplomatic assertiveness in general (but in North Africa in particular); and some Eastern European allies “expressed concerns that the intervention might detract from NATO readiness for territorial defence (i.e. v. Russia)” (Chivvis 2014, p. 74). Moreover, the Italian swinging approach to the crisis displayed conflicting regional concerns rather than an attachment to the alliance’s collective security the country was torn between its alignment with major European countries and its national interests in the region—namely the energy policy, highly dependent on imports from Libya, and the containment of illegal immigration through the Mediterranean Sea (Carati and Locatelli 2017). And finally, even the US had some regionally-driven purposes, particularly in the mission *Odyssey Dawn*, that was disproportionate to the humanitarian crisis in the field. As Christopher Chivvis noted (2014, p. 83), this mission “was a demonstration of power that may have gone beyond the immediate needs of the operation, but it was no doubt intended to demonstrate US capabilities to other regional powers—such as Iran and Syria”.

Similarly, the asymmetry of power between the US and its partners played a prominent role, with no precedents in previous interventions, and inconceivable during the Cold War. In this regard, NATO’s operation in Libya differed from the intervention in Afghanistan, but revealed just the same as the US freedom of action, due to its overwhelming military capacity. In Afghanistan, greater freedom of the US in the unipolar context appeared in the initial marginalization of NATO and in the later re-Americanization of the mission. The same freedom appeared, in opposite terms, in Libya, where the US decided for a detached involvement, while being fundamental in the air campaign and its military success.

The “leading from behind” formula, as an American official successfully labelled the US involvement in Libya, was implausible to imagine in the bipolar context, because it was unlikely that NATO could be activated without the US being fully engaged in the front line. In this regard, the fact that America—for the first time in NATO’s history—was not *leading* the alliance’s military operations reveals how, in the unipolar context, even if the US asserts a renewed and broader commitment to a liberal global order, the transatlantic alliance is no longer an institutional tool of global rivalry. In the current international environment, NATO could be activated in more erratic ways, and its activation is not necessarily driven by common strategic goals. In other words, NATO, and the part that the US plays in it, is more unpredictable because is not determined by a global strategic order. In such a volatile environment, without an overwhelming global threat, the strongest ally has a greater freedom of action to choose where, when and how to intervene, and the US role in Libya clearly confirms that lack of restrictions.

While the new—and probably occasional—approach of “leading from behind” was indicative of American’s greater freedom of action in the unipolar context, the US military power was nonetheless confirmed on the operational side, as the reverse of that same freedom. The US military assets were essential for the air campaign, providing air refuelling, aerial surveillance, precision-guided munitions, and carrying out all the electronic warfare missions (Gertler 2011; Michaels 2013). In addition, it should be noted that the nine-day-long operation *Odyssey Dawn*, that preceded the NATO campaign *Unified Protector*, was unquestionably dominated by the US: during the operation “the United States had fired 192 Tomahawks, with Britain firing only 7 [... and] dropped 455 precision-guided munitions, with 147 from the coalition” (Chivvis 2014, p. 89). Indeed, NATO’s intervention could not have been so quickly set in motion if it had not been for the “battlefield well prepared by the US-led coalition that preceded it” (Chivvis 2014, p. 96). Once again, although the US was not in the lead, the intervention in Libya paradoxically corroborated both the greater US freedom of action and its strategic capacity “to go it alone”.

Finally, with regard to credibility, the intervention in Libya represented a tricky precedent for NATO’s future missions. Albeit from a mere military point of view the operation was deemed to be a success, it was nonetheless a debacle from a strategic perspective (for opposite views, see Daalder and Stavridis 2012; Kuperman 2013). If it could be conceded that the air campaign per se was carried out more or less efficiently, and it achieved its ultimate goal (although belatedly), the political cohesion within NATO could not have been more flawed. Operation *Unified Protector* is the single NATO military intervention in which only a small minority of member states contributed to the mission, with the US not in the lead and devoid of a shared strategic goal.

A number of aspects reveal how the intervention exacerbated the allies’ concerns about credibility. First, “leading from behind” not only proved the greater freedom of action of the US, but also nurtured the syndrome of abandonment of several European allies (Lindsay 2011). In other words, it contributed to the crisis of expectations regarding the US global engagement. Second, the fact that only a few of the 28 NATO members took part in the operation was indicative of the level of distrust among allies. The problem was not only about burden-sharing, but about a more challenging issue of cohesion. Indeed, among participating countries (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, US, UK), the contributions were different and intermittent (Chivvis 2014, pp. 83–86). The resistance of other allies was particularly prominent, as in the case of Germany, which pulled its crews from NATO AWACs (Airborne Warning and Control System) or Turkey, which pushed to the limits the intra-alliance tensions with France (Chivvis 2014, p. 77). Third, the absence of a clear strategic goal put at risk both the operation’s effectiveness and the alliance’s credibility, especially when the air campaign reached a stalemate that was fortuitously overcome by the rebels’ initiative on the ground in mid-August (Michaels 2013). In sum, the operation *Unified Protector* suffered from the ambiguous US engagement in the unipolar condition, as well as from the lack of an actual common threat cementing the alliance’s cohesion. Against this backdrop,

the crisis-management role that NATO played in Libya, where a minor crisis occurred, was inevitably marked by divergences, different perceptions, uneven contributions and mixed national interests. All these elements turned out to be detrimental to the credibility of allies' commitments to their collective security.

7 Conclusion

The contradictory relationship between a renewed globalization in the post-Cold War period and the emergence of resilient processes of regionalization is one of the defining features of the current international system. In this context, the US plays a decisive role since it is the only, actual global actor in the international arena and, at the same time, is forced to manage multifaceted strategic competitions in different regions. As a result, US foreign policy in the post-bipolar system is inescapably marked by conflicting urges: on the one hand, the effort to build a consistent liberal global order and, on the other, the need to come to terms with different and increasingly autonomous regional dynamics.

This constitutive ambiguity shaping current US foreign policy in the unipolar system has consequences for several aspects of world politics. Here, the focus is on alliances, and on NATO in particular. The effort is to investigate how that ambiguity affected the transatlantic alliance in one of its most crucial activities, military intervention. The approach is necessarily explorative, since a thorough comparison between NATO missions before and after the end of the Cold War is not feasible. Yet, the chapter has looked at the alliance's performances in the interventions in Afghanistan and Libya through a new perspective that stresses the controversial effects stemming from the unipolar condition and the novel unipolar position of the US. The chapter suggests three possible effects on alliances—the prominence of regional concerns, the consequences of the asymmetry of power, and the issue of credibility—and assesses them against NATO's interventions in Afghanistan and Libya. Both cases seem to confirm that allies tend to attach a greater importance to regional considerations, that secondary allies suffer from the greater capacity of the US to go it alone (or go with a less institutionalized coalition of the willing), and that the credibility regarding the allies' commitment to collective security is undermined by the unpredictability of the unipole behaviour.

What should be considered is that these effects are having an impact on NATO, and more generally US alliances, independently from specific American administrations. Although, as we noted in Sect. 2, in a unipolar condition US domestic politics and partisanship play a greater role in foreign policy decision-making, nevertheless the huge asymmetry of power implied in the unipolarity, and the lack of an overarching global threat, also produce effects that go beyond the strategic approach of a specific president. This could tell us something about the new American president Donald Trump and his foreign policy. As he may be unpredictable, the fact that NATO will remain an unthreatened alliance, and that the US will remain in the near future a *lonely superpower*, let us predict the same overall

effects on the alliance that we have witnessed over the last 25 years. As with the Clinton and Obama administrations, and even the Bush unilateralist attitude (which was not the only source of strain within NATO), the alliance will probably suffer from similar structural problems even during the Trump presidency: problems that depend to a lesser extent on the president's approach to foreign policy—the US capacity for “going alone” and its preference for non-institutionalized organizations; the greater importance attached to regional concerns; and the double fear of abandonment (for secondary states) and entrapment (for the unipole).

Other effects should probably be explored and empirical investigations of other cases must be certainly be attempted. Even the empirical analysis of other NATO activities, not necessarily military intervention, could be meaningful, particularly if these activities permit a comparison between the present and the bipolar international systems. Still, as this chapter tentatively tries to suggest, what is worthwhile from an analytical perspective is grasping problems that currently affect both NATO and US foreign policy and which are rooted in the ambivalent and contradictory processes of both globalization and regionalization.

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The US-Russia Conflict in the Ukrainian Crisis: Unipolarism Versus Revisionism?

Barbara Pisciotta

Abstract This chapter seeks to analyse the causes of the clash between the United States and Russia over the Ukrainian question since the 1990s. Despite America's evident military and economic superiority, Russia has continued to constitute a potential challenger, in terms of revisionist power, especially since Putin's rise to power. In this perspective, the paper starts by presenting an overview of the country's difficult situation from independence to the crisis now under way and then goes on to examine the reasons for this crisis in relation to the three aims pursued by US foreign policy in post-communist Europe, namely the promotion of democracy, expansion of the EU and enlargement of NATO.

1 US Foreign Policy in East Europe After the Cold War: An Introduction

The thaw in relations between the United States and the Soviet Union during in the first few months after the end of the Cold War has been interpreted as something exceptional, unrepeatable and *temporary* (Waltz 2000; Mearsheimer 2001) caused by a series of epoch-making changes that radically altered the structure of the international system.¹ The imbalance within the system caused the stronger actor at first to adopt a prudent, wait-and-see attitude while seeking to understand the nature and direction of these changes. America's initial caution was due above all to fear about the repercussions of the Soviet crisis on the security of the entire planet. The unipolar structure taking shape forced the USA to shoulder the burden of ensuring the system's stability while offering it the opportunity, for the first time in history, to pursue its strategic interests at the global scale with no other actor capable of counterbalancing them (Ikenberry 2001).

¹For an interesting discussion of the debate on neorealist *pessimism*, see Glaser (1994).

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In the short period (1989–1991), awareness of its hegemony with respect to the bipolar phase led to a radical upheaval in American foreign policy towards the post-communist area. Even though containment of the Soviet Union constituted the primary objective even after 1989, the global pursuit of American interests presupposed the maintenance of stability in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Attainment of this aim necessarily depended on the possibility of avoiding the disintegration of the USSR and the rise of nationalism that would destabilise both Eurasia and the Middle East, threatening the borders of democratic Europe and creating hotbeds of revolt along the fault lines running through the eastern hemisphere. Faced with the prospect of a world order jeopardised by the outbreak of rivalry at the regional and local level, as was soon to be demonstrated by conflict in former Yugoslavia and the Caucasus, the USA chose the lesser evil, giving priority to a collaborative attitude towards Moscow and supporting perestroika in the hope that the reforms announced by Mikhail Gorbachev could be effectively introduced. As George H.W. Bush stated as early as May 1989, the new *beyond-containment* strategy was designed to test the new Soviet thinking and, if the new order proved credible, to support America's old rival in its desire for change and reform (Goldgeier and McFaul 2003).

It is significant that the United States had no hesitation in jettisoning its rhetorical support for the self-determination of the Soviet republics, which had served to weaken its enemy during the Cold War, in order to attain this objective and to avoid a rapid collapse of the USSR, which would destabilise the region. Identifying the gradual formation of a federal structure more responsive to the demands for autonomy of the various former Soviet republics as the best way to maintain order, the USA saw Ukraine and Belarus as the pillars of the new union. Despite the constant stream of proclamations about captive nations all the way from Eisenhower to Reagan, followed above all in the 1970s by numerous legislative initiatives in favour of nationalities oppressed by Soviet power,² the Bush administration opted for a situational approach and sacrificed the demands for self-determination. This initial phase therefore saw the United States decide to shoulder the burden of global hegemony and work to maintain the minimal requisites of international order: protection from violence, maintenance of agreements and stability of possession (Bull 1977). It is not surprising that the Security Council of United Nations was able on 29 November 1990, without being vetoed by China and the Soviet Union, to adopt resolution 678 condemning the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and authorising military intervention to restore the status quo.

The medium-long term has seen a radical change in US foreign policy. When the political immobility of China and the results of the crumbling of the USSR became evident, the USA was concerned to maintain the stability of the international order based on its hegemony. To this end, the strengthening of the asymmetrical relationship with its European allies, as crystallised with the adaptation of NATO to

²Over 150 legislative initiatives in favour of Ukraine were promoted by Congress between 1970 and 1979 (Kaminski and Haran 1996).

address the new international challenges, was designed to establish an order capable of attracting and absorbing the two major rival powers, Russia and China, thus *preserving the unipolar moment* (Mastanduno 1997).

If institutions played a key part in the creation of the new international order promoted by the United States, as demonstrated by the continued existence of the Atlantic Alliance, it is also true that the course of relations with Moscow was primarily influenced by military questions. The first step towards this new order in the area of East Europe was the reunification of Germany. According to John Ikenberry, the attempt to persuade Russia to accept a unified democratic German state that was also a member of NATO constituted an objective of American diplomacy as from the spring of 1990. Fears of a Russian reaction in favour of German neutrality then led America to adopt a moderate approach and involve Moscow in the negotiation process, presenting the possibility of a unified, autonomous Germany outside NATO as a risky alternative for the United States and Russia alike. The compromise reached in a period still marked by *détente* involved a series of assurances from the West: the signing of new agreements on the limitation of conventional and nuclear weapons; a pledge to ensure that Germany did not arm itself with atomic, chemical or bacteriological weapons; an undertaking not to deploy NATO troops on the territory of the former German Democratic Republic; the reform of NATO's strategic objectives in the light of the radical changes in Central and Eastern Europe (Ikenberry 2001).

While Gorbachev's fall sounded an alarm for the western diplomacies and rekindled smouldering fears, the transition from Yeltsin to Putin took place in an international context already undermined by mutual distrust. As John Mearsheimer points out, from the early 1990s on, the United States systematically offered Russia "the West's triple package of policies—NATO enlargement, EU expansion and democracy promotion" without bothering about the impact such policies would have on Moscow's strategic interests (Mearsheimer 2014, p. 4). Throughout East Europe, the Bush, Clinton, Bush Jr. and Obama administrations have worked to supply the former Soviet republics and satellite countries with economic aid (above all through NGOs), technical advice and expert personnel in order to support the process of democratisation and/or the attainment of independence; to favour the forces of anti-Russian opposition; to facilitate adaptation to European parameters and entry into the European Union; to foster membership of NATO (Pridham et al. 1997; Whitehead 1996; Zielonka and Pravda 2001; Hyde-Price 2002; Way 2008).

In the altered international situation, the repeated attempts of western countries to integrate Ukraine into the sphere of their institutions, as confirmed by their support for the pro-western coalition that gave birth to the Orange Revolution (November 2004), are rooted in a gradual and dogged effort to create a Euro-Atlantic regional order based on democratic principles and strongly bound up with NATO. The evident incompatibility of this plan with Russia's political, economic, energy and military interests has accompanied Ukraine's uncertain progress towards democracy from the outset all the way to the present violent crisis that exploded in the spring of 2014. The threat of possible encirclement as a direct result of the enlargement of NATO has never been underestimated by the Kremlin

(Deudney and Ikenberry 1992). As stated in the official document establishing the fundamental principles of Russian military doctrine in response to American attempts to bring the countries of Central and Eastern Europe into western military institutions, “The basic existing and potential sources of external military danger for the Russian Federation are: the territorial claims of other states on the Russian Federation and its allies; existing and potential local wars and armed conflicts, particularly those in the immediate vicinity of the Russian borders; (...) the expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of the interests of the Russian Federation’s military security.”³

Against this background, the present paper seeks to analyse the causes of the clash between the United States and Russia over the Ukrainian question since the 1990s. It starts by presenting an overview of the country’s difficult situation from independence to the crisis now under way and then goes on to examine the reasons for this crisis in relation to the three aims pursued by US foreign policy in post-communist Europe, namely the promotion of democracy, expansion of the EU and enlargement of NATO.

2 The Ukrainian Political Context and the Question of *Stateness* (1991–2016)

Generally speaking, the interests of the USA and Russia in the Ukrainian crisis can be explained in geopolitical terms. Ukraine is still divided between East and West as a result of its strategic location in the Black Sea region, close to Russia, Turkey, Central and Eastern Europe and Baltic countries. Because of its key significance for the European and Eurasian regions in military and strategic terms and as regards energy transit, the country has been repeatedly attacked and occupied throughout history by Tartary, Poland, Russia, Turkey, the Habsburg Empire, Romania, Hungary and Germany. Its different political cultures are thus the historical legacy of exposure to different civilisations and foreign domination. In particular, the eastern and southern regions had never been exposed directly to any political and cultural influences other than those of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, and are still today more under the influence of Moscow than Kyiv due to the mass media, cultural flows and the predominance of the Russian language. The western regions were instead influenced by the European powers and displayed a higher level of modernisation in terms of civic culture, urbanisation and industrialisation. Until 1991, Ukraine was unable to conduct its own foreign policy and had no right to formulate its own geopolitical goals separate from Soviet interests (Evangelista 2015a; Scherbak 2015).

³*The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, approved by the Russian Federation Security Council at its session on 2 November 1993.

When Ukraine became a sovereign nation in 1991, it was one of the most promising states to emerge from the ashes of the Soviet Union. The new leadership was really determined to create a centralised authority asserting its monopoly on the legitimate use of the force as a prerequisite of effective government in a modern state. The Ukrainian parliament passed the new country's laws on citizenship and the state borders during the autumn of 1991. The former established the right of citizenship for everyone officially resident in Ukrainian territory, irrespective of ethnicity, and the latter the post-1954 borders of the Ukrainian Soviet republic, which received widespread international recognition. Parliament also established the country's ministry of defence and placed all of the armed forces on Ukrainian territory under its command (Grilli di Cortona and Pisciotta 2015).

Despite the difficult Soviet legacy, the Orange Revolution represented a high point for Ukraine's democratic development and respect for human rights as well as a marked change from the Kuchma era. The new regimes necessarily required decisions about the design of the state and the balance of power between the major political institutions (Baylis 1996, 2007; Elster et al. 1999). Over the period from Kuchma (1994–2004) to Yushchenko (2005–2010) and Yanukovych (2010–2014), the model of the Ukrainian constitutional process moved from a presidential to a parliamentary system and then back again. Political repression was moderate under Kuchma but saw exponential growth as from 2010 under Yanukovych (Way 2008; D'Anieri 2007; Kuzio 2012). After 2010, the building of institutions to create a new modern and democratic state was subordinated to personal interest in the accumulation and perpetuation of political power and financial wealth (Kudelia 2012). The newly established order was based not on the rule of law, democratic legitimacy or effective checks and balances but rather on the monopolisation of power by one faction through the repeated circumvention of constitutional procedures.

As stated by Kramer et al. (2011), the transformation undergone by the Ukrainian political system during 2010 demonstrated that the country's democratic institutions are both dynamic and fragile. Even though President Yanukovych was elected democratically, Freedom House downgraded Ukraine from free to partly free in January 2011. While Ukrainian democracy was not perfect under Yushchenko, the environment that emerged after the Orange Revolution was the most democratic since 1991. Subsequently, one of the most serious accusations made against the Yanukovych administration was of using the justice system to punish political opponents.⁴ Ukraine's justice system lost a great deal of its

⁴Human rights watchdogs and figures in the EU have drawn attention to many cases of selective use of the judiciary for political reasons. While Tymoshenko is the most prominent case, charges were brought against nearly a dozen other top officials from her government. A number of criminal investigations were launched against leading members of the former government at the end of 2010. The former minister of the interior Yuriy Lutsenko and deputy justice minister Yevhen Korniyshuk were arrested, criminal charges against Tymoshenko restricted her political activities and the former minister of the economy Bohdan Danylyshyn obtained political asylum in the Czech Republic after a Ukrainian court ordered his arrest.

remaining independence during 2010, largely through the introduction in July of a reform that effectively subordinated the judicial system to the executive branch.

This institutional fragility is particularly evident in the country's missed opportunity to consolidate the state. After the Orange Revolution, one of the main obstacles to Ukrainian institutional development was the persistent pressure for repatrimonialisation of the state, a phenomenon defined by Francis Fukuyama as a "natural human propensity to favour family and friends [that] constantly reasserts itself in the absence of strong countervailing incentives" (Fukuyama 2011, p. 423). Pressure to return to personalised relations often comes from non-state groups within society such as family, clans or corporations. When the state is weak or dysfunctional, non-state actors tend to form networks of political patronage preying on state resources and maximising personal profits. Serhiy Kudelia argues that in the early independent Ukraine "patrimonialism was not an aberration seeking to regain ground, but a principal mode of elite relations inherited from the Soviet state" (Kudelia 2012, p. 418). The prevalence of these informal networks and the patrimonial nature of the Ukrainian state were supported by party control over state resources and bureaucratic appointments and massive corruption at all levels of government (Grzymala-Busse 2007). National and international sources have confirmed that the high degree of political corruption is an important threat to the Ukrainian state. Ukraine was ranked 118 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2007 and 134 out of 178 in 2010 (transparency.org). Despite the Revolution's promises of democratisation, the country lacked the political capital needed for institutional and economic reforms (Tucker 2010) and was plunged into crisis.

After the Orange Revolution, as Mykola Riabchuk points out, "the controversy is primarily about values and about the national identity as a value-based attitude toward the past and the future and toward 'us' and 'them'. It looks barely possible to find any compromise between democratic and authoritarian anti-Soviet and Soviet." (Riabchuk 2008, p. 57). The division between the two images of the state is so deeply rooted in social and political behaviour that it is very difficult to mould a common national identity.

Samuel Huntington, for example, predicted the division of Ukrainian territory into two nation states respectively built on the different civilisations and foreign relations developed in the long term (Huntington 1996). The divided national identity and the fragility of political and administrative institutions prevented the founding of a new democratic and independent state (Carbone and Memoli 2015). After 1989, numerous international crises were brought about by fragile or failed states (Somalia, Haiti, Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo, East Timor, Syria and Ukraine) and the international community was forced to intervene in many cases and take over their functions of government. The literature defines failed states as those lacking: (1) control over territory; (2) exercise of sovereignty; (3) ability to administer; (4) common identity (Carment 2003; Fukuyama 2004; Rotberg 2004; Di Sotto and Grilli di Cortona 2016).

Ukraine now provides a good example of this. The Fragile States Index for 2016 confirms a worsening trend and the current assessment is an elevated warning.

Ukraine's fragility index rocketed from 66 in 2013 to 76 in 2015, due to the ongoing political upheaval (The Fund for Peace 2016). The first act of the present crisis took place in the autumn of 2013. Protest against the decision of the former president Viktor Yanukovych to suspend the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and seek closer economic ties with Russia led to a wave of demonstrations (Euromaidan) and escalating violence that resulted in the toppling of Yanukovych and a new government.⁵ The second occurred in February 2014, when Vladimir Putin began preparations to annex Crimea. After the entry of Russian troops, a controversial referendum declared that 97% of Russian people living in Crimea were in favour of joining Russia. In March 2014, Russia and the self-proclaimed Republic of Crimea signed a treaty whereby the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol joined the Russian Federation. The third act was the commencement of still ongoing military operations in the eastern area of Donbass in the spring of 2014. The self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic declared their independence and merged in the Novorossiia or New Russia confederation in April 2014.

In conclusion, while the former ruling class was unable to forge a common national identity, the current elite is unable to maintain the territorial integrity of the state. The clearest result of this turmoil is that today in Ukraine there is no nation and a fragile, reduced state. This is the political arena in which the United States, the European Union and Russia are all playing strategic roles to protect their interests.

3 US Foreign Policy in Ukraine: The Promotion of Democracy

The political and social context of the Kuchma era (1994–2004), characterised by a process of radical economic change to a market system, generated a series of dysfunctions—including the appropriation of public resources by new oligarchic clans, financial scandals and corruption—that made Europe and the USA far less interested in bringing Ukraine into their institutional frameworks. The scepticism that predominated in western chancelleries until the Orange Revolution was substantially due to two major causes. The first, of a primarily internal nature, regards the obvious inability (or unwillingness) of the national leadership to break free of Russia and implement the political reforms required to comply with western democratic standards. The weakness of institutional changes, indifference to the protection of political rights and civil freedoms, progressive strengthening of the executive and emulation of the Russian presidential model all constituted major obstacles to the legitimisation of Ukraine at the international level and its integration into the western economic and military institutions (Kudelia 2012;

⁵Petro Poroshenko won the presidential elections in May 2014 on a pro-EU platform.

Kuzio 2012). The second is instead international and regards the cautious stance temporarily adopted by Europe and the USA towards Moscow. As we shall see in greater depth in the following sections, the entry into NATO and the EU of former satellite countries of the USSR had already put a great strain on relations between the western powers and Russia, which felt openly threatened by the constant expansion of the democratic model and military alliance close to its borders. In short, the absence in Ukraine, unlike the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, of favourable internal and international conditions for democratisation discouraged both the USA and the EU at first from adopting a proactive stance in the country's political transformation, thus crystallising its ambiguous oscillation between East and West.

Euro-Atlantic scepticism towards the Ukrainian leadership did not, however, prevent the country from receiving considerable amounts of aid to foster the process of economic transformation. Intense cooperation with major international economic organisations such as the IMF, WB and EBRD as from the mid-1990s thus provided Ukraine with funds and technical advice to ensure financial stability and strengthen the banking system. Ukraine joined the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as an observer in 2001 and introduced a series of reforms to combat money laundering (Riabchuk 2008). Even though these reforms proved largely ineffective in halting the widespread corruption, as we have seen, the country's political and institutional evolution was constantly monitored by the international organisations. During the Kuchma and Yanukovych administrations, both Freedom House and the OECD reported continual violations of civil and political rights, explicit attempts to gag the press, vote rigging and irregularities in the electoral process (Dyczok 2006; Kramer et al. 2011).

The change in Euro-Atlantic strategy became more sharply defined when the USA identified the pro-western Orange coalition as a political force capable of challenging the pro-Russian regime. The first direct clash between the United States and Russia in the Ukrainian crisis took place precisely during the presidential campaign of 2004. The Bush administration openly supported the pro-western candidate Viktor Yushchenko, an advocate of political reform in favour of civil and political rights, the central role of parliament and entry into the EU and NATO. Putin instead backed the pro-Russian presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovych, an opponent of entry into the EU and NATO and an advocate of preserving and strengthening the presidential model, maintaining Russian as the official language and dual citizenship for Ukrainians, and closer economic and political relations with Moscow (Helsti 2006).

Putin took advantage of his popularity in Ukraine to support Yanukovych's electoral campaign actively, stating a few months before the elections that he would be willing to reduce Russian revenues on oil exports to Ukraine and make it easier for Ukrainian citizens to enter Russian territory and live there. During the presidential campaign, Russian political technologists close to Putin (and perhaps to the Russian intelligence agencies) appear to have played a somewhat ambiguous role in actions ranging from efforts to discredit the rival candidate to attempts to incite ethnic conflict between the eastern and western regions (Kuzio 2005).

The United States in turn financed Yushchenko's electoral campaign on a massive scale. According to Mearsheimer, "Victoria Nuland, the US assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, estimated in December 2013 that the United States has invested more than \$5 billion since 1991 to help Ukraine achieve 'the future it deserves'" (Mearsheimer 2014, p. 4). If the total cost of Yushchenko's electoral campaign can be estimated at over \$100 million, as claimed by Lucan Way (2008), a large amount of the American funding was unquestionably diverted to support the Orange Revolution. In a well-known article eloquently entitled *The Color of Money*, Scott Radnitz not only calls into question the spontaneity of the coloured revolutions and points out the dark side of these transformations, often born out of collusion between activists of national and international NGOs and some members of the new post-communist business elite, but also reconstructs the context of a "well-organized operation that owed much of its success to the contributions of private capital".

Yushchenko and his party, Our Ukraine, whipped up support all over the country in the summer of 2004 with a "\$150 million war chest" used to create networks of activists, put up posters, install video cameras, artificially create disorder and stage public protests, taking advantage of large-scale media coverage in their favour. In the wake of the well-known electoral fraud that characterised the second round of the presidential vote, as confirmed by observers from the OECD and other international organisations (the Central Election Commission of Ukraine recorded the presence of 4000 international observers all over national territory),⁶ Yushchenko's supporters "gathered at Kiev's central square and erected to miniature city of 1500 tents to help demonstrators brave subfreezing temperatures. A long line of buses arrived to transport people to the square from outside the capital. Organisers distributed food and hot drinks, and set up a massive stage and sound system" (Radnitz 2010, p. 137).

Evidence of the dark side of the Orange Revolution is provided first of all by the NGOs. While it is known that Russia controlled the Ukrainian leadership up to 2004 and ensured its economic interests through an entrepreneurial oligarchy at the Kremlin's orders, it should not be forgotten that the American dollars that financed the pro-western coalition enabled a group of oligarchs discontent with the previous management of the economic and financial sphere to replace the existing oligarchy and momentarily put an end to Russian influence. As rightly pointed out by Radnitz, it is precisely the NGOs that constitute the link between the United States and the oligarchic clans. Most of these organisations operating in Ukraine—such as the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, Freedom House, the Open Society Institute, the United States Agency for International Development and the Albert Einstein Institution—are based in the USA and funded by the US government. Through the provision of economic support, training and technical-organisational advice to opposition forces, these NGOs helped more or less wittingly to alter the existing power structure (Pishchikova 2011) and tilt

⁶International Election Observation Mission, 31 October 2004.

Ukraine towards the West, thus compromising Russian military and energy interests and offering the United States an opportunity to expand its control over the area.

4 Expansion of the European Union

In terms of political theory, America's intervention in the Ukrainian presidential election confirms the hypothesis of a substantially bipolar European regional system based on the United States and Russia (Mearsheimer 2001; Katzenstein 2005). Despite America's evident military and economic superiority, Russia has continued to constitute a potential challenger and to seek regional dominance, especially since Putin's rise to power. The fault line along which the rivalry between the two powers still manifests itself corresponds precisely to the borders of the former Soviet empire, thus confirming Russia's evident attempts to rise from the ashes of communism, maintain its influence over the strategic territories of the post-Soviet area and regain a position of power on the international chessboard as a revisionist power (Mead 2014).

In empirical terms, the balancing undertaken by the United States with respect to Europe since the 1990s has been primarily aimed at the creation of counterweights to prevent the rise of a dominant regional power capable of destabilising the area and challenging US hegemony. Two major political tools, respectively of a military and a economic nature, have enabled the United States to implement this balancing effectively, namely the enlargement of NATO (as discussed in the following section) and the eastward expansion of the EU (Keohane 1993; Keohane and Martin 1995). The strategic importance and impact in terms of the consolidation of hegemony of the enlargement of NATO in the area of Central and Eastern Europe was unquestionably greater than that of the European Union as from the Clinton administration. The construction of a vast, stable, democratic and economically developed European region stretching from the Pyrenees to the Carpathians has, however, always been a objective of American foreign policy⁷ (Kozhemiakin 1998; Ikenberry 2014; White House 2015).

The three stages of the EU's eastward expansion are in fact followed or accompanied by the entry of Central and Eastern European countries into NATO. The first saw Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania join the EU in 2004. Bulgaria and Romania followed three years later and Croatia in 2013. The slow approach of Ukraine to the EU began in 1994, during the Kuchma era, with the signing of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (ratified in 1998). This was followed in February 2005, during the Yushchenko presidency, by the EU-Ukraine Action Plan and the start of negotiations two years later for the signing of the Association Agreement—Deep and

⁷For an interpretation of the EU as *security actor* see, *inter alia*, Buzan and Wæver (2003), Tardy (2009), Lucarelli and Fioramonti (2010), Renard (2014).

Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. After the interruption of talks and the Euromaidan protests, triggered precisely by Yanukovych's decision to suspend the Association Agreement and consolidate ties with Moscow, dialogue with the EU recommenced in March 2014. Subsequent to the election of the new president Petro Poroshenko, the Association Agreement was signed and came into effect on 1 January 2016.

For the United States, Ukraine was another piece of the jigsaw puzzle it was putting together in Europe. This strategy was not based solely on a humanitarian imperative or the desire to strengthen cultural ties with Europe. A far more prosaic factor was perception of the potential Russian threat. The extension of the western democratic model to the countries of East Europe and especially the Baltic republics, for which joining the EU meant further international legitimisation and the severing of ties with Russia, enabled the USA to construct a new regional order capable of perpetuating its hegemony. In particular, the expansion of the EU on the northeast and southeast fronts took on twofold strategic importance for Washington. On the one hand, it asserted America's supremacy at the systemic level while thwarting the ambitions of its regional competitor at the same time. On the other, definitively stabilising the area and cutting the rival power down to size constituted two prerequisites for launching a foreign policy of disengagement from Europe so as to concentrate resources on the Middle-Eastern and Asian squares of the international chessboard (McArdle Kelleher 2009). The risk of being trapped pointed out by Snyder (1984) had in fact already forced the United States to undertake military intervention in Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999 in order to ensure the security of its European allies. After 2001, far more importance was attached to the threat of terrorism and the rise of China than to Europe in the hierarchy of American interests, and the imbalance of power between the two sides of the Atlantic enabled the United States to delegate to its European allies commitments and responsibilities that US governments no longer wished to bear, starting with the Balkans (Stefanachi 2004).

In this perspective, America's interest in Ukraine is to be understood not only as an anti-Russian but also, potentially, as an anti-European move. The entry of the Baltic republics into NATO and the EU, something insisted on by George W. Bush despite the misgivings of many European countries, and the subsequent attempts to bring Ukraine onto the western side are part and parcel of a divide-and-rule strategy ultimately designed to impair relations between the EU and Russia in order to isolate and damage the latter economically, end Europe's reliance on Moscow for energy and enable the USA to take over from Russia as direct supplier of the European countries.⁸ The creation of a secure, stable, democratic regional order in Europe, controlled by the United States and managed by the EU as a loyal but subordinate ally, has run up against three setbacks, namely the failure of the Orange Revolution, Russian military intervention in Georgia and the annexation of Crimea

⁸The tough negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership provide clear confirmation of the divergence of interests between the USA and the EU on energy policy.

to the Federation, which demonstrate Putin's determination to safeguard his country's national interests and alter the balance of power in Eurasia, thus forcing the USA to reconsider its policy of detachment in Europe (Mearsheimer 2016).

More specifically, Russia's annexation of Crimea initially provided confirmation of the line of disengagement not only through America's indifference to Ukraine's territorial integrity but also and above all through the way in which the crisis was handled, with all the costs being borne by the European allies (Pridham 2014). The weak strategy of compellence implemented by the western countries has so far failed to serve the strategic interests of Washington and Brussels. While UN resolution 68/262 asserts the need to safeguard of territorial integrity of Ukraine and the invalidity of the referendum on the Russian annexation of Crimea, the sanctions imposed on the aggressor with Washington's support have been applied exclusively by the EU. The EU imposed a series of restrictive diplomatic and economic measures against Russia in March 2014 in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sebastopol, which have been extended until 31 January 2017 due to Moscow's failure to comply with the terms of the Minsk agreements. The diplomatic measures include the cancellation of bilateral meetings between the EU members states and Russia, the expulsion of Russia from the G8 and the suspension of negotiations for Russia to join the OECD and the International Energy Agency. The economic measures range from asset-freezing and travel restrictions for 146 persons of Russian nationality and 37 bodies held responsible for actions that compromise or threaten the integrity of Ukraine to trade sanctions. The latter include: (1) the limitation of access to the primary and secondary capital markets of the EU for the five largest Russian financial institutions and their branches as well as three Russian companies operating in the energy sector and three in the defence sector; (2) the prohibition of exports and imports of weapons and dual-use goods; (3) the limitation of access to certain sensitive services and technologies for oil production; (4) the suspension of EIB and EBRD funding programmes and bilateral and regional programmes of cooperation between Russia and EU member countries (European Council/Council of the European Union).

While the prolongation of these sanctions, against the wishes of some EU countries (including Italy), has partially furthered Washington's plans to impair relations between the EU and Russia and weaken trade at the regional level, the new energy plan put forward by the USA for Europe has so far struggled to take off, thus allowing Russia to go on playing a crucial part in supplying Europe with gas (see the recent bilateral agreement with Germany). Moreover, also in the light of the bitter struggle over the agreement with Moscow signed in September 2016 on a cease-fire and a road map for settlement of the Syrian conflict, the policy of appeasement towards Russia on the Ukrainian question has proved ineffective as regards not only restoring peace and stability in Europe but also asserting American primacy over the Old World. It is indeed surprising that Barack Obama should have expressed himself in the following terms on Russian intervention in Crimea until last spring, clearly manifesting unwillingness to fight in order to re-establish the status quo even against one of the major powers seeking to change it:

Putin acted in Ukraine in response to a client state that was about to slip out of his grasp. And he improvised in a way to hang on to his control there. He's done the exact same thing in Syria, at enormous cost to the well-being of his own country. And the notion that somehow Russia is in a stronger position now, in Syria or in Ukraine, than they were before they invaded Ukraine or before he had to deploy military forces to Syria is to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of power in foreign affairs or in the world generally. Real power means you can get what you want without having to exert violence. Russia was much more powerful when Ukraine looked like an independent country but was a kleptocracy that he could pull the strings on (Goldberg 2016).

5 Enlargement of NATO

On the political and military front, relations between the United States and Russia went through a series of critical moments before reaching the present conflict. Despite the Kremlin's repeated attempts to point out the explicitly anti-Russian function of the enlargement of NATO, the period from 1989 to 2008 can be described as a sort of golden age in bilateral relations between Moscow and Washington (Mearsheimer 2016).

The first decade, from 1989 to 1999, was characterised above all by America's construction of a security system of concentric circles based on the centripetal force of NATO and aimed at integrating former countries of the Soviet bloc through programmes of cooperation like the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1991), later renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (1997), and the Partnership for Peace, launched in 1994. During this initial phase, the extraordinary ability of NATO to adapt to the new international context was the direct result of the imbalance of power established within the system (Hellmann and Wolf 1993; Clementi 2002; Colombo 2001, 2004). The USA's grand strategy necessarily involved reappraisal of the security challenges emerging after the end of the Cold War, which broadened the boundaries of threats and redrew the new geopolitical map with the resulting extension of the institutional framework supporting one of the pillars of US hegemony, namely military power (McCalla 1996, Wallace 1994, Brown 1995). The process of dismantling of the Soviet arsenal, together with the centrifugal pressures and economic difficulties with which Russia was grappling in the early 1990s, unequivocally marked the end of an era and prevented the Russian leadership from working on a par with the Americans to thrash out the features of the new world order (Brzezinski 1995).

Both Russia and Ukraine joined the Atlantic partnership during this first decade, entering the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and the Partnership for Peace in 1994. In 1997 the NATO-Russia Founding Act formally laid the foundations for cooperation between Russia and the United States. In the same year, Ukraine signed the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, which marked the creation of the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) to define the formal framework of cooperation activities and institute a forum of consultations with the allies to handle

common threats to security. In 1996, despite having opposed NATO military intervention, Russia sent its own contingent to support NATO peacekeeping operations in Bosnia Herzegovina.

Two events threatened to compromise relations between the United States and Russia in 1999. The first coincided with the beginning of the historic eastward enlargement of NATO. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined the Alliance on 12 March. This further enlargement on the central and eastern front, after East Germany's entry into NATO through German reunification in 1990, took place when Russia was still grappling with a difficult economic situation and severely weakened. The second, which occurred a few days later, was NATO's intervention in Kosovo without a UN mandate, which began to foster the perception on Russia's part of western expansionism designed to prevent any interference by Moscow in the territories of the former Soviet empire (Roberts 1999). The then president Boris Yeltsin, raising the well-known problem of reciprocal vetoes in the UN Security Council, openly denied the legitimacy of NATO action to re-establish order in Europe. Moscow's firm condemnation was followed by Russia's decision to suspend the NATO-Russia Founding Act, even though the Kremlin had sent its peacekeeping contingent to Kosovo. In line with the initial premises, the intermediate phase of US-Russia military relations (2000–2008) developed with America concerned at first to heal the rift by offering Russia a new agreement, which took formal shape in May 2002 with the creation of the NATO-Russia Council. Russia took part in the NATO Active Endeavour naval operation in 2004 and the first Russian frigate was deployed in the Mediterranean two years later within its framework. It was during this phase, however, due to their evident and constant incompatibility of interests, that both two powers laid the foundations for future conflict. In the West, Washington's concerns were initially related to Russia's failure to respect the commitment undertaken at the OECD Istanbul summit of 1999 to withdraw the peacekeeping military contingents deployed in the early 1990s in two secessionist regions with a Russian majority, namely Transnistria in Moldavia and Abkhazia in Georgia. Faced with Russia's refusal, the western countries decided not to ratify the new version of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, which provided for a system of mutual monitoring of troop movements and the exchange of information (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The inevitable breaking point was reached in the summer of 2008 with Putin's decision to invade southern Ossetia.

In Russia, a series of alarms went off in the space of a few years. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined NATO on 29 March 2004, thus enabling with the United States to control the eastern front from north to south. The following year, Viktor Yushchenko was proclaimed president of Ukraine, thus paving the way for a potential switch to the western side and further enlargement of NATO. Between the end of 2005 and the spring of 2006, NATO set up four military bases in Romania and three in Bulgaria. This was followed early in 2007 by America's decision to construct an anti-missile system—for use against Iran and North Korea, according to Washington—by installing a battery of Patriot anti-missile missiles in Poland and a radar system in the Czech Republic,

thus triggering a violent Russian reaction. In July 2008, after the Czech-American agreement for the deployment of radar stations on Czech territory, the Russian Transneft company almost halved its exports of oil to the Czech Republic and the Kremlin threatened to install a battery of missiles in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad against the American shield. The tension was to increase in August 2008 with the war between Russia and Georgia over control of South Ossetia, which ended in Russian victory and the country's independence. For the first time since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Russia had taken military action against another independent state in its regional area and explicitly told the West not only that it would not hesitate to intervene, also with force, to safeguard Russian minorities resident outside the borders of the Federation, but also and above all that it would never tolerate a pro-western Georgia.

The present phase of relations between Russia and the United States (2009–2016) has developed under the worst of auspices. While the NATO enlargement process saw the entry of Albania and Croatia in April 2009 and Montenegro in May 2016, attempts to reopen dialogue, which took formal shape with the NATO-Russia Council agreement signed in November 2010 during the Lisbon summit, ran aground again in 2014 with Russian intervention in Ukraine. At the NATO summit of September 2014 in Wales, the western countries “condemned Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine and demanded that Russia comply with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities; end its illegal and illegitimate occupation of Crimea; refrain from aggressive actions against Ukraine; withdraw its troops; halt the flow of weapons, equipment, people and money across the border to the separatists; and stop fomenting tension along and across the Ukrainian border” (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The failure of the Minsk agreements of February 2015, which provided for a cease-fire, the freeing of prisoners, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and all foreign and mercenary troops from Ukrainian soil and the obligation to allow OECD observers free passage to monitor and ensure compliance with the agreement provides further confirmation how difficult it is to reach a definitive solution to the conflict.

At the political level, the major difficulties regard above all points 9 and 11 of the agreement, which speak respectively of the “reinstatement of full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine throughout the conflict area” and “carrying out constitutional reform in Ukraine with a new constitution entering into force by the end of 2015 providing for decentralization as a key element (including a reference to the specificities of certain areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, agreed with the representatives of these areas), as well as adopting permanent legislation on the special status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions”.⁹ If the unilateral declarations of independence of Donetsk and Luhansk in May 2014 have buried the principle of the territorial integrity of Ukraine still deeper, it is even more significant that there has never been any reference to Crimea in the Minsk text.

⁹Financial Times (2015). www.ft.com/content/minskagreement/.

In this perspective, a reading of the conflict in strategic terms again raises the question of whether Russia is revisionist power. According to Randall Schweller (2015, p. 8)

there are four dimensions to revisionism that, taken together, determine whether the revisionist state poses a dangerous threat to the established powers and to what degree: (1) the extent of the revisionist state's aims; (2) the revisionist state's resolve and risk propensity to achieve its aims, (3) the nature of its revisionist aims (does it seek changes in international norms, or territory, or prestige); and (4) the means it employs to further its revisionist aims (whether peaceful or violent).

The first and third dimensions can be identified in the light of the location of NATO and Russian military bases in Europe. The strategic position of the Russian military bases on Ukrainian and Georgian territory casts some light on the scale of Moscow's objectives: (1) to halt the expansion of NATO so as to ensure its own security and put an end to America's grand strategy; (2) to prevent Ukraine and Georgia from joining NATO so as to avoid losing the use of its bases located along a *cordon sanitaire* that runs from Belarus to Ossetia and constitutes the last bulwark to defend the territory of the Federation.

The other two objectives, namely to alter the post-bipolar status quo so as to regain the territories of the former USSR, acquire prestige and strengthen its position in the international power system as well as safeguard the Russian minorities residents in other countries (Treisman 2016), clearly emerge from the declarations made by Putin after the annexation of Crimea:

Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia in the hearts and minds of people. [...] After a long, hard and exhaustive journey at sea, Crimea and Sevastopol are returning to their home harbor, to the native shores, to the home port, to Russia! [...] Millions of Russians went to bed in one country and woke up abroad. Overnight, they were minorities in the former Soviet republics, and the Russian people became one of the biggest – if not the biggest – divided nations in the world (New York Times 2014).

The second dimension, namely the revisionist power's resolve to achieve its objectives and readiness to take the risks involved, can be inferred from the trend in military expenditure. As shown in Table 1, this has increased constantly and nearly doubled over the period 2006–2015. Moreover, 2007 marked the start of a programme on a vast scale to restructure the armed forces and modernise the defence industry that is perfectly in line with Russia's foreign policy over the last few years. In this perspective, the view of Russia as a revisionist power is confirmed not only by its intervention in Georgia and Ukraine, undoubtedly significant but still located inside its regional area, but also by its military action in Syria, outside the borders of

Table 1 Russian military expenditure in constant (2014) US\$ m. (2006–2015)

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
47,601	51,814	56,933	59,730	60,940	65,040	75,364	79,030	84,697	91,081

Author's elaboration from SIPRI, sipri.org. Accessed 17 January 2017

Eurasia, in an attempt to challenge the US monopoly in the area of the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean (Tsygankov 2011; Trenin 2016).

The fourth and last dimension can be seen in the readiness explicitly manifested by the Russian leadership to resort to violence in order to achieve its aims (Evangelista 2015b). Moscow has not hesitated to employ the army on four occasions since 1989: against the Chechen separatists in order to regain the territories lost in 1996, a clash that dragged on until 2009; against Georgia in support of the secessionist claims of South Ossetia; against the Ukraine in order to annex Crimea; and against the Syrian rebels in order to support Assad and ensure that any change in leadership is in line with its interests in the area. As Putin said in a bitter attack on the foreign policy pursued by the USA and its allies: “They cheated us again and again, made decisions behind our back, presenting us with completed facts. That’s the way it was with the expansion of NATO in the East, with the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders. They always told us the same thing: ‘Well, this doesn’t involve you’” (New York Times 2014).

As we have seen so far, the roots of Russian discontent are embedded in the suspect legitimacy of a post-bipolar international system constantly moulded by the American strategy of promoting democracy, expanding the EU and above all enlarging NATO in East Europe. The Ukrainian crisis and the bloody Syrian conflict therefore offer two key opportunities for insight into the clash between grand strategy and revisionism.

6 Conclusions

Hailed at the time by European and US diplomacy as an indispensable first step towards the hoped-for solution to the Ukrainian crisis, the Minsk negotiations have laid bare the fragility of the agreement on which the fate of future East-West relations is supposed to hinge. The long fault line running through Europe and dividing the Ukraine into two opposing fronts, one western and one orthodox, could hardly be more evident. And this is not only because blood is still being shed along the line but also because it is the very history of Ukraine that displays the divisions and conflicts that have forged it for so long. On the one hand, with independence from the Soviet Union, centuries of failure to fully integrate the western and Slav cultures have constituted an insurmountable obstacle to the construction of a *nation*. On the other, it must unfortunately be recognised that today Ukraine is no longer capable of safeguarding itself as a *state*.

For these reasons, in the light of the scenarios opened up for the country and for relations between the USA, the EU and Russia, interpretation of the conflict entails acknowledgement of the failure of the nation and the persistent difficulty of the Ukrainian leadership to preserve the integrity of the state. Given the diplomatic silence of the Minsk agreement as regards the *fait accompli* of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, as matters now stand it is more than reasonable to doubt whether the Ukrainian government can regain full control over its borders, as hoped for by the

UN and the EU. It is, however, precisely on the basis of this silence that the United States and Russia will be required, more or less wittingly, to draw the new geopolitical map of Europe. Moscow has for now taken effective preventive action to counter the threat of a democratic Ukraine integrated into the EU and NATO, safeguarding its own strategic interests in the area, maintaining control of the military bases on the Black Sea and declaring explicitly that it will tolerate no further expansion past the red line separating the former Soviet republics from the rest of East Europe. In the light of the West's ambiguous and wavering response, this strategy obviously jeopardises the prospects for stability in the area, providing ideal fuel for all the separatist demands of pro-Russian minorities from Belarus to the Baltic (Panebianco 2014).

It follows that building the future territorial and political structure of Ukraine will necessarily entail prior agreement between Brussels, Washington and Moscow on the country's strategic position. While the hypothesis of a division of Ukraine into two separate entities, one pro-western and one pro-Russian, would constitute a very serious defeat for Kiev and its allies, it could allow both parts to follow their own destiny. It is instead evident that the federal solution timidly sketched out in Minsk will require further effort if it is to become genuinely practicable. Even if a blind eye is turned to Crimea and it is optimistically assumed that some compromise can be reached on the status of the eastern regions within a federal structure, the question still remains of the international alignment of Ukraine. The proposal of Mearsheimer (2016) to create a neutral buffer state on the fault line between Russia and the West could prove, as things now stand, to be the only practicable alternative.

It is in any case clear that any attempt to duck the question of Ukraine's international position involves the risk of adding another brick to the wall that already divides the United States and Europe from Russia. The fact that Putin continues to perceive this wall as something very real is confirmed by his repeated warnings against the enlargement of the EU and NATO and against western support for the democratic movements that have given birth to the coloured revolutions both in Georgia and in Ukraine. In the end, the Russian response has arrived, confirming what Edward Carr perceived as long ago as 1939, namely that there is always a fundamental divergence of interests between states wishing to maintain the status quo and those wishing to overturn it (Carr 1939). As long as the latter are willing to fight in order to achieve this aim, the former will not be able to pass the maintenance of the status quo off as preserving peace and the common good for long. Nor will they be able to safeguard it by calling for compliance with the international rules. Until last summer, the combination of Europe's divisions and uncertainties, America's discontinuous involvement and the absence of any rigid hierarchy of priorities in western foreign policy offered Russian revisionism a historic opportunity. The construction of a stable and legitimate international order has certainly always constituted the greatest aspiration of the dominant power: the preservation of unipolarity with or without the use of force.

The decisions taken at the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016 appear instead to depart from the strategy adopted the USA and the EU immediately after the

outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis. As from May 2017, NATO will deploy a deterrent force in the area of the Baltic Sea consisting of approximately 4000 men divided into four battle groups: 1000 US soldiers in Poland and the other 3000 provided by the United Kingdom (in Estonia), Germany (in Lithuania) and Canada and Italy (in Latvia). The status quo is therefore to be restored also by recourse to military force if and when the necessary conditions present themselves. If actually adopted, this radical change in strategy will basically mean two things: 1) an end to the US policy of disengagement in Europe; 2) the adaptation of America's grand strategy to the new and more complex international situation.

Despite the reassuring statements by the Western leaders, who insist that they have no desire to break off the dialogue with Moscow, Russia has taken cognisance of the situation. Putin's alleged intervention in the US democratic process supporting a candidate who repeatedly advocated policies in Syria and Europe strongly favored by the Kremlin, has represented "a troubling chapter in an ongoing story".¹⁰ In a Declassified Report assessing Russian cyber campaign to sabotage the Presidential elections, the US Intelligence Agencies state: "We assess with high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential elections, the consistent goals of which were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump. [...] All three agencies agree with this judgment. CIA and FBI have high confidence in this judgment; NSA has moderate confidence" (Intelligence Community Assessment 2017).

Even so, President-elect Donald Trump declared in an interview published in *The Wall Street Journal* on January 13 that he will keep US sanctions against Russia in place "at least for a period of time", adding that he would consider lifting the sanctions the Russian President proves he can be an ally. He also announced on February 27 he will seek a \$54bn hike in spending on tanks, ships and weapon systems while cutting foreign aid, environmental programmes and domestic agencies by the same amount: "This budget will be a public safety and national security budget", Trump said at the White House, "It will include a historic increase in defence spending to rebuild the depleted military of the United States of America at a time we most need it" (The Guardian 2017).

On the other hand, Russia has secretly deployed a new cruise missile that US officials say violates an arms control treaty (*The New York Times* 14 February 2017), and declared it intends to keep Crimea and not return it to Ukraine, thus posing a major test for President Trump as his administration is facing a crisis over its ties to Moscow: "We're not returning our territory. Crimea is part of the Russian Federation".¹¹

¹⁰Senator Richard Burr, *Washington Post*, 7 January 2017.

¹¹Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, 15 February 2017 (CNN).

We can expect Putin will wait and weigh up the options with the new President. Obama has thus left his successor a difficult task in the handling of foreign policy while at the same time, at the very end of his mandate, he initiated a stance that could inaugurate a new phase in relations between the United States and Russia. It is impossible today to say whether the new President will follow the new line mapped out or instead radically alter the foreign policy of the United States. The only certain thing at present is that Russia will continue to occupy the presidential agenda for a long time to come.

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Part III
The Middle East

Towards a Post-Camp David Paradigm? US Foreign Policy in a Reshuffled Middle East

Marco Pinfari

Abstract This chapter discusses the reasons for the continuing relevance of the Camp David paradigm in the contemporary Middle East and its relation with US foreign policy towards Israel and Egypt since the 1970s. It argues that the 1978 Camp David Accords, that led to the 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, resulted in the institution of a foreign policy paradigm that was informed by the regional vision held by the Carter administration at the time in which the treaties were negotiated. In the following decades many components of this vision became outdated, and yet some of its core tenets survive to this day. As a result, the Camp David paradigm is still at the heart of US policy-making towards the Middle East, even if its exact content is being reshaped by the changing nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the dynamics of post-Arab Spring Egypt and the alliance between Bedouins and Islamist groups in the Sinai Peninsula.

1 Introduction

In 2008, a cable from the US Embassy in Cairo provided background information to American officials ahead of the visit to the United States (US) by Marshal Hussein Tantawi. Since 1991, Tantawi had served as commander-in-chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces and, contextually, as Minister of Defence. In his capacity of Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, he would later find himself as Egypt's de facto Head of State between Mubarak's resignation in February 2011 and the election of Mohammed Morsi in June 2012. This leaked cable presented a mixed picture of such prominent guest:

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The eighty-year-old veteran of five wars with Israel is committed to preventing another one ever. But he is also frozen in the Camp David paradigm and uncomfortable with our shift to the post-9/11 GWOT [Global War on Terror]. Recognizing that he is reluctant to change, we nonetheless should urge Minister Tantawi towards a broader and more flexible partnership based on shared strategic objectives, including border security, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping and civil defense (Anon 2008).

Tantawi's adherence to the "Camp David paradigm" was in itself hardly surprising. Often seen as "a watershed in Middle Eastern affairs" (Freedman 1984, p. 1) and envisaged by then US President Jimmy Carter to be the "cornerstone of an overall Middle East Peace" (Sid-Ahmed 1980, p. 53), the 1978 Camp David Accords reshaped the military and diplomatic milieu of the region and cast a long shadow over regional politics for the following decades. However, even if the territorial and diplomatic arrangements between Egypt and Israel that lay at the heart of those treaties still formally hold today, the changes that affected the Middle East since 1978 shook this "paradigm" from its foundations, to the point that by the beginning of the new millennium some of the regional actors that had been socialized in its shadow (such as the Egyptian military and its leaders) were seen by the US almost as a political liability. Especially in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings and the fall of Hosni Mubarak, various scholars even suggested that the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty is facing a "rupture" or that it is about to "collapse" (Hamid and Cofman Wittes 2013).

This chapter suggests that the changes that have affected the Middle East as a region since 1979 have caused the obsolescence of some of the strategic reasons that persuaded the US to invest significant political and economic resources in achieving the Camp David settlement (and in its maintenance to this day). However, the main bilateral foreign policy goals that the US pursued in relation to the two signatories of the peace treaty (Israel and Egypt) have been affected only partially and still largely hold true today. This, together with the enduring relevance of some of the regional systemic preconditions that made the Camp David possible, and the continuing significance of the basic territorial settlement brought about by the peace treaty, may result in the development of an updated version of the Camp David paradigm, but not in its complete disappearance from the diplomatic and political chessboard of the region.

This argument will be developed in four stages. The first section of the chapter provides an overview of the Camp David Accords and the bilateral relations between the US and the two parties of the agreement since 1945. The second section spells out the main systemic preconditions and foreign policy goals embedded in the Camp David settlement, while the third traces their development up to the 2013 coup in Egypt. The fourth section considers the most recent developments in the region, including the impact of the election of Donald J. Trump as US President in 2016, and the exact shape that a *post*-Camp David paradigm may take in the years to come.

2 Camp David and Its Time

The Camp David Accords are two agreements subscribed by the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat in November 1978, mediated personally by the US President Jimmy Carter during almost two weeks of closed-door negotiations at the Camp David presidential resort in Maryland. The accords consisted of two framework agreements, denominated respectively *A Framework for Peace in the Middle East* and *A Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel*. While the former never translated into a binding agreement among the parties involved, the latter paved the way for an actual peace treaty between Egypt and Israel that would be solemnly signed at the White House on 26 March 1979.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail the historical and ideological setting that made these agreements possible in the late 1970s. Yet, it is important to review the key events that influenced the make-up of these treaties, which have a substantial bearing on the shape that the Camp David settlement—and especially the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty—eventually took.

Since the end of the World War Two, the two main foreign policy priorities of the US vis-à-vis the Middle East had been securing access to oil and the existence of Israel (Halliday 2005, p. 97). Access to oil—either directly or through privately-owned American companies—was in fact the priority throughout most of the Truman administration, to the point that in 1945 State Department Middle East experts explicitly advised the President to “stay out of any activity that might offend the Arabs” (Little 2008, p. 80). Yet, between 1946 and 1948, the US showed a more lenient attitude towards the state-building efforts of the Zionist movement, mostly in response to the support that it was receiving among the American public—as Harry Truman himself put it, many Americans were “anxious for the success of Zionism” while he did not have “hundreds of thousands of Arabs in [his] constituents” (Little 2008, p. 81). The diplomatic honeymoon between the US and the Zionist movement, however, was short lived; in September 1948, a few months after the Israel’s declaration of independence and the beginning of the first Arab-Israeli war, the US strongly protested against the killing of the UN envoy Count Bernadotte and revised its foreign policy attitude towards a form of “estrangement” (Little 2008, p. 87) which lasted until the late 1950s. US-Israel relations underwent another upheaval in the last years of the second Eisenhower administration, when the two countries were drawn closer to each other as a result of various regional and domestic dynamics, most notably the ascent to power of Gamal Abd el-Nasser in Egypt and his alignment with the Soviet bloc. By 1962, John Fitzgerald Kennedy had approved providing Israel with support in its nuclear programme and was prepared to declare that “the United States has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East really comparable only to that which it has with Britain” (Druks 2005, p. 44).

Israel enjoyed consistent support from the US throughout the Johnson administration, including during the 6-Day War in 1967—the blitz operation during

which Israel crushed the armies of its neighbouring Arab states and conquered the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights and the West Bank. Yet, even if Israel continued to be a close ally to the US into the new decade, the attitude of subsequent US administrations about Israel's territorial acquisitions was less enthusiastic. Already in 1967, the US supported UN Security Council Resolution 242, which introduced what would be known as the principle of "land for peace"—a call for Israel to return the territories that it had conquered during the war, in exchange for Arab countries normalizing their relations with the Jewish state. In 1969, the Nixon administration let its Israeli counterparts know that it was working on a comprehensive peace settlement that required Israel to return the territory that it had conquered from Egypt in exchange for peace negotiations with Nasser (Little 2008, p. 104). The unwillingness of the Israeli leadership to negotiate with the Egyptians from a position of strength, and Nasser's decision to intensify his military cooperation with the Soviet Union, put these plans on hold.

The 1973 Yom Kippur or Ramadan War, however, proved to be the final game-changer for the Arab-Israeli conflict. On 6 October 1973, the Egyptian armed forces launched a surprise attack that breached the Israeli defences on the eastern shore of the Suez Canal and rapidly penetrated into the Sinai Peninsula. The Israeli army and its political leadership took few days to reorganize after this initial shock; with the decisive support of a US airlift that shipped to Israel almost 11,000 tonnes of military hardware (Quandt 1977, p. 185), eventually repelled the attack and, by the time an internationally-mediated ceasefire came into force in late October, had even entered into Egyptian territory west of the canal. Yet, the war shattered Israel's self-confidence in its war machine and allowed Nasser's successor as President of Egypt, Anwar el-Sadat, to present the 6 October operation as a decisive strategic victory for his country.

The 1973 war was therefore followed by five years of intense diplomatic efforts at whose heart lay the complex territorial predicament of the Sinai Peninsula. Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in 1974–1975 led to a series of agreements that saw Israel temporarily withdrawing from some of the territory that it had conquered in 1967. After Carter's election in 1976, however, Israel and Egypt intensified their direct and secret contacts to the point that, when, on 9 November 1977, Sadat announced his intention to visit Jerusalem, the US was apparently "caught by surprise" (Quandt 2001, p. 191). In the following year, US mediation managed to steer the peace process towards what it saw as the ultimate prize of the bilateral Israeli-Egyptian negotiations—trying to achieve "as broad an agreement as possible" that would directly contribute to securing Israel's existence in the long run while also pacifying the Middle East as a whole (Quandt 2001, p. 192). Yet, this vision clashed with the immediate policy goals of the Israeli leadership, for which reaching a bilateral peace deal with Egypt was clearly the main priority. Israel's position was summarized effectively by Moshe Dayan, the former Israeli Chief of Staff who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1977 and 1979; in a conversation with President Carter on 4 October 1977, his reply to Carter's questions about the likelihood that Israel would withdraw behind its pre-1967 border was the following:

I would not say that we could go back to the 1967 lines everywhere. We would have to see a map and we would have to know about what kind of guarantees you could give. My attitude is that for the first time Egypt is ready and the others may not be. “If you take one wheel off a car, it won’t drive.” If Egypt is out of the conflict, there will be no war (Howard 2013, p. 671).

Sadat also had a direct interest in reaching an agreement with Israel that would secure the return of the entire Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and allow him to his domestic problems—identified by Ajami (1978, p. 80) as “a huge population that must be fed and educated; a decaying capital; an overcrowded society that must seek an economic role in the surrounding region”. Despite his efforts in addressing the condition of Palestinians in the West Bank as part of his negotiations with Israel, Sadat was also less bound to the ideological framework of pan-Arabism than his predecessor, and therefore the resolution of the Palestinian issue was not as important to him as the restoration of Egypt’s pre-1967 borders.

Begin and Sadat were eventually persuaded to attend a closed-door summit in Camp David in November 1978, where Carter hoped to use the incentive of reaching a peace treaty with Egypt to lure the Israeli delegation into accepting a settlement of the Palestinian issue in the West Bank (Quandt 2001, p. 198). The framework agreement on *Peace in the Middle East* that emerged from the summit, however, included only a weak commitment to secure transfer of power to a “self-governing authority” in the West Bank and Gaza strip, which did not recognize any true Palestinian sovereignty over these territories and was, in any case, not followed by a binding treaty. The second framework agreement negotiated during the summit led instead to a full-fledged peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. The treaty entered into effect in January 1980 and disposed the full Israeli withdrawal behind the pre-1967 border in the Sinai (with the exception of the Gaza strip, that remained under Israeli control) in exchange for Egypt ending the state of war against Israel. The treaty and its protocols also included an Egyptian commitment to leave the Sinai Peninsula demilitarized (unless Israel explicitly approved the presence of Egyptian troops on a temporary basis); to repeal its boycott laws against Israel; to allow the free passage of Israeli ships through the Suez canal; and to treat the Strait of Tiran—the access to the Gulf of Aqaba which was then fully in Egyptian territorial waters—as an international waterway.

3 The Camp David Paradigm

The Camp David Accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty that followed are not simply important pieces of the broader diplomatic and political puzzle that constitutes the contemporary Middle East. They also crystallized a specific strategic approach to Middle East politics promoted by the Carter administration, that was also largely in line with those of the administrations that immediately preceded it, and in which the military and political leadership of Egypt (and, to a lesser extent, that of Israel) became socialized.

It can be argued that this paradigm is based on three longer-term, systemic *foreign-policy premises or “assumptions”* (cf. Bloomfield 1972–1973), pertaining to the Middle East as a region, that were based on the nature of regional politics since the end of World War Two. These, in turn, set the stage for the elaboration of three *regional foreign policy goals* and two *bilateral foreign policy goals*—the former related to the broader vision of the Middle East held by the Carter administration, while the latter focused on the two main state actors involved in these peace negotiations (Israel and Egypt).

3.1 *Regional Foreign Policy Assumptions*

The three foreign policy assumptions that influenced the Camp David settlement were not explicit foreign policy goals pursued by US administrations but, rather, key underlying features of the region that differentiated the Middle East from other regional theatres and that set the main strategic and political preconditions to allow an active involvement of the US. The first was the “fractured” nature of the region (AbuKhalil 1992, p. 22), which was reflected primarily in the absence of a single hegemonic actor that could be a source of hierarchical order (Lustick 1997). The last actor that could be described as true hegemon in the Middle East was the Ottoman Empire; since its gradual demise and eventual collapse, no local player had enough military, economic and political power to replace it, thus giving rise to what may at best be described as a “multipolar” system based on a constellation of up to four or five regional powers (Frazier and Stewart-Ingersoll 2010, p. 738). In certain periods, some of these wielded more power or influence than the rest—such as Egypt between 1956 and 1967 and Israel between 1967 and 1973—but none was ever in a position to promote and support a viable political, military or economic order on its own.

A second, related feature of the Middle Eastern regional system lies in its peculiar historical development, which left in its midst a state—Israel—that is politically, ethnically and ideologically alien to the rest of the region. As we noted above, at least since the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, there was no doubt within successive US administrations that the coexistence between the Jewish state and its neighbours would be deeply problematic; many feared, in fact, that the partition of Palestine would “permanently injure [US] relations with the Moslem world” (Little 2008, p. 84). Arab countries did approach Israel consistently as one of the last remnants of European colonization and—even if Israel lies geographically at the heart of the Middle East—never engaged with it as *part* of the region, systematically excluding it from institutional region-building efforts that in fact often showed a strong anti-Israeli orientation. And yet, it was exactly the nature of Israel as an actor that is at the same time *both* regional *and* non-regional, together with its political and ideological affinity with the Western world and the presence of sizable influential Jewish communities in many Western countries (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007), to eventually turn Israel into a key US ally. In fact, the Western

and non-regional nature of Israel set the stage for developing a type of “special relationship” that arguably has no match across other regional theatres in which the US had been similarly involved on military or diplomatic grounds.

A third aspect of the Middle Eastern regional system, which can be seen as a direct consequence of the first two, is the failure of the Middle East to set in place viable regional institutional arrangements ever since the end of World War Two—and therefore, from the standpoint of outside powers, the absence of a credible set of regional institutions that could be relied upon for regional conflict management and to foster political cooperation. The League of Arab States is the first regional organization (in the contemporary meaning of this concept) in the entire world; it was created in 1945 with the goal of encouraging intra-Arab cooperation in facing the challenges posed by the gradual disengagement of France and Britain from the region, including the Palestinian issue. Yet, already by 1949, its performance was dubbed as “disastrous” and contemporary observers concluded that the League, “in its efforts to create an exclusive, self-sufficient Arab world in the Near Eastern cauldron of great power rivalries, has had neither the resources nor the requisite strength to accomplish its tasks” (Seabury 1949, pp. 640–642). In the following decades, its role in fostering both regional security and economic cooperation across the Arab world has similarly been very marginal. The reasons for the failure of the Arab world to generate viable regional institutionalized cooperation frameworks have been repeatedly discussed in the literature (Nye 1971; Zacher 1979; Awad 1994; Barnett and Solingen 2007; Pinfari 2009); they are probably related to the nature of state-building processes in the region and to the widespread fear that a strong pan-Arab institution would undermine the domestic cohesion of individual Arab states, many of which are of relatively recent formation and bound by borders drawn during the colonial age. This predicament also helps explain why, since the end of World War Two, and despite the presence of a strong anti-colonial rhetoric and close cultural and religious ties among Arab people, many Arab states repeatedly looked at powers outside the region as patrons rather than investing in intra-Arab cooperation initiatives.

3.2 Regional and Bilateral Foreign Policy Goals

This systemic vision of the Middle East as a region acted as the backdrop for the regional and bilateral goals that the Carter administration hoped to pursue through the Camp David framework. The first goal of Camp David was obviously taking a major step towards *resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, seen as the main cause of instability in the region*—an assumption that was justified by the recurrence of Arab-Israeli wars since 1948 and by other non-military measures that Arab states took in response of these events, including the oil embargo decided by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries in 1973. The nature of the Camp David negotiations also suggested that all the key actors involved looked at

constraining the warmongering behavior of powerful states and of their conventional armies (as opposed to non-state actors) as a key to regional security.

Finally, since the 1950s this *fractured* region had also been a Cold War battleground, with the two superpowers competing for securing support from key actors in the region, also relying on—in fact, often exploiting—the divisions within the Arab world. Early on, the US had developed close ties with Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iran, but faced vigorous foreign policy initiatives by the Soviet Union that brought into its orbit Syria, Egypt and other less prominent regional actors. The Soviet Union played a fundamental role in arming Egypt in the run-up to 1973 and, in the last phases of the war, in persuading the US to accept a ceasefire that would prevent a decisive Israeli victory. Yet Sadat's pragmatism and political expediency led him to listen to the opposing camp and try to secure as many benefits as possible for his country from this strategic reorientation. The Camp David agreements therefore sanctioned the transition of Egypt under the American umbrella, and the Camp David settlement became a means to *securing a strong alliance with Egypt as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the Middle East.*

The Camp David Accords also reflected some core assumptions that informed the bilateral relations between the US and the two countries at the heart of this framework—Israel and Egypt. As has emerged from our brief historical overview above, US foreign policy towards Israel has historically been influenced by two main strategic goals: keeping the Jewish state in existence and safe (a goal that has direct implications for US domestic policy, being strongly supported both by Jewish lobbies and large portions of the American electorate) and safeguarding a loyal ally strategically located at the heart of a turbulent region. The former goal was at the heart of the Camp David Accords, and especially of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty; by removing what had historically been the main antagonist of the Jewish state, these agreements were seen as a significant step towards *ensuring Israel's survival in the long run.*

The US approached Egypt differently. Even if in the year of Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, Egypt experienced what is often seen as the worst episode of domestic unrest since the end of World War Two in the country—a series of urban revolts caused by the rising cost of basic commodities, commonly known as the 1977 Bread Riots—the internal stability and long-term survival of the Egyptian state were not treated as variables that would affect the Camp David negotiations. Egypt was instead seen primarily as the leading actor in the pan-Arab movement, the key Soviet client in the region and the state that, by commanding a vast army and by presiding over the most important waterway of the Middle East (and perhaps of the entire world), could affect more than any other the prospects of establishing peace and stability in the region. The US therefore made sure that Egypt would receive, together with some of the indirect “peace dividends” of the peace treaty (Fischer et al. 1994, p. 4)—including the prospect of significantly expanding its tourist sector as a result of the end of the state of war—direct economic support from the US in the form of a yearly grant geared towards the supply of military hardware, as well as access to a variety of other channels of economic and development aid. The broad purpose of this policy was to *support politically and financially Egypt*

irrespective of its domestic policies, as long as in its foreign policy it remained aligned with the US and complied with the letter of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. After Camp David, Egypt became almost overnight the second largest recipient of US foreign aid (after Israel itself), and the centrality that the Middle East assumed in US foreign policy was proven by the fact that, after the accords, the aid allocation to Middle East accounted for approximately 60% of US external assistance.

4 The Paradigm Under Strain

Unsurprisingly for what scholars and politicians like to describe as a “chronically unstable region” (Watkins 1997, p. 4), the Camp David settlement went under strain even before the ink on the Egypt-Israel treaty dried. The different components of the Camp David paradigm, however, were affected to different degrees. By 2001, all the *regional* foreign policy goals that stood behind the American vision of the Camp David settlement had become obsolete. The *bilateral* goals that US had pursued through the Treaty—the aid policy that supported it—would instead endure for longer, before turning into stumbling blocks during Barack Obama’s administrations between 2008 and 2013, and undergo some partial revisions.

4.1 Regional Upheavals

Within little more than 20 years, the deep changes that affected the Middle East made all three regional underpinnings of the Camp David settlement essentially redundant or unserviceable as guidelines for US foreign policy in the region. This was the main reason why after 9/11, US diplomats, as we saw, argued that the adherence of regional allies to the “Camp David paradigm” could be seen as a liability, or at least as a sign that they had not been up to speed with the evolution of the region.

The first working assumption of the Camp David paradigm to be overtaken by the events was the idea that the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict would pave the way for a more stable and peaceful future in the region. While Egypt—in fact, no other Arab state except for Iraq during the 1990–1991 Gulf War—had been waging a significant military campaign against Israel since 1979, other sources of instability soon emerged. One was the direct result of the other key event that shook the region in 1979—the Islamic revolution in Iran and the ascent to power of a regime hostile to the US. The revolution was followed by an intense 8-year conflict with Iraq in which the US took the side of the latter, before Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 caused a UN-sanctioned peace enforcement operation led by the US itself. Iraq would repeatedly top the regional foreign policy agenda of the US until the 2003 invasion made it its true regional focus for the following decade. The attacks of 9/11 also brought Islamic terrorism to the centre of American

global concerns; the strategic use of the Palestinian national struggle by Bin Laden to rekindle Arab-Muslim nationalism (Doran 2003) and the increasingly significant role of Islamist groups in the second *Intifadah* created a clear linkage between the Global War on Terror and Israel's anti-terrorism efforts, even if the latter still remained a sideshow to a conflict mainly fought on the grounds of Afghanistan and, later, Iraq.

The end of the Cold War also reshaped the nature of the global power struggle in the region. Even if the influence of the Soviet Union had been on the decline since the 1970s, its eventual demise and the substantial downsizing of the global ambitions of its successor states made the US not only the main superpower, but also the only indispensable hegemon in the Middle East—that is, the only actor both able and willing to uphold any regional settlement. This had already been de facto sanctioned with the Camp David agreement ten years earlier; however, there are various indications suggesting that the end of the Cold War did affect the distribution of power in the region. For instance, even if in 1979 the Arab world could afford to take exception to Egypt's new course and expel it from its multilateral forums, including the Arab League, Egypt would find its place back in the regional order in 1989 with the symbolic return of the Arab League headquarters to Cairo, where it had been based since 1945.

Even if Carter was too optimistic in expecting that a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict could have been sufficient to pacify the region, he was correct in spending time and energies on reaching a broader political settlement of the conflict that would have included the Palestinian issue. In fact, even if Dayan's prediction about the impact of an Egypt-Israel peace treaty in halting inter-state warfare between Arab states and Israel proved overall accurate, non-state actors that were hostile to Israel and—eventually—to the US proliferated in the region. The first signs of this evolution were visible with the escalation of the Palestinian national struggle in the 1980s, temporarily held in check with the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982, but later re-emerging vigorously with the first *Intifadah* in 1988. The end of the Cold War and the status of the US as the single, undisputed hegemon set the stage for a decade in which both the Palestinian movement and other state-based actors came to terms with Israel. This process resulted first in the 1993 Declaration of Principle that set in motion the so-called Oslo Peace Process and, the following year, by a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. Yet, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process encountered a variety of political obstacles in the 1990s, and in 2000 the final attempt by the Clinton administration to resurrect the Camp David summit format by inviting Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat to negotiate behind closed doors in the presidential resort did not lead to a comprehensive agreement between the two parties. In the following years, the 9/11 attacks, the beginning of the second *Intifadah* and the rise of other non-state actors that were hostile to Israel in neighbouring states—such as Hezbollah in southern Lebanon—all highlighted the increasing importance of sub-state groups and non-state actors as the key source of insecurity for Israel and the region at large.

4.2 *Israel and Egypt During the Obama Administration*

When Barack Obama took office in January 2009, the regional scenario had dramatically changed since the signing of the Camp David Accords, but the two, key bilateral foreign policy goals that had bound the US respectively with Israel and Egypt still largely held.

During George W. Bush's tenure in office, Israel's survival was still at the heart of US foreign policy. Until the end of Bush's first mandate, this was in turn tied primarily to the defeat of the Palestinian Islamist groups, like Hamas, that were explicitly framed as one of the targets of the Global War on Terror. Since the discovery of Iran's nuclear programme in 2004–2005, however, Bush was increasingly responsive to the worries of the Israeli political establishment about the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran. For instance, he stated:

The threat from Iran is, of course, their stated objective to destroy our strong ally Israel. That's a threat, a serious threat. It's a threat to world peace; it's a threat, in essence, to a strong alliance. I made it clear, I'll make it clear again, that we will use military might to protect our ally, Israel (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, p. 72).

The relationship between the US and Egypt also held strong during the years of the War on Terror. Despite Mubarak's scepticism of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and—as in the case of Marshal Tantawi's visit—the frustration occasionally expressed by US officials about the Egyptian military leadership, the Bush administration still saw its partnership with Egypt as “a cornerstone of [American] foreign policy in the Middle East” (Kelly 2006). Yet, within Egypt the power of Mubarak and his family endured essentially unchallenged, hardly affected by timid attempts to liberalize Egypt's political system, and the US appeared unwilling to suspend or question the flow of military aid even in the face of blatant acts of political repression. In 2005, for instance, Mubarak had Ayman Noor, his challenger in the presidential elections, arrested over charges that appeared to most as politically-motivated, even if he had already soundly defeated Noor at the ballot box. The US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice “abruptly” postponed one of her visits as a sign of protest for Noor's detention (Kessler 2005) but refused to publicly challenge Mubarak's regime over this case; throughout these events, US cooperation with Egypt never seriously appeared at stake.

During Obama's two terms in office, the relation between the US and the two key players of the Camp David settlement witnessed a significant reorientation. In relation to Israel, Obama's new course could be described as the result of a proactive revision of two core tenets of the US foreign policy towards the Middle East while, vis-à-vis Egypt, the Obama administration behaved reactively by taking stock—not without inconsistencies and hesitations—of the new political environment brought about by the Arab Spring and Mubarak's downfall.

In relation to the Israeli file, the Obama administration showed from its very first months a new approach to the Muslim world and specifically to Iran—part of what would later be described as a strategy of “engagement” with countries that had previously been treated with hostility by the US and made objects of severe

sanctioning regimes, that also included Myanmar and Cuba (Friedman 2015). Even if no diplomatic breakthrough with Iran would be reached until Rouhani's election in 2013, Obama's opening towards a negotiated path out of the crisis unleashed by Iran's opaque nuclear policy raised more than one eyebrow in Israel, where a right-wing government chaired by Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu had come to power few months after Obama's inauguration. Already in March 2009, rumours circulating in the American press, suggesting that Netanyahu was prepared to attack Iran unilaterally if the US failed to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons (Goldberg 2009), sparked a major controversy and set the stage for a rocky personal relationship between the two leaders. In the following two years, various reports suggested that the Israeli leadership was mulling the launch of a blitz operation to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities (Bergman 2012), as it had done in Iraq and Syria respectively in 1981 and 2007. Even if they remained unconfirmed, these rumours repeatedly forced members of the Obama administration to take an official stance on Israel's regional policies and its relations with its neighbours.

A second significant policy change brought about by Obama during his first term was a stronger commitment to reaching a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the pre-1967 borders, and therefore a tougher stance on Israel's settlement policies in the West Bank. Over time, and especially after a particularly tense visit by Netanyahu at the White House in 2011 (Kampeas 2015), Israel's settlements became an "obsession" for both sides (Abrams 2011)—for the Obama administration, a tangible demonstration of Israel's unwillingness to work towards a two-state solution, and for Netanyahu's government a sign of Israel's commitment to the right-wing vision of a Jewish "Judea-Samaria" interspersed with small pockets of Palestinian self-government.

Both policy changes were reflected in the different articulation that Obama gave to the longer-term policy priorities of the US vis-à-vis Israel. For Obama, the main goal of the support that the US kept providing to Israel—which in itself was never seriously put into question—was not ensuring Israel's survival, but rather Israel's *security*. When compared to his predecessor, in particular, he was less keen to acknowledge the existential threats that Israel faced either from Islamic terrorism or state actors in the region, while he would still remark on the strength of "America's commitment to Israel's security" or the fact that "a strong and secure Israel is in the national security interest of the United States" (Obama 2011). Given the almost complete overlap between his administration and Netanyahu's tenure in office, it remains uncertain whether this stance was truly based on a different strategic view of Israel's place in the region, or the outcome of the difficulties encountered by Obama and his staff in negotiating with Netanyahu's government. Still, throughout Obama's terms, it appeared clear to many that Israel's place in the region was arguably more secure than it had ever been in its history and largely "comfortable with the status quo" (Economist 2014). As the *Economist* later put it:

Israel's GDP per person is \$37,000, according to the IMF, nearly 12 times that of its biggest Arab neighbour, Egypt, and far above most of the others. Indeed, it is higher than most EU countries. And a bonanza from offshore gas is in the offing. Militarily Israel feels pretty

secure, especially in the short run. It is nearly a decade since it faced the sustained terrorism that traumatised Israelis during the Palestinians' second *intifada* (Economist 2014, p. 39).

Israel's position would also not be affected by the major set of events that shook the Middle East during Obama's tenure—the wave of revolutions and civil wars that began in late 2010 and that is collectively known as the Arab Spring. These events, however, had two direct implications for the Camp David paradigm. First, some of the direct or indirect consequences of these revolts—especially the Syrian Civil War and the rise of the so-called Islamic State—were the last nail in the coffin of the regional agenda that the Carter administration hoped to pursue with the Camp David Accords. The collapse of Syria and of parts of Iraq, and the nesting of a powerful Islamic quasi-state actor in the heart of the region, further pushed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the edges of the political agendas of most international actors.

A second front was opened by the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the political transition that followed. The cautious response of the Obama administration to the 25 January 2011 revolution was probably the reflection of the *horror vacui* that seized US officials at the height of the Tahrir demonstrations, especially in the absence of any meaningful historical or political coordinate that could have helped foresee the attitude of a regime different from that of Mubarak towards the Camp David agreement. Also, the peace treaty with Israel was known to be highly unpopular among the Egyptian populace, which was still infused with anti-Israeli sentiments (Murphy and Schneider 2011; Chick and Murphy 2011).

The 2011 revolution and the transition that followed therefore directly affected the nature of the bilateral relation between the US and Egypt by highlighting the extent to which Egypt's adherence to the alliance to the US in its foreign policy could not be entirely disentangled from its domestic politics. That is, in taking stock of what Korany (2013, pp. 94–95) described as the “intermestic” nature of post-Cold War Middle Eastern politics, the US increasingly realized that *Egypt's domestic politics can have a deep (and possibly disruptive) effect on the Camp David settlement*, and during Egypt's transition it was forced to navigate its way through a variety of complex political predicaments.

To be clear, at no stage since 2011 did Egyptian authorities attempt to formally repeal the peace treaty with Israel. Yet, the 2011 Revolution and the events that followed posed for US policy-makers two sets of problems that were essentially unknown during Mubarak's rule. First, Egyptian politicians of various extraction, including some at the highest level of government, voiced their dissatisfaction with the Treaty and suggested (at least in words) that it was time to amend it. In September 2011, a few days after an angry mob attacked the Israeli embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharaf (leader of a transitional government and himself previously affiliated with Mubarak's regime) publicly stated that he saw Camp David as “not a sacred thing” (Blomfield 2011). In October 2012, an advisor to President Morsi lamented the fact that the clauses of the treaty do not give Egypt full sovereignty over the Sinai, and argued that:

[Israel] doesn't want to touch Camp David as if it were above the constitution, the Quran and the Bible, and this cannot be accepted with any degree of national dignity [sic]; we insist on amending it. There are clauses in the treaty that give us that right (Ahram 2012).

These statements sparked outrage in Israel but did not throw the Obama administration into panic, perhaps because it was reassured by the central role of Marshal Tantawi (the man previously seen as “frozen in the Camp David paradigm”) in managing the transition until June 2012 and, later, by Mohammed Morsi's adherence to the spirit of Camp David in helping resolving the Gaza crisis of November 2012, which earned him the praise of vast sections of the Western world (Khalaf 2012).

A second feature of the post-2011 political transition in Egypt that challenged the foreign policy priorities of the Obama administration was the rise to power of an Islamist movement—the Muslim Brotherhood—through rounds of parliamentary and presidential elections that were significantly more open and fair than those that had happened under Mubarak's rule. Especially after the constitutional declaration issued by Morsi on 22 November 2012 that seemed to set the stage for an authoritarian entrenchment of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership (Kirkpatrick and El Sheikh 2012), most Western actors felt that Morsi's *electoral* legitimation might not have led to a working *substantial* democracy. Morsi's close links with Hamas, which were instrumental to the role that he played in mediating the Gaza crisis, also highlighted the degree of connivance between Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements in the region, including those—like Hamas itself and the Islamic Jihad—that are seen as one of the few remaining threats to Israel's survival.

And yet, the moment at which the Camp David paradigm was truly put to the test was not related to the policies of the Muslim Brotherhood, but rather to the events that led to their removal from power. On 30 June 2013, on the first anniversary of Morsi's election, major popular demonstrations erupted in Egypt with the goal of forcing Morsi to stand aside or at least call for new presidential elections. The powerful Egyptian army backed up these demonstrations with an ultimatum that was enforced on 3 July 2013, when the Chief of Staff and Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah el-Sisi deposed Morsi in a military coup, suspended the constitution and announced a political roadmap leading to new parliamentary and presidential elections.

Morsi's ousting “presented one of the trickiest foreign policy dilemmas” for the US since the beginning of Egypt's transition (Roberts 2013). Since 1986, US foreign assistance has been subject to legislation that strongly restricts the provision of financial aid to countries that experience military coups. Before the revolution, some estimates suggested that US military aid to Egypt amounted to approximately 80% of Egypt's military procurement costs (Sharp 2009, p. 35) and therefore the decision to potentially suspend such aid had obvious implications for the diplomatic and political relations between the two countries. The Obama administration itself hesitated to enforce this ban and avoided any use of the term “coup” in public statements, aided by the fact that this task formally rested with Congress and not with the executive. However, after a series of violent crackdowns against protestors

and dissidents by the new Egyptian leadership, and in face of a mounting pressure from the American public opinion, a partial ban was eventually implemented in October 2013. Yet already in January 2014 Congress passed new legislation that exempted Egypt from the anti-coup ban on an ad hoc basis, bringing to “full flower” (HLR 2014, p. 2507) the practice (already trialled, but more ambiguously, in the previous years with other recipients of US aid) according to which foreign assistance may be maintained even after military coups if doing so serves a “US national interest” (HLR 2014, p. 2504).

5 A New Paradigm in the Making?

The events of 2013–2014 led only to a temporary suspension of US aid to Egypt, and its reinstatement was accompanied by the acknowledgment that the alliance with Egypt is still in the national interest of the US. Yet, the very fact that one of the key components of the Camp David diplomatic settlement was put into discussion raises a fundamental question: under what circumstances may the US be prepared to move completely *beyond* the Camp David paradigm, and redirect its foreign policy away from the trajectory set by treaties that were negotiated when the Middle East was very different from today? This question, that might have already been justified by Obama’s “reluctant engagement” with the Middle East (Landler and Gordon 2014), has become of even more immediate relevance since the election of Donald J. Trump as 45th US President and the expectation that it may pave the way to an “isolationist” turn in US foreign policy (Friedman 2016).

Even if any answer is necessarily speculative, our previous analysis of the Camp David paradigm provides some analytical coordinates for elaborating an informed guess about its future. The first, and possibly most fundamental inference that can be derived from the history of the Camp David settlement is that the three, key regional foreign policy assumptions that made US involvement in the Middle East possible (and necessary) still largely hold true today—in fact, some of them even more than in the past. In particular, the Middle East remains a region without a strong hegemon, and there is no indication that regional organizations like the Arab League could step up their role as multilateral guarantors of regional security. Saudi Arabia’s increasingly intrusive role within the Arab League and in a variety of regional crises—what has been described as the “Salman Doctrine” (Obaid 2016), after the name of the new Saudi king who acceded to the throne on 23 January 2015—does reflect the relative wealth and power of the Saudi leadership and its willingness to confront what it sees as its main regional challenger, Iran; however, even Saudi Arabia does not have the willingness and capabilities to manage on its own major conflicts like the Syrian Civil War. As a result, more than 25 years since the end of the Cold War, the Middle East is still a volatile region whose stability ultimately depends on the intervention of extra-regional actors, and the military might of the US arguably remains the final arbiter of any regional dispute.

Similarly, the existence since 2002 of a multilateral forum known as the “Middle East Quartet” to coordinate the four key international mediators of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—the US, the EU, the UN and Russia—should not be taken as an indication of the potential effectiveness of multilateral, institutionalized mechanisms for the management of regional conflicts. The Quartet, whose formation seemed to prefigure the end of “the era of unilateral American mediation” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, had in fact in the US not just a “*primus inter pares*” but also the only actor perceived by the parties as truly able to enforce a peace settlement—to the point that the Quartet became primarily a venue utilized by the Europeans to “reignite American interest in mediation” after the cold reception by the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships of the 2003 Roadmap (Tocci 2013, p. 38).

It is therefore unlikely that the Camp David paradigm will no longer inform regional politics in the Middle East in the years and decades to come. In its basic form, it will continue to reflect the presence of close bilateral ties between the US and the two parties of the peace agreement—Israel and Egypt. The precise shape that it will take, however, will depend on the exact trajectory of Middle East politics during Trump’s presidency.

Trump’s election may lead the way to the rekindling of the old paradigm through the revival of a foreign policy agenda similar to the one that was associated with the Camp David framework in the 1980s and 1990s. Early indications suggest that the Trump administration will be prepared to strongly endorse authoritarian and repressive states that fight Islamic terrorism, and that it will return to the policy attitude towards Israel that characterized earlier Republican administrations (Friedman 2016). On these bases, the bilateral relations between the US and Israel and Egypt may be no different from those pursued until the beginning of Obama’s terms in office. Some of the regional policy goals originally envisioned by the Carter administration may also resurface, including the fight against threats coming from state-like actors like the Islamic State, or even the prospect of a “Cold War 2.0” between the US and a Russian government increasingly involved in Syria (Wintour, Harding and Borger 2016). Yet, apart from a likely revision of its relations with Iran, other drastic policy changes in the US agenda towards the region appear unlikely in the short-term; terrorism and state failure in the Middle East remain the main security threats of concern to global powers, and the Trump administration is likely to find in Putin’s Russia an ally, rather than a rival, in its Manichean approach to the fight against Islamist extremism.

Other trends, however, suggest that we may also be witnessing the birth of a *post*-Camp David paradigm based on a revision of some key military and diplomatic aspects of the peace treaty. The wavering nature of domestic politics in Egypt since the end of the Mubarak regime makes it very unlikely that Israel and the US will accept any substantial revision of the core of the peace treaty and of the formal, legal safeguards it offers; however, two interesting developments have been

recorded recently, signalling what may be the first steps towards the vision of a “new order in the Sinai” (Haaretz 2011). One is the prospect that the islands of Tiran and Sanafir—two uninhabited but strategically-located small islands who command the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba, which is Israel’s only access to the Red Sea—will be ceded by Egypt to Saudi Arabia to settle an age-old border dispute between the two countries. El-Sisi’s regime has formally approved their cession as part of a broader cooperation framework with Saudi Arabia, but the implementation of the agreement was later suspended by an Egyptian administrative court (Ahmed 2016). Should these islands eventually become Saudi, only one shore of the strait of Tiran would be under Egyptian sovereignty, turning it into an international strait whose openness to ship traffic (an important part of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, as its blockade was a *casus belli* of the 1967 war) would no longer depend alone on Egypt’s compliance. At present Israel seems to be “untroubled” by this prospect (Ahren 2016) because Saudi Arabia’s regional policies (especially its leading role in contrasting Iran and the international network of the Muslim Brotherhood) have created various areas of convergence with the regional vision of the Jewish state.

Another significant trend can be identified in the increasing irrelevance of the clauses of the peace treaty (and its protocols) that concern the presence both of Egyptian troops in the Sinai and international observers to monitor Egypt’s compliance with this part of the treaty provisions. Since the fall of Morsi, in particular, the Sinai Peninsula has become the main hotbed of the Islamist guerrilla against el-Sisi’s regime, which in turn has forced the Egyptian armed forces to send an increasingly substantial number of troops to the area. Israeli authorities have shown a collaborative attitude in approving these measures, as the peace agreement required them to. The actions taken by the Egyptian military—including a drastic campaign aimed at destroying underground tunnels at the border between Egypt and the Gaza strip—also demonstrated that it is clearly in Israel’s interest to support this re-militarization of the Sinai. The close collaboration between Israel and Egypt on the Sinai, together with the deterioration of the security condition, especially in the north of the Peninsula, led to rumours that the US might withdraw its contribution to the Multilateral Force and Observers (MFO) military contingent which has monitored the implementation of the peace treaty since 1981 (Ariel 2016). Even if these rumours remain to date unconfirmed, it seems clear that—at least in the present circumstances—the main security threat associated with the Sinai is not the prospect of a new territorial war between Israel and Egypt, but rather the evolution of the Peninsula into a fully independent region or even an exclave of the Islamic State, run by an alliance between Bedouin and Islamist groups at war with *both* Israel and the Egyptian state (Aboulenein 2016). In this context, it is increasingly apparent, as noted by Israeli media since 2011, that—especially in the post-Arab Spring Middle East—“Israel’s limitations of the Egyptian military presence in the Sinai could also be to Israel’s detriment” (Haaretz 2011).

6 Conclusion

Irrespective of the direction that the regional politics of the Middle East will take in the coming years, however, the Camp David settlement has already shaped the region in its image. Its most immediate goals—bringing to an end the state of war between Israel and Egypt, opening diplomatic relations between the two countries and returning the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt—appeared utopic just few years before it was signed, and yet its impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict was immediate and significant, to the point that it became a key cause of the regional transformations that eventually made its own regional agenda obsolete. The failed implementation of the provisions concerning Palestinian autonomy still casts a long shadow over the peace process, but has also revealed the importance of engaging directly with the Palestinian people, rather than with the Arab states that supported them, often lukewarmly. The territorial arrangements of the treaty also still largely hold today. Therefore, regardless of the possible impact of the Trump administration on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and on the bilateral relations between the US and Egypt, Camp David will not be out of the diplomatic map of the Middle East any time soon.

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The Terminal Decline of American Democracy Promotion in the Middle East

Oz Hassan

Abstract Over a fifteen-year period, successive US administrations sought to institutionalise the Freedom Agenda for the Middle East and North Africa. The objective of this policy was to promote democracy and provide a renewed way of engaging with the region in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. For the G.W. Bush administration, this was characterised by the creation of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Broader Middle East and North Africa Agreement (BMENA), and the Middle East Free Trade Agreement (MEFTA). These were built upon by the Obama administration in the wake of the Arab awakening with the MENA Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative (MENA-TIP), the creation of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Middle East Transitions (D/MET) and pushing the G8 Deauville Partnership. Analysing the evolution of these institutions reveals the Freedom Agenda's turbulent institutionalisation as it rose to the top of the political agenda under the G.W. Bush administration, only to fall in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab revolutions and the collapse of the regional security architecture. What this demonstrates is the US reliance on, and preference for, the regional status quo remains in place as the Trump administration frustrates the last vestiges of credibility the US had as an exemplar for liberals in the region to follow.

1 Introduction

The unipolar moment in the 1990s represented the high water mark of the United States' (US) global power and its ability to remake the world in its image. This was the era in which Francis Fukuyama famously declared 'the end of history' and the triumph of the liberal world order. Indeed, the end of the Cold War apparently marked the 'unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism' evident in the 'total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism'

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(Fukuyama 1989, 1992). Yet, a decade later, as American power within the international system was peaking, the events of September 11, 2001 provided a sobering moment. This was a moment in which the limits of American power to guarantee absolute security within its borders were to be realised, and America's regional strategy and national interests towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) were to be reconsidered. That one of the first and most defining crises of the unipolar era emanated from the MENA, sharpened the focus upon America's historical preference for the maintenance of the regional status quo as much as its inability to deal with the growing surge in international terrorism (Brands 2016, pp. 224–273).

As the George W. Bush administration attempted to redress these problems in and through the “war on terror”, US strategy shifted from a preference for the status quo to revisionism in the form of the Freedom Agenda. That is to say, the US government moved away from believing the regional status quo was in the US national interest, and came to believe that the region needed to be reformed politically, socially and economically. Accordingly, the defining characteristics of US-MENA relations in the twenty-first century came to be distinct from the twentieth. No longer was the US solely concerned with access and a balance of power within the region, but attempted to redress its traditional national security interests with a new desire to promote the long-term transformation of the MENA towards democracy based on liberal values. This balancing act did not mean the abandonment of autocratic allies willing to cooperate on more immediate national security interests such as counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation, and the free-flow energy sources into the global market. Rather, US democracy promotion programmes were incremental by design and characterized by their gradualist and often-collaborative nature. The Freedom Agenda was a cautious and evolutionary policy, rather than advocating any revolutionary shifts in power.

Describing the Freedom Agenda as cautious and evolutionary is at odds with the public perception of “American democracy promotion”. Indeed, the term democracy promotion itself has become tarnished by the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the illegitimate use of American military power for regime change. Yet, there is more to this vindicationist strategy than projecting force or the soaring rhetoric of the G. W. Bush administration. Rather, as this chapter argues, the G.W. Bush administration laid the foundations for what the Obama administration came to call “the long game” based on a doctrine of “strategic patience”. That is to say, it was the G. W. Bush administration that moved away from a traditionally shallow understanding of US security interests in the region, and expanded them to include human security elements. That is to say, it was the G.W. Bush administration that expanded the referent object of security in the MENA region to include both states and civil society. This was a move away from understanding security as something exclusively provided through state-to-state relations, to a focus on what is more typically understood as a human security agenda; focusing broadly on freedom from fear and freedom from want, but specifically on political, economic, education and women's rights though a securitized lens. This strategy drew on pre-existing institutional structures and capabilities, such as the United States Agency for

International Development (USAID), the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the International Republican Institute (IRI), along with a global network of democracy promotion leaders, NGOs and activists. Yet, more specific policy instruments towards the MENA were institutionalised throughout the 2000s, namely the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the Broader Middle East and North Africa Agreement (BMENA), and the Middle East Free Trade Agreement (MEFTA).

The importance of this shift from a traditional national security approach to a one that included internally reforming MENA states themselves is important. The shift lies behind what President Obama summarized as a doctrine of ‘strategic patience and persistence’ in the 2015 US National Security Strategy. This was a strategy in which national security and human security interests in the MENA were intended to work towards creating the long-term conditions for freedom, peace and prosperity in the region, whilst being operationalized through “partnerships”, “sustainability” and “development”. Indeed, throughout the Bush and Obama administrations a consensus around this embedded human security dimension to the region emerged even as it moved up and down the foreign policy agenda. Thus, even as President Obama sought to overcome and distance himself from the US’s damaged reputation from invading Iraq, the Obama administration quietly allowed the Freedom Agenda institutions to develop, evolve and mature, allowing them to extend where possible, but tempering them when deemed necessary. However, rather than this strategy flourishing after the 2011 Arab revolutions, the collapse of the regional security architecture laid waste to Freedom Agenda and the Obama administration hollowed out its institutions returning once again to a status quo policy and reliance on autocratic regimes for security in the face of counter-revolutionary movements. As a result, by 2017, the Freedom Agenda was in critical condition and in need of renewed animation. This however, remained wanting under President Trump, who in the 2016 Presidential campaign dealt blow after blow on the liberal world order and the credibility of the US as leader of the free world. Moreover, with President Trump’s temperament for neo-nationalism, strong-men and protectionism, it became evident that the evolutionary rise and fall of the Freedom Agenda came to an abrupt demise.

2 The Evolution of the “Freedom Agenda”

The G.W. Bush administration’s rationale for promoting democracy in the MENA was a direct consequence of assessing why the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 occurred. For the G.W. Bush administration, a lack of political and economic freedom in the MENA allowed terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda to radicalize alienated individuals. Consequently, democracy promotion rose up the foreign policy agenda. For some within the administration this was seen a policy that could both form the basis of a long-term counter-terrorism approach designed to “draining

the swamp”, but also as a wider approach to engaging with the MENA region and its governments. In this regard, the first United Nations (UN) sponsored *Arab Human Development Report*, published in July 2002, influenced the thinking of President Bush and his National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice towards “democratizing” the Middle East (Jackson 2006). In the report, a group of prominent Arab intellectuals concluded that human development in the region required human rights and freedom, which would enable good governance, the empowerment of women, and the effective utilization of knowledge (Hassan 2013).

The events of September 11, 2001 demonstrated to the administration that ignoring political and economic freedom in the MENA was not without consequences. In effect, the administration questioned the security bargains it had maintained through its bilateral relations in the region. As these ideas crystalized, President Bush announced that,

Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe — because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export [...] Therefore, the United States has adopted a new policy, *a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East* (Bush 2003b).

As these ideas sharpened, the administration came to see democracy promotion itself as a core national interest, arguing that,

As long as the Middle East remains a place of tyranny and despair and anger, it will continue to produce men and movements that threaten the safety of America and our friends. So America is pursuing a forward strategy of freedom in the greater Middle East. We will challenge the enemies of reform, confront the allies of terror, and expect a higher standard from our friends (Bush 2004).

By 2005, the Freedom Agenda became the central organizing concept around which President G.W. Bush based his second inaugural address, announcing that,

The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands [...] America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one [...] So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world (Bush 2005).

The intention of the Freedom Agenda was to use the full spectrum of means available to the United States for the “advancement of human freedom and human dignity through effective democracy” (NSCT 2006, p. 9). Yet, this was not suggesting an abandonment of long-term allies in the MENA region. Rather, it was proposing a long-term incremental approach to fostering the conditions necessary for democratic reforms. It is with this strategy in mind that the Freedom Agenda was institutionalized in and through MEPI, the BMENA, and MEFTA. These were followed by legislation embodied in the Freedom Agenda in the *Advance Democratic Values, Address Nondemocratic Countries, and Enhance Democracy Act* of 2007 (ADVANCE) and National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) Fifty-Eight.

2.1 The Middle East Partnership Initiative

Launched in December 2002, MEPI was the Freedom Agenda's flagship vehicle for democracy promotion. Situated in the US Department of State's Bureau of Near East Affairs (NEA), it was intended to be a flexible program enjoying a high degree of independence from bureaucratic control and operational autonomy which could be tailored to country specific requirements. This took the form of providing discreet short-term grants of up to two years, which addressed specific challenges to democratization, and bridged some of the longer-term development projects ran by the USAID (McInerney 2008; Wittes 2008). The intention behind MEPI's grant funding was to 'broaden' the US approach to Middle East reform, by addressing the issues raised by the 2002 *UN Arab Human Development Report*. Consequently, MEPI was divided into four pillars; Political, Economic, Education, and Women's issues (Hassan 2008). In practice, this translated into the issuing of a plethora of grants in each pillar, which were undertaken simultaneously and justified by their ability to complement and facilitate progress in each other. These include funding voter registration programs, judicial reform seminars, training sessions for female candidates for parliament, women's literacy programs, and the development of information technology infrastructures (Sharp 2005b).

To fund these programs in Fiscal Year [FY] 2002 and FY2003, MEPI originally relied on emergency supplemental appropriations from Congress, which combined into a total of \$119 million (Sharp 2005a, b). However, from FY2004 to FY2008 MEPI received funding from Economic Support Funds (ESF) in the annual rounds of Congressional Foreign Operations Appropriations legislation. This peaked at a single year high of \$114.2 million in FY2006, but from FY2002 to FY2008 cumulatively totalled \$497.7 million. Beyond the financial commitments MEPI made in the region, however, it also rose to become an important institution within the US 'democracy bureaucracy' itself. MEPI became the 'central hub' for interagency discussions under the Freedom Agenda. Consequently, MEPI was able to produce a joint review between the Department of State and USAID, in which USAID programs in the MENA region were scrutinized to ensure compliance with the MEPI goals and objectives (see Hassan 2013). The results of this review were published in a *Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) for Fiscal Years 2007–2012*, by the Department of State and USAID, in which a strategy of 'Transformation Diplomacy' was proposed (Department of State-USAID 2006). Nevertheless, MEPI was to be bolstered by MEFTA and the BMENA.

2.2 The Middle East Free Trade Area

In May 2003, less than 6 months after the launch of MEPI, the Bush administration outlined plans to see the establishment of MEFTA by 2013. President Bush argued that,

The combined GDP [Gross Domestic Product] of all Arab countries is smaller than that of Spain. Their peoples have less access to the Internet than the people of Sub-Sahara Africa. The Arab world has a great cultural tradition, but is largely missing out on the economic progress of our time. Across the globe, free markets and trade have helped defeat poverty, and taught men and women the habits of liberty. So, I propose the establishment of a US - Middle East free trade area within a decade, to bring the Middle East into an expanding circle of opportunity, to provide hope for the people who live in that region ... By replacing corruption and self-dealing, with free markets and fair laws, the people of the Middle East will grow in prosperity and freedom (Bush 2003a).

MEFTA was perceived as an end goal of a series of cumulative measures targeted at twenty countries in the MENA.¹ This required MENA countries adopting six step:

1. Joining the World Trade Organization (WTO).
2. Participating in the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program to increase US trade linkages with the MENA.
3. Negotiating and entering into new trade and investment framework agreements (TIFAs).
4. Negotiating formal bilateral investment treaties (BITs) with interested countries.
5. Negotiating comprehensive free trade agreements (FTAs) with the US, this would be combined into a sub-regional and ultimately a single MEFTA.
6. Participating in trade capacity building, by allowing the US to provide financial and technical assistance to realize the creation of open markets (Bolle 2006; Lawrence 2006; Zoellick 2003).

Whilst the establishment of a US-MEFTA by 2013 was not achieved, there was movement towards its establishment throughout the Bush administration's time in office. Whilst the US already had FTAs established with Israel and Jordan before September 11, 2001, the US subsequently concluded FTA agreements with Morocco, Bahrain, the West Bank and Gaza and Oman. Moreover, by the end of President Bush's tenure in office the US had 15 TIFAs and 6 BITs in place with MEFTA eligible countries, and was assisting Arab governments that had not joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) to reach this goal (Hassan 2013).

The rationale for attempting to institutionalize a US-MEFTA was not primarily economic. Rather, in addition to envisaged economic benefits, MEFTA was seen as a method of winning 'hearts and minds' by creating greater prosperity and peace through trade, whilst laying the foundations for liberal reform in the region. MEFTA sought to work with MEPI to use FTAs as a democratizing tool, by promoting structural, economic and governance reforms. Accordingly, trade promotion and trade-related technical assistance programs were established, focusing on teaching better methods of making government regulation transparent, promoting the rule of contract law, and protecting intellectual property (see Bolle 2006; Lawrence 2006; Wittes 2008).

¹These countries included Algeria, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen (Bolle 2006, p. 18).

2.3 *The Broader Middle East North Africa Initiative*

The US launched the BMENA initiative during its 2004 G8 presidency, intending to add a multilateral dimension to the Freedom Agenda. The initiative was the product of a working paper, which suggested that the G8 create a *Greater Middle East Initiative* (GMEI), which agreed upon a set of common reform priorities towards the MENA. This attempted to replicate many of MEPI's ambitions and tried to create a multilateral goal of 'promoting democracy and good governance, building a knowledge society, and expanding economic opportunities' for the MENA. As a result, the BMENA initiative was marketed as a 'partnership' between the G8, the US, and European nations, with governments, business and civil society of the MENA region working towards 'freedom, democracy and prosperity for all' (Department of State 2004; G8-BMENA 2006).

The central initiative that emerged from the June 2004 Sea Island summit was the *Forum for the Future*. This was intended to be an annual meeting in which governments, business and civil society groups from the G8 and MENA would meet and discuss reform measures. The first of these meetings took place in December 2004 in Morocco. A further multilateral program launched under the BMENA initiative was the *Foundation for the Future*. Announced in November 2005, the foundation was intended to pool and distribute international funds to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the region. As Condoleezza Rice announced,

The Foundation will provide grants to help civil society strengthen the rule of law, to protect basic civil liberties, and ensure greater opportunity for health and education. But most importantly, the Foundation is a sign that citizens have to be trusted who are working for democratic reform in particular countries, and cities, and villages to use their grant money for the greatest good that they see fit (Rice 2005).

The largest donations to this fund came from the US, which in FY2006 dedicated \$35 million of MEPIs funding to the foundation, but other donors included Denmark, the European Commission, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Jordan, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom (Wittes 2008). In total the fund raised approximately \$60 million, and by the year end of 2008 the foundation had a net total of \$26 million in available assets for future projects (Sharp 2005a)

2.4 *The ADVANCE Democracy Act of 2007 and the National Security Presidential Directive Fifty-Eight*

Whilst MEPI, MEFTA and the BMENA were central to the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda, this institutional layer was buttressed with a legislative layer. This manifested itself in the codification of ADVANCE Democracy Act, which was

passed on August 3, 2007, as part of H.R.1. *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007*. Notably this legislation was inspired by and attributed to Mark Palmer's book *Breaking the Real Axis of Evil: How to Oust the World's Last Dictators by 2025* (Lantos 2005; Palmer 2003). Accordingly, the ADVANCE Democracy Act asserts that:

It is the policy of the United States to promote freedom and democracy in foreign countries as a fundamental component of United States foreign policy, along with other key foreign policy goals (Congress 2006, p. 132).

The importance of this is that 'the act for the first time declares with the force of law that supporting democracy and human rights abroad shall be a fundamental component of US foreign policy' (Mann 2007). In addition to the ADVANCE Democracy Act providing a legal basis for US foreign policy to commit to democracy promotion, the Bush administration codified the policies and practices of the Freedom Agenda on the July 17 2008 in NSPD-58. Although the exact wording of this document is unknown, the Bush administration elected to partially declassify NSPD-58 on October 9, 2008. Entitled *Institutionalising the Freedom Agenda*, NSPD-58 stated that,

It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in the world. This policy goal was established and elaborated in the 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States of America, which declares the promotion of freedom, justice, human dignity, and effective democratic institutions to be central goals of our national security (Department of State 2008).

The enactment of the ADVANCE Democracy Act and NSPD-58 in twilight years of the Bush administration's tenure in office, should not however be seen as the pinnacle of the Freedom Agenda. Indeed, it was in previous years that the Freedom Agenda was already being derailed as an approach to the MENA region. As the first institutionalisation phase of the Freedom Agenda, between 2002 and 2004, gave way to its dominant period 2004–2006, the policy failed to forestall the rise of Islamic parties hostile to the status quo. As a result, between 2006 and 2009, the Freedom Agenda was already in a period of decline and near abandonment.

3 The Hollowing of Bush's Freedom Agenda

The peak period of the Freedom Agenda, between 2004 and 2006, was characterised by its central profile within the G.W. Bush administration. Bolstered by MEPI, MEFTA and the BMENA, the Freedom Agenda became the loadstar of President G.W. Bush's second inaugural address. Moreover, as the Freedom Agenda evolved, the administration combined a more forthright approach to the region with lofty and determined rhetoric. Indeed, the period between 2004 and 2006 looked promising for regional reform. It was a period referred to by the Bush administration at the time as an 'Arab spring'. With broad elections in Afghanistan

and Iraq, limited elections in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, women's suffrage introduced in Kuwait, political reforms in Morocco and Jordan, and the 'Cedar' revolution in Lebanon, the Bush administration came to believe that there was 'extraordinary progress in the expansion of freedom' in the region (National Security Council 2006, p. 2). As these developments grew, Freedom House measured 'modest positive trends' taking place throughout the region in 2005 (Abrams 2005). For many in the Bush administration and the some members of the political commentariat, these moderate successes were touted as vindication for the Iraq war and the Freedom Agenda more generally (Krauthammer 2005; MacFarquhar 2005; Purdum 2005).

Nevertheless, the Freedom Agenda began unravelling throughout 2006. On January 25, 2006, with the electoral victory of *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya* (Hamas) in the Palestinian parliamentary elections, the Freedom Agenda was confronted with the so-called "Islamist Dilemma". This marked a significant turning point. In spite of Hamas being elected to power in one of the freest elections the region had ever seen, the US did not recognize the result. Moreover, Hamas' electoral victory also represented the acme of a pattern where Islamic groups, hostile to Washington and Israel, won significant gains through elections. This included the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Shiites backed by militias in Iraq (Weissman 2006). This was coupled with the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon and increasing civil violence in Iraq despite hopes that the elections would calm an increasingly violent insurgency (Kurth 2006). This sent a clear signal that promoting democracy, whether that is through toppling tyrants or by insisting on elections, carried risks that the Bush administration failed to recognize because of ideological blind spots (Hassan 2013). Accordingly, 2006 marked a retreat from any attempts to confront allies on political reforms in the region. Accordingly, the policy became less coherent, as a lack of strategic guidance led to democratization projects being funded in a 'hodgepodge' manner (Hawthorne 2005).

Where the Freedom Agenda did maintain a modicum of coherence, however, was through its commitment to democratization through economic liberalisation. Thus, whilst the Freedom Agenda institutions maintained conceptual commitments to political reform, educational reform and women's rights, the core emphasis on programming between MEPI, MEFTA and the BMENA was economic reform. This emphasised MENA countries adopting free trade and free market rules. The importance of this to the Bush administration's implicit theory of democratization was that free markets and free trade rules are both economic and political. They were not only seen as necessary for generating wealth, but as a means of enhancing the overall freedoms enjoyed by the individual. For those promoting the incremental transformation of the MENA that characterized the Freedom Agenda, economic freedom was linked to an inherent understanding of how economic freedom can contribute to social modernization in two ways. The first of these resonates with what political scientists refer to as modernisation thesis. The theory links liberalisation and democratisation to political economy, by positing that positive political change can be achieved through pursuing policies of economic

growth that result from integration into the global market and the adoption of free market rules. Not only are these seen as a method of reducing poverty and unemployment, but also of creating a form of modernization that over time creates democracies. Within this schema economic freedom is paramount, and capitalism is seen as fundamental to processes of democratization because it produces wealth that is assumed will “trickle down” and lead to a higher level of mass consumption, and a well-educated and independent middle class that will demand cultural changes favourable to democracy.

The second implicit model of democratization embedded within the Freedom Agenda’s core programming was that which related economic freedom and modernization with the coproduction of the rule of law. Within this schema, the promotion of economic reform was seen as a method of promoting good governance, which it was believed could contribute to the creation of democratic governance in the long term. The importance of this rule of law approach is that economic reform is being understood to be a methodology in the promotion of gradual political liberalization and democratization processes. Economic governance was therefore not only seen by the administration as a method of growing innovation, investment and industry, but also transparency and accountability. This in turn, was seen as a method of indirectly promoting independent judiciaries and free presses, which would symbiotically assist in the gradual strengthening of civil societies, human rights and free elections as the cornerstones of democratic processes and institutions. Evidently, both focusing on economic reform as a method of producing both modernisation and the rule of law there was an intention to create a slow gestation of democratisation processes in the MENA. After 2006, this cautious approach persisted throughout the rest of the Bush administration’s tenure in office and was the dominant approach inherited by the Obama administration.

4 President Obama: The Developmental Iteration of the Freedom Agenda

Upon taking office in January 2009, many analysts labelled President Obama a foreign policy ‘realist’, predicting the end of the Freedom Agenda. Fareed Zakaria, for example, argued that ‘Obama is a realist, by temperament, learning, and instinct’ and has said ‘almost nothing about broader goals like spreading democracy, protecting human rights, or assisting in women’s education’ (Zakaria 2009). Specifically on the MENA region, Francis Fukuyama dismissed what the administration had said on democracy assistance as mere ‘lip service’ and argued that the US has returned to a traditional policy of ‘reliance on Arab strongmen’ (Fukuyama 2010). For many analysts, at least, the Obama administration had terminated the Freedom Agenda and returned to the old status quo policy. Nevertheless, a closer analysis of how the Obama administration allowed the Freedom Agenda to evolve within the confines of a pragmatic approach to the MENA region produces a more

nuanced analysis. This in turn is more in line with Thomas Carothers' 2007 forecast that,

The United States is not going to embrace a substantially more idealist position with respect to democracy promotion in the world in the next five to 10 years. It has too many substantial realist interests in Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Ethiopia, and so forth that it is not going to turn its back on. It's that simple. At the same time, the United States is also not going to turn its back on democracy promotion in some kind of stern realist realignment (Carothers 2007, p. 7).

Indeed, the Obama administration proved keenly aware that, for many observers, the Freedom Agenda had been exclusively conflated with the war in Iraq. As a result, the administration vehemently distanced itself from the Iraq war and calling for a 'new beginning' in a speech made at Cairo University. As President Obama argued,

I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation on any other (Obama 2009).

This marked an unusual step of openly criticizing both the previous administration and recent American military action, in what the President publically termed a 'war of choice' in Iraq. Nevertheless, the President added,

That does not lessen my commitment [...] to governments that reflect the will of the people [...] we will welcome all elected, peaceful governments – provided they govern with respect for all their people.

The Cairo speech was significant at both a conceptual and declaratory level. It focused on "mutual respect" and universal principles, which set the stage for a wider shift in tone and tactics, along with a more subtle change in substance. This was evident in the Obama administration's engagement strategy that played down controversial human rights violations in China, Russia, and Iran. This strategy was particularly controversial when the regime in Tehran crushed "the Green movement," a mass protest movement against the alleged falsification of presidential election results in June 2009, and the US remained relatively quiet. Moreover, when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emphasized development along with diplomacy and defense, many came to ask if the administration had abandoned the fourth 'D' of democracy altogether (Bouchet 2011).

The lack of emphasis on democracy promotion within the administration's language was not just led by a desire to distance itself from the legacy of the Freedom Agenda, but rather, it was also part of a subtle conceptual shift. Increasingly, the Obama administration saw democratization as a part of a gradual process of sustainable development and modernisation, not spurred on simply through free trade. This is a development of ideas outlined by candidate Obama, who argued that,

In the 21st century, progress must mean more than a vote at the ballot box – it must mean freedom from fear and freedom from want. We cannot stand for the freedom of anarchy.

Nor can we support the globalization of the empty stomach. We need new approaches to help people to help themselves (Obama 2007, p. 2).

Once in office, and certainly before the complications of the Arab Awakening, the Obama administration began institutionalising democracy promotion along with its development agenda. This created an amalgamate of development, democracy, security and diplomacy agendas, which was highly evident in the launch of the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), and the assertion that the US should use what Hillary Clinton termed ‘smart power’ (2009). The release of the QDDR in late 2010 reaffirmed the administration’s rationale for articulating democracy support and development policy,

Through an aggressive and affirmative development agenda and commensurate resources, we can [...] advance democracy and human rights; and ultimately position ourselves to better address key global challenges by growing the ranks of prosperous, capable and democratic states that can be our partners in the decades ahead (Department of State 2010, p. 9).

The importance of this is not only the manner in which it built on the larger rationale behind the Freedom Agenda, by adding a development dimension, but also because it built on the Obama doctrine’s emphasis on strategic patience and persistence.

5 The Freedom Agenda’s New Institutions and the Arab Awakening

Prior to the 2011 revolutions sweeping across the MENA, the Obama administration was already engaged in re-evaluating US policy towards the region. On August 12, 2010, President Obama wrote a five-page memo on *Political Reform in the Middle East and North Africa* and sent it to his top advisors. It argued that, ‘Increased repression could threaten the political and economic stability of some of our allies, leave us with fewer capable, credible partners who can support our regional priorities, and further alienate citizens in the region’. Moreover, the President argued that ‘our regional and international credibility will be undermined if we are seen or perceived to be backing repressive regimes and ignoring the rights and aspirations of citizens’ (Lizza 2011). As a result, the President directed senior members of his national security staff, Samantha Power, Gayle Smith and Dennis Ross, to lead a review that would provide “tailored” country strategies for political reform.

Conducting this review and having MEPI in place on the ground, should have led to the Obama administration being better able to respond to the tumult starting in late 2010. Indeed, no sooner than those carrying out the review into political reform begun finalizing their work, a vegetable vendor in Tunisia performed an act of self-immolation that would spark waves of popular protest across the regions. The events of December 17, 2010 provided a spark that ignited a tinderbox built

upon political, economic and social problems (Croft and Hassan 2015). As events moved quickly and unpredictably, President Ben Ali was deposed without the US playing an important role. It was not until protests spread to Egypt that the Obama administration was forced to make tougher strategic decisions. As the protests continued and levels of violence increased, it became evident that the long-term strategic partnership between the Mubarak regime and the US was in tension with supporting democracy and protecting human rights. Moreover, as protests began to swell around the country, the administration broke with its non-interference strategy and on February 1, President Obama spoke with Mubarak. This was followed with a public statement on the situation, in which President Obama argued that,

Throughout this period, we've stood for a set of core principles. First, we oppose violence [...] Second, we stand for universal values, including the rights of the Egyptian people to freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and the freedom to access information [...] Third, we have spoken out on behalf of the need for change [...] the status quo is not sustainable and [...] change must take place [...] what I indicated tonight to President Mubarak – is my belief that an orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful, and it must begin now (Obama 2011).

Just ten days later on February 11, President Mubarak capitulated to calls for him to step down. Much to the chagrin on allies such as Saudi Arabia, the US had effectively abandoned a long-term strategic ally, and cast aside a security guarantee under the force of popular protest and other domestic political pressures.

As popular protests spread across the region, it became clear that they were outpacing the administration's ability to produce a strategy, forcing reactive rather than proactive policies to take shape. This was highly evident in Libya as popular protests were deteriorating into civil war. By early March, European governments, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council all called for the establishment of a no-fly zone, in response to Colonel Gaddafi's threats to crush the rebellion. Consequently, the Obama administration finally decided to intervene to prevent a humanitarian disaster, supporting United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorized NATO intervention to protect civilians (Bellamy and Williams 2011). By March 19, the Obama administration was "leading from behind" in a NATO intervention that would last seven months and decisively contribute to the rebel victory over the Gaddafi regime (Lizza 2011).

The importance of the first year of the Arab Awakening was that it forced the US to make serious choices over whether to support democracy and potentially break with important strategic partnerships, or attempt to hold on to the status quo. Throughout 2011 the Obama administration was forced to intervene in the unfolding crises, and as Thomas Carothers notes, 'the administration faced a defining question of democracy support: Should it now shift gears and put democracy at the core of its policy in the Middle East?' (2012, p. 29). In that respect, the US response to the Arab Awakening was characterised by its pragmatic nature. The Obama administration for the most part supported democratic transitions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Yet, this was done through cautious, restrained and careful strategizing. Yet, with other strategic partners, the US was silent even as protests took shape. This was particularly notable as criticism of Bahraini human

rights abuses were muted; along with commentary on Saudi Arabia's attempts to quell protests in the Eastern Province. Similarly, in Syria, the Obama administration proved inactive, indecisive and ineffective, allowing other international and regional actors to bolster President Assad's regime and further complicating the conflict.

The Arab Awakening provided significant opportunities that the administration seized too cautiously and reactively under the guise of strategic patience. This does not, however, diminish the efforts made to bolster democratic trends in Tunisia, Egypt and to a lesser extent Libya. In Tunisia and Egypt, for example, the administration spoke out in favour of democratic transitions and provided multiple sources of funding to support a new range of programmes from 'elections administration, civic education and, and political party development' (Carothers 2012, p. 31). In terms of concrete policies, Obama announced the MENA "Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative" (MENA-TIP) to facilitate trade and investment with the region. In addition to creating the Office of the Special Coordinator for Middle East Transitions (D/MET) and pushing the G8 Deauville Partnership.

5.1 The Middle East and North Africa-Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative

The primary focus of the MENA-TIP was to (1) facilitate trade within the region, (2) promote greater trade and investment with the US and other global markets and (3) provide a pathway for MENA partners willing to adopt trade liberalization to create a regional trade agreement. This was particularly targeted at Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, and to a lesser extent Libya. In a similar vein to the Bush administration's MEFTA initiative, MENA-TIP was aimed at providing a framework for intraregional trade liberalisation and movement towards globalised trade imperatives. This was in line with long term US trade policy seeking to open international markets under rules based systems that successive US governments believed is not only beneficial for the modernisation of countries, regions and the wider international system, but also for creating long-term sustainable jobs within the US itself (Akhtar et al. 2013, pp. 17–19). Accordingly, MENA-TIP was overseen by the US Trade Representative (USTR), acting as the primary and most concrete policy vehicle produced in response to the Arab Awakening. With a focus on investment, trade facilitation, small and medium enterprise (SME) support, regulatory practices and transparency, MENA-TIP built on the same rationale as MEFTA, bringing the USTR together with the Departments of Commerce, State and the Treasury (Akhtar et al. 2013, p. 18). As a result of MENA-TIP, bilateral agreements were made with Morocco and Jordan, and intentions for an action plan with Egypt were announced. In Egypt especially, the focus was on boosting exports, promoting investment and strengthening Egyptian SMEs.

5.2 Office of the Special Coordinator for Middle East Transitions

In addition to the trade policy, put forward under MENA-TIP, the Obama administration also set up D/MET at the State Department in September 2011. Led by Ambassador William B. Taylor, Jr., a veteran of US democracy assistance in the post-Soviet space, and reporting to Deputy Secretary of State William J. Burns, D/MET was responsible for implementing a coordinated interagency strategy for assisting the young democracies of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. This included the key responsibility for developing comprehensive assistance strategies and ensuring that assistance tools were aligned with US policy goals (Department of State 2011). In addition, D/MET had the role for multilateral oversight, focusing on cooperation with the European Union. This it was hoped would create a more robust transatlantic response.

5.3 The G8 Deauville Partnership

To further international response to the Arab Awakening, the Obama administration sought to spearhead multilateral initiatives through the G8 Deauville Partnership with Arab Countries in Transition. Put forward at the May 2011 G8 summit in France, the Deauville Partnership included, the G7 countries Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, and the United States. Beyond the G7, the Deauville Partnership also included the EU and regional partners Kuwait, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, along with international financial institutions and organisations the Islamic Development Bank, the African Development Bank, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Arab Monetary Fund, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Finance Corporation, the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank, the OPEC Fund for International Development, and the World Bank. However, the Deauville Partnership faced a number of challenges. Notably, the amount of actually received financial resources, consistently failed to match initial commitments. This tarnished the project from the beginning and undermined its credibility.

This chronic underfunding exposed a problem with the timing of the Deauville Partnership and the Arab Awakening more widely. Beleaguered by the protracted effects of the 2008 global financial crisis, Western economies proved unable not only to mobilize resources on the scale that was needed to support transition but were also outmatched by the Gulf monarchies, engaged as they were in turning the threat of political opening into an opportunity for expanding regional influence through proxies (Hassan 2015). Instead of a much evoked Arab Marshall Plan for a revival of the Arab economies that could have been combined with regional integration, funds channelled from the Gulf and other wealthy donors risked splitting

the region along sectarian divides and a power struggle between Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia on the other. The new pro-Brotherhood agendas of actors such as Qatar and Turkey further complicated the picture, opening the way to multiple intersecting proxy conflicts.

6 Obama and the Second Hollowing of the Freedom Agenda

In spite of the optimism and euphoria the Obama administration maintained for promoting democracy throughout 2011–2012, it was becoming increasingly evident that the region was slipping into crisis. As the Obama administration witnessed revolts turn from popular uprisings against authoritarian regimes into counter-revolutions, regional strife and civil wars in Syria and Libya, it began to backpedal its commitments to promoting democracy. By 2013, what had too hastily been portrayed as a “new era” had become a quagmire where the region’s security architecture begun to erode, and the prospects for democracy taking hold in all but Tunisia were highly unlikely. This was epitomised by the rise of the so-called Islamic State and the unprecedented out-flows of refugees from Syria. Yet, the rapidly deteriorating strategic and security context, and its implications for democracy promotion, were best exemplified in the US-Egyptian relationship that exposed the heightened strategic dilemmas the Freedom Agenda was facing.

6.1 Obama’s Renewed Security-First Strategy

After the fall of Mubarak, the Obama administration had decided to work with the new Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, accepting the Muslim Brotherhood as a legitimate political actor with a vast and long-standing constituency of followers in the country. For the US, supporting a brotherhood led transition was as strategic as it was an acceptance of the reality on the ground. It was hoped that societal pressures would force the Brotherhood to gradually adopt a democratic agenda, and that this could lead to more than a simple electoral democracy in the long term. The Obama administration took this path despite significant opposition to and fear of the Brotherhood within the American public, within the US Congress, and amongst long-standing US strategic partners in the region such as Saudi Arabia.

By early 2013, however, this hope was shattered by the Egyptian state’s hardening approach to independent civil society actors, including the persecution of US organizations and individuals that had been involved in democracy support activities relying on foreign funding. When in the summer 2013 President Morsi was ousted by the Egyptian military under mounting popular pressure, the US condemned the ouster but avoided characterizing it as a military coup, which would

entail legal restrictions on US foreign aid. As the US remained largely silent, tinkering with military aid, but refusing to determine the nature of political events in Egypt, the Egyptian military's counter-revolution had begun with what Human Rights Watch termed "excessive lethal force" and a trail of other human rights violations. Moreover, under the guise of its own "war on terror" the new military government increasingly sought US cooperation intervening in the Sinai Peninsular to tackle the terrorist threat from groups such as Ajnad Misr, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, and the Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin fi Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis, and attempting to cut off supplies of weapons and fighters flowing into the country through its western border with Libya. The Obama administration's doctrine of strategic patience had become a doctrine of strategic silence, once again prioritising security over democratisation. Indeed, Egypt's flirtation with Putin's Russia and its unilateral actions in Libya appeared to cause more concerns in Washington than any lack of political reform. The Freedom Agenda was jettisoned in favour of a security-first approach that attempted to maintain what could be salvaged of regional order. Moreover, even as this was occurring, the Freedom Agenda institutions were becoming hollowed out, adding a further blow to democracy support in the region.

6.2 Hollowing Out the Freedom Agenda Institutions

At the declaratory level, the Obama administration continuously renewed calls to support human rights and civil society throughout its time in office. Yet, as its second term in office grew to a close, the Freedom Agenda institutions and their staff were under increasing pressure. As a result there was a "hollowing out" in terms of both substance and expertise. Central to this process was the manner in which MEPI was restructured and incorporated into the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Office of Assistance Coordination (NEA/AC) (McInerney and Bockenfeld 2016). This was compounded with MEPI receiving its lowest annual budget request in FY17, demonstrating the increasing lack of importance it was ascribed as the Obama administration left office. Far from being the central hub of MENA democracy promotion programmes, by the time President Trump took office MEPI was ill-defined, and in search of Congressional support at a time when democracy promotion in the MENA was removed from the executive's agenda (McInerney and Bockenfeld 2016). These changes are significant, as MEPI has subsequently lost important elements of its autonomy, which has stymied the active, responsive and "grass-roots" nature of the institution. MEPI was no longer headed by a political appointee from the democracy promotion community, and grew to display renewed restraint in funding projects in the region that did not have official authorization from the host governments. Indeed, these were the very features that made it one of the most interesting and innovative instruments of US democracy assistance. MEPI was, however, not alone in this hollowing out process. The same fate was shared by D/MET, which was also folded into the NEA/AC. This followed

serious shortfalls with this new position, which symptomatically failed to fill the Special Coordinator position once Ambassador Taylor departed the role in 2013.

As the Obama administration's prioritisation shifted exclusively traditional security interests such as counterterrorism and crisis management, calls to be strategically patient but persistent were made. For example, the 2015 National Security Strategy argued at length,

Defending democracy and human rights is related to every enduring national interest. It aligns us with the aspirations of ordinary people throughout the world [...] Our closest allies in these efforts will be, as they always have, other democratic states. But, even where our strategic interests require us to engage governments that do not share all our values, we will continue to speak out clearly for human rights and human dignity in our public and private diplomacy. Any support we might provide will be balanced with an awareness of the costs of repressive policies for our own security interests and the democratic values by which we live. Because our human rights advocacy will be most effective when we work in concert with a wide range of partners, we are building coalitions with civil society, religious leaders, businesses, other governments, and international organizations (Department of State 2015).

What this statement masks, however, is the extent to which the Obama administration has come to rely on authoritarian allies in favour of pursuing stability at the expense of political change. Rather than the Arab awakening feeding initial hopes for the democratisation of the region, it led to a renewed retrenchment of traditional status quo policies. This was a similar pattern of rise and fall to that witnessed under the G.W. Bush administration, where once regional challenges pushed back against US policy, arguments about patience, longevity, modernisation and security hollowed out the Freedom Agenda leaving the inertia of free trade in place of pushing for political reform. As such, the doctrine of strategic patience emerging in 2013 came to look conspicuously similar to Bush's Freedom Agenda after 2006. Nods were made acknowledging the importance of democracy in the region, but a cautious approach was put forward that was reliant on largely economic programs such as MENA-TIP. Moreover, confronting the Islamic State supplanted the urgency of dealing with the social, economic and political grievances fuelling alienation and radicalization across the region.

This was a missed opportunity, as attempting to deal with the regions collapsing security architecture without addressing the wider regional context, is indicative of the Obama administration's attempts to treat the *symptoms* of the current regional crisis rather than the *cause*. In the name of short-term security needs, the US accepted restricted civil societies, well-established authoritarian elites, poorly administered bureaucracies, and fractured and divergent identities fitting within mismatching state boundaries. This formulation was as unlikely to provide regional or international security when the Obama administration left office in 2017, as it did when President G.W. Bush entered office in 2001. These are the same issues faced by the Trump administration. Yet, with a President that has demonstrated hostility towards Islam, women's right and free trade, in favour of neo-nationalism, strong-men and protectionism, it is clear that the evolutionary rise and fall of the Freedom Agenda over the last fifteen years has come to an abrupt end. Whilst the Obama administration repudiated the Bush administration's vindictionalist

impulses, in turn the Trump administration has undermined the US as a liberal exemplar.

Whilst the democracy promotion bureaucracy and institutions remain in place, the 2016 Presidential campaign and Trump's victory dealt blow after blow on the liberal world order and the credibility of the US as leader of the free world. It is difficult to make the argument for the peaceful transition of power in the MENA, when this was called into question within the US itself under assertions of "rigged elections". It is difficult to espouse women's rights in the MENA, when the US President is on record bragging about sexually assaulting women. It is difficult to reaffirm the need for reason, rationality and logic within the regions educational systems, when the US campaign was dogged by "fake news", conspiracy and polarisation. It is also difficult to argue for free trade, modernisation and globalisation with a President willing to attack companies on twitter and promote protectionism and heightened economic statecraft. It is difficult to espouse the need for free speech and the freedom of the press, when these issues are under attack from the executive office, signalling a wider crisis of US democracy itself. Yet, US credibility on women's rights, education, political reform and economic openness were the very pillars upon which the Freedom Agenda was built. Attacking these pillars and undermining US credibility highlights the terminal decline the Freedom Agenda faces. The Iraq war removed aspirations for a vindicationist strategy, and has contributed to the collapsing security architecture in the MENA itself. Yet, an even more fatal blow has been dealt as the US states no longer sits as an exceptional liberal exemplar for others to aspire to. This should not only raise concern about the future of American democracy promotion in the MENA, but also to the future of democracy and the liberal world order itself.

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Constructing a Regional Order Through Security: Strategies and Failures of US Policy Towards the Sahara-Sahel Region

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Abstract Considering the Sahara-Sahel as an unstable periphery of the international system, since the end of the Cold War the United States has tried to export liberal order in the region. Sharing the burden with its European allies, during the 1990s, the US focused its action on spreading democracy, spreading market economy and containing violent crises. After 9/11, and as a consequence of the “ungoverned space” framework, United States strongly increased its engagement in the Sahara-Sahel, pursuing an integrated approach to counterterrorism and de-radicalization. American initiatives promoted a securitization of the region, while also contributing to redefine regional borders and local dynamics. The civil war in Mali and the temporary collapse of the Malian state called into question the American approach in the region, considering that the Sahara-Sahel has probably never been as dis-ordered and “ungoverned” as it is today. On the one hand, cognitive and normative problems determined the failure of the US strategy in the region. On the other hand, recent events and the international reaction to the Malian crisis show, that the United States is still a necessary actor to bring order and stability to the Sahara-Sahel.

1 Introduction

Today’s Sahara-Sahel region is considered comprising the whole territory of Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad, as well as part of the territory of Senegal, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Algeria. The borders of the Sahara-Sahel have never been fixed permanently, and the region has only recently gained a *geopolitical dimension*. In particular, since the beginning of the 2000s, the definition of an internationally recognized region, with common internal dynamics and threats and shared borders, has been mostly influenced by the United States (US).

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The Pan-Sahel Initiative, a military programme managed by the Department of State (DoS) and launched in 2003, was the first programme to establish which countries belonged to the regional system (Bonnecase and Brachet 2013; Harmon 2014).

Even if the Sahara-Sahel has never been a strategic priority for the US, this country has become one of the most important international actors in the area during the last 15 years. The same changes in defining the region—from Sahel, to Sahara-Sahel until Northwest Africa (Whitehouse and Strazzari 2015)—followed the geographical expansion of the American initiatives. Moreover, in the Sahel, the US tested new, multi-sectorial and integrated approaches to counterterrorism and de-radicalization, which also inspired both organizational and policy changes in other areas (Kandel 2014). Since 2002, the US has spent more than a billion dollars in the Sahara-Sahel, to plan and launch security, counterterrorism and institution-building programmes, as they have considered the Sahel as the second African front of the War on Terror since at least 2003. According to American decision-makers, it was essential to bring order and stability to this region, before it turned into a terrorist safe haven (Subcommittee in Africa—Committee on Foreign Affairs—Senate 2009; Warner 2014).

The Libyan breakdown and the troubling fragility of almost all the countries in the region have called into question the American approach to the area. At the same time, what marked a clear failure of American counterterrorism policy was the collapse of the Malian state in 2012, under the threat of a terrorist-driven civil war.¹ The apparently stable and democratic Mali was considered as the *pivotal* state of the American strategy: the Malian crisis called not only for a revision of the American approach in the Sahara-Sahel, but asked for a change in the way the US supports order and stability in world *peripheries* (Buzan 1991).

Starting from these considerations, the main questions this chapter aims to answer are: Why did the US consider its security was at stake in the Sahel? How did it try to bring order and stability to the region?

The US defined its interest and security in the Sahel according to its vision of order and threat in the international system. As a consequence of these interpretations, it elaborated norms and rules about how to intervene and modify institutional equilibrium in unstable regions. Exploring these rules and actions should allow an understanding of what role the US plays in the region. In the conclusions, we would also try to establish, if the US is a *necessary* actor in the Sahara-Sahel.

¹During 2012, a *Tuareg* rebellion in the north turned out to be a real war of conquest led by different Islamist groups and in particular by Aqim, the group representing al-Qaeda in the region. In March 2012, the Malian army organized a *coup* which overthrew the Malian democratically elected president.

2 How the World Peripheries Challenge American Order and Security

The US considered the end of the Cold War as an unprecedented occasion to reshape the international system, diffusing its vision of a liberal order all around the world. Democracy and market economy not only had the potential to become common and shared values, but could also represent the new basis for an American-fashioned international order. In this context, one of the main dangers for the imagined “New World Order” (White House 1991) was coming from the dis-order in the peripheries.

The different crises erupting in the Global South showed that without a strong and stable international commitment, the liberal order would have hardly penetrated into different areas of the world. On the one hand, the end of the Cold War did not coincide with the diffusion of a long-lasting peace. The implosion of Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, and the different crises that erupted in Africa, all showed that political violence was not disappearing, but rather changing its nature. In particular, different authors underlined the absolute pre-eminence of a “new kind” of multidimensional conflict, where political struggle and state actors were only some activating factors (Duffield 2001; Kaldor 1999). On the other hand, it was clear that in a world “freed” from bipolar constraints, both state sovereignty and Western-like territorial governance were weak institutions in the world peripheries: “huge sections of the world’s population have won the ‘right of self-determination’ on the cruellest possible terms: they have been simply left to fend for themselves. Not surprisingly, their nation-states are collapsing, as in Somalia and in many other nations of Africa” (Ignatieff 1993, p. 12).

During the first decade after the end of the Cold War, the international debate started to focus and loosely define a particular category of state, which represented one of the creators, but was also a consequence of the peripheral dis-order. Being inspired by the paradigmatic example of the collapse of the Somalian state, the category of failed or fragile states was put on the international stage (Call 2008; Di John 2008).²

A failing or fragile state is characterized by the collapse of its institutions and the resulting lack of ability to programme, manage and implement the most basic public policies that define a full sovereignty. During the 1990s, fragile states were observed using “humanitarian lenses”, as they represented only an indirect threat to international security (Patrick 2011). At the same time, they had the potential to represent a menace to the international liberal order. While violence and humanitarian crisis were seen as a consequence of the disruption of all the most fundamental institutional rules, collapsing states questioned the principle of an American-fashioned international order based on independent and sovereign units.

²The term *failed state* made its first appearance during the 1970s, as a category elaborated by the literature on rental states. Since the 1990s, the term partially changed its meaning, and was used more by development and security experts.

On different occasions, failed states have been used by the international community as a trial for testing a new global governance, built on a liberal state-building agenda (Duffield 2001; Paris 2004). During the nineties, debates around new strategic concepts such as *peace-building* (Boutros-Ghali 1992) and *responsibility to protect* (Deng 1996) linked this issue to the general pursuit of a global order. On the same lines, concepts such as *human security* (United Nations Development Programme 1994) tried to attribute the same priorities to underdevelopment, bad governance and institutional collapse as accorded to security issues (Tschirgi et al. 2010). This interpretation, however, did not succeed among American decision-makers until the 9/11 attacks.

“The post 9/11 moment brought more radical changes to the global periphery, as it was used as a pretext to reconfigure it as a space of in/security rather than as spaces of, for example, underdevelopment and poverty” (Smith 2009, p. 22). After 2001, fragile states and disorder in world peripheries became “the single most important problem for the international order” (Fukuyama 2004), in particular for the US. This was a consequence of the plotting behind 9/11. The attacks were seen as planned and prepared in Afghanistan, one of the poorest and most fragile states in the world. Following the “Afghanistan frame”, failed/fragile states started to be considered as the places where underdevelopment, lack of governmental control and corruption, along with impunity and poverty, nourish terrorist networks and radicalize people. Not only is local dysfunctional governance considered as a threat to people living under its rule, but it is now seen as a permissive factor for the development of the terrorist menace (Call 2008; Patrick 2006; Rotberg 2003).

Already in the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS), the White House affirmed: “Weak states [...] can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders [...] America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones ” (White House 2002, p. v-1). This idea has become a “strategic belief” that has since influenced American decision-makers. For example, in the 2010 NSS (White House 2010), it is clearly stated that since the end of the Cold War’s, the US has been facing a fragmented world order. Terrorism is considered as one of the expressions of the “dark side of globalization”, while failed states are still seen as a consequence of this broken order, and a factor that nourishes instability, conflict and asymmetrical threats.

As the former British Foreign Minister Jack Straw affirmed in 2002:

Yet the events of 11 September devastatingly illustrated a more particular and direct reason for our concern. For it dramatically showed how a state’s disintegration can impact on the lives of people many thousands of miles away, even at the heart of the most powerful democracy in the world. The shocking events of that day were planned, plotted and directed by a group which exploited domestic chaos to commit the most heinous international crime.[...] We need to remind ourselves that turning a blind eye to the breakdown of order in any part of the world, however distant, invites direct threats to our national security and well-being. [...] State failure can no longer be seen as a localised or regional issue (Straw 2002).

According to this declaration, the same dysfunctional institutions that in the previous decade were seen as a matter of local development and justice became a threat to both national and international securities. The very nature of the state, together with its institutional structure and operational principles, became a source of threat. As a consequence, state-building was not carried out just to bring order and create like-minded units in the peripheries, but it became part of a wider security strategy.

As former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice suggested in 2006:

the greatest threats now emerge more within states than between them. The fundamental character of regimes now matters more than the international distribution of power. In this world it is impossible to draw neat, clear lines between our security interests, our development efforts and our democratic ideals (Rice 2006).

One year earlier, the Agency for International Development (USAID) had published its *Fragile State Strategy*, which confirmed the link between bad governance and security threats operated by US administration: “governments collapsing, criminal and terrorist networks, humanitarian crises, and grinding poverty can have global ramifications. Weak states tend to be the vector for these destabilizing forces, manifesting the dark side of globalization, and pose a very difficult kind of national security challenge” (USAID 2005, p. v).

Once fragile states entered in the “Global war on terrorism” framework (Buzan 2006), another category emerged, as a corollary of the menace represented by failed states. The second part of the “Afghanistan frame” stated that terrorists would exploit ungoverned spaces hosted by fragile states, wherever they were in the world, to create their *safe haven* (Innes 2008). What has been called the *safe haven myth* (Walt 2009) suggests that ungoverned areas identify territories where the sovereign and legal authorities are unable to exercise an effective and durable control. Ungoverned spaces deal at one time with a strictly territorial and fixed vision of space, and with a lack, or even a total absence, of governance—even a territory where an alternative form of authority dominates the structure of the local governance is considered as non-governed. In these empty spaces, characterized by a political vacuum and the absence of state institutions, terrorists should find a favourable ground for their activities (Keister 2014; Raleigh and Dowd 2013).

After the 9/11 attacks attention to terrorists’ sanctuaries and safe havens quickly gained momentum. The February 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* considered denial of sponsorship, support and sanctuary to terrorists as its second main goal in the War on Terror (White House 2003). The 9/11 Commission Report published in 2004 devoted considerable attention to terrorist sanctuaries, defining them as places where terrorists have “time and space to develop the ability to perform competent planning and to assemble the people, money and resources needed for the terrorist act. [...] Any area where there is lawlessness and the inability of a government to control its countryside” (The 9/11 Commission 2004, pp. 365–366). Again, in the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (September 2006), the denial of sanctuaries and the control of nations by terrorists were two of the four main priorities of action (White House 2006a).

The George W. Bush and Obama administrations followed a similar path concerning the definition of fragile states and ungoverned spaces as international threats. The *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* (June 2011), for example, stated: “al-Qa‘ida and its affiliates and adherents rely on the physical sanctuary of ungoverned or poorly governed territories, where the absence of state control permits terrorists to travel, train, and engage in plotting. [...] We will also build the will and capacity of states whose weaknesses al-Qa‘ida exploits. [...] Our challenge is to break this cycle of state failure to constrict the space available to terrorist networks” (White House 2011, p. 9).

This last quotation shows that fragility and a lack of government in the peripheries maintained their priority even after president Obama declared the end of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), as intended by the previous administration (Wilson and Kamen 2009). The main changes occurred in the definition and the approach to violent extremism, now linked to radicalization and insurgency (USAID 2009, 2011). At the same time, American decision-makers continued to understand safe havens as the result of broken governance and the absence of control over territory, two attributes that characterize fragile states.

2.1 *Africa as a Fragile Periphery*

Considering this framework, since the 1990s Africa has emerged as one of the most unstable and potentially threatening places in the system. The Westphalian state, one of the essential institutions on which western-like international order has been built (Bull and Watson 1984), did not fully take root in Africa. If we consider the five fundamental attributes of Westphalian sovereignty—the domestic monopolies on violence, taxation, citizens’ loyalty, judgment on disputes and representation in the international society (Williams 2014a)—we see that most African states are not fully able to exert them. Confronting the African state with its Northern equivalent, it appears that institutional arrangements and modes of governance follow specific rules, and apply different practices and an alternative distribution of power, in their quest for a durable equilibrium between wealth and violence (North et al. 2012). Even the concept of security needs to be revisited, when dealing with Africa: “an African perspective on security is a human security-based negation of conventional security perspectives, which in the African context have historically privileged the security of the state over its citizens, and military security over human security” (Salih 2010, p. 92).

According to the main international indexes for state failure,³ Africa is the continent that hosts the greatest number of fragile and failed states. This

³For example the World Bank’s Governance Matters Data Set; the Failed States Index by the Fund for Peace; the UNDP’s Human Development Index; and the Index of State Weakness in the Developing World by Brookings.

characteristic, along with its linked ungoverned spaces, has allowed the continent to attract an increasing attention by security experts and practitioners:

Narratives on threats originating from Africa are riddled with phrases of “ungoverned spaces” and “failed states.” U.S. State Department officials and Defense analysts write about Africa’s “anarchic zones” giving rise to “dangerous chaos,” while threat briefings claim that the “vast stretches of ungoverned areas”—lawless zones, veritable “no man’s lands”—demand constant levels of scrutiny. As one analyst claimed, Africa, with its “war-ravaged areas and vast swathes of ungoverned territory,” offers ideal conditions for extremists looking for a foothold (Metelits 2014, p. 2).

During the 1990s, Africa was a challenge to the US order, but not for its direct security. In the 1994 NSS for example, it was stated that: “Africa is one of our greatest challenges for a strategy of engagement and enlargement. Throughout Africa, the US policy seeks to help support democracy, sustainable economic development and resolution of conflicts through negotiation, diplomacy and peacekeeping” (26). The change in the perception that followed 9/11 appears clear looking at the 2006 NSS, where it is written that: “the United States recognizes that our security depends upon partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies” (White House 2006b, p. 37).

From the end of 2001, the Department of Defense, with the help of SOCOM⁴ and the others Regional Unified Combatant Commands, planned what became to be known as the GWOT. The GWOT strategy predicted that the US should also conduct operations and fight terrorists in those countries which they were “not at war with” (Ryan 2011). Since the very beginning, the African continent was considered as the second front of this War (Francis 2010). In the section of the report dedicated to the initiative to be taken to defeat al-Qaeda, the 9/11 Commission proposed a list of the world’s ungoverned spaces to be monitored and, if necessary, where to intervene: there was an attentive focus on Western Africa, and in particular the Northern regions of Nigeria and Mali (The 9/11 Commission 2004). Since then, the Sahara-Sahel has officially appeared as a source of threat and a menace not only for the international order, but also for American national security.

3 American Norms and Rules to Bring Order to the African Ungoverned Spaces

The Sahara-Sahel region has become a recognized threat to international order and to American security during the last 15 years. Before 9/11, American foreign policy decision-makers did not identify different regions in Africa, preferring to maintain

⁴The US Special Operations Command is the Unified Combatant Command charged with overseeing the various Special Operations Component Commands of the US Armed Forces.

bilateral relations with African countries. At the same time, even if September 2001 represented an important turning point, some of the norms that emerged during the 1990s still influenced US action towards the Sahel, and more general towards Africa. Aiming to explore the way the US managed regional order and security, we distinguish between a continental approach followed between 1991 and 2001, and a Sahel-focused policy born with the GWOT.

3.1 Exporting Liberal Values: The American “Soft Pressure” Towards Africa for Stability, Democracy and Market Economy During the Nineties

In the last decade of the twentieth century, Africa represented a peripheral area of concern for American decision-makers, a place where a US presence was guaranteed essentially by a restricted group of functionaries who managed almost every aspect of the policy (Schraeder 1994). Moreover, these officials had to deal with a decreasing level of resources. The Republican majority at the Congress led a strong battle to cut budget for African policy, facing a weak, or even non-existent resistance by the Executive (Bagayoko-Penone 2003). “U.S. aid to Africa (inclusive of development assistance, economic support funds, food aid, and foreign disaster relief) fell from a peak of \$1,93 billion in 1992 to \$933 million in 2000, a 52% decrease in overall aid” (Schraeder 2001, p. 393). As the then Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, James L. Woods, affirmed in 1992, decision-makers could no longer see clear American interests on the continent (Subcommittee in Africa—Committee on Foreign Affairs—Senate 1992).

Even if during that period American action in Africa was *residual*, the US approved some significant initiatives on the continent. The aim was to influence the future of Africa, in order to insert it inside the liberal international order. Also the Sahara-Sahel was fully captured inside this mechanism. The US identified three main priorities to be pursued in Africa: spreading democracy; spreading market economy; containing violent crisis. Democracy and market economy were considered as the long-term solution to obtain peace and development (Alden 2000), while the latter priority was imposed by the recent “explosion” of political violence on the continent (Williams 2014b).

The diffusion of democracy and market economies all over the world became a foreign policy paradigm under the Clinton administration, as a consequence of its new doctrine called *democratic enlargement* (Brinkley 1997). “[D]emocratic enlargement represents a ‘novel geo-economic synthesis’ [Cox 1995] that overtly links the expansion of democracy across the globe with that of the spread of market economies” (Alden 2000, p. 357). This doctrine—proposed for the first time in the 1994 NSS (White House 1994)—suggested the possibility to export the liberal ideology worldwide (Broderick 1998). In the following National Security Strategies, the Clinton administration strengthened its engagement to spread

democracy and free-market economies, proposing an additional strategy called *Shaping* (Bagayoko-Penone 2003; White House 1997, 2001). According to this principle, the US was called to reshape the international security environment using its leadership, in order to support democracy and stability in as many regions as possible. In practical terms, the US should have put “soft pressure” on peripheral states which had not yet undertaken liberal reforms, promoting at the same time every initiative inspired by liberal values and principles in the international arena.

Looking at the Sahara-Sahel region, the US elected Mali as its privileged partner for spreading democracy in the area. Since 1991, the Malian military regime was invested by popular rallies and protests that lasted for almost a year. At the beginning of 1992, a coup organized by General Touré finally overthrew the dictator Moussa Traoré, quickly transforming Mali into an electoral democracy (Galy 2013; Harmon 2014). Mali became the Sahelian country that received the largest portion of American aid during that decade: according to the OECD, the US never failed to allocate to Mali never less than \$40 million of Official Development Assistance (ODA) between 1991 and 2000, more than the double the amount Nigeria received in the same period (OECD 2016). The only exception was in 1996.

Already in 1992, the former president Carter went to Mali to express American appreciation for the Malian political transition (Agence France Press 1992b), while the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, visited the country in 1996, during his first travel to Africa (Agence France Press 1996; Bassir 1996). Mali was considered as the potential “force for democracy” and a privileged partner that might act as an American proxy in the area, mirroring an approach also followed in the security domain.

Concerning the spread of market economy, new approaches for development aid and support to private sector in Africa have been discussed since the beginning of the 1990s (Subcommittee on Africa—Committee on Foreign Affairs—House of Representatives 1991; Subcommittee on Africa and Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade—Committee on Foreign Affairs—House of Representatives 1992). An important part of American grants and development assistance programmes focused on the support for business initiatives, with the aim to create a positive environment for the development of private enterprises. The most important initiative taken in this sector has been the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), approved in May 2000. AGOA created a commercial system—still in function—which guarantees a privileged access to the American market for hundreds of African products (Bagayoko-Penone 2003; Latreille 2003). Some authors suggested that AGOA could be considered not only as a commercial initiative, but also as an “indirect security strategy” (Alden 2000).

Nevertheless, during the first decade after the Cold War, violent political crises were the most urgent issue in Africa. The George H. W. Bush administration tried to promote a new form of global security governance and support humanitarian intervention, participating in the United Nations (UN) mission in Somalia in 1992. The failure of the operation *Restore Hope* and the consequent *Presidential Decision Directive 25*—published in 1994—determined the end of direct American

intervention in African crises.⁵ The “Somalia Syndrome” (Patman 2015) pushed the US to look for solutions that could come from local states. The US would have given African states the means to finding “African solutions to African problems”.

This led to a two-level strategy: (1) the US started looking for partner states which could act as *proxy warriors* and guarantee the managing of local conflicts. Consequently, security governance in Africa was delegated not only to the stronger and more stable African states, but also to the European allies, such as France, more concerned with African affairs (Bagayoko-Penone 2003; Olsen 2014). (2) The US sought to improve its military cooperation with African partners, with the aim of making them responsible of their own security.

Following a practice born during the Cold War, the US accepted an informal division of labour with France and the UK, countries recognized as having had the will and the capacity to intervene in, and manage, local crises in their former colonial empires. This choice reaffirmed the pre-eminence of the P3,⁶ as the most important international security providers in Africa. The US opted for an indirect approach, especially when dealing with violent conflicts, while France and, to a lesser extent the UK, had the task of acting on diplomatic, political and military fields, in order to solve crises (Schraeder 1994, 2001).

Focusing attention on the Sahara-Sahel region, France obtained full approval for its approach in handling instability in Chad (Agence France Press 1992a; Cohen 1998). In this sense, France was considered as the first ally in the area. Regarding the search for local proxies, none of the Sahelian states were considered by the Department of Defense (DoD) as *pivotal* states. In the 1995 *DoD Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa*—also confirmed without major changes in 2001—the Pentagon proposed a list of potential security partners in Africa. Considering their geographical position, the relative strength of their economies, the size of their armies and their good relationship with the US, the DoD indicated Nigeria, Kenya—replaced by Ethiopia for a while—and South Africa as the three key actors on the continent. At the same time, the Pentagon also proposed a second list of *partner* states. Thanks to its political stability and its successful process of democratization, Mali was the only Sahelian state associated to the American security strategy in Africa (Bagayoko-Penone 2003).

In the 1997 NSS, it is stated that: “[w]ith countries that are neither staunch friends nor known foes, military cooperation often serves as a positive means of engagement, building security relationships today in an effort to keep these countries from becoming adversaries tomorrow” (White House 1997, p. 9). The DoD’s relationship with Mali followed this strategic approach. The first American contingents arrived in Mali in 1992; the first JCET (Joint Combined Exchange

⁵In October 1993, 18 American soldiers died in Mogadishu trying to capture the warlord Farah Aidid. After this episode, the US recalled its contingent, determining the failure of the UN mission UNOSOM II. The Presidential Decision stated that American soldiers should have participated in peacekeeping operations only if a vital national interest had been at stake.

⁶The three Western permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Training)⁷ was launched in 1993; and the first Exercise Flintlock, was organized in 1997.⁸ Another programme designed to address local civil and military defence officials, and regularly organized in the Sahelian countries, is the Expanded International Military Education and Training (IMET), whose aim is to improve local capacities in the security sector governance. Moreover, Malian troops formed and logistically supported by the US took part in peacekeeping operations in Liberia in 1997 (Abramovici 2004). Thanks to military cooperation and the “good offices” of the DoD, at the end of the decade Mali became an American ally and part of its local security strategy.

Nevertheless, the most innovative American security initiative in Africa has been the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), renamed African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) after 2002. The main idea behind this programme was that local partners would not only guarantee the everyday security governance on the continent, at the same time spreading American influence, but they would also take responsibility for managing regional crisis. ACRI was initiated after the Rwanda genocide, and aimed to give African countries the means to intervene in such extreme situations. ACRI was managed by EUCOM, the European Unified Combatant Command, which was also responsible for the biggest part of the African continent. Selected units of different African armies were equipped and trained to conduct peacekeeping operations under an international mandate, becoming a sort of multinational standby force. Once again, Mali participated in the American initiative. At the end of 2002, eight battalions formed by 9000 soldiers from Mali, Senegal, Uganda, Malawi, Ghana, Benin and Ivory Coast were ready to intervene in support of UN and African Union peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations on the continent (Bagayoko-Penone 2003; Bassir 1996).

3.2 Fighting Terrorism in the Sahel: Between Counterterrorism and Institution-Building, A Regional and Integrated Approach to Security

On 7 November 2002, the Office of Counterterrorism of the DoS released this announcement:

[i]n October, AF DAS Robert Perry and S/CT Deputy Coordinator Stephanie Kinney, along with other State representatives, visited Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Mali, briefing host nations on the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI). PSI is a programme designed to protect borders, track movement of people, combat terrorism, and enhance regional cooperation and stability. PSI is a State-led effort to assist Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania in detecting and

⁷JCET is a military training programme run by Special Forces with the aim of giving a specific formation to local elite units.

⁸Exercise Flintlock is a multinational simulation that can last several months, aiming to train local forces to collaborate and react to sudden crises and possible critical scenarios.

responding to suspicious movement of people and goods across and within their borders through training, equipment and cooperation. Its goals support two U.S. national security interests in Africa: waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security (US Office of Counterterrorism 2002).

This statement shows the biggest change that impacted on the American policy towards the Sahel. As part of its War against Terrorism, the US decided to tackle the threat posed by ungoverned spaces in Africa, launching regional initiative and putting security and counterterrorism at the very centre of its African agenda (Francis 2010; Pham 2010). Bringing stability to the region remained the first goal pursued by the US. Compared to the previous decade, this purpose was not only a tool to spread liberal order in the peripheries, but it became also a national security aim.

Since its beginnings, the fight against terrorist networks should have combined specific anti-terrorism actions with long-lasting counterterrorism solutions: the Pan Sahel Initiative and its successors would have been immediate responses, while democracy and development were now considered as the “second part” of the strategy, a structural response to the terrorism threat. The “3D approach”—based on Diplomacy, Defense and Development—promoted by the G. W. Bush administration (White House, 2002, 2006b), and the following “Whole of Government approach” pursued by Obama administration (White House 2010), became the guiding principles for the implementation of the American foreign policy towards the more unstable world peripheries after 9/11.

According to the USAID database (USAID 2014), American aid to Sub-Saharan Africa increased from about \$2 billion in 2002, to \$9 billion in 2009, touching \$10 billion in 2014. The Sahel followed a similar path: excluding security and military cooperation, the general budget allocated for the region regularly increased from 2002, with Mali and Chad respectively receiving the greatest amount of aid in the area.⁹ If Mali obtained \$46 million in development aid in 1999, in 2009 the US gave the country almost \$100 million. Good governance became the new main focus of American development aid: since corruption and bad governance are seen as factors that nourish terrorism and “fragilize” states, giving better institution to Africa emerged as a clear priority for the US (Rotberg 2009; USAID 2011).

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Chad-Cameron pipeline are two clear examples of the American effort for improving good governance in the Sahel. The MCC is an independent development agency created in 2004 with the aim to select and award those developing countries able to promote and maintain good democratic and economic governance. Confirming a solid partnership, Mali was the Sahelian country which received the biggest amount, obtaining \$460 million in 2006, while Niger received \$23 million in 2007 (USAID 2014).

Since 2002, the US has also supported a World Bank initiative in Chad. The international organization proposed to create a pipeline connecting Chad’s oilfield

⁹Most of the aid received by Chad has been humanitarian and crisis-relief aid.

with the Atlantic harbours in Cameron. A consortium formed by the governments of Chad and Cameroon, and by ExxonMobile, Chevron and Petronas, should have exploited the oilfield, while a special agency composed by members of the local civil society should have monitored how the governments spent oil revenues. Chad should have created a specific fund, allocating most of its revenues to improving good governance initiatives. The pipeline began operations in 2003, but by 2007 the project could be considered as a failure: because of the worsening of the security situation, Chadian president Déby refused to redistribute oil revenues, using them to reinforce the country's army (Pegg 2009).

In 2014, the Obama administration tried to move forward, promoting an integrated approach between governance and security. The *Security Governance Initiative* (SGI) focuses its attention on security sector governance, aiming to improve local institutions' efficiency and strengthening their capacity to address threats (Office of the Press Secretary 2014). Currently implemented in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Tunisia, Kenya and Ghana, the SGI is clearly linked to counterterrorism goals, and represents an explicit example of the overlapping between development and security initiatives in terrorist-prone regions.

Nevertheless, the most significant American efforts have been devoted to the security domain. With a budget of \$7.5 million for the years 2003–2004, the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) was a state-led programme which aimed to develop border and territorial control capacities through the training of local armies and police forces (Archer and Popovic 2007). The PSI can be considered as the starting point for a new front of the War on Terror in the Sahel.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the Sahel effectively presented some characteristics that attracted American attention: on the one hand the GSPC (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prière et le Combat*), a terrorist group born during the Algerian civil war, was intensifying its contacts with al-Qaeda (rebranding its name in Aqim—al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb—in 2007) and extending its activities over the Algerian southern borders, in particular in Mauritania and Northern Mali (Harmon 2014; International Crisis Group 2005). On the other hand, radical Islamic organizations and missionaries—coming from the Middle East, the Arabic Peninsula and even from Pakistan—were settling in the region, proposing to the population an extremist interpretation of Islam. In particular, preachers and Islamic *Madrasa* inspired by the *Jama'at al Al-Tabligh* and the *Wahhabiyya* Islamic movements were perceived as extremely radical and dangerous (Archer and Popovic 2007; Gutelius 2007).

The PSI was launched thanks to the particular conditions that the War against Terror created within the American foreign policy decision-making community, and under the combined initiative of different actors. First, the European Unified Combatant Command (EUCOM)—with the support of American officials on the ground—actively sustained the necessity to act in what was presented as an ungoverned and terrorist-prone region. As reported by Raffi Khatchadourian: “[I]n Washington ... a number of people said that European Command had a bureaucratic imperative to cast militant Islam in the region as an impending danger. A retired CIA specialist in counterterrorism told me that European Command had

its “nose [put] out of joint”, because the main theatres of the war on terrorism fell under Central Command, the division responsible for American forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. A former US diplomat who worked closely with the Defense Department said: “I mean, for European Command, when they tore down the Berlin Wall, a lot of their missions evaporated—so it’s a matter of having resources [allocated by Congress] and then trying to find missions to justify them.” A State Department official familiar with the military’s Saharan strategy called it “a hammer looking for a nail” (Katchadourian 2006b).

On the other hand, Algeria strongly claimed that the GSPC was a danger to the entire region. Thanks to its previous experience in fighting Islamic terrorism, since 2002 the Algerian regime had become one of the most important Northern African partners for the US in its War against Terror, obtaining in exchange both international legitimation and military and development aid (Zoubir and Amirah-Fernández 2008). Algeria supported EUCOM’s efforts towards the Sahel, determining a successful “securitization” of the region. As Colonel Nelson once declared: “Let’s face it. We will have trained six motorized infantry companies to monitor the borders in an area as large as the United States. So you could say, ‘give me a break. Is this a joke?’ But it opens the door, fosters cooperation, opens the door to future programs. If it goes well, the test case, well, let’s expand, let’s do it some more” (Archer and Popovic 2007, p. 44).

The Pan Sahel Initiative was effectively developed and substituted by the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (then Partnership, TSCTP) in 2005, in order to also include Burkina Faso, Algeria, Senegal, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia and Cameroon within the same framework. The decision was taken after that, in 2003–2004, the GSPC leader Amari Saifi aka Abderrazak El Para organized the kidnapping of 32 European tourists in Southern Algeria. The kidnappers operated on a territory comprised between Eastern Mauritania and Western Chad, and they were only arrested in 2004, thanks to a joint action of Malian, Mauritanian, Nigerian and Chadian security forces, probably supported by American and French special forces (Katchadourian 2006a). On this occasion, the GSPC demonstrated its ability to exploit the “empty” spaces of the Sahel for its activities. In the following years, different kidnappings and attacks were committed by the group against local security forces and foreign citizens, and the declaration of allegiance made to al-Qaeda in 2007 convinced the US about the dangerousness of the newly born Aqim.

Also, the Trans Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) shows the strong continuity between Bush and Obama policies towards the Sahara-Sahel. The programme is still under implementation, and its strategy was reviewed in 2013: “TSCTP stakeholders agreed that the programme’s framework needed to be strengthened in order to address the region’s security challenges” (Warner 2014, p. 24). Different norms and strategic beliefs lie behind the TSCTP, combining rules elaborated during the 1990s and new approaches specifically proposed to fight transnational terrorism.

First of all, the US should not intervene directly against terrorist organizations—in the same way that it did not intervene in the African crises—but it should

influence the local environment, in order to create favourable conditions for the development of a stable order and common security governance. Under the Obama administration in particular, the US organized a system of special forces and drone bases covering the whole African continent (Whitlock 2012, 2014), but its first task was to support and train African countries in fighting terrorism and eliminate roots causes of its development.

This strategy has been built on the same two pillars applied against conflicts during the 1990s. On the one hand, the US must identify partner countries acting as proxy. Looking at local allies, Mali—the country that “hosted” the biggest part of the ungoverned space in its northern regions—appeared as the most stable and reliable state in the area, while Algeria owned the most efficient security apparatus. At the same time, the division of labour between European allies remained an important option. The US still has a preference for a “leading from behind” approach. In this regard, apart from a short period at the beginning of the 2000s, France appeared as ready and able to intervene in African crisis, while other actors, such as the European Union (EU), started to become valuable allies in conflict-management and de-radicalization initiatives (Balthasar and Barrios 2014; Lequesne and Vaïsse 2013; Olsen 2014). Nevertheless, if the French intervention in Mali in 2013 can be seen as a further confirmation of this informal distribution of tasks, different experts recently underlined growing French economic difficulties in maintaining an effective military force in Africa (Leboeuf and Quénot-Suarez 2014).

On the other hand, military cooperation becomes essential for giving local states the means to be responsible for their own security. Operation Enduring Freedom—Trans Sahara was inserted into the TSCPT framework from 2005, in order to improve counterterrorism training and equipping in the area. Moreover, the Defense Department became responsible for different training programmes that also concerned the institutional functioning of local defence forces, while the State Department followed the education of civil functionaries.

Secondly, the American response must be regional. The terrorist threat is transnational by its very nature: terrorists are able to exploit the fragility of local states and their lack of control over their borders, and their agenda is not limited to the territory of a single country. The GSPC-Aqim, along with the transnational criminal networks which augmented their activities at the beginning of the 2000s, transformed the Sahara-Sahel into a “regional security complex” (Buzan and Wæver 2003), i.e. a geopolitical space defined by the common security threat and by the operating capacities of destabilizing actors. Only a shared effort can defeat an enemy that does not recognize frontiers and challenges the territorial sovereignty of local countries.

The regional approach completes and expands a strategy that accords a central role to states in the fight against instability and safe havens. As the US has to deal with weak and fragile states, working with all countries that share frontiers with the ungoverned space should obtain different advantages: it can reduce costs and burdens (on material, political and symbolic sides) for local allies, while it allows to the US to “diversify the risk”, as it can count on more than just one ally on the

ground. Sahelian countries have been exhorted to create common security institutions, while since 2005 the US has organized a new form of Exercise Flintlock, which involved special forces and battalions from all the countries of the region (Fellows 2005).

As underlined in the first part of this chapter, the same definition of the Sahara-Sahel as an autonomous geopolitical space has been crucially influenced by American initiatives. Observing the lines of activity of the perceived threats, and focusing on the shared elements of dis-order since the launching of the PSI, the US gave borders to an “unfixed” region (Bonnecase and Brachet 2013). Not only local actors started to accept a common identity based on a shared danger, but also international actors embraced the same American frame. During the last few years, more than a dozen “Sahel strategies” have been adopted by various states and organizations.¹⁰ Even if “every actor conceive the Sahel according to its needs, its interests and its perceptions” (Helly et al. 2015), they all followed the same definitional path that brought from the Sahel, to the recently configured Northwest Africa region (Whitehouse and Strazzari 2015).

According to the third rule affecting US policy towards the Sahel, American initiatives must follow an integrated and comprehensive approach, both at organizational and implementation levels. The TSCTP is a State-led and State-funded programme implemented by Defense and USAID functionalities.¹¹ The distribution of the roles within the TSCTP anticipated the way the US decided to organize AFRICOM, the Unified Combatant Command for Africa, created in 2008—with the difference that, in this case, the leading player is the DoD (Burgess 2008; Francis 2010).

The US opted for an integrated approach, in order to assimilate de-radicalization and institution-building initiatives within the same counterterrorism framework. As a consequence of this choice, TSCTP had to fulfill five main tasks: (a) build law enforcement capacity; (b) support efforts to counter terrorism financing; (c) reinforce military capacity to counter terrorism; (d) enhance regional capacity to secure borders; and (e) counter the spread of violent extremist ideology. The DoS was responsible for the first two tasks, while State and Defense together had the responsibility for strengthening local security capacities. Countering violent extremism was a task assigned to the DoS, DoD and the USAID: the DoS and DoD promoted public diplomacy, i.e. the diffusion of a positive image of the US through public initiatives, while the USAID was called to work with the most vulnerable subjects,¹² in order to contrast the diffusion of the Islamist ideology.

Not only was the “classic” train and equipment of local military forces organized under the TSCTP framework: the DoS tried to become responsible for the education of local functionaries and attempted to engage local ruling class in the process of

¹⁰Among others, Sahelian strategies have been adopted by the UN, the EU, the African Union, ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), France and Denmark.

¹¹Between 2005 and 2013, the TSCTP received more than half a billion dollars (Government Accountability Office 2008, 2014).

¹²The main focus is dedicated to the youth, the unemployed, and to people living in peripheral, underdeveloped areas of the country.

project-planning and spending, while USAID promoted a soft security approach, based on the spread of peace and anti-extremist messages among local population. Nevertheless, if we consider how the money has been managed, we clearly see that the Pentagon took the informal lead of the programme since its beginnings: between 2005 and 2008 the DoD directly spent and managed \$256 million, leaving to the DoS and USAID \$96 million together (Government Accountability Office 2008, 2014).

4 Between Engagement and Failures in the Sahel: Is the US an Indispensable Actor in the Region?

Because of the role being played by Mali in the American approach, the 2012 Malian crisis put dramatically into question the US strategy in the region. Local armies, starting with the Malian one, showed their total lack of cohesion and preparation in fighting against rebels and terrorists groups. After the first defeats in the North, the Malian army preferred to react through a *coup d'état* instead of trying to halt the advance of rebels. For several and even contradictory reasons, Algeria refused to take the lead of a local response to the crisis. Meanwhile, Aqim became a well settled actor which started to participate and get benefits from the different illegal traffics concentrated in the region (Harmon 2014).

American action in the Sahara-Sahel failed to bring order to the region for different reasons. First of all, the “ungoverned space” model that inspired and influenced the policy did not really coincide with the effective functioning of the local governance. Sahelian governments did not actually leave part of their territories in a political vacuum, but they used strategies other than governing in order to maintain an indirect control. As they did not have the means to impose their direct rule, they preferred to coopt, negotiate, make alliances or obstruct local actors, trying to pursue an informal equilibrium in the distribution of power, wealth and violence (Briscoe 2014; Raleigh and Dowd 2013). Almost paradoxically, placing security and borders control at the top of the agenda gave more power to criminal and terrorist groups, as they were among the only actors with the means and the resources to carry on their activities, corrupting or coopting security forces, employing local people and redistributing a (small) part of the profits. Since the middle of the 2000s, drug traffickers, but also Aqim, thanks to its “kidnapping industry”, have taken increasing control over economic activities in the region, earning local legitimization and penetrating the political and social system (Harmon 2014; Moulaye 2014).

On the other hand, the US showed to be unable to stop predatory actions by local elites, or to persuade them to adopt cooperative behaviour. In Mali, the US never obtained a full commitment by the government, in its fight against Aqim. For president Touré, Malian priority was to manage Tuareg independentism, more than

trying to expel Aqim from the national territory (Chauzal and van Damme 2015).¹³ Since 2009 Malian army started to occupy Northern territories, presenting this choice as a consequence of American requests to intervene against Aqim. In the following years, Malian army showed to be more active in perpetrating a policy of “soft discrimination” against Tuareg people, than in fighting against terrorist groups (Briscoe 2014; Harmon 2014). Similarly, local elites diverted most of the development and military aid, in order to pursue local agendas and specific interests. With regard to military cooperation, American officials on the ground were fully aware of the total lack of preparation of Malian soldiers, and saw the diffused corruption among Malian civil and military officials. Nevertheless, they had neither the means nor the will to sanction these behaviours. As a consequence, alleged military elite units formed by the US were among the first groups in 2012 who refused to fight, abandoning their positions and their arms, or even deciding to defect and follow the rebel advance (Galy 2013; Powelson 2013).

To sum up, American objectives in the region evolved from the early 1990s, following a changing definition of order that was influenced by the 9/11 events. During the first decade after the end of the Cold War, democracy and economic development were seen as the two fundamentals elements, able to integrate Africa inside the American-led international liberal order. After 9/11, good governance substituted democracy and market economy as the American main priorities in the region, along with the need to restore the full sovereign capacities of local states. Nevertheless, for the US, bringing order in the region primarily meant producing a minimal level of stability. This implies that the political, economic and social conditions should reach a durable and shared equilibrium, capable of averting the explosion of violent conflicts or, even more importantly, the growth of transnational threats. After 9/11, removing the terrorist menace and contrasting extremist ideologies became the main expressions of order, in peripheral areas such as the Sahel.

As a consequence of the Malian crisis, the Sahara-Sahel has probably never been as unstable and *ungoverned* as it is today. The influence of dysfunctional local institutions, and the impact of destabilizing transnational dynamics, along with a limited level of engagement by international actors, has prevented a sustainable stability from being created in the region. At the same time, the current situation shows that the US must be considered as a crucial actor in the region, even if its reduced and inefficient engagement has prevented it from introducing a sufficient level of order. On the one hand, Sahelian states were revealed as being weak against destabilizing actors, while local institutions did not conform to liberal vision of governance. On the other hand, even a strategy of burden sharing with other international partners has recently been put into question. American support for the international French-led intervention in Mali was essential on a diplomatic, logistic and economic level. France has been the only actor that agreed to put boots on the

¹³See, for example, WikiLeaks files ‘Malian President addresses diplomatic corps on Northern Mali’, 10Bamako11_a, dated 7 January 2010, or ‘Aqim seeking intermediary in Mauritania via Malian government’, 10Bamako17_a, dated 12 January 2010.

ground in order to stabilize the region by the use of military force. However, it is not clear if the country is still able to maintain a long-lasting engagement in the area. Other actors such as the EU, the African Union or even China showed themselves to be ready to play a role in specific domains,¹⁴ but they cannot replace the US in their role of security provider.

Given these circumstances, will the Sahara-Sahel and Africa in general, remain places of interest and (limited) engagement for the US? This question has become even more pressing since the election of Donald Trump as president of the US. The few words the president spoke about Africa suggest that the continent will not attract his attention (Allison 2016). In this sense, the situation resembles that of the mid-1990s, when a lack of interest characterized the American approach towards the continent. At the same time, so long as fighting terrorism remains a strategic imperative for the US, Africa will maintain its place in US foreign policy. The Obama administration showed that even after the end of the “GWOT frame”, fighting instability and transnational threats in world peripheries still has an important place within the American global strategy. President Trump will inherit a complex bureaucratic structure that has already demonstrated a strong resilience in the face of political or strategic changes. Consequently, we can presume that the American presence and action on the continent will be maintained. However, it is more difficult to say if, without clear political guidelines, the US will be able to understand past errors and adapt them in their future approach.

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¹⁴In the Sahara-Sahel the EU is the first international donor, while a Chinese contingent is participating to the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali.

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Mirage of Retrenchment: Obama and the Syrian Conflict

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Abstract This chapter analyses US policy toward the Syrian conflict under the Obama administration. It critically engages with perceptions of disengagement and waning influence of the US in the Syrian conflict and more broadly in the Middle East. What is usually perceived as retrenchment and disengagement of the US is viewed in the chapter as ambiguity resulting from the strategy of the Obama administration to pursue US objectives through indirect and undercover operations. The chapter analyses continuity and change from Bush to Obama in US policies towards the Middle East, as well as the strategies through which the US has pursued its imperial ambitions in the Syrian conflict. In doing so, the chapter highlights that Obama's policy of leading from behind was actually not a sign of US decline in the Middle East, but of resilience and leadership by stealth.

1 Introduction

On 23 January 2017, military representatives of the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition met in Astana (Kazakhstan) to negotiate, under the auspices of Russia, Turkey and Iran. What was particularly striking in these talks was the conspicuous underrepresentation of the US, which only sent its ambassador in Kazakhstan instead of a fully-fledged delegation. It is unclear whether this was more the result of disarray of the Trump administration and its isolationist rhetoric, or something more significant and in line with the US approach of Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama. Whatever the internal reason, this has been interpreted by external observers as a significant development. This is not only because the US failed to play its traditional role of bringing together the Middle East warring parties, but also

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because the US rivals, Russia and Iran, took on this role, ultimately at the expense of US and its allies and clients.¹ This has been read as evidence of American retrenchment and disengagement from the Middle East (Sen 2016). It sparked widespread criticism from even within the State Department, the Senate and the US Army.² With Russia and Iran expanding their role in the Arab Levant, and creating one of the greatest humanitarian disasters since World War II,³ the Syrian expert Charles Lister saw Obama's approach as a "definition of insanity" (Lister 2017).

The reluctance of the Obama administration to intervene militarily in Syria seemed consistent with previous statements that a military solution to the conflict was simply "impossible". However, what complicates this storyline is that the US did actually engage in fighting through undercover operations and indirect involvement, by supporting, financially and militarily, state and non-state intermediaries and proxies, as well as by employing Special Forces and drone operations. What is crucial is not so much the ambiguity surrounding the US approach. Rather, it is the disparity between the discourse of reluctance and active involvement in the conflict through non-conventional means. What explains Obama's approach toward the Syrian conflict? Central to answering the question is a better understanding of the duality between public rhetoric and actual policy.

This chapter attempts to explain the US approach to the Syrian conflict as a function of Obama's purpose to deconstruct images of American imperial hubris stemming from the US global war on terror, whilst remaining fully committed to it. In so doing—the chapter argues—Obama has opted for a dual policy of public and shadow engagement in Middle East conflicts, especially in the war in Syria. On the one hand, Obama pursued a public strategy of retrenchment and reassertion of the US role through multilateral engagement and cooperation, commitment to international law, and relentless support for the diplomatic solution of the Syrian conflict. On the other hand, the US engaged in a shadow war of intelligence and technology in Syria, aimed at containing the Islamic State (ISIS) and other jihadi groups. Put differently, amidst the US withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, the consequences of "imperial overstretch" (Burbach and Tarbell 2004) and widespread opposition towards new military interventions in the Middle East (Pew Research Center 2012), the Obama doctrine in Syria was one of pursuing US national interests from behind, whilst shifting public responsibilities to others—as

¹The US has led the negotiations of all the major Middle East conflicts since the 1970s. These include the different rounds of negotiation between the Israelis and the Palestinians; the 1979 Camp David Agreement between Israel and Egypt; the 1989 Ta'if agreement, which put an end to the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990); the 1990 unification of Yemen; and the 1994 peace between Israel and Jordan.

²On 15 June 2016, 51 diplomats and mid-level officials signed a letter protesting against the President's caution over regime-change in Syria and calling for military strikes against Syrian President, Bashar al-Asad, in response to his manifold violations of ceasefires (Landler 2016).

³The conflict in Syria has claimed more than 250,000 lives (UN News Centre 2017) and produced 6.3 million internally displaced persons, 4.9 million in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, and 4.8 million Syrians who have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq (UNHCR 2017).

epitomized by his foreign policy maxim, “Don’t do stupid stuff”. This entails enhancing trans-regional cooperation through both formal multilateral engagement and informal cooperation, when it comes to sharing costs and burdens, but also seeking goals unilaterally when vital US interests are at stake.

Against this backdrop, the chapter analyses Obama’s policy in the context of broader trends of continuity and change in US foreign policy, and ponders whether changes are related to style or substance, especially between Obama and Bush. It is divided into three sections: in the first section, I elaborate on the rhetorical and actual realities of US retrenchment, amidst a world order marked by American preponderance and imperial reach. In the second section, I explore the conditions under which Obama decided whether or not to intervene against the regime of Bashar al-Asad in Syria. I show that, whilst drifting away from Bush’s imperial style of conducting the global war on terror, the Obama administration has actually enhanced its commitment to it. Finally, I analyse the practices of US shadow intervention in the war in Syria and argue that the US has not actually disengaged from Syria and the Middle East, but has merely transformed the techniques of pursuing its interests in the region.

2 Obama and US Retrenchment

“If John McCain had been elected in 2008, you would still have seen some degree of retrenchment” (Goldberg 2016). This statement by Stephen Sestanovich, from the Council of Foreign Relations, suggests that the post-2008 retrenchment policy was not just the fruit of Obama’s presidential agency, but rather a structural trend of US global engagement. In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, and the two resource-draining wars of Iraq and Afghanistan, it became a necessity more than a choice for the US to reduce the financial burden of international engagement. With a price tag of \$4 trillion to \$6 trillion respectively, these two wars had already become unpopular among US taxpayers before Barak Obama took office in 2009. In this sense, retrenchment seemed like a natural choice, after eight years of expensive military fatigue.

Retrenchment is seen as a strategy of reducing and sharing costs and responsibilities in maintaining the international order. In Sestanovich’s words, it means “pulling back, spending less, cutting risk, and shifting burdens to allies” (Goldberg 2016). More generally, retrenchment has been associated with disengagement and hegemonic decline, for decline would set in when we see “the economic costs of maintaining the status quo to rise faster than the economic capacity to support the status quo” (Gilpin 1981, p. 156).

Yet, the debate about the US hegemonic decline and disengagement in the 21st century—especially after the 2008 financial crisis—can also be associated with the normal recalibration of hegemonic rule. In this sense, the US would not be disengaging from its global commitments, but instead restructuring its presence in the global arena, especially as it seems to be drifting away from unipolarity (Brooks

et al. 2012). By echoing the 1980s' debate between the declinists and those who challenged the views and myths of US lost hegemony (Keohane 1984; Strange 1987), the 21st-century debate has so far focused on systemic factors that may produce illusions of US decline—and even actual pulling back—without altering the dominant position and structural power of the US in the international system (Cox 2002; Brown 2013). Incidentally, from the Pivot to Asia to NATO and Europe, it seems that the US under Obama has not pursued a strategy of disengagement, but one of cautious reassertion of its dominant role, more selective and centred on American national interest and security, and yet pursued through enhanced multilateral engagement (Heisbourg and Valášek 2012; Simón 2015; Silove 2016; Waalkes 2017).

Paul Wohlforth, for instance, suggests that scholars should pay more attention to causes of decline that are “exogenous to hegemony and the international system and those that are causally connected to being the hegemon or pursuing hegemony” (2014, p. 111). In fact, despite claims about the end of the “unipolar moment”, American power preponderance still relies on the fact that, notwithstanding growing and differentiating threats, there is no significant balancing towards the power of the US (Pape 2005; Brooks and Wohlforth 2005; Craig 2009).

Incidentally, Obama elucidated this principle right after the nuclear deal with Iran, when he said:

We are powerful enough to be able to test these propositions without putting ourselves at risk. And that's the thing... people don't seem to understand... [With] respect to Iran, a [large] country, a dangerous country, one that has engaged in activities that resulted in the death of U.S. citizens...the truth of the matter is: Iran's defense budget is \$30 billion. Our defense budget is closer to \$600 billion. Iran understands that they cannot fight us...You asked about an Obama doctrine. The doctrine is: We will engage, but we preserve all our capabilities (Friedman 2015).

After the end of the Cold War—by virtue of the deep interdependence of the world economy, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and also the rise of asymmetric/terror attacks and cyberattacks—hegemony cannot be maintained and reproduced only through systemic war and deep financial engagement in other countries. In fact, although the global war on terror, initiated by George W. Bush after 9/11, targeted two specific countries, revealing the pernicious and misleading continuity of territorial conquest and control in the belligerent mentality of the US, the decline of the great power threat and the emergence of impalpable and non-territorial challenges, which do not follow the logics of state and inter-state security (Agnew 1994; Vaughan-Williams 2009), have brought about the development of new understandings of balancing and counteracting to threats.

The recent evolution in the practice of the war on terror and counterinsurgency (COIN) indeed conceptualizes threats as omnipresent and constantly moving, and therefore does not entail territorial limitations to the deployment of forces and action. This is epitomized by the emergence of terror groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, which constantly produce overlapping spatial conceptions of sovereignties, as well as ambiguous legal frameworks of belligerent action, since the enemy tends to claim authority over specific territories and then moves and reproduces itself

elsewhere (Calculli and Strazzari 2017). In fact, US intelligence service is active in all corners of the globe, aided by satellites that help identify and monitoring moving targets. As US intelligence-spending has dramatically increased in the wake of the war on terror—especially since 2005, when the cost of intelligence ramped up to \$60 billion, doubling the spending of the previous year—there has been a development of a new political economy of private contractor companies specializing in “geographical intelligence” (Crampton et al. 2014, p. 199).

The developing definition of this new form of threat and its prioritization for US national security, especially after the 9/11 attacks, has led to the emergence of a new paradigm of American engagement in the world, especially in the Middle East. As the proliferation of non-state armed groups in the Middle East, Pakistan and Afghanistan—what Fred Halliday (2005, p. 130) labelled as “the greater West Asian crisis”—has actually been exacerbated, and not contained, by the war on terror, the US has adapted its belligerent action to the new security challenges, shifting from classical warfare to undercover operations. The US approach to these new threats in fact goes far beyond the domain of traditional interstate relations, for the ontology of the enemy is different from that of the state, and thus requires unconventional modes of balancing and counteracting. From supporting special operations with the use of drones, which, according to Bureau of Investigative Journalism (2016), have killed nearly 4800 people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen from 2009 to 2016, there is a new form of engagement of US Foreign Policy. Also, this constitutes a “new political economy”, whose contours “are difficult to identify due to official policies keeping much relevant information secret” (Crampton et al. 2014, p. 197). To put it differently, as the modes of confronting these new threats escape traditional definitions of international/interstate engagement, the legal and financial definition of this engagement also tends to fall in the shadow of the state, that is its intelligence service, whereas the state facade gives the impression of commitment to international norms and procedures.

Against this backdrop, I suggest that analysing the US approach to the new Middle East insecurity, and especially the post-2011 Syrian conflict, requires keeping state and non-state threats as two discrete ontological domains, which in turn shape two separate logics of US national security and international engagement. Therefore, whereas retrenchment and multilateralism appear to be the most visible features of US foreign policy in the Middle East, when dealing with both rival and allied states, there is a less visible dimension of American engagement that deserves to be better investigated. This new dimension of US engagement represents the latest evolution of the global war on terror.

2.1 Obama, the Middle East Quagmire from the Bush Legacy to the War in Syria

Obama’s approach to the Middle East has revitalized the debate over US hegemonic decline and retrenchment, especially after the 2011 Arab uprisings. In light of

Washington's external penetration and subordination of the Middle East (Brown 1984), the domino effect of the revolts, with its alteration of the regional security status quo, was a matter of concern for US interests in the region. The absence/failure of indigenous leadership—due to systematic foreign and predatory access to Middle East resources, and control/limitation of Middle Eastern states' military power (Brownlee 2002; Fawcett 2011; Hinnebusch 2013)—has made America, since the late 1970s, not just the “external” hegemony, but rather, a full-fledged “regional” power (Migdal 2014).

Since the 1940s, the US has been the main importer of oil from the Persian Gulf, especially the Saudi Kingdom. Washington not only established special trade and political relations with Riyadh, but also became the main external vector of Saudi state-building and regime survival (Vitalis 2009). In addition to Saudi Arabia, Egypt is a pillar of US interests in the region. Since 1979, the US has provided military aid of to the tune of \$1.2 billion per year, in exchange for the continuity of the Camp David peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. With the Gulf war of 1990–1991, the US frustrated Saddam Hussein's hegemonic ambitions over the Arabian Gulf and the whole Middle East, perceived as the major threat to American access to cheap oil. With the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Washington finally secured its access to Arab oil without the need for political alliances, and eliminated the possibility for Iraq to build a regional leadership in the Arab World, thus removing the remaining constraints to US and Israeli interests in the region (Burbach and Tarbell 2004, pp. 96–100; Hinnebusch 2011, p. 238). The post-Saddam Iraqi political establishment was turned into an American client, with the flow of aid fuelling internal corruption, and political rivalries (Al-Ali 2014).

Yet, the Bush administration hoped to conduct a rapid and cheap high-tech war, but ended up delving into the unintended—and perverse—consequences of imperial overstretching. In fact, the strong ideological rationale (Ryan 2002)⁴ and ill-starred strategy of US nation-building in post-Saddam Iraq, actually prevented the reconstruction of the state, and produced new sources of insecurity. First of all, the purge of the Ba'th party marginalized from public life many Iraqis who had been only nominal members of the party in Saddam's totalitarian state, and were not part of the establishment. Second, the imposition of a Lebanese-styled parliamentary system Iraq—with a formal distribution of political representation amongst the confessional or ethnic groups of the country, in relation to their demographic weight—produced a counterproductive effect: instead of enhancing pluralism and inclusion, it actually *institutionalized* and crystalized the sectarian rift between Sunni and Shi'ia (Calculli 2016, pp. 25–26). The monopolization of the parliament and state institutions by the new dominant Shi'a parties only succeeded in producing more exclusion and marginalization of entire segments of the Iraqi population, and a severe underrepresentation of Sunni-populated provinces of Iraq, such as Nineveh and Anbar. All this created the conditions for a withdrawal of political loyalty, the proliferation of militias and the fragmentation of Iraqi sovereignty. Finally, the

⁴Iraq was defined as part of the “axis of evil”.

dismantling (instead of the reform) of the Iraqi Army—considered unreliable by American authorities in Baghdad for having resisted US troops advancing toward Baghdad during the 2003 invasion (Al-Marashi 2008, pp. 145–46)—deprived Iraq of its main security institution and indirectly empowered non-state armed groups, clashing with one another and claiming authority over parts of the Iraqi territory.

Therefore, when Obama took up office, pragmatic considerations of retrenchment led to the need to relinquish the legacy of George W. Bush’s foreign policy in the Middle East. The war on terror had created grey areas of international legal action: the status of detainees and suspects of terrorism fell into a “state of exception”, which emerged more clearly with the exposure of systematic ill-treatment and torture carried out by US intelligence agents, marines and contractors in Guantanamo, as well as in the US detention camp of Abu Ghraib in Iraq (Greenberg and Dratel 2005; Khalili 2013). With the American counterinsurgency in Iraq becoming a laboratory of imperial brutal practices, all this created the conditions for intractable instability in Iraq, and triggered anti-American sentiments in the Middle East and beyond. Furthermore, Bush’s blatant disdain for multilateral engagement had been detrimental to international legality and legitimacy, as well as to the institutions that were accountable for it (Falk 2005; Ralph 2013, pp. 23–54). All this was perceived as an *anomaly* of US interventionism. Especially after failing to turn the allegation of Saddam Hussein’s Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) into proof of an actual threat, there was a need to return to a *new normal* in US foreign policy (Gerges 2012, pp. 89–114).

Barak Obama announced the “new beginning” of Arab-US relations during his famous speech at the Cairo University on 4 June 2009. This new turn had to be “based on mutual respect [and] a sustained effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other” (Obama 2009a). He also stated its preference for a multilateral approach when dealing with common problems:

[H]uman history has often been a record of nations and tribes — and, yes, religions, subjugating one another in pursuit of their own interests. Yet in this new age, such attitudes are self-defeating. Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail. ... Our problems must be dealt with through partnership, our progress must be shared (Obama 2009a).

Yet, aside from Obama’s inspiring internationalism, the Cairo speech already contained the pragmatic features of the new approach for the Middle East (Huber 2015). A key element of his intervention at Cairo University concerns externally-driven regime-change:

America does not presume to know what is best for everyone—he said—But I do have an unyielding belief that all people everywhere yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed (Obama 2009a).

From Obama’s perspective, this played as a principle of dealing with the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings, that is: not taking the responsibility for regime-change and refraining from engaging in nation-building abroad. In 2012, he clearly stated: “After more than a decade of war, it is time to focus on nation-building here at home” (Obama 2012). Also, Obama’s internationalism

during his early days as US President remained anchored to pragmatic stances that actually marked continuity with, rather than rupture of, the Bush era. In fact, Obama amplified the war on terror, and remained fully committed to it, in spite of completing the full withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. In his famous 2007 *Foreign Affairs* piece, written two years before entering the White House, he defined the priorities for US and international security in terms that did not differ from those used by the neo-conservative administration of George W. Bush. He argued that:

[threats] come from weapons that can kill on a mass scale and from global terrorists who respond to alienation or perceived injustice with murderous nihilism. They come from rogue states allied to terrorists and from rising powers that could challenge both America and the international foundation of liberal democracy. They come from weak states that cannot control their territory or provide for their people (Obama 2007).

Whereas Obama took office in 2009, in a spirit of great discontinuity from his predecessor, he maintained the idea that the major threat to US and global security stemmed from terror groups, and that this represented a challenge far different from conventional threats stemming from states. He highlighted this conviction even during the speech he gave at the reception of the Nobel Prize for Peace:

There will be times when ... we will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified...I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake, evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al-Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason (Obama 2009b).

This conception of unconventional threats, originating from inherently irrational actors, thus not addressable by classical instruments of reasons, underpins the whole logic of the war on terror and its *exceptional* neglect for territorial/spatial boundaries, as well as the legal and rational limits of the use of force. With the post-2011 Middle East becoming the tinderbox of jihadi armed struggle and quest for authority and territory, Obama not only pushed for a development of the war on terror, but also crafted a different pattern of international behaviour (Ralph 2013; Bentley and Holland 2017). This pattern emerged clearly in the Obama approach to Syria, which even led to open disagreement within his own administration.

Since the very beginning of the conflict, Obama's intention was to delegate responsibilities and shift burdens to US Middle Eastern allies, especially Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, countries that were eager to sponsor and arm the opposition against Assad forces. This did not entail disengaging from the conflict, but coordinating with partners, whilst refraining from directly causing regime-change in order to avoid the obligation of dealing with both the expected and unintended consequences thereof.

3 Obama, a Reluctant Warrior in Syria?

US-Syria relations have been marked by long-standing tension and mistrust, with Damascus being one of the few Arab capitals to remain committed to the war against Israel and Western imperialism in the Middle East (Lesch 1992; Hinnebusch 2010). Amidst the Bush war on terror, the US labelled Syria as a “sponsor of terrorism” and included it—together with Libya and Cuba—amongst the countries “beyond the axis of evil”. Bush’s memoirs have revealed that, after Iraq, the US seriously considered invading Syria and Iran (MacAskill and McGreal 2010). In December 2003, the US Congress had already approved the *Syrian Accountability Act and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA)* aimed to put pressure on Asad and force him to withdraw his troops from Lebanon. The goal was to weaken the “Resistance movement” (harakat al-muqawama) formed by Syria, Iran and the Lebanese Party and armed group, Hezbollah. In 2005, the US suspended diplomatic ties with the Asad regime, following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, in Beirut, for which the US indirectly blamed President Bashar al-Asad, by closing the American embassy in Damascus. Yet, the American-driven regime-change in Baghdad in 2003 resulted in unintended effects for Washington: it actually empowered, instead of straining, the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis, as Saddam Hussein had long been the major container of Teheran’s power projection over the Arab Levant, as well as the strongest balancing force against Syria (Calculli 2015).

Ironically, 2011 opened with a significant thaw in US-Syrian relations. Whilst the Arab uprising erupted in Tunisia between December 2010 and January 2011, Washington restored the diplomatic ties with Damascus. When the first protests erupted in the southern city of Dara’a in March 2011, President Obama refrained from calling for Bashar al-Asad to step down—what he eventually did in August 2011, when the six-month-long peaceful civil strife turned into a violent conflict. Obama’s U-turn was meant to indirectly support Turkey’s sponsorship of the first anti-Asad armed group, the “Free Syrian Army” (FSA), created on 29 July 2011, and led by Colonel al-Asaad. Also, the creation of the “Syrian National Council” (SNC) in Istanbul on 1 October 2011 obtained Washington’s approval on 5 December 2011: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, recognized Burhan Ghalioun, the then leader of the SNC, as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. This, while the US embassy in Damascus remained open until February 2012.

The US in 2012 supported the beginning of a diplomatic multilateral process under the United Nations’ umbrella, involving Russia as the main international sponsor of the Syrian regime: the peace talks started in Geneva—the so-called “Geneva action group”—under the supervision of Kofi Annan. In June 2012, they released a communiqué according to which both the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition committed themselves to a “transitional governing body” to be formed “on the basis of mutual consent”. Yet, the diplomatic process was overwhelmed by the exacerbation of violence on the ground.

There was no evidence of US direct support for Syrian rebels until 2012, when the US decided to provide the FSA with non-lethal items. This turned out to be a major matter of division between the White House and the State Department, then led by Hillary Clinton, who favoured direct armament of the rebels and taking a more assertive position against Bashar al-Asad. Openly criticizing Obama for not arming rebels, in an interview during the Presidential Campaign, Clinton said: “great nations need organizing principles, and ‘Don’t do stupid stuff’ is not an organizing principle” (Goldberg 2014).

Yet, in 2016 *The New York Times* (NYT) released a report according to which even in 2012, the CIA—authorized by the White House under the Timber Sycamore programme for providing non-lethal equipment to Syrian rebels—was sidelining a number of Saudi, Qatari and Turkish operations in support of the opposition in Syria (Mazzetti and Apuzzo 2016). Revelations about the US clandestine provision of weapons to Syrian rebels, authorized by Obama, have appeared in other reports, citing anonymous government sources (Humud et al. 2017, p. 28). According to the NYT report, the CIA relied mainly on Saudi money at a time when President Obama was inviting US Middle East allies to take more responsibilities in regional security. Under Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Saudi intelligence was ordered to buy thousands of AK-47s and millions of rounds ammunitions from Eastern Europe to the Balkan countries, to be directed to the Syrian rebels. The report suggests that the decision of Obama to finally authorize the delivering of lethal ammunition to Syrian rebels in 2013 came as a measure to “try to gain control of the apparent free-for-all in the region” (Mazzetti and Apuzzo 2016), so as to avoid exposure of US involvement in the shadow of Syrian violence.

The Saudi-CIA intelligence connection is controversial when it comes to an indirect provision of weapons to jihadi groups in Syria that the US has labelled as “terrorist groups”. Among these groups is Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN), the first jihadi group to emerge in the conflict in November 2011, when it used suicide bombers to attack government positions in Damascus—thus initiating a trend of radicalization of the Syrian revolt. JaN was an al-Qaeda affiliate until 2016, when it strategically rebranded itself as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (JFS), in an attempt to enter the negotiation process. After its appearance in the conflict, it soon became the hegemonic group in the Syrian opposition. It has been documented that JaN directly bought antitank missiles from the FSA, which, in turn, received them from a Saudi shipment (Cafarella 2014, p. 19).

Amidst such a hybrid form of engagement in Syria, based on US informal complicity with its Middle Eastern allies, the US revealed the dual logic of its engagement in the Syrian conflict in August-September 2013. Back in 2012, President Obama had stated:

We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized ... We have communicated in no uncertain terms with every player in the region that that’s a red line for us and that there would be enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons (Obama 2012).

This apparently off-the-cuff statement came to haunt Obama on 21 August 2013: on the day in which a UN mission tasked with monitoring the alleged use of chemical weapons landed in Damascus, a chemical attack occurred on the Ghouta, in the outskirts of Damascus, killing 1429 civilians (Human Rights Watch 2013). In the following weeks, Secretary of State John Kerry delivered a passionate speech calling on Obama to take a side, and the US seemed prepared for striking Syrian positions in Syria. Yet, in a surprising U-turn, President Obama delayed the attack, saying he first had to seek the approval of the Congress. On 11 September 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin wrote an op-ed column on *The New York Times*, calling for more multilateral cooperation in order to solve the conflict in Syria (Putin 2013).

Against the backdrop of potential American military intervention, the Security Council rapidly passed a resolution—Resolution 2118—condemning the attack on the Ghouta, and calling for a complete destruction of chemical weapons in Syria. It also threatened the Syrian government that, in the case of non-compliance, additional measures would have been taken under Chap. 7. The resolution paved the way for a multilateral agreement, sponsored by Russia and the US: the Syrian regime agreed to give up all the chemical weapons present over the Syrian territory. After labelling the attack on Ghouta as a cowardly act, John Kerry stated that the Syrian regime deserved credit for its collaboration.

Obama's U-turn in September 2013 became the epitome of Obama's "Don't do stupid stuff doctrine", as well as the main reference of internal and international criticism to his approach. Obama showed the greatest respect for domestically legitimate action, when calling for Congress approval to justify a military intervention in Syria. Many precedents suggest he did not need one, whilst a hostile Congress was liable to mobilize against the President's decision (Hendrickson 2015, p. 114). Therefore, Obama's call for Congress approval seems rather a sign of his wait-and-see approach. Finally, his decision not to strike was compensated for by the UN Security Council Resolution, and the possibility to engage in a multilateral action, to bypass the chemical impasse.

Furthermore, Obama's reluctance to intervene in Syria was also in line with the general domestic support for a military engagement against Damascus. According to a survey of the Pew Research Center, published in May 2012, only 25% of US citizens were in favour of striking Asad (Pew Research Center 2012). It showed coherence with Obama's purpose of "doing nation-building at home" and drawing a contrast with the interventionist style of George W. Bush. In his interview with Jeffrey Goldberg on *The Atlantic*, he defended his decision not to strike Syria, noting it would have required "putting large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground, uninvited, without any international law mandate" (Goldberg 2016). Yet, Obama's Syrian U-turn in 2013 has also drawn a temporal line, marking the reintegration of Asad within the international community. Whereas before September 2013, Obama and his two heads of the State Department, Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, had called the Syrian President to step back, after 2013, the fate of Bashar al-Asad was not been put into question, even though the US remained formally committed to a political transition.

3.1 *US Shadow Engagement in Syrian Violence*

Whereas *publically* acting as a reluctant warrior, after 2013 Obama continued to militarily engage *from behind*. With the eruption of the Syrian war, he accelerated the war on terror, through traditional and non-traditional forms of warfare, which included:

- Training and Equipment programmes for rebels
- Airstrikes
- Aerial support for anti-ISIS rebel groups
- Special Forces ground operations
- Drone attacks

Especially after ISIS proclaimed the Caliphate in Mosul (Iraq) in June 2014, and seized Raqqa in Syria, *de facto* dismantling the border between Syria and Iraq, the US government enhanced its counterinsurgency operations in both Syria and Iraq—supporting the Iraqi army and conducting Special Forces operations in Iraq, but also engaging in training and equipping selected rebel forces in Syria.

In 2014, the US government allocated \$500 million, through the “Counterterrorism Partnership Fund Money” to train a force of 3000 in Fiscal Year 2015 and 5400 in 2016 (Humud et al. 2017, p. 25). A successful part of the operation involves arming a Kurdish-Arab coalition known as “Syrian Democratic Forces” (SDF). This force is specialized in fighting against ISIS, and has been crucial in retaking areas of the Syrian territory—such as Mambij—previously seized by the terror group. US Special Forces dependent on the Pentagon have also taken part in ground operations, fighting together with Kurdish forces in the northeastern part of Syria (Spencer 2016). Other forms of engagement include classical airstrikes, which have targeted military bases or deposits of ISIS and JaN/JFS (Dearden 2017).

Although the programme that started in Jordan under the supervision of US military training personnel was abandoned, as US-trained rebels in the southeast—the “New Syrian Army” (NSA)—were reported as handing weapons over to radical groups, the Pentagon remained engaged in the conflict and undertook a similar plan to train and arm rebels in 2016 (McLeary 2016). Yet, the ambiguities of this shadow engagement led to some paradoxes: for instance, in March 2016, Pentagon-backed SDF advancing towards the central town of Marea fought against CIA-armed militia Fursan al-Haq (Bulos et al. 2016). Also, in July 2016, members of Nour al-Din al-Zinki, a group armed by the US government, appeared in a video, beheading a young member of the pro-government force Liwa’ al-Quds. Furthermore, when US Special Forces entered Syria, together with Turkish troops, amidst “Operation Noble Lance”, US-armed rebels kicked American soldiers out of the territory, labelling them as apostates (*kufar*) (Starr and Browne 2016). Nevertheless, the continued engagement of the US serves two purposes: on the one hand, it helps to contain ISIS and JaN; on the other hand, it balances Russian and Iranian action in Syria, forcing rivals to spend more, engage more and deal with the

international exposure of violations of humanitarian law in the conflict. Yet, the US use of drones in Syria and in other Middle East countries has been far more controversial. In fact, between the summers of 2015 and 2016, the White House assessed that drones had killed 35 civilians in Iraq and Syria, and in July 2016, a US drone killed up to 200 civilians who were fleeing ISIS-controlled Mambij in Syria (Bearak 2016). Yet, not only is the so called “collateral damage” of drone operations (which are cloaked in secrecy and have no traceable human responsibility) unclearly regulated by humanitarian law; but it also gives the US, in its post-heroic belligerent engagement, a relative advantage vis-à-vis Russia and Iran—two countries that are officially conducting military operations in Syria.

Ironically, the Mambij drone massacre took place amidst a crucial phase of the 2016 Aleppo battle, in which the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition recaptured the eastern part of the once ‘economic capital’ of Syria. After the fall of Aleppo, on 14 December 2016, the US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, delivered a powerful speech calling on Russian conscience. Mentioning the victims and the violation of Russia, Iran and Syrian during the Aleppo battle, Power asked: “Are you incapable of shame?” (Power 2016). Incidentally, President Obama himself admitted that he felt “responsible” for not having stopped Russia (Rhodan 2016). Yet, US engagement in Syria and Iraq, during the Aleppo battle, amidst the reseizure of the Iraqi city of Mosul, in fact increased. All efforts, however, included cooperation with Turkey, the SDF, and other rebel groups against ISIS and JaN. Therefore, in spite of their criticism of the brutality of pro-Asad forces in Aleppo, US shadow military operations in Syria have very much played into the hands of the Asad regime.

Ironically, this shadow complicity is liable to rise to the surface again with President Donald J. Trump. The 45th US President has manifested his willingness to cooperate more assertively with Russia, with the main objective of destroying ISIS and other jihadi groups. In this, he claims to distance himself from Obama. However, fighting ISIS and jihadi groups was precisely the priority of the Obama administration in Syria, which also entailed implicitly cooperating with Russia at different points in time. Therefore, whereas the Trump approach to Syria is likely to change significantly in style, it actually seems to be following in the tracks of Obama’s war on terror, as much as Obama’s war on terror was a continuation of Bush’s one.

4 Conclusion

In a press conference in February 2017, the UN envoy to Syria, Staffan De Mistura, talking about the difficulties of solving the Syrian conflict, rhetorically asked: “Where is the US in all this? I can’t tell you because I don’t know” (AFP, Reuters 2017). De Mistura was probably referring to the diplomatic negotiations, but it does capture the popular opinion about the US role in Syria. However, as this chapter has shown, the US has been present but not visible. Its manifestation has been felt

primarily through clandestine and undercover operations and direct and indirect support to state and non-state actors involved in the conflict. It is actually inappropriate to talk about US retrenchment and disengagement in light of the US imperial reach, which requires constant engagement, despite isolationist rhetoric. Yet, the enhanced global dimension of the war on terror, together with the need for restoring the image of the US to the world, has entailed delegating foreign policy actions to US partners and allies. In this context, Obama's approach to Syria does not point to a decline in US influence, but rather to a strategy of reducing and avoiding responsibilities for failure in a protracted conflict that does not involve US vital interests.

Whilst this approach is bound to generate ambiguity, it should not be mistaken for disengagement. In fact, Obama *de facto* continued many of Bush's policies, including the global war on terror, intensifying it further through the aggressive use of drone attacks and special operations. However, he did so whilst seeking to diffuse and avoid accountability for his action and inaction. The fact that he publicly committed himself to a diplomatic and multilateral solution to the Syrian conflict served equally to both distance himself from Bush's legacy of unilateralism and share international duties. Furthermore, from the "Russia reset" to the Iranian nuclear deal, to the unusual pragmatism in dealing with the Asad regime, Obama succeeded in neutralizing the mystical rhetoric of the "axis of evil" and, more generally, overcoming traditional ideological constraints of US diplomacy, such as kneejerk antagonism towards Syria, Iran and Russia (Hinnebusch 2010; Gani 2014; Feklyunina 2016). Incidentally, this is in line with what he said during the third presidential debate in 2008: "I will meet not just with our friends but with our enemies, because I remember what Kennedy said, that we should never negotiate out of fear, but we should never fear to negotiate" (Obama 2008).

Through conducting unilateral undercover military operations, mainly against ISIS and JaN—two groups that have been systematically excluded from the multilateral negotiations in Geneva (2012, 2014), Vienna (2015) and Astana (2017)—Obama pursued *de facto* a unilateral approach when dealing with core US priorities, whilst going multilaterally when vital American interests were not at stake. Obama seemed to embody the long-standing US pragmatic approach to multilateralism: embracing it when the US could control the process and outcomes and resisting or avoiding it when it acted as a constraint (Martin 1992; Karns and Mingst 1992; Patrick and Forman 2002; Foot et al. 2003; Skidmore 2012).

The novelty of the Obama approach, though, is that—by engaging in shadow wars, which include coordinating operations with proxy insurgents on the ground, conducting secret intelligence operations, and sending special forces to war-torn countries—the US has relied on the clandestine register of warfare. Grounded in informality and plausible deniability, this has helped the US to mitigate public criticism, whilst having the potential to publically expose the atrocities and violations of rival parties, such as Russia, Iran and Syria. So, leading from behind perhaps means leading by stealth.

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Israel, ISIS and the Iran Nuclear Deal: The Comeback of the Middle East in the 2016 American Presidential Campaign

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Abstract This chapter investigates the relevance of the Middle East issue in the 2016 American presidential campaign. After describing the early campaign's international context and the past and current public opinion's perception on foreign policy, the article analyses the primary candidates' proposal on Middle East and other linked topics. The whole presidential primary campaign on both sides was full of references to the Middle East, often linked to other adjacent topics such as immigration and terrorism. Republicans are usually favoured by voters on foreign politics, while Democrats are preferred when it comes to welfare. As shown by electoral manifestos and TV debates, the Middle East issue also remained central in the Clinton v Trump final race. However, opinion polls and media coverage explained how the 2016 presidential campaign will probably be remembered for the harsh personal attacks exchanged against each other by the two nominees. The unexpected Donald Trump victory was certainly not driven by his statements on Middle East, but his presidency will probably be characterized by a completely new approach towards this region.

1 Introduction

The 2016 American presidential campaign seemed to be promising in term of relevance of the “Middle East” issue. The early beginnings of the presidential primary campaign occurred simultaneously with a series of important foreign politics events, most of which related to the Middle East. In the first months of 2015, while the self-proclaimed caliphate was scoring successes in Syria, Iraq and Libya, the Obama administration was in the middle of talks regarding the Iran nuclear deal framework, and Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was

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going to the United States (US) on an official visit that was predicted to be critical and controversial (BBC News 2015).

Furthermore, according to the opinion polls, Americans considered foreign policy as one of the top campaign issues. Primary candidates in both parties dedicated part of their time to covering topics ranging from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), to Russia, to the Middle East. Among Republicans, this relevance can be explained by the wish to criticize the apparently passive foreign politics of the Obama administration. On the other side, among the Democratic primaries, Hillary Clinton's four years as Secretary of State certainly played a role in placing foreign politics as a relevant campaign issue (Jones 2015).

Parties were far apart on domestic issues, while in foreign policy all candidates lined up for a more aggressive foreign policy than that being conducted by the Obama administration. Republicans portrayed President Obama as pursuing a retreating foreign policy which allowed ISIS: "His vanishing red line in Syria showed great weakness. Afghanistan is certain to fall because Obama announced the end of U.S. combat operations prematurely, thus encouraging the Taliban to hang on. Iran is about to get the bomb because Obama is supposedly not tough enough in the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program" (Brewster 2015). Republican candidates wanted foreign policy to be a major issue in the campaign, as they believed they had a foreign policy advantage among voters. On the other hand, among Democrats, there was the need not to break away from the Obama presidency, which was regaining general approval ratings among voters and was still very popular among minorities—a strategic electoral constituency (Nield 2016).

Strangely, when compared with past campaigns, hardly any of the Republican candidates had foreign policy experience. They were mostly young with only a brief time in public life as governors or junior members of the Senate. This was unusual, as Republican candidates often have substantial governmental or military experience (e.g. Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, George H.W. Bush and John McCain) or have been a long time on the national scene (e.g. Ronald Reagan and Bob Dole). In contrast, Hillary Clinton had considerable experience that was both relevant and specific.

Several foreign-policy issues dominated the conversation in both parties. One was trade, which is both a domestic and international matter. Obama was seeking congressional support for the TPP, which would have reduced barriers between the US and other countries. While many of the Republican candidates (but not Donald Trump) backed the TPP, there was more hostility towards the deal from Democrats. A second issue was climate change. Planning for the United Nations Climate Change Conference kept the issue in the news. Democrats were supportive of more far-reaching US commitments, although, again, differences in views emerged on both sides (Haass 2015).

A third cluster of issues—probably the most relevant one—involved the Middle East, ISIS and the Iran nuclear deal. There was little willingness on either side for large-scale military intervention in Iraq and Syria to counter the Islamic State. But, there was heated debate over what should and should not be done. This cluster was also related to the long-term "special friendship" between the US and Israel, which

might have been affected by a congressional ratification of the proposed agreement with Iran. Many Republican candidates were critical of any proposed deal: questions were raised about which sanctions had to be eased and when; about the terms of compliance inspections; and about what would happen once some of the limits on Iran’s nuclear activities expired. Democratic candidates were naturally more likely to be sympathetic to whatever was negotiated (Haass 2015).

This research aims to investigate the relevance of the Middle East issue in the 2016 American Presidential campaign, and to see if the importance of the Middle East in the primary campaign continued into the Clinton v Trump final race. This article has five brief sections. After this short introduction, which describes the foreign policy issues at the core of the 2015–2016 intra-party competition, the second section analyses the public opinion trends on foreign policy, showing voters’ preferences and their beliefs about the two parties’ political standings. The third section offers an historic excursus of past US election campaigns, in order to relate the 2016 event to the previous contexts. The fourth section analyses the major primary candidates’ positions concerning the Middle East and related issues, while the fifth focuses on the Clinton vs Trump presidential race.

2 Opinion Polls on Voters’ Perceptions of “Foreign Policy” (2015–2016)

Since the early stages of the 2016 primary campaign, several polling institutes started monitoring the relevance of the different issues. According to Gallup’s survey (Table 1), 86% of Americans said that the economy would be extremely or very important to their vote in 2016—a significantly higher percentage than for any other issue. Concerns about terrorism ranked high at 74%, with foreign policy at 61%.

For the whole 2016 campaign cycle, “the economy” persisted at the top of the list, as it has done historically, both when the economy was weak, as in 2008, and when it was strong, as in 2000. International matters increased in their prominence, as in early 2015. However, they ranked behind several issues, including the way government operates in Washington, healthcare policy and the distribution of wealth and income in the US.

Table 1 How important will each of the following issues be to your vote for president —will it be—extremely important, very important, moderately important or not that important?

Issue	Extremely/very important (%)
Economy	86
Healthcare/Obamacare	77
ISIS & Terrorism	74
Foreign policy	61
Immigration	59
Race relations	55

Author’s elaboration from Jones (2015)

Notes: Survey conducted on 6–7 May 2015

According to Table 1, Americans' ascription of importance to terrorism and foreign affairs as election issues was no higher than the level which Gallup (2015) has measured in previous presidential election cycles. The figure of 74%, stating that terrorism would be extremely or very important to their vote, is comparable with the averages of 74% 2012 and 78% in 2008, but lower than the average of 86% in the 2004 cycle, when the 9/11 terror attacks were still fresh in Americans' memories and the Iraq war had just started. Likewise, Americans were more likely to say that foreign affairs were important to their vote in the 2004 election cycle, averaging 68%—more than in any other recent election cycle, including 1996 (62%), 2000 (58%), or 2016 (61%).

Other surveys, however, showed different results. A research conducted by the Republican firm OnMessage, found that security issues ranked first in a list of top priorities for voters—ahead of economic growth, fiscal responsibility, and moral issues. A 22% cent plurality of all respondents ranked it as the top issue, compared with 13%, who listed economic growth as their top concern. These findings confirmed what other surveys also observed: in January 2015, the Pew Research Center found that, for the first time in five years, an equal share of voters rated defending the US against terrorism (76%) as important a policy priority as the economy (75%) (Kraushaar and Roarty 2015). While foreign policy moved down the list of public concerns following the 2008 financial crisis, the above-mentioned polls were a sign that the issue had returned with vigour to the public consciousness. Its rising importance also sparked a debate over whether foreign policy, despite its surge in polls, was really going to be such an important issue in 2016. Different reports maintained that the economy “trumps foreign affairs as key 2016 election issue”, while others argued that foreign policy would be the electorate's number one priority (Jones 2015).

Opinion polls show that the American public has a more positive image of Democrats' compassion and tolerance, but tends to side with Republicans when it comes to dealing with foreign policy and terrorist threats (Brewster 2015). Citizens gave President Obama low marks on the issue, and a February 2015 poll from Pew showed that voters trust Republicans more than Democrats to handle foreign policy (Huffington Post 2015). Again, according to a Pew Research Survey (2015), more people (48%) said the GOP would do a better job handling foreign policy than Democrats (35%), with a large shift in independents.

When asked which party was better able to deal with the terrorist threat at home, the majority said Republicans (51–31%). This was the largest GOP advantage since after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A total of 62% of adults surveyed claimed Republicans were not “tolerant and open to all groups of people”, with 59% saying that Democrats were indeed tolerant (Brewster 2015). The 2015 Gallup survey, reported in Table 2, shows that Republican voters place much more importance on foreign policy than Democratic voters (77% v 58%, respectively). This confirms, once again, foreign policy's relevance for Republicans and their implicit advantage on the topic. Furthermore, and we will see it in the following sections, issues such as “terrorism” and “immigration” can also be linked to “foreign policy” and the “Middle East”.

Table 2 Ratings of issue relevance to presidential vote, by party

Issue	Republicans	Democrats	Republican-democratic gap
	%	%	Pct. Pts.
Foreign policy	77	58	+19
Immigration	69	58	+11
ISIS & terrorism	81	71	+10
Economy	89	85	+4
Healthcare/obamacare	75	83	-8
Race relations	49	67	-18

Author’s elaboration from Jones (2015)

Notes: Survey conducted on 6–7 May 2015, Ranked by Republican-Democratic Gap

3 Foreign Policy and the Middle East in Past Campaigns

It has long been assumed that foreign policy attitudes of the mass public are random, disorganized, and unconstrained. Further, foreign policy thinking has not been found to be structured along standard ideological (liberal-conservative) lines, partisan lines, or class lines (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987, p. 1099). Additionally, while candidates regularly spend much time and effort campaigning on foreign policy, the thrust of prevailing scholarly opinion is that voters possess little information on, and weak attitudes towards, these issues, which therefore have a negligible impact on their voting behaviour. Even though Aldrich et al. (1989, p. 32) argue that public attitudes on foreign and defence policies are available and cognitively accessible, the whole topic remains controversial, and the only genuine source of public opinion’s measurement are the recurrent surveys.

In order to contextualize the 2016 presidential election into the American political history, it is useful to check the historical analysis of Gallup’s most important problem (2015)—a question that has been investigated as far back as 1948. Data confirm that international matters were more salient for Americans in 2004 than in any other recent elections. Earlier election years, including those in the 1950s and early 1960s—during the early part of the Cold War and in 1968 with the Vietnam War raging—also had high percentages of Americans viewing international matters as the most important problem facing the country. In 2015, only 18% of Americans named an international issue as the most important problem facing the country. Foreign policy achieved its peak during periods of international crisis such as the beginning of the Cold War, when the US was at war, in the 9/11 aftermath. Again, this might seem obvious, but we all know how campaigns can be “manipulated” by media and candidates, and sometimes stray far from the real issues (Kaid 2004, p. 158). And, this is particularly true when election campaigns are dominated by stories concerning candidates’ personal lives. For instance, the 1976 campaign was still dominated by Watergate and Ford’s presidential pardon of Nixon, while the 1996 and the 2000 elections heavily focused on Bill Clinton’s private affairs, which overshadowed any other issue.

Republicans are considered at an advantage when presidential campaigns are centred on foreign policy. The party won five of the six presidential elections after the war in Vietnam became a salient issue, and while the Cold War raged. GOP is less advantaged in domestic politics. George H.W. Bush lost re-election, despite presiding over the peaceful end of the Cold War, and achieving a quick victory in the Gulf War, because his opponent, Bill Clinton, cleverly argued “it’s the economy stupid”, to shift attention away from foreign policy when taking on Bush in 1992. Barack Obama, a foreign policy novice, won office in 2008 due to the deepening recession, and not because of promises to fight harder in Afghanistan while winding up US involvement in Iraq (Denton 2009, p. 11). According to Gallup data, only a handful of presidential campaigns can be compared to the current one. With the exception of the 2004 campaign, these belong to the first years after WWII, when international affairs dominated news, campaigns and voters’ perceptions.

Scholarly contributions concerning foreign news in the American media provided the idea that—together with a relevant decrease of foreign news in the American media—the few foreign news items covered are usually linked to domestic issues (Enda 2011). This is particularly true of the mainstream media in which, for instance, very little has been said about the Greek crisis—where the US interests are considered marginal—while there has been more coverage on the Middle East, where American soldiers are still in the field, Israel is nearby, and everything can be labelled around the idea of “terrorism”. Linking foreign news to domestic issues can guarantee good numbers of viewers.

4 Primary Candidates’ Platforms on the Middle East

The Middle East was widely discussed during the long primary season, in the TV debates and interviews, in public rallies and by the candidates in their websites (Hudak 2016). Hillary Clinton supported the multinational deal with Iran to stop its nuclear programme, but said the US must ensure that Teheran complies. “My approach will be distrust and verify. We should anticipate that Iran will test the next president. They’ll want to see how far they can bend the rules. That won’t work if I’m in the White House” (Brookings Institution 2015). In the event that Iran attempted to acquire a nuclear weapon, she would “not hesitate to take military action”. Previously, Clinton said Iran had no right to enrich uranium: “Contrary to their claim, there is no such thing as a right to enrich” (Goldberg 2014). Iran and allied militant groups continue to destabilize the broader region and pose an existential threat to Israel: “We cannot ever take that lightly, particularly when Iran ships advanced missiles to Hezbollah, and the Ayatollah outlines an actual strategy for eliminating Israel or talks about how Israel won’t exist in twenty-five years” (Brookings Institution 2015).

She referred to the Obama’s administration’s intervention in Libya in 2011, which was authorized by the United Nations and supported by the Arab League, as “smart power at its best” (New York Times 2015). As US senator, Clinton voted in

2002 to authorize the US invasion of Iraq, a decision she admitted in 2015 was a mistake. However, she said the Iraqi government was wrong not to allow several thousand US troops to remain in Iraq after 2011 (CNN 2014). Clinton was an early supporter for arming and training “vetted” Syrian rebels in 2012. She also supported the surge in Afghanistan in 2009 and for keeping US troops in Iraq beyond 2011. In the aftermath of the Islamic State’s November 2015 attacks on Paris and Beirut, Clinton presented a detailed plan to defeat the group: “Our strategy should have three main elements: One, defeat ISIS in Syria, Iraq, and across the Middle East. Two, disrupt and dismantle the growing terrorist infrastructure that facilitates the flow of fighters, financing, arms, and propaganda around the world. Three, harden our defenses and those of our allies against external and homegrown threats” (Council on Foreign Relations 2015a). In December 2015, Clinton put forth a plan to defend the US homeland from terrorist attacks. Among other things, she called on government agencies to work with top tech companies to shut down the online presence of violent extremist groups like Islamic State. She also called for greater screening of migrants coming to the US, particularly those who have travelled to a country with “serious problems with terrorism and foreign fighters” (The Briefing 2015).

As is well known, the core of Sanders’ campaign was on inequalities, ethics and welfare. He talked very little of foreign politics (Haaretz 2016), and most of his concerns—which are related to it—were focused on immigration. He opposed spending increases in defence; he wanted to close the Guantanamo Bay detention centre and was keen to prohibit the use of harsh interrogation techniques, like waterboarding, on terrorism suspects. He proposed to allow up to 10,000 Syrian refugees per year into the US; he defended President Obama’s deportation relief actions; he proposed to allow a path to citizenship for the undocumented migrants; and he called an end to the federal detention of undocumented mothers and children. Specific Middle East proposals were rare and referred to “fight[ing] the Islamic State with a coalition of Western and Arab states” and to “avoid[ing] deploying a large U.S. ground force in Iraq and Syria” (Sanders 2016). Sanders also claimed that the multinational deal to halt Iran’s nuclear programme was the best possible way forward to avoid another war in the Middle East. Speaking in the Senate in September 2015, he criticized lawmakers who oppose the Iran nuclear deal, saying: “Those who have spoken out against the Iran agreement, including many in this chamber, and those who have made every effort to thwart the diplomatic process, are many of the same people who spoke out forcefully and irresponsibly about the need to go to war with Iraq, one of the worst foreign policy blunders in the modern history of our country” (Merica and Kopan 2015).

In the Republican field, Ted Cruz was a vocal opponent of the Iran deal, and said that if elected, he would seek to undo it. He outlined the reasons he opposed the deal, criticizing the Obama administration for failing to secure an arrangement in which international inspectors could carry out “anytime-anywhere” inspections on Iran’s nuclear facilities (Cruz 2015). Cruz also proposed to lift caps on the defence budget, to conduct more US airstrikes in Syria, to arm and support Kurdish fighters,

to block refugees from several Middle Eastern states, and to keep the Guantanamo Bay detention centre open (Ackerman 2016).

Ohio Governor John Kasich, wanted to expand the armed services and review the military's procurement system. Convinced of the necessity of cultivating a multilateral approach in foreign policy, Kasich aimed to strengthen military alliances. He also wanted to block refugees from Syria, to increase US ground forces in Iraq and Syria, and to arm and support Kurdish fighters. He was also keen to keep the Guantanamo Bay detention centre open and to fight the Islamic State with a coalition of Western and Arab states. Kasich also urged NATO to invoke Article 5 of its charter (Hains 2016). Unlike many of his Republican competitors, early in the nomination race Governor Kasich did not vow to end US participation in the Iran nuclear deal immediately upon taking office. He claimed, in July 2015, that those candidates who said they would end the deal immediately on winning the presidency were "just playing to a crowd", and exhibiting "inexperience" (Nasiripour 2015). During the second Republican primary debate, however, Kasich described the deal as a "bad agreement" and added that he "would never have done it" (The Washington Post 2015). In December 2015, Kasich said President Obama were meant to begin working with European allies to prepare for the possibility that Iran would violate the agreement. In the absence of such groundwork, the US would be forced to act unilaterally to reimpose sanctions (Council on Foreign Relations 2015b). In March 2016, Kasich said the US should respond to Iran's testing of ballistic missiles by suspending US involvement in the multinational nuclear deal and reimposing sanctions. He acknowledged that the weapons tests were not a direct violation of the accord, but said they flouted the spirit of the agreement (Hanchett 2016).

Donald Trump characterized the beginning of his primary campaign by sending contrasting messages on foreign policy topics (Judah 2016). Only later, some of his beliefs became clearer: "The multinational nuclear agreement with Iran is a terrible deal that the Obama administration pursued out of desperation and threatens the future of Israel". He opposed all aspects of the deal, including the lifting of international sanctions and the inspections regime, and promised to renegotiate it if elected president (Schaefer 2016). Like his fellow competitors, he wanted to lift caps on the defence budget, to expand the armed services, and tighten screening of people who had travelled to countries facing "problems with terrorism". He wanted to conduct more US airstrikes, establish a no-fly zone over parts of Syria, and increase US ground forces in Iraq and Syria (Judah 2016). In the beginning, he also called to allow up to 65,000 Syrian refugees per year into the US. With the increasing success of his campaign, his messages became more conflicting, if not controversial: he first stated that the Guantanamo Bay detention centre should be closed, then he affirmed he wanted to keep it open. He wished to prohibit the use of harsh interrogation techniques, like waterboarding, on terrorism suspects. Then he said that he approved of the use of such techniques (Jacobs 2016a). Trump represented the model candidate who stressed the Middle East issue, constantly linking it to the immigration issue. In this sense, he provoked international flames,

proposing a ban on Muslims from entering the US; he called to organize a mass deportation of the undocumented, and to end birthright citizenship (Foran 2016).

In the primary season, the “Middle East” issue was widely covered by the candidates, but with a strong connection to domestic politics. Mostly, the strategy was to link together Middle East-immigration-terrorism-Islam. As outlined in the previous section, it is common in the American news (and in politics) that foreign issues are stressed in a way that the topic is covered because of its potential consequences at the domestic level. In this sense, most of the debate concerned the war on terrorism, and further flames came after Donald Trump threatened American Muslims with deportation.

Furthermore, an analysis of news coverage from the 2016 primary races underscored the role that the press can play in keeping voters under-informed by focusing only on the horse race instead of the candidates or relevant issues: “Game-centered reporting has consequences [...] The media’s tendency to allocate coverage based on winning and losing affects voters’ decisions [...] The press’s extensive focus on the horse race also leaves less time for substantive coverage. Mainstream media primary coverage was almost entirely about the competition or the campaign process. Only 11 percent of the primary coverage focused on the candidates’ policy positions, leadership abilities or personal and professional histories. Substantive concerns got the least amount of attention, on both sides of the aisle” (Patterson 2016).

5 The Middle East Issue in the 2016 Presidential Campaign

The race for the White House came at a time of rising global instability, as the US and its allies faced a complex array of threats and diplomatic challenges (Weiss 2016). Drawing on the previous section, one might have expected the Middle East (and foreign policy in general) to be a top issue in the presidential campaign, as well. And, that it was, even though most of the media coverage focused on the personal attacks that the two candidates launched at each other. Part of the distorted media perception on the under-evaluation of the “foreign policy” issue came because of the several personal attacks that the candidates exchanged with each other, and also because the political advertisements were mostly characterized around negative campaigning (Jacobs 2016b). However, looking only at the data, the “Middle East” topic was not marginalized at all and represented the most important single topic in the three presidential TV debates.

Hundred of millions of Americans watched the presidential debates on TV, which saw both candidates clash over abortion, gun rights, immigration and foreign policy (Yuhás 2016). Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton spoke for most of the combined 270 min, with some interjections from the moderators. Clinton and Trump talked most about foreign policy, during the three presidential debates.

Table 3 Debate topics in the three TV presidential debates. Minutes that each candidate spent on the issues

Issue	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton	Minutes total
Foreign policy	22:36	15:52	38:28
Economy	17:51	17:45	35:36
ISIS & terrorism	8:46	11:39	21:25
Race & crime	7:51	8:36	16:27
Immigration	8:18	6:56	15:14
Clinton scandals	8:35	5:57	14:32
Trump taxes	7:20	5:11	12:31
Trump women	4:06	6:38	10:44
Trump scandals	5:06	4:56	10:02
Healthcare/Obamacare	4:51	4:10	9:01
Energy & environment	2:02	1:45	2:47

Author's elaboration from Sidahmed et al. (2016)

Table 3 has aggregated the time spent on key topics throughout the three debates. The candidates' differing styles affected how much they spoke on each issue. Clinton's succinct responses on issues of foreign policy meant that her answers often took less time. Trump danced from one issue to the next whenever he was given a chance to speak, and Syria and Iraq were common fail-safes for the Republican nominee (Sidahmed et al. 2016).

The first presidential debate was the most "moderate" one, with the candidates having several heated exchanges only by the end of it, with Clinton attacking on Trump's taxes and "racist behaviour" regarding birtherism. Clinton also flayed Trump on his lack of knowledge about the deal to withdraw US troops from Iraq, and on climate change being a "Chinese hoax". The Republican candidate best line was: "Hillary's got experience, but it's bad experience" (McCarthy 2016). Clinton repeatedly linked the Middle East issue with the "experience" topic, saying that Donald Trump had no experience, and he would represent a risk for the country if he held the nuclear codes. On the other hand, Trump linked Clinton to the Middle East, mentioning her 2003 vote in the Senate in favour of the invasion of Iraq, and her "failure" in the Libyan events that ended with the assassination of the US ambassador.

In the second TV debate, Clinton said "Trump's rhetoric about terrorist attacks gives Isis what it wants" (The Guardian 2016). Again, she insisted that Trump had no plan, while she was the only candidate with experience of being "part of the hard decisions to take terrorists off the battlefield". Trump quickly responded to what he claimed was a "disgusting attempt" by Clinton to distract from US foreign policy failures by suggesting he was a traitor (Roberts 2016). The Republican nominee insisted in linking the Middle East issue with the discussion on immigration and he also took chance to attack the stepping-down Obama administration: "Diminishing

the threat the Obama administration has allowed to materialise on its watch puts us all at risk and is another reminder that we need new leadership in the fight against radical Islamic terrorism” (Roberts 2016).

As we noted in the previous section, immigration was a particularly contentious issue in the Republican primary, providing fodder for numerous attacks. Some of the candidates said they would pursue a path for undocumented immigrants to stay in the country legally, while others condemned granting what they considered to be an amnesty. In the presidential election context, differences between the candidates were very clear: Clinton supported a path to citizenship; Trump wanted to deport illegal immigrants. Clinton was keen to allow Syrian refugees in the country; Trump was to prevent refugees from entering the US (Andrews and Kaplan 2015). Again, in the 2016 presidential campaign, immigration could be considered as the “domestic mirror” for the Middle East issue and, looking at Table 3, the figure of 15:14 minutes debate could be summed up as “ISIS and Homeland Security” and be part of the leading “Foreign Policy”.

Considering that political commercials have long represented the primary source of information about the candidates for American voters (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 2006, p. 12), their relevance is undoubted. While a comprehensive content data analysis for the 2016 political advertisements has yet to come, several observers found that most of the commercials focused on negative campaigning, and policy proposals were marginalized (Green and Higgins 2016).

Again, the negative tone of the 2016 campaign was clear from the very beginning: “In accepting her historic nomination of the Democratic Party, Clinton mentioned Trump by name 21 times and in other ways plenty of other times. She mentioned him throughout the speech. A week before, Trump offered a dark and often factually challenged case against her and the Obama administration. If you combine Trump’s mentions of Clinton and Obama by name with Clinton’s mentions of Trump by name, the grand total in the two speeches is 39. In 2012, the two nominees—Obama and Mitt Romney—combined for 13 mentions of their opponents. In 2004, there were only three, combined. The only recent analog for a nomination acceptance speech that was so much about an opponent was the 2008 campaign, when Barack Obama spent plenty of time decimating John McCain and George W. Bush—29 combined mentions—often tying McCain to the deeply unpopular Bush” (Blake 2016).

The proportion of Americans who claim that the presidential candidates are talking about the issues they care about dropped to its lowest point in the 2016 election cycle in mid-October. A total of 48% of Americans said the candidates were talking about the issues that really mattered—the lowest in Gallup’s history. Gallup asked this question periodically between 1992 and 2011. During this time, the lowest percentage of Americans saying the candidates were addressing the issues they cared about was 53% in February/March and April 1992, when the political coverage was focused on Bill Clinton’s extramarital affairs. But, in that election year, Americans became more likely to say that candidates were addressing important issues, as the campaign progressed. By late October 1992, 76% said the candidates were talking about important issues. So, not only does 2016 measure the

lowest in Gallup's trend, but it stands in contrast with these two prior election years in which Americans became more likely to believe the candidates were talking about important issues as the campaigns progressed. Americans' lower level of agreement that the candidates were talking about important issues occurred as the news focused on the release of a 2005 videotape showing Donald Trump making lewd and controversial comments about women. Perceptions that the candidates were talking about the right issues were equal among both Republicans and Democrats. The 51% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, and 49% of Democrats and leaners who answer "yes", are the lowest of the year for both groups.

The drop in the percentage of Americans who said the candidates were talking on the issues they cared about reflects the increased focus on the character and temperament of Trump and Hillary Clinton. Separate Gallup research show that "Americans on a daily basis have mentioned the word 'women' more than any other when asked in recent weeks what they have read, seen or heard about Trump, while 'emails' is the most commonly mentioned word for Clinton, as it has been throughout the campaign" (Newport 2016).

We all know that party platforms are not factually relevant. While these political manifestos are official documents aimed at being the electoral programmes of the candidates, in truth they do not bind the candidate and can be considered mainly as the party's attempts to include motions arising from defeated primary candidates—in order to consolidate the party's electoral base. More important, party platforms are almost always ignored by voters. They do not read them, relying more for political information in TV news, TV debates and political commercials (Kaid 2004, p. 165). However, it is interesting to take a look at them, in order to assess the official position of the two nominees.

The Democratic party platform places the "Middle East" (and "foreign policy" in general) after "economy", "jobs", "climate change", "health system" and "education". Most of the statements are quite predictable and in line with the tradition of the Party: Obama's policies are to be continued, diplomacy has always to be performed before military actions, and while the Iran deal has to be confirmed, Iran itself might still represent a threat. Interestingly, there are several references to Donald Trump's statements. While the idea is to criticize him, and to show the weakness of his approach, this constant reference draws the attention away from the Democratic platform and gives him again a sort of "free coverage", like general media did during the race (Confessore and Yourish 2016).

We will use all the tools of American power, especially diplomacy and development, to confront global threats and ensure war is the last resort [...] Democrats will continue to lead a broad coalition of allies and partners to destroy ISIS' stronghold in Iraq and Syria. We will press those in the region, especially the Gulf countries and local forces on the ground, to carry their weight in prosecuting this fight. [...] We reject Donald Trump's vilification of Muslims. It violates the religious freedom that is the bedrock of our country and feeds into ISIS' nefarious narrative [...] We reject Donald Trump's suggestion that our military should engage in war crimes, like torturing prisoners or murdering civilian family members of suspected terrorists [...] The Syrian crisis is heartbreaking and dangerous, and its impact is threatening the region, Europe, and beyond. Donald Trump would inflame the conflict by

alienating our allies, inexplicably allowing ISIS to expand in Syria, and potentially starting a wider war. This is a reckless approach. Democrats will instead root out ISIS and other terrorist groups and bring together the moderate Syrian opposition, international community, and our regional allies to reach a negotiated political transition that ends Assad's rule. [...] We support President Obama's decision to maintain a limited troop presence in Afghanistan into 2017 and ensure that Afghanistan never again serves as a haven for terrorists to plan and launch attacks on our homeland [...] We support the nuclear agreement with Iran because, as it is vigorously enforced and implemented, it verifiably cuts off all of Iran's pathways to a bomb without resorting to war. [...] Democrats will also address the detrimental role Iran plays in the region and will robustly enforce and, if necessary, strengthen non-nuclear sanctions. Iran is the leading state sponsor of terrorism. It violates the human rights of its population, denies the Holocaust, vows to eliminate Israel, and has its fingerprints on almost every conflict in the Middle East (Democratic Party 2016, pp. 42–43).

In their platform, Republicans reaffirm some of their long-term beliefs: the importance of the military, raising the defence budget, American exceptionalism. Interestingly again, no mention of Hillary Clinton:

We are the party of peace through strength. We believe that American exceptionalism - the notion that our ideas and principles as a nation give us a unique place of moral leadership in the world - requires the United States to retake its natural position as leader of the free world [...] The Republican Party is committed to rebuilding the U.S. military into the strongest on earth, with vast superiority over any other nation or group of nations in the world. We face a dangerous world, and we believe in a resurgent America [...] We support lifting the budget cap for defense and reject the efforts of Democrats to hold the military's budget hostage for their domestic agenda (Republican Party 2016, pp. 41–42).

A few pages further on, the Middle East becomes central, with statements that are completely opposite to those of the Democrats. It is worth noting the recurring reference to the defence of Israel:

The Middle East is more dangerous now than at any time since the Second World War. [...] We consider the Administration's deal with Iran, to lift international sanctions and make hundreds of billions of dollars available to the Mullahs, a personal agreement between the President and his negotiating partners and non-binding on the next president. Without a two-thirds endorsement by the Senate, it does not have treaty status. Because of it, the defiant and emboldened regime in Tehran continues to sponsor terrorism across the region, develop a nuclear weapon, test-fire ballistic missiles inscribed with "Death to Israel," and abuse the basic human rights of its citizens. A Republican president will not be bound by it [...] The dictator of Syria, Bashar Assad, has murdered hundreds of thousands of his own people and created millions of refugees, and an American president has been unable to rally the world against him. Understandably, our allies fear for their future in a region far more dangerous than it was eight years ago. [...] Support for Israel is an expression of Americanism, and it is the responsibility of our government to advance policies that reflect Americans' strong desire for a relationship with no daylight between America and Israel. We recognize Jerusalem as the eternal and indivisible capital of the Jewish state and call for the American embassy to be moved there in fulfillment of U.S. law. [...] We reject the false notion that Israel is an occupier and specifically recognize that the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (BDS) is anti-Semitic in nature and seeks to destroy Israel (Republican Party 2016, pp. 46–47).

6 Conclusion

According to the opinion polls, foreign policy becomes a crucial campaign issue when the US is at war or dealing with critical international affairs. While in recent years—and especially since the beginning of the so-called Great Recession (2007–2008)—“the economy” has always been the most important issue, the beginning of the 2016 presidential primary campaign coincided with a series of relevant events related to foreign politics, and to the Middle East specifically. The primary campaign was consistently focused on the Middle East, which was also associated with relevant topics such as “terrorism” and “immigration”. Furthermore, for the first time ever, “American Muslims” also became a contentious issue, because of Donald Trump’s outrageous proposal of deporting all Muslims from the country.

The Middle East was widely discussed in electoral rallies, TV debates and candidates’ public statements. The presidential primary candidates expressed their opinions on the Iran deal, with Democratic candidates favouring Obama’s administration proposal, and Republicans opposing it. Both parties’ candidates agreed on a military intervention in Syria being jointly organized with Arab allies, while major disagreements arose with the proposed closure of Guantanamo Bay (with Clinton and Sanders supporting it, and Republicans against it) and immigration. On the latter point, the Democrats chose to allow a certain number of refugees into the country and to design a path to citizenship for current illegal immigrants, while GOP candidates were against both actions. Interestingly, Donald Trump was the most “flipping” candidate: he took a stance on several topics, but soon afterwards completely changed his position.

The relevance of foreign policy was, then, expected to last for the presidential campaign too. And that it was: data shows that foreign policy was Clinton and Trump’s number one topic in the three TV debates, followed by ISIS, terrorism and immigration. Official party platforms also clearly outlined the candidates’ stance on the Middle East. However, because of a news cycle that was strongly focused on negative campaigning and candidates’ personal scandals, policy proposals disappeared from the public debate. Trump’s opinion of women and Clinton’s email scandal killed any constructive discussion on policies.

The extraordinary Donald Trump victory came with Republicans keeping control of both chambers of the US Congress, empowering the party to reshape Washington. Such a majority would usually be seen as a golden opportunity for the new president to realise his programme. However, Trump’s eccentricity stands in sharp contrast to relevant parts of the party—a juncture which may produce tensions between the Executive and the Parliament. Furthermore, as we have seen in the previous pages, it is not that clear what Trump’s foreign policy ideas are. The media defines him as an isolationist, while Hillary Clinton is considered an interventionist. Clinton—who is a well-known politician—would probably have been a stabilizing figure, while Trump represents an unknown variable. At this point, it is still difficult to separate the boastings of the election campaign from real beliefs. And we know how, during the whole election campaign cycle, Trump said everything and its opposite. Summing up what it has not been contradicted in the

election campaign, with the crucial points of the party platform, we can expect Trump to support the attacks against ISIS in Mosul and Raqqa, but without the involvement of the US army. Diplomatic relationships with Assad should improve; the strong bond with Israel will be maintained and reinforced; but the relationship with Iran may be again in trouble. As it happens, Trump is against the Iran deal and the diplomatic efforts sustained by the Obama administration. On the other hand, the relationship with Egypt may improve: Al Sisi has been one of the first international leaders to congratulate the newly elected president, and this potential new strong connection between two “strong men” might also have consequences for the Libyan situation.

We also believe that President Trump will not pay much attention to the internal consensus that may exist around each foreign policy issue. Coming from the business world, he is not used to listening to advisors and pollsters, and his recurring “flip-flopping” positions are just a sign of him being a “man of instinct”.

While Trump won the presidency, he lost the popular vote by almost three million votes. This is something that will certainly remain in US political history, and a factor that also poses serious doubts on the institution of the Electoral College. However, we believe that it does not have any effect on Trump’s future actions in foreign politics. Curiously, three out of four past presidents who were elected while losing the popular vote are still remembered for their muscular foreign policy: George W. Bush in 2000, Benjamin Harrison in 1888, and John Quincy Adams in 1824.

Finally, it is unclear if Trump’s statements on the Middle East helped him to secure the White House. Muslim voters—who might have been the most interested on the issue—make up approximately three million people (1% of the whole electorate) and are scattered all around the country, so they do not represent a relevant constituency anywhere. Other ethnic groups, such as Hispanic-Americans, were certainly directly affected by Trump’s rhetoric against migrants. In this case, they voted mainly for Clinton, especially in South-Western states such as Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico. However, in the biggest battleground state—Florida—*latinos* still voted for Clinton but, according to the exit polls, only with a 67:31 ratio. Here, it is possible that the populous anti-Castro Cuban community was unhappy with Obama’s re-establishment of US-Cuba ties with the Castro family. Above all, there was no minority that had a relevant impact in the rust-belt states such as Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin, which literally gave Donald Trump the astonishing 2016 presidential victory.

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Part IV
The Asia-Pacific

The US Rebalancing and the Process of Regionalization in the Asia-Pacific

Matteo Dian

Abstract This chapter analyses the legacy of the Pivot to Asia on the processes of region-building in the Asia-Pacific region, looking at the normative content, geographic shape and competition for leadership associated with them. The strategy of rebalancing aimed to consolidate a Trans-Pacific form of regional order, rooted in Washington's leadership and free market capitalism, and attempted to prevent the rise of Sino-centric regional order, based on Chinese leadership and "State capitalist" practices. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) represented a key pillar of that strategy. The chapter concludes that a reversal of the strategy of rebalancing, particularly in the realm of regional economic governance, might lead to a progressive decline of the American influence in the region.

1 Introduction

This chapter will consider the policy of rebalancing (or Pivot to Asia) promoted by the Obama administration, its legacy and its consequences for the American capacity to underpin the current international order. Moreover, it will conclude by reflecting on the likely consequences of a possible reversal of the key components of the strategy of rebalancing in future years. Here, I will focus on the economic, institutional and diplomatic dimension of the rebalancing strategy and describe the major change it determined. In particular, I will highlight how it led to a comprehensive engagement of the processes of regionalization in East Asia. While the Bush administration had focused largely on upgrading the existing structure of hub-and-spoke alliances, relegating regional multilateral fora to a secondary role, the Obama administration relaunched the idea that the United States (US) needed to

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shape the normative, institutional, political and even geographical contours of the region.

Investigating the legacy of the Pivot to Asia on the evolution of the regional order in East Asia represents an empirically central and theoretically relevant observation point to address the main questions posed by this volume. It helps to shed light on the US capacity to generate order globally, as well as on the relations between global and regional orders. Moreover, observing the process of redefinition of the normative and geographical boundaries of the regional order contributes to underlining the role of international institutions as well as the crucial role of regional partners.

The chapter will consider several features of the processes of regionalization: the geographical definition of the region; its normative content; and the leadership in the process of regionalization. The first paragraph of the chapter will introduce a theoretical framework aimed at analysing the processes of competitive regionalization, in which different main powers, in this case the US and China, promote two different ideas of what the region should look like, geographically, normatively, and in terms of political leadership.

2 Contested Regional Orders: A Theoretical Sketch

The Pivot to Asia rested on two main premises. Firstly, the acknowledgement that Asia is both the engine of economic growth for the 21st century and the central stage for great power competition. Secondly, the idea that the durability of US primacy, and the international order resting on it, are deeply intertwined with Washington's capacity to preserve or reinforce its leadership role in the Asia-Pacific (US National Security Strategy 2015). As former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Kurt Campbell, has stated:

the Pivot is premised on the idea that the Asia-Pacific region not only defines global power and commerce, but also welcomes US leadership and reward US engagement with positive returns on political economic and military investments (Campbell 2016, p. 3).

These two fundamental premises in turn imply other assumptions regarding geography, normative and institutional structures of the regional order and the regional-global nexus: the US can be an Asian power; it makes strategic and political sense to define the region as "Asia-Pacific"; the US are able to shape the rules and norms of regional integration and they will be in the future; if the American primacy fades in the Asia, the global order is likely to unravel or, at least, to evolve into something very different from the liberal order we know today. Finally, key partners are likely to share and support the American vision of the region.

The above-mentioned assumptions are both widely discussed in theory and disputed in practice. In this paragraph, I will highlight how theoretical approaches to regionalism discussed those assumptions. As Campbell stated in his recent book,

one of the main constraints the US strategy in Asia has to overcome in order to create Asia-Pacific forms of regionalization is the “tyranny of distance” (Campbell 2016). Different approaches to regionalism have widely debated the role of physical geography and the possibility of transcending geographical distances when it comes to creating or reshaping the boundaries of a region. Part of the scholarship on regionalism emphasizes the necessity of geographical proximity in order to create and sustain processes of regional integration. Fawn (2009) stated that a region typically conjures up the idea of a homogenous block of space that has a persisting distinctiveness due to its physical and cultural characteristics. Ravenhill (2007, p.174) identified processes of regionalisation as “the growth of economic interdependence within a given geographical area”. Risse and Borzel (2016, p. 7) defined regions as “social constructions that make reference to territorial location and to geographical or normative contiguity”.

A similar position led Buzan (2012, p. 23) to state, referring to the Asia Pacific, that “a region that spans oceans and contains half of the world stretches the concept beyond breaking point”. This has led Buzan (2011) both to describe the contemporary world in as a “world without superpowers” and to rule out the existence of an Asia-Pacific path to integration. Moreover, he argued that regions are necessarily exclusive, and that a region cannot be part of different regions at the same time. As a consequence, even a global leader such as the US cannot be contemporaneously an American, Asia-Pacific, and Trans-Atlantic power.

While some theories assigned a prominent role to geographic proximity, others tended to point out that “geography is what states make of it”. These approaches followed the basic insight of critical geography, namely the idea that “spatial scales can no longer be conceived as pre-given or natural areas of social interaction, but are increasingly viewed as historical products at once socially constructed and politically contested” (Brenner 1998, p. 460). Therefore, regions are constructed by politics and identity, transcending material realities of geography and spatiality. The geographer Paasi (2009, p. 131) further warned of the challenge of dealing with regions as “a complicated category since it brings together both material and virtual elements, as well as very diverging social practices and discourses”. Söderbaum made a similar point, stating that “there are no natural regions”. On the contrary, regions are “made, remade and unmade”, in the process of global transformation and identity formation (Söderbaum 2014, p. 14).

The idea of social construction of space through practices, norms and identities also entails the rejection of exclusivity. Andrew Hurrell, for instance, has written that “there can be no wholly self-contained regions, immune from outside pressures” (Hurrell 1995, p. 342). Similarly, Emmanuel Adler and Patricia Greve argued that regional orders and regional mechanisms tend to overlap, leaving the space open for the possibility of a creation of an Asia-Pacific region (Adler and Greve 2009). Katzenstein (2005) has pushed this interpretation, further stating that key processes of regionalization in Asia and Europe have been an essential part of the establishment and maintenance of the American *imperium*.

Generally, liberal theories consider economic development as the real engine of processes of integration and regionalization (Väyrynen 2003). To explain the rise of

economic integration processes of region-making, they point to material incentives and positive economic and trade externalities, such as reduction of transaction costs, and economies of scales (Mattli 1999; Hancock 2009). Liberal theories of regionalism tend to consider the creation of regions and regional institutions as a spillover generated by interdependence and the necessity to deal with collective action problems and other obstacles related to the complexity of increasingly integrated economic and societal systems. Accordingly, globalization becomes a major driver for economic regionalism, since global markets entail increased trans-border mobility and economic linkages, and trade issues are less cumbersome to deal with at the regional than at the multilateral level (Milward 1999; Schirm 2002).

This perspective offers a broad but significant point for the future of regionalism in Asia: the shape of the region, in terms of institutional and political forms should reflect the state of economic and societal networks or constellations present in the region. The construction of the region, therefore, should grow increasingly in line with the broad constellation of formal and informal networks. This hypothesis suggests that in a region increasingly defined by transnational chains of production and investment, the process of region-making should reflect the shape and the intensity of those relations (Mansfield and Milner 1999; Haggard 2014). Practically, this approach highlights that the region could probably assume an increasingly Sino-centric shape, since Beijing has been assuming the role of first provider of foreign direct investments (FDIs) and first commercial partner for almost every nation in East Asia.

The constructivist scholarship considers identity as the fundamental engine of regionalism. On the one hand, underlying the role of intersubjective meaning and identities led several constructivists to highlight the social features of regions over the relevance of geographical boundaries. Moreover, the many constructivists emphasized the possibility of socialization and diffusion of norms as fundamental mechanisms to contest and redesign both the geographic boundaries and the normative content of a region. The constructivist approach admits the possibility for an external power to promote processes of regionalization through norm diffusion and socialization, more or less accompanied by material incentives (Jetschke and Murray 2012; Jetschke and Lenz 2013; Hurrell 1995, 2007; Katzenstein 2005).

This possibility has been recently disputed, mainly by the work of Amitav Acharya, who argued that processes of region-building are not necessarily determined by the spread of global norms. On the contrary, Asian regionalism has emerged amidst an increasing consensus around Asian norms, such as non-interference. East and South East Asian regionalism, as a consequence, appears to be at odds with Western standards, not because it has not reached a compatible level of institutionalization or maturity, when compared with the West. Regionalism in Asia is rooted in a distinctive “cognitive prior” constituted by different norms, shaped by historical experiences as colonization, decolonization and a late and uneven process of democratization (Acharya 2004, 2009). As a consequence, regionalization in Asia, where norms tend to reflect a post-colonial normative background, are likely to emerge in contrast with the principles of the global order.

Analyses drawn from the English school perspective state that the future forms of regionalism will be marked by a dynamic process. China, the US and other relevant actors, such as ASEAN, shape the process of regionalization, which will be marked by a process of contestation involving values, rules and primary institutions (Goh 2013). Among these, the most crucial are great power management, diplomacy and “market”. The first refers to “special rights and duties of great powers”, both in terms of maintenance of the order through the avoidance of war, the preservation of the balance of power, and the exercise of leadership in the international order. The second includes both bilateral relations and multilateral practices, and, in particular, the establishment of new multilateral fora and the leadership in those institutions. The third concerns the core norms governing the interaction between political power and markets (Bull 1977; Buzan 2004; Beeson and Breslin 2014; Khong 2014).

As Buzan and Zhang put it,

fundamental institutions defined and shaped by these historical and social processes do not only represent the hegemonic institutional preferences but also represent a collective solution invented by, and consented among, East Asian states to perennial problem of interstate conflict, co-existence and cooperation (Buzan and Zhang 2014, p. 3).

The ongoing process of regionalization should be considered as a “struggle for order” aimed at determining which basic rules will regulate relations between great and middle powers in the region in the political, security and economic realms. From this perspective, the incumbent global and regional leader, the US, and the challenger, China, compete to determine the normative and political content of the order, in turn defined by fundamental primary institutions. This approach highlights that the struggle to define the basic primary institutions, however, is not simply defined by the great powers’ capacity to impose their preference. On the contrary, the capacity to provide practically viable solutions to economic and political problems, and achieve the consent of key regional partners, appears to be crucial.

Ultimately, therefore, the English school perspective does not necessarily imply the rise of closed and exclusive regions. On the contrary, it leaves open the way for the establishment of non-geographically contiguous regions, if a great power manages to acquire the consent of local powers, socialize them and build workable solutions for basic political and economic problems. This implies the necessity of continuing investments in the realm of institution-building, diplomatic presence and attention, and economic diplomacy.

This exploration of the literature has revealed several important issues for the analysis of the attempt to promote a regional order based on an Asia-Pacific shape that is associated with the strategy of rebalancing. Firstly, it allows the presence of several important obstacles to be underlined. The main obstacle appears to be the “tyranny of distance” generated by the physical separation of the mainland US and Asia. Other crucial hurdles are the presence of an “Asian cognitive prior”, as normative and ideational core of East and South East Asian regionalism. This cognitive prior, alimeted by the experiences of colonization and decolonization, appears to make the region more open to proponents of regional projects based on

the centrality of the state, rather than liberal beliefs and regional projects based on the rights of individuals. Obstacles in the way of Asia-Pacific forms of regionalization are not only ideational or geographical. Looking at the region through neoliberal lenses, the rise of commercial and financial networks centred on China is also a serious problem for the American leadership in the region.

All these factors may turn regionalization into a stumbling block, rather than into a building block of the global order (Bhagwati 1991).¹ The possible rise of a closed East Asia region, built around the Chinese centrality and economic model, would represent a major reason for fragmentation of the contemporary global order, and, arguably a major cause of decline of the American hegemony.

Basically, all approaches to regionalization reserve a relevant role for Asia's middle powers. None of these theories in fact attribute to China and the US as the main powers the capacity to shape the region independently from the consent and active cooperation of key regional partners.

These approaches propose different representations of the role of international institutions. Constructivism considers institutions as agents of socialization and norm diffusion. Neoliberal approaches generally consider international institutions as a sovrastructure of existing networks. The English school considers them both as agents of socialization of local agents to hegemonic preferences, as parts product of the international hierarchy between great powers and instruments to solve economic and political problems.

The literature on regionalism in Asia leads us to distinguish two ideal-typical scenarios for the region. On the one hand, the development of a region defined as East Asia—geographically defined, politically and economically exclusive region, which would be based on the Chinese leadership, a post-colonial normative core. This region would be the result of a successful Chinese attempt to contest the basic primary institutions of the US-led order, at least regionally. Finally, such a region would represent a stumbling block for the order itself, since it would create a basic divergence from other key regions, more hospitable for American influence and leadership.

The other polar type is represented by an Asia-Pacific scenario – an open region, only vaguely related to geographically defined boundaries, in which main actors are socialized to global norms and participate to global institutions. The prevailing institutional settings would link the two sides of the Pacific, and include the US and even other states in the American continent, such as Canada, Mexico or even Latin American states. This scenario implies a low level of resistance and contestation of the primary institutions of the international society of the current international order. Finally, such a scenario foresees the Asia-Pacific as a fundamental building block of the global order (Table 1).

¹The concept of building block vs stumbling block was firstly proposed by Bhagwati (1991).

Table 1 Ideal-types of regional order

East Asia	Asia Pacific
Exclusivity	Overlapping regions
Normative and cognitive prior	Socialization to global norms
Regions as stumbling blocks	Regions as building blocks
Regions physically and geographically defined	Virtual region
Closed regionalism	Open regionalism
High level of contestation of key primary institutions	Low level of contestation of primary institutions

3 China's Renewed Centrality as Strategic Challenge

The rise of China represents a fundamental challenge for the contemporary US-led international order. The challenge posed by Beijing is not a mere consequence of its economic ascendancy or its rapidly growing military capabilities. Crucially, China has been elaborating a vision of the region close to the first ideal type I described above: increasingly inhospitable for external influence and global norms; based on Sino-centric institutions and economic networks; and developed around an increasingly statist vision of the relations between states and markets. The construction of such a regional order would represent critical damage for the contemporary world order, undermining the American capacity to behave as an order maker.

Beijing has displayed signs of dissatisfaction with the regional order since the second half of the 1990s, and, in particular, after the Asian financial crisis. However, only under the leadership of Xi Jinping has it proposed a comprehensive regional project that constitutes an alternative to American leadership.

Up to the mid-1990s, the Chinese leadership largely followed Deng's dictum, "adopt a low profile and never take the lead". In the early 1990s, China appeared eager to be socialized to the international order, particularly when it came to economic norms and global financial and trade institutions (Johnston 2008). However, Beijing started to revise its approach to the region after the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis, advancing the first proposals to build forms of regional governance, aimed at isolating the region from the American hegemony (Rozman 2010; Zhang 2012).

The American reaction to the Asian financial crisis created the strategic opportunity for those who favoured "exclusivist" and "Asianist" regional projects to advance their proposals. The Clinton administration was perceived as unable and unwilling to intervene to alleviate the worse consequences of the crisis. The US was the main sponsor of the imposition of harsh conditions by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other global financial institutions (Goh 2013). Moreover, the Clinton administration opposed the creation of an Asian Monetary Fund, proposed by Japan in 1997, that could possibly alleviate the damages of the crisis. Many in Asia perceived Washington's stance as an abandonment of the South East

and East Asian states in their moment of need in favour of the advancement of a particularly rigid economic and ideological stance (Searight 2010).

The aftermath of the crisis offered a unique opportunity to Beijing, which could present itself as uniquely equipped to understand the position of other Asian states, sharing the same history of colonization and anti-colonial struggle, and the same normative core, rooted in respect for each other's sovereignty and non-interference, and an economic receipt that allowed significant space for the state (Zheng 2005; Callahan 2008).

This contributed to spreading the idea that East Asian countries had to look for alternative institutional settings and had to promote a "close" form of regionalism that could potentially isolate them from American pressures. In the decade following the crisis, the main Chinese objective has been promoting forms of economic and financial cooperation based either on Chinese centrality or, at least on an idea of "East Asian" community.

Firstly, China managed to deepen the economic relations it had with East and South East Asian states, assuming an increasingly central and indispensable role in the process of economic development and integration in the area (Jiang 2010; Yoshimatsu 2014). Secondly, it promoted a process of institutionalisation in the economic and financial realms, aimed at building its renewed centrality in the region. On the commercial front, it signed a number of free trade agreements. Among them the most relevant are those with ASEAN, Australia, South Korea, Peru, New Zealand and Singapore. On the financial and monetary front, the most relevant initiatives are those related to the ASEAN + 3: the Chiang Mai Initiative, a regional mechanism aimed at supplying liquidity to countries experiencing a financial crisis; and the Asian Bond Markets Initiative, aimed at strengthening the regional bond market (Goh 2007).

Here, it is important to note that the increasingly active role of Beijing, at least in the decade between the two financial crises, was welcome by Japan and South Korea, as well as by most ASEAN members. At the time, in fact, most Asian states considered these new institutional mechanisms as solving two main functions: addressing (1) the potential problems of liquidity, which triggered the Asian crisis and the limited the capacity of the US and (2) the global financial institutions to impose their condition, in case another crisis should occur. Finally, the 2007–2008 global financial crisis contributed to enhancing East and South East Asian countries' perceptions of the US, both as a declining hegemon and as a factor in their instability. The crisis further alimented the idea that a form of closed regionalism could better promote the interests of East Asian states, isolating the region from the economic and financial turbulence originating in the US (Dent 2013; Emmers and Ravenhill 2011).

The rise of Xi Jinping to power led to a radical evolution of the Chinese approach to the region. The new leadership promoted a new comprehensive vision, explicitly based on China's leadership, and its capacity to promote norms and build new international institutions. This vision is based on an exclusivist notion of regionalism. As Xi famously stated in 2014, "Matters in Asia ultimately must be

taken care of by Asians, Asia's problems ultimately must be resolved by Asians" (Xi 2014).

The new Chinese regional strategy led to the promotion of a development bank (the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank or AIIB); a new, mega trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP); and a new framework for Eurasian connectivity, the so-called "One Belt, One Road" initiative.

The establishment of the AIIB constitutes the most recent and most discussed Chinese initiative. Its creation clearly shows how China is not satisfied by its role in existing international financial institutions, and how it is ready to promote its own version of Sino-centric regionalism. The participation of main Western countries, and the high proportion of Asian states in the initiative, proved to be a resounding success for Beijing and a policy fiasco for Washington, since the Obama administration failed to prevent its allies' participation in the AIIB.

The significance of the Chinese regional vision is not limited to the redefinition of the geographical boundaries of the region, or to the promotion of the Chinese leadership. The crucial aspects concern the rules and norms associated with the Chinese regional proposals. Those norms tend to define the Chinese regional project squarely in contrast with the most important normative foundation of the contemporary global order. Two aspects are crucial: the centrality of sovereignty and non-interference; and the relationship between state and market. Firstly, China's vision of the region tends to project externally the core principles of Chinese foreign policy, such as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. On the one hand, this approach is largely welcome in a region that has experienced colonialism and the overwhelming influence of great powers in the Cold War. As Acharya rightly put it, the respect of sovereignty and non-interference represents the fundamental "normative prior" for processes of regionalization in Asia. On the other hand, the reaffirmation of the Five Principles appears in stark contrast with the general tendency that has characterized the international order since the Cold War. The US has promoted a number of distinctively "solidarist" developments. On the matter of security, the rise of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect and humanitarian intervention has canonized the limits of a state's sovereignty in cases of the violation of human rights. In the realm of economic governance, the US and other Western states have promoted the idea that international institutions such as World Bank and IMF should exercise a high degree of conditionality, imposing both a certain economic orthodoxy and conditions related to domestic politics, such as democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights (Williams 2005; Buzan 2014). China, on the contrary, has explicitly put respect of sovereignty and non-interference in other states' domestic affairs at the centre of its new proposals. As a consequence, the membership of institutions such as the AIIB or Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) comes with "no strings attached", in terms political principles. This makes Chinese proposals particularly attractive to non-democratic states in need of aid and interested in attracting foreign investments. In turn, this can undermine the capacity of global international institutions to impose political conditions, in terms of democratic and humanitarian standards.

The second fundamental aspects that set the Chinese regional project in stark contrast with the US-led liberal order is the relationship between market and state. The length of this chapter does not allow a detailed description of the features of the Chinese economic model, or the relationship between the state, the party and the market. However, it is important to underline the role of the Chinese model of “market” as a primary institution for the evolution and contestation of the regional order. The main feature of the Chinese model, described as “State Capitalism” or “Socialist Market Economy”, is the unique interaction between State, the Communist Party of China and economic actors. The political power retains a fundamental influence over the banking system and the state owned enterprises (SOEs), which almost monopolize economic sectors considered as strategic. As a consequence, the activities of Chinese SOEs abroad tend to respond more to political logic than to economic rationales. Moreover, Chinese SOEs are shielded from competition, since they receive backing from public banks and the government (McNally 2012; Breslin and Wang 2016).

The ascent of practices associated to a state capitalist model, and the expansion of the activities of the Chinese SOEs in the region, prompted by the creation of new regional institutions such as AIIB, One Belt One Road (OBOR) and RCEP, represent another element of contrast with the normative foundation of the liberal world order, based on principles of competition, and limited intervention of the state in the national and global market.

4 The Legacy of the Pivot and the Regional Order in Asia

Maintaining a role of system-maker in Asia was a crucial strategic objective of the Obama administration. The Pivot to Asia was conceived as a comprehensive strategy, aimed at leveraging military, economic and diplomatic resources to achieve a fundamental political aim – the reinforcement of the American leadership in Asia.

The main discontinuity with the previous administrations regards the idea of nurturing forms of Asia Pacific regionalism as a complement of the US military presence and the already existing system of “hub-and-spoke” bilateral alliances. As a consequence, the economic, diplomatic and institutional engagement of the region became a fundamental priority for the Obama administration. President Obama announced this shift during his first trip to Asia in 2009, stating:

In addition to our bilateral relations, we also believe that: the growth of multilateral organizations can advance the security and prosperity of this region. I know that the United States has been disengaged from many of these organizations in recent years. So let me be clear: those days have passed. As a Asia Pacific nation, the United States expects to be involved in the discussions that shape the future of this region, and to participate fully in appropriate organizations as they are established and evolve (The White House 2009).

The most obvious change concerned relations with ASEAN. The Obama administration, on the contrary, signalled the importance of nurturing a stable and relevant relationship with ASEAN, signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), dispatching an ambassador to the ASEAN headquarters in Jakarta and joining the ASEAN Defence Minister's meeting. Secretary Hillary Clinton, in October 2010, defined the ASEAN as a "fulcrum for the region's emerging regional architecture" and announced the renewed engagement of ASEAN, reflecting the American intention to "sustain and strengthen America's leadership in the Asia Pacific Region" (Clinton 2010; Asia Society 2011).

In 2011, the US also joined the East Asia Summit. As Jeffrey Bader argued, "EAS was considered the most important organization in view of its ability to deal with political and security issues" (Bader 2013, p. 14). Joining the EAS, the US recognized its importance as a forum in which to address crucial issues for the region, such as territorial and maritime disputes and nuclear proliferation. This process of institutional engagement, together with the strengthening of the bilateral security alliances, have clarified the American commitment to prevent, at least in terms of institutions and governance, the consolidation of a Sino-centric form of regionalism.

The second fundamental aspect of the renewed diplomatic engagement of the region concerns the relationship with non-allied regional partners. From this point of view, the crucial relations are those with India, Myanmar, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Forging a deeper relationship with India has been a relevant objective for the policy in Asia. India maintains a strong scepticism towards the Chinese rise and the possibility of a Chinese hegemony in Asia. However, historically, Indian foreign policy has been rooted in a strong post-colonial identity and a marked aversion towards permanent alignments (Mohan 2003).

The election of Narendra Modi opened the possibility for the establishment of more consistent bilateral ties. In 2015, Washington and New Delhi signed a Defence Framework Agreement, facilitating military sales and the sharing of military technology. At the same time, the two countries inaugurated a US-India Strategic and Commercial Dialogue. The US also asked India to participate in APEC. Despite the promising start and a common interest in avoiding the rise of a China-dominated region, India remains sceptical towards more significant and more binding forms of agreements with Washington (Madan 2016; Kumar 2016).

Myanmar has represented probably the most visible result of the changing American approach in the region. The Obama administration has reversed the policy of isolation and promoting a diplomatic opening that culminated with Secretary Clinton's visit in 2011 and the presidential visit of 2012. This policy shift encouraged the transition from the military regime to a multiparty democracy. In 2011 the military *junta* was dissolved and new civilian institutions were formed. The new government promoted a number of reforms, and allowed a by-election, that led to the return to parliament of the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi. In 2015, the NLD won the new parliamentary elections. Aung San Suu Kyi was named State Counsellor (a role similar to Prime

Minister) and the NLD representative, Htin Kyaw, was elected as the first non-military president since 1962 (Bünto 2016; Walton 2015).

This determined a major change in Myanmar foreign policy orientation. The military regime, due to the sanctions and its international isolation, was forced to develop a highly dependent relationship with China. This asymmetric relationship had created an evident discomfort for the country, since Beijing tended to over-exploit the Burmese territory, promoting vast infrastructural projects, such as dams on the Irrawaddy River that led to the relocation of substantial numbers of local inhabitants. Moreover, China directly controlled the majority of the country's natural resources. The process of democratization favoured the abandonment of the policy of alignment with Beijing and the development of a more autonomous and diversified position that was able to balance the Chinese influence with growing ties with the US, Japan and other ASEAN members (Haacke 2015; Wilson 2016).

The improvement of the bilateral relations with Vietnam is another relevant consequence of the strategy of rebalancing. Vietnam still maintains a socialist regime and the monopoly of power of the Communist Party. The relationship between Washington and Hanoi continues to be influenced by the legacies of the Vietnam War and concerns about Vietnamese standards in terms of human rights. However, the rise of China and the increasing number of bilateral disputes with Beijing have led the Vietnamese government to favour a rapprochement with the US (Hiebert et al. 2014).

In 2010, Washington and Hanoi started an annual Defence Policy Dialogue. In the same year, Vietnam declared its intention to participate in the negotiations for the TTP, ultimately signing the agreement with the other partners in February 2016. The two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on defence cooperation in 2011 and a Comprehensive Bilateral Partnership in 2013. The rapprochement with Vietnam culminated in President Obama's visit to Hanoi in May 2016. The visit led to the lifting of the arms embargo that had lasted for more than 30 years, and further cooperation in the realm of maritime security and disaster relief, non-proliferation and civil nuclear collaboration (Le Thu 2016).

The rapprochement with Hanoi more generally is significant in a number of ways. On the one hand, it represents a major success for the strategy of rebalancing, since a significant actor such as Vietnam is progressively aligning itself with the US, despite ideological and political differences. This means that Vietnam is ready to side with its former ideological and military archenemy in order to prevent China from achieving hegemony in the region and to contain Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea (Martin 2014; Tuan and Thuy 2016).

The other crucial element of the strategy of rebalancing concerns trade and economic relations. In this field, the main initiative is the promotion of the TTP. In November 2009, the Obama administration announced that the enlargement of the TPP would be a keystone of American trade policy (Fergusson et al. 2013). The TPP aimed at eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade and investment among the parties. It was also thought that it could serve as a template for future trade pacts among members and become the largest free trade area at global level.

The agreement was signed by the member states in February 2016. However, Congress failed to ratify it during the last months of the Obama administration. President Trump criticized the content of the TPP and promised not to ratify it. Even if the agreement is abandoned, it is important to reflect on its role in the strategy of rebalancing, and to highlight the likely consequences for the region of the policy reversal promoted by Trump.

I will not detail the content of the TPP. Not only has this been done by Arlo Poletti (see Chap. 2), but it would be beyond the scope of this chapter, particularly given the complex nature of the partnership's provisions. Here, however, it is important to underline the objectives the TPP aimed to fulfil in normative, institutional and economic terms. The promotion of the TPP was not simply concerned with the possibility of increasing the volume of trade in goods and services between the member countries. The agreement represented a crucial instrument to promote an open, Asia-Pacific vision of the region, based on liberal market capitalism, and rule and norms favourable to the US (Solis 2013).

The first and most obvious point concerns geography. The TPP embodied the most significant attempt to create an economic region that would embrace both sides of the Pacific, including Canada, Mexico, Chile and Peru in the American continent and Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Australia, Vietnam, and Brunei on the Asian continent. The TPP would define a quintessentially "virtual region", held together more by interests, norms and institutions than by geography or cultural affinity.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the TPP aimed to achieve the normative content of the regional order in two distinct ways: (1) it proposed to favour forms of deep integration that would create new limits for state sovereignty; (2) it intended to promote the construction of an economic order based on liberal market capitalism, rather than state capitalism, as preferred by China.

The TPP could promote a fundamental change in terms of depth of regional governance, in a region where, generally, forms of commercial and financial cooperation find an insurmountable barrier in the sovereignty of states and in the principle of non-interference (Acharya 2009; Bellamy and Drummond 2011; Narine 2005). Beyond the effects of the single provisions in terms of relative gains and trade diversion, the TPP touches upon the normative content of the regional order in terms of sovereignty and relations between the rights of states and the rights of individuals. In this case, the rights of individuals are not only considered as human rights, but also as rights of works and investors. Several of the 29 chapters of the agreement explicitly design mechanisms created to limit the control that each state has on its own domestic regulation. Signatories of the treaty accepted, for the first time, that they would reach common standards in sectors such as labour rights, environmental and phytosanitary standards, intellectual property, rules of origin and protection of investments (US Trade Representative 2016c).

The TPP could represent a crucial step toward the acceptance of deep or "intrusive" forms of economic governance, redefining the balance between states' rights and powers and the rights of individuals and firms. The underlying logic was the attempt to create a space in which goods and services could be freely traded,

while creating a limit to the possibilities of the states to disrupt free trade and competition. These principles represented a Copernican revolution in a region that has largely embraced the idea that trade and economic policies should be complemented with strong guidance from the state.

The final key consequence of the TPP concerns the contestation of the market as the primary institution. The TPP aimed at promoting an economic order based on free market capitalism, and at generating severe limits for norms and practices associated with state capitalism. The chapter dedicated to SOEs is central from this perspective, and states that

businesses, regardless of ownership, compete fairly through enforceable rules to ensure that foreign-owned SOEs compete on the basis of quality and price, not on the basis of discriminatory regulation, subsidies, or favouritism (US Trade Representative 2016b).

This chapter limited the potential for SOEs in receipt of financial support or special treatment to invest or export. The TPP aimed at creating a normative environment that would limit the activities of the Chinese SOEs, in order to deprive China of the possibility of using state-owned companies to fulfil its political needs, such as acquisition of foreign technology, strategic assets and infrastructures, the creation of relations of asymmetric interdependence, or using investments as a political reward (Szamosszegi and Kyle 2011). This chapter is even more relevant, since the Chinese Communist Party has recently confirmed the necessity of tightening its control and the political guidance over the SOEs (Breslin and Wang 2016).²

Another crucial part of the agreement concerned financial services (US Trade Representative 2016a). This chapter created limits to the role of state-owned banks, depriving them of the potential to both receive special treatments or subsidies from the state and offer special treatment to firms. On the one hand, these rules would induce states such as Vietnam and Malaysia to reform and privatize their banking sectors. On the other hand, this chapter would severely curb the potential for Chinese state-owned banks to invest in TPP member states or to support SOEs or private enterprises in their investments in the TPP area.

Ultimately, these sections of the TPP evidence the political nature of the agreement. The TPP would serve many purposes: redefining the regulatory environment, favouring the convergence towards free market capitalism, limiting the Chinese capacity to used investments and political tools, and increasing the economic integration with key Asian actors, limiting their dependence on Beijing.

As mentioned previously, the TPP was widely criticized during the presidential campaign. Donald Trump reversed the traditionally pro-trade orientation of the party, promising not ratifying the TPP. It is important for the scope of this book,

²As Breslin and Wang (2016, p. 4) have recently underlined, in September 2015, the Plenum of the CPC reaffirmed its commitment to “strengthen and improve the party’s leadership over SOEs” and called for “Party committees and governments at all level to unify their thinking with high sense of responsibility”.

and for any analysis of the future of the American role in Asia, to consider the consequences of the likely abandonment of the TPP.

Signing the TPP has had resulted in relevant political costs for most of the members. A prime example is the opposition faced by the Japanese government at the hands of the agricultural sector and the doctors. Another example is the commitment of the Vietnamese and Malayan governments to approve drastic reforms in order to reach the advanced standards required by the TPP, in virtually every relevant sector of the agreement, from workers' rights and protection of the environment, to protection of intellectual property and foreign investments. In advanced capitalist democracies, such as Canada and Australia, governments faced the opposition of trade unions and other anti-TPP activists. All these governments regard the abandonment of the agreement as a signal that the US failed to consider the amount of political capital their partners had to invest to contribute to the open, Pacific-wide, vision of regional integration.

Even more significantly, abandoning the TPP would have very significant consequences in terms of credibility and leadership. It would signal a fundamental lack of credibility and political will and would deprive the US of the crucial instrument for the construction of the "Asia-Pacific model" of regional order. The abandonment of the TPP could generate a reaction similar to that following the 1997–1998 financial crisis. The main actors in the region would look for alternative solutions to create a stable economic order. The major difference between the current situation and that at the end of the 1990s is China, which, at the time, had neither the resources, the ideas, nor the political appetite to present itself as a regional leader. Today, those states that feel abandoned by Washington have before them a clear alternative blueprint for the region. From the normative point of view, the Chinese regional project is less demanding for the vast majority of East and South East Asian states, with the notable exception of Japan and South Korea. On the one hand, many of them would probably accept a regional order based on a closed region, the reinforcement of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, and a diffusion of practices associated with state capitalism. On the other hand, the progressive development of a Sino-centric, economic regionalism would amplify Beijing's leverage in the region. This would be likely to also undermine the American position in the security sphere. Ultimately, the development of a regional order based on Beijing leadership would define East Asia as the main stumbling block of the international order.

5 Conclusions

In the conclusion, we can finally address some of the broad questions that characterize this volume, regarding the American capacity to produce order, the indispensability of the American power, and the relationship between regional and global order.

This chapter has described how East Asia is characterized by a process of competition between two different visions of the regional order. China has developed a blueprint based on the notions of exclusivity (Xi's "Asia for Asians, governed by Asians"), a "statist" and post-colonial normative core, and the Chinese leadership. The flagship institutional initiatives proposed during the Xi era, such as AIIB, RCEP, and OBOR, broadly reflect this vision. The Pivot to Asia was associated with an "Asia-Pacific vision" of the regional order that would help to socialize the region to global norms and standards, and would make Asia a fundamental building block for a renewed American leadership globally.

This chapter underscores a number of merits in the Obama administration. Firstly, this administration recognized the centrality of East and South East Asia for the future of the international order and it has acknowledged the urgency of the challenge posed by a rising China. Secondly, it recognized that the hub-and-spoke system of alliances is only a part of the solution. Washington needed to deepen and improve its engagement in the realms of economic governance and multilateral institutions. This enhanced form of engagement was rightly considered as necessary to set the boundaries of the Chinese rise and to preserve the American capacity to shape the future of the region.

Another crucial merit of the Obama administration was the recognition that, in order to face this crucial challenge, the US needed to harness all the instruments of statecraft and not just military power. As a consequence, the pivot was conceived as a genuinely multidimensional strategy, underpinning a clear vision of the regional order. The economic leg, embodied mainly by the TPP, aimed at advancing the principles of free market capitalism and protection of the economic rights of the individuals from the rights of the states.

The chapter has also highlighted a number of obstacles in the way of the construction of the "Asia Pacific" template. Firstly, China is the first commercial partner of most states in the region, and China is increasingly a central node of regional production chains. The second obstacle is ideational. Especially in South East Asia, many states base their identity on a post-colonial and "statist" identity. As with China, they value the principles of sovereignty and non-interference as well as the primacy of the rights of the state over those of the individual. Despite these obstacles, a number of states have adhered to the American regional project (notwithstanding their distance, in terms of values), and to the principles underpinning the idea of an open "Asia-Pacific regionalism". Arguably, Vietnam's opening up to Washington is more a consequence of the Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea than a commitment to liberal values. Similarly, the transition and the new foreign policy course in Myanmar are intertwined with the necessity to overcome the overreliance on Beijing. Nevertheless, policies generated by conjuncture political and strategic necessities can also help structural domestic transition and the diffusion of different norms and values.

This leads us to consider the role of China. The Chinese leadership has produced a coherent blueprint for the region. The significant advantage for Beijing is the relatively low political costs borne by China's partners in order to participate in Chinese initiatives. Beijing's principles, such as sovereignty, non-interference, a

relevant role of the state in the economic system, as well as broadly post-colonial narrative, resonate in many Asian capitals. Adhering to the Chinese regional project requires neither political costs nor painful economic adjustments. Nevertheless, China has been undermining this advantage in different ways: firstly, its position on the territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea is threatening many Asian neighbours, pushing them somehow to make unnatural alignments with the US (Fravel 2017). Secondly, this perception is alimented by the increasingly exceptionalist and Sino-centric narrative produced by the Chinese leadership, particularly under Xi. The idea that China is the natural leader of the region, and that other Asian states should recognize its superiority, has alienated many potential partners, especially within ASEAN.

The chapter leads to a significant conclusion regarding the relationship between American commitment and the role of institutions. This analysis highlights that in contemporary Asia, institutions cannot be considered as an alternative to direct and visible political commitment. Participation in regional institutions is a fundamental signal of commitment. Moreover, new and old institutions are needed to promote values and practices associated with a well-defined regional project.

The final consideration concerns the indispensability of the role of the US and the role of allies and partners. A conventional view would consider the indispensability of the American commitment as an alternative to a central role for key allies and partners. This chapter highlights that these two are neither theoretically nor empirically mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the chapter highlights both that the US and key partners are essential to promoting the Asia-Pacific regional project.

The American commitment remains indispensable, since a disengagement from the region would alter the cost benefits calculus for all the key regional actors. Many states would accept the Chinese leadership and its underlying principles. Others, such as Japan and possibly South Korea, would likely resist any hegemonic attempt. As a consequence, an American retrenchment would lead to a serious risk of conflict.

The indispensability of the American role, however, must not be considered as a polar opposite to a significant role for key partners. The construction of a regional order requires the active consent of key local partners which, in turn, need to promote norms and practices inspired by a given set of ideas. Neither of the two visions of the regional order can be imposed, but only nurtured through institutionalized cooperation and engagement of the main regional partners.

All these considerations allow the proposal of some theoretically-grounded hypotheses on the future role of the US in Asia. The election of Donald Trump sent shockwaves in the region. During the campaign, he attacked what were perceived as inviolable principles of the US engagement in the region, such as the commitment towards hub-and-spoke alliances and non-proliferation. In the first months after his election, he tried to reassure key partners such as Japan and Korea. Nevertheless, he will probably maintain his promise to abandon the newest and most advanced forms of cooperation in the realm of economic governance, such as the TPP.

The analysis proposed in this chapter clearly points to several possible consequences, one of which is positive for the durability of the American hegemony or

for the current regional order in general. The abandonment of the TPP is likely to be a first step towards a reversal of the strategy of rebalancing as promoted by the Obama administration. This will possibly fundamentally undermine the project of building an Asia-Pacific form of regionalism and favour the success of the regional project based on the Chinese leadership. As this chapter has underlined, this will probably entail the prevalence of forms of economic integration based on state capitalist norms, associated with a strong reaffirmation of the role of sovereignty and non-interference. Ultimately, Asia seems to be poised to become one, and possibly the main stumbling block for the contemporary economic world order. This would further complicate the current dilemma faced by key US partners, namely the necessity to hedge between a stable relationship with Washington as the main security provider and Beijing, which is increasingly assuming a position of leadership in the economic realm. Moreover, the perception of a declining commitment in the realm of regional governance is likely to also affect the perception of the American commitment in the sphere of security.

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US Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the South China Sea—Able to Keep Chinese Territorial Expansionism in Check?

Axel Berkofsky

Abstract While Beijing is occupying and building military facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea, Washington is on regular basis conducting “Freedom of Navigation Operations” (FONOPs) in the same waters seeking to deter and indeed contain Chinese territorial expansionism. As it turns out, however, US FONOPs do not work as Beijing’s territorial expansionism goes on undeterred while Beijing is, wrongly as it turns out, claiming that it is merely building facilities and military on islands that have been part of Chinese sovereign territory since ‘ancient times’. In fact, China cites allegedly “aggressive” US FONOPs as the reason why it is from its perspective obliged to build military facilities on those islands for the purpose of self-defence. Arguably a “chicken and egg” situation in the South China Sea that could get out of control if Washington run by the unpredictable Donald Trump followed-up on the dangerous idea circulating among policymaking circles to block China’s access to the islands in the South China Sea it is occupying and building military facilities on.

1 Introduction

The purpose of US FONOPs in the South China Sea is to assert navigational freedoms against “excessive claims” to maritime jurisdiction by other states that are inconsistent with “high seas freedoms” as formulated in The “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea” (UNCLOS). FONOPs are operational assertions using military vessels to reinforce US declaratory policy on freedom of navigation, while they do not constitute actions to deter how states pursue their claims in maritime disputes. In fact, US FONOPs are a reaction to claims already defined by third parties¹ as a demonstration that Washington does not recognize those territorial claims and the territorial expansionism accompanying them. Freedom of

¹In essence Chinese territorial claims in the South and East China Seas.

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navigation in Asian territorial waters also regards the right of US military vessels to operate in what China claims as its two-hundred-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The US maintains that nothing in UNCLOS denies Washington the right to conduct military activities in EEZs without coastal state notice or consent from Beijing, or anybody else for that matter. The fact, however, that Washington has not ratified UNCLOS weakens US references to that UN convention.

It can indeed be concluded that so far US FONOPs do not, at least not yet, “work.” Do not work in the sense that they have not deterred Beijing from building civilian and military facilities on islands in the South China claimed by China and a number of Southeast Asian countries. In fact, the more the US insists to conduct FONOPs in the South China Sea, the more Beijing insists to continue to ignore international law and unilaterally claim disputed islands and islets in the South China Sea as part of its sovereign territory, for which there is according to the Permanent Court of Arbitration no historical evidence, for details see below. The US, at least those under President Obama was at time being criticized for not having been determined enough to keep Beijing from unilaterally expanding its territory in the South China Sea. To be sure, it is not obvious or indeed easy to contemplate what else Washington could—short of threatening Beijing with military consequences—do to deter Beijing from doing what it does in the South China Sea: occupying islands and islets that might never have belonged to China in the first place. Bonnie Glaser, Senior Advisor for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) admits that it might indeed not be possible to stop Chinese land reclamation activities in the South China Sea. Therefore, she recommended Washington to urge Beijing to be transparent and explain its intentions (Glaser 2015). That sounds good on paper and certainly makes sense given the lack of possible alternative actions short of threatening China with the use of military force to stop Chinese reclamation activities, but Beijing does not seem to feel obliged to give many explanations on what it does on islands, which in its own view belong to China. To be sure, what China offers in terms of explanations on why it builds military facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea are not—to put it bluntly—the kind of explanations Washington is hoping for. China’s builds military facilities on disputed islands, and Beijing does not get tired of pointing out that it does so in “self-defence”, defending itself against the alleged military threat posed by US intrusions into what Beijing maintains are Chinese territorial waters. While from Beijing’s perspective FONOPs are indeed viewed as direct challenges to China’s sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, the concept of “cause and effect” has seemingly yet to arrive in Chinese policymaking circles: Beijing’s policymakers categorically deny the possibility that Washington conducts those missions because China is building facilities on islands, which are disputed and are not part of Chinese national sovereign territory. In other words: Beijing does not acknowledge the possibility that China occupying disputed islands is the “cause”, while Washington conducting FONOPs in the South China Sea is the “effect.”

2 The FONOPs Record so Far

US FONOPs in the South China Sea are meant to challenge Chinese restrictions on the transit of military vessels through a 12 nautical mile territorial sea. Meant are restrictions such as China requesting prior permission or prior notification before sailing through what Beijing claims is its 12 nautical mile territorial sea. China is requesting such prior permission on the basis that it claims the territorial waters in question as part of its sovereign territory and maintains that Chinese domestic law requires prior notification. In 2015 and 2016 the US conducted four FONOPs: the USS Lassen in October 2015, the USS Curtis Wilbur in January 2016, the USS William P Lawrence in May 2016 and the USS Decatur in October 2016. The USS Lassen sailed within twelve nautical miles of five features in the Spratly Islands claimed by China. The USS Curtis Wilbur did the same off Triton Island in the Paracels, and in May 2016 the USS William Lawrence sailed within twelve nautical miles of Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands. In late October 2016 the US conducted its most recent FONOP challenging China's claims in the South China Sea. The USS Decatur sailed within waters claimed by Beijing near the Paracel Islands close to (but not within) the 12 nautical mile territorial sea limits of any of the islands. Washington maintained that the conducted the Decatur's transit what it referred to as "routine lawful manner." Calling the transit conducted in a "routine lawful manner" is noteworthy, as the passage was not like in the past referred to as "innocent passage" as the 1982 UNCLOS requires—indeed an important qualitative change of as compared to the three previous FONOPs (Valencia 2016). That could have meant that Washington in October 2016 did no longer feel obliged to call the transit "innocent passage" as it does not recognize the waters near the Paracel Islands as belonging to Chinese territory.² Indeed, it seemed that Washington ordered its destroyer at the time to challenge Beijing's territorial claim over the Paracel Islands by not abiding by China's request for prior notification before sailing through China's declared baselines and entering China's claimed territorial sea. In fact, US defence officials at the time said the guided-missile destroyer USS Decatur's transit was conducted to challenge "excessive maritime claims" near the Paracel Islands. The US FONOP in October 2016 took place during the Philippines' controversial President Rodrigo Duterte's visit to China, at the time aimed at improving bilateral relations after the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration of July 2016. Unsurprisingly, Beijing therefore at the time accused Washington of deliberately seeking to stir up trouble in the South China Sea and seeking to put Manila under pressure. "This shows that it is the United States which is the troublemaker when it comes to the stability of the South China Sea", China's Ministry of Defence announced on its website at the time (Blanchard 2016b).

²The Paracel Islands are a group of roughly 130 islands, reefs banks and other maritime features. They are controlled and occupied by China but also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam.

So far, Washington is on its own conducting FONOPs in the South China Sea. While it cannot be completely excluded that navies from other countries join the US Navy in the future, for the time being, the US is alone conducting FONOPs operations in the South China Sea. However, in June 2015 Japanese Admiral Katsutoshi Kawano, chief of the Joint Staff of Japan's Self-Defence Forces (SDF) said that Japan's navy—Japan's Maritime-Self Defence Force (JMSDF)—could consider conducting joint patrols with the US Navy “Depending on the situation” as he put it back then (Gady 2015). Already in April of the same year Washington and Tokyo reportedly discussed the possibilities of conducting joint patrols not only in the South China Sea but also in the East China Sea (Parameswaran 2015). To be sure, jointly patrolling the South China Sea with the US Navy could be easier said than done, as Tokyo would have to adopt laws, which authorize its navy to conduct such operations. Adopting laws to enable Japan's navy to jointly patrol Asian territorial waters; however, is not the only obstacle Tokyo would have to overcome. The limits of Japanese naval capacities too are an issue in view of the fact the country's naval and coast guard vessels are already engaged in patrolling Japanese territorial waters close and not so close (e.g. in the East China Sea around the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands) to the Japanese mainland.

China, the official political rhetoric suggests, does not have a problem with the US exercising freedom of navigation per se, but the devil is in the detail as it turns out. Zhou Bo, honorary fellow at the Center of China-American Defence Relations at the People Liberation Army's (PLA) Academy of Military Science stated that

The United States certainly enjoys freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, but its sailing within 12 nautical miles off China-controlled islands and reefs can only be a provocation in that these waters are not internationally recognized sea lanes (Bo 2016).

However, that is a Chinese perspective and Chinese perspective only, not least because the territorial waters China is referring to are in reality disputed territorial waters and—to put it bluntly—just because China says they belong to Chinese national territory does not necessarily mean that they do. And that is true for both what Beijing is referring to territorial waters, which according to Beijing belong to China since “ancient times” as well as for what China says is its EEZ around the islands it claims and has built facilities on. Consequently and from a non-Chinese perspective, Bo claiming that what he calls “American military activities, such as the close-in reconnaissance and surveillance by the US Navy in China's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that infringe on China's security interests” do not constitute FONOPs, does not correspond with reality, as the territories around which China claims EEZs are disputed. All of this has been confirmed with the verdict of the Permanent Court for Arbitration in July 2016. Against that background, US FONOPs in the South China Sea will continue to be one thing for Washington and the rest of the international community and something very different for China: a legitimate and lawful behaviour of the US navy versus an illegal and potentially dangerous intrusion into Chinese territorial waters.

3 Occupying and Militarizing Islands and Ignoring International Law

China claims most of the South China Sea, through which about \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes every year as part of its sovereign territory through the above-mentioned “Nine-Dash Line.”³ Beijing has over the last 3 years added more than 1,300 hectares of artificial land on seven features in the South China Sea. On that land, China built runways, ports, aircraft hangars and communications equipment (Packham 2016). Chinese military—undoubtedly with the blessing of the country’s political leadership—has over the last 12–18 months struck an increasingly bellicose tone when commenting on US FONOPs. Chinese admiral Sun Jianguo e.g. said during a conference in Beijing in July 2016 that

Freedom of navigation by American warships in the South China Sea, designed to ensure sea lanes stay open, could “play out in a disastrous way”, indicating that Beijing might see itself obliged to respond not only verbally but also with actions to US intrusions into allegedly territorial waters (Blanchard 2016a).

Finally, analysts are warning that China’s artificial island building could soon extend to Scarborough Shoal located 123 nautical miles from the main island of the Philippines, 250 nautical miles from the disputed Spratly and Paracel land features, and 530 nautical miles from China’s Hainan Island. In the South China Sea Beijing’s territorial disputes include the Paracel Islands, also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam, the Spratly Islands, claimed by Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei and the Scarborough Shoal, claimed both by Taiwan and the Philippines. Through China’s so-called “Nine-Dash Line”, Beijing claims sovereignty over more than 90% of the South China Sea. That line, which was first announced by China’s former president Chiang Kai-shek in 1947, stretches several hundreds of miles south and east from China’s most southerly province of Hainan and it indeed encompasses almost the entire South China Sea. Beijing claims that its territorial rights in the South China Sea go back centuries when the Paracel and Spratly island chains were regarded as integral parts of Imperial China, and in 1947 it issued a map detailing its claims. This map e.g. shows that the Paracel and Spratly Island groups fall completely within Chinese territory. Vietnam (like the Philippines) disputes China’s historical account, saying China had never claimed

³Roughly 30% of global maritime trade goes across the South China Sea, including goods worth \$1.2 trillion destined for the US. The South China Sea accounts for over 10% of world fisheries production and is believed to have significant oil and natural gas deposits beneath its floor. Furthermore, up to 75% of global crude and natural gas transits the South China Sea annually. Roughly one third of global crude oil and over half of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) passes through the South China Sea each year and more than 50,000 vessels transit the Straits of Malacca. While it is estimated that by 2020 the amount of oil and gas shipped through the South China Sea will double, China receives roughly 90% of its overseas-sourced crude oil through the South China Sea. Roughly half of the global liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade is shipped through the South China Sea and large quantities of coal from Australia and Indonesia pass through the South China Sea to markets around the world, above all to China, Japan, and India.

sovereignty over the islands before the 1940s. Instead, Vietnam claims that it has ruled over both the Paracels and the Spratlys since the 17th century. The other major claimant in the South China Sea are the Philippines, which argues that the Philippines' geographical proximity to the Spratly Islands makes them part of its national territory. Both the Philippines and China also claim sovereignty over the Scarborough Shoal, referred to as Huangyan Island in China—a little more than 100 miles from the Philippines and 500 miles from China. China has over the last 3–4 years pursued maritime assertiveness at the expense of its Southeast Asian neighbours. The expansive Chinese claims in the South China Sea impact upon the rights of Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Brunei to exploit waters within 200 nautical miles of their respective EEZs as granted under UNCLOS. If left unchallenged, Philippines and Malaysia will lose about 80% of their respective EEZs, Vietnam about 50%, Brunei about 90% and Indonesia about 30%. To drive home the point that the Paracel Islands belong to China, Beijing has authorized daily civilian charter flights from Hainan to Woody Island.⁴ Woody Island is the biggest of the Paracel Islands (which is under Beijing's control since 1956). Woody Island, which is also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan, has become the seat of what China calls Sansha City, China's newly established administrative centre for the South China Sea (Reuters 2016a).

To be sure, China has yet to specify what exactly the above-mentioned "Nine-Dash Line" means for overall sovereignty in the South China Sea. It is not clear—at least not to the outside observer—whether it means that Beijing considers everything within the line part of its sovereign possessions or instead only the islands and the waters surrounding them (The Economist 2016c). Given the overall lack of transparency as regards Beijing's strategic intentions (together with a lack of transparency as regards China's military capabilities and defence spending), it is indeed not a surprise that Beijing chooses to opt for strategic ambiguity as regards the quality of its overall territorial claims in the South China Sea. Although largely uninhabited, the Paracel and the Spratly Islands are believed to have reserves of natural resources around them even if the amount and quality of the natural resources is not (yet) fully known.

Despite earlier assurances not to "militarize" the disputed islands, China has done just that over the last 3–4 years. Indeed, Beijing has continuously defended what it calls its "right" to put "necessary military installations" on artificial islands in the South China Sea, after the US think tank The "Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative" (AMTI) in December 2016 detected that Beijing seemed to have deployed weapons such as anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems on those artificial islands (BBC News 2016a). The AMTI based at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington based its analysis and conclusions on satellite images of disputed islands in the South China Sea. Satellite images appear to show that China has built aircraft hangars on disputed islands, making it possible that Chinese military fighter jets will in the future be based on Fiery Cross, Subi and

⁴Yongxing Island in Chinese.

Mischief Reefs. Beyond the hangars and air defence systems, the satellite pictures also show that the construction of three naval bases is close to completion, including large docking facilities and harbours for the PLA Navy, the coast guard and other Chinese maritime law enforcement agencies. This sort of military constructions on the islands is most probably evidence that Beijing will in the very near future be in a position to deploy fighter regiments of up to 80 aircraft from bases built on artificial islands. Furthermore, the bases will be able to host Chinese strategic bombers such as the H6-K, early warning and surveillance aircraft and long range transport and tanker jets (BBC News 2016b). Finally, the satellite images showed what appear to be Chinese anti-aircraft weapons and close-in weapons systems (CIWS) to protect against cruise missile strikes. Three of these bases on the Spratly islands have military-length runways, and the satellite pictures also show the construction of concrete bunkers, possibly for fighter jets (The Economist 2016a). Further satellite images showed towers equipped with targeting radar (Blanchard and Martina 2016). Unsurprisingly, Beijing found nothing unusual, let alone threatening, about the installation of weapons systems on what it calls the Nansha Islands (known to the rest of the world as Spratly Islands). “The Nansha islands are China’s inherent territory. China’s building of facilities and necessary territorial defensive facilities on its own territory is completely normal,” a spokesman for China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared at the time.

If China’s building of normal facilities and deploying necessary territorial defensive facilities on its own islands is considered militarization, then what is the sailing of fleets into the South China Sea? (Brunnstrom 2016),

the spokesman added indicating that Washington’s FONOPs are from a Chinese perspective obliging Beijing to build military facilities on the islands it occupies in the South China Sea. Nothing, however could be further away from the truth and Beijing did certainly not need US “encouragement” to build these facilities together with other earlier-built facilities such as expanded deep-water naval bases to project China’s power far into the South China Sea and to support a new archipelago of artificial islands that China has built on reefs and atolls a long way from Chinese shores. The “militarization” of Chinese-occupied islands in the South China Sea has led analysts to conclude that the development and deployment of Chinese naval military capabilities on disputed islands could point to a possible Chinese strategy to in the future block US FONOPs as part of Chinese so-called “anti-access strategies” to the region.

From a Chinese perspective, China’s construction of military facilities on disputed islands is not only a reaction to US FONOPs in the South China Sea but also what Beijing perceives as an overall US—driven containment strategy—an allegedly “defensive” reaction to the US “pivot to Asia announced in 2011 (White House 2011). The US re-balancing towards Asia—albeit yet incomplete—will result in the reconfiguration of the ratio of American military power from its decade-long 50–50 split between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans to 60–40 in favour of Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, the US pivot to Asia will be complemented by the strengthening of existing US security ties with Japan and South Korea and the

strengthening of new defence relations with Vietnam, Australia, India and the Philippines. All of this has provided Chinese policymakers with alleged “evidence” that Washington has resorted to Cold War-style containment policies, this time directed at China. To be sure, Beijing policymakers and scholars do not—obviously against better knowledge—admit that Chinese policies and actions related to territorial claims in the East and South China Seas provide Washington’s with a motivation not only to continue FONOPs in the South China Sea but also to expand its security ties as part of the Asia pivot.

With the exception of China, all the claimants of the South China Sea have attempted to justify their claims based on their coastlines and the provisions of UNCLOS. China on the other hand ignores UNCLOS and instead cites history and Chinese historical maps as evidence that all of the disputed islands in the South China Sea belong to China. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, however, dealt a blow to China’s strategy to insist on alleged “historical rights” and ignore international law. In response to a court case submitted by the Philippines in 2013,⁵ the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in July 2016 that China cannot lawfully claim historic rights to resources within the above-mentioned “Nine-Dash Line.” Furthermore, the court ruled that China and other claimant countries cannot claim an EEZ from land features above high tide in the Spratlys, which the court in its verdict referred to as “rocks” entitled only to a 12 nautical miles territorial sea. The Spratly features that China claims, individually or collectively, the verdict rules, cannot generate an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for Beijing. The Mischief Reef was defined as a “low-tide elevation” on the Philippines’ continental shelf. This in turn mean that China’s construction of artificial installations on the Mischief Reef violate the Philippines’ sovereign rights, illegally interfered with traditional fishing rights of the Philippines, and unlawfully created serious risk of collision by engaging in unsafe navigational practices and obstructing Filipino vessels. This ruling was meant to pre-empt a Chinese claim to any maritime zones based on straight lines that could be drawn around the Spratlys as a whole. As a member of UNCLOS Beijing is in theory obliged to abide by the court ruling. However, the court has no enforcement mechanism and hence is not able to oblige China to accept the ruling and act accordingly. Beijing of course dismissed the ruling as irrelevant, which confirmed that it has no intention whatsoever to accept and abide by international law if international law limits the country’s territorial claims and de facto territorial expansionism backed-up by the display of military force. Consequently and on the basis of that verdict, the US FONOPs in 2015 and 2016 did not take place within Chinese EEZs but instead—as Washington claims—in international waters.

China’s reaction to the verdict is uncompromising as it concerns China’s “core interests”—next to Taiwan and Tibet that is territorial integrity in the South China Sea—China had no choice but to refer to the ruling as “irrelevant”. The South

⁵Manila submitted its case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2013 after Beijing took control of Scarborough Shoal, about 220 miles north-west of Manila.

China Sea is part of Chinese “core interests” alongside Taiwan and Tibet. South China Sea subject and policy area on which there is no Chinese flexibility: China is not ready—at least not under the current circumstances and against the background of Western “weakness”—to negotiate on sovereignty issues in the South China Sea. Consequently, Chinese offers to negotiate bilaterally on territorial disputes are indeed pointless, against the background that Beijing has already unilaterally decided that all disputed islands and islets are part of Chinese national territory. If Beijing did not respond to FONOPs, it would risk being viewed as weak and not being able to resist US pressure. In other words, responding to FONOPs with “dramatic” or aggressive language is the safer option for Beijing led by Xi Jinping in view of inner-Chinese pressure exerted onto the political leadership calling for (much) more than only strong words towards the US. Indeed, there are groups and influential policymakers and scholars in China, who urge the political leadership to opt for a military response the alleged violation of Chinese territorial integrity in the South China Sea.⁶

4 Keeping up the Pressure in the Neighbourhood

Claimant countries’ territorial claims in the South China Sea are according to China’s own interpretation of the facts and history of Asian territorial disputes all but completely obsolete. According to the scholar Edward Friedman those Chinese policymakers who believe that all other Asian countries involved in territorial disputes with China have become increasingly confident that other claimant countries will eventually accept Chinese domination in Asia, are the greatest concern, as they take Southeast Asian “submission” to China for granted (China File 2016). Weaker and smaller states in Asia, many Chinese policymakers and scholars argue, typically off the record, cannot prevail with their territorial claims against a militarily increasingly strong China and cannot afford to lose the benefits of trade and investment ties and Chinese tourists. The Philippines e.g. under its controversial president Duterte have repeatedly announced not to act on the above-mentioned court’s ruling and also Vietnam has recently declared wanting to avoid conflict with China over disputed territories in the South China Sea. Instead, Hanoi aims at seeking to settle its territorial disputes with Beijing through bilateral negotiations as opposed to multilateral and outside arbitration. Both Manila and Hanoi’s changing approaches towards territorial disputes with China surely provide Beijing with additional ammunition to refer to US FONOPs as counterproductive and indeed not necessary. To be sure, given that Beijing continues to insist that all of the disputed islands in the South China Sea are already an “integral part” of Chinese sovereign national territory, the questions remains what exactly China

⁶Interviews with two Chinese scholars working for think tanks affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The scholars asked not to be identified by name.

intends to negotiate about. Beijing has—at least not in public and on the record—in any way explained whether and to what extent it could or would accept to make concessions as regards sovereignty over disputed islands in the South China Sea. In fact, judging by the very assertive Chinese political rhetoric and Beijing’s attitude towards territorial disputes in the South China Sea it seems very unlikely—at least to the outside observer and analyst—that bilateral negotiations with Beijing on disputed islands could produce any results other than Beijing requesting other claimant countries to accept Chinese sovereignty over the disputed islands in question. Indeed, it is not at all clear what claimant countries could be expecting from Beijing in terms of concessions or compromise. Given China’s past practices, the most other claimant countries can expect—unless they challenge Chinese sovereignty over Chinese-occupied islands—is the problem-free continuation of business and trade ties with China. If they don’t, Chinese economic retaliation makes it onto the bilateral agenda. Indeed, in February 2016 China has continued to restrict banana imports from the Philippines,⁷ citing quarantine issues at the time. However, at the time it was clear that Beijing restricted banana imports as a result of Manila’s decision not to bow to Chinese pressure to drop the above-mentioned case submitted to the Permanent Court of Arbitration. In sum, China has in the South China Sea pursued a from its perspective very effective approach towards the territorial claims by Southeast countries—an approach also referred to as “combination of punches”: 1. deploying law enforcement, and not the Chinese navy, into disputed waters to assert its power while at the same avoiding direct military clashes with other claimant countries. 2. Exploiting its economic power and trade and investment ties with ASEAN countries in order to deter Southeast claimant countries from challenging Chinese territorial claims.

While Beijing is clearly not in the business of considering sharing sovereignty on the islands it is occupying in the South China Sea, it nonetheless remains somehow open to discussions on how to avoid military clashes with claimant countries in disputed waters. On October 16, 2015, China held the inaugural ASEAN-China “Defence Ministers’ Informal Meeting” (ACDMIM) in Beijing, during which China proposed to conduct joint training on the so-called “Code for Unalerted Encounters at Sea” (CUES) and to set up an Asian dispute settlement mechanism without the interference of outside powers (Nalwa 2016). While the initiative to set up a dispute settlement mechanism to avoid military clashes with claimant countries in the South China Sea is positive per se, China’s discussions with ASEAN claimant countries do not—at least not on the publicly available record—include negotiations on ownership, let alone sovereignty over disputed territories. Indeed, China it seems is primarily or indeed exclusively interested in avoiding military clashes with other claimant countries while at the same time making sure that “outside powers”, i.e. the US, do not “interfere” in territorial disputes with or on behalf of Southeast Asian claimant countries. To further

⁷Already in 2014, China halted its banana imports from Mindanao and other parts of the Philippines.

discourage Washington, or everybody else, do that, Beijing has over the last year or so more than once been thinking out loud about declaring a so-called “Air Defence Identification Zone” (ADIZ) over the South China Sea. In early 2016, Navy Senior Colonel Liang Fang, strategist in the National Defense University kicked off the conversation urging—like many other of his colleagues in the PLA or affiliated think tanks⁸—Beijing to declare an ADIZ over the South China Sea (Vuving 2016). Such an ADIZ in the area, Beijing policymakers and scholars decided, would require incoming aircraft to identify themselves to Chinese authorities (The Economist 2016b). While it can be assumed that Washington would ignore an ADIZ over the South China Sea, as it ignored Beijing’s ADIZ over the East China Sea in 2013, countries in the region are clearly and already very concerned that the ADIZ could nonetheless provide China with the basis to impose air control over the Spratly Islands (International Crisis Group 2014). Beijing’s ADIZ, in violation of common international law and practice, obliges all aircraft entering the zone to identify themselves, submit flight plans and maintain permanent radio communication with Chinese authorities. Japan, the US and South Korea responded to that request by ignoring all of this immediately, declaring that China’s ADIZ is in non-compliance with international practice and law (Szecheny et al. 2013). Although it remains very difficult for an outside observer to predict if and under which circumstances Beijing could decide to unilaterally declare an ADIZ over the South China Sea, it is nonetheless predictable that declaring such an ADIZ would almost certainly have consequences and would lead to a US reaction. In fact, under the new US presidency led by Donald Trump such reaction could be strong and resolute, paving the way for further escalation. Beijing, of course, is aware of Trump’s unpredictability—it got a “taste” of it when he announced to consider revisiting the “One-China-Principle” shortly after he took office⁹—and might therefore have—at least for now—decided to forego the declaration of an ADIZ in the South China Sea.

5 FONOPs Shortcomings

China remains—at least for now—undeterred despite the four FONOPs conducted in 2015 and 2016. The sailing of a US destroyer within 12 nautical miles of the Subi Reef in October 2015, was neither referred to a “deterrent” nor a “challenge” but instead “innocent passage” under Article 17 of UNCLOS, a right granted to all ships, enabling transit in another state’s territorial waters without permission. The fact that Washington at the time chose to call the transit “innocent passage” led to criticism and was also interpreted as a sign of weakness: as indicated above,

⁸A number of conversations this author had with PLA officers in 2015 and 2016 confirm this.

⁹In a telephone conversation with Chinese leader Xi Jinping he later assured Beijing that the US would instead continue to honour the “One-China-Principle”.

“innocent passage” under Article 17 of UNCLOS stands for the passage through territorial waters of other countries, which—at least according to some analysts—could be interpreted as Washington having acknowledged that its destroyer was sailing through Chinese territorial waters. At the time, the US vessel deactivated its radar systems and avoided exercises or tactical manoeuvring. Indeed, there is a debate in the US on whether the FONOPs make the right legal points strongly enough or whether they actually lend legitimacy to Chinese claims of sovereignty and/or maritime rights. As elaborated above, however, the most recent US FONOP in October 2016 constituted a possibly qualitative change as compared to previous operations: the operation by the USS Decatur was no longer referred to as “innocent passage” but instead referred to as conducted in a “lawful manner.”

As indicated above, Beijing has exploited US FONOPs as a justification to speed up the construction of military bases on the disputed islands it occupies in the South China Sea. That in turn allows for the conclusion that, because the FONOPs were not able to deter Beijing from constructing the military bases, US FONOPs were not only not able to deter Beijing from occupying islands and building bases, but were indeed counterproductive. From a Chinese perspective that in turn could mean that US FONOPs are indeed “welcome” as they allow Beijing to claim that military facilities on the islands are being built in “self-defence.” Washington under Donald Trump as it seems, however, has another potentially very dangerous trump up its sleeve. In January 2017 Donald Trump’s then appointee for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson¹⁰ said during the US Senate confirmation hearing that “We’re going to have to send China a clear signal that first, the island-building stops, and second, your access to those islands also is not going to be allowed” (Hranjski 2017). That statement suggested that Washington could be adopting policies and actions to block China’s access to islands in the South China Sea, which according to Beijing are part of sovereign Chinese national territory. To be sure, Tillerson did not say anything about how Washington could be or would be blocking Chinese access to any of the seven artificial islands Beijing has constructed. Not least, as Bonnie Glaser pointed out at the time, as Washington under Trump has not developed a strategy on how to deal with Chinese territorial expansionism in the South China Sea (Hranjski 2017). If we take the warnings coming out of Beijing at face value, for China the blockage of the occupied islands would constitute a declaration of war. In other words: if Washington decided to block Chinese access to islands in the South China Sea it has built facilities on, China would see itself obliged to respond with military force. To be sure, “upgrading” US involvement in territorial disputes from FONOPs to blocking access to islands, which from Beijing’s perspective already belong to China national territory, would stand for a fundamentally different US approach towards territorial disputes in the South China Sea. In that case, Washington could no longer maintain not to take sides in Asian territorial conflicts. Cited in the Economist in January 2017, Bill Hayton from Chatham House in London argues that Washington hinting at blocking China’s access to islands in the

¹⁰Who was later confirmed as US Secretary of State.

South China Sea served a very concrete purpose: deterring China from building a military base on the Scarborough Shoal, from which Beijing obliged the Philippines navy to leave a few years ago. A military base on the Scarborough Shoal would complement Chinese military bases already built on the Paracel and Spratly Islands, enabling China to militarily control the entire South China Sea (The Economist 2017). US warnings towards China not to build military facilities on the Scarborough Shoal were already voiced by the former US administration under President Obama and according to the Economist the ongoing rapprochement between Manila and Beijing could be an indication that Beijing has decided not to provoke Washington any further by building a military base on the Scarborough Shoal in 2017, a year which Chinese President Xi declared to be one of “stability.”

6 Beyond FONOPs, Possibly

FONOPs, as turns out, are not the only possible instrument at Washington’s disposal to keep Chinese territorial ambitions in check. In January 2016, the Centre for Security and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington issued a report, in which it recommends the US in the years ahead to increase its military presence and footprint in the Asia-Pacific in general and East Asia in particular by deploying additional nuclear attack submarines and advanced long-range missiles. The study concludes with a warning saying that

Chinese and North Korean actions are routinely challenging the credibility of US security commitments, and at the current rate of US capability development, the balance of military power in the region is shifting against the United States. Robust funding is needed to implement the rebalance. [...] The Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s anti-access/area denial capabilities that many once viewed as Taiwan-specific are rapidly expanding to the Second Island Chain and beyond, affecting not only an increasing number of US allies and partners, but also US territories such as Guam (Smith 2016).

As a result, the report advises Washington to increase its “surface fleet presence”, increasing the number of US nuclear attack submarines in Guam from four to six, to improve regional missile defence systems (with Japan and South Korea), to stockpile critical precision munitions and enhance intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance cooperation with allies in the region. Finally, the report urges Washington to sustain and expand its military presence in the Asia-Pacific in view of Chinese and North Korean very assertive and indeed aggressive behaviour in the region (Centre for Strategic and International Studies 2016).

In August 2015 the US Pentagon adopted its new Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy, outlining three objectives of US military presence and involvement in Asia: Safeguard the freedom of the seas; Deter conflict and coercion; Promote adherence to international law and standards. The strategy suggests that Washington US is on schedule to rebalance its resources and naval capabilities towards the Asia Pacific by deploying 60% of its naval and air forces to the region by 2020. China can for the foreseeable future not match the quality of US navy

capabilities deployed in the Asia-Pacific region and Washington is currently seeking to make sure that this will not change in the years ahead. In May 2016 e.g. the US Navy was equipped with the much-anticipated stealth destroyer USS Zumwalt. The destroyer will be deployed to the US West Coast as a reflection of the above-mentioned navy's re-positioning of navy assets to the Asia-Pacific. By 2020, an estimated 60% of the US Navy fleet will be based in the Asia-Pacific region (The Maritime Executive 2015).

7 Conclusions

FONOPs have not worked, at least so far. China continues to build facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea. To be sure, US President Trump's earlier threat to revisit the above-mentioned "One-China-Principle" and impose additional tariffs on Chinese exports to the US might have had an impact on what Beijing will in the months and years ahead decide to build on disputed territories and with what speed. As elaborated above, there is a fundamental difference as to how Washington and Beijing interpret the quality and purpose US FONOPs: while the US maintains that it is conducting legitimate and non-threatening FONOPs in international waters, China argues that Washington is conducting aggressive operations in Chinese territorial waters. This fundamental difference in interpretation of what the US navy is doing and conducting in the South China Sea will most probably continue to make sure that result-oriented discussions between Beijing and Washington on US FONOPs will not take place. Whether or not that will even be more the case under US President Trump remains yet to be seen, but what can already be concluded is that it appears very, very unlikely that the current US administration could in any way become more accommodating towards China as regards its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

If Chinese territorial expansionism continues in the future, the purpose of US FONOPs should be changed if they are actually meant to deter Beijing from continuing to build artificial structures on island in the South China Sea. In that case, Washington could or indeed should declare that FONOPs take place to challenge Chinese claims to maritime jurisdiction over the artificial islands that China has created in the South China—at least four of which would not be entitled to even a territorial sea because they are artificially-built structures built on a low-tide elevation, as opposed to what can be referred to as "island", as ruled by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in July 2016. However, even if Washington decided to do that, it is—at least judging by the recent very assertive Chinese rhetoric and reactions to US FONOPs—unlikely that Beijing would decide to stop building artificial structures and civilian and military facilities on the disputed islands in the South China Sea. That in turn leaves us with the question what Washington could or would do then to oblige Beijing to stop expanding its territory. Given Beijing's insistence that de facto the entire South China Sea—together with all the islands it is currently building civilian and military facilities on—belongs to China and given

the FONOPs' failure to deter China from building facilities on islands that are also claimed by other countries, Washington would have to resort to other means to deter Beijing from territorial expansionism in the South China Sea.

To be sure, US actions in the South China Sea must also be measured by what Washington wants from Beijing in terms of containing North Korea's belligerency in the region. Washington—like the other interested parties Japan and South Korea—want to be able to count on Beijing's ability to deter Pyongyang from aggravating the fragile security situation on around the Korean Peninsula.¹¹ Although there is not necessarily always an “automatic” connection between what is taking place on the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea, it is nonetheless accurate to conclude that the more Washington and Beijing are in conflict over territorial disputes in the South China, the less Beijing could feel inclined to contribute—on Washington's behalf—to controlling North Korean belligerency, with a potentially immediate impact on the security of US military stationed in South Korea and Japan.

Beijing as it turns out is not the only country in the business of building facilities in Southeast Asia. At the very end of January 2017, Washington has announced that it will soon begin the construction of facilities to accommodate US troops and military equipment inside Philippine army bases (Hranjski 2017). However, the current government in Manila led by President Duterte is—because of his apparent interest not to do anything that might “offend” Beijing—far less enthusiastic about expanding the Philippines' defence ties with Washington than the previous government. Hence, it remains probably yet to be seen whether the accommodation of US military within the military bases will go ahead as smoothly and quickly as scheduled.

The fact that China categorically ignores and indeed dismisses the above-mentioned verdict of the Permanent Court of Arbitration as irrelevant suggests that UNCLOS and the court in The Hague judging on UNCLOS-related cases need a clear mandate and more importantly instruments to impose their verdicts if they want to avoid the fate of being irrelevant. As shown above, Beijing is clearly taking advantage of the absence of UNCLOS law-enforcing instruments, allowing it to mock the court and its verdict. As mentioned above, the fact that the US has not ratified UNCLOS does not help Washington's case of urging China to respect international law and will in Beijing continue to be used against Washington's efforts to contain Chinese territorial expansionism.

The fact the US find itself *de facto* alone seeking to deter Beijing from occupying disputed islands is indeed remarkable and must be very welcome in Beijing. Above-mentioned economic pressure on Southeast Asian claimant countries, Chinese policymakers must be concluding, is “working” and will continue to work until Southeast Asian countries and ASEAN remain divided on how to react to

¹¹Even if Beijing's willingness—among others by threatening to reduce Chinese economic and financial aid for North Korea—to control the level of North Korean belligerency over recent years must be described as limited at best.

Chinese successful policies aimed at controlling movements in and access to the South China Sea. Regardless of the fact that Southeast Asian countries are without a doubt aware that above-mentioned bilateral negotiations will not lead to China ceasing islands and islets it already calls their own, Southeast Asian ability and preparedness to confront Beijing with US help remains very limited, if at all existent. To be sure, Washington is conducting FONOPs obviously not for Southeast Asian claimant countries alone, but also to secure its very own interests in the region, but the reluctance of other interested parties to get involved to secure their territorial interests is—at least from an outside perspective—barely understandable. From a Southeast Asian perspective things apparently look differently and it seems that countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and others have chosen problem-free trade and business ties with China over confronting Beijing's unilateral territorial expansionism. The one country, however, Washington might or indeed will want to depend on in terms of burden sharing for Asian security is Japan. Tokyo, however, thinking out loud about joining US patrols in the South China Sea without following-up on the “thinking” with actual joint US Japan patrols in the South China Sea might not be good enough for Washington under Trump. Indeed, it is possible and even likely that Washington under Trump will come back to Japan on the issue of joint patrolling in the months ahead, regardless of the above-mentioned Japanese legal, constitutional and political limits and restraints standing in the way of joint US FONOPs in the South China Sea.

Washington arguably remains the “indispensable” nation seeking to keep Chinese territorial expansionism in check, but does not receive much help—or indeed none at all—from those countries that are meant to profit from US FONOPs. The fact that US FONOPs in 2015 and 2016 were not able to deter Beijing from building military bases on Chinese-built artificial islands in the South China Sea must have convinced Southeast claimant countries to have made the “right” decision of not having supported or even joined US FONOPs.

Finally, analysts warn that China's artificial island building could soon extend to Scarborough Shoal located 123 nautical miles from the main island of the Philippines, 250 nautical miles from the disputed Spratly and Paracel islands, and 530 nautical miles from China's Hainan Island. If and when that happens, it will be interesting to see how Washington under Donald Trump reacts. Maybe the above-mentioned dangerous idea of blocking China's access to its occupied islands in the South China Sea could in that case re-surface and stir-up the troubled waters of the South China Sea even more.

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Confronting China's Cyberwarfare Capabilities: A "Weapon of the Weak" or a Force Multiplier?

Simone Dossi

Abstract The military uses of cyberspace and their implications for international politics are widely debated among scholars. A central issue in this debate is whether cyberweapons favour weak or strong actors. While many consider the new technology as a "weapon of the weak," others are convinced that it is in fact the opposite—a force multiplier, consolidating the existing hierarchy of power. These two opposing views have equally opposing implications when it comes to US-China relations and the future of the US-led international order. While the mainstream discourse tends to see China as a major beneficiary of cyber, others argue that Chinese cyberthreats to the US are largely overestimated, as the new technology increases China's own vulnerability to US attacks. The aim of this paper is to investigate Chinese and US perceptions of cyberwarfare, the connections between the two, and their implications for the future of the US-led international order. Based on the analysis of the official discourse in the two countries, the paper shows that cyberspace remains a highly ambivalent domain, presenting both China and the United States with a mix of challenges and opportunities.

1 Introduction

During the Obama administrations, cyber disagreements have been a major irritant in US-China relations. Beyond systematically criticizing censorship of the internet in China, Washington has repeatedly denounced Chinese attacks against US private companies, governmental agencies and research institutions. A critical turning point were the 2010 cyberattacks that would later become known in the Western media as "Operation Aurora." In January of that year, Google disclosed that hackers based in China had infiltrated its systems and accessed Gmail accounts of human rights activists in China, the US and Europe. It was later reported that Chinese hackers had

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also attacked several other US companies, including Adobe, Symantec, Yahoo, Morgan Stanley and Northrop Grumman (Cate 2015). In retaliation, Google announced that it would stop complying with Chinese censorship regulations and, a few weeks later, began to redirect traffic from mainland China toward its Hong Kong-based, uncensored server. This crisis had significant repercussions on US-China relations. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called for an in-depth investigation and launched a campaign against censorship of the internet in China, declaring that Beijing's violation of "the basic rights of internet users" risked "walling [China] off from the progress of the next century" (Clinton 2010). Since then, economic cyber-espionage from China has become a major concern for US authorities, which fear that Chinese cyberattacks might jeopardize US competitiveness (Read 2014). But concerns are not restricted to the arena of economic competition, and it is feared that Beijing could translate its growing cyber capabilities into a military advantage over the US, thus paving the way for the "next generation of conflict" with Washington (Manson 2011).

The military exploitation of the cyber domain and its implications for the future of international politics have been widely discussed by scholars. A central issue in this debate has been whether cyberwar—"a coercive act involving computer network attacks" (Junio 2013, p. 126)¹—favours strong or weak actors. On the one hand, several scholars have argued that cyberwarfare works as a strategic equalizer that helps weak actors—including both state and non-state actors—to close the power gap with stronger opponents. From this mainstream perspective, the new technology seems set to empower a wide range of US competitors, thus radically impacting on the existing international order. On the other hand, a few scholars have replied that cyberwarfare is in fact just the opposite: a force multiplier that benefits strong actors and the US above all. From this alternative point of view, the new technology will ultimately consolidate the existing hierarchy of power and strengthen the US-led international order. When it comes to the future of US-China relations, these two opposing points of view have equally opposing implications. If it works as a strategic equalizer, then cyberwarfare will empower China and other rising actors against the US, thus accelerating a global redistribution of power. On the contrary, if cyberwarfare works as a force multiplier, then it will help the US to preserve the existing international order, while posing a major challenge for China's successful rise.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the Chinese and US perceptions of cyberwarfare, the connections between the two, and their implications for the future of the US-led international order. How is cyberwarfare perceived in Beijing and in Washington? How is the US responding to the perceived role of China in the cyber domain? To answer these questions, the paper proceeds as follows. The first section goes back to the theoretical debate introduced above and explores the two opposing

¹The definition of cyberwar and cyberwarfare remains controversial. For alternative definitions, see, for instance, Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1997), Demchak (2012), Rid (2012), Kello (2013) and Stone (2013).

perspectives on cyberwarfare, with a focus on their implications for the future of the US-led international order and the role played by China. The second section is then focused on the Chinese official discourse on cyberwarfare. Drawing on Chinese authoritative sources, this section emphasizes the mixed character of cyberwarfare as perceived by China: a threat in some respects, but an opportunity in others. The third section turns to the US official discourse under the Obama administrations, with the analysis of White House and Department of Defense documents. Also in this case, it is argued that cyberwarfare is perceived both as a threat—posed by several actors, including China—and as an opportunity for the US. The conclusions will finally address how the Obama administrations have responded to China's role in the cyber domain, and the prospects for the continuation of such a policy under the new president.

2 The Theoretical Debate

As mentioned above, mainstream discourse tends to depict cyberwarfare as a weapon of the weak. The cyber domain has low barriers to entry—so the argument goes—and this empowers weak actors in their fight against stronger enemies. First, cyber technology is assumed to be relatively cheap, with cyber weapons making it possible to achieve the desired military goal at a comparatively low cost. An example that is often made is *Stuxnet*, a worm reportedly produced by the US and Israel. In 2010, media reports revealed that more than 1000 centrifuges in the uranium enrichment facility of Natanz had been severely damaged by the worm, thus significantly delaying the Iranian nuclear programme. It was alleged that achieving the same goal with alternative tools would have been much more expensive: the whole *Stuxnet* project cost “in the low double-digit millions of dollars,” compared with the \$2 billion of a single B2 bomber, in case an aerial attack was attempted (Koblentz and Mazanec 2013, p. 423). A second reason why cyberwarfare is considered to have low barriers to entry is the interconnectedness of the cyberspace, which offers multiple points of access for an attack. An example of this is the cyber campaign against Estonia in Spring 2007. In the midst of a dispute with Russia, a series of Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks disrupted websites of the Estonian government, companies and the media. It was estimated that the attacks were launched by approximately 100 million computers from more than 50 countries (Koblentz and Mazanec 2013). As argued by one analyst, the campaign against Estonia demonstrated that “anyone with a computer can launch targeted or even random attacks against other users or systems that depend on information technology” (Blank 2008, p. 241). Training in cyberwarfare techniques is equally cheap and easy to obtain, which is the third reason why the barriers to entry are reportedly low. Technology used for a cyberattack does not differ substantially from that used in everyday life for peaceful purposes, so that the technical expertise for a successful cyberattack can be easily accessed. For all of these reasons, cyber technology is thought to have created huge opportunities for weak

actors. With cheap hardware, an elementary training, and access to one of the innumerable entry points of the cyberspace, anyone is capable of inflicting considerable damage on a stronger enemy.

While weak actors are favoured by low barriers, strong actors are disadvantaged by their greater dependence on information and communications systems. In fact, such a dependence is intrinsic to advanced societies, as the functioning of critical facilities—including power and water grids, oil and gas pipelines, refineries—relies on their Industrial Control Systems (ICS). An attack against these systems would thus result in serious disruptions or even in a complete paralysis. As argued by one scholar, “information systems control many important aspects of modern society, from power grids through transportation systems to essential financial services. These systems are riddled with technical vulnerabilities. Consequently, our reliance on these systems is a major factor making cyber war inevitable” (McGraw 2013, p. 109). The idea that technological superiority and social complexity are conducive to bigger vulnerability is not peculiar to the discourse on cyberwarfare. The same assumption underpinned, for instance, the discourse on air power between World War I and World War II. In the US, air power theorists from the Air Corps Tactical School postulated aerial attacks against “national organic systems on which many factories and numerous people depended” (quoted in Faber 1997, p. 219): power generation and distribution systems, transportation networks, food production and distribution infrastructure, steel mills, etc. This approach was based on the so-called Industrial Web Theory, which assumed that modern industrial societies are highly dependent on the web of production and distribution systems. Collapse of those systems would inflict high material and moral costs on the whole society, ultimately leading to surrender. A 1932 exposition of this concept is strikingly similar to the complexity-vulnerability nexus in today’s discourse on cyberwarfare: “Modern great powers rely on major industrial and economic systems for production of weapons and supplies for their armed forces, and for manufacture of products and provision of services to sustain life in a highly-industrialized society. Disruption or paralysis of these systems undermines both the enemy’s capability and will to fight” (quoted in Faber 1997, p. 217).

The idea that cyberwarfare is the weapon of the weak has been systematically opposed by a smaller group of scholars. What they have tried to demonstrate is that cyberwarfare is in fact the opposite: a force multiplier that consolidates the superiority of the strong. First, it has been argued that barriers to entry to the cyber domain are higher than usually assumed. Cheap hardware and easy training might be sufficient for an amateur attack, but not for a military operation with major political goals. In this case, an actor needs to invest considerable resources in research and development for a protracted period of time. As convincingly argued by Jon Lindsay in his study of *Stuxnet*, only strong actors can afford the luxury of cyberwarfare. In that case, the successful outcome of the attack was the result of huge investments on both the intelligence and the engineering side of the project. Still, its final cost did not include “the substantial infrastructure, expertise, and experience already paid for and embodied in agencies like the NSA, CIA, and Mossad” (Lindsay 2013, p. 388). Lindsay’s conclusion is therefore that “barriers to

entry for targeted, destructive ICS attacks will thus remain prohibitive for all but states with long-established and well-funded cyber warfare programs” (Lindsay 2013, p. 388). As he noted, moreover, only strong actors possess the traditional military capabilities that are necessary to face the consequences of a failed cyber-attack. When experimenting with *Stuxnet*, the US and Israel knew that—whatever might happen—they still retained capabilities sufficient to cope with any potential Iranian retaliation. Inferiority in terms of traditional military capabilities might therefore dissuade weak actors from resorting to cyberattacks, thus effectively transforming cyberwarfare into a weapon of the strong.

This leads to the second argument proposed against mainstream discourse on cyberwarfare: the idea that cyberwarfare is more effective when integrated with traditional forms of warfare. Some scholars from the mainstream perspective have argued that cyberwarfare can achieve a strategic aim even if used independently. According to Kello (2013), this is the main lesson of the *Stuxnet* project, which managed to inflict considerable physical damage on the Iranian nuclear facilities without resorting to kinetic force. All the more interesting, in his view, was the campaign against Estonia, where cyberweapons posed a significant challenge to the country's national security even without producing physical destruction: although confined to the virtual sphere, cyberattacks were able to affect everyday life and produced a psychological impact on Estonian public opinion. Some scholars, however, have rejected the idea that cyberweapons can be used independently and have emphasized that they are more effectively used when combined with traditional weapons, in the logic of “offline-online interaction” (Eriksson and Giacomello 2007). According to Gartzke (2013), resorting to traditional tools of military power is inevitable, if one wants to transfer the advantage gained in the virtual world into a stable advantage in the “terrestrial” world of international politics. Accordingly, actors that do not possess adequate traditional military capabilities will be discouraged from resorting to cyberwarfare in the first place. For this reason, “the chief beneficiaries of cyberwar are less likely to be marginal groups or rising challengers looking to overturn the existing international order and more likely to be nation-states that already possess important terrestrial military advantages” (Gartzke 2013, p. 43).

Whether cyber technology is a weapon of the weak or a weapon of the strong remains a disputed issue. What is clear, however, is that these two different perspectives have opposing implications when it comes to the future of the US-led international order. On the one hand, those who think that cyberweapons favour weaker actors tend to conclude that the new technology poses a structural threat to the current international order. In their opinion, cyberweapons are a strategic equalizer that might be used by weaker actors to reduce their power gap with the US. From this point of view, the new technology would favour all potential challengers, starting with powers that have long opposed US hegemony, such as Iran and North Korea. Russia has also been singled out as a major beneficiary of cyber technology, which Moscow would be ready to use against Washington and not just against minor enemies such as Estonia and Georgia (Thomas 2009). What has attracted more attention, however, is the empowering effect that the new technology

might have on a wide set of non-state actors, including religious extremist groups, criminal networks and individual activists (Kello 2013). More specifically, it is feared that cyberweapons could create unprecedented opportunities for terrorist groups: for those who “want badly to hurt the modern Western and Western-leaning world,” targeting “our technological Achilles’ heel, cyber,” would be a particularly effective strategy (Bucci 2012, p. 65). In the long-run, the advantage provided by cyber technology to non-state actors is going to dramatically transform the international system. According to Joseph Nye, cyberpower is the main driver behind the diffusion of power from the state system to a more complex system where both state and non-state actors coexist.² Although states are going to play a major role in cyberspace, in his opinion “the largest powers are unlikely to be able to dominate this domain as much as they have others, such as sea or air” (Nye 2011, p. 150).

On the other hand, those who argue that cyberweapons favour the strong are more sceptical about the prospects for large-scale involvement of non-state actors in this domain. Giacomello (2004), for instance, has argued that cyberattacks are not an attractive option for terrorist groups. Based on a cost-benefit analysis, he has demonstrated that cyberterrorism entails high costs and meagre returns, when compared with more conventional forms of terrorism, including the use of explosives and chemical devices. Cyberattacks might therefore be used in conjunction with a physical attack, but are unlikely to become the preferred tool of terrorist groups. When it comes to revisionist powers, they are equally unlikely to prioritize the cyber domain. Lacking any clear advantage on this terrain, as well as the conventional capabilities to face an expected retaliation, US opponents have no incentive to stage a major cyberattack against their enemy. As argued by Gartzke, the most likely scenario is in fact the reverse: the use of cyberwarfare by the US against insulated states. Hence his “unfashionable prediction” that “rather than threatening to overturn the existing world order, cyberwar may perpetuate or even increase current military inequality” (Gartzke 2013, p. 63).

The two opposing views on cyberweapons are also reflected in the debate on the new technology’s impact on US-China relations. On the one hand, the mainstream discourse argues that China has an advantage over the US in the new domain. First, it is argued that China has developed advanced offensive capabilities, including not only special military units for cyberwarfare, but also civilian hacker groups more or less directly controlled by the government (Ball 2011). Second, China is thought to have stronger defence capabilities than the US, as the Chinese government’s strict control of the internet means that it has the “capacity to isolate the mainland’s entire

²According to Nye’s definition, cyberpower is the “set of resources that relate to the creation, control, and communication of electronic and computer-based information—infrastructure, networks, software, human skills. This includes not only the internet of networked computers, but also Intranets, cellular technologies, and space-based communications. Defined behaviorally, cyberpower is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes through use of the electronically interconnected information resources of the cyberdomain. Cyberpower can be used to produce preferred outcomes *within* cyberspace, or it can use cyberinstruments to produce preferred outcomes in other domains *outside* cyberspace” (Nye 2011, p. 123, emphasis in the original).

network from the global web,” thus “significantly degrading the effectiveness of cyber attacks directed at the PRC in the event of a conflict” (Manson 2011, p. 124). Third, the US is deemed to be more vulnerable than China, because its higher cyber-dependence implies that “network-integrated infrastructure represents a major strategic liability for the US in the event of a cyber conflict” (Manson 2011, p. 126). On the other hand, scholars who consider cyber as the weapon of the strong tend to reject the idea of China as a major threat to US cybersecurity. According to Lindsay, such a threat is largely overestimated in all of its manifestations: as a political threat to the open internet, as an intelligence threat to US political and economic secrets, as a military threat to the US Armed Forces, and as a normative threat to US-led internet governance. Regarding the military threat, Lindsay argues that the reality of China's capabilities is “more mundane” (Lindsay 2015, p. 32) than often assumed, and that China's military modernization—ultimately resulting in increased dependence on networks—is in turn intensifying China's own vulnerability to US cyberattacks.

3 The Chinese Discourse on Cyberwarfare

Contradictory as it may seem, both elements of this theoretical debate coexist in the Chinese discourse on cyberwarfare. On the one hand, the new technology is considered as a major threat to China's national security, with China reportedly at disadvantage in the cyber domain. On the other hand, however, the same technology is also conceived as a key component of an asymmetric approach, presenting China with a potential advantage vis-à-vis a stronger enemy. To go deeper into this discourse, and to better understand this apparently contradictory perception of cyberwarfare, we will now turn to the analysis of Chinese authoritative sources.

The first sources to be considered are the government's white papers on national defence. Published biannually since 1998, the white papers are released by the Information Office of the State Council in a Chinese and an English version, and provide the most authoritative presentation of China's official policy. When it comes to cyberwarfare, very little can be found in the white papers, which have almost completely neglected this issue until very recently. Reference to the cyber domain first appeared in the 2010 edition, which mentions the issue in two short passages. First, cyber appears at the beginning of the document, in the section on “The security situation.” In addressing the issue of military competition, the document argues that “some powers have worked out strategies for outer space, *cyber space* and the polar regions, developed means for prompt global strikes, accelerated development of missile defense systems, enhanced *cyber operations capabilities* to occupy new strategic commanding heights” (State Council Information Office 2011, emphasis added). Cyberspace is thus placed together with outer space and the polar regions as an emerging domain of military competition, due to the development of “cyber operations capabilities” (*wangluo zuozhan nengli*) by the most technologically advanced powers. A second reference is then made in the section on

China's "Defense policy." The first goal of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is to safeguard "national sovereignty, security and interests of national development:" it is here affirmed that "China's national defense is tasked to guard against and resist aggression, defend the security of China's lands, inland waters, territorial waters and airspace, safeguard its maritime rights and interests, and *maintain its security interests* in space, electromagnetic space and *cyber space*." The defence of China's "security interests" (*anquan liyi*) in "cyberspace" (*wangluo kongjian*) is presented as an integral part of China's national defence from external threats: without going into details, the white paper thus frames the cyber phenomenon as a threat, and not as an opportunity for China.

The same discourse appears in the next white paper, which was published in 2013 and focused on the "diversified employment" of China's armed forces. First, it is reaffirmed that "major powers are vigorously developing new and more sophisticated military technologies so as to ensure that they can maintain strategic superiorities in international competition in such areas as outer space and cyber space" (State Council Information Office 2013). The cyber phenomenon is thus associated with the desire of other major powers to preserve their superiority by "seizing strategic high ground" (*qiangzhan zhanlüe zhigaodian*)—the same Chinese expression that was used in 2010. Second, the cyber domain is mentioned when elaborating on the PLA's role in "safeguarding national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, and supporting the country's peaceful development." As in the 2010 white paper, the cyber domain is thus associated with threats posed by major powers and the need for adequate defences against them.

The approach is slightly different in the 2015 white paper, which for the first time focused on China's "military strategy." First, the document declares that "threats from such *new security domains* as outer space and *cyberspace* will be dealt with to maintain the common security of the world community," thus extending the threat posed by the cyber phenomenon from China's own national security to the international community's "common security" (*gongtong anquan*) (State Council Information Office 2015, emphasis added). Second, the document contains for the first time a more detailed discussion of the cyber domain, which is included—together with the oceans, the outer space and the nuclear domain—among the "critical security domains" (*zhongda anquan lingyu*) of China's national defence. On the one hand, the cyber phenomenon is framed here once again as the object of increased international competition and a threat to China's national security: "as international strategic competition in cyberspace has been turning increasingly fiercer, quite a few countries are developing their cyber military forces. Being one of the major victims of hacker attacks, China is confronted with grave security threats to its cyber infrastructure." On the other hand, however, the document also outlines for the first time China's own goals in the cyber domain: "As cyberspace weighs more in military security, China will expedite the development of a cyber force, and enhance its capabilities of cyberspace situation awareness, cyber defense, support for the country's endeavours in cyberspace and participation in international cyber cooperation, so as to stem major cyber crises, ensure national network and information security, and maintain national security and social

stability.” While still emphasizing the defensive nature of China’s involvement in the cyber domain, this passage also mentions the establishment of a Chinese “cyberspace force” (*wangluo kongjian lilian*) and unspecified “endeavours in cyberspace.” It is worth noting that the expression used in the Chinese version (*wangluo kongjian douzheng*) is stronger than the word “endeavour” used in the English one and might be better translated as “cyberspace struggle.” On the whole, then, what we learn from the 2015 white paper is that the cyber domain is not only a source of national security threats, but also an arena where China has its own agenda—a “struggle” to be conducted by an ad hoc force.

To investigate this complex perception of the cyber domain we will now turn to a second source: the Chinese journal *Guofang Keji* (National Defence Science and Technology). Established in 1979, this academic journal is published by the prestigious National University of Defence Technology (*Guofang Keji Daxue*), a PLA institution based in Changsha, Hunan Province, and tasked with the scientific education of PLA officers and with advanced research in military technology (Zhongguo Da Baike Quanshu—Junshi Bianweihui 2005, p. 923). Over the past decade, *Guofang Keji* has published several articles on information and communications technology, cyberspace, and cyberwarfare. While some of these articles are focused on strictly technical issues, others are in fact concerned with the new technology’s strategic implications. Unlike the national defence white papers, these articles do not convey the official stance of the Chinese government, yet they entail a certain degree of authoritativeness, as implicit both in the affiliation of the journal to the PLA National University of Defence Technology and in the affiliation of its individual contributors to PLA research institutions or combat units.

The discourse on the cyber phenomenon emerging from *Guofang Keji* is based on the idea that the new domain is largely dominated by the technologically advanced powers and in particular by the US. Several articles insist on a so-called US “internet hegemony” (*wangluo baquan*), meaning that the US “uses its technological advantage to obstruct, restrict or prevent other countries from obtaining and using information, or even take advantage of monopolized information technology to control other countries’ sources and flows of information, in order to promote its own economic, political or military interests” (Wu 2014, p. 55).³ This hegemony has different components. It is, first of all, a technological hegemony, with US monopoly over key-technologies resulting in a de facto control over the “nerve center of the developing countries’ political, economic and military institutions” (Wu 2014, p. 55). Second, it is a hegemony in terms of management of the internet, as the US controls those institutions that are in charge of crucial administrative aspects. Third, it is a cultural hegemony, with the US controlling not only the technical infrastructure of the internet, but also the cultural content that it conveys, so that exchanges through the internet are in fact just a unidirectional flow of information from developed countries to the developing ones. Finally, it is a

³Author’s translation, as with the subsequent quotations from Chinese.

military hegemony, as the US has militarized cyberspace with the establishment of cyber forces for offensive operations against US enemies.

Thanks to its wider hegemony in cyberspace, the US also enjoys a long-term “hegemonic position” on the cyber battlefield (Guo et al. 2013). As reported in several *Guofang Keji* articles, the US has an advantage against any potential enemy in the arena of cyberwarfare and is willing to use such an advantage to conduct offensive operations (Liang et al. 2012; Wu 2012, 2014; Zhuang and Si 2013). This means that—for the time being—“the conditions of cyberspace confrontation are unfavourable to China” (Zhan 2013, p. 69), with the country remaining “on the whole in a weak position” (Du and Liu 2014, p. 72). First, China is placed behind the US in terms of cyber technology: as argued in one of the articles, “there is still a rather huge gap with the US in all of the following areas: research on the theory of cyberwar, development of cyberweapons, as well as financial investment, personnel training, force dimensions” (Wu 2014, pp. 58–59). The logical conclusion is that, “objectively, the US armed forces have seized strategic high ground in the cyberspace and have the initiative in the future of cyberwar. This will pose a serious threat to the defence of China’s basic infrastructure and to its military security” (Wu 2014, pp. 58–59). The expression used here to describe US military superiority—“seizing strategic high ground” (*qiangzhan zhigaodian*)—is the same that was also noted in the white papers. Second, China’s vulnerability to US cyberattacks is increasing rather than decreasing. The country’s economic development has created an unprecedented dependence on information flows and the related physical infrastructure, which might now offer an easy target for a technologically superior enemy. As argued in a 2012 article, “as soon as [China’s cyber infrastructure] is attacked, the economy and society might plunge in total chaos, with consequences that would be worse than those of a purely military attack” (Wu 2012, p. 3). Vulnerability is further increased by China’s reliance on US companies for much of its information and communications infrastructure. Most of the equipment used in Chinese governmental and financial institutions is reportedly provided by US company Cisco: this is the case with the four major national banks and many local commercial banks, while Cisco equipment is also widespread in Chinese customs, public security and education departments, as well as in the railways, aviation and oil industries (Du and Liu 2014). This dramatically increases China’s vulnerability to a US attack, thus transforming the security of China’s cyberspace into “the new focus of the whole national defence construction effort” (Wu 2012, p. 3). On balance, China is thus confronted with a complicated challenge: becoming increasingly dependent on information and communications technology and therefore increasingly vulnerable to a US cyberattack, while at the same remaining well behind the US in terms of technological progress.

While emphasizing this overall picture of vulnerability and inferiority, several *Guofang Keji* articles affirm that the cyber domain also presents significant opportunities for China. The fact that the US enjoys a general advantage does not prevent China from establishing its own “local advantage” (*jubu youshi*) in more specific areas within the cyber domain at large. The concept of advantage is therefore conceived in relative terms: not as an absolute advantage, i.e. an objective

and immutable superiority at any time and in any area of cyberwarfare, but as a flexible condition that depends on specific circumstances. A disadvantage in the “general situation” (*daju*), i.e. inferiority in the overall balance of forces, can thus be turned into an advantage in the “local situation” (*jubu*), i.e. superiority on a specific terrain within a specific struggle. The first step to transforming China's general disadvantage into a local advantage is to recognize that the US is itself vulnerable to cyberattacks. While enjoying an undisputable technological superiority over any other actor in the world, the US is also more dependent than any other country on information and communications technology. As argued in one *Guofang Keji* article, “the United States can be considered as the country where the internet is most developed, but it is also the country that is most easily the object of cyberattacks” (Shang et al. 2009, p. 9). This is true not only for American society at large, including governmental departments, economic and financial institutions, and the media, but also for the US military. As argued in one article, “since the US military depends always and everywhere on cyberspace, the biggest fear of the United States is a ‘cyber paralysis:’ accordingly, cyberspace has become an important domain where we should conduct ‘asymmetric’ systemic attacks against the strategic opponent” (Wu 2012, pp. 2–3). In case of a conflict with the US, China should then make every effort to attack the enemy's cyber infrastructure, since, “as soon as the internet is attacked or disrupted, US military operations will precipitate into chaos” (Zhuang and Si 2013, p. 75). In this way, China would manage to gain local “control of the internet” (*zhi wang quan*) even against the backdrop of US overall superiority in the cyber domain at large. As this would have dramatic implications for the outcome of a military confrontation, it is expected that the struggle for local “control of the internet” would take place at the early stages of a conflict, with a cyber first strike against enemy targets being launched before kinetic operations have started (Cheng et al. 2009).

The idea that local superiority can be pursued even against the backdrop of overall inferiority is coherent with a long tradition of Chinese strategic culture. In fact, emphasis on the relative nature of “advantage” (*you*) and “disadvantage” (*lie*) is a main feature of Mao Zedong's political and military thought, which was itself—in this respect—a reformulation of China's ancient military theories. As Mao wrote in 1938 in his *On Protracted War*, “superiority and inferiority between the two opponents are not absolute but relative,” because the advantage that each side has in one domain corresponds to a disadvantage in another. The key to military success is then to recognize one's own relative advantage and leverage on it to overturn the military balance with the enemy: “such is the mutual relationship between initiative and passivity, between superiority and inferiority” (Mao 1991). One should therefore impose time, space and forms of fighting that are favourable to his or her own side, while making any effort to avoid those conditions that are favourable to the enemy—“you fight your way, I fight my way” (*ni da ni de, wo da wo de*), as Mao famously wrote in 1947 (Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Junshi Kexueyuan 1981, p. 299). This approach is still central to China's doctrine for asymmetric warfare with against a stronger opponent. A clear example of this is the following

passage from *The Science of Strategy*, the authoritative volume on military strategy published in 2001 by the PLA Academy of Military Sciences:

“advantage” and “disadvantage” are a dialectical unity: “advantage” does not mean advantage “on the whole spectrum” and “at any time;” in the advantage there is the disadvantage, in force there is weakness. Similarly, “disadvantage” does not mean disadvantage “in any dimension” and “along the whole process;” in the disadvantage there is the advantage, in weakness there is strength. In particular, at certain conditions the objective realities of “advantage” and “disadvantage” will switch (Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Junshi Kexueyuan Zhanlüe Yanjiubu 2001, p. 459).

4 The US Discourse on Cyberwarfare and China

If one looks at the Obama administrations’ foreign and security policy documents, the prevailing attitude towards the cyber phenomenon at large is ambivalence. On the one hand, the new technology is considered as an opportunity for the US—a tool for promoting its values worldwide. On the other hand, however, the cyber domain is also presented as the source of a new type of threat, posing a major challenge to US national security. In this respect, the most significant document is the *International Strategy for Cyberspace* that was published in May 2011 by the White House. It outlines the US vision for the future of the internet, “a future in which reliable access to the Internet is available from nearly any point on the globe, at a price that businesses and families can afford,” thus promoting business exchanges, people-to-people interactions, and the diffusion of new technologies (White House 2011, p. 7). The cyber domain is presented as a powerful tool for the global expansion of US values: “we encourage people all over the world to use digital media to express opinions, share information, monitor elections, expose corruption, and organize social and political movements, and denounce those who harass, unfairly arrest, threaten, or commit violent act against the people who use these technologies” (White House 2011, p. 23). At the same time, however, the cyber phenomenon is also posing new challenges to US national security. The point is, once again, that technological progress creates new forms of dependence: as a consequence, “assuring the free flow of information, the security and privacy of data, and the integrity of the interconnected networks themselves are all essential to American and global economic prosperity, security, and the promotion of universal rights” (White House 2011, p. 3). For these reasons, the US Armed Forces are required to prepare to defend national networks, “whether the threat comes from terrorists, cybercriminals, or states and their proxies” (White House 2011, p. 12).

The idea that the cyber domain poses new challenges had already appeared in 2010, both in the *Quadrennial Defense Review* and in the *National Security Strategy*. The former presented cyberspace as a domain of national defence exactly as “the naturally occurring domains of land, sea, air, and space” (Department of

Defense 2010, p. 37).⁴ A few months later, the *National Security Strategy* went even further, affirming that “cybersecurity threats represent one of the most serious national security, public safety, and economic challenges we face as a nation” (White House 2010, p. 27). The issue of cyberthreats—posed by states as well as non-state actors—was mentioned again both in the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Department of Defense 2014) and in the 2015 *National Security Strategy* (White House 2015a). More interestingly, however, cyberthreats were the specific object of two documents released by the Department of Defense during the Obama administrations: the 2011 *Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace* and the 2015 *Cyber Strategy*. In the first document, dependence of US “critical infrastructure”—including energy, communication, finance, and the defence industry—on cyberspace was presented as a vulnerability that external and domestic actors might consider exploiting. Among the external enemies, the focus was both on “foreign intelligence organizations” and on non-state actors empowered by “low barriers to entry” in cyberspace (Department of Defense 2011a, p. 3). To cope with these threats, the Department of Defense would treat cyberspace as an “operational domain,” it would elaborate new operating concepts to protect departmental networks, and strengthen cooperation with other governmental agencies, the private sector and international partners. The US strategy in cyberspace was further articulated in the 2015 document, which confirmed the threat assessment presented in 2011 and formulated more specific strategic goals for the Department of Defense’s cyberspace missions.

If we now move to how the US perceives the role of China in the cyber domain, we will find out that only indirect references are made in the documents published before 2014. In the 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, the issue is mentioned indirectly when dealing with China’s military modernization: among the areas of main progress, “computer network attack capabilities” are mentioned, without further elaborating (Department of Defense 2010, p. 31). It is worth noting that the issue is not even mentioned in the 2010 *National Security Strategy*, which contains a few lines on US relations with China but makes no reference to the cyber dimension. The same holds for the 2011 White House *International Strategy for Cyberspace* and the Department of Defense *Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace*: neither of them explicitly mentions China when dealing with the potential challenges in cyberspace. An implicit reference to China might be found in another 2011 Department of Defense document: the *Cyberspace Policy Report* submitted to Congress in November. It is declared that the Department “recognizes that a nation possessing sophisticated and powerful cyber capabilities could attempt to affect the strategic calculus of the United States. In this scenario, an adversary might act in ways antithetical to vital U.S. national interests and attempt to prevent the President from exercising traditional national security options by threatening or implying the

⁴Cyberspace was defined in the document as “a global domain within the information environment that encompasses the interdependent networks of information technology infrastructures, including the Internet and telecommunication networks” (Department of Defense 2010, p. 37).

launch of a crippling cyber attack against the United States” (Department of Defense 2011b, p. 3). While China is not explicitly named, it would certainly qualify among the nations with “sophisticated and powerful cyber capabilities.”

Starting with the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, however, China is often explicitly mentioned among the potential cyber challengers. The document argues that China might employ cyber technologies as a component of its “anti-access and area-denial” approach, aimed at obstructing US military access to the East Asian region (Department of Defense 2014, p. 6). Similarly, China is singled out as a source of cyber threat in the 2015 *National Security Strategy*: “on cybersecurity, we will take necessary actions to protect our businesses and defend our networks against cyber-theft of trade secrets for commercial gain whether by private actors or the Chinese government” (White House 2015a, p. 24). The focus is here not on cyberattacks on US infrastructure, but on cyberespionage for commercial gain with national security implications. Finally, the 2015 Department of Defense *Cyber Strategy* presents China—together with Russia, Iran, and North Korea—among the “potential adversaries” that “have invested significantly in cyber as it provides them with a viable, plausibly deniable capability to target the US homeland and damage US interests” (Department of Defense 2015, p. 9). More specifically, China is here accused of cyber espionage against US companies, to the advantage of its own defence industry.

A more detailed presentation of how China might pose a cyber threat to US national security is contained in the annual reports on China that the Department of Defense has submitted to Congress every year since 2002. While totally absent in the first editions, the cyber issue has gradually become one of the most closely-watched developments in China’s military modernization: the word “cyber,” which had not appeared at all in the annual reports until 2004 (with just one occurrence that year), is used more than 30 times in 2016. China’s cyber threat was first perceived within the wider picture of PLA anti-access and area denial capabilities, i.e. those assets that would make it possible for China “to attack, at long ranges, military forces that might deploy (anti-access) or operate (area-denial) within the western Pacific” (Department of Defense 2009, pp. 20–21). Against this background, cyber capabilities work as one of the “multiple layers of offensive systems utilizing the sea, air, space, and cyber-space” that would aim at keeping US forces out of the region in case of a contingency. For instance, computer network attacks could complement short and medium-range missiles in a Chinese attack against US targets in the Western Pacific, including military bases and logistics infrastructure. Since 2009, cyber assets have continued to be considered as an important component in China’s anti-access and area denial capabilities, as was also reaffirmed in the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review*. At the same time, however, annual reports published since 2011 have more specifically focused on China’s cyber capabilities as an autonomous source of threat to US national security. As reaffirmed in subsequent editions of the report, cyberwarfare capabilities could serve the PLA in three areas. “First and foremost, they allow data collection through exfiltration,” which might then be used not only for intelligence purposes but also for offensive cyber operations against US targets, as added in the most recent issues

of the report. “Second, they can be employed to constrain an adversary’s actions or slow response time by targeting network-based logistics, communications, and commercial activities.” And “third, they can serve as a force multiplier when coupled with kinetic attacks during times of crisis or conflict,” i.e. they can be used in support of traditional military force to amplify its impact (Department of Defense 2011c, pp. 5–6). Recent issues of the report also include sections on “Cyber activities directed against the Department of Defense,” which provide details of intrusions in US departmental computer networks that are more or less directly attributable to the PLA. According to the latest edition, these intrusions are aimed at exfiltrating information that might be used to advance China’s defence industry, to gain insights on the US China policy and to prepare plans for an attack against US critical networks in case of a confrontation (Department of Defense 2016, p. 64).

While emphasizing that the US considers itself as a potential victim of cyberwarfare, however, official documents also suggest a different perspective on the cyber phenomenon. In a more nuanced way, cyberspace is also presented as a domain where the US has a military advantage that should be used to enhance national security. This different point of view is implicit, first of all, in the *International Strategy for Cyberspace*, in the section where the US stance on cyber dissuasion and deterrence is presented. The “defense objective” stated in the document reads as follows: “the United States will, along with other nations, encourage responsible behavior and oppose those who would seek to disrupt networks and systems, dissuading and deterring malicious actors, and *reserving the right to defend these vital national assets as necessary and appropriate*” (White House 2011, p. 12, emphasis added). Though exclusively defensive, this formulation leaves the door open for a more muscular approach, as shown a few lines below when articulating the US approach to cyber deterrence: “we reserve the right to use all necessary means—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—as appropriate and consistent with applicable international law, in order to defend our Nation, our allies, our partners, and our interests.” And then again: “[we] will act in a way that reflects our values and strengthens our legitimacy, seeking broad international support whenever possible” (White House 2011, p. 14). While upholding a defensive approach, the document thus asserts US freedom to operate in any way that might be necessary to protect national security—including unilateral actions whenever international support is not available.

The position that the US is ready to use its advantage in cyberspace whenever necessary is more openly conveyed by the two Department of Defense documents on cyber strategy. The 2011 *Strategy for Operating in Cyberspace* argues that the new domain presents a significant potential for US military operations. This point is reflected in the way the first “strategic initiative” launched by the document is worded: “DoD will treat cyberspace as operational domain to organize, train, and equip so that DoD can *take full advantage of cyberspace’s potential*” (Department of Defense 2011a, p. 5, emphasis added). That the US enjoys an advantage is also implicit in the fifth “strategic initiative:” “DoD will *leverage the nation’s ingenuity* through an exceptional cyber workforce and rapid technological innovation” (Department of Defense 2011a, p. 10, emphasis added). As explained in the same

section, the Department will “catalyze U.S. scientific, academic, and economic resources to build a pool of talented civilian and military personnel to operate in cyberspace and achieve DoD objectives” (Department of Defense 2011a, p. 10). The idea here is that the US has a lead in the development of information and communications technology: cooperation between the Department of Defense, private companies and scientific institutions will thus result in a US indisputable military advantage in the cyber domain. That such an advantage would be used in support of military operations is openly declared in the 2015 *Cyber Strategy*. The third “primary mission” in cyberspace presented in the document states: “if directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense, DoD must be able to provide integrated cyber capabilities to support military operations and contingency plans” (Department of Defense 2015, p. 5). Although somehow mitigated by reference to a “doctrine of restraint,” to “enduring U.S. values,” and to the law of armed conflict, the point is clear: the US military is ready to “conduct operations to disrupt an adversary’s military-related networks or infrastructure so that the U.S. military can protect U.S. interests in an area of operations” (Department of Defense 2015, p. 5). In other words, the US is ready to use its cyber capabilities offensively, in support of ongoing military operations against an enemy: “for example, the United States military might use cyber operations to terminate an ongoing conflict on U.S. terms, or to disrupt an adversary’s military systems to prevent the use of force against U.S. interests” (Department of Defense 2015, p. 5). Accordingly, as a fourth “strategic goal,” the document instructs the Department of Defense to “build and maintain viable cyber options and [to] plan to use those options to control conflict escalation and to shape the conflict environment at all stages” (Department of Defense 2015, p. 14). In case of a conflict, the US military will then use its cyber capabilities to disrupt the enemy’s “command and control networks, military-related critical infrastructure, and weapons capabilities.” To this aim, combatant commands will “plan and synchronize cyber operations with kinetic operations across all domains of military operations” (Department of Defense 2015, p. 14). Cyber operations are thus conceptualized as an integral component of a multidimensional military effort, whose aim is to expand and diversify the range of options for “managing conflict escalation.”

5 An Ambivalent Domain: Cyberwarfare, China, and the US Response

The implications of cyberwarfare for the future of the US-led international order are still difficult to assess. As argued in the first section, the theoretical debate remains highly polarized. Some scholars continue to argue that cyberweapons will empower new actors, including rising powers and non-state groups. On the opposite side, others remain convinced that continuity will eventually prevail, with cyberweapons ultimately strengthening the existing hierarchy of power. While still far from a

consensus, this debate seems in fact to suggest that cyberspace remains an ambivalent domain, which presents both consolidated and rising powers with a mix of challenges and opportunities. Such is the view from China, a country that mainstream ideas about cyberwarfare would rather consider as a major beneficiary of the new technology. Quite the contrary, the Chinese discourse on cyberwarfare emphasizes the threats that the cyber domain poses to China's national security. At the same time, however, much emphasis is also placed on the "local advantages" that the PLA might gain in specific niches of this domain, thus creating significant opportunities in a situation of overall inferiority. Such a Chinese approach is well known in the US, where the cyber dimension has gradually become a key component in the assessment of China's challenge to US national security. As the Department of Defense's annual reports on China make clear, Washington perceives China's growing cyber capabilities as a major threat, both as a component of a wider set of anti-access and area denial capabilities and as an independent tool for power projection. In this respect, US perceptions of cyberwarfare are coherent with the mainstream discourse analyzed in the first section: the idea that the more a society is technologically advanced, the more it is vulnerable to cyberattacks. Yet, for the US as well, the cyber domain is not only the source of new threats but also a world of new opportunities. As affirmed in US official documents, Washington has its own cyber agenda—it is willing to use the new domain to promote American values in the world, and it would be equally willing to use cyberweapons against an opponent in case of a military confrontation.

Well aware of this ambivalent nature of the cyber domain, the Obama administrations have opted for a mixed approach when addressing the perceived threat posed by China in cyberspace. On the one hand, Washington has become increasingly vocal in denouncing Chinese alleged exploitation of US cyber vulnerabilities. Since 2005, the media have reported several cases of cyberattacks originating in China and directed against US companies and governmental agencies: for instance, it was reported in 2005 that a series of attacks code-named "Titan Rain" had targeted the US Department of Defense, NASA and Lockheed Martin; in 2010 Google denounced "Operation Aurora," then in 2011 it was reported that "Operation Shady RAT" had attacked once again several organizations, including the Department of Defense and some of its contractors (Cate 2015). At that time, Washington was careful not to attribute these attacks to the Chinese government. This attitude, however, would eventually change in May 2013, when a Department of Defense report for the first time mentioned the Chinese government and the PLA as the source of cyberattacks against US targets (Cate 2015). The campaign against Beijing's alleged involvement in cyber theft grew until late Spring of that year, when media reports on the Snowden affair revealed the extent of Washington's own cyber operations against foreign governments, thus placing the Obama administration on the defensive. But US "naming and shaming" (Cate 2015) of China's involvement in cyberattacks soon resumed, to reach a climax in Spring 2015. Six Chinese citizens—including one professor at Tianjin University—were then indicted by a US federal grand jury on charges of stealing trade secrets. A few weeks later, it was announced that personal data of millions of US federal

employees had been stolen in an unprecedented breach of the Office of Personnel Management system, with China named as the “leading suspect” by the US Director of National Intelligence (Glaser and Vitiello 2015a). The media revealed then that president Obama was ready to apply to China an executive order he had signed on 1 April, establishing a sanction programme against cyberattacks. It was reported that a list of Chinese companies and individuals was being prepared and that sanctions against them would soon be levied.

On the other hand, however, Washington has also made important steps toward the establishment of cooperative mechanisms with China for the management of cybersecurity concerns. In September 2015, during president Xi Jinping’s visit to the US, a groundbreaking agreement was reached on several issues (Glaser and Vitiello 2015b). According to a White House fact sheet, the two governments agreed to cooperate in the investigation of cybercrime, in the collection of electronic evidence and in the mitigation of “cyber activity emanating from their territory;” they also decided to establish a “high-level joint dialogue mechanism on fighting cybercrime and related issues” and a dedicated hotline between the two governments. More importantly, presidents Xi and Obama agreed that “neither country’s government will conduct or knowingly support cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property, including trade secrets or other confidential business information, with the intent of providing competitive advantages to companies or commercial sectors” (White House 2015b). While mainly focused on cybercrime, the consensus reached by the two governments also included a joint effort “to further identify and promote appropriate norms of state behaviour in cyberspace within the international community” (White House 2015b): to this aim, the two parties decided to establish an ad hoc Senior Experts Group. This suggests that bilateral cooperation on cybersecurity might gradually extend from the politically more neutral field of cybercrime to more sensitive issues of interstate relations in cyberspace.

Significant steps toward stronger US-China cooperation in the cyber domain have been made between late 2015 and late 2016. In December 2015, the High-Level Joint Dialogue on Cybercrime and Related Issues established at the Obama-Xi summit convened for the first time in Washington: a second and a third meeting were subsequently held in 2016, in June and December respectively. In Spring 2016, the first meeting of the Senior Experts Group on International Norms and Related Issues was also convened, thus paving the way for a structured dialogue on interstate relations in cyberspace. Whether any significant progress can be achieved in the future will now depend on the policy choices of the next US administration. What Donald Trump affirmed during the election campaign seems to suggest a more muscular approach. Presenting the Obama administrations’ policy in this field as a total failure, Trump declared that under his presidency cybersecurity would figure as a “major priority for both the government and the private sector.” Convinced that cyberwarfare will be the “warfare of the future,” he emphatically declared that “America’s dominance in this arena must be unquestioned.” To this aim, he insisted not only on defensive but also on offensive cyber capabilities (“cybersecurity is not only a question of developing defensive technologies but offensive technologies as well”). In this context, China was explicitly mentioned by Trump—together with

Russia, North Korea, terrorist and criminal groups—among those actors whose cyberattacks “constitute one of our most critical national security concerns” (Trump 2016).

Based on similar statements, prospects for US-China cooperation on cybersecurity do not seem to be particularly promising. This is even more so if one considers that cooperation in this area will largely depend on the overall state of US-China relations under the new administration. In this respect, the first steps of president-elect Donald Trump provide more than one reason for concern. Although some items in the new administration's agenda might be positively received in Beijing, starting with the US announced withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the confrontational attitude that has so far characterized Trump's approach to China might inflict significant damage on bilateral relations. This is particularly true for Trump's repeated challenges to the one-China policy—first with his phone conversation with Taiwan president Tsai Ing-wen, then with explicit remarks that his administration might not be bound by the one-China principle unless Beijing compromises on trade issues (Liu 2016). With “national reunification” still considered in Beijing as a basic “core interest”, and no deviation to the one-China policy tolerated, it is not too pessimistic to assume that the same behaviour after Trump is inaugurated in January 2017 would seriously disrupt US-China relations. It goes without saying that, under a similar scenario, bilateral cooperation in the cyber domain would end up strangled in the cradle. Whether this would eventually consolidate US “dominance” over cyberspace and “make America great again” in the international system, remains to be seen—to say the least.

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The US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Against the Backdrop of US Grand Strategy

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Abstract While US-Japan-Australia trilateralism is but a single feature of overall US regional and alliance policy, it is a strong trend leader and indicative of the future of US alliance policy in the region. It's incremental and evolutionary nature—going back to the second Bush administration—matches China's own salami-slicing tactics in the Western Pacific. While the Trump administration is yet to decide on a clear Asia Pacific strategy, it is likely that they will seek to combine the tools at hand in the region—US alliances—to help secure “comprehensive national power” in the face of China's rise.

1 Introduction

The Australian scholar and China analyst Hugh White once wrote that

America's problem in Asia today is that China seeks to take its place as the primary power in Asia, and the shift in relative power between the two countries over recent decades makes China's challenge very formidable indeed (White 2016, p. 16).

The US, White insists, is trying to maintain “primacy” in the face of growing Chinese power, something that will ultimately lead to great power conflict. Is the US willing to go to war with China? In making this argument, White mimics those Americans who feel that the US should negotiate European security directly with Russia, “over the heads” of the Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks. Similarly, White makes the mistake of assuming that US policy is about maintaining its privileged place as the regional hegemon and that regional states are merely the spoils of a grand strategic game between two superpowers. Ultimately, this is a false image of the

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region, and derives from both an overly-narrow interpretation of US grand strategy and an anachronistic view of great power relations.

It fundamentally underestimates the decision-making role accorded regional actors in US grand strategy. US grand strategy under President Obama—the Pivot—was often characterized as attempting to contain or constrain Beijing. It is clear that US alliance policy in the Asia Pacific has been inclusive, seeking symmetry, burden-sharing, and reacting adroitly to regional circumstance. The question now, is how that will change under President Donald Trump. One of his first decisions was to unilaterally withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. US-China relations are also under pressure, as the new administration makes strong statements regarding trade and China's activities the South China Sea. In regard to alliances, the new administration seems intent on re-installing a more transactional form of the Nixon Doctrine, paralleled by a *Reaganesque* "peace through strength" doctrine vis a vis China, an idea brought up by Peter Navarro in his 2015 book, *Crouching Tiger: What China's Militarism Means for the World*. This is less of a military response to China—though clearly the military element is important—and more of a "comprehensive national power" response, which means reforming domestic contributors to American power. Navarro's suggests that in addition to correcting trade imbalances with China, the US should get its own house in order by reforming the US tax system and education system. What it does not require is a grand containment strategy of China (Navarro 2015).

While the idea of containment is quite prevalent among Chinese IR scholars, Nina Silove (Silove 2016) points out that the US is not implementing any of the behaviours that would actually meet the definition of a containment policy with regards to China. It has not yet, for example, sought to constrain the growth of Chinese power, merely observed and reacted to it. Nor has it sought to restrict regional states and allies from developing strong bilateral relationships with Beijing. Even its economic plan for the region—the Trans-Pacific Partnership—was not built to exclude China, but to socialize it into higher labour and intellectual property standards. Many commentators point to the development of US alliance trilaterals across the region as a sign of US encirclement,¹ and while it is true that the alliance networking has a China component, they are built to deter rather than contain Beijing.

In order to understand the future of US strategy in the Asia Pacific under a Trump administration, it is necessary to trace the evolution of the US alliance strategy over the past three Presidents, from the Bill Clinton administration, to George W. Bush administration, and ending with the Barack Obama administration. Despite apparent differences in policy, it is possible to see continuity in the US search for an appropriate post-Cold War strategy. One sees this primarily in its reaction to the growing security dilemma with China, through a two-headed approach of China-engagement and alliance-integration. Many commentators have

¹Currently, there are three track 1 trilaterals involving the US in the region: the US-Japan-ROK trilateral; the US-Japan-India trilateral; and the US-Japan-Australia trilateral.

written about these two approaches as if they were in opposition to each other, however, examining US strategic documents, it becomes clear that they have been long been seen as two sides of the same coin.

US strategy did not merely swing from one to the other. Instead, it implemented both strands simultaneously. The 2001 Quadrennial Review² and the 2004 Global Posture Review—quietly³ and with little fanfare—set about shifting the rationale for US forces in the region, setting up the “Pivot before the Pivot” (Silove 2016, p. 58). Previously, the Cold War rationale had been about stopping the spread of Communist; as a result, US forces were spread throughout the region and were essentially isolated forces with limited ability to work across the region. Following the QDR, the objective of the alliance system was dissuading future military competition through both internal and external balancing. Not only would US forces be spread across the region away from vulnerable centres like Guam, but they would also be far more integrated with their alliance partners. While US-ROK and ANZUS forces were somewhat interoperable, there was a large gap in the US military alliance structure when it came to Japan, one of the region’s largest militaries. Its forces not only lacked serious inter-operability with US forces, they lacked based inter-service interoperability as well as alliance interoperability. The new concept of dissuasion was to create a federated system of alliances that would support each other in the event that China decided to challenge the rules-based system. The strategy was a much more nuanced concept than containment and set against a massive simultaneous strategy of integrating China into the regional and global economies, shaping its choices, until it became what Robert Zoellick would eventually call a “responsible stakeholder” (Zoellick 2005).

2 The 1990s: The Origin

Coming to office in 1993, the Clinton administration focus on almost entirely on domestic and economic issues, and did not initially have a strong vision for the US alliance system in the post-Cold War space. It had inherited the East Asia Strategy Initiative (EASI) from the Bush White House, which sought to reduce overall Defence spending by reducing troops numbers in the region from 140,000 to 90,000 and to encourage allies to do more to share the costs of regional security. This fit into the “peace dividend” ethos that permeated Washington DC at the time. EASI also seemed to herald the end of the San Francisco System, as new regional multilateral fora sprung up across the region. By comparison, the old “hub and spokes” system of John Foster Dulles seemed out-of-date and ill-suited to the

²“Quadrennial Defense Review Report”, Department of Defense, (September 2001), at: <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/qdr2001.pdf> (accessed on February 3 2017).

³“Global Posture Review of the United States Military Forces Stationed Overseas”, committee on armed services senate, One Hundredth Eight Congress, second session, (September 2004) at <https://archive.org/stream/globalposturerev00unit#page/n1/mode/2up> (accessed on February 3, 2017)

optimistic spirit of the times. The Clinton administration embraced multilateral organizations like APEC and the ARF as models for new security. For a time, the White House even entertained ideas of an American-led security community developing across the Asia Pacific. In November 1993, Clinton hosted the first APEC Summit in Seattle, Washington, where he trial-ballooned the concept with foreign leaders. Secretary of State Warren Christopher stated that the new multilateralism would mimic the “open architecture” that was then found in the software industry (Christopher 2001).

In late 1993, Clinton announced of a “New Pacific Community Initiative”, which he unveiled in a speech in Seoul. While the initiative ultimately faded into obscurity, it inserted a new ethos of regional integration into the US alliance system, a trend, which would continue right through to the “Pivot”. A new Pacific Community, Clinton stated during the speech, would be built on three core elements: (1) shared prosperity, shared strength, and shared commitment to democratic values. It sought to “place US-Japan relations at the center and promoted economic cooperation through APEC, democracy and human rights across the region” (Department of State 2009). Praising the role of NATO in post-Cold War Europe, Clinton stated:

In the Pacific no such institution exists [...] The challenge for the Asian Pacific in this decade, instead, is to develop multiple new arrangements to meet multiple threats and opportunities. These arrangements can function like overlapping plates of armour, individually providing protection and together covering the full body of our common security concerns (Clinton 1993).

In this way, he gave room for American policymakers to conceive of the old bilateral US alliance system as another “overlapping” set of arrangements. As will be shown, this optimistic approach to the region did still contain a pessimistic hedge toward regional security, and did not completely jettison hard power principles or the alliance system.

In addition to undermining strict bilateralism that then pervaded US government, the new approach fostered an inclusive regional approach to countries with which the United States had previously excluded during the Cold War. One could see this in the administration’s efforts to integrate China into American policy. In his 1993 speech in Seoul, President Clinton proclaimed:

The goal of all these efforts is to integrate, not isolate, the region’s powers. China is a key example. We believe China cannot be a full partner in the world community until it respects human rights and international agreements on trade and weapon sales. But we also are prepared to involve China in building this region’s new security and economic architectures. We need an involved and engaged China, not an isolated China (Ibidem).

It was clear that although the Tiananmen Square Massacre had only been five years before, most FPEs in the administration did not share a high threat assessment of China. The 1994 *National Security Strategy* aptly called for *Engagement and Enlargement* (White House 1994).

Admiral Blair, the Commander-in-chief at PACOM and a supporter of the security community notion, argued that:

This idea of security communities would enable cooperation to happen even between countries that were not ideologically aligned with us, to do good things without bringing in the things like democracies versus autocratic governments, or China versus the rest.⁴

Despite the inclusive nature of the security community policy toward China, American FPEs never completely forgot that China might emerge as a threat, as Admiral Blair makes clear:

[...] It [the security community] was also partly to deal with China in a way that offered a helpful role to China, but with a sort of back up in case China wasn't going to be helpful, it would form a containment net around China, not of our actions, but of China's actions (Ibidem).

Nearly 20 years later, Kurt Campbell would write of alliance integration efforts:

Ultimately, if these integrative efforts are successful, they will hold significance not only because they will manage regional tension and uncertainty, but also because they could provide a foundation for knitting together a still-nascent Asian security community. Many of these groups should also seek to involve China in shared efforts to address common problems (Campbell 2016, p. 207).

2.1 *The US-Japan-ROK Trilateral*

The growing crisis on the Korean Peninsula in 1993 was the catalyst for the first trilateral dialogue between the US, Japan, and the ROK. With little fanfare, the trilateral model was created in 1994 by the Former-Deputy Secretary of Defense for East Asia, Carl Ford. He was troubled that there was a complete absence of military-to-military contact between his Japanese and Korean counterparts. Due to political sensitivities, Seoul and Tokyo would only agree to an “unofficial” track one point five meeting, and Ford began organizing it with support from George Washington University. The first meeting was not held in Washington, but rather at a PACOM-connected think tank, Pacific Forum in Hawaii in August 1994. The meeting saw the first grouping of American, Korean, and Japanese defence and foreign ministry officials attempting to build closer relations between the two security partners of the United States.

While Ford had stressed trilateralism as a mechanism for ending Japan-ROK enmity, some attendees of that first trilateral meeting already viewed the strengthening and networking of the US alliance system into trilaterals as a means of dealing with the rise of China.⁵ Admiral Michael McDevitt—a prominent naval thinker, and James Kelly—later the Undersecretary of State for East Asia under the Bush administration—wrote in a key article:

⁴Interview with Admiral D. Blair (Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Command 1999-2002), Washington, DC, 6 May 2015.

⁵Telephone Interview with Rear-Admiral M. McDevitt (Director Strategy & War Plans, J-5 CINCPAC, 1993-4), 23 March 2016. Telephone Interview with C. Ford (Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia 1991-1993), 29 March 2016.

The real key to long-term stability in Northeast Asia is the UK-Korean-Japanese strategic triangle. The best way to ensure that Northeast Asia remains stable in the future is for the United States and its two closest allies in Asia to become strategic coherent...Japan and the United States alone can influence the direction China pursues, one must consider how much more influential this balance of power would be if it included the ROK (McDevitt and Kelly 1999, p. 158).

Another attendee, a senior Japanese defence official, Noboru Yamaguchi, has written his impressions of that first trilateral meeting in Hawaii, saying the three sides “exchanged views on the regional security environment, explained national security policies, and discussed scenarios for future trilateral cooperation” (Yamaguchi 1999, p. 8). Here, in the first trilateral, were five of the key ingredients that were also to drive US, Japanese, and Australian security cooperation: continued US engagement in the region; burden-sharing among allies; the normalization of Japan and a regional role; and maintaining a balance of power vis a vis China.

Meanwhile, Japanese foreign policy makers began to view new alliance structures and behaviours more favourably. First, the US was not only encouraging, but adamant about promoting a new security relationship, which gave Tokyo a stronger voice in regional security. Second, there was cross-party support for the evolution of Japanese security policy as it combined the “interwoven influences of the US alliance, UN-centric policies, and regional interests balanced and complemented by military dispatch” (Mulloy 2011, p. 2). This allowed for growing cooperation between Australia and Japan on “soft” regional security issues, and included the peacekeeping cooperation in Cambodia and East Timor. These missions were critical in strengthening “what Australian diplomats characterized as an underdeveloped or ‘weak third leg’ of Australia-Japan security relations” (Tow 2008). For one Japanese diplomat, it was clear that Japan-Australia bilateral cooperation always had a trilateral element to it, saying:

[...] when we talk about strengthening the relationship with Australia, that is always something to do with our relationship with the United States. So, these days, because our alliance has been strengthened, and we try to be more operationally integrated, seen from the US side, of course Australia and Japan should be in the room.⁶

The first trilateral interaction took place at this time in the form of military exercises. Inaugurated in 1999, the Cope North air exercises involved all three air forces taking part in large scale military scenarios, and remain an annual feature of trilateral military cooperation (Gray 2013). A second area was the development of the trilateral model on the Korean peninsula. Despite the failure of trilateral cooperation to resolve either the North Korea nuclear issue or Japan-Korean tensions, growing institutionalization provided a ready framework for future alliance cooperation on tangible areas like non-proliferation, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) (Schoff 2015).

⁶Interview with Anonymous (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Counsellor, Washington DC 1994–1997), Tokyo, 2 March 2015.

By 1999, the US-Japan-Korean variant of the trilateral had become one of the most exciting features of American foreign policy in northeast Asia. US officials described the intricate diplomacy required to come up with the Agreed Framework as follows:

Managing the Korean crisis felt like playing a multi-tiered chess game on overlapping boards. It required dealing with the North, the South, China, Japan, the IAEA, the UN, the non-aligned movement, Congress, the press, and others (Wit et al. 2004, p. 193).

Minilateral approaches seemed to suggest themselves to resolve this tangle. In November 1998, former US Defence Secretary William Perry assumed the role as US North Korea policy coordinator and special advisor to the President and the secretary of state. As part of preparation for the role, he consulted with Japanese and Korean representatives. When he suggested that more formal and regular trilateral talks might be useful, both countries readily agreed and the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) was born.

The first TCOG meeting took place in Honolulu on April 25, 1999, prior to a US-DPRK bilateral that would take place in Berlin on November 15th (Cha 2000, p. 68). Jim Schoff has argued that while the TCOG never became “a common negotiating platform with North Korea” (Schoff 2004, p. 12), it did provide trilateral solidarity, and became an important planning function for KEDO-related issues. American FPEs “saw the TCOG as an opportunity to get Seoul and Tokyo involved in the US policy-making process on board with initiatives early” (Ibid, p. 11). It also presented itself as a model for regional alliance-networking in the minds of American planners, significantly influencing the Bush and Obama approaches towards “federated networks of allies”. In the end, TCOG as an institution began to suffer from internal tensions in the Agreed Framework, and inter-agency tensions inside the new Bush administration. The trilateral had met in 1999 eight times. By 2001, this had dropped down to four. By 2003, the meetings were no longer labelled “TCOG”, and had stopped issuing press statements, and gradually morphed into “a sort of informal caucus among allies within the so-called six-party talks on North Korea’s nuclear weapons programs (Schoff 2005).

2.2 *Engaging China*

Despite the Taiwan Crisis of 1995–1996, the Clinton administration’s policy on China remained aspirational, forward-looking, and intent on engagement: In a joint statement issued during President Jang Zemin’s 1997 visit to Washington, the two agreed in the US-China Joint Statement that “the two Presidents are determined to build toward a constructive *strategic partnership* between the United States and China” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States 1997). As laid out in the 1997 National Security Strategy, still seemed excessively optimistic and inclusive, indicating the administration had not fundamentally altered course on its neoliberal strategy of binding China into global liberal institutions and norms, but it did include a new desire for China to behave “responsibly”. The new NSS stated:

There is an overarching US interest in China's emergence as a stable, open, secure and peaceful state. The prospects for peace and prosperity in Asia depend heavily on China's role as a responsible member of the international community (White House 1997).

This linkage to responsible behaviour was emphasized again by the administration and again by Senator Feinstein in the Foreign Relations Committee and traces the arc of Robert Zoellick's "responsible stakeholder" concept over a decade later. During the nomination of Secretary of State Madeline Albright, in 1997, Senator Feinstein stated:

The United States must build *our most important*, but largely undeveloped, bilateral relationship – that with the People's Republic of China – into one of partnership and cooperation in our many areas of mutual interest (Congressional Record Volume 1997).

In October 1997, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Stanley Roth, stated at the World Economic Forum: "We want China to take its place as an active and responsible member of the international community" (Roth 1997). The US gave China's accession into the WTO its full support with House Majority Leader Richard K. Armey saying that he hoped China's accession to the WTO would help extend "freedom through commerce to the Chinese people" (Kaiser and Mufson 2000).

Despite this, the last half of the Clinton Presidency saw a surge in the competitive elements of the relationship, particularly around the Taiwan Crisis, and the American bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. These apparent contradictions in Washington's China-engagement strategy were pushed aside as Clinton promised that China's accession would ameliorate future tensions between the two:

If you believe in a future of greater openness and freedom, you ought to be for this agreement. If you believe in greater prosperity for the American people, you certainly should be for this agreement. If you believe in a future of peace and security for Asia, and the world, you should be for this agreement (Clinton 2000).

In 1995, President Clinton told President Jiang that "a stable, open and prosperous China—in other words, a strong China—is in our interest. We welcome China to the great power table. But great powers also have great responsibilities" (Nye 2001, p. 146).

3 The 2000s: The Bush Administration

Much like the Clinton administration before it, the Bush administration sought to "shape" China's choices through a dual-headed approach of heavy engagement and alliance integration with the region. It did this by promoting closer and more formal engagement with China—particularly on trade, but increasingly on security issues. It also matched this engagement with a two-track approach toward a "federated network" approach towards alliances at the State Department level and at the Defence Department level.

The initial seed for a regular strategic trilateral discussion was planted by Foreign Minister Alexander Downer at the AUSMIN meeting with Secretary of State Powell in Sydney in July 2001 (Sato 201). Downer and Foreign Secretary, Ashton Calvert had been working on the idea, which then emerged spontaneously during the post-AUSMIN press conference.⁷ Calvert—a dominant figure inside the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)—had strong personal links to Japan, spoke the language fluently and was a long-time friend of the new Japanese Ambassador to Washington, Ryozo Kato. In turn, Kato was very close to Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and to Australian Ambassador Michael Thawley. Within days of Kato’s arrival in Washington, the new Japanese Ambassador presented his credentials to his old friend at the State Department. Armitage had also known and been friends with Prime Minister Howard since the Reagan administration (Howard 2013).⁸ An Australian diplomat who worked closely on this at the time asserts that this close relationship between the three was crucial to starting the trilateral, since all three had known and trusted each other for many years and were “each in their own way, capable stepping above the day-to-day grind of foreign policy-making and bilateral relations and understood strategic power relations in East Asia, and—in a policy sense—what to do about it.”⁹

The first meeting of the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) in the summer of 2001 was tacked onto the afternoon session of a US-Japan Strategic Dialogue and took place between US Assistant Secretary Richard Armitage, Japanese Vice-Foreign Minister Yasuo Takeuchi, and Australian Foreign Secretary Ashton Calvert. A senior American diplomat remembers:

it was our view that this was the way of the future. A good solid anchor in the north, which was Japan, a good solid anchor in the south, ourselves and India—though you had to be much more careful about how you played India. As the overarching democracies in the region, we thought it was a pretty good—not containment strategy—a pretty good signpost for the region.¹⁰

A senior Japanese diplomat, also present at that first meeting, remembers:

The mood that first meeting was very good, very constructive with some interesting discussions. I think it was a full meeting with Dr. Calvert, Mr. Takeuchi, and Mr. Armitage in Washington, I think...When you start doing things for the first time, you don’t have a big fanfare because you’re not sure if this is going to work and you don’t know what kind of reaction you’re going to get from other countries to what you’re doing. We don’t want to be too noisy about what we were doing. So the atmosphere that first time was, let’s have an occasion for discussions to see the value of this initiative.¹¹

⁷Interview with W. Tow (Professor, International Relations, ANU), Canberra, 10 March 2015. Interview with A. Downer (Foreign Minister of Australia, 1996–2007), London, 9 September 2015.

⁸Interview with R. Armitage (Assistant Secretary of State, Department of State, 2001–2004), Washington DC, 26 May 26 2015.

⁹Interview with Anonymous, Tokyo, 23 February 2015.

¹⁰Ibidem.

¹¹Interview Anonymous, Tokyo, 12 February 2015.

The Department of Defense variant, the Security and Defense Cooperation Forum (SDCF) began as an offshoot of an internal planning process, the Defense Strategy Review (DSR) begun by Andrew Marshall—the Office of Net Assessments “guru”—in 2000. This document, forecasting the growth of Chinese military “anti-access” capabilities, long-range, precision-guided munitions and the impact this would have on US carrier vulnerability, led to some of the greatest integration efforts of the US alliance system to this day. With the emphasis on “dissuading” and “detering” a “peer competitor” from challenging US power, the strategy sought to integrate US alliances into a “federated network of capabilities”. Andrew’s ethos was encouraged by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who incorporated the language into the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and the 2004 Global Posture Review (GPR). It was also developed by Michael Green in the National Security Council in 2003–2004. This inter-agency Asia strategy took 6 months to write and envisioned the building of interoperability as an important means of dissuading China from using force in the region. However, the document did not envision using allies to bolster American primacy, but rather sought to create a web of Defence relationships, message that was repeated almost verbatim in the 2015 Obama document *Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific*: moving past the hub and spokes would allow for a “more networked architecture of cooperation among our allies and partners—including through expanded trilateral cooperation frameworks.” This emphasis on trilateral and regional interoperability has seen the growth of military exercises across the region, a surge in intelligence-sharing agreements and training exercises, and explains the odd troop rotations throughout the region—like the 2500 marines in Darwin, the F22’s through Japan, and the Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) through Singapore.

4 From Obama to Trump

The Obama administration picked up the reins where the Bush administration left off, implementing a number of Bush-era positions. In trade, it ratified the KORUS free trade agreement (FTA) with South Korea, and also adopted the Trans-Pacific Partnership with enthusiasm.

4.1 *Engaging China*

All during this period, American policy has consistently promoted the growth of the Chinese economy and supported deeper engagement between its allies and China, and between regional states and China. Where Hugh White and others have seen containment, US policy documents actually point to a much more nuanced and inclusive approach toward China. This has even continued despite the surge in tensions over the South and East China Sea disputes over the past few years. Even

here, the US has responded with further alliance-integration, and greater interoperability, rather than with force. The Bush administration institutionalized Clinton's engagement policies with a number of government-to-government meetings. These include the Senior Dialogue (2004) led initially by deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, and the Robert Zoellick. It also includes the Strategic Economic Dialogue (2006) led by Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson. These two high-level meetings were then upgraded and merged by the Obama administration into the Strategic and Economic Dialogue in 2009, bringing together senior diplomatic and economic government representatives. As Jeffrey Bader notes in his book, *Obama and China's Rise*, "this mechanism was unknown in US relations with any other country in the world, and therefore indicated the particular importance that the Obama administration attached to China" (Bader 2012, p. 22).

It has also seen the US military attempt to build strong relationships with the PLA. This has included mutual high-level visits, including hosting Chinese PLA leaders in Washington, as well as inviting Chinese participation into the bi-annual RIMPAC exercises. In 2015, the two militaries signed new annexes to the Rules of Behavior for Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters Memorandum of Understanding, with one on air-to-air accidents, and another on crisis communications. The US DOD also exchanged a large number of institutionalized visits with Chinese high-ranking military officials across the various services. They also carried out reciprocal visits between defence university and training staff, discussing everything from maritime security, peacekeeping, and military medicine. Around five ships from each country made port visits to the naval stations. The Department of Defense says this about its engagement with China:

The 2015 National Security Strategy emphasizes that the United States seeks to develop a constructive relationship with China that sustains and promotes security and prosperity in Asia and around the world. At the same time, the strategy acknowledges there will be areas of competition and underscores that the United States will manage this competition from a position of strength, while seeking to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation (Department of Defense 2016, p. 94)

5 Conclusions

There is much confusion on US grand strategy in the Asia Pacific region, *vis à vis* China, and *vis à vis* the US alliance system. Arguably this has grown significantly worse since Trump began commenting on policy issues relating to the region. Many in the region await the formation of his administration to determine whether he will follow a policy of engagement or a policy of confrontation with China. Many commentators write about the two as if they were oppositional policies in contradiction to each other, suggesting that the US balancing and engagement strategy constitute a two-headed policy of hedging (Medeiros 2005). While this approach has some merit, it misses the driving logic behind the US alliance strategy—that of dissuasion and deterrence. The idea that these mechanisms are merely instruments

of external balancing misses the fact that they also represent the best means for Washington to maintain what it sees as a favourable balance of power in the region. It does this not merely by chaining US allies more closely to it, but actually by promoting a security community approach. In pushing Australia and Japan to work with Southeast Asian states on maritime security issues, capacity-building, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, it is hoped that the architecture will evolve in a way that shapes Chinese choices and behaviour.

Has this policy been successful? This question seems to focus on the results of American policymaking and events, and why this is important to the international relations scholar to understand the dynamic between policy and events, there is also merit in trying to divine strategic intentions. US grand strategy has not been about constraining, encircling, or containing China. There are a number of policy baskets that it has avoided, which would have forced US allies to choose between it and Beijing, which the US has avoided. Nor has it sought to constrain China's economy. Quite the reverse: Washington has seen Chinese growth as integral to the healthy functioning of the global economy and has encouraged closer economic integration between its allies and China. It has also sought to shape and ameliorate areas of competition by engaging more closely with China, at the economic level, at the military level, and at the diplomatic level. This can be seen in the various institutions it shares with China, ranging from the Senior Dialogue (SD), the Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED), and the Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED).

In her book, *Hard Choices*, Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton traces the strategic choices facing the United States. Her division of tasks facing US policymakers is instructive, as is her recommended policy course:

One option was to focus on broadening our relationship with China, on the theory that if we could get our China policy right, the rest of our work in Asia would be much easier. An alternative was to concentrate our efforts on strengthening America's treaty alliances in the region (with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia), providing a counterbalance to China's growing power. A third approach was to elevate and harmonize the alphabet soup of regional multilateral organizations, such as ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and APEC (the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation organization). [...] I decided that the smart power choice was to meld all three approaches. We would show that America was 'all in' when it came to Asia (Clinton Clinton 2014, pp. 44–45).

Her attempt to deal with the choice was actually to avoid making a choice, as a form of "smart power". As this chapter has endeavoured to show, Clinton is merely one in a long line of American policymakers who sought to combine outreach, balancing, and integration, as a means of handling strategy for the Asia Pacific region.

The real question is where the next administration will go in its overall policy toward the region. Given the influence and incorporation of China-hawks like Peter Navarro, in addition to President Trump's many criticisms of China, it is clear that the administration will adopt a slightly confrontational stance toward Beijing. However, it is unclear if Navarro's "peace through strength" and "comprehensive national power" will an organizing principle of American policy for the region.

Presently, it appears that two centres of policy output are developing in the White House, the National Trade Council, which Peter Navarro will chair, and the Strategic Initiatives Group, which will go to Steve Bannon and Jared Kushner. The downsizing of the National Security Council's research staff may see a return of policy power to the Department of Defense and Department of State, where two former Bush Administration officials, Victor Cha and Randall Schriver, are slated for key positions. Schriver, a Washington insider, worked closely with Richard Armitage in the Department of State during the crucial years that the US-Japan-Australia trilateral was established. He is likely to favour its continued evolution. Cha, a well-known North Korea analyst and academic, wrote some of the original theoretical work on trilateralism, using the US-Japan-ROK trilateral as his case study. As many inside the Beltway have noted, in the US system, people make the policy. Should the Trump administration seek to forge its own "pivot to Asia", it is likely to follow many of the institutional and laid-out tools of the previous two administrations.

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Conclusions: US Foreign Policy Under Trump, Years of Upheaval

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Abstract The election of Donald Trump has paved the way for a period of uncertainty regarding the US commitment to uphold and strengthen the current international rule-based order. This chapter states that the rise of populism that favoured the ascent of Trump has several fundamental consequences. Firstly, liberal internationalism and Wilsonianism, who constituted the basic ideational foundations for the US foreign policy narrative, appear to be rejected as the intellectual product of a distant cosmopolitan elite. Secondly, the Trump administration seems to rely on Jacksonianism to look for alternative ideas to reinterpret the US role in the current international order. Finally, this led to the rise of a “A-moral transactionalism”, an approach that is likely to lead to put into doubt several key pillars of the US international engagement to obtain short-term economic gains.

1 Trump and the Demise of Liberal Internationalist Consensus

The election of Donald Trump to the presidency paved the way to a period of uncertainty about whether the US will continue to play the role of main supporter and operator of the current rule-based international order. The 2016 elections signalled a fundamental erosion of the bipartisan consensus on the basic pillars of the American post-war grand strategy, based on free trade, advancement of democracy and military primacy. Previous debates were largely concerned with how the US should pursue those fundamental objectives and the right mix of economic, diplomatic and military resources it needed to employ. Before Trump, no other administration questioned the fact that the US should preserve and consolidate the

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current international liberal order. The main assumption was that it was instrumental both to American security and prosperity and to global stability (Ikenberry 2012; Brands 2016).

During the post-Cold War period, this debate has been characterized by three positions: minimalist offshore balancers, mainstream and centrist liberal internationalists and neo-conservative unilateralists (Posen and Ross 1996). The latter position was very influential during the first years of the Bush Jr. administration and proposed a strategy based on unilateralism, the recurrent employment of hard power, and scepticism towards multilateral institutions (Schmidt and Williams 2008; Ryan 2010). The opposite side of the spectrum is represented by the supporters of the offshore balancing. Among the supporters of this strategy are mainly realists such as Barry Posen, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, who consider necessary a revision of the costs and the risks associated with the American global engagement (Posen 2013, 2014; Mearsheimer and Walt 2016). The strategy of offshore balancing would reduce the propensity to intervene in conflicts not involving vital interests. From this perspective, policymakers should bear in mind both the costs of military interventions and their limited effectiveness in delivering political objectives. Finally, offshore balancers argue that an excessively activist grand strategy is destined to accelerate the resistance and the rise of anti-hegemonic coalitions (Layne 1997). From this perspective, the ultimate aim of the US grand strategy should be to prevent both alterations on a favourable balance of power and the rise of new rivals, eschewing any other risky or excessively idealistic enterprise. The idea of offshore balancing has found many supporters among IR theorists, as well as academic specialists in foreign affairs. During the Obama administration, it did not gain a significant traction in Washington, where the foreign policy community tended to identify largely with the broad mainstream position, defined by a globalist grand strategy, associated with free trade and democracy promotion in the tradition of liberal internationalism.

Liberal internationalists consider benefits of a continuing activism as larger than costs, and believe that a strategy of retrenchment would generate instability in key regional theatres. Moreover, they consider the American leadership as essential for the maintenance of an economic and commercial system, as well as for a functioning global governance structure (Brands 2015). Supporters of this approach claim that the US should maintain their network of alliances, coupled with the current levels of overseas military presence. The risk of entanglement generated by existing alliances is considered inferior to the benefits they assure in terms of stability (Beckley 2015). Moreover, they admit the use of force even when the American security or vital interests are not threatened, including for humanitarian reasons (Brooks et al. 2012). Ultimately, they argue that the future American leaders should continue to invest in the liberal rule based order, supporting free trade, multilateralism, the diffusion of democracy, and continuing to contribute to the security of allies and partners. The presence of legitimate difference of opinions and partisan division can concern relevant issues such as when and if to use force, in what degree to support friendly nations, and how to strike a balance between interests and democratic principles. However, during the post-Cold War era, the

existence of a broad consensus based on liberal internationalist principles basically isolated the voices of those who thought that the maintenance and the deepening of the current international rule-based order were not in the best interests of the US.

Trump's victory represented a moment of sudden and largely unexpected eclipse for mainstream liberal internationalism. While the result of the election and the possibility of a radical revision of US foreign policy stance were not predicted by the majority of commentators and analysts, several studies had evidenced the symptoms of a progressive erosion of the domestic foundations of the American post-war grand strategy.

2 The Rise of Jacksonian Populism

During the Obama years, domestic polarization reached unprecedented peaks, as testified by voting behaviour by members of Congress, as well as political radicalization within American society at large. The days of what the Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called "Vital Center", and the consensus over an agenda based on the values of liberal internationalism and a global engagement appear a distant memory (Schlesinger 1949; Kupchan and Trubowitz 2007). Social and political transformations as well as increasing partisanship progressively undermined the bilateral consensus over the three fundamental pillars of post-war foreign policy. Political polarization has undermined the necessary cooperation between Congress and the executive branch and a substantial degree of bipartisanship, especially when it comes to funding foreign policy initiatives, ratifying international treaties, and approving sanctions, foreign aids and military interventions. Increasing political polarization has led a Republican- led Congress to oppose the most significant achievements of the Obama administration, from the nuclear deal with Iran, to agreements on climate change and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Several scholars opposed the idea that the US is losing credibility due to its increasing domestic polarization (Chaudoin et al. 2010; Drezner 2015). Nevertheless, it is clear from cases such as the failure to ratify the TPP, or the difficulties Obama experienced with the Iran nuclear deal, that a polarized Congress represents a very significant constraint for US foreign policy-making (Milner and Tingley 2015; Sinclair 2014).

The election of Trump is a further manifestation of the erosion of the consensus that underpinned the grand strategy inspired by the basic tenets of liberal internationalism. On the one hand, this deprived US foreign policy of its main strategic and political script, paving the way for a period of uncertainty regarding not only the means, but the fundamental values and objectives, guiding the US engagement with the world. On the other hand, the sudden decline of influence of liberal internationalism represents an unprecedented occasion for promoters of other ideas that had previously had little impact in Washington's foreign policy circles to have a decisive effect on the foreign policy approach of the new administration.

The alternative set of ideas that will have more influence under the Trump administration will probably be what Walter Russell Mead defined as the Jacksonian

tradition. This tradition is considered to be a counterweight to the Wilsonian idealism, which in turn is considered to be the main ideological inspiration underpinning liberal internationalism. As Mead put it, the “Jacksonian tradition is the least impressive in American politics, the most deplored abroad and the most deplored at home”, nevertheless it remains a relevant part of the cultural baggage of American political thought, especially on the Republican side (Mead 1999).

The re-emergence of this tradition has been described as a product of the radicalization of the Republican Party and the emergence of anti-elitist populism, “an ideology”, as correctly defined by Albertazzi and McDonnell, “which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous others” (Albertazzi 2007). The result of the 2016 elections can probably best interpreted as a revolt against the liberal establishment, embodied by the rejection of Hillary Clinton. From this perspective, the triumph of Trump can be read as a high tide of centuries-long hatred of the metropolitan elites, and especially of “the decadent, exploitative, and above all commercial East” by the inhabitants of the internal regions (Lieven 2004, p. 96), generated by the consequences of the 2008 crisis and by structural socio-economical changes.

Proponents of the Jacksonian tradition believe that “capitalists and intellectuals in urban areas aim to exploit country workers economically and tarnish their authentic national, white and Christian, identities in the name of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism” (Cha 2016). Trump’s proposals reflect the re-emergence of a Jacksonian tradition in several ways. Firstly, many of its proposed solutions mirror the belief that to restore the American position in the world it is necessary to reject the values as well as the policies promoted by the liberal establishment: among them especially are those inspired by internationalism, free trade, globalization, cosmopolitanism. Secondly Trump’s approach to foreign policy, coherently with Jacksonian beliefs, tends both to negate the political, economic and strategic benefits of the American global engagement and oversimplify the nature of the main problems in international affairs. Trump’s political horizon, coherently with the Jacksonian world, rests upon “the very sharp distinction in popular feeling between the inside of the folk community and the dark world without” (Mead 2001, p. 236).

Trump’s foreign policy platform also expresses the resentment of his voters with the most relevant effects of economic and social globalisation, from the emergence of a multicultural and multi-ethnic society, to the delocalization of traditional manufacture and industries, the transition to a post-industrial economy based on services and innovation. His appeal to the losers of globalization generated a policy platform based on a mix of isolationism and scepticism towards the main tenets of the American engagement in the world, such as democracy promotion and a global open-door policy, supported by key international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Finally, the Jacksonian tradition is highly sceptical towards Wilsonian moralism. It tends to reject the idea that the US should actively promote democracy and human rights abroad. These efforts to frame the US interests abroad in a moralistic way are considered as part of the intellectual baggage of the Eastern cosmopolitan elite. As a consequence, they should be rejected as part of a globalist and cosmopolitan

approach that ultimately hurts the economic interests, as well as the social position of “ordinary people” who identify themselves with the Jacksonian narrative.

Jacksonianism and anti-elite populism, in contrast with liberal internationalism, do not provide a clear handbook for foreign policy or grand strategy. Rather, they offer a *Weltanschauung*, a vision of America and its role in it. Trump’s Jacksonianism has led him to portray a dark and Hobbesian vision of the world, characterized by a neo-isolationist and neo-sovereignist inclination in which the American interests are conceived against multilateralism, globalism and the current rule-based order. “Making America great again”, in this vision, means putting a certain vision of the American interest before any other principle or moral value. This position was fully expressed in Trump’s inaugural address as he stated:

From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this day forward, it’s going to be only America first, America first. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs will be made to benefit American workers and American families. We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength (Blake 2017).

3 A Strategy of “Amoral Transactionalism”

This vision of the world, purposely constructed against mainstream liberal internationalism, is likely to promote a selective appropriation of key elements of the other two strategic traditions I mentioned before: offshore balancing and neo-conservatism. None of these two strategic visions is likely to be completely embraced by the Trump administration which, on the contrary, appears inclined to cherry-pick some of its elements.

Offshore balancing might offer guidance in terms of reducing the cost of the American commitment abroad, and a minimalistic redefinition of the US role and interests in unstable areas such as the Middle East. Moreover, it provides valuable suggestions for an administration that does not appear to include democracy promotion among its priorities. Contrary to the assumptions of proponents of offshore balancing, however, Trump and his closer aids seem to appreciate much more the value of military force as a key aspect of America’s greatness. As Peter Navarro, Trump’s senior foreign policy advisor and Director of the National Trade Council, wrote in March 2016, “The Trump doctrine is a page right out of Ronald Reagan’s playbook: peace through economic and military strength” (Grey and Navarro 2016). This concept somehow echoes neo-conservative positions of the Reagan era that considered military superiority as the crucial element for the ultimate defeat of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The emphasis on strength and military might, in explicit conceptual opposition to the preference for multilateralism and international governance, represents the main continuity with the more general Reaganesque conservative and neo-conservatism.

A second element is the emphasis on the role of Islamist fundamentalism as a fundamental threat to US security. Aside from these elements, however, the Trump administration in fact appears quite distant by the neo-conservative legacy, especially in terms of the will to promote democracy abroad, and the use of force to promote non-vital interests. As Peter Navarro has stated:

Trump has developed a strong aversion to the kind of “nation building” that dragged America into wasted and protracted wars in God-forsaken killing fields like Iraq and Afghanistan. Accordingly, Trump has promised the American people — he will not be shedding the blood of any American soldier either in vain or under the vanity banner of American Exceptionalism. This is how Trump is in tune with the American public that is both tired of war and ready for the new era of prosperity that will usher in peace founded on true American power (Navarro 2016).

Many commentators stated that the rejection of liberal internationalism and the volatile mix of isolationism and oversimplification of complexity are likely to produce a highly incoherent foreign policy, deprived of any grand strategic vision (Zenko and Friedman 2017). However, it is possible that a relatively coherent grand strategy might emerge from the *Weltanschauung* described above. Firstly, as pointed out by Brands and Kohl, the Trump administration has produced a clear perception of the threats that the US face today. The Radical Islam is considered to be the most dangerous one, both in “civilizational terms” and in terms of security. This belief is supported both by more ideological elements of the administration as Steve Bannon and members closer to the mainstream foreign policy establishment, such as National Security Advisor, H.R. McMaster, and Secretary of Defense, James Mattis. It is important to note that the perception of Radical Islamism as a main threat reflects the Jacksonian aversion towards complexity. As a consequence, it blurs the difference between Shiia and Sunni Muslims, the role of Iran and ISIS, and leads to describing Muslim American citizens as a potential fifth column of Radical Islam (Brands and Kohl 2017).

The second threat to national security is considered to be the limits imposed by unfair trade agreements. During the presidential campaign, Trump defined the TPP as a “rape of our country” and NAFTA as “the worst deal in history”. These agreements are considered damaging for the American interests, since, allegedly, they would lead to a loss of jobs in the US. The rebalancing of trade policy in protectionist terms is therefore considered to be a main priority for the administration. The abandonment of the TPP should be interpreted as the first step in this direction.

The rejection of the TPP and the intention to revise NAFTA are symbols of the wider scepticism towards the rule-based international order that the US has fundamentally contributed to shape and promote since 1945. Trump is likely to show the same contempt for all the other main institutional pillars of the liberal world order, seen as the intellectual and political product of the liberal elite, hostile to the interests of the ordinary American people.

China is considered to the third key threat in the list. Trump blames the previous administrations for having favoured the rise of China and its integration with the international global order. According to Trump’s senior advisor, China should be

considered as a currency manipulator and the main cause of the US alleged economic decline, with particular reference to traditional manufacturing jobs. According to Peter Navarro, who gained the attention of the president through his book *Death by China*, the US already has “a trade war with China and Beijing is winning it” (Navarro and Autry 2011).

China is not only portrayed as an economic rival, it is also perceived as a geopolitical rival to contain. To contain China, the Trump administration appears oriented to privilege the military dimension inspired by the motto “Peace through Strength”, rather than a more nuanced and comprehensive approach proposed by the Obama administration through the Pivot to Asia (see Dian, Chap. 16 of this book). The first proposals of Trump’s advisors on Asia underlined the necessity of expanding the US fleet and rebuilding the US military superiority. At the same time, one of the first acts of the Trump administration was to stop the TPP, which represented one of the most valuable instruments Washington had to limit the Chinese economic influence in Asia and globally.

This relatively clear perception of the threats, the Jacksonian inspiration, and hostility towards the rule-based international order have led to what Brand and Kohl have defined as “amoral transactionalism”: the idea that the US should be willing 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 (Brand and Kohl 2017). As a consequence, security alliances with European and Asian partners are not considered essential to international stability and to the US role in the world. They are considered conditional and subject to permanent renegotiation. Traditional allies, such as NATO members, or Japan and South Korea are not necessarily considered better partners than others. Moreover, the American commitment appears to be conditional on the possibility for America to get a “good deal” from the partnership. As Trump argued in his inaugural address, Washington has “subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military”, meaning that postwar alliances have made the country weaker and less secure, subordinating America’s interests to the security of its partners.

A foreign policy based on “amoral transactionalism” might lead to a substantial revision of the US foreign policy stance, particularly if Trump adopts, during his mandate as president, solutions similar to those proposed during the campaign. In the year leading to the elections, he argued in favour of a revision of the US role in NATO, considering the American commitment to the defence of NATO allies, even under the article 5, as conditional; he anticipated a reversion of the current US policy on nuclear proliferation, allowing and even encouraging South Korea, Japan, and even Saudi Arabia to acquire nuclear weapons; he suggested the systematic imposition of trade tariffs to protect American produces, including a 45% tariff against Chinese imports. Implicitly, this position also contested the legitimacy of the WTO and its rules. On top of this, he promised an opening to Russia and nominated Rex Tillerson, the former CEO of Exxon, with very close ties with the Kremlin, to the position of Secretary of State.

Adopting these solutions would dramatically change the course of US foreign policy and decisively damage the relations with key allies in Europe and East Asia, with relevant neighbours as Mexico, and with other key stakeholders of the current international order, such as China. Trump's early statements on alliances, proliferation, trade and international institutions, to mention the most obvious examples, send several negative messages to different audiences. Many allies might consider the American commitment to their defence less unshakable as it was in the past. This is particularly significant for Eastern European states, threatened by Russia, and for East and South East Asian states, which look to Washington to set boundaries to the Chinese assertiveness. Similarly, is the possibility that the US could reverse its position on proliferation and international trade might undermine a capital of political credibility that has been built over several decades (Wickett 2017).

The Trump administration is also likely to produce a fundamental turning point when it comes to Trans-Atlantic relations and in particular when it comes to the perception of the role of the European Union (EU). Previous administrations had different ideas of the capacity of European states to act as valuable partners for the US, or of the necessity to consult and consider the position of the European partners. Still, never before has an American president explicitly favoured the weakening of the EU as functional to the American interest. On the contrary, previous administrations explicitly supported the enlargement and the deepening of the EU, considered to be the fundamental pillar for European prosperity and geopolitical prosperity (Lundestad 1998; Sloan 2010).

Trump's early statements seem to point towards a radical shift. He openly argued in favour of Brexit, declaring his support for the leader of the "Leave" campaign, Nigel Farage. Moreover, the Trump administration also seems inclined to practise the doctrine of amoral transactionalism in its relations with Europe. On the one hand, it has proposed the reconsideration of the role of NATO and subordinated the American commitment to the price, in terms of military burden-sharing, that the European allies are willing to pay. On the other hand, it has explicitly theorized the necessity to deal with European states bilaterally, bypassing Brussels as much as possible, to leverage the asymmetry of power and to exploit the divergence between the member states. Moreover, Trump harshly criticized European, and in particular, German policies on migration, stating that they alimented the threat of Islamic terrorism (Friedman 2017).

Major EU and European leaders harshly reacted to Trump's statements. Donald Tusk argued that "Europe must not surrender to those who want to weaken the transatlantic bond, without which the global order and peace cannot survive". Federica Mogherini, asked the Trump administration not to interference in the EU's own affairs and to avoid "Inviting us to dismantle what we have managed to build and which has brought us not only peace, but also economic strength." (Berger 2017; Financial Times 2017). Guy Verhofstadt, the leader of the Liberal Democratic group in the European Parliament, and former Belgian Prime Minister, openly defined Trump as an existential threat to the EU.

These statements are a few examples of how Trump's approach to foreign policy might endanger relations between Washington and the other key stakeholders of the international system, undermining the legitimacy of the attempt by the US to maintain a role of economic, institutional and political leadership in the current international order.

4 Trump and the Resilience of the Rule-Based World Order

Finally, the Trump administration is likely to represent a crucial stress test for the resilience of the rule-based international order, for the relations between Washington and its key European and Asian allies, as well as bilateral relations with other powers, such as Russia and China.

This first element of concern is represented by the lack of predictability demonstrated by the Trump administration. The open disregard for the very idea of rule-based international order, and the will to reject the strategic principles embraced by its predecessors, makes the conduct of the current administration difficult to predict and open to cycles of neglect and overreaction. Trump's position on bilateral relations with key Asian states is a clear example of this unpredictability. Before taking office, Trump questioned the "one China policy", namely the key principle underpinning US-China diplomatic relations since 1978. In February, he recommitted to that principle during a conversation with the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, in order to limit the damage made by his first statements. Something similar has happened with Japan. During the campaign, and in the aftermath of the elections, he argued that Japan and other US allies needed to do more in terms of economic and military burden-sharing, raising doubts about the American commitment toward the security of Japan. Subsequently, during the summit with Prime Minister Abe, he promoted a more traditional position, reaffirming the value and the strategic necessity of the alliance.

The first months of the Trump administration led to the emergence of a distinct path. The president himself, encouraged by the "ideological wing" of the administration, appears prone to sudden and radical policy changes, regarding key foreign policy issues, from commitment to alliances, non-proliferation and trade. Generally, these radical, and often poorly articulated, changes are rejected or at least largely reconsidered by the establishment wing of the administration, whose members would proceed to reassure partners and allies. Examples of this emerging trend are early roles played by Vice-President Pence, Secretary of Defence Mattis, and National Security Advisor McMaster. The first travelled to Europe, the second to Asia to re-assert Washington commitment to NATO and the bilateral alliances with South Korea and Japan. The latter refused to consider Radical Islamism as a threat, stating that the term could lead to a misleading understanding of the problem and consequently wrong policy solutions.

The balance between populist ideologues and pragmatists will fundamentally shape the course of US foreign policy during the Trump administration. The emergence of this conflict and the consequential chain of announcements, reactions and reassessments represent a dangerous factor of instability and unreliability. The fact that the Trump administration appears inclined to send mixed signals in different crucial policy areas, such as alliances and non-proliferation, is likely to undermine the credibility of the US commitment in regions and in strategic interactions in which the solidity of those very commitments is the key foundation of stability and security. A loss of credibility on security commitments, generated by mixed signals and frequent changes of policy, is likely to undermine the stabilizing effect of alliances, worsening already existing security dilemmas, such as those between China, Russia and their neighbours. Similarly, policy inconsistency regarding other fundamental areas as nuclear proliferation is likely to weaken the existing non-proliferation regime, with dangerous effects for the stability of regions such as the Middle East and South Asia and East Asia.

Another possible effect of the foreign policy approach envisioned by the Trump administration is a considerable decline of the American soft power and, in particular, of the legitimacy of the US as a global leader. The will to put “America first” in every circumstance, promoting a certain vision of the US interests above the stability of the international order, and above liberal and democratic values, is likely to generate considerable damage to the perception of the US abroad, and above all to the legitimacy of its role as a global leader.

The decline of the US soft power, together with the explicit rejection of the narrative based on American exceptionalism, and the declining effort to promote and support democracy abroad, is likely to have significant effects on the diffusion of democratic forms of government throughout the world. The eclipse, at least in terms of soft power, of the American model, based on an open and inclusive society, a melting pot of religions, cultures and races, and an open “civic nationalism”, is likely to limit the number of those, especially in developing countries, who look up to Western democracy for successful receipt for modernization and progress. This is particularly relevant since emerging or returning powers, such as Russia and China, propose new models based on the re-affirmation of the centrality of other norms such as sovereignty, the supremacy of the national interest over the rights of the individuals, centralized control, and forms of nationalism rooted on ethnic identities.

The will to reject the normative foundations of the global order, considered to be alien because they are a product of the liberal Wilsonian elite, is going to lead to a voluntary abdication of the US from a position of leadership in key policy areas in global governance. Anachronistic and self-damaging positions, such as the rejection of global warming as a “plot against the United States to favour China” (Foran 2016), or the proposal advanced by Trump’s policy advisor to abandon the WTO (Dyer 2016), might have far-reaching effects. Firstly, those positions are likely to further damage the assumption that the US might still exercise forms of leadership in terms of global governance. Secondly, other countries, where is possible will assume a guiding role when it comes to promoting and negotiating new agreements

of forms of governance in those sectors. In the foreseeable future, countries such as China and India, previously known for their disregard of environmental norms, will probably be on the forefront of new efforts to deal with climate change and environmental damage.

Similarly, America's protectionist turn, that has already led, among other things, to the demise of TPP and TTIP, is leaving space for initiatives sponsored by other countries. China appears the most active in this realm, with the promotion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank and the Belt and Road Initiative.

The fact that other powers, and especially those outside the Trans-Atlantic region, are for the first time willing and able to promote new forms of global governance is probably an early manifestation of the main features of the future international order. Possibly, this order is likely to resemble what Amitav Acharya has defined as multiplex. This new world order would be characterized by the coexistence of different great powers able to provide public goods; the presence of different types of regional and global organizations, based on a plurality of ideas and organizing principles. In other words, a multiplex world would be much more heterogeneous, but not necessarily unpeaceful (Acharya 2014).

From this perspective, the contemporary international order can preserve its rule-based nature, and resist a sudden reversal of the Washington policy stance. In a multiplex order, institutions would play a post-hegemonic role, favouring cooperation even in the absence of the American leadership or any other leadership (Keohane 1984; Snidal 1985; Milner 1998). As a consequence, a post-American world would not necessarily be unstable, but would be more complex, given the presence of multiple actors able to produce order, and more heterogeneous in terms of values and norms. Rising powers in fact tend to favour forms of cooperation not directly inspired by Western values of democracy and free market, but rather on "post-colonial" values, such as respect of sovereignty and "state capitalism".

The highly institutionalized nature of the contemporary international order, therefore, leads to the fact that it is not essential for Washington to "bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, and oppose any foe", as in Kennedy's era. On the contrary, the American role can be integrated, complemented or even substituted by other actors and new and old forms of international cooperation.

Despite these considerations of the solidity of the current international order, the perspective of a transition to a post-American era remains troublesome both in terms of global stability and values. As several of these chapters have highlighted, the US remains an indispensable power for the stability of key regions, such as East Asia. A decline in the US influence in East Asia would probably further deteriorate the current security dilemma between China and its neighbours, especially Japan. The US role and its continuing commitment to NATO remains fundamental for checking Russian assertiveness in Eastern Europe, even if the Russian influence of senior members of the new administration might undermine the reliability of Washington's commitment. Similarly, the role of the US appears to remain indispensable when it comes to the nuclear realm. Virtually no agreement in this area can

be achieved or would make any strategic sense without the full participation and compliance of the US.

The final relevant issue concerns norms and values. Trump's foreign policy is ultimately likely to accelerate systemic tendencies toward a more multipolar order, with other powers promoting new forms of institutionalized cooperation, both in the field of trade and finance, and in the realm of security and diplomacy. If the decline of the US influence and the rise of new centres of powers do not necessarily entail global instability, it is likely to reduce the extent to which liberal and democratic norms can represent the founding principles of the future international order. In other words, the relative decline both in terms of the power and legitimacy of the US might reduce the possibility of constructing a global order rooted in liberal, cosmopolitan and post-Westphalian principles. On the contrary, the rising influence of non-Western powers, and their ideas on international politics and global governance, points to a future in which the principles of national interests, ethnic exclusivist nationalism, and sovereignty will take precedence over the values of democracy, rule of law and multilateralism.

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