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DOMESTIC HYPER-POLARIZATION AND ITS INFLUENCES ON THE US FOREIGN POLICY

NGUYEN THI THAO VY[1]

Abstract

Thirty years ago, Americans across party lines agreed that the unipolar moment at the end of Cold War was the opportunity for their country to become the global leader, thereby reinforcing its idea of "an indispensable nation". Taking on this leading role and maintaining an active global engagement, specifically through promoting democratic values and facilitating international cooperation, have been the mainspring of US foreign policy ever since. Recently, as domestic polarization has deeply divided the US over debates of core American values, this vital part of the country's identity also comes undone. By investigating how this national role is disputed domestically, this research aims to investigate whether foreign policy matters of the US have been negatively affected by growing domestic polarization. As illustrated by the case of 2003 Iraq war, Republicans and Democrats were advocating for opposite strategies in the same interest of democracy promotion. Though such cross-party dispute over the appropriate approach is not the exception, this eroding consensus and the 2003 Iraq war debacle have fuelled a broader divide over a suitable global position of the US in a changing environment. This internal ideological conflict, coupled with many other factors that are not examined within the scope of this study, contributed to the rise of Donald Trump – whose presidency mainly fed on growing domestic polarization. During his presidency, Trump's foreign policy was in many ways a clearer break from decades of diplomatic tradition as he

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attempted to scale back the global commitment of the US. In contrast to the idea that politics stops at the water's edge, political polarization has transformed into a destructive force that wrecks the conduct of US foreign policy from within. This research concludes that severe polarization has negatively affected US foreign policy, as negative partisanship (1) wastes the limited resources allocated for foreign policy, (2) undermines America's credibility in the relations with global partners, (3) injures the functions of decision-making institutions, and (4) puts power in the hand of incompetent decision-makers.

Key words: polarization, partisanship, domestic role contestation theory, national role conception theory, second image theory

Introduction

When it comes to the United States' vision on global affairs, world history has proven that the idea of "American exceptionalism" is ingrained in the fabric of US foreign policy. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the new international order was in America's favor as it took the lead in sustaining a stable, democratic world, and retained the power to shape the external conditions in its own formula. At that moment, Americans across party lines both at home and abroad endorsed this strategy of global leadership with little to no opposition, even though identity politics had already fragmented domestic social cohesion to a great extent. Since then, attending to an extensive network of global missions has been the norm of US foreign policy. Concurring, from the outside, international community looks up to America for standards, as well as guidance in international relations. The world is so familiar with, and somewhat reliable on the US leadership that in cases where the State is slow to respond or take active measures, many would quickly jump to the conclusion that the superpower is in decline. In response to such reasoning, realists tend to argue that the grand strategy of global leadership itself is too idealist. In his book "The hell of good intentions", Stephen Walt (2018) contended that one reason behind America's foreign policy failures lays in the misguided strategy of liberal hegemony itself. Since the primacy position of the US allowed it to follow

reckless, ambitious plans without having to face any imminent dangers to national security, the foreign policy community has mistaken that as a cue for affirmation and had the leader role ingrained in their mind as the destined mission of America. Whether the post Cold War leadership role is the right strategy for America deserves a separate discussion. Hereby in this analysis, foreign policy failure refers to the inability to articulate a consistent idea on national role, and hence a coherent foreign policy strategy.

On the other hand, over the past decades, the country has shown that it is unmatched not only in terms of economic and military capacity, but also in the level of domestic political division that it has endured. Though polarization has been an inherited part of American history, many scholars contended that never before has it been this challenging to discuss non-partisan issue without having to overcome the hardening lines of identity politics. Not just about domestic values, Republicans and Democrats are increasingly divided over what constitutes an "American identity" on the global stage, including what it means to be a global leader.

In light of recent debates about the paralysis effects of growing political division and debates about American global leadership, this work examines the influence of domestic hyperpolarization on the ability of America to determine and pursue sound foreign policy strategy, particularly regarding its role as a global leader over the past thirty years. After a brief summary of the work's outline, the first chapter introduces the theoretical foundation of this research – domestic role contestation theory, which examines the way different national role conceptions are contested domestically before a final strategy is chosen. Follow suit will be an overview of America's identity as a global leader since the end of the Cold War, specifically in promoting democratic values and facilitating multilateral cooperation. Next, the foundation of polarization is laid out, as well as how American politics today comes to deeply polarized around different political identities and how this phenomenon has spilled over to the realm of foreign affairs. To examine how polarization manifests itself in the conduct of foreign policy, the next part will analyze how US roles are discussed during the long

course of America's entanglement in Iraq and during the Trump era. While in the first case the two parties were deeply divided over the same goal of democracy promotion, in the latter case the polarizing administration has diminished the bipartisan consensus of active global engagement altogether. Learning from these cases, the fourth chapter posits four negative effects that hyper-polarization inflicts on the process of US foreign policy decision-making. First, as opposing party tries to alienate their policy from each other, foreign policy must take up extra resources. Second, a country marked with deep division deals a blow to America's credibility as a global partner. Third, polarized institutions cannot facilitate optimal decision-making process, especially in halting unwise decisions. Finally, a divided electorate by the power of their presidential vote can indirectly encourages partisan policy choices.

The reason this work concentrates on polarization in the US can be attributed to a number of reasons. First of all, social segregation is best observed in countries where citizens are outspoken in securing their negative freedom to embrace whatever identities they wish for. Though rarely situated at the top of democracy indices, the US's "American dream" promises are still sold like hot cakes around the globe. It is where frequent news about thousands of people pouring out on the street to fight for the rights of their marginalized group often travels far and fast. Besides, due to its history woven with major waves of immigrants, the country has induced an environment conducive to identity tribalism, i.e., a society in which people, deepened by unique lived experience, tend to gravitate themselves towards isolated minor groups perceived to be competing with the others in a zero-sum game. On top of that, as the unconstrained position leaves America a lot of leeway in its maneuvers, it could offer a great opportunity to study the extent of partisan foreign policy.

Regarding contribution to the field of International Relations, by looking into how the US's foreign policy strategy is debated domestically, this study opens up the black box of national role conceptions theory that takes state's foreign policy as given and overlooks domestic role competition process. In other words, it emphasizes national identity in the making, rather than the sausage that is usually

taken as face value. At the same time, as this analysis seeks to examine how domestic conditions assert negative impacts on foreign policy approach, it also enriches the literature on Waltz's second image, i.e., how the states influence the international system.

Setting the Scene

Domestic role contestation – the theoretical framework

In 1970, by analyzing statements from policymakers, Holsti conducted research on the national conception that guides a country's external affairs actions, thereby laying the groundwork for national role studies in foreign policy. However, his line of reasoning is deemed as black boxing the state as it overlooks how the chosen national role competes with other options in the first place, i.e., the fact that a shared outlook does not always exist is ignored. Moreover, his research reasoning also implies a questionable assumption that political elites have the final say in foreign policy or at least have the capacity to shape public opinion at their will. Since individual preferences cannot be examined outside of his/her community, subsequent scholars in foreign policy have tried to expand the subjects of role perception beyond key political figures. Inter alia, focusing on how roles are contested/selected through domestic political process may offer great insight into how a deeply divided government may feed into a nation's foreign policy decision-making.

Reviewing the literature on national role conception theories, Brummer and Thies (2015) contended that legislature is the main site where role contestation occurs in parliamentary democracies. Bureaucratic processes usually eat deep into policy outcomes as opposition parties always attempt to align the proposed, or sometimes even already enacted, national role with their party ideology. This competition though inseparable from setting foreign affairs agenda, can be resolved by four popular tactics (Sarbin & Allen 1968, as cited in Brummer & Thies 2015), namely: changing the external conditions on which other alternative roles depend, diverting attention, altering the expectations for opposed roles, or

simply letting it slide due to inability or unwillingness of powerful actors. Under closer examination, the making of US foreign policy reflects all the processes of taking part in heated debates, the endeavor to win support for the proposed action drafted by one wing while invalidating the arguments made by the opposition, and then either bridging the difference or circumventing it altogether. Although in presidential democracy parliament does not have as much decision-making power in issues of foreign policy as the head of state, the US Congress still has great influence over foreign policy choices as it holds the power to approve treaties and diplomat nominees.

One frequently cited justification for deeming the elites as representatives of the masses is that they all draw their preferences from a shared culture or "social origin" (Abramson and Grillot 1996; Krotz 2001 as cited in Cantir & Kaarbo 2012). Yet this logic is directly challenged by the very nature of divisive identity politics which lives off distinct "lived experience" (Fukuyama 2018/2019, 94) particular to each group. Another shortcoming of the national role theory which is particularly detrimental to studying the situation in the US lies in their methodology of investigation. National roles are aggregated into one collection without sufficient attention to attributes such as identities of the speakers; or which subgroups they belong to, given that they are already distributed to a specific role, etc. This approach essentially "obscures evidence of any debates" and fails to inspect the extent to which changes in role conception are associated with a specific leadership style or grouping (Cantir & Kaarbo 2012, 9-10) – a problem which has gained great prominence during the Trump presidency.

Based on Brummer & Thies and Cantir & Kaarbo's work, this analysis examines the US internal political contestation for an appropriate American proposition on the global stage. The domestic struggle behind national role formulation is not only confirmed, but also heightened in a sharply polarized environment. The next chapters aim to challenge traditional premises that largely assume a broad horizontal-vertical consensus (i.e., respectively the harmony of elite-public and elite-elite or public-public) on foreign affairs, overlook all the other unchosen roles and the two-way interaction between ordinary people and political elites.

In specific, this study will inspect the process of role contestation over US long-haul involvement in Iraq, and during the presidency of Trump – whose term in office was marked with record partisanship and controversial foreign affairs statements. While the former case study shows how polarization means opposing parties would interpret the same national role in divergent manners, the latter unveils a more dangerous ramification of hyperpolarization when the underlying fundamentals of a country's script are rejected altogether. Maybe America is not in decline, it is just that the roles of the superpower has undergone major changes over the last three decades.

American national role conception since the end of Cold War

First of all, an established national identity is vital to a country's political life as it engineers physical security, efficient government, economic growth, wide-ranging scope of social trust, and a strong social safety net while reinforcing the idea of liberal democracy itself (Fukuyama 2018/2019, 108-110). By looking back and forward in the same angle, or "an inclusive sense of national identity" (Fukuyama 2018/2019, 108), the government and its people can coherently devote their limited resources to a collective effort, while enhancing their image on the global stage. After the two devastating World Wars and an extremely distressed rivalry between the biggest two superpowers during the Cold War, democracy once again championed to be the way forward. Fukuyama called it "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1992) as we have reached, or found, the final stage in human ideological evolution in America's idea of liberal democracy. At the same time, the fall of the communist bloc provided America with a rare opportunity to shape the world to their liking. Being the only country with the capacity and cultural influence to spread liberal principles, the US made it their responsibility to secure safeguard liberal principles and to sustain a peaceful international order. The grand strategy of liberal hegemony then transcended party lines and has been the default setting of US foreign policy ever since (Walt 2018, 18-19).

As part of that comprehensive strategy, democracy promotion has been a vital part in the national identity of the US since its foundation. Through the course of history, this diplomatic tradition has been central to US foreign policy decision-making (Monten 2005, 113-120), although domestic politics usually splits on how to act on this inherited role. To sum up this dispute, Monten recorded that there are generally two main opposing camps in America, namely – exemplarism and vindicationism. Advocates of the first roadmap contend that the US should promote democracy by being a good example itself rather than imposing an American ideal of democracy on others, therefore "close the gap between the ideals of the American Creed and the actual performance of U.S. political institutions" (Monten 2005, 124). On the contrary, supporters of vindicationism, which became prominent thanks to the unraveled position that America afforded after the Cold War, insisted that active measures are required because "any increase in the power or influence of the U.S. in world affairs generally results [...] in the promotion of liberty and human rights in the world." (Huntington, as cited in Monten 2005, 125). In the context of sharp polarization, political parties are now divided over these two main schools. Specifically, regarding the 2003 war in Iraq, the logic of vindicationism totally prevailed as it was the Republican administration who championed the political discourse with their missionary democratic building rhetoric.

Regarding multilateralism, America has soon recognized that its prosperity and security are conditional on its global commitment, hence "international organizations, and especially military alliances, were a critical element of American power" (Daalder & Lindsay 2018, 27). Since the unipolar moment made America the main architect of the new international order, almost all the US presidents have generally been proactive in facilitating multilateral cooperation. The Bush doctrine for the war on terror was also based on this reasoning. Enshrined in the National Security Strategy of 2002, the doctrine said that being the unchallenged power granted the US the chance to "extend the benefits of freedom across the globe". At multiple occasions, Bush had also implied his ambition to maintain a unipolar order with no competitor to the US,

and the intervention in Iraq was partly designed to showcase America's power (Rielly 2008).

For the time being, American capacity is still a superior superpower in many ways, and its pivotal role in sustaining the current international order is undeniable. The question then is, what is the starting point for arguing that the US is retreating from its global commitment when democracy promotion and international cooperation still tops the country's foreign affairs agenda? As we shall see in the following parts, the answer lies partly in the domestic state of dysfunctional fragmentation. The majority of Americans still perceive global leader to be their national role, but growing partisanship has significantly re-structured its substance.

Identity politics and polarization

What still holds true from Holsti's 1970 seminal work on national role theory is that conception starts with individual conviction. If we were to look beyond the circle of policy leaders, the first question to begin with is what constitutes one's perception. From the 1960s social movements, the deducible answer has a lot to do with identity groups because people are treated not by their individual characteristics, but the assumptions assigned to their group (Fukuyama 2018/2019, 106). For that reason, humans tend to think of their interests in terms of their group's interests and in return identity groups start to act as a collective force to advance and secure its members' wellbeing. Whereas identity has been a crucial part of human nature since the dawn of time, the hardening and sometimes clashing lines of identity groups only came much later. However, the latter's evolution has been much more rapid, and along the way induced the lethal form of identity politics that we are observing more frequently nowadays. Tracing the course of history and the work of major philosophers from Socrates, Adeimantus, Plato, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, etc., Fukuyama (2018/2019) located 1) "the seat of today's identity politics" in *thymos* – the third part of the soul craving for public recognition (according to Socrates); 2) "a critical stepping stone to modern idea of identity" in Rosseau's distinction brought about by

modernization between one's inner self (true identity) and that of the society (*i.e.,* a shift from *amour de soi* – self-love that predates the creation of society to *amour prope* – self-esteem that comes from other's recognition and approval); and 3) universal recognition of everyone's moral freedom (Fukuyama 2018/2019, 37-41). The interplay of these factors means that in modern society, everyone with their freedom to determine their moral grounds, seeks for others' approval not only to satisfy their inherited yearning but also to earn the recognition for a superior status, as well as their deserved respect.

Identity politics gives way to polarization when instead of several fragmented groups, identities are sorted into two opposing camps. To be more specific, polarization represents the tension between two distinct values systems in which members view their opponents in an "us versus they" rhetoric while their standpoint is strictly confined by their group-identification. Polarization per se is not an unwanted disease (Cholbi 2019). Indeed, it could expose the weakness of either party, provides a floor for opposing parties to sit down and envision their future in the same direction. On the other hand, polarization can pose serious threat to democratic processes once intense antagonism pushes identity groups towards extreme positions that they are unable to tolerate opposing ideas. Polarized politics will then become a menace as it fuels constant political gridlocks, cross-party resentment, violence, and distrust towards the others – which forms the essence of negative partisanship. In other words, negative political polarization is when politics of recognition has given in to politics of resentment, fostering an environment in which people choose a stance that distances themselves the furthest from their opponents rather than taking a decision that best align with their beliefs. Reaching a bipartisan consensus, or at least a compromise would therefore be much more challenging. As the following part shows, negative polarization between two major political parties has deeply fractured the substantive cohesion of American political life.

Polarization in the USA

Generally, one can identify themselves in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, economic condition, education background, whether they believe in the benefits of a free market, or the role of the state, or a woman's right to determine whatever happens to her body, etc. The list goes on and on, as there is actually no cap on the number of identities one can take. In the US, political identity, as a social identity, is the strongest and probably the most important form of identity (Klein 2020). Under the climate of hyper-polarization, supporters of different political parties are not only less unwilling to cross the aisle for a dialogue with their opponents, but also more hostile towards the others and more likely to perceive their rivals' moral ground as unacceptable. This situation of binary identity politics leaves us at the malady of today's political polarization in America.

First of all, America is not the first country to experience political polarization, however, it is the only established democracy that endures a destructive level of polarization for such a prolonged period of time (McCoy & Press 2022). A working paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research concludes that since the 1980s, affective polarization (to have positive feelings towards members of the same group but negative feelings towards non-members) in the US has risen much more significantly than the other eleven OCED countries in the study[2]. Besides the fact that political conflict is an inherited characteristic of federalism, the negative effects of polarization are particularly perilous in the US as it feeds on three cleavages of US society, namely the racial divide, dispute around the role of government, and different religious beliefs (Carothers 2019). In the same manner, after examining the history of political polarization among elites and the public alike in the US, Abramowitz (2019) claimed that drastic changes in society have deeply divided Americans into two opposing wings that can be alternatively described as "a racial divide between a shrinking white

[2] Switzerland, France, Denmark, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, Australia, Britain, Norway, Sweden, and (West) Germany.

majority and a rapidly growing nonwhite minority, an ideological divide over the proper role and size of government, and a cultural divide over values, morality, and lifestyles". (Abramowitz 2019, 17).

The early symptoms of polarization in the US arose in the 1960s-1970s when party affiliations started to become major dividing forces as parties began to align their policies along different identities. At the early stage of the Cold War, heightened tension with the Communist bloc rallied Americans around the flag, forging a Cold War consensus on containing the Soviet and avoiding a nuclear disaster. However, this consensus did not last very long as the US at home was soon bombarded with overlapping waves of destructive forces. Heating debates concerning the US government, US "unchallenged" power, the American identity, and the established social norms (especially on women and gay rights) had respectively fueled "a crisis of legitimacy", "a crisis of confidence", "a crisis of identity", and "a crisis of equality" throughout this period (Kruse & Zelizer 2019). First stop, the anti-Vietnam-war movement and Watergate scandal added great insult to Washington's competence, creating a widening ideological divide that has not stopped disintegrating the country ever since. That the economy fell prey to stagflation and unemployment during the 1970s, coupled with mounting concerns about the prospects of the US energy dependence triggered by the embargoes imposed by Middle East countries, particularly questioned the extent of US confidence. The American crisis of identity also emerged when the cultural divide boosted by waves of immigrants ran in parallel with growing cultural nationalism as different minorities embraced their ethnicity while disregarding the "American" identity. Along this process, various social movements unearthed the inequalities that ran deep in the country's cultural life. In response to this difficult time, identity groups naturally found refuge in either the Republic or the Democratic party whilst the two also started retreating to opposing wings. That is to say, issue-based division has transformed itself into political polarization between the conservative and the progressive (Carothers 2019).

Today, party affiliation, i.e. being whether a Republican or Democrat (political identity), is particularly relevant in this discussion. Although a great majority of

Americans refuse to affiliate with a political party as it may dismiss neutrality in their judgements, they are likely to lean towards either one of the two major parties. A report by Pew Research Center in 2019 showed that of 38% adults who identify themselves as independents, 13% of them are lean-Republicans and 17% lean toward the Democratic party (Laloggia 2019). Gradually, "as various types of identities have become "stacked" on top of people's partisan identities", the partition wall between them has been continuously reinforced (Dimock & Wike 2020), so much so that the division among voters is not just about difference viewpoints, as a matter of fact, it is a debate over the core American values.

Since partisan polarization has coincided with many polarization processes along the lines of race, gender, religion, ideology, etc., one's political identification in today's time can tell a lot about themselves. In his recent book "Why we're polarized", Ezra Klein recorded that in the twentieth century, the widening partisan gap between the Republican and Democrats seems apparent to even inattentive voters that one does not have think too much to choose a party whose agenda aligns with their vision because "The choice between the two parties is much, much clearer." (Klein 2020, 28). A typical supporter of the Democratic Party nowadays tends to support racial equality, active government role, gay marriage, and abortion rights. Republican supporters, on the contrary, very likely to espouse the exact opposite values. Examining the progress of political polarization since the early 1950s, Abramowitz perfectly captured the essence of today's distinct electorate bases as follows:

> "*Today's Democratic electoral base is dominated by nonwhites and secular white liberals who view Republican politicians and voters alike as religious zealots, racial bigots, and defenders of multinational corporations and the wealthy. The Democratic base is pro-government, pro-choice on abortion, and pro-gay-marriage. Today's Republican electoral base is dominated by socially and economically conservative white voters who viewed Barack Obama as an extreme liberal or socialist and his supporters as unpatriotic moochers who would rather*

> *live off of government handouts than work for a living. The Republican base is anti-government, antichoice on abortion, and opposed to gay marriage."* (Abramowitz 2019, 109)

At the same time, feeling thermometers have shown that partisan antipathy is also on the rise as the number of supporters who hold negative feelings towards the other party has intensified over the last decades. In 1994, about one in five Republicans had a "very unfavorable" view on the Democratic party, but by 2016 the share increased to 58%. Similarly, Democrats' negative feelings with Republicans increased by 39% from 1994 to 2016 (Pew Research Center 2016). This growing aversion indicates that Americans think the other party "poses a much sharper threat to [their] vision of a good society" than in the past (Klein 2020, 26-27).

Polarization has been reported to also fracture these parties from within. A survey conducted by the Chicago Council in 2019 showed that in the Democratic Party for example, Liberal and Moderate Democrats hold divergent views on domestic as well as foreign policy (Benjamin 2019). Compared to self-identified moderate or conservative Democrats, liberal counterparts are less uneased with nuclear, more concerned with climate change and domestic polarization (by 90% versus 63% and 59% versus 41% respectively), more in favor diplomatic solutions rather than military means in international affairs, less likely to believe in American exceptionalism and support deterrent measures against immigrants (though the two groups are still generally pro-immigration). These six trends continue to divide the Democrat party till now – said a similar Chicago Council survey in 2022 (Sullivan & Smeltz 2022). However, due to its limited scope, this analysis will focus only on the growing partisan between the general Democratic and the Republic parties.

As political identity is the basis on which legislative agenda comes into being, while parties are deeply divided over the ideals of an American image, foreign policy too cannot escape the influence of domestic hyper-polarization. Since the moment ideological polarization took root in American society, it took about

four decades to divide the substance of foreign policy to the same level of domestic policy (Jeong & Quirk 2017). In recent decades, this realm has witnessed an eroding consensus between the two parties, both among elites and the public.

The departure from traditional US foreign policy consensus

Concerning the formulation of policy, Walter Lippmann contended that: "In foreign relations, as in all other relations, a policy has been formed only when commitments and power have been brought into balance" (Kupchan & Trubowitz 2007). "Power" in this term can be interpreted as material capacity, while "commitment" means the nation's overall willingness to execute the policy or as in the case of American politics, it is essentially the bipartisan consensus. However, over the debates of America core values, the Republicans and the Democrats are also diverging in their views of the country's global identity, diminishing the bipartisan consensus[3] on which decision-makers used to rely on for a shared foreign affairs outlook. Without such a cohesive commitment across party lines, the conduct of US foreign policy has been facing many challenges.

Concerning the relation between domestic cohesion and foreign policy, the notion "politics stops at the water's edge"[4] implies that despite any political disputes within its border, a country is always a united unit in interaction with other global actors. Yet, several opinion polls have indicated an unprecedented level of political polarization both within the elite and public especially in a number of key foreign policy issues. For example, in a 1998 survey, migration was an area of bipartisan consensus but 21 years fast forward, it became the strongest force driving two big parties further into opposite poles (Figure 1). Moreover, Republicans and Democrats are also in stark disagreement over climate change. A Chicago Council survey showed that whereas 77% of

[3] It is worth to note that bipartisan consensus on foreign policy rarely existed in total terms, but across party lines there used to be broad agreement about what the US should do in international affairs.

[4] The phrase is allegedly coined by Michigan Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg.

Democrats in 2021 perceived climate change to be one of the most critical threats, only 23% of Republicans think it is a very important concern (Figure 2).

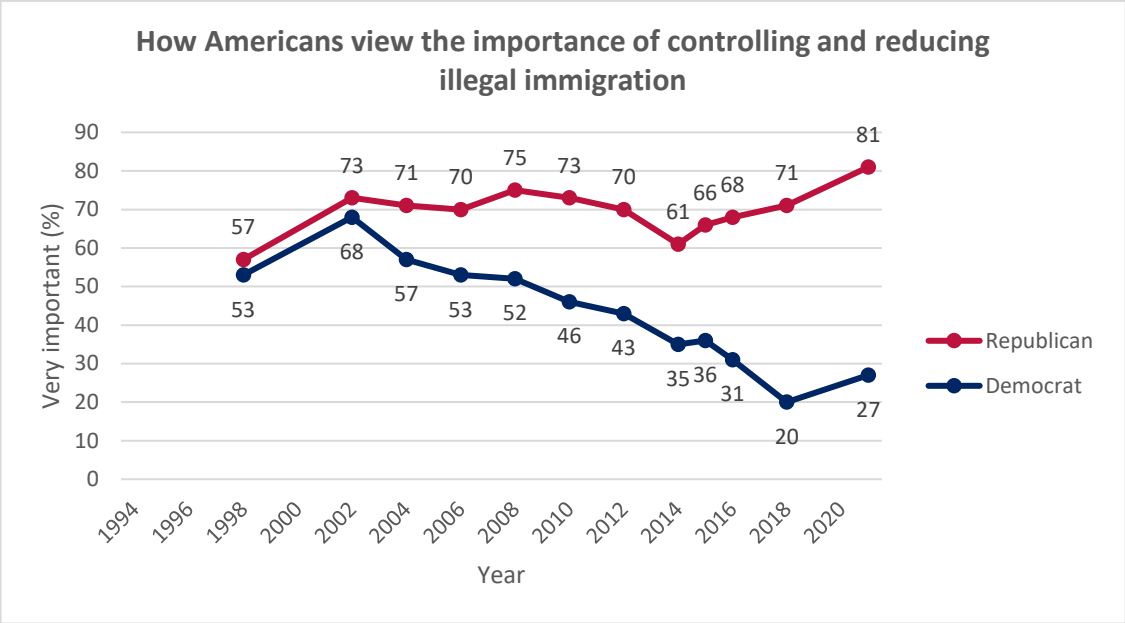

Figure 1: How Americans view the importance of controlling and reducing illegal immigration (Data from Smeltz et al. 2021)

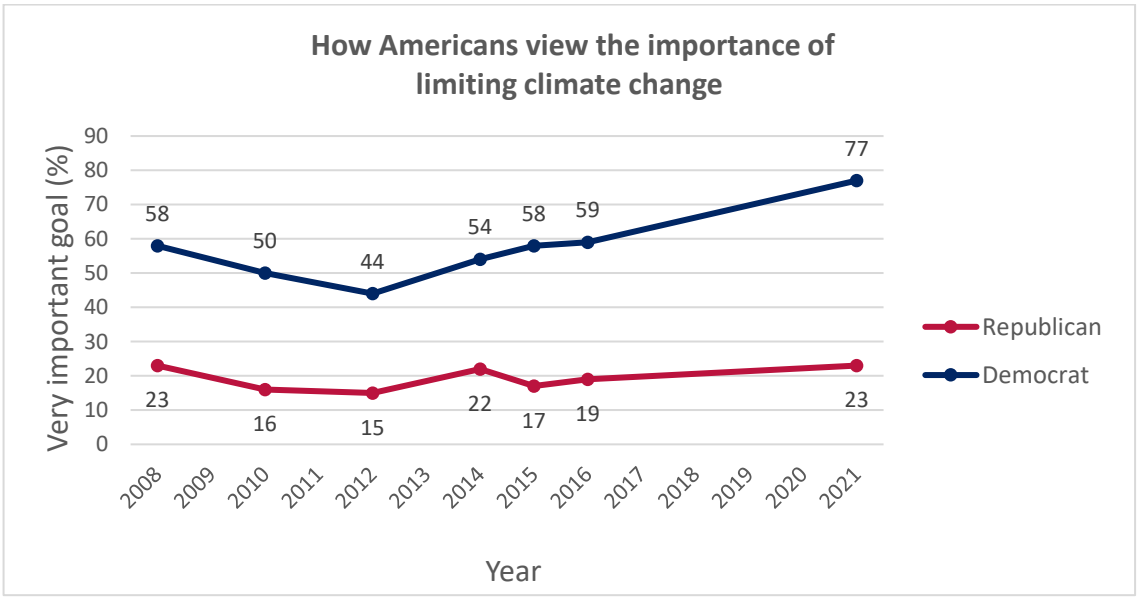

Figure 2: How Americans view the importance of limiting climate change (Data from Smeltz et al. 2021)

If there were no common ground on which parties anchor their position, US foreign policy would be in serious trouble. One of the few areas that still receive constant major support across party lines is the active role of the US in global affairs. Since the end of the Cold War, the two parties have maintained a broad consensus of over 55% with regards to this foreign policy goal. In 2021, about six in ten Americans endorse an active US international engagement (Figure 3). A closer look at this trend, however, would show that each party actually has distinct visions of how to attend to this role. In 2021, albeit both endorsed continued global engagement and active leadership, Republicans generally favored the use of military power. Most of them (74%) said that US military superiority is a crucial element for America foreign policy to execute its desired goals, while only less 41% of Democrats agreed so (Figure 4). Alternatively, a large number of Democrats stood up for multilateral strategies and lay their faith still on UN mechanism (Smeltz et al. 2014). In 2020, the two parties continued to retreat further away from each other along this line as the Democratic Party still embraced an internationalist approach that highlighted close cooperation with other countries through international organizations and agreements, while Republicans in stark contrast, have reformulated American global commitment in unilateral terms that are more in line with their "American first" attitude.

In a nutshell, Americans overall still endorse a world leader role, but because of growing negative polarization, Republicans and Democrats are interpreting this role in conflicting formulas. While a large proportion of Republicans prefer the use of military forces and unilateral response, many Democrats advocate for diplomatic solutions and multilateralism. As a result, a sound policy is one that receives broad bipartisan support, and to do that its justification must appeal to both parties. For example, the war in Afghanistan was (successfully) executed because it was in tune with "an unsentimental concern for the national interest, which appealed to Republicans, and yet it also enjoyed multilateral support, which appealed to Democrat" (Beinart 2008, 158). As we shall see in the case of Bush's long war in Iraq, a policy will also go badly if the initial cross-party support steadily eroded during its implementation.

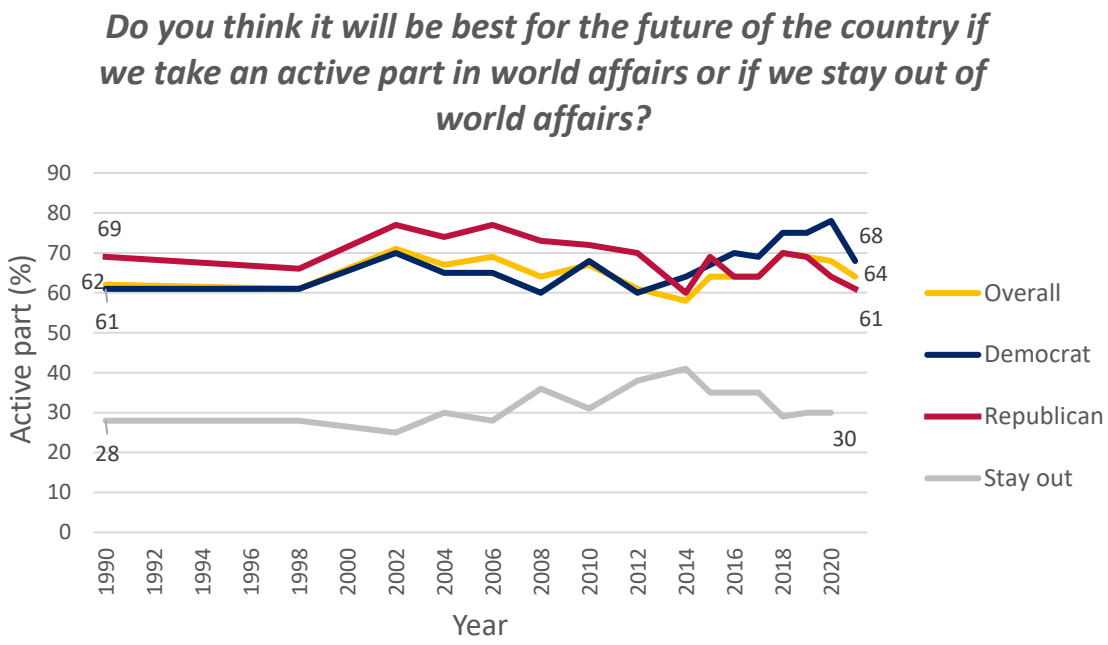

Figure 3. How Americans think about US's active role in world affairs (Data from Smeltz et al. 2021)

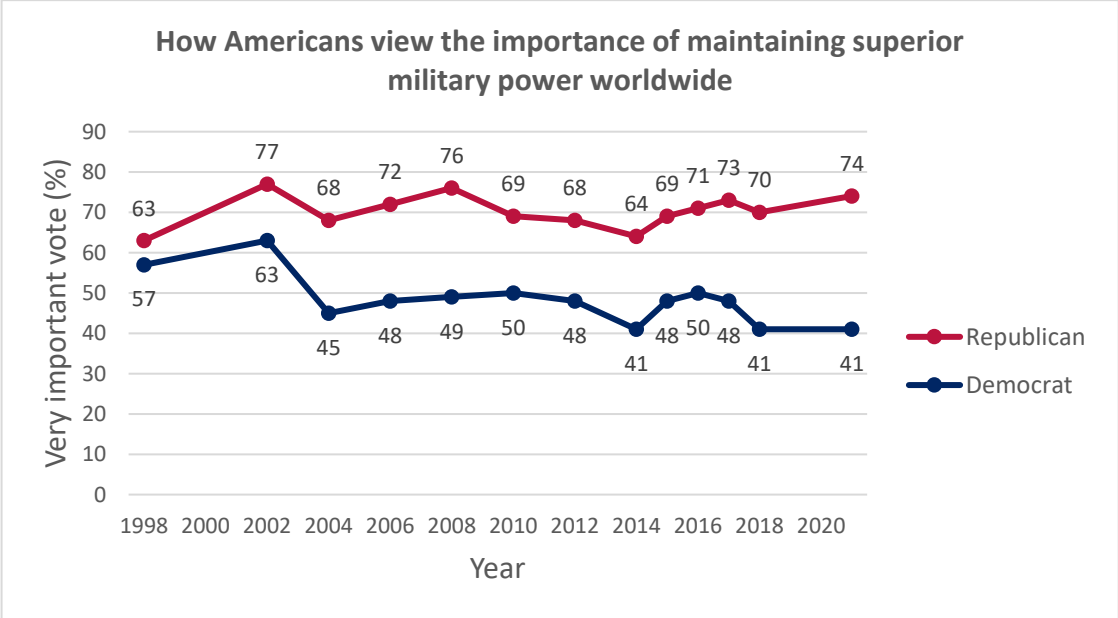

Figure 4: How Americans view the importance of maintaining superior military power worldwide (Data from Smeltz et al. 2021)

Domestic National Role Contestation in A Highly Polarized Climate

The war in Iraq – when two wings are divided over the same goal

By mapping the trends of polarization in foreign policy versus domestic policy, Jeong & Quirk's study (2017) found that events in the 1980s, including the foreshadow of Soviet collapse, have sped up the process of partisan conflict. It also showed that in 2001, ideological divergence in the realm of foreign policy started to precede that of domestic policy, and the 2003 war in Iraq marked the most polarized foreign affair in US history since the 1960s to 2009 (Jeong & Quirk 2017, 70). Since the inception until the demise of the war, there appeared to be less and less consensus on a coherent strategy every time the issue surfaced on the political scene. US foreign policy with regards to Iraq therefore offers a good case study to examine how domestic political division can spill over to the realm of foreign policy. Specifically, the way the Bush administration handled the Iraq question provided the typical example of what could happen when a country is split over how to execute the same foreign policy goal.

Initially, although Bush enjoyed a rally around the flag moment right after the 9/11 attacks, his decision to wage war with Iraq did not sit well with Democratic supporters. It is not the case that Democrats had never supported the use of military force abroad. There was an overwhelming majority that supported the military campaign against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991. At the end of the Persian Gulf War, 72% of Americans thought that the liberation of Kuwait had been worth the loss of lives and other costs (Newport 2003). Indeed, the fact that Bush senior managed to gain a broad consent for the war was frequently deployed to condemn his son's presidency in a decade to come. To forestall to Democrats' criticism, the George W. Bush Administration framed the military intervention in terms of democracy promotion. Making use of the flaring

national sentiment after 9/11, the Republicans also easily sidelined any opposition and made the case for waging war. Throughout the debates, (Democrat) war critics were frequently condemned by Republicans for being soft on matters of national security. The underlying reason behind downgrading opponents by national sentiment is Republicans' concern that other international actors who opposed the war would take off this rhetoric and delegitimize their rationale of "preemptive war" in international forum (V & eHei 2003). Moreover, both sides understood that appearing soft in this case would put the party at disadvantage in the coming election. Or in DeLay's words: "When you are constantly criticizing the president, you are also criticizing the 70 percent of people supporting him" (V & eHei 2003). For fear of losing political strength, the Democrats went along with Bush's plan of punishing Iraq.

Although there were debates between the two parties in the run-up to the invasion in March, but multiple opinions polls throughout this period showed that "most of these doubts evaporated once the bombs began failing" (Smith & Lindsay 2003). Right before the war, public opinion was permissive to a great extent as they would support the president's decision to go to war but were not proactively asking for it. A poll right after the invasion indicated that this "movable middle" had shifted in favor of the Republican president as support for the invasion reached the highest record of 71% when the war broke out in March 2003 (Oliphant 2018). Although Democrats did waver when Bush decided to halt diplomatic efforts with the US-led coalition of the willing and delivered an ultimatum for Saddam Hussein on March 17th, more than half (53%) of them still hold that the military intervention was justified in the first few weeks. In the early stage, Americans' general optimism about the military intervention had significantly boosted approval ratings of both Congress and Bush. In order to maintain such sweeping support, Bush's administration executed a massive misinformation campaign to convince Americans as well as the international community that among other things, Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, and that Saddam Hussein was linked with al Qaeda. The increasing partisanship meant that even when the government had officially

conceded their claims on these justifications, a great majority of Republicans, in contrast to a shrinking Democratic base, continued to believe that weapons of mass destruction was found at the time of the war (Jacobson 2010, 38).

Towards the end of 2004, there were less and less reasons for Democrats to cross the aisle to support Bush. Several casualty reports and events took place that severely undermined the legitimacy of this preemptive rhetoric. The magnetic force of partisanship took hold, and Democrats retreated to their own principles and increasingly opposed the war. The fact that Democrats took control of both the House and Senate in 2006 mid-term election, was a clear embodiment of the shifting consensus. Figure 5 below shows that the support for Bush's invasion plan was more or less shrinking during the period of 2003 to 2008 among the Republicans and the Democrats despite following different rates (Democrat's disapproval ratings fell more sharply). This unified position, however, was only short-lived because since Obama took office in 2008, the two parties only went in opposite directions.

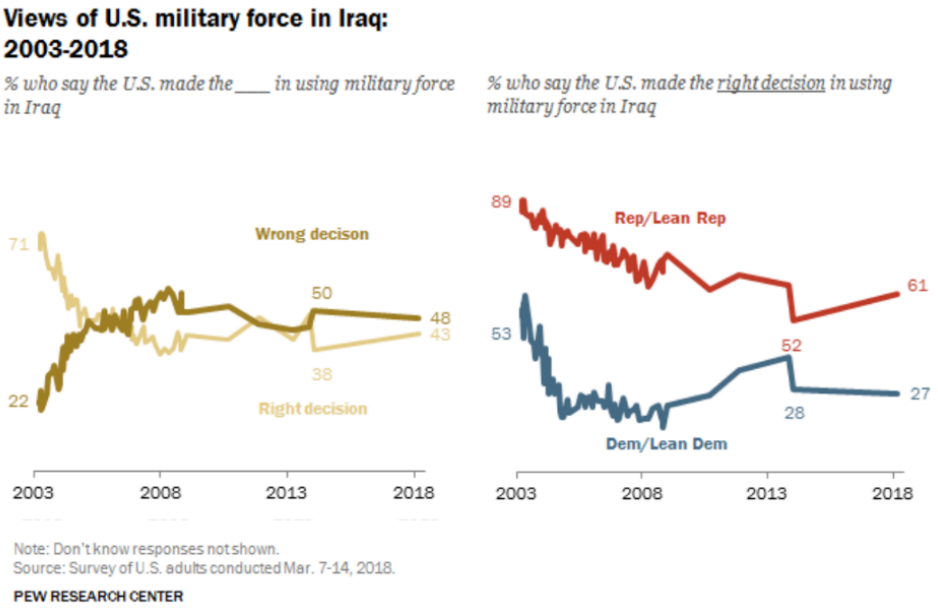

Figure 5: How Americans view the use of US military force in Iraq from 2003-2018 (Oliphant, 2018)

Needless to say, Iraq was the bone of contention in the electoral campaign of 2008. Preceding the election day, a public survey done in April 2007 by Pew Research Center showed that both parties voters deemed the war in Iraq the most crucial factor affecting their primary vote (38% of Democratic voters and 31% of Republican voters) (Pew Research Center 2007). The results also reveal that there were nearly as many voters believing that the chance of terrorist attack at home would be higher if US troops stay in for a few years (41%), as those who claimed the chance would be higher when the US withdraws and leaves an unstable regime behind (45%). A sharp intra-ideological divide was also revealed as among Republicans' voters, about 44% preferred continuity with Bush's handling of Iraq, while 49% wished for a different approach.

In general, George W. Bush's decision to go to war with Iraq left lasting damage to America's political health. As one the most divisive issues in modern US history, debates over the performance of Bush's administration polarized the parties just as much as during the Vietnam war (Beinart 2008 as cited in Jeong & Quirk 2017), or even more so with an over-50-point gap between Republicans and Democrats between summer 2004 and early 2009 (Jacobson 2010, 31). Increasing criticism of the war haunted the Republican president until the last day of his second term in office as the number of Americans who agreed with the USmilitary intervention in Iraq steadily eroded across party lines. Fifteen years after its outbreak, the US public was almost equally divided over the war in Iraq – 43% still held that using military force was a correct move, while 48% condemned the strategy. In 2018, the political divide was clearly evident as among the 43% of Americans who insisted that the US's military intervention in Iraq was legitimate, more than 60% was Republicans/lean-Republicans as compared to only 27% Democrats/lean-Democrats.

These numbers clearly reflected the contradicting ways of what each party perceived as "democracy promotion". While the Republican deployed the language of national security to retain strong support for the adoption of military forces, the Democrats were uneasy with the unilateral attack. It can be concluded from this case that although growing domestic polarization could not press the

administration to put a halt to the long-haul operation straight away, it definitely signaled the next president to make ending the war a priority. Indeed, by the time Obama came to office, the general consensus over the war in Iraq had already eroded. Its lasting damage to America's political life, however, compounded with the soaring pressure of the 2007 financial meltdown struck a burning question that cuts across party lines: whether the country's global commitment is still sustainable, or should it start to take on more restraint approach (Deudney & Ikenberry 2021). As the country was still looking for a common ground to replace its old, eroded consensus, this question further divides Americans along the line of party ideologies. Then in 2016, a Republican supporter emerged on the political scene with a clear vision in his head of freeing America off its global commitment altogether.

The Trump era – when America's foreign policy tradition comes undone

In the case of Donald Trump, we observed how a president elected by a deeply divided electorate not only finished his term with a country most divided since the Civil War (Brownstein 2021) but also went against decades of American diplomatic tradition. Recalling the intervention in 1991 Gulf War, Joseph Nye (1991) rightly commented that one wrong but severely consequential message that Americans could get from the event is, among other things, that the US had the ability to "police the world alone or that Americans can embark on moral crusades to impose their ways on other peoples, or if they neglect the pressing agenda of domestic issues" (Nye 1991, para. 33). This message seems to resonate very well with the Trump era, as his determination to demolish the US national role as a democracy guarantor and leader of multilateral cooperation really sabotaged the US in every nook and cranny.

Although Republicans specifically prefer a unilateral rather than multilateral approach, the majority of them still see the benefits of international cooperation for the country's economic growth and national security (Smeltz et al. 2021). To Trump, however, the GOP's nationalist, isolationist idea reached new heights as

he openly condemned many of America's key partners for free riding on America's contribution in international forums. As a result, Trump presidency was more or less a chaotic period for the foreign policy community worldwide. For 25 years, before the businessman entered the Oval Office as the 45th President, greatest allies of the US rarely had to question their diplomatic relations and America's support for multilateral cooperation. All US presidents, since the Cold War at least, had shared a consensus with regards to the huge benefits of being a leader rather than a follower on the global stage. As a global hegemon, "*It's up to us, through action and example, to sustain the international order that's expanded steadily since the end of the Cold War, and upon which our own wealth and safety depend.*", read the inauguration letter Obama left for Trump. Before he came to power, there were times when his predecessors abandoned some international treaties in the name of America's interests, but Trump was distinct in that game as instead of thoroughly reviewing the merits of each agreement, he was trying to get the US out of its external liberal duties altogether as he reconceptualized the US global position. At multiple occasions, he publicly denounced important international treaties that are not only central to America's interests and national security, but also the corner stones of multilateral cooperation. Among other things, he had called the Iran nuclear deal "an embarrassment", the Paris climate accord "very unfair", and the Trans-Pacific Partnership "a rape of our country" (Burns 2020). As Trump tried to scale down the foreign commitments of the US, he withdrew America from an unprecedented number of treaties and international organizations, many of which were the results of very laborious negotiations (1. Table).

President	Year	Name	Type
Clinton	1995	Pan-American Railway Congress Association	International Organization
	1995	World Tourism Organization	International Organization
	1996	United Nations Industrial Development Organization	International Organization

Bush	2002	1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty	Treaty
	2005	Optional Protocol of Vienna Convention on Consular Relations	Treaty
Trump	2017	Paris Agreement	Executive Agreement
	2018	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)	Political Commitment
	2018	United Nations Human Rights Council	International Organization
	2018	Universal Postal Union	International Organization
	2018	Treaty of Amity with Iran	Treaty
	2018	Optional Protocol of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations	Treaty
	2018	UNESCO	International Organization
	2019	1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty	Treaty

1. Table: US withdrawals (or Declared intent to Withdrawal) from international organizations, and treaties, 1991-2019 (Cooley & Nexon 2020, 169)

From the start, the ideological departure was clear and alarming even within his own party. Early on, prominent figures of the GOP signed an open letter voicing their concerns about Trump's compatibility as presidential candidate[5] based on the red flags they found in his value-system: his inconsistency in viewing American role in the world, his aggressive and undiplomatic language, inappropriate sentiments towards their closed allies, etc. Then five months later, in August 2016, another fifty top-tier Republican foreign policy and security experts signed a second open letter arguing that temperament and inexperience made him unfit for the job. The letter reads, "*Indeed, we are convinced that he would be a dangerous President and would put at risk our country's national security and well-being*". What we could learn from the 2016 "unexpected" presidential election result is that: despite the poor support of his own party and the lack of temperament he displayed throughout the campaign trail, he became the 45th president thanks to

[5] Open letter on Donald Trump from GOP national security leaders (2016).

the fact that his explicit rhetoric could feed on the growing affective polarization environment (Abramowitz & McCoy 2018). This is one of the ways that domestic polarization can stream into the process of foreign policy decision-making. Though might be short of political knowledge and easily exposed to political manipulation, the public has the power to choose who will wear one of the most important hats in today's international order.

Many scholars contended that it is better to consider Trump as a symbol rather the cause of hyper-polarization since political division was already underway for a long time when he came into power, and that it would take more than an unexperienced diplomat to completely reverse the course of America diplomatic tradition (Walt 2019). A survey in 2020 also found that in some areas such as trade, alliances, abroad bases, etc., there is little correlation between Trump's view and that of the Republican mass, as well as Republican foreign policy leaders (Kafura et al. 2020). In other words, though Trump's attitudes undermined the core tenets of US foreign policy to a great extent, Trump himself did not completely break down the bipartisan consensus in both the public and foreign policy community. As Trump withdrew the US from several critical commitments, Americans continued their strong support for multilateral cooperation and specifically the country's alliance system. However, what is noteworthy about Trump's presidency is that it illustrates how when a polarizing figure is in charge of such senior position in foreign policy decision-making, political partisanship can disseminate its poison at multiple junctures not only in the domestic sphere but also in interactions with other global partners.

How Hyperpolarization Gets in The Way Of Foreign Policy

As the spill-over effect of polarization into the making of a coherent foreign policy strategy is already established in the debates about Bush's Iraq war and Trump's America first foreign policy outlook, this chapter will examine the main ties of domestic polarization and foreign policy outcome. Although these effects are observed in both cases, what transpired during the Trump's presidency,

however, offered a clearer picture to study the negative effects of polarization on foreign policy. This is because by the time he came into power, America was already greatly entrenched by the accumulative damage of the war in Iraq, the financial crisis, together with multiple social movements that cut through the core of the Republican bases. Most importantly, the man was not only an embodiment, but he was also a catalyst of political polarization as actively feeds on the widening ideological, cultural cleavages to rally his base. Therefore, for this part, most evidence will be drawn from Trump's foreign policy choices and diplomacy conducts, with reference to that of Bush where applicable. Overall, sharp political divide has made decision-making more time-consuming as well as arduous, damaged the country's international credibility, corrupted important institutions, and put power in the hands of deviant figures. Alternatively, in the words of William J. Burns: "policies lurch between parties, commitments expire at the end of each administration, institutions are politicized, and disagreements are tribal." (Burns 2020). These effects are not only self-reinforcing, but also closely interconnected with one another.

Polarization depletes resources in foreign policy

Polarization itself is a laborious, exhaustive, costly process to both domestic and foreign policy. First of all, the fact that polarization can stimulate choices which markedly derails foreign policy from its present track reveals a challenge of resources allocation. This is because both the Republican and the Democratic parties wish to adopt a foreign policy strategy that is in line with their ideology which tend to go in opposite direction under the effect of growing partisanship. Therefore, with every change of party division in the government, polarization expects to cause a disrupt in the foreign policy script of the US. Tracing back to the examples above, it is divided ideology that drew Bush's administration to stretch the war in Iraq, but it is also the pressure of stark division that elected Obama to office so that he could fulfil his promise to withdraw troops from Iraq. Trump fed on the widening political divide to rally his base and withdraw the US from a number of international treaties, trying to make Obama's legacy

"wound up on the trash heap" (Burns 2020). Shortly after that, however, the deep division infused by his leadership style endowed the 2020 Democrat candidate with the mass's hope to restore the US global role. Once Trump was ousted of office, the Biden-Harris administration quickly took action to rebuild US global standing. Besides, the new government can also make direct changes to the budget dedicated for diplomatic activities, as in the case of Tillerson's proposal to reform the State Department by cutting its funding and downsizing a great number of experienced staff (Blinken 2017). When Americans are deeply divided, it seems that US foreign policy has made very little progress with all these moving back and forth. Unless polarization is under control so that opposing parties can more or less see down the same road, the vicious cycle of allocating more resources to overturn an opposition's legacy and allocating just as many resources to secure one's own policy trajectory would likely to persist.

Secondly, hyper political polarization renders long accepted traditions and well-established institution which are meant to optimize foreign policy decision-making obsolete. As mentioned above, the Republicans and the Democrats despite radical changes along the lines of political ideologies still largely concede to some thin consensus (e.g., an active US international engagement). In order to ensure a coherent strategy across changes of government, a number of foreign policy norms have been established over time. When polarization sets in, these traditions usually come under attack of the emerging polarized forces whose antagonism with the opponent makes them lose sight of the underlying thread. As party breaks away from the traditional consensus and do things their own way, a cost must incur for trials and errors. In the case of Bush junior, his decision to act alone without a UN resolution under the reasoning of "preemptive war" set a dangerous precedent to the very order they were trying to sustain. As in the case of Trump's abdication of global leadership, the cost for the lessons learnt is yet fully unfolded. However, there are other instances of his diplomatic conduct that had incurred some visible blowback and the "chaotic" transition period of Trump's administration in 2016 was such a case. In their book "The Empty Throne" (2018), Daalder & Lindsay recorded that the

president-elect's team was too eager to take office and to make America great again as soon as possible that there was little to no contact between the old and new influx of staff in the White House during the presidential transition period. This transition period is indeed originally planned to prepare the incoming administration with all necessary briefings and technical support so that there is as little delay as possible when the handover officially takes place. Consequently, Trump's first days in office was marked with chaotic, undiplomatic conducts. For instance, he took his congratulatory calls in random order without going through the State Department Operations Center and denied getting any brief on issues that should be addressed in his first official conversation with important allies, despite of his lack of expertise in foreign policy. Such undiplomatic conduct was the very first hint of how his administration would disregard many other traditions of US foreign policy.

On the other hand, the chaos that Trump revealed during his presidency indeed exposed two flawed assumptions undermining the importance of the international and domestic infrastructure on which the American prosperity depends (Cooley & Nexon 2020). Exiting from the liberal order altogether therefore will not only do no good to but also harm the roots of prosperity the US is enjoying. Contrary to nationalist wisdom, military capabilities alone cannot secure the country, the international liberal order US is sustaining, in fact, also reinforces US security in return. It is the substantial independences generated by "an extensive web of alliances and partnerships, which itself rests on a variety of routine cooperative practices; transnational networks that include bureaucracies, diplomats, and military personnel; and other infrastructure" that do the trick (Cooley & Nexon 2020, 179). Put differently, for any competitors that wish to take over US position, they need to establish such an extensive network. Trump's decision to withdraw American engagement therefore took huge intangible cost not only during his presidency but also his successor's. The other erroneous assumption concerns underinvestment in the domestic domain, particularly via tax cut and weakened safety nets. Because the public is closer to domestic politics, political polarization always takes its toll on public policy first before

spilling over into foreign affairs. If domestically the divided public is deeply discontent with the government, any ventures beyond the country's border are more likely to be considered a waste of resources. Without public support, as in the end of the war in Iraq, foreign policy pursuits may face fatal consequences. Therefore, pivoting attention away from diplomatic relations and domestic cohesion, which Trump and Bush both did, does more harm than good to American foreign policy. If anything, they were drawing resources away from America.

Last but not least, as political parties in deeply polarized society increasingly retreat themselves to opposing camps, they need to go through an internal struggle to re-define their ideologies – a process that not only takes up lots of precious time but also very likely facilitates further intra-party division. A country that is deeply baffled with deep division will then unavoidably call into question their reliability on the global stage.

A country fuelled with deep division casts doubts in the eyes of their alliances

The fact that Republicans drew the patriotic card to shut down any possible critics from inside the Congress in the run up to the invasion of 2003 showed that politicians totally understood the damages of such representation of domestic division, especially at the time when America was trying to justify its unprecedented undertaking in global affairs. A country fractured by internal contradictions not only misses the strength to live up to its words, but also loses the credibility in the interaction with other actors.

By turning his back to the international system, Trump at the same time "*emboldened foes and created uncertainty in the minds of friends about whether the United States would stand with them in a crisis.*" (Daalder & Lindsay 2018, 18). To adversaries, the US abdication from the role of the global leader essentially means a window of opportunity for them to take over the throne and redefine the new order in their interests. For instance, while Trump was cutting down US commitments abroad, China – one of the few superpowers that comes the

closest to the military and economic sizes of the US, was proving its capacity to be the new rule-maker by gracing and advancing its ambitious influence. To its key allies, when US breaks away from its diplomatic tradition, they are unsure whether America stills embraces the democratic values that form the backbone of their relationship, and whether they could rely on and cooperate with the US on sustaining the global order. In response to Trump's ferocious attacks on these pillars, a number of the EU leaders have voiced their concerns over his isolationist approach[6]. Along these lines of critics, international partners have started to question the idea of the US leadership per se, instead of only questioning the country'sdecisions as a leader like they did in the past (Daalder & Lindsay 2018, 181).

Another costly break-away from the US diplomatic tradition was Trump's outspoken dismissal of long-held democratic and human rights values, which created a ripple effect not only at home but also far beyond the State's border. From aggressive anti-migration rhetoric and racist statements – something that the GOP open letter has warned us about, Trump went on to openly and repeatedly appraised authoritarian leaders at multiple occasions for their governing style (Cillizza & Williams 2019). One of the rock-bottom moments was when he implied that like in Russia, there are also a lot of killers in America, suggesting some sort of equivalency between Putin's authoritarian regime and the US democratic government (Tatum 2017). By doing so, Trump not only attempted to define the concept of democracy, but he was also at large questioning the core of American values.

Although Trump was not the only president of the United States to question the US global commitment in international forums (Daalder & Lindsay 2018, 39), no one has ever gone that far as to denounce American leadership role and the

[6] E.g., with regards to US's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement: Dettmer, J. 2017. "Europe Leaders React Angrily to Trump Climate Pact Decision". *VOA*. https://www.voanews.com/a/europe-leaders-react-angrily-trump-climate-pact-decision/3883296.html

three main backbones guiding the US foreign engagement, namely security alliance, free trade, rule of law and democratic principles. This radical departure of American diplomatic traditions was captured perfectly by a senior Japanese foreign policy official as he said: "The throne is empty", not least because countries around the world had looked up to the White House for leadership and advice (Daalder & Lindsay 2018, 17). It seemed that "all of a sudden, the leadership of the Free World was in the hands of someone who did not appear to comprehend the responsibility attendant to such a role" (Daalder & Lindsay 2018, 65). This study, however, would affirm that the throne in many ways is still occupied by the US, or in other words, the US still holds the leading role globally in certain aspects. It is just that the owner, on the other hand, is also busy dealing with its internal tensions that are about to wreak havoc on the whole country itself.

A polarized public calls for polarized institutions

As a matter of fact, a polarized public would generate a "feedback loop" of polarized political identities and polarized political institutions (Klein 2020). As different identity groups would expect their representative to fight for the group's interest, the representative as well as the institution in return would adopt more partisan rhetoric to rally their base. Starting with the demand for a more restraint and balanced foreign policy posture that would not compromise investments in social infrastructure, a force that Trump failed to address during his tenure (Cooley & Nexon 2020), these mutually reinforcing dynamics have found their way through the institutions that deal with domestic policy. Along that path, polarization has also crept into the US Congress (Figure 7) – a governmental body that has the sole power to approve international treaties and diplomat nominees. This role, however, has been steadily undermined under the effect of growing partisanship because it is much harder for both parties to seek a common ground.

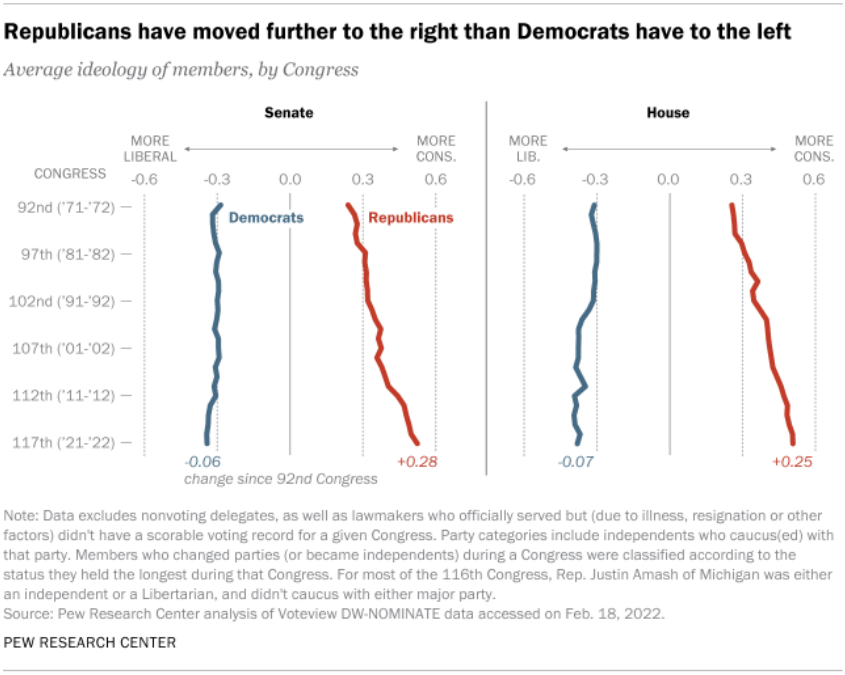

Figure 7: Average ideologies of members of Congress (DeSilver 2022)

In fact, a report by Pew Research Center in 2022 showed that the ideological divide within the Congress has never been this wide for the past fifty years as the Republicans and the Democrats are retreating towards two ends of the political spectrum (DeSilver 2022). In key foreign policy issues that Republicans and Democrats are almost equally divided, the disparity is even more intense. Since Congress members are more inclined within the bound of their party's ideology and are less likely to cross party lines, they will faithfully follow the head of state in a unified government, while in divided government, congressional gridlocks become the norm. Acute partisanship has accordingly weakened Congress's role in foreign policy decision-making.

In the same light, Goldgeier & Saunders (2018) argued that Trump's heedless foreign policy venture was made possible due to the fact that check and balances on executive power has eroded rapidly since 1991. In their words, "The end of the Cold War unleashed the power of the American president". From the outside, occupying an unchallenged position on global political scene means there are no allies of equivalent power to check on the US. From the inside, the

chief executive is under far less supervision than he was in the past. On top of that, there are also ways in which the President can easily bypass a divided Congress, such as opting for an executive agreement instead of a treaty which would be subject to certain constitutional criteria (e.g., Obama's Iran nuclear deal in 2015). Similarly, Stephen Walt (2018) argued that the primacy position of the US has left a lot of leeway for their ambitious external endeavors while mounting division has halted check and balances on presidential power.

A polarized public – an outlier president and a partisan cabinet

Although the number of people involved in international affairs and national security decisions is enormous, the chief executive alone constitute a major power over foreign policy decision-making. Hence, by casting a vote in presidential election, a polarized politics can already indirectly affect the domain of foreign policy. At the same time, because the public are so divided over the core of their identities, they will likely vote for the candidate that is the most pronounced of their innermost beliefs. Seizing that opportunity, in the 2016 election, Trump emerged as a figure that many was longing for, thanks to whom their deepest social resentment found an echo chamber. Undeniably, Trump's electoral victory was greatly attributed to the widening political divide as he openly engaged in anti-migration, nationalist, racist, sexist, etc. rhetoric. In fact, he drew on white resentment in the 2016 election more publicly than any big party presidential candidate since the end of the World War II (Abramowitz 2019). His opposition towards climate change talks were in fact a reflection of his own base.

Moreover, in making foreign-policy decisions, the US president also gets a lot of influence from close advisors. Therefore, a good balance of opposing ideas is always pivotal to secure sound policy outcome. To overcome the negative effects of polarization, Kupchan & Trubowitz (2007) suggested that the president must ensure there are different standpoints presented on the discussion table, as they referred to President Theodore Roosevelt who worked closely with the opposition parties and even appointed key Republican figures to important

positions. However, if the top leader replaces competent fellow workers with only those who align with his ethos, check-and-balances collapse. Decision-making will be reduced to a large-scale group think in which what the leader gets from his advisors is only blinded support instead of appropriate expertise and objective opinion, as observed both in the case of George W. Bush and Donald Trump.

In his book "The Empty Throne", Daalder & Lindsay (2018) recorded how not only Trump's direct decision but also his choice of staff for pre-eminent positions were made primarily to match with his political ideology rather than his needs. To make up for his political inexperience, during the campaign trail, people expected that he would assemble a team of experienced experts, but after months of beating around the bush, the foreign policy advisers he announced in March 2016 only raised even more questions to his electorate, let alone the foreign policy community (Rappeport 2016). Once elected, the 45th US president's national security team narrates a similar story – it consisted of military personals with little to no foreign policy or diplomacy expertise, who tend to share Trump's belief on the power of military means, conservative values, and sometimes even on the benefits of having a close tie with Russia. For example, Michael Flynn, who had been in close contact with Russia and whom Obama specifically advised Trump against, was pointed as the Secretary of State – another influential position in US foreign policy. On top of that, by appointing inexperienced staff to these positions, Trump was contributing to the overall decline in expertise in foreign policy and national security, which is another internal force that weakens US foreign policy.

As we can see from the case of Trump, the US foreign policy can stumble into a period of chaos as the elected head of state tries to please their support groups with approaches that often times aim to differentiate themselves from the opposing party rather than to pursue a coherent strategy that is best in the interests of the USA. Therefore, what the 45th president demonstrated had provided an interesting text-book example of how much harm a reckless executive could bring to the international order.

Conclusion

In summary, what is distinct about the US politics today is the severe level of polarization that dominates almost all domains of the political discourse. Along the course of its development, different identity groups, which came together under the multiple movements and events since the 1960s, have generated themselves into two opposing wings of the political spectrum – the Republican and the Democratic Party. Under the force of growing partisanship, not only are supporters of one camp more inclined with their group, but they are also more likely to hold negative feelings towards members of the opposing camps. Originally these groups were mostly divided over domestic issues, but the destructive forces of polarized politics have spilled over to the realm of foreign policy as the two parties are now increasingly entrenched over the meaning of the global leader role of the US – the cornerstone of US foreign policy ever since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

In the early moments of that unipolar order, Americans across the political spectrum used to agree that the country should endorse a global leader role, especially in promoting democracy and international cooperation. Although the majority of Americans today still believe that the US should maintain an active global engagement, the initial bipartisan consensus seems to be significantly eroding. Applying Brummer & Thies and Cantir & Kaarbo's national role contestation theory to look into the domestic contestation over this global leader role, this study has found that one reason for that growing divide lies in the stiff competition between the Republicans and the Democrats over the country's grand strategy for foreign policy.

The two empirical cases of Bush's 2003 war in Iraq and Trump's nationalist attack on multilateralism have shown that severe domestic polarization is one of the driving forces behind foreign policy failure. In the first case, the two camps were greatly entrenched over the interpretations of one same goal of promoting democracy. To the Democrats, it is the best for the US to address this responsibility through international or multilateral forums. The logic of

Republicans, on the contrary, emphasizes unilateral approach and favors the use of force. As the parties debated over the means rather than the objective itself, the global leader role was still the common thread underlying the debate. However, towards the end of the war, the high cost inflicted by the two interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan soon started to divide Americans again over the question of the USglobal commitment, and in light of recent financial, cultural crisis at home, a case was made for a more restraint foreign policy strategy. This debate still cuts along, and even within, party lines until today, but in 2016 it has a turning point with the election victory of Donald Trump who had a clear vision that instead of restraining, they should diminish America's global commitment altogether. In denouncing international institutions, the 45th president was not just offering a different definition of global leadership, he was dismissing this role altogether. In many aspects, Trump's case illustrates how hyperpolarization can undo the diplomatic traditions that the US has embraced for decades.

Drawing from these two cases, this study concludes that hyper-polarization can inflict foreign policy decision-making in four overlapping ways. First, polarization incurs higher cost for foreign policy making as parties try to overturn their opponent's strategy and overlook established diplomatic traditions. Second, a country deeply divided over foreign policy will give off mixed signals to their alliances, hence undermining the credibility of their relationship. Third, polarized institutions will not be able to properly execute its role in foreign policy decision-making, specifically with regards to the US Congress. Last but not least, a polarized public can also indirectly affect foreign policy outcome by casting their votes for incompetent figure.

For the time being, though polarization is still a burning issue to American politics both domestically and globally, the governing elites have been aware of its implications. At the same time, a survey on opinions of foreign policy by the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs in 2018 shows that though divided in their views, both Democrats, Republicans, as well as Independents agreed that the most critical threat was political polarization (Busby, Smeltz & Tama 2018).

Biden for example, has addressed restoring bipartisanship multiple times in his campaign trail. Regarding the remedy, many prominent authors on polarization point to a unifying identity that transcends party lines. Kupchan & Trubowitz called for a grand "politically solvent" strategy that would marry what Republicans and Democrats wish for, which essentially means cutting back US commitments abroad to correspond with the shrinking consensus at home (Kupchan & Trubowitz, 80). The idea is that if the US were to live up to its "*E Pluribus Unum*" principle, an inclusive national identity is called for, one that would realign minor collective identities to one set of core principles. It is also worth to note that although the bipartisan consensus in foreign policy today has decreased significantly, there is still some common ground for the US to bounce back. A survey by Chicago Council-Ipsos carried out during the troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 also highlighted "an unusually high level of support" (Kafura 2021) in admitting refuges. Across the board, most Americans supported evacuating Afghan close allies to the US even though migration has consistently been a contested issue dividing Americans. In the similar light, though the message was not totally clear from some prominent Republican figures, there was a unified, bipartisan support for Ukrainian refugees (Pew Research Center 2022). It seems that after all, what the American values mean to Democrats and Republicans are not completely different. The Americans indeed have the ability to reunite, although the circumstances for such reinvention will need more research.

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