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## American Foreign Policy in the Age of Donald Trump\*\*

Often the best predictor of a new US president's foreign policy is to look at his predecessor. Yet each president does leave his impact on American foreign policy. Donald Trump came to office with no government or foreign policy experience and his presidential campaign rhetoric suggested significant changes in a US foreign policy, which he described as "America First." This article examines Trump's foreign policy after nearly three years both in terms of how it is made and across three levels—interests, strategy, and tactics. The argument is that while Trump's foreign policy shares many continuities with his predecessors, there are notable differences, especially in terms of how it is made and the conflict between his intensely personal style and the control the US foreign policy establishment has over him. Finally, any permanent changes in US foreign policy beyond Trump may have more to do with larger shifts in a world that is no longer dominated by the US.

### Introduction

Nearly three years into the presidency of Donald Trump assessments of his imprint on US foreign policy are mixed, with some asserting that he has affected a significant break from his predecessors, while others claim more continuities.<sup>1</sup> While every US president inherits a context from his predecessor, he too has some opportunity to imprint his worldview on American foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

This article assesses the legacy and impact Donald Trump has made on US foreign policy nearly three years into his term. The argument is that while

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<sup>1</sup> Landler, Mark. 2017. "Trump, the Insurgent, Breaks With 70 Years of American Foreign Policy." *The New York Times*, 28 December, A1; Ruiz, Juan Tovar. 2018. "La doctrina Trump en política exterior: fundamentos, repuras y continuidades." *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 120: pp. 259-283.

<sup>2</sup> O'Reilly, Kelly P. 2013. "A Rogue Doctrine? The Role of Strategic Culture on US Foreign Policy Behavior." *Foreign Affairs Analysis*, 9(1): pp. 57-77.

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President Trump has altered the course of US foreign policy on some issues, overall he remains within the context of the broad parameters of America policy as it has evolved over the last few years. The reasons for this are the geopolitical, institutional, and constitutional forces that limit all presidents in terms of making significant policy change, have constrained Donald Trump too.

## 1. Presidents and Foreign Policy

### 1.1. Policy Windows

Often the best predictor of a new US president's foreign policy is to look at his predecessor.<sup>3</sup> Despite the criticisms Barack Obama leveled against George Bush, by the time the former left office, his presidency displayed greater continuity than divergence with his predecessor.<sup>4</sup> Obama had pledged to end the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, close Guantanamo Bay, "push the reset button" with Russia, and "pivot toward Asia." By the time Donald Trump became president these pledges by Obama were largely unfulfilled or unchanged from how Bush left them for him. In addition, Obama inherited standoffs in the Korean peninsula, between Israel and the Palestinians, a deteriorating situation in Yemen with Saudi Arabia, and tense relations with Iran. These problems he passed on to Donald Trump along with a civil war in Syria.

Yet every president leaves an imprint on foreign policy. Personality matters in many areas of presidential power, including in foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> For Barack Obama, it was the Iranian nuclear deal and a change in US–Cuban relations. For George Bush it was the War on Terror, with Bill Clinton it was the Middle East Peace (Oslo) Accords, and for George H. W. Bush it was the first Gulf War. But the basic policies and relationships of US foreign policy displayed more parallels from Bush to Obama to the beginning of the Trump presidency.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Abrams, Elliott. 2019. "Trump Versus the Government: Can America Get its Story Straight?" *Foreign Affairs*, January/February: pp. 129-137.

<sup>4</sup> Nelles, Roland. 2019. Trumps Außenpolitik: Das Ende der Brechstange. *Spiegel Online*, located at <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/donald-trump-und-seine-aussenpolitik-groessenwahn-und-ahnungslosigkeit-kommentar-a-1267286.html> (May 15) (site last visited on September 7, 2019); Porter, Patrick. 2018. "Why America's Grand Strategy has not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment." *International Security*, 42(4): pp. 9-46.

<sup>5</sup> Gallagher, Maryann E., and Susan H. Ellen. "Presidential Personality: Not Just a Nuisance." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 10(1): pp. 1-21.

<sup>6</sup> Lieven, Anatol. "The Future of U.S. Foreign Policy." In *U.S. Foreign Policy*, Michael Cox and Doug Stokes, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 380-396.

Many scholars have examined the limited ability of US presidents to abruptly alter or change America's foreign policy. Peake notes that while it is generally assumed that presidents have more autonomy to set the political agenda in international or foreign affairs, they actually are weaker than thought.<sup>7</sup> Presidents are reactive in foreign affairs, having inherited preexisting commitments and conflicts.<sup>8</sup> Presidents share foreign policy responsibilities with Congress, and when media scrutiny increases or there is sharper disagreement over issues, interest group pressures constrain the president.<sup>9</sup> Jacobs and Page make a similar argument regarding interest group activity, noting the pressures of business and labor groups in terms of encouraging or forcing certain issues to be addressed, or continuing past behavior.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Cruz De Castro points to business interests, and geopolitical contexts and realities that force presidents into compliance.<sup>11</sup> Brzezinski also argues that preexisting world commitments and conflicts limit presidents.<sup>12</sup> O'Reilly makes a similar claim.<sup>13</sup>

Porter locates presidential constraints in what he calls habituation.<sup>14</sup> These habits are forced by a US foreign policy establishment which Porter refers to as the "Blob."<sup>15</sup> The Blob is composed of foreign policy careerists, experts, think tanks, and academics who reinforce the status quo in four ways. One, foreign policy or security elites gather information from mental shortcuts which they internalize to structure their thinking, often perhaps producing a confirmation bias for their views. Two, they socialize with one another, yielding a groupthink that filters out alternative options and policy choices. Three, they dominate public discourse. Four, they communicate with allies and that produces a feedback loop. In examining both the Clinton and then the first year of the Trump presidency, Porter finds that the inertia of the Blob created

<sup>7</sup> Peake, Jeffrey S. 2001. "Presidential Agenda Setting in Foreign Policy." *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(1): pp. 69-86.

<sup>8</sup> Peake, 70-72.

<sup>9</sup> Ripley, Randall B., and Grace A. Franklin. 1990. *Congress, the Bureaucracy, and Public Policy*. Boston, MA: Brooks/Cole.

<sup>10</sup> Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Benjamin Page. 2005. "Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?" *American Political Science Review*, 99(1): pp. 107-123.

<sup>11</sup> De Castro, Renato C. 2000. "Wither Geoeconomics? Bureaucratic Inertia in U.S. Post-Cold War Foreign Policy toward East Asia." *An American Review*, 26(4): pp. 201-221.

<sup>12</sup> Brzezinski, Zbigniew. 2009. "Major Foreign Policy Challenges for the Next U.S. President." *International Affairs*, 85(1): pp. 53-60.

<sup>13</sup> O'Reilly, Kelly P. 2013. "A Rogue Doctrine? The Role of Strategic Culture on US Foreign Policy Behavior." *Foreign Affairs Analysis*, 9(1): pp. 57-77.

<sup>14</sup> Porter, Patrick. 2018. "Why America's Grand Strategy has not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment." *International Security*, 42(4): p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

a “pervasive ideology of US leadership [that] constrains Washington’s foreign policy choices. Successful presidents have been predisposed toward the status quo with little critical evaluation.”<sup>16</sup> Porter specifically contended that despite Trump’s political rhetoric, his first year in office was characterized by a normalizing of his foreign policy and a push toward the status quo.<sup>17</sup> Ilyinichna sees the pressures of the presidency and the reality of foreign policy forcing presidents into making more pragmatic choices.<sup>18</sup>

Overall, US presidents, as powerful as they are, actually have less freedom to alter the course of America’s foreign policy than normally recognized. They are the products of historical contexts and circumstances, which often limit their ability to act.<sup>19</sup>

As noted above, part of the reason for this continuity is the strength and bipartisan nature of the American foreign policy establishment and culture since World War II, which generally assures consistency across presidential administrations.<sup>20</sup> The US foreign policy establishment is the product of careerists in the State and Defense Departments, the National Security Council, the CIA, and a few other federal agencies. These agencies, along with experts in Congress and academics in a few US universities, form a stable group of leaders who advise, guide, and often limit presidents in their foreign policy choices. At its best, the US foreign policy establishment forms a stable bloc of advisors and experts who assure continuity and coherence across presidencies, and at its worst it is an insular groupthink that unduly limits presidential foreign policy innovation or fails to provide reliable information for decision-making.<sup>21</sup>

As a candidate in 2016, Donald Trump pledged many promises when it came to foreign policy. As president, Trump has made several decisions to imprint US foreign policy. What is Trump’s foreign policy imprint or doctrine? Pejoratively the media recounts an official who declares it to be “We’re America, bitch,” but is there something more coherent or deeper than this phrase

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>18</sup> Ilyinichna, Arsentyeva I. 2016. “К Вопросу О Возможных Изменениях В Американско- Китайских Отношениях При Дональде Трампе.” *Society: Politics, Economics, Law*, 12: pp. 1-3.

<sup>19</sup> Skowronek, Stephen. 2008. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

<sup>20</sup> Gallagher, Maryann E., and Susan H. Allen. 2014. “Presidential Personality: Not Just a Nuisance.” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 10(1): pp. 1-21.

<sup>21</sup> Pillar, Paul R. 2011. *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, 9/11, and Misguided Reform*. New York: Columbia University Press; Weiner, Tim. 2008. *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA*. New York: Anchor Books.

that has been designed or has emerged?<sup>22</sup> Despite skeptics who argue that the Trump doctrine is one of incoherence and whim, a Trump doctrine has actually emerged, based on Trump's own sense of how to do business as a dealer and his view of the world.<sup>23</sup> Trump's intensely personal worldview shares many characteristics of his predecessors yet also it leaves a unique imprint whose impact has already changed—for good or bad—American foreign policy and world politics.<sup>24</sup>

## 1.2. The Constitution Limits

But in addition to presidential foreign policy agenda-setting generally constrained by US geopolitical commitments, the constitutional context of the American government generally dictates limits. Despite claims of an imperial presidency, the American constitutional structure of checks and balances and separation of powers limits one branch of government from having too much authority.<sup>25</sup> Simply put, the US political system is not set up to permit abrupt political change.<sup>26</sup> The Constitution in Article I and Article II addresses matters of foreign policy, and war and peace in detail. Among the reasons for this is that the American colonial experience with England and King George III raised concerns about the possibility that an executive could abuse his military and war-making powers.

If one examines the text of the Constitution, the number of clauses that define congressional as opposed to presidential power in the area of foreign policy and war-making powers seem to suggest that the former was meant to be the preeminent institution in these areas. Historical analysis also confirms this point, as do statements by US constitutional founders such as James Madison in *The Federalist* No. 10, who declared the legislative supremacy of Congress as an important value.<sup>27</sup> Over the years, presidents have increasingly

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<sup>22</sup> Goldberg, Jeffrey. 2018. "A Senior White House Official Defines the Trump Doctrine: 'We're America, Bitch.'" *The Atlantic*, located at <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/a-senior-white-house-official-defines-the-trump-doctrine-were-america-bitch/562511/> (site last visited on December 26, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Ruiz, Juan T. 2018. "La doctrina Trump en política exterior: fundamentos, repuras y continuidades." *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 120: pp. 259-283.

<sup>24</sup> Abrams, Elliott. 2019. "Trump versus the Government: Can America Get its Story Straight?" *Foreign Affairs*. January/February: pp. 129-137.

<sup>25</sup> Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr. 1973. *The Imperial Presidency*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

<sup>26</sup> Howell, William G., and Jon C. Pevehouse. 2007. *While Dangers Gather: Congressional Checks on Presidential War Powers*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>27</sup> Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay. 1937. *The Federalist*. New York: Modern Library.

taken control of foreign policy into their own hands, both out of necessity and as a result of congressional acquiescence or delegation. President Franklin Roosevelt, for example, carried the exercise of such prerogatives to a new level. Early in his first term, Congress had passed a resolution authorizing the president to regulate the exportation of arms and munitions of war to the point of a complete embargo if he found certain specified conditions to exist.

That the federal government may exercise only the powers granted by the terms of the Constitution is a truism of US public law.<sup>28</sup> However, the federal government operates not only internally but in foreign affairs as well, and it has come to be accepted that the strict doctrine of delegated powers applies to the federal government only in the field of domestic affairs. Since the federal government is the only entity in the United States recognized to carry on international relations, it must have plenary power in this field in dealing with the nations of the world. This was confirmed in *United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp*, where the Supreme Court granted significant authority to the president and the national government to act in the field of foreign affairs.<sup>29</sup>

The operation of foreign and military policy thus poses at least three constitutional dilemmas. The first involves the application of the constitutional division of labor in foreign as opposed to domestic relations. How do the principles of American constitutional law such as checks and balances and separation of powers apply when it comes to international affairs, especially those that take place outside the borders of the United States? A second question addresses the issue of national emergencies: when the country is at war, does the Constitution afford either the president or Congress special or extraordinary powers that are not expressly defined in its text?

Finally, a third constitutional dilemma lies at the intersection of the powers of Congress under Article I and presidential power under Article II. Under Article I, Section 8, Congress is given the power to declare war, raise and support armies and a navy, and undertake a host of other activities related to war and foreign policy. Under Article II, Section 2, the president is commander in chief of the army and navy (armed forces). This dual authority over war-making and foreign policy powers leaves open critical questions regarding when or where the power of Congress ends and that of the president begins. For example, does the president have inherent constitutional authority to start a war, deploy troops to defend the United States from attack, or undertake other military activities?

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<sup>28</sup> *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 17 U.S. 316, (1819)

<sup>29</sup> *United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp.*, 299 U.S. 304, (1936)

In a world with nuclear capacities and international terrorism—especially since the attacks and events of 9/11—the issue has become more pronounced in terms of the ability of the president to respond to an attack and if necessary, deploy nuclear missiles in a matter of minutes, perhaps in the absence of congressional authorization or consultation. While the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, brought up many constitutional issues testing the war-making powers of the two branches, the scope of presidential power to deploy troops goes far back in American history.

Defenders of executive power often point to a statement by John Marshall (not in his capacity as chief justice of the US Supreme Court in the nineteenth century but as Secretary of State under President John Adams) that the president is the “sole organ” in foreign affairs. In so doing, defenders of presidential power look to the Commander in Chief clause as support for executive supremacy in foreign and military affairs.<sup>30</sup> They also note that the president, unlike Congress, may be able to act quickly to respond to emergencies. Conversely, defenders of congressional supremacy or authority point to the text of the Constitution, which gives more explicit foreign and military power to the Congress than to the president.

Many of the major issues testing the intersection of presidential and congressional authority in this area first arose during the Civil War. At that time, important questions about the presidential power of Abraham Lincoln to embargo ships and try individuals for conspiring against the Union North, among other asserted powers, were first raised before the courts.

Immediately after the fall of Fort Sumter in April of 1861 as the US Civil War was beginning, President Lincoln ordered a blockade of all southern ports. As a result of the enforcement of this blockade, four ships were seized and taken to port to be held as prizes. In *The Prize Cases* the owners of the ships contended that the seizure was illegal since a blockade was a belligerent act and could not be undertaken in the absence of a declaration of war by Congress.<sup>31</sup> In permitting President Lincoln to act, the Court made a distinction between “declaring” war and “making” or “conducting” war. This phraseology was changed at the Constitutional Convention.

*Ex parte Milligan* is another Civil War era precedent that has assumed renewed importance in light of the war on terrorism begun by President Geor-

<sup>30</sup> Henkin, Louis. 1997. *Foreign Affairs and the United States Constitution*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>31</sup> *The Prize Cases*, 67 U.S. 635, (1863)

ge Bush after the events of 9/11.<sup>32</sup> In *Milligan* the military used its courts to try a civilian who sought to steal guns and attack the United States. He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to hang. However, he appealed his case to the Supreme Court, seeking a habeas corpus review of his trial and conviction. The Court ruled in his favor, arguing that unless the civilian courts were not functioning, a civilian could not be tried in military courts. The decision placed tight limits on when habeas corpus could be suspended (it was permitted here), but it also placed even tighter restrictions on when, where, and who could be tried in what type of courts. *Milligan* would become a critical precedent often debated when terrorist suspects were detained as enemy combatants at the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, and denied habeas relief by the president and Congress.

*United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corporation* raised important constitutional questions. The Court distinguishes between federal activities in domestic matters and those in foreign affairs.<sup>33</sup> The former are strictly limited by the doctrine of delegated powers and the Tenth Amendment. The latter are plenary powers and allow no interference on the part of the states. In the area of foreign relations, the power belongs to the federal government. Included here are such matters as the powers of Congress, the power of the president, and limitations on Congress such as delegation of legislative power. Only the federal government has the powers of external sovereignty. The states are unknown in the field of international relations. Only the federal government may speak there, and the president is its chief spokesperson—the voice of America.

The conduct of foreign relations, at least according to the *Curtiss-Wright* Court, is an inherent power of the federal government under international law. There are no limitations on it in the Constitution except such incidentals as the procedure for the making of treaties. Also, Article I, Section 10 of the US Constitution forbids states from entering the field of foreign relations. The opinion in *Curtiss-Wright* does not authorize the president to act contrary to a statute.

*Youngstown Sheet and Tube v. Sawyer* also known as the “Steel Seizure” case, may be one of the most influential cases on foreign policy in the Court’s history—at least, it has become so.<sup>34</sup> While the Court struck down President Truman’s effort to nationalize the steel industry in order to avert a strike and the interruption of steel production during the Korean War, the case is not

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<sup>32</sup> *Ex parte Milligan*, 71 U.S. 2, (1866)

<sup>33</sup> *United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corporation*, 299 U.S. 304, (1936)

<sup>34</sup> *Youngstown Sheet and Tube v. Sawyer*, 343 U.S. 579, (1952)



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read as detrimental to presidential power and authority. The various opinions describe legal scenarios that might support significant presidential power in foreign policy matters, or at least issues that take place beyond US borders. It is important to read the opinion as providing an outline for what types of foreign policy authority the president does have.

Most importantly, Justice Jackson's opinion is often the most cited part of the *Youngstown* decision. It describes a tripartite division of presidential power in foreign affairs depending on whether the chief executive is acting alone, or with or against congressional approval. Presidents from Lyndon Johnson to George Bush cite it to support their military adventures, especially when they can point to congressional resolutions endorsing their actions. It seems to suggest, following *Curtiss-Wright*, that Congress can augment presidential power in foreign affairs by authorizing the chief executive to act.

The president has considerable discretion in the use of the armed forces as the commander in chief. But the president also appears to have broad powers even when it comes to the use of diplomatic skills to address foreign policy matters. In *Dames & Moore v. Regan*, at issue is the scope of the president's authority to negotiate an agreement to resolve an international dispute.<sup>35</sup> Here, it involved President Carter negotiating an agreement to end the Iranian hostage crisis. The Court draws upon Justice Jackson's tripartite analysis of presidential power to support part of the agreement. However, the Court also looks to inherent presidential authority to act on their own to settle claims with the Iranian government.

*Youngstown* is important because it establishes that while presidential power in foreign policy and defense is significant, it is also subject to constitutional limits. The president has textually explicit powers granted by the Constitution, but both through Supreme Court interpretation and congressional delegation, presidents have acquired additional powers, defining the formal authority that a US president has when it comes to creating foreign policy.

### 1.3. The US Foreign Policy Establishment

As powerful as the president is in foreign affairs, he does not act alone. The Constitution and law impose some limits, as does the structure of foreign policy decision-making in the US. Presidents do not make foreign policy alone—there are many actors involved. Allison, describing US decision-making

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<sup>35</sup> *Dames & Moore v. Regan*, 453 U.S. 654, (1981)

during the Cuban Missile crisis, nicely illustrates the layer of agencies, personnel, and motivations all involved in making foreign policy decisions.<sup>36</sup>

The US foreign policy establishment, or the Blob as Porter calls it, consists of several agencies. At the top of course is the White House and the president. The White House staff will include the president's chief of staff as well as other individuals whom he trusts or considers close in terms of providing advice. Some of the people who provide advice may do so informally, but there are other formal players as part of the foreign policy establishment. They include the Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Agency, the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the US Information Agency, the Agency for International Development, the US Trade Representative, and the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>37</sup> It is beyond this article to provide detail on the expertise of each of these agencies, but they do provide information, input, or implementation of different aspects of US foreign policy.

It is important to understand that each president develops his own pattern for how to solicit the input and work with these executive department agencies.<sup>38</sup> In some cases, presidents rely more on one or other agencies more so than others, or some personnel have greater access to the president than others. It is also important to note that these agencies include presidential appointees and careerists, with the former often with histories of working with the latter, or even have risen from their ranks.

Outside the executive branch, members of Congress and special committees too have an influence on US foreign policy. Specifically, the important House committees are Armed Services, Foreign Affairs, Homeland Security, Intelligence, Energy and Commerce Financial Services, Appropriations, and, to a lesser extent, Agriculture. In the Senate the major committees are Foreign Relations, Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Intelligence, Armed Services, Commerce, Science and Transportation, Energy and Natural Resources, and Appropriations. Some of these committees that are in both houses, such as Intelligence and Armed Services, have general oversight and potential input into foreign policy, while others will have more limited roles depending on the topic. Appropriations committees in both House wield powerful budgetary power. Within these committees, the chairs often have significance

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<sup>36</sup> Allison, Graham T. 1999. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: Pearson.

<sup>37</sup> Aronica, Valentina, and Inderjeet Parmar. "Domestic Influences on Foreign Policy Making." In *U.S. Foreign Policy*, Michael Cox and Douglas Stokes, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.125-140.

<sup>38</sup> O'Reilly, Kelly P. 2013. "A Rogue Doctrine? The Role of Strategic Culture on US Foreign Policy Behavior." *Foreign Affairs Analysis*, 9(1): pp. 57-77.

influence too, along with others viewed as powerful. Examples of this include former Senator John McCain.<sup>39</sup>

American political scientists describe iron triangles as important policy coalitions. Iron triangles consist of relevant congressional committees, experts, or agencies in the executive branch, and influential interest groups. Collectively, the three form strong “triangles” that define and dominate policy in specific areas. The same is true with foreign policy where defense contractors, high tech companies, other businesses, and academic experts form coalitions that influence and dominate.<sup>40</sup> This group of people is what is known as the US foreign policy establishment. In general, it is this coalition of interests that provides the core of the decision-making for American foreign policy, with all recent presidents, at least prior to Trump, dependent on them for expertise, information, and guidance. It would not be wrong to say that this establishment as much guides or controls the president as vice versa.

Among the most important tasks performed by the foreign policy establishment, at least the official one in government, is the congressionally mandated Quadrennial Defense Review. This review defines US military challenges and policies for the next four years. Trump came to office with the previous one performed in 2018, by the then Obama staff, and it provided a context for the next review—now known as the National Defense Strategy—performed in 2018, still with mostly careerists. This review or strategy by the foreign policy establishment guides presidential action, generally in ways consistent with previous reviews.

Overall, bureaucratic or institutional forces limit or constrain presidential foreign policy authority.

## 2. Principles, Strategies, and Tactics of American Foreign Policy Prior to Trump

Another constraint on presidential foreign policy initiative is a grand strategy or set of commitments made over time by previous presidents, Congress, and the foreign policy establishment. Trump came to office within a context of a set of principles, strategies, and tactics that arguably go back to the end of World War II.

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<sup>39</sup> Aronica, Valentina, and Indejeet Parmar, pp. 125-140.

<sup>40</sup> Adams, Gordon. 1981. *The Iron Triangle: The Politics of Defense Contracting*. New York: Studies/Council on Economic Priorities.

*Life Magazine* founder Henry Luce famously proclaimed in a 1941 issue of his magazine that the 1900s was “America’s Century.”<sup>41</sup> His proclamation has garnered various interpretations, but at its most basic it was a statement declaring that the United States would be the dominant power in the world. That has been generally the case since the end of World War II, but what have been the elements that have accounted for that dominance and creation of the American century? To understand US foreign policy one needs to look at it from three levels—principles, strategic, and tactical.

## 2.1. Principles

American foreign policy since the end of World War II is guided by several principles, which have largely remained constant over time. If we assume as realists do that each nation acts in its own interests, then one can argue that these are the guiding principles of US foreign policy.<sup>42</sup> These principles, as noted below, often serve a dualistic function of being strategies or tactics to securing the principles. Thus, in some cases, principles also exist as strategies.

The first principle is a commitment to a liberal world order. A liberal order can mean a political philosophy indebted to the British political philosopher John Locke, which includes respect for democratic rights, limited government, and support for property rights.<sup>43</sup> One might also attach to this principle a commitment to a capitalist world order where free markets are generally considered to be the preferred form of economic activity, generally ascribing a limited role to the government. While until the 1970s or 1980s the combination of the two philosophies into market capitalism meant tolerance for welfare state policies, since the 1980s it has turned into neoliberalism and more toward market fundamentalism.<sup>44</sup>

The importance of the support for market capitalism has meant several things when it comes to US foreign policy. For one, generally the US supported Western democratic values and opposed communism or other non-democratic values or regimes across the world. Second, it meant that the US generally would support free trade and open economic orders. This translated

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<sup>41</sup> Luce, Henry. “The American Century,” *Life Magazine*, February 17, 1941: pp. 61-64.

<sup>42</sup> Morgenthau, Hans J. 2006. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: McGraw-Hill; Ikenberry, G. John. 2018. “The American Liberal Order: From Creation to Crisis.” In *U.S. Foreign Policy*, Michael Cox and Douglas Stokes, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 359-368.

<sup>43</sup> Weisband, Edward. 1973. *The Ideology of American Foreign Policy: A paradigm of Lockian Liberalism*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>44</sup> Plant, Raymond. 2009. *The Neo-Liberal State*. New York: Oxford University Press.

into support for free trade agreements such as NAFTA in North America, as well as multinational entities such as the World Trade Organization. It also meant that the US would support countries and movements it considered to be democratic.

A second guiding value linked to the first is an opposition to communism. This principle may be an outgrowth of the first principle endorsing democracy, but it has its own distinct guiding value. From the end of World War II until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cold War politics defined the US. This played out in terms of the US being viewed as the leader of the free world or at the same time seen as the world's policeman in terms of seeking to enforce democratic norms. Anticommunism as a defining principle meant that during the height of the Cold War, international relations could depict the world as bipolar—with respective spheres of influence allocated to the US and the USSR.

With the collapse of the latter there was a brief period or emergence of a unipolar world with the US at its helm.<sup>45</sup> This was the point where Fukuyama proclaimed that history had ended and Western values had triumphed.<sup>46</sup> However, as Herring and Brands have pointed out, that unipolar moment has disappeared.<sup>47</sup> Instead, as Huntington and Barber have argued, a new “clash of civilizations” has emerged pitting the US against perhaps the Arab or other worlds.<sup>48</sup> The point being is that while the US is still considered the leader of the Western democratic world (the First World that used Cold War language), its foe is now terrorism and the US now sees itself as defending Western values against it.

The third principle for the US was maintenance of military and nuclear superiority over all other countries in the world. The Cold War was in part about both of these types of superiorities. The idea of military superiority was to ensure the US could enforce democratic capitalist norms, be the leader in the West, and oppose communism and the USSR. To be the leader of the free world and control its part of a bipolar world necessitated this superiority.

Finally, the fourth principle was economic dominance or superiority. While this principle could be linked to the first principle supporting liberal

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<sup>45</sup> Herring, George C. 2008. *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>46</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: The Free Press.

<sup>47</sup> Herring, George C.; Brands, Hal. 2016. *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>48</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. 2011. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster; Barber, Benjamin R. 1996. *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy*. New York: Ballantine Books.

capitalism, here the idea is that the US wanted to maintain itself as the dominant economic power in the world. In part, as Paul Kennedy argued, military superpowers such as the US need to have a strong economy to support their empires, but America has also viewed having the dominant and largest economy in the world both as a matter of pride and also as a way to influence and leverage international affairs.<sup>49</sup> Its sheer wealth and size has made it possible for the US to have its currency dominate the world in many capacities, influence trade agreements, and affect global economic policies through its banks or other institutions.

These principles—support for democratic capitalism, opposition to communism and global terrorism, and military and economic superiority, enjoyed bipartisan support in the United States from 1946 through (and as will be argued) into the Trump administration. These principles have also been sustained by several strategic policies.

## 2.2. Strategy

Kennedy argued that superpowers need to have both economic and military resources to sustain their hegemonic status.<sup>50</sup> By that, an expansive empire of sphere of influence requires both a large military to enforce its goals or interests, but at the same time it needs the economic resources to support its military goals. Power or influence in international affairs requires a combination of these two forces. Kennedy's discussion has been refined to offer a description of the forces that great powers need to maintain their influence. Nye further distinguishes the nature of power between hard and soft power. Hard power is threats, such as through military action, to further foreign policy goals, whereas soft power is the ability to set the political agenda to shape the preferences of others. The best manifestation of this soft power is diplomacy.<sup>51</sup>

Mead further distinguishes American power into four types: military, economic, sweet (cultural), and hegemonic.<sup>52</sup> This distinction further articulates the various ways the US has deployed a variety of tools to enforce its values. While one can debate exactly the different ways American power can

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<sup>49</sup> Kennedy, Paul. 1987. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York: Vintage.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Kaufman, Joyce P. 2017. *A Concise History of U.S. Foreign Policy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 190.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 191; Mead, Walter R. 2004. *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

be described or dissected, there is no question that generally one sees several strategies in US foreign policy. The first has been military (conventional) and nuclear superiority. Throughout the Cold War and after, the goal has always been to maintain a military strength sufficient to deter communism, defend the free world or democracy, fight two wars, deter nuclear war, or lead the fight against the war on terrorism. At present, the US military budget is by far the largest in the world, surpassing the next seven countries combined.<sup>53</sup> Military superiority is both a strategic tool and an end or principle in itself.

The second strategy has been diplomacy. Diplomacy is broader than simply setting up ambassadorships; it is negotiating treaties and alliances that are often multilateral. It is creating rules for international trade and dispute resolution. Diplomacy is about using American soft power to create a world hospitable to US interests, including democratic and free market values. Diplomacy is convincing others to do things America wants, reaching agreements to protect the country. Diplomacy has produced alliances such as NATO, SEATO, and international organizations such as the World Trade Organization. Diplomacy secured the coalitions the US needed under the George H. W. Bush administration to liberate Kuwait from Iraq, broker the Camp David Accords under Jimmy Carter, and open up US–China relations under Nixon.

The third strategic tool is economics. The US maintained the largest economy in the world and its sheer size gave it muscle across the globe. American capitalism, coupled with diplomatic skills in forging free trade and other economic agreements, fashioned a world where America dominated. It may not have been the case that the US had a positive trade balance with every nation, but collectively the economic world order formed after WWII favored the United States, making it the most prosperous nation on earth. Economic superiority, like with its military power, is a strategic tool and an end or principle in itself.

Finally, one can see cultural values as critical to US foreign policy interests. Perhaps the most significant US export is its cultural values. Hollywood, television, and American pop culture define America and are projected onto the rest of the world. They define a hegemonic way to see and describe the world.

Collectively these four strategic tools of power could be seen as an “America First” doctrine. Yet how America First was defined and these strategies were employed has varied across US presidents. One can argue that some

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Peterson Foundation. May 3, 2019. “U.S. Defense Spending Compared to Other Countries.”, [https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053\\_defense-comparison](https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison)

were willing to place greater emphasis on military as opposed to diplomatic tools, or more willing to rely on economic power to further US interests. Military interventions (invading Afghanistan after 9/11 under George Bush) versus diplomacy (the Iran nuclear deal under Barack Obama) versus embargos (Cuba under several presidents) are examples of these differences.

### **2.3. Tactics**

However, US foreign policy has to be examined at a third level—tactical. Tactics are how the four different powers are leveraged. For example, it might be how the US would pursue its interests through these powers not just in the short term but also in the long term. It was also a foreign policy that was statist; by that it was built on crafting alliances with specific states and not specific regimes or leaders. US interests were best preserved by forging relationships with strategic countries, often without regard to whom was leading them. Finally, the US would seek to leverage overall world influence through bi- and multilateral agreements and alliances, and that it would cooperate with other states as part of a broader strategy to maintain US supremacy across the world.

Tactically, the US would pursue its interests through four types of powers employing tactics that were interventionist, often multilateral (although not consistently and sometimes it would adopt a go-it-alone approach), using international institutions and organizations to help secure its basic interests. At this tactical level one would see the greatest difference across presidents, with varying levels of interest and skills in working with other countries or institutions to pursue more narrowly defined US interests or ones that saw America's security connected to a larger global community. However, even at the tactical level, there was more coherence than disagreement among and across US presidents.

Overall, a core set of principles, strategic powers, and tactics defined an America First foreign policy that has held together the US foreign policy establishment across presidents since the 1940s. Yes, each president would imprint or change it to adapt to evolving world conditions such as the end of communism, the rise of terrorism, or the emergence of China and Asia as major economic players. But collectively, no post-World War II president has rejected the basic goals or pillars that forge US foreign policy strategy.



### 3. American Foreign Policy under Trump

The Trump presidency displays continuity and discontinuity in terms of the broader patterns of recent US foreign policy and many of its positions are within the mainstream of Republican Party politics.<sup>54</sup> Trump, like previous presidents, came into office with a set of political views, yet he has achieved mixed results in terms of securing them. Moreover, despite some impression that he represents a radical break from the past, his changes are less so than often depicted.

There is no debate that he buys into American core principles of economic and military superiority, but it is far more questionable how much he is committed to furthering liberal democratic values, and his commitment to fighting terrorism is also questionable, at least and until it actually hits the United States directly again.<sup>55</sup> At the strategic and tactical levels, Trump's foreign policy displays even greater divergence, but the place where his foreign policy is at its greatest break is in terms of how foreign policy is made—Trump increasingly displays a gut instinct approach that appears to disregard the traditional channels and mechanisms for creating foreign policy.

In many ways Trump's decision-making in foreign policy shares the overall pattern of policymaking that is characteristic of his entire administration—incoherent and disorganized.<sup>56</sup> Woodward, Wolff, and Anonymous, a senior official within the Trump administration, along with other press accounts, describe the Trump White House as highly disorganized and undisciplined.<sup>57</sup> This pattern extends to frustration where the president refuses to read daily

<sup>54</sup> Abrams, Elliott. 2019. "Trump versus the Government: Can America Get its Story Straight?" *Foreign Affairs*. January/February: pp. 129-137; Ruiz, Juan T. 2018. "La doctrina Trump en política exterior: fundamentos, repuras y continuidades." *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 120: pp. 259-283.

<sup>55</sup> Diamond, Larry. 2019. "Democracy Demotion: How the Freedom Agenda Fell Apart." *Foreign Affairs* (July/August), located at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-06-11/democracy-demotion> (site last visited on September 10, 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Ruiz, Nelles, Roland. 2019. Trumps Außenpolitik: Das Ende der Brechstange. *Spiegel Online*, located at <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/donald-trump-und-seine-aussenpolitik-groessenwahn-und-ahnungslosigkeit-kommentar-a-1267286.html> (May 15) (site last visited on September 7, 2019); Diploweb.com 2019. La politique étrangère de Donald Trump marque-t-elle -vraiment- une rupture? *La Revue géopolitique*, located at <https://www.diploweb.com/La-politique-etrangere-de-Donald-Trump-marque-t-elle-vraiment-une-rupture.html> (October 28) (site last visited on September 7, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> Woodward, Bob. 2018. *Fear: Trump in the White House*. New York: Simon & Schuster; Wolff, Michael, 2018. *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*. New York: Henry Holt and Company; Anonymous. "I am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration." *The New York Times*, September 5, 2018, located at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/05/opinion/trump-white-house-anonymous-resistance.html> (site last viewed on December 26, 2018).

intelligence and other reports when it comes to military and foreign affairs.<sup>58</sup> He has disregarded advice in many scenarios—saluting North Korean military officers when told not to do so or going against advice in canceling the Iran Nuclear Treaty or pulling troops out of Syria and Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

Trump has refused to follow or believe intelligence information, for example regarding Russian interference in the 2016 elections or the complicity of Saudi Arabia in the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, or even in disregarding evidence of global warming and climate change.<sup>60</sup> At times Trump's position has been denial and disregard of the facts and recommendations provided to him by his staff and the foreign policy establishment, or he has vacillated his positions, leaving some confused regarding what his position is or who he is taking advice from.<sup>61</sup> Some have gone so far as to suggest that his foreign policy views are dictated by his anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments, views he expressed repeatedly as candidate and president.<sup>62</sup> Others have argued his closest advisors are conservative journalists and that his foreign policy decision-making is driven by his efforts to appeal to his base core of supporters.<sup>63</sup>

A clear example of his disregard of the advice from the foreign policy establishment can be seen in changing the White House staff. Initially Trump selected Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State, Jim Mattis at Defense, Mike Pompeo as CIA director, Michael Flynn as national security advisor, and Reince Priebus as Chief of Staff. Within a few months Flynn was out due to legal problems and replaced by General H. R. McMaster, Tillerson was replaced by Pompeo, and Priebus was replaced by General John Kelly. At the CIA, Pompeo was succeeded by Gina Haspel. These changes suggested Trump was moving toward a more military-focused foreign policy with Pompeo, Mattis, Kelly, and McMaster (the latter three being military generals). However, conflicts with these individuals led to the departure of Kelly, McMaster, and then finally Mattis, resigning or ousted because of conflicts with the president.

One example of that conflict or disregard of advice from his staff by Trump occurred in December 2018 where, over the objections of his Secretary of Defense Mattis (and without consulting US allies) he announced the US was

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<sup>58</sup> Woodward.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Greenberg, Jon. 2018. "Donald Trump Falsely Says he Never Denied Russian Meddling." Polifct.com, located at <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2018/feb/19/donald-trump/donald-trump-falsely-denies-he-denied-russian-meddl/> (site last visited on September 10, 2019).

<sup>61</sup> Woodward.

<sup>62</sup> Trump, Donald. June 16, 2015. "Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech."

<sup>63</sup> Lucey, Catherine, and Jill Colvon. "Trump Bows to Conservative Backlash over Border Wall Funding." *Associated Press*, December 21, 2018.

pulling all troops out of Syria along with a significant reduction of military personnel in Afghanistan. Trump also announced at this time that ISIS (Dash) had been defeated. In response, Mattis penned his resignation, citing that his views and those of the president did not align.<sup>64</sup> Initially the resignation was to allow for a two month transition but the president then forced him out almost immediately. Along with Mattis quitting or being fired, Brett McGurk, special envoy for the coalition to defeat ISIS, also resigned in protest. What the Mattis incident serves as is a case study on how the Trump administration's process of making foreign policy decisions seems at variance with that of his recent predecessors. In fact, there seems to be a basic conflict in the Trump administration over who has control over foreign policy—the traditional establishment or Trump himself.

The conflict over how foreign policy is being created spills over into what exactly is being decided, including support for some of the basic principles. For example, it is not so clear that Trump himself is committed to the antiterrorism policies of Bush and Obama. His declaration with the Syrian troop pullout that ISIS was defeated suggests Trump either believes the war on terrorism has been won, is no longer worth fighting, or that it has been supplanted by other goals.

As a candidate in April 2016, in his first major foreign policy speech Trump declared that: "My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else." First, he saw the US military weakened by a weak US economy. By a weak economy he identified trade deficits with the world and specific countries. He wanted to reduce and reverse these deficits. Second, he argued that US allies were not paying their fair share in military alliances. He specifically pointed to NATO countries where only four of the twenty-eight countries were spending at least two percent of their GDP on defense. He wanted to reverse this unfair burden on the US.

Third, he argued that our friends cannot rely upon the US, seeing America as negotiating bad deals, such as with Iran over nuclear weapons production, as an example. He saw this deal as selling out Israel and humiliating the US internationally. Fourth, he argued that US rivals no longer respected the US, citing the failure of a leader from Cuba to greet Obama when he visited there. Finally, he contended the US no longer had clarity in terms of its foreign policy goals since the Cold War ended. This clarity requires the US to develop a plan to halt the spread of radical Islam, rebuild the military and the economy, and "develop a foreign policy based on American interests." In

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<sup>64</sup> Mattis, James. December 20, 2018. "Resignation Letter to the President of the United States."

this speech Trump also urged for common ground to be found with Russia and China to address terrorism and migration, and he also indicated that financial leverage and economic sanctions would be among his tools to push American interests. Finally, as one other part of his foreign policy, Trump stated in 2015 when he announced his candidacy that: "I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I'll build them very inexpensively. I will build a great, great wall on our southern border and I'll have Mexico pay for that wall."<sup>65</sup> The wall would be a way to protect the US from immigrants who he saw as taking advantage of the US, bringing in criminals. Collectively, these criticisms and goals defined the America First vision for his foreign policy if elected.

What does seem important to Trump's view of the world is a narrower vision of what is in America's interest than from previous presidents. More specifically, he has adopted a more nationalistic, isolationistic, unilateral, bilateral, and anti-immigrant approach to foreign policy than recent predecessors. In many ways, the best way to describe the Trump administration's foreign policy is that it is not the administration's but Trump's own views. American foreign policy under Trump is personalized and not a product of institutional or organizational deliberation. Additionally, Trump likes to describe how he has good personal relations with Putin, Xi Jinping, and Kim Jong-Un.<sup>66</sup> The issue for Trump is not how the US relates to other countries, but personalities. US national interest is reduced to his personal relations.

Trump agrees with the two principles of military superiority and economic nationalism, but he applies especially the latter in ways unique compared to recent presidents. Specifically, he views the economics not collectively in terms of how the US does overall but evaluates US relationships on a bilateral county-by-county basis. Trump is practically a mercantilist. Trump appears to want to win every negotiation and views any situation where a country has a positive balance of trade with the US as an unfair agreement. He seems to think that the US needs to export more goods than import from every country.

Trump's view of the world is one where he seeks other countries taking advantage of the United States. In a December 26, 2018 speech to US military personnel in Iraq he makes that point clear:

While American might can defeat terrorist armies on the battlefield, each nation of the world must decide for itself what kind of future it wants to build for its people, and what

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<sup>65</sup> Trump, Donald. June 16, 2015. "Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech.," <https://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>

<sup>66</sup> Beckwith, Ryan T. "President Trump Says He Has a 'Very Good Relationship' with Kim Jong-Un." *Time Magazine*, January 11, 2018, located at <https://time.com/5100039/donald-trump-kim-jong-un-good-relationship/> site last visited on September 10, 2019).

kind of sacrifices they are willing to make for their children. America shouldn't be doing the fighting for every nation on Earth not being reimbursed, in many cases, at all. If they want us to do the fighting, they also have to pay a price—and sometimes that's also a monetary price—so we're not the suckers of the world. We're no longer the suckers, folks. And people aren't looking at us as suckers. And I love you folks because most of you are nodding your head this way. We're respected again as a nation. We're respected again.<sup>67</sup>

Second, Trump does not like multinational trade deals and prefers to do one-to-ones.<sup>68</sup> This suggests that he does not see traditional linkages across issues, or how international economics or politics is more than bilateral, or how in many cases, a deal with one nation is connected to another. For example, Trump does not like the trade deficit the US has with South Korea. However for many strategists, the trade deficit is worth it because it places US military bases there, including equipment that could detect the launch of missiles from North Korea or China far more quickly than radar in Alaska, for example. The trade deficit thus purchases US military security through an advanced warning system.

However, in some cases, Trump does make linkages, such as offering to drop charges against a Huawei official in return for trade concessions from China.<sup>69</sup> This personalization of US foreign policy came contrary to the advice of his administration not to politicize extradition law. But it also stood in contrast to the decision not to press Saudi Arabia on the Khashoggi murder, citing important arms deals and relations with that country to counter Iran. Moreover, in pulling troops out of Syria Trump fails to see the impact it will have on the Kurds, allies of the US, and upon strengthening Iran's regional power and influence.

Trump's personal dealings with North Korea (DPRK) and halting the military exercises fail to appreciate the concerns of domestic security for South Korea, and any deal with the DPRK is connected to regional issues that also involve China and Japan. Economically, all relationships with a Trump foreign policy are zero-sum games. By that, Trump expects the US to win with every state America deals with. No country—including allies—seems to be given any preference.

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<sup>67</sup> Trump, Donald. December 26, 2018. "Remarks by President Trump to Troops at Al Asad Air Base, Al Anbar Province, Iraq", <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-troops-al-asad-air-base-al-anbar-province-iraq/>

<sup>68</sup> Kinne, Brandon J. "Trump is Abandoning Security Cooperation." *Foreign Affairs*, January 30, 2019, located at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-01-30/trump-abandoning-security-cooperation> (site last viewed on September 10, 2019).

<sup>69</sup> Kharpal, Arjun. "Pompeo Says the US Message on Huawei is Clear. Trump's Words Say Otherwise." CNBC August 22, 2019, located at <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/23/huawei-mike-pompeo-appears-to-be-contradicting-president-donald-trump-on-the-chinese-firm.html> (site last visited on September 10, 2019).

Trump's foreign policy thus elevates economics and hard power as primary goals and tools of US power, although at least so far, military action has been downplayed. Trump also downplays diplomacy (soft power) and seems unaware of the power of cultural values as tactical tools. But even more broadly, Trump seems uninterested in the promotion of liberal democratic values across the world, as well as maintaining the current free market, open economic borders of world trade, unless it works singularly to the advantage of the US. Thus, while economic and military superiority are values or interests that Trump shares with his predecessors, the remaining interests seem expendable.

Trump's focus is simply not on using this or any form of soft power when it comes to furthering US interests. With both friends and foes it is bullying, approaching personal threats lodged against other leaders. Trump is also not interested in furthering human rights and democracy and he seems to like autocratic leaders. His foreign policy is personal, as with Kim Jong-Un of North Korea, and not statist. His preference for the art of the deal is based on traditional theories of business negotiations that stress the personal. And like many business deals, they are discreetly transactional and not necessarily part of building longer-term relations. Yet despite Trump not emphasizing soft power, the US still commands a presence in the world and its actions as well as that of its presidents send cultural signals and messages across the world.

What does all this mean for US foreign policy? Trump has already made an impact. He has pulled the US out of the Paris Accords, the Iran Nuclear Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the UN Human Rights Council. Look to see if the US exits or weakens other multilateral agreements alliances over the course of the rest of the Trump presidency. Second, Trump's rejection of soft power, diplomacy, and human rights parallels and enables the erosion of democratic norms across the world that groups such as Freedom House have recently documented.<sup>70</sup>

Third, his economic bilateralism will continue to spark trade wars and economic sanctions among the US and its partners.

Fourth, his bilateralism, short-term, winner-take-all approach will challenge the basic world order that the United States has created for itself over the last 70 years. Perhaps this was a world order already collapsing for many reasons, but Trump's foreign policy does little to construct a larger world order over the long term that favors America's longer-term interests or builds alliances favorable to American interests. Pulling out of so many multilateral agreements opens

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<sup>70</sup> Freedom House. 2018. "Freedom in the World 2018 Democracy in Crisis", <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>

a void for other states such as China to fill. America was powerful because it was a player, it was always there and not taking its ball and bat and going home.

Fifth, Trump's anti-immigration and anti-Muslim policies have been central to his foreign policy. The "Muslim" travel ban that he sought soon after taking office to institute was eventually upheld by the US Supreme Court in *Trump v. Hawaii* after it had been revised and weakened several times in response to lower court decisions.<sup>71</sup> Trump has also sought to punish so-called sanctuary cities that refuse to cooperate with Homeland Security, but the courts have struck down many of his policies. Yet other measures to tighten border security have been instituted, affecting immigration and the ability of individuals to seek asylum in America.

Finally, his foreign policy is having a major impact on domestic politics. The trade and tariff war with China as of the end of 2018 is beginning to have an economic impact on US agriculture and other businesses such as the automobile industry, as much of the US soybean crop is not being sold and the cost of some materials is making it more difficult to purchase supplies for cars.<sup>72</sup> Wall Street and investors also reacted negatively to the continued trade wars and appear to be impacting the US economy. Additionally, the demand to address immigration and build a wall on the US–Mexican border appeared to be an issue that cost Republicans control of the US House of Representatives and which precipitated the partial shutdown of the government at the end of 2018.

## Conclusion

After nearly three years Donald Trump has left an imprint on US foreign policy. While Trump seems to support some of the major principles of US foreign policy, he has also rejected parts of it and for those he endorses, he appears to be pursuing strategies and tactics that will both undermine the principles he promotes. Trump's foreign policy is best characterized as having a clear personal style of being nationalist, bilateral, and isolationist, but also one which eschews institutional grounding and is often at war with the mainstream establishment in the United States. These personal foreign policy values have collided with the later constitutional, bureaucratic, and strategic constraints on

<sup>71</sup> *Trump v. Hawaii*. 2018. 138 S. Ct. 923.

<sup>72</sup> Bartash, Jeffrey. "Escalation in U.S.–China Trade War Threatens Global Economy, Poses Trump Reelection Risk." *Market Watch*, August 24, 2019, located at <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/escalation-in-us-china-trade-war-threatens-global-economy-poses-trump-reelection-risk-2019-08-23> (site last viewed on September 10, 2019).

his approach to foreign policy, producing not so much major breaks from the past, but more limited ones. Moreover, since he has become president Trump has not enunciated a major foreign policy vision, instead taking many initiatives that add up to a somewhat incoherent approach described in this paper.

But having acknowledged the above, many of Trump's principles, strategies, and tactics are not far beyond the orthodoxy of recent American foreign policy. The bigger issue has been how foreign policy is created and executed under his presidency, with the establishment largely able to confine the worst instincts of Donald Trump personally, despite the fact that Trump ignores some of their advice. Going into the second two years of his first presidential term Trump is facing more checks on his foreign policy than in his first two years. Democratic Party control of the House has placed more oversight on him, along with budget constraints.

The Republican Senate appears less supportive of the president when it comes to his policies on Saudi Arabia and Syria, and it is possible that this body will be less willing to follow the president than it was in the first two years, especially as the 2020 elections get closer and Trump appears to be a liability for the Republicans. Additionally, it is not clear how legal investigations of his administration by a special counsel will affect the president, and how what appears to be a slowing US or world economy and a distancing of the US from its allies will play out in terms of constraining Trump's brand of US foreign policy. Conversely, the departure of Mattis and Kelly leaves open what senior staff are in place to check Trump's personal style. Overall, the simple answer is that there does not appear to be any indication that Trump's personal foreign policy influence will be enhanced, instead its incoherence and the rise of new institutional checks suggest more limits on what the president will personally be able to accomplish.

Finally, whatever more permanent changes in US foreign policy emerge in the future may be less the consequence of Trump himself and more because of changes in world politics that have been building for some time.<sup>73</sup> This again suggests that Trump's foreign policy is more reactive than proactive.

*December 2018*

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<sup>73</sup> Cohen, Eliot A. 2019. "America's Long Goodbye: The Real Crisis of the Trump Era." *Foreign Affairs*. January/February: pp. 138-146.