Continuity and Change in US Foreign Policy: The Dialectical Interplay of Hegemonic Legitimacy, Leadership and International Order under Bush

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Citation | Ain. Q. U. S, "Continuity and Change in US Foreign Policy: The Dialectical Interplay of Hegemonic Legitimacy, Leadership and International Order under Bush", MCCSS, Vol. 5, Issue. 1 pp 18-35, January 2026
Received| Dec 20, 2025 **Revised|** Jan 22, 2026 **Accepted|** Jan 28, 2026 **Published|** Jan 31, 2026.

This article analyzes the dialectical relationship between continuity and change in the foreign policy of the United States as a hegemonic power. The article starts by looking at the agent-structure problem and the things that affect changes in foreign policy and the legitimacy of hegemony. different ways that three former US presidents—George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump—led with hegemony. fully understand foreign policy, it is important to look at changing factors like the context and the leader. article seeks to juxtapose the foreign policy strategies of the three presidents and articulate two principal arguments. leaders' perspectives and their capacity to adjust to unforeseen crises. The slow loss of the United States' dominance in the world order can be traced back to changes in the structure of the world order and the loss of its social capital and hegemonic role. Leadership styles employed by American presidents significantly influence the decline of the nation's hegemonic leadership.

Keywords: W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, Hegemonic Legitimacy, International Order, Leadership, And Foreign Policy Change

Introduction:

At present, two phenomena impact theory and politics in international relations. First, is that the processes of change and dynamism in international politics are becoming more complicated. Second is the breakdown of the liberal order that happens when people lose faith in the leadership of hegemonic power.

Events affect the United States' (US) grand strategy [1][2] and its ability to change and keep its legitimate hegemony. Do big changes in foreign policy happen for big changes in foreign policy to happen? Ideas, cultural images, and the leadership style of US president's matter?

The article examines the United States, aiming to elucidate the interplay between structural and agential factors that influence continuities and discontinuities in foreign policy and the adaptation processes of actors. The primary aim is to ascertain whether a leadership transition can effectuate substantive change in the nation's foreign policy, or conversely, whether agents and their rhetoric concerning change are largely inconsequential to the persistence of domestic and international frameworks. The article integrates the agent-structure framework with historical events to examine factors influencing dynamism and change in international politics, evaluating their effects on US foreign policy and hegemonic leadership.

International Leadership of US presidents transcends mere examination of their leadership styles in office or their psychological and cognitive attributes and preferences when confronted with specific situations or domains in foreign policy [3][4]. We talk about leadership styles; we

mean the role of US presidents in strengthening American symbolic power and their international hegemonic leadership. This includes the ideas and cultural images that US presidents have about the US's role in the world and the best ways to maintain a consensual hegemonic leadership [5].

The article seeks to empirically delineate the foreign policies of Bush, Obama, and Trump, while also examining the dynamics of continuity and change in their ideas, perceptions, and representations concerning the United States' hegemonic leadership role. Leadership results in two critical conditions: Firstly, the capacity to maintain and modify the principles and standards of the international liberal order to illustrate its distinct political, normative, and security significance in relation to alternative initiatives.

Are two parts to this article. The initial section delineates theoretical arguments concerning the agency-structure dilemma and the legitimacy of hegemony in international relations, while examining the critical factors that influence alterations in foreign policy. The second part compares the historical and political settings of the Bush, Obama, and Trump presidencies, with an emphasis on the consistencies and shifts in US foreign policy throughout their terms.

The article makes two main points. elucidate the transformation in US foreign policy, it is imperative to comprehend three essential dimensions: the significance of political and ideological contexts, the influence of leadership, and the unpredictability of international political dynamics. The real reason why American leadership in the world is getting weaker is not just because the US's material power is getting weaker. It's also because the US's hegemony is losing its legitimacy, and the US's symbolic power and social capital are also getting weaker.

Framework:

One of the most interesting debates in social science is about the connection between agency and structure (A–S from now on). This debate centers on the degree to which agents are influenced, limited, and dictated by structures, and conversely. In other words, this debate is about how agents, who do things, and the times and places where they do them are related. Marx's famous saying, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" [6], sums up this age-old problem well (contexts). Two things are always interacting with each other, which helps them build on each other. At the same time, the actor's agency is both free and limited by the situation. Decision-makers' actions always show how they feel about the situation and how they react to it. Nevertheless, there exists a temporal precedence of structure over agency. People are born into a social context that they didn't help create. We must not forget, although, that structures are not natural. Structures are historical constructs that emerge from the dynamic processes of mutual constitution between contexts and their agents. Actors create and institutionalize structures. Structures are created, kept up, or changed only when people agree on their meanings [7]. In the domain of foreign policy, entities function within two principal frameworks: the international system, characterized by its normative and hierarchical international order, and the national system, defined by its political and constitutional culture [8].

So, what is the best way to solve the AS problem when making decisions about foreign policy? Taking into account the theoretical contributions of FPA [9], this paper proposes the following three propositions. First, any leader and foreign policy decision-maker operates within an established context, attempting to conform to historical foreign policy trends, which subjects them to inherent pressures and limitations. Second, the amount of freedom and power that a decision-maker has to make and carry out changes is related to how good they are at political entrepreneurship. Leaders who have great ideas for the world and are good at starting businesses can make a big difference. Third, even with these things in mind, the fact that events can change at any time has a big effect on the goals of foreign policy. Because of

this unpredictability, many leaders have failed or bad leaders have succeeded. A great politician is someone who can handle an unexpected crisis. Machiavelli called this skill virtue in the 17th century. The leader's virtue is his ability to be flexible and deal with the ups and downs of politics [10].

Another skill that a great leader has is the ability to get out of the cognitive dissonance trap. [11][12] identifies two primary factors that disrupt policymakers' cognitive processes and skew their situational analysis: "wishful thinking" and the "lessons of history." Wishful thinking is when a decision-maker looks at a situation and weighs their options based on what they believe and hope will happen. The other reason has to do with past experiences and the lessons learned from history that shape how a leader sees things. Leaders often don't understand the real reasons behind the historical events they choose to make decisions about because they are influenced by false historical comparisons. Instead, they keep using solutions that have worked in the past and don't bother to look at other options to find the best one.

There is always a difference between what you hear, how you understand it based on cultural images, and the full facts of the situation. Sadly, the person in charge often overlooks this gap or downplays the truth of the information or the value of its source and can't choose information that could prove traditional policy solutions wrong. This cognitive dissonance in decision-making may be either typical or atypical. When there is a crisis or not enough information, it's okay for the leader to sometimes fall into the cognitive dissonance trap. It is different when the leader has preconceived ideas about the situation and consistently makes biased political choices, which is common for populist leaders. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that foreign policy is shaped by leaders who are driven by their beliefs, worldviews, and cultural images [13]. These ideological factors significantly influence the leadership styles [14] of American presidents, the formulation of US foreign policy doctrines, and "the rise and fall of American hegemony".

Table 1. Key Conditions Facilitating Change in US Foreign Policy

Condition	Description	Examples from Bush, Obama, Trump Eras	Impact on Hegemonic Legitimacy
Structural Changes in World Order	Shifts in material and ideational power distribution	Post-Cold War unipolarity → rise of China	Erosion of US symbolic power
Leadership Style & Ideas	Presidents' worldviews, cognitive biases, and entrepreneurial capacity	Bush neo-conservatism, Obama multilateralism, Trump populism	Direct influence on policy continuity/change
Unpredictable Crises/Shocks	Sudden events that destabilize existing frameworks	9/11 attacks, Global Financial Crisis, COVID-19	Accelerated policy shifts
Domestic Political Dynamics	Internal polarization, populism, and electoral pressures	Rise of Tea Party, Trumpâ€™s base mobilization	Increased politicization of FP

Change and Dynamism in Foreign Policy:

Foreign policy in any state is characterized more by continuity than by change. Many concrete factors that shape a country's foreign policy stay the same for a long time, so there isn't much room for big, ongoing changes. Leaders also tend to be careful when it comes to making big changes to their countries' long-standing foreign policy patterns. John F. Kennedy said, "Domestic policy can only defeat us, foreign policy can kill us".

The examination of change became indispensable following the conclusion of the Cold War. Since that time, many studies have made cases for different parts of change in the world after the Cold War. Some studies have looked into how changes in foreign policy affect

general trends in international relations [15]. Some studies have also looked at how this change is important at the FPA level [16].

Nevertheless, it is frequently noted that all foreign policy decisions exhibit rigidity. When a particular foreign policy choice is delineated and executed, institutional inertia and entrenched interests generate stabilizing effects that create significant barriers to change [17]. While continuity is more common in foreign policy, changes are more important to FPA. It is very important to explain the dialectic of continuity and change in a state's foreign policy and to find the conditions that lead to major turning points. Turning points are times when unusual circumstances make big changes possible, breaking up the normal flow of a country's foreign policy. Three essential conditions facilitate alterations in foreign policy [18]:

Table 2. Levels of Foreign Policy Change (Adapted from Hermann)

Level of Change	Description	Examples from US Presidents	Observed in Bush/Obama/Trump?
Adjustment Change	Minor tweaks in implementation	Tactical adjustments in troop levels	Yes (all three)
Programmatic Change	Changes in means while goals remain the same	Shift in counter-terrorism tactics	Yes (Obama vs Bush)
Problem/Goal Change	Redefinition of objectives	Obama's pivot to Asia vs Bush's GWT	Yes (Obama)
International Orientation Change	Fundamental shift in overall stance toward the world	Trump's "America First" vs previous liberal order	Yes (Trump)

Changes in the structure of the world (both material and mental);
Changes in political leadership (new ideas and likes);
The occurrence of any crisis (for example, shocks to the social or political system).

The simultaneous presence of these three conditions indicates a favorable environment for inducing alterations in foreign policy. There is also a need for a connected approach between structural change and the people who are in charge of it. Even though internal and external time constraints exist to initiate responses, they are taken aback by the phenomenon's unpredictability [19]. Crisis emerges from a transformation that ends fundamental interests, values, and norms, instills uncertainty and insecurity, and narrows a sense of urgency [20]. Political shocks are broader. All elected officials keep their voters in mind when making decisions, but this has become especially worrying with the current ultraconservative populist governments. of taking the traditional view that only looks at the possible use of military force, our view of crises includes the bigger picture of threats to the stability and security of the international order. crises and political shocks we've talked about here are connected to international crises that change the structure and hierarchy of the international order. Actually, dealing with a set of crises that are all connected: political, economic, environmental, social, and identity-related. defined by the emergence of novel and unpredictable events that destabilize the international order and challenge the hegemon's actions. International crises represent critical "moments of truth" for hegemonic leadership and function as essential analytical components (refer to images 2 and 3) for evaluating their adaptability; most importantly, they facilitate the assessment of the degree of international acceptance and recognition of sanctioned hegemonic leadership.

Some people call this a polycrisis. The crisis of international hegemonic leadership and the resulting anti-American sentiment, stemming from Bush's neo-imperial policies and exacerbated by Trump's challenge to the liberal order, further contribute to the atmosphere of polycrisis and uncertainty. Domestic politics and foreign policy are becoming more intertwined, making it essential to acknowledge the domestic origins of foreign policy. People

call this a polycrisis. crisis of international hegemonic leadership and the resulting anti-American sentiment, stemming from Bush's neo-imperial policies and exacerbated by Trump's challenge to the liberal order, further contribute to atmosphere of polycrisis and uncertainty. Changes or crises in a country's own politics are another important part of changes in foreign policy. Politics and foreign policy are becoming more intertwined, making it essential to acknowledge the domestic origins of foreign policy politics is a very messy, complicated, and political process, especially in the US. It can't be separated from bureaucratic and domestic politics [21][22]. Consequently, it is imperative to understand the pivotal influence of alterations in internal politics—encompassing new ideological polarization and the ascent of populism—that facilitates modifications in foreign policy. It is imperative to acknowledge that the rise of populism increasingly sways critical foreign policy decisions, including significant crises or warfare, by internal political dynamics. The increasing politicization of public policymaking has also had an effect on foreign policymaking, making international politics more complicated and difficult for officials keep their voters in mind when making decisions, but this has become especially worrying with the current ultraconservative populist governments. In fact, a lot of their policies try to spread values around the world. Classic hegemonic theorists contend that stability in international politics necessitates a hegemonic power that ensures the enforcement of rules within the international system. The hegemon possesses three fundamental attributes: extraordinary material and political capacity, enabling the formulation of the rules of engagement; the resolve to govern the order and uphold the regulations; and, ultimately, a consensual hegemonic leadership grounded in the unequivocal supremacy of social capital within the international system. The hegemon is therefore dedicated to the durability of the international order, specifically to the contentment of its principal actors and institutions. So, they need to see it as good for reasoning, the maintenance of international order structures depends realm of foreign policy, the situation is even more dire, as decisions are perceived not as state policy but as strategies for domestic mobilization and the attraction of international allies. Bias linked to political leaders' need for internal political survival can lead to unforeseen shifts in foreign policy. Many different kinds and levels of changes in foreign policies. on the hegemon's ability to create a stabilizing hegemony that balances legitimate authority with its ability to enforce its power strategies. In addition, hegemonic stability relies on the hegemon's capacity to illustrate the advantages of stability and order to the other participants within the system. A valuable typology that classifies the changes into four distinct levels. First is a change that happens through adjustments or small changes made at the level of putting policies into action. The second is programmatic change, which means changing the way things are done, even if the goals stay the same. The Third thing to do is change the problem or goal, which means changing the goals themselves. The fourth kind of change means that a state's structural changes will lead to changes in its international orientation. In this case, the state alters not only a policy or issue about foreign policy but also its overall stance on international relations.

Herman's categories are useful, but they need to be connected to how unpredictable international politics can be and how unexpected socio-political shocks can happen. Consequently, we contend that the decline of hegemonic legitimacy expedites transformations. This makes things less certain and shows how important it is for hegemonic leaders to be smart.

Legitimizing Hegemonic Leadership: The Interplay of Symbolic Power and Social Capital Stability in international politics necessitates a hegemonic power that ensures the enforcement of rules within international system [23]. The hegemon possesses three fundamental attributes: extraordinary material and political capacity, enabling the formulation of rules of engagement; resolve to govern the order and uphold the regulations; and, ultimately, a consensual hegemonic leadership grounded in the unequivocal supremacy of social capital within the

international system. Hegemon is therefore dedicated to the durability of the international order, specifically to contentment of its principal actors and institutions. need to see it as good for both of them and agree to it. According to this reasoning, the maintenance of international order structures depends on the hegemon's ability to create a stabilizing hegemony that balances legitimate authority with its ability to enforce its power strategies. In addition, hegemonic stability relies on the hegemon's capacity to illustrate the advantages of stability and order toother participants within the system. If this doesn't happen, hegemonic leadership can turn around and make the system less stable.

Alongside the conventional material determinants of material power, various scholars have recognized significant ideological dimensions of hegemonic leadership. [24] attempted to transcend the excessive materialist determinism inherent in Marxist and realist perspectives by incorporating significant ideological elements influenced by. [24] emphasizes the political and ideological supremacy that underpins material factors crucial for the construction and preservation of the institutional and ideal frameworks of the international order. [25] augmented the concept of hegemonic leadership by emphasizing the significance of the socialization process. Hegemonic leadership transcends mere material power and incentives; it primarily hinges on the hegemon's ability to persuade and socialize global leaders regarding the legitimacy and utility of the hegemon's advocated ideas and norms. Consequently, for hegemonic leadership to be effective, it must depend on a collective consensus regarding the legitimacy of the ideas and practices of the international order, rather than solely on the "cultural images" of decision makers; it must also consider the beliefs of the global populace and public opinion [26].

We cannot examine the stabilizing function of hegemonic power without addressing its legitimization. All power, particularly hegemonic power, is characterized by its ability to legitimize the normative and political framework that governs the relationships within the system. The broad majority of international actors [27] must agree to this hegemonic power relationship and believe it is good. The hegemony must be accepted and not challenged.

The Hegemon must acknowledge the dialectic between material and ideological power, as well as the significance of values and norms in the construction of international social order. Building on these ideas, we argue that in a post-traditional unipolar American hegemonic world and with the emergence of a "multiplex order" [28], what may be decisive in accepting and consenting to hegemonic leadership relates to the capacity of the hegemon to accumulate symbolic power and social capital [29].

By applying Bourdieu's ideas to international politics, we contend that for the hegemon to guide the current hybrid multipolar international order, it must exhibit its benevolence through the accumulation of social capital and symbolic power, regarded as the paramount manifestation of power [29].

Symbolic power encompasses social and political capital, as well as the capacity to shape and construct reality, thereby affecting the development of practical and institutional frameworks for acquiring political power and legitimacy. The hegemon uses this power to make shared ideas and norms about the power hierarchies and the rules of the game in a certain international order normal. gain this power, the hegemon needs to have a lot of social capital. Works also stress that states want social recognition of their status as great powers, in addition to material power. Capital manifests as the capacity to cultivate networks of adherents who acknowledge and embrace hegemonic leadership as benign [29].

Significance of the hegemon's symbolic power and the accumulation of social capital are linked to social and hierarchical discourses about the importance of status in international politics [30]. In this context, the hegemon necessitates societal acknowledgment of its position and its "moral authority" [31] to govern with legitimate consent. This bolsters our Notion that hegemony is intersubjective. The current hegemonic leadership underscores the necessity for

the US to be recognized as a legitimate hegemonic power in light of the challenges arising from changes in the international order. This hegemonic recognition should not be be confined to diplomatic leaders and decision-makers; it should also be bolstered by prevalent perceptions among the populace. diplomatic leaders and decision-makers; it should also be bolstered by prevalent perceptions among the populace. So, the idea of hegemony needs to be spread and shared around the world, with a strong network of social and normative capital, where most people agree that the hegemon's symbolic power is real.

In addition to the hegemonic structural transition dynamics [32], it is essential to understand the hegemon's ability to establish and sustain networks of adherents. In a world where hegemonic power is shifting, itis important for both the hegemon and its rivals to gain symbolic power that leads to the most followers. What is really at stake is not so much whether China will surpass the US as the most materially powerful state in the system, but whether this transition will result in the erosion of the West's identity and symbolic power, as well as its capacity to attract adherents and supporters of the liberal order.

The diminishing disparityin material power between the global North and South, alongside the emergence of new power centers, particularly in Asia with China as its principal power, signifies an unavoidable historical progression. The traditional and dominant power pole of Western Europe and the United States must adapt to the new situation.

Most importantly, the United States, which is still the country with the most power to lead, needs to be able to change by trying to predict and shape the chances of keeping the liberal order in the future.

Historical and Political Contexts:

George W. Bush: The Decline of Neo-Imperialism and Hegemonic Legitimacy Bush administration advocated for a transition to unilateral internationalism through rhetoric, while concurrently adapting to the "unipolar moment". US foreign policy was to maintain its hegemonic power status by being flexible and in charge. The Bush administration in the US used a strategy of benign hegemonic stability, which was similar to what George H. W. Bush and Clinton did before them. traditional US "grand strategy" values working with other countries, but it may also act alone to protect American interests. In the long run, the US was able to act alone without hurting its agreed-upon power and social capital in the world order. The Gulf War is a good example of how a multilateral hegemonic leadership style based on consent can work. Although he believed in normative internationalism, the consensual and multilateral leadership had to deal with the fact that the US was the leader of the UN under George H. W. Bush, and the international community widely accepted this stabilizing hegemony. opposition to its hegemonic power. It is hard for the US to make its case without support from the UN Security Council. The US got ready for war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Scholars and politicians are still arguing about whether Iraq was a "necessary war" or an optional one. The two main ideas behind GWT. Second was the need for an internationalist foreign policy to change the way things are done around ideas that were based on false beliefs about the US's unilateral dominance, with little thought given to the possibility that its hegemonic power could help stabilize the declining international order. doctrine was influenced by a religious and messianic perspective characteristic of conservative American republicanism. up the US political identity. This includes a voluntarist view of its Although Clinton's US was assertive multilateralism, it was still the dominant leader and stabilizer of the international system. 11, 2001, terrorists used three civilian planes as weapons to attack the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon Building in Arlington, Virginia. The attack involved a "revolution" in the way the US looked at the world. Were a number of ideological influences on the Bush doctrine, such as American neo-conservatism (which is a mix of conservative and voluntarist ideas) and a certain Manichean view of international politics. A combination of these ideas with those of the US founding fathers is what makes

Christian and democratic-liberal values and vision of its unique role in the world. The way Americans saw their country was by adding a neo-imperial view. vision combined post-bipolar ideas about the "end of history" and the growth of "democratic peace" with new ideas about unipolar supremacy and the idea that democracy could be forced on people quickly through regime changes. concepts of US internationalism and exceptionalism, while reinterpreting US unilateralism, which numerous scholars have described as imperial. is important to stress, although, that all of the ideas that drove Bush administration's vision put too much emphasis on hard power and pushed the legitimacy of the hegemon's symbolic power to the back.

The US is in a position to be seen as a possible violator of other states' sovereignty by allowing "pre-emptive war," especially attacks that the United Nations (UN) did not approve of. big problem for the country when it came to keeping the international system stable. The US, which had been seen as a force for stability in the world order, is now seen as a force for instability because of its neo-imperial unilateralism. The legitimacy of US hegemony-initiated discourse on hegemonic destabilization and the potential for alternative powers to implement counter-hegemonic balancing measures. Reaction to Bush's neo-imperial attitude weakened the US's unipolar military power in the world after the invasion of Iraq and sparked a lively debate about the US's hegemonic leadership, which had not been questioned very often before, at risk because the administration couldn't show that the GWT was making the world more stable and peaceful. main ideas—"pre-emption," "regime change," and the Manichaean division of the world between friends and enemies—had a few good days, even though this was a problem. doctrine encountered significant criticism only after the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan reached a stalemate.

This raises the question of whether it is possible to start a war around the world without hurting the legitimacy of US hegemony. This goal cannot be achieved unilaterally by depending solely on the supremacy of hard power and attempting to create a neo-imperial international order. Additionally, it is unattainable through leadership that promotes simplistic worldviews based on messianic and Manichaean ideologies, or through political decisions arising from conflicting cognitive processes and misconceptions, exemplified by the belief in the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Table 3. Bush Administration – Key Foreign Policy Features and Consequences

Aspect	Bush Policy Approach	Intended Goal	Actual Outcome / Consequence
Unilateralism & Pre-emption	Emphasis on hard power and preventive war	Maintain US dominance	Damage to legitimacy & rise in anti-Americanism
Neo-Conservative Ideology	Manichean worldview, regime change	Spread democracy	Prolonged wars in Iraq/Afghanistan
Multilateral Institutions	Selective engagement (e.g., limited UN role in Iraq)	Preserve freedom of action	Weakened symbolic power

Barack Obama: The End of Unilateralism and the Restoration of American Leadership. Many people in the US and around the world were happy that Obama won because it meant that Bush's way of seeing things was not going to be followed. Obama probably got the Nobel Peace Prize early because he wanted to change US foreign policy. Obama said he wanted to change the direction set by his predecessor. This meant stopping military operations in Iraq, starting talks with US enemies like Iran, Syria, and Cuba, stopping torture, freeing prisoners at Guantánamo, giving up on unilateralism and preventive wars, repairing relationships with allies, and getting back involved with multilateral agreements like the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which were put on hold during the Bush presidency.

Above all, Obama said he would look at terrorist threats in a new way. He talked about the problem of terrorism around the world, but he also said that there are many other important issues in international politics besides the fight against terrorism. Obama said there would be change. Obama's speeches and written works about US foreign policy show that he has different views from Bush.

Table 4. Obama Administration – Continuity vs Change in Foreign Policy

Policy Area	Continuity from Bush Era	Change Introduced by Obama	Long-term Effect
Counter-Terrorism	Continued operations against Al-Qaeda	Shift to drones, reduced large-scale ground wars	Mixed: reduced footprint but criticism on drone use
Multilateral Engagement	Selective use of institutions	Renewed emphasis on alliances & diplomacy	Partial restoration of US soft power
Middle East Strategy	Focus on regime change & military presence	Diplomatic engagement (Iran deal, Cuba)	Temporary thaw followed by later reversals

Obama Says:

"These threats call for a new kind of leadership in the twenty-first century, one that is based on the past but not limited by old ideas. The Bush administration responded to the unusual attacks of 9/11 with old-fashioned ways of thinking, mostly seeing problems as state-based and mostly solvable by military means. This tragically wrong view is what got us into a war in Iraq that should never have been allowed or fought. The world no longer trusts our goals and values after Iraq and Abu Ghraib.

Obama in 2007:

But once he was elected, there was a big difference between Obama's inspiring speeches and how politics really worked. Obama laid out four main ideas that guide American foreign policy. Idea was that the US would do everything it could to achieve its foreign policy goals. But for this to work well, these goals needed support from both parties in the US Senate. Third, Obama said that the US should be ready to talk and negotiate with its enemies before using force, even though he agreed that there were times when force was the only option. Obama pledged to the "Renewing American Leadership" initiatives by "Pursuing Comprehensive Engagement" and working to "Strengthen Institutions and Mechanisms for Cooperation".

The most important thing about Obama was that he tried to change how Americans saw the world and make the US the most powerful country based on ideas that were better suited to the problems of the twenty-first century. Obama changed how people thought about some problems. He started by saying that Islam was not the enemy and that the GWT could not be the most important thing about the US's role in the world. This meant that US foreign policy had to stop being aggressive and one-sided, like neo-Manichean and neo-imperialism.

Obama pushed for a big change to the GWT. His efforts led to the creation of a policy aimed at fighting terrorist networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The fight against military insurrection in Taliban-controlled areas also became part of his strategy. So, the war in Afghanistan was framed as politically useful to help build stable states and societies instead of just being a military operation.

Obama defended a slow plan to pull American troops out of Iraq. He wanted to end the war in a responsible way by letting Iraqis handle their own security. But this effort failed because the US and Iraqi governments didn't work together to promote policies of inclusion

and stabilization after the fall of Saddam and the Ba'ath regime. This was because they saw Iraq as a military problem instead of a political one.

Obama promised to back democratic reforms in the Middle East to help bring about peace and a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Obama's goal was for the US to be seen as an unbiased mediator in the conflict between Israel and Palestine, but this didn't work out very well. Obama started a new policy in Iran by talking to Tehran about its nuclear policy. This opened up diplomatic channels for talking about other issues involving this key state in the region.

Obama wanted to restore US leadership in Latin America by encouraging North and South American states to work together in a respectful way. Obama defended the creation of a soft-power policy that took into account the historical and cultural sensitivities of Latin American countries and led to a new strategic alliance for the Americas. He said:
"However, we are bound by shared values even more than by interest. We see parts of our own journey in each other's. Colonists who left empires behind. Pioneers who opened up new lands... This is our shared history. This is a site of shared heritage. We are all from the United States.
(Obama 2011):

Obama finally realized that the US needed to improve its ties with Cuba to make its relationship with this neighboring country more normal.

One of the most important things that happened during Obama's presidency was the strengthening of US ties with Europe and Asia and a closer relationship with the Islamic world. During the Iraq War, the US tried to restore a friendly relationship with Europe and get past the distrust that had built up between the "new" and "old" Europe.

Obama talked about how Asia's economy is becoming more important and pushed for a strategic partnership between the US and emerging Asian markets. This policy has a special place for China. Obama's administration tried to build a special relationship with China on globally important issues. People no longer think of China as an economic partner; instead, they think of it as a diplomatically important player.

Another unique situation is the one between the US and Russia. Obama said that the way Americans usually think about Russia needed to change. He wanted to improve the political and economic ties between the US and Russia and get rid of the old idea that Russia was a geopolitical enemy. But during Obama's last term, US-Russia relations got a lot worse because Putin kept claiming more power in the region and against US hegemony. Relations between the US and Russia were at their worst level since the end of the Cold War at the end of Obama's last term.

Obama pushed for an active nuclear policy that would start with the US and work to reduce nuclear arsenals. More importantly, he told world leaders to believe that it was possible to get rid of all nuclear weapons. Lastly, Obama's plan included plans to deal with climate change and other environmental problems. He tried to make policies that connected energy security with solutions that were better for the environment.

All of these ideas support the idea that Obama had a complex view of the world and was better able to deal with the new problems that the current international order was causing. He admitted that traditional political movements that used force or economic sanctions to force international policies and norms on others had become harder to carry out without a strong sense of legitimacy to support US hegemony.

It is still important for leaders in different countries to work together through traditional diplomacy, but public diplomacy that strongly involves civil societies and transnational movements must also support solutions to global problems. Obama understood the risks of a one-sided foreign policy and the value of multilateralism and public diplomacy. He also understood that the hegemon had the right to keep the international order stable.

Obama couldn't get rid of all of Bush's policies because the political system was so important, and public policies tend to stay the same. But Obama proved that he could think strategically and see the big picture, not just the small details. He had a complex view of the world that was based on the main idea that the US should lead a liberal international order.

Obama started his presidency with too much idealism, which sometimes got him into trouble, like when he said there was a "red line" in Syria. Obama balanced his liberal ideals with a practical approach while he was in office. Instead of withdrawing from the US's global role, Obama pushed for a more logical redefinition of US interventionist voluntarism. Obama tried to fix the wrong military campaigns of Bush'sGWT by learning from history. He wanted the US to stay a leading power, but he didn't want its influence and show of power to go against international norms. Obama opted for drones, sanctions, and negotiations over conventional military actions in several pivotal situations, including Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, and Iran.

Obama decided that the problems in the Middle East were too complicated to be solved by the great powers, no matter how well-meaning they were [32] The Obama administration stopped making bold and direct moves and instead used a more cautious approach that kept troops on the ground from getting involved directly. But this policy drew a lot of criticism, especially from people who missed the aggressive actions and zero-sum game of the Cold War. Some people even said that the US had given up on a grand strategy for its foreign policy or worse, that Obama had chosen a foreign policy that would lead to the US's decline [22]. These ideas struck a chord with Trump and helped him come up with the idea for "America First."

It is important to remember that politics can't always make both Greeks and Trojans happy. Obama made mistakes, like pulling troops out of Iraq without any guarantee of stability and not using American power during the Arab Spring. But in the end, he had more successes than failures. Obama was able to put two important ideas into action at the same time in Asia through the Trans-Pacific Partnership: strengthening the growth of the global economy and strengthening the democratic liberal order.

Obama also managed to restore diplomatic relations with Iran and Cuba through active and ongoing diplomacy. In both cases, there was a big change in how people thought about their relationships with countries that were once thought to be enemy states. He gave up the simple policy of isolation and sanctions and changed the way he thought about foreign policy to one that was based on trade-offs and diplomatic dialogue. Obama thought that the most important thing for the US to do was to talk to people and connect closed societies with open ones. This would help keep the liberal international order going and growing. In this situation, Obama believed that the strategy of promoting open societies would eventually work in Iran, Russia, and China.

But these kinds of long-term plans run into a lot of problems, like how to deal with short and changing political cycles within a country and changes in international politics that happen all the time and are hard to predict. It is pragmatic to assert that until these insular societies transition to openness, nations such as Iran, Russia, and China may implement aggressive policies that destabilize the liberal international order. China has embraced the principle of "Peaceful Rise" however, there are indications, although less pronounced than in Russia, of anti-hegemonic movements.

Obama understood the rights and responsibilities of hegemony, but he disagreed with his predecessor because he didn't believe in Manichean views or that democracy could be imposed quickly and through hard power, which is a contradiction in terms. Obama, on the other hand, had a cosmopolitan, multilateral, and institutionalist view of the world. Obama thought that the US should take the lead by working with other countries, even if this meant

that the hegemon's offensive power would have to be limited. Obama's last speech at the UN shows what he thinks:

"We can only fulfill the promise of this institution's founding—to replace the damage of war with cooperation—if powerful countries like mine agree to limits. People in my own country sometimes criticize me for believing in international norms and multilateral institutions. But I am sure that in the long run, giving up some freedom of action—binding ourselves to international rules over the long term—will make us safer. And I don't think that's just true for us.

Donald Trump: Populist Neo-Nationalism and the Decline of the Liberal Order:

The Breaking Down of the Multilateral Vision and the Problems with America First. Trump was an accidental leader because he was a businessman and TV star who became very popular. His inflammatory language, which mixed false information, emotional appeals, and ideas that were too simple, showed a populist dislike for elites that many Americans could relate to [24]. Trump's populist leadership style and good communication skills helped him connect with the far-right wing of the Republican Party, which is both populist and conservative.

In the end, Trump was a leader who took advantage of a time when the US was doing less well. He was able to use the nationalist anger of more conservative Americans to his advantage. This included not only the traditional ideological conservatives linked to Jacksonian populism and the Tea Party, but also middle- and lower-class Americans who have felt the effects of the US's decline as an industrial power due to faster economic globalization and China's rise as an industrial power.

Their opinions on international politics and the US's role in leading the world were not very deep and were based on simple ideas that are often found in ultraconservative nationalist stories. Trump wanted to go back to neo-nationalist isolationism and get rid of Obama's foreign policy of trying to regain international hegemonic leadership. Trump was the first US president after World War II to ask if the liberal order that American leadership had set up and kept going was useful.

This questioning of the liberal order was due to his overly simple view of the cost–benefit ratio of keeping the political, normative, and security structures of the liberal order in place. He thought that the US would not gain anything by continuing to lead this order. The liberal order was good for other countries, especially the US's long-time allies, but it was bad for American interests. Trump said that for America to become "great again," it needs to break free from the limits of the liberal order's multilateral options. As he said in his first speech,

"For many years, we've helped foreign businesses at the expense of American ones, paid for other countries' armies while letting our own fall apart, defended other countries' borders while refusing to defend our own, and spent trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay." While our country has lost its wealth, strength, and confidence, we have made other countries rich. The money that our middle class had in their homes has been taken away and given to people all over the world. But that's what happened in the past. Now we are only thinking about the future. From this day on, a new vision will guide our country. From now on, America comes first.:

There was a tendency to undermine liberal democratic ideas, practices, and values during Trump's presidency. This was clear when the strategic principle of putting democratic allies ahead of non-democratic actors changed. People have either questioned or given up on the Obama administration's most important international agreements. These included economic partnerships with Asia and Europe, global pacts, and many other multilateral and bilateral agreements. Trump thought these agreements were bad for the US because they didn't put American interests first. His main focus was on an accounting balance sheet that showed how costs were shared between NATO member countries. This nationalist vision might have

been popular with voters in the country, but for the liberal order's dominant leaders, it was a step back to a time when the US couldn't lead the world. The main problem with the "America First" idea is right here.

Trump's call for a return to a time when the US didn't have to lead the world shows that he is trying to protect himself from the problems the US faces as it tries to become a global hegemon. Conversely, his nationalist perspective of "America first" contradicts the concept of offering stabilizing hegemonic leadership. In this kind of leadership, everyone else agrees because they see the benefits that come with it. This is based on the idea of interdependent reciprocity, not nationalism.

Trump never really understood the problems of being the leader of the world because he was ideologically against the multilateral liberal order. So, Trump decided not to take on that job, in part because he needed to tell a story about an anti-liberal order to win over his populist supporters. So, whether it was because he was a nationalist or because he wanted to stay in power at home, Trump's foreign policy broke down many of the liberal order's normal ideas and practices.

Lastly, it should be stressed that American leadership's social capital is at its lowest point. A Pew survey from 2018 that looked at 25 countries found that 70% of those countries did not trust Trump. Seventy percent of the countries surveyed also thought that the US doesn't care about the needs of other countries, either "not too much/not at all". The Soft Power Index is another example. It ranks countries based on how well they can use cultural, political, and economic means to attract and persuade others. The index says that the US went from first place in 2016 to fifth place in 2019.

The criticism of America during the Bush years was mostly about the neo-imperialist foreign policy choices. Now, under Trump, the criticism is more about the basic role of American democracy itself. Trump's ideas and actions have weakened the symbolic power of the leaders of the demo-liberal Western model. This started when he stopped pushing for the spread of democracy. Then, he got close to authoritarian and populist ultraconservative regimes. Finally, the US pulled out of global agreements, and multilateralism fell apart. The quality of democracy in the US is getting worse, even at home. Freedom House says that President Trump "went against established standards of ethics and openness, verbally attacked important democratic institutions like the news media and the courts, and made inflammatory and often wrong statements about many different things."

The United States, as an example and leader of the liberal order, has lost social capital in both the Global South and the Global North. The EU and G7 leaders have not liked its confrontational, populist, and nationalist vision and way of leading. The most obvious sign of the decline of US social capital under Trump was his speech to the UN in 2018, when he said at the beginning of his speech:

"Today, I am speaking to the United Nations General Assembly to talk about how far we have come. My administration has done more in less than two years than almost any other administration in the history of our country.

(Trump 2018):

The diplomats and leaders who were at the General Assembly laughed out loud when they heard this. This is the first time a North American president has spoken at the UN. It shows how badly Trump has hurt the US's reputation around the world.

A Foreign Policy That is Both Chaotic and Nationalist:

Trump has turned down Obama's ideas, calling the foreign policies of both Obama and Hillary Clinton "a complete and total disaster," with "no vision," "no purpose," and "no direction". These were some of the ideas that many analysts used to describe Trump's foreign policy doctrine, which they also called "chaotic", "incoherent", "imprudent," and

"incompetent". The investigation into the presence of a Trump doctrine or a coherent conceptual framework directing Trump's foreign policy has been a topic of contention.

A report written for the US Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations on October 21, 2020, said:

"President Trump's foreign policy has been full of chaos, neglect, and failed diplomacy." Former Trump administration officials say that the President's rash and unpredictable behavior have hurt the United States' reputation as a trustworthy partner and made it harder to work with other countries.

(USA 2020):

This is also why people thought Trump made decisions that didn't make sense. He changed the US's foreign policy in a way that went against the traditional hegemonic role of the liberal order. This was clear in the big problems that global governance was having and the US's decreasing role in multilateral normative regulation. The United States pulled out of a number of multilateral agreements while Trump was president. These included the Paris Climate Agreement, the Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to stop Iran's nuclear program, and the Human Rights Council. The Trump administration has also said it might pull out of the World Health Organization (WHO). The USA's withdrawal from the Paris agreement is more important than its symbolic meaning. What is more important is that Trump has contradictory views on climate change and has denied that there is an environmental threat.

The Trump administration thought that the most important thing for the US to do was to stop China from becoming a global power, as stated in the 2017 National Security Strategy. But its aggressive stance and too much focus on economic factors didn't work. Ultimately, the commencement of a trade war with China did not produce the desired outcomes. The conventional method of confrontation and the hierarchical imposition of sanctions have exacerbated the instability of the liberal order. As a Chinese diplomat, Wang Yi says, "The United States is largely engaged in unilateralism and protectionism, which is hurting multilateralism and the multilateral trading system." It has already become the biggest thing in the world that makes things unstable". Obama's goal was to make China more like the US, but Trump's aggressive approach has made China more independent and more critical of US power.

Trump's choice to pull the US out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) weakened the US's power in the Asia-Pacific region. He has missed an opportunity to bring this region into the liberal order and fight China's alternative hegemonic vision by going against the strategic idea of working with the Asia Pacific. On the other hand, Trump's failure to speak out against human rights abuses in Hong Kong and Xinjiang hurts the US's ability to promote liberal values around the world. Trump has had a hard time dealing with China's rise as an economic power and realizing that US leadership must be defined not only in economic terms, but also in terms of ideas, norms, and symbols, such as promoting democracy, freedom, human rights, and international norms.

Trump tried a new approach with North Korea: talking directly with Kim Jong Un. Trump said, "We fell in love" with the North Korean dictator. Even though they are in love, North Korea's nuclear missile threat has not gone down. Even though it was new for their leaders to meet in person, efforts to limit North Korea's nuclear policy have not worked.

Trump tried to change the way he dealt with Russia and put his money on a close relationship with Putin. But he didn't talk much about the ideas and norms, and he didn't strongly criticize Russia's neo-imperialist enforcement policy toward its neighbors. This policy includes terrible things like the poisonings of Sergei Skripal and Alexei Navalny, Russia's support for Assad's brutality in Syria, and Russia's interference in the US elections of 2016 and 2020. But the Trump administration kept Obama's efforts to keep Russia in check, such as

putting sanctions on Russia and making the unprecedented choice to give Ukraine lethal aid. Trump's illegal pressure on Zelensky hurt Trump's reputation and made relations with Ukraine worse.

There have been a number of changes and improvements in the Middle East. Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal, saying he would get a better deal and make Iran less powerful in the area. It seems that there was a bigger goal: to change the government. In reality, Iran kept enriching uranium, and neither goal was met. Trump kept the US-led military operation going that started in 2014 to fight the Islamic State. During the Syrian war, Trump was quick to act but didn't always stick to his plans. He said he would use force to stop Assad's crimes and fired missiles in response to Assad's use of chemical weapons. But in the end, he pulled US troops out of Syria without getting much done, which is why Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis resigned.

During Trump's time in office, the agreement between the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Israel was a big step forward for the region. This was the first time these countries had normal diplomatic ties with Israel. But these deals didn't come with a full plan for the Middle East. These agreements have not helped the conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Libya, and Lebanon in real life. Also, they haven't dealt with the deeper structural problems that are stopping peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Trump's support for conservative Israeli positions, such as moving the capital to Jerusalem, made it harder for the US to act as an impartial mediator in the conflict.

Trump has gotten rid of the policy of slowly bringing the countries of Latin America together and trading with each other. The region's dislike and alienation from Trump is most clear in his anti-immigration policies and his preference for building walls instead of bridges to connect with the region. Brazil was the only other country. With Bolsonaro, we reached an unusual ideological and political agreement. The two populist leaders worked together to bring down socialist governments, especially those in Cuba and Venezuela. But their harsh treatment of refugees and confrontational approach has hurt the United States' social capital in the area. Mexico did not end up paying for the border wall. The effort to get rid of the Venezuelan government has failed, and the new strict policy toward Cuba has also failed to bring about democratic change.

President Trump had the most negative things to say about NATO of any US president since the alliance was formed in 1949. This has made things worse between the US and some NATO members. Because of this, President Trump's relationship with European leaders has become tense. Obama set the goal of European countries investing 2% of their GDP in NATO in 2014, but it was Trump who pushed European partners to meet this goal. This policy was reasonable; however, Trump's populist and combative approach harmed efforts to strengthen the political partnership with Europe, which was at one of its lowest points.

Trump's leadership and his nationalist and populist ideas led to changes in US foreign policy. His narrow and anti-globalist views, along with his populist and combative style, have made multilateralism weaker and broken down the foundations of the liberal order. Trump said that he was someone who reacts quickly and aggressively. He tried to use his unpredictability and the fact that the US military was getting stronger, which was one of his successes. But when faced with complicated and global situations, he couldn't adapt or make smart choices. His response to the COVID-19 pandemic around the world was the best example of this inability. This failure led to more than 200,000 deaths in the United States. Trump did not lead the US in the global effort to fight the pandemic. Trump's weak response has also hurt the United States' social capital and its position as a world leader.

Final Thoughts: Three relevant and interconnected conditions facilitate changes in foreign policy. The first is changes in the way the international order is set up, specifically in terms of

hierarchical and ideational normative power. The second is changes in leaders and the cultural images and worldviews that foreign policymakers get as a result. The third is the occurrence of crises that cause political shocks and give strong reasons to change foreign policy. Consequently, shifts and modifications in US foreign policy are elucidated by alterations in the international order, leaders' ability to adapt and augment the hegemon's symbolic power, and the unpredictability of socio-political crises.

We must also take into account two other relational contextual conditions in addition to these three. First, times when one country is in charge, and there is a lot of disagreement about ideas and norms for international leadership, make crises more likely and happen faster. Second, new and unexpected socio-political shocks, like the COVID-19 pandemic or surprise wars, don't have any planned solutions. This means that things can change quickly and decisions can be made more quickly, which leads to more uncertainty, misunderstandings, and mistakes.

We come to some conclusions about the cultural images and dominant leadership styles of Bush, Obama, and Trump. Bush changed the way the US dealt with other countries and took on a unilateral hegemonic leadership style. His leadership style was neo-imperial during the GWT, which was a time when there was only one superpower. But his neo-conservative ideas about using hard power to intervene in other countries and his Manichean view of the world hurt the US's role as a good and stabilizing hegemon.

Obama went back to Bush's neo-imperial style and anti-Americanism. He was a more sophisticated, practical, and multilateral leader. Obama's plans were bigger, less one-sided, more focused on specific issues, and less based on strict geopolitical and ideological ideas. Obama comprehended the paradox of US power, the development of a hybrid multipolar order, and recognized that US hegemony, despite its formidable status, must adhere to multilateralism and international law, as they are essential mechanisms for legitimizing the application of hard power.

The Trump administration was a new and dangerous way to do international politics. Leaders and decision-makers with simplistic worldviews often pose unwarranted threats to international stability. Obama brought about change by undoing some of Bush's policies. Trump, on the other hand, called for a real Copernican revolution in American foreign policy, which changed the way the US led the world. Bush, even though he acted alone, knew how important American hegemony was to building the liberal order. Trump, on the other hand, was the first US president since World War II to question the usefulness of the liberal order that American hegemonic leadership had built since then.

Leaders are important, but we can't ignore how structure limits agency. Political leaders are limited in their ability to make decisions and carry out policies by structural factors. So, leaders' messianic visions should be kept to a minimum. Even with smart leaders, the chance of war will always be there, and the sad unpredictability of a new political shock will always be there. We have to accept that international politics is complicated and hard to predict. You can't predict or control changes. History does not follow the rules of efficiency [3], and political shocks can happen at any time. Change is the only thing that stays the same in international politics, even though most people think otherwise. In just twenty-five years, the United States went through three different types of leadership: a unipolar moment with a hegemonic leader whom everyone agreed with, a neo-imperial moment when that leader's authority was challenged, and an illiberal neo-nationalist moment when the conditions for symbolic power and social capital got worse for the US to continue to play a role in international leadership.

Still, the ability of leaders to encourage careful and multilateral responses to global crises makes it more likely that the US will continue to be a stabilizing hegemon. However, the American presidents need to understand how the new multiplex order works and how

important it is not to weaken the US's symbolic power and social capital, especially in the Global North but also in the Global South. If leaders keep getting stuck in cognitive dissonance and can't change their ideas and beliefs to fit the changing and unpredictable world of international politics, then any decisions made with hard power will hurt the hegemon's legitimacy.

Another important part of keeping the symbolic power of a hegemonic leadership that everyone agrees on is to adopt policies that are flexible and work with others, not policies that are aggressive and one-sided. Bush and Trump's confrontational strategies were major causes of anti-Americanism and the decline of America's social capital.

Lastly, the traditional link between power and material resources isn't enough to fully explain the current state of hegemonic leadership. The United States is still the most powerful country in the world. Still, this isn't enough for the US to take the lead in the world. The US did not lose its position of benign hegemony because it didn't use hard power. The actual issue was the erosion of symbolic power and the increasing global consensus that the legitimacy of the leader-follower dynamic, dependent on the hegemonic leader's social capital, is threatened by the unilateral policies and insular leadership of the United States.

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