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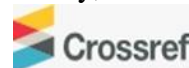
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Worlds Apart: Liberal Internationalism and the Trump ‘America First’ Foreign Policy

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Abstract

Purpose: Two key academic questions that underpin the Donald Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy has to do with whether or not he developed a distinct foreign policy worthy of recognition in the International Relations discipline as a new foreign policy school of thought, and the exact kind of impact this kind of foreign policy have or could have on the liberal international system.

Materials and Methods: Academics and pundits who engage the subject either disagree that Trump developed a distinct foreign policy or agree that he did. But even scholars and pundits who agree that Trump developed a distinct foreign policy still disagree on the type. And while there is a seeming consensus about impact, there is disagreement on the type and scale of

impact.

Findings: This article discusses the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy and argues that Trump developed a distinct foreign policy worthy of recognition in the International Relations discipline as a new foreign policy school of thought best described as the Trump Doctrine.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: It discusses the impact of this foreign policy on liberal internationalism, and argues that a US foreign policy that ends US stewardship of the international system tears the world apart.

Keywords: ‘America First’, Trump Doctrine, Liberal Internationalism

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A huge influx of foreign policy literature asserts that the United States has a foreign policy as demonstrated by its approach to international politics. In tracing the origins of US foreign policy, Walter Russell Mead in his; *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*, outlined four key US foreign policy schools of thought which represent what he considered the four thematic domains of the US foreign policy; Jeffersonianism, Hamiltonianism, Jacksonianism, and Wilsonianism (2001). These four thematic themes of the US foreign policy have often defined the ideologies and political actions of US presidents since the beginning of the last century at least;

Jeffersonianism was the foreign policy principle of the Thomas Jefferson presidency and it focused on the preservation of democracy and avoidance of war, particularly in war-torn Europe (Paterson 2018). Hamiltonianism was the foreign policy principle of Alexander Hamilton who was although not a US President, but a leading writer of the Constitution - 51 out of the 85 Federalist Papers. It was based on the promotion of free international trade and global economy (Schroeder 1997). Jacksonianism was the foreign policy principle of Andrew Jackson who prioritized US national interest and advocated for a powerful US military with little or no regard for internationalism or liberal internationalism (Hall 2017). Wilsonianism was the foreign policy principle of Woodrow Wilson who valued internationalism and prioritized the promotion of liberal democracy, multilateralism, and international organizations (Paterson 2018).

US foreign policy within the four key themes has always been re-formed and applied by different US Presidents in the course of time to address different issues (Fazly, 2020:81). But regardless of the differences and reformation, US core foreign policy interests as defined by every US President since WWII are unchanged: to guarantee US national security, economic prosperity, and American vision and way of life. The objectives are the protection of US and its citizens and allies, the preservation of balance of power, the expansion of capital mobility, (Dimitrova, 2017) and external promotion of democracy. US external democracy promotion is impacted through normative interaction, aids, and sanctions, but could sometimes take the form of military intervention in circumstances where economic aid instrument fails. (Ikenberry, 2011). The US as the hegemonic power of our world-system precisely from 1945 to 1990 was easily able to achieve these foreign policy interests (Wallerstein, 1995:176 & Patrick, 2010).

US foreign policy principles for a long period of time were constructed on neutrality and isolationism in order to avoid war and exponentially enrich US economy. But as the April 2, 1917 war between the US and Germany broke out and the US got directly involved in European war after nearly 135 years, US foreign policy shifted sharply from the principles of neutrality and isolationism to a rather multilateral and internationalist approach (Walt, 1998). The European war and US direct involvement is considered by many scholars of foreign policy as a historical event in the reformulation of modern US foreign policy (Fazly, 2021) which has external nation building as its core principle.

During WWII (1939-1945) and throughout the Cold War era (1947 – 1991), US foreign policy strategy fully shifted towards internationalism with the Marshall Plan (Paterson 2018). After WW II in 1945, successive US leaderships increased emphasis on foreign policy based on nation-building abroad. Part of the aim was to globalize US ideology of democracy and good governance through internationalism.

The Marshall Plan was introduced on December 19, 1947 and signed officially into law on April 3 1948 after Congress overwhelmingly passed the Economic Cooperation Act. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) would later become what is today known as the WTO (Altay, 2017). Building on the success of the Marshall Plan, Harry Truman proposed the 1949 Point Four Program which helped to diminish communist threat through the use of capitalism. President John Kennedy in turn signed the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 into law and created the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to further re-assert US political obligations to internationalism.

Liberal Internationalism

Liberal internationalism emerged through Lord Palmerston who was former British Prime Minister (Taylor 1994), although it proceeded out of the foreign policy ideologies of Franklin Roosevelt (Ikenberry 2018). Whether considered a doctrine, a belief system, a political principle, an ideology, or a movement, liberal internationalism advocates for greater economic, political and social cooperation towards the promotion of liberal democracy, multilateralism, capitalism, collective security and the avoidance of US isolationism.

The ‘War of Ideas’ of Ronald Reagan in his Cold War foreign policy set up a more formidable liberal internationalist foundation for subsequent US presidents. The foreign policy involved the creation of National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 1984. The organization received \$18 million annual budget to fight the ‘war of ideas’ with the Soviet Union. George Bush and Barack Obama followed up on this liberal internationalist foreign policy principle by adopting a bottom-up approach of external nation building especially in the Middle East.

The consistency of US in liberal institutionalism makes it a social structure even though its challenger – constructivism is on the rise, albeit skepticism (Wendt 1999) & Hopf (1998:171-200) But regardless, there has been improvement on governance across the globe since Reagan’s early 80 ‘war of Ideas’ and the popularization of liberal internationalism through US foreign policy. The US power has been unmatched across the globe because it works efficiently with committed allies and partners in every region of the world.

What puts the US ahead of Russia and China is that none of them as US rivals has as many allies and partners to count on a committed support towards communist ideologies as the US do for the promotion of liberalism (Lasarettes, 2017). US foreign policy from its historical discourse above has been subject to multiple changes throughout different historical periods and historical events for different reasons. However, these changes reflect liberalism as the overriding focus of modern US foreign policy.

The Trump ‘America First’ Foreign Policy: What Grand Strategy?

The Trump presidency has come to an end, but academic debate about his grand strategy is still in full swing. Two key questions that underpin this discussion is whether or not Trump constructed any distinct foreign policy doctrine, and what type of doctrine if he did. Foreign policy analyst and president of the Council of Foreign Relations Richard Haass argued that not much of a grand strategy is there in Trump’s ‘America First’ foreign policy (2017). His position is corroborated by some of Trump’s White House Officers, including Trump’s director of communications Michael D. Dubke who believed ‘there is no Trump doctrine’ (Goldmacher 2017).

However, in the course of shedding light on his presidency and grand strategy, prompted by NYT’s

David Sanger, Trump stated categorically he had a foreign policy captured in two important words; ‘America First’. He further explained he was ‘not isolationist’ by being ‘America First’ (Rothman, 2016). Trump’s claim of having a grand strategy features prominently among the defense of scholars who agree that Trump constructed a distinct foreign policy, even though Trump was not the first to use ‘America First’ – a slogan used by WW II anti-interventionist Americans. But even at that, the question many academics and pundits ask is how much of a grand strategy is there in the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy. To this effect, the understanding of grand strategy is relevant to the examination of the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy.

According to Robert Art in his classical definition of grand strategy, the concept deals with the full range of goals that a state should seek. (Art 2003:2) Being prescriptive, visionary and evolutionary, grand strategy concentrates essentially on how a state should employ its military instrument in the realization of the full range of its foreign policy goals. Posen and Ross illustrate the constituents of a well-defined grand strategy, underlying: 1) the clear identification of US interests and objectives; 2) the threats to those interests and objectives; 3) the appropriate strategic responses to those threats; and 4) the principles that should guide the construction of US policy and strategy (Posen & Ross 1996:5-6). A grand strategy is mostly regarded as a coherent roadmap communicating US vision and role on the international political space, its key foreign policy goals as well as the most efficient instrument for realizing those goals.

A grand strategy is constructed to respond to specific crises that threaten American national interests. This is the case with every coherent and well-defined doctrines such as the Reagan doctrine that responded effectively to Communist expansionism, the successful containment strategy of the Truman doctrine, the Bush doctrine developed to respond to the 9/11 anti-American terrorism etc. A number of key official documents such as National Security Strategies, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, National Military Strategies, and Quadrennial Defense Reviews are normally at the disposal of every US administration for grand strategy development (Dimitrova 2017:3)

The first issue with understanding the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy stems from his inexperience. Unlike his predecessors – Monroe, Truman, Reagan, Bush and Obama, Trump is an international political actor with no military or public service experience. He is therefore neither a political interventionist nor an isolationist; neither a neoconservative, nor a paleo-conservative, neither a traditional realist nor a liberal internationalist (Anton, 2019). Trump’s foreign policy is rather a combination of these (2019).

But what Trump himself understands his ‘America First’ foreign policy to be and the full range of goals it seeks is significant in this discussion. When on Wednesday April 27, 2016, Trump stood at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington DC to deliver his election campaign speech: ‘*America First will be the overriding focus of my administration*’ was the center of his speech. (Trump: Election Campaign Speech, April 27 2016). By ‘America First’ he explained that he would guarantee US national security by defeating Islamic terrorism and safeguard US jobs for US citizens. He further emphasized his readiness to abandon external nation-building, ‘*replace randomness with purpose, ideology with strategy and chaos with peace.*’

Trump also hinted on how to chart America’s new path – reminiscing the 1940s when America saved the world from the hands of the Nazis and Japanese Imperialists. Trump was emphatic on how Democrats and Republicans worked together to actualize Reagan’s ‘tear down this wall’ against Gorbachev – casting doubts on potential unilateral actions. His understanding and

communication of American First foreign policy was therefore very clear on paper.

But how do academics and analysts understand the Trump America First foreign policy? In his contribution to this discussion, Richard Haaass in his; *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* told Scott Simon of Radio Foundation in New York that he was skeptical of a certain Trump doctrine. Some academics even assume that Trump lacks the aptitude to develop a distinct and coherent foreign policy. Even his economic policy, one claim — the policy area he apparently triumphed, his preferred approach of engorging the corporate sector on tax cuts proved a poor decision considering the immeasurable scale of havoc wrought by his virus-induced lockdowns (Elliot 2021). Trump's policy disaster put him in years of crises ranging from impeachments to a particularly underwhelming performance in the covid-19 management. He would go on to lose the 2020 election by over 7 million votes partly on some of these accounts (Busch & Pitney Jr 2021).

However, when Bentley and Lerner engaged the editors of the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* on the Trump's foreign policy issue in October 2019, political scientists such as Fuchs were discussing Trump's erratic behavior as a mode of foreign policy doctrine – the 'doctrine of unpredictability' (Bentley & Lerner, 2021). Proponents of the concept who are mostly Trump's defenders argue that it is Trump's distinct approach to force US allies and adversaries not to take US largesse for granted (Krauthammer 2017). Critics however warned that unpredictability as a political behavior makes international politics more chaotic, destabilize US vital relations, and ultimately disrupt the US-led liberal international order (Nedal & Nexon 2017; Saletan 2016).

But how do we understand unpredictability vis-a-vis foreign policy formulation? Is unpredictability an epistemologically coherent approach to foreign policy formulation, or is it simply *apost hoc* rationalization for inspired policy-framing based on alternative motives (Bentley & David, 2021)? Is there a detailed account of unpredictability in Trump's 'America First' foreign policy? Is unpredictability in Trump's presidential actions if any (1) a feature—the product of a distinct and well thought out application of grand strategy equally shared by his allies and supporters, (Lerner 2021:2), or (2) a bug—the result of Trump's inconsistencies (Bentley & David 2021)? Did Trump coherently formulate and execute the doctrine of unpredictability or was he simply unpredictable because he was inconsistent, lacking differentiation and integration – the two key components of low conceptual complexity (Hassan & Featherstone 2021:7)?

In shedding light on unpredictability, Lerner (2021) typologies the thinking of scholars regarding unpredictability by offering what he regarded as three 'buckets' of unpredictability – each representing generally acknowledged limitations on inquiry. The first two 'buckets' according to him spring from a dichotomy first outlined by renowned economist Frank Knight (1921) between risk and uncertainty. Risk on one hand is the predicting system about which scholars generally agree on the probability distribution such as the results of an impending election that has highly detailed opinion polling available for examination (Lerner 2021). Uncertainty on the other hand refers to circumstances in which academics do not agree on a likely probability distribution such as the political behavior of a really erratic political actor, or the likelihood of a catastrophic natural disaster occurring any time (Lerner 2017).

Lerner assumes that a doctrine is not simply an account of a presidential administration's foreign policy programme, 'but instead a discursive outcome of commentariat interpretation

alongside presidential statements articulating the rationales of actions (Lerner, 2021:14). This is the case with Monroe when he explicitly articulated his ‘Monroe Doctrine’ to the Congress (Gilderhus 2006). Lerner (2021:2) also demonstrated how Trump’s supporters and allies offered favorable parallels between Trump’s foreign policy and ‘Nixon’s Machiavellian ‘Madman Theory.’ The author then applied the parallels drawn - Trump’s articulated goal and a frequent illustration of his personal behavior to make justification for labelling Trump’s worldview ‘*a savvy doctrine*’.

Bentley & David (2021:16) also argue strongly in favor of conceiving Trump’s unpredictability as a form of doctrine. However, the authors contrast Nixon’s pretended ‘craziness’ which was widely understood to be ‘*the action of a rational actor motivated by rational aims*’, with Trump’s unpredictability, that was ‘*frequently framed clearly in contrast to the rational actor*’. But contrary to the assumption of Bentley and David, Hassan and Featherstone (2021) argue that Trump was unpredictable because of his ‘low conceptual complexity leadership style.’ To establish their position, the academics outlined five key hypotheses which they claimed a full fulfilment is necessary for understanding unpredictability as the defining principle of the Trump foreign policy. Three of the five key hypotheses are;

- i. Whether unpredictability was consistently presented as a primary belief.
- ii. Whether unpredictability was ‘adopted as a shared foreign policy framework by Trump’s administration officials.
- iii. Whether unpredictability was ‘consistently communicated and explained to the public in speeches and documents justifying Trump’s key actions (Hassan & Featherstone, 2021:7).

Hassan and Featherstone instead are in support of a through line between Trump’s foreign policy rhetoric and actions. The through line is what the scholars termed ‘*low conceptual complexity*’. The academics defined conceptual complexity as composed of two key components: (1) *differentiation* and (2) *integration*. Differentiation as a component of conceptual complexity they wrote, refers to an individual’s ability to ‘ascertain more than a single dimension’ while integration as a component of conceptual complexity is the ability ‘to combine these multiple dimensions in one bigger picture.’ Hassan and Featherstone argued that Trump throughout his campaign and presidency, showed himself to be ‘a prime example of a low conceptual complexity leader’, using the term ‘*nasty*’ every single time to delineate almost all of his political rivals – unable to make differentiations between his issues with his rivals or to integrate them into a larger political critique. (2021:3-4).

They assumed that perceived unpredictability in Trump’s foreign policy springs primarily from Trump’s low conceptual complexity explained above and not from any kind of coherent doctrine; ‘There was no causal conviction to a doctrine’, Hassan and Featherstone wrote, ‘but there was the outcome of unpredictability due to the ad hoc and ill-informed nature of policy-making within the Trump presidency’ (Hassan & Featherstone 2021:19–20).

Krauthammer (2017) and Sciutto (2020) in their contributions to discussed a possible parallel between Trump’s unpredictability and Nixon’s ‘Madman Theory’ of the Vietnam War. The foreign policy approach primarily sought to persuade adversaries that Nixon was an erratic political actor, and concessions were the sole option of safety from the risk of unpredictable

and disproportionate American measures. Boys (2021:14-16) also assumed that Trump's unpredictability constitutes a distinct foreign policy with parallels to Nixon's 'Madman Theory'. He claimed that Nixon was largely portrayed as a leader of unpredictability and irrationality – deterring his adversaries with his Madman Theory. Nixon was greatly influenced by the 1962 work of Herman Kahn: *Thinking About the Unthinkable*. Kahn argued that erraticism induces adversaries to stand down.

Turner & Kaarbo (2021) are other academics who drew a parallel between Trump and Nixon's Madman Theory, drawing upon political psychological literature to identify what they termed Trump's impulsivity, emotionality and provocative rhetoric towards China as with Nixon towards Vietnam. The authors claimed Trump's unpredictability played a significant role in straining US-China relations as Trump scapegoated China regarding US trade deficit by over-levelling tariffs against China in May 2019. The authors also referenced Trump's labelling of the Covid-19 virus as '*Chinese virus*' in 2020, worsening US-China relations.

However, Boys (2021) most extensively explored the parallel between Trump's America First foreign policy and Nixon's Madman Theory. The scholar drew upon some comparative historical discourse analyses to explore the impact of unpredictability on US grand strategy during both presidencies. Boys began by tracing the development of 'Madman Theory.' He then outlined how the inklings of a notion within the works of Machiavelli and Hobbes that inspired a coterie of scholars, including Thomas Schelling, Daniel Ellsberg, and Henry Kissinger to reflect on the limitations of rationality in grand strategy during the later period of 1950s and the early period of the 1960s.

Ellsberg at a lecture delivered at the Boston Public Library in March 1959 titled '*The Political Uses of Madness*', believed in the possibility of manipulating the confidence of adversaries through nuclear blackmail. Kissinger was stimulated by Ellsberg's spellbinding lecture and consequently invited the scholar to lecture his students on political madness. Ellsberg's ideas ultimately reinforced Kissinger's reflections on the possibility of using nuclear weapons in a limited war '*in order to affect the opponent's will*', and also played significant role in the development of Kissinger's *Realpolitik* (cited in Boys 2021:5).

Kissinger subsequently became a top confidant of Nixon whose preferred strategy for US victory in the Vietnam War was the Madman Theory. Nixon personally explained his 'Madman Theory' to his advisor Bob Haldeman in 1968: '*Bob, I call it the Madman Theory, The North Vietnamese must believe I have reached the point in the Vietnam War where I could do anything just to bring the war to an end. We will just slip the word to them that for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about Communism. There is no possible way to stop him when he is angry, and he already has his hand on the nuclear button. Ho Chi Minh will definitely be in Paris in two days to plead for peace*'. (cited in Boys 2021:6). This singular thinking directed Nixon's foreign policy in Southeast Asia. Notwithstanding, the theory ultimately failed to convince the communist forces that Nixon's unpredictable language and the implementation of irrational actions could potentially result to US deployment of nuclear arsenal in the Vietnamese War (Boys 2021: 14- 16).

There are other scholars who agree that Trump developed a distinct foreign policy but disagree with the rest of the scholars discussed so far on the type – unpredictability. Dimitrova (2017) for instance argued that Trump constructed a Jacksonian foreign policy, assuming that Trump's presidency was a resurgence of Jacksonism. Appaubaum (2019) on the other hand

claimed that Trump ran a neo-isolationist foreign policy.

Why Trump's America First Foreign Policy is Trump Doctrine

When at the course of an interview with NYT's David Sanger on March 28 2016, Trump trimmed his foreign policy down to two words; 'America First', and further reiterated 'not isolationist' he was demonstrating his foreign policy distinction. Some of his White House officials including his communications director Mike Dubke assumed 'there is no Trump doctrine' because of Trump's inexperience in foreign policy formulation – stemming in part from being first US president without prior experience of neither military nor public service life.

According to Posen and Ross' conceptual framework, it is also vital discovery that Trump's 'America First' is a distinct foreign policy because it contains; 1) US interests and objectives; 2) threats on those US interests and objectives; 3) strategic responses to those threats; and 4) the guideline for US foreign policy development. The fact that Trump was mostly unilateral and never got along well with his advisors suggests the substance in his America First policy was distinctly his. Come to think of it, his foreign policy departure from external nation-building contrasts the foreign policy goals of most of his predecessors – Monroe, Truman, Reagan, Bush and Obama – a key inkling into his foreign policy distinctiveness. Trump's foreign policy view reflects Hobbesian perspective of the international environment and quasi-realism (Walt 2016) and his knowledge of international politics contrasts sharply with the post-WW II internationalist consensus held by both mainstream liberals and conservatives (Cha 2016:93) – what has not featured in US foreign policy since the end of WW II at least.

The parallels drawn between Trump's 'unpredictability' and Nixon's Madman Theory raises the question of why Trump would adopt a foreign policy strategy that ultimately failed. Two political actors could be erratic, impulsive and provocative and yet contrast in foreign policy area as foreign policy is more of the full range of goals pursued by a state than the personality of a single individual. Trump did not communicate erraticism, impulsivity and provocativeness as instrument for the realization of his full range of foreign policy goals. Trump's foreign policy guideline contained in his foreign policy corner-stone speech delivered at the National Interest Review on April 17 2016, his Inaugural Address on January 20 2017 and at NATO Summit in Brussels in May 2017 demonstrates that Trump developed a distinct foreign policy different from those of past US presidents and worthy of recognition in International Relations discipline as Trump Doctrine, much like the Monroe Doctrine, Truman Doctrine, Reagan Doctrine, and Bush Doctrine.

Trump much like the aforementioned explained his vision for the American people on multiple occasions — especially in his most understudied speech at the APEC CEO Summit in Da Nang, Vietnam in November 2017 – encapsulating his vision with a quote from *The Wizard of Oz*: 'There's no place like home.' Few weeks earlier, at the U.N. General Assembly, 'great reawakening of nations' featured eminently in his explanation of his vision for American people. He would go on with a barrage of executive orders – all of which demonstrate his foreign policy distinctiveness;

He withdrew the US from the 2016 Paris Agreement on June 1 2017 claiming '*The Paris agreement limits US mining activities and makes the US to lose and pay more*'. He withdrew the US from the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal. He argued: '*We cannot prevent an Iranian bomb under the current agreement which is already decaying. Because of the rotten structure, I am announcing today that the United State is withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal*'.

Trump attempted to withdraw the US from NATO during his first summit with NATO leaders through the announcement of his ‘burden sharing’ policy toward NATO. He argued that NATO members are complete liability to the US. At the opening of NATO’s 750 million Euros new headquarters in the city of Brussels on May 25 2017, Trump declined from reaffirming US commitment to Article 5 of NATO Treaty. The Article 5 of NATO Treaty asserts that an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all members. The principle of Article 5 has served as the foundation of the transatlantic security alliance for over seventy years. It has only been invoked once at the course of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. The invocation of the Article 5 is considered to have far-reaching impact which is part of the reasons why the NATO Article 5 is reasoned to be the treaty’s most significant principle.

Trump also announced plans to pull out the US from the WTO. He pressured top White House officials for cooperation. He argued that ‘the WTO was put in place by the rest of the world to screw the US’. Again, Trump declined from endorsing the joint statement issued at the end of the 2018 G7 summit in Canada. At the 2018 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Trump apparently delivered an isolationist speech.

There are also five key patterns in Trump’s policy not found in those of his predecessors’ liberal grand strategy – patterns which make the Trump ‘America First’ foreign policy ultimately distinct;

- i. Pro-Putin pattern
- ii. Patterns against multilateral institutions
- iii. Unilateral pattern
- iv. Pattern against pro-democracy leaders
- v. Political nick-naming pattern

Trump attacked all of the arenas of democracy including suing the major media establishment; the *Times*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN –nicking the press ‘fake news’. He has now become so popular for nicknaming his adversaries. He once told the New York Times ‘*I think it is an instinct*’. Rightly so, he nicknamed Joe Biden ‘*sleepy Joe*’ Lyn Ted ‘*Crazy Bernie*’, Hillary Clinton ‘*Crooked Hillary*’ Kim Jong Un ‘*Little Rocket Man*’ and Ron DeSantis ‘*Ron DeSanctimonious*’ just to mention but a few. (Jessica Hullinger, NYT September 17 2017).

On the pattern against pro-democracy leaders, in March 2017, Trump declined from shaking hands with Angela Merkel during her visit to the White House. The *CNN* described the scenario in the following words: ‘*this is a tense moment between the U.S and German leaders. Trump once again bashed Merkel, citing ‘policies allowing refugees into Germany’ in his campaign trail.*’ Away from the White House, Trump again demeaned Angela Merkel in public during a 2018 G7 Summit attended by other world leaders, saying: ‘*Here, Angela. Don’t say I never give you anything or guide you*’, accusing Angela Merkel of being ‘a hardcore protectionist’ with trade policies, which he later asked the US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to investigate: ‘launch an investigation into whether German car companies and automobile imports are hurting US national security’. During the Trump administration, both Germany and Canada signaled that the era of American global leadership dwindled significantly.

After the May 2017 NATO summit held in Brussels, Merkel briefed a large congregation in Germany that reliance on the transatlantic relationship was no longer a possibility and positivity. She asserted: ‘*From my experience in the last few days, the times for relying fully on others are*

somewhat over. It is time for us, Europeans, to seriously and conscientiously to take our fate into our own hands'. Canada was not let out in the Trump attack on liberal democracies. Trump imposed tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum. Then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau captioned it '*a turning point in the Canada-US relations*'. Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland equally delivered a speech thanking the US for its long stewardship of the international system right from the post-war era, implicitly suggesting it was the end of US global leadership under the Trump administration. The former President also downgraded the status of the EU Ambassador to the US, from the equivalent of a country to a 'head of delegation,' without an official notification of the ambassador and the EU.

When Trump decided that his first presidential visit was going to be Saudi Arabia on May 20 2017, he signaled that pro-democracy leaders around the world were not going to have the democratic best of US during his administration. Trump went on to sign a military arms deal worth \$350 billion for over 10 years with Saudi Arabia to contain Iran. Given that Saudi Arabia is an authoritarian state, and the brutal murder of U.S *Washington Post* Journalist, Jamal was fresh, the Trump first presidential visit has been reviewed along anti-democracy line by many diplomacy scholars. Rightly so, as Trump continued his brinkmanship, both Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping conveniently removed the two term presidential limits on their countries' Constitutions.

Ruth Ben-Ghiat who is a historian at New York University and expert on authoritarianism told *Insider* during an interview session (September, 6 2018) '*If I am asked to grade Trump on his support for democracy domestically and internationally, I will correctly score him an F.*' Putin and Jinping's constitutional dominion is reminiscent of brutal autocrats, and the Trump administration was supportive with policies, appraisal and silence. (Stewart, 2017: 52). Sheri Berman who is a professor of political science at Barnard College with expertise in democracy, populism, and fascism, in an interview with the *Insider*, (July 20 2018) asserted: '*President Donald Trump spent four years of his presidency praising authoritarian leaders such as Putin and Xi for their ability to remain in office beyond constitutional stipulation. This has had a dangerous influence on Putin and Xi's latest authoritarian actions.*' (Shirk, 2018).

On the pro-Putin pattern, Trump vigorously opposed Congressional sanctions legislation on Russia, in an apparent credence to Putin's authoritarian strategy and objective. He showed great eagerness to lift sanctions on Russia as he lobbied to counter the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) - a bipartisan legislation that placed multiple sanctions on Putin and Russia in response to Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S election.

Trump's worldview from liberal internationalist standpoint contrasts with those of his predecessors as reflected in most of his executive orders, presidential speeches, presidential visits, media interviews and tweets – all of which define his political personality and America First foreign policy. The US is the most powerful nation-state in the world today, even though this position is being hotly debated amidst the 'era of groupism'- the building of defense blocks, each of which asserts its own claim of superiority but using collective solidarity to survive alongside and against other opposing groups (Wallerstein, 1995: 6 -7). The US enjoys membership of some of such groups as founder and leading force (Munkler, 2007: 146 – 147).

It uses some of them such as NATO, United Nations, WTO, IMF, WB, etc. which are organizations serving the interest of the liberal international order to achieve some of its foreign policy objectives, especially that of democracy promotion (Ikenberry 2018). However, the Trump foreign policy contrasts those with which the US has been overseeing the stewardship of the international

system since the post-war era as it seeks the withdrawal of US from key global accords. This also created the kind of impact that was never created by the foreign policy of any former US president.

Jeremi Suri in what he called '*the Historical Nightmares of the World before December 1941*' argued that Trump took the national race and US foreign policy to the bottom in a one-man-approach with a barrage of executive orders that tormented the international political space in the name of '*making America Great Again*' (2017). This is one of the key features of the arguments about Trump's impact on liberal internationalism, as he attempted to '*save*' the US from '*free riders*' – liberal allies.

Immanuel Wallerstein claimed that unless the US recognizes that only the safety of humankind is all the safety that exists, and not the safety of the US alone, neither the US nor the rest of the world will triumph over the structural crisis of the world-system' (1995:205). But Trump did not consider this as majority of his policies and executive orders easily restricted US commitment to, and participation in global accords that serve the need of the international system. The US Constitution makes no clear provision for executive orders, but executive orders has been an effective tool in the hand of some US Presidents. In the case of Trump, his executive orders are widely considered the blueprints for the exact departure from US foreign policy values since the horrendous attack of Japan on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 –A departure which makes his foreign policy ultimately distinct –driving the US backward and into '*the historical nightmares of the world before December 1941*' (Suri, 2017).

Trump's distinction is also seen in his impeachment trials. He was impeached by the US House of Representatives on December 18, 2019 as the articles of impeachment charged him with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. The Republican Party voted on January 21 2019 to reject 11 amendments proposed by Democrats, requesting subpoena authority to introduce testimonial evidences from current and former White House officials, as well as some of the Trump administration documents not made available to House investigators. Eventually, on February 5 2020, Trump was acquitted by the Senate on both impeachment articles, as neither article produced the required two-thirds supermajority of senate support.

55 Republican senators voted against the charge of abuse of power, while all 53 Republican senators voted against the charge of obstruction of Congress. The difference was senator Mitt Romney who eventually became the first US senator in history to support the removal of a president of his own party through impeachment vote. Undeterred, Trump once again on January 13, 2021 faced a second impeachment trial at the House of Representatives following the 2021 Capitol Hill invasion. However, Trump was acquitted by the Senate a second time on February 13, 2021. However, neither were his twin acquittal a justification of his presidential actions nor did they bring to an end the debate over his ultimately distinct approach to politics.

The 2020 and 2021 reports of the Freedom House reported the fourteenth consecutive years of deteriorating freedom, rule of law, rights and liberties around the world; sixty-four countries lost liberties in the past year, while only thirty-seven registered improvements. India as the world's largest democracy witnessed some of the most alarming declines. Together with the US as the second largest democracy in the world, the assessment of democracy in both countries gave room for alarm. In 2009, the US had a score of 94/100- nearing the top of the rank, just behind Germany, Switzerland, and Estonia respectively. Ten years later –under Trump, democracy slipped eight points; ranking behind 'even' Greece, Slovakia, and Mauritius.

In the assessment of the US, Freedom House analysts pointed to the types of trends that they only use in the designation of fragile parts of the world: ‘pressure on electoral institution and personnel, fierce rhetorical attacks on the press, judiciary, and on the rule of law’. The notable contemporary political figures often considered as the worst offenders of democracy are Putin and Jinping, but Trump easily rose to that rank just under a single term. Those who bemoan Trump’s impact on the international system argue that he failed to adhere to established norms, favoring the authoritarian objectives of Putin. He even described Putin’s attack on Ukraine as “savvy” and “genius”.

Ruth Ben-Ghiat – a historian at New York University told *Insider* during an interview session (September, 6 2018) ‘*If I am asked to grade Trump on his support for democracy, I will correctly score him an F.*’ Sheri Berman – a professor of political science at Barnard College with expertise in democracy in an interview with the *Insider*, (July 20 2018) asserted: ‘*Trump spent four years of his presidency praising authoritarian leaders such as Putin and Xi for their ability to remain in office beyond constitutional stipulation.*’

2.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The iconization of American Presidents as world’s most powerful men (Singh, 2006:28) implies that Trump as a US president must have had some kind of impact on the international system. The presidential impact of US presidents in the area of foreign policy has also been prominent historically (Maidment & McGrew, 1991:74, 83). This also suggests that Trump is not left out of this foreign policy impact. Therefore, the question of whether or not Trump developed a distinct foreign policy as Monroe, Truman, Reagan, or Bush, and the kind of impact his foreign policy has had on the international system is answerable. This is what this article has attempted.

Trump developed a distinct foreign policy worthy of recognition in IR discipline as the Trump doctrine. This doctrine is about putting America’s interest first, withdrawing America from some global accords and the stewardship of the international system, to make US allies and partners share in the burden of international security and peace, while giving America more resources to guarantee its national security, economy, and US vision. The Trump doctrine has five key features which I call patterns. These patterns define his grand strategy which is ultimately distinct;

- i. Unilateral patterns
- ii. Patterns against multilateral institutions
- iii. Pro-Putin patterns
- iv. Patterns against pro-democracy leaders
- v. Political nick-naming patterns

Since the last decades, US domestic issues have been the defining feature of US foreign policy formulation (Maidment & McGrew 1991:141) we know this. However, Trump’s ‘America first’ radically shifted US foreign policy trend (Zakaria, 2017:52) as it displaced the US liberal internationalist grand strategy, considering it to be ‘*a complete and total disaster*’. In defense of his decision, the period of Pax Americana – the epoch in which the US wielded the most power on the international political space- is best described as a huge national loss and decline by Trump.

The changes in US foreign policy under Trump is massive – leaving his ‘America First’ ultimately distinct. The huge party difference between the Republicans and the Democrats in terms of ideology often lead to changes in foreign policy (Singh 2006:16). This accounts for why the

transition from a democratic era of Obama to a republican era of Trump could not have happened without significant changes. More so that Trump's perception of the international system and his vision for America contrasts those of his predecessors. According to the internationalist consensus, the US has been persistent in playing the kind of international political role described by Ikenberry as '*liberal Leviathan*' (2011) in developing and sustaining the liberal international order — the institution which Trump considered '*free riders*'.

Trump's foreign policy distinctiveness is therefore particularly apparent in the liberal grand strategy dominant in the foreign policy of most of his predecessors. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has been struggling to construct a novel political frontier that could perfectly supplant the old democracy vs. communism antagonism (2005:3-4), but the Trump intervention is only a credence to authoritarian actors – what is not associated with his predecessors.

What we see in the Trump 'America First' foreign policy is a Trump doctrine. And with politically minded people around the world borrowing a page or more from Trump's foreign policy book and political worldview in an era of increasing ultra-nationalist policies, I recommend the Trump doctrine for future research.

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