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**BETWEEN CHANGE AND CONTINUITY:
Making Sense of America's Evolving
Global Engagement**

January 2018

Publication series of
the Government's analysis,
assessment and research
activities 3/2018



DESCRIPTION

Publisher and release date	Prime Minister's Office, 31.1.2018		
Authors	Mika Aaltola, Charly Salenius-Pasternak, Juha Käpylä and Ville Sinkkonen (eds.)		
Title of publication	Between Change and Continuity: Making Sense of America's Evolving Global Engagement		
Name of series and number of publication	Publications of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities 3/2018		
Keywords	United States, domestic politics, foreign and security policy, defence, trade, transatlantic relations		
Other parts of publication/ other produced versions	-		
Release date	January, 2018	Pages 163	Language English

Abstract

This report investigates the evolution of America's global engagement. In particular, it examines both the longer-term trends and the more immediate dynamics that affect the global role of the United States.

The report first considers domestic developments as well as strategic debates, to provide a context for understanding the potential changes and continuities in American foreign and security policy during and beyond the unfolding Trump era. The intention is to shed light on the evolution of US global engagement and national interests in terms of the future of international order, great-power relations and the strategic setting of Northern Europe. Within this global framework, the analysis also contributes to the understanding of Finland's broad security environment.

In their first year, President Donald J. Trump and his administration have stressed competition between states, shifted US focus to hard power, emphasised the conditionality of alliance commitments, shown a preference for bilateral transactions, and paid less attention to America's core liberal values. Nevertheless, in practice the US has been less disruptionist than initially feared. In particular, it remains committed to NATO, continues its engagement in the Asia-Pacific and Afghanistan, combats transnational terrorism and views China and Russia as strategic competitors.

Yet, the oscillation between change and continuity has alarmed America's allies and partners. A transatlantic "waiting game" has emerged, defined by the need to pursue both strategic patience and selective sector-based proactivity.

This publication is part of the implementation of the Government Plan for Analysis, Assessment and Research for 2017 (tietokaytoon.fi/en).

The content is the responsibility of the producers of the information and does not necessarily represent the view of the Government.

KUVAILULEHTI

Julkaisija ja julkaisu-aika	Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 31.1.2018		
Tekijät	Mika Aaltola, Charly Saloni-us-Pasternak, Juha Käpylä ja Ville Sinkkonen (toim.)		
Julkaisun nimi	Between Change and Continuity: Making Sense of America's Evolving Global Engagement		
Julkaisusarjan nimi ja numero	Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 3/2018		
Asiasanat	Yhdysvallat, sisäpolitiikka, ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikka, puolustuspolitiikka, kauppapolitiikka, transatlanttiset suhteet		
Julkaisun osat/ muut tuotetut versiot	-		
Julkaisu-aika	Tammikuu, 2018	Sivuja 163	Kieli Englanti

Tiivistelmä

Tässä raportissa tarkastellaan Yhdysvaltojen globaalin roolin muotoutumista ja siihen vaikuttavia pitkän ja lyhyen aikavälin kehityskulkuja.

Raportti analysoi USA:n sisäpoliittisia prosesseja, maan roolista käytäviä strategisia keskusteluja sekä ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikan kehitystä. Lisäksi työssä tarkastellaan Yhdysvaltojen suhdetta kansainväliseen järjestykseen, keskeisiin suurvaltoihin ja Pohjois-Euroopan turvallisuusympäristöön. Selvitys pyrkii lisäämään ymmärrystä Yhdysvaltojen toimijuuden vaikutuksista Suomen laajemmassa strategisessa toimintakentässä.

Ensimmäisen vuotensa aikana Donald J. Trumpin presidentinhallinto on korostanut edeltäjiään enemmän valtioidenvälistä kilpailua, sotilaallisen vallan merkitystä, kumppanuuksien ehdollisuutta sekä kahdenvälisiä transaktioita. USA:lle perinteisesti keskeiset liberaalit arvot ovat osittain jääneet taka-alalle. Näistä painotuksen muutoksista huolimatta hallinnon politiikassa on havaittavissa myös jatkuvuutta. Yhdysvallat on esimerkiksi edelleen sitoutunut Natoon, panostaa läsnäoloon Tyynenmeren alueella ja Afganistanissa, jatkaa kamppailua kansainvälistä terrorismia vastaan ja pitää Venäjää ja Kiinaa strategisina kilpailijoinaan.

Vaikka nähtävissä olevat muutokset pysyivät USA:n ulko- ja turvallisuuspolitiikan perinteisen vaihteluvälin sisällä, ne herättävät huolta sen liittolaisissa ja kumppaneissa. Transatlanttisissa suhteissa on alkanut "odottamisen aikakausi", jota kuvastaa tarve pidemmän aikavälin strategiselle kärsivällisyydelle ja valikoivalle sektorikohtaiselle yhteistyölle.

Tämä julkaisu on toteutettu osana valtioneuvoston vuoden 2017 selvitys- ja tutkimussuunnitelman toimeenpanoa (www.tietokaytoon.fi).

Julkaisun sisällöstä vastaavat tiedon tuottajat, eikä tekstisisältö välttämättä edusta valtioneuvoston näkemystä.

PRESENTATIONSBLAD

Utgivare & utgivningsdatum	Statsrådets kansli, 31.1.2018		
Författare	Mika Aaltola, Charly Salenius-Pasternak, Juha Käpylä och Ville Sinkkonen (red.)		
Publikationens namn	Between Change and Continuity: Making Sense of America's Evolving Global Engagement		
Publikationsseriens namn och nummer	Publikationsserie för statsrådets utrednings- och forskningsverksamhet 3/2018		
Nyckelord	Förenta staterna, inrikespolitik, utrikes- och säkerhetspolitik, försvar, handel, transatlantiska relationer		
Publikationens delar /andra producerade versioner	-		
Utgivningsdatum	Januari, 2018	Sidantal 163	Språk engelska

Sammandrag

Den här rapporten undersöker utvecklingen av USA:s globala engagemang. Den granskar trender som påverkar USA:s globala roll både ur ett längre och ett kortare perspektiv.

Rapporten tar först upp utvecklingen inom landet, liksom viktiga strategiska debatter som anger kontexten för att förstå eventuella förändringar och kontinuiteter i amerikansk utrikes- och säkerhetspolitik under och efter Trumps presidentperiod. Meningen är att belysa utvecklingen av USA:s globala engagemang och nationella intressen i relation till den framtida världsordningen, stormaktsrelationerna och den strategiska miljön i Nordeuropa. Inom denna globala ram, vidgar analysen även förståelsen för Finlands säkerhetsmiljö i ett bredare perspektiv.

Under sitt första år har president Trump och hans administration betonat hur stater tävlar sinsemellan, förskjutit USA:s fokus mot hårda maktaspekter, poängterat det villkorliga i alliansförpliktelser, betonat bilaterala förhandlingar och gett mindre uppmärksamhet åt USA:s liberala kärnvärderingar. Trots det har USA i praktiken varit mindre splittrande än man först befarade. Framförallt är USA fortsättningsvis engagerat i NATO, samt i Asien-Stillahavsregionen och Afghanistan, engagerat i striden mot gränsöverskridande terrorism och ser fortfarande Kina och Ryssland som dess strategiska konkurrenter.

Det oaktat oroar växlingen mellan förändring och kontinuitet USA:s allierade och partners. Ett transatlantiskt "spel av väntande" har uppkommit, definierat av behovet till att sträva efter både strategiskt tålamod och en selektiv sektorbaserad proaktivitet.

Den här publikation är en del i genomförandet av statsrådets utrednings- och forskningsplan för 2017 (tietokayttoon.fi/sv).

De som producerar informationen ansvarar för innehållet i publikationen. Textinnehållet återspeglar inte nödvändigtvis statsrådets ståndpunkt



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List of Abbreviations

A2AD	Anti-Access and Area Denial
AB	Appellate Body (of the World Trade Organization)
AC	Arctic Council
ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
AIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ANWR	Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (bloc of countries)
CBO	Congressional Budget Office
CETA	EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
CUSPP	Center on US Politics and Power
DACA	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
DCA	Dual Capable Aircraft
EDC	European Defence Community
EDI	European Deterrence Initiative
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union (EU)
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ERI	European Reassurance Initiative
ESDP	European Security and Defense Policy
FISE	Finland – Sweden Defense Cooperation
FY	Fiscal Year
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIUK Gap	Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom Gap
GLACIER	Conference on Global Leadership in the Arctic
GOP	“Grand Old Party” (the Republican Party)
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICS	Investment Court System
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISDS	Investor-State Dispute Settlement

ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISR	Intelligence-Surveillance-Reconnaissance
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KORUS	US – Korea Free Trade Agreement
MDR	Missile Defense Review
MENA	Middle East and North Africa region
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NDS	National Defense Strategy
New START	New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command
NORDEFECO	Nordic Defence Cooperation
NPR	Nuclear Posture Review
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
OCO	Overseas Contingency Operations
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PSI	Proliferation Security Initiative
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RNC	Republican National Committee
ROK	Republic of Korea
SDF	Self-Defence Forces (Japan)
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USTR	United States Trade Representative
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th President of the United States has led to the widespread perception that America's global engagement is in flux. The aim in the present report is to shed further light on this assessment by investigating both the longer-term trends and the more immediate dynamics of America's global engagement.

To accomplish this, the following analysis focuses on domestic, political and cultural developments, as well as strategic debates on foreign policy that have a bearing on the potential changes and continuities in American policymaking. The report also zooms in on the formulation and execution of US foreign, defence and economic policies in the unfolding Trump era. The eventual aim is to shed light on the evolution of US global engagement and national interests in terms of the future of international order, evolving great-power relations and the strategic setting of Northern Europe, and furthermore, to enhance understanding of Finland's broad security environment.

At present, America's global engagement is characterised by "change in continuity". Despite the prevailing climate of political polarisation and uncertainty, the broad parameters of America's global role look to remain within the bounds of the long-term post-World War II bipartisan consensus (which can still accommodate considerable policy variance).

First, the US will continue to have an important role in the world. However, the specific modes of this engagement are negotiable. There is contention over the extent to which the US should be a pragmatic arbiter of common global problems or a custodian of principle on a moral mission to remake the world based on cultural signifiers.

Second, although the importance of America's engagement with the world is rarely contested, there is considerable contention over the specific means it should adopt. The choice is frequently articulated through the opposition between "hard" (military and economic) versus "soft" (diplomatic, institutional and cultural) means of power.

Third, the importance of fulfilling existing international responsibilities and commitments is broadly recognised. Nevertheless, open questions remain over the extent to which these commitments should be made conditional on the willingness of allies and partners to engage in more equitable burden-sharing and, relatedly, on the degree to which the US needs to accommodate others' interests by engagement in multilateral forums.

The present report comprises five parts, each of which addresses different aspects of this change/continuity dynamic.

Domestic Drivers of Change and Continuity

In the domestic arena, a climate of deepening political polarisation continues to plague the United States. Tapping into this prevalent trend, Donald Trump has drawn upon polarising politico-cultural resources, two of which – the conservative narrative of decline and the revival of religiosity – have been of particular relevance in articulating his "America First" policy agenda. At the same time, the worldview of President Trump (and some of his advisors) breaks with secularist and liberal traditions, and instead emphasises the need to protect the Christian and European creed of the American way of life. With regard to foreign policy, the administration is thus likely to depart from the time-honoured American tradition of pragmatic arbitration and espouse a "custodian of principle" approach. In the global arena, this carries

the potential of muscular action against potential enemies that threaten the United States and the broader civilisation it purports to be defending.

As for the balance of domestic political forces, the 2016 election handed the Republican Party a resounding victory as it gained control of not only the White House but also both chambers of Congress. Such a period of unified government should open up opportunities to advance a substantial conservative agenda at home and abroad. In practice, however, success will depend on the ability of the Trump administration and Congress to co-operate despite the considerable divisions within the Republican Party over ideology and policy questions, particularly when it comes to government spending. With regard to America's foreign engagement, points of contention have arisen over the balance of investment between "soft" and "hard" elements of US power, the future of the Iran nuclear deal, addressing the North Korea threat and, most pertinently, the Trump team's links with Russia. Intra-party divisions combined with policy contention could therefore render it difficult for the Trump administration to advance not only its domestic initiatives but also its preferred global agenda.

Foreign and Defence Policy

Broadly speaking, US foreign-policy thought in the post-Cold War era has followed three prominent traditions: liberal internationalism, neoconservatism and realism. Neoisolationism has recently emerged as a fourth alternative, gaining more traction in public debates. Although President Trump has sought to posture himself as an outsider and disruptor, he – like any other policy maker – remains immersed in these broad, historically-evolved sets of ideas that enable and constrain American thinking on foreign policy. Not having explicitly endorsed any of these alternatives, the President (and his foreign-policy team) draws upon – or at the very least takes varying postures against – each of these traditions in his foreign-policy thinking. In its yet evolving form, the so-called "Trump doctrine" toys with neoconservative tropes in laying emphasis on unilateralism over multilateralism and stressing America's civilisational affinities, although not in the traditional sense of advocating freedom and democracy. There is also a realist strand, most obvious in the build-up of and willingness to use hard power instruments, which suits the administration's view of the world as an arena in which states compete. Furthermore, the Trump team bows selectively to the isolationist tradition with its transactionalist mind-set, favouring bilateral deals built on *ad hoc* sector-based bargains. These step changes can still be accommodated within the broad web of traditions of American foreign-policy thought.

In the realm of defence policy, there are broad areas of continuity with the past despite the exceptional rhetoric of the President. America's top defence priorities will be to counter challenges from the revisionist powers of China and Russia, to keep the rogue states of Iran and North Korea at bay, and to tackle transnational threats, particularly from transnational terrorist groups. In addition, US bilateral and multilateral defence ties with Europe and Asia will remain relatively stable, despite some friction over questions of spending levels and industrial cooperation on defence. Developments in nuclear-weapon and missile-defence policies are also possible, and these have potential implications for the already tense relations with Russia. The prospect of a more serious quarrel between the US and its allies lurks in the background, however, and might be realised if the Trump administration were to be perceived as partly responsible for a major military clash on the Korean peninsula or the collapse of the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran.

Multilateral governance

The Trump administration's "America First" policy agenda has been widely interpreted as an expression of a newfound unwillingness on the part of the US to maintain its traditional role

as the leading proponent of the post-World War II liberal international order. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that Donald Trump's rise to the presidency is symptomatic of the longer-term internal and external challenges faced by the current order, which include the "return of geopolitics", the negative externalities of economic globalisation and the rise of nationalist populist movements in the broader West. As initially expected, the first year of the Trump presidency has seen America challenge some components of the institutional, normative and economic foundations of the liberal international order, most notably by downplaying the promotion of liberal values and support for key multilateral institutions – the UN in particular – as well as treaties such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Climate Agreement. These strands of disruption have not led to a full-scale unravelling of the order, however. America's espousal of its commitments looks to remain firm in the security sphere in particular, although it will continue to press for more equal burden-sharing from allies and partners. Despite calls for Europe to up its game and to show leadership, America's willingness to maintain sustained support for the key components of the present order remains essential.

When it comes to the global free-trade regime, there is widespread concern about the current White House and its "America First" agenda with its emphasis, at least rhetorically, on the negative aspects of globalisation and its focus on America's bilateral trade deficits. Beyond withdrawing the US from the TPP and initiating renegotiations on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the current administration has also begun domestic processes that review key aspects of the US-China trade relationship. The US could also undermine the World Trade Organization by hampering the functioning of its dispute-settlement system. However, worst-case scenarios of trade wars and protectionist tariffs have not materialised, which points to the diagnosis that the President is, in fact, engaged in a bold negotiating tactic to achieve "better deals" for America. Over time, if not acted upon these tactics might even lose their effectiveness.

New Great Power Politics

In terms of US relations with the great power competitors highlighted in the 2017 National Security Strategy, surface-level change remains offset by long-term historical trends. In the case of Russia, President Trump, like many of his predecessors, came into office with the intention of improving relations between Washington and Moscow. However, the recalibration of the relationship appears extremely unlikely given the fundamental and persistent differences over various key foreign-policy issues such as Ukraine, Syria, Iran and North Korea, and on-going investigations into Russia's election interference. The investigation into the Trump team's possible collusion with Russia during and after the 2016 elections, along with allegations of obstruction of justice, have added another impediment to improving relations. Fears of a grand bargain between Washington and Moscow have thus largely subsided in Europe. However, assertive Russian behaviour and potential negative spill-over from crises in which both Russia and America are immersed continue to raise concerns. Although Presidents Trump and Putin have both continued to entertain the possibility of improving the bilateral relationship, Russian-American relations are now poor and seem likely to remain so.

An increasingly assertive and self-confident China poses a growing challenge to US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. References by President Trump to US disengagement from the region and the proliferation of perceptions that the US is a power in relative decline have raised further expectations of a regional power shift. Despite such harbingers, US engagement in the Asia-Pacific is likely to remain, by and large, as laid out by the Obama administration. In an attempt to balance China's rising prominence, the US will further build up military capabilities and continue its efforts to create a security network in the area. Such efforts will

include strengthening military ties with allies such as Japan and South Korea, and with strategic partner countries such as India. Support for liberal values, human rights and normative principles, however, are likely to have a less important role than during previous presidential administrations.

The United States and Europe

It is often argued that the United States and its allies and partners in Europe constitute the most mature example of a security community, wherein the use of force has been replaced with debate and negotiation in settling disagreements. President Trump's belittling remarks regarding the European Union and his comments on the obsolescence of NATO have raised concerns over the foundations of the transatlantic relationship, including the ironclad nature of the Article 5 security guarantee. Fears have also been expressed about the smooth continuity of transatlantic free trade and the upholding of shared liberal values. However, amidst the apparent turmoil, it should be remembered that transatlantic unity has faced tensions and occasional crises throughout its history and has still endured. In this sense, the Trump administration's "America First" approach could be seen as merely another American (re)articulation that US interests should matter more within the transatlantic security community. Institutionalised security cooperation, extensive economic relations and shared values are likely to continue guiding the relationship between the United States and Europe, even if uncertainty over the normative and institutional common ground, in particular, raises some concerns for the future.

The United States has also recently started to pay closer attention to the transforming circumpolar north. Despite initial concerns, the US under the current administration appears to recognise enduring strategic interests in the Arctic, and continues to engage in practical co-operation in the region. However, President Trump has voiced broader views on climate (and energy) policy, multilateral co-operation and America's relationship with Russia that create strategic ambiguity, which is not likely to disappear overnight. Although the Arctic may not be on the White House radar, these more general policy tendencies have an Arctic aspect and, in the worst-case scenario, might result in "collateral damage" to the enduring elements of US Arctic policy, and regional co-operation in general. The fact remains that comprehensive and constructive US engagement in the region remains important, and has implications for the foreign and security policy environment in Northern Europe.

The US has become more interested and has invested in the security of the Baltic Sea region during the past four years. Even though the Baltic Sea is a strategically important regional gateway to the global maritime (and other) commons, and therefore a security concern for the US in its own right, the mounting strategic uncertainty of recent years and an increasing sense of the "return of geopolitics" has drawn it deeper into the region. Given its multiple NATO allies as well as partners (Finland and Sweden) in the area, it is clear that failure to uphold its security commitments would undermine America's global influence. As a response to the growing strategic uncertainty, the US has ramped up its engagement by supporting new forms of security cooperation, increasing its military presence and intensifying inter-personal contacts in the region. These developments began before the Trump era, and highlight broader transatlantic and North European security trends. Despite initial concerns in the Nordic-Baltic region, the current administration seems to have come to the conclusion that supporting its European allies and partners is actually a good deal for the United States in the present geopolitical situation.

Coping with Change and Continuity

In terms of security and stability in the Nordic-Baltic region and Europe more broadly, the United States remains the “indispensable nation”. The need to engage in and strengthen cooperation across all levels (from high politics all the way to civil society) will persist, regardless of who is at the helm in the White House.

Irrespective of the potential for disruption that Trump as a president *sui generis* presents, there are considerable continuities in America’s global engagement, especially in terms of guaranteeing its military ascendancy, maintaining its security commitments in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, and continuing the battle against transnational terrorism. It is also possible that future US presidents will revert to an American foreign policy that is more traditional in terms of US dedication to the normative, institutional and economic foundations of the liberal international order. The foreign-policy pendulum of US international engagement has historically swung back and forth between more withdrawn isolationist and more expansive interventionist periods, and the Trump presidency may yet turn out to be another chapter that fits into this long-term ebb and flow.

It should nevertheless be borne in mind that the United States that emerges at the end of President Trump’s incumbency will not be the same as it was on January 20, 2017. Not only will the surrounding world have changed – more or less dramatically – so will the issue-specific content of the debates taking place within the US over America’s place in that world. For instance, it is highly likely that calls for more equitable burden-sharing within its broad network of alliances, along with a less benign attitude to economic interdependence and globalisation, will persist after Trump’s term(s) in office. Moreover, political polarisation in the country shows few signs of dissipation. In fact, it is possible that divisions will widen not only on the traditional liberal/conservative axis but also along educational, ethnic and racial lines as part of the inevitable process of demographic change. The more positive possibility is that the Trump presidency will provide “lessons learned”, and will foster attempts by future leaders to return to pragmatic arbitration and bipartisanship.

It is argued in this report that, in the short term, the Trump presidency offers both challenges and opportunities to Europe more broadly, and Finland in particular. It is becoming increasingly clear that President Trump has little time for or interest in engagement in complex organisational forums and long-winded institutional processes. Even if his presidency takes a more traditional turn, this resistance to multilateral solutions and organisations is likely to remain a mainstay of the administration. In fact, Republican presidents in general have approached multilateral forays with more reservation than their Democratic counterparts.

Even if the Trump administration has not been as radical a departure as initially feared, its attempts at reframing America’s foreign and security policy have raised serious concerns, and have led to the emergence of a new “waiting game” characterised by the interplay between expected continuities and newfound uncertainties concerning America’s future direction. Consequently, European and Finnish policymakers could benefit from adopting a combination of strategic patience and selective sector-based proactivity to navigate the present situation.

As a starting point, Finland and its European partners would do well to remember that aloofness is not a substitute for engagement. Despite potential policy and value divergence between the United States and Europe on issues such as climate change and trade policy, there is a need to find avenues of cooperation that can be harnessed to sustain the transatlantic link through the potentially turbulent times ahead.

On the one hand, the Trump presidency does open up opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation that could be framed as a policy triumph or economic gain for the US administration, which the President could then sell as a victory to his domestic constituents. Illustrative examples include NATO burden-sharing and the development of European defence capabilities, as well as efforts to combat the threat of transnational terrorism and devise new ways of countering hybrid influencing.

On the other hand, America's willingness to act as a global leader that maintains a guarantor role in the institutions of the liberal international order has waned, at least for the time being. It is incumbent upon Europeans to take a stand against the United States (as they have in the past) on issues that are of importance to them, especially when America is charting a course that is detrimental to European interests and core values, and to the stability of the international order in general. In such cases, declaration and policy need to be proportional to the magnitude of the disruptive action.

In fact, although the temptation might sometimes be considerable, it would most likely be counterproductive to enter into escalatory public rows with the current US administration. Not only does Trump's leadership style draw on public spectacles, such high-profile disagreements might merely accentuate the "values gap" between the two shores of the Atlantic, or within respective societies. They might also render it more difficult for more moderate actors within the Trump administration and different government departments and agencies to push their agendas forward in Washington, and to cooperate with Europeans.

The most important agenda item for small internationally networked states such as Finland is to ensure the US continues to support and defend the fundamental building blocks of the liberal international order. Given the current administration's "America First" agenda, this presents a conundrum that could be reconciled by looking at each issue of contention on its own terms and utilising the European Union (or other multilateral constellations) as forums in which Finland can seek to defend the building blocks of the rule-based multilateral order. In situations in which America's policy behaviour compromises Finland's core principles and values, therefore, it is necessary – in bilateral talks with the US or in cooperation with its European and global partners – to remind the United States how important it is to adhere to legitimate international norms and institutions.

The increasingly bilateral bent in America's foreign policy means that state-to-state – as well as leader-to-leader – contacts may be prioritised more than in the past. Although not conducive to important multilateral cooperation, this could open up opportunities through innovative bilateral diplomacy, which would not necessarily have been available during a more traditional presidential administration.

On the question of security and trade ventures with the United States, Finland should attempt to drive home the message that US interests will be well served by cooperation: Finland keeps its promises, takes care of its own lot and is willing to engage the US in fair trade that also benefits Americans. This is a message that the US President and his administration could sell to domestic supporters.

The interest of the United States in the Nordic-Baltic region has also increased as the geopolitical situation in Europe has evolved over the last few years. Although heightened tensions *per se* are of concern, the situation could also prove fortuitous for Finland if handled correctly. Paradoxically, this may well be the time for pragmatic initiatives and forays *vis-à-vis* the US.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report investigates the evolution of America's global engagement after the election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th president of the United States. In particular, the study maps out key internal and external tendencies that influence – even beyond one election cycle or single administration – how the US understands its role in the world. It also investigates the development of US policies in the international arena, and highlights the potential implications of America's current and future foreign engagement for Europe in general and the Nordic-Baltic region more specifically. In conclusion, a number of rules of thumb are suggested, which Finland as a small but internationally networked and export-oriented state could follow as it (re)formulates its approach to the United States now and in the future.

As the results of the 2016 congressional and presidential elections illustrate, the American politico-cultural climate is experiencing profound polarisation. Conflictual cultural dynamics with long historical roots have accentuated the inability of the US political system to govern effectively through pragmatic compromise. The demographic makeup of the United States is also undergoing a historical transformation, as the proportion of ethnic minorities in the population keeps increasing. At the same time, perceptions of structural injustice have fuelled a protest mentality among certain sections of society, most notably in the African American community. This belief in the inherent unfairness of the system is also increasingly apparent among Americans of European descent, manifest most recently in the activation of Donald Trump's voter base in the 2016 elections. Coincidentally, new modes of election campaigning and political mobilisation based on fake news and social-media bubbles, along with suspicions of foreign collusion and influence, are topics of everyday discussion in the US.

Although the American economy recovered relatively quickly from the 2007/8 financial crisis, the perception prevails that globalisation has not created equal opportunities throughout the country. Income inequalities are increasingly viewed as an ever-strengthening barrier against social mobility – the realisation of the “American dream” has become increasingly difficult. This sense of economic injustice is reflected in the growth of opposition to free trade. Various multilateral agreements aimed at further liberalising international trade – including legacy items such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and novel trade pacts such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – have met with resolute criticism from both sides of the political spectrum. In fact, the view that the emergence of transnational supply chains has robbed the United States of domestic job opportunities has become more prominent. This is the case even though the unemployment rate is relatively low and economic growth has been respectable in comparison to Europe, for example.

The 2016 presidential elections reflected these underlying trends. The central theme of candidate Trump's campaign was anti-globalisation, and Democratic primary candidate Bernie Sanders was similarly critical of the new free trade pacts. In the run-up to the vote, both Trump and his opponent Hilary Clinton promised improved job opportunities based on supply-side economics. Infrastructure modernisation and defence spending were the two dominant themes on candidate Trump's agenda. It is likely, given the current Republican-controlled government, that defence spending will increase even if America's military presence around the world is not significantly altered. In general, it is also likely that the heated debate over

America's global engagement will continue when factions with differing worldviews seek to advance their agendas in Washington. Paradoxically, the desire for robust American engagement is growing amongst America's allies and partners, whereas US willingness to bind itself to global institutions, foster free trade and commit militarily to global hot spots may become increasingly based on conditionality and narrower perceptions of the national interest.

Alterations in America's global role and the foreign-policy interests that underpin it have a bearing upon the future of the transatlantic bond and, by implication, on Finland's security environment. On the most general level, US foreign policy since the Second World War has been founded on three key pillars:

1. the US remains *the* central global actor;
2. US power relies on hard and soft components, namely superior military force and economic strength underwritten by legitimate international institutions, astute diplomacy and cultural influence; and
3. the US retains an unwavering commitment to its allies and partners (Haltzel 2016).

Donald Trump has pointedly criticised American allies for free riding on US security guarantees. In his view, US allies have not shown sufficient resolve in maintaining their defence capabilities, and US commitments should be contingent on a narrower definition of America's national interests. Such demands *per se* are by no means novel. Complaints about Europe's unwillingness to carry its share of the transatlantic military burden have been voiced at least since the days of the Eisenhower presidency. The Obama administration was no different in this regard, and the former president even alluded to America's European allies as free riders (Goldberg 2016).

Nevertheless, Trump's comments imply that the United States might have an appetite for more shallow engagement. In a world that the administration characterises not as a "global community", but as "an arena where nations [...] engage and compete" (McMaster and Cohn 2017), President Trump's America seems to view allies primarily as force multipliers. This sentiment may indicate a shift towards a more realist foreign-policy orientation. At the very least, the Trump administration appears less inclined than its predecessors to stress the centrality of liberal-democratic values in America's engagement with the world. Instead, the President's foreign policy is likely to retain its isolationist and nationalist rhetorical bent – tried and tested on the campaign trail. At the same time, US commitment to multilateralism may be undermined by a more transactionalist approach, the idea being to compartmentalise the international arena into bilateral relationships – at least in certain sectors.

The new administration looks to be altering the mix of America's global strategic engagement by prioritising "hard power" means, the military in particular, over "soft power" instruments such as public diplomacy, cultural exchanges and foreign aid. Upon unveiling the budget proposal for the fiscal year (FY) 2018, Trump's budget director Mick Mulvaney laid emphasis on the hard-power component. The budget plan would send a message to allies that they were dealing with a "strong-power administration". The most clear-cut signal in this respect are the cuts and streamlining measures the administration has proposed with regard to various programmes and posts at the State Department and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The Trump team has singled out climate-change-related initiatives and foreign aid, for instance, as items that rank low on the administration's agenda. These cuts would be undertaken concurrently with an increase in military spending. Although the budget proposal's impact on the State Department is likely to be watered down in Congress, the message is clear: the Trump administration will focus on restoring America's international prestige by building

up its material power base, not by investing more in programmes intended to increase America's international legitimacy.

If one is looking for the lowest common denominator of the US geostrategic vision, the idea of securing access to the high seas and international commerce is the key (Aaltola et al. 2014a). This view, associated with Admiral G. Mahan, contrasts with the mainstream of continental European geopolitics, which emphasises the need to control territory and the strategic resource deposits therein. Although the difference between the geopolitical visions is not absolute, the US emphasis on the maritime domain is nevertheless a pragmatic tendency that has prevailed for decades. Freeing up markets and securing sea lanes of communication are among the policies to which the present administration – irrespective of its disruptiveness – is committed. Inside the broad geostrategic vision are multiple doctrines and styles to which different administrations have adhered.

Although the magnitude of America's foreign and security policy shift will ultimately be contingent on unfolding internal and international dynamics, and even possible "black swan" events, the climate of uncertainty after Trump's election has already created uneasiness in Europe. In May, German Chancellor Angela Merkel went as far as to call on Europeans to "take our fate into our own hands" (quoted in Dempsey 2017). Upheavals on the old continent accentuate such immediate apprehensions. There is a pressing sense of uncertainty over Britain's exit from the European Union, while intra-European solidarity has eroded in the aftermath of the Eurozone crisis, and as a result of differences in opinion on how to deal with migration from the Union's southern neighbourhood. The geopolitical realities on the old continent have also become more tenuous because of Russia's aggressive foreign-policy behaviour (especially in Ukraine and Syria), and the use of hybrid influencing. Currently, relations between Russia and the West are arguably at their post-Cold War lowest point. The European security environment is therefore rife with newfound insecurities. To make matters worse, European defence capabilities have deteriorated across the board in the post-Cold War era as a result of chronic underinvestment in national defence throughout the continent. There has been increasing realisation in recent years that the trend should be reversed sooner rather than later. In fact, America's European allies made it clear that they remain committed to the two per cent of GDP defence spending pledge made at NATO's Wales Summit in 2014.

President Trump's administration took hold of the reins of US foreign policy in a situation in which America is dealing with increasingly complex technological, cultural, economic and security dynamics. Two structural trends are of particular significance. First, the power balance between states is becoming increasingly dynamic. The United States remains militarily ascendant for the time being, and it still wields considerable soft power. However, in the economic realm the power balance has been shifting for decades with the rise of the emerging economies in Asia and, more recently, China in particular.

The rise of China, together with the role it will ultimately assume in the evolving international order, is among the most significant determining factors when it comes to the development of global politics in the 21st century. The effects of China's evolving role will not be limited to its immediate neighbourhood: they will be felt globally. The evolution of the US-China relationship, the most important bilateral dyad in the international system, will have a great bearing upon the future of the balance of power and the liberal international order, which has served the West well since its inception in the aftermath of World War II. China has grown more assertive in its near abroad in recent years, and the United States will need to react to these forays sooner or later – a process that began with the Obama administration's talk of a "Pacific

century” and the “rebalance to Asia” (Obama 2015, 24-25; Clinton 2011). Disruptions in relations between Washington and Beijing – brought about through protectionist trade policies fuelled by economic nationalism, for instance – would be reflected in the economic prospects of small open economies such as Finland.

Russia, in turn, has sought to reassert its status as a great power by engaging in destabilising actions in Europe and the Middle East (although Moscow considers its actions stabilising). Contrary to early speculation about a grand bargain in the aftermath of Donald Trump’s election victory, the US-Russia relationship reached its lowest point for over twenty-five years in the spring of 2017. The window of opportunity for such a bargain appears to have closed. The Trump administration is engulfed in a string of investigations – in Congress and by a Special Counsel appointed by the Department of Justice – on Russian influence on the 2016 presidential election and the alleged links between the Trump campaign and Russia. Any attempt at a Russia reset in this political climate would be extremely risky for the President. A further bone of contention concerns the US air strikes in Syria after a chemical-weapons attack widely attributed to dictator Bashar al-Assad, a Russian ally. The role of Iran is another contentious point. The Trump administration’s tough talk directed at Tehran stands in stark contrast to Russia’s increasingly friendly relations with America’s long-time adversary.

Nevertheless, as an overall tendency the possible reprioritising of bilateral great-power relationships over multilateral solutions by the United States may also have consequences affecting the stability and predictability of small countries’ security environments.

The second key trend in 21st-century international life is the diffusion of power to non-state actors. These actors include civil society organisations, cities, regions, and dispersed international networks, which exist beyond and below the state level. It has become apparent that the increasing complexity of the interdependent world may also breed new vulnerabilities, as potential sources of disruption grow. In the case of the Trump administration’s first year, the more insidious manifestations of power diffusion have attracted considerable attention. In particular, international terrorism and vulnerabilities created by cyber connectivity have dominated the debate. The Trump team has pledged to step up the battle against terrorism, and for the president this has become a struggle between the forces of “good and evil”, and has acquired a dimension of civilizational struggle. In the case of cyber vulnerabilities, the ability of great-power competitors to leverage the cyber domain for political gain has cast doubt on the credibility and resilience of American democracy.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

Recent events in the United States and Europe, and in world politics more generally, have created a clear demand for a study that analyses the potential changes and continuities of America’s global engagement. This is particularly relevant for Finland, a small export-oriented country that relies on the predictability provided by the stable rules-based international order pioneered and supported by the United States.

The aim in this report is to enhance understanding of the contemporary manifestations and future development of America’s role in the world. Accordingly, the investigation covers both the *broader trends* and the more *immediate dynamics* of America’s global engagement. Domestic political and cultural developments are analysed, as well as strategic debates that have a bearing on the potential changes and continuities in American policymaking. The report also zooms in on the formulation and execution of US foreign, defence and economic

policies in the unfolding Trump era. The intention is to shed light on the evolution of US global engagement and national interests in terms of the future of international order, evolving great-power relations and the strategic setting of Northern Europe. Finally, this analysis should also contribute to the understanding of Finland's broad security environment, facilitate decision-making related to foreign and security policy, and stimulate debate about it in the future.

The key research questions that guide the analysis presented in the report are:

1. How do domestic trends and foreign-policy dynamics affect the evolution of America's global engagement and national interests?
2. How does the US currently formulate and execute its foreign, defence and economic policies?
3. How does America's evolving global engagement bear upon great-power politics, transatlantic relations and Finland's broader security environment?

1.3 Research methodology and material

The analysis presented in this report was conducted within the broad framework of qualitative research. The methodology adopted is known as *triangulation*, which is a mode of qualitative research that combines different research material, means of analysis and points of view. The rationale for adopting this methodology is the expected enhanced validity of the research results, given that the analysis does not rely solely on a single data set or the interpretation of one analyst.

In the present context, the analysis is based on three forms of triangulation:

1. *Research-material triangulation* to obtain various relevant pieces of information (government documents, expert interviews, statistical data, research literature, expert analyses);
2. *Methodological triangulation* to generate knowledge based on various means of analysis (conducting interviews, qualitative content analysis of documents);
3. *Researcher triangulation* to bring together various scholars to analyse the same broad themes.

The main research material used for the report consists of policy documents produced by actors in the US. These include, for example, White House policy declarations, strategy documents produced by government departments and agencies such as the Department of State and Department of Defense, as well as Congressional testimonies and bills. This data is complemented with relevant research literature, expert commentary and news reporting, which provide background information on and interpretations of the evolution of America's global engagement.

The analysis is further enhanced by interviews and discussions with relevant Finnish, American and European experts on the subject matter. In particular, the broad theme of US global engagement was analysed from various perspectives at the main event of FIIA's Center on US Politics and Power (CUSPP), the 4th Annual Helsinki Summer Session *Reimagining Transatlantic Relations in the Trump Era*, August 29–31, 2017. The CUSPP Helsinki Summer Session is an interdisciplinary event that brings together researchers and experts from Europe

and the United States to discuss the future of the transatlantic relationship.¹ During the conference, the research team also conducted expert interviews on relevant changes and continuities in US foreign, security and economic policies during the first seven months of Donald Trump's presidency. In addition, FIIA organised the US research day on May 15, 2017, *Understanding Trump: The domestic roots of US foreign policy*, during which American and Finnish experts also discussed some of the key themes addressed in the current report.²

1.4 Research timetable and team

The research project was conducted at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs between January 1 and December 31, 2017. The project was divided into three phases:

1. Phase 1 (January 1 – April 30, 2017): identification and collection of primary research material and relevant research literature (updated throughout the duration of the project).
2. Phase 2 (May 1 – November 30, 2017): compilation of the analyses and the organisation of expert events and interviews; commentary from the project's steering group.
3. Phase 3 (December 2017): completion of the editorial processing of the report for publication.

The programme director of FIIA's Global Security Research Program, Dr Mika Aaltola led the project. The editors of this final report of the research project include Mika Aaltola, senior research fellows Charly Salenius-Pasternak and Dr Juha Käpylä, and research fellow Ville Sinkkonen. In addition to the editors of the report, the research team included the following current and former FIIA researchers: senior visiting research fellows Leo Michel and Professor Mark N. Katz (George Mason University); CUSPP project director, senior research fellow Dr Bart Gaens; senior research fellow Dr Harri Mikkola; former FIIA senior research fellow Dr Anna Kronlund (University of Turku); and former FIIA research fellow Dr Johanna Jacobsson (IE University). Details of specific contributions are to be found after the Table of Contents above.

FIIA research assistants Anna Wikholm and Anu Ruokamo coordinated the research project, and FIIA project managers Marie-Louise Hindsberg, Sannamari Bagge and Kukka-Maria Kovsky took care of the related seminar and conference arrangements. FIIA's director of administration Helena Lehtovirta and financial manager Lauri Kaanela dealt with administrative matters. Joan Nordlund MA edited the language of the report, and Inka Reijonen produced the graphical illustrations.

In addition to this final report, the project outcomes to date include three additional FIIA publications (2 FIIA Working Papers and 1 FIIA Briefing Paper).

¹ For additional information, see the event description on FIIA's homepage, available at: <https://www.fia.fi/en/event/4th-annual-helsinki-summer-session-decline-of-liberal-rule-based-world-order>.

² For additional information, see the event description on FIIA's homepage, available at: <https://www.fia.fi/tapahtuma/understanding-trump-the-domestic-roots-of-us-foreign-policy>.

1.5 The structure of the report

The report is subdivided into five substantive parts.

Part I deals with the domestic politico-cultural trends as well as the institutional and party-political dynamics that affect – directly and indirectly – America’s global engagement.

Chapter 2 analyses the broader politico-cultural trends in American society and how they are reflected in the leadership mode of Donald Trump and his administration. Instead of relying on the age-old tradition of American pragmatic pluralism, Trump highlights moral differences and the importance of traditional conservative values, European heritage, and the idea of the West as a Christian civilisation. According to this view, the United States should no longer be seen as a multicultural melting pot. Trump draws his legitimacy from an appeal to the existence of a shared, but now lost, communal and moral element in America, which is framed in conservative, populist and reactionary terms. In particular, the current political polarisation in the United States could be said to spring from two long-term trends in American domestic political culture: the proliferation of narratives of decline and the revival of religiosity. These trends play a role in shaping the leadership mode of the Trump administration, both domestically and in relation to America’s evolving global role.

Chapter 3 investigates the current situation in America’s political institutions and party politics, with a view to analysing their implications for US foreign policy. In an attempt to shed light on the President’s ability to lead US foreign policy, the chapter explores the enduring constraints of the American political system, the more fluid dynamics of intra-party divisions and the intervening potential of public opinion. It is argued that all these factors act as enablers of and constraints on the foreign-policy agenda of the Trump administration.

Part II of the report focuses on the current trajectories of US foreign and defence policy.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the “Trump doctrine” and its relationship with America’s enduring foreign-policy traditions. The aim is to explore the international implications of the “America First” and “Make America Great Again” slogans, and the extent to which the Trumpian approach departs from US foreign-policy thought and practice in the longer term. Tapping into different traditions of foreign policy, the analysis offers some preliminary insights that shed light on how the current administration envisions US global engagement.

Chapter 5 analyses the emerging US defence policy in the Trump era. In spite of persistent turmoil in the domestic political sphere, the vast US defence establishment is engaged in various military activities, including operations in the broader Middle East, the strengthening of the US presence in Europe, and countering possible future crises in North Korea and potentially even Iran. The administration is currently in the process of compiling its conceptual framework for these efforts in the form of various strategic reviews – a task that should be complete by early 2018. This chapter investigates the strategic changes and continuities that are likely to emerge from these reviews, and assesses their effects on US defence capabilities and transatlantic partnerships.

Part III of the report deals with issues related to multilateral governance.

Chapter 6 analyses the uncertain future of the liberal international order. This body of norms, rules and institutions that evolved after the Second World War under American leadership is facing a number of internal and external challenges. These include the rise of anti-globalist

sentiments, shifts in the global distribution of power and the growing importance of non-state actors. Such long-term trends are further complicated by more timely factors, of which the uncertainty over US global leadership during the current administration is a key example. From a longer-term perspective, potential trajectories for the liberal international order are considered in the light of the current political situation in the US and globally.

Chapter 7 zooms in on the current administration's international economic policy, with a particular focus on foreign trade relations. For Donald Trump, the 2016 presidential campaign was a showcase for economic nationalism, the core institutions and tenets of international trade bearing the brunt of his rhetorical offensive. Aside from America's quick exit from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the launch of the NAFTA renegotiation process, at present it appears that the new president's critique of trade practices might be more rhetorical than substantive. However, there are worrying signs in relation to the country's evolving approach to the core institutions of global trade, the WTO in particular. US attempts to assert its economic muscle vis-à-vis China could also bring negative externalities to bear upon other trade partners.

Part IV of the report covers emerging great-power politics.

Chapter 8 investigates the relationship between the United States and Russia. Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential elections raised the possibility of an improvement in Russian-American relations, which had deteriorated during the previous eight years despite the Obama administration's attempt to "reset" them. However, persistent differences between these two great powers have led to recurring cycles of frustrated expectations, of which the current impasse is only the most recent example. Although the US and Russia share certain common interests, it is likely that they will be outweighed by differences on various policy issues such as Syria, Ukraine, North Korea and China, as well as the unfolding Russia investigations. Consequently, the poor state of US-Russian relations will likely endure during, and possibly also beyond, the Trump/Putin era.

Chapter 9 explores the US role in the transforming security environment in Asia. There were widely held perceptions at the start of the current presidential administration that US foreign policy would shift dramatically – from "Asia first" to "America First". Nevertheless, Donald Trump's early foreign-policy approach to this vital region exhibits significant continuity with Barack Obama's "rebalance to Asia" policy. In particular, it appears that America will maintain its strong military presence in the region and hold onto its security commitments. However, it may well expect more from its allies and partners in return. These core continuities are vital not only for maintaining a balance against a rising China, but also for managing the various strategic challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, including those in the South China Sea, the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Strait.

Part V of the report focuses on America's evolving engagement in Europe in general, the circumpolar North, and the Nordic-Baltic region.

Chapter 10 traces current trends in the transatlantic relationship, arguably the most mature example of a security community in the world. Yet, the first year of the current US administration has been characterised by increasingly strained relations between the US and Europe, and commentaries on the erosion of the transatlantic bond have proliferated. However, the relationship has never been problem-free, characterised instead by fluctuating tensions. Nevertheless, it has endured because of robust security and economic links, as well as common institutions and a (by and large) shared value base. Currently, in spite of fears raised by

Trump's inflammatory rhetoric, the security and economic pillars of the community show considerable resilience. With regard to the value base and commitment to institutions, however, differences between the continents have been brought to the fore.

Chapter 11 investigates US engagement in the transforming circumpolar north. Reflecting the broader *Zeitgeist*, there has been uncertainty about the future of US policy in the Arctic. Despite initial concerns, the US under the current administration appears to recognise enduring strategic interests in the Arctic, and continues to engage in practical co-operation in the region. That said, there remains the worry that President Trump will advocate certain policies that might be contradictory to the long-term goals and aspirations of international co-operation in the region. These concerns include the President's critical approach to climate change, his emphasis on bilateral transactionalism as opposed to multilateral co-operation, and the recalibration of the relationship with Russia in the absence of a noticeable change in its behaviour.

Chapter 12 explores US security engagement in the Baltic Sea region. It first places the Baltic Sea in the global geostrategic context and then considers how the US has responded to the changing balance between the normative/economic and geostrategic pressures that animate its involvement in this region. The US response is examined on three levels of interaction: the institutional, the practical and the personal. On all three levels there are indications of a significantly more active United States, which through its myriad actions has managed both to reassure its allies in the region, and to draw in Sweden and Finland as closer partners in regional security, thereby enhancing webs of cooperation.

The *Conclusion* presents reflections on the preceding analysis, and ends with some general rules of thumb for Finland in what could be described as an emergent transatlantic "waiting game".

PART I: DOMESTIC DRIVERS OF CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

2. The political culture: competing visions for 21st-century America

- The Trump administration has drawn upon polarising politico-cultural resources – the conservative narrative of decline and the revival of religiosity – to frame the tenets of its “America First” policy agenda both domestically and globally.
- The conservative narrative of decline focuses on reviving the US national character by emphasising patriotic zeal, civilizational identity grounded on its Anglo-American heritage, and a specifically Judeo-Christian conception of American civil religion.
- Conservative Christian themes have become more prominent in American public life. Their proponents view the espousal of (overly) liberal values as a regressive development for America and Western civilisation in general, and have sought to “restore” Christian values and practices in the body politic.
- Drawing on these resources, the worldview of president Trump (and some of his advisors) breaks with secularist and liberal traditions, and instead emphasises the need to protect the Christian and European creed of the American way of life. The administration is thus likely to espouse a “custodian of principle” approach in its foreign engagement.

2.1 Introduction

Donald J. Trump’s incumbency was forged in an extraordinarily polarising presidential campaign.³ As a candidate, Trump turned practical issues into signs of moral difference rather than embracing the American tradition of pragmatic pluralism, which entails turning potentially divisive moral problems into manageable practical issues. As president, instead of engaging in professorial speeches in the vein of his predecessor Barack Obama, Trump has utilised devices outside of the traditional mediascape – Twitter in particular – to persuade people of the presumed existence of a shared, but now lost, communal and moral element in America, framed in conservative, populist and reactionary rhetoric. Time and again, he has shown a propensity to use hyperbole and antagonistic language to attack political opponents.

Trump’s use of such politico-cultural resources is at times incoherent, and even self-contradictory. However, it is also dynamic and can trigger the foundational myths by which a political community remembers and reproduces itself, along with the rites and devotions of this grounding process. Trump’s interpretation of this American “civil religion” or “creed” draws on Christian values, its European heritage, and the idea of the US-led West as a Christian civilisation. It is an alternative to the globalist understanding of the US as a multicultural melting pot.

The American tradition of pragmatic pluralism is therefore under assault in the present political climate of polarisation. People with diverse backgrounds and ideologies are finding it harder

³ This chapter draws upon Aaltola, Mika and Ville Sinkkonen. 2017. “Political culture and the domestic aspects of American leadership: Towards a new version of the Clash of Civilizations.” *FIIA Working Paper* 95, June 8, 2017. <https://www.fia.fi/en/publication/political-culture-and-the-domestic-aspects-of-american-leadership>.

to engage in issue-based dialogue to solve common problems. The aim in this chapter is to make sense of this impasse in the light of two long-term trends in the US domestic political culture: the proliferation of narratives of decline and the revival of religiosity. These trends play a role in shaping the leadership mode of the Trump administration both domestically and in relation to America's evolving global role.

2.2 American narratives of doom and gloom

All foreign-policy leaders are products of their sociocultural surroundings (Hopf 2002, 37). Domestic ideological contestation is therefore an essential factor to be considered in the development of the global role of the United States and its evolving relationship with the world. In particular, identity-political dynamics influence the central tenets of American foreign-policy consensus: whether or not the US should have a global leadership role, remain globally engaged, and maintain its responsibilities and commitments.

According to opinion polls, an increasing number of Americans believe that the US is on the wrong track, or on a declining path.⁴ Of course, such an alarmist interpretation is by no means new. In fact, Joseph Nye (2015) traces the tradition of American declinism back to the days of the Massachusetts Bay colony in the 17th century, and cycles of declinism have ebbed and flowed ever since, including in the 20th century (Joffe 2009). At present, there seem to be two prevalent and competing formulations of American decline: the liberal and the conservative.

The liberal narrative laments America's incapability of perfecting itself as a lawfully and justly regulated realm with minorities able to voice their opinions. According to this account, the US should strive harder to be a nation of rules and laws. Liberals see the US as a self-perfecting and self-governing community, the key rationale of which should be the struggle to expand justice. The liberal vision also calls for normative consistency in US foreign policy.⁵ President Barack Obama's often-repeated phrase "the arc of history bends towards justice" is a good illustration of how just rules should be seen as a starting point for both domestic government and global engagement (Washington Post 2013).

Conservative declinism, on the other hand, laments the erosion of the traditional value base of American society as a result of globalisation, immigration and the loss of religiosity along with the overarching liberalisation of individual conduct. The conservative narrative thus focuses on reviving America's national character in emphasising patriotic zeal, civilizational identity grounded on its Anglo-American heritage, and a particular Judeo-Christian conception of American civil religion. In the sphere of foreign engagement, the conservative vision foresees danger in the lack of dynamic and direct action to defend America's place in the world, even if this comes at the expense of policy consistency.

These two views of declinism are competing, contradictory and increasingly mutually exclusive. Within both, any deviations from the respective ideals are regarded as signs of decay and political regression.

Donald Trump, by and large, subscribes to the conservative declinist narrative, and it constitutes a key building block of his threat perceptions. He has highlighted the need to put "America First" in its dealings with the rest of the world (White House 2017a), and has drawn parallels between excessive liberal or globalist ambitions and America's domestic and international

⁴ According to a *Wall Street Journal* and NBC News poll from July 17, 2016, for instance, 73 per cent "say things have gone off-course" (Zitner 2016).

⁵ For arguments reflecting the tenets of the liberal declinist view, see for example Ikenberry (2012, 326-331) and Kupchan (2012, 159-166).

predicaments (White House 2017b; Stephens 2017). This theme of overextension contains different, but interrelated, variants in the Trumpian trope. Economic overstretch evokes problematic outflows of capital, a global imbalance of trade surpluses, “unfair” free-trade pacts and stifling climate-change regulations, all of which are potentially disadvantageous to the US (White House 2017c; White House 2017d; Ross 2017). There is also a sense of danger that the United States is living beyond its means by stretching its military resources too thinly: consider, for instance, Trump’s comments about the need for fairer burden-sharing in NATO (White House 2017e; White House 2017f).

Trump has also made strong references to a cultural form of overstretch, meaning the degree of over-extendedness with reference to civic resources such as declining morality and work ethics. The conservative narrative of American overextension tends to link foreign influences with the nation’s political regression. According to this declinist vision, there is a possibility that outsiders will culturally undermine core American values if the US tries to integrate too many people or accommodate the national interests of too many allies (see Kaplan 1994; Huntington 2004, 30-45). The perceived danger is that foreign practices or elements will dilute core American civic beliefs. Trump’s comments about “bad Mexicans”, the need to build a border wall and his toying with labelling China a currency manipulator could be viewed in this light (Tennery 2016; White House 2017g; Lawder 2017).

In this manner, America’s global role comes to be understood as a function of a “healthy” domestic civil religion. Trump’s rhetoric stressing internal problems and societal ills – a vast drug problem, a high rate of violent crime, the lack of a national direction and mission and a decline in family values – is therefore relevant from the perspective of US global engagement. In the language of decline and fall, these are problems stemming from perceived civil irreligiosity (White House 2017b; White House 2017h). Trump’s “America First” doctrine maintains that the only way to fix these underlying problems is to avoid global overextension. International commitments are thus seen as a function of, or in the worst case detrimental to, domestic health. From this standpoint, the new president appears to embody a transitional figure who will rid US foreign policy of the misinformed strategy of “deep engagement” favoured by Obama-era liberals and Bush-era neoconservatives, and place it on a footing increasingly favoured by the country’s populace (see Schweller 2017).

2.3 A civilizational focus

The narratives of American decline have international implications and tangible consequences for America’s preferred modes of engagement and perception of threats. In key speeches both domestically and internationally, Trump has highlighted the concept of “civilisation” as opposed to much more traditional terms such as human rights, democracy and freedom (White House 2017f; 2017i). Trump’s vision is one of prosperous and secure civilised regions surrounded by enemies, which will ultimately seek access to American territory thereby challenging its culture and endangering its prosperity. The civilised world is the last stronghold against these “barbaric” elements of chaos (Kaplan 1994). Trump often uses language that suggests signs of contagious hazards – corruption, political violence, drugs *et cetera* – that threaten to spread to the US from the outside (White House 2017b; 2017h). On the Trumpian world map, international borders and lines of communication from air and sea to cyberspace represent possible vectors for the spread of dangerous “cultural pollution”. For Trump, liberal ideas and institutions represent the wrong types of “cure” for America’s present ills. Primarily, America’s resources need to be used for the defence of the homeland and the “civilised world” as Trump defines it (White House 2017a; 2017b; 2017i).

Trump's vision for America's global engagement and domestic regeneration bears similarities with Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" framework (Rachman 2017; Walt 2017a). In Huntington's (1993; 2002) view, the international politics of the post-Cold War world would not be dominated by economic conflict or a battle between competing grand ideologies. Instead, cultural identity would become increasingly salient, and future conflicts in international politics would take place on the "fault lines" between cultural entities called civilisations.⁶ For Huntington, the most precarious of civilizational divides was between the non-Muslim and the Muslim worlds (Huntington 2002, 255).

Some of the advisors President Trump nominated at the beginning of his term, including now-ousted chief strategist Stephen Bannon, senior policy advisor Stephen Miller and National Security Council spokesman Michael Anton, subscribe to this civilizational worldview and frame "radical Islamic terrorism" as an existential threat to the United States (Anton 2017; Smith 2017). Trump's inauguration speech, reportedly written in part by Bannon, evoked the notion of a civilised world locked in conflict with "radical Islamic terrorism, which we [America with Trump at the helm] will eradicate completely from the face of the earth" (White House, 2017b). In this vein, the task of the new administration is to act as a vanguard in the inter-civilizational battle between the Judeo-Christian West and the "others". These others include "Islamist extremists" and Iran (White House 2017j), but the category has proven sufficiently fluid also to include other "rogue" regimes such as Cuba, North Korea and even Venezuela (White House 2017k).

The Trump administration began putting its civilizational sentiments into practice in the form of an executive order issued on January 27, 2017, banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries for a period of 90 days (White House 2017l). The order faced legal challenges and was duly frozen by a US district judge in the state of Washington, a verdict upheld by the US Court of Appeal for the Ninth Circuit (Ford 2017). A revised order in March sought to rectify some of the most troubling aspects of the original, exempting permanent US residents and visa-holders, and dropping the reference to the preferential treatment of religious minorities (Thrush 2017). The Supreme Court allowed parts of this revised ban to go into effect in June (Shear and Liptak 2017). However, the Court cancelled oral arguments on the temporary ban, as the administration rolled out a new version that sets different degrees of restriction on travel and immigration into the United States for citizens of Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Chad, North Korea, Iran and Venezuela (White House 2017m; Shear et al. 2017). The Supreme Court allowed this new ban to take effect on December 4, 2017, despite on-going legal challenges (Liptak 2017).

The clash-of-civilisations worldview of the Trump administration is not limited to the battle against terrorism and rogue states, however. In fact, there is a strong domestic-politics aspect in the Huntingtonian thesis, according to which immigration is a source of potential decay in the political community. Of particular concern for Huntington (2004, 141) were immigrants "from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies", a danger intensified by modern forms of communication. As immigrants retain their links to their countries and communities of origin, people from different civilisations come to represent a potential source of decay in America's collective identity (Huntington 1997, 28-49; 2002, 306). In the worst case, such an erosion of the American creed could ultimately lead the US to rescind its leadership role as the vanguard

⁶ In his later book, Huntington distinguished between eight such civilisations: Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American and, with a caveat, African (Huntington 2002, 45-47).

of Western civilisation. In the inter-civilizational battle, this scenario would precipitate an inevitable decline in the United States as well as in Western civilisation in general (Aysha 2003).

Trump's election campaign approximated these Huntingtonian views, especially in its inflammatory immigration rhetoric. Although the President's tone has admittedly softened since his infamous comments depicting Mexican immigrants as sexual assaulters (TIME 2015), he has retained the substantive edge of his attack on immigration in key speeches by framing it as an internal security threat (White House 2017b; New York Times 2017a). He has, for example, issued two executive orders to strengthen border controls and issue penalties to "sanctuary cities" unwilling to aid the federal government in the deportation of illegal aliens (White House 2017n; White House 2017o). Candidate Trump also pledged to erect a wall along the Mexican border, a promise that he still insists on honouring as President, although he has been forced to put his plans on hold in the face of congressional unwillingness to fund the project (White House 2017h; Hulse 2017a; Becker and Cornwell 2017). Trump has also targeted the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme launched by the Obama administration, which has protected the children of undocumented immigrants from deportation. After Trump's decision to end the programme, Congress was given six months to come up with an agreement on the fate of some 800,000 "Dreamers" enrolled in it (Shear and Hirschfeld Davies 2017).

Yet, Trump's offensive is taking place as estimates show a winding down of illegal immigration to the United States, especially via the Southern border. In fact, according to Pew Research Center, since 2009 the number of Mexican immigrants leaving the US has exceeded the number of new entrants (Passel and Cohn 2016; Gonzalez-Barbera and Krogstad 2017).

2.4 Modes of religious leadership

According to James Davison Hunter (1991, 44), there are two important groups claiming moral legitimacy in contemporary America. The first comprises the conservatives, or the orthodox, united in their "commitment [...] to an external, definable, and transcendent authority". These custodians of the American creed are priming themselves to lead their people through dramatic times, and draw their rhetoric from religious fundamentals and authorities. The second group could be characterised as liberals or progressives, whose legitimacy derives from pluralist and secularist ideas of modernity. These two groups provide the stock figures of the contemporary American politico-religious scene.

The secularist spirit has been under challenge in American political life in recent decades. The roots of these recent developments can be traced to changes that have taken place in American Christianity, especially to the rise of charismatic evangelicalism in mainstream American society.

Two competing versions of Christian revivalism developed in the 1960s and 1970s as a backlash against political disorder and the impression that American society was in disarray. The division became manifest in issues such as legalised abortion and family values, but also reflected the perceived weakening of America's global position. The conservative wing saw these progressive themes as antagonistic developments that weakened the American Judeo-Christian creed, whereas the liberals highlighted the need for a progressive interpretation of freedoms and rights.

Conservative Christian narratives claim that something went wrong in the otherwise pure and righteous US with the spread of liberal, cosmopolitan and globalist ideas (Dochuk, Kidd and

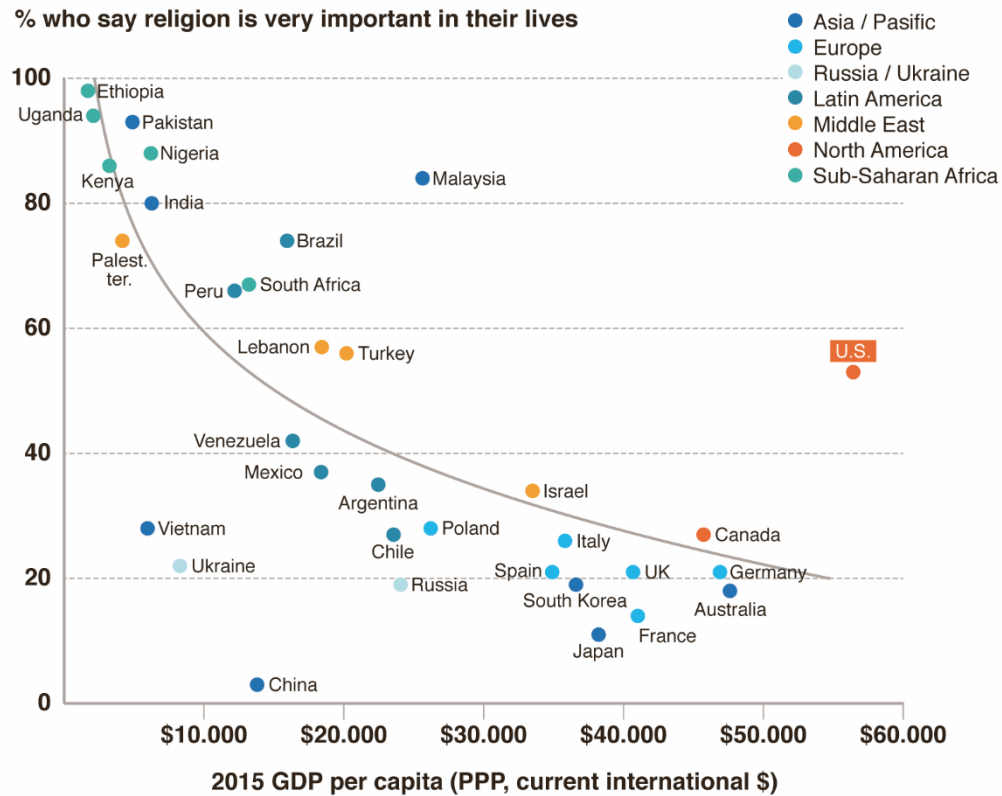
Peterson 2014. 3-8). Controversies over expansion of civil rights, the Vietnam War, contraception and abortion, together with the HIV/AIDS outbreak, contributed further to the perception that the American Christian way of life was under attack. Christian revivalism was meant to counteract the centrifugal forces of value pluralism, socialism, the mass immigration of non-Christians and globalisation. In the eyes of the Christian right these dangers legitimised the return of openly Christian themes and values to public life. Hence, in the conservative narrative, liberal values came to be regarded as a regressive development in Western civilisation. The liberal definition of America was resisted both at home and abroad, such as in the sending of missionaries abroad to preach against the decadence of Western-style liberalism.

The religious movement in America also sought to “restore” and “re-establish” Christian values and practices in public life, and started to demand that politicians be openly Christian (Casanova 1994, 158). During the 1980s, mainstream politicians began using increasingly religious language to express themselves, and in politics this type of religious rhetoric fuelled nostalgia for an American golden age that had been lost because of the liberal expansion of rights. This nostalgic yearning for a real but lost America effectively became a sounding board for political populism.

At the same time, state secularity has remained a very powerful principle in the US, and the multicultural character of the nation has relied on the separation between state and church. In a similar vein, the liberal secularisation hypothesis has been driven by the desire to turn religion into a private matter (Hadden 1987). The roots of liberal-humanistic civil religion go back to the Enlightenment. It is based on a secular conception of humanity and virtues such as freedom, equality, human goodness, friendship and compassion for distant others. The secular movement opposed established forms of religion, but was not directed against religion per se. This critique of blind faith in the authority of religious institutions and figures could accommodate rational members of secular humanity holding religious beliefs, as long as these beliefs were not irrational or in contradistinction to more secular forms of knowledge.

The revival of religious themes in public life means that Christianity has broken away from the private realm and has returned to play an important role in day-to-day politics. Although secularisation is still a trend, it is counteracted by the increasing political influence of themes espoused by the Christian Right. In fact, the US currently seems to be an outlier when it comes to the significance of religion in society at large within the group of economically more developed countries (see Figure 1). This countervailing drift also strengthens the Christian elements in American civil religion. The content of contemporary civil religion is increasingly Christian and less dependent on the values and myths of modern secularity. For example, it has become customary to include an act of prayer, which until only recently was considered a private matter, in the public speeches of American presidents. This has brought a sense of introspection and mystical experience to public speeches (Schmidt 2002, 602).

Figure 1: The role of religion in society versus the country's wealth



Source: Pew Research Center (2016b)

Against this background, orthodox custodian-of-principle political figures draw on Judeo-Christian themes – such as the Bible, the Holy Land, divine mission, prayer and God. They promote a programme that resists liberal secularism and multiculturalism, and highlights certain American experiences such as its exceptional way of life, divine providence or mission, and the Founding Fathers. Reflecting the themes of the Evangelical movement and the religious right, custodians of principle often refer to the programmatic notion that Christian ideals should guide the public life of the nation. In this context, themes such as pro-life and the freedom to carry guns have functioned as rallying calls, and these political ideals have led to the mobilisation of strong movements, most recently the Tea Party and the Trump campaign. In addition, custodians of principle make frequent Manichean references to a cosmic battle between good and evil. Their relationship with people and states deemed to be outside of or – worse – antagonistic to American-led civilisation is openly hostile.

President Trump's custodian-of-principle rhetoric frames Western civilisation and its power in terms of religious values. "America first" conveys the nationalistic message of the US as the land of God's chosen people. For instance, when he announced the April 2017 cruise missile strike against Assad's forces in Syria, Trump appealed to the civilised world and, in a profound break from established tradition, blessed not only America but also "the entire world". The rhetoric that Trump used to justify the missile strike also reflects this mode of cultural leadership: "Tonight I call on all civilized nations to join us in seeking to end the slaughter and bloodshed in Syria [...] We ask for God's wisdom as we face the challenge of our very troubled world" (quoted in Beckwith 2017). A similar evocation of evil is also apparent in Trump's call to Arab leaders in Riyadh to step up in the battle against terrorism: "[P]iety to evil will bring you no dignity. If you choose the path of terror, your life will be empty, your life will be brief, and YOUR SOUL WILL BE CONDEMNED" (White House 2017j; capitals in original).

It is thus clear that the worldview of president Trump (and some of his advisors) breaks with secularist and liberal traditions. It holds secular values to be idealistic and bleary-eyed, and purports to protect the Christian and European creed of the American way of life. Judging by the use of underlying cultural resources by the Trump administration, its foreign policy is likely to continue adopting the custodian-of-principle approach.

2.5 The polarisation of identity politics

The ideological and civil-religious characteristics of the Trump administration emanate from fundamental changes in the general composition of the American political culture. Trump's election victory, and his winning coalition, could be considered a reaction against the underlying and – according to some observers – unsurpassable demographic trends, which favour a more secularist and multiculturalist interpretation of America. In this sense, Trump's triumph represents the victory of identity politics over structural trends.

This is the case despite statistics indicating a general decline in religiosity in the United States. In a prominent poll, the proportion of agnostics and those unwilling to identify their faith stood at 22.8 per cent in 2014, an increase of 6.7 per cent since 2007 (Pew Research Center 2015). However, the proportion of white born-again/evangelical Christians in the electorate has remained at roughly 20 per cent for the last two decades (Pew Research Center 2016a). It has also been estimated that white born-again/evangelical Christians make up 35 per cent of Republican Party supporters (Pew Research Center 2016a). When other groups with broadly similar views – namely Catholics and Mormons – are factored in, approximately 57 per cent of the Republican support base is made up of what is often termed the “Christian Right”, constituting a formidable coalition of veritably reliable voters (Marsden 2014, 121).

Whereas the role of evangelicals and the Christian Right has expanded in the Republican Party, support for Democrats within these religious groups has declined steadily over the last two decades – before the 2016 election, eight per cent of the Democratic support base comprised white evangelicals, compared to 16 per cent in 1996 (Pew Research Center 2016a). The secular component of the Democratic base has grown accordingly, from ten per cent in the mid-1990s to 29 per cent in 2016 (Pew Research Center 2016a). Interestingly, the secular shift at the population level has not been reflected in the makeup of the legislature: Congress appears to be profoundly religious, with over 90 per cent of members identifying, at least by declaration, as Christian (Pew Research Center 2017a).⁷

Related to this dynamic of apparent secularisation is the changing composition of the US population. According to an argument originally coined by John Judis and Ruy Teixeira (2004) in the early 2000s, the demographic changes unfolding in the United States will, in the long run, lead to the advent of a “Democratic majority”. In fact, an independent review panel commissioned by the Republican National Committee (RNC) to plot a way forward after the 2012 elections between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney recommended making concerted efforts to secure support and new voters from ethnic and racial minorities, as well as from young and female demographic groups, to prevail in future elections (Barbour et al. 2012, 12).

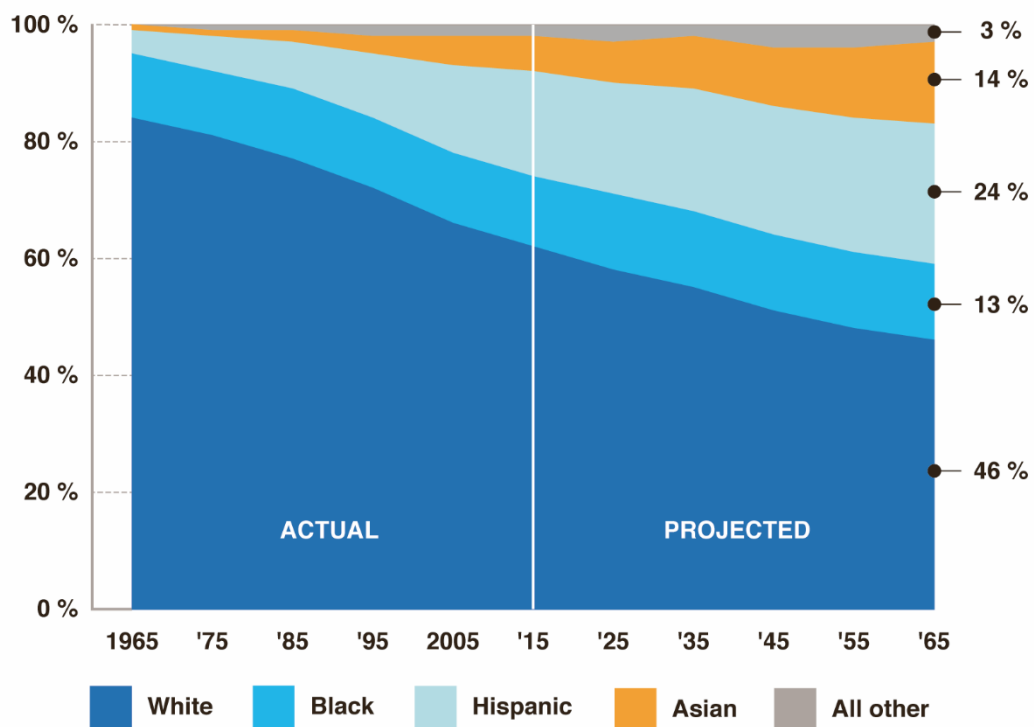
Over 26 per cent of those who voted in the 2012 presidential election were non-white, although this figure still falls considerably short of their 37-per-cent share of the American population at the time (Taylor 2016, 32). According to exit polls, Obama won overwhelmingly in the black, Hispanic and Asian voter groups, with 93, 71 and 73 per-cent support, respectively.

⁷ 55.9 per cent of representatives identify as Protestant and 31.4 as Catholic (Pew Research Center 2017a).

The Republican candidate Romney, in turn, received 59 per cent of the white vote (New York Times 2012). Romney beat Obama by over two million votes in the over-30s demographic (Taylor 2016, 32), whereas Obama had the broad support of the under-30s, with 60 per cent of the vote (Pew Research Center, 2012a). Romney also racked up 79 per cent of the evangelical Protestant vote, and won the white Protestant vote overwhelmingly, with 69 per cent to Obama's 30 per cent (Pew Research Center 2012b).

A recent study conducted by the United States Census Bureau estimates that the proportion of non-Hispanic whites will decline from 62.2 per cent of the population in 2014 to 43.6 per cent in 2060 (Colby and Ortman 2015, 9). If the present projections for birth, mortality and immigration rates underpinning such estimates prove correct, at around mid-century non-Hispanic whites will no longer comprise the largest ethnic group in the United States (Colby and Ortman 2015, 9; see also Figure 2).

Figure 2: Demographic trends in America



Source: Pew Research Center (2016c)

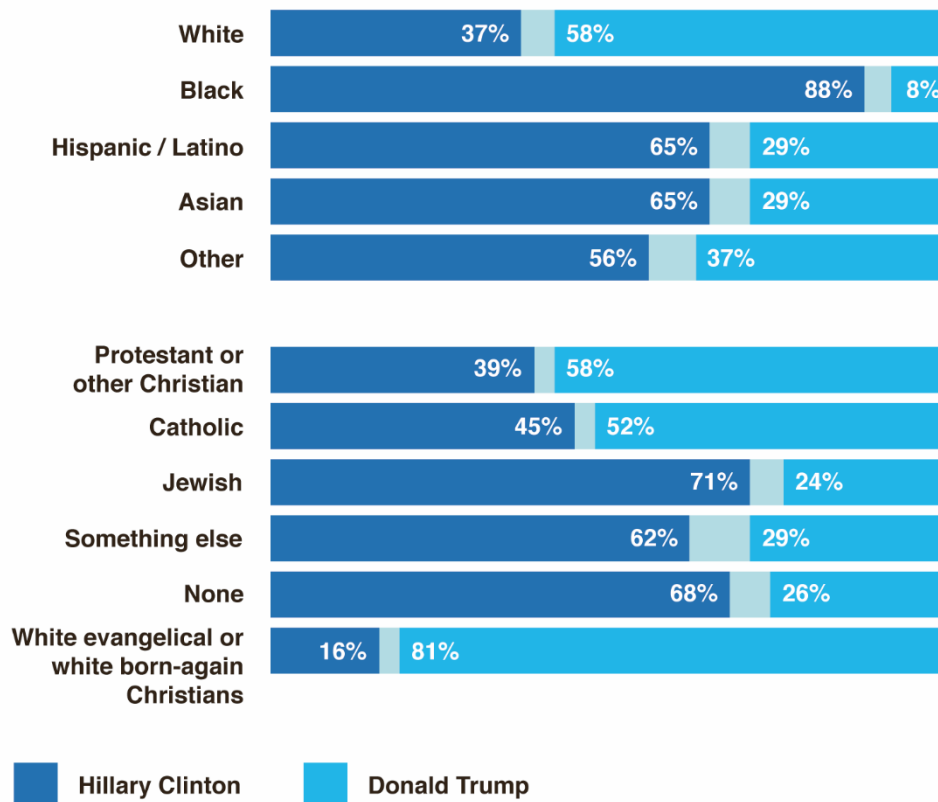
The problem with demographic changes, however, is that they are slow and structural in nature. In the fallout of the 2014 Democrat defeat in the midterm elections, John Judis (2015) recanted on his earlier claims regarding the emergence of a Democratic majority, and argued that support for the Democrats was declining ominously, not only within the white working classes but also among the white middle class. The lesson of the 2016 election is that demography is hardly destiny, and political factors may intervene and render contingent what once seemed inevitable (see Holland 2017a; Foran 2017; Erickson et al. 2017).

To a large extent, the crux of Trump's winning strategy was his recognition of the "missing white voter", who could be stirred by a clear but simplified anti-globalist, anti-establishment and culturally divisive message (Trubowitz 2016; Holyk 2016). This was a far cry from the

opening up of the GOP to the diverse group of minority voters, as suggested in the 2012 RNC report. According to exit polls, the Republican candidate attracted 58 per cent of the white vote, and particularly excelled amongst white voters without a college degree with 67 per cent of the vote (Huang et al. 2016).⁸ This allowed Trump to take control of the “Rust Belt” swing states, which ensured his victory. Hillary Clinton, although beating Trump decisively in the popular vote tally (Wasserman 2017), failed to garner Obama-like support from black, Hispanic and Asian voters.⁹

However, lost amidst the furore over Trump’s successful mobilisation of the white non-college-educated vote is the role of the Republicans’ religious coalition. Despite considerable uproar over Trump’s inflammatory rhetoric and revelations of sexism, exit polls show that the evangelicals supported the new incumbent overwhelmingly – 81 per cent voted for Trump and only 16 per cent for Clinton (Huang et al. 2016). In fact, as analyst Sean Trende (2016) points out: “Trump received more votes from white evangelicals than Clinton received from African-Americans and Hispanics combined [a considerable chunk of the ‘Obama coalition’]. This single group [the white evangelicals] very nearly cancels the Democrats’ advantage among non-whites completely.”

Figure 3: Voting patterns in the 2016 presidential election



Source: Huang et al. (2016)

⁸ This marked a 14-per-cent shift in favour of the Republican Party compared to the 2012 elections (Huang et al. 2016).

⁹ Clinton had 88, 65 and 65 per cent of support in the black, Hispanic and Asian demographics, respectively (Ehsan 2016, 1-3; Huang et al. 2016).

Voters subscribing to the orthodox brand of American civil religion were clearly influential in dismantling the demography-based Democratic advantage in the 2016 election. The trustworthy religious coalition, along with the mobilisation of the white working class, ultimately spurred Trump on to victory. The religious right, therefore, constitutes a dependable base of followers, upon which the alarmist strand of conservative declinism propounded by the Trump administration can anchor itself in the on-going contest over America's identity-political landscape. This will continue as long as voters belonging to the Christian Right can trust Republican administrations to take their concerns into account, especially in pushing through conservative judicial appointments such as that of the latest Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch. In fact, Trump has a momentous opportunity to shift the American courts in a more conservative direction, given the ageing bench on the Supreme Court and also in the appeals courts (Savage 2017).

Unsurprisingly, the Trump incumbency has brought with it visible manifestations of a fundamental rupture in America's body politic. Protests of historic proportions took place across the United States in the aftermath of Trump's inauguration (Broomfield 2017). Instead of opting for measures to unite the country, the administration has stoked the flames further by feeding the insecurities of its supporters. In August, there were violent clashes between right-wing nationalists and counter protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia over the removal of a Confederate statue. Instead of condemning the white-supremacist elements, President Trump took an ambivalent stand, fuelling further speculation of racist inclinations (White House 2017p). Trump's attack on the National Football League (NFL) for allowing its players to protest against police violence directed at black people by "taking a knee" during the national anthem has done little to dispel such fears (Selk 2017). In fact, the first nine months of Trump's presidency have elapsed in the midst of an on-going feud with liberal-leaning media outlets, which have gone out of their way to criticise the administration's sketchy policy record (Nussbaum and McCaskill 2017). This strategy panders to the perception of a "liberal media bias", which remains widely shared amongst Republican supporters (Gates 2016; Saad 2017).

The profound political division is borne out in opinion-poll data collected during the first months of Trump's presidency. A Pew survey conducted in February 2017 reported that Donald Trump's approval rating was a mere six per cent amongst interviewees who regard themselves as Democrat or Democrat-leaning (Pew Research Center 2017b). This is an unprecedented lack of support for a new president among supporters of the opposition party.¹⁰ A survey released in June gave the same figure for Democrats, whereas Republican and Republican-leaning respondents rated Trump highly, with 81 per cent voicing their approval. Negative views of Donald Trump's incumbency also reflect the ethnic and racial divisions in the country: 88 per cent of black and 72 per cent of Hispanic respondents disapproved of the President's job performance. In contrast, half of white respondents approved of Trump's early endeavours in the White House (Pew Research Center 2017c).

When it comes to reactions to President Trump's policies, particularly those tracking the administration's civilizational agenda, polarisation remains profound. On the most general level, according to a Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey, anti-globalist views were prominent amongst Trump supporters before the 2016 election: only 49 per cent regarded globalisation as "mostly good" for the economy (Smeltz et al. 2016, 20-21). The corresponding figures were 59 per cent for Republican supporters in general, and 74 per cent for Democrats (Smeltz et

¹⁰ The corresponding figures for President Obama amongst Republicans in February 2009 was 37 per cent, and even George W. Bush – who came to power in the wake of a Supreme Court battle over the fate of the presidency – enjoyed an approval rating of 30 per cent amongst Democrat supporters (Pew Research Center 2017b).

al. 2016, 20-21). According to the 2017 survey, 80 per cent of Trump supporters view immigrants and refugees entering the country as a “critical threat to the vital interests of the United States”, whereas the figures are 61 per cent for Republican supporters and 20 per cent for Democrats (Smeltz et al. 2017a, 25).

There is, again, an ethnic and racial component to this division. Initial support for Trump’s first-week executive order placing restrictions on entry into the United States from seven Muslim-majority countries was 49 per cent among white respondents, whereas the corresponding figures among black and Hispanic interviewees were 11 and 17 per cent (Pew Research Center 2017d). Notably, the response was also divided along religious lines: 76 per cent of white evangelical Protestants supported the ban, falling to 50 per cent among white mainline Protestants and 24 per cent among the religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Center 2017d). The building of the wall along the Mexican border attracted widespread criticism amongst the general populace, with 62 per cent of respondents voicing their disapproval of the construction project. However, 74 per cent of Republicans and 80 per cent of conservative GOP supporters voiced their support for the policy (Suls 2017).

Trump supporters – and GOP supporters in general – thus hold broadly supportive views on the core themes of the Trump campaign. Although the above illustrations merely scratch the surface, they not only reflect the deep polarisation of America’s political landscape along party, ethnic and racial lines, but also confirm the weddedness in Trump’s constituencies to the conservative strand of civil religion and the conservative declinist thesis propounded by the new presidency. The conservative strand of civil religion prevalent within the Republican Party would appear to favour the custodian-of-principle leadership mode. This development has the potential to fuel the polarisation, given that the Democratic Party is drawing increasingly on America’s progressive cultural resources for leadership.

2.6 Conclusion

To conclude, it is worth emphasising that the sense of American decline, the revival of religion in US politics, and the country’s changing demographics are intimately intertwined with broader debates over America’s national and, by implication, foreign-policy identity. In stark contrast to the inclusive and multicultural vision of the Obama age, the American national identity propounded in the conservative vision of declinism and the orthodox brand of American civil religion is exclusive in nature. Its relationship with incompatible foreign elements could turn hostile. The inclusion of the “other”, those holding beliefs and value systems of non-Judeo Christian (and, to a lesser extent, non-Anglo Protestant) origin, would be sufficient to challenge the very foundations of Americanness.

Although the electorate as a whole has become increasingly heterogeneous, many congressional districts, for instance, are ethnically homogenous (Wong 2017, 28-29) – often by design through the practice of “gerrymandering”.¹¹ Moreover, the electorate is still largely white and Christian. Trump’s winning coalition could theoretically be mobilised for future elections, and the battle lines between the liberal and conservative narratives of internal and external threats may continue to characterise American politics for years.

Immigration policy illustrates the potential for a continuation of the Trump coalition. Views on the reform of immigration legislation tend to track the partisan divide (Ehrenfreund 2016). Studies also show that anti-immigration attitudes tend to be more pronounced in areas in

¹¹ Gerrymandering refers to the deliberate manipulation of electoral-district boundaries to favour a particular political party or group.

which few immigrants reside, and legislators hailing from such districts remain “unlikely to embrace the new demographic normal until electoral incentives demand it” (Wong 2017, 29-30). It may be that these parts of America continue to be resistant to more secularist and liberal cultural identifiers. Such resistance could feasibly be utilised in future presidential elections as well.

The domestic politico-cultural drivers of America have an effect beyond its shores. On the one hand, the impact may be diffuse and difficult to pin down. Ideas travel across oceans almost instantaneously in today’s complex and interconnected world. The politico-cultural divisions in the United States could thus have an impact on the development of similar debates in Europe. However, this cultural diffusion is not linear, and depends on manifold factors within the societies to which the ideas are transmitted. The rise of civilizational rhetoric and the hardening views on immigration in the United States could therefore engender both affinity for and aversion to such ideas – and the US in general – within European societies.

On the other hand, the impact could also be channelled into the international arena through policy action, particularly in the manner in which US global engagement and identification are justified. A contemporary example is the utilisation by the George W. Bush administration of civilizational political leadership as a rationale for unilateral interventions. However, a distinction should be made between weak and strong justificatory arguments for interventionist endeavours (Purdy 2003). The weaker argument, often employed by more pragmatically inclined presidents, stems from the premise that clear differences exist between regimes in terms of their ability to practice responsible governance. Furthermore, this argument holds that regimes should be held accountable for their shortcomings, and, in extreme conditions, their sovereignty may become conditional. The existence of regime ineptitude thus legitimises direct or indirect control over foreign territory to help people, or to address non-state challenges such as terrorism.

The stronger argument, on the other hand, rests on the assumption that there are differences in the cultural characteristics of a people, which affect its ability to maintain legitimate rule. This argument associates interventions with the civilising mission. Because of this existential nature, harder forms of interventionism tend to be employed by custodian-of-principle types of leader. Trump has used such hard-line justification in his reactions to ISIS, Syria’s use of chemical weapons, and the North Korean nuclear programme, for example. The strong argument takes for granted that some “rogue” states or localities do not have the same ability and readiness in terms of self-government, the underlying assumption being that some are more backward than others. Such “rogueness” invites a more exclusionary or even openly antagonistic attitude from the US. The implication is that if regimes perceived as deviant challenge US national interests when President Trump is at the helm, American reactions will probably be intense and direct. This would be a departure from the “pragmatic realism” and “strategic patience” of the Obama years.

The boundaries of the Trumpian civilisation may yet be extended, but the principles of inclusion still have cultural and religious signifiers. Russia, as a Christian nation, could potentially be included if it acknowledges American interests and engages in civilizational battles – against ISIS, for example. Although China does not share underlying cultural elements with the West, it could also be recognised as a civilizational actor if it pays heed to American economic, trade and geopolitical interests, and plays a role in defusing more existential dangers such as in North Korea. As for America’s European allies, shared cultural affinities are clearly present, regardless of ideological differences and disagreement over burden sharing. The likely outcome is that reliable partners will be approached in cooperative forays, as long

as they contribute to the civilizational defence against threats such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. This would not only create prospects for sector-specific collaboration, but could also be useful in keeping America globally engaged – issues that America’s European partners and allies should bear in mind when formulating their policy approaches.

3. Institutional and party-political dynamics in the United States

- Political power is divided between the executive and the legislative branches in the US political system. However, the unified government in the hands of the Republican Party opens up opportunities to advance a substantial conservative agenda at home and abroad.
- In practice, success will depend on the ability of the Trump administration and Congress to co-operate despite attempts by the minority to thwart its legislative agenda and the considerable divisions within the Republican Party over ideology and policy questions.
- Policy differences have already emerged with regard to budgetary issues, such as funding the State Department and balancing “soft” and hard” elements of US power. Furthermore, there is contention over pressing items on the foreign-policy agenda, including the Iran nuclear deal, North Korea and Russia.
- For the time being, America’s foreign policy remains conditioned by intra-party tensions as well as problems within the Trump administration, in particular the on-going Russia investigations.

3.1 Introduction

The 2016 elections resulted in the surprising outcome of a unified government.¹² Donald Trump was elected the 45th President of the United States, and the Republicans maintained majority-party status in both the Senate and the House of Representatives despite losing seats.¹³ In theory, this state of affairs should open up ample opportunities for the GOP to pursue its political agenda. However, in practice, success will depend on functional rapport between a White House led by a politically untested president and a Congress controlled by a fractious party, the electoral success of which did little to mend existing ruptures in its ranks.

The present chapter therefore addresses the current situation in America’s political institutions and the inherent potential tensions, with a view to deciphering the implications for US foreign policy. In particular, it explores the systemic constraints of the American political system on the President’s foreign-policy leadership, the role of intra-party divisions in enabling and constraining the presidential administration’s foreign-policy agenda and the intervening potential of public opinion.

3.2 The US political system: the interplay between presidential and congressional power

The US Constitution sets out the powers of the President and Congress. These powers are not static, however. They remain dependent to some extent on political realities, including the political capital of various actors, the contexts in which power is wielded, the issues that are dealt with, and the ways in which these issues are understood and defined by different actors. Broadly speaking, the powers of Congress are eminent in terms of legislating, levying taxes,

¹² This chapter draws upon Kronlund, Anna. 2017. “Republican government in the United States: Its implications for US foreign policy.” FIIA Working Paper 99, September 20, 2017. <https://www.fia.fi/en/publication/republican-government-in-the-united-states>.

¹³ The respective numbers in the 115th Congress for Republicans and Democrats as of March 2017 are: in the Senate 52 to 46 (plus 2 independents caucusing with the Democrats), and in the House 239 to 197 (Manning 2017). The GOP lost 6 seats in the House and 2 seats in the Senate in the 2016 elections (Peters 2017).

and appropriating funds, whereas the powers of the President, who heads the executive branch, are most prominent in matters related to foreign policy.

The branches of US government are neither completely separate nor wholly autonomous. The president may, for example, unilaterally veto congressional legislation, which Congress could then overrule with a two-thirds majority. The House of Representatives and the Senate also have their own enumerated powers that can affect presidential decision-making. The Senate, for instance, gives, advice and provides consent when it comes to international treaties (as distinct from executive agreements).¹⁴ It also confirms presidential nominations, which include Supreme Court justices, cabinet members, key department appointments and ambassadors. Congress can also assume a key role in foreign-policy matters through its “power of the purse” – the ability to fund or defund certain foreign-policy initiatives the president pursues. The president thus needs co-operation from Congress for legislative actions, nominations and policy execution.

Despite these systemic constraints, the president is empowered to advance his or her agenda through political leadership. A key tool in this regard is executive action, which can be taken without Congressional consent. The basis of this power lies in Article 2 of the Constitution, which states that executive authority is vested in the president of the United States. Generally speaking, there are three different types of executive action available to the president: executive orders, presidential memoranda and presidential proclamations.

Executive orders are used to instruct the federal government and its agencies on the ways in which US policy or existing laws should be executed. They cannot be used to change existing legislation (which is the role of Congress), and they do not have “the force of law”, even if they have the status of law when they rely on the authority of existing statutes or the Constitution. This means they are also reversible, and future presidents may overrule predecessors’ orders. Whereas executive orders usually deal with issues that warrant public awareness or heightened scrutiny, presidential memoranda concern the more routine actions of government agencies. Presidential proclamations, in turn, are typically handed down to enable the regulation of private individuals: they could be considered strong recommendations (Garvey and Chu 2014; BBC 2017).

The President enjoys considerable flexibility when it comes to executive actions. Within his first 100 days, Donald Trump issued more executive orders (31) than any president since Harry S. Truman (Cohen and Payson-Denney 2017). With regard to foreign policy in particular, President Trump’s executive actions include:

- executive orders on building a wall along the US-Mexico border, banning immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries, rescinding certain regulations made by the previous government on climate change, and addressing trade-agreement violations and abuses;
- presidential memoranda on defeating ISIS, rebuilding the military, approving the Dakota Access and Keystone XL oil pipelines, and withdrawing the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free-trade agreement;
- a presidential proclamation enhancing the vetting capabilities of US border authorities (effectively modifying the two previous “travel bans”, see Chapter 2).¹⁵

¹⁴ The bulk of international agreements entered into by the US take the form of executive agreements, which do not require consent by the senate (Garcia 2015, 4).

¹⁵ For a list of Trump’s executive actions, see White House (2017q).

In addition, President Trump announced US withdrawal from the Paris climate accord to which the US was committed through an executive agreement by President Obama.¹⁶

The ability of presidents to achieve their intended aims by means of executive actions should not be overstated, despite the leeway they provide. If an executive order requires funding to have an impact, for example, the president may well need the blessing of Congress, which as mentioned above, holds the “power of the purse”. This was famously the case with President Obama’s failure to close the contentious prison facility at Guantanamo Bay. Although he issued an executive order to close the base, Congress thwarted the plan by refusing to fund the closure of the prison, the transfer of detainees to the US and the construction of facilities for holding detainees on American soil (Reilly 2016).

The president may also wield executive authority by pursuing rules and regulations in various US agencies to set policy. The new government cannot simply overturn regulations that have entered into force just by issuing an order, as it can in the case of executive orders: there is a formal process that must be adhered to. When it comes to pursuing deregulation, the president has three options: he or she could challenge regulations through the legal system (judicial review), ask Congress to revoke some of the potential regulations, or use the standard regulatory process to influence existing regulations – a slow and painstaking process (Shapiro 2015; Garvey 2017).

Although the president may advance parts of his or her agenda without Congress, he or she also needs it to amend existing legislation, enact new legislation, and authorise and appropriate funding. Committee hearings in Congress (whether on legislation, strategy, nominations or budgetary issues) are a significant setting in which legislators are able to exert an influence on issues, including those related to the armed services or foreign relations.

When it comes to foreign policy, the president is expected to take the lead. Although Congress is not well suited to managing daily crises given the frequently long and/or complex deliberation, it may still make constructive contributions. In addition to appropriating funding, it provides advice and consent with regard to treaties. Recently, for instance, the Senate played a role with regard to the NATO membership of Montenegro. The quick vote on the Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro was initially delayed in the Senate because of opposition from two Republican senators, but it was ultimately passed by a vote of 97 to two on the Senate floor (see US Senate 2017a). Congress also has competence in specified actions related to defence and security cooperation. One example of this is the *Arms Export Control Act*, which allows it to overrule a possible presidential veto on legislation that aims to prohibit or modify arms sales (Grimmet 2010).

Congressional influence on foreign policy could also entail the promotion of US interests through legislative efforts (most notably sanctions), funding the State Department, or engaging in “person-to-person” diplomacy (Bruder 2016). In the end, the role of the legislative body hinges on the issues or initiatives it decides to promote or object to. The ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is a good example of the latter. Due to recalcitrance in the Senate, the US has not ratified the treaty, even though it would advance various US strategic interests – especially in the South China Sea and the Arctic.¹⁷ For several years, Congress similarly prevented the US from backing the reallocation of IMF voting quotas to

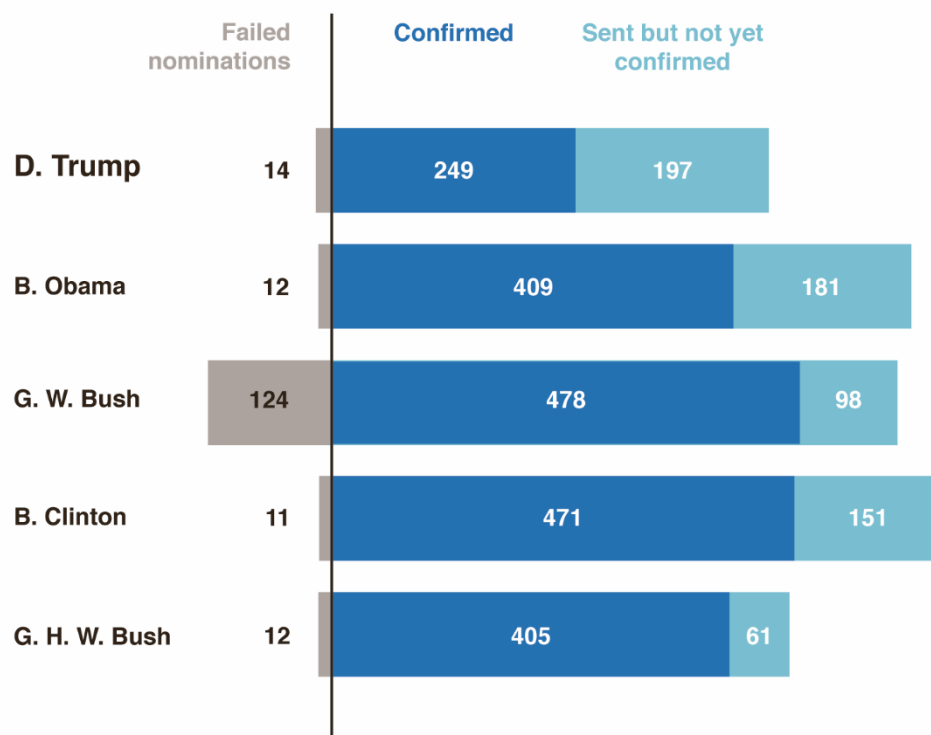
¹⁶ The decision does not affect US participation in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is an international treaty approved by the US Senate.

¹⁷ Among other things, it would provide the international legal basis for extending US continental shelves (e.g. in the Arctic) as well as for defending the freedom of navigation. Freedom of navigation, in turn, is a strategically important legal principle that guarantees the free flow of global trade as well as the ability of the US to project military force around the globe. It is also an issue that is likely to gain in prominence in critical regions, most notably in the South China Sea and the Arctic, where the US has enduring strategic interests.

China (Nye 2017). Most recently, Congress made an exceptional foreign-policy move by approving a bill that makes it harder for the White House to modify sanctions on Russia (see below).

Moreover, the control of government by the same party should allow the White House to push its preferred executive nominations through the Senate. Ideally, this should enable the administration to get its foreign-policy apparatus up and running relatively quickly. The Trump administration, however, has been criticised for its extremely slow nomination process (see Figure 4). There are various reasons for this state of affairs: obstruction by the Democrats (Hulse 2017b), the difficulty of finding qualified candidates, the disarray in the administration, and the aspiration to slim down departments by leaving positions unfilled. At the State Department, for instance, there are many positions with no nominees announced at the assistant-secretary and undersecretary levels, not to mention ambassadorial appointments.¹⁸ Despite the escalation of tensions in the Korean peninsula, for example, the Trump administration had not nominated an ambassador to Seoul as of November 30, 2017 (Partnership for Public Service 2017).

Figure 4: Presidential appointments sent to the Senate by November 30, 2017



Source: Partnership for Public Service (2017)

Finally, although Congress holds the power to declare war as per the Constitution, the president, as Commander in Chief, is perceived to retain wide constitutional powers to take any action he or she deems fit to defend the homeland. In the battle against terrorism – a key foreign-policy priority for the new administration – President Trump (like his predecessor) continues to rely on the wide authorisation for the use of military force issued by Congress in the

¹⁸ In fact, despite being frequently dubbed as one of the “adults” on Trump’s team (see below), Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has curiously heeded the call of anti-establishment voices, such as that of Stephen Bannon, to “deconstruct the administrative state” by supporting budget cuts and not filling vacancies at the State Department (Mann 2017).

aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Given that the situation on the ground has evolved significantly since 2001, there has been speculation that the 115th Congress may even proceed to enact a new authorisation for the use of force against ISIS. Congress could have the incentive to act now: although the Supreme Court has not tackled the issue of the War Powers Resolution to date, it could do so if the use of armed force is expanded in the future (Rudalevige 2017). However, there are divisions on this issue on Capitol Hill.¹⁹

3.3 Inter-party and intra-party political dynamics

There are various sources of division in the US political system that may hinder or block the president's ability to govern effectively. Historically, a key *modus operandi* in American governance has been pragmatic bipartisan co-operation – the practice of “reaching across the aisle” – between the Democrats and the Republicans.

At the beginning of the 111th Congress in 2009, when President Obama took office, the Democrats had a considerable majority in the Senate (57 Democratic and two independent Senators) and the House (255 Democratic representatives). As a result, Congress was able to pass a number of President Obama's legislative priorities – 11 in total – in the first 100 days. The 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (“Obamacare”), perhaps the most notable achievement of Obama's presidency, was passed during the second year of his presidency, without bipartisan support. Given the divided government in the later Obama years, the Republicans were better positioned to adopt various tactics to obstruct the President's agenda.²⁰

Nevertheless, even the minority party can exercise forms of influence in Congress. In the Senate, for example, this means being able to slow down or prevent a decision on proposed legislation (“filibuster”), to withdraw consent, or to invoke a cloture rule that requires 60 votes for proposed legislation to proceed.²¹ The minority can also get the majority party on record with their votes, publicly highlighting potential divisions. Furthermore, senators from the minority party may propose legislation. For example, in response to President Trump's executive order regarding border security and immigration – the so-called “travel ban” – a number of Democratic senators introduced a bill in March 2017 “to nullify the effect of the recent Executive order regarding border security and immigration enforcement” (US Senate 2017b).²² Although legislative efforts of this kind are typically unsuccessful, members of the minority may also suggest amendments to majority-sponsored bills, which the majority is then forced to strike down. This could be costly in terms of public relations, and could affect future re-election chances (Jenkins et al. 2016). In the current context, it gives Democrats the opportunity to create discord amongst the Republicans in Congress, and between Capitol Hill and the White House. Republicans can then blame Democrats for obstructing President Trump's agenda, although research shows that majorities are more likely to be held responsible for inaction than minorities are for frustrating legislative progress (Binder 2017).

The US electoral system further hardens party-political divisions. Both Congress and the president have their own constituencies, as the two branches of government are elected separately. Although members of Congress and the president share the broader party platform,

¹⁹ The Republican majority House and its Committee on appropriation did approve an amendment that would repeal the 2001 authorisation for use of military force for the first time. However, in the final version of the bill (H.R. 3219) the proposal made by Democratic Representative Barbara Lee was watered down (Wire 2017).

²⁰ The GOP gained control of the House in the 2010 mid-term elections, and of the Senate in the 2014 mid-term elections.

²¹ A filibuster can be stopped by signing and presenting a cloture motion (with a minimum of 16 senators' signatures) and then voting to invoke cloture after two days (successfully with 60 votes) (Davis 2017).

²² The Federal Court decision overruling the first of President Trump's “travel ban” executive orders illustrates not only the limits of presidential powers but also the resilience of the “checks and balances” built into the American political system. For further discussion, see Chapter 2.

their policy preferences may differ on various topics. It is not uncommon, particularly in the House of Representatives, whose members have to face elections every two years, for the views of constituents in a specific congressional district to be reflected in the member's actions on polarising issues such as immigration (Prokop 2017). This is less common in the Senate, where the terms span six years, the electorate is bigger (state-wide) and only a third of the seats are up for re-election at any one time.

Nevertheless, a Republican majority in Congress should ideally weaken congressional limits on the president's powers, including those related to foreign policy. The situation is more complex in the current political climate, however, and political divisions may not necessarily follow rigid party lines. Although in control of both Houses, the Republican Party remains divided, and intra-party-political struggles in Congress have already assumed newfound salience.²³

In simple terms, the tension within the GOP is two-dimensional: conservative versus moderate, and anti-establishment versus establishment. In this context, the strongest conservative positions are represented by the House Freedom Caucus, which advocates ideologically rigid conservative views (e.g. on abortion, and limited government and fiscal responsibility), whereas the more moderate Republican position in the House is embodied in the more pragmatic and compromise-minded Tuesday Group. The anti-establishment–establishment division can be understood in terms of either endorsing or challenging existing political power structures, institutional authority and long-held policy prescriptions. Anti-establishment dynamics take many concrete forms, but the most relevant in the current context relate to US foreign and trade policy. A number of establishment senators, including John McCain, Bob Corker and Lindsay Graham, have been critical of the Trump administration's pursuance of what have often appeared to be anti-establishment policies – such as the aspiration to “get along” with Russia, questioning the viability of NATO, and the promotion of economic nationalism rather than trade liberalisation.

3.4 Wrangling over the budget

Funding the government is a key issue that is likely to cause policy divisions between the White House and Congress. The Trump administration released its budget proposal “A New Foundation for American Greatness” for FY 2018 in May 2017.²⁴ One key element with foreign-policy implications is the funding of the US Armed Forces. Although US military spending as a whole increased significantly during the 2000s, spending on both war and defence more broadly has dropped somewhat in recent years after peaking in 2010 (Perlo-Freeman et al. 2015; Chapter 5).²⁵ During the presidential race, then-candidate Trump made a campaign pledge to rebuild and modernise the US military (Trump 2016). In honour of this pledge and to prepare the armed forces for the future, he proposed to increase the defence budget for FY 2018 by \$52 billion, from \$587 to \$639 billion (see White House 2017r).²⁶

²³ Bills should be easier to pass in the House because of a considerable (although not always unanimous) Republican majority. The situation is trickier in the Senate due to a narrower Republican majority. As illustrated by the Republican Party's failure to repeal and replace Obamacare, only a few defections may prevent the passage of a bill.

²⁴ The US Government fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30 of the following year. Hence, FY 2017 included spending from October 1, 2016 until September 30, 2017, and FY 2018 began on October 1, 2017.

²⁵ The rise in US military spending is partly attributable to “overseas contingency operations” (OCO) in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. The costs of OCOs are largely separate from the base budget of the Department of Defence (Cordesman 2016; Chapter 5).

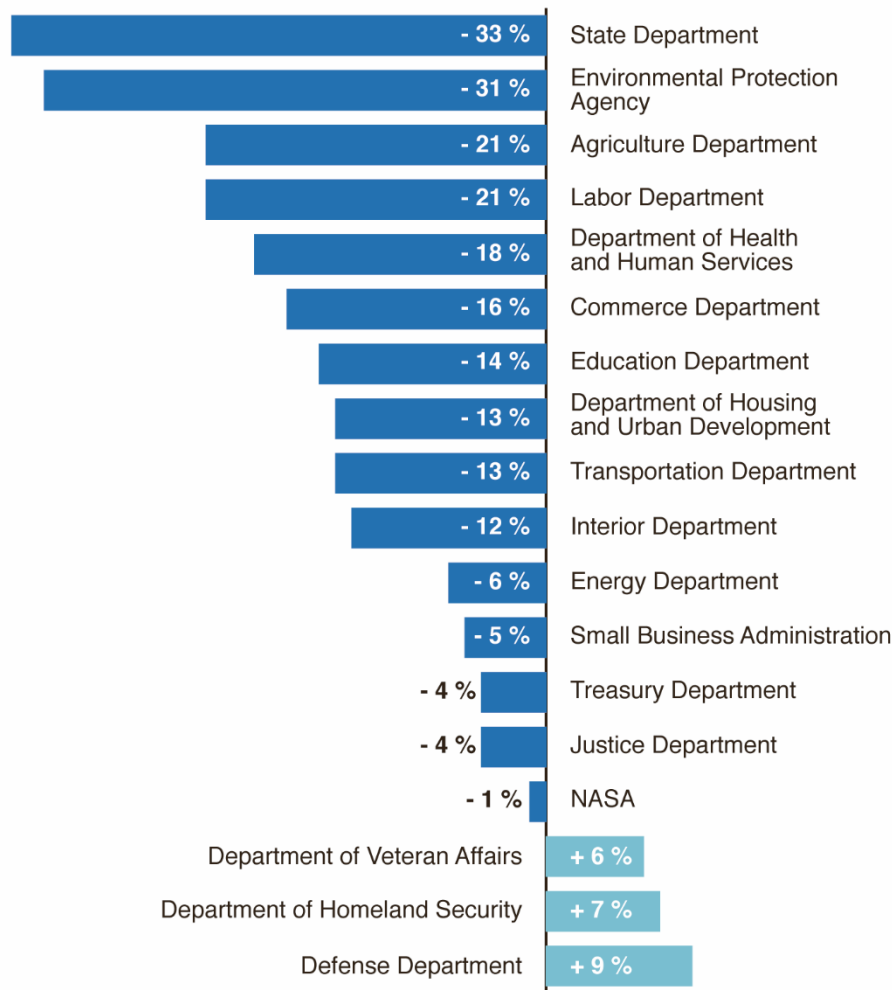
²⁶ The Senate passed The National Defense Authorization Act of 2018 by a vote of 89 to 8 (Lardner 2017). Republicans opposing the bill were senators Bob Corker, Mike Lee and Rand Paul. For voting results see US Senate (2017c). The House has also approved a Department of Defense Appropriation bill for FY 2018 to provide funding for national security (US House of Representatives 2017b). The measure includes funding for the border wall and an increase in military spending.

The budget proposal contained other elements with foreign-policy and global implications. For example, the President sought to make various US agencies engaged in foreign affairs leaner, more efficient and more effective. To this end, he proposed to decrease funding to the Department of State and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) by 32 per cent (Manson and Sevastopulo 2017; Ebbs and Riviera 2017; White House 2017r). If implemented, these cuts would likely hamper US diplomatic efforts and increase the role of the Armed Forces in US foreign and security policy. The suggested budget cuts along with the organisational restructuring have already led to a brain drain and general demoralisation at Foggy Bottom (Gramer et al. 2017; Stephenson 2017). The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was also set to experience a dramatic cut of 31 per cent in its budget, with implications related to combatting global climate change. However, drastic cuts even in highly polarised areas such as climate change are not automatically a foregone conclusion in Congress.

Furthermore, Trump's budget includes a proposal to reduce direct funding to international organisations. In particular, the aim is to reduce the US share of funding to key institutions of the liberal international order, the United Nations in particular (White House 2017r, 13). Congress has, in the past, attached reform proposals or conditionalities to UN funding, and this option is on the table once again.²⁷ Reflecting such sentiments, the State and Foreign operations bill for FY 2018 – reported by the House Appropriations Committee in July 2017 – also calls for decreases in international security assistance, as well as cuts in payments to the UN and other international organisations, and USAID (US House of Representatives 2017a). In October, the Trump administration also announced America's withdrawal from The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), citing America's unpaid contributions, the need for reform and the organisation's anti-Israel bias (US Department of State 2017a).

²⁷ For instance, in January 2017 Republican Representative Mike Rogers introduced a bill aiming "to end the membership of the United States in the United Nations" (Govtrack 2017).

Figure 5: Proposed cuts to key agencies in the Trump FY2018 budget proposal



Source: Soffen and Lu (2017)

It is worth pointing out that although the President's proposals reflect the priorities of the administration, Congress will eventually decide on the funding framework.²⁸ In this respect, critical voices have already emerged, as the order of priorities in the budget has reignited domestic debate about the correct balance between the "hard" and "soft" elements of US power. In his remarks on President Trump's FY 2018 budget proposal, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell reminded the public that it would be treated only as a "recommendation" (Davidson et al. 2017). Furthermore, a group of 43 Senators (including six Republicans) criticised the proposed budget cuts to the State Department and foreign aid to offset increases in defence spending (Tritten 2017). This sentiment is echoed by a host of senior military officials, business leaders and foreign-policy experts (Lamothe 2017).

On the general level, some of Trump's agenda items require substantial federal funding that could cause problems among conservatives who typically endorse limited government and

²⁸ As of early December 2017, the Senate and the House have agreed on budget resolutions that set targets for spending and tax revenues, as well as their respective tax-overhaul bills, which would cut the corporate tax rate by approximately 20 per cent, adding \$1.4 trillion over 10 years to the national debt (Morgan and Becker 2017).

fiscal responsibility. In terms of military spending, opposing interests between “deficit hawks” and “defence hawks” within the GOP could still cause confrontation on Capitol Hill (see Chapter 5). Other contentious items that necessitate substantial public spending include infrastructure investment and the construction of a wall along the US-Mexican border. Congress is also facing the question of the debt ceiling: can the government go beyond the legislative limit on how much it can borrow or should it balance the budget to remain within the borrowing limit? In September, President Trump and the Democrats somewhat surprisingly found common ground on some fiscal-policy issues including a short-term plan to secure government funding until December 8, 2017, and to raise the borrowing limit (DeBonis et al. 2017). A further bill was passed on December 7, 2017 to avert a government shutdown for another two weeks (Bresnahan et al. 2017). On December 21, 2017, Congress again moved the deadline until January 19, 2017.

3.5 Contentious foreign-policy issues

Beyond questions of funding, a few central foreign-policy issues are likely to feature prominently in the relationship between the White House and Capitol Hill. First, the fate of the nuclear deal with Iran (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) has been hanging in the balance ever since Trump assumed the presidency. Under the deal, Iran has agreed to significantly reduce its nuclear centrifuges and uranium stockpile, and in exchange for compliance, economic sanctions have been reduced (BBC 2016). Every 90 days the Trump administration is required to certify to Congress that Iran remains in compliance with the agreement (Baker 2017). As the October 15, 2017 deadline for certification loomed, the President ratcheted up his critical rhetoric concerning the agreement, which is broadly regarded as strategically beneficial for the US and is one of President Obama’s key foreign-policy achievements. Ultimately President Trump did not certify that Iran remained in compliance with the deal, and instead decided to pass the buck to Congress, which will now have to decide on the future of US commitment to the agreement. This could entail seeking modification or reinstating sanctions, for example. Given that even President Trump’s top military advisors, including Secretary of Defence James Mattis, are in favour of keeping the agreement in place, it is likely that the Republican-dominated Congress will at most seek to toughen its provisions. This could entail, *inter alia*, removing the phasing out of uranium-enrichment restrictions, providing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with greater authority to carry out inspections and restricting Tehran’s ballistic-missile programme. This might give President Trump the chance to agree on accepting the modified, tougher version of the treaty – assuming, somewhat optimistically, that all the other international parties to the agreement would concur (Feroz 2017; Landler and Sanger 2017a; b).

A second issue that could create contention between the President and Congress is the US response to North Korea’s nuclear posturing. On the one hand, Trump’s inflammatory remarks in response to escalation by the Kim Jong-un regime have invited bipartisan criticism. Not only is Trump’s rhetoric likely to further deteriorate the situation, it is also uncertain whether he can back it up with resolute and credible action given the immense risks involved in any significant military engagement in the region (Herb 2017a). On the other hand, many members of Congress have clearly expressed their desire to remain involved in the decision-making process, and have warned that pre-emptive military action would probably require Congressional authorisation. A key issue here is the understanding of the threat that North Korea poses. The President, as the Commander in Chief, is typically assumed to have wide authority to take military action to protect the US from a threat to its national security. Although Congress has few options to prevent this, it might try to do so by introducing legislation to block the use of force or to bar any funding for military action against North Korea (Herb 2017b).

Last, but certainly not least, Russia is a serious source of tension between President Trump and Congress. There are two interrelated reasons for this. First, there is a policy disagreement over the best formula for dealing with Russia. Second, there are on-going committee investigations in the House and Senate into Russia's involvement in the 2016 presidential-election process, including the hacking and release of damaging materials on the Clinton campaign (Uhrmacher and Soffen 2017; Chapter 8). The committee investigations in Congress remain polarised and politicised, perhaps with the exception of the Senate Intelligence Committee. These divisions will probably have an impact in terms of findings and reporting (see e.g. Carney 2017; Kelley 2017; Kutner 2017).

The question of "election hacking" has, curiously, been missing from President Trump's policy agenda, despite initial calls to improve cyber security (see White House 2017s). To further understand Russia's activities and protect the reliability of future elections, members of Congress have called for cooperation from the administration and its agencies over the issue. Congress took a bold legislative step in July in restricting the freedom of the Trump administration to unilaterally lift sanctions on Russia (also North Korea and Iran) – a bill grudgingly signed by the President (Weaver and Foy 2017).

In May, former head of the FBI, Robert Mueller, was appointed "to serve as Special Counsel to oversee the previously-confirmed FBI investigation of Russian government efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election and related matters", including the Trump campaign's potential collusion with Russia and events leading to Trump's firing of FBI director James Comey (US Department of Justice 2017). The results of this inquiry are likely to be critical with regard to the development of the relationship between President Trump and the current Republican-dominated Congress. Should the inquiry find intentional and malicious collusion or a severe case of obstruction of justice it is possible – although unlikely – that the Republican party will withdraw its support for the President, or even move to remove him from office through impeachment or by evoking the 25th amendment of the Constitution (see Chapter 8).²⁹ The upcoming mid-term election in November 2018 could also alter the composition of Congress and affect the prospects of impeachment, especially if the Democrats take control of the House of Representatives (which initiates the procedure).

3.6 The intervening dynamics of public opinion

Foreign-policy issues are not typically of major concern to the American public. This was the case in the 2016 presidential elections, in which voting behaviour was largely predicated upon domestic issues. Furthermore, polls conducted prior to the election indicated that Hillary Clinton was trusted more on foreign-policy questions (see e.g. Blanton 2016; Byrnes 2016). On a broader level, the President's support of protectionism and nationalism over globalism, free trade and alliances is likely to result in a world that the US public does not support unequivocally (see Smeltz et al. 2017b). In fact, Trump's belief in and policy of putting "America First" do not even enjoy unanimous support within his own administration (Mann 2017), and face opposition from the foreign-policy establishment in the US as well as from several Republican members of the Senate (with competence in foreign-policy matters) (Brands 2017; McCarthy, D. 2017).

²⁹ There are two pathways for removing a president from office. The first is the impeachment procedure. The House of Representatives has the sole power of impeachment as per the Constitution. The House can charge the President with "Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors". A resolution to impeach (or its separate articles) requires a simple majority of votes in the House, after which the matter is presented to the Senate to initiate the trial. Conviction by the Senate requires a two-thirds majority (see Halstead 2005). Only two US presidents have ever been impeached by the House: Andrew Johnson in 1868 and Bill Clinton in 1998. In both cases, senators voting to remove the president from office were in the majority, but did not constitute a two-thirds majority. The second path to removal is through section four of the 25th amendment, which allows the vice-president and the majority of the cabinet, or a body appointed by Congress (e.g. a group of medical experts) to determine that the president is "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office". Should the president object, a two-thirds majority in the House and Senate is necessary to remove him or her (Osnos 2017).

Despite the fact that foreign policy is not the most significant issue for Americans, public opinion still plays a role in conditioning US foreign-policy choices – and public perceptions seem to be extremely important for the current president. For example, dissatisfaction with the military adventurism of the George W. Bush presidency allowed Barack Obama to campaign successfully with a message of hope and domestic rejuvenation that included a pledge to withdraw from a long and costly war in Iraq – a promise he ultimately kept (Aaltola et al. 2014a). In this regard, public perceptions are relevant when it comes to the ebb and flow of US foreign policy between interventionist and more isolationist phases (Sestanovich 2014; Chapter 4).

It has been argued in recent years that popular opinion in the US is characterised by “war weariness”, and has been drifting towards more limited participation in world affairs, especially on matters such as democracy promotion and human-rights advocacy (see Drezner 2008). Nevertheless, according to a Pew Research Center poll from October 2017, an equal percentage of Americans (47 per cent) support active involvement in global affairs and paying more attention to problems at home, respectively (Pew Research Center 2017e). According to a similar study conducted by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 63 per cent of respondents favour an active role for the US in global affairs (Smeltz et al. 2017a).³⁰

Public opinion also plays a role in the struggle for influence between the White House and Capitol Hill. Congress enjoys relatively low confidence among the American public. According to average figures published by Real Clear Politics (2017), Congressional job-approval ratings in recent years have fluctuated between 10 and 20 per cent. Public support is thus commonly considered to constitute “leverage” for the president *vis-à-vis* Congress (Cassino 2017). However, the current president enjoys historically low popularity among the general public – his average approval rating hovers at around 38 per cent (FiveThirtyEight 2017; Pew Research Center 2017c). In situations in which the president’s “standing in the public sphere” is not high, incumbents also tend to face problems in cooperating with their own party members (Chafetz 2017). The events leading up to Richard Nixon’s resignation are an extreme example of this dynamic, and in this regard the healthcare legislation debacle between the Trump White House and Congress might prove a harbinger of things to come.

One further complicating factor regarding the Trump presidency concerns the rallies he continues to hold for his core supporters, in stark contrast to past practice. On April 29, 2017, for example, to mark the first 100 days of his presidency Trump opted to skip the White House correspondents’ dinner and to hold such a rally in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, with an estimated 7,000 people in attendance (Fisher 2017). In this way, the President connects and communicates directly with his support base, and can emphasise the issues he considers to be of paramount importance. It could become a longer-term problem for the Republican Party, however, to the extent that Trump manages to control the base and radicalise the party – in effect eroding the foundations of more moderate Republicanism.

3.7 Conclusion

As the above discussion purported to illustrate, if they are to capitalise on their majority status and advance their agenda, Republicans need to be on the same page. In this sense, communication between the White House and Capitol Hill is critical. However, the Trump administration’s forays have indicated otherwise. To further complicate matters, President Trump has

³⁰ However, it is also worth noting that the way in which polling questions are framed can affect how people respond to them, and thus they paint a limited picture of how supportive or sceptical Americans are of global engagement.

no previous political experience and apparently little interest in policy details, which also inhibits his ability to deal with Congress. It will be interesting to see whether Vice President Mike Pence, with his long track record, will take a more active role in building up relations with Congress in the same way that Joe Biden did during the Obama presidency. Personal relations could thus mitigate the effects of intraparty tensions or, in a worse scenario, serve to underline them further.

Such dynamics are inevitably affected by the volatility of the Trump administration. The President is infamous for his controversial and often insulting social-media communication – some of which has even been targeted at leading Republican politicians such as John McCain (Chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services) and Bob Corker (Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee). Cabinet and White House rosters have also undergone significant changes. Key departures among anti-establishment figures include those of National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, chief strategist Stephen Bannon and policy advisor Sebastian Gorka. Offsetting the dismissals of Chief of Staff Reince Priebus and Press Secretary Sean Spicer, both representatives of the Republican mainstream, have been other moderate appointments, including those of generals John Kelly and H.R. McMaster, who have assumed the positions of Chief of Staff and National Security Advisor, respectively. As a result, analysts foresee this “axis of adults” – including Secretary of Defence James Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson – assuming a more pivotal role in forging the Trump administration’s foreign policy (see Boot 2017).

Nevertheless, US foreign policy is ultimately led by the president. Congress has more influence on domestic politics due to its power to legislate. From the perspective of getting legislative measures passed, the administration commonly benefits from majority-party status in both chambers of Congress. The effect is seldom as visible in matters of foreign policy because the president has more room for manoeuvre to begin with. The period of unified government could also have an effect on the oversight role of Congress, *de facto* limiting its willingness to act as a check on the president. This does not rule out differences of opinion among Republicans, however. So far, divisive foreign-policy issues have included the soft versus hard power trade-off in the FY 2018 budget, administration policy vis-à-vis North Korea and Iran, and especially the US relationship with Russia – an area that has already provided some surprising common ground for bipartisanship on Capitol Hill. It remains to be seen whether circumstances and pressure from within the reformed administration, the Republican Party, and the media will push Trump’s foreign policy in the direction of “mainstream” Republicanism, or whether the agendas of Trump and his party will diverge further. One potential scenario is that the tensions between the parties that characterised the Obama years will be complemented with intra-party tensions during the current presidency – something that should also be taken note of in Europe.

PART II: FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICY

4. US foreign policy: the “Trump doctrine”

- Despite posturing himself as an outsider, President Trump – like any other policy maker – remains immersed in the broader, historically-evolved set of ideas that enable and constrain American thinking on foreign policy.
- US foreign policy thought in the post-Cold War era has followed three prominent traditions: liberal internationalism, neoconservatism and realism. Neoisolationism has recently emerged as a fourth alternative.
- Although not fully endorsing any alternative, President Trump in his foreign-policy thinking draws upon – or at the very least takes postures against – each of these traditions.
- The so-called “Trump doctrine” emphasises unilateralism, civilizational affinities, and the build-up and use of hard power. Furthermore, it undermines aspects of multilateral co-operation in favour of transactionalism, in other words bilateral deals built on *ad hoc* sector-based bargains.

4.1 Introduction

To make sense of US foreign policy one might look at the contradictions and debates that followed the 2016 presidential election. These deliberations illustrate the underlying trends as the new administration and its critics alike draw from a specific subset of foreign-policy traditions. The expectation is that the divergences and debates will result in a balance that generally aligns with the continuity of US foreign-policy thought. However, the similarities between past, present and future will also reflect elements of “change in continuity”.

American foreign-policy experts and academics were already extremely critical of Donald Trump’s approach during his raucous presidential campaign, which they considered unorthodox, disruptionist and even dangerous. These fears have yet to be dispelled completely. The beginning of Trump’s tenure in the White House has been marked by contradictory statements disseminated by the President and different administration figures on key foreign-policy issues such as US commitment to NATO, America’s approach to resolving the North Korea crisis and the future of the Iran nuclear deal.

To understand the extent of change and the trappings of continuity in Trump’s approach, however, it is necessary to move beyond the cacophony of statements emanating from the administration and the criticism circulating in the media and academia. This chapter analyses how the Trump administration’s foreign policy relates to US foreign-policy traditions. The aim is to map out what the “America First” and “Make America Great Again” slogans have entailed so far, and how drastic a departure the Trumpian approach is, in reality, when it comes to the broader perspective of US foreign-policy thought and practice. This will shed light on the question of whether, and if so how, the Trump administration may seek to refashion the decades-old orthodoxies on US global engagement in the coming years.

4.2 Policymakers and foreign-policy debates

Donald Trump has made much of the fact that he is not beholden to anyone and does not further the agenda of the Washington establishment. Instead, he is the hope of forgotten America, on a mission to regain America's surrendered prestige. Despite posturing himself as an outsider, neither Donald Trump nor his administration officials – many of them former business executives and generals – exist independently of the history-bound ideational constructs that function as a wellspring for foreign-policy thinking and decision-making. Even in the era of a potentially disruptive presidency, the debates on America's place in the world structure the worldviews of policymakers in key positions. As Ted Hopf (2002, 37) once argued: “[e]very foreign policy maker is as much a member of the social cognitive structure that characterizes her society as any average citizen”.

Hence, debates that take place in the public sphere (and also in academia) over a state's place in the world play a role in constructing points of departure for political action. Scholars have long appreciated the influence of such discussions. As fabled economist John Maynard Keynes (1939, Ch. 24, V) put it:

“The ideas of economists and political philosophers [...] are more powerful than is commonly understood. [...] Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.”

It is thus relatively safe to assume that even President Trump – in spite of his pledge to break with tradition – is irredeemably enmeshed in the history-bounded competition between different views of America's place in the world. Traditions of foreign-policy thought thus have an impact upon policymakers, and the influence is tangible regardless of whether these actors acknowledge this to be the case.

4.3 Alternative traditions of US strategic thought

Debates on America's place in and engagement with the world are habitually framed in terms of competing grand-strategic alternatives. Simply put, “[a] state's ‘grand strategy’ is its leaders' theory and story about how to provide for its security, welfare and identity” (Nye 2011, 212). It also informs states and their leaders on “how they mobilise which elements of their power in pursuit of which causes in global politics” (Kitchen 2010, 121).

All leaders engage in the formulation of grand strategies when conducting foreign policy. They do this by deciding which ends to pursue and which means to harness for such exploits. They “have a sense, whether implicitly or explicitly, of their country's national interests, the threats that exist to those interests, and the resources that can be brought to bear against those threats” (Dueck 2005, 198). This implies that grand strategies are not necessarily enshrined in foreign-policy documents or reiterated in key speeches: they may also be embedded in policy practices (Brands 2012, 6-7).

One way of categorising the ebb and flow of the grand-strategic debate on US engagement with the world is through the three prominent traditions of post-Cold War American thinking on foreign policy: *liberal internationalism*, *neoconservatism* and *realism*. *Neoisolationism* can be considered a fourth approach, which until recently had been relegated to the fringes of US

foreign-policy debates (Quinn 2016). These schools of thought represent “ideal type” positions, which presidents tend to utilise in combination to arrive at different grand-strategic options.

The first of these schools, *liberal internationalism*, has been ascendant in US foreign-policy circles throughout the post-Cold War era. Adherents of the approach view the promotion of liberal trade practices and core American (and more broadly Western) values, especially democracy and human rights, as central to America’s national interests. US involvement in multilateral institutions is seen as crucial to entrench these values in international society (Ikenberry 2009, 14-20). When it comes to exerting force, liberal internationalists do not shy away from using military power to defend these values. However, such measures should be undertaken for legitimate reasons with the support of the broader international community. The so-called humanitarian interventions undertaken during the Clinton presidency are thus often attributed to the ascendancy of liberal internationalism in Washington (Dueck 2005).

Liberal internationalists also place strong emphasis on the economic dimension of foreign policy and the tools of soft power that tend to be associated with public diplomacy (Nye 2011; Ikenberry 2015). Many liberal internationalists thus subscribe to a strategy of “deep engagement”, maintaining America’s responsibilities to international institutions and its military commitments around the world (Ikenberry 2014). According to proponents of the strategy, nurturing the liberal international order is necessary for co-opting the rising powers – China as well as India some years ahead – as “responsible stakeholders” in resolving common global challenges. In addition, the US needs the institutions of the liberal order to perform essential functions, including the maintenance of financial stability, the negotiation of best practices for global commons such as sea, air and cyberspace, and securing interstate peace (Nye 2017; see also Chapter 6).

Proponents of the second school of thought, the *neoconservatives*, agree with the liberal internationalists on the importance of promoting America’s liberal-democratic values – especially the so-called “negative freedoms”³¹ – abroad. In fact, neoconservatism is often associated with moralistic “missionary zeal”. Therefore, unlike liberal internationalists, “neocons” are willing to follow their agenda unilaterally if necessary, without encumbering multilateral alliances and, *in extremis*, circumventing international legal constraints on the use of military force. In practice, however, this has meant the use of flexible US-led “coalitions of the willing”. Neoconservatives also emphasise the importance of maintaining America’s unchallengeable military power position in the international system as a clear foreign-policy priority (Krauthammer 2002). This connotes a willingness to expend vast resources on bolstering military power. Soft power tools, although potentially useful instruments, are treated as auxiliary means of achieving foreign-policy goals (Singh 2014, 30-31). The muscular and unilateralist foreign policy of the George W. Bush presidency, especially during his first term in the aftermath of 9/11, is often termed the golden age of the neoconservative foreign-policy vision (see Reus-Smit 2004).

Realism, the third school, represents a broad and diverse tradition of foreign-policy thought. Despite the heterogeneity, most realists would acknowledge that the international system is inhabited by states bent on survival and locked in persistent competition for power. This preoccupation with international “anarchy” and power in its material form leads realists to argue that states will (and should) act in a self-interested manner within the international system,

³¹ Negative freedom here refers to the freedom of persons or groups to conduct themselves as they see fit without interference from others. For the seminal discussion, see Berlin (1969).

seeking relative gains and placing little emphasis on values (Mearsheimer 2001, 17-18; Wohlforth 2008, 133-135). At best, the proliferation of democracy or human rights is a welcome side effect of pursuing national interests. At worst, the pursuit of such eloquent goals could divert attention away from the true task of a nation's leadership: ensuring national survival. Moreover, given the inevitable uncertainty among states about each other's intentions, the best way to ensure survival is to accumulate power (Mearsheimer 2001, 31-33).

Prominent realist thinkers have recently challenged the strategy of "deep engagement" ascribed to liberal internationalists. Instead, they call for a strategy of "offshore balancing" to scale back America's overseas engagements and focus only on making sure key regions (Europe, Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf) do not fall under the rule of a hostile regional hegemon. This would cater to a narrower definition of American national interests. Such an approach, they claim, would avoid the dangers of overstretch that a policy bent on the promotion of liberal-democratic values might create, but still retain America's place at the top of the global power hierarchy (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016).³²

Neoisolationists take the argument to disengage further. As a term, isolationism echoes negative connotations from the 1930s, but the whole school should not be equated with nationally minded figures on the right of the political spectrum, despite similar talking points. Nevertheless, like their isolationist forebears of the interwar period, neoisolationists call for the abandonment of America's role as global leader and the putting of its own house in order. From this standpoint, America's pursuit and maintenance of superpower status and entangling global engagement – massive military spending in particular – has, in fact, made it less secure and economically less well off. Such sentiments were long relegated to the fringes of US foreign-policy debates, but have resurfaced in Trump's "America First" agenda. Proponents of the approach claim that America's deep engagement with the world is a folly maintained by foreign-policy experts and the elite, which holds little appeal among the broader public (Preble 2017).

4.4 Deciphering the "Trumpian" approach to foreign policy

A fervent debate has surfaced in the US and globally on the "true" nature of Trump's approach to the world. These discussions have made some headway in pinning down how the President and his team view America's global role in the future. The following exploratory profile of Trump's foreign policy is based on a review of the main strands of this debate and how they tie in to statements and practices emanating from the President and his administration, and reflect the US foreign-policy traditions presented above.

³² Realism is a broad school of thought. Some realists even agree with liberal internationalists in regarding "deep engagement" with the world as the safest bet for safeguarding US interests (Brooks et al. 2012).

Figure 6: The "Trump doctrine" and US foreign-policy traditions

THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY AND US FOREIGN POLICY TRADITIONS	
<p>Liberal internationalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of liberal values • "deep engagement": involvement in multilateral institutions, maintain military commitments • emphasis on soft power 	<p>Neoconservatism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of liberal values (especially negative freedoms), sense of moral mission • preference for institutional detachment, coalitions of the willing, unilateral action • emphasis on hard power
<p>Neoisolationism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put America's own house in order • abandonment of America's role as global leader • downscale military spending 	<p>Realism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-interest (not liberal values) as guiding principle in an anarchical world • "offshore balancing": moderate US global engagement • emphasis on hard power
<p>THE "TRUMP DOCTRINE"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal internationalism: little emphasis on liberal values, sceptical of "deep engagement" in the institutions of the international rule-based order • Neoconservatism: unilateralism, moralistic "civilisational" rhetoric, hard-power emphasis • Realism: hard-power emphasis, zero-sum view of global competition • Neoisolationism: undermine and (sometimes) reject multilateral trade cooperation in favour of transactionalism 	

4.4.1 Trump's challenge to liberal internationalism

President Trump has drawn considerable fire from liberal internationalists in his critique of the Western-led liberal international order and the Washington foreign-policy establishment (Ikenberry 2017; Nye 2017). In fact, although presidential elections are rarely decided on foreign-policy issues, the result of the 2016 election may ultimately turn out to be highly relevant in terms of the future of America's commitment to deep engagement and the building blocks of the liberal rule-based order (Patrick 2016; Kitchen 2016).

As candidate and incumbent, Donald Trump has articulated a narrower definition of America's national interests, especially when it comes to commitment to the international norms and institutions of the US-led rule-based liberal international order. As the new National Security Strategy (NSS) published on December 18, 2017 states: "all institutions are not equal [...] [t]he United States will prioritize its efforts in those organizations that serve American interests" (White House 2017z). Reflecting this "America First" pledge, the administration has, for instance:

- delayed the endorsement of *Article 5* of the North Atlantic Treaty;
- disavowed the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA);
- pulled the US out of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change;
- withdrawn from the nascent Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP);
- put out a budget proposal that would slash US funding to the United Nations;
- walked away from UNESCO and threatened to leave the UN Human Rights Council.

The administration has also been perceived as putting the promotion of liberal-democratic values on the backburner. Although the US has traditionally done business with and even propped up authoritarian leaders, human-rights rhetoric has been uncharacteristically absent in public statements issued by the new administration. President Trump put the virtues of sovereignty and patriotism – instead of democracy, human rights and freedom – centre stage in his speech at the United Nations (White House 2017k). Secretary of State Rex Tillerson similarly made a point of laying out how America’s interests might be harmed by keeping such concerns at the forefront (US Department of State 2017b).

Admittedly, there have been some exceptions to the Trump administration’s departure from liberal internationalist convictions. In late December 2017, the administration moved to sanction 52 persons and entities for human-rights abuses and corruption under the Global Magnitsky Act of 2012.³³ A more widely publicised exception was the bombing of a Syrian airfield in the aftermath of an alleged chemical-weapons attack by Bashar al-Assad’s regime. The missile strike was explicitly justified with reference to the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons in international law (Beckwith 2017). Anne-Marie Slaughter (2017), former Director of Policy Planning at Hillary Clinton’s State Department, regarded Trump’s missile strikes on Syria as “a refreshing moment of moral clarity”. However, the decision to uphold the ban on the use of chemical weapons and the targeting of individual human-rights abusers seem to contradict the Trump administration’s broader approach towards the normative foundations of international order and the human dignity of non-Americans.

Judging by the first nine months of his term, therefore, Trump is positioning himself against the central theses of liberal internationalism. According to one prominent critic, the administration’s conduct challenges the five “core convictions” that have upheld America’s commitment to the liberal international order: internationalism, free trade, global leadership, multiculturalism and faith in the virtues of democratic governance (Ikenberry 2017; see also Chapters 2 and 6).

4.4.2 Trump’s conflicted relationship with neoconservatism

Interestingly, a president espousing a neoconservative agenda could have promoted many of the policy stances and actions adopted by the Trump team. A swift comparison of Trump’s above described forays with George W. Bush’s foreign policy record suffices to prove the point. Bush, for instance, “unsigned” the Statute of the International Criminal Court, abandoned the Kyoto climate protocol, sanctioned an extraordinary rendition programme and enhanced interrogation techniques, and paid little heed to the lack of a United Nations Security Council resolution authorising the invasion of Iraq (Hastings Dunn 2009).

Despite such parallels, there is little love lost between Trump and some prominent neoconservative pundits, who are animated by their convictions regarding the muscular defence of American interests, as well as the promotion of its values and of US-style democracy in the world at large (Franko 2016; Kagan 2016). It is not only the omission of value-based rhetoric that sets the Trump administration apart from “necon” foreign-policy thinking. Trump and his team eschew a key component of American “exceptionalism”: the belief in America’s destiny to actively remake the world in its own image. According to the neoconservatives, Trump’s “America First” approach is the “antithesis of American exceptionalism” because “[i]t makes America no different from all the other countries that define themselves by a particularist blood-and-soil nationalism” (Krauthammer 2017a). However, in keeping with some liberal in-

³³ The Global Magnitsky Act allows the president to target individuals and entities with property seizure and revocation of visas.

ternationalists, neoconservatives applauded the missile strikes on Syria for muscularly reasserting American leadership after “eight years of sleepwalking” in the Obama era (Krauthammer 2017b; see also Lobe 2017).

Of course, the fact that Trump evades the defence of liberal democratic ideals does not mean that his foreign policy is devoid of an ideational basis. Despite the departure from the White House of members of his core group of nationalistically-minded advisors such as Stephen Bannon and Sebastian Gorka, Trump continues to echo the Huntingtonian clash-of-civilisations framework described above, according to which “cultural commonalities and differences shape the interests, antagonisms and associations of states” (Huntington 2002, 29; see also Chapter 2; Walt 2017b; Rachman 2017). Trump’s preoccupation with ISIS and repeated use of the loaded phrase “radical Islamic terrorism” in his key policy speeches implies that, for the President and some of his advisors, this threat is existential in nature, and must be exorcised from the American and global societal body. This is a pronouncedly Manichean view of international politics, framing the international as an arena in which the “good” forces of Christianity and the “evil” cohorts of radical Islam are in perennial conflict (Kennedy 2013). According to critics, a similar impulse was a mainstay of the discourse that informed George W. Bush’s War on Terror and the branding of Iran, North Korea and Iraq as the “axis of evil” (Müller 2014). In his UN speech, Trump similarly identified “a small group of rogue regimes” – North Korea, Iran and Syria, but also Cuba and Venezuela – as the “scourge of our planet today” (White House 2017k).

4.4.3 Realist undertones in Trumpian thought

Trump has explicitly stated that, for him, the measure of a great country is a great military. This approach is also evident in the military emphasis of the administration’s budget proposal (see Chapters 3 and 5). In March, Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Mick Mulvaney termed it “a hard-power budget” blueprint for “a strong-power administration” (White House 2017t). The President has also shown his preparedness to utilise military power (Syria), and has given the military considerable latitude in the battle against terrorism (Afghanistan). However, he seems unlikely to use the US military machine, to uphold the nascent norm of responsibility to protect or promote democratic governance, for instance.

This focus on hard power, combined with his pronounced unwillingness to engage in democracy promotion, tilts Trump’s foreign policy towards the realist tradition (Brooks 2016; Drezner 2016). As evinced in his UN speech, Trump and his team view the international arena in state-centric terms, acknowledge the primacy of great-power relations, focus on competition for power understood in terms of the possession of material capabilities, and adhere to a zero-sum understanding of the nature of international competition (Schweller 2017). As National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Director of the National Economic Council Gary Cohn put it in their Wall Street Journal op-ed: “the world is not a ‘global community’ but an arena where nations [...] engage and compete [...]. Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it” (McMaster and Cohn 2017). This outlook is captured in the Trump team’s new NSS under the moniker “principled realism” (White House 2017z).

It is hardly surprising that some self-identified realists have supported Trump’s “America First” foreign-policy platform, viewing it as a welcome departure from decades of misinformed deep engagement based on liberal internationalism and the “unipolar illusions” of neoconservatives (Mearsheimer 2016; Layne 2016; Schweller 2017). Although Trump may not see the issue on quite these terms, for such realists his “America First” and “Make America Great Again” slogans reflect a long-overdue realisation that the US can only maintain its position at the top of the international power hierarchy by demanding that allies do more and the US itself resists

the temptation to engage in costly and difficult nation building in faraway places. Some realists are even amenable to Trump's initial toying with a Russia reset: if China is the only legitimate long-term threat to US primacy, then finding common cause with Moscow would not be such a bad idea. From this standpoint, the Trump team is a disappointment (Walt 2017c). By raising suspicions of questionable dealings with Russia through its own policy incompetence, the administration has botched hopes of an improvement in relations (see Chapter 8).

4.4.4 Trump's transactionalism as selective neoisolationism

It has become commonplace to conflate President Trump's approach to the international arena with isolationism. It is true that Trump toys with neoisolationist talking points, especially in the realm of trade. However, he departs from this tradition with his manifest willingness to build up and exercise military power. In the realm of economic policy, he seeks engagement on terms that are favourable to the United States: the objective is to secure "fair" as opposed to "free" trade deals that do not "take advantage of the US".

An apt descriptor of Donald Trump's *modus operandi* for conducting day-to-day international relations is transactionalism: foreign policy boiled down to the art of deal making. Good deals are defined in narrow terms, according to Trump's designation of what is in America's (economic) interests. In the transactionalist mindset, these interests are invariably represented in terms of relative as opposed to absolute economic gains – in other words the aim is for America to get more out of the deals than its counterpart(s), not that all parties should benefit from agreements (Stephens 2017; Kahl and Brands 2017). Thus understood, transactionalism breaks international politics into bilateral silos, akin to a string of one-off commodity exchanges, which means that short-term benefits are deemed more important than potential long-term returns. Therefore, Trumpian transactionalism is at most a selective espousal of neoisolationism, and his affinity with the approach remains issue-specific (see Rothkopf 2017).

On the one hand, the President's distrust of multilateral institutions and organisations of global governance have led him down the isolationist path, most notably in the case of the TPP (see Chapter 7). On the other hand, he has shown a willingness to walk back on some of his views, such as opting for a strategy on Afghanistan advocated by his generals, passing the buck on the Iran deal to Congress instead of pulling the US out of the agreement outright, and ultimately endorsing Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. In the spirit of transactionalism, therefore, it is likely that isolationist impulses will be harnessed selectively, restricted to relationships and deals the President personally deems particularly detrimental to relative US interests as he defines them.

4.5 Conclusion

It is clear that the Trump administration's foreign-policy approach is a shifting yet selective mix of different traditions of American foreign-policy thought. The President adopts components of neoconservatism from the George W. Bush era (eschewing cumbersome multilateralism and relying on clash-of-civilisations rhetoric), realism (emphasising military power and a zero-sum view of global competition) and neoisolationism (rhetorically undermining multilateral rules and institutions of global trade and rejecting them on a case-by-case basis).

Trumpian foreign policy is thus characterised by apparent incompatibilities and inconsistencies – perhaps even more so than the policies of his immediate predecessors. Critics have taken this to indicate that there is no broad, grand-strategic thread, merely issue-specific

short-termism (Friedman Lissner and Zenko 2017). It should be admitted that the President (less so his foreign-policy team) is at most an intellectual scavenger. Nevertheless, his foraging takes place in the forest of American foreign-policy and grand-strategic thought. In this sense, President Trump is a product of American foreign-policy traditions just as his predecessors were, regardless of the desire among critics to dismiss him as simply a nationalist or an isolationist aberration.

A key question faces observers of Trump's evolving foreign-policy strategy. Which inclination will dominate, and what contexts provide the space for each approach to come to the fore? This is also of long-term significance, given that the next president, whoever it might be, will evaluate and react to the success of his selection of underlying trends. However, there is an important distinction to be made between Trump, on the one hand, and his foreign-policy advisors and cabinet secretaries in charge of the State and Defence Departments on the other. In the aftermath of the missile strike on Syria, the unveiling of the administration's Afghanistan strategy and the President's decision to push for renegotiation of the Iran deal, the influence of the "adults in the room" – Mattis, Kelly, McMaster and Tillerson – has been cited as a potential check on the President's most unorthodox foreign-policy impulses (Mann 2017; Boot 2017). Some have gone as far as to claim that the administration is approaching a more traditional Republican foreign policy (Abrams 2017), which in Trump's case would entail toning down his more controversial isolationist impulses.

The problem with the mainstreaming argument is that President Trump's latitude on foreign-policy matters is vast (see Chapter 3). In the case of the Iran deal, for instance, arguments that stress an averted storm do not take account of the fact that Mattis – often seen as the most influential of the adults – as well as McMaster and Tillerson apparently advocated certification, as did all the other state parties to the deal. The Paris Climate Agreement is another example of when Trump reportedly turned a deaf ear to the advice of more centrist characters in the administration, including his daughter Ivanka, son-in-law Jared Kushner and economic advisor Gary Cohn: instead he opted for a policy stance advocated by the nationalist wing of his team (Easley and Parnes 2017). A similar dynamic characterised Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and to relocate (eventually) the US embassy from Tel Aviv, reportedly against the advice of his Secretaries of State and Defence (Landler 2017a; Holland 2017b). Trump's impressionability thus appears contingent upon how strongly he feels about a policy issue on the one hand, and domestic political exigencies on the other.

In sum, for America's partners and allies there are both comforting and unsettling facts. First, despite the air of uncertainty, the Trump era is likely to provide allies and partners with opportunities for sector-based cooperation by virtue of the President's transactionalist impulses. Second, it appears that he is capable of selective social learning, and at the present time the adults in his administration seem to have some influence over the policy agenda, as illustrated by America's re-articulation of its security commitments in Europe and Asia. Third, although the US president is powerful, he cannot merely wish away the structural constraints imposed by other actors – state or non-state – or the normative frameworks that constitute international society overnight. The flipside of the coin is that the president of the United States can probably do more than any other individual in the world to undermine and reshape these constraints. Trump's volatility is a wild card that allies, partners and adversaries must keep in mind when dealing with the United States during the next three (or possibly seven) years.

5. Crosscurrents in US defence policy

- Despite the exceptional rhetoric of the President and related concerns over political turmoil inside the Trump administration, US defence policy reflects several broad areas of continuity from previous administrations.
- In line with the National Security Strategy released by the White House in December 2017, the Pentagon's top priorities will be to counter challenges from the revisionist powers of China and Russia, the rogue states of Iran and North Korea, and transnational threat organisations, particularly terrorist groups.
- The large increases in military capabilities proposed by the Trump administration are likely to fall short of early expectations, largely due to budgetary realities. Nevertheless, depending on the on-going policy review, developments in nuclear-weapon and missile-defence policies are possible, with potential implications for the already tense relations with Russia.
- US bilateral and multilateral defence ties with Europe and Asia will remain relatively stable, despite some friction over spending levels and industrial cooperation on defence. A more serious quarrel with its allies might result if the Trump administration were perceived as partly responsible for a major military clash in Korea or the collapse of the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran.

5.1 Introduction

Since his inauguration in January 2017, President Donald Trump has limited his statements on defence matters to a few broad themes: rebuilding the US military with a hefty increase in spending; strengthening, in particular, its nuclear forces and missile defences; and destroying ISIS. He has relished his role, under the Constitution, as Commander-in-chief, exhorting military audiences with hyperbolic language. For instance, he has taunted adversaries and raised the prospect of military action by threatening to “totally destroy” North Korea, while publicly deriding efforts by his Secretary of State Tillerson to find a diplomatic path to relieve tensions. To date, however, the President has seemed to prefer the selective use of force, as shown in the US cruise-missile attack last April on a Syrian air base used for chemical-weapons strikes, and the modest reinforcement of US forces in Afghanistan.

The US system contains checks and balances, and the President's approach is likely to be moderated and directed towards relative continuity. Despite evidence of turmoil in the White House, the vast US defence establishment has “soldiered on”. This entails simultaneously managing military operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan; reinforcing US positions and capabilities in Europe in response to Russia; and improving the readiness to deal with these and other potential flash points, including North Korea and potentially Iran. The conceptual framework for these efforts should emerge in early 2018 in the Pentagon's National Defense Strategy (NDS), to be followed soon after by its Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and Missile Defense Review (MDR).

The aim in this chapter is to identify the strategic changes and continuities that are likely to emerge from the high-level reviews, and to assess their effects on US defence capabilities and the potential future pathways for the transatlantic relationship.

5.2 The emerging defence strategy: the threat environment and policy responses

In the hierarchy of national security documents mandated by Congress, the National Security Strategy (NSS) report is the core document outlining the tenets of the US grand strategy. Prepared by the National Security Council and approved by the President, the NSS, according to its Congressional mandate, should provide guidance for the entire US Government on matters including US worldwide interests, objectives, and commitments deemed vital to national security; proposed political, diplomatic, military, economic, intelligence and other elements of national power to promote those interests and objectives; and the overall resources and capabilities required to execute the various parts of the overall strategy.³⁴

In many respects, the new National Security Strategy (White House 2017z) reflects the ongoing tension between two somewhat amorphous camps. On the one hand, there are the President and a circle of hardline, ideologically-driven advisors within the administration or with close, informal links to the White House. On the other hand, there are conservative but pragmatic officials whose government and/or military experience has framed their thinking more along the lines of the defence and foreign policy “establishment” often derided by the President and his loyalists.

For the former camp, the NSS represents an unapologetic shift to an explicit “America First” approach across the spectrum of domestic and international security issues. Hence, the document promises, *inter alia*, stronger border controls (including a “border wall”), “enhanced vetting” of prospective immigrants and refugees, expanded cyber and ballistic missile defences, greater protection for American defence industries, “strengthening (US) sovereignty” in multilateral organisations, and retaining US “military overmatch” to deter and defeat adversaries – or, in the President’s words quoted by the NSS, to “always win”.

For the latter camp, the NSS offers more traditional and/or centrist reference points. It promises, for example, to “preserve peace through strength” (resurrecting President Ronald Reagan’s theme during the Cold War); counter Chinese and Russian efforts to “shape a world antithetical to US values and interests,” while keeping open the possibility of cooperation in areas of mutual interest; integrate all elements of America’s national power – political, economic and military; and “deepen collaboration with our European allies and partners to confront forces threatening to undermine our common values, security interests, and shared vision”.

Not surprisingly, the President’s critics were quick to point out many inconsistencies between the NSS description of US objectives and priorities and the actual policies and actions undertaken by his administration (Cohen 2017). For example, shortly following release of the NSS, the Republican-controlled Congress passed tax legislation (enthusiastically embraced by the President) that, according to independent estimates, would be likely to add more than \$1 trillion to the US national debt over the coming decade (Patel and Parlapiano 2017; Joint Committee on Taxation 2017). According to the NSS, however, the current \$20 trillion debt “presents a grave threat to America’s long-term prosperity and, by extension, its national security” (White House 2017z). Even Republican-leaning commentators pointed to disconnects between the NSS praise for the “indispensable” role of American diplomacy while the administration has proposed a 30 percent cut in funding for the Department of State (Schake 2017;

³⁴ The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 mandated the submission of the NSS. The principal drafters are staff members of the National Security Council (NSC), working under the direction of the President’s National Security Advisor, a position now held by Army Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster.

Inboden 2018). Similarly, the NSS acknowledges the growing cyber threats to American political, economic and security interests, and – in a separate chapter – Russian “interference in the domestic political affairs of countries around the world,” but carefully omits any explicit linkage between the two.

According to its congressional mandate, the forthcoming NDS should describe the projected threat environment and the defence department’s strategy for countering those threats; priority missions and planning scenarios to execute them; the size, posture and non-nuclear capabilities of the military forces; and the necessary investment framework to execute the strategy over a five-year period. The Pentagon will submit the strategy to the appropriate congressional committees in a classified form, with an unclassified summary released to the public. The classified nature of the report might facilitate Secretary of Defense James Mattis’ stated intention to challenge the *status quo* and to make hard choices among readiness, investment, force structure and operational commitments.

In recent months, Mattis and Marine General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have previewed their thinking on the threat environment in regions vital to US security.³⁵

In Europe, they see a “resurgent and more aggressive” Russia, which is investing in capabilities designed to limit the US ability to project power into Europe, and thereby meet its commitments to NATO. These Russian capabilities range from anti-access/area denial (A2AD) tools – including long-range strike platforms, extended air defences, and electronic warfare – to the modernisation and deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Russia’s reported deployment, in December 2016, of a new nuclear-capable ground-launched cruise missile in violation of the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, together with various military activities in the northern European region and in Syria have heightened Pentagon concerns about Moscow’s intentions and appetite for risk-taking.

In Asia, North Korea has moved to the top of the Pentagon’s list of near-term threats for several reasons: its tests of prototype intercontinental-range ballistic missiles in July 2017; the detonation two months later of its largest nuclear device to date; and reports (attributed to US intelligence) that it might be closer than previously assessed to mounting a nuclear warhead on ballistic missiles capable of reaching Hawaii, Alaska and the US territory of Guam. The Pentagon leadership is also concerned about an assertive China, which is challenging international norms on the freedom of navigation (especially in the South China Sea) and intimidating nations on its periphery. China’s extensive programmes to modernise and expand its strategic arsenal and conventional (including A2AD) capabilities are seen as an integral part of Beijing’s strategy to limit US power projection and its ability to meet alliance commitments in the Pacific. Indeed, as Dunford told a Senate panel in September: “China probably poses the greatest threat to our nation by about 2025” (quoted in Hincks 2017).

Across the Middle East, North Africa and Southwest Asia (especially, Afghanistan and Pakistan), Mattis and Dunford highlight “extremists” or “violent extremist organizations” such as ISIS and al Qaeda as a serious, long-term threat to US partners in those regions, European allies, and potentially the American homeland. At the same time, they avoid using descriptors such as “radical Islamic extremists” favoured by the White House. They cite Iran’s support for proxies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, as well as its improving ballistic-missile, cyber and cruise-missile capabilities as a growing threat to regional security and American interests. Although

³⁵ The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military adviser to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the NSC.

they reportedly opposed Trump's initial plans to withdraw from the 2015 multilateral agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme, they later acquiesced in his decision to seek its renegotiation (see Chapter 3).

Mattis and Dunford also point to global trends that pose an increasing risk to US forces. According to their analysis, although the US military maintained either uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain – air, land, maritime, space and cyber – for decades, it now finds itself challenged in all of them. In addition, many of the rapid technological changes that the US military will depend upon in the future – including advanced computing, big data analytics, artificial intelligence and robotics – emanate from the commercial sector. This means that, in many instances, state and non-state adversaries might have increased access to technologies that they can employ to degrade US advantages.

Even if Mattis and Dunford adopt a somewhat more strident and urgent tone than projected by the Obama administration, their description of the evolving threat environment does not differ radically in substance. Hence, in terms of its overarching objectives, the forthcoming NDS is likely to resemble the Pentagon's last major strategic report, the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (US Department of Defense 2014). That document emphasises the need to deter and defeat any attack on the US homeland; to continue with a strong US commitment to shaping world events so as to deter and prevent conflict, while assuring allies and partners of that commitment; and to maintain armed forces with the capability to deter acts of aggression and defeat adversaries in one or more operational theatres. If this analysis proves correct, one might anticipate a degree of continuity in the NDS's approach to policy.

For example, despite the President's scolding of NATO allies on defence spending and his six-month wait before explicitly reaffirming his commitment to the collective defence provision (Article 5) of the NATO Treaty, Mattis and Dunford have consistently made the case for maintaining strong transatlantic defence bonds and a "rock solid" US commitment to NATO and Article 5. The new NSS specifically confirms this view. The NDS, therefore, could be expected to endorse efforts – initiated by the Obama administration following Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine – to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities: these include the enhanced US forward presence in Poland, the Baltic states and Romania, and the further pre-positioning of equipment to support the rapid deployment of additional forces, if necessary, from the United States. Although Mattis and Dunford do not use the "third offset" terminology of the last administration, they do support further US and NATO efforts to counter Russia's A2AD capabilities.³⁶ As Mattis stated: "While willing to engage diplomatically, we are going to have to confront Russia when it comes to areas where they attack us, whether it be with cyber, or they try to change borders using armed force" (quoted in CBS News 2017).

Similarly, without reference to "rebalance" – the Obama administration's descriptor for paying greater attention to the Asia-Pacific region – Mattis appears to differ very little from his immediate predecessors in his overall approach. Thus, while welcoming China's economic development, he warns against its militarisation of islands in the South China Sea, and any unilateral changes to the *status quo*. He has also pledged to strengthen longstanding US bilateral alliances (with Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines), and to forge newer defence-cooperation partnerships (with India and Vietnam, for example). As a result, the new NDS is likely to follow through on the Obama administration's plan to assign 60 per cent of US Navy ships, 55 per cent of Army forces, two-thirds of Marine forces and (in the near future) 60 per cent of US overseas tactical aviation assets to the Asia-Pacific region.

³⁶ For an excellent discussion of the "third offset strategy," see Hicks et al. (2017).

Regarding North Korea, Mattis and Dunford warn that US patience has its limits, and a military conflict would have disastrous consequences for the Kim Jong-un regime. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that US allies (especially South Korea and Japan) and US forces in the region are vulnerable to North Korean conventional, chemical and, potentially, nuclear weapons. Hence, they have avoided Trump's most provocative rhetoric, emphasising that the best approach is through diplomatic and economic pressure, while strengthening missile-defence co-operation with South Korea and Japan.

If a military conflict with North Korea were to appear imminent, additional US forces and support assets would be deployed to the region. This, in turn, would force difficult decisions by the Pentagon on whether, and if so how to draw such reinforcements from US-based units and/or regional combatant commands, such as the European Command and the Central Command. The unclassified version of the NDS would not include detailed analyses of potential conflict scenarios and associated risks. However, it might point to the volatile situation on the Korean peninsula as a reason why a future US defence strategy, force structure and global posture should be tailored to the possible need to fight and win two major regional wars simultaneously.³⁷

In some respects, the Pentagon's preferred strategy for dealing with ISIS resembles the Obama administration's approach (often ridiculed by then candidate Trump) to "degrade and destroy" the terrorist organisation and its affiliates through a US-led anti-ISIS coalition comprising some European allies and partners, with participation and support from largely Sunni Arab states in the region. The NDS almost certainly will not suggest the reintroduction of thousands of US combat forces into the Middle East. However, Mattis has promised an "accelerated and reinforced" effort and a shift from "attrition" to "annihilation" tactics. Based on its budget submissions for the fiscal year 2018, the Pentagon envisages a slight increase in funding to train and equip Iraqi government, Kurdish Peshmerga, and Syrian opposition forces. Several thousand US military advisors will probably remain forward deployed with (or near to) the combat forces they support in Iraq, with additional US military personnel – approximately 2,000 according to recent Pentagon statements – in Syria. Notwithstanding the aforementioned cruise-missile strike last April, US military efforts in Syria are likely to remain heavily weighted to combatting ISIS rather than the Syrian regime.

In this context, the Pentagon apparently remains sceptical regarding the possibility of extensive military cooperation with Russia in Syria. After all, Moscow and Washington are backing different sides in the conflict, and the US military and its coalition partners are very critical of Russian military tactics that produce high civilian casualties. Still, the NDS will probably support efforts, where possible, to avoid a direct US-Russian confrontation through military-to-military lines of communication. Elsewhere in the region, the NDS is likely to stress the importance of enhanced defence cooperation (including through military sales) with Israel and those Arab states that are presumed to be reliable partners in fighting terrorism and containing Iran.

Regarding South Asia, the NDS will not unveil any significant change from the President's August 2017 statement, which promised a "conditions-based" approach to the size and timing of the US troop presence in Afghanistan; increased pressure on Pakistan to stop the "harbouring of militants and terrorists"; and the further development of a US "strategic partnership"

³⁷ Critics of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review argued that its force-sizing construct meant that US forces could not simultaneously fight and defeat aggressors in two major regional conflicts. The QDR language reads: "If deterrence fails at any given time, US forces will be capable of defeating a regional adversary in a large-scale multi-phased campaign, and denying the objectives of – or imposing unacceptable costs on – a second aggressor in another region" (US Department of Defense 2014).

with India (White House 2017u). Some 4,000 US soldiers reportedly will join the 11,000 currently deployed in Afghanistan. Most will provide increased training and mentoring to Afghan forces, putting some Americans in closer proximity to direct combat with the Taliban.

5.3 Nuclear forces and missile defence

In testimony to congressional panels and other public statements, Mattis listed the maintenance of a safe, secure and reliable nuclear deterrent at the top of the Pentagon's priorities to build a "more lethal force". In language similar to that of his predecessors, he argued that nuclear weapons were fundamental to US national security in providing a deterrent against aggression (either nuclear or non-nuclear) aimed at the United States and/or its allies; underpinning the US ability to deploy conventional forces worldwide; and, by extending deterrence to allies, dissuading them from developing their own nuclear weapons. Before assuming his cabinet post, he questioned whether the United States needed to retain a land-based inter-continental ballistic missile force as part of its strategic triad, along with submarine-launched ballistic missiles and long-range air-launched cruise missiles delivered by strategic bombers. More recently, he has acknowledged his intent to retain and modernise all three legs of the triad, thereby maintaining a continuity of approach with the four previous post-Cold War administrations.

Nevertheless, prominent current and former senior defence officials have pointed to changes in the strategic environment that the forthcoming NPR will need to take into account. For example, given the nature of Russia's security policy since early 2014, the characterisation of relations set out in the Obama administration's 2010 NPR – "Russia and the United States are no longer adversaries, and prospects for military confrontation have declined dramatically" – is no longer accurate (US Department of Defense 2010). Moreover, Russia proved unwilling to engage in the US proposal to negotiate an additional one-third cut in strategic arsenals linked with transparency measures and eventual reductions in non-strategic nuclear weapons, or to address US concerns regarding Russia's violation of the INF treaty.

Elsewhere, North Korea has pressed ahead with its nuclear build-up, prompting calls from some South Korean parliamentarians for the deployment of US non-strategic nuclear weapons on their territory to strengthen their deterrent effect. China has deflected US proposals for "strategic stability" talks, which would include discussion on transparency measures related to nuclear doctrines and postures. In addition, if the decision Trump made in October regarding the JCPOA eventually leads to the collapse of the agreement, Iran would most likely resume its pre-2015 activities, possibly bringing it to within a few months of fabricating a nuclear weapon.

To date, defence officials have given little public indication of how their NPR analyses and recommendations are shaping up. However, there are signs that significant policy shifts are under consideration.

For instance, it is suggested in a non-government think-tank report published in May 2017, some of whose authors are now involved in the NPR process, that the "expectation of a more benign nuclear threat environment embedded in previous nuclear (posture) reviews [...] should not serve as a planning assumption for the new NPR" (Payne and Foster 2017, 3; see also Michel 2017a). It further proposes several new approaches that, if adopted, would prove controversial. These include explicitly setting the deterrence of aggression and the assurance of allies as the priority goals of US nuclear policy, thereby pushing non-proliferation lower

down the agenda; rejecting any “minimalist” approach to determining the size of the US arsenal and leaving the door open to a possible expansion; incorporating allies in eastern Europe into NATO arrangements for the deployment of “dual capable aircraft” (DCA); and extending US DCA deployments to bases in Japan and South Korea.³⁸

Although the report does not rule out further arms-control agreements with Russia, its authors would set a very high bar for entering into new negotiations. For example, they would make future talks conditional on Russia’s return to compliance with the INF Treaty, the resolution of US questions regarding Russia’s compliance with the 2010 “New START” treaty on strategic arms reductions, and the fulfilling of political commitments to reduce non-strategic nuclear arsenals and delivery systems made by Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin in the early 1990s.

The capabilities and posture of US missile defences are similarly under review, but with little official comment on any progress. Again, there are elements of continuity. Trump-administration officials, like their predecessors, have highlighted the growing threat to US allies, regional partners and, potentially, the US homeland from the ballistic-missile programmes of North Korea and Iran. They emphasise the fact that North Korea has tested, albeit with mixed results, a variety of missile types from land, road-mobile and submarine-based platforms, while Iran reportedly holds the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the Middle East, with the ability to strike targets throughout the region and into south-eastern Europe. For the most part, they also stress the need to improve US capabilities (such as the ground-based interceptors) to defend the US homeland against the evolving but limited North Korean ballistic-missile threat. To date, US cooperation with Japan and South Korea to defend their territory against ballistic-missile attack has also focused on the North Korean threat, whereas cooperation with NATO allies has focused on the Iranian threat (see Harvey 2017).

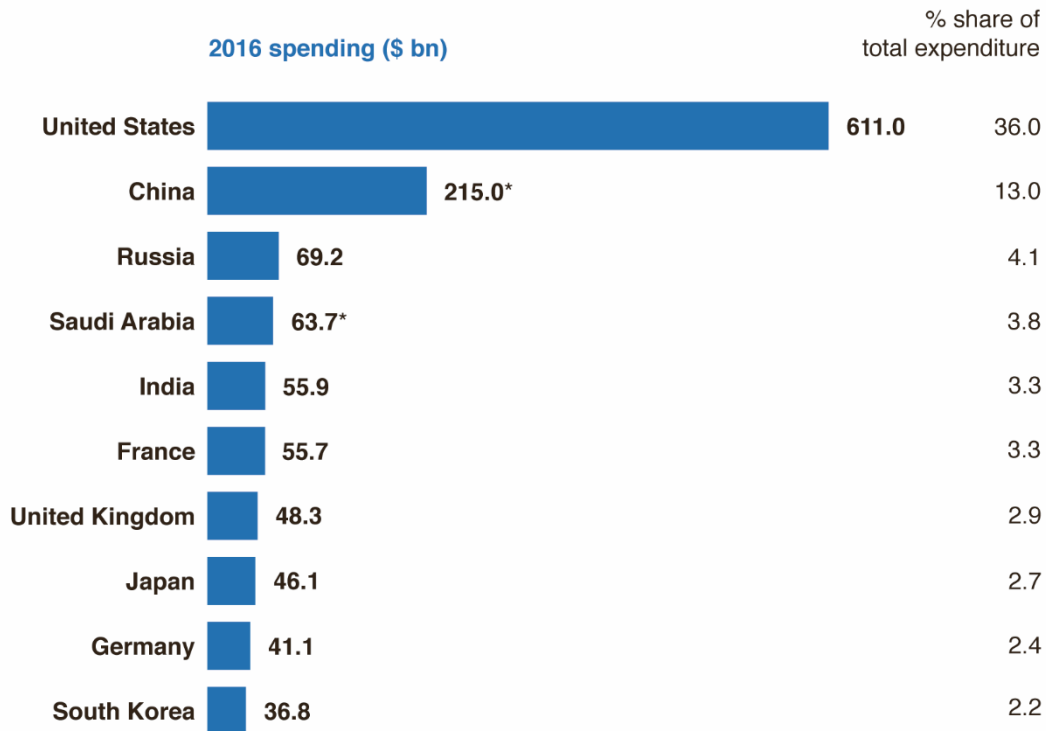
However, in what appears to be a subtle change from the Obama administration, US defence officials are now more likely to draw attention to Russian and Chinese ballistic-missile and advanced cruise-missile developments that could put US as well as regional targets at risk. It is unclear if this presages a shift in US strategy, which might be unveiled in the MDR, towards building defences against those Russian and Chinese offensive capabilities. If such a shift were to occur, it would doubtless increase tensions between Washington on the one hand, and Moscow and Beijing on the other. Indeed, the latter have frequently claimed that US missile defence cooperation with its European and Asian allies is essentially a mask concealing their efforts to degrade the Russian and Chinese deterrents.

5.4 Fiscal constraints and the prioritisation of capabilities

The United States has been the world’s leading military power for years, its defence expenditure outstripping that of other great powers by a wide margin (see Figure 7). Trump promised soon after his inauguration to put in place “one of the largest increases in national defense spending in American history” (quoted in Greenberg 2017). This apparently reflected his political messaging calculations – specifically, his desire to underscore differences with the previous administration – rather than a considered analysis of US capability requirements. Still, even some prominent experts who served in the Obama administration have welcomed the prospect of additional resources for the Pentagon. The emerging debate will be over how much and for what purposes.

³⁸ DCA are combat aircraft capable of delivering conventional and nuclear weapons.

Figure 7: World military spending in 2016



* Estimate

Source: McCarthy, L. (2017)

The stakes in this debate are enormous, given that defence spending represents approximately one-sixth of all federal spending, or about three per cent of GDP (Congressional Budget Office 2017). In May 2017, Congress approved a total of \$586 billion in spending for the fiscal year (FY) 2017, which represents a \$6 billion increase over the 2016 figure approved by the Obama administration. As part of a deal between the President and Democratic congressional leaders in September 2017 to avoid a government shutdown, defence spending for at least the first quarter of FY 2018 was capped at the FY 2017 level, leaving major new Pentagon programmes proposed by the administration without funding. In November 2017, Congress passed a defence authorisation bill totalling \$700 billion for FY 2018, a significant increase over the Trump administration’s request of \$639 billion. As part of a short-term budget compromise to prevent a partial federal-government shutdown on the eve of Christmas, the Pentagon received an extra \$4.7 billion (above the FY 2017 cap) for missile-defence and ship-repair programmes. However, the real battle over how much money the Pentagon actually receives will be decided when Congress debates the FY 2018 defence appropriation bill beginning in early January 2018.

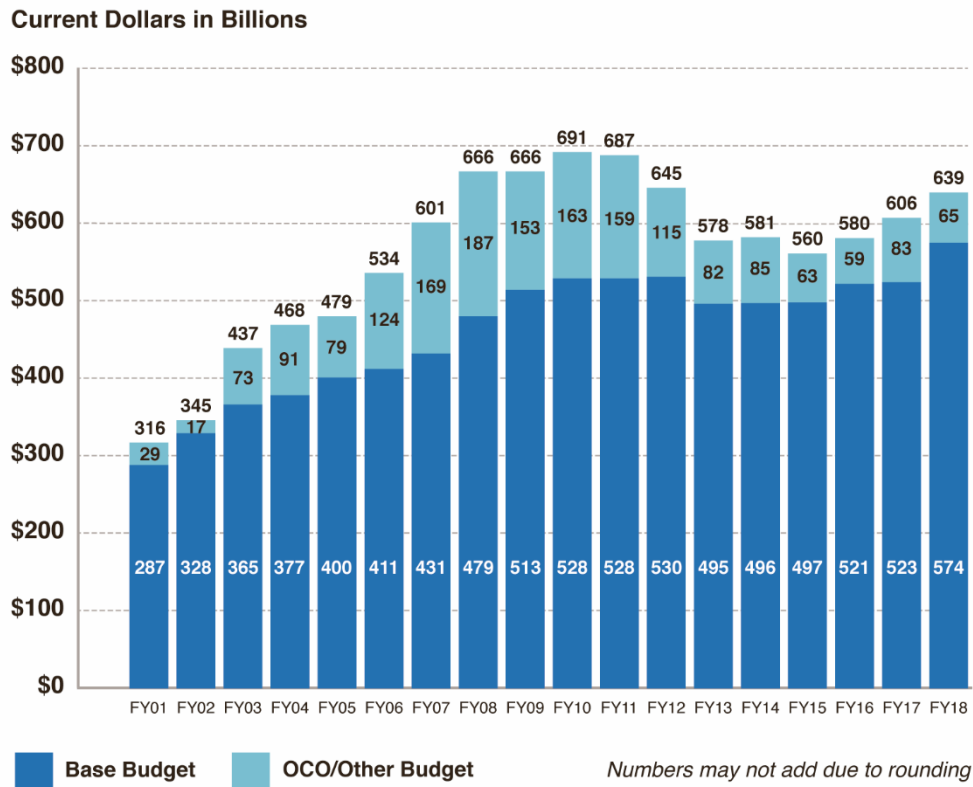
Hence, the stage is set for what promises to be a protracted and contentious fight in Congress. Republican “deficit hawks,” who are committed to reducing overall federal-government spending, are uncomfortable with proposals by fellow Republicans (known as “security hawks”) to appropriate up to \$650 billion or more for defence – or \$70 billion more than statutory budget caps enacted in 2011. On the Democratic side of the aisle, liberal Democrats who oppose any increase in defence spending will be at odds with moderates in their party willing to accept a smaller increase than the Republican “security hawks” want. However, the lion’s share of

Democratic members are likely to vote against additional defence spending if it is not matched by increases in spending on domestic programmes such as health care and infrastructure. Trump (and most of the congressional Republicans) staunchly oppose the former, and the chances of a bipartisan compromise on infrastructure legislation appear to be fading, in part due to the President's insistence on including funding for building a wall along the US-Mexican border. The longer Congress is unable to resolve these differences, the greater the chances will be of a government shut down in early 2018 and a concomitant freeze on substantially increased defence spending.

Although less publicly, the debates on how to allocate defence spending, which will take place within the Trump administration and between the administration and Congress, will probably be just as spirited. Given the size of the defence budget and the complexity of modern defence systems, it is very difficult to introduce radical changes in direction and to obtain quick results. Moreover, defence strategists must constantly seek a balance among the oft-competing priorities inherent in preparing for current or imminent operations, investing to meet anticipated future needs, and getting the associated force structure right. Meanwhile, members of Congress keep a close eye on the effects of defence spending on their constituencies. Hence a substantial number of members in both parties, for example, appear to oppose the Pentagon's desire to close or consolidate unnecessary basing structures in the United States and redirect the savings – about \$2 billion annually, according to the Pentagon – to higher-priority readiness or investment needs.

Much of the FY 2017 and proposed FY 2018 spending increases will be devoted to improving war-fighting readiness in the near term – such as in the areas of training, equipment, maintenance and munitions. They will also help to fund a modest augmentation (by several thousand personnel) in active-duty military ranks, which currently total about 1.3 million soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines. If approved along the lines proposed by the administration, the FY 2018 budget will also include enhancements to US power-projection capabilities in the air and maritime domains. Missile-defence programmes would receive a modest increase in funding, mostly for implementing existing plans (such as the deployment of missile defences in Poland), maintaining the 44 ground-based interceptors currently deployed in Alaska and California, and upgrading various sensor capabilities.

Figure 8: US defence spending during the 2000s



Source: US Department of Defence (2017)

Over the longer term, however, the Trump administration will face serious challenges to its promise to “rebuild” the armed forces. In addition to renewing strategic delivery systems, for example, the NPR is likely to endorse the modernising of the DCA; making safety and reliability improvements to certain types of nuclear warheads; enhancing command, control and communications systems involved in detecting attacks and relaying orders regarding the deployment and/or possible use of weapons; and sustaining the extensive nuclear-weapons laboratories, production and dismantlement facilities. According to government estimates, the price tag of these programmes over the next decade will range from \$340-\$400 billion, or about six per cent (versus three per cent currently) of the total defence budget in this period. Although manageable, the large increase for nuclear programmes would put more stress on resources for conventional weaponry, investment and force structure.

Trump’s appetite for other major defence investments may also be unaffordable. In March 2017, he promised to expand the Navy’s fleet from 275 to 350 ships, which would represent the largest proposed growth since the early 1980s. As the CBO pointed out in January 2017, however, the Navy’s mid-2016 plan to number 308 ships by 2021 came with an estimated price tag of around \$20 billion annually for new ship construction – more than one-third more than the inflation-adjusted average spent on shipbuilding in recent decades. A notional fleet of 350 ships would cost around \$25 billion annually for new ships – around 60 per cent above the historical average, according to the CBO. Meanwhile, the Air Force is seeking to boost funding for its top three priorities: the further production and deployment of F-35 combat aircraft; the development of a new B-21 strategic bomber; and the acquisition of new KC-46 aerial tankers.

Moreover, the purchase of platforms and weapon systems is only part of the story. The Pentagon will seek to maintain a reasonable margin of US technological superiority through innovation projects such as unmanned aerial and submarine vehicles, directed-energy weapons, and new space- and seabed-based sensors. Successful innovation initiatives will require that technology and resources be matched with the “best and the brightest” individuals drawn to military and civilian government service – an effort that is not helped by the President’s derisive references to the federal workforce.

In some instances, US defence innovation benefits from a willingness to work closely with allies and partners with special skills. However, the Trump administration’s “Buy American” mantra, if widely applied to defence research, development and acquisition programmes, would impede such international cooperation. Although imperfect, the previous administration’s efforts to improve defence-industry relations with selected allies and partners yielded technological, cost and political dividends for both sides. The stated policy objective of the President’s July 2017 Executive Order – that the United States “must maintain a manufacturing and defence industrial base and supply chains” capable of providing “goods critical to national security” – might seem unobjectionable (White House 2017v). However, broad definitions of materials and capabilities deemed necessary for national security purposes, combined with the administration’s emphasis on returning manufacturing jobs to the United States, could set the stage for further constraints on the possibility for non-US entities to compete for Pentagon contracts.

5.5 Transatlantic trends and uncertainties

Europe’s deep and complex defence relationships with the United States have never been problem-free. In recent decades, even American presidents who enjoyed broad popularity across the Old Continent were, on occasion, targets of stiff criticism from European officials and non-government security analysts. Some faulted Bill Clinton, for example, for his early reluctance to engage American power to stop the Bosnian war. Others blamed Obama’s decision not to launch military strikes against Syria (after warning that its use of chemical weapons would cross a “red line”) as a “failure of leadership”. Still, the frequency and degree of loose rhetoric emanating from the current resident of the White House, combined with occasional policy decisions showing disregard for the views and interests of allies, leaves many Europeans understandably worried. As one unnamed diplomat in Washington recently confided to *The Washington Post*: “[t]he idea that he [President Trump] would inform himself, and things would change, is no longer operative” (quoted in DeYoung and Jaffe 2017).

To better anticipate how crosscurrents of US policies and/or actions might affect transatlantic defence relationship, it would be useful to examine its three dimensions: first, the bilateral and multilateral ties primarily related to US engagement in Europe; second, the effects on Europe of the US defence strategy vis-à-vis Russia; and finally, how European defence structures and interests might be shaped by US actions in other regions, especially in the Asia-Pacific and the broader Middle East.

Of these, the first dimension appears the most stable. With the President now on record – albeit belatedly – as committed to upholding the NATO Treaty’s collective defence provision, the United States and its allies have turned their attention to the practical tasks at hand. For NATO, these include continuing the implementation and longer-term sustainment of deterrence and defence measures in the Baltic States, Poland and Romania; improving cooperation on capacity-building and interoperability; and deepening a range of activities (from consultations to exercises) with Enhanced Operational Partners, notably Finland and Sweden,

and the EU. On the bilateral track, which complements US work within the Alliance, Mattis reaffirmed the longstanding patterns of US cooperation with individual allies, as well as the more recent defence-cooperation agreements (covering military training, information sharing and research) with Finland and Sweden.

Some areas of friction are likely to persist or expand, however. The Trump administration in general, and the President in particular, are unlikely to relax their insistence that allies increase defence spending (and do so at a faster pace) to reach the NATO-agreed target of two per cent of GDP. European allies, for their part, will closely examine the results of the NPR and MDR, especially any suggestions to expand NATO's nuclear-sharing arrangements to include DCA capabilities for Eastern European allies and/or to introduce capabilities to NATO missile-defence systems directed against Russian ballistic and cruise missiles. Meanwhile, Washington and some of its closest allies find themselves at odds on how to deal with Turkey, a NATO member that appears increasingly determined to go its own way on issues ranging from involvement in Syria to its recent purchase of a Russian air-defence system. In addition, the United States and its European allies and partners might find themselves increasingly at odds over industrial and technology-sharing issues, given the growing protectionist sentiments on both sides of the Atlantic.

On the second dimension, there is a strong possibility that a downward trend in the US-Russia relationship will have secondary effects on European security interests. For example, the US decision in late December to approve the first-ever sale of lethal defensive weapons to Ukraine is certain to rile Russia: President Putin suggested in September that such an action might prompt Russia to increase its military assistance to Ukrainian separatists. Moscow might also retaliate by suspending its participation in the "Minsk process". Without defending the Russians, Germany and France, who remain committed to the Minsk process, may well consider the US action counterproductive. A number of EU member states might even view the US action as provocative, and argue for a relaxation or the abandonment of economic and financial sanctions on Russia.

Russia will also closely examine the NPR and the MDR, and its reaction is likely to be highly critical of both. President Vladimir Putin reportedly raised the possibility, in a January 2017 phone call with Trump, of extending the 2010 New START agreement beyond its 2021 expiration date. Hence, he would probably respond harshly to any suggestion in the NPR to link an extension to Russian compliance with other arms-control treaties.³⁹ A collapse of New START would not directly affect the independent UK and French nuclear systems – neither country participates in the strategic arms talks – but the absence of any arms-control process could strengthen the appeal of the "nuclear ban" movement across Europe. Similarly, having claimed for years that US missile defences aim to degrade the Russian deterrent (rather than defend against a potential North Korean or Iranian threat), Russian leaders would seize on any indication of such a shift in US strategy to step up efforts to contain or reverse US missile defences deployed in Europe.

With regard to the third dimension, the US defence posture and operations outside Europe may also have far-reaching ramifications for European interests. For example, the current tense standoff involving the Korean Peninsula could unravel in a number of ways. A major military clash would produce catastrophic loss of life and injuries on both sides of the Demilitarized Zone, including thousands of foreign nationals in the south. The second- and third-order consequences of a failure of deterrence in Korea are hard to predict – particularly if the

³⁹ During his presidential campaign, Trump dismissed the 2010 New START nuclear arms reduction treaty with Russia as a "one-sided deal".

conflict escalated to the use of nuclear weapons – but they would probably be dramatic. They might include, for example: a serious deterioration in US-China and US-Russia relations; the reappraisal of US bilateral defence ties to South Korea and Japan (in the event that those countries blamed US actions, at least in part, for precipitating the war); and a significant transfer of US military capabilities from Europe to meet more urgent war-fighting and stabilisation needs in northeast Asia.

In South Asia, failure by the United States and its NATO allies and partners to stabilise and, eventually, improve the security situation in Afghanistan would be a serious setback for the Alliance. At a minimum, it would provoke a debilitating round of recriminations between the United States and Europe over “who lost Afghanistan”, making it exceedingly difficult to work together on risky out-of-area operations for many years to come. At worst, it would allow terrorist networks once again to use Afghanistan as a base from which to launch attacks against European and US interests in the region and, potentially, their homelands.

Across the broader Middle East, US decisions affect European security interests in multiple areas. For example, French, British and German negotiators worked hard with their American counterparts to reach a nuclear deal with Iran based on shared strategic concerns over that country’s progress towards acquiring a nuclear weapon. If Europeans came to view the Trump administration as responsible for the deal’s collapse, their future cooperation with the United States on counter-proliferation would be jeopardised. Moreover, European direct or indirect assistance in any US military intervention against Iran would be highly unlikely. Similarly, although many Europeans share US concerns about the threats posed by violent extremism across the region, they would find it increasingly difficult to participate in US-led military coalitions if Washington appeared to be focused on “killing terrorists” and disinterested in diplomatic solutions. Widespread opposition in Europe to the Trump administration’s decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem might be a harbinger of a deeper transatlantic split over Middle East policy affecting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

5.6 Conclusion

Despite the potential for policy differences and adverse externalities assessed above, worst-case scenarios in any of the three dimensions of the transatlantic defence relationship are not preordained. The current occupant of the White House is likely to remain unpredictable, prone to favouring a transactional approach over the constraints of multilateral alliances, and more enthralled with hard power (at least brandishing it, if not its actual use) than with soft power tools, including patient diplomacy. To date, he has not been tested in a major, imminent crisis – although a military conflict with North Korea could erupt with little warning.

First, the good news: despite occasional deep divisions, from the 1956 Suez crisis to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the underlying fabric of transatlantic defence relations has grown stronger and more resilient. Indeed, over the past decade or so, the dominant trend among US defence strategists and military commanders – especially in light of lessons learned from Afghanistan and Iraq – has been to formulate and implement policies with allies and partners in mind. As Secretary of Defence Mattis put it in a recent speech: “Nations with allies thrive, and those without allies decline. It’s that simple [...]. We must be willing to do more than to listen to our allies. We must be willing to be persuaded by them [...]. Not all the good ideas come from the nation with the most aircraft carriers” (Mattis 2017a).

Additional good news: for their part, European allies and partners still command substantial defence and military resources, and have the potential – individually and collectively – to do

more, if the political will is there. There is a growing understanding, among NATO allies as well as partners such as Finland and Sweden, that Russia's more assertive – even aggressive (as in Ukraine) – behaviour challenges the European security order in a way that cannot be ignored. A strong US link to Europe will remain important for stability on the “old continent”. By following through on their commitments – nationally, and within NATO and the EU – Europeans will help to contain the impulse for unilateral decisions and actions that remains in parts of the US national-security complex.

However, there is also more worrying news. In many respects, Trump seems out of step with key national-security figures in his own administration, as well as with mainstream opinion within the broader defence and foreign-policy establishment across both political parties. Moreover, this Commander in Chief is likely to remain in office for at least three more years. The Constitution entrusts him with broad discretion in the conduct of foreign and defence affairs, and the checks-and-balances that can hamstring a president's domestic agenda are generally weaker – and slower to take effect – when it comes to defence affairs writ large, and crisis management in particular.

The renowned British wartime leader Sir Winston Churchill famously quipped: “You can always count on the Americans to do the right thing, after they have exhausted all other possibilities”. The Trump administration's defence policy will test whether Sir Winston's back-handed compliment still applies.

PART III: MULTILATERAL GOVERNANCE

6. The uncertain future of the liberal international order

- The Trump administration's "America First" policy agenda may denote a newfound unwillingness on the part of the US to maintain its traditional role as the leading proponent of the post-World War II liberal international order.
- Donald Trump's rise to the presidency is, in part, a symptom of the longer-term internal and external challenges faced by the current order, which include the "return of geopolitics", the negative externalities of economic globalisation and the rise of nationalist populist movements in the West.
- The first year of the Trump presidency has seen America challenge parts of the institutional, normative and economic foundations of the liberal international order. In the security sphere America's espousal of its commitments looks to remain firmer, although it will continue to press for more equal burden-sharing from allies and partners.
- America's willingness to maintain sustained support for all key components of the present order remains essential. A reassertion of American commitment could lead to the continuation or renegotiation of the current order. An American retreat, on the other hand, would increase the likelihood of great power or civilizational competition, the birth of opposing power blocks or a rising China filling the leadership vacuum.

6.1 Introduction

Days before Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2017, the *Financial Times* painted a gloomy picture of the potential metamorphosis of "Pax Americana [...] into a return to the Hobbesian world of great power conflict" (Stephens 2017). The will to sustain American leadership of the rule-based liberal international order – arguably a key part of US long-term global engagement and President Obama's grand-strategic objective – appeared to have been replaced with a rejection of the order's foundational values and institutions.

According to critics, the current administration's "America First" policy agenda exhibits a manifest unwillingness on the part of the US to aspire to American political leadership of the liberal international order. At the same time, however, the pledge to "Make America Great Again", and the administration's plans to increase the defence budget, lead to the expectation that, in the military sphere, the material foundations of American hegemony will remain intact. In this sense, inherent in the Trump presidency is the potential of a partial retreat by the US from its global leadership role in the current order.

This chapter investigates the uncertain future of the liberal international order and the internal and external challenges that it currently faces. From a longer-term perspective, the focus then turns to potential world-order trajectories in light of the current political situation in America and globally.

6.2 The foundations of the liberal international order

In broad terms, an international order is "the body of rules, norms and institutions that govern relations among key players in the international environment" (Brands 2016, 2). As such, it

has normative, institutional, economic and security components. The liberal international order (also sometimes called the liberal rule-based order) evolved in the aftermath of the Second World War. It was constructed upon a body of multilateral institutions, including the UN, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and later the European Community. Within these bodies, liberal values such as human rights, representative government, non-aggression, self-determination and the peaceful settlement of disputes were meant to flourish. The institutions also fostered the economic leitmotifs of the order, namely free trade and market-based solutions. In addition, security arrangements, most notably NATO and the US-Japan alliance, along with various arms-control agreements that emerged later, constituted a foundation that allowed other components of the order to bloom (Brands 2016, 2).

As the superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union became an entrenched fact of global life in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the US assumed the mantle of leader of the liberal international order. It became, in effect, a *liberal hegemon*, and the order's fate became synonymous with the fate of its superpower guarantor (Ikenberry 1998, 65).

The logic underpinning the liberal international order was simple: the US "provided global public goods such as freer trade and freedom of the seas and weaker states were given institutional access to the exercise of US power" (Nye 2017, 11). This grand bargain produced security and economic gains for both the US and its partners. In short, by agreeing to institutional bargains that tied its hands to an extent – by exercising what has been termed "strategic restraint" to reduce other states' fear of American power (Ikenberry 1998) – the United States created an orbit of friendly states that were willing to grant it "geopolitical access". In return, its partners were given security guarantees. Americans also enjoyed the prosperity gains attributable to increasingly uninhibited global trade, while other countries were given access to the burgeoning markets of the US (Ikenberry 2017, 4; Brands 2016, 2).

Neither the US nor its allies and partners had reason to upend an order that not only accrued benefits to all involved, but also inhibited the unrestrained exercise of power on the part of the hegemon. In effect, US willingness to act as a relatively "benevolent hegemon" within the liberal international order has made its unrivalled power more bearable for others (Brooks 2012; Walt 2002, 139). However, such "benevolence" did not always equate with non-coercive behaviour. This was the case especially with regard to combatting the perceived threat of Communism in the developing world and, later, in the battle against transnational terrorism.

The US also assumed normative leadership of the liberal international order by maintaining political commitment to its norms, values and institutions, oftentimes at the cost of short-term exigencies (Ikenberry 1998; 2008, 9).⁴⁰ This liberal rule-based order has become increasingly robust and durable over the decades as its institutional webs have grown. In the meantime, key constitutive norms of the post-Second World War order have come to be regarded as legitimate in their own right: they "warrant respect and compliance for more than self-interested reasons, for reasons of their normative standing" (Reus-Smit 2007, 193). These institutions and norms play a dual function for the hegemon. They lend authority to its dominance, but also function as constraints on its behaviour. For other states, they provide a metric for evaluating the legitimacy of the hegemon's conduct, and offer the normative ammunition with which to challenge it (Krisch 2005).

Still, in spite of its robustness, the post-World War II liberal international order should not be equated with the international system or the world order writ large. In fact, although universal

⁴⁰ Of course, the US has never been wholly consistent in living up to its promoted values (Finnemore 2009; Sinkkonen 2015).

in aspiration, the liberal rule-based order has never been universal in scope. This was certainly the case during the Cold War, when it functioned as a bulwark against the spread of Communism for its Western core. Although the scope of the liberal international order gradually expanded during the Cold War, and then with a bang in the 1990s, to this day some states remain on the fringes. Donald Trump's labelled rogues North Korea, Iran and Syria would qualify as states that have either been pushed to the outside or have chosen to remain there (White House 2017k).

For America, the commitment to lead, foster and extend the liberal international order has been a grand-strategic mainstay since the aftermath of the Second World War. This fundamental consensus has remained intact regardless of the different approaches that presidential administrations have taken to achieve these aims (Brands 2016; Dueck 2006). It has also endured in spite of the changing structural power dynamics in the global system. In fact, the commitment has not been a function merely of strategic imperatives, but also of factors tied to America's political culture. At the heart of these is the widely held belief in the desirability of promoting the liberal democratic values that are central to the American creed (see Chapter 2).

6.3 Mounting challenges to the sustainability of the liberal rule-based order

Nowadays there is considerable agreement among scholars of world politics that the liberal international order is in crisis mode, or at the very least is facing challenging times. One interpretation is that the crisis began at the moment of the order's greatest success, in other words the disappearance of bipolarity, the balance of power that had persisted between the US and the Soviet Union since the late 1940s (Ikenberry 2015). The international system transitioned to unipolarity at the end of the Cold War, when the United States was dominant in all spheres of power, be it military, economic or "soft" (Wohlforth 1999). In fact, the US had become so powerful that the incentive to restrain itself weakened considerably, as did the ability of other states to trust it not to use its acquired position to pursue narrow self-interests without taking into account the views and concerns of allies and partners (see Kydd 2005). The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, undertaken without explicit United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorisation, appeared to confirm such fears as warranted.

Related to this, the deepening of the global human-rights regime and the emerging notion of the responsibility to protect (R2P) has led to a situation in which sovereignty – the foundational norm of the international order of the state-based system since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 – has become increasingly conditional.⁴¹ This is most obvious in the case of interventions undertaken by the United States and its allies in Kosovo (1999) and more recently in Libya (2011), the latter with UNSC backing. These episodes have spurred an on-going debate on the legality and legitimacy of such interventions, in other words who has the authority to undertake them and how such authority should be acquired in the future (Ikenberry 2015, 79; Bellamy and Reike 2011).

Meanwhile, the number of stakeholders in the game of international politics has proliferated, and this movement has been both "horizontal" and "vertical" in nature (Nye 2011). With regard to the horizontal shift, more and more states previously relegated to the global peripheries have been incorporated into the liberal international order. At its inception they had little stake

⁴¹ The notion of the Responsibility to Protect is most clearly laid out in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 United Nations World Summit Outcome document and can be summarised thus: (1) The state carries the primary responsibility for the protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing; (2) The international community has a responsibility to assist states in fulfilling this responsibility; and (3) the international community should use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means to protect populations from these crimes. If a state fails to protect its populations or is in fact the perpetrator of crimes, the international community must be prepared to take stronger measures, including the collective use of force through the UN Security Council (ICRtoP 2017).

in it, and no say in negotiating its normative and institutional foundations (Ikenberry 2015, 79). Now, amidst increasing global complexity, this is no longer the case. Consequently, contestation over international norms and institutions is likely to increase. This is especially true in the case of rising powers, most pressingly China but also India and Russia (although the latter is arguably not a rising power in the traditional sense of the term) (Prantl 2014; Hurrell 2006).

In fact, many experts on international relations maintain that a horizontal power transition from the US/West to the “rising rest” is underway (Zakaria 2011; Kupchan 2012). The situation was exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis, and the misnamed “Arab Spring” of 2011 set off a chain of events the repercussions of which have been felt in the West in the form of regional instability and migration flows (Wright 2015). Russian aggression in Georgia and Ukraine, along with Chinese assertiveness in the South East Asia maritime domain have led analysts to proclaim the “return of geopolitics” in Europe and Asia (Mead 2014). Still, there is little agreement on if, and when exactly, the United States would be replaced at the top of the global power hierarchy, and what this new power constellation and novel international order underpinned by it would look like (cf. Ikenberry 2012; Kupchan 2012; Jacques 2009; Nye 2015; Zakaria 2011).

Power is also diffusing vertically from states to non-state actors in the global arena, and this phenomenon is being accelerated by new communications technologies and common spaces in the cyber domain. The actors involved include multinational corporations and non-governmental organisations but also cities and regions. There are also more insidious and disruptive players, such as organised-crime networks, terrorist organisations and hackers (Nye 2011). Moreover, the relationship of these other actors to states may be multidimensional and difficult to pin down. Of particular relevance is the fact that many such links are forged and maintained through cyberspace, making the attribution of actions to actors increasingly difficult. This novel state of affairs may well create unforeseen power dynamics. A telling case is the recent election-influencing operation directed against the United States, when a plethora of actors and platforms including cyber espionage groups, websites, discussion forums, social media and (unwittingly) more traditional media outlets were involved in the conduct of an operation, which according to the US intelligence community was coordinated by Russia (Aaltola and Mattiisen 2016; Aaltola 2017; National Intelligence Council 2017).

Finally, it has become commonplace to argue that the liberal international order is facing its gravest challenge from within. Populist movements in Europe have tapped into the disillusionment with the negative side effects of globalisation, which affects considerable portions of the European populace. The appeal of politicians parading nationalist messages is not limited to Central and East European states such as Poland and Hungary, which began their journey to democratisation during the so-called “third wave” in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁴² The phenomenon is also manifest in Western Europe, including France, Germany, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries. In the UK, the country’s exit from the European Union could be interpreted as a repudiation of the most robust liberal institutional experiment of the 20th century, and of the EU’s core norms, the freedom of movement in particular. At its Western core, the malaise of the liberal international order is a “crisis of faith” in the very liberal norms that have undergirded the order for decades (Traub 2017).

⁴² The first wave of democratization began in the 1820s with the widening of suffrage, and ended in the 1920s with the rise of authoritarianism in Europe. The second wave ensued after the Second World War and ended in a backlash that began in the 1960s. The onset of the third wave came in the early 1970s with the fall of right-wing dictatorships in Portugal and Spain, and spread to Latin America and ultimately to Central and Eastern Europe with the fall of Communism (Huntington 1991, 12–14).

6.4 The “Trump factor” and the liberal international order

In light of the above, President Donald Trump’s rise to power is clearly not a cause of the malaise: he is at most a symptom of the broader challenges faced by American hegemony and the liberal international order in general. Trump has tapped into the domestic backlash against global engagement that is symptomatic of the disenchantment with the negative externalities of an increasingly complex interconnected world harboured by certain sectors of the American public (see Chapters 2 and 3).

As argued in Chapter 4 of this report, the isolationist strand of foreign-policy thinking has gained ground, and the wariness exhibited by portions of the American public towards global engagement has long historical roots (Drezner 2008; Pew Research Center 2016a). Similarly, the relationship of American leaders with global engagement, whether in the form of multilateral institutions or the promotion of liberal values, has been historically ambivalent. In particular, aside from Woodrow Wilson’s activism during the First World War, engagement in the global arena was at most selective until the end of the Second World War (Cronin 2001; Mastanduno 2008). The unilateralist/multilateralist dichotomy that is habitually invoked to categorise the foreign policies of presidential administrations in the US, therefore, hides considerable contextual shades of grey when it comes to the extensiveness of global engagement (see Brown 2004; Nye 2002, 154–63).

By way of illustration, the George W. Bush administration, with its neoconservative-influenced foreign-policy agenda, is often presented as the epitome of US unilateralism (Chapter 4). In addition to its disdain for the UN, its extensive use of an extraordinary rendition programme and “enhanced interrogation techniques” were widely criticised as antithetical to the tenets of the international human rights regime and to liberal values. However, the Bush team retained its support for multilateral forays to foster free trade, took arms control seriously with the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), and worked with NATO allies and partners in Afghanistan (Mastanduno 2008, 42).

Although Barack Obama was pronouncedly more multilateralist in rhetoric, his administration’s record on multilateral engagement was also inconsistent. He did seek to recalibrate relations with allies, which had been frayed over the invasion of Iraq. Obama also re-engaged the world on climate change, sought a broad international coalition and UNSC backing for intervention in Libya, and used multilateral diplomacy to negotiate the nuclear deal with Iran. However, he avoided tying the US to potentially encumbering multilateral treaties, including the ICC statute and the Mine Ban Treaty (Skidmore 2012). He also sanctioned the use of drones for targeted killings – a practice of which the international legal credentials are at most questionable.⁴³

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Donald J. Trump is the first post-Second World War presidential candidate to be elected on a platform that explicitly challenged the overall logic of America’s global engagement. In this respect, the Trump factor is manifest as a lack of will on the part of the liberal hegemon to lead the liberal international order, an order that is largely of its own making. This disinterest in (re)assuming leadership is at its clearest when it comes to fostering the normative and institutional foundations of the order. The situation is less clear-cut in the economic and security spheres.

⁴³ See e.g. “Symposium: Toward a Drone Accountability Regime”, *Ethics & International Affairs* 29 (1).

Through his rhetorical barrages in the first seven months of his presidency, President Trump has managed to call into question America's espousal of core liberal values – including democracy, human rights and freedom of expression. In short, Trump does not champion the *liberal* normative parameters of the post-World War II order (Ikenberry 2017; Stephens 2017). Instead, his administration – in the words of Secretary of State Tillerson – has explicitly dismissed the promotion of human rights and diplomacy as “obstacles to our ability to advance our national security interests” (Piccone 2017; US Department of State 2017b). Meanwhile, the President himself has expressed admiration for strongmen such as Putin, Egypt's leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Philippine dictator Rodrigo Duterte (White House 2017x; Landler 2017b). Most relevant of all, and in stark contrast to all four post-Cold War US presidents that preceded him, Trump emphasises the importance of sovereignty and patriotism as values that states in the international community should hold dear (White House 2017k).

Beyond challenging the core liberal norms of the international rule-based order, Trump with his “America First” agenda has raised concerns that the US is no longer committed to supporting the multilateral institutions that underwrite the order. He has, *inter alia*, criticised NATO for being obsolete, made unflattering comments on the European Union, fathomed drastic cuts to UN funding, announced America's exit from UNESCO and threatened to leave the UN Human Rights Council. President Trump's first forays into multilateral summits have done little to allay fears that America's new president will be “socialised” into the game of international diplomacy. The May G7 summit in Sicily ended with a division between the US and the other nations on climate change (Chassany and Parker 2017). Similarly, the final communiqué from the Hamburg G20 summit in July failed to paper over differences between the US and the other countries on trade and climate change (Wagstyl 2017).

When it comes to the economic sinews of the liberal international order, Donald Trump's ascendancy leaves space for bleak prognoses, although the challenge has been largely rhetorical so far. Trump's decision to pull the US out of the TPP process is indicative of the fact that, as President, he will not subject the United States to novel multilateral trade deals that are not supported in his core constituencies. He is similarly unlikely to move forward on other analogous initiatives such as the TTIP, which have the express aim of allowing America and its Western partners to write the rules and regulations of global trade into the 21st century. Moreover, Trump could still choose to double down on China's trade practices, for instance, by imposing steel tariffs or measures to counter the theft of US intellectual property (Chapter 7). Such measures could be used as leverage to rectify America's trade deficit with China or, in a more optimistic scenario, even to persuade it to integrate further into the liberal international order as a more “responsible stakeholder” (Vezirgiannidou 2013).

However, the opposite effect is also possible. Beijing could view the measures as offensive, and emerge as an (even more) forceful challenger to the current order. Similar protectionist measures against the European Union would add another layer to the inflammation of transatlantic joints during Trump's presidency (Eder 2017), and thus further undermine the transatlantic link that constitutes the core of the current order. So far, however, it appears that the current administration's threats in terms of erecting barriers to free trade have not materialised (Chapter 7).

There is further light at the end of the tunnel in the security realm. Despite the criticism directed at its allies' military spending emanating from the White House, the United States is likely to retain its military commitment to its core allies and partners in Europe and Asia, while remaining engaged in the Middle East (see Chapter 5). Therefore, efforts to turn the tables on America's military power are likely to be met by US resolve even during a Trump presidency. The

same could be said of forcible attempts by potentially revisionist powers (most notably Russia and China) to redraw internationally accepted boundaries or challenge the rules of the international order on issues such as free navigation of the seas. America's top military leadership – including Secretary of Defence Mattis and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dunford – remains dedicated to maintaining US commitments, and the President has thus far deferred considerable authority to “his generals” with regard to military matters. In fact, this has already occurred in Syria and Afghanistan. It is also possible that Trump – despite not being well versed in the intricacies of military policy – will remain aware of issues that have a bearing on sustaining international “respect” for America, which he tends to equate first and foremost with military might (Sinkkonen 2017).

6.5 The liberal international order in flux: future trajectories of world order

The challenges facing the liberal international order would be substantial even without the apparent leadership vacuum that has ensued since Donald Trump's election victory. Pondering on the future of the current order – and world order in general – generates more open questions than answers. In light of the challenges to the liberal international order discussed above and the additional challenge related to the Trump presidency's still-evolving foreign policy, at least six possible future scenarios are open to elaboration.

(1) *Great power competition*: There is a possibility of an uncontrolled breakdown of the present order and the return to a world of unmitigated competition among the great powers, replete with the potential for military conflict. After Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014, it has been in vogue to speak of the “return of geopolitics” (Mead 2014; Mearsheimer 2014). Taken to its extreme, such a return would entail a more anarchical or Hobbesian world, in which great-power competition would increasingly crowd out the prospects of global cooperation and collective action to solve common problems. One trend in particular works towards the potential coming into fruition of such a scenario. Not only is the rise of nationalism evident in the domestic societies of the United States and Europe, it has also been strengthened by the leaderships of the (potentially) revisionist powers China and Russia (Laine 2016; Zhao 2013). Meanwhile, the Trump administration has made it clear – most recently in the new NSS – that it views the international arena in zero-sum terms, as a realm in which states compete for advantage (McMaster and Cohn 2017; White House 2017z). At worst, airing and acting in accordance with such views may turn the return of geopolitics into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

(2) *Competing civilizational entities*: Relatedly, the US and Europe may take a more permanent turn in a less liberal direction. Instead of relying on the liberal principles of individual freedom, democracy and human rights, the normative sinews of the West – and international order more broadly – would then be built on more “traditional” and conservative premises, such as a common Judeo-Christian heritage (Beinart 2017). This would fit the “clash of civilizations” worldview of President Trump and certain members of his administration, and might also garner support in the ranks of European populist nationalists.⁴⁴ The struggle for future world order in this Huntingtonian scenario would be between competing civilizational entities, the boundaries of which could nevertheless prove to be more fluid than in Samuel Huntington's original thesis (see Chapter 2).

(3) *A world of power blocs*: It is also possible that no single great power will possess the wherewithal to assume a hegemonic position and, thus, the ability to lay down new norms and institutions for an international order in the 21st century. This “no one's world” would be a

⁴⁴ The jubilant reception of Donald Trump's “civilization speech” in Poland is a case in point (Lyman and Berendt 2017).

realm of ideational contests, in which “alternative conceptions of domestic and international order will compete and coexist on the global stage” (Kupchan 2012, 183). However, this scenario does not necessarily entail the full-scale breakdown of order, and could promote coexistence among different regional orders, issue-specific coalitions and more enduring power blocks. Great-power alliances would form to check potential regional and system-level hegemony before they can emerge.

The reasoning behind this is that each of the great powers has weaknesses that are difficult to overcome. At present, the US appears to have squandered its “unipolar moment” in getting bogged down in intractable military conflicts in the Middle East. Related to this, even though America’s population seems set to increase throughout the 21st century, the political polarisation in the country and the rise of nationalism may be further accentuated by demographic changes to a minority-majority nation (see Chapters 2 and 3). In the case of China, demography may prove to be an obstacle to becoming anything more than a regional hegemon. The Chinese population is aging rapidly, which will place considerable strain on Beijing’s resources in the future, and a painful economic transformation may be on the cards as China moves up the global value chain. Other great-power contenders have their own long-term problems that will be difficult to shake off: Russia’s population is declining and the economy relies heavily on petroleum exports; the EU remains an economic giant and a military dwarf hampered by internal divisions; and India has internal issues with clashing minorities and a precarious geopolitical position (Katz 2017).

(4) *A China-led international order.* Another potential scenario is Chinese hegemony, a full-blown hegemonic transition precipitated by Beijing’s rise to military and economic prominence. This would probably put an end to America’s global leadership, and to the liberal international order as we know it. Chinese ascendancy would impose new parameters on the international order to suit Beijing’s normative values and economic and security interests. Given what we know about China’s current priorities, the order could well be rule-based without the liberal caveat. Sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of others and checks on individual freedoms could serve as the foundational parameters of a new world order (Breslin 2013). One problem in the case of China’s ascendancy would be that, although Beijing may overtake the United States as the world’s largest economy, the US will probably remain militarily ascendant for decades to come. In fact, the Trump administration looks to retain America’s military supremacy, if not to strengthen it (see Chapter 5). Moreover, in terms of soft power China has so far been unable to compete with the global reach of US culture and ideas (Nye 2015).

(5) *Renewal of the liberal international order.* A fifth possible future scenario would be the rejuvenation of the liberal international order in a form that is less US/Western-centric. Such an update would necessitate giving more voice to the other great powers in negotiating the rules of the game, but this would be done in a manner that is consonant with the liberal character of the international order. Consequently, America’s leadership would be replaced with more universal and globally legitimate institutions such as a reformed and more inclusive UNSC, as well as a broadly accepted regime for checking Westphalian sovereignty when states cannot or will not fend for their people. In areas in which it is not possible to renegotiate established formal institutions, informal ones with more emphasis on *ad hoc* or sectoral cooperation could come into being. This scenario would rise or fall depending on whether the United States was willing to renegotiate the parameters of its leadership and allow its superpower prerogatives to be augmented with more consensual decision-making on global questions. At the same time, other great powers would have to be enticed to join the order as responsible stakeholders as opposed to “free riders” or revisionist disruptors (Ikenberry 2015).

(6) *American liberal hegemony reclaimed*: A sixth possible future scenario would be the reassertion of American liberal hegemony, which would also largely sustain, if not update and expand, the grand bargains of the post-Cold War liberal international order. This could entail a newfound impetus to push for Western conceptions of trade rules (through an updated TTIP or TPP process, for instance), along with a novel drive to undertake democracy-promotion and nation-building projects in the developing world. *In extremis*, the US would undertake such projects unilaterally. Proponents of American primacy have recently lamented the unwillingness of the US populace and its leaders to shoulder the burden of maintaining US ascendancy (Kagan 2017; Lieber 2012). However, it is worth pointing out that American foreign policy has been characterised by swings between “maximalist” and “retrenchment” tendencies for decades, and if this ebb and flow continues, Donald Trump’s taste for global disengagement might be offset by a more assertive policy in short order – even during his own presidency (Sestanovich 2014). Recurring cycles of declinism could also be seen as part of America’s politico-cultural narrative as drivers of US dynamism, and could even serve as a regenerative force in the future (Joffe 2009; see also Chapter 2).

6.6 Conclusion

Whether any of the potential scenarios comes to pass in reality will depend on a constellation of complex political, economic and cultural factors within the international sphere and domestic arenas of states. Unexpected black-swan events – in the vein of 9/11 – could also throw previously sensible projections into the dustbin. The question of temporality and sequencing is also important: it is possible that the realisation of one scenario will bear fruit to the fulfilment of another. For instance, a Chinese hegemony could well be preceded by a period of intense conflict among the great powers. All this conjecturing is further complicated by on-going technological change and the vertical diffusion of power to various non-state entities capable of wielding new and relatively inexpensive forms of influence.

In terms of the present situation, the likelihood of the confrontational scenarios of great-power conflict or a world in which civilizational entities clash is tied to domestic dynamics, both within the West and among its potential challengers. Domestic political outcomes will play a major role in the decision-making concerning what the US and its allies more broadly are willing to do to sustain or reform the liberal international order.⁴⁵ If nationalist movements gain an even stronger foothold in Europe and the political polarisation in the US remains profound, domestic political tensions will sap the prospects of Western leadership and cohesion. If the authoritarian and potentially revisionist powers continue to stoke the flames of nationalism at the same time, the likelihood of scenarios involving great-power conflict, a clash of civilisations or – at the very least – a world of power blocs increases.

When it comes to the future of the liberal international order (as either a US-led constellation or a more egalitarian enterprise), it should be borne in mind that the normative, institutional, economic and military foundations of international orders are thoroughly interlinked (Kupchan 2014). America’s leadership role in the liberal order has been so sustainable because the US has been regarded as a more benevolent hegemon than other alternatives. A key aspect of this benevolence has been commitment to the norms, institutions and interdependence that form the basis of the order and have, by and large, legitimated US leadership. Undermining the normative, institutional and possibly economic foundations will thus have a bearing upon

⁴⁵ For an elaboration of this argument, see the presentation by Jan Techau at the Fourth Annual Summer Session of the Center on United States Politics and Power (CUSPP), Finnish Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.fiia.fi/en/event/4th-annual-helsinki-summer-session-decline-of-liberal-rule-based-world-order>.

America's ability to project its power globally. Therefore, the maintenance of US military primacy will not be enough to sustain the liberal international order in the 21st century – the country's holistic commitment simply remains indispensable. Any measures that America's allies and partners can take to bind the United States to the institutional and economic sinews of the liberal international order will therefore contribute to its endurance.

7. Global economic co-operation in the Trump era

- There has been widespread concern about the future of free trade as the current White House has remained focused – at least rhetorically – on its “America First” agenda, which emphasises the negative aspects of globalisation and America’s bilateral trade deficits.
- So far, the Trump administration has withdrawn the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and initiated renegotiations on the North American Free Trade Agreement. It has also begun domestic processes that review key aspects of the US-China trade relationship. Furthermore, the administration could undermine the World Trade Organization by hampering the functioning of its dispute-settlement system, the Appellate Body.
- However, worst-case scenarios of full-blown trade wars and substantial protectionist tariffs have not materialised, which points towards the diagnosis that Trump is, in fact, engaged in a bold negotiating tactic to achieve what he perceives as better deals for America. Over time, if not acted upon, these tactics might lose their effectiveness.
- Yet, if the more disruptionist aspects of Trump’s trade agenda are adopted, the international rule-based trade system might end up facing severe challenges. In any case, the Trump presidency provides space for America’s European partners to assume a greater role in supporting the rule-based international trade system.

7.1 Introduction

Donald Trump’s election victory evoked anxiety in most parts of the world.⁴⁶ Some of the most alarming comments the American President made during his election campaign concerned specific trade agreements, as well as global economic governance in general. The current White House remains focused – at least rhetorically – on bilateral trade deficits, and its “America First” agenda has the potential to radically shake the foundations of US policy on foreign trade and investment.

The present chapter investigates the current administration’s international economic policy, especially in the area of foreign-trade relations. It begins with a brief account and evaluation of the motivations behind Trump’s trade policy. The focus then shifts to post-election developments. These include the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the activation of the re-negotiation process for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico, as well as early US reactions towards China and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

7.2 Much talk, less action

Donald Trump’s election campaign was a showcase of economic nationalism. According to the key narrative, trade agreements such as NAFTA were having a devastating impact on the US and, more broadly, America was being exploited by the apparently skewed system of global trade. Candidate Trump pledged to place “America first” and to get rid of the bad deals in which his predecessors had involved the country.

⁴⁶ This chapter has also been published in an augmented form as Jacobsson, Johanna. 2017. “US Trade Policy: America Resigns from its Leading Role as a Global Rule-Setter.” FIIA Briefing Paper 229, December 7, 2017. <https://www.fiaa.fi/en/publication/us-trade-policy>.

Among the concrete election promises in this regard were withdrawal from the TPP agreement with eleven key nations on both sides of the Pacific, and the termination – or at least renegotiation – of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). When these pledges were complemented with Trump's critical comments about the World Trade Organization (WTO), the incoming administration's policy towards trade started to sound extremely alarming, not only to close neighbours and economic allies of the US, but also to the international economic community as a whole.

The worst-case scenario was clear: a full-blown trade war. So far, however, President Trump has held back from drastic measures leading to such an outcome. His most significant move to date was, on his first full weekday in office, to pull the US out of the TPP, Barack Obama's signature trade agreement. The decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement was another big blow and will affect economic relations with countries that remain committed to it.

So far, Trump has emphasised that instead of pursuing large regional trade agreements (such as the TPP), the US will negotiate bilateral trade pacts. In the President's view, they are better deals as they will bring jobs and industry back to America. The issue is also related to his concerns about trade deficits. Trump seems to believe that the US can control trade flows to the benefit of the American economy more effectively through bilateral arrangements.⁴⁷

There has been much confusion about the rationale behind this tactic. It seems that the Trump administration believes it will be able to leverage US influence and exert more pressure on single countries as opposed to larger groupings. There may be some truth to this. Both the EU and the US have in the last couple of decades been active in concluding bilateral trade agreements. Because the other negotiating party is economically significantly weaker, and often dependent on the stronger partner in other ways, these economic giants have been able to insert in the agreements provisions that are specifically advantageous to them. One of the key challenges in the project to conclude the biggest bilateral trade and investment agreement so far, the TTIP, was the equal negotiation power of the EU and the US.

However, the geographical dispersion of global production networks calls for the harmonisation of rules in larger regions rather than through bilateral trade deals. Arguably, the national approach to international trade is an out-dated framework from an economic standpoint. International competition today is based more on regions competing with regions rather than on countries competing with countries (Gereffi 2017). If the US chose to follow through on its bilateral inclinations, separate agreements with Canada and Mexico would be negotiated. Such an approach would almost certainly lead to the de-integration of the North American economy, and disturb the sophisticated value chains in the region.

There has been less talk about the WTO than about NAFTA. It is not clear what the pledge to conclude bilateral deals means in terms of America's commitment to the WTO. Trump's critical remarks about the multilateral trade-liberalisation organisation have been vague, and in substance limited to his call to end unfair trade practices. Given that progress at the WTO has practically come to a complete halt in recent years, his strongest message is understandably directed elsewhere. However, one of Trump's main targets in addition to the TPP and NAFTA is China. American trade relations with China are governed by the WTO, there being no bilateral or regional deals in place between the two giants. One might therefore interpret this to

⁴⁷ Trump's mercantilist attitude contrasts with the widely-held consensus among economists that trade deficits are not inherently good or bad; they can be either, depending on complex circumstances. In the case of the US, one of the reasons behind the country's trade deficits is the dollar's position as the global reserve currency. But the dollar's significance to global finance is also one of the factors that make America so economically powerful.

mean that, in his opinion, there are shortcomings either in the WTO rules or in their implementation on China's behalf.

The US is looking increasingly isolated on the key issues of trade and climate change. In rejecting the TPP the US has, for the moment, given up the powerful opportunity to give shape to international trading rules.⁴⁸ (Although it still has a chance to do this by grouping together with the EU.) However, the TPP was considered a priority during the Obama administration in the light of Asia's economic and geopolitical significance. It was also seen as necessary to maintain US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and to contain China's ascendancy (Hamilton 2014).

Pulling out of the TPP has been the most significant trade-related measure taken by Trump thus far. However, the deal's fate looked uncertain even before Trump won the elections. In fact, during the presidential campaign, the TPP became the symbol of decline in US manufacturing and was heavily criticised by Republicans and Democrats alike (see e.g. DiSalvo and Kusic 2015). It was never put to a vote in Congress.

However, the Trump administration is preparing other trade-related measures, such as the re-negotiations for NAFTA, which are already underway. In the best scenario, the negotiations will end in a satisfactory result for all countries involved. The lack of action so far is probably due to an increasing understanding of the enormous negative effects that the termination of trade agreements and the introduction of protective measures could inflict upon the American economy and its relations with other countries. However, President Trump's tone has not changed. In particular, he keeps criticising NAFTA and has suggested that he will probably end up terminating the agreement, despite the fact that renegotiations have just started. This kind of loose talk brings cheers from the crowds but groans from the business community. It would appear that the tactic is part of Trump's game plan. By issuing threats and exerting pressure on his negotiation partners, he hopes to secure better deals.

7.3 The Trump effect in the US

American blue-collar communities have felt the impacts of free trade and technological change. The perceived benefits of globalisation have not been distributed equally. The situation is somewhat similar in Europe. Although the US and the EU as a whole continue to benefit from trade, some people are left behind. The same applies to technological development. When routine jobs become either automated or outsourced to other countries, it seems natural to try to stop the process. However, it is practically impossible to stop technological change, and no country in a globalised world can exclude itself completely: all stakeholders are forced to interact and "play the game". Moreover, in the aggregate, technological progress and increased trade bring huge benefits to societies. Internal adjustment is, however, needed – whether in terms of redistribution or the direction of resources to innovation, education and social support. These policies seem to have failed in the US and at least in some parts of Europe. As a result, there are increasingly large numbers of angry and frustrated citizens in the West. Although this is only one of the explanations behind Trump's success, it is hard to ignore.

President Trump dismisses the broader understanding of the overall benefits of trade, and instead focuses his energy on the negative side effects. The big picture still shows that the

⁴⁸ Text analysis reveals that US treaty language is pre-eminent in the TPP, thus suggesting that the US heavily influenced the writing of the agreement. See Allee and Lugg (2016).

US continues to benefit from globalisation and integrated markets, particularly with its neighbours through NAFTA (see McBride and Sergie 2017).⁴⁹ Although import competition has had significant effects on manufacturing jobs in the US, the effect of automation and technology should not be underestimated. Moreover, the share of manufacturing in the American GDP has been on a steady level for the past 30-40 years (see Trilling 2016). However, Trump has chosen not to address the challenge that technology is posing to jobs. It is politically more expedient to blame foreigners rather than robots – many of which are being developed in the US. The effects of automation also tend to spread more widely than those of trade, and are less visible.

The effects of trade are nevertheless clearly felt in certain areas and groups of society, and may be substantial and devastating. The real winners tend to reside in big cities, where the service industry in particular is booming. Instead of addressing economic displacement through domestic policies, Trump is entertaining the populist route of protectionism and economic nationalism. The tactic may be mainly rhetorical, aimed at attracting Trump's core supporters and drawing attention away from the administration's lack of progress in domestic policy. This, again, hides the above-mentioned issues that relate to domestic redistribution, education and innovation. Major changes in domestic policies are difficult to achieve, however, and they take time. It is easier to blame trade, foreigners and climate treaties.

Nevertheless, President Trump seems to be right on one count. Trade agreements have become out-dated. Although not entirely obsolete, most of them do not tackle the most pressing issues of today, such as digital trade and sustainable development. In this sense, there is indeed a need for upgrading. However, when Trump talks about renegotiating NAFTA or the 2012 bilateral trade agreement with South Korea (KORUS), he does not talk about these issues. His message is that the agreements need to be torn up because the US is losing out. In some instances there might be some truth to such claims, but it is hard to ascertain who would lose or gain from updated regimes. In fact, this is not the key issue for the future – arguably not even in America. It would be more important to address the rise of digital technologies, the explosion in e-commerce flows, increased security concerns and tax evasion, just to name a few issues. It is clear that in the aggregate, no society is likely to benefit from rising tariffs.

7.4 The Trump effect elsewhere

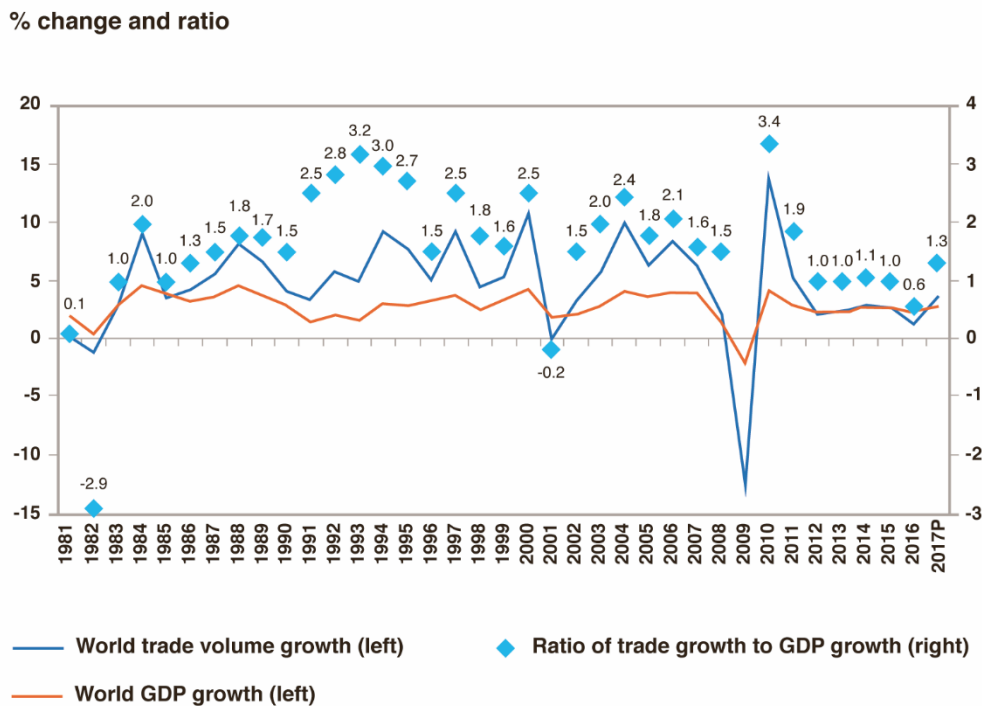
The most highly developed areas of the world have become increasingly sceptical of globalisation. A part of the reason lies in the dissatisfaction caused by the unfair distribution of its benefits, which has been exacerbated by the hardships endured in the aftermath of the 2007/8 financial crisis. Whereas all major economies in the world are now growing, global trade has not yet properly taken off. Protectionism increased significantly during the financial crisis, even though it is only one of the reasons for the slowdown in global trade: many of the explanations relate to other globalisation dynamics. The continuing trend is that trade growth is increasingly synchronised across regions, and that merchandise trade is no longer growing significantly

⁴⁹ NAFTA, negotiated by the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States, entered into force in January 1994. It provided for the elimination of most tariffs on goods traded among the three countries. The liberalisation of trade in agriculture, textiles, and automobile manufacturing was a major focus of the agreement. For an analysis of the trade effects of NAFTA on the three countries' economies, see McBride and Sergie (2017). Most studies conclude that NAFTA has had only a modest positive impact on US GDP. However, trade specialists tend to agree that the deal's direct effects on trade and investment are difficult to separate from other factors, such as rapid improvements in technology and expanded trade with other countries.

faster than GDP (World Trade Organization 2016; 2017; Figure 9).⁵⁰ At the same time, services exports are growing, attributable largely to advances in technology (Loungani et al. 2017a; see also Loungani et al. 2017b).⁵¹

One of the significant developments after the election of Trump is the newfound sense of urgency within the EU. This could be attributable in part to America's current trade policy, and in part to Brexit. However, the EU-27 seem to be more steadfast than for a long time in facing challenges as a united front. One sign of this was the conclusion, on the eve of the G-20 meeting in Hamburg, of an agreement in principle on the main elements of an EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement. The hurried signature was heavy with symbolism. Japan is one of the countries that signed the TPP, now abandoned by the US, and it is one of the key markets for US exports. The signing of a free trade agreement with Japan ahead of the US is likely to give European manufacturers, farmers and service suppliers a head-start to enter newly-opened markets there. For the EU, the deal with Japan is the most important bilateral trade agreement yet. It is also significant in that it is the first trade agreement that includes a specific commitment to the Paris climate agreement.

Figure 9: Ratio of growth in world merchandise trade volume to global real GDP growth, 1981-2017



Source: World Trade Organization (2017)

While the US appears to be taking a less engaged role on the world stage, other countries are keen to fill the void. This is the case with some of the BRICS countries, most notably

⁵⁰ The figures from the last few years show a weakening in the relationship between trade and GDP growth. Over the long term trade has typically grown at 1.5 times faster than GDP, and in the 1990s world merchandise trade volume grew almost twice as quickly as world real GDP at market exchange rates. In recent years however, the ratio has slipped towards 1:1, below both the peak of the 1990s and the long-term average (World Trade Organization 2016; 2017).

⁵¹ Services trade is more difficult to track than trade in goods, but recent studies show that services seem to experience productivity growth through the same mechanisms that have traditionally made manufacturing the key driver of growth (see Loungani et al. 2017a; b).

China.⁵² Moreover, the TPP is back on the agenda, this time without the US. Japan has been active in holding discussions about reviving rules that would, among other things, open markets to agricultural products and digital services, improve labour conditions, and increase protection for intellectual property around the region. Whereas President Trump used the APEC summit in Danang in November 2017 to make it clear that he was only interested in bilateral agreements in Asia, the other 11 TPP countries have continued their efforts to keep the agreement alive. The planned pact has now been formally renamed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and is being negotiated in a way that would make it accessible to a future US administration.

However, achieving success without the US will be challenging in the absence of one of the most attractive markets in the world. Developing countries in particular may be unwilling to accept the demanding rules on labour laws and patent protection without the incentive of getting improved access to American consumers. US GDP accounts for 69 per cent of the combined GDP of the 12 countries that negotiated the original agreement.

Currently, none of the BRICS countries is involved in the CPTPP negotiations either, but there is speculation about China's possible accession to the treaty. At the moment, however, China is pressing ahead with its own major trade project – the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). CPTPP and RCEP are not mutually exclusive, and some countries would possibly be members of both. If CPTPP members manage to conclude a deal and agree on high standards without the US, China would have an incentive to reform in order to accede to the agreement. If China is successful with RCEP, however, lower standards are likely to be attained. Avoiding the latter scenario was one of the biggest motivations for the US involvement in the original TPP process.

Of the other major trade agreements under negotiation in recent years, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) remains a big open question. The negotiations between the EU and the US had stagnated already before Trump's presidency, and are unlikely to go forward at least in the short term. If China presses ahead with RCEP, one possibility is that Europeans and Americans will find one another again and "accept the challenge" by negotiating a high-standard trade agreement between themselves. This would undermine the position of RCEP as the global rule setter. Although Trump has complained about the US trade deficit with certain European countries, Germany in particular, there is a slight chance that agreement could be reached, even with Donald Trump at the helm. Trump's immediate instinct would probably be to negotiate separate deals with different EU countries. However, the EU negotiates and concludes trade agreements as a block, so any bilateral deal with a single EU member state is impossible to begin with, and even if Trump were to agree on talks with the entire EU, major difficulties in the relationship would not disappear. The EU and the US are close partners, but have major differences in their respective attitudes towards safety, social and health standards. The goal of the TTIP is a highly integrated market, which is, admittedly, challenging to achieve in the current political climate.

7.5 Updating NAFTA – a worthy undertaking after all?

Withdrawing from or renegotiating NAFTA was one of Trump's prominent campaign promises. In fact, he was pledging to renegotiate all "bad deals" to which the US was a party. So far, moves have been made only on the TPP (termination) and NAFTA (opening of renegotiations). With regard to KORUS, the free trade agreement with South Korea, the US Trade

⁵² The BRICS countries include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Representative Robert E. Lighthizer has approached the South Korean government and expressed America's desire to revise the agreement. So far it is unclear whether Korea will agree to such a revision, especially given that the US accusations seem to be on very shaky ground.⁵³

The US has gone a step further with NAFTA. Canada and Mexico have agreed to renegotiations, and the first round was held in August 2017. This and the Korean situation differ significantly, however. KORUS is a recent agreement and some of its commitments have not yet come into force. NAFTA, on the other hand, entered into force over 20 years ago, and parts of it have become outdated. Canada and Mexico know this, and agreeing to talks was therefore not a huge concession on their part. If the US demands are completely unreasonable, America's partners are unlikely to agree to them. At the same time, Canada and Mexico are likely to conclude that Trump would not terminate the agreement given that the US still benefits from NAFTA. However, Trump is playing "hard ball". He is trying to show his determination by making public threats and hinting at terminating the agreement regardless of how the negotiation process unfolds. Even if the threat is exaggerated, Canada and Mexico must show that they are serious about reviewing NAFTA.

At the time of its conclusion, NAFTA was a modern and innovative trade agreement. It was, for example, the first trade pact to include extensive discipline on intellectual property rights (such as copyright, patent and trademark rights) as well as provisions on the environment and labour (although non-enforceable). It has become antiquated by today's standards, however, specifically because of the radically deeper integration in global supply chains and the revolution in digital technologies. New rules and regulations are needed, especially in areas that relate to digital trade and services (see Lester and Manak 2017).

For a while the current US administration had no clear vision for the future of NAFTA. Some clarity has emerged in light of the negotiation objectives released in July 2017, however. The key objective of the US is, unsurprisingly, "a much better agreement that reduces the US trade deficit" (see Office of the United States Trade Representative 2017a). This is an unusual way to start negotiating a trade agreement. As already discussed, trade deficits are not generally regarded as an adequate starting point. However, the way the US is aiming to reach its goal is more traditional. It is basically looking for wider market access for its products, to be achieved by "seeking the highest standards covering the broadest possible range of goods and services". Because most tariffs between the three countries have already been eliminated, the way forward is to tackle technical barriers, which make exports expensive, burdensome or even impossible in some cases.

One of the key areas is digital trade. The US has identified its objectives as "strong protection and enforcement for new and emerging technologies and new methods of transmitting and distributing products embodying intellectual property". It is similarly eager to make sure that NAFTA countries do not impose measures that restrict cross-border data flows, and do not require the use or installation of local computing facilities.

Rules of origin are another significant area for the US. These are the complex rules that are applied to determine whether a specific good qualifies as an originating good under the terms of NAFTA. Lower tariffs are applied only to goods originating from other NAFTA members. The purpose is to ensure that NAFTA's benefits are not extended to goods that are exported from non-NAFTA countries, which have undergone minimal processing in North America. The

⁵³ The USTR claims that KORUS is causing US a trade deficit. However, the sectors most responsible for the deficit in goods are autos and electronics. KORUS has not yet kicked in on the former, and does not touch the latter as trade in electronics was already tariff-free. The US is also ignoring the fact that it is running a surplus in its services trade with Korea.

US wants to update and strengthen NAFTA's rules of origin to ensure that the agreement benefits North American production. The rules are dated, but the downside of pushing for too much "Made in North America" is the potential for disruptions in existing global value chains.

Certain new rules may also be introduced to address some of the social, environmental and health concerns related to NAFTA. The updated version may include enforceable rules on labour issues (although perhaps not on the environment, given Trump's views on climate change). In its most recent trade agreements, including the TPP, the US has managed to include rules that protect the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as standards that discourage trade in goods produced by forced labour, and child labour in particular. The agreements have also established mechanisms to monitor and address other labour concerns. The US renegotiation objectives for NAFTA indicate that it would like to bring its labour provisions into line with the other recent agreements. Given that Mexico and Canada agreed to a similar approach in TPP, they are likely to agree on this.

Another area under discussion is the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) system included in Chapter 11 of NAFTA. ISDS has faced worldwide criticism in recent years, and has become one of the most toxic elements of trade and investment agreements. For that reason, the EU is currently pushing for a radical reform of ISDS and proposing a new international investment court. A plan for the court is already included in the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), as well as in a new agreement negotiated with Vietnam. The EU's proposal is a complete overhaul of the ISDS by bringing investment claims to a new multilateral and permanent court. There are no indications that the US will support the proposal, and its fate in the EU is open as well.⁵⁴

Given the areas that have so far been identified by the US as subject to negotiation, it is ironic that the TPP is thus far the only trade agreement that Trump has pulled out of completely. It was negotiated exactly as the kind of modern agreement that would address some of the pressing issues that the US administration is now talking about. However, it became a victim of extreme politicization during the election campaign, with Hillary Clinton also voicing her dissatisfaction with the deal. Now the US has the possibility to bring some of the modern elements of the TPP into NAFTA if Trump manages to control his inward-looking instincts and to reach a deal that seems reasonable to all three countries. The deadline for negotiations has been pushed from the end of 2017 to the first quarter of 2018, the Canadians and the Mexicans accusing the US of a "winner-takes-all" mind-set.

7.6 Trump's actions on China

Concerns about unfair competition by China are not new, and the US is not the only country to have kept the issue on the agenda. For example, many businesses in the EU are similarly worried about the unfair advantage accorded to Chinese economic operators through state subsidies and the various forms of discrimination used against foreign companies in China. One of the key issues in this regard is the battle over China's status as a market economy in the WTO, the recognition of which the Trump administration opposes (Donnan 2017). However, Trump stands out among world leaders with his particularly tough stance on China.

During his campaign, Trump typically mentioned China alongside NAFTA as one of the biggest sources of misfortune for the American worker. He constantly tried to drive home the

⁵⁴ The compatibility of the Investment Court System (ICS) with the European Treaties is currently at stake in a request for an Opinion by the Court of Justice of the European Union submitted by Belgium on 6 September 2017. See Kingdom of Belgium Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (2017).

idea that Beijing was using unfair trade practices to make US products uncompetitive in the world market. One of his rhetorical tactics was labelling China a “currency manipulator”, claiming that the Chinese government was taking illegitimate steps to keep the yuan’s value artificially low. Although expert opinion no longer supports this view, Trump stuck to it, and even threatened to slap a 45-per-cent retaliatory tariff on Chinese imports.

Since taking office, Trump has kept quiet about currency manipulation, and has even seemed to enjoy somewhat friendly relations with China, especially during Xi Jinping’s visit to the US and his own reciprocal visit to China. Nevertheless, Trump has continued to test China’s patience by initiating two separate procedures that carry potentially negative implications for the Chinese economy.

The first of these is a national security review of Chinese steel. In this case the American approach seems openly protectionist, although Europeans have also raised concerns about the oversupply of Chinese steel in global markets. The Trump administration seemed to be prepared either to impose a broad tariff on all steel imports or to set up a system of quotas and tariffs that would, in effect, freeze imports from particular countries at existing levels and charge tariffs on any imports exceeding those levels. The choice of method is especially worrying. If taken to WTO litigation, the US has threatened to invoke the national security option,⁵⁵ which is considered the “nuclear weapon of WTO law”. The WTO’s legal system gives leverage to countries choosing to use this option, but its limits are unclear given the practically non-existent case law. Were the WTO to find in favour of US in dispute settlement, it could give it carte blanche to invoke the provision, and thus introduce a new protectionist instrument that all WTO members could use. On the other hand, were the WTO to find against the US Trump might choose to ignore the ruling, which would seriously undermine the credibility of the organisation. In fact, the US is already challenging the WTO’s dispute-settlement system (see below).

Another risk is that America’s tactic is not solely directed at China, its intended target. A broad move on tariffs and quotas would hit all steel imports, including those from Europe and Canada, for instance. In anticipation of this, European NATO members launched a lobbying campaign, also involving the Pentagon, in an attempt to convince the US administration to abandon its tactic by disputing the threat imposed by steel imports from longstanding ally countries. China also gave in. One week after the July G20 summit in Hamburg, Beijing proposed cutting steel overcapacity by 150m tons by 2022. Trump reportedly walked away from the offer and stuck to his demand for increased tariffs. He has not taken any action in this regard, but since then China has cut back on its steel production and there is a recovery in global steel prices. Trump’s threats may thus have worked, although at the expense of setting off the Europeans as well.

The second concrete action taken by Trump on Chinese trade so far is the launch of a review into compulsory technology transfers and the theft of American intellectual property by Chinese companies. Compared to threats against China made on the campaign trail, the approach appears quite mild. It entails launching a process that could continue with formal investigations. These would probably take up to a year, and would include talks with Beijing and wider consultations with the business sector (see Federal Register 2017).⁵⁶ It is worrisome that the US is considering a domestic investigation instead of taking the issue to the

⁵⁵ The measure would be based on a little-used power referred to as the “big sledgehammer”: Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 allows the Commerce Department to investigate if an import threatens US security, and gives the president authority to act without Congressional approval if the investigation concludes that it does.

⁵⁶ The process concerns a so-called “Section 301” investigation under the Trade Act of 1974. It is very rarely used and extremely controversial because it gives the President the power to impose unilateral tariffs and to take other measures against trading partners. In the worst case, it could end up sparking a trade war. See Federal Register (2017).

WTO. Trump's strategy, however, may be to incentivize the Chinese to agree to buy more American products and thereby avoid a trade war, which in turn would allow Trump to save face to a certain extent.

This strategy played out during Trump's recent visit to China on his East Asia tour at the beginning of November 2017. China and the US concluded several deals – many of them tentative memoranda of understanding (MOAs) – in which China agreed to purchases worth 250 billion dollars in the future (Einhorn 2017). No matter how lucrative they are for the US, such individual purchases and investment agreements do not address the structural issues in the two countries' trade relations. The overall sum is less than the trade deficit that the US has accumulated with China over a one-year period.⁵⁷ In addition, US businesses still have many long-standing concerns including limited access to the Chinese market, big subsidies that Beijing channels to domestic companies, and issues related to the Chinese theft of American intellectual property and cybersecurity. Nevertheless, the agreements allow Trump to portray himself as a master dealmaker, while drawing attention away from the lack of progress in addressing structural concerns.

Another recent addition to the China puzzle is Trump's threat to cut off US trade with countries that deal with North Korea, which has been viewed as a warning to China, North Korea's main trading partner and only major ally. In general, Trump increasingly appears to be linking the economy with security, as is also evident in his tactic of invoking national security concerns in relation to the high level of Chinese steel imports. Connecting Sino-American security talks with trade may increase the chance of retaliation from China on economic matters if it is pushed too far.

7.7 America and the future of the WTO

Global trade liberalisation is likely to continue only bilaterally and regionally in the coming years. Multilateral negotiations have not made serious progress for years on account of the many and diverse interests that encumber the WTO. One of the key issues is that emerging economies are not ready to liberalise as much as the developed countries would prefer. Moreover, the WTO is not capable of tackling the most pressing new issues related to digital trade, e-commerce, services and investment. Agreement on deep regulatory issues is more likely to be achieved among like-minded country groupings.

Negotiations at the WTO had already stalled before Trump's arrival on the scene. However, there is a worrying development regarding dispute settlement, which is the most efficient and functioning part of the WTO. For a while, the US has been voicing criticism of the highest organ of the dispute-settlement system, the Appellate Body (AB).

The WTO Appellate Body is a seven-member, independent court that takes the final decision on the interpretation of WTO law and its application to WTO members. AB members are nominated and appointed by member governments, and serve a maximum of two four-year terms. In the first half of 2016, during the Obama administration, the US blocked the re-appointment of a South Korean judge to the Appellate Body, citing his role in a series of decisions with which the US disagreed. This was heavily criticised by other WTO Members as amounting to meddling with the independent judiciary. In the end, another Korean national was appointed, but in August 2017 he unexpectedly resigned, taking up a position as trade

⁵⁷ The annual trade deficit in goods has been closer to \$300 billion in the past few years, peaking at \$347 billion in 2016. However, service exports from the US to China have grown by over 400 per cent in the last ten years, and the US services trade surplus with China was \$37.4 billion in 2016. See the webpage of the Office of the United States Trade Representative (2017b).

minister in the Korean government. The US has since blocked the recruitment of new judges, exacerbating the risk that the WTO could effectively run out of judges. In a statement in August, the US said it would not move forward with the appointment procedures before its systematic concerns about WTO dispute settlement were addressed. The goal thus seems to be to pile pressure on other WTO members to accept US plans for reform, which appear to be going potentially as far as opening the door for individual WTO member states to block appeals rulings in certain cases.

The US attitude has raised fears about Trump's reaction at any major negative WTO ruling against the US during his term. This is not likely to occur in the near future, as the US managed to score an important victory at the beginning of September 2017. In the Boeing Case, the US won a dispute against the EU with the AB overruling a lower-level finding that \$8.7 billion in tax incentives awarded by Washington State to Chicago-based Boeing for the development of the 777X jetliner constituted a violation of WTO law on subsidies. It would be tempting to read something political into the ruling, but the case is part of a long-running trade dispute, with both Airbus and Boeing scoring wins and enduring losses. The broader dispute on airline subsidies continues at the WTO, with claims being made by both the EU and the US.

The international community should be most worried about the US administration's shifting stance on the principal governing structures of world trade. During a rare public appearance in Washington in September 2017, US Trade Representative Lighthizer sent mixed signals on whether the administration would be willing to take its trade fights to the WTO. He also contrasted the ways in which Europeans and Americans saw trade agreements: Americans tend to see them as contracts, enforcing a clearly-defined set of rights and obligations, whereas Europeans and certain others see them as an evolving form of governance. This comment highlights the general suspicion and criticism the current US administration is projecting towards the WTO, and global governance more broadly. On the same occasion, Lighthizer argued that the WTO was not equipped to deal with China, and underlined the fact that the US would have to find other ways of defending its companies, workers and farmers, and its market-based economic system (Center for Strategic & International Studies 2017).

7.8 Conclusion

So far, the implications of Donald Trump's "America First" agenda for the long-term trade policy of the US remain limited. The withdrawal from the TPP will have significant and far-reaching strategic consequences for America and the world economy, but it appears to be the principal sacrifice that had to be made in light of the President's campaign promises. As for the rest, it is too early to say.

Trump's actions would nevertheless indicate that he is relying on his own playbook, namely threatening and possibly bluffing. He already has two significant successes in this respect. First, he managed to curb Chinese steel imports, and second, he has opened the NAFTA renegotiation process. However, his motives remain hard for outside observers to pin down, and it is unlikely that he really believes trade is as harmful to the US as he maintains in his public statements. Nevertheless, his strategy seems to have worked so far. However, continued threats tend to lose their power if they are never acted upon, and it may become increasingly difficult to lure other countries into making concessions as they become increasingly aware of Trump's reluctance to carry out his threats.

Concluding and renegotiating trade agreements takes time, which Trump may run out of sooner rather than later. His re-election is uncertain (should he not be forced to step down beforehand), and he may not even choose to run for another term. The main trading partners of the US may therefore decide to lie low and avoid confrontation in the hope of dealing with a more reasonable administration in a few years' time. This is especially the case with multi-lateral trade deals, TTIP in particular. However, existing frameworks of global governance need to be safeguarded against gradual erosion or full-blown crisis. The US attitude towards the WTO's well-functioning and respected dispute settlement is especially worrying. Other WTO Members, and especially the EU, should support it as a cornerstone of the global trading system. The central interest of the US for decades has been to assure that the world economy is (increasingly) open and rule-based. As long as the current president refrains from pursuing that agenda, whether because of political manoeuvring in front of domestic audiences or for ideological reasons, Europeans need to up their game. In addition to defending the existing legal framework, this includes devising new ways of dealing with the emerging economies and finding solutions to challenges of the new economy, especially in the digital sphere

PART IV: NEW GREAT POWER POLITICS

8. The US-Russia relationship

- President Trump, like many of his predecessors, came into office with the intention of improving relations between the United States and Russia.
- However, the recalibration of the relationship appears extremely unlikely due to fundamental and persistent differences over various key foreign-policy issues and ongoing investigations into Russia's election interference, as well as the Trump administration's possible collusion and obstruction of justice.
- Fears of a grand bargain between Washington and Moscow have largely subsided in Europe, and in Northern Europe in particular. However, assertive Russian behaviour and potential negative spill-over from crises in which Russia and America are immersed continue to raise concerns.
- Although Presidents Trump and Putin have both continued to entertain the possibility of improving the bilateral relationship, Russian-American relations are now poor and seem likely to remain so.

8.1 Introduction

The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in November 2016 held out the prospect of an improvement in Russian-American relations from the poor state they had reached in the Obama years. Trump came to power promising to reset America's relationship with Russia. In this, he did not differ from his two predecessors, Barack Obama and George W. Bush, who came to power with similar intentions. Russia remains important for the US as it has influence in regions and on key issues that matter to the United States, such as stability in the Middle East, security in Europe, and the power balance in the Asia-Pacific. However, strategic incompatibilities have often overridden underlying common interests in the past.

Similarly, both Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin initially made positive statements about each other, and both appeared ready to build stronger ties after the US presidential election. Some of Trump's initial appointees – particularly Michael Flynn, who was quickly ousted from the post of National Security Adviser – seemed committed to achieving this goal. Soon enough, however, Russian-American relations turned sour once again under the Trump administration, as media and Congressional interest in the Russia investigations intensified. Recently, voices in Washington and Moscow have described the relationship as even worse under Trump than at any other time since the end of the Cold War.

This chapter investigates the present state of the US-Russia relationship. In particular, it posits that persistent differences between the two great powers have led to recurring cycles of frustrated expectations, of which the current impasse is only the most recent example. Although Trump and Putin have both continued to give sporadic indications of their willingness to cooperate with each other to improve the situation, Russian-American relations are now poor and seem likely to remain so.

8.2 Persistent differences in the US-Russia relationship

There are many reasons why Russian-American relations have been poor since the end of the Cold War and prior to Trump's election in 2016. Russia resents the fact that the Soviet Union collapsed and that the Cold War ended with the loss of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. A series of American foreign-policy actions thereafter have been viewed by Moscow as taking advantage of Russia's temporary weakness (as many Russians insist on describing it). These include:

- the expansion of NATO;
- American and European military action against Russia's ally, Serbia, vis-à-vis Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo;
- recognition of Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia without Belgrade's consent;
- American efforts to limit Russia's relations with Iran;
- US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty soon after Putin had expressed support for the US after 9/11;
- the US-led intervention in Iraq without UN Security Council (and hence Russian) approval;
- US support for "colour revolutions" in former Soviet republics, Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) in particular;
- American support for the "Arab Spring" opposition to governments allied to Russia in both Libya and Syria;
- US support for another colour revolution in Ukraine in 2014, as well as negative reaction to Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for secessionists in eastern Ukraine.

The US, of course, is not alone in incurring Russian resentment. Criticism of Moscow's policies by European governments and the expansion of the European Union have also been seen by Moscow as directed against Russian interests.

With the election of Donald Trump – who had praised Putin and called for improved US-Russian relations – high hopes emerged in Russia about the prospects for improved ties between Moscow and Washington. However, this did not happen, for two main reasons. First, the scandal over Russia's election meddling and the potential links between the Kremlin and Donald Trump's team have made prospects for cooperation slimmer. Moscow sought to undermine Hillary Clinton's presidential prospects by releasing damaging e-mail messages hacked from her campaign organisation (National Intelligence Council 2017). In addition, members of the Trump campaign may have actively colluded with Moscow in this endeavour, and it also remains an open question whether this was done with Trump's knowledge or not. Although Trump has vociferously denied all such allegations, there is now an on-going special counsel investigation into these matters and into the possibility that Trump may have sought to obstruct justice through firing FBI director James Comey, who was in charge of the FBI Russia inquiry at the time.

The eventual outcome of this investigation – and of related probes by various Congressional committees – cannot be foretold. However, at the very least the whole debacle has already served to constrain the extent to which Trump can afford to cooperate with Russia: making what could be considered in the US to be undue concessions to Russia to improve relations would be seen as evidence of Trump's being somehow beholden to Putin for his electoral

victory. Speculation that the president sought to prevent Moscow from revealing embarrassing information about him, as it did with Clinton, would proliferate. Congressional Republicans have already limited Trump's ability to improve ties with Russia through enacting, with bipartisan support and in the face of White House objections, tougher economic sanctions that the President cannot lift without Congressional approval.

The whole affair illustrates the underlying antagonism between the US and Russia, and also brings to the fore new areas of contestation. It highlights the wide-ranging challenge posed by Russia, and indicates new forms of hybrid influencing that autocratic governments can use to undermine Western democracies now and in the future (Aaltola and Mattiisen 2016; Aaltola 2017). Russia is therefore likely to remain a thorny issue that cannot be resolved by the reset attempts of the current administration.

Second, the relationship between the US and Russia remains fraught with policy differences, many of which have their roots in the past. Even without the above-mentioned concerns over Russian interference in the 2016 elections, continuing differences persist over numerous issues, including sanctions, nuclear-arms control, NATO, Ukraine, Iran, Syria, North Korea and China. After Trump's election there was a degree of optimism in both capitals that some, if not all, of the differences between Washington and Moscow could be resolved. Since then, however, none have been reconciled – or appear likely to be.

This transition from optimism about the prospects for Russian-American relations after the 2016 elections to the pessimism that has taken root since Trump has been in office should not be a surprise. From a historical perspective, every other American president since the end of the Cold War began his tenure hoping to improve relations between the two countries, but sooner or later saw these efforts fail. Bill Clinton's hopes for better Russian-American relations in the 1990s foundered over the US-led military intervention in Kosovo against Moscow's ally Serbia. Relations during the George W. Bush years improved when Putin backed the American-led intervention in Afghanistan after 9/11, but then deteriorated when the US withdrew from the 1972 Soviet-American ABM Treaty, and especially after the US undertook its intervention against Iraq without UN Security Council – i.e. Russian – approval. Obama's hopes for improved Russian-American ties were set back not only due to differing worldviews and global aspirations, but also because of the intervention by the US and its allies in Libya during the 2011 Arab Spring to overthrow Moscow's long-term partner, Muammar Qaddafi (Stent 2014). The only real difference under Trump has been that this period of hope was far shorter than in previous administrations.

8.3 Frustrated expectations in the Trump era

A key contributing factor to this rapid decline in Russian-American relations after Trump's inauguration was the unrealistically high initial level of expectations on both the US and the Russian sides of the willingness to pursue improved relations on the one hand, and the infeasibility of such forays given the constraints of the current situation on the other. This, in fact, made mutual disillusionment all the more likely. It is worth exploring the substance of these unrealistic expectations. On the American side, (parts of) the Trump administration seem to have held the belief that Russian-American relations would improve simply because the incumbent was the antithesis of Obama. Just as President Obama blamed the deterioration in Moscow-Washington ties during the Bush administration on his predecessor, Trump attributed the failure of the highly publicised "Russia reset" almost solely to his predecessor, President Obama. President Trump has even boasted on several occasions that Putin "likes

me”, thus enabling him to make a deal with the Russian leader more easily than Obama (whom they both despise).

The details of what such a deal would entail have never been made clear, however. President Trump seemed to expect that because he and Putin were “on the same wavelength” they could work together on what the new US incumbent saw as their common problems, including Syria (both opposed ISIS), Iran and even China. Trump also had a geopolitical logic supporting his Russia proposals: he thought that Obama had driven Russia closer to China – and China was a prominent target of his campaign rhetoric, especially on the issue of trade. In return, Trump made it clear that he would not try to promote democratisation in Russia, or hector Putin about human rights and the rule of law the way Obama had done. Going against the foreign-policy mainstream, even (or especially) that of his own party, the current US President considered such criticism of Russia ineffective, and thus unnecessary. Further, he seemed to hope that there was room for a grand bargain with Russia covering arms control, counter-terrorism, Crimea, economic sanctions and relations with China. He also seemed to expect that improved Russian-American relations would entice Russia to cooperate with the US against Iran. In return, Trump appeared willing to lift US sanctions, which had been imposed after Russia’s annexation of Crimea. This would have been part of a larger Russian-American “deal” in which “the two leaders indomitably face down all comers like some maverick geopolitical wrestling team” (Economist 2017a).

The Kremlin’s expectations were quite different, however. To begin with, Russia did not view Iran or China as problems: they were partners, and therefore cooperation with the US against them was not on the Russian agenda. In addition, Moscow seemed to anticipate not only that Trump would end all efforts to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Russia, but also that he would lift sanctions and accept as valid the Moscow-sponsored 2014 referendum in Crimea, which called for the peninsula’s adhesion to Russia. America was also expected to acknowledge the Russian sphere of influence in its near abroad. This would have meant that neither Ukraine nor other former Soviet republics (except the Baltics) would join NATO or the EU.

Even if such Russian expectations were unrealistic, it appears that the Kremlin actually had them. According to media reports, the Russian government sent a proposal to the US in March 2017 for the immediate restoration of US-Russian cooperation in the diplomatic, military and intelligence fields, which had been severed in response to Russian intervention in Ukraine and Syria. The proposal appeared to have been made on the basis that the Trump administration would be willing to ignore reports that Moscow had interfered in the 2016 US presidential election (especially since, after all, Trump had won), and that Trump would ignore Russian behaviour in Ukraine and lift the Obama-imposed sanctions against Moscow. Furthermore, the Kremlin seems to have developed the expectation that all this would be possible from Western press reports about how Trump wanted to work with Putin, and from Trump’s own statements to that effect (Hudson 2017). If Russia really did interfere in the 2016 US presidential election to help Trump against Clinton, the Russian leadership may have felt not just disappointed, but tricked when Trump did not adopt the pro-Russian policies that the Kremlin expected from him.

These differing expectations on the US and Russian sides were based on a mutually held assumption that the other side would be willing and able to modify its policies for the sake of improving relations. However, neither side had either the willpower or the ability to undertake such policy reorientation. Thus, although President Trump was willing to end the Obama-era calls for democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Russia, he could not drop the Ukraine-

related sanctions that Congress (including the Republican leadership) insisted on continuing and even strengthening if Russia did not modify its Ukraine policies. The checks and balances inherent in the US political system set limits for the US president, even in foreign policy (see Chapter 3).

For the Kremlin, however, Ukraine is not just a foreign-policy issue: it is also a domestic matter in that Russian nationalists genuinely consider much of it (Crimea and Eastern Ukraine especially) as rightfully belonging to Russia. This shows how foreign-policy considerations have a “cultural component” grounded in the domestic sphere that sets limits on manoeuvrability, not only in the United States but also in Russia. Making any concessions on Ukraine would risk undermining support for Putin not just among the Russian public, but also in his core security service and nationalist constituencies.

In addition, although it might seem sensible to the Trump administration that Moscow should distance itself from Iran and China as part of Russian-American rapprochement, Russia remains dependent on both. Tehran’s support is essential for propping up the Assad regime, and Russia’s status seeking in the Middle East is intimately linked to maintaining an influential role in Syria. China, on the other hand, has a role to play in buttressing the Russian economy through substantial investments and loans, and Beijing continues to share similar views about the coming of a multipolar world order. In addition to putting these benefits at risk, moving away from Iran and China at Washington’s behest would make Russia appear as “less than a great power”. Such questions of status are of great significance to the Kremlin. Nor will Russia support Trump’s efforts to end the Iranian nuclear accord, and will likely see the divisions over the JCPOA as an opportunity for exploiting the differences between Trump and most of America’s allies on this issue.

Similarly, Russia may see it as perfectly reasonable for the US to forswear the expansion of NATO into any other former Soviet republic outside the Baltic states, or even anywhere else in Europe (such as Finland and Sweden). However, there are domestic and international constraints that limit President Trump’s ability to make such promises: precluding a possible NATO expansion would be a concession that most Republicans and Democrats in Congress, let alone most of America’s NATO allies, would not be willing to make. The alliance will not relinquish the principle that accession to NATO is decided by the current and prospective member governments alone, and does not require agreement from any third party such as Russia (even though, as a practical matter, Ukraine and Georgia are highly unlikely to be admitted into NATO). The Kremlin’s expectations about sanctions relief are also likely to be thwarted. Russia may be able to hold on to Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, but what it has been unable to do is to get America and its European allies to acquiesce to this and return to business as usual. The issue is simply too fundamental to the interests of the Western actors involved.

Yet, despite the many differences between the US and Russia that have persisted since Trump’s inauguration, Moscow and Washington continue to share some common interests. Both oppose ISIS and other jihadist groups in Syria and elsewhere in the greater Middle East. On this, Russian-American cooperation could be achieved. Further, the Trump administration does not appear to be insisting that Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad step down, as the Obama administration did, and this also constitutes a potential basis for cooperation with Moscow. Although they disagree on Iran, Moscow and Washington both have good relations with Tehran’s regional adversaries (Israel and the Arab Gulf monarchies). Indeed, both want to see the status quo in the Middle East largely preserved, and conflicts there to be contained

even if they cannot be ended. Unlike most governments in the region, Washington and Moscow are sympathetic to the Kurds in both Iraq and Syria. Far from opposing the Kremlin's support for right-wing nationalist forces in Europe, Trump has also expressed sympathy for them. At the same time, both are simultaneously pursuing good relations with moderate democratic governments in Europe.

8.4 Enduring uncertainties between the US and Russia

There are also some uncertainties in the US-Russian relationship in several areas going forward. If the hostility between the US and North Korea (or more accurately, between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un) intensifies, Russia's response remains unclear. The Kremlin recently supported sanctions against North Korea at the UNSC, although they were a watered-down version of the more stringent measures called for by the US. In addition, it is not clear what Russia could (or would) do if Trump were to follow through on his threats to intervene in Venezuela to solve what he called a "completely unacceptable" situation in the country (White House 2017k). Similarly, it is unclear how the US would respond, in the current situation, to any additional Russian military moves in former Soviet republics such as Ukraine, Belarus or Moldova. It is not known, either, how both America and Russia would respond to violent conflict erupting between third parties such as India and China, India and Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, for example.

With both Putin and Trump cultivating reputations for acting quickly, decisively and unpredictably, the future course of US-Russian relations with both men in power is less certain, as well as less stable, than under a more cautious American president such as Barack Obama. The inquiry into the Russia-Trump campaign connection will continue to limit the current administration's ability to cooperate with Russia without generating domestic political opposition. Most notably, prominent Republican senators such as John McCain and Bob Corker have voiced strong concern over any concessions to the Kremlin without a discernible modification in Russia's international behaviour.

Furthermore, a decision by Congress to impeach Trump and remove him from office as a result of evidence uncovered in the Russia investigations would prevent his successor from pursuing a friendlier US policy toward Russia. A finding that Trump colluded with Russia would make it especially difficult for a Pence administration to pursue closer ties with Moscow. With Republicans currently enjoying a majority in both the House and the Senate, it is highly unlikely that the House would vote to impeach Trump, or that the Senate would vote to remove him from office. If the Democrats were to regain control of the House as a result of the November 2018 elections, they could move to impeach Trump. However, even if the Democrats regained a majority in the Senate (which now seems increasingly possible), they will not have the two-thirds control needed to remove Trump from office.⁵⁸ This would require some Republicans to join them in such an effort, and it is highly doubtful that many would do so as long as Republican voters continued to support Trump, even though a majority of voters do not. It is more likely, but far from certain, that Trump will not run for re-election in 2020, or that he is not re-elected.

Similarly, although a sudden leadership change in Russia could lead to a very different foreign-policy approach towards America and the West than Putin's, it might not. Each new Russian leader seems to want to distinguish himself by criticising his predecessor's policies and

⁵⁸ For further elaboration on removing a president from office, see footnote 29.

adopting different ones that are “better”, but some policies will not change. It is simply impossible to predict which of Putin’s policies his successor will change and which he will retain. For the time being, such speculation seems premature, as Putin has recently announced he will seek a fourth term as President.

In the short-term, the most likely scenario is that the US and Russia will continue to undertake actions that the other does not like, while both simultaneously try to avoid situations that could spin out of control. Indeed, the various crises in the relationship may even provide opportunities for bilateral summits aimed at resolving, or at least containing, them. In addition to the domestic constraints described above, there are also external limits to US-Russia cooperation. The problem facing both nations is that they may simply be unable to tackle issues effectively by themselves. In Syria, for instance, both Turkey and Iran are pursuing their own independent policies. Another danger for the US is that cooperation with Russia risks alienating America’s traditional allies and partners, especially in Europe where concerns about Russia’s influence in the region remain. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that Trump will stray too far in this direction given that his top advisors – McMaster, Mattis, and Pence – remain distrustful of Russia and retain some influence over the President’s foreign-policy decisions. Finally, it is possible that the period of unrealistic expectations and initial disillusionment has now passed, and that the US-Russia relationship will move forward on the basis of more realistic mutual expectations. This would allow Moscow and Washington to contain their differences, if not to resolve them.

8.5 The US-Russia relationship and Northern Europe

Whether it is good or bad, the state of US-Russia relations has an impact on Northern Europe, not least on Finland, which shares a 1,300-kilometre border with Russia. Initial fears that Trump and Putin would get along well and reach an agreement affecting Europe without any consultation have dissipated in the wake of the deteriorating US-Russian relationship. On the one hand, poor US-Russia relations raise concerns about the possibility of some form of hostile Russian actions or posturing towards America’s European allies. On the other hand, frictions between the US and those very same allies may arise if Europeans wish to continue cooperating with Russia economically despite US-Russia tensions. The consternation caused in Europe following the imposition by Congress of the most recent round of sanctions against Russia (reluctantly signed into law by President Trump), highlighted this prospect (Weaver and Foy 2017).

Russia has signalled that it respects NATO’s current membership level, but after the accession of Montenegro it does not want to see any further expansion. There does not appear to be sufficient appetite within NATO to accept any more former Soviet republics (after the three Baltic states) into the alliance in any case. The possible accession of Sweden and Finland is another matter. They are both Western democracies in good standing, and there is a stronger perception among existing NATO members that they should be allowed to join if they want to – and if they are willing to adopt and share the burden of collective defence. Russia, for its part, has indicated that there will be negative consequences for Sweden, and especially Finland, if they do decide to seek membership of the alliance, but it has not specified what these might be. However, a recent report by a panel of experts argued that Russia’s political and economic responses would be strong, if not blunt, even if it did not resort to military means (which cannot be completely ruled out) (Bergquist et al. 2016). In the end, Russia’s threats may be intended more to deter Sweden and Finland from joining rather than to be acted upon if they do. However, it is unlikely that Finland will apply for NATO membership, at least in the near future. The situation in Sweden appears to be more uncertain (see Dalsjö 2017).

In the absence of NATO membership, both Finland and Sweden have pursued other avenues to enhance their security. Both have been increasing their bilateral security cooperation with the US, other NATO states and NATO itself, without eliciting an unduly negative Russian reaction.⁵⁹ The Northern European states – especially Finland and Sweden – exercise a considerable degree of control over the question of NATO expansion in the Nordic states, and thus over whether or how strongly US-Russian differences arise over it. They have less control, but could still be affected by, US-Russia differences elsewhere, especially in conflict situations such as Ukraine and Syria. There is understandable concern in Northern Europe that events in these two places could spill over and negatively affect them. This could happen in Syria, for example, where Moscow in September 2017 “raised the threat of a direct confrontation with US forces in Syria, saying that it would target areas occupied by American units and US-backed militias if its troops came under fire” (Filipov and Sly 2017). However, although the Trump administration is contesting the growth of Iranian influence in Syria, it seems to have accepted Russia’s presence there. In addition, despite their overall lack of cooperation in Syria, the US and Russia have taken care to pursue “deconfliction” (coordination aimed at avoiding any direct clash between their forces). What is even more relevant, the Syrian conflict contributed to the recent large-scale refugee flows into Europe, but for the moment the massive movement of people from Syria (and elsewhere) seems to have subsided.

The heating up of the conflict in Ukraine would have greater spill-over potential in Northern Europe. The possibility that America will provide arms to Ukraine could well lead to the escalation of the conflict given that Russia would undoubtedly respond by increasing support for pro-Russian separatists, or even sending in Russian military forces. The security situation in the Baltic Sea region could also take a turn for the worse, with the heightened risk of miscalculation. Russia, in fact, has been relatively cautious in using force, and it is doubtful that it would want to spread its military out too thinly through opening additional theatres of conflict in Europe. All in all, the best way for Northern Europe to mitigate the risk of an expanded Ukrainian conflict would be to engage in vigorous conflict-resolution diplomacy. This could also be significant in terms of keeping an expanded conflict in Ukraine from spreading elsewhere in Europe.

8.6 Conclusion

As argued above, hopes for a US-Russia rapprochement have been dashed along with expectations in the Kremlin and the White House concerning a grand bargain and a rejuvenation of relations between the two countries. This has been due, in part, to the unfolding controversy and investigations concerning Russia’s election meddling and the Trump campaign’s possible collusion with Russian operatives. Congress has also taken a strong view on Russia, voicing public concerns and passing sanctions legislation that renders it increasingly difficult for the current administration to pursue a policy perceived as too Russia-friendly. Perhaps more relevant still, enduring differences related to crucial issues in contemporary world politics – such as the situations in Ukraine and Syria, the actions of Iran, the role of China and especially the future of the European security architecture – are likely to add the Trump presidency to the long line of failed American attempts at reconciling fundamental disagreements with Russia.

Nevertheless, irrespective of changes in leadership in Washington or Moscow, the US-Russia relationship remains crucial for the security of Europe, and Finland’s immediate neighbour-

⁵⁹ Further, the issue of how Russia would respond in practice to the accession of Sweden and Finland will not arise unless and until there is a firm decision (or a credible process leading towards it) on the part of these governments to apply for admission, and of existing NATO members to accept them.

hood in particular. In terms of immediate challenges, the US and its European allies and partners on the one hand, and Russia on the other, must find ways of managing their differences, particularly over the conflict in Ukraine. At the very least, this should be done in a way that prevents the escalation and spillover that would further destabilise the European security situation. A resolution based on the Minsk II agreement should remain the desired ultimate objective. Overall, given the history of dispute and disappointment in the US-Russia relationship, suspicions between Washington and Moscow are likely to persist long after the Trump era and Vladimir Putin's reign.

9. The United States and the transforming security environment in Asia

- An increasingly assertive and self-confident China poses a challenge to US hegemony in the Asia Pacific region. Perceptions of the US as a power in relative decline coupled with references by President Trump to US disengagement from the region have served to underscore the notion of an on-going regional power shift.
- Nevertheless, US engagement in the region is likely to remain, by and large, the same. In an attempt to balance China's rising prominence, the US will further build up military capabilities and continue its efforts to create a security network in the "Indo-Pacific". Such efforts will include strengthening military ties with allies such as Japan and South Korea, and with strategic partner countries such as India.
- Support for liberal values, human rights and normative principles, however, are likely to have a less important role. Nevertheless, the current focus on commercial access and national defence underscores the inconsistency and tension between self-determination and universal values that has also been present during previous US administrations.
- Evolving US engagement in the region offers opportunities for the European Union to intensify commercial links and further promote free trade with its Asian partners. At a time when the US is perceived as relinquishing its strategy of promoting liberal norms, the EU could also revitalize region-to-region cooperation with ASEAN in particular, based on a shared commitment to a rule-based order, while continuing to emphasize human rights and normative principles.

9.1 Introduction

The US "pivot to Asia", later renamed "rebalance towards Asia", during the administration of President Barack Obama underscored the greater global importance of Asia, and the ensuing need for the US to strengthen its engagement in the region. This recently intensified emphasis corresponds with the general transition of global economic power, although the US was already playing a robust role in the region during the Cold War. However, once the administration under President Donald Trump began to function it was widely perceived that US foreign policy in Asia would shift dramatically towards a stronger focus on hard power, national self-interest, protectionism and transactionalism. The aim in this chapter is to assess the manifestation and significance of the perceived policy shift for the Asian region, and to examine its potential future implications, including for Europe. Will the US policy of rebalancing towards Asia be dead and buried in the Trump era and beyond?

The chapter first sketches the main contours of the evolving security landscape in a region that is still marked by a strong emphasis on the nation state, sovereignty and non-interference, but which also has its territorial disputes, unstable regimes and imperfect democracies, accompanied with rising uncertainties and policies of hedging and balancing. Second, it addresses the question of change versus continuity, and assesses the extent to which, after one year in office, Trump and his Asia policy constitute a breach with the past. The focus then shifts to China's challenge to US hegemony – its preponderant power position in the region and beyond – the aim being to extrapolate certain future developments in the relationship between China and the US and its regional allies. The final section draws overall conclusions, examines the changing role of norms and values, and considers the potential implications for Europe and its relationship with the US.

9.2 The evolving Asian security environment: flashpoints and challenges

For some years now, Asia has been in the global spotlight as the world's fastest-growing region holding the key to 21st-century history. The region stretching from Japan through China and from Southeast Asia to India has been called the "arc of ascendance" forecasting "Asia's march on the future" (Campbell 2016, 1). Nevertheless, it is also a region of numerous security risks and potential hot spots. The way in which the Trump administration handles these challenges could have a more lasting impact as future administrations reflect upon them as "lessons learned" for America's foreign policy in the area.

First of all, an increasingly assertive China strongly affects the regional security environment. Its military expansion alongside its economic growth, its actions in regional maritime affairs (constructing artificial islands to reinforce claims on disputed territories in the South China Sea, for example) and growing influence in the region have contributed to raising threat perceptions. According to the official rhetoric, China's current strategy focuses on peaceful development. Nevertheless, in the field of foreign policy Beijing takes a much more proactive strategic stance, coupled with a tougher approach towards national interests such as the South China Sea, or officially-recognised "core interests" such as the Japanese-controlled Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. The Taiwan Strait is another potentially dangerous flashpoint because of the tension between US security commitments, its long-standing geostrategic vision as the guardian of the maritime commons, and China's ambitions to re-integrate Taiwan. Following a policy of "strategic ambiguity" the US has aimed to conduct a delicate balancing act, deterring China from using force against Taiwan and dissuading Taiwan from pursuing independence. It is clear that China has become more vocal about its great-power ambitions, making territorial claims as well as taking economic and finance-related initiatives. Contrary to its former low-profile strategy, since 2012 Beijing has actively sought to shape the regional and international environment under the banner of "major power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics".

Second, the situation on the Korean Peninsula makes the region highly volatile. Tensions reached a new peak in 2017 after the North Korean regime under its leader Kim Jong-un carried out its sixth nuclear test in early September, and in November conducted its sixteenth missile test in 2017 alone. It seems beyond doubt that North Korea is making progress in its missile programme, in terms of both nuclear technology and strike capability (Chapter 5). The alleged end of the "strategic patience" policy on the part of the US at the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency has further exacerbated the North Korean belligerent rhetoric and accompanying regional tensions. The US has been appealing strongly to China to apply direct pressure on the regime, but has come to realise that the options are limited in view of China's reluctance to exert its influence on Pyongyang and put pressure on the regime, even if Beijing has gradually taken a tougher line.

Third, there are "non-state risks" including the proliferation of WMDs, as well as non-traditional security challenges such as terrorism, humanitarian crises, natural disasters and piracy. Vulnerability to terrorism is an outcome of poor border security, weak law enforcement, and poor coordination and information sharing among relevant agencies, whereas piracy has been on the rise, particularly in Southeast Asia (Green et al. 2016, 28).

Lastly, the region is characterised by what is often referred to as the Asian paradox. In other words, in East Asia, vibrant economies, rapidly growing economic interdependence and integration, and deepening trade and investment networks, on the one hand, coexist with tense diplomatic relations, increasing political nationalism and regional rivalry, unresolved territorial disputes, lingering historical grievances, an on-going arms race and relatively limited security-related cooperation on the other (see Pollack 2016). The paradox is also evident in the relationship between two of America's military allies, Japan and South Korea (ROK, Republic of Korea). Both countries have deep cultural ties as well as close trade relations, but bilateral relations are strongly impeded by differing views on wartime history and mistrust, as is most obvious in disputes over the issue of comfort women, visits by Japanese politicians to the controversial Yasukuni shrine and territorial claims to Dokdo/Takeshima.

9.3 The US policy on Asia from Obama to Trump

The pivot to Asia highlighted the need for the US to devote more energy and resources to the burgeoning Asian region. According to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's (2011) article in *Foreign Policy* launching the pivot, "(t)he future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be at the center of the action". The US rebalance towards Asia therefore also implied a shift away from seemingly endless engagements in the Middle East. Heralding "America's Pacific Century", Clinton expounded Washington's ambitions to form a counterweight to China and to take on a leading role in a region "eager for US leadership and business" – along with its traditional allies and, possibly, India. According to one of the main architects of the pivot, former Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, the new policy had one important additional objective, namely to move away from the hitherto predominant "China first" policy or the "G2" approach (proposed at the start of the Obama administration), and instead apply an integrative approach by embedding a China strategy in a larger regional framework and advancing relations with countries across the region (Campbell 2016, 7). The purported goal was not to contain China but to engage it, and to preserve and extend American power in Asia.

The extent to which the pivot materialised in terms of the resources allocated to a strengthened military and diplomatic presence in Asia is open to debate. One element seems beyond doubt, however: it had an effect on alliance partners. Countries such as Japan duly strengthened their physical as well as, importantly, their legal capabilities to reinforce the alliance and ensure US commitment. More relevant still, rhetoric focusing on closer ties through trade, diplomacy and defence reassured allies in the region, and expressed support for norms and values reflected US ambitions for continued regional leadership. Both of these aspects continue to play a key role among countries in the region as a tool for future hedging against China's rise to preponderance.

The election of Donald Trump as US president seemed to indicate a shift from Obama's "Asia first" policy to a new "America first" orientation. Already during his election campaign Trump set himself apart from the Obama administration. Both before and after the election, he displayed a shallow understanding of the history, legacy and underlying purpose of the US alliance system in the region, and of East Asian geopolitics in general. Instead, he gave precedence to balancing trade relationships, reviving American industry and creating jobs. Trump's efforts were clear during his recent tour of Asia, where he boasted of his apparent success in securing economic, energy and military trade agreements with China, Japan and South Korea that would "bring jobs to the United States and reduce the trade deficit" (Qiu 2017).

At least as significant as a result of Trump's election was the fallout for alliance partners. The US-Japan alliance, for example, has been both the cornerstone of Japan's security and the hallmark of the power structure in the Asia-Pacific region for most of the post-war period. Now, more than ever before, question marks abound over the role and function of the alliance for Japan and in the region. Trump referred to the alliance as a one-sided and unfair agreement, saying that Japan was over-reliant on America. He contended that countries such as Japan should cover more of the costs of maintaining US forces on their soil. Concerns about the need for greater burden-sharing had been raised during former administrations as well, but the fact that Trump placed doubts on the entire alliance set off alarm bells in Tokyo and exacerbated existing fears of future abandonment: "Japan used to beat China, they routinely beat China. Why are we defending them at all?" During his election campaign Trump already hinted at the possibility for both Japan and South Korea to acquire nuclear weapons so as to reduce their reliance on Washington. Within Japan, this has given a boost to conservative politicians, including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in their efforts to strengthen the Japanese military and give it more autonomy, the long-term goal being to change the "US-imposed" constitution. On the regional level, many observe an on-going power shift, while casting doubt on whether the US presence at the core of the post-war system in the Asia-Pacific is sustainable.

Furthermore, vowing to place American business first, Trump has been openly wary of regional alliances, multilateral deals and multinational trade agreements. Since taking office he has pulled out of the Paris climate accord and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a planned mega-FTA including twelve Asian-Pacific countries initially led by the US, intended not only to foster trade but also to bolster America's geostrategic position in the region (Chapter 7). This seemed to indicate that the US was relinquishing its global leadership on key issues such as climate and trade, with ramifications in other fields including security. Instead, Trump has been advocating bilateral trade deals, including with the eleven TPP countries, which have decided to move forward with the regional trade agreement without the US.

Lastly, among the more substantial changes during the Trump administration is the ambition to uphold the liberal order based on universal norms and values (see Chapters 4 and 6). One of the key objectives of the US pivot to Asia was to reinforce critical norms and values underpinning a secure and prosperous regional and international order, through bilateral, trilateral and multilateral means. Trump, on the other hand, has made no mention of "traditional" US leadership in terms of liberal values, progressive norms, or open economic philosophy. Instead, with his aim to place "America First", he is criticised for jeopardising US ambitions to continue to be a "force for good" in the world. According to a recent editorial in the Economist (2017b):

"[p]erhaps the greatest damage that Mr Trump has done is to American soft power. He openly scorns the notion that America should stand up for universal values such as democracy and human rights. Not only does he admire dictators; he explicitly praises thuggishness, such as the mass murder of criminal suspects in the Philippines. He does so not out of diplomatic tact, but apparently out of conviction. This is new."

9.4 The pivot to Asia: dead in the water or continuity after all?

It is therefore tempting to depict the transition from Obama to Trump in terms of discontinuity. As Storey and Izzuddin (2017, 2) argue, Obama's pivot to Asia is more or less dead in the water. For one thing, Trump explicitly aimed to dismantle the Obama legacy; second, his TPP

withdrawal dealt a major blow to the earlier strategy; and third, his preoccupation with combating ISIS will ensure that the emphasis remains on the Middle East, at the expense of Asia. In other words, it is not difficult to focus on a change from openness to isolationism, from multilateralism to a retreat from global governance, from free trade to protectionism, from dialogue and engagement to confrontation, and from an “Asia First” to an “America First” policy. Nevertheless, one should not overemphasise the breach with the past. From a wider and longer-term perspective, the focus may still remain on continuity, in particular when it comes to the US’s grand strategy for Asia. All in all, the following elements point to continuity rather than change.

First, there is history. Since the start of its engagement with Asia in 1784, the main focus of US strategy has been to prevent the rise of a hostile hegemon that would threaten US interests. To quote Green (2017, 5):

“[i]f there is one central theme in American strategic culture as it has applied to the Far East over time, it is that the United States will not tolerate any other power establishing exclusive hegemonic control over Asia or the Pacific. Put another way, for over two centuries, the national interest of the United States has been identified by key leaders as ensuring that the Pacific Ocean remains a conduit for American ideas and goods to flow westward, and not for threats to flow eastward toward the homeland.”

The US grand strategy, in other words the interplay between intelligence, diplomacy and military strength, for the Asia-Pacific has therefore remained a constant, even when a “fluctuating roster of mostly incompetent leaders are unsure as to why they do anything” (McDougall cited in Green 2017, 3). It is therefore important to distinguish between Trump’s rhetoric and the bigger picture. As Parameswaran (2017) argues, US commitment to the region is structural, not situational. Continuity is particularly prominent at the level of defence, as the Pentagon tends routinely to continue engagements such as exercises and military transfers in a less visible fashion.

Second, key pillars of the US strategy in Asia remain unaltered. As was clear in the Trump administration’s first major Asia defence-policy address, given by Secretary of State Mattis during the Shangri-la Dialogue in June 2017, the three core components of strengthening alliances, encouraging a more interconnected region, and building US military capabilities, were all essential parts of the pivot or rebalance under the Obama administration (Parameswaran 2017).

The objective to strengthen existing alliances and forge a denser security network of like-minded countries specifically denotes continuity with preceding administrations. In spite of the above-mentioned concerns that Trump raised *vis-à-vis* its alliance partners in the region, his administration appears to be seeing eye-to-eye again with countries such as Japan and South Korea. Relations with Japan were reset after two meetings between Abe and Trump, in which the latter vowed to be 100-per-cent on the side of Tokyo, complemented by visits to Tokyo by Secretary of Defence Mattis and Secretary of State Tillerson. Moreover, during a recent visit to Seoul Trump managed to iron out his differences with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and reconfirm US deterrence commitments.

Furthermore, partly as an outcome of the limited overarching regional security institutions (often described as talking shops), for some years now the region has been characterised by the on-going creation of so-called strategic partnerships on the bilateral, trilateral, or even quadrilateral level. The hub-and-spokes system with US-centred military alliances at its core

has remained central, but countries are increasingly hedging their bets by establishing issue-based and functional partnerships with other countries. These partnerships tend to complement more formal and military-oriented alliances such as the one between the US and Japan. Strategic partnerships are therefore an instrument for multiple hedging, against both a threatening China and possible abandonment by a potentially weakening US. They are increasingly becoming a key factor in what Buzan (2012, 11) refers to as the Asian “supercomplex”, a regional security complex covering South and East Asia and marked by the continuing rise of China and India and a weakening US.

As a strong sign of the increasingly important regional role of India, in particular as a hedge against possible Chinese predominance, the Trump administration has started to emphasise the concept of the Indo-Pacific.⁶⁰ Following a reference in an earlier speech by Secretary of State Tillerson, at the most recent APEC summit in November 2017 Trump repeatedly referred to “Indo-Pacific”, rather than using the more common moniker “Asia-Pacific”.⁶¹ Using Indo-Pacific as the strategic definition of Asia was originally a Japanese idea, launched in 2007 by current Japanese Prime Minister Abe during his first term in office. The concept denotes a wider area including South Asia, stretching to Southeast Asia and Oceania, and entails a “dynamic coupling” of both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. The term also gives a key role to India as a regional power, denoting a region in which China plays a relatively lesser role. It thus dovetails with Abe’s idea of the “Asian security diamond”, a free and open maritime region connecting the US, Australia, India and Japan. References to a “free and open Indo-Pacific” are therefore explicitly aimed at denoting a strategy in which countries such as India, Japan, Australia and Southeast Asian nations such as Vietnam, equally wary of China’s ascendancy, will contribute to countering Beijing’s strong maritime ambitions in the South China Sea and far beyond. It is likely that less formal alignments such as the US-India-Japan trilateral dialogue and US-Japan-India-Australia quadrilateral cooperation will continue to develop under the Trump administration and beyond (see also Chapter 6).

9.5 The China challenge

The single most important predicament for the US remains China’s challenge to US hegemony. An increasingly assertive China under President Xi Jinping clearly harbours the ambition to regain a central role in Asia and to acquire a larger role in global affairs. This has led to speculations about the unavoidability of conflict in the long run, and a debate on whether both powers will be able to avoid “Thucydides’s trap”, which postulates that when one rising power threatens to displace another great power, war is almost always the result (Allison 2017). China’s challenge to American hegemony and international principles is clear. China has challenged the freedom of navigation and strengthened territorial claims in Southeast Asia. Its military spending continues to rise. It has been aggressively investing in anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities as well as in cyber, electronic warfare, a blue-water navy, missiles, and intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, all intended to undermine the US military capability to protect its interests in the region (see Green et al. 2016, 2-3). The US remains the dominant naval power in the Asia-Pacific, but is being increasingly challenged by

⁶⁰ It is obvious that the definition of Asia as a geographically-based grouping of countries representing a region is highly fluid and variable. The concept of Asia differs according to the strategic goals, identity and national interests of a certain country’s government. This automatically implies that definitions also shift over time, reflecting the evolving definitions of interests and national identity. As pointed out by Green (2017, 14-15), US definitions of Asia have evolved historically from a focus on the East Indies, Northeast Asia, the wider Asia-Pacific with a rising China at its core, to the current concept of the Indo-Pacific, especially salient in terms of the balancing efforts against China’s ascendancy.

⁶¹ The term “Asia-Pacific” would also have been the expected term to use within the framework of APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation).

China, which no longer accepts that the US is the sole naval power in the region. According to China's Defense White Paper of 2015, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is gradually seeking to shift the defence focus from offshore waters to include "open seas protection" (Green et al. 2016, 18) and long-distance operations in the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific (Economist 2015).

In addition, China has ambitions to create alternative systems of governance, including through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the BRICS Bank, and the proposed Shanghai Cooperation Bank. The 16+1 grouping of Central and Eastern European countries plus China could be seen as an example of China's strategy not to displace existing structures (as "Thucydides's trap" would predict), but to create parallel ones. Economic development, continued growth and sustainable prosperity are key determinants of whether China can further boost its clout in the Asia-Pacific in particular. In the aftermath of the US withdrawal from the TPP, China is profiling itself as the champion of free trade. Beijing is pushing forward with its own regional trade construction, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

China also displays a newfound self-confidence. At the recent Congress of the Communist Party, President Xi Jinping referred to China as a "mighty force" in the world and a role model for political and economic development, adding that his country's political system "is a great creation" that offers "a new choice for other countries" (Doan 2017). Furthermore, since the rise to power of Xi in 2012, China has come to see US power in the region as a lesser constraint on China's exercise of influence, and relations with the US in general have seemed less of a preoccupation than in earlier years (Green et al. 2016, 14). Trump has only strengthened that tendency: his numerous missteps and mishaps, both at home and abroad, have boosted the Chinese leadership's confidence. When Trump cast doubt on US adherence to the One-China policy, Xi made the non-negotiable demand that Trump reassert the policy before any conversation between both leaders could take place. The fact that Trump duly reversed his view only reinforced a strengthening conviction in China of American weakness and of the US as a "paper tiger" (Economist 2017c).

One key element that will determine whether conflict in the region can be avoided and a balance of power achieved, is the extent to which the US can maintain and strengthen the hub-and-spokes system of alliances. It is said, for example, that within the next 30 years China's navy might match the American navy, but this discounts the fact that the US could cooperate closely with the powerful Japanese Maritime SDF and the growing Indian navy (Economist 2015). The extent to which the US can complement the alliance system with the strengthened strategic partnerships with other countries in the "Indo-Pacific" is a core determinant in the China-US rivalry.

A second key element is Japan's stance. Japan has historically refused to submit itself to a China-dominated order, seeing itself as an equal. As Michael Green argues, in view of Japan's own expansionist policies during the Pacific War, and the lingering grievances concerning its actions during the first half of the 20th century, the country will not be able to become a dominant regional power through a Pax Nipponica. At the same time, Japan will reject domination by China (Pax Sinica). Peace and stability in the region therefore hinge upon the strength of the security alliance with the US and the continued Pax Americana (Green 2001).

9.6 Conclusion

The debate on the US as a power in relative decline in the Asia-Pacific, coupled with Trump's references to US disengagement from the region, have served to underscore the notion of a continuing power shift in the region propelled by a strongly (re)emerging China. One core aim of the Obama administration's rebalance to Asia was to "bend Asia's evolving distribution of power away from hegemony and more toward balance" (Campbell 2016, 157). The US aimed to engage China and cooperate with Beijing, but at the same time sought to hedge against China's rise. The prime instrument for achieving this was engagement with India, Australia and individual Southeast Asian countries through economic diplomacy, and the strengthening of military ties to establish a security network in the Asia-Pacific. Relations with alliance partners Japan (e.g. through collective security) and South Korea (e.g. the THAAD missile defence system) were strengthened. In addition, the US was a driving force behind the creation of strategic partnerships with countries such as India and Australia. The creation of these partnerships has gained popularity in the region as a highly flexible foreign-policy instrument to promote cooperation on a limited number of specific issues. Countries such as Japan, for example, aspire to build strategic alliances of like-minded, democratic Indo-Pacific countries that share similar anxieties about China's growing naval might. Many countries in the region, including Southeast Asian states, Australia and Japan, therefore welcome a stronger presence and a regional role for the US, as this allows them to conduct a "dual hedge" and play both great powers against each other. China, for its part, has been highly active in exerting influence in the region through different degrees of charm offensive and tactical intimidation to test US standing as the region's security guarantor (Gill et al. 2016, 16).

Compared to the Obama era, at first sight the Trump administration has changed tack by emphasising an "America first" policy and shifting towards isolationism and self-interest. Nevertheless, US grand strategy is likely to remain by and large the same. The extent to which the Trump administration can uphold these efforts in the years to come is the key to balancing China's rise. Trump's recent tour of Asia confirms that a prime goal for now is to build personal relationships and cement partnerships, but this is likely to be done at the expense of expressing support for human rights and normative principles, as the President's visit to the Philippines made clear. The promotion of liberal norms has been a key element in US foreign policy, given "the clear strategic advantages of maintaining a favorable ideational balance of power in which like-minded states reinforce American influence, access, and security" (Green 2017, 9). Trump is seemingly overturning this policy. However, it should be kept in mind that strong tension between self-determination and universal values has been an equally consistent element of US policy in Asia. Trump's focus on commercial access and national defence underscores the inconsistency that has also been present during preceding administrations.

Propelled by China's ascendancy, US re-engagement with East Asia has drawn other players, old as well as new, more closely into the East Asian power game. The EU remains a more important trading partner for East Asia than the US. The total volume of EU trade and the relative importance of the East Asian region have increased significantly. As a political actor however, the EU continues to have a limited role. A major milestone towards assuming a more influential role in political affairs was its attendance at the East Asia Summit as a guest for the first time in November 2017. This was preceded by the Union's accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2012 – a pre-requisite for being considered a candidate for a seat at the East Asia Summit table.

Another possible element contributing to a potentially larger security role in the region is the EU's agreement (signed by 25 member states) to establish Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which aims to increase joint military investment and defence capabilities. Furthermore, as the US appears to be less interested in promoting liberal norms, the EU could revitalise region-to-region cooperation with ASEAN based on a shared commitment to a rule-based order, and emphasise human rights and normative principles in the process. America's evolving engagement in Asia thus provides opportunities for the EU, not only to intensify commercial links and promote free trade, but also to engage more closely with Asian countries by offering – in the words of European Commission vice-president Jyrki Katainen – “stability, rule of law, [and] a rules-based system of multilateralism” (quoted in Beesley et al. 2017). Ultimately, it will be in the interest of the US to work with Europe in upholding support for a rules-based order in Asia.

PART V: THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

10. Trends in the transatlantic security relationship

- The United States and its allies across the Atlantic constitute a security community wherein the use of force has been replaced by debate and negotiation in settling disagreements.
- President Trump's various remarks have raised concerns over the foundations of the transatlantic relationship, including the ironclad nature of NATO's security guarantee, the smooth continuity of transatlantic free trade and the upholding of shared liberal values.
- Transatlantic unity has witnessed tensions, bickering and occasional crises over the years. In this sense, the Trump administration's "America First" approach could be seen as merely another American (re)articulation that US interests should matter more within the transatlantic security community.
- Institutionalised security cooperation, extensive economic relations and shared values are likely to continue guiding the relationship between the United States and Europe, even if uncertainty over the normative common ground, in particular, raises some concerns for the future.

10.1 Introduction

The first year of the Trump administration was characterised by growing strain in relations between the United States and Europe. Politicians, the media and foreign-policy experts have questioned assumptions about institutional sustainability and certainties of commitment. Nevertheless, the cornerstones of the transatlantic security community remain. Security cooperation, extensive economic relations, broadly shared values and a mutual interest in backing the existing international order continue to guide the relationship between the United States and Europe.

This chapter considers the Trump presidency in the context of the enduring bonds that have kept the transatlantic community together since the end of the Second World War, including the cycles of tension that have been symptomatic of this overall relationship. The present situation and future trajectories of the transatlantic link are also discussed in terms of security and economic relations, and with reference to the common institutional and value base.

10.2 Enduring foundations of the transatlantic security community

The United States and its allies across the Atlantic constitute the core of the liberal international order (see Chapter 6). It has often been claimed that they comprise a "security community", a constellation wherein "war or the threat of force to settle disputes within the region is unthinkable" (Ikenberry 2008, 7). In short, members of security communities "entertain dependable expectations of peaceful change", and such expectations become embedded in the social fabrics of the states and their constituent communities (Adler and Barnett 1998, 34). Security communities are typically defined in terms of three elements characterised by confluence between community members, namely:

1. power and security interests;
2. economic interdependence and market relations;
3. common institutions, values and political identity.⁶²

Security cooperation across the Atlantic is institutionalised in the form of NATO, which has shown an ability to change in response to evolving security-related demands emanating from its members on both sides of the Atlantic. Operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan, and a more recent re-focus on collective defence in Europe constitute evidence of this. In addition, there is an increasing number of flexible formats that enable multilateral cooperation, which are nonetheless more formal than the coalitions-of-the-willing format championed by the United States during the early 2000s. The benefits of this security cooperation have been clear to US military personnel and civil servants and, after varying lengths of time, to every US administration since the end of World War II.

Mutually beneficial extensive economic relations between the United States and Europe stretch back to the founding of the original thirteen colonies on the eastern-seaboard of today's United States. Given the nature of the economies involved, the relationship is primarily among myriad private-sector actors on both sides of the Atlantic. Governments, or more recently the European Union, have tended to be involved by facilitating the frameworks of trade liberalisation (e.g. GATT/WTO, TTIP negotiations, the EU's four freedoms and the EMU) and enforcing their own national or supranational laws. It is this multiplicity of actors and extensive web of relations that make the transatlantic economic relationship so robust.

The cornerstone of the transatlantic relationship is the idea of a shared set of values. On the very broadest levels, such as the promotion of democracy, a market economy and citizens' rights, it is possible to make the case that both Americans and Europeans hold a broadly similar set of values. On individual issues such as gun ownership, however, there is a clear gap. Surveys also report wide variability within the United States and between different European states on matters such as drug policy, the role of religion in society and the rights of sexual minorities. For the purposes of evaluating the political state of the transatlantic relationship, perhaps the key metric is the extent to which both Europe and the United States seek to uphold and buttress these and other universal values on the global stage.

Continuing to support and underwrite the existing international order has been a broadly shared mutual endeavour on both sides of the Atlantic, which has held the transatlantic relationship together politically for the past seventy years. One of the drivers of the TTIP negotiations, for instance, was the recognition that together the US and the EU could guide and shape the evolution of the global economic framework. Only a few other state actors (most notably China) have the power to seek meaningful change in the existing order. However, non-state actors – primarily global multinational companies – have emerged as perhaps the more serious challengers, while at the same time greatly benefitting from the current order. From the perspective of the transatlantic relationship, it is fortunate that many of the key global companies have roots in the Anglo-Saxon transatlantic space.

⁶² This typology draws on Risse (2008, 268).

10.3 Transatlantic security relations: continuity in cooperation and cycles of tension

Donald Trump is the first post-World War II US president to assume office articulating a platform of detachment from America's global commitments. This included questioning the collective defence commitments the United States had taken on through NATO. For nearly seven decades, NATO has embodied the unwavering American and European support for collective defence, and has harnessed America's preponderant power for the common good of the transatlantic security community. All American presidents since the organisation was founded have acknowledged and recognised Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty in particular. Prior to President Trump's incumbency, US demands for Europeans to spend more on defence had not been read as a sign of a more conditional commitment. In fact, the US had been demanding for decades that Europeans do more for their own security. This trope has proliferated in American discussions since at least the Eisenhower presidency.

President Trump's first visit to Europe in 2017 was seen as a sign that the US might, also in the future, perceive its commitments as grounded on transactional reciprocity. According to some, more equitable burden-sharing would ensure the sustainability and vitality of the transatlantic link. However, if Europeans do not commit more funds to their common defence, the US may rethink its efforts regarding the defence of Europe (see e.g. Mandelbaum 2017; Gordon 2016). Nevertheless, whenever periodic discussions about the need for increased "strategic autonomy" surfaced in Europe, multiple US administrations have cautioned against it, fearing it could ultimately reduce American influence in European security and defence affairs.

One should therefore consider the perceived crisis in the transatlantic security community that accompanied the election in the context of long-term oscillation in the transatlantic relationship, and America's commitment to the liberal international order of which the West constitutes the core (see Chapter 6). In fact, transatlantic relations have rarely been unproblematic, not even in the security sphere in which continuity has persisted across US presidential administrations on the subject of America's commitment to Europe.

The transatlantic security community experienced multiple crises during the Cold War, and it was often thought to be on the verge of a "divorce". These critical episodes included external events such as the Suez Crisis in 1956 and the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, as well as domestic political shifts such as the inception of German *Ostpolitik* in the late 1960s and Ronald Reagan's initially confrontational attitude towards the Soviets in the early 1980s (Green Cowles and Egan 2016). At the time, they were all seen as risks to future transatlantic security cooperation.

After the end of the Cold War, each US administration had to deal with its own form of transatlantic strains. This was the case, for instance, when the United States pushed for German Reunification under George H.W. Bush, and as NATO sought to identify a new post-Cold War role and membership profile under US leadership during Bill Clinton's presidency. During the George W. Bush presidency, Europeans were concerned about his willingness to espouse a unilateralist worldview – a "go it alone" attitude stressing the role of "coalitions of the willing" and challenging core international norms (see Chapters 4 and 6). In other words, the problem in the early 2000s was hyper-militarised involvement, not a lack of involvement *per se*. America's willingness to assert leadership consummate with its position in the global power hierarchy was not questioned by the Bush administration (see Brown 2004; Nye 2002; Reus-Smit 2004).

President Obama, in turn, pressed Europeans on NATO burden-sharing (Howorth 2010, 463), and the much-touted “rebalance to Asia” policy did not exactly indicate that the transatlantic partnership would be a priority for him (Chapter 9; see also Cox 2012). Moreover, both the Libya intervention and vacillation over Syria showed that Obama would not assume as much of a leadership role as some allies might have hoped. As a result, the Obama administration came to be associated with the foreign-policy approach termed “leading from behind”⁶³, which as a mode of leadership rested on the assumption that military action could be both legitimate and effective if it was not branded as solely American, and if others – particularly European partners – took a more active role (Reich and Lebow 2014; Aaltola et al. 2014a). In this sense, Obama’s foreign policy was a corrective to the failures of the more unilateral military campaigns during the Bush era.

In reality, therefore, tensions, bickering, and occasional crises have tended to characterise transatlantic unity in action. Squabbles over whose interests should have priority in common actions and whose resources are burdened the most have persisted in the transatlantic security community, fuelled by disagreements over who should take the leadership role, what means should be used, how unilateral versus multilateral the operations should be, and how US and European security interests were related. In this sense, Trump’s “America first” slogan could be seen as merely another American (re)articulation that US interests should matter. Trump’s leadership instincts and style merely highlight the burden-sharing element.

Nevertheless, the burden-sharing issue is not likely to result in fundamental long-term differences within the transatlantic alliance. The extraterritorial nature of NATO’s “out of area” crisis-management operations during the 2000s turned the organisation into an increasingly global security actor. The operation in Afghanistan in particular – launched after the first ever evocation of Article 5 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks (NATO 2017) – was more difficult, complex and costly than was initially thought. However, the emergence of the Russian geopolitical challenge and ISIS-related terrorism in Europe has turned NATO’s attention and planning back towards territorial defence and the security of Europe. Given that the interests of European states are more obviously at stake, increases in defence expenditure are less troublesome politically. The issue of a bigger role for Europeans within NATO is not likely to lead to major divisions in the end, especially given that the division within Europe between states focusing on the east and those focusing on the south makes little difference to the United States, which as a global actor is interested in both.

In the current climate of increasing defence investments the question of whether to develop stronger European defences within NATO or the EU is less important to Washington than to its continental allies. Increasing the strategic autonomy of the EU was highlighted in the aftermath of President Trump’s ill-received visit to Europe in May 2017. Most notably, Chancellor Merkel referred to the discussions with Trump as “unsatisfactory”, and added that “the era in which we could fully rely on others is over to some extent” (quoted in Politico 2017). The development itself has long roots, and could arguably be traced as far back as the failed European Defence Community (EDC) in the early 1950s, although the symbolic “re-launch” of the current ESDP/CSDP framework under EU auspices took place in 1998.⁶⁴ Moreover, initiatives to strengthen the EU’s defence arm are supported by recent geopolitical trends in and around Europe (see above).

⁶³ Leading from behind was an ambiguous concept and it is unclear who in the Obama administration originally evoked it (Rogin 2011). It was used by Obama’s critics during the 2012 presidential elections as a quick descriptor for the President’s allegedly passive foreign policy. For a thorough discussion on the concept, see Lizza (2011).

⁶⁴ The St. Malo Declaration on December 4, 1998 by then British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac stated: “the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises”. For the full text of the declaration see CVCE (2008).

Brexit has also fuelled the EU's ambitions to develop its own defence capabilities further now that Britain, the leading military power alongside France, is leaving the Union. Paradoxically, Brexit may serve to increase EU defence cooperation and foster regional forms of multilateral security collaboration. The Northern Group⁶⁵ and the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force serve as examples of such forms of cooperation in northern Europe, the implication being that Brexit may not have an altogether negative effect on the transatlantic relationship from a security perspective (see Chapter 12).

Alongside the EU's common defence policies and plans for more efficient pooling and sharing among national forces and defence procurements, the closer relationship between the EU and NATO is a significant development that is now relatively uncontroversial in the US and Europe. It is increasingly seen as a win-win situation on both sides of the Atlantic, given its potential to foster more efficient European defence while heeding enduring American calls for more equal burden-sharing. For example, plans to ensure the mobility of military troops across national borders within the EU would support NATO efforts at collective defence in Europe (Michel 2017b). In the long term, such developments are also likely to alleviate fears of US unilateralism, in that more effective European defence would increase the Europeans' say in collective operations aimed at furthering common agendas, such as countering terrorism.

10.4 Enduring transatlantic economic bonds

The transatlantic economic relationship was built upon an often-forgotten bargain. Combined with the US military presence to keep potential expansionist plans by the Soviet Union at bay, the Marshall Plan – initiated in 1948 – made it possible for Europe's devastated economies to begin rebuilding after the horrors of the Second World War. It also functioned as the stimulus behind European economic integration. This economic commitment by the US not only fortified the capitalist core of the West in the Cold War power struggle, but also re-established trade links across the Atlantic and fostered a culture of cooperation in various rounds of negotiations on global trade liberalisation.

The relationship remains robust and strong to this day, and is still arguably the most important trade relationship in the world, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It comprises, primarily, a web of private sector relationships and rules-based market-driven logics. Consequently, despite criticism from politicians on both sides of the Atlantic regarding individual aspects of the economic relationship, it will take more than a disruptionist presidency in the United States to sever the economic sinews that bind the transatlantic community.

Although America and its European allies have not always seen eye-to-eye on trade matters, to this day their economies remain irredeemably interdependent. The US-EU trade and investment relationship is the most extensive in the world, and it also remains the most closely integrated one. The value of total trade in goods between the two partners in 2016 was over €600 billion, and the EU enjoyed a €115-billion trade surplus (European Commission 2017a).⁶⁶ Most relevant of all, foreign direct investment (FDI) between the US and the EU in 2015 totalled over €4 trillion – the US total in the EU at over €2.5 trillion is three times as large as US investments in the whole of Asia. In terms of total trade, the EU remains America's largest partner and its largest export market. The Union is also the second largest exporter of goods to the United States, surpassed only by China (European Commission 2017b). This extremely robust level of economic interdependence is essential for the sustenance of the

⁶⁵ The Northern Group consists of the UK, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries and the Baltic States.

⁶⁶ The latest available data on services is from 2015. Imports from the US to the EU totalled €212.8 billion, and the EU's surplus totals €13 billion.

transatlantic security community, as it fosters transatlantic contacts on all societal levels. To some extent, these relationships are a reflection of path dependency, but they also flourish because companies on both sides of the Atlantic appreciate the relatively stable social and economic (regulatory) environments in which they can operate (Salonius-Pasternak 2016).

The average level of tariffs between US and EU markets is low, only three per cent. If it were to be concluded successfully, the trail-blazing TTIP trade agreement would create a massive free trade area by abolishing customs and reducing non-tariff trade barriers. More importantly, it would also mean that the US and the EU could, in practice, set the rules, norms and regulations of global trade for decades to come. The TTIP process was launched in earnest in 2013, but has faced an uphill battle ever since, not least because of the controversial Investor State Dispute Settlement procedure included in the treaty (Chapter 7). In his at times inflammatory campaign rhetoric, President Trump attacked both TTIP and its “sister agreement” TPP, from which he has already withdrawn the US. It thus appears unlikely that negotiations on TTIP will proceed during Trump’s tenure, as he enacts his pledge to fight for bilateral and “fair but tough trade deals” for American workers (White House 2017c).

Trump’s challenge to the transatlantic economic relationship was thus initially viewed as potentially grave. Beyond downgrading the prospects of an already unlikely free trade agreement, however, the administration’s actual policies have not supported his nationalistic rhetoric on international trade (see Chapter 7). For instance, Trump’s threat to slap 35-per-cent tariffs on German cars has not materialised (Taylor and Rinke 2017). Nor has he begun to set up steel tariffs that would, according to reports, prompt countermeasures from Europe (Francis 2017). It appears that the Trump team has concluded that a trade war would be detrimental to America’s economy, which is actually showing solid growth rates – a fact that Trump constantly highlights. The economic base of the transatlantic security community therefore seems set to persevere regardless of the Trump presidency, just as it has endured and matured throughout the post-Second World War era.

10.5 The future of a shared mission and shared values across the Atlantic

It is frequently accepted that a common normative base – even a collective identity - underpins the transatlantic community. Despite differences in national political structures and cultures, this has facilitated the undertaking of a joint strategic and political project to build a liberal international order based on core liberal ideas, including democracy, freer trade and human rights – values unfortunately too often respected in the breach.⁶⁷ A substantial weakening of this shared value foundation could have significant potential implications for the joint project to buttress the existing world order, because for better or for worse, the transatlantic security community still makes up the dense core of the liberal international order. The political institutions and values are the glue that holds this core community together. Currently all three, the liberal international order, the political institutions and the shared value base, are under pressure, attributable to both external and internal developments (Chapter 6).

Evidence of the shared transatlantic value base is to be found in both the Transatlantic Trends and the World Values surveys, according to which significant majorities in the United States, Great Britain, France and Germany have a favourable view of each other and agree that the United States and Europe share common values (Dalton 2013). As recently as the start of 2017, both sides of the Atlantic continued to see each other as valuable allies in international

⁶⁷ The EU and the US have traditionally shared the belief that their conceptions of democracy and human rights are worthy of active promotion to the outside world (Nicolaidis 2005). Differences have usually arisen over how to go about this process of promotion, rather than over the actual desirability of such forays (for instance during the George W. Bush era).

affairs, with 73 per cent of Americans seeing Europeans as such and 67 per cent in Europe seeing the US as such (Ewering 2017). However, there are considerable fluctuations. For example, in addition to historically grounded anti-American sentiments on the old continent, European views of the US tend to track changes of presidential administrations (and their policies) in America (Pew Research Center 2017f; Katzenstein and Keohane 2007).

In fact, President Trump has made it abundantly clear that he does not agree with the European elites on the normative foundations of the transatlantic security community and the liberal international order (Ikenberry 2017; Stephens 2017). For example, his Secretary of State has explicitly downgraded the promotion of human rights and diplomacy in America's set of foreign policy priorities (Piccone 2017; US Department of State 2017b). The new National Security Strategy only mentions "human rights" once, in the context of punishing those (regimes) that abuse them (White House 2017z). Additional examples of differences between European foreign-policy elites and President Trump include frequent expressions of admiration by the latter of autocratic leaders, and casual suggestions that the torture of terrorist suspects should be reinstated (see Chapters 4 and 6).

By calling into question America's espousal of core liberal values upon which the collective identity of the transatlantic community has traditionally been built, President Trump has raised concerns in Europe (Ewering 2017; Pew Research Center 2017f). However, the "fraying" of the shared normative base is also an internal phenomenon, both in the United States and within the European Union. This explains, to some extent, why President Trump's approach – and the sentiments that fuel it – have met with applause from some in Europe, including national political leaders of EU member states.

Although there is strong mutual support for the transatlantic relationship, it is worth pointing out that there are genuine and substantial differences within Europe and the United States. In Europe, for instance, there are significant differences in terms of values relating to political systems (democracy vs. other systems) and individualism, and commonality is common within groups/states that share a particular religious affinity (protestant or catholic) or a recent historical background (part of Western Europe during the Cold War) (see Pew Research Center 2016d). This has an impact on the functioning of the European Union, and thereby on the transatlantic relationship. Comparable divisions also exist within the United States. Moreover, the US has domestic drivers that do not always move in synchrony with the internal and domestic dynamics of its European allies and partners – when it comes to support for global institutions and US engagement, for example (Chapter 2).

The key question is whether the shared transatlantic mission of buttressing the current international order can survive the diverging values and fluctuating commitments to shared political institutions that are visible on both sides of the Atlantic.

Now at the end of the first year of the Trump presidency, concerns regarding the interest of the US in continuing to underwrite the current international order have been alleviated to a degree. After a tumultuous beginning, the administration has taken policy positions that are increasingly in line with the longer-term trends in the American global role, and in keeping with its commitments. Several key advisors who pushed for policies specifically aimed at breaking with tradition, most notably Stephen Bannon, have left the administration. Moreover, experienced generals and businesspersons occupy many key positions in the White House and cabinet. Trump's early critique of Brussels has also largely disappeared from his rhetorical toolbox, which may have something to do with a general sense of a resurgent EU and NATO.

What has not disappeared is the almost total abdication of US leadership on issues relating to climate change. Although individual states and US actors (including corporations) continue to work to reduce the impact of climate change, official United States is likely to remain on the sidelines in terms of global efforts, occasionally even taking the role of a spoiler. A genuine difference between the United States and Europe is the level of politicization and science denialism that infuses the policy discourse on climate issues. Even if future administrations wanted to take a more proactive role, this underlying trend would be likely to surface with regularity (Mehling and Vihma 2017; see also Chapter 11).

However, the rhetorical dismissal of the need to uphold norms and values is not entirely consistent with the actions of the Trump administration. For example, it cited the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons to justify its bombing of the Syrian airfield in April, which some liberal-leaning foreign-policy commentators actually regarded as a positive development. In a departure from Trump's rhetorical cosying-up to authoritarian strongmen, the US withheld portions of its military aid to Egypt in August 2017. The decision was reportedly attributable not only to Egyptian links to North Korea, but also to Cairo's continuing crackdown on civil-society organisations (Tamkin 2017; Harris and Walsh 2017). In any case, it is unlikely that democracy and human-rights promotion will be at the top of Trump's policy agenda.

Similarly, it is likely that President Trump's focus on the defence of Western civilisation will shift from liberal values towards the defence of more traditional common threads that transcend the Atlantic, the shared Judeo-Christian heritage in particular (Chapter 2). This qualitative shift in how Washington views the value base of the Transatlantic community, and the normative parameters of American leadership in the world, looks to persist throughout President Trump's tenure.

10.6 The future role of the US in Europe

One of the challenges in trying to predict the future of the transatlantic relationship is that although the cornerstones remain, they are shifting in different directions. This does not mean that the foundations of the relationship are crumbling: it is simply that a variety of approaches should be taken to ensure the transatlantic structure remains vital and fit for purpose.

In terms of security cooperation, both sides of the Atlantic are concerned about the impact of continuing instability in the MENA region as well as Russia's actions that challenge Europe's security architecture. Nevertheless, there are clear differences between Americans and Europeans regarding how the Asia-Pacific region is perceived, and what actions are necessary. The United States is likely to find little appetite among its European allies to engage militarily in the Pacific theatre. There are overlapping interests in Central Asia (including Afghanistan), MENA and Africa that could boost cooperation. Defence spending, and particularly the ability to generate new capabilities and project force even over medium distances, will remain a cause of tension in the relationship. However, because of its institutionalised nature and multiple overlapping security interests, the security cooperation component is likely to remain robust.

Barring a global cataclysmic event, the transatlantic economic relationship will continue to be strong, because the US remains the biggest economic power in the near term, and Europe has shown itself to be economically more resilient than many doomsayers expected. The combined financial might in terms of capital and investment flows suggests that the relative global position of the United States and Europe still has long-term sustainability. However, the US and its European partners should be prepared for challenges ahead, particularly as

the relative shift in the balance of global economic power towards the major production and (increasingly) innovation centres in the East Asia and China continues.

Major global digital and ICT companies such as Google and Facebook are US-based, leading to the contention that an “innovation GAP” exists between America and Europe. Reality does not support this claim, however. Innovation exists on both sides of the Atlantic, as the Global Innovation Index reveals (Cornell University et al. 2017): European actors dominate the TOP 10. Moreover, much of the innovation in Europe occurs within existing corporations, rather than in start-ups. This makes it easier for US firms to develop services that challenge existing business models, particularly in the consumer sector, but also benefits Europe (and Asia) in the development of other kinds of business-focused technologies (Ezell and Marxgut 2015). Nonetheless, together the United States and Europe will remain major market areas that are also relatively predictable from the perspective of corporate investors. An individual US administration is unlikely to drastically alter this picture.

As suggested in surveys on values, a core set of normative beliefs is shared across the Atlantic, albeit with regional and religion-based variances. The general trend towards political polarization is evident on both sides of the Atlantic, too. Although the diversity of values within the United States and Europe has the potential to cause internal tensions, such tensions often tend to be subsumed and “averaged out” in the context of the transatlantic relationship *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world.

In terms of their role in upholding the international order, from the European perspective the US will remain Europe’s major democratic ally and “indispensable” partner. As a panel of German foreign-policy experts recently noted: “[t]oday, no other actor in the world can offer the same advantages to Germany that it gains from its alliance with the United States. No other power takes on such far-reaching security guarantees and offers such comprehensive political resources. If Germany wants to be an effective actor in Europe, it needs the United States” (New York Times 2017b). This point of view acknowledges and reaffirms the durable nature of the transatlantic bond. From the perspective of Europe, the United States remains an important ally, not only in terms of security and economic cooperation but also in various multilateral fora.

Still, there is a necessary psychological shift to be made among current and subsequent US administrations, politicians and even the populace at large. The United States can only hope to influence global events: the era during which the US (even together with Europe) steered or even dictated them has passed. What it can do, together with its allies and partners in Europe and Asia, is to make adjustments to the current international order, so that there are fewer incentives for others to challenge it. Here, Europe’s role may be to remind the United States that the “American century” was made possible by strategic restraint – that America limits its power by binding itself to broader normative structures of the liberal international order (see Chapter 6).

10.7 Conclusion

Although the transatlantic relationship is attacked on both sides of the Atlantic with increasing frequency – and at times ferocity – it remains the key political and economic relationship for both the United States and Europe. The extensive and deep web of relationships, as well as its institutional nature in security matters, serve as bulwarks against attempts by any single individual, even the President of the United States, to dramatically change it overnight.

A comparison of the outcomes of Donald Trump's 2016 and President George W. Bush's 2003 statements regarding America's European allies illustrates this very clearly. Disappointed that not all of its allies rushed to join the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Bush administration sought to actively divide Europe into "old" and "new" parts. Nonetheless, transatlantic security cooperation continued and even flourished in some fields. President Trump's statements have been aimed at the institutional core of the transatlantic relationship, which has resulted in a "circle the wagons" effect among European allies. Still, the current US administration has suggested almost tripling the amount of money the United States is to spend on security-assurance measures in Europe. It is a testament to the strength, continuity and importance of the transatlantic relationship that the US position has (once again) reverted to more traditional American expressions of commitment to existing agreements.

11. US engagement in the Arctic

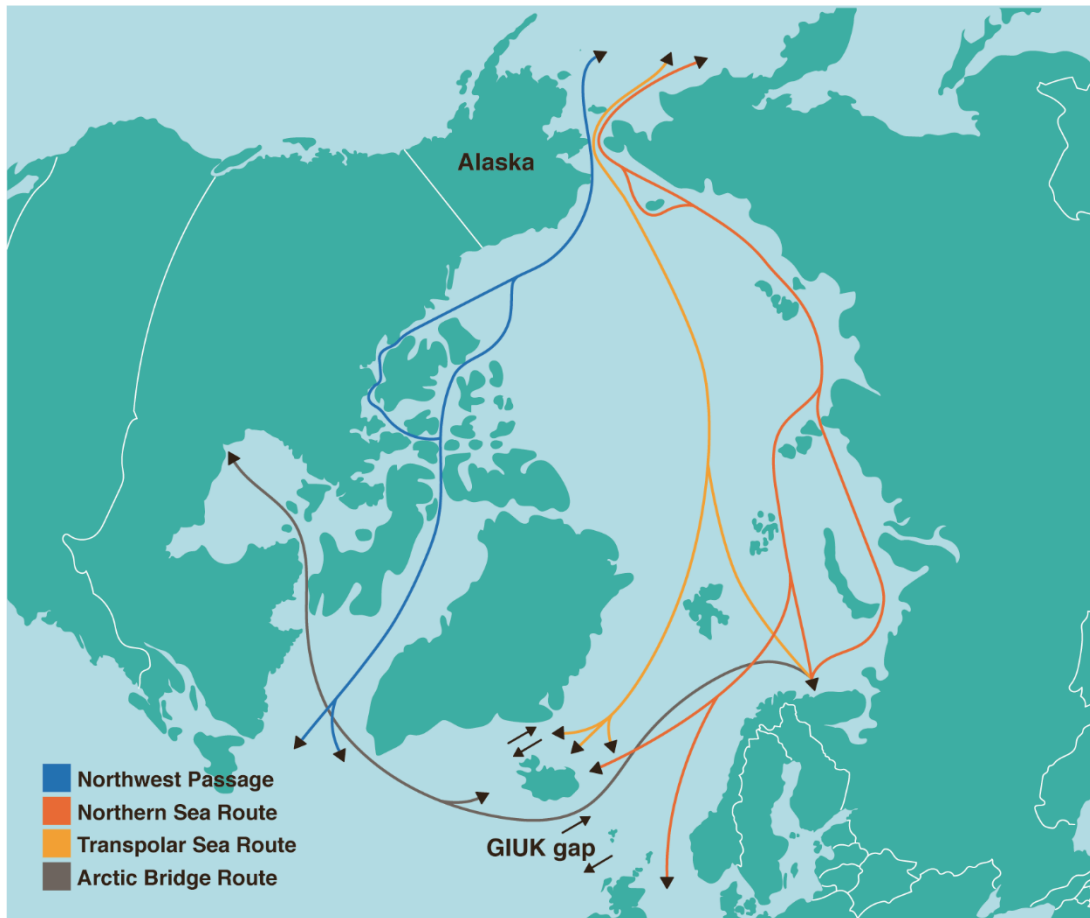
- Traditionally a reluctant Arctic actor, the United States has started to pay closer attention to the transforming circumpolar north. During the Obama era, the US emphasised combatting climate change and international co-operation in the region.
- The current White House has remained silent on America's Arctic policy. Despite initial concerns, the US appears to recognise enduring strategic interests in the circumpolar north, and continues to participate in the practical co-operation in the region.
- However, President Trump has voiced broader views on climate (and energy) policy, multilateral co-operation and America's relationship with Russia that create strategic ambiguity, which is not likely to disappear overnight.
- Although the Arctic may not be on the White House radar, these more general policy tendencies have an Arctic aspect and, in the worst-case scenario, might result in collateral damage to the enduring elements of US Arctic policy and Arctic co-operation in general. Nevertheless, comprehensive and constructive US engagement in the region remains important, and has implications for the foreign and security policy environment in Northern Europe.

11.1 Introduction

The United States faces a transforming circumpolar north. Driven by climate change, the Arctic is warming up twice as fast as the rest of the world, with no end in sight at least in the near future. The warming in the region continues to exacerbate the melting of the ice cover. Along with the terrestrial thawing, some estimates suggest that as much as 70 per cent of the total ice volume in the Arctic Ocean may already have been lost. It is highly likely that the Arctic Ocean will be free from summer ice by the middle of the century (Arctic Institute 2013; Perovich et al. 2016).

This Arctic transformation is expected to have various economic consequences. Potentially time- and money-saving Arctic maritime routes are projected to become more easily accessible for a variety of activities, including maritime trade, tourism and fishing. The region is also estimated to reveal substantial new sources of oil and gas, and other minerals. As an opening geopolitical frontier with novel economic opportunities and serious environmental challenges, the Arctic is attracting an increasing amount of global attention.

Figure 10: The Arctic maritime area



Source: Humpert and Raspotni (2012)

The United States is one of these global players. This chapter investigates US engagement in the Arctic. The focus is, first, on the US relationship with the circumpolar region and its enduring strategic interests there. Against this backdrop, the discussion turns to the potential consequences of certain policy inclinations of President Trump for US policy and for co-operation in the region more generally.

11.2 The United States and the Arctic

Since the purchase of Alaska from the Russian Empire in 1867, the United States has been an Arctic nation. However, although one of the five Arctic Ocean littoral states and one of the eight Arctic Council (AC) member states, the US is often referred to as a “reluctant Arctic power” (Huebert 2009). The Arctic is simply very far away from Washington, both geographically and mentally. This peripheral position, a lack of public awareness, the low-threat security environment in the region, budgetary concerns and more pressing global issues have, in combination, meant that the Arctic has been perceived as a minor element of the geopolitical landscape and foreign-policy agenda in post-Cold War America (Käpylä and Mikkola 2013).

Nevertheless, for the past two decades the US has had a clearly defined Arctic policy that outlines a broad range of strategic interests in the region. The key elements of the policy were spelled out in the 1994 Presidential decision directive on the Arctic and the Antarctic, and subsequently reaffirmed in the 2009 National security Presidential directive on the region.

However, it was only during President Obama's two terms that the Arctic gradually came to be regarded as important in Washington.

By way of an illustration, the US published various new strategy documents to guide the federal government's response to the transforming region. These included an updated national strategy for the Arctic region in May 2013, its implementation plan in January 2014, and Arctic-specific strategic papers by various federal agencies such as the Department of Defence, the US Coast Guard and the US Navy. In December 2016, just before President Obama left office, the Pentagon further updated its own Arctic strategy. This strategic work was complemented in early 2015 with the establishment of the Arctic Executive Steering Committee to improve the coordination of inter-agency co-operation across the federal government. The legislative branch also increased their level of attention to the region, with Senators Lisa Murkowski and Angus King establishing the Arctic Caucus in the US Senate in 2015 (Carney 2015).

US engagement in the region rose to a new level when Hilary Clinton decided to attend the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council (AC) in 2011 as the first US Secretary of State in history to do so. John Kerry continued the tradition of active participation during his tenure from 2013 to 2017. In hindsight, this was a relatively unsurprising development, given that the US held the chair of the Arctic Council from 2015 to 2017. US engagement was further strengthened by the nomination of Admiral Robert J. Papp as the Special Representative to the Arctic in July 2014.

The Arctic also fitted neatly into broader US foreign-policy goals that included a potential legacy item for President Obama. While steering the work of Arctic Council, the US vigorously highlighted the theme of climate change in the area. This was not only an opportunity for the US to assume international leadership, it also went hand in hand with the Obama administration's broader policy to combat climate change globally. During its chairmanship period the US also organised noteworthy events on climate issues in the region, including the first-ever White House Arctic Science Ministerial and high-level GLACIER Conference in Alaska, hosted by President Obama himself. Obama's visit to Alaska was also significant symbolically, him being the first sitting US president to visit the US Arctic. As President, he also took steps to limit the extraction of hydrocarbons from America's offshore areas in the polar region. Furthermore, some of the US sanctions imposed as a response to the crisis in Ukraine targeted offshore hydrocarbon production in the Russian Arctic.

In spite of all this, US engagement in the Arctic continued to have its handicaps. As a thematic cutting across and between various departments and agencies, the Arctic was – and continues to be – easily overlooked in the US government. Furthermore, despite the release of various policy papers and the growing awareness of environmental, economic and geopolitical dynamics, Washington remained uncertain about when and exactly how to commit its financial and political resources to its Arctic engagement and the region's development. This included concrete issues related to the lacking infrastructure in Alaska, for example, and the re-modernisation of US ice-breaking capability.⁶⁸ The overall uncertainty increased the danger that US investments in the Arctic would be too late as opposed to too early – that the US could even “miss the Arctic train”.

⁶⁸ On the theme of US icebreaker modernisation, see O'Rourke (2017).

11.3 Enduring US interests in the Arctic

The Arctic has never been a top priority on the US foreign-policy agenda, even though America has had a broad range of strategic interests in the region. These were outlined in the 1994 Presidential decision directive and its subsequent variations.

First, the US has a range of significant national defence and security interests in the region. This is primarily due to the geographic location of Alaska in the near vicinity of Russia, coupled with an openly hostile North Korea and an ascendant China in the broader Asia-Pacific security environment. Consequently, crucial elements of US strategic deterrence, global missile defence and early-warning architecture are situated or operational in the North American Arctic. US strategic submarines continue to operate regularly below the surface of the Arctic Ocean. The US also maintains two strategic early-warning radar stations and NORAD's numerous atmospheric air-defence radars in the region. In terms of operational capability, the US military also has an interest in guaranteeing its ability to show its presence, conduct maritime operations and be able to strategically transport troops to the region. In practice, it has tended to emphasise sub-sea and aerial assets, with no permanent Navy presence⁶⁹ and only limited ice-trained ground forces in Alaska.

Since the rapid deterioration of the European security environment due to the crisis in Ukraine and Russia's more assertive behaviour, the strategic value of the North Atlantic Basin – and particularly the maritime area between Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom (GIUK-gap; see Figure 10) – has increased once again (Olsen 2017). Much akin to the Cold War years, this maritime area is particularly relevant for securing the transatlantic sea-lanes of communication to ensure the credible defence of Europe by NATO forces. The US, the UK and key Nordic countries have taken measures to increase their deteriorated maritime situational awareness in this interface between the Arctic and the Atlantic oceans. For example, the US and Iceland have agreed to (re)station American maritime surveillance aircraft on a rotational basis to Keflavik airport in Iceland. The US has also sold new surveillance aircraft and has helped to outfit a state-of-the-art intelligence naval vessel for Norway, in addition to deploying a rotational company-sized army contingent to the country. The UK has resumed its submarine activity in the region, too.

NATO, as a whole, is also planning to establish a new North Atlantic command structure to facilitate the improvement of alliance deterrence capability and situational awareness in the GIUK-gap area (Peel and Bond 2017). That said, the US has not pushed for an explicit NATO presence in the Arctic, despite Norwegian calls to the contrary. This is primarily because of Canada's objections to the "internationalisation" of the region, but also to avoid expected conflict dynamics with Russia that could annul the prospects of continued co-operation in the region and tie the US to yet another global "hot spot".

Freedom of navigation in the Arctic is another important long-term security interest for the US. It is also a key trend in its global geostrategy. Accessible and open international maritime routes are the arteries of the global economy, and key enablers of flexible power projection by the US military. Consequently, the US is adamant about defending the freedom of navigation and open sea-lanes globally, including on maritime routes in the Russian and Canadian Arctic. Although there have not been significant diplomatic disputes over the issue in recent years, the stance puts the US at odds with the above-mentioned Arctic Ocean littoral nations that emphasise their respective sovereignty in their adjacent maritime areas. The status of

⁶⁹ The US Coast Guard, part of US Navy, currently has a seasonal presence (from July 1 to October 31) at a permanent base in Kotzebue. See Andrews (2016).

Arctic maritime routes is a matter of global strategic significance given the wider implications that an unfavourable precedent in the region would have for the principle of freedom of navigation elsewhere – such as in the South China Sea.

Second, the US also has an interest, although currently also inadequate capability, in providing safety and law enforcement – responding to oil-spill or cruise-ship accidents and policing the opening sea-lanes – in the increasingly busy and navigable Arctic maritime environment. This specifically involves the US coast Guard and its ageing fleet of one medium (*Healy*) and one heavy (*Polar Star*) icebreaker in need of urgent modernisation. That said, a lack of strategic awareness, the relatively low level of activity and the fact that the US has paid more strategic attention to its southern rather than its Arctic border have meant that investments in Arctic infrastructure and capabilities have stalled. Furthermore, the US has had the benefit of having Canada provide its own Arctic capabilities to monitor and govern large parts of the North-American Arctic.

Third, the exploitation of natural resources – gas, oil, minerals, and fish stock – has been another key component of US policy in the Arctic. The US has a long history of hydrocarbon production in Alaska, particularly in onshore/coastal areas in Prudhoe Bay. Oil, and to a lesser extent gas, constitute a major source of socio-economic development in the American Arctic: they are a central source of Alaska state revenue and bring employment opportunities, economic activity and the potential for infrastructure investment. However, Alaska and Washington have often been at odds over the latter's emphasis on environmental protection at the cost of focusing on socio-economic development by the former. This is especially the case in Alaska's federal areas, including the Arctic National Wild Refuge⁷⁰ and the offshore maritime areas in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas (Huebert 2009, 4-5).

To enhance US energy security and to strengthen the economy, the Obama administration tended to accept the responsible development of domestic oil and gas production elsewhere in the US. During the past decade, due to declining production in Alaska's existing oil fields coupled with a lack of new onshore sites, there has been domestic pressure to explore offshore oil in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas (Conley 2012, 3; Huebert 2009, 4-7). Major energy corporations from the US and abroad have acquired licences for offshore production blocks. However, these efforts have been challenging due to pressure from the strong environmentalist movement and the Obama administration after recent environmental accidents (e.g. the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill and the 2012 Shell oil-rig incident in Alaska), coupled with the growing awareness of climate change. In addition, advances in unconventional gas and oil production elsewhere in the US have generally reduced the urgency to "go Arctic". The fact that expensive exploratory drilling did not yield the expected results was probably the final straw in the process of abandoning offshore/deep-water activities around Alaska for the time being. Shell, the leading actor in the American offshore, abandoned its multi-billion dollar efforts in 2015.

Fourth, the US has recognised the unique and fragile character of the Arctic environment, and the need to protect it through conservation, regulation and international co-operation. It also acknowledges the immediate impact of environmental dynamics on indigenous populations and their way of life. In an attempt to understand and react to the complex environmental dynamics that pose challenges in the region, the US has invested in scientific monitoring and research on Arctic environmental dynamics. It has also been a forerunner in international

⁷⁰ The ANWR is protected by the 1980 Alaska National Interests Land Conservation Act, according to which hydrocarbon extraction could occur in the coastal part of the refuge only with the consent of the US Congress. The protection of ecological diversity and especially fragile wildlife in the area (e.g. Porcupine caribou and their calving grounds, as well as polar bears and their dens) has been of particular interest to those who oppose drilling in the region.

climate research, with notable scholars and research institutes dealing with the topic and contributing to current knowledge on climate change in high latitudes, including in the context of the Arctic Council (Conley 2012, 27-28; Huebert 2009, 14).

Last but certainly not least, the US has a broad interest in supporting peace and co-operation in the Arctic. All Arctic nations recognise the importance of the 1980 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). However, the US approach to Arctic legal governance has been ambivalent. Although *de facto* adhering to the UNCLOS as customary international law, the US has not ratified the treaty despite wide support for it across the federal government. The continuing failure to ratify because of objections from certain GOP representatives hampers US leadership in Arctic multilateral governance. Non-ratification also denies America a legitimate legal framework within which to ensure the freedom of navigation, settle disputes in the Arctic maritime environment, and pursue economic interests by extending its Arctic EEZ. To date, the US has followed President Truman's unilateralist proclamation that resources in or below the US continental shelf are the sole property of the United States (Cohen 2011, 11).

The US policy on Arctic institutional governance has also been ambivalent. Initially, during the 1990s, the US only grudgingly endorsed the creation of the Arctic Council, which in its view had only limited political importance, status and role. In practice this meant that its mandate was to be limited to environmental matters, and that it would not be a full-fledged international organisation with a bureaucracy and a budget (Huebert 2009, 12). Later on, given the growing awareness of the economic prospects and geopolitical stakes related to the warming Arctic, the US was willing to consider the group of five Arctic littoral states (the "Arctic Five") as a format within which to discuss topical issues, including those related to sovereignty and security in the Arctic. This emphasis *de facto* further marginalised the prospects of the AC. As implied above, in recent years the US has reversed its policy on the Council and has started to regard it as the "pre-eminent forum for international cooperation in the Arctic" (Pedersen 2012, 149). After a long silence, in 2013 it also endorsed the inclusion of new observers – including China – in the AC. This not only reaffirmed US commitment to multilateralism in the Arctic, but also expressed America's willingness to strike new bargains with rising powers such as China within the parameters of the rule-based multilateral order (in the region).

11.4 US Arctic engagement in the Trump era

As discussed in this report, the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States in 2016 has raised concerns about the future of US foreign policy and global engagement. In this respect, the Arctic is no exception. After the November surprise, experts, advocates and former civil servants dealing with the region have continued to express unease about the future of US Arctic policy, some even raising concerns about America's commitment to co-operation in the region (see e.g. Huebert 2016; Hammit 2017; Panetta 2017).

US government representatives dealing with Arctic issues have tended to emphasise continuity over change, however. For example, David Balton, the chairman of the Senior Arctic Officials during the US AC chairmanship (2015-17), stated in January 2017:

"[t]he truth is I don't think anybody really knows yet. But — and now I speak as someone who has been at the State Department for more than 30 years — U.S. policy in the Arctic has not changed appreciably in that time [...]. And so

if the past is prologue, my supposition is that U.S. policy in the Arctic is not likely to change in the next few years either [...]" (quoted in Rosen 2017a).

The main reason for this, Balton continued, is the fact that although there may be changes in emphasis, "U.S. interests in the Arctic are profound and enduring [...]"

There are, indeed, indications that point towards such a conclusion. For example, although it is not a top priority, the US military continues to understand the strategic importance of the region on both sides of the Atlantic. The intensified situation with North Korea highlights the significance of early-warning and ballistic-missile defence capabilities in Alaska. China's growing maritime capabilities and non-military ventures in the Arctic are being monitored closely. On-going efforts to bolster European defence through rotational deployments in the Baltic States, Poland (European Reassurance Initiative) and Norway (bilaterally), coupled with intensified exercising, are intended to create much-desired stability in the broader Nordic-Baltic region in the wake of an increasingly unpredictable Russia (see Chapter 12). In addition, the expected establishment of NATO's North Atlantic Command and on-going improvements in maritime surveillance capability in the GIUK gap support this effort in the long run – not least because they will further facilitate the detection and monitoring of Russian submarine activity passing through the Arctic Ocean.

The Pentagon has also persevered in developing its Arctic strategy to guide the response of US military in the region, with the last update approved in December 2016 and released in February 2017. Among the very few explicit statements by the current administration, the then-nominee for Secretary of Defence James Mattis explicitly acknowledged in his Senate confirmation hearing that the Arctic is one of the regions in which the US continues to have responsibilities. With regard to the military, this includes a variety of security tasks ranging from search and rescue to patrolling and maintaining sovereignty in the region. In particular, Mattis stated that the US needs to understand what Russia's increased military presence and activity in the Arctic means, and to make sure that it is not able to dominate what has been up until now "part of the international commons" (quoted in US Senate Committee on Armed Services 2017, 96-97).

While it remains unlikely that a Republican-dominated Senate would ratify the UNCLOS, should President Trump unexpectedly suggest it based on the guidance of his advisors, America will nevertheless continue to participate in a regular manner in various Arctic governance forums that advance international co-operation and the softer aspects of security in the region. These include, for example, the Arctic Council and the most recent innovation, the Arctic Coast Guard Forum. In fact, in some instances co-operation seems to have only strengthened, maritime safety and security being a prime example. In the light of the new risks in this opening maritime area, co-operation between national Coast Guards in the region has only intensified during the first year of the Trump presidency (although not specifically because of it). The Coast Guard Forum organised its first search and rescue exercise *Arctic Guardian* in Iceland in September 2017, at which the US Coast Guard was present (Finnish Border Guard 2017).

Furthermore, despite the apparent demoralisation at the State Department (Chapter 3), the US successfully led negotiations on an international fishery agreement to prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the international waters of the Arctic Ocean. According to US officials involved in the process, the State Department worked smoothly on this issue, forging the agreement between five Arctic Ocean coastal states and other notable fishing nations with an

interest in the matter – namely China, Iceland, Japan and South Korea, and the EU as a whole (Rosen 2017b; 2017c).

These developments suggest that the US government continues to perceive, and advance, enduring national policy objectives in the region while also seeking practical win-win outcomes through regional co-operation with other Arctic nations. However, President Trump remains something of a wild card in this respect, too. Swamped by various domestic and foreign issues – and public controversies – the White House has remained silent on the direction of US Arctic policy. Nevertheless, President Trump's specific policy decisions and broader foreign-policy inclinations do raise questions about the nature of US Arctic engagement, and ultimately about the prospects of (consensus-based) international co-operation in the Arctic.

First, there are uncertainties with regard to the future of international co-operation on climate change in the Arctic. The Arctic Council is the principal intergovernmental body in the region with a focus on climate change. In this regard, the 2004 Arctic Climate Change Impact Assessment was a key milestone upon which subsequent work in the forum has built. As mentioned, the United States continued this progressive work during its chairmanship of the Council (2015 to 2017) by giving priority to addressing the impacts of climate change.

Donald Trump was dismissive of climate change during his presidential campaign, and vowed to undo President Obama's climate legacy. Subsequently, as president, he has stated that his administration will pursue a "balanced approach to climate policy" that re-evaluates the relationship between emission reduction, economic growth and energy security (Tillerson 2017a). As a notable component of this policy, the President decided to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Agreement after months of suspense and speculation. The international accord – in its current form⁷¹ – apparently stifles domestic economic growth, fails to fulfil US energy needs, and shares the financial burden of climate action too favourably with regard to developing nations such as China (Volcovici and Mason 2017; Chapters 3, 4 and 10).

Although previous Republican administrations have advanced a progressive environmental policy – President Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970, for example – Trump's decision to withdraw from the climate agreement is broadly consistent with the more recent GOP environmental politics and ideologically motivated critique of climate change in particular (Mehling and Vihma 2017, 7-9). This raises the question of whether the US is currently comfortable supporting the continuation of the work on climate change in the context of the Arctic Council, and if so, in what substantive terms and with what concrete scientific contributions.

Curiously, the decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement actually contradicted the earlier US endorsement of the declaration of Foreign Ministers in the Arctic Council ministerial meeting in May 2017. In the declaration, albeit after last-minute reformulations (see more below), the US did acknowledge the existence of climate change and the need to tackle it. This indicates that it chose – at least initially when President Trump was still weighing up his options on climate policy and the Paris Agreement – not to politicise the work of the AC by actively obstructing climate action in the forum. The decision (by Tillerson) was probably made easier by the fact that the current White House is unlikely to pay very much attention to the AC. In

⁷¹ According to a leaked State Department diplomatic cable from August 2017, the US has decided to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, but the President remains "open to considering the possibility of re-engaging under terms that are more favorable to the United States". However, the same cable also states: "there are no plans to seek renegotiate or amend the text of the Paris Agreement, or begin negotiations toward a new agreement" (Tillerson 2017a; see also Torbati and Volcovici 2017).

fact, the US could simply ignore the national implementation of any unwanted decisions in the Council.

Given subsequent developments, it is likely that initiatives framed in terms of environmental protection (conserving clean air and water), health and technological solutions with an economic component (perhaps even renewable energy) rather than climate change will more easily secure the support of the administration – or at least stand a chance of not raising any unnecessary red flags in the White House. This could well mean, for example, that work related to pollution prevention, such as the reduction of black carbon emissions, will continue in the AC. As President Trump's *America First Energy Plan* states, "our need for energy must go hand-in-hand with responsible stewardship of the environment. Protecting clean air and clean water, conserving our natural habitats, and preserving our natural reserves and resources will remain a high priority" (White House 2017d). Furthermore, despite the reluctance of the current administration, it is worth remembering that action taken in response to the challenge of climate change proceeds at the state level (and among the private sector) in contemporary America – Alaska included (Rosen 2017d).

The Trump administration has also sought cuts to environmental bureaucracy and research in its recent budget proposals. For example, the administration has wanted to downsize the EPA and reduce funding for various federal science agencies and their research programmes, many of which have a climate-change focus. In addition, it has aspired to slash international funding to tackle climate change and pursue sustainable development (Henry 2017a,b; Dennis and Eilperin 2017; Meyer 2017; Chapter 3).

While highlighting administration priorities, these efforts have not, for the most part, been approved by Congress so far. The administration's critical views are nevertheless unhelpful in advancing long-term scientific work done in the US, and subsequently also in the Arctic Council in which US scientists and their research have played a significant role. Over time, should this tendency persist and affect federal funding decisions, it might even affect the status of the US as an "Arctic science power" (Conley 2015: xiv). Furthermore, suggested cuts to US international financial commitments raise a potential question mark on the long-term feasibility of the two overarching themes – the implementation of the Paris climate agreement and UN sustainable-development goals in the Arctic – which Finland has decided to advance as the chair of the AC from 2017 to 2019.

Second, and closely related to the climate thematic, the Trump administration also seeks to plot a new climate-unfriendly course for America's energy policy. This involves – as per the *America First Energy Plan* (White House 2017d; see also Tillerson 2017a) – the elimination of allegedly burdensome regulations, the utilisation of untapped fossil-fuel reserves and the revival of the domestic coal industry. With regard to the Arctic, in particular, the administration has sought to re-open federal maritime areas around Alaska for offshore hydrocarbon production by reversing President Obama's key decisions. These include the exclusion of federal waters in the Arctic from the next offshore oil and gas leasing strategy for 2017-2022 and the subsequent decision to ban indefinitely future hydrocarbon production in the majority of the US offshore Arctic. The Trump administration is also taking steps to open two federal onshore regions – the Alaska National Wild Refuge (Eilperin 2017) and the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (Harball 2017) – for future production.

However, efforts to rejuvenate hydrocarbon production in the American Arctic are unlikely to result in numerous new development projects any time soon. Not only will the reversal of

Obama-era regulations take time, environmental groups will seek every opportunity to challenge them in public debate and in the courts. Furthermore, whereas onshore projects may be economically and practically more feasible, long and challenging development projects in offshore areas around Alaska will remain unprofitable if the price of a barrel of oil hovers between \$55 and \$65.

The recent much-touted but non-binding agreement by Chinese entities to invest in the \$43 billion Alaska LNG project is a good example of long timeframes and existing uncertainties. Even if President Trump and public officials highlighted reductions in the US trade deficit, billions of dollars in state revenue and up to 12,000 new jobs throughout the construction phase, the project's future remains open. It still requires a permit to export the liquefied gas, for example, and negotiations on concrete financing are far from complete, with current estimates suggesting a final investment decision in 2019. Before the Chinese came along, key players including Exxon Mobil, ConocoPhillips and BP had already withdrawn from the project (Murtaugh and Collins 2017; Mason 2017).

Third, the current administration's foreign-policy tendencies also raise questions about America's commitment to multilateral co-operation in the region. The State Department continues to suffer from understaffing and demoralisation. With regard to the Arctic, two key figures – Special Representative Papp and Ambassador Balton – are no longer present to steer US policy and keep Arctic cooperation on the agenda.⁷² However, these losses are, to some extent, covered in two respects. First, other key parts of the US government, including the Pentagon and the Coast Guard, recognise the importance of Arctic multilateral co-operation for peace, stability and practical safety in the region. Second, the Secretary of State, given his background in high-stakes oil business in the Russian Arctic and sub-Arctic, is also likely to give his attention to the Council. At least, he was the first Republican Secretary of State to attend the AC ministerial meeting last May.

However, the person sitting in the Oval Office is the one who ultimately formulates US foreign policy. Or, as the current occupant put it recently, "I'm the only one that matters, because when it comes to it, that's what the policy is going to be" (quoted in Chappell 2017). President Trump is also likely to promote, as much as possible, a transactionalist as opposed to a multilateral approach to foreign policy. As elaborated in this report, a transactionalist US foreign policy emphasises bilateral relations and the sovereign ability to make the best possible deals that advance America's interests as defined by, in this case, the President himself (Chapter 4). As such, it entails "the implicit rejection of the US role in the international system that has underpinned the west" (Stephens 2017).

Secretary of State Tillerson downplayed this scenario in the 2017 ministerial meeting of the AC. According to him, the AC is "an indispensable forum in which we can pursue cooperation" and the US will continue to participate in Arctic multilateral governance by being "an active member in this council" (Tillerson 2017b). However, the overall transactionalist emphasis in US engagement with the world may result in less *political* attention to and emphasis on co-operation in multilateral governance forums in the Arctic, including the Arctic Council. Whereas federal agencies appear to continue *practical* co-operation to fulfil their legally required duties and tackle practical challenges, the political leadership at the top is unlikely to pay as much attention to circumpolar co-operation as the previous administration did. To the extent that there will be political interest, it is likely to be more sporadic and motivated by issues that either raise ire (climate change) or support broader policy goals – e.g. economic

⁷² David Balton, previously the top diplomat on Arctic affairs in the US State Department, held the rank of an ambassador. However, the United States does not have an official Arctic ambassador's position. Currently, Julia Gourley continues to work as the US Senior Arctic Official.

activities in Alaska (oil and gas) or national defence. In the long term, there is a danger that US Arctic policy may become more selective and conditional, in other words that the US will support the work of the Arctic Council insofar as it directly advances specific (perceived) national interests, not because a commitment to multilateral governance in the region is valuable in its own right, accrues benefits for all participants and helps to solve common problems.

A potential indication of this newfound emphasis on “America First” attitude was seen prior to the aforementioned AC ministerial meeting. The United States had initially expressed no objections to the final declaration of the meeting. However, last-minute uncertainty over references to climate change and UN Sustainable Development Goals due to US reservations – assumedly higher up in the chain of command – put the unanimous acceptance of the final declaration exceptionally in jeopardy (Shankman 2017). Although a compromise was ultimately reached, events in the Fairbanks meeting suggest that, in addition to creating uncertainty about the seamless continuity of co-operation in the Council, a more transactional and bullish US policy even has the potential to create a new dividing line within the Arctic between the US and other Western nations.

Finally, President Trump has also made it clear that he wishes to improve the relationship between the US and Russia (Chapter 8). As his Secretary of State has pointed out, the administration’s view is that the “world’s two foremost nuclear powers cannot have this kind of [poor] relationship” (quoted in *The Economist* 2017d). These kinds of comments quickly raised the possibility that President Trump might singlehandedly relax or undo some, or all, sanctions that the US had placed on Russia and Russian entities in reaction to the crisis in Ukraine and, subsequently Russia’s interference in the 2016 US presidential elections. Not only would the cancellation of sanctions effectively legitimise Russia’s recent revisionist activities in Europe, it would also enable the resumption of offshore energy co-operation in the Kara Sea in the Russian Arctic between Rosneft, Exxon Mobil and others. Whereas the former would create geopolitical uncertainty in the European Arctic (the Nordic countries), the latter development would be detrimental to efforts to combat climate change, given that all the hard-to-recover resources in the Arctic probably ought to be left untouched to successfully limit global warming in the coming decades (McGlade and Ekins 2015). However, recent legislation that codified the above-mentioned Russia sanctions into law – passed almost unanimously by Congress and reluctantly signed by the President – made any unanimous decision to undo them by the executive branch impossible.

11.5 Conclusion

What does the election of Donald Trump actually mean for the US Arctic policy and the future of Arctic governance? So far the US appears to recognise its enduring strategic interests in the circumpolar north and continues to participate in the practical co-operation in the region. Private discussions with people familiar with the Arctic Council, for example, indicate that co-operation is continuing relatively well, despite initial worries to the contrary. The above-mentioned examples of Coast Guard co-operation and successful fishery negotiations further illustrate this. All these developments are encouraging, but the worry remains that President Trump will continue to advocate certain policies that are contradictory to the long-term goals and aspirations of international co-operation in the region that have been established during the past two decades. In particular, his views on climate change, multilateral co-operation and the US relationship with contemporary Russia create ambiguity that is not likely to disappear anytime soon. Although the Arctic might not be on the White House radar, these more general tendencies have an Arctic aspect and could result in some collateral damage to the enduring elements of US Arctic policy and Arctic co-operation in general. In the end, the fewer the

Arctic (related) issues that reach the Oval Office, the better it might be in terms of continuing co-operation.

From a Finnish point of view, the Arctic cannot be separated from the broader foreign and security policy environment in Northern Europe. This means that here, as elsewhere, comprehensive and constructive US engagement in the region will continue to be important. To maintain this, it is essential to keep open the lines of communication to key parts of the US government, and to encourage them to pursue co-operation in the region. In addition to finding politically plausible and concrete initiatives, it is equally important, when necessary, to voice critical concerns about potentially detrimental policies the US is, or might be, pursuing. The safest bet is to do this within a broader framework, such as the Arctic Council, the Nordic states or the EU.

12. The US and the security of the Baltic Sea region

- The United States has become more interested and invested in the security of the Baltic Sea region during the past four years as the security environment has evolved.
- The Baltic Sea is a strategically important regional gateway to the global maritime and other commons, and in its own right a security concern for the US. Strategic uncertainty and an increasing sense of the “return of geopolitics” has drawn the US into the region. Given its multiple NATO allies as well as partners (Finland and Sweden) in the area, failure to uphold its security commitments would undermine America’s global influence.
- As a response to growing strategic uncertainty, the US has ramped up its engagement by supporting new forms of security cooperation, increasing its military presence and intensifying inter-personal contacts in the region.
- These developments began prior to the Trump era, and highlight broader transatlantic and North European security trends. Despite initial concerns in the Nordic-Baltic region, the current administration seems to have come to the conclusion that supporting its European allies and partners is actually a good deal for the United States in the present situation. A possible significant improvement in the security environment – although not likely anytime soon – might decrease US interest and engagement.

12.1 Introduction

The United States has become considerably more interested and invested in the security of the Baltic Sea region during the past four years (from 2014 to 2017). The primary reason for this is the changed security environment, and the increasing recognition that more needed to be done to ensure the security of US allies in the region.

This chapter investigates US security engagement in the Baltic Sea region. It first places the Baltic Sea in the global geostrategic context, and illustrates how the US has responded to the changing balance between the normative/economic and geostrategic pressures that animate its involvement in this region. The US response is then examined on three levels of interaction: the institutional, the practical and the personal. On all three levels there is evidence of a significantly more active United States, which through its myriad actions has managed both to reassure its allies in the region, and to draw in Sweden and Finland as closer partners in a regional security-enhancing web of cooperation.

12.2 Evolving US engagement in the Baltic Sea region

Although Russia’s moves against Ukraine constitute the proximate cause of increased US interest in the Baltic Sea region, the US had been paying more attention to the area since the early days of the Obama administration, when the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia was still fresh in the collective memory. At the time, major European NATO members did not yet appreciate the emerging strategic challenge, and were unwilling to make significant changes to NATO’s collective defence posture. Nevertheless, between 2009 and 2014 the US began to take increasing note of the slowly deteriorating security environment in the region.

Starting in about 2012, the United States also notably increased its bilateral cooperation with the Nordic countries. This happened within more of a global context, however, as the US was increasingly interested in putting its resources into cooperation with allies and partners with

which it could operate as “peers” in international operations. Two years later, in the spring of 2014, this ramped-up cooperation took on a more regional focus, as the United States began to pursue a multi-pronged approach to increasing the security of the Baltic Sea region. In line with this approach, the US has engaged with countries on a bilateral basis, pushed for reforms and a refocus of NATO (at both the 2014 Wales and the 2016 Warsaw summits), and has become more active in less formal multilateral forums such as the Northern Group.

Driving all of this has been a growing understanding by US policy makers and civil servants about the changed security environment in the region and its implications for US interests, commitments and partnerships. The growing need to find partners and new types of security arrangements to address different global and regional issues and challenges also implies that the United States perceives the Nordic-Baltic region as a whole as a compelling partner.

None of these elements of US engagement in the Baltic Sea region have changed materially during the first year of the Trump administration. In contrast to expectations, continuity between the Obama and Trump administrations has been the key theme when it comes to real cooperation and US activities. This is attributable in part to the geopolitical drivers in the region, in which two strategic spheres of interest have not only met but have also overlapped during the past two decades (Salonius-Pasternak 2017).

12.3 The Baltic Sea in the global geostrategic context

The broader US geopolitical approach provides a framework for understanding the US role in the Baltic Sea region. America has long acted as the global guardian of the freedom of navigation and the provider of maritime security around the world. This global mode of engagement and the associated maritime geostrategic orientation has often become manifest in the need to keep the key sea-lanes open for trade and economic activity. This includes the Baltic Sea, a key economic transit corridor for many states in the region.

Nordic-Baltic states have been subjected to two forms of adaptive pressure, the normative/economic and the geopolitical. Following the end of the Cold War, the main pressure was to create open national strategies that allowed their integration into the regional and global models of the liberal international order. The second underlying pressure – the need to secure state sovereignty and territorial existence – receded into the background due to the primacy of economic prosperity. Nowadays, all the states in the region appreciate the significance of the second set of geopolitical concerns, which are manifest in the gearing up of defence-related solutions and networks (Salonius-Pasternak 2017). However, the heightened geopolitical tensions also extend into the economic realm. Especially in the field of energy politics, some of the states are concentrating their efforts on lessening their dependence on Russia (although others remain committed to increasing energy cooperation with Moscow). This trend is likely to sustain at least in the near-to-medium term. Together with sanctions policies aimed at conditioning the underlying geopolitical challenge, the perceived geoeconomic tools of statecraft will remain sensitive issues (Wigell 2017).

These two types of pressure are also evident in a number of locations around the world. In the South China Sea, China is increasing its efforts to control and secure the trade flows upon which it is highly dependent. Russia might shift its policy in a more assertive direction in the Baltic Sea region, ostensibly to secure its own energy trade through this maritime area. This could take place through a combination of means in the economic, diplomatic and security

spheres. However, the uncertainty of control over the Baltic maritime route and the consequent potential inability to secure access to the maritime lifeline emphasises Russia's need to diversify and seek other maritime routes – in particular the Northern Sea Route.

It is not an accident that this characteristic of geostrategy is also present in the Baltic Sea region. The Baltic Sea and its coastal states comprise one of the most active areas of global trade and economic activity. The Baltic is among the major maritime shipping regions on a global level. Its trade flows account for up to 15 per cent of global seaborne trade, making it one of the busiest maritime environments in the world. There are approximately 2,000 larger vessels operational in the Baltic Sea at any given moment. The coastal states are relatively dependent on the Baltic Sea as a shipping route, and it is also an important maritime route supplying strategic natural resources such as oil and gas. Nearly half of Russia's energy exports flow through the Baltic. The Danish Straits are more congested as an oil transit chokepoint than the Panama Canal or the Turkish Straits, and not far behind the Suez Canal (International Shipping News 2017; Aaltola et al. 2014b; Behr et al. 2013).

All its coastal states, including Russia, are economically and societally dependent on the Baltic Sea. According to general liberal theory, growing economic interdependence should act as a stabilising force. From this perspective, mutual dependence should stabilise the Baltic Sea region and lower the likelihood of disruptive conflicts (Aaltola et al. 2014b).

However, dependence has evolved qualitatively. The trade and supply flows are asymmetrical, and some states are more dependent on them than others. Between 80 and 90 per cent of Finnish exports by volume are shipped along the Baltic Sea, for example. Finland, like many other coastal states, is a relatively small, highly open and connected society that has actively sought to become connected to global lifelines through the Baltic Sea. However, the increase in connections and value chains is likely to result in new vulnerabilities, as well as opportunities. For example, the development of Helsinki as a Baltic Sea hub and a multidimensional gateway – via its maritime, air and data connections – has also exposed Finnish society to potentially complex security-of-supply vulnerabilities. Finland is also directly dependent on free and secure access to the global commons more broadly (air, maritime and cyber domains). With its open, export-driven economy the United States has been important to Finland in terms of safeguarding the rule-based international order, including the maritime commons (see Chapters 6 and 10). Therefore, from a Finnish perspective, the US has been an indispensable security provider not only in a regional context, but also more comprehensively and globally.

The scope of security issues has broadened as the countries in the region have become more digitalised. The Baltic Sea is also a data corridor, most of the data travelling to and from the coastal states being transmitted through undersea data cables. Modern economies are also heavily energy-dependent, and Baltic Sea hydrocarbon flows are intensifying through the construction of the NordStream II pipelines, for example. Although security-of-supply issues still tend to be national-level considerations, they are increasingly coordinated through the European Union and its common resilience-creating policies. Sanctions regimes also play a role, and continuing coordination of such regimes between the US and the European Union would be desirable. However, there have recently been signs of disharmony in this respect. For example, the US Congress passed a law that opens up the possibility of sanctioning certain

energy projects in the Baltic Sea region, NordStream II in particular. This could cause disharmony and divergence in interests between the US and the EU, and between regional states and the US (Foy 2017).⁷³

12.4 Harder Baltic Sea insecurities and the US response

The United States recognises that although Baltic Sea littoral states are vital actors in assuring the region's security, the US plays an important role (in parallel with the EU) as a stabiliser against more assertive Russian efforts to coercively extend its influence beyond its territorial borders.

Although the Baltic Sea is a gateway that needs to be secured to enable access to the global maritime and other commons, it is in itself a more complex security concern for the US in a way that goes beyond such considerations. The US has multiple NATO allies as well as partners (Finland and Sweden) in the region. The NATO membership of the Baltic States has also increased America's need for know-how, and the decline in stability and a growing sense of the "return of geopolitics" has drawn the US further into the region. America's strategic interests could be at stake under certain (extreme) circumstances, such as if the safe and secure use of Baltic maritime routes were to be compromised or if the security of the allies was imperilled.

The growing interest of the United States has manifested itself in many ways, on the institutional, practical and personal level. Much of this increased attention is focused on security-related issues, but a focus on three sub-themes is clear: military defence, co-operation in global counter-terrorism and in cyber/intelligence.

12.4.1 *The institutional level*

From an institutional perspective, the most noticeable trend of the past decade is that the US understands, and in certain cases is even ready to support, different forms of cooperation aimed at enhancing regional security.

If the United States previously objected to defence cooperation at the European (EU) or regional level, fearing that non-NATO cooperation would weaken its influence and role in Europe, bilateral and multilateral cooperation between northern European (Northern Group), the Nordic countries (NORDEFECO) and bilaterally (FISE, Finland-Sweden) appears to be supported as a synergic complementary element. Another initiative for which the US has pledged its support is The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Mattis 2017b). This movement towards multi-layered security relationships is also in line with the Trump administration's apparent preference for bilateral relationships (see Chapter 4; White House 2017y).

The longer-term trend underlying the development towards complementary security networks and bilateral relationships is the deepening awareness in Washington that any action that increases the security of the area – and, consequently, of American allies – is useful. Implicit in this awareness is the acknowledgement that the project to make Europe "whole and free" through enlarged NATO membership is no longer sustainable as a guiding principle on matters concerning the Baltic Sea region. Difficulties in the NATO-accession process with some of the former Eastern-block states, as well as the growing demands placed on candidate

⁷³ Although to prevent disharmony, the bill calls for coordination with America's European allies.

states regarding defence spending and capabilities, are likely to accelerate the development of informal bilateral or multilateral security networks and relationships.

The United States is also increasingly favourable towards regional formal and institutionalised cooperation in the form of the Northern Group or the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force. A clear example of this is US Secretary of Defence James Mattis' participation in the Northern Group ministerial meeting in Helsinki in November 2017, something that US officials had sought for a long time (Standish 2017). Such geographically limited groupings are more likely to share common geographically delimited security challenges, unlike pan-European groupings such as NATO and the European Union. Hence, practically useful and pragmatic cooperation is also easier to elicit.

Nordic Defence Cooperation under the NORDEFECO umbrella took its first steps in 2009. Its establishment meant that three separate streams of cooperation were included in one flexible structure, which enabled all five Nordic countries to participate voluntarily in any given project.⁷⁴ This ensured that only those with a genuine interest would participate, and that project goals would not be limited to the lowest common denominator. More than a hundred areas of cooperation were identified initially, among the better-known of which are weekly cross-border training by national air forces and information exchange on maritime and air spaces. Although not one of its explicit goals, NORDEFECO also provides a loose structure that enables US allies (NATO members) and partners to collaborate more smoothly on regional security and defence issues.

Recognising the need for a softer touch, the United States has, in recent years, accepted that its efforts to persuade the Nordic states to include Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia as permanent members of NORDEFECO are unlikely to result in anything positive. This has, again paradoxically, made it easier to cultivate real cooperation within a loose Nordic Baltic collective.

In addition to supporting multilateral forms of cooperation, the United States has also agreed to institutionalise its bilateral security relations with two Baltic Sea non-NATO-member countries: Finland and Sweden. The Statements of Intent signed in 2016 underline the fact that the United States sees both Finland and Sweden as individual actors capable of contributing to their own and regional security, while also encouraging ever deeper regional cooperation with NATO allies. The Swedish Statement of Intent locates Sweden as a bilateral partner of the United States, whereas the Finnish one points out that this strengthened link with the United States is part of the overall web-of-security cooperative relationships that Finland has sought to build.⁷⁵

12.4.2 The practical level

In terms of practical activity, the United States has significantly increased its military and intelligence activities in the Baltic Sea region. Although there was an initial effort after the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia to assuage newer NATO members in the Baltic Sea region, the step-change in US activity began in the spring of 2014. Immediately after the invasion of Crimea, America sent company-sized airborne units to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland. At the same time, it increased the number of fighters in its Baltic Air Policing rotation from four to ten.

⁷⁴ On the history of Nordic defence cooperation, see NORDEFECO (2017).

⁷⁵ For the official statements of intent see the Government Offices of Sweden (2016) and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Finland (2016).

These immediate actions of military reassurance were followed by political and diplomatic efforts, including strengthening cohesion within NATO and shifting the focus of the Alliance from crisis management to collective defence. Thus, by 2015/16 the initial reactions in 2014 had given way to the adoption of a longer-term approach to deterring Russia, while still showing a readiness to engage in dialogue. The Obama administration's well-meaning but ineffectual "reset" policy with Russia was thus replaced with strong signalling regarding the sanctity of Alliance members' territory.

In the summer of 2014, the Obama administration decided to package separate efforts to reassure allies into the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). The ERI aimed to spend approximately one billion USD annually across five sets of actions, all with the aim of reassuring and then deterring Russia in the European theatre of operations. Increased to \$3.4 billion for 2017, the ERI focused on participation in training and exercises, infrastructure, prepositioning equipment, supporting partner capacity building and simply maintaining a presence. President Trump has signalled that he would like to increase the amount spent on the initiative (renamed the European Deterrence Initiative or EDI) to nearly five billion USD.

The impact of these efforts is already visible in the Baltic Sea region. Numerically, more US troops and equipment are participating in more exercises than at any point since the end of the Cold War. Qualitatively, the biggest change is that US forces are focusing on conventional warfare that takes into consideration the limitations that facing a near-peer adversary involves in terms of air-superiority, electronic warfare *et cetera*.

The US Navy has also increased its presence in the Baltic Sea region, with frequent port calls by large Arleigh Burk-class ships and participation in operations such as BALTOPS and Northern Coasts, and a range of bilateral exercises. Here, again, both numbers and focus together emphasise the step change in US engagement and activity in the region.

These actions, which have strengthened NATO's common defence and deterrence, have led to counter-measures by Russia. Although it should not have done, this came as a surprise to most US decision makers. Russia sees itself as having lost influence in the area since the end of the Cold War, as well as, on average, about a thousand kilometres of "defensive depth". Russia has sought to restore this "defensive depth" by technological means, creating what NATO and the US often refer to as anti-access area denial (A2AD) capacity in the Baltic Sea region – in other words the ability to prevent the unimpeded use of the area. The United States is a strong supporter of the concept of freedom of navigation, and wants to secure its ability to help its allies and thereby to strengthen the credibility of its global alliance network. It is thus likely to continue its current level of activities in the near and medium term. Significant increases in the volume of activity should not be expected unless the general security situation deteriorates considerably. Individual incidents are unlikely to be met with a permanent change in force posture.

In Finland, this increased readiness on the part of the Americans to participate has become evident during the past three years: American naval, air, land and special-forces units have been participating in exercises in Finland.

Bilateral exercises between US and Finnish air forces have also increased in volume and scope, with two separate two-week exercises in 2016 involving US F-15s and Finnish F-18s, as well as in 2017 with US A-10s. In addition to this, the two air forces have exercised together in various multinational manoeuvres such as the Arctic Challenge Exercise series, and in more limited activities in which US refuelling planes practise with Finnish fighters, for example. Although US F-15s first visited Finland in 1997, and the two countries started their cooperation

in the early 1990s, the step-change lies in the quantity and quality of the exercises currently going on.

Furthermore, there have been more US Navy port visits – and the accompanying training – as the US has brought more ships into the Baltic Sea. Perhaps the most notable change has been in the willingness of Finland to take in and the US to send land forces to participate in national exercises, the most obvious ones being the mechanised exercises ARROW 16 and 17 (in which Norway was also involved). In addition to this, American special operations soldiers and units have continued their bilateral training cooperation.

12.4.3 The personal level

The third discernible manifestation of America's increasing interest in the Baltic Sea region lies in the qualitatively and quantitatively intensified contacts between high-ranking US politicians, soldiers and civil servants with their Nordic and Baltic counterparts over the past three years. Examples abound. There was a joint visit of Nordic leaders to the Obama White House in May 2016. President Sauli Niinistö visited Washington during Donald Trump's first year in office, as did Danish Prime Minister Lokke Rasmussen. Vice President Pence toured the Baltics in the summer of 2017, and Secretary of Defence James Mattis attended the Northern Group meeting of defence ministers in Helsinki in November. In addition, representatives of almost all security-relevant US governmental organisations have met with Finnish authorities over the last few years. Similar flows have been reported in other regional capitals, too.

In addition to high-level interaction, and of particular relevance to Finland, doors in Washington and its surroundings have also opened with increasing frequency. Although nominally national representatives, Finnish officers serve as integrated contributors in various parts of the global US command structure. This increased flow has strengthened the web of personal relationships between security actors in Finland and the United States, thereby laying the foundation for the formation of long-term relationships. This is a clear by-product of what one person familiar with the US-Finland bilateral relationship described as the current reality: "Finland is now pop in Washington."

12.5 Conclusion

Recent years have seen increasing American interest in the Baltic Sea region as a result of the changing geopolitical dynamics and the consequent need to ensure the security of US allies – and, increasingly also of its partners – in the area. The fact that the three levels through which this burgeoning interest has materialised – the institutional, the practical and the personal – were all established prior to the Trump administration highlights broader transatlantic and North European security trends. Despite initial concerns in the Nordic and Baltic capitals, the Trump administration seems to have come to the conclusion that supporting its European allies and partners is actually a good deal for the United States.

Nevertheless, although US interests in the Baltic Sea region are not dependent on any given US administration, the effort put into it during the past three years is unlikely to be sustained indefinitely. Rather, after the on-going ramp-up period, which included strengthening institutional and inter-personal bonds, a steady-state period is to be expected. It is also possible that US interest in the region will wane if the transatlantic relationship is completely undermined, or if the relationship between the West and Russia improves significantly. Given the weight of history and even the present state of affairs, both possibilities seem unlikely to materialise in the near to mid-term.

Barring a major regional war outside of Europe or the Middle East, the scenario in which the United States would pay less attention and decrease its security investment in the Baltic Sea region would probably involve a significant thaw in the icy relationship between Moscow and Washington and its allies. Should this come to pass, it is likely to take at least as long as the deterioration of the relationship in the first place – that is, about a decade. This trend would have to withstand multiple presidential and Congressional elections in the US and a possible change of government in Russia (see Chapter 8).

In Finland's case, the increased interest and engagement of the United States could be viewed as a positive development because it creates strategic stability, facilitates the maintenance of the broader transatlantic link and enables the further strengthening of bilateral relations. The United States appreciates Finland's level-headed approach to security and defence. The US military and civilian bureaucracy is also increasingly adept at understanding and working with the particularities of Finland's approach to communicating and conducting security policy. This has contributed to facilitating more and deeper cooperation on Baltic Sea security in a way that suits both Finland and the United States.

The general Finnish-US bilateral relationship stands on considerably firmer ground than it did a quarter of a century ago, largely because the relationship is both more extensive and deeper than at the end of the Cold War. It is able to withstand individual political or diplomatic predicaments, and in the realm of security policy it enables Finland, in particular, to participate in certain international endeavours (ISAF in Afghanistan or OIR in Iraq) while not contributing to others (the invasion of Iraq in 2003).

It was already a major step change in the security and defence-policy aspects of this relationship when Finland decided to procure F-18 Hornets from the United States in 1992. At the time, it was the largest foreign military sale in US history, concluded when Finland was experiencing its deepest economic crisis since the 1930s. While the security and military relationship has expanded and deepened significantly – as has the overall bilateral relationship – many are aware of the potential impact of the upcoming procurement of new fighter jets (HX-programme) on the latter. The fact that security-policy considerations will be among the factors influencing the choice of jet has been freely acknowledged since the beginning of the process.

13. CONCLUSION: THE EMERGENT WAITING GAME

This report identifies observable longer-term trends that are likely to have relevance in the future, as the US is moving deeper into and, eventually, beyond the Trump era. US foreign policy has often been seen as oscillating between more withdrawn isolationist and more expansive interventionist tendencies, which are also highlighted in different schools of foreign-policy thought that frame America's grand-strategic options across decades. At the same time, it should be noted that this oscillation always varies qualitatively as the global context changes. In many ways, the US is fundamentally more global and interdependent, and cannot withdraw in the same way as during previous periods of isolationism or minimalism. The kind of drastic retrenchment that occurred after World War I is too simplistic a parallel for what is happening today, for example. The US will remain welded in complex ways to the global arteries of trade, finance, information and data. This renders withdrawal a relative and context-specific question.

The 2016 presidential election provides another vantage point from which to understand America's foreign-policy future(s). Even though it was a surprise, the election result can still be seen as an expression of underlying trends that can last over several presidencies. President Trump has taken anti-free-trade and anti-immigration positions. The Republican Party has altered its pro-free-trade stance, which had prevailed since the Reagan years, to give at least lukewarm support to the Trump administration's agenda. Irrespective of the relative reluctance expressed by some key Republicans, especially during the election campaign, this is a marked shift. The Democratic Party, in contrast, seems to be moving towards the left in its criticism of wealth inequalities and support for policies that promote social justice. This is a discernible change in comparison to the Obama and Clinton years. On the right, nationalist populist sentiments have been surging and blatantly xenophobic views that highlight America's white Christian heritage are more openly expressed. These trends indicate that the US is moving towards a phase characterised by reluctance towards certain aspects of globalisation. This is a departure from the neoconservative legacy of the Bush era and the pragmatic internationalism of the Obama years.

Polarisation is deepening, and internal animosities are becoming a driver of foreign policy as well. The discussions, investigations and suspicions over collusion with an external power for electoral gain, for instance, are yet another milestone in the saga of increasing divisions among America's political elites and the body politic. The Ancient Greek historian Thucydides once wrote about the dangers of political regression into a situation in which external enmities matter less than internal feuds and conflicts. In today's information age, external actors can easily meddle in networked societies that are plagued by internal divisions. There is a risk that the mutually felt suspicion among political rivals will become the key constitutive element in the political life of contemporary America. In effect, ideological divisions and party politics have started to outweigh patriotism and the sense of national belonging.

However, there are also hopeful signs. America is still regarded by many as an indispensable ally, especially in Europe and Asia. The US is economically strong and innovative. It is increasingly self-sufficient in energy production, and its role in global energy markets has grown – some even project it will become a net exporter of energy during the 2020s. Even the cloud of post-election controversies, however unsettling, could have a silver lining and act as a wake-up call for a better understanding of global dependencies and vulnerabilities. It is clear

that, by and large, US awareness of its global interconnectedness within a more complex, globalised, and networked world has, in fact, grown. This would suggest the emergence of a more globally engaged US in certain key functions, sectors and regions, and a less engaged one in others. That is to say, in a feverishly intertwined world, even isolationist aspirations could have different contents, contradictions and consequences than in the past.

Politics, and especially foreign policy, tends to fuse specific political leaders' inclinations with traditions, institutions and structures. Donald Trump's agency, although potentially disruptive especially in the short term, should therefore not be overstated. Foreign-policy prognostication typically draws upon the relative constancy of US foreign policy. After years of culture wars, political polarisation and decision-making problems, there is still substantial common ground amongst US foreign-policy stakeholders over America's global engagement. Even significant portions of the American public continue to prefer a globally active role. The controversies that resulted from the apparent reluctance of President Trump to mention and recognise America's Article 5 responsibilities during his first trip to Europe in late May 2017, for example, reveal that there are enduring expectations concerning how the American President should conduct himself. So far, he has had to concur with many consensus expectations, although his reluctance to do so has probably stretched the boundaries of consensus to a degree. This change may have staying power as a key legacy or as a failed experiment, catapulting into prominence a different mix of foreign- and economic-policy doctrines in future elections. Meanwhile, the world is still holding its breath. As a result, a new "waiting game" has emerged, characterised by interplay between expected continuities and newfound uncertainties concerning America's future direction.

It is therefore plausible that areas of strong national consensus can still be used to shed light on America's future foreign-policy tendencies. Furthermore, future administrations, Congress and the so-called foreign policy establishment can garner support for particular strategic options that remain within the bounds of the underlying foreign-policy common ground. Existing areas of commonality are enablers that can be used to enhance understanding of and even envisage future pathways of US foreign policy. This is also the case in turbulent times, when different actors cannot agree on the specific definition of US national interests. The areas of consensus also serve an important yet complex signalling role in the outside world: they embody intended messages to allies, partners and potential adversaries.

In sum, there are at least three areas in which a long-term bipartisan consensus on global engagement has existed in post-Second World War America. These commonalities will likely continue to exist, but differences over policy formulation and implementation can still be accommodated within them.

First, it is generally agreed that the US will continue to have an important role in the world. However, the specific modes of this engagement are negotiable. At present, it is especially relevant to assess the extent to which and in what fields the US is a pragmatic arbiter of common global problems and to what extent it is a custodian of principle on a mission to remake the world in its own image, a core tenet of American "exceptionalism". Under Trump, it is trying to manage the North Korean issue and the Russia challenge in a way that is interest-driven and transactional – in a word, pragmatic. However, it is also trying to declare a moral mission in defence of "civilisation", national sovereignty, and a conservative interpretation of the American creed based on Judeo-Christian values, which at least partially clashes with the more liberal rights and value-based definitions of the West.

Second, although the importance of America's engagement with the world is rarely contested, there is considerable contention over the specific means it should adopt. The choice is frequently articulated through the opposition between "hard" (military and economic) versus "soft" (diplomatic, institutional, cultural) means of power. At present there is a trend away from reliance on softer means towards the prioritisation of military might and coercive aspects of economic power, such as more bullish negotiation strategies and extensive sanctions. The accompanying worldview is markedly pessimistic and gloomy. Since 9/11, America has employed different mixes of these two forms of power. It prioritised hard power for the first years of the George W. Bush presidency, only to shift towards a softer approach (out of necessity) during his second term. The Obama administration favoured a more balanced approach in which soft tools were visible in public, whereas harder tools were frequently used, but largely out of the public view (e.g. through special operations and remote-controlled aerial vehicles). On the basis of its first year, one could say that the Trump administration has clearly shifted towards a mode of engagement emphasising hard power and a zero-sum worldview rather than soft power and win-win scenarios.

Third, most foreign-policy analysts and practitioners in Washington agree on the importance of fulfilling existing international responsibilities and commitments. Nevertheless, open questions remain over the extent to which these commitments should be made conditional on the willingness of allies and partners to engage in more equitable burden-sharing and, relatedly, on the degree to which the US needs to accommodate others' interests by engagement in multilateral forums. Moreover, there are debates over the balance of priorities and related commitments when it comes to different regions around the world. For instance, although the post-Cold War shift from Europe towards the rest of the world was "delayed" by US-supported efforts to make Europe "whole and free", as well as by wars in the Balkans, the increased focus on Asia that started during the Obama administration was relatively uncontroversial. In reality, however, the shift towards Asia has been piecemeal, even in the hard-power realm. The recent agreement by numerous countries to negotiate a post-TPP agreement without the United States underlines the nascent nature of the so-called pivot to Asia.

The uncertainties related to these three areas of consensus have put Europe and the Nordic-Baltic region on the alert. To a degree, increasing unpredictability in Washington is intentional. US foreign policy has evolved by design during the first year of the Trump administration, away from President Obama's penchant for risk-aversion and strategic patience to more confrontational rhetoric that aims consciously to keep both friends and foes on their toes. These ideas are not new. They were used during the Nixon administration, and they have bubbled to the surface occasionally, especially in political rhetoric, as a tool to warn potential enemies. George W. Bush had his controversial use of the "axis of evil", and his Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld spoke of "old" and "new" Europe.

It could be argued that contingent events rather than strategic leadership and progressive visions have played a significant role in Western politics in recent years. After many relative shocks – from the Iraq debacle, the financial crisis of 2007/8 and the Euro crisis to elections-related unpredictability – the strong teleological belief in the inevitable progress of liberal market-oriented democracy has declined. The arch of history does not appear to bend in the direction of justice if there is no one to bend it. There is a growing awareness that at least a pause has taken hold over hitherto steady progress, and a rising sense of crosscurrents and uncertainty has started to prevail. This is another characteristic of the "waiting game". As well as adapting to the unpredictability in the US, actors in Europe and the Nordic-Baltic region have to defend the resilience of their political systems. The reversal of democratic progress, the waning of democratic appeal, and a growing sense of democratic vulnerability may even

raise the possibility of international conflicts between democratic and autocratic actors. Indeed, there are worrying signs. However, many of the trends that are now becoming evident have a long pedigree. Enhancing understanding of these trends would facilitate the management of unpredictability.

The surprising election and referendum results in the transatlantic area, the Brexit negotiations, the scandals and investigations in Washington, and the still unsettled nature of the Trump administration's foreign policy have resulted in at least a momentary loss of transatlantic confidence. This is a further defining feature of the "waiting game". In an era of heightened uncertainty, waiting has to be strategic in nature. Pursuing the agenda to which we have grown accustomed during the past decade – combatting climate change and fostering transatlantic free trade, for example – has to be put on the backburner, or pursued within alternative constellations because the all-important leadership from Washington is missing. Some expect that keeping a low profile on these issues will save them for the post-Trump period. Administrations come and go, and power changes hands along the long continuum of relatively stable yet oscillating US global engagement. However, those who are tempted to wait for the Trump era to be over should acknowledge that the administration's agenda also represents longer-term trends that could well endure into the future. Such trends include rising economic nationalism and the increasing conditionality of US commitments.

Contemporary times are defined by contradictory trends. On the one hand, after a steady flow of bad news, the EU seems to have recovered some momentum after various crises on and around the continent. This is partially a reaction to the Trump victory and Brexit, which bear family resemblances, at least in terms of marking a trend of growing cultural and economic nationalism. The regaining of some confidence signals that liberal institutions continue to endure, and that the underlying spirit of peace through integration can still be sold to voters. Similarly, liberal values that have come to characterise the republic also remain strong in the US. This is exemplified in the persistence of the rule of law, the judicial system having proved capable of checking some of the most controversial policy proposals of the Trump administration. The free press has also continued to highlight shortcomings in governance despite facing extraordinary criticism from the White House and the proliferation of "fake news" emanating from domestic and foreign sources.

On the other hand, great-power politics and geopolitical contestation based on narrower zero-sum understandings of self-interest seem to be making a comeback. Meanwhile, authoritarian political orders appear to have strengthened their appeal around the world. As a result, the task of sustaining and refining the liberal order seems increasingly difficult. A sense of muddling-through has replaced the strong belief in the liberal telos – very few people would subscribe to the "end of history" thesis today. To a degree, this could be healthy. It puts the onus on active political leadership instead of waiting for an inevitable future and relying on less proactive measures. The security challenge posed by geopolitical contestation and transnational terrorism, together with the increasing sense of vulnerability of Western democracies, both serve as wake-up calls.

Paradoxically, the current "waiting game" is thus also characterised by the need to take action – to change, to mitigate and to adapt. Indeed, in this sense, recent years have witnessed increased activity in Europe and in the Nordic-Baltic region. Challenges to the region's stability have been tackled by investing resources in harder forms of security, countering hybrid threats, and building defence capabilities and security networks, even across the NATO boundary. The countries in the region are now better prepared to face the challenges of build-

ing up independent, networked and collective defence mechanisms. This active stability promotion includes bilateral and trilateral relationships, as in the case of the deeper cooperation between Sweden and Finland, with further links to the US and NATO. At the same time, there has been a steady development of mutual ties between NATO and the EU.

However, there are a number of challenges that need to be managed. The re-emergence of major power politics is a global phenomenon. Active stability promotion – e.g. in the Nordic-Baltic region – requires a degree of win-win thinking. The strengthening zero-sum tendencies and expansionist policies of the strong (and the daring) are both reasons behind and consequences of the malaise affecting the liberal international order. On the one hand, major transformations of world orders have historically entailed large-scale violent contestation. Such regressive cycles would inevitably have ramifications in Europe and in the Nordic-Baltic region, where societal prosperity is dependent upon a stable international environment. On the other hand, many of the rising powers – such as China, India and, to a degree, Russia – are major beneficiaries of the liberal rule-based order. These actors' willingness to radically alter the foundations of their own economic prosperity and domestic stability would seem to be counterintuitive.

The biggest non-Western economic beneficiary of the liberal international order, China, neither represents nor endorses its key values. Democratisation expectations have dissipated and the system of government is still authoritarian. The Chinese legal system remains under political direction and liberal political rights are hardly endorsed or respected. However, the geopolitical challenge is still mainly geoeconomic, and limited to the maritime regions, the Silk Road projects and the cyber domain. The more assertive approach adopted by Russia in Europe is interpreted by some as proof that a more illiberal state can be tempted to challenge regional security norms. However, the counter-measures taken so far should be enough to check the current level of challenge. Nevertheless, a darker future can also be envisioned. The prospect of bilateral deals between great powers – such as Russia and the US or Russia and China – raises concerns in the light of historical experiences in Europe.

Yet, dynamics that challenge the liberal international order are not only external to its Western core. President Trump's forceful rhetoric on burden sharing and his suggestions that US commitments are conditional have been noted in Europe with concern, and have fuelled a dual effort to strengthen transatlantic security institutions. To achieve the two-per-cent defence-spending pledge agreed to by NATO members at the 2014 Wales summit, European allies and partners are increasingly investing in defence across the board. This reversed a trend that had prevailed since the 1990s. At the same time, the development of common EU defence capabilities has gathered new momentum, driven by strong public calls for European strategic independence, most notably by Chancellor Merkel after the G7 meeting in May 2017. The idea of a stronger European leg of NATO is also being entertained. All these processes could be viewed as synergic, contributing to collective defence and more effective integration between NATO and the EU. These recent developments have been received positively in the US, which is increasingly emphasising the idea of an ally or partner taking care of its own lot, and being a strong contributor to defence collaboration and a provider of regional stability.

These concerns are also related to the prioritisation of threat perceptions, and to the question of who has most say in ranking priorities in the transatlantic realm. The American prioritisation of threats appears to be changing. The United States is a global power with a global outlook. Its vast network of allies includes states that have their own unique regional threat perceptions. In Europe these include Russia and terrorism, in the Middle East Iran and its Shiite affiliates, and in Asia North Korea and China. It seems that the new Trump administration

does not prioritise the complete list of threats in the same manner as many European states do. Most notably, at least the White House has been looking for ways of collaborating with Russia, even recognising some of its interests. The trepidation among America's European allies and partners is not necessarily the key determinant of the US regional policies in the White House (although it may play a bigger role in the calculus of Pentagon and Congress). These developments are likely to increase anxieties given that European allies and partners have become used to the US strategic preoccupation with Europe, trusting the American slogan "Europe whole and free". These anxieties may feed the need to find alternative solutions, and increase tensions amongst foreign-policy elites in the regions of Europe that feel externally exposed.

Finally, the degree of change in the transatlantic relationship does not depend solely on the committed leadership on both sides of the ocean. The political strains in the relationship may be further accentuated by the strengthening appeal of a populist nationalist ethos. The emergence of these politico-cultural sentiments and their diffusion from one side of the Atlantic to the other (and vice versa) could potentially undermine the liberal character of the transatlantic community, instead fuelling conflict dynamics both within societies and across assumed cultural boundaries. Such divisions also produce fissures that could be further amplified and exploited by external actors through disinformation campaigns in the run up to elections, for example. Moreover, the balance between domestic forces has become particularly pertinent in contemporary America. Although the President has extensive power over foreign and security policies, many in Congress (particularly in the Senate) currently harbour more traditional foreign-policy inclinations. Key government departments and agencies can (and will) guard against radical ruptures, and steer administrations (Trump's included) towards the long-prevailing US foreign-policy consensus.

For the time being, the overall situation seems to reflect elements of both continuity and change, which is challenging for policy planners, who have to wait for clarity. In terms of nurturing the commonly held value base and trade cooperation, bold initiatives are unlikely to bear fruit in the short term. At the same time, in the security sphere the European drive for strategic rethinking of the EU-NATO relationship provides a much-needed sense of direction. There is no time to lose, given that the European security environment is characterised by uncertainty. Regression into power politics and spheres of influence remains a possible, although unlikely, future scenario. Even the remote possibility of this should provide the West the impetus to re-imagine the transatlantic relationship in a manner that would support the emergence of a reformed liberal order, a normatively and strategically desirable outcome for "post-post-Cold War" Europe.

Engagement in the waiting game

The United States remains – in the words of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright – the "indispensable nation" when it comes to security and stability in the Nordic-Baltic region and Europe more broadly. The need to engage in and strengthen cooperation across all levels (from high politics all the way to civil society) will persist, regardless of who is at the helm in the White House.

Irrespective of the potential for disruption that Trump as a president *sui generis* presents, there are considerable continuities in America's global engagement, especially when it comes to guaranteeing its military ascendancy, maintaining its security commitments in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region and continuing the battle against transnational terrorism. It is also possible that future US presidents will revert to an American foreign policy that is more traditional

in terms of US dedication to the normative, institutional and economic foundations of the liberal international order. The foreign-policy pendulum of international engagement has historically swung back and forth in the United States, and the Trump presidency may yet turn out to be a cyclical aberration.

It should nevertheless be borne in mind that the United States that emerges at the end of President Trump's incumbency – whenever that may be – will not be the same as it was on January 20, 2017. Not only will the surrounding world have changed – more or less dramatically – so will the nature and conventions of the debates taking place within the US over America's place in that world. For instance, it is highly likely that calls for more equitable burden-sharing within its broad network of alliances along with a less benign attitude to economic interdependence and globalisation will persist after Trump's term(s) in office. Moreover, political polarisation in the country shows few signs of dissipation. In fact, it is possible that divisions will widen not only on the traditional liberal/conservative axis but also along educational, ethnic and racial lines as part of the inevitable process of demographic change. The more positive possibility is that the Trump presidency will provide “lessons learned” and foster attempts by future leaders to return to pragmatic arbitration and bipartisanship.

In the short term, however, the Trump presidency offers both challenges and opportunities to Europe more broadly and Finland in particular. It is becoming increasingly clear that as the proverbial transactionalist, President Trump has little time for or interest in engagement in complex organisational forums and long-winded institutional processes – the United Nations being the most obvious case in point. Even if his presidency inches in a more traditional direction, this reticence towards multilateral solutions and organisations is likely to remain a mainstay of the administration. In fact, Republican presidents in general have approached multilateral forays with more reservation than their Democratic counterparts.

While engaged in the “waiting game”, Finland and its European partners would do well to remember that aloofness is not a substitute for engagement. Despite potential policy and value divergence between the European Union and the United States on issues such as climate change and trade policy, there is a need to find avenues of cooperation that can be harnessed to sustain the transatlantic link through the potentially turbulent times ahead. This requires a deft touch on the part of European policymakers to adopt a combination of *strategic patience* and *selective sector-based proactivity*.

On the one hand, the Trump presidency does open up opportunities for cooperation that could be framed as a policy triumph or economic gain for the US administration, which the President could then sell as a victory to his domestic constituents. Illustrative examples in the security sphere include NATO burden-sharing and the development of European defence capabilities, as well as efforts to combat the threat of transnational terrorism and devise new ways of countering hybrid influencing.

On the other hand, America's benevolence as a liberal hegemon – a leader that maintains a guarantor role for the institutions of the liberal international order even if this does not always serve its immediate national interests – has waned, at least for the time being. It is incumbent upon Europeans to take a stand against the United States (as they have in the past) on issues that are of importance to them, especially when America is charting a course that is detrimental to European interests and core values, and to the stability of the international order in general. In such cases, declaration and policy need to be proportional to the magnitude of the disruptive action.

In fact, although the temptation might sometimes be considerable, it is most likely to be counterproductive to enter into escalatory public rows with the present administration. Not only does Trump's leadership style draw on public spectacles, such high-profile disagreements might merely accentuate the "values gap" between the two shores of the Atlantic, or within respective societies. They might also render it more difficult for more moderate actors within the Trump administration (e.g. Tillerson, Mattis and McMaster) and different government departments and agencies (e.g. the State Department and the Pentagon) to push their agendas forward in Washington and to cooperate with Europeans.

The liberal international order is extremely important for Finland as a small internationally networked state, and its building blocks are worthy of defence whenever feasible. This presents a conundrum that can be reconciled by looking at each issue of contention on its own terms and utilising the European Union (or other multilateral constellations) as forums in which Finland can seek to defend the building blocks of the rule-based multilateral order with like-minded states.

The increasingly bilateral bent in America's foreign policy means that state-to-state – as well as leader-to-leader – contacts may be prioritised more than in the past. Although not conducive to important multilateral cooperation, this could open up opportunities through innovative bilateral diplomacy, which would not necessarily have been available during a more traditional presidential administration. However, it is still worth keeping in mind that the relationship between Finland and the United States is fundamentally asymmetric.

When it comes to security and trade ventures with the United States, Finland should drive home the message that US interests are especially well served by cooperation: Finland keeps its promises, takes care of its own lot and is willing engage the US in fair trade that also benefits Americans. This is a message that the US President and his administration could sell to domestic supporters.

American interlocutors, including President Trump and more recently Secretary of Defence Mattis, have made it clear in public addresses that they have respect for Finland and value Finnish expertise in issues pertaining to its near abroad. The interest of the United States in the Nordic-Baltic region has also increased as the geopolitical situation in Europe has evolved over the last few years. Although heightened tensions *per se* are of concern, the situation could also prove fortuitous for Finland if handled correctly. Paradoxically, this may well be the time for pragmatic initiatives and forays *vis-à-vis* the US.

In light of the above, the report sets forth the following general rules of thumb upon which Finland could draw while engaging in the "waiting game" with the United States and its European allies and partners. As a whole, they outline the elements of an approach that combines the virtues of strategic patience with selective sector-based proactivity.

Guard against overreaction: Finland should guard against overreacting to the rhetoric and policies pursued by a single presidential administration. America's foreign policy has exhibited considerable continuity throughout the post-World War II era and, barring outliers such as scepticism about climate change and isolationist nationalist rhetoric, even the policies of the Trump administration are likely to remain within the bounds of US long-term international engagement.

Compartmentalise and frame win-win formulations: Finland should advance a clear set of priority areas that can be compartmentalised to cater to America's increasingly transactional and bilateral approach. These sector-based cooperative forays should be framed as beneficial for the US when possible, especially in terms of economic growth and job creation. Such proposals are more likely to get the Trump team's seal of approval. These win-win formulations could further produce transactional benefits that flow from connecting one set of issues with another.

Pursue areas of confluence: Finland can play a proactive role in Europe to make the case that existing avenues of cooperation with the United States should be maintained as far as possible, and new ones considered and explored, regardless of the present presidential administration. This is the case, in particular, when it comes to cooperation in the realm of common defence, responding to transnational terrorism, as well as tackling cybercrime and hybrid threats. A message of cooperation in these areas of confluence would also be easy for President Trump to sell to his domestic constituents.

Strengthen regional security and stability: Finland should continue to conduct a foreign policy aimed at actively strengthening overall security and stability in the Nordic-Baltic region, which entails facilitating coordination and open dialogue between all relevant regional and global actors whenever possible. This can be done by engaging the US, in cooperation with other partner states, in forums in which America has shown interest, also during the first year of the Trump presidency. Such constellations include NORDEFECO, NATO-EU cooperation, the Northern Group and the Arctic Council, for example.

Continue to use multilateral forums: In key areas that are important for Finland but harbour the potential of creating differences with the US, Finland should utilize the buffering potential of multilateral forums. In particular, it could enlist the help of its European Union partners and the Union's institutions as potential safeguards against any negative effects of bilateralization, transactionalization and disruptive policies pursued by the US.

Utilise backchannels: When a European front is unavailable or undesirable, Finland could utilise channels to officials in the White House and Trump's cabinet who are more sensitive to Finnish and European concerns than the President and some of his less accommodating advisors. Discussions with American officials on lower levels of government should pave the way for the continuation of cooperation when the political climate in Washington changes in a more globally engaged direction.

Nurture bilateral links on multiple levels: Finland should continue to nurture existing bilateral links with American interlocutors, and establish new ones when it is deemed to be in the interest of strengthening Finland-US relations. This should be done on the highest levels with presidential and ministerial-level contacts, and range across all relevant levels in government ministries. Finland should also invest in maintaining strong cooperative links to both houses of Congress, which can function as indispensable conduits for channelling European and Finnish views into American political debates. In areas in which the federal government is not forthcoming, cooperation could still be fostered with states, cities, private-sector actors and civil society.

Wait out the storm: In areas in which the United States is unwilling to engage, including climate change and multilateral trade agreements (especially TTIP), it is likely better to wait out the current turn in the cycles of US global engagement, and restart these processes in the relevant formats when a more forthcoming interlocutor enters the White House.

Stand up for values: When America's policy behaviour compromises Finland's core principles and values, it should – in bilateral talks with the US or in cooperation with its European and global partners – remind the United States of the importance of adhering to legitimate international norms and institutions.

Formulate a clear message: in the end, four simple dictums should form the core of the narrative in Finland's strategic communication with the United States:

Finland is a reliable partner now and will remain so in the future.

Finland has historically delivered what it promises, and will continue to do so.

Finland is part of the Western community of nations committed to the norms and values of the rule-based international order.

Finland is further committed to maintaining, strengthening and investing in its own security and is able to take care of its own lot, and this commitment fosters peace and stability in its neighbourhood.

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GOVERNMENT'S ANALYSIS,
ASSESSMENT AND
RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

tietokayttoon.fi/en

ISSN 2342-6799 (pdf)
ISBN 978-952-287-505-1 (pdf)
ISBN 978-952-287-506-8 (nid.)

