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Donald Trump and American foreign policy: The return of the Jacksonian tradition

Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts

National Security College, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article examines the wellsprings of Donald Trump's nascent foreign policy program. It argues that the locus of the Republican president's foreign policy agenda is found within the Jacksonian tradition of American foreign policy identified by Walter Russell Mead. Here, notions of "national honor" and "reputation" are the driving factors that underpin Trump's emerging narrative. The implications of this for U.S. strategic and defense policy may be an enhanced reliance on nuclear deterrence and the downgrading of the U.S. military's forward posture in Asia and the Middle East.

Throughout the tumultuous first few months of Donald Trump's presidency, his approval ratings have tracked similarly to those of previous presidents.[1] Except for perhaps President Ronald Reagan—whose landslide second-term election resulted in a spike in voter satisfaction[2]—President Trump's has followed a familiar trajectory of an immediate downturn in his approval rating subsequent to his election. One area in which such continuity with past rhythms of American politics has been markedly absent has been the Trump administration's foreign policy. To date, the administration has been remarkable for the extent to which its foreign policy positions have run counter to the largely liberal internationalist approach of successive administrations since 1945. Hal Brands, for instance, has suggested that President Trump's foreign policy is "a hardline, nearly zero-sum approach that would actively roll back the postwar international order and feature heavy doses of unilateralism and latter-day isolationism."[3] Thomas Wright has stated that "Trump is the first postwar president to oppose the liberal order as he seeks an 'America First' foreign policy."[4] And similarly, conservative writer David Frum lamented that "Donald Trump is doing damage to the deepest and most broadly agreed foreign-policy interests of the United States."[5]

Such critical accounts generally fail, however, to provide persuasive explanations as to the causes of such a distinct break with recent American foreign policy. We argue that what has been missing is an appreciation of the core wellspring of the Trump administration's emerging foreign policy: the Jacksonian tradition of American foreign policy detailed by Walter Russell Mead.[6] Mead argued that American foreign policy since the founding of the republic has been defined by the evolution of four distinct, yet complementary, traditions of foreign policy: the Hamiltonian (promotion of an "open door" world), Jeffersonian (maintenance of a democratic system), Jacksonian (populist values, military strength), and Wilsonian (moral principle). A fundamental distinction amongst the four traditions is between those that seek to perfect and protect the virtues of the republic (Jeffersonian and Jacksonian) and those that seek to remake the world in its image (Hamiltonian and Wilsonian). In Walter McDougall's memorable terms, this concerns the historical debate as to whether the United States would be a "promised land" or "crusader state."[7]

CONTACT Michael Clarke michael.clarke@anu.edu.au

This argument proceeds in four parts. First, we outline the traditions of American foreign policy. This section explores the synthesis between American values and interests in assembling America's foreign policy agenda. Second, we outline the core themes of the Jacksonian tradition as depicted by Walter Russell Mead. Here we anchor the "folk" community's feelings of "honor" and "interest" to a specific style and tone of American foreign policy behavior. Third, we outline candidate Trump's campaign rhetoric by paying particular attention to the manner in which he spoke directly to Jacksonian principles of populism, individualism, honor, and courage. Finally, we demonstrate how the Jacksonian tradition has been expressed in President Trump's foreign policy with respect to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Afghanistan, the Syrian crisis, and the Paris Climate Agreement.[8]

The traditions of American foreign policy

The works of McDougall and Mead draw our attention to an enduring dilemma that often bedevils analyses of U.S. foreign policy, and the analysis of the foreign policy thinking of individual presidents in particular: the tendency to characterize the foreign policies of administrations or presidents through international relations dichotomies of realist/idealist or internationalist/isolationist. For both of these historians of American foreign policy, a more useful and accurate way to structure analysis of the country's foreign policy is via the identification of prominent "traditions" of foreign policy or statecraft. Ultimately, traditions, in the sense employed by McDougall and Mead, refer to the development over time of coherent narratives regarding how the United States can *and* should engage with the world.

For Mead, the crucial "engine" in the generation of traditions of U.S. foreign policy is based on two elements: "an admiration for the founding principles" and "enlightened ideas of the Revolutionary era," and "a sober recognition that under their guidance the American Republic has enjoyed a far happier political and material existence than any other commonwealth of comparable size in the history of the world."[9] McDougall similarly argues that the tendency to categorize American foreign policy along such continuums of realism-to-idealism or internationalism–isolationism are false due to the fact that "what is often seen as a Hegelian clash in the national discourse between theses and antitheses is actually a clash between competing syntheses of what American values and national interests require."[10] Perhaps most indicative of this tendency was Hans Morgenthau's critique of American foreign policy as tending toward "intoxication with moral abstractions" and a central belief in the "antithesis of national interests and moral principles."[11]

Yet, Mead and McDougall were not the first to recognize the importance of this synthesis between American values or principles and national interests in framing how Americans think about, to use McDougall's phrase, their "encounter with the world." The eminent American diplomatic historian, Samuel Flagg Bemis, writing at the height of the Cold War in 1962 reflected on the centrality of interpretations of American values and principles for the formulation of U.S. foreign policy:

> Can the diplomatic history of the United States strengthen our judgement in facing the problems of today which include nothing less than the survival of our nation and the principles we have stood for in the world? Only if we relate our historical experience to the successive stages of world politics and power in which American diplomacy has operated for better or worse for nearly two centuries. And *only if we measure the history of American foreign policy in terms of fundamental purposes and values of our life as a nation* and our determination as a people to preserve them.[12]

Despite this belief, Norman Graebner, writing in 1989 as the Cold War drew to a close, noted that "traditions rest lightly on the American people" in the realm of foreign affairs before lamenting the fact that "even intellectual conservatives revealed little respect for the nation's past" in this context.[13] For Graebner, the "only diplomatic tradition widely recognized is that of Woodrow Wilson" and that tradition "partook of the very exceptionalism that denied the need for examination of the past for guidance."[14] Graebner's purpose, reminiscent of Morgenthau's efforts during the 1950s, was to draw attention to what he judged to be modern American foreign policy's divergence from a singular American foreign policy tradition—that of the Founding Fathers.[15] The Founders, Graebner argued, "adapted the established principles of modern diplomacy to the peculiar needs and advantages of the American republic."[16] In particular, the

Founders "argued especially against the two fundamental tendencies toward overcommitment: partiality to other people's quarrels and the inclination to enter foreign crusades beyond the country's means or real intentions."[17] Ultimately, in Graebner's estimation, the Founders understood that the "international system . . . responded to the interests of nations, not to generally accepted codes of international behavior" and that the United States "would serve human society by pursuing its real interests, nothing more."[18]

Graebner (and also Morgenthau) thus both construed the Founder's foreign policy as broadly consistent with that of political realism. For Mead, however, the expression of such realism was imbued with such individual characteristics to warrant characterization as an "American realism." This "American realism," in Mead's schema, is associated with the Hamiltonian tradition whose core interests in "freedom of the seas," economic "open doors," and an open international financial system were reflective of the central role of the New England merchant class in establishing the United States as a "commercial republic."[19] Mead and McDougall, much like Bemis and Graebner, identify the historical syntheses of American values/principles and national interests (understood in political and material terms) as the "secret" to American foreign policy success. For Mead, while "each generation of Americans has struggled to define the national interest and the national values, and to relate the two concepts in an overall foreign policy strategy, they have done so within a certain broad consensus about the *nature* of those interests and values."

Mead argues that this synthesis has been central to the success of American foreign policy. The "engine" of the four traditions, and the factor that accounts for their distinctive characteristic, is how each tradition has defined the national interest and national values and related the two concepts into a coherent foreign policy strategy. Mead's work in particular opens up the space to consider the least prominent of American foreign policy traditions—the Jacksonian tradition. This tradition, as we shall demonstrate in the following two sections, has clear affinities with Donald Trump's emergent foreign policy narrative.

The Jacksonian tradition

The Jacksonian school of thought takes a pessimistic view of the political elite, and promotes a federalist system that seeks to prevent the concentration of power within a centralized government. Indeed, Andrew Jackson, in a personal letter to John Quincy Adams, remarked that a powerful central government "is calculated to raise around the administration a moneyed aristocracy dangerous to the liberties of the country."[20] While Jeffersonian and Jacksonian traditions share this mutual affection for liberty, illustrated through their shared affording of primacy to the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, there is a stark divide in how both traditions believe this goal of liberty is best achieved. As Mead argues:

> The Jeffersonians are most profoundly devoted to the First Amendment, protecting the freedom of speech and prohibiting a federal establishment of religion, Jacksonians see the Second Amendment and the right to bear arms as the citadel of liberty. To oversimplify, Jeffersonians join the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU); Jacksonians join the National Rifle Association (NRA). In doing so, both are convinced that they are standing at the barricades of freedom.[21]

The Jacksonian tradition is based on what Mead terms a "community of political feeling" defined by principles of populism, individualism, honor, and courage.[22] Drawing on the work of David Hackett Fischer, Mead identifies the basis of the populism central to the Jacksonian tradition with the Protestant "Scotch-Irish" element of British colonization of North America.[23] The Scotch-Irish, Mead argues, shaped by centuries of conflict in Ireland, "established a culture and outlook formed by centuries of bitter warfare before they came to the United States." Rogers M. Smith also identified the development of what he termed an "American creed" amongst this important segment of the American population that bears striking resemblance to Mead's characterization of Jacksonians. For Smith, by the mid-nineteenth century many Americans in fact "identified membership in their political community not with freedom for personal liberal callings or republican self-governance," as Jeffersonians would have it, but rather "with a whole array of particular cultural origins and customs" strongly linked to North European ancestry, Protestantism, belief in the superiority of the "white race," and patriarchal familial leadership.[24]

In order to understand the importance of the Jacksonian tradition's influence on American foreign policy, one must recognize perhaps its central engine: Jacksonians "believe that government should do everything in its power to promote the well-being—political, economic, and moral—of the folk community. *Any* means are permissible in the services of this end, as long as they do not violate the moral feelings or infringe on the freedoms that Jacksonians believe are essential."[25] The Jacksonian foreign-policy call to arms is thus not driven by the moral underpinnings of the Wilsonian tradition or the quest for an "open door" world of the Hamiltonian tradition. Rather, it is animated by the instinct, in the first instance, to protect members of the "folk community" from threat.

From this attitude flow a number of important implications for American foreign policy. The first concerns the Jacksonian threshold for action, especially for the use of military force. Jacksonians were against the U.S. intervention in Bosnia, due to limited threat this posed to direct American security interests, but were accepting of the push for U.S. intervention against Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, as the Iraqi dictator's move was perceived as a threat to world oil supplies, and hence, a potential threat to the economic well-being of Jacksonian America. A similar rationale was evident in the shifting positions of Jacksonian sentiment in the lead up to American intervention in both World Wars. Here, it was not the atrocities committed by the Central Powers, the Nazis, or Japanese army but the sinking of American shipping (e.g., the Lusitania) and the attack on Pearl Harbor that rallied Jacksonian sentiment to the side of Presidents Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the latter case, as FDR biographer Jean Edward Smith has documented, the president, during the tense U.S.-Japanese diplomacy prior to Pearl Harbor, was careful to be "like Lincoln prior Fort Sumter" in wanting "Japan to be perceived as the aggressor" in the event of open conflict.[26]

This desire to be seen as the righteously aggrieved party to a conflict also speaks to the second important implication of Jacksonian sentiment for foreign policy: the significance attached to the protection of national honor and reputation. As Mead notes, honor for Jacksonians:

> is not simply what one feels oneself to be on the inside; it is also a question of the respect and dignity one commands in the world at large. Jacksonian opinion is sympathetic to the idea that our reputation—whether for fair dealing or cheating, toughness or weakness—will shape the way others treat us.[27]

This reputational calculus has been evident throughout the history of American foreign policy from Robert Kennedy's claim in his memoir, *Thirteen Days*, that he advised his brother, President John F. Kennedy, against a Pearl Habor-esque "sneak attack" against Soviet missile sites in Cuba[28] to the Jacksonian opprobrium directed at President Barack Obama after he failed to follow through on his "red line" statement regarding Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's use of chemical weapons in 2013.[29]

Once Jacksonian opinion is mobilized in support of American intervention or military action abroad, a third implication comes into play. Jacksonians agree with General Douglas MacArthur's understanding that victory in war must be total and come with the "unconditional surrender" of the enemy forces. The failure of this stringent warfighting aim has seen Jacksonian sentiment turn against a number of twentieth-century American presidents:

> Truman's efforts to wage limited war in Korea cost him his re-election in 1952. Similarly, Lyndon Johnson's inability to fight unlimited war for unconditional surrender in Vietnam cost him his presidency in 1968; Jimmy Carter's inability to resolve the Iranian hostage crisis with a clear-cut victory destroyed any hope he had of winning the 1980 election; and George Bush's refusal to insist on an unconditional surrender in Iraq may have contributed to his defeat in the 1992 Presidential election.[30]

A fourth implication stemming from the harnessing of Jacksonian sentiment in support of intervention or war is that Jacksonian opinion is predisposed to be bloody minded once the United States is engaged in a conflict and resistant to rationales for their resolution short of "total victory." President Richard Nixon's struggle to extricate the United States from the Vietnam War is illustrative here. Nixon and his National Security Adviser and then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger spent much of their time in office attempting to assuage Jacksonian opinion as they attempted to withdraw the United States from Vietnam without losing "credibility" with adversaries, allies, and the American public alike.[31] It was arguably no coincidence that Nixon and Kissinger framed their strategy of withdrawal from Vietnam as "peace with honor." Additionally, once adversaries are defined as an "enemy nation" (for

instance China from 1949–1972 or Iran since 1979) it becomes extremely difficult for Jacksonian opinion to be swayed to support efforts at normalization. This attitude continues to be manifest in contemporary foreign controversies such as some of the rhetoric deployed by those opposed to the Obama administration's negotiation of a nuclear agreement with Tehran or normalization of relations with Cuba.

Finally, Jacksonian opinion, in the absence of direct threats to American security, is likely to advocate a minimalist or, in the words of George W. Bush during the 2000 election campaign, a "humble" foreign policy that eschews both the "crusading" liberal interventionism of the Wilsonians and the American underwriting of international political and economic institutions characteristic of the Hamiltonians.[32] For instance, in the 1990s Jacksonian opinion was against the Clinton administration's interventions in Haiti, Somalia, and Bosnia, due to limited threat this posed to the traditional national security interests of the United States. Michael Mandelbaum, encapsulating Jacksonian sentiment in this context, castigated President William Jefferson Clinton for attempting to "turn American foreign policy into a branch of social work."[33] The Clinton administration's interventions in these countries were symptomatic, Mandelbaum argued, of a shift in attention from those states "potentially dangerous" to international order (and American security) to the "political, economic and social conditions" of weak states on the periphery of international affairs.[34] Even more egregious from this perspective was that the administration's interventions in each of these cases were half-hearted and harmed American prestige:

> Putting an end to the suffering in Bosnia, Haiti and Somalia would have involved addressing its causes, which would have meant deep, protracted and costly engagement in the tangled political life of each country. When the time came to carry out the commitment at the risk of American lives, the president balked. He refused to bomb in Bosnia, withdrew US troops from Somalia and recalled the ship from Haiti, thereby earning a reputation for inconstancy that haunts his presidency.[35]

In contrast, the George H. W. Bush administration had avoided such criticism with respect to its response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, in part by framing Hussein's move as a threat to world oil supplies and, hence, a potential threat to the economic well-being of Jacksonian America. Thus, for a particular case or crisis in which American intervention (especially militarily) is proposed to win the support of Jacksonian opinion, the case or crisis must be framed as a direct threat to the core interests of the United States.

Candidate trump and the Jacksonian "Folk" community

The 2016 presidential election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton was in many respects a contest between liberal internationalism and nationalistic isolationism. On the one hand, Hillary Clinton's foreign policy platform was in many respects an archetypal liberal internationalist one that afforded primacy to the role of democracy, free-market capitalism, traditional security alliances, and the export of American ideas and norms. On the other side, however, Donald Trump ran a campaign that lambasted the "foreign-policy elites" for their pursuance of an agenda that had "ripped off" the American people. Robert J. Merry picked up on this aspect when he argued that the Trump–Clinton presidential contest was (amongst other things) between whether "nationalism" or "globalism" would guide American foreign policy.[36] Trump's "America First" sloganeering placed him in opposition not only to the group of neoconservatives that have had a stranglehold on GOP foreign policy debates in recent times but also to the broader post–Cold War consensus amongst Washington's foreign policy establishment that U.S. national security is best served by the country remaining the "indispensable nation" that brings *both* order and justice to the international system. This consensus has been based on the twin assumptions, as Eliot Cohen, Eric Edelman, and Brian Hook argued, that a

> strong United States is . . . essential to the maintenance of the open global order under which this country and the rest of the world has prospered since 1945; that the alternative to America's "indispensability" is not a harmonious, self-regulating balance of independent states but an international landscape marked by eruptions of chaos and destruction.[37]

The strain of nationalism that Trump tapped, however, was driven by a number of core sentiments that directly challenged such a consensus. Trumpian nationalists, Robert Merry suggested: (a) "don't care

about dominating world events" but "want their country to be powerful, with plenty of military reach . . . to protect American national interests;" (b) ask "whether the national interest justifies the expenditure of American blood and treasure" when interventions abroad are proposed; and (c) the "fate of America" is their primary consideration.[38] Since 1945, it is clear that the extroverted "crusader state" traditions of Hamilton and Wilson have dominated American foreign policy.

However, the nascent nationalist/globalist divide depicted by Merry pointed to the recrudescence of the influence of the Jacksonian tradition, which, critically, Donald Trump increasingly connected with throughout his presidential campaign. Indeed, Ian Bremmer characterized much of candidate Trump's statements on foreign policy issues as almost entirely driven by an "instinctive" approach that positioned him in direct opposition to the liberal internationalism of his opponent. Trump, he argued:

> won't be guided by ideology. He doesn't appear to have one. He's a gut-feel guy, a zero-sum strategist, and a bottom-line businessman. He won't approach problems as if the world's sole superpower can afford to be generous, to do more so that others can do less. He sees no special responsibility to be magnanimous, or even patient. Being No. 1 doesn't mean playing the role of provider. It's about winning. It means being the toughest, smartest son of a bitch at the table. In short, Trump will probably try to remake U.S. foreign policy in his own (self-) image.[39]

This apparent lack of belief in the necessity for American global leadership was perhaps best illustrated in the way that Trump sought to redefine America's relationship with NATO. During the election campaign Trump, described NATO as "obsolete" and a "relic" and opined that he "would be fine if NATO broke up." Moreover, Trump argued that NATO members were in fact taking advantage of the United States:

> That means we are protecting them [NATO], giving them military protection and other things, and they're ripping off the United States. And you know what we do? Nothing. . . . either they have to pay up for past deficiencies or they have to get out.[40]

This sentiment was furthered by Trump in his lengthy interview in early 2016 with the *New York Times,* in which he reflected that America's relationship with NATO was "unfair, economically, to us."[41] For Trump, this "entangling alliance" does not serve the "national interest" of the United States, but instead diminished the America First program that underpinned his campaign for president. The instrumental framing of NATO as an institution that had "exploited" American foreign policy ultimately established a clear separation between the "liberal elites" that were championing Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and Jacksonian America that perceived continued American underwriting of such security architecture as no longer serving the national security of the country.

Throughout the election campaign, Trump focused this rhetorical swagger not only on regional security institutions, but also on America's relationship with key allies. Trump indicated his willingness to allow relations with long-standing alliance partners—such as Japan—to drift, and argued that such states should be prepared to "go it alone" if they are "not willing to pay in cash or troop commitments, for the presence of American forces around the world."[42] Moreover, while Clinton located alliances as a core pillar of America's grand strategy,[43] Trump disputed the salience of this outlook, and argued that Japan should incur the cost of America's troops stationed on its soil, or otherwise learn to "defend themselves" in a volatile and unpredictable environment.[44] For instance, in the much-publicized Republican primary debates, Trump mapped his vision for the Asia–Pacific region succinctly when he stated, "Now, wouldn't you rather, in a certain sense, have Japan have nuclear weapons when North Korea has nuclear weapons?"[45] Trump further stated, with his rhetoric perhaps more obviously targeted to appeal to Jacksonian sentiment, that "if they don't take care of us properly, if they don't respect us enough to take care of us properly, then you know what's going to have to happen. …It's very simple. They're going to have to defend themselves."[46]

Indeed, throughout the election campaign Trump intensified this attitude to other staunch American allies, such as South Korea and Saudi Arabia. In a 2013 YouTube clip that has come to capture much of Trump's Asia-Pacific foreign policy, he stated:

> South Korea is a very, very rich country. They're rich because of us. They sell us televisions; they sell us cars. They sell us everything. They are making a fortune. We have a huge deficit with South Korea. They're friends of mine.

> I do deals with them. I've been partners with them, no problem. But they think we're stupid. They can't believe it. We are defending them against North Korea; we're doing it for nothing. We're not in that position. When will they start to pay us for this defense? Isn't it really ridiculous when you think of it? They make a fortune on the United States and then they got some problems, and what happens? They call the United States to defend them, and we get nothing?[47]

Trump offered comparable antipathy to Saudi Arabia, which the United States has looked to as a key ally in the Middle East for the past forty years.[48] Trump declared, "We're not being reimbursed for the kind of tremendous service that we're performing by protecting various countries. Now Saudi Arabia's one of them. . . . If Saudi Arabia was without the cloak of American protection, I don't think it would be around."[49]

At this time, many argued that Trump's revision of American foreign policy would "undermine" America's interests and would further destabilize an already fractured global order. For instance, Tobias Harris and Jeffrey W. Hornung, writing in the *National Interest,* stated:

> Trump is right that these [U.S.] troops defend Japan, but thanks to Japan's willingness to host so many U.S. troops, the U.S is capable of projecting power in the region, enabling it to respond to regional contingencies, deter adversaries and reassure allies of American resolve. Unfortunately, Trump does not seem to appreciate the extent to which the U.S. military presence in Asia depends on Japan's willingness to support it.[50]

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton also used Trump's "Japan policy" as a tool to discredit his foreign policy experience. In her much-heralded foreign policy speech, Clinton lambasted Trump when she stated, "It's no small thing when he suggests that America should withdraw our military support for Japan, encourage them to get nuclear weapons."[51] Clinton's consternation was not only driven by the "suggestion" that Japan should get nuclear weapons, but by Trump's apparent disregard for how acquiescence to such a development would weaken regional security in Northeast Asia by undermining the credibility of American extended nuclear deterrent guarantees to allies and providing further proliferation incentives to the likes of North Korea.

However, such criticism failed to acknowledge the motivating factors that undergirded Trump's foreign policy direction. Trump's *National Interest* speech outlined "five main weaknesses in [American] foreign policy (overextended resources; allies are not paying their fair share; friends no longer depend on America; our rivals no longer respect us; and America no longer has a clear understanding of their foreign policy goals)," which he claimed he would redress if elected president.[52] Trump identified his foreign policy as diverging from that of previous administrations in that:

> My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people, and American security, above all else. That will be the foundation of every decision that I will make. America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration.[53]

Thus, Trump's "America First" approach was predicated upon, and spoke directly to, the "introverted tendencies" of the Jacksonian tradition that we mapped above. He depicted America's post–Cold War foreign policy as defined by "foolishness and arrogance," with a clear disposition toward "extroverted" impulses:

> It all began with the dangerous idea that we could make Western democracies out of countries that had no experience or interest in becoming a Western democracy. We tore up what institutions they had and then were surprised at what we unleashed. Civil war, religious fanaticism; thousands of American lives, and many trillions of dollars, were lost as a result. The vacuum was created that ISIS would fill. Iran, too, would rush in and fill the void, much to their unjust enrichment.[54]

Critically, though, Trump did not run for president as an explicit isolationist. As Daniel Larison stated, "If we can pin down his foreign policy at all, it is aggressive and unilateralist when Trump thinks the United States has something to gain, and it is otherwise content to leave regional problems to regional actors."[55] In other words, while Trump signaled his intention to leave regional problems to Japan, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia, throughout the election cycle he also clearly stated his intention to use force against ISIS. As Trump stated in his foreign policy address, "And then there's ISIS. I have a simple message for them. Their days are numbered. I won't tell them where and I won't tell them how. We must as, a

nation, be more unpredictable. But they're going to be gone. And soon."[56] In a separate campaign speech Trump enunciated his plan to "Bomb the shit outta them. . . . I'd just bomb those suckers. . . . I'd blow up the pipes, I'd blow up the refineries, I'd blow up every single inch, there would be nothing left."[57] Such rhetoric speaks to the Jacksonian desire to protect its community from direct threat (construed in this instance as both physical and economic) and Jacksonian conceptions of "honor," as the Islamic State constitutes an inherently dishonorable adversary justifying the deployment of all and any means to destroy them.

Taken together, Trump ran for president of the United States by appealing to the core tenants of the Jacksonian tradition. Trump articulated a rebuttal of America's post–World War II foreign policy and provided an alternative vision that appealed to segments of American society that were disconnected from the "political elite" and their financial and economic interdependence: "Trump's supporters sought an 'America-First' policy that depended on a return to robust economic growth and the exclusion of foreigners."[58] Randall Schweller similarly argued that the America First program emerged at a critical juncture between the shifting dynamics of the international system with a president that acknowledged the interests of those disconnected from the benefits of the liberal order:

> For decades, American citizens, in stark contrast with their leaders, have been more realist than liberal in their foreign-policy orientation. There is now sufficient compulsion in the United States' external environment for them to demand a more narrowly self-interested foreign policy. They insist on a President who unabashedly puts American interests first; who, as a billionaire businessman with highly touted deal-making skills, will fight as an economic nationalist to keep manufacturing jobs in the United States rather than letting the vagaries of markets and globalization decide the fates of working class Americans.[59]

The Jacksonian President: Trump's unilateral grand strategy

Since President Trump's inauguration, there have been conflicting assessments as to whether Trump has (and is) following the pledges made on the campaign trail. Philip Bump, for instance, has stated that "the recurring theme of his presidency so far has been that the rebel he presented on the campaign trail quickly transformed into a doctrinaire Republican after inauguration. This is almost certainly a function of Trump's indifference to the details of policy."[60] David Graham has similarly stated that "By our tally, Trump has fully completed one full promise. A handful of them have seen little or no action at all. Larger portions are either in progress or too early to judge. Two are frozen in court. The largest single chunk is those whose completion looks highly dubious but cannot be finally judged yet."[61] For some it is Trump's "foreign policy" in particular that has veered "furthest from his campaign positions, taking a warmer approach to Japan and other US allies than he did as candidate, and being notably less aggressive towards China."[62] And others have seen Trump leave behind the campaign hyperbole and replace it instead with a more coherent and positive policy agenda. Matthew Kroenig stated that "the Trump administration has left behind the rhetoric of the campaign trail and has begun to adopt foreign policies that are, for the most part, well suited to the challenges ahead."[63]

In contrast, we argue that Trump's presidency demonstrates a continuation of the Jacksonian tradition that animated his 2016 election campaign. We point to a level of coherence within Trump's foreign policy agenda, which is focused first and foremost on disconnecting America from the post–World War II international order that Trump believes has "ripped off" the American people. More specifically, we argue that President Trump has adopted a strategy of unilateralism to vindicate the Jacksonian segments of American society, and anchor notions of "national honor" and "reputation" to his America First sloganeering. In making this argument, we point to three core foreign policy decisions of the Trump administration: first, Trump's unwillingness to endorse Article V of the NATO Treaty that binds member nations to defend one another if one comes under attack; second, Trump's military actions in Afghanistan and Syria; and third, President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, which was labeled by the administration as encroaching upon America's ability to "conduct its own domestic affairs."[64]

Trump's refusal to commit to Article V of the NATO Treaty has been labeled a disaster by liberal internationalists. Constanze Stelzenmuller has stated that "it is one of the most damaging things an American president has ever done to NATO. It amounts to an abandonment of the alliance."[65] Julie Smith, writing at *Foreign Policy*, stated that Trump's refusal to invoke Article V "fueled uncertainty and insecurity,

which will serve as an obstacle to transatlantic cooperation in the years ahead."[66] And Thomas Wright has perhaps gone further, stating that "Trump's failure to personally endorse Article 5 may come to be one of the *greatest* diplomatic blunders made by an American president since World War II."[67] Yet, such arguments fail to consider the source of Trump's NATO skepticism: the Jacksonian Tradition. As Walter Russell Mead has recently stated, Trump's "destiny" is to look after the "physical security and economic well-being of the American people in their national home," rather than to defend European interests that seemingly have no connection to the "folk" constituency's way of life.[68] At the May 25, 2017, NATO meeting in Brussels, Trump stated that "I have been very, very direct with Secretary Stoltenberg and members of the Alliance in saying that NATO members must finally contribute their fair share and meet their financial obligations, for 23 of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defense."[69] For Jacksonian America, then, Trump's scrutiny of NATO's economic deficiency, and his failure to "coherently" endorse Article V, is further proof of the president's willingness to place America and its citizens before projects that are connected to the liberal international order. Moreover, this judgement is symbolic of Trump fusing Jacksonian perceptions of American "national honor" and "reputation" to his America First agenda.

The second foreign policy domain that President Trump has demonstrated consistency with Jacksonian sentiments is through his decision making on American military operations in Afghanistan and Syria. In Afghanistan, the president has announced that he is considering sending up to another 5,000 U.S. troops to beat back a resurgent Taliban.[70] These deliberations have led some to question how this policy aligns with Trump's previously professed skepticism of overseas military interventions. Phillip Carter, for instance, has stated, "None of this squares with President Donald Trump's campaign pledge of an 'America First' foreign policy, nor with his healthy skepticism of how America's long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were managed under Presidents Bush and Obama."[71] Others have stated that "sending thousands more troops into harm's way would be an even graver step into the kinds of foreign entanglement he [Trump] criticized as a private citizen."[72] However, Trump's decision to continue the "forever war" is more likely found in his eagerness to be characterized as a powerful president that conquered "evil." Stephen Walt has perhaps come closest to this assessment, stating, "My fear, of course, is that the real purpose of this new move is simply to delay the admission of defeat, so that the top brass doesn't have to admit it failed and a president who portrays himself as a 'winner' won't have to watch Afghanistan collapse on his watch."[73] Indeed, this argument, which plays into the key Jacksonian value of the defense of "national honor" and "reputation," is also connected to President Trump's decision to drop "the world's largest non-nuclear bomb"—or Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB)—on an Islamic State tunnel complex in eastern Afghanistan. This strategy captured the attention of many analysts due not only to the size of the weaponry but to the limited number of militias it targeted. Robin Wright has argued that "The U.S. decision to drop the bomb was striking for several reasons. America's biggest non-nuclear bomb—which costs sixteen million dollars, and three hundred million dollars to develop—was used on one of the smallest militias it faces anywhere in the world."[74] The use of the most powerful conventional weapon in the American armory is consistent with the Jacksonian tradition of signaling American prestige and resolve. Indeed, this logic is also representative of the rationale behind President Trump launching 59 Tomahawk missiles into Syria, which Walter Russell Mead described as "playing the right cards" to the Jacksonian community:

> At home, it won approval from Jacksonians and others who want a strong president. The strikes vindicated America's prestige and dealt a clear setback to those who seek to humiliate or marginalize the U.S. But no ground troops were involved and Mr. Trump made no move toward long-term counterinsurgency or nation-building, the type of campaign that many Americans, his base in particular, have learned to view skeptically.[75]

The third foreign policy area in which President Trump has continued to display his Jacksonian tendencies regards his decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement. This decision has been labeled as "a disaster for America,"[76] "one of the worst foreign policy blunders in history,"[77] and as "counterproductive to willingly become an international pariah on global climate change."[78] While such analysis is based on the impact that this will have on the climate, it is also driven by the residual effects that observers perceive this decision will have on the continued credibility of American global

leadership more broadly. According to David Sanger and Jane Perlez, President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord is the "greatest strategic gift to the Chinese, who are eager to fill the void that Washington is leaving around the world on everything from setting the rules of trade and environmental standards to financing the infrastructure projects that give Beijing vast influence."[79] Yet these judgments are primarily focused on the likely *effects* of President Trump's foreign policy program rather than an explanation of likely causes of such decisions. A more salient assessment of Trump's decision to withdraw from the accords has perhaps been made by Cary Coglianese, a professor of law and political science at the University of Pennsylvania, when he noted that, "It's one of the few things that he's able to do. . . . for Trump supporters it looks like he's delivering on a campaign promise—it looks like he's standing up for Americans against the rest of the world."[80] Indeed, in explaining his rationale to leave the accords, Trump stated:

> As President, I can put no other consideration before the well-being of American citizens. The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries, leaving American workers—who I love—and taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production.[81]

Trump further stated that the Paris Accords

> could cost America as much as 2.7 million lost jobs by 2025 according to the National Economic Research Associates. This includes 440,000 fewer manufacturing jobs—not what we need—believe me, this is not what we need—including automobile jobs, and the further decimation of vital American industries on which countless communities rely.[82]

In this respect, President Trump is attempting to connect directly with the "American people" by characterizing the Paris Accords as another example of the liberal economic agenda impinging upon the physical and economic security of American citizens.[83]

Conclusion

Criticisms of President Trump are inclined to overlook that his often-contradictory assertions on key foreign and defense policy issues are driven by an inherently Jacksonian sentiment: unilateralism. The embryonic "Trump doctrine," then, as Alex Ward has argued, could be best described as "America Alone":

> He wants to alter the liberal international order that has benefitted the United States and its allies since the end of World War II. He wants to defeat terrorists wherever they are. He wants to forcibly wrest natural resources from other states and bring them to America. And, he wants America to do all this by itself, mostly with military force. Perhaps instead of "America First," his doctrine should really be "America Alone."[84]

This predominant theme of unilateralism, and its centrality to restoring the rest of the world's respect for the United States, was underlined again by the candidate himself as he officially accepted the GOP nomination in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 21, 2016:

> The most important difference between our plan and that of our opponents, is that our plan will put America First. Americanism, not globalism, will be our credo. As long as we are led by politicians who will not put America First, then we can be assured that other nations will not treat America with respect. This will all change when I take office.[85]

Trump is thus demonstrating a clear rapport with the Jacksonian tradition. The locus of this affinity is found in Jacksonian notions of American populism, national honor, and reputation, where Trump will seek retribution when America's prestige or reputation is infringed upon. Through the 2016 presidential contest, Hillary Clinton rightly lambasted Trump's disparate statements on foreign policy as "dangerously incoherent."[86] Yet simply labeling such Trump assertions that the United States should abandon long-standing alliances such as NATO if allies don't "pay their own way" or that it would not be a bad thing for South Korea and Japan or Saudi Arabia to acquire nuclear weapons as "dangerous" does not directly address the Jacksonian sentiments that underpin their appeal to Republican voters. The opening months of the Trump presidency have continued to resonate with Jacksonian society, which suggests that a strategy of unilateralism will continue to drive the foreign policy agenda of the administration.

As allies and adversaries both at home and abroad attempt to come to grips with the Trump administration's evolving foreign policy, they may do well to recall Max Weber's observation that, while "Interests (material and ideal), not ideas, dominate directly the actions of men" the "images of the world created by these ideas have very often served as switches determining the tracks on which the dynamism of interests kept actions moving."[87] Given the rise of anti-establishment populism on both sides of American politics during the 2016 election cycle, including robust critiques of the liberal internationalist foreign policy agenda by both Donald Trump and Senator Bernie Sanders, it appears that the Jacksonian tradition of foreign policy should now be seriously reckoned with as an animating force for American foreign policy into the future.

ORCID

Michael Clarke http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1048-9586

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Notes on contributors

Michael Clarke (michael.clarke@anu.edu.au) is associate professor at the National Security College, Australian National University. He has written extensively on Australian foreign policy, nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation, the history and politics of Xinjiang, Uyghur separatism and terrorism, and Chinese foreign policy in Central Asia in a variety of academic publications, while his journalistic writing on these topics has been published by the *Wall Street Journal, CNN, The National Interest, The Cipher Brief,* and *The Diplomat*. He is also the author of *Xinjiang and China's Rise in Central Asia – A History* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), co-editor (with Anna Hayes) of *Inside Xinjiang: Space, Place and Power in China's Muslim Far North-West* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), and co-editor (with Douglas Smith) of *China's Frontier Regions: Ethnicity, Economic Integration and Foreign Relations* (London, UK: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

Anthony Ricketts (anthony.ricketts@anu.edu.au) is a doctoral student at the National Security College, Australian National University. He is also a teaching fellow at the Australian Command and Staff College, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University. His doctoral thesis is focused on American grand strategy in the Middle East.