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“A Third-Image Explanation for Why Trump Now: A Response to Robert Jervis’s ‘President Trump and IR Theory’”¹

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I am only guessing, since no one has said as much to me, but I suspect that I was asked to participate in this policy roundtable because of my remarks about Donald Trump to *The New Yorker*’s Evan Osnos, which appeared in the 26 September 2016 issue: “I think we’re just at a point in our history where he’s probably the right guy for the job. Not perfect, but we need someone different, because there’s such calcification in Washington. Americans are smart collectively, and if they vote for Trump I wouldn’t worry.”² Yes, there it is, I am an academic who, like sixty-three million Americans, supported Trump for President. Indeed, as both a Republican and a political realist, I am not only untroubled by his election, I look forward to the next four years with great expectations. “This is,” as Daniel Drezner put it, “realism’s moment in the foreign policy sun.”³

¹ Robert Jervis, “President Trump and IR Theory,” ISSF Policy Series “America and the World—2017 and Beyond,” Introductory Essay, <https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/Policy-Roundtable-1-5B.pdf>.

² Randall Schweller quoted in Evan Osnos, “President Trump: What Would He Do?” *The New Yorker*, 26 September 2016, 40.

³ Daniel W. Drezner, “So When Will Realists Endorse Donald Trump?” *The Washington Post*, 1 February 2016: https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/02/01/so-when-will-realists-endorse-donald-trump/?utm_term=.89d21ae4ee75

In this essay, I offer a structural-realist explanation for what I meant by the United States having arrived “at a point in our history” where the phenomenon of President Donald Trump or someone like him is, if not inevitable, highly probable. The short answer is that the world is becoming more competitive and tightly coupled as it transitions from unipolarity to emerging multipolarity—which, if and when it arrives, will be the first truly global multipolar system in history.⁴ For decades, American citizens, in stark contrast with their leaders, have been more realist than liberal in their foreign-policy orientation. There is now sufficient compulsion in the United States’ external environment for them to demand a more narrowly self-interested foreign policy. They insist on a President who unabashedly puts American interests first; who, as a billionaire businessman with highly touted deal-making skills, will fight as an economic nationalist to keep manufacturing jobs in the United States rather than letting the vagaries of markets and globalization decide the fates of working class Americans.

More generally, the old rationale for America’s deep engagement with the world, which took hold in the wake of World War II and persisted through the Cold War, has been rejected by many Americans, who wonder why Uncle Sam needs to play such an outsize and, too often for their taste, “other-regarding” role on the world stage. According to a Pew Research Center poll conducted in April 2016, more Americans say the U.S. does too much (41%) than too little (27%) to solve world problems, with 28% saying it is doing about the right amount; and they are just as wary about U.S. participation in the global economy. “Nearly half of Americans (49%) say U.S. involvement in the global economy is a bad thing because it lowers wages and costs jobs; fewer (44%) see this as a good thing because it provides the U.S. with new markets and opportunities for growth.”⁵

In short, Americans want a hard-boiled realist for President. Robert Jervis claims that “a Trump foreign policy that followed his campaign statements would be hard to square with Realism, although it would be difficult to say what alternative theory, if any, it vindicated.” I disagree. As I argue below, Trump’s views conform with both the political economy and geopolitics of realism, and they represent a sea change from those of his predecessors.

Since 1945, but most especially since the end of the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy has been captured by liberal internationalism—a creed that sees multilateral regimes, democratic institutions, economic interdependence, and the export of American values and norms as the most effective and appropriate means to advance U.S. interests and to get others to do and want what Americans want.⁶ This is the logic behind Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s vision of an emerging “multipartner,” as opposed to multipolar, world. “It does not make sense to adapt a 19th-century concert of powers or a 20th-century balance-of-power strategy. We cannot go back to Cold War containment or to unilateralism,” Clinton said in a speech at the Council on

⁴ While a full-blown multipolar system composed of several great powers of roughly equal strength remains decades away, the current distribution of power resembles what the late Samuel P. Huntington called “uni-multipolarity.” Samuel P. Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” *Foreign Affairs* 78:2 (March/April 1999), 36.

⁵ Pew Research Center, “Public Uncertain, Divided Over America’s Place in the World,” 5 May 2016: <http://www.people-press.org/2016/05/05/public-uncertain-divided-over-americas-place-in-the-world/>

⁶ For a recent example, see G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, *Forging a World of Liberty under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century* (Princeton: Princeton Project for National Security, 2006).

Foreign Relations in July 2009. “We will lead by inducing greater cooperation among a greater number of actors and reducing competition, tilting the balance away from a multipolar world and toward a multipartner world.”⁷ It is a view based on the assumption that history moves forward in a progressive direction—one that is consistent with the metaphor of time’s arrow.⁸

But while this Lockean world view retains an ideological stranglehold over U.S. policy elites, the American body politic embraces an essentially realist understanding of international relations. As Drezner points out, “surveys about foreign policy world views and priorities, the use of force, and foreign economic policies all reveal a strong realist bent among the mass American public. The overwhelming majority of Americans possess a Hobbesian world view of international relations.”⁹ If, as survey data show, America’s realist attitude towards foreign policy has been consistent for decades, the puzzle is not why Americans have finally decided to elect a president who campaigned on an “America First” brand of realism, but rather why it took so long to close the breach between elites and the public. International structure provides a powerful explanation.

While the U.S. has, since the last half of the twentieth century, consistently adhered to a grand strategy of deep engagement with the rest of the world, its motivations have changed. This shift can be explained by the differing structural incentives of bipolar and unipolar systems. Likewise, the current movement from unipolarity to a system of more diffused power has sparked yet another, more dramatic shift in American grand strategy. Now, after decades of extroverted U.S. foreign policy, the American electorate finally perceives a sufficiently compelling reason—namely, emerging multipolarity that brings renewed concerns over global competitiveness—to demand an end to liberal internationalism and its replacement with a foreign policy of global restraint, retrenchment, and a return to realist principles rooted in narrow self-interest. In stark contrast with liberal hegemony, which holds that the United States must use its power not only to solve global problems but also to promote a world order based on international institutions, representative governments, open markets, and respect for human rights, “Trump’s narrow definition of the national interest does not include things like democracy promotion, humanitarian intervention, the responsibility to protect people from atrocities or the advocacy of human rights abroad....He doesn’t think the U.S. government should spend blood or treasure on trying to change other countries’ systems.”¹⁰

Indeed, the Trump administration represents an opportunity to base U.S. foreign policy on the real interests of the American people as they themselves perceive them to be rather than what Washington elites take to be the interest of U.S. global primacy. To achieve this goal, Trump must override a generation or more of U.S.

⁷ Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Foreign Policy Address at the Council on Foreign Relations,” U.S. State Department, Washington, D.C., 15 July 2009. Available at <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/july/126071.htm>.

⁸ See Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Robert Jervis, “The Future of World Politics: Will It Resemble the Past?” *International Security* 16:3 (Winter 1991-1992): 39-73.

⁹ Daniel W. Drezner, “The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion,” *Perspectives on Politics* 6:1 (March 2008), 63.

¹⁰ Josh Rogin, “The Trump Doctrine Revealed,” *Bloomberg View*, 31 January 2016: <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-01-31/the-trump-doctrine-revealed>.

policymakers and advisers—who have touted deep engagement, whether for neoconservative or liberal internationalist reasons, and have been responsible for one disaster after another—and chart a new course on the basis of Trump’s essentially realist philosophy.¹¹ But I am getting ahead of myself. Let me, instead, start at the beginning.

Under bipolarity, the motivation was to contain and, if possible, defeat the Soviet Union and its allies. Thus, the United States bestrode the world as an institution builder, providing public goods in the form of, *inter alia*, security guarantees, trade liberalization, and monetary stability to its allies. Because the Cold War was fueled by both the bipolar distribution of power and a deep rift between two universalistic ideologies, realist and liberal prescriptions mostly overlapped. When there were contradictions—for instance, whether to support an anti-Communist but otherwise repugnant regime or, instead, promote human rights and democracy—realist power politics usually triumphed over American ideals.¹² The key point is that, once the Cold War started, there was no longer a U.S. debate centered on internationalism versus isolation, as in the past: competition with the Soviet Union was global, and so the periphery was no longer seen as peripheral.¹³ In this zero-sum game, America’s deep engagement, whether driven by a grand strategy of liberal hegemony or the global distribution of capabilities, became axiomatic. Put differently, the social purpose of American hegemony and power politics tended to complement each other.

After the Cold War, the U.S. remained deeply engaged with the world, but its intent was very different: revisionism in the guise of liberal hegemony. As an unchallenged Mr. Big, America would now endeavor to remold large swaths of the world to fit its image of international order. All states, including authoritarian major powers such as Russia and China, would become supplicants in an American-dominated world order. The shift from a status-quo to a revisionist power is easily explained by structural realist theory in both its Waltzian and Gilpinian variants. From a Waltzian perspective, the structural incentives of unipolarity—unchecked power—provided powerful external compulsion for the United States to pursue grand revisionist policies on a global scale, even though it was free to choose a foreign policy of retrenchment and restraint and such a strategy would have better served its national interests. The logic is that of Arnold Wolfers’s “racetrack analogy” wherein individuals, who cannot see the horse race clearly because of the crowds who arrived before

¹¹See for instance, Anatol Lieven, “What Next for Donald Trump?” *The National Interest* 147 (January/February 2017), 15.

¹²For the dilemmas that American policymakers faced as they tried to balance security and reform goals, see Douglas J. Macdonald, *Adventures in Chaos: American Intervention for Reform in the Third World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹³On this point, Waltz’s structural realist theory contains an important contradiction. The theory explains bipolar stability as a result of the two superpowers’ reliance on internal balancing; simply put, in bipolar worlds, unlike multipolar ones, the two polar powers are unfettered by the structural uncertainty associated with alliances—who will align with whom—and the dangers of entrapment, that is, being dragged into war by reckless partners. That said, Waltz also claims that bipolarity, though not plagued by the danger of miscalculation, encourages the danger of overreaction—because, in a two-power competition, a loss for one appears as a corresponding gain for the other. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 170-172; Waltz, “The Stability of a Bipolar World,” *Daedalus* 93:3 (Summer 1964): 881-909; Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 118-122.

them, can be expected to rush to fill an opening that occurs in front of them—thus illustrating compulsive action arising not from external danger but from an irresistible opportunity for gain.¹⁴

From a Gilpinian perspective, America's victory over the Soviet Union, though peaceful, served with one exception all the same systemic functions as victory in a hegemonic war: it did not entirely obliterate the old order; that is, it did not wipe clean the old institutional slate so that a new global architecture could be built from ground zero. It did, however, concentrate enormous power in the hands of one dominant state possessing the capabilities, will, and legitimacy to transform the world and enforce its preferred order.¹⁵ Remember, the core logic behind Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war is that major powers will attempt to change the international system if the expected benefits exceed the expected costs. In Gilpin's words, "As the power of a state increases, the relative cost of changing the system and of thereby achieving the state's goals decreases (and, conversely, increases when a state is declining). ... Therefore, according to the law of demand, as the power of a state increases, so does the probability of its willingness to seek a change in the system."¹⁶

Prior to the end of the Cold War, this logic seemed to pertain only to rising challengers. There is no good reason, however, why it should not apply equally well to a hegemon that outlasts a rising challenger in a failed power transition. After all, the collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a major power shift in the United States' favor, increasing the net expected benefits of system change. This explains not only why the U.S. remained deeply engaged with the world but, more important, why it did not emerge as a powerful defender of the international status quo—one committed to preserving the global arrangements that suited it so well.¹⁷ Instead, the United States became, as Robert Jervis argues, "a truly revolutionary power, [seeking] not only to shape international politics but, as both a means to that end and a goal in itself, also to remake domestic regimes and societies around the world."¹⁸ The motive for deep engagement was no longer system maintenance (containment) but system transformation.

¹⁴ Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), 14.

¹⁵ Like a hegemonic war, the end of the Cold War also clarified the bargaining situation among the great powers—confusion over which is the root cause of war in the first place. For these global functions served by hegemonic wars, see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁷ Indeed, "realist theory would predict that the revitalized hegemon will have every incentive to exercise its newfound power to extract whatever concessions it can from the defeated challenger. In so doing, the hegemon will bring the international system back in to equilibrium—albeit, an equilibrium that is likely to differ markedly from the 'status quo ante.'" Randall L. Schweller and William C. Wohlforth, "Power Test: Updating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War," *Security Studies* 9:3 (Spring 2000), 84. See also William C. Wohlforth, "Gilpinian Realism and International Relations," *International Relations* 25:4 (December 2011), 505-506.

¹⁸ Robert Jervis, "Unipolarity: A Structural Perspective," *World Politics* 61:1 (January 2009), 205.

Predicting a short life for unipolarity, Waltz wrote, “Those who refer to the unipolar moment are right.”¹⁹ Here, the structural realist logic is twofold. First, the misuse of power follows inevitably from its concentration; a unipolar power is, therefore, prone to take on too many tasks beyond its own borders, weakening it in the long run. Second, excessive power, no matter how it is wielded, is inherently dangerous to others: “With benign intent, the United States has behaved, and until its power is brought into a semblance of balance, will continue to behave in ways that annoy and frighten others.”²⁰

But after a decade of unipolarity (and then another decade), the puzzle for realists became how to explain the absence of any meaningful semblance of pushback against unchecked U.S. power. William Wohlforth argued that the enormous disparity in relative power between the United States and other major powers prevented the return of a global balance of power. Stephen Walt agreed and added that, consistent with his balance-of-threat theory, the “formation of a cohesive anti-American coalition is not inevitable, and may not even be likely,” so long as the United States does not act in ways that needlessly threaten others.²¹

Josef Joffe explained how the U.S. managed to keep the world off-balance through the genius of its grand strategy. Unlike prior hegemony that were in business only to enrich themselves, the United States provides global public goods that not only project American power and influence but also serve the needs of others. American leaders have understood that the proper maxim for an unchallenged number one is: “Do good for others in order to do well by yourself.”²² The United States’ transcendence of narrow self-interest, its willingness to take on global obligations and responsibilities, has allowed it alone among hegemony to “defy history” by overcoming the law that power will always beget power.

Then came the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-2008. The world no longer seemed unipolar as far as the eye could see. The Great Recession—coupled with the rise of China, India, and a resurgent Russia—cast doubts on the state of American relative power that found official expression in the National Intelligence Council’s (2008) *Global Trends 2025* and (2012) *Global Trends 2030* reports. It has become commonplace to claim that the unipolar era is over or fast winding down. Predictions of continuing unipolarity have been superseded by premonitions of American decline and emerging multipolarity.²³ Indeed, a February 2016 Gallop poll found Americans evenly split when asked if the U.S. is No. 1 in the world

¹⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” *International Security* 25:1 (Summer 2000), 30.

²⁰ Kenneth Waltz, “America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24:4 (December 1991), 69.

²¹ Stephen M. Walt, “Keeping the World ‘Off-Balance’: Self-Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in G. John Ikenberry, ed., *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 153.

²² Josef Joffe, “Defying History and Theory: The United States as the ‘Last Remaining Superpower,’” in Ikenberry, *America Unrivaled*, 180.

²³ See Christopher Layne, “This Time It’s Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana,” *International Studies Quarterly* 56:1 (March 2012): 203-213; National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008); National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012).

militarily, with 49% saying “yes” and 49% saying “no.” The poll also showed that half of Americans see the U.S. as one of several leading military powers.²⁴

This widely held perception of coming structural change largely explains the appeal of Donald Trump’s “American First” doctrine. Joffe may indeed be correct that the proper maxim for an unchallenged number one is to do good for others in order to do well by yourself. But the U.S. is no longer an unchallenged number one—or, at least, many Americans no longer perceive the United States as a lone hyperpower without peer competitors. They realize what many of their leaders seem unable to accept: that even if the United States remains the strongest global power, and there are good reasons to believe that it will, Washington will be unable to exercise the influence it once enjoyed. Simply put, the American era is over, and Washington must devise a new grand strategy to deal with the new situation.²⁵ Realism, which the American body politic has supported for decades, offers just such a strategy.

Americans rightly see emerging multipolarity as a more competitive realm than the unipolar world that the United States has enjoyed since 1991. They rightly see America’s dismal record in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. A majority of Americans now say that the U.S. should be less engaged in world affairs and, for the first time in recorded history, believe that their country has a declining influence on what is happening around the globe. Americans are rejecting hard power and high politics; in their eyes, history is shaped more by networks of peoples spontaneously gathering in squares than by the military capabilities of powerful states. An April 2016 Pew poll found that 57 percent of Americans agree that the United States should “deal with its own problems and let others deal with theirs the best they can.”²⁶

Little wonder, then, that Trump found receptive audiences whenever he argued that the costs of preserving the international liberal order outweigh its benefits and “that Washington would be better off handling its interactions with other countries on a case-by-case transactional basis, making sure it ‘wins’ rather than ‘loses’ on each deal or commitment.”²⁷ Some interpret this to mean that Trump wants to transform the United States into a mercenary superpower, protecting only those countries that pay, so that it can turn inward and make itself great again. Perhaps. But selfishness is not always a shameful thing, as Adam Smith pointed out in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). After all, the United States suffers from massive accumulated debt, enormous trade and current-account deficits (the U.S. economy imports half a trillion dollars more a year than it exports), eroding infrastructure, and a persistently sluggish economy, in which business start-ups are happening at half their rate of fifteen years ago and ordinary workers’ wages have been stagnant (in real terms) for decades. It is high time that America devoted more attention to getting its own house in order.

²⁴ Gallup, “Americans Less Likely to See U.S. as No. 1 Militarily,” 15 February 2016: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/189191/americans-less-likely-no-militarily.aspx>

²⁵ See Stephen M. Walt, “The End of the American Era,” *The National Interest* 116 (November/December 2011): 6-16.

²⁶ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, (July/August 2016), 70.

²⁷ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Will the Liberal Order Survive? The History of an Idea,” *Foreign Affairs* 96:1 (January/February 2017), 12.

The shift from deep engagement—in both its liberal internationalist and neoconservative incarnations—to a more realist U.S. grand strategy did not start with Trump. When the financial crisis hit and murmurs of emerging multipolarity began, Americans voted for the ‘restraint and retrenchment’ candidate, Barack Obama. In terms of his general foreign-policy philosophy, President Obama proved to be a bit of a compromise between realism and liberal internationalism, which explains why his foreign policy often fell between two stools. His administration was split between realists and idealists, and their debates tended to break down along gender lines: realists who viewed foreign policy as a chess game and emphasized the importance of India and China (National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon, Deputy National Security Adviser Denis McDonough, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell, and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates) versus idealists who championed human rights and democracy promotion (Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Special Assistant to the President Samantha Power, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice, and Director of Policy Planning Ann-Marie Slaughter). On most issues, the realist camp triumphed, but Obama often seemed to want to have it both ways. Thus, in a June 2009 speech at Cairo University, he said: “I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation by any other.”²⁸ But two years later, during the Egyptian “January 25 revolution” that overthrew President Hosni Mubarak, Obama seemed to have abandoned a loyal autocratic ally in favor of the people’s choice, The Muslim Brotherhood. An Obama advisor declared, “Obama didn’t give the Tahrir Square crowds every last thing they sought from him at the precise moment they sought it. But he went well beyond what many of America’s allies in the region wished to see.”²⁹

In the end, Barack Obama is, as Henry Kissinger put it, a realist at the prudential level but his vision is more ideological than strategic.³⁰ His realist-inspired prudence—speaking of “hitting singles” and “passing the baton”—struck many observers as strangely detached and minimalist. His own advisor described his approach to *The New Yorker’s* Ryan Lizza as “leading from behind.”³¹

To be sure, much of what annoyed the foreign-policy elite about Obama’s grand strategy is structural in nature: global power is more diffused today and is wielded in different ways by various kinds of actors; as this structural complexity increases, American influence declines.³² But, whereas Trump told his wildly enthusiastic crowds that he would make American great again, Obama struck a pose of denial about American decline. In his last State of the Union speech, he said: “...anyone who tells you that America is in decline or

²⁸ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at Cairo University, 4 June 2009: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09>

²⁹ Quoted in Ryan Lizza, “The Consequentialist: How the Arab Spring Remade Obama’s Foreign Policy,” *The New Yorker*, 2 May 2011.

³⁰ Henry Kissinger, “A Conversation with Henry Kissinger,” *The National Interest* 139 (September/October 2015), 17.

³¹ Lizza, “The Consequentialist.”

³² See Randall L. Schweller, *Maxwell’s Demon and the Golden Apple: Global Discord in the New Millennium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Walt, “The End of the American Era”; Richard Haass, *World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017).

that our influence has waned, doesn't know what they're talking about. ... America remains the one indispensable nation in world affairs—and as long as I'm President, I intend to keep it that way.”³³

Trump's successful campaign themes—that America needs its allies to share responsibility for their own defense, better trade deals, and protection from currency manipulation—stem from the political economy of realism, sometimes called neomercantilism or, more appropriately, economic nationalism.³⁴ Trump is an economic nationalist. He believes that political factors should determine economic relations; that globalization does not foster harmony among states but rather creates yet another arena of interstate conflict; that economic interdependence increases national vulnerability, and constitutes a mechanism that one society can employ to dominate another; and that the State should intervene when the interests of domestic actors diverge from its own.

We see Trump's support for economic nationalism when, in February 2016, he called for a boycott against Apple until the technology giant helps the FBI break into the iPhone of one of the San Bernardino shooters. We see it in his intended use of tax policy to support particular companies (e.g. tax incentives to Carrier to keep jobs in Indiana) and regulatory policy to assist entire industries (e.g. repealing Clean Air Act regulations to help the coal industry); in his proposals to unilaterally impose 35-45 percent tariffs and to renegotiate trade agreements such as NAFTA; in his embrace of industrial policy (federal efforts to promote certain industries); and in his coercing companies—reprimanding Ford, Carrier, and Toyota—to get them to change their ways: “We're gonna get Apple to start building their damn computers and things in this country, instead of in other countries,” he declared during a speech at Liberty University;³⁵ On Toyota, Trump tweeted: “Toyota Motor said will build a new plant in Baja, Mexico, to build Corolla cars for U.S. NO WAY! Build plant in U.S. or pay big border tax.”³⁶ As these examples suggest, Trump's economic philosophy could scarcely be more in opposition to traditional Republican conservatism and its core philosophy that financial markets, not the federal government, do the best job of allocating investment capital where it will be most productive.

It is not surprising, however, that economic nationalism resonates with middle and working class Americans, who think that China, among other countries, has taken advantage of U.S. free-trade policies and the lack of protection for domestic industries to steal jobs and manufacturing businesses that should be those of Americans. As the incoming White House chief strategist Steve Bannon told the *Hollywood Reporter* after Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton: “I'm not a white nationalist, I'm a nationalist. I'm an economic

³³ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address,” 24 January 2012: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/24/remarks-president-state-union-address>

³⁴ See Jonathan Kirshner, “The Political Economy of Realism,” in Ethan Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies After the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), chap. 3.

³⁵ Donald Trump, speech at Liberty University, 18 January 2016. Quoted in T. C. Sottek, “Donald Trump Says He Will Get Apple to ‘start building their damn computers and things’ in the US,” *The Verge*, 18 January 2016: <http://www.theverge.com/2016/1/18/10787050/donald-trump-apple-fantasy>

³⁶ Donald Trump tweet, quoted in David Shepardson, Trump Hits Toyota in Latest Broadside Against Carmakers and Mexico,” *Reuters*, 6 January 2017: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-toyota-idUSKBN14P27S>

nationalist.” He went on to say, “The globalists gutted the American working class and created a middle class in Asia. The issue now is about Americans looking to not get f—ed over.”³⁷

President-elect Trump expresses similarly realist views—unambivalently so, to the dismay of his many critics—in the realm of high politics. At various times during the campaign, he not only showed disdain for the European Union by supporting Brexit but called into question the very relevance of the NATO alliance itself as well as the U.S. commitment to abide by the Article Five obligation to come to the aid of allies under attack. In an interview with *The New York Times* in March 2016, Trump said, “...the question was asked of me a few days ago about NATO, and I said, well, I have two problems with NATO. No. 1, it’s obsolete. When NATO was formed many decades ago we were a different country. There was a different threat. Soviet Union was, the Soviet Union, not Russia, which was much bigger than Russia, as you know. And, it was certainly much more powerful than even today’s Russia.” He went on to say, “NATO is unfair, economically, to us, to the United States. Because it really helps them more so than the United States, and we pay a disproportionate share.”³⁸

This skepticism about NATO’s continued existence in the post-Cold War world and its benefits for U.S. national security relative to the costs to American taxpayers shocked the foreign-policy establishment and commentariat. How, they wondered, did Trump have the temerity—along with ignorance and reckless judgment that befitted someone clearly lacking the temperament to be commander-in-chief—to call into question the Atlanticist consensus that has been supported by U.S. administrations and European governments for over seventy years now?

Epitomizing the appalled reaction of the political punditry, James Kirchick of *The Daily Beast* responded:

For a man who assesses everything in terms of dollar signs, it’s no surprise President-elect Donald Trump sees global alliances as just another form of deal-making. One of the few consistent themes in Trump’s rhetoric going back decades has been a belief that America is being ripped off by the rest of the world. Trump’s conception of the national interest is an extremely narrow and pecuniary one with no time for considerations like common values.

Trump fails to grasp that while you can certainly put a price tag on military commitments to our allies, the value of preserving the liberal world order—which the United States built after World War II and has sustained ever since—far outweighs the numbers on any balance sheet. Indeed, even if our allies in Europe and Asia paid

³⁷ Steve Bannon quoted in Louis Nelson, “Steve Bannon Hails Trump’s ‘Economic Nationalist’ Agenda,” *Politico*, 18 November 2016: <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/steve-bannon-trump-hollywood-reporter-interview-231624>

³⁸ Donald Trump in an interview with Maggie Haberman and David E. Sanger, “Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views,” *New York Times*, 26 March 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html?_r=0

substantially less, or even nothing, toward their own defense, our alliances with them would still be worthwhile.³⁹

In equally alarmist and condescending tones, Nicholas Kristof, an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times* who refers to Donald Trump as “the Russian Poodle,”⁴⁰ opined on MSNBC that “Trump doesn’t understand the complexities of what may happen in the Baltic Republics, which, I think, is one of the things that worries a lot of us the most—that there could be some kind of disturbance by Putin in Latvia or Estonia to test NATO—and, um, that Trump has deeply undermined NATO, the basis for the post-Cold War order in Europe.”⁴¹ Precisely—a disturbance by Russian President Vladimir Putin or any other Russian leader in Latvia or Estonia could trigger war between the United States and Russia. To Kristof, this state of affairs seems perfectly fine; indeed, it is the “basis for the post-Cold War order in Europe.” The problem as he and the media, and the foreign policy Titans within both the GOP and Democratic Party see it, is not that NATO has expanded right up to Russia’s border, has deployed components of a missile-defense shield in Poland and Romania, and has flirted with offering both Georgia and Ukraine membership in the Western military alliance despite the fact that both of these countries have traditionally been within Russia’s sphere of influence. The problem is not Western encroachments in the past two decades that necessarily threaten Russia, and that such a beleaguered former superpower can be expected to aggressively push back, even if it means war. No, the problem, in their eyes, is that Trump “recklessly” questions America’s unwavering support for such a state of affairs twenty-five years after the Soviets were vanquished; that he wants friendly relations with Putin and Russia; that he has empathy for Russia as a great power with sovereign interests; and that he respects Putin as a strong and popular leader of a major power, which he clearly is. In 2016, Donald Trump was the only presidential candidate who championed “a policy prescription designed to reverse the West’s provocative eastward expansion, reduce tensions and test Russia’s true intentions.”⁴² On these issues, Donald Trump is firmly within the Realist camp.

The wrongheaded idea to expand NATO by bringing in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic nations was first proposed by Richard Holbrooke, then an assistant secretary in the State Department, in 1996. In response, a prominent group of fifty leading Americans, conservative and liberal alike, signed a letter to President Clinton opposing NATO expansion, calling it “a policy error of historic proportions.” Among the signers were Robert McNamara, Sam Nunn, Bill Bradley, Paul Nitze, Richard Pipes, and

³⁹ James Kirchick, “Why Donald Trump Keeps Dissing America’s Allies in Europe and Asia,” *The Daily Beast*, 29 December 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/12/29/why-donald-trump-keeps-dissing-america-s-allies-in-europe-and-asia.html>

⁴⁰ Nicholas Kristof, “Donald Trump: The Russian Poodle,” *New York Times*, 17 December 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/17/opinion/sunday/donald-trump-the-russian-poodle.html>

⁴¹ Nicholas Kristof comments to Lawrence O’Donnell on *The Last Word*, “What Foreign Leaders Know About Trump,” *MSNBC*, 29 December 2016, <http://www.msnbc.com/the-last-word/watch/what-foreign-leaders-know-about-donald-trump-844354115540>

⁴² Robert W. Merry “What Next for Donald Trump?” *The National Interest* 147 (January/February 2017), 19.

Marshall Shulman.⁴³ Yet, Congress, the media, and the foreign policy establishment barely debated the issue, much less seriously considered its long-run ramifications. For all intents and purposes, there was no national discussion whatsoever about one of the most momentous (realists would say ‘utterly foolish’) foreign policy gambits in American history—one that risked triggering a new cold war with potentially catastrophic consequences.

In contrast, realists immediately decried NATO expansion as monumentally imprudent and dangerous. “I think [NATO expansion] is the beginning of a new cold war,” George Kennan, the American diplomat and historian known best for having formulated the policy of “containment” in 1947, told *The New York Times* in 1998. “I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way.”⁴⁴

Expecting NATO to dwindle at the Cold War’s end and ultimately to disappear as had every other past grand coalition once its principle adversary was defeated, Kenneth Waltz explained NATO’s growth as a pathology that springs from the structure of unipolarity—the vice to which the lone superpower in a unipolar world succumbs is overextension. “The reasons for expanding NATO are weak,” he asserted, “most of them the product not of America’s foreign-policy interests but of its domestic political impulses.”⁴⁵ The reasons for opposing expansion are strong.” Most important, NATO expansion would push Russia towards China rather than drawing Russia towards Europe and the United States.

More recently, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt maintain that “once the Soviet Union collapsed” the “United States should have steadily reduced its military presence, cultivated amicable relations with Russia, and turned European security over to the Europeans. Instead, it expanded NATO and ignored Russian interests, helping spark the conflict over Ukraine and driving Moscow closer to China.”⁴⁶ Likewise, Barry Posen argues that “the United States should withdraw from [NATO’s] military command structure and return the alliance to the primarily political organization it once was.” Pointing out that the U.S. spends 4.6 percent of its GDP on defense, whereas its NATO allies in Europe spend 1.6 percent and Japan spends 1.0 percent, Posen calls this “welfare for the rich” at a time when “the U.S. government considers draconian cuts in social spending to restore the United States’ fiscal health.”⁴⁷ The views of these prominent realists are

⁴³ A full text of the letter and a full list of signers are available at www.bu.edu/globalbeat/nato/postpone062697.html

⁴⁴ George Kennan as quoted in Thomas L. Friedman, “Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X,” *New York Times*, 2 May 1998.

⁴⁵ Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” 13.

⁴⁶ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2016), 76.

⁴⁷ Barry R. Posen, “Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 92:1 (January/February 2013), 121, 125.

entirely consistent with Trump’s remarks about NATO and Russia’s response to it. Moreover, realists seem to also agree with Trump’s suggestion that the United States should let Russia deal with the problem of Syria. On this point, Mearsheimer and Walt remark: “In Syria, the United States should let Russia take the lead.... If the civil war continues, it will be largely Moscow’s problem, although Washington should be willing to help broker a political settlement.”⁴⁸

Indeed, Trump’s foreign-policy approach essentially falls under the rubric of “offshore balancing”—a grand strategy first articulated by Christopher Layne in a 1997 article in *International Security* that has been adopted over the years by many prominent realists, including John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt, Barry Posen, Robert Pape, and Andrew Bacevich.⁴⁹ That approach asserts that, “instead of policing the world,” Washington should “encourage other countries to take the lead in checking rising powers [in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf], intervening itself only when necessary.”⁵⁰ Prescribing that the U.S. calibrate its military posture according to the distribution of power in the three key regions, and allow regional forces to be its first line of defense should a potential regional hegemon emerge, offshore balancing “would preserve U.S. primacy far into the future and safeguard liberty at home.”⁵¹ The trick, however, is implementing the strategy—how to wean the world off of American power while avoiding a hard landing (e.g., regional arms races and intense security dilemmas). Even with the most skilled leadership, we can expect a very bumpy ride.

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⁴⁸ Mearsheimer and Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing,” 82.

⁴⁹ Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America’s Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 22:1 (Summer 1997), 86-124; and Christopher Layne, “The Global Power Shift from West to East,” *The National Interest* 119 (May/June 2012), 30-31.

⁵⁰ Mearsheimer and Walt, “The Case for Offshore Balancing,” 71.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 72-73.