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## **An Unexceptional Presidency: A critical analysis of Trump's foreign policy discourse**

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“The fate of America cannot depend on any one man. The greatness of America is grounded in principles and not in any single personality.” – Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1932

# An Unexceptional Presidency

*A critical analysis of Trump’s foreign policy discourse*



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## **Abstract**

Donald Trump has frequently been labelled an idiosyncratic aberration and has equally been accused of breaking with American foreign policy tradition. However, by applying the foreign policy traditions uncovered by Mead (Wilsonianism, Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism), scholars began arguing that Trump was perfectly traditional because he adhered to one or more of these historic traditions. Simultaneously, scholars argued that Trump rejected the myth of American exceptionalism that informs said traditions. This begs the question of how one can be traditional, yet also reject their foundational myth. Scholars had failed to consider these two facets in tandem, and had only focussed on Trump's campaign and early presidency therefore failing to provide a prudent analysis of Trump's entire foreign policy. This thesis aimed to rectified both by asking the following question: *how has Trump's re-interpretation of American exceptionalism influenced the utilisation of the dominant traditions in American foreign policy in his foreign policy discourse?* Through the use of a critical geopolitical analysis, it was uncovered that Trump redefined American exceptionalism to an conditional state of objective greatness that only he could achieve and maintain, rather than an inherent trait. This allowed him to argue that his predecessors had made America *unexceptional*, stirring feelings of betrayal that he could then mobilise for his own political gain. This demagogic 'exceptional me 2.0' strategy shaped his application of all the four traditions wherein he blames Wilsonianism for American decline and aims to rally disappointed Hamiltonians, Jeffersonians and Jacksonians against them in order to effectuate a great reset of American foreign policy *and* domestic politics.

**Key words:** Trump, United States, America, American Exceptionalism, Wilsonianism, Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism, Jacksonianism, Foreign Policy, Foreign Policy Traditions, Identity, Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Geopolitics.

## **Abbreviations**

FP	–	Foreign Policy
US	–	United States
UNGA	–	United Nations General Assembly
ICC	–	International Criminal Court
IR	–	International Relations

# Chapter 1: Introduction

**T**ump, pundits predicted during the 2017 presidential campaign, “would break sharply with US foreign policy tradition,” and short of a year into his presidency, the New York Times labelled him an “insurgent” who had broken with American foreign policy (FP).<sup>1</sup> When we fast forward to just a few months into the Biden presidency, a stark contrast emerges when John Bolton – who had worked as Donald Trump’s national security advisor – declared that American FP under Biden “return[ed] to normal”, indicating an established view of the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States (US) as “an idiosyncratic aberration.”<sup>2</sup> Trump’s FP has further been characterised as “unpredictable”<sup>3</sup>, “unprecedented,”<sup>4</sup> and even “un-American.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Trump himself fostered such notions by raising the need for a brand new FP centred around unpredictability which prompted several scholars to conceptualise unpredictability as the Trump doctrine.<sup>6</sup>

However, many scholars of American FP and International Relations (IR) have argued that Trump’s FP has in fact been perfectly traditional. To make their case, they relied on Walter Russel Mead’s foundational book on American FP traditions, *Special Providence*. Therein he explains that American FP has historically been shaped by four competing yet often

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<sup>1</sup> David Wright and Tom Kludt, “Trump would break sharply with US Foreign Policy tradition,” *CNN*, July 21, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/21/politics/trump-foreign-policy-interview/index.html>; & Mark Landler, “Trump, the insurgent, breaks with 70 years of American foreign policy,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/28/us/politics/trump-world-diplomacy.html>.

<sup>2</sup> John Bolton, “Foreign Policy Returns to Normal, for Both Better and Worse,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/foreign-policy-biden-trump-russia-china-iran-cuba-venezuela-normalcy-11627421864>;

<sup>3</sup> Max Boot, “Trump’s ‘America First’ Is the Twilight of American Exceptionalism,” *Foreign Policy*, November 22, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/22/trumps-america-first-is-the-twilight-of-american-exceptionalism-obama/>; & Ali Wyne, “Trump’s Foreign Policy Chaos,” *The New Republic*, January 23, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/140038/trumps-foreign-policy-chaos>.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Azari, *Unprecedented: A Simple Guide to the Crimes of the Trump Campaign and Presidency* (Lincoln: Potomac Books, 2020); & Martha Brockenbrough, *Unpresidented: A Biography of Donald Trump* (New York, Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> J.J. Pitney, *Un-American: The Fake Patriotism of Donald J. Trump* (London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Donald J. Trump, “America First,” transcript of speech delivered at Mayflower Hotel, Washington DC, April 27, 2016, <https://time.com/4309786/read-donald-trumps-america-first-foreign-policy-speech/>; Michelle Bentley and Maxine David, “Unpredictability as doctrine: Reconceptualising foreign policy strategy in the Trump era,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34, no. 3 (2021); & Adam B. Lerner, “Theorizing unpredictability in international politics: a new approach to Trump and the Trump Doctrine,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34, no. 3 (2021).

overlapping schools of thought, or traditions, which he has labelled Wilsonianism, Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism.<sup>7</sup> These traditions all flow from the same foundational myth that has defined American history and American FP: a belief in American exceptionalism.<sup>8</sup> Scholars, Mead among them, found great similarity between the populist Jacksonian tradition and Trump's FP discourse during his campaign and early presidency.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps unsurprising since Trump has openly expressed his admiration for the seventh president of the US.<sup>10</sup> Others agreed, but argued that Jeffersonianism had to be included to explain some of Trump's policies that were in fact not Jacksonian.<sup>11</sup> Some went even further and posited that Trump's focus on trade issues made him a not only a Jacksonian and Jeffersonian but Hamiltonian as well.<sup>12</sup> All of them argued, however, that Trump adhered to historical FP traditions and could therefore not be considered an idiosyncratic aberration.

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Russel Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Hilde Eliassen Restad, "Whither the 'City Upon a Hill'? Donald Trump, America First, and American Exceptionalism," *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 1 (2019); Restad "Old Paradigms in History Die Hard in Political Science: US Foreign Policy and American Exceptionalism," *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (2012); Restad, *American Exceptionalism: An idea that made a nation and remade the world* (London: Routledge, 2014); Stephen Wertheim, "9. Trump Against Exceptionalism: The Sources of Trumpian Conduct", in *Chaos in the Liberal Order*, ed. Robert Jervis et al. (Columbia University Press, 2018); Jason Gilmore and Charles M. Rowling, "Partisan Patriotism in the American Presidency: American Exceptionalism, Issue Ownership, and the Age of Trump", *Mass Communication and Society* 22, no. 3 (2019); Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me: How Donald Trump Exploited the Discourse of American Exceptionalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021); Joanne P. Sharp, "Publishing American Identity: Popular Geopolitics, Myth and The Reader's Digest", *Political Geography* 12, no. 6 (1993).

Also see: Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); Ruggie, "The Past as Prologue?"; Charles Lockhart, *The Roots of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Deborah I. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Jackson: University press of Mississippi, 1998); & Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Mead, "The Jacksonian Revolt. American Populism and the Liberal Order," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 2 (2017); Taesuh Cha, "The Return of Jacksonianism: The International Implications of the Trump Phenomenon," *The Washington Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (2016); Matthew Fay, "Obama, Trump, and Jacksonian Foreign Policy," Niskanen Center, November 30, 2016, <https://www.niskanencenter.org/obama-trump-jacksonian-foreign-policy/>; Anna Dimitrova, "Trump's 'America First' Foreign Policy: The Resurgence of the Jacksonian Tradition?" *L'Europe en Formation* 1, no. 283 (2017); Michael Clarke and Anthony Ricketts, 'Understanding the Return of the Jacksonian Tradition', *Orbis* 61, no. 1 (2017); Roberto Rabel, "Donald Trump, populism and the shallow roots of American internationalism," *New Zealand International Review* 44, no. 2 (2019); & Jack Holland and Ben Fermor, "The Discursive Hegemony of Trump's Jacksonian Populism: Race, Class, and Gender in Constructions and Contestations of US National Identity, 2016-2018," *Politics* 41, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>10</sup> Jonah Engel Bromwich, "The Wild Inauguration of Andrew Jackson, Trump's Populist Predecessor," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/20/us/politics/donald-trump-andrew-jackson.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Niklas Rolf, "Donald Trump's Jacksonian and Jeffersonian Foreign Policy," *Policy Studies* 42, no. 5-6 (2021).

<sup>12</sup> Milan Krstić, "Donald Trump's 2016 Presidential Campaign in the Light of U.S. Foreign Policy Traditions," *Serbian Political Thought* 14, no. 2 (2016).



Simultaneously, scholars began arguing that Trump rejected traditional notions of exceptionalism, such as the inherent uniqueness and (moral) superiority of the US and its people – his rhetoric might be hypernationalist, but he is not an exceptionalist.<sup>13</sup> This then begs the question how Trump can be considered traditional, in the sense that he fits into pre-determined traditions, when he also rejects their foundational myth. After all, if “a president is thought to not hold such ideals [exceptionalism] about the US, the nation’s founding idea is by definition threatened.”<sup>14</sup> The work of Gilmore and Rowling – who pioneered the research on Trump’s relationship with American exceptionalism – might provide answers as they posit that Trump does not reject exceptionalism as a concept, but redefines it into a demagogic form wherein the US is not inherently exceptional due to its institutions, values or people, but thanks to his person. It is therefore something that can be gained and lost, depending on whether Trump is the president.<sup>15</sup> Given that FP is constituted by ideas and identities, such a drastic re-interpretation of America’s core identity is sure to have had an impact on American FP.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, we must consider how Trump’s re-interpretation of exceptionalism has influenced his utilisation of the dominant FP traditions. There is, after all, clear evidence that Trump does adhere – at least to some extent – to the discursive confines of these traditions. However, since most, if not all, of the scholarly work trying to categorise Trump seems to focus on Trump’s 2016 campaign and his early presidency, they fall short of providing a broader analysis of how Trump has applied these traditions throughout his term. Moreover, scholars

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<sup>13</sup> Wertheim, “9. Trump Against Exceptionalism”; Gilmore and Rowling, “Partisan Patriotism”; “Whither the ‘City Upon a Hill’?; & Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*.

<sup>14</sup> Restad, *American Exceptionalism* 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*.

<sup>16</sup> Restad, “Old Paradigms in History,” 53; Ruggie, “The Past as Prologue?”; Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Collective Identity in a Democratic Community: The Case of NATO,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Norms Identity and Culture in National Security,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Andrew Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); & Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, “Explaining Government Preferences for Institutional Change in EU Foreign and Security Policy,” *International Organization* 58, no. 1 (2004).

have failed to consider Trump's utilisation of these traditions and his interpretation of exceptionalism in tandem, or, have done so based on a misreading of these traditions and their relationship with American exceptionalism.<sup>17</sup> This is something this thesis aims to rectify. Building on this literature and inspired by Wertheim's question of "what will become of American foreign policy when greatness, no longer bestowed, must be seized,"<sup>18</sup> this thesis is an endeavour to answer the following question: *How has Trump's re-interpretation of American exceptionalism influenced the utilisation of the dominant traditions in American FP in his FP discourse?* By doing so, I aim to contribute to the literature and provide a greater understanding of Trump's FP and its impact on the United States.

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<sup>17</sup> See for example: Restad, "Whither the 'City Upon a Hill'?"

<sup>18</sup> Wertheim, "9. Trump Against Exceptionalism," 126.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' slogan implied that the United States were no longer great, that it had lost its exceptionalism. Historically, Trump was reluctant to embrace the idea of American exceptionalism, sometimes even challenging its existence altogether, and his modern politics also does away with traditional notions of exceptionalism.<sup>19</sup> By doing so, he brought into question America's core national identity that has shaped the country and its FP for centuries: American exceptionalism.<sup>20</sup> Yet, multiple scholars still argue that Trump's FP was traditional in the sense that it adhered to pre-established FP traditions.<sup>21</sup> This raises the question of how a president can be traditional when he rejects the identity that constitutes the tradition. In order to contextualise this contemporary debate – which is critically examined at the end of this chapter –, American national identity and its importance to understanding US FP shall first be discussed, followed by an examination of the traditions that derive therefrom.

### *American Geopolitical Identity*

To properly analyse Donald Trump's FP, it is necessary to first establish what constitutes, informs, and shapes FP in general, and American FP specifically. I do not consider the grand state-centric paradigms of international relations (IR) centred on international structures, geography and material interests to provide satisfactory and holistic explanations for the

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<sup>19</sup> Wertheim, "9. Trump Against Exceptionalism"; Gilmore and Rowling, "Partisan Patriotism"; "Whither the 'City Upon a Hill'"; & Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*.

<sup>20</sup> Sharp, "Publishing American Identity"; Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*; Ruggie, "The Past as Prologue"; Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*; Lockhart, *The Roots of American Exceptionalism*; Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*; Restad, "Old Paradigms in History"; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*; & Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*.

<sup>21</sup> Krstić, "Donald Trump's Presidential Campaign"; Jefferso Holland and Fermor, "The Discursive Hegemony of Trump's Jacksonian Populism"; Rabel, "The Shallow Roots of American Internationalism"; Dimitrova, "Trump's 'America First' Foreign Policy"; Mead, "The Jacksonian Revolt"; Cha, "The Return of Jacksonianism"; & Fay, "Obama, Trump, and Jacksonian Foreign Policy"; & Rolf, "Donald Trump's Jacksonian and Jeffersonian Foreign Policy."

complexity of FP.<sup>22</sup> Instead, I follow a plethora of scholars in the field of IR and American FP who assert that national interests and FP forward are not determined by material factors as much as by ideational factors – that is to say that ideas and identities are understood as the primary factors that constitute FP.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the US, this thesis defines its identity as the “widespread and deep belief in American exceptionalism” as an inherent trait of America(ns).<sup>24</sup>

The case for studying identity in FP is that it allows us to focus on preferences and the way interests are defined as dynamic and subjective, rather than static and objective, as classic geopolitics and IR have tended to do.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the attraction of constructivist theory is that “it challenges the traditional focus on structural limitations on states by bringing social factors such as identity into the analysis.”<sup>26</sup> How state identities are constructed is a matter of debate. Some constructivists argue that state identities are derived from interactions *among* states.<sup>27</sup> Others instead point to factors *within* states such as national identities, values, and cultural attitudes as domestic determinants for state identity.<sup>28</sup> However, both hold that “variation in state identity, or changes in state identity, affect the national security interests or policies of states.”<sup>29</sup> The latter appears to be the approach favoured by most scholars of American FP as the study of the nature of American identity in relation to FP and political thought has a long pedigree.<sup>30</sup>

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22 David Campbell, “Global inscription: How foreign policy constitutes the US,” *Alternatives* 15, no. 3 (1990).

23 Restad, “Old Paradigms in History,” 53; Ruggie, “The Past as Prologue?”; Risse-Kappen, “Collective Identity in a Democratic Community”; Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein, “Norms Identity and Culture in National Security,” Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously”; Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*; & Koenig-Archibugi, “Explaining Government Preferences.”

24 Restad, “Old Paradigms in History”; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*; Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*.

Also see: Sharp, “Publishing American Identity”; Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*; Ruggie, “The Past as Prologue?”; Lockhart, *The Roots of American Exceptionalism*; Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*; & Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*.

25 Paul A Kowert, “National Identity: Inside and Out,” *Security Studies* 8, no. 2 (1998-99).

26 Restad, “Old Paradigms in History,” 55.

27 Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 28.

28 Koenig-Archibugi, “Explaining Government Preferences”; Risse-Kappen, “Collective Identity”; & Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously.”

29 Jepperson, et al., “Norms Identity and Culture in National Security,” 52.

30 Restad, “Old Paradigms in History”; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*.

National identity<sup>31</sup> can be defined as the “maintenance and continual re-interpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern.”<sup>32</sup> Based on this definition, it becomes clear that the American identity can indeed be defined as a *belief* in American exceptionalism, because it has been a “powerful, persistent and popular myth throughout American history.”<sup>33</sup> Here, myth is the operative word, as it must be emphasised that American exceptionalism as understood in the literature and in this thesis does not entail an objectively measurable definition such as many pundits have tried,<sup>34</sup> because that would merely describe “the ways in which the US varies from the rest of the world,”<sup>35</sup> but all nations vary from one another. Such objective notions are therefore “nonsensical” because “inevitably the academic endeavour of investigating exceptionalism entails normative judgment.”<sup>36</sup>

Instead, American exceptionalism entails the belief in the special and unique role the US is meant to play in world history, its distinctiveness from the Old World, and its resistance to the laws of history – the rise to power and inevitable fall that has afflicted all powers of the past.<sup>37</sup> This belief can be traced back to before the Founding with the arrival of

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<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that national identity is the domestic determinant for state/geopolitical identity. They are closely related and inform one another, but they refer to different levels.

<sup>32</sup> Antony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (New York: Oxford University press, 2003), 24-25.

<sup>33</sup> Restad, “Old Paradigms in History,” 55; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, 14, 46; Sharp, “Publishing American Identity,” 498; James W. Ceaser, “The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism,” *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (2012): 2-3; ; Gilmore et al., “Gilmore et al., “Exceptional ‘We’ or Exceptional ‘Me’? Donald Trump, American Exceptionalism, and the Remaking of the Modern Jeremiad”, *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2020): 542; Chris McMillan, ‘MakeAmericaGreatAgain: Ideological Fantasy, American Exceptionalism and Donald Trump’, *Subjectivity* 10, no. 2 (2017): 207; Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 13; & Wertheim, “9. Trump Against Exceptionalism.”

<sup>34</sup> Byron Shafer, *Is America Different? A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); N.T. Saito, *Meeting the enemy: American exceptionalism and international law* (London: New York University Press, 2010); A. Kohut and B. Stokes, *America against the world: How we are different and why we are disliked* (New York: Times Books, 2006); K. J. Holsti, “Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy: Is It Exceptional?”, *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 3 (2011); & Stephen M. Walt, “The Myth of American Exceptionalism,” *Foreign Policy* 189 (2011).

<sup>35</sup> Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, 234; Restad, “Old Paradigms in History,” 54-55; Trevor B. McCrisken, “Exceptionalism,” in *Encyclopaedia of American Foreign Policy*, vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Alexander DeConde et. Al. (New York: Scribner, 2002): 64-65.

the Puritan colonists who had divine aspirations of building a “redeemer nation” which would “save the rest of the world from itself.”<sup>38</sup> Since then it has had a considerable influence on the American psyche, permeating society, culture, and politics, because Americans – across the political spectrum – continued to identify themselves and their country as exceptional and desired to see this reflected in American policies.<sup>39</sup> Of course, American exceptionalism has been expressed and materialised in various way but they all relate back to this core belief.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, American identity defined as “the belief in American exceptionalism” makes for a “coherent and historically correct conception of identity,” that best captures “the collective feelings of national purpose” that constitute, inform, and shape the dominant, long-standing US FP traditions.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ceaser, “The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism,” 2-3; Gilmore et al., “Exceptional ‘We’ or Exceptional ‘Me’?,” 542; Chris McMillan, ‘MakeAmericaGreatAgain: Ideological Fantasy, American Exceptionalism and Donald Trump’, *Subjectivity* 10, no. 2 (2017): 207; Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 13; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, Wertheim, “9. Trump Against Exceptionalism.”

<sup>40</sup> Restad, “Old Paradigms in History.”

<sup>41</sup> Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, 14, 46; Restad, “Old Paradigms in History,” 55; Joanne P. Sharp, “Publishing American Identity,” 498.

## *American Foreign Policy Traditions*

Having established American identity to be construed by a belief in American exceptionalism, it is now important to discuss how this identity in turn influences US FP. Given that identities are not static but in constant motion due to their dependence on repeated (re-)interpretation; and that changes to identity bring about changes in preference, it follows that policy changes over time. Indeed, a belief in American exceptionalism does “not prescribe a singular course of action,” hence explaining the continuity and change of American FP.<sup>42</sup> This makes a constructivist approach too elegant. Below, I shall explain how the influence of identity on FP can be best examined through the application of traditions as an analytical tool, specifically the four traditions proposed by Walter Russel Mead in his seminal work *Special Providence: Wilsonianism, Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism*.

Traditions can be regarded as narratives that build on previously established identities, expectations and preferred roles, “in other words, these traditions give us a way of talking about political experiences and history that boils the past down into recyclable principles, generalisations, priorities, stories, tropes and lessons.”<sup>43</sup> They enjoy great popularity with politicians and policy-makers and act as a useful bridge between intellectuals and political practitioners,<sup>44</sup> but they are primarily “invented” after the fact as an analytical tool to classify individuals and ideas and enable us to make sense of a vast array of political interactions.<sup>45</sup> Traditions need to be historically grounded, but need not be linearly passed through time, rather they should be understood as sets of ideas defined by their “logical inter-relation.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>42</sup> Wertheim, “9. Trump Against Exceptionalism,” 126.

<sup>43</sup> Brendon O’Connor, *American Foreign Policy Traditions* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 2

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Renée Jeffery, “Tradition as Invention: The ‘Traditions Tradition’ and the History of Ideas in International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (2005): 76-77; Jens Bartelson, “Short Circuits: Society and Tradition in International Relations Theory,” *Review of International Studies* 22, no. 4 (1996): 347; & O’Connor, *American Foreign Policy Traditions*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> O’Connor, *American Foreign Policy Traditions*, 3; Martin Wight, “An Anatomy of International Thought,” *Review of International Studies* 13, no. 3 (1987): 226.

traditions are understood as analytical tools used to understand and categorise FP – invented after the fact, yet grounded on evidence-based historical interpretation –, but also as narratives that are consciously utilised by actors and therefore undergo a constant “active process of interpretation and construction.”<sup>47</sup>

Historically, scholars have argued that America’s identity resulted in a FP dichotomy: either the US took on the role of ‘exemplar’ and pursues an isolationist FP, or it took on a ‘missionary’ role and pursued an internationalist or interventionist FP.<sup>48</sup> However, this “Janus-faced” nature of American FP has been increasingly questioned.<sup>49</sup> Mead, whose critique has been most influential, argues that this dichotomy is too crude a distinction to do justice to the complexity of American foreign affairs and considers it to be based on a misreading of American history.<sup>50</sup> Instead, he posits that American FP is informed by four competing, yet often overlapping, traditions. This typology provides a framework for understanding both the history and ongoing trajectory of American FP in all its complexity.<sup>51</sup> These are in essence four different interpretations of (the logical consequences of) American exceptionalism and by virtue of their differences bring a different set of FP preferences.

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Also see: Wight, “Western Values in International Relations,” in *Diplomatic Investigations*, eds. Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (1966): 90-91; & Gabriele Wight and Brian Porter, *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (London: Leicester University Press, 1991).

<sup>47</sup> Ruggie, “The Past as Prologue?”, 124.

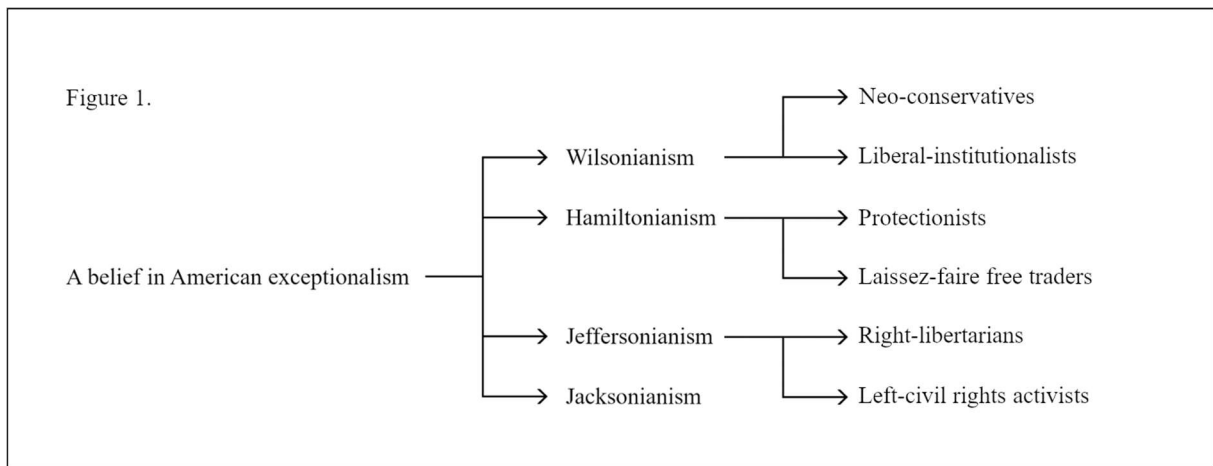
<sup>48</sup> Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion in the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Walter A. McDougall, *Promised land, Crusader State: the American encounter with the world since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Trevor B. McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); & Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Restad, *American Exceptionalism*; “Old Paradigms in History”; Emily Rosenberg, “A Call to Revolution: A Roundtable on Early U.S. Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 1 (1998): 66-67.

<sup>50</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, Chapter 3; O’Connor, *American Foreign Policy Traditions*, 9; Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> O’Connor, *American Foreign Policy Traditions*, 1.





Hamiltonianism view commerce to be at the core of the US' national interest. Therefore, Hamiltonians consider “the first task of the American government as promoting the health of America enterprise at home or abroad”<sup>52</sup> However, how these interests are best safeguarded is of secondary order. For example, modern Hamiltonians favour a strong global system of free trade that they believe is to everyone’s advantage, especially the hegemonic US, whereas Hamiltonians in the early days of the republic backed a protectionist policy to protect America’s infant industries.<sup>53</sup> Yet, in either case, Hamiltonians have been internationally minded, vigorously pursuing an open-door policy for American goods and merchants in foreign markets, enforced by a strong military if need be.<sup>54</sup> Both strands are also passionately convinced that the US is uniquely situated and destined to one way or the other supplant the Old World’s (economic) power in, fitting squarely within the third pillar of the exceptionalism framework: rising to power yet never declining.<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile, Wilsonianism is more interested in exporting American values and institutions rather than goods.<sup>56</sup> Instead of a Hamiltonian economic order, they envision a global moral order centred around what they consider to be innately American ideals such as “human

<sup>52</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 87.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 107; Rolf, “Donald Trump’s Jacksonian and Jeffersonian Foreign Policy.”

<sup>55</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 101; Peter S. Onuf, “American exceptionalism and national identity.” *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (2012); & Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, 234.

<sup>56</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 107; Mead, “The Jacksonian revolt,” 2.

rights, democratic governance and the rule of law.”<sup>57</sup> “Right Wilsonians,” frequently associated with neo-conservatism, hold that the US has fulfilled the promise of the Founding and should therefore focus on evangelising these promises to the world, often through unilateral action. Conversely, “left” or “radical” Wilsonians believe that the US has not yet lived up to its Founding promise and should seek to simultaneously “act to reform ourselves while we seek to reform others.”<sup>58</sup> This branch is often made up of liberal institutionalists who argue that the promotion of international institutions that bind both the US and others is the best guarantor of achieving “genuinely Wilsonian international order,” and thus living up to the ideals of the revolution.<sup>59</sup> Both, however, “are reasonable confident that the legacy of the revolution is secure from internal dangers.”<sup>60</sup> Hamiltonians may believe commerce to be the tool to end war, but Wilsonians believe a democratic world order to be the best safeguard against war. How ironic then that their most recent adherents have tried to spread democracy through war.<sup>61</sup>

Jeffersonians agree with radical Wilsonians’ assessment that the US should continue to perfect its union to live up to its founding principles, but they do not believe the revolution to be safe from internal dangers. They also hold that foreign entanglements threaten the founding promise, rather than promote it, likening American democracy to a “fragile plant – difficult to grow, harder to propagate.”<sup>62</sup> Tending to this plant at home, left Jeffersonians pursue an egalitarian agenda centred on the promotion of civil rights, social welfare and direct democracy, whereas the right Jeffersonians pursue a libertarian agenda advocating individual liberties, small government and the protection of private property.<sup>63</sup> Internationally, they both maintain that the object of FP should be to defend these unique American values at home rather

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 92-93; Mead, “The Jacksonian Revolt,” 2.

<sup>59</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 166, Mead, “The Jacksonian Revolt,” 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>61</sup> Rolf, “Donald Trump’s Jacksonian and Jeffersonian Foreign Policy.”

<sup>62</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 181-182.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-180.

than to extend them abroad.<sup>64</sup> Therefore Jeffersonians caution against foreign entanglements, fearful that they drag the US into foreign wars, leading to strategic overreach and imperial overstretch which threatens the US' unique heritage.<sup>65</sup> While Jeffersonians prefer to keep a low profile internationally, their aversion to war has led them to support international disarmament agreements, strict rules of war, and arbitration between states to resort differences in peace, and should engagement become unavoidable it must be conducted with “the least amount of risk, cost, and application of force and always in accordance with the ideals of the Constitution.”<sup>66</sup> Through the defence of values at home and the Constitutional conduct of FP, the US can better serve as a model to inspire the world.<sup>67</sup>

Jacksonianism shares with Jeffersonianism a passionate attachment to the Constitution and Bill of Rights. However, unlike the Jeffersonians, Jacksonians see those less as a protection of minority rights and more as a defence for the majority against the machinations of minorities and political elites – “for minorities to use constitutional provisions to check the will of the majority is unconscionable.”<sup>68</sup> They differentiate between members of the folk-community (majority) – whose physical security and economic well-being should be the most important goal of American FP – and outsiders (minority), who are viewed with suspicion and best and hostility at worst, because of fears that they serve the interests of ‘big business’ and foreign countries.<sup>69</sup> The folk-community is bound together by a “widely spread populist and popular culture of honor, independence, courage, and military pride among the American people,”<sup>70</sup> and those who adhere to the honour code<sup>71</sup> may be absorbed into the

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 175, 189-190.

<sup>66</sup> Rolf, “Donald Trump’s Jacksonian and Jeffersonian Foreign Policy,” 665; Mead, *Special Providence*, 190.

<sup>67</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 182.

<sup>68</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 225, 238.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-246: Those considered to be within the folk-community are bound by together by a social compact, an honour code centred on self-reliance, equality, individualism, loyalty to family, honesty and courage. Historically the folk-community was conceived of as Southern, White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant, but today Jacksonian populism has

community, but those who do not are considered outsiders who are not granted its protection and are thought of as deserving no more consideration than rats: “death to the enemies of the community!”<sup>72</sup> Jacksonianism is therefore a virulently populist tradition within the US that gets little political respect and is frequently deplored.<sup>73</sup> That feeling is mutual though, as Jacksonians are distrustful of Hamiltonian free-trading, suspicious Wilsonian state-building<sup>74</sup> and puzzled by Jeffersonian worries about a permanent military.<sup>75</sup> They generally prefer to keep out of international affairs, so that the US can focus in preserving what makes America exceptional: its people. When provoked, however, they agree with MacArthur’s adage that “there is no substitute for victory.”<sup>76</sup> Jacksonians find that an honourable person is ready to kill or die for family and flag, and resent what they perceive to be the cowardice, or perverted values of the other traditions.<sup>77</sup>

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moved beyond its original ethnic and geographical limits because other groups made successful claims to its honour code.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>74</sup> Mead, “Donald Trump’s Jacksonian Revolt,” *Hudson Institute*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.hudson.org/research/13010-donald-trump-s-jacksonian-revolt>.

<sup>75</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 240.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

## *Trump's Jacksonian Revolt?*

Many scholars have turned to Mead's typology in their efforts to categorise Trump's FP and explain why he is not an idiosyncratic aberration, but in fact, rather traditional. Most, Mead included, explain Trump's election as a "return of the Jacksonian tradition,"<sup>78</sup> or a "Jacksonian revolt,"<sup>79</sup> pointing to his populist nationalism; anti-globalist 'America First' rhetoric, which is a renunciation of Wilsonianism and modern Hamiltonianism; claims that American FP did not do enough to safeguard American physical and economic well-being; and reliance on coercive violence – such as his "fire and fury" rhetoric – to make their case.<sup>80</sup> Others posit that we must consider Trump's FP as Jacksonian, yes, but in tandem with a Jeffersonian inclination, which offers a better and more nuanced explanation of Trump's policies, which sometimes do not resemble Jacksonianism at all.<sup>81</sup> There also exists a third camp which argues that in order to fully grasp Trump's FP, we must include Hamiltonianism alongside Jacksonianism and Jeffersonianism because of Trump's heavy emphasis on American commercial interests.<sup>82</sup> We must then consider whether we are not stretching the model to fit our case, or perhaps squeezing the case to fit our model. Both are undesirable. However, the devil is not always in the ideas of a tradition, but how traditions are drawn upon and applied.<sup>83</sup>

How they are drawn upon and applied is mostly determined by the interpretation of America's identity: exceptionalism. For example, Restad claims that Trump's populist nationalism is a clear renunciation of American exceptionalism and because of this she

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<sup>78</sup> Clarke and Ricketts, "The Return of the Jacksonian Tradition."

<sup>79</sup> Meads "The Jacksonian Revolt."

<sup>80</sup> Holland and Fermor, "The Discursive Hegemony of Trump's Jacksonian Populism"; Rabel, "The Shallow Roots of American Internationalism"; Dimitrova, "Trump's 'America First' Foreign Policy"; Mead, "The Jacksonian Revolt"; Cha, "The Return of Jacksonianism"; & Fay, "Obama, Trump, and Jacksonian Foreign Policy."

<sup>81</sup> Rolf, "Donald Trump's Jacksonian and Jeffersonian Foreign Policy." 671.

<sup>82</sup> Krstić, "Donald Trump's Presidential Campaign," 42.

<sup>83</sup> Anatol Lieven, *America right or wrong: an anatomy of American nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

categorises him as a Jacksonian.<sup>84</sup> Many scholars agree with her assessment that Trump rejects traditional notions of American exceptionalism, which is in line with his historical reluctance to embrace the idea or acknowledge its existence.<sup>85</sup> Trump's rhetoric emphasised how the US was no longer exceptional, his slogan 'Make America Great *Again*' betrays as much, and this contradicts the third pillar of American exceptionalism: "[the US is a] country rising to power yet *never declining*."<sup>86</sup> Trump views exceptionalism, which had always been understood as a "more or less permanent trait, intrinsic to American identity," as a conditional state, akin to a more 'objectivist' vision of exceptionalism which we have already established does not constitute American exceptionalism proper.<sup>87</sup> However, this rejection is indirectly a rejection of Jacksonianism, as this tradition – just like the others – is informed by an understanding of exceptionalism as the core identity of America, and if "a president is thought to not hold such ideals [exceptionalism] about the US, the nation's founding idea is by definition threatened."<sup>88</sup> How can Trump simultaneously be part of a tradition, or use traditional discourse, and reject the US' core identity?

The work of Gilmore and Rowling, who have pioneered the research on Trump's relationship with exceptionalism, may provide an answer to this predicament, because they propose that Trump uses American exceptionalism as a unique rhetorical strategy. Yes, he did reject traditional notions of exceptionalism, but he provided an alternative interpretation wherein American exceptionalism became conditional on his person: "he alone, was the master

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<sup>84</sup> Restad, "Whither the 'City Upon a Hill'?"; Restad, "What Makes America Great? Donald Trump, National Identity, and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Global Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2020): 8.

<sup>85</sup> Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*; Gilmore and Rowling, "Partisan Patriotism and the American Presidency"; Gilmore et al., "Exceptional 'We' or Exceptional 'Me'?"; Wertheim, "9. Trump Against Exceptionalism"; & Jason A. Edwards, "Make America Great Again: Donald Trump and Redefining the U.S. Role in the World", *Communication Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>86</sup> Restad, *American Exceptionalism*, 234, (emphasis added).

<sup>87</sup> Wertheim, "9. Trump Against Exceptionalism", 129; and Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 7.

<sup>88</sup> Restad, *American Exceptionalism* 14-15; Mead, *Special Providence*, 175; O'Connor, *American Foreign Policy Traditions*, 10.

of American exceptionalism.”<sup>89</sup> They call this strategy the ‘Exceptional Me 2.0’<sup>90</sup> strategy, which consists of the following five themes. First, Trump made the case for American *un*exceptionalism. Second, he argued that the US was in the process of rebuilding its exceptionalism and credited himself for this resurgence. Third, central to this resurgence was his own person and presidency which he portrayed as exceptional. Fourth, he began warning that because he made America exceptional, so would America stop being exceptional if he was not re-elected. Five, he increasingly began reifying the American people into himself and his political base.<sup>91</sup> The goal here is of course to condition the American people to understand that he is what makes America exceptional and therefore make himself indispensable.<sup>92</sup> By leaving intact the signifier of exceptionalism, Trump can still manoeuvre within its discursive superstructure and invoke its subsequent traditions. However, this will have an impact on how these traditions are invoked. If Trump also reconceptualises the American people, how will he appeal to the Jacksonian folk-community; and if American greatness is dependent on the whims of the president, then how will this impact Hamiltonian conceptions of the national interest; or how will Jeffersonian democracy be defended when an attack against Trump’s person is an attack on the nation? Such demagoguery is sure to have an impact.

Since it has been established that identity is in constant motion and that a change in identity affects the interests and policies of states, we must consider how Trump’s re-interpretation of exceptionalism has influenced his utilisation of the dominant FP traditions. There is, after all, clear evidence that Trump does adhere – at least to some extent – to the discursive confines of these traditions. However, given that most, if not all, of the scholarly work trying to categorise Trump seems to focus on Trump’s 2016 campaign and his early presidency, they fall short of providing a broader analysis of how Trump has applied these

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<sup>89</sup> Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 8.

<sup>90</sup> They call this version 2.0 because it is slightly different from his campaign rhetoric which is version 1.0.

<sup>91</sup> Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 6-8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

traditions throughout his term. Moreover, scholars have failed to consider Trump's utilisation of these traditions and his interpretation of exceptionalism in tandem, or have done so based on a misreading of these traditions and their relationship with American exceptionalism.<sup>93</sup> This thesis aims to rectify both points by analysing how Trump has re-interpreted American exceptionalism in his FP discourse and how this has impacted his use of the dominant American FP traditions. Therefore, the following research question is formulated: *How has Trump's re-interpretation of American exceptionalism influenced the utilisation of the dominant traditions in American FP in his FP discourse?*

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<sup>93</sup> See for example: Restad, "Whither the 'City Upon a Hill'?"



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Based on the puzzles uncovered in the literature review, the following question has been formulated: *how has Trump's re-interpretation of American exceptionalism influenced the utilisation of the dominant traditions in American FP in his FP discourse?* To answer this question, this thesis shall draw from the field of critical geopolitics, a specific school of discourse analysis within IR that shall be explained below. After this explanation, the analytical framework shall be elaborated upon, followed by a justification for the time period and source selection.

Since this thesis is focussed on reconstructing Trump's efforts to re-interpret American identity in order to better understand his FP discourse, the application of interpretive-explanatory critical geopolitics is of particular interest, because this form of research has been the "mainstay in critical interrogation of the formation of geopolitical identities"<sup>94</sup> Within critical geopolitics the use of discourse is seen as "inseparable from the formation and use of power" – i.e. geopolitics – since "strategies of power always require the use of space and, thus, the use of discourses to create particular spatial images".<sup>95</sup> Therefore, critical geopolitics places discourse at the centre of its analysis. Moreover, Müller posits that these discourses are drawn on intentionally and deployed strategically to pursue political ends.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Ó Tuathail argues that discourse is "drawn upon and used by officials and leaders to constitute and

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<sup>94</sup> Martin Müller, "Doing Discourse Analysis in Critical Geopolitics", *L'Espace Politique. Revue En Ligne de Géographie Politique et de Géopolitique*, no. 12 (2011): par 16-17; Johannes Angermüller, "'Qualitative' Methods of Social Research in France: Reconstructing the Actor, Deconstructing the Subject", *The State of the Art of Qualitative Research in Europe* 6, no. 3 (2005): 4; & Mats Alvesson and Dan Karreman, "Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis," *Human Relations* 53, no. 9 (2000): 1132.

<sup>95</sup> Sharp, "Publishing American Identity", 492; Martin Müller, "Reconsidering the Concept of Discourse for the Field of Critical Geopolitics: Towards Discourse as Language and Practice", *Political Geography* 27, no. 3 (2008): 323–325; Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew, "Geopolitics and discourse: Practical geopolitical reasoning in American Foreign Policy," *Political Geography* 11, no. 2 (1992): 192.

<sup>96</sup> Müller, "Reconsidering the Concept of Discourse for the Field of Critical Geopolitics", 323-325; also see Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby, *Rethinking Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 1998): 12-13.

represent world affairs,”<sup>97</sup> and Zaretsky identifies the use of discourse by actors as a cause of shifts in audience attitudes, and a reflection of an agent’s values and world view that calls for interpretation.<sup>98</sup> Bilgin’s work is exemplary of how interpretive-explanatory research allows us to understand how actors endeavour to construct their own discourses in order to shape domestic political processes, and mainstream their ideological underpinnings by presenting them as geopolitical truths.<sup>99</sup> Thus, domestic factors do not only shape FP discourse; FP discourse is deployed to influence domestic politics. By using this interpretive-explanatory form of research, we may reconstruct how domestic political actors – specifically Trump – use geopolitical imaginations to represent world affairs and the US’ place in the world to shape American identity and thus policy.

As with all forms of research, interpretive-explanatory critical geopolitics also has its limitations. The primary of these is the intersubjectivity of language, meaning that every word and phrase can be interpreted differently by different individuals depending on their identity, previously held beliefs and background knowledge.<sup>100</sup> It is, however, precisely this intersubjectivity which is of interest to this thesis, because it is through the competition for meaning that the narratives that underpin policy are constructed.<sup>101</sup> After all, Trump’s different interpretation of pre-established concepts lies at the heart of this thesis. However, the subjectivity of language also extends to the researcher, to me. Accordingly, it is important to put texts into historical, political, and social context in order to carefully furnish an analysis that, as closely as possible, approximates the original meaning.<sup>102</sup> To limit the impact of my

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<sup>97</sup> Gearóid ÓTuathail, “Theorizing Practical Geopolitical Reasoning: The Case of the US’ Response to the War in Bosnia”, *Political Geography* 21, no. 5 (2002): 607, (emphasis added).

<sup>98</sup> Zaretsky, “Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2004): 610.

<sup>99</sup> Pinar Bilgin, ““Only Strong States Can Survive in Turkey’s Geography’: The Uses of ‘Geopolitical Truths’ in Turkey”, *Political Geography* 26, no. 7 (2007): 741-753

<sup>100</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 529-520.

<sup>101</sup> Nicole Curato et al., ‘Twelve Key Findings in Deliberative Democracy Research’, *Daedalus* 146, no. 3 (2017): 28–38; and Marco R Steenbergen et al., ‘Measuring Political Deliberation: A Discourse Quality Index’, *Comparative European Politics* 1, no. 1 (2003): 21–48.

<sup>102</sup> Müller, “Doing Discourse Analysis in Critical Geopolitics”, par 17.

subjectivity on the interpretation process the analysis is grounded in the literature which provides a frame of reference for the accurate interpretation of the texts.

In the literature, four relevant FP traditions were identified: Wilsonianism, Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism. All of these are constituted by a fundamental geopolitical identity, namely the belief in American exceptionalism. To answer the research question, this thesis will first uncover how, Trump re-interpretation of American exceptionalism informs his FP discourse. For this Gilmore and Rowling's 'exceptional me' model will be applied, which consists of five themes: an emphasis on how America was, or still is, unexceptional; a resurgence of American exceptionalism for which he credits himself and his administration; portraying himself and his presidency as exceptional; warnings that only he can keep America exceptional; and presenting himself as the true representative of the people and equating the people with his political base.<sup>103</sup> After, Trump's FP discourse will be scrutinised through the lens of the four traditions in order to ascertain how his redefinition of exceptionalism has shaped his utilisation of these traditional FP narratives. Using this as the analytical framework will ensure a grounded, theoretically sound, and accurate interpretation of the texts, thus enabling us to draw valid conclusions regarding the nature of Trump's FP, its shaping of the American geopolitical identity, and its impact on America's standing in the world.

Because this thesis seeks to expand the scope of the literature from Trump's campaign and early presidency to his entire presidency, the timeframe of this thesis shall encompass the period between his election in 2017 and the end of his presidency on January 20, 2021. However, given the limited resources available for this research not all presidential communications could be analysed, therefore a selection has been made that ensures content validity. The backbone of this thesis shall consist of an analysis of Trump's four annual State

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<sup>103</sup> Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 6-8.

of the Union addresses and the four annual addresses to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) because these are the speeches wherein President Trump presents his grand narrative to both his domestic and his international audiences. Additionally, Trump's speech on the new Afghanistan and South Asia strategy from 2017, address at the Riyadh counterterrorism summit in 2017, and his press conference in Singapore following the North Korea summit, were chosen because these were integral to his policies in the MENA region and Asia. Also, his remarks at the NATO summits in 2017, 2018, and 2019 were analysed because Trump's tumultuous relationship with NATO marked his presidency. Related to this was his joint press conference with Putin in 2018 which set the tone for the perception of his Russia policy. Lastly, in order to also include the economic angle of FP, his remarks pertaining to the China trade deal in 2018, statements at the G7 and G20 summits in 2018 and 2019, respectively, as well as his contribution to the Davos summit in 2020 have also been included. This provides a cross-reference of the over-arching narratives and specific dossiers which safeguards content validity and allows me to draw valid conclusions.

## **Chapter 4: A Great Reset**

In this chapter the analysis of Trump's FP discourse will be expounded. It was uncovered that his re-definition of American exceptionalism along the lines of the 'exceptional me 2.0' strategy permeates his application of the FP traditions. He would constantly emphasise how American greatness was undermined by his predecessors so that he could present himself as the champion who would restore the proper order and make America great again and keep it great. The focal point of his aggression, or the supposed cause of American demise are the ideas of Wilsonianism, and through attacking them, Trump aims to unify elements of the other theories in a new synthesis that can reset American FP. To explain, the use of the 'exceptional me 2.0' strategy shall first be clarified, after which each of the traditions will be separately discussed, and finally their interplay shall be detailed.

### *"Exceptional Me 2.0"*

The 'exceptional me 2.0' strategy as detailed by Gilmore and Rowling is clearly present in Donald Trump's FP discourse and has a direct impact on the utilisation of Mead's traditions. All themes of the 'exceptional me 2.0' strategy were explicitly covered in Trump's FP discourse: America was made unexceptional; but it is becoming exceptional again,<sup>104</sup> and he is the reason for this resurgence; he and his presidency themselves were portrayed as being exceptional; Trump equated himself with the folk-community and his enemies as the outsiders. How this strategy was applied by Trump and for what purpose will be elaborated below. For clarity they are discussed separately but overlap and inter-relation does exist.

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<sup>104</sup> Exceptional in Trump's vocabulary simply means 'great'.

First, Trump frequently emphasises that the US is unexceptional and that it has been deliberately made so by domestic and foreign actors. First, he repeatedly stresses the uniqueness of other countries, their cultures, their peoples and their systems of government, thereby undermining the notion that America is unique in its own right.<sup>105</sup> After all, if everyone is unique, no one is exceptional. What then makes the US ‘exceptional’ is its pre-eminence – as discussed in the literature –, but this has supposedly been undermined by his predecessors. This will become clearer in the analysis below because this accusation is a thread woven throughout Trump’s application of the American FP traditions, but in essence he complained about inheriting a mess from his predecessors,<sup>106</sup> who had allowed the US to decline while they gave away everything<sup>107</sup> in pursuit of a globalist agenda,<sup>108</sup> and neglected their duty to the country to the benefit of a few elites.<sup>109</sup> In other words: America has been made unexceptional. The goal here is to create a sense of betrayal among his audience, but also to establish that indeed exceptionalism is something to be gained or lost, not an inherent American trait, reflective of his personal convictions.

Building on this sense of betrayal, Trump positions himself as the American saviour by making the case that US exceptionalism is resurging, for which he simultaneously credits himself. For instance, after listing how the US was doing badly during his first UNGA address

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<sup>105</sup> Donald Trump, “Remarks by President Trump to the 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” New York, September 19, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/> (hereafter called: “UNGA 2017”); “Remarks by President Trump to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” New York, September 25, 2018, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-73rd-session-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-ny/> (hereafter called: “UNGA 2018”); “Remarks by President Trump to the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” New York, September 24, 2019, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-74th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/> (hereafter called “UNGA 2019”); “Remarks by President Trump to the 75<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly,” Washington, DC, September 22, 2020. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-75th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/> (hereafter called: “UNGA 2020”); & “Remarks at the Arab Islamic American Summit,” Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. May 21, 2017, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-arab-islamic-american-summit-riyadh-saudi-arabia> (hereafter called: “Arab American Summit”).

<sup>106</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2017.”

<sup>107</sup> Trump, “Meeting With Secretary General.”

<sup>108</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>109</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2017”; & “UNGA 2019.”

in 2017, Trump declared triumphantly that “fortunately, the United States has done very well since Election day last November 8<sup>th</sup>,”<sup>110</sup> he then continued to list how well the stock market was doing, how employment was down, how companies are returning, and how the military is “rebuilding.”<sup>111</sup> This language is meant to invoke a sense that America is regaining, or rebuilding its greatness – literally introduced by Trump as a “program of national rebuilding,”<sup>112</sup> or “an exciting program of national renewal.”<sup>113</sup> Another example of such language being used was at a NATO luncheon, where Trump asserted that when he first visited “it was like a rollercoaster down, not up. Down. It was all the way down at the lowest point ever. And since then, we’ve gone up massively. Now we’ll be at, by far, the highest point ever.”<sup>114</sup> All this is done to signal one message: America is (becoming) great again.

Importantly, Trump claims personal credit for such successes. At that same NATO summit he gleefully asserted that he was “happy to have helped,” referring to how other states had committed to greater defence spending.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, he personally claimed credit for being able to get the EU to agree to trade negotiations where other presidents had failed, declaring that “I’m changing that, and I’m changing it fairly rapidly,”<sup>116</sup> and later concluding “they

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<sup>110</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”.

<sup>111</sup> Trump. “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>112</sup> Trump, “Presidential Address before a Joint Session of Congress,” Washington, DC, February 28, 2017. <https://www.govinfo.gov/features/state-of-the-union> (hereafter called: “Joint Session 2017”).

<sup>113</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019”; also see: “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018”; “Presidential Address before a Joint Session of Congress,” Washington, DC, January 30, 2018, <https://www.govinfo.gov/features/state-of-the-union> (hereafter called: “Joint Session 2018”); “Presidential Address before a Joint Session of Congress,” Washington, DC, February 5, 2019, <https://www.govinfo.gov/features/state-of-the-union> (hereafter called: “Joint Session 2019”); & “Presidential Address before a Joint Session of Congress,” Washington, DC, February 4, 2020, <https://www.govinfo.gov/features/state-of-the-union> (hereafter called: “Joint Session 2020”).

<sup>114</sup> Trump, “Remarks at a Working Lunch on North Atlantic Treaty Organization Burden-Sharing and an Exchange With Reporters,” Chandler’s Cross, UK, December 4, 2019, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-working-lunch-north-atlantic-treaty-organization-burden-sharing-and-exchange-with> (hereafter called: “NATO Working Lunch”).

<sup>115</sup> Trump, “Remarks Following a Meeting With Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of the North Atlantic Treaty organization and an Exchange With Reporters,” London, UK, December 3, 2019, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-following-meeting-with-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg-the-north-atlantic-1> (hereafter called “Meeting With Secretary General”).

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

wouldn't even talk to [Bush]. Me, they're talking to."<sup>117</sup> Likewise, when discussing the fight against ISIS, he essentially said he alone defeated them: "We've defeated the ISIS caliphate. Nobody thought we could do that so quickly. *I did it very quickly. When I came in, it was virtually a hundred percent. And I knocked it down to zero. I knocked it down to zero.*"<sup>118</sup> America is thus not merely becoming great again, America is becoming great thanks to Donald Trump, and he wants the public to know so. By broadcasting this message, Trump essentially makes himself the enabler of American success and therefore indispensable.

What makes it possible for Trump to be the enabler of American exceptionalism, is his own supposed exceptionalism. To this end, everything Trump achieves, says or does is presented as the pinnacle in order to portray himself and his presidency as exceptional. The object is clear: America has become exceptional because Trump is exceptional – his "policies were historic and greater than anything the country had ever seen."<sup>119</sup> For a president who was reluctant to embrace the exceptionalism of the country, he strongly favoured to emphasise his own exceptionalism. Examples abound, but "historic,"<sup>120</sup> "unprecedented,"<sup>121</sup> "record,"<sup>122</sup> "all-time,"<sup>123</sup> or "highest"<sup>124</sup> – or lowest depending on the context such as unemployment or deficits –, are constantly repeated in relation to Trump's actions and policies. This is not mere hyperbole, but a conscious strategy to embed himself and his presidency as truly exceptional in the psyche of his audience. In essence, Trump's presidency is unique and unprecedented and

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<sup>117</sup> Trump, "The President's News Conference in Davos, Switzerland," Davos, Switzerland, January 22, 2020, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-davos-switzerland> (hereafter called: "Davos").

<sup>118</sup> Trump, "Meeting With Secretary General" (emphasis added).

<sup>119</sup> Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Trump, "Remarks at the Dedication Ceremony for the Berlin Wall Memorial and the 9/11 and Article 5 Memorial," Brussels, Belgium, May 25, 2017, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-dedication-ceremony-for-the-berlin-wall-memorial-and-the-911-and-article-5> (hereafter called: "Dedication Ceremony"); "UNGA 2018"; "UNGA 2019"; "UNGA 2020"; "Joint Session 2017"; "Joint Session 2018"; "Joint Session 2019"; & "Joint Session 2020."

<sup>121</sup> Trump, "NATO Working Lunch"; "Davos"; "UNGA 2019"; "UNGA 2020"; "Joint Session 2017"; & "Joint Session 2019."

<sup>122</sup> Trump, "Davos"; "UNGA 2017"; "UNGA 2018"; "UNGA 2020"; & "Joint Session 2017."

<sup>123</sup> Trump, "Davos"; "UNGA 2017"; "UNGA 2018"; "Joint Session 2018"; "Joint Session 2019"; & "Joint Session 2020."

<sup>124</sup> Trump, "Davos"; "UNGA 2018"; "Joint Session 2018"; & "Joint Session 2020."



by virtue of his exceptionalism, he allows the US to share in it. This further emphasises how indispensable Trump is supposed to be for the US. After all, rather than US exceptionalism as some abstract idea, it is directly bound to Trump's unique abilities and accomplishments. Consequently, when Trump is no longer part of the equation the country automatically stops being exceptional/great as well. Trump is the guarantor of American greatness, and the master of American exceptionalism therefore opposition to Trump becomes opposition to American greatness.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Trump reifies the American people as a whole specifically with his political base and himself as their sole and true representative. In essence this is a clear demagogic in-group/out-group or us-versus-them rhetoric, or a "me the people" strategy.<sup>125</sup> In his early presidency, when addressing the UNGA, Trump stated that he was "elected not to take power, but to give power to the American people, where it belongs," essentially asserting that through giving him power, the people regained their power, which they had apparently lost beforehand.<sup>126</sup> He also frequently uses 'we' and 'I' interchangeably when talking about the US or Americans. Additionally, frequently accused his predecessors of not being true representatives of the people, asserting for instance, that other countries liked Obama because he "did not represent us strong," whereas Trump was disliked because he "is representing us. And I represent us strong."<sup>127</sup> The second implication here is of course that Obama served the interests of other states better than the interests of the US, for which he was liked. Likewise, Trump would regularly use international fora to attack Democrats as unpatriotic, unlike himself who is a true patriot.<sup>128</sup>

When Trump elaborates on what constitutes a patriot, he means "citizens who are rooted in its history, who are nourished by its culture, committed to its values, attached to its

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<sup>125</sup> Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 8.

<sup>126</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2017."

<sup>127</sup> Trump, "Meeting With Secretary General."

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

people,” and who can “see a nation and its destiny in ways no one else can.”<sup>129</sup> Given the ongoing culture wars in the US, the implication here is clear, as anyone who shares different values, or interpretations of the same values, might criticise certain aspects of American culture or history are automatically suspect, they do not share the same vision. Trump, for example, repeatedly warns against inside and outside threats to American liberty and democracy in the form of globalists,<sup>130</sup> bureaucrats,<sup>131</sup> partisan social media platforms<sup>132</sup> and socialists. For instance, Trump often declares socialism to be unamerican, yet accuses his opponents of being socialists, thus excluding them from the patriot in-group,<sup>133</sup> Accordingly, Trump is convinced that America should be “governed by Americans” who, like him, “reject the ideology of globalism and embrace the doctrine of patriotism,” therefore disqualifying numerous Americans from being patriots. After all, his charge against globalism is basically a catch-all phrase for his opponents, used synonymously for Wilsonians, modern Hamiltonians and leftist Jeffersonians.

Trump therefore uses his FP discourse to further establish his alternative vision of American exceptionalism which is centred on his own person and indispensability to American greatness and allows him to divide the country into his supporters, the true Americans, and his opponents, who are at best un-American and at worst an outright threat to America. This of course means that any criticism against him, is also a criticism against the country, something he gladly exploits and has used to render valid criticism pointless, and at worst, a mobilising act for his base. Through redefining patriotism as Trumpism, Trump ensures that loyalty to him supersedes all other determinants of the Jacksonian honour code, thus equating the folk-community with his base and turning it into a cult of personality. This allows him to mobilise

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<sup>129</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>130</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2017”; “Joint Session 2018”; “Joint Session 2019”; & “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>131</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018”; & “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>132</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>133</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2019”; “Joint Session 2020”; “UNGA 2018”; & “UNGA 2019.”

Also see “Jeffersonian Jamboree” and “Jacksonian Jingoism” sections.

this vast populist force – which does not take kindly to outsider threats – against his opponents. Moreover, by presenting his opponents as globalists, socialists, bureaucrats, and un-American threats to American liberty and democracy, Trump is also able to mobilise (right-wing) Jeffersonians who see the US' founding principles threatened.

## *Writing Off Wilson*

Trump's FP discourse is a repudiation of Wilsonianism, which he equates with globalism and interventionism that had come to define American Post-War FP. Wilsonian globalism – as well as the modern globalist branch of Hamiltonianism as shown later – is clearly presented as the cause of American decline in Trump's rhetoric and serves as the omnipresent enemy against which he can rally various elements of America's populace and policy elites. His attack on the post-War Wilsonian order consists of two themes that both lay the groundwork for his invocation of the other traditions: anti-globalism and anti-interventionism. These will be elaborated below, but how they are then specifically used shall be explained in the sections on the other traditions.

Trump's anti-globalism consists of two steps. First, he discredits Wilsonian liberal institutionalist principles as ineffective or false. Then he goes a step further and alleges it to be anti-democratic. For example, when addressing the UNGA in 2019 Trump asserted that "this theory," referring to the liberal institutionalist idea that autocracies, such as China, once incorporated into the global liberal order would be compelled to liberalize and strengthen protections of private property and the rule of law, "has been tested and proven completely wrong," adding that "the future does not belong to globalists."<sup>134</sup> Later, he would add that "for decades the same tired voices proposed the same failed solutions, pursuing global ambitions at the expense of their own people."<sup>135</sup> In this line, both steps are clearly visible, first he emphasises how Wilsonianism has become a tired voice, continuously pushing the same failures, then he expresses how they are in essence anti-democratic.

Already in 2017, Trump claimed that "for too long," the American people were told that "unaccountable international tribunals, and powerful global bureaucracies were the best

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<sup>134</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2019."

<sup>135</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2020."

way to promote their success” – referring again to radical Wilsonian institutionalism – but that American citizens were forgotten while the system was “gamed” and the rules were broken.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, Trump argues that Americans “reject the ideology of globalism,” because they “will always choose independence and cooperation over global governance, control and domination.”<sup>137</sup> By making this claim, he openly presents globalism as an ideology of control and domination, placing it in opposition to American independence and liberty. Indeed, Trump insists that globalism has “exerted a religious pull over past leaders, causing them to ignore their own national interests.”<sup>138</sup> The implication is clear: globalism is an ideology that forces nations to neglect the desires of their citizenry and subject their democracies to global control – antithetical to America’s founding promise.

The second theme is rather a critique of the right Wilsonianism, or neoconservatism with its unilateral internationalism, or as Trump calls it: interventionism. First, Trump questions the core tenet of (right) Wilsonianism: the mission to spread American culture, values, and government. For instance, Trump stated that “we do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone,”<sup>139</sup> and that “the United States will not tell you how to live or work or worship.”<sup>140</sup> Also, in an address laying out his new MENA and southeast Asia strategy, Trump assured the nation that he “will no longer use American military might to construct democracies in faraway lands or try to rebuild other countries in our own image,”<sup>141</sup> later insisting that “we are not nation-building again.”<sup>142</sup> Ultimately, according to Trump, the US does not “expect diverse countries to share the same cultures, traditions, or *even systems of government*.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>137</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>138</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>139</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; & “Arab American Summit.”

<sup>140</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>141</sup> Trump, “Address to the Nation on US Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia,” Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Virginia, August 21, 2017, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-nation-united-states-strategy-afghanistan-and-south-asia-from-joint-base-myer> (hereafter called: “Address to the Nation”)

<sup>142</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; & “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

Instead, Trump puts the importance of (the spreading of) democracy on the backburner, and “renew[s] the founding principle of sovereignty.”<sup>144</sup> This, he argues, is the best way to “secure the blessings of safety, prosperity, and peace.”<sup>145</sup> For example, Trump asserts that “the future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect their citizens, respect their neighbors, and honor the differences that make each country special and unique.”<sup>146</sup> This is of course a direct appeal to Jacksonian sentiments. Similarly, when discussing his plans for Afghanistan, he insisted that the US is a partner and friend, but that it “will not dictate to the Afghan people how to live or how to govern their own complex society,” instead “it is up to the people of Afghanistan to take ownership of their future, to govern their society, and achieve an everlasting peace.”<sup>147</sup>

This belief that “nations of the world must take a greater role in promoting secure and prosperous societies in their own regions”<sup>148</sup> is a recurring narrative in his messaging which allows him to stress that the US should not “serve other nations as law enforcement agencies,”<sup>149</sup> nor should it “seek territorial expansion, or attempt to oppose and impose our way of life on others.”<sup>150</sup> This implicitly addresses Jeffersonian fears for imperial overstretch and strategic overreach. More directly invoking Jeffersonian (and Jacksonian) sentiments, he asserts the US must “uphold respect for law, respect for borders and respect for culture and the peaceful engagements these allow”<sup>151</sup> In return for “recognizing the right of every nation to set its own policies,”<sup>152</sup> he asks to other countries and intuitions to respect the US’ right to do the same, because its first duty is to its citizens – “to serve their needs, to ensure their safety, to preserve

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<sup>144</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018”; “UNGA 2019”; “UNGA 2020”; “Joint Session 2017”; “Joint Session 2018”; “Joint Session 2019”; & “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>145</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018”; see also “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>146</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>147</sup> Trump, “Address to the Nation.”

<sup>148</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; & “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>149</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>150</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

their rights, and defend their values.”<sup>153</sup> Sovereignism, for Trump, means strict non-intervention, again appealing to Jacksonian and Jeffersonian fears of foreign meddling while rejecting Wilsonism.

The object is clear, Wilsonianism has led to the rise of an ideology of globalism that puts the interests of American citizens second and subjects’ American institutions and democracy to foreign control. Similarly, the obligations that come with being the leader of such a global order has led to imperial overstretch and strategic overreach, draining valuable resources on foreign adventures and diverting precious attention away from home. This charge is the foundation of Trump’s FP rhetoric and underpins his application of the other traditions, whose adherents he attempts to rally behind him by claiming he alone will put a stop to the ideology that has wrecked the US and change American fortunes for the better. This will become clearer below.

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<sup>153</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; & “UNGA 2018.”

## *Hamilton on the Horizon*

Trump's critique of globalism is also targeted at the Hamiltonians, or rather what has become modern Hamiltonianism, because, as will be explained below, he does draw on Hamiltonian narratives to shape his critique. In essence, Trump laments that the Hamiltonians have become too alike the Wilsonians and have therefore contributed to what he asserts basically amounted to a wholesale auctioning of the American economy and therefore a betrayal of core Hamiltonian principles. Unlike his predecessors who have allowed this to happen, Trump asserts he has always put American commercial interests first and therefore presents a neo-classical Hamiltonian<sup>154</sup> narrative. The themes uncovered in this narrative are, a support for Hamiltonian core principles, an assertion that these principles have been broken by both domestic and foreign actors, but that with an adjusted policy these principles can again be protected.

First, Trump reaffirms Hamiltonianism's core tenets: American economic interests come first, and the open-door policy is important in securing those interests. For example, in his 2020 address to the UNGA, Trump asserted that "American prosperity is the bedrock of freedom and security all over the world."<sup>155</sup> Similarly, in his address after the G7 summit in 2017 Trump expressed his desire for "the ultimate thing," a trade system wherein "you go tariff-free, you go barrier-free, you go subsidy-free," because he wants and expects "other nations to provide fair market access to American exports."<sup>156</sup> Trump sees such a "fair and reciprocal" system of trade as essential to American interests, which he mostly understands in term of

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<sup>154</sup> Thusly named because it claims to a new iteration of Hamiltonianism by returning it to its classical principles.

<sup>155</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2020."

<sup>156</sup> Trump, Press Conference by President Trump After G7 Summit," Charlevoix, Canada, June 9, 2018, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/press-conference-president-trump-g7-summit/> (hereafter called: "G7 Summit").



prosperity, similar to Hamiltonian conceptions of the national interest.<sup>157</sup> Finally, Trump clearly declared during his first State of the Union address in 2017 to “believe strongly in free trade.”<sup>158</sup>

“But,” continued Trump, “it also has to be fair trade. It’s been a long time since we have had fair trade.”<sup>159</sup> This is the second theme of Trump’s neo-classical Hamiltonian narrative: it is a repudiation of how modern Hamiltonians have failed to protect the US’s commercial interests, because the free-trade system they have advocated exists only in spirit, and is in fact to the detriment of the US economy due to its the current unfair and unfree characteristics in practice. This grievance is expressed twofold: on the one hand, his predecessors and opponents have put the country up for sale, and on the other hand, the world has taken advantage of the US. The intent is clear and builds on the ‘exceptional me 2.0’ narrative: Trump desires to create a sense of betrayal among his domestic audience in order to present himself as their saviour.

Statements accusing his predecessors and political opponents of failing to protect American economic interests are frequent. A clear example of this is Trump’s complaint that “Obama gave the ship away. He allowed them to take everything.”<sup>160</sup> Similarly, in his first State of the Union address, he claimed he had “inherited a series of tragic foreign policy disasters,”<sup>161</sup> referring to numerous “bad deals,” or “terrible deals” – a judgment invoked regularly throughout his presidency.<sup>162</sup> These deals – such as the “historic trade blunder known as NAFTA”, called “catastrophic,”<sup>163</sup> and “one of the worst trade deals ever made”<sup>164</sup> – are “one-

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<sup>157</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018;” “UNGA 2019”; “Joint Session 2019”; “Joint Session 2020”, “G7 Summit”; & White House, *National Security Strategy of the US of America*, Washington, DC, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>158</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2017.”

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Trump, “Meeting With Secretary General.”

<sup>161</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2017.”

<sup>162</sup> Trump, “Davos”; “Meeting With Secretary General”; “G7 Summit”; “Joint Session 2017”; “Joint Session 2018”; “Joint Session 2019”; “Joint Session 2020”; “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018”; & “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>163</sup> Trump, „Joint Session 2018.“

<sup>164</sup> Trump, “The President’s News Conference in Osaka, Japan,” Osaka, Japan, June 29, 2019, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-osaka-japan> (hereafter called: “News Conference in Osaka”).

sided deal[s] where the United States gets nothing in return,”<sup>165</sup> resulting in the loss of “more than one-fourth of [US] manufacturing jobs,”<sup>166</sup> and a “chronic trade deficit”<sup>167</sup> of hundreds of billions, if not trillions,<sup>168</sup> of dollars in trade deficits with “virtually every country in the world.”<sup>169</sup> Trump would repeat his exasperation over these deals at nearly every public event domestic, or abroad, and he was always clear that he “blame[s] past leaders. There was no reason that this should have happened.”<sup>170</sup> for instance during his 2019 address to Congress where he stated, “I blame our leaders and representatives for allowing this travesty to happen,”<sup>171</sup> or in Davos where made his disdain for the perpetrators known: “I don’t give the people that were in my position great credit, because, frankly, they let it all happen.”<sup>172</sup>

They did not merely allow it to happen through bad policy, but by supporting a global trade system that Trump – contrary to modern Hamiltonian opinion – alleges is inherently unfree and unfair. He argues that despite the US opening its economy to the world, “other countries did not grant [the US] fair and reciprocal access to their markets in return. Even worse, some countries abused this openness to dump their products, subsidize their goods, target [US] industries, and manipulate their currencies to gain unfair advantage over [the US].”<sup>173</sup> The purportedly “unfair foreign trading practices, of which, really, there are many,”<sup>174</sup> are presented as a clear violation of the Hamiltonian open-door policy. He accuses other actors of acting in bad faith, especially the WTO, the EU and China. For example, when Trump was asked about trade with the EU, he complained that “they have trade barriers where you can’t trade. They have tariffs all over the place. They make it impossible,” he continued “of course, they like it

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<sup>165</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>166</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2017.”

<sup>167</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2018.”

<sup>168</sup> Donald Trump keeps switching on the figures.

<sup>169</sup> Trump, “G7 Summit.”

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2019.”

<sup>172</sup> Trump, “Davos.”

<sup>173</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>174</sup> Trump, “G7 Summit.”

the way it is; they're making \$150 billion-plus, right?"<sup>175</sup> China is considered a "rival" that challenges the American economy,<sup>176</sup> by "targeting our industries and stealing our intellectual property," as well as the "theft of American jobs and wealth."<sup>177</sup> China has been able to do so because the WTO, with the support of Trump's predecessors, has favoured China and treated the US "unfairly."<sup>178</sup> Trump, therefore, often expresses that the US predilection for free-trade "has been taken advantage of for decades and decades."<sup>179</sup>

With Trump in charge, however, the US will be taken advantage of "no longer," because he pledges to protect "America and its great companies and workers."<sup>180</sup> This is the final theme of his neo-classical Hamiltonian narrative: he promises to fix American trade policy to truly protect American interests, unlike his predecessors. Trump declared victoriously that he had "rejected the failed approaches of the past, and [he] is proudly putting America first,"<sup>181</sup> and was therefore willing to "take whatever steps are necessary to protect American industry and workers from unfair foreign trading practices."<sup>182</sup> These steps allude to Trump's return to classical Hamiltonian protectionism, through which he desires to enforce his "ambitious campaign to reform international trade,"<sup>183</sup> and establish a system of absolute reciprocity.<sup>184</sup> After being elected, Trump believed it was time to heed the advice of Abraham Lincoln who warned that the "abandonment of the protective policy by the American Government will produce want and ruin among our people."<sup>185</sup> Doing so allowed Trump to legitimise

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<sup>175</sup> Trump, "Davos."

<sup>176</sup> Trump, "Joint Session 2018."

<sup>177</sup> Trump, "Joint Session 2019"; also see: "Joint Session 2017"; & "Joint Session 2020."

<sup>178</sup> Trump, "Davos."

<sup>179</sup> Trump, "G7 Summit"; „Davos; „Joint Session 2017“; „Joint Session 2019“; „Joint Session 2020“; „UNGA 2017“; & „UNGA 2018.“

<sup>180</sup> Trump, "Joint Session 2017."

<sup>181</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2020."

<sup>182</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2018."

<sup>183</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2019."

<sup>184</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2017."

<sup>185</sup> Trump, "Joint Session 2017."

protectionism as a valid measure needed to level the playing field or break open the door – i.e. get countries to (re)negotiate trade deals.

He swiftly claimed success, stating his “massive tariffs” on Chinese-made goods had accomplished the return of companies to America.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, Trump threatened with reciprocal taxes in response to French plans to tax American companies, believing that such taxes on would be beneficial for American businesses. He added, however, that he was “only going to do that if it’s necessary,” indicating it is a tactic to get the French (i.e. the EU) to the negotiating table.<sup>187</sup> He also repeatedly warned the EU directly that “they have to shape up; otherwise, things are going to get very tough.”<sup>188</sup> Consequently, Trump boasted that he got the EU to negotiate where all previous presidents had failed, and also achieved “a great new deal with China,” indicating that his brash protectionism effectively serves its purpose as battering-ram that ensure the door remains open to American goods.<sup>189</sup>

The goal is clear, through the application of the ‘exceptional me 2.0’ strategy Trump has been able to co-opt the Hamiltonian tradition. He presents a narrative of how Hamiltonian principles had been violated and betrayed by his political opponents and predecessors who have failed to enforce the open-door policy thereby allowing the US to be extorted and harming American commercial interests – they had become too much alike the Wilsonians in their love for globalism.<sup>190</sup> In contrast, Trump is presented as truly having America’s national interests at heart and willing to do whatever it takes to protect American commerce and interests. As established, how these interests are best protected is of a secondary order, therefore, there is still some Hamiltonianism on the horizon of Trump’s FP, albeit a re-oriented one. This allows

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<sup>186</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>187</sup> Trump, “Meeting With General Secretary.”

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Trump, “Davos”; & “Remarks on China-US Trade Relations and an Exchange With Reporters Abroad,” Air Force One, December 1, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-china-united-states-trade-relations-and-exchange-with-reporters-aboard-air-force> (hereafter called: “China-United States Relations”).

<sup>190</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 93.

Trump to accuse anyone who still argues in favour of a free-trade system – in the ‘globalist’ or modern Hamiltonian sense – of endangering the American economy and US interests. A powerful tool.

## *Jeffersonian Jamboree*

Trump's FP is not only one of Hamiltonian interests, but also one of values, Jeffersonian values to be precise. They see foreign entanglements as threats to American democracy; endeavour to avoid war at all costs; desire FP to be conducted in accordance with the Constitution; and should foreign engagement become unavoidable, they believe that those should be pursued with the least possible risk, cost, and application of force.<sup>191</sup> Trump's redefinition of American exceptionalism through the 'exceptional me 2.0' rhetorical strategy also clearly informs his application of this tradition. Herein he first asserts that the US' founding principles are under threat due to foreign entanglements pushed by domestic actors. Then he presents himself as a true lover of the Constitution who is committed to defend the US against counterrevolutionary threats,<sup>192</sup> wherever they may arise. Finally, he professes this is done by returning to Jeffersonian FP principles.

First, Trump asserts that "freedom and democracy must be constantly guarded and protected against threats from abroad and from within."<sup>193</sup> References to the need to defend, protect, or preserve the founding principles are frequently utilised by Trump to arouse a constant need for alertness among his base, and by clearly indicating who is responsible he is able to direct that alertness against his opponents.<sup>194</sup>

This is done by first establishing foreign threats to American sovereignty and liberty. Most of the rhetorical attacks are aimed at foreign entanglements in the form of "an unelected, unaccountable, global bureaucracy."<sup>195</sup> Trump argues that international entities, if unopposed, would "trample" and "threaten the liberties of law-abiding American citizens,"<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 189-190.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>193</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2019."

<sup>194</sup> Trump, "Joint Session 2018"; "Joint Session 2019"; "UNGA 2017"; "UNGA 2018"; "UNGA 2019"; "UNGA 2020"; & White House "NSS."

<sup>195</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2018"; also see: "UNGA 2017"; & "UNGA 2019."

<sup>196</sup> Trump, "UNGA 2019."

but, “the United States will not cede sovereignty to those that claim authority over American citizens and are in conflict with [its] constitutional framework.”<sup>197</sup> Therefore he opposes the UN Arms Trade Treaty because “the United States will always uphold our constitutional right to keep and bear arms,”<sup>198</sup> and rejects the jurisdiction, legitimacy and authority of the International Criminal Court which “claims near-universal jurisdiction over the citizens of every country, violating all principle of justice, fairness, and due process.”<sup>199</sup> Similarly, he refused to participate in the Global Compact on Migration and complained about UN infringement on the American “wish to protect innocent life,”<sup>200</sup> believing such matters “should not be governed by an international body unaccountable to our citizens,”<sup>201</sup> and that “global bureaucrats have no business attacking the sovereignty of nations.”<sup>202</sup> However, global governance is not the only form of “coercion and domination.”<sup>203</sup> “Other forms,”<sup>204</sup> referring to “the spectre of socialism,”<sup>205</sup> presents an equally serious challenge. It is portrayed as the “wrecker of nations and destroyer of societies,”<sup>206</sup> that leads to “government coercion, domination and control,”<sup>207</sup> “expansion, incursion, and oppression,”<sup>208</sup> and “corruption.”<sup>209</sup> In short, globalism and socialism are presented as the antithesis to American liberty and clear counter-revolutionary threats in a narrative of a grand international clash of ideologies – socialism and globalism versus life and liberty – that spills over to domestic politics. This is precisely the point as it enables and legitimises an all-out assault on his political opponents as enemies of America.

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<sup>197</sup> White house, *National Security Strategy*, 40.

<sup>198</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>199</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>200</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>201</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>202</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>203</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*; also see: Trump, “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>207</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2019.”

<sup>208</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>209</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”; “UNGA 2019.”; “UNGA 2020.”

Domestically, Trump also observes that constitutional rights are “under siege,”<sup>210</sup> but that his administration is “totally defending” them.<sup>211</sup> Just as “global bureaucrats” threaten the US from the outside, so does “a faceless bureaucracy operate in secret and weaken democratic rule.”<sup>212</sup> Jeffersonians fear government secrecy above all else,<sup>213</sup> and Trump warns that bureaucracy should have no place in American life.<sup>214</sup> He also observes “we see alarming signs and new challenges to liberty,”<sup>215</sup> claiming to be “alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism in our country,”<sup>216</sup> and accusing American lawmakers, referring to Democrats, of “endorsing legislation to impose a socialist takeover.”<sup>217</sup> However, Trump assured the nation that “America will never be a socialist country,”<sup>218</sup> implying that he would protect the US from the Democrats’ attempts to turn it into one. These attacks do not stop there as Trump frequently uses the international state to denounce his domestic opponents as threats to American democracy. They are accused of “hurting” the country and doing a “disservice” to it by abusing government institutions, turning the Constitution into a “performance.”<sup>219</sup> According to Trump these “do-nothing Democrats”<sup>220</sup> do “nothing but resist and obstruct”<sup>221</sup> his project of national rejuvenation. In these efforts they have “enlisted partisan media”<sup>222</sup> who use their “immense power over what we can see and over what we are allowed to say”<sup>223</sup> to silence, coerce, cancel or blackmail Trump and his allies.<sup>224</sup> By deploying such similar language about foreign and

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<sup>210</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>211</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2018.”

<sup>212</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>213</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 191.

<sup>214</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2018.”

<sup>215</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>218</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2019.”

<sup>219</sup> Trump, “Meeting With Secretary General”; also see Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> Trump, “The President’s News Conference With President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia,” Helsinki, Finland, July 16, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-with-president-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-russia-helsinki> (hereafter called: “News Conference With Putin”).

<sup>222</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019”; also see: “Meeting With Secretary General”; & “News Conference With Putin.”

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*



domestic threats to American life and liberty, Trump conjures the impression that they are one and the same, or at the very least that foreign and domestic forces of globalism, and socialism are colluding against America and ultimately against Trump – for they are one and the same in his FP discourse –, thus legitimising any possible (future) attack by Trump and his base against their political rivals and the free media, all in the supposed defence of democracy.

Finally, Trump presents himself as the true defender of the American Constitution and adheres closely, at least rhetorically, to the Jeffersonian emphasis on the “Constitutional conduct” of FP and peace.<sup>225</sup> Trump repeatedly professes a love for the Constitution, in similar fashion to the Jeffersonian love affair with this founding document. He opened his first speech to the UNGA celebrating the 230<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his “beloved Constitution,” a “timeless document” that has been the “foundation of peace, prosperity and freedom for the Americans.”<sup>226</sup> Trump repeatedly stresses his, and America’s, commitment to the “founding principles,”<sup>227</sup> or “core rights and values [...] inscribed in America’s founding documents,” such as “liberty, independence, and self-government,”<sup>228</sup> but also “the dignity of the individual” and “rule of law.”<sup>229</sup> More specifically, Trump continuously champions the Second Amendment, religious freedom and the protection of “innocent life,” referring to the unborn child, which carries over into his FP discourse.<sup>230</sup> Proudly declaring it an “immense privilege” to be the elected leader of a country that “prizes” these values “above all.”<sup>231</sup> He believes that these principles inspire “countless millions around the globe” by virtue of their “respect for human nature, human dignity and the rule of law.”<sup>232</sup> In direct confrontation with Wilsonianism, and seemingly embracing Jeffersonianism, Trump asserts that “we do not seek to impose our

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<sup>225</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2020”; also see: Mead, *Special Providence*, 189-190.

<sup>226</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>227</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*.

<sup>228</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>229</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>230</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2018”; “Joint Session 2019”; “Joint Session 2020”; “UNGA 2019”; and “UNGA 2020.”

<sup>231</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>232</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

way of life on anyone, but rather let it shine as an example for everyone to watch.”<sup>233</sup> Therefore, he charges Americans to “take pride in that example”<sup>234</sup> and strive to be “the brightest star” on “the tallest summit,” reflecting the old city-upon-a-hill trope.<sup>235</sup> In short, Trump believes that the US must “never lose sight of [its] values and their capacity to inspire, uplift, and renew,” but claims that his predecessors have done just that.<sup>236</sup>

Additionally, Trump professes a Jeffersonian love for peace, stating that peace is his “number-one goal,”<sup>237</sup> and he will help America fulfil its “destiny as peacemaker.”<sup>238</sup> He desires to “embrace friendship with all who genuinely seek peace,”<sup>239</sup> and expresses a preference for diplomacy over “conflict and hostility.”<sup>240</sup> During his summit with Kim Jong-un, Trump stated that “anyone can make war, but only the most courageous can make peace,” adding that “peace is always worth the effort.”<sup>241</sup> After, he boasted that he had achieved more with North Korea in 6 months than others had in 80 years.<sup>242</sup> Similarly, during his press conference with Putin, he vowed that he “would rather take a political risk in pursuit of peace than to risk peace in pursuit of politics.”<sup>243</sup> This combined with the other statements sends a powerful message tailored to the Jeffersonian tendencies in American society: I am courageous enough to risk my political career in the pursuit of peace, simultaneously implying that others

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<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*; Mead, *Special Providence*, 182.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2019.”

<sup>236</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, ii.

<sup>237</sup> Trump, “Remarks by President Trump at Press Conference After NATO Summit,” Brussels, Belgium, July 12, 2018, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-conference-nato-summit-brussels-belgium/> (hereafter called: “Press Conference After NATO Summit”); “Remarks by President Trump and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg prior to Bilateral Breakfast,” Brussels, Belgium, July 11, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-exchange-with-reporters-prior-breakfast-with-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg> (hereafter called: “Remarks Prior to Bilateral Breakfast”); & “Remarks by President Trump and NATO secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at Bilateral Breakfast,” Brussels, Belgium, July 11, 2018, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-nato-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg-bilateral-breakfast/> (hereafter called: “Remarks at Bilateral Breakfast”).

<sup>238</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2020.”

<sup>239</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>240</sup> Trump, “News Conference With Putin.”

<sup>241</sup> Trump, “The President’s News Conference on Sentosa Island, Singapore,” Singapore, June 12, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-sentosa-island-singapore> (hereafter called: “Sentosa News Conference”).

<sup>242</sup> Trump, “China-United States Relations.”

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

are not courageous or willing enough to do the same. Unlike his predecessors, Trump maintained that he was “working to end America’s wars,” adding that he would “finally end America’s longest war and bring our troops back home,”<sup>244</sup> referring to his planned exit from Afghanistan, and repeatedly boasted about the many “ground-breaking” peace deals he had brokered.<sup>245</sup>

The messaging is clear. Trump paints a picture of racketeering predecessors who have pursued foreign wars, surrendered American sovereignty to global bureaucracies, and actively endanger American liberty at home. All this as part of an implied global conspiracy. Instead, he positions himself as a true lover and defender of the Constitution and bringer of peace. This ‘they ruined it, I’m fixing it’ narrative is a direct translation of his ‘exceptional me 2.0’ strategy. After all, it is only due to Trump’s courage that American life and liberties will persevere. Therefore, Trump presents a clear choice: either you are on his side in the defence of American democracy and values, or you are bent on obstructing his vision for America and a globalist, socialist, bureaucrat, or worst of all a Democrat, but above all an enemy.

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<sup>244</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>245</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2020.”

## *Jacksonian Jingoism*

The Jeffersonian peace is, however, to be enforced with Jacksonian militarism, best encapsulated in the following statement made by Trump: “we are stronger now than ever before. Our weapons are at an advanced level like we’ve never had before — like, frankly, we’ve never even thought of having before. And I only pray to God that we never have to use them.”<sup>246</sup> It is a peace enforced through sheer strength, making it clear that Jacksonian emphasis on security have trumped Jeffersonian concerns over a growing military.<sup>247</sup> This strength is needed to ensure the security of the people, a central tenet of Jacksonianism. Again, Trump’s ‘exceptional me 2.0’ strategy is uncovered in his application of the Jacksonian tradition as well. First, he establishes how the folk-community has been betrayed by (political) elites, but he is their champion; followed by an explanation of how he protects them by going after the enemies of the folk-community with all means necessary and a jingoistic fervour.

First, Trump establishes the importance of the folk-community – framed as the “American family,” “middle class,” “citizens,” and “patriots” – by referring to them constantly throughout his communications.<sup>248</sup> He stresses that this “great middle class” was once the “bedrock of American prosperity,”<sup>249</sup> and repeatedly asserts that government’s first job is to serve their interests.<sup>250</sup> Similarly, he expresses how America was built on “strong families, deep faith, and fierce independence,” signalling his Jacksonian predilection.<sup>251</sup> Instead, they were forgotten and left behind,<sup>252</sup> their “jobs were outsourced,” and “a small handful grew wealthy” at their expense.<sup>253</sup> American workers were allowed to be victimised, and leaders permitted

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<sup>246</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019.”

<sup>247</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 187-188.

<sup>248</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018”; “UNGA 2019”; “UNGA 2020”; “Joint Session 2017”; “Joint Session 2018”; “Joint Session 2019”; & “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>249</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>250</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018”; “UNGA 2019”; “UNGA 2020”; “Joint Session 2017”; “Joint Session 2018”; “Joint Session 2019”; “Joint Session 2020.”

<sup>251</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>252</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>253</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019”; also see “Joint Session 2017.”

“our wealth to be plundered and transferred.”<sup>254</sup> In other words, they were betrayed to benefit corrupt elites. However, under Trump, “America will never apologize for protecting its citizens,”<sup>255</sup> and will no longer allow such travesties to take place.<sup>256</sup> In Trump, so he assures, the American middle class has found its champion as he proclaims, “they are forgotten no more and they will never be forgotten again.”<sup>257</sup>

Not only is Trump their champion, but he also endeavours to equate himself and his base with the folk-community proper. Basically, through the ‘me the people’ rhetorical device explained above, Trump is able to make loyalty to him the superseding determinant of the Jacksonian honour code that decides who is part of the community’s in-group.<sup>258</sup> Similar to how globalists, bureaucrats, socialists and Democrats are presented as threats to American liberty, so are they considered outsiders, positioned in opposition to true patriots such as Trump and his base, and undeserving of the protection the Jacksonian honour code provides. These are after all the same elites who have betrayed the American middle-class, just as they have betrayed American commercial interests,<sup>259</sup> and American democratic sovereignty.<sup>260</sup> Trump, for example queried “are we still patriots?” after lamenting the previous lack of investment in the US to “build strong families” and “safe communities.”<sup>261</sup> Later he declared: “Our families are flourishing. Our values are renewed. Our pride is restored.”<sup>262</sup> Thereby, he established that he was committed to the Jacksonian values that had made the country great, whereas his predecessors had neglected them, again signalling he is one of the people, and they are not. And unlike these outsiders and political elites, Trump emphasises he looks out for the well-being of

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<sup>254</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018,” (emphasis added).

<sup>255</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>256</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>257</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>258</sup> See Gilmore and Rowling, *Exceptional Me*, 8, and “Exceptional Me 2.0” section.

<sup>259</sup> See: “Hamiltonian on the Horizon” section.

<sup>260</sup> See: “Jeffersonian Jamboree” section.

<sup>261</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; also see: “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>262</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2020.”

the people, both economically, as seen in his neo-classical Hamiltonianism, and physically, through a powerful military.

References to this physical protection, with iterations and iterations of protect, secure, defend, etc in relation to the American citizens are numerous in all sources bar one.<sup>263</sup> Trump alleges that “to keep America safe,” the military must be provided “with the tools they need to *prevent war*.”<sup>264</sup> Consequently, Trump frequently boasts about the budget increases his administration has enacted, to better protect the American people, mirroring the Jacksonian conviction that the best government can do is to spend money on the military, whose defence of the nation is seen as a great service.<sup>265</sup> Through the “unrivalled might,”<sup>266</sup> achieved by Trump’s defence spending, so he alleges, other nations, and enemies are kept in check by sheer “fear.”<sup>267</sup> This powerful military not only deters threats, thus protecting the physical wellbeing of the people, it also enables the US to relentlessly persecute those who challenge the US and break the international variant of the Jacksonian honour code.<sup>268</sup>

Mimicking the Jacksonian reluctance to fight abroad, as well as the adage that there can be no substitute for victory when provoked, Trump stated in his first State of the Union that “if they must” the men and women of the US military “only have to win.”<sup>269</sup> To this end, Trump promised that that “the brave defenders of the American people, will have the necessary tools and rules of engagement,” needed to ensure their effectiveness.<sup>270</sup> Notably, Trump also refers to the necessary rules of engagement, referring to restrictions “placed on our warfighters that prevented the Secretary of Defense and our commanders in the field from fully and swiftly

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<sup>263</sup> Trump’s remarks in Davos was the only instance these terms were not utilised.

<sup>264</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2017.”

<sup>265</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018”; “UNGA 2019”; “UNGA 2020”; “Joint Session 2017”; “Joint Session 2018”; “Joint Session 2019”; “Joint Session 2020”; “Meeting With Secretary General”; “Address to the Nation”; & Mead, *Special Providence*, 240.

<sup>266</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2019”; “Joint Session 2019.”

<sup>267</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017.”

<sup>268</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 254.

<sup>269</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2017.”

<sup>270</sup> Trump, “Address to the Nation.”

waging battles against the enemy,” adding that “these killers need to know they have nowhere to hide; that no place is beyond the reach of American might and American arms. Retribution will be fast and powerful.”<sup>271</sup> Terrorists, in this case referred to as “killers,” are obvious violators of the Jacksonian honour code, but so are Iran, Hezbollah and Assad’s Syria, because they sponsor terrorists; North Korea, because it regularly threatens the US without provocation; and socialist regimes because they brutalize their own people.<sup>272</sup> Thus, explaining Trump’s violent rhetoric targeting these actors.

At the dedication ceremony in Brussels for the Berlin Wall Memorial and the 9/11 and Article 5 Memorial, Trump remarked that “wherever they exist in our societies, we must drive them out and never, ever let them back in.”<sup>273</sup> Here Trump clearly referred to terrorists, but no enemy of the community deserves any quarter according to Jacksonians, no matter the severity of the crime.<sup>274</sup> When such logic is applied domestically by painting his political rivals and opponents as un-American – hence outsiders –, such language becomes a powerful implicit and omnipresent threat conveyed by Trump: there are no limits to my defence of the people and the Constitution. By reifying the American people as such with his base and presenting himself as its champion, Trump is able to wield a potent populist force that could potentially be targeted at his domestic enemies, who he conscientiously presents as corrupt elites that ignore – if not downright betray – the needs of the people they are supposed to protect and serve.

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<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2017”; “UNGA 2018”; “UNGA 2019”; “UNGA 2020”; “Joint Session 2017”; “Joint Session 2018”; “Joint Session 2019”; “Joint Session 2020”; & “Address to the Nation.”

<sup>273</sup> Trump, “Dedication Ceremony.”

<sup>274</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 235-246.

## *“Principled Realism”*

As we can see there is a lot of interaction between neo-classical Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism, and Jacksonianism in Trump’s discourse, they frequently overlap, but when they do conflict, a clear preference is given to Jacksonianism with its jingoist populist tendencies, perhaps due to his personal affections for Jackson. From this we may conclude that Trump’s FP (discourse) is a marriage between elements of these three traditions as they seek a reckoning with the Wilsonianism that has defined American FP in one way or another over the past decades.

This ‘grand coalition’ is one that unites neo-classical Hamiltonians who were unsatisfied with the economic status quo, Jeffersonians who have seen US democracy and its founding principles “under siege” by foreign entanglements and war, and Jacksonians who believed that US politicians no longer served the wellbeing of its citizenry, but the interests of a global elite. This is all informed by an understanding that naïve ideas about supposed exceptionalism held the US back from truly living up to its promise and achieving greatness, because it paralysed the US from fully committing itself to the game of IR.<sup>275</sup> This realisation made possible a ‘great reset’ of, rather than a break with, US FP traditions that is best encapsulated in Trump’s maxim of “principled realism” – wherein Jeffersonianism informs the principles, and the neo-classical Hamiltonians and Jacksonians provide the realism.<sup>276</sup>

Principled realism, presented by Trump as a break with “old dogmas” and “discredited ideologies,”<sup>277</sup> serves as the rallying cry of Trump’s grand coalition and is defined as a FP that is “based upon the view that *peace, security, and prosperity* depend on strong, sovereign nations that respect their citizens at home and cooperate to advance peace abroad.”<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Wertheim, “9. Trump Against Exceptionalism,” 129.

<sup>276</sup> For “Principled Realism” see: White House, *National Security Strategy*; & Trump, “UNGA 2017”; see also Mead, *Special Providence*, 100, 244.

<sup>277</sup> Trump, “UNGA 2018.”

<sup>278</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, 1 (emphasis added).



This view – the emphasis on those three specific values – is repeated throughout Trump’s FP communications. For example, at the Arab-America summit, Trump declared that “our vision is one of peace, security and prosperity,”<sup>279</sup> and at the 2017 NATO summit he affirmed that the US would never waiver in its determination to “achieve lasting security, prosperity and peace.”<sup>280</sup> These three values are clear references to Trump’s coalition: security for the Jacksonians, prosperity for the neo-classical Hamiltonians and peace for the Jeffersonians – with the necessary overlap, of course.

Central to the doctrine of Principled Realism is the dictum that “we are guided by our values and disciplined by our interests.”<sup>281</sup> The values – understood as a great love for the Constitution and adherence to the honour code – hint to Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism, while the interests – understood as commercial as well as the people’s wellbeing – hint to neo-classical Hamiltonianism and Jacksonianism. This doctrine means as much as a belief that American values are indeed good, worth protecting and should therefore be guiding principles for (international) conduct, but naïve notions of exceptionalism should not lead to such bravado that the United States loses sight of its interests and its people, nor get in the way of effective FP that actually protects the people and the values that make America great and allow it to live up to the promise of the Founding – such as had previously been the case. In short: Americans were supposedly enthralled by “empty platitudes” about exceptionalism that prevented them from living in the real (international) world and acting accordingly.<sup>282</sup>

It is in Trump’s interaction with NATO that we most clearly see the interplay between these traditions culminate. The Jeffersonian in Trump has occasionally expressed a reluctance to adhere to such international commitments, especially when they could draw the

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<sup>279</sup> Trump, “Arab America Summit.”

<sup>280</sup> Trump, “Dedication Ceremony.”

<sup>281</sup> White House, National Security Strategy, 55.

<sup>282</sup> Trump, “Joint Session 2020.”

US into a war.<sup>283</sup> He has also repeatedly called it obsolete. The Hamiltonian inclination comes to the fore in his insistence for a better deal.<sup>284</sup> Meanwhile, the Jacksonian reflex is clearly related to honour code in the sense those who are able must shoulder the burden of defence and dodging the duty is considered contemptible cowardice, forfeiting any entitlement to protection.<sup>285</sup> Likewise, independence and self-reliance are central Jacksonian thought, so NATO allies failing to live up to these expectations lessens Jacksonians respect for the alliance. All this while simultaneously attacking Wilsonianism by lamenting NATO's interventionism.

Ultimately, through the utilisation of his “exceptional me 2.0” strategy, Trump was able to redefine American exceptionalism as a conditional state rather than an inherent trait – America is exceptional so long as it is great. Simultaneously, he is the only one who can protect its economy, defend its values, and provide security for the people, i.e., he is the only one who can make America great and therefore exceptional again. This allowed him to become the standard-bearer of a grand anti-globalist coalition of neo-classical Hamiltonians, Jeffersonians, and Jacksonians – all of them resentful about the failed promises of the past and bent on renegotiating the global order – by reckoning with naïve ideas about exceptionalism that had led the US to lose sight of its interests, and those of its people, in search of Wilsonian fantasies. Instead, Trump would reset American FP to curtail the chaos caused by the power-war consensus to ensure Jeffersonian peace, Hamiltonian prosperity, and Jacksonian security, rather than serve the interests of Wilsonian globalists, thereby restoring order.<sup>286</sup> However, this rhetoric could prove to be a dangerous cocktail.

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<sup>283</sup> See: Guardian staff and agencies, “‘Very aggressive’: Trump suggest Montenegro could cause world war three,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jul/19/very-aggressive-trump-suggests-montenegro-could-cause-world-war-three>.

<sup>284</sup> Trump, “Meeting With Secretary General”; “Dedication Ceremony”; “Press Conference After NATO Summit”; “Remarks Prior to Bilateral Breakfast”; & “Remarks at Bilateral Breakfast”.

<sup>285</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 234, 246.

<sup>286</sup> Edwards, “Make America Great Again.”

## **Chapter 5: The Fate of America?**

This thesis endeavoured to answer the following question: *how has Trump's re-interpretation of American exceptionalism influenced the utilisation of the dominant traditions in American FP in his FP discourse?* In this endeavour it became clear that taking into consideration Trump's 'exceptional me 2.0' strategy improves our understanding of his FP. It was uncovered that through this strategy he was able to redefine American exceptionalism as a conditional state – rather than an inherent trait – in such a way as to become contingent on him. This allowed him to twist and co-opt American FP traditions to reinforce his demagoguery, by taking their signifiers and applying his (re-)interpretations to them.

Specifically, the 'exceptional me 2.0' strategy permeates his utilisation of these traditions in that it provides a clear discursive structure to which the traditions can be tailored. First, he repeatedly makes the case that Wilsonianism had led to the rise of a globalist ideology that harms American interests, threatens American liberty and neglects the American people. Therefore, they had made the US unexceptional. Then he appeals to the core tenets of Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism as the answers to solve this problem and make America great again but asserts that only *he* will be able to properly apply/champion them. By doing so, Trump is able to preside over a great reset of American FP, leading a grand anti-globalist coalition of neo-classical Hamiltonianism, right-wing Jeffersonians, and populist Jacksonians, in a reckoning with the dominant – supposedly globalist – Wilsonianism, bent on renegotiating the global order. To use Mead's metaphor: the Jacksonian base is the car itself, Trump is the driver, and disgruntled neo-classical Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians have hitched a ride away from exceptionalism towards greatness. Is this merely an alliance of convenience or is something more fundamental happening? If it is a coalition of convenience, how long can

it last? Moreover, is Trump the only one to master this coalition, as he claims, or may he be usurped? These are all valuable questions that only time, and more research can answer.

Of course, when one can ascribe various aspects of nearly all traditions – three out of the four traditions is rather substantial – to a presidency, we might wonder how well they are suited to make clear categorisations. However, models are more akin to ideal types, and seldom fit perfectly when exposed to robust reality. Instead, they help structure an analysis of the (interplay) of societal determinants of FP. Mead already elaborated that these traditions are very much alive, and not static monoliths, that frequently form coalitions.<sup>287</sup> There has already been ample evidence of such coalition building, although this combination and this quantity is indeed unique.<sup>288</sup> Moreover, how traditions are used by politicians, such as Trump, rather than how they are used by scholars to categorise, is of far greater import, since actors use narratives/discourse for distinctive aims. Such typologies can help us understand *how* actors draw from these traditions to construct geopolitical reality and influence (domestic) politics, as they provide a solid framework to structure the analysis and provide grounded interpretations, but they remain mere approximations.

Trump's rejection of exceptionalism and his utilisation of Hamiltonianism, Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism does provide unique insights, because it indicates a realignment is occurring. The US appears to be shirking its traditional geopolitical identity of exceptionalism in favour of 'regular' nationalism, or at least that seems to be the aim of Donald Trump because this would allow him to 'rectify' the chaos caused by the 'naïve' traditional belief in exceptionalism that had actually caused its downfall. This would explain the shock Trump caused with his presidency and the accusations of being 'un-American,' 'unprecedented', or quite simply an aberration, even though Trump does appear to adhere to the confines of the supersubjective structures as dictated by the dominant traditions that do

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<sup>287</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 89.

<sup>288</sup> Rolf, "Donald Trump's Jacksonian and Jeffersonian Foreign Policy."

certainly correlate with societal tendencies. This indicates that Trump both tries to shape the FP discourse while simultaneously being shaped by it. Being confined by the superstructures does not imply, however, that Trump sticks to each idea within these traditions. That is to say he is neither a pure Jacksonian, nor a pure Hamiltonian, nor a pure Jeffersonian. As previously established: the devil is not in the ideas of these traditions per se, but how traditions are drawn upon and applied, and Trump draws on elements from the various traditions and forces a synthesis between them that he hopes will definitely break with the post-War order.<sup>289</sup> More importantly, however, is that Trump has presented himself as indispensable to the adherents of these traditions as they strive for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

More research must be conducted to see how successful Trump's efforts to lastingly alter America's geopolitical identity, and whether such a change can be only credited to him. Recent polls, however, do seem to confirm the conclusions of this thesis as a belief in exceptionalism, especially among the youth, appears to be declining. One poll found that 52% of US adults believed the US to be great, but along with others, whereas only 23% insisted that the US was indeed uniquely great.<sup>290</sup> Another poll had similar findings, and also showed Trump his grand coalition in action: around 30% of Trump supporters believed "maintaining overwhelming strength and deploying it only when America is attacked or our vital interests are compromised," (Jacksonian and Hamiltonian) would be the best course of action, and ~35% found that "keeping a focus on domestic needs and the health of American democracy, while avoiding unnecessary intervention" abroad (Jacksonian and Jeffersonian) should be a priority.<sup>291</sup> Curiously, despite Biden's emphasis on a democratic world order, signalling

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<sup>289</sup> O'Connor, *American Foreign Policy Traditions*, 7; & Anatol Lieven, *America right or wrong: an anatomy of American nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>290</sup> Hannah Hartig, "Younger Americans still more likely than older adults to say there are other countries better than the U.S.," *Pew Research Center*, December 16, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/12/16/younger-americans-still-more-likely-than-older-adults-to-say-there-are-other-countries-better-than-the-u-s/>; & Mark Hannah and Caroline Gray, "Indispensable No More? How the American Public Sees U.S. Foreign Policy," *Eurasia Group Foundation*, November 2019, <https://egfound.org/2019/09/indispensable-no-more/>.

<sup>291</sup> Hannah and Gray, "Indispensable No More."

Wilsonianism, his supporters seem to also have a rather Jeffersonian (~20%) and Jacksonian (~19%) inclination, although most do embrace more syncretic globalist Hamiltonian ideals (~38%).<sup>292</sup>

What lasting impact this might have on America's FP remains to be seen and requires continued research, but one might speculate that when a nation's core identity is altered to be centred around one individual, FP becomes subject entirely to the whims of said individual and their (domestic) political machinations. At best, this might lead to unpredictability,<sup>293</sup> or untrustworthiness, but at worst, it could lead to autocratic tendencies. Interestingly, while security, prosperity and peace are constantly recurring themes throughout Trump's FP discourse, democracy itself is seldom expressed as a goal in and of itself. It is *implied* through the emphasis of American values and the Constitution, but rarely made *explicit*. In discourse analysis, what is not said is often as important as what is said. This therefore necessitates further investigation, because it would imply democracy to be secondary to the other interests. When this is combined with Trump's reification with the people and his claim to be the sole protector of the Constitution, it becomes a dangerous cocktail, one that quite possibly relates to the Capitol Insurrection and the Big Lie. After all, Jeffersonians and Jacksonians have always considered FP to be an extension of domestic policy, and Trump seems to expertly use the international arena as a platform to broadcast his views to the domestic audience, using geopolitical imaginations of an international clash between oppressive globalists and liberty-loving sovereigntists to set the stage for domestic conflict.<sup>294</sup> Further research in how these narratives play out in Congressional debates, or other fora of public discourse – rather than a mere focus on presidential discourse – might prove to be fruitful.

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<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> Bentley and David, "Unpredictability as doctrine."

<sup>294</sup> Mead, *Special Providence*, 176; Tucker and Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty* 139.

By stripping it of its exceptionalism, Trump has turned the US into a country as unique as any other country: not inherently exceptional because of its history, people, values, or institutions, but made exceptional by the grace of its objective military and economic superiority. His brand of FP is one of hypernationalism informed by demagoguery, meant to foster a cult of personality because Trump argues that he alone can combat domestic and foreign globalist elites, thereby ensuring American greatness. Therefore, his slogans ‘Make America Great Again’ and ‘Keep America Great’ should be read as a ‘*I* make America great again’ and ‘*I* keep America great’. In a campaign address at Madison Square Garden in New York City in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt stated his conviction that “the fate of America cannot depend on any one man. The greatness of America is grounded in principles and not in any single personality,” but now, taking the findings of this thesis and the events following Trump’s electoral defeat into consideration, this could rather be construed as a warning and that is that it *must not*.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Campaign Address at madison Square Garden,” New York City, November 5, 1932, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/campaign-address-madison-square-garden-new-york-city-0>.

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