

# Unraveling Triadic Relationship in Trump's Foreign Policy: Internationalism, Nationalism, and Trumpism

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This article is adapted from the research “In Search of Grand Strategy in the Indo-Pacific: The Incompatibility between Nationalism and Internationalism in the Trump Administration and Its Implications for U.S. Strategy” funded by the Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration, Chiang Mai University. The author would like to thank Dr. Kamonphorn Kanchana and the anonymous referees of *International Journal of East Asian Studies* for reading and commenting on drafts of this article.

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**Received:** 12 Aug 2019

**Revised:** 10 Oct 2019

**Accepted:** 1 Dec 2020

## Abstract

This article provides a new framework for analyzing the dynamics of U.S. foreign policy establishment in the Trump administration. Since Trump became the President of the United States in 2017, the foreign policy establishment has changed drastically to the point that it now consists of three ideologies: internationalism, nationalism, and Trumpism. Though the three ideologies may contradict, they coexist and, above all, take the helm of American foreign policy. The nature of competing yet coexisting three ideologies is defined as “triadic relationship”. This article argues that internationalism and nationalism are sometimes eclipsed by Trumpism, but they are not be completely silenced once overshadowed by Trumpism. Rather, when Trumpism reaches its goals, it will “juggle back” enabling nationalism and internationalism to resume their duties. Moreover, the distinctions between internationalism, nationalism, and Trumpism are not clearly drawn in the sense that internationalism and Trumpism can only be associated with security issues whereas nationalism is connected to economic ones. Instead, any ideology can compete in the security or economic realm, and briefly dominates U.S. foreign policy in a “juggling back and forth” way. In conclusion, the triadic relationship, along with the concept of juggling back and forth, can clarify the complexities of President Trump’s foreign policy and the dynamics inside the foreign policy establishment.

**Keywords:** U.S. foreign policy, American foreign policy community, nationalism, internationalism, Trumpism

## INTRODUCTION

In 2016, John Oliver, an English-American political commentator and famous host of *Last Week Tonight*, quipped that 'Donald Trump is America's back mole—it may have seemed harmless a year ago, but now that it has gotten frighteningly bigger, it is no longer wise to ignore it' (Locker, 2016). Both before and during his presidential campaign, the idea of Trump sitting in the Oval office seemed to be inconceivable. Though Trump has been constantly mocked, the "Make American Great Again" populist mantra successfully captured the heart and minds of "Trump Tribe" (Chua, 2018, p. 30; 2019, p. 161). More importantly, it also proves that Oliver's take on Trump incredibly rings true. Yet one marked difference remains – Trump is not just the problem of America.

Following Inauguration Day on January 20, 2017, much ink has been spilled on Trump and his "America First" foreign policy. It did not come as a surprise to some analysts that U.S. foreign policy under Trump would break dramatically from the conventional foreign policy playbook (Elliott Abrams 2017). In other words, in the view of President Trump, who spoke unequivocally that he was the "President of the United States" and not the "President of the world" (White House, 2017), the liberal international order is deemed obsolete. Based on Trump's track record, his foreign policy centers around the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian schools of thought, focusing primarily on reducing American global footprint while strengthening national military capability and economic well-being of his fellow Americans (Mead, 2001, 2017).

President Trump's executive order to withdraw the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (White House, 2017), the lynchpin of U.S. Rebalancing Strategy toward Asia-Pacific, is a good case in point. Trump strongly opposed the twelve member states trade deal that was the Obama administration's brainchild in promoting American presence in the region because he believed that the agreement was 'a potential disaster for the country' (BBC, 2017). Additionally, he also signed another executive order imposing travel ban for six Muslim-majority countries from traveling to US; Trump's divisive immigration and refugee executive orders provoked outrage and criticism around the globe. However, for working-class white Americans, Trump is different from American elites, in that Trump said he would place American interests first. It should also be noted that a growing sense of anti-establishment appears to be the most important factor which allows Trump to fully embrace the notion of nationalism while turning away from internationalism.

Apart from Trump's propensity to over-promise but under-deliver and his daily war of words on Twitter, the unorthodox president came to realize that, like many of his predecessors, he might not be able to alter, let alone revolutionize, the prevailing orthodoxies of American foreign policy. Because of his lack of political experience and understanding of foreign policy, his dependence on the foreign policy establishment that exerts control over the President appears to be extremely difficult to overcome. In retaliation for the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people, the administration launched 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles to the airbase controlled by Bashar al-Assad's Syrian government. While Trump's approval ratings skyrocketed due to the rally-round-the-flag effect, the drone strike also high-

lighted the extraordinary degree Trump relies on his advisers. To put it another way, the foreign policy of the new administration appears surprisingly traditional and represents what Elliott Abrams calls “conventionally Republican” foreign policy (Abrams, 2017, p. 13).

Zack Cooper, Senior Fellow for Asian Security at The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington DC, conceptualizes the nature of Trump's Asia policy by asserting that U.S. foreign policy under Trump comprises two contradicting yet coexisting ideas (Cooper, 2017). On the one hand, those who support economic nationalism may convince the president to adopt nationalist and protectionist policies, such as imposing higher tariffs on imports from China. On the other hand, the Obama's legacies on Rebalancing in Asia are inherited by the security internationalists, who recognize the importance of the Asian Pacific. Internationalists embrace the idea of American presence in the region, militarily and economically, as well as promoting the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy to counterbalance China's assertive behavior and the Belt & Road initiative.

With this backdrop in mind, Cooper's main argument is that the desire of President Trump to resolve all internal contradictions is incomprehensible, but he has to find a way to make security internationalism and economic nationalism coexist and, where possible, 'retain the ability to function' (Cooper, 2017, p. 9). Cooper further complicates matters by saying, 'the administration must rely on the expertise of its senior officials to overcome these internal contradictions' (Cooper, 2017, pp. 7-9). That line of argument sounds convincing, but it was only true in the early stage of the Trump administration. In addition to being able to break away from two dominant ideologies that belong to the American foreign policy establishment, Trump can finally pull off the "Trumpism," a term denoting aggressive and nationalist policies of President Trump in which he regularly uses to accumulate power and retain support at home. (Thompson, 2017, p. 4) Ultimately, U.S. foreign policy in the Trump administration is no longer "America First" but "Trump First".

Under the circumstances, how can we understand the process of U.S. foreign policy making in Trump era? Has the President successfully altered the course of U.S. foreign policy? My central argument is that since Trump's unexpected victory in 2016, the dynamics of American foreign policy community have changed dramatically to the degree that they are now comprised of three contesting ideologies: internationalism, nationalism, and Trumpism. Arguably, internationalism and nationalism are sometimes eclipsed by Trumpism. However, internationalism and nationalism has not been completely silenced once overshadowed by Trumpism. Rather, when Trumpism reaches its goals, for example after the Washington-Tehran stand-off, it will juggle back enabling nationalism and internationalism to resume their duties. Finally, I suggest that "juggling back and forth" is the current state of American foreign policy community and it can shed light on the modus operandi of U.S. foreign policy under President Trump.

The article is divided into 4 sections. The first section revisits the current state of American foreign policy studies in the Trump administration and expostulates that, since Trump's stunning turnaround in the 2016 United States presidential election, the American cognoscenti have been overflowing with analysis and insights into the new trajectory of U.S.

foreign policy, but most are unable to offer any analytical value. In the second section, I lay out the significance of the American foreign policy establishment, which will be used in subsequent sections to analyze nationalism, liberalism, and Trumpism. I also consider the relationship between nationalism and internationalism in the third section, paying close attention to its incompatibilities, as well as its shortcomings. Then, I argue that even though Trumpism seems to overshadow the other two ideologies, Trumpism cannot completely replace internationalism or nationalism, even if it so desires, for President Trump still relies on experience and guidance from the American establishment. In the last section, I conclude that the relationship in the foreign policy community under Trump is not static but evolve over time. Most specifically, the triadic relationship during Trump era is the determining forces in shaping and shaping the course of American foreign policy. The relationship works in a way that “juggles” back and forth between nationalism, internationalism and Trumpism rather than being dominated by each.

### THE STATE OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY STUDIES

The range of explanations for a fundamental change in American foreign policy under President Trump is exceptionally long. Essentially, the prevailing ideas among American intelligentsia tend to favor the elements of change over continuity (Dombrowski & Reich, 2018, p. 56). Many academics and commentators tend to ridicule Trump's presidential style and, on several occasions, view Trump's rise as the greatest threat to America and the world. Joseph S. Nye, an American foreign policy expert from Harvard University, claims that he was not concerned about China's, but he was more worried about the rise of President Trump (Allison, 2018, p. 124). Similarly, Eliot A. Cohen, a renowned international relations scholar from Johns Hopkins University, makes an interesting comment that Trump is actually both “a symptom and a cause” in the creation of U.S. foreign policy crisis (Cohen, 2020). The repetition of these narratives, while pleasing a number of Americans, does not, in my view, provide a systematic explanation of the trajectory of American foreign policy.

In the meantime, scholars in the field of strategic studies seem to conclude that if one wants to understand the new developments in American foreign policy, one should pose the most important questions: Does Trump have a grand strategy? It is apparent that grand strategy is widely used as a concept and as an analytical tool in both international relations and strategic studies, but grand strategy is also a contested concept. Based on the conceptualizations and reinterpretations of 6 influential thinkers, namely Paul Kennedy, John Lewis Gaddis, Edward Luttwak, Barry Posen, and Robert Art, they all give a wide spectrum of meanings and a completely different intellectual intent. For example, Gaddis, “Dean of the Cold War Historians”, defines grand strategy as ‘the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities’ (Gaddis, 2018, p. 21). He also writes, with a string of sport analogies, that ‘knowing which to do when requires the ability to see all of the parts in relation to the whole; the vision is not that of a theorist but of a quarterback’ (Gaddis, 2009, p. 16). Unlike Gaddis's broad definition, Art believes that grand strategy ‘concentrates on how the military instrument can best be used to support foreign policy goals’ (Art, 2009,

p. 1). Perhaps the right way to understand the limitations of modern grand strategic thought is through what Lukas Milevski of the Leiden University, brilliantly puts it that 'one person's grand strategy is not another's, nor yet another's [grand strategy]' (Milevski, 2016, p. 4).

Hal Brands, a leading expert in strategic studies, pioneered the use of grand strategy to make sense of American grand strategy in the age of Trump. Brands asserts that though 'Trump came to Washington promising a grand strategic revolution... so far, the president's statecraft has proved somewhat less radical than his rhetoric portended' (Brands, 2014, pp. 154-155). Nonetheless, according to Brands, the fact that Trump's worldview is based on a zero-sum game has contributed to policies of isolationism and protectionism that will continue to have deleterious effect on America's global position.

In a similar vein, Barry R. Posen, a renowned professor from MIT, remarks that President Trump, in contrast to conventional wisdom, is anything but an isolationist (Posen, 2018, p. 20). Under President Trump, U.S. engagement in the world remains intact, especially in the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East. The factor making Trump stand out from his predecessors, in Posen's view, is that Trump 'has taken much of the liberal out of liberal hegemony,' but Trump 'still seeks to retain the United States' superior economic and military capability and role as security arbiter for most region of the world' (Posen, 2018, pp. 20-21). U.S. novel grand strategy under Trump should be, therefore, considered as "illiberal hegemony" (Posen, 2018, p. 20). Some scholars, however, disagree with Brands and Posen. For example, Micah Zenko and Rebecca F. Lissner believe that Trump has no grand strategy at all. (Zenzo & Lissner, 2017) While Michael H. Fuchs has gone so far to assert that 'America doesn't need a grand strategy' in Trump era (Fuchs, 2019).

Without doubt, grand strategy has gradually become a fashionable concept among scholars for understanding and explaining Trump's foreign policy, but it does not provide us with a systematic clarification of how the inexperience President can exert influence over the American establishment and vice versa. More importantly, grand strategy is unable to explain how the internationalism in American foreign policy still prevails, even if it is marginalized by the tide of populist nationalism.

In order to answer the above questions, based on an extensive review on American foreign policy-making process, we need to delve much deeper into where it all began – American foreign policy establishment.

## THE AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY ESTABLISHMENT

Political commentators believe that a group of experts and epistemic communities have dominated U.S. foreign policy for decades. Research on experts and its influence on foreign policy makers have been widely discussed among scholars for more than two decades (Haas, 1992). During the mid-2000s, for example, Lawrence R. Jacobs and Benjamin I. Page conducted an important research on "Who influences U.S. foreign policy?" using extensive data set and cross-sectional analyses to argue that experts and epistemic communities ap-

pear to be the second most important factor, after internationally oriented business leaders, in terms of exerting substantial influence upon U.S. foreign policy (Jacobs & Page, 2005). They also made an interesting remark on the increasing complexity and volatility of global issues that has led policy-makers to turn to new and varied sources of advice from 'new networks of knowledge-based experts in the academy, think tanks, and other repositories of technocratic expertise' (Jacobs & Page, 2005, p. 108). However, this is a small part in a big picture.

In his new book, 'The Hell of Good Intentions America's Foreign Policy Elite and The Decline of U.S. Primacy', Stephen M. Walt, a distinguished scholar of international affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School, has raised 3 controversial and thought-provoking questions regarding the failure of American foreign affairs. The questions are as follows:

- Why did U.S. foreign policy based on the strategy of liberal hegemony perform so badly?
- If liberal hegemony contained obvious flaws and contributed to repeated disappointment, why did the United States adopt it? Why didn't U.S. leaders learn from their mistakes?
- How did U.S. sell the foreign policy that most of them did not want, and how did foreign the foreign policy elite sustain public support for policies that keep failing? (Walt, 2018, p. 16)

Among other possible answers, Walt believes that the root cause of repeated failure in U.S. foreign policy derives from liberal hegemony strategy advocated by American foreign policy establishment. The liberal hegemony strategy, according to Walt, 'remained the default setting for U.S. foreign policy because the foreign policy establishment was deeply committed to it and in ideal position to promote and defend it'.

It is an open secret that, for American elites and foreign policy establishment, Trump was unqualified from the outset to be the President of United States. As an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy and a firm believer that he could alter the course of U.S. foreign policy, Trump delivered his very first remark on foreign policy during the presidential race in 2016 by asserting that American foreign policy is 'a complete and total disaster. No vision. No purpose. No direction. No strategy', and for him the only way that can rectify the failing policy is to 'shake the rust off American foreign policy' (The New York Times, 2016). President Trump seems to have a strong conviction that the best course of action to keep his promise and to overcome power and influence of the American foreign policy establishment is to 'look for talented experts with approaches and practical ideas, rather than surrounding [himself] with those who have perfect resumes but very little to brag about except responsibility for a long history of failed policies and continued losses at war. We have to look for new people' (Drezner, 2016). In doing so, Trump would steer the course of American policy into a new

direction, radically departing from the conventional Washington playbook. Unfortunately, challenging and overcoming the establishment is not an easy task that any president can achieve on their first attempt. Trump, like his predecessors, will learn it the hard way.

If anything, foreign policy establishment seems to be structurally embedded in American politics wielding influence over government decisions and framing public perceptions toward international issues. The most important questions are who the establishment in U.S. foreign policy community is and how we can define or identify them.

In the Obama White House, the administration had to deal with the bipartisan class of foreign policy elites that Ben Rhodes, Obama's speech writer and foreign policy adviser, called "Blob" – the term originally derived from the film "The Blob" (1958), the alien creature arrives in a small town in Pennsylvania and starts devouring any humans it finds on its path while keeps growing and growing. The so called "Blob" in contemporary America has the same attribute as the alien entity, in that it "absorbs its enemies, and rolls on, regardless of the president's preferences (Tierney, 2019).

For Rhodes, the foreign policy establishment in the Obama administration includes 'Hillary Clinton, Robert Gates and other Iraq-war promoters' from Democrat and Republican, who, according to his interview with The New York Times Magazine, 'now whine incessantly about the collapse of the American security order in Europe and the Middle East' (Samuels, 2016). Since then "Blob" has become a term commonly used among analysts and academics.

In a bid to untangle the complexity of "Blob", Stephen Walt defines foreign policy establishment as 'individuals and organizations that actively engage on a regular basis with issues of international affairs' (Walt, 2018, p. 95). Walt's definition encompasses a wide range of entities, including formal institutions of government, membership of organizations, think tanks, interest groups and lobbies, the media, and the academia (Walt, 2018, pp. 95-103). Although its broad picture of foreign policy establishment contributes significantly to the academia, this article, with the purpose of developing a framework for analysis in minds, solely focuses on the formal institutions of government and major exponents inside the Trump administration.

When it comes to foreign policy formulation, both democratic and authoritarian leaders alike have to rely on officials and advisers in the executive branch (Grieco, Ikenberry, & Mastanduno, 2015, p. 114). These advisers and officials may or may not completely share the president's view what the nation should be doing overseas. Even if they share that view, they may have different ideas on how best to behave in advancing interests (Grieco et al., 2015, p. 116). This happens to be the case for Trump's America.

Trump's pledge to revolutionize U.S. foreign policy by bringing new and fresh voices into his government appears to shake up the status quo of the foreign policy establishment as expected. The unorthodox arrangements during Trump's early days in the White House included Michael Flynn, who was handpicked by Trump to be his first national security advisor; Rex Tillerson former CEO of ExxonMobil for the post of secretary of state; Steve Bannon, a notorious demagogue and political provocateur from Breitbart News Network, to be prin-

cipal committee of national security council, to name but a few. Regardless of the 80 percent turnover rate of Trump's foreign policy team, these unconventional appointments turned out to be remarkably short-lived (Walt, 2018, p. 222) and Trump has no choice but to embrace the establishment approach. After the resignation of Flynn due to allegations over the Russia election-meddling in 2016, Trump named H.R. McMaster, a retired lieutenant general, to be his second national security advisor. After a year in a position, McMaster was replaced by a die-hard hawkish John Bolton who briefly served under Trump before he was ousted after clashing with Trump over Iran and Afghanistan. Trump then appointed a former hostage negotiator Robert C. O'Brien, a familiar face in Washington's circle of power, to be his fourth national security advisor. Of all national security advisors, there is only Michael Flynn who shared the President's a nationalist and populist sentiment. After three years in the office, Trump has a propensity to select candidates based on experience and performance over political ideologies. After all, the bigwigs in U.S. foreign policy establishment have proven that their influences in framing foreign policy, albeit differences in political ideologies, last through successive administration (Walt, 2018, p. 97).

### THE TRIADIC RELATIONSHIP

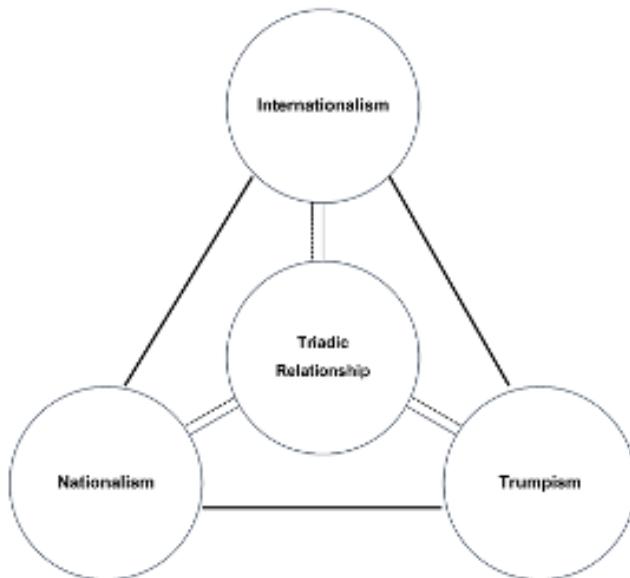
In the previous section, I lay out the significance of American foreign policy establishment in which, for many scholars, its influence can endure in the era that many expect change over continuity. Conventional wisdom has it that at the end of the day Trump would finally wave a white flag and surrender to the establishment. This would make Trump White House the spitting image of Obama's. Dominic Tierney, a prominent scholar from Swarthmore College, once remarked: "Obama and Trump are like two rival sculptors who end up working on the same statue. Trump can't obliterate Obama's legacy without destroying his own" (Tierney, 2019). However, I contend against such narratives and suggest that Trump's unorthodox presidential style, to some remarkable extent, appear to challenge the orthodoxies in American foreign policy and briefly dominate U.S. foreign policy on several occasions.

Based on an extensive review on the American foreign policy establishment during the Trump administration, I have identified three competing yet coexisting ideological perspectives as well as make a case about its relationship that will help explain Trump's foreign policy. They are nationalism, internationalism, and Trumpism.

#### Nationalism

Trump's path to the White House is part of a right-wing, nationalist, populist upsurge that has been considered a potent threat to democracy and liberal values in the Western world (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. xi). While the 'angry old white men' felt betrayed and intensely resentful toward American elites, Trump seized the opportunity and, as Obama observed, capitalized 'on resentments that politicians have been fanning for years' (Reints, 2018). In addition to the politics of resentment (Cramer, 2016), the power of identity politics and cultural issues are two most important factors in explaining Trump's unexpected victory

Figure 1. The Triadic Relationship



in 2016. In an article 'Populism on the March: Why the West is in Trouble,' Fareed Zakaria explores the rise of populism in the West in detail, focusing mainly on Trump's America. Although scholars classify populism into different variants, Zakaria believes that all versions of populism 'share a suspicion of and hostility toward elites, mainstream politics, and established institutions' (Zakaria, 2016, p. 9).

Nowadays, Americans tend to vote on the basis of cultural and identity issues such as ethnicity, gender, gun control, and environment more than economic ones (Zakaria, 2016, pp. 13-14). In a similar vein, Walter Russell Mead, a leading expert on American foreign policy of Bard College, uses the term "Jacksonian populism"<sup>1</sup> to explain a growing revolt against American elites. For Jacksonians, the best way to govern America is by 'looking after the physical security and economic well-being of the American people in their national home—and to do that while interfering as little as possible with the individual freedom that makes the country unique' (Mead, 2017, p. 4). Many Jacksonians feel that they are gradually excluded from cosmopolitanism and globalism enforced by American elites. More importantly, they are unable to identify themselves with American society, which recognizes different types of

<sup>1</sup> Jacksonian populism refers to President Andrew Jackson (1767-1845), the first populist U.S. president. Mead uses the term Jacksonian revolt to describe the growing surge of nationalist populism that has challenged the mainstream politics in the Western world. Many Jacksonians tend to support populist candidates while distancing themselves from the establishment. Jacksonians mainly focus on the America's military strength, economic well-being, freedom, and dignity of individual American citizens.

identities and offers economic benefits and social advantages to all but them (Mead, 2017, pp. 4-5).

The political genius of Trump helped him connect with Jacksonians and even allowed him to speak on behalf of “ordinary American” in the same way that an Austrian populist Norbert Hofer remarked: ‘you have the high society behind you; I have the people with me’ (Zakaria, 2016, p. 9). Large numbers of Americans voting for Trump have lived with a conviction that ‘the past was better than the present and that the present, however bleak, is still better than the future’ (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. xxii) and they have longed for a strong leader who would advance military strength and preserve economic well-being and dignity of American citizens before others. Against this backdrop, it came as no surprise that Jacksonians prefer nationalist populism to liberal internationalism because the former will truly represent them and defend U.S. interests at home and abroad.

The rising tide of populist nationalism seems to have triumphed in the Trump administration’s economic policy. Since his first full day in office, Trump has introduced new and fresh voices who advocate nationalist economic agendas. Clearly, there are some advisers inside Trump’s economic team leaning towards internationalism (Mashayekhi, 2019), for example Gary Cohn, a former Director of National Economic Council (NEC), who, according to Bob Woodward, successfully stopped Trump from terminating the United States- South Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS)—a potential trigger that could lead to economic and security catastrophe for both countries (Woodward, 2018, pp. xvii-xxii). However, Cohn, like many senior advisers to President Trump, resigned from his position<sup>2</sup> and left the nationalist faction dominated a scene, pursuing nationalist and protectionist policies in full swing.

Trump regularly tweets about U.S. protectionist agenda; his government, at the same time, has criticized unfair trade practices, retreated from multilateral deals, called for more withdrawal from major trade agreements, and even intensified trade war with Beijing. All of these occurred when the nationalist wing dominates Trump’s economic decisions. Peter Navarro, the professor-turned-politician and Director of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, represents the influence of economic nationalism in the Trump administration. For Navarro, the United States ‘should be tough on trade, crack down on intellectual property theft, tax Chinese exports, combat Chinese mercantilism, [and] bring jobs home’ (Cowen, 2016). Among Navarro’s books and documentary films, *Death by China: Confronting the Dragon* (2011) epitomizes his anti-Chinese sentiment and protectionist agenda that he uses to direct the administration. His fierce criticism of China’s currency manipulation, intellectual theft, and illegal export subsidies has been highly praised by Jacksonians and, of course, President Trump, who, along with other nationalist advisers, has adopted a hard-line on China, culminating in the U.S.-China trade war.

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<sup>2</sup> As of March 2020, the turnover rate of President Trump’s initial team is 82 percent (Tenpas, 2020), the highest of any administration in modern American history.

Ironically, although Navarro is aware of China's expanding influence in Asia-Pacific, he strongly opposes to the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), Obama's signature trade agreement, claiming that 'American economy will suffer severely' (Navarro, 2015). Highly influenced by Navarro and other economic nationalist advisers, Trump perceived the TPP as 'a potential disaster for the country' (BBC, 2017) and abruptly removed the U.S. from the deal without proposing any alternative. This is undoubtedly a disaster to U.S. foreign policy since 'it allowed China to claim that the United States was an unreliable partner in Asia' (Westad, 2019, p. 94). Hence, if U.S. wants to preserve a powerful military presence in the region while counterbalancing China's assertiveness at the same time, it is an ill-fated decision to play a nationalist card alone.

### **Internationalism**

Contrary to common belief, the lines between internationalism, internationalism, and Trumpism are not clearly drawn in the sense that internationalism and Trumpism can only be correlated with security issues whereas nationalism is connected to economic ones. Throughout the Trump administration, the triadic relationship operates in a non-linear manner. Any ideologies can compete in the realm of security or economics, and momentarily dominates U.S. foreign policy when an opportunity arises before it will "juggle back" allowing others to take charge.

On the economic policy side of the Trump administration, populist nationalism clearly prevails over internationalism. Notwithstanding, as the framework suggests, the balance across the triadic relationship, in the light of Trump's foreign policy, appear to compete and clash with one another. Consequently, nationalism will not be able to entirely eclipse internationalism, especially when it comes to security policy where the strength of American foreign policy establishment remains.

'For the first time in 70 years', writes Walter Russell Mead writes, 'the American people have elected a president who disparages the policies, ideas, and institutions at the heart of post-war U.S. foreign policy.' (Mead, 2017, p. 2) In other words, the victory of Trump marks the erosion of the liberal international order, the hegemonic order that has provided global public goods (Nye, 2017, p. 11) and upheld international security and economic stability for over 7 decades.

After the Second World War, the U.S.-led liberal international order was established. G. John Ikenberry coined the term "liberal leviathan" to describe American global authority built on the global consensus where countries in the international system handed over the power and authority to the United States (Ikenberry, 2011, p. 10). This occurred in a manner of a Hobbesian social contract theory – individuals, living in the state of nature, voluntarily gave up their rights to "leviathan" or the sovereign. With the rising tide of populist nationalism, Ikenberry's liberal leviathan was slowly turned into the crippling international leviathan, while the future of liberal order has been called into question as never before.

Recently, research on the demise of liberal order and American decline has flourished in academia (Acharya, 2014; Allison, 2018; Mearsheimer, 2018; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016; Nye, 2015, 2017; Rose, 2019; Walt, 2018; Zakaria & Ferguson, 2017). Most of the arguments favoring the post-war order and American power. Nye believes that while America's economic power may be challenged by the rising China, but its military strength and soft power remain intact, enabling the U.S. to maintain its global preeminence (Nye, 2015). Walt and Mearsheimer, on the contrary, tend to be outspoken critics of America's liberal hegemonic strategy contributing to failure after failure (Mearsheimer, 2018; Walt, 2018). However, in Trump's era, the most interesting statement came from world-renowned political scientist Graham Allison, who points out that while Trump can pose an unprecedented challenge to the liberal international order, 'he is far from the biggest threat to the global stability' (Allison, 2018, p. 125) as Trump is merely a symptom of a dysfunctional political system that allows him to ascend to the highest office in the United States, and bid farewell to internationalism (Allison, 2018, p. 132). This is not the case, however.

In security policy, while the internationalist wing tends to prevail over the nationalist contingent, it should be noted that after the appointment of John Bolton, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, as the third national security advisor to President Trump, many expected that Trump's foreign policy would turn hawkish, adopting a hard-line approach to Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, and Syria. In addition to his op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* "The Legal Case for Striking North Korea First" (Bolton, 2018), Bolton also commented that 'we have to ask ourselves whether we're prepared to take preemptive action, or live in a world where North Korea — and a lot of other people — have nuclear weapons,' (Jaffe & Dawsey, 2018).

With respect to tensions with Iran, Bolton is a committed Iran hawk who supports potential regime change policies in Tehran. Bolton finally convinced President Trump to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, claiming the agreement was doomed to fail. Most specifically, even before the Iranian General Soleimani's assassination in January 2020, Bolton viewed the Iranian government's drone attack on Saudi Aramco, the state-owned Saudi Arabian Oil Company, as an "act of war" (Lippman, 2019) and that he wanted the U.S. to wage war with Tehran (Waed, 2019).

As a war-averse commander-in-chief, Trump's instinctive ability to prevent a major conflict that might end in another quagmire in Middle East remains intact. The resolute hawkish had to part with the President, who again dismissed another senior advisor on Twitter. Trump writes: 'I informed John Bolton last night that his services are no longer needed at the White House. I disagreed strongly with many of his suggestions, as did others in the Administration, and therefore I asked John for his resignation, which was given to me this morning' (Pettypiece, Lee, Alexander, & Edelman, 2019). The departure of Bolton from "The Room Where It Happened", to use the title of Bolton's forthcoming book, has underscored the fact that Trump, albeit influenced by the hawkish warmongering advisor, has been restrained from opening a new theater of war upon which the United States will stumble. The resignation of Trump's hawkish advisor also marked the diminishing role of nationalists in

the White House and highlighted the emergence of those security internationalists who gradually seem to dominate and form the course of U.S. foreign policy.

It is apparent that internationalism is a part of the American establishment that embraces the strategy of liberal hegemony. The liberal hegemony strategy is aimed at broadening and expanding the liberal world order under American benevolent leadership (Walt, 2018, p. 54). Practically, all three post-Cold War administrations, Walt argues, were following the strategy based on the principles of maintaining American primacy, extending U.S. sphere of influence, and upholding liberal norms and universal values (Walt, 2018, p. 61). Zac Cooper has made a case in defining major exponents in Trump's security policy, as he writes: 'the three most important government agencies on national security (the State Department, Defense Department, and National Security Council) are led by internationalists.' Such cabinet members are also instructed by trusted experts including 'Matthew Pottinger, Randy Schriver, and a deep bench of civil servants' who advocate internationalist policies. (Cooper, 2017, p. 9). While President Trump and his economic nationalist advisors have abandoned the TPP, the internationalist wing of the administration seems to exert its impact on U.S. security policy, as demonstrated by the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy, which emphasizes U.S. engagement in the fastest-growing region of the world. The strategy of "Indo-Pacific" represents an extension and revision of Asia-Pacific geopolitical landscape of Obama's Rebalance Strategy. The FOIP is thus a rebalancing policy it all but name. 'Obama administration', Cooper claims, 'had the right overall approach' to the Indo-Pacific (Cooper, 2017, p. 8).

In the midst of China's economic growth and military modernization of People's Liberation Army, the cooperation and linkage between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean are of paramount importance for U.S. interests. To counterbalance China's assertiveness and preserve U.S. military presence in the region where it has been traditionally regarded as America's sphere of influence, the Trump administration needs to strengthen ties with traditional allies as well as reinvigorate the quadrilateral alliance with Japan, Australia, and India (U.S. Department of State, 2019, p. 6). The reprioritization of the Indo-Pacific region in the Trump administration, which from the outset aims to maintain the "free and open" American-led order, is the brainchild of the internationalism that is inextricably linked to American foreign policy community making their influence and legacy continue, even in times of populism.

### **Trumpism**

Michael Anton, a former Trump national security official in the Trump administration, argues that the consistency in maintaining America's national interests before other countries, or America First, is the distinctive feature of "Trump Doctrine" (Anton, 2019). Nonetheless, there's a stark difference between Trump doctrine and Trumpism, the term used to explain an exceptional character of U.S. foreign policy in Trump era.

Those who study U.S. foreign policy will come across the term "doctrine" – foreign policy guidelines under a given administration – American foreign policy doctrines, whether

the Truman doctrine, the Nixon doctrine, or the Bush doctrine, shared a major problem: it is ‘imprecise, ambiguous, and mystifying’ (Caldwell, 1983, p. 115). In case of President Trump, the “Trump Doctrine” would help disguise the fact that the administration, contrary to Anton’s interpretation, has no coherent policy at all.

Jack Thomson, a senior researcher at the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich, coined the term “Trumpism” to describe the current state of U.S. foreign policy under President Trump who exploits a pervasive sense of threat and heightens fears enabling him to consolidate power and pursue his domestic agenda. In other words, Trumpism is the ideology that views American foreign policy as ‘an extension of domestic politics’ (Thompson, 2017, p. 4). In a similar vein, Canadian-born American historian Timothy Naftali, who specializes in U.S. presidential impeachment, analyzes at length how U.S. foreign policy has been “hijacked” by President Trump who is inclined to put his private political interests above the country’s (Naftali, 2020). While internationalism and nationalism lock horns and compete on security and economic issues, President Trump has been trapped at the epicenter of a political storm swirling around the impeachment crisis. This is when Trumpism juggles back to the dominant position and, at the detriment of two other principles, drives American foreign policy into uncharged water.

In 2020, the 45th U.S. president is facing a myriad of problems in domestic and international affairs. Although grappling with a quid pro quo controversy with President Volodymyr Zelensky soliciting ‘the Government of Ukraine to publicly announce investigations into’ Hunter Biden, a son former Vice President Joe Biden, in an exchange for military assistance to Kiev (Cai & Parlapiano, 2020), Trump successfully turned global attention away from the impeachment trial to the imminent war with Iran.

Conventional wisdom has it that Iran, like many authoritarian countries, still follows subversive statecraft – empowering insurgents to undermine and destabilize targeted state and establishing the so called “ungoverned space” (Lee, 2020). For decades, the American government is conscious of Tehran’s covert activities in Syria and Iraq, but Trump is the president who dared to pull the trigger. The assassination of Quassem Soleimani, a major general of the Republic of Iran’s Quad Forces, immediately sparked worldwide fears, as many viewed it as Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s degree of assassination of an event. While tensions between the U.S. and Iran have de-escalated in less than weeks, the fact that Trump took the world to the brink of the Third World War still perplexes those who are persuaded that practical guidance, whether from internationalism or nationalism, would at least be listened to in order to preserve U.S. interests. Yet Trump has defied all odds.

Provided that Trump is a war-averse leader, the reason behind the killing that has reverberated around the world seems to be the essential question that we need to answer. What motivated Trump to have the assassination of Soleimani authorized? Among other pre-suppositions, Trumpism is aware of the consequences of U.S.-Iran tensions that the blowback might be even worse than Washington would expect, but the president is truly committed to Trumpism and throws caution to the wind believing that the confrontations might not end up in a war. In particular, considering that he took the risks, whether for boost his approval

ratings or to secure his presidency from the looming impeachment, it helps to underline the fact that Trumpism primarily focus on personal political agenda more than anything else.

Trumpism seems to temporarily overshadow internationalism and nationalism, but in the long run it will not completely replace the two ideologies, even if it so desires, since the president is aware of his limited foreign policy experience and the need to rely on the establishment. Consequently, once Trump's scheme to turn America's attention to U.S.-Iran confrontation is a fait accompli, Trumpism will juggle back allowing internationalism and nationalism to reclaim their responsibilities. This, however, does not mean that it will be buried and absolutely silenced by two other principles. Instead, if Trump faces another political crisis at home or abroad, chances are Trumpism will strike back.

## CONCLUSION

Trump's presidential campaign "Make America Great Again" appears to be the zeitgeist of the populist upsurge in the 21st century. Although the revolt against liberal democracy emerged in Europe long before Trump, such as Marine Le Pen's National Front in France and Victor Orbán in Hungary (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. x), Trump embodies national populism in the Western world with his unorthodox presidential style that shocked both America and the world. Trump has challenged mainstream politics, capitalized on the American people's deep-seated resentments toward the elites, but above all he can resonate with "ordinary" Americans who support his nationalist populist policies that put American interests above others. Trump quipped during his 2016 presidential campaign that 'Real power is — I don't even want to use the word — fear,' (Boucheron, 2020) a famous line that later appeared as the epigraph of the book "Fear: Trump in the White House" (2018) by a famous investigative journalist Bob Woodward. Trump instills not only fear in Americans but also among U.S. allies who are perplexed by Trump's rudderless foreign policy.

In attempts to systemically explain the process of foreign policy making under the 45th President, the triadic relationship, along with the concept of "juggling back and forth", is a new analytical framework that can shed light on Trump's foreign policy. The article also argues that the triadic relationship in the American foreign policy community consists of three competing ideologies: nationalism, internationalism, and Trumpism. I am aware that other scholars can identify factors that influence U.S. foreign policy in different ways, but I have found that the classification I use can provide alternative perspective and deeper understanding of the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy in the age of Trump. It is apparent that internationalism and nationalism are sometimes eclipsed by Trumpism. However, internationalism and nationalism will not be completely silenced once overshadowed by Trumpism. Rather, when Trumpism reaches its goals, it will "juggle back" enabling nationalism and internationalism to resume their duties. Hence, "Juggling back and forth" defines the state of American foreign policy community under President Trump.

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