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The Future of Transatlantic Relations after Ukraine: Unravelling Republican Foreign Policy Objectives

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Johannes Kornberger

Abstract

A resurgent isolationist faction within the US Republican Party poses a challenge to the transatlantic alliance. Aware of their vulnerability in light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, European nations must adapt to evolving US foreign policy objectives. Using GOP elite perceptions as intervening variables between prevailing systemic pressures on the one hand, and US foreign policy objectives on the other, I propose that three unique groupings: conservative internationalists, hardliner activists and populist neo-isolationists share foreign policy objectives in the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East, but have divergent objectives regarding NATO and Ukraine. By exposing US Republican foreign policy objectives, this thesis highlights the need for the EU and the US to re-position their relationship towards areas of common interest to revive the transatlantic partnership.

Keywords: US foreign policy, elite perceptions, European security.

Abstract

Ein wiederauflebender isolationistischer Flügel innerhalb der US-Republikanischen Partei stellt eine Herausforderung für das transatlantische Bündnis dar. Angesichts ihrer Verwundbarkeit im Licht der großangelegten Invasion Russlands in die Ukraine im Jahr 2022 müssen sich die europäischen Nationen an die sich entwickelnden außenpolitischen Ziele der USA anpassen. Unter Verwendung der Wahrnehmungen der GOP-Elite als intervenierende Variablen zwischen den vorherrschenden systemischen Druckfaktoren einerseits und den außenpolitischen Zielen der USA andererseits schlage ich vor, dass drei einzigartige Gruppierungen – konservative Internationalisten, Hardliner-Aktivisten und populistische Neo-Isolationisten – außenpolitische Ziele im Indo-Pazifik und im Nahen Osten teilen, aber unterschiedliche Ziele in Bezug auf die NATO und die Ukraine haben. Durch die Offenlegung der außenpolitischen Ziele der US-Republikaner hebt diese Arbeit die Notwendigkeit hervor, dass die EU und die USA ihre Beziehung auf Bereiche gemeinsamen Interesses neu ausrichten müssen, um die transatlantische Partnerschaft wiederzubeleben.

Schlagwörter: US-Außenpolitik, Elite-Wahrnehmungen, Europäische Sicherheit

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Why Republican Foreign Policy Objectives?

In her final speech as a 2024 Republican presidential candidate, Nikki Haley claimed that ‘our world is on fire because of America’s retreat’.¹ Haley’s warning came as she bowed out of the 2024 US Republican primary, reflecting fears about a resurgent isolationist movement in the GOP – and what this might mean for the US and the world. Not long after triumphing over Haley in the Republican primaries, former US President Donald Trump encouraged Russia to ‘do whatever the hell they want’ to European states that did not pay their contributions towards NATO.²

Anyone unfamiliar with US politics would be easily forgiven for thinking Trump and Haley represented opposite ends of the political spectrum. The fact that both Haley and Trump find discord regarding foreign policy while agreeing on immigration is a testament to the perennial tension between isolationist and internationalist factions of the GOP – which has existed for generations.

While Trump and Haley’s respective audiences were primarily domestic, the rest of the world listened closely to what they said. Their remarks are not only reflective of a divided GOP, but they also represent fundamentally opposing views of America’s role in global affairs. Trump’s galvanising effect on a swathe of working-class voters in 2016 gave new strength to the isolationist wing of the GOP – forcing policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic to grapple with the question of how evolving foreign policy objectives of the US Republican Party will impact the future of transatlantic relations. So why then, do Republican foreign policy objectives matter, and what impact might they have on the future of the transatlantic relationship, in particular between Brussels and Washington?

The question is a highly relevant one. Conflict within, and on Europe’s doorstep has risen dramatically since 2014 with Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Civil conflict in Syria, Israel’s war on Hamas and the regional fallout have further eroded a relative period of regional stability and dashed hope for the normalisation of Israel-Arab ties. Chronic civil conflict across the Horn of Africa and the Houthi Rebel attacks on vital shipping lanes have further destabilised a region vital to world trade. The rise of China and India presents a challenge to pre-existing balances of power systems in the Indo-Pacific. Meanwhile, Europe’s geopolitical environment in the East has (once again) become hostile and unpredictable. To the West, the US 2024 presidential elections, poised to (re)set the direction of US foreign policy may be the most consequential for European security in decades. Regardless of the outcomes of the 2024 election, seismic shifts already underway in the transatlantic alliance mean that European leaders will need to understand and work with US isolationist factions and navigate their non-interventionist foreign policies – whether they’re inside or outside the White House.

Even before the emergence of the United States (US) as a global economic and military superpower, leaders and policymakers around the globe have strived to discern US foreign

¹ Jeff Zeleny, “Is Nikki Haley the future – or the past – of the Republican Party?,” *CNN*, March 6, 2024. <https://edition.cnn.com/politics/live-news>.

² Donald Trump, “Trump on NATO allies: Would encourage Putin to do whatever he wants with those who pay too little,” *The Economic Times*, February 12, 2024, YouTube Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hw9P2nDVVc>.

policy objectives – Republican or otherwise. This thesis focuses on Republican foreign policy objectives given the need to revisit the topic in light of the shifting balance of power in Eastern Europe brought about by Russia’s unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Since February 2022, US military aid to Ukraine has proven critical in preserving Ukrainian sovereignty in the short and medium term, initially preventing an immediate takeover by Putin’s army and uniting Western allies around the cause.

Republican foreign policy objectives, whether they include Ukraine as a priority or not, remain firmly focused on domestic as well as broader challenges in the Indo-Pacific, and in the Middle East. With changing power dynamics in Eastern Europe, NATO expansion, and the rise of China, there is a need to re-examine the future of Republican foreign policy objectives by looking at how GOP elites themselves *perceive* these priorities and challenges in a world where Europe is once again at war.

Despite internal divisions on foreign policy approaches and growing factionalism, the GOP has proven its long-standing ability to shape foreign policy from inside and outside the Oval Office. For example, GOP elites have deeply enmeshed themselves in the debate concerning military aid to Ukraine and frequently hold out on key packages to score political points at home.³ Various GOP elites have also foregrounded domestic debates about US border security and immigration as a quid pro quo for military aid to Ukraine.⁴ Recognising the domestic importance of these issues is critical in understanding how GOP factions position themselves in opposition, and in office.

The evolving nature and objectives of GOP factions themselves is why Republican foreign policy objectives form the centrepiece of this thesis. The direction of Republican foreign policy, especially since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 represents a challenge to the transatlantic alliance – aggravating European fears of what future Republican administrations might do (or not do) with the established security structures in the North Atlantic.

Moreover, as traditional divisions between foreign policy hardliners, internationalists and isolationists become more fluid and issue-specific, there is a renewed need to develop an understanding of how individual GOP elites perceive the international system, America’s role in it, and why they coalesce around certain foreign policy directions.

1.2. Aims and Scope

This research analyses GOP foreign policy objectives post-Ukraine by generating a typology of elite perceptions found within different factions of the GOP, and based on this framework, delineates certain foreign policy objectives in the context of the transatlantic alliance.

By locating and classifying post-Ukraine GOP foreign policy objectives, I aim to empower European policymakers to enhance decision-making and better nurture the evolving transatlantic alliance. More specifically, the thesis aims to inform and prepare European policymakers for potential advancements in US foreign policy objectives following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

³ Joan E Greve, “Mike Johnson faces revolt by hard-right Republicans over Ukraine aid package,” *The Guardian*, April 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/apr/08/mike-johnson-ukraine-aid-congress-republicans>.

⁴ Rachel Dobkin, “Matt Gaetz Reveals New Plan for Ukraine Aid Money,” *Newsweek*, April 18, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/matt-gaetz-ukraine-aid-mexico-border-1891930>.

Through this research, I arrive at a more nuanced understanding of current US Republican foreign policy objectives – which are critical in informing future diplomatic, academic and international relations (IR) discourses.

The scope of the research is limited to the collection and classification of perceptions within the present-day GOP; and to providing a historical backdrop for their positioning in modern-day transatlantic relations, and broader geopolitical discourses. The GOP represents a diverse factional landscape with highly pronounced and historically divergent foreign policy objectives, many of which are in tension with long-standing expectations of US allies and partners in Europe. Notwithstanding the evolution of US foreign policy following the 2024 US General Elections, this thesis develops a typology of GOP elite perceptions. It provides an overarching assessment of future GOP foreign policy objectives.

Attempting to include respective US Democratic Party factions would not be possible in such a limited space and time and have therefore been excluded. Also excluded from this research are comparisons between Republican and Democratic ideology, and leadership styles. The research focuses primarily on the perceptions of GOP elites and their ideas and understandings of the international system, America's role in the world and actual resulting foreign policy tendencies. The thesis concludes by offering an assessment of the implications for the future of the transatlantic relationship and a call to re-orientate the strategic partnership.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

To effectively foreground GOP foreign policy objectives post-Ukraine, it is necessary to (1) establish a link between the systemic level and foreign policy, and (2) balance human-centric factors with structural realities of the international system. To this end, certain approaches to IR theory are more useful than others.

Liberalism

Liberal IR theory would have us believe that foreign policy objectives are the result of progressive economic integration, interest group politics, globalisation, norms, and public opinion. Through this lens, progressively pluralist and democratically leaning political systems orientate the moral compass of elites possessing soft power and diplomatic capital. Free trade, democracy and a rules-based international order form a global system that promotes peace, human rights and the rule of law. Liberalism is therefore optimistic regarding the nature of the international system and offers many false assurances that international law, cooperation and economic progress will lead to peace.

However, liberal IR theories overlook important factors like the balance of power dynamics, which free trade and multilateral cooperation simply do not have the power to ameliorate. The expansion of protectionist trade policies following the COVID-19 pandemic both within the US, EU and elsewhere are evidence of an erosion of these liberal ideals.

What most liberals fail to acknowledge is that the current international order (which has indeed provided space for multilateralism, free trade and the spread of democracy in Europe), is fundamentally built on the US security guarantee. This reality is most visible in Western European states, which have flourished as a result. The US security umbrella has effectively underwritten the post-war peace dividend – and continues to do so today. While many liberal theorists point towards this post-war peace dividend as a global condition that shapes action,

they fail to acknowledge that this condition has been deliberately created by the actions of a few states which were able to establish an international rules-based order following the Second World War.

Liberalism also fails to account for the deep truths that persist in the international system, namely that no state can be truly cognisant of another's intentions.⁵ There will always be room for misinterpretation and thus, states' interpretations may be flawed and can lead to dangerous miscalculations or conflicts. Proponents of liberalism almost completely overlook the vital role that individual decision-makers have in influencing foreign policy. The GOP is no exception. More specifically, it ignores how perceptions, cognitive biases, and domestic political considerations influence real flesh-and-blood human beings in their decision-making process.

Today, liberalism suffers from a growing irrelevance in international relations discourse. With the Wilsonian liberal world order under strain and with growing great power competition fuelling nascent protectionist social and economic dogmas, the common rules of free trade as we know it, multilateralism and open society ideas are once again under threat. Employing a liberal perspective for this research while personalities such as Trump actively challenge the presumptions that underpin the school seems short-sighted.

Constructivism

The role of social interactions, norms, beliefs, and identities is an important and even necessary consideration when investigating GOP elite perceptions and their preferred foreign policy objectives. According to the constructivist school, states' perceptions of their interests and the external world are not objective or fixed, but are socially constructed through interactions with other states, international institutions, and domestic actors. Hardcore realists might easily critique this approach for its lack of falsifiability and empirical testing. It is indeed difficult, if not impossible to measure ideas and interpretations of social processes. Constructivists, for their part, would be at ease with this lack of measurability.

I critique constructivism not for this reason, but rather for its limited explanatory power. David Dessler and John Owen's review of various constructivist authorship concludes that compared to rationalists, constructivists view behaviour as creative, novel, and shaping the conditions of action – rather than being determined by them.⁶ On the other hand, rationalists, me included, tend to view behaviour as a response to objective conditions. With such limitations in its ability to explain how perceptions (and resulting behaviour) are manifested via a given set of historical and objective conditions, it is difficult to place constructivism in any serious position of strength in analysing US foreign policy. While ideas norms and identities are indeed important by-products of systemic realities, placing them within the context of a state's relative power and raw security concerns is even more important. Hence, this school suffers a similar fate as liberalism in its (in)ability to identify how systemic stimuli crystalise into raw foreign policy decisions.

Realism

The realist school is a broad church and reflects multiple overlapping and sometimes contradictory notions of how power is distributed in the international system. Indeed, there is

⁵ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* W.W. Norton & Company, (2001), 31.

⁶ David Dessler and John Owen. "Constructivism and the Problem of Explanation: A Review Article." *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 3, no. 3, (2005): 598, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3689039>.

some debate over what realism actually is. The broad collection of theories has sometimes been referred to as a ‘family’ of theories or even a realist ‘paradigm’.⁷

Most realists would agree that the pursuit of power and national interest (for better or worse) is the goal of organically self-interested states existing in a state of international anarchy. Based on pure experience, modern-day realists like Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, and Henry Kissinger recognised the possibility of violence as an omnipresent reality for states – and preparing for war was a necessary evil, not only for survival but also to carefully preserve a balance of power and deter aggression.⁸ At a time when the US faces multiple overlapping crises abroad, the realist culture is perhaps more potent than ever in understanding the complexities of the international system.

However, some argue that since the end of the Cold War, realism has morphed into a hollowed-out ‘academic realism’ which paints a grim and overly pessimistic picture of America’s role in international affairs.⁹ These academic realists, it is argued, have forgotten the true meaning of the paradigm and have retreated from their core roots – advocating for a reduced US role in international affairs, and failing to recognize the responsibilities of global hegemony.¹⁰

Rather than completely give in to such structural or neorealist leanings, this thesis takes core assumptions from the plethora of realist scholarship¹¹ that positions American power within an anarchical system as the driving force behind the global balance of power and the post-Second World War peace dividend. Hans Morgenthau, reflecting on the various elements of power,¹² maintained that ‘it is the task of those responsible for the foreign policy of a nation...to evaluate correctly the bearing of these factors upon which the power of their own nation and of other nations [rests].’¹³ For the modern-day GOP, such a clear-eyed approach is perhaps lacking. Indeed, for a growing portion of the GOP who are sceptical of globalisation, the inability to connect America’s present-day position in the international order with the hard-won effort of those elites who preceded them is worrying.

Most realists assume that analysis of foreign policy should be free from ideological biases or moralistic assumptions. At best, this approach is scientifically pure. At worst, it ignores the fact that both commentators and participants in international politics (no matter at which level) are indeed human beings with their own perceptions and biases. Later, I explain how the neoclassical realist theoretical framework balances these shortcomings by harmonising the human and structural elements.

Structural realism

⁷ Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Fall, 1999): 5-55, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228899560130>.

⁸ Hal Brands and Peter Feaver, “Saving Realism from the So-Called Realists,” *Commentary*, (September 2017), <https://bit.ly/3xqk0zw>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See, for example, Hans Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1948), E.H Carr’s *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (1939).

¹² Morgenthau mentions in particular: geography, natural resources, Industrial capacity, military preparedness, population, national character, morale, quality of diplomacy and government.

¹³ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace*, 112 – 49.

In his *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz proposes that structural realism is divided into two opposing sub-branches: offensive and defensive realism.¹⁴ Structural realism maintains that the international system is inherently anarchic and exists by the grace of a decentralised dispersion of power and capabilities among a given number of states. Offensive realism as elaborated on by John Mearsheimer, posits that states seek power and influence to achieve security in an anarchical world.¹⁵ On the other hand, defensive realism holds that the same anarchy restrains states from acting unilaterally and nurtures a tendency to conform to the balance of power principles.¹⁶

These streams of realist thought have greatly influenced the post-Cold War debates and have ultimately filtered up to the contemporary GOP elites of today – including Trump himself, who has followed a particular brand of transactional ‘hands-free’ structural realism. Structural realists or neorealists like Mearsheimer would promote what has come to be known as ‘offshore balancing’ or policies of ‘restraint’ in international affairs – akin to a kind of ‘free-market international order’ where almost anything goes.

Despite its maximalist tendencies, applied to the dichotomy of internationalism vs isolationism, structural realist perspectives provide an interesting lens through which potential foreign policy outcomes may be measured. While internationalist and pro-interventionist foreign policy may be better explained by offensive realism (Bush-doctrine and the US invasion of Iraq is a case in point), defensive realism would facilitate a more cautious and isolationist tendency (Obama’s backstep on his ‘Red Line’ on chemical weapons use in Syria is a counter-example).

Yet, while these structural realist approaches might be useful in understanding how the international system is organised at a broader systemic level, they fall short in their ability to pinpoint how foreign policies are formulated by real-world leaders who exist within specific domestic contexts. In overplaying their hand on the structural elements, they fail to encompass the important role human nature, leadership psychology plays in the creation and implementation of foreign policy. Enter classical realism.

Classical Realism

While modern neorealists would prefer to count battleships and draw conclusions about inevitable major power conflict in the Indo-Pacific,¹⁷ they tend to forget that the traditional roots of the realist school lie in early and venerable conceptions of morality, legality, and human nature – espoused by the likes of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Freud, Nitsche and even Marx.¹⁸ Far from distorting the fundamentals of realism, classical realists like Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau delivered what structural realists could never achieve: a recognition of the human tendency towards self-interest, the pursuit of power and influence, and at times, miscalculation and conflict. Like individuals, states pursue power and security to ensure survival. In a classical realist world, balance of power, political pragmatism and statecraft are essential tools in maintaining relative stability. The post-World War Two US

¹⁴ Steven E. Lobell, “Structural Realism/Offensive and Defensive Realism,” *Oxford University Press*, (March 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.304>.

¹⁵ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, W.W. Norton & Company, (2001).

¹⁶ Steven E. Lobell, “Structural Realism/Offensive and Defensive Realism,” *Oxford University Press*

¹⁷ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

¹⁸ Brian Leiter, “Classical Realism,” *Philosophical Issues* 11 (2001): 244–67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3050603>.

Republican Party reflected a dynamic representation of this classical realist reality. Despite realism being in crisis, the realities facing statesmen have not changed and people like Trump and Haley alike must deal with systemic challenges. Today's GOP elites and leaders must still walk the line between idealism and realism in what can still be described as a Westphalian system.

This is what led Bill Scheuerman, Michael C. Williams and Robert Schuett to point out that classical realism (as per Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, or John Hertz) has effectively engaged with ethical questions and described how the worst excesses of the Westphalian state system can be transcended, or at least alleviated via more nuanced understandings of the nature of international affairs.¹⁹ For example, Schuett contrasts Mearsheimer's 'hard-edged offensive realism' with Morgenthau's more 'interpretive-hermeneutical, historical, and reflexive' approach,²⁰ thus echoing the chasm between the Cold War realists like Morgenthau himself and the academic realist camp that emerged later.

Following the classical realist tradition and emphasising the importance of human nature and power in international politics, I take a deeper look at the prevailing ideas within US history that played a vital role in how leadership perceptions are formed at the unit level today. So, while classical realists focus on the systemic factors influencing foreign policy, I hope to carry out a more detailed and unit-level analysis that examines GOP elites within their domestic context and against critical real-world policy issues.

Neoclassical realism

To uncover the relationship between individual GOP elites and their foreign policy preferences after Ukraine, there is a need to balance structural factors with individual, unit-level variables. In his seminal review of neoclassical realist scholarship, Gideon Rose argues that neoclassical realism 'bridge[s] classical realism and structural realism by integrating key elements from both traditions'.²¹ Rose acknowledged the importance of systemic pressures found within structural realism while also recognising the significance of state-level variables highlighted by classical realism. While structural power dynamics remain important, how states respond to systemic pressures is moderated by domestic and even individual variables. While states might exist in structural anarchy, it is up to individual leaders to perceive threats and opportunities and thus generate foreign policy responses.

Therefore, this thesis assumes that GOP elite perceptions themselves may pose as intervening variables between what neoclassical realists would call *structural forces* or *systemic stimuli* on the one hand and *actual foreign policy* on the other. It follows that the foreign policies of current elites within the GOP hinge first and foremost on the US position in the international system and relative material power considerations. How elites like Donald Trump, Paul Rand, and Nikki Haley perceive the systemic stimuli are what gives us real foreign policy, and, by extension, the possible direction of the transatlantic relationship. While examining how major systemic challenges are perceived by certain elites is key, so are the domestic factors which constitute the local contexts against which these systemic issues are placed.

¹⁹ Robert Schuett, "The End of Open Society Realism?" *Analyse & Kritik* 44, no. 2 (2022): 219–242, <https://doi.org/10.1515/auk-2022-2024>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy by Michael E. Brown, Thomas J. Christensen, Randall L. Schweller, William Curti Wohlforth, and Fareed Zakaria," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054068>.

In mobilising the neoclassical realist approach to understanding evolving US foreign policy objectives, the fundamental roots of the classical school must not be ignored. As Thucydides expressed in his historical accounts of the Peloponnesian War, ‘The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must’.²² With the great powers of the world no longer residing in Europe, the attention of the strongest global power is firmly in the Indo-Pacific, will Europe suffer what it must as a consequence? The question is fundamentally a realist one and assumes that national interest comes first as a matter of sovereignty, security and survival.

However, the nature of national interest and how it is perceived by its purveyors and by those to whom it is directed are also of critical importance – after all, national interest and the policies used to achieve it are created and delivered (and received) by individual human beings, each with their unique perspective on the world. How then do GOP elites crystallise perceived structural realities into foreign policy? This question is fundamentally neoclassical, as it assumes that structural pressures are filtered at the unit level, by individuals with unique perceptions of the world.

Central to this neoclassical realist lens is the need to look back at the history of ideas within the GOP to understand how competing ideas of internationalism and isolationism influenced US foreign policy in the past. The neoclassical realist approach in practice meets the GOP elites at their own level – where critical questions of power, national security and the future of the nation converge. The neoclassical realist framework is also suited to understanding how elites perceive the world because the theory takes cues from the classical realist approach which quite rightly contends that leaders must evaluate their present position in the world – in particular, based on their relative material power.

I am not the first – or indeed last to foreground the perceptions of elites and decision-makers as intervening variables between structural pressure and resulting foreign policy. In his work *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, Fareed Zakaria concludes that increases in state power accompany shifting intentions²³ – in other words, perceptions of relative capabilities shape foreign policy objectives. If relative power is perceived to have increased, foreign policy will follow suit.

Using Zakaria’s logic in reverse, perceptions of elites concerning a *decrease* in relative power will also shape policy and restrict a country’s interests abroad. I propose that elite perceptions concerning the US relative power whilst in decline will have fundamental impacts on foreign policy objectives – in a way, reverse engineering Zakaria’s hypothesis and combining both historical and present-day case studies to arrive at GOP foreign policy objectives following Ukraine.

The following theoretical framework will be employed:

	Past/historical analysis	Present/current analysis

²² Thucydides, “The History of the Peloponnesian War”, Chapter XVII, translated by Richard Crawley, (March 2003), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7142/7142-h/7142-h.htm>.

²³ Fareed Zakaria, “From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role,” *Princeton University Press* (1998): 13–43.

Systemic pressures	Belligerent/militaristic nations in Europe First and Second World Wars Cold War	Rising China, Revisionist Russia Iran/Middle East Conflict Great power competition
<i>Translated through (causal mechanism)</i>		
Unit-level intervening variables	GOP elites' perceptions of US relative power (framework matrix Chapter 5)	
<i>Results in (effect)</i>		
Foreign policy objectives	Internationalist vs non-interventionist foreign policy objectives	Internationalist, hardliner, and neo-isolationist foreign policy objectives

Figure 1: Theoretical framework and causal mechanism.

1.4. Methodology

Broadly speaking, this thesis is divided into 2 parts:

- Chapters 1–3 provide a literature review, a historical analysis of GOP foreign policy ideas throughout the 20th Century and an analysis of GOP factions and their post-Ukraine priorities.
- Chapter 4 concludes by looking at how these competing priorities will impact the European security architecture and the future of transatlantic relations.

In answering the question of what post-Ukraine GOP foreign policy objectives might be, I engage a historical analysis of GOP perceptions and foreign policy in the early 20th Century. This constitutes part of the systemic level analysis as seen in Figure 1. The historical analysis (Chapter 3) reflects not only on GOP elites (senators and presidents) but also on the influential thinkers of their time (historians and writers). Back then, as is the case today, it was not only those in office who had the power to influence the course and objectives of US foreign policy.

In Chapter 4, and using evidence collected from publicly available speeches and interviews of GOP elites, I formulate perception profiles of various individuals and their factions. This constitutes the unit-level intervening variables seen in Figure 1.

For example, elite perceptions on the following range of issues are collected:

- i. Ukraine and Russia
- ii. EU/NATO
- iii. Middle East (in particular Iran and Israel)
- iv. China

This methodology reflects a bottom-up approach, starting with the raw perceptions of individual GOP elites, before allocating groupings, thus providing a more organic structuring of various elites and their foreign policy objectives. Ensuring breadth and cross-sectionality in this approach is critical to gaining a representative picture of current US foreign policy objectives.

1.5. Literature Review

There is an abundance of literature covering US foreign policy objectives. Yet following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, there is a need to revisit the topic to foreground the foreign policy objectives of respective GOP factions, which have, for the first time in nearly a Century, coalesced around certain isolationist and non-interventionist dogmas. This thesis builds upon existing literature dealing with the question of US foreign policy and Republican elite perceptions – in particular, the formation and evolution of internationalist, hardliner and isolationist factions within the GOP. It also touches on debates and conceptions of the nature and direction of transatlantic relations.

When it comes to US foreign policy tendencies, existing literature tends to foreground distinct attitude dimensions – based on classifications that place certain groups in diametrically opposed positions to one another. At the heart of this divide is the perennial battle between *internationalists and isolationists*.²⁴ According to Busby and Monten, internationalism refers to the idea that the US could 'best achieve security and economic growth by remaining engaged in international politics'.²⁵ They argue, along with others like Wittkopf, that foreign policy internationalism is guided by notions of 'liberal internationalism' that emerged from the Second World War and includes two overarching groupings: *cooperative internationalists and militant internationalists*.²⁶ Cooperative internationalists support international institutions, the United Nations, free trade and foreign aid; Militant internationalists, on the other hand, support a more coercive form of engagement, high military spending, and the use of force.²⁷ Wittkopf proposes that these two broad internationalisms have in turn given rise to a sub-breed of '*selective internationalists*'.²⁸ Wittkopf recognises that of this selective internationalist dimension, *accommodationists* embrace 'cooperative involvement' with the world while 'rejecting the more coercive strains of such involvement', while *hardliners* tend towards the opposite – limited engagement, but tending towards coercive use of force wherever necessary.²⁹

As put forward in Holsti and Rosenau's *The Structure of Foreign Policy Attitudes among American Leaders* and using Wittkopf's framework that emerged from his analysis of Chicago Council on Foreign Policy surveys, the two overarching forms of internationalism (*militant*

²⁴ Peter Gourevitch, "Review of Untangling US Foreign Policy, by David Lake." *Harvard International Review* 22, no. 2 (2000): 76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42762615>.

²⁵ Joshua W Busby and Jonathan Monten, "Republican Elites and Foreign Policy Attitudes." *Political Science Quarterly* 127, no. 1 (2012): 107. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41502509>.

²⁶ Eugene R. Wittkopf, "On the Foreign Policy Beliefs of the American People: A Critique and Some Evidence." *International Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1986): 425–45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600643>.

²⁷ Busby and Monten, "Untangling US Foreign Policy" 107.

²⁸ Wittkopf, "On the Foreign Policy Beliefs of the American People: A Critique and Some Evidence", 428.

²⁹ Ibid.

and cooperative) mix to create four unique sub-branches: *hardliners*, *internationalists*, *isolationists* and *accommodationists*.³⁰

Hardliners according to Wittkopf, support militant internationalism and oppose cooperative internationalism.³¹ As such, they are less tempted by multilateral security arrangements and favour the preservation of American agency and unilateral flexibility when it comes to dealing with challenges abroad.

Internationalists are natural interventionists, preferring action over inaction in foreign affairs. They see the international role of the US as a largely positive phenomenon and indeed necessary in upholding international stability, democracy and freedom. This grouping tends to see multilateral cooperation as a viable way of advancing the national interest and is more likely to use coercive policies abroad in order to reach foreign policy objectives.

Isolationists, on the other hand, are fundamentally opposed to both militant internationalism and cooperative internationalism. They prefer a more limited role in international affairs. They prioritise domestic issues over foreign entanglements and national sovereignty over multilateral commitments. Isolationists are highly sceptical of unnecessary overseas military interventions and are likely to question any deep involvement in military alliances that might see the nation obliged to commit forces overseas. They favour protectionist policies that serve the domestic economy – often at the expense of other nations, and often in contradiction to international law.

Accommodationists, according to the Holsti-Rosenau-Wittkopf consensus, perfectly contradict *hardliners* - opposing militant internationalism and supporting cooperative internationalism.³² For the purposes of this thesis and given the lack of evidence supporting the existence of this grouping within the GOP, I begin instead, by focusing on the remaining three groupings which are most visible: (*Internationalists*, *Hardliners* and *Isolationists*).

Others, including Lake, openly reject the notion of an *internationalist vs isolationist* divide, positing that the main chasm exists instead between *unilateralists and multilateralists*.³³ For Lake, this divide between unilateralists and international/multilateralists is not an ‘all or nothing choice’, but rather a potential means of tailoring certain policies to certain situations and contexts.³⁴ Others, including Chittick, agree with the need to move beyond the isolationist-internationalist dichotomy, positing in 1995 that there is a need to recognise three unique dimensions in foreign policy opinions: *military-antimilitary*, *interventionist-isolationist*, and *unilateralist-multilateralist*.³⁵ Such schemas are helpful in understanding the potential modes of GOP foreign policy tendencies on a 2 to 3-dimensional sliding scale. By using data on foreign policy attitudes arising during the post-Vietnam years, Wittkopf, Holsti and others, postulate that US foreign policy tendencies can be characterised by the opinions

³⁰ Ole R. Holsti, and James N. Rosenau, “The Structure of Foreign Policy Attitudes among American Leaders,” *The Journal of Politics*, (1990): 94, <https://doi.org/2131421>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. 96.

³³ David A. Lake, “The Self-Restrained Superpower: Entangling Relations and US Foreign Policy.” *Harvard International Review* 22, no. 3 (2000): 48–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42762635>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ William O. Chittick, Keith R. Billingsley, and Rick Travis. “A Three-Dimensional Model of American Foreign Policy Beliefs.” *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1995): 314. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600923>.

and attitudes of both the public and US leadership elites. They help foreground fundamental divides between certain groups based on their prior actions.

However, they critically overlook how certain elites perceive real-world challenges across a range of present-day foreign policy challenges facing the US. In other words, such schemas tell us how elites may be inclined to make their decision based on certain normative factors but stop short of offering any real-world applicability. For example, they fall short in explaining *why* certain GOP elites might be extremely hardliner or ‘hawkish’ over China, pro-engagement over Iran, and non-interventionist over Ukraine.

While such frameworks help in locating certain categories of Americans’ foreign policy beliefs, there is a need to combine a historical approach with more targeted and recent data on what today’s GOP elite actually perceive to be the key foreign policy challenges of the time. Therefore, this thesis focuses on specific GOP elites in an attempt to further crystalise an understanding of the variety and nuance within this political party.

In Chapter 4, the framework matrix proposes a more targeted and issue-specific understanding of the spectrum of possible foreign policy leanings – thereby alleviating the deficiencies of a binary or indeed a bi-partisan approach in how we understand future GOP foreign policy objectives.

Having established the literature which provides a foundational framework for understanding existing divides, there is a need to pivot towards existing literature concerning the transatlantic alliance.

Much has been made of how US elites pursue foreign policy in coordination with, and often in contradistinction to European interests. While the existing literature offers a multiplicity of reasons for the perceived US disentanglement from its transatlantic allies, the literature broadly coalesces around a few key points that exhibit various ‘cracks’ in the relationship. First, there is a loose consensus from some theorists writing in the post-9/11 era that the ‘foundational principles of the Atlantic security order that emerged after World War II have been compromised’.³⁶ A series of international crises from the Iraq War to differences on counter-terrorism and even the Global Financial Crisis they argue, have exacerbated existing rifts between the US and its Western European partners.³⁷ Some argue that on the systemic level, the interests of the US and the EU will continue to diverge, irrespective of who is sitting in the White House.³⁸

Writing in 2008 following Iraq and the Global Financial Crisis, Charles Kupchan concluded that mutual trust had been all but ‘eroded’, and ‘institutionalised cooperation [could] longer be taken for granted, and a shared Western identity has attenuated’.³⁹ Furthermore, Obama’s

³⁶ Charles A. Kupchan, “The Atlantic Order In Transition: The Nature of Change in U.S.-European Relations.” in “The End of the West?: Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order”, edited by Jeffrey Anderson, G. John Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse, *Cornell University Press*, (2008), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1tm7j6s.9>.

³⁷ Henry R. Nau “Iraq and Previous Transatlantic Crises: Divided by Threat, Not Institutions or Values,” in “The End of the West?: Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order, edited by Jeffrey Anderson et al., *Cornell University Press*, (2008): 82–110, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1tm7j6s.8>.

³⁸ Rikhodko, O.V., “U.S. Foreign Policy on the Verge of a New Path” *Her. Russ. Acad. Sci.* 91, (2021): 667–676, <https://doi.org/10.1134/S1019331621060186>.

³⁹ Kupchan, “The Atlantic Order In Transition: The Nature of Change in U.S.-European Relations.” 111-126.

‘pivot to Asia’ is seen by many as yet another strategic rift for the transatlantic partnership.⁴⁰ For many commentators and theorists alike, the election of populist and isolationist Donald Trump in 2016 ushered in a new period of ‘unpredictability’ for the transatlantic alliance.⁴¹ This thesis seeks to arrive at a more forward-looking understanding of transatlantic relations. By incorporating a normative approach within the latter chapters of this thesis, I aim to provide a framework for navigating each of the possible future GOP foreign policy objectives.

Existing literature also acknowledges the role of popular movements such as the Tea Party Movement or categorisations of certain GOP legislators in terms of their views on the role of government in society (establishment vs anti-establishment) or by their stance on social-cultural issues (GOP conservative vs moderates).⁴² Some argue that the wealth of factions and intra-party divides they create are the result of the restrictive two-party system that has come to dominate US politics – leaving little room for a plurality of parties, or cross-party factions.⁴³ Others point to how ideological differences have resulted in large ‘cleavages’ within the GOP thus creating an opening for Donald Trump in 2016.⁴⁴

It is virtually impossible to examine current GOP factions without looking at the relationship between realism, neoconservatism and the Bush era.⁴⁵ Such debates foreground modes of neoconservative thinking of the late 1990s as seen by the open letter to President Clinton in January 1998 advocating for regime change in Iraq.⁴⁶

Today’s conservative foreign policy thinking in the US, in particular, the populist-nationalist approach embodied by Trump is highly influenced by traditional notions of conservative American nationalism. Colin Dueck’s *Age of Iron on Conservative Nationalism* provides a foundational overview of shifting coalitions within the GOP – and the resulting impact on the foreign policy objectives of various administrations (both inside and outside the White House). Dueck holds that three main ‘groupings’ on GOP foreign policy existed during the Wilsonian era and in response to the First World War, namely, the non-interventionists (like Republican Senator Robert LaFollette), Hardliners (like Republican Senator William Borah) and a form of conservative internationalism (like Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge).⁴⁷ Dueck further claims that the interaction between these rough groupings and schools of

⁴⁰ David Shambaugh, “Assessing the US ‘Pivot’ to Asia.” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (2013): 10–19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26270763>.

⁴¹ Kiliç Buğra Kanat, “Transatlantic Relations in the Age of Donald Trump.” *Insight Turkey* 20, no. 3 (2018): 77–88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26469845>.

⁴² Stella M. Rouse, Charles Hunt, and Kristen Essel, “Growing Tea With Subnational Roots: Tea Party Affiliation, Factionalism, and GOP Politics in State Legislatures,” *American Politics Research* 50 no. 2 (September 2021): 242–254, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X211041150>.

⁴³ Howard L. Reiter, “Factional Persistence within Parties in the United States,” *Party Politics* 10 no. 3 (May 2004): 251–271, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068804042458>.

⁴⁴ Hans Noel, “Ideological Factions in the Republican and Democratic Parties,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667, (September 2016): 166–188, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24756149>.

⁴⁵ Brian C. Schmidt & Michael C. Williams, “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists,” *Security Studies* 17 no. 2, (2008): 191–220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410802098990>.

⁴⁶ Elliot Abrams et al. “Letter to President Clinton on Iraq.” Project for the New American Century, January 26, 1998, accessed 2 May 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050204091959/http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm>

⁴⁷ Colin Dueck, *Age of Iron on Conservative Nationalism*, (Oxford University Press, 2020), 2–3.

thought has, more or less, determined the course of GOP elites' foreign policy objectives ever since.⁴⁸

Dueck provides a sound framework for understanding how GOP factions changed over time – and does so from a position of American strength and primacy. The US indeed retains its international primacy – which is of course a condition rather than an overt strategy. However, while the US remains the predominant world power, scholars also agree that the nation is undoubtedly experiencing a period of relative decline.⁴⁹

Just as the US is not the first nation to experience global hegemony, it is also not the first to experience a period of relative decline. Aaron L. Friedberg's *The Weary Titan – Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1985 – 1905* looks at how British 'statesmen become aware of unfavourable shifts in relative power' in Britain at the turn of the Century.⁵⁰ Friedberg's book demonstrates the viability and applicability of the neoclassical realist approach, in particular to understanding the perceptions of decision-making elites – and holds theoretical significance for this research.

Friedberg's book provides key insights into the British experience of relative decline – a process, he argues, should be on the minds of American elites – but for different reasons. Friedberg argues that America has been much luckier than Britain and has remained more energetic and flexible in responding to changing economic and geopolitical conditions.⁵¹

Overall, the works by Friedberg, Dueck and others foreground perceptions as an important factor that determines key foreign policy objectives, while remaining close to the core tenets of the realist school. Both Friedberg and Dueck demonstrate the centrality of perceptions in understanding how foreign policy responses are construed. Friedberg maintains that 'shifts in the distribution of power within an international system may be 'real' in some sense, but they may fail to have any real impact unless and until they are perceived.'⁵²

At the same time, it is important to recognise that elite perceptions are not enough to change foreign policy alone. Snyder and Diesing in their book *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises*, remind us that broader shifts in foreign policy 'usually result from a change of regime, or a shift in the balance of power within a regime, not from individuals changing their minds.'⁵³ The importance of Snyder and Diesing's argument cannot be overstated. While perceptions intervene between systemic forces to crystallise foreign policy, they are not an end unto themselves, but rather a means.

⁴⁸ Dueck, *Age of Iron*, 3.

⁴⁹ William R. Thompson, "The Relative Decline of the United States," *American Global Pre-Eminence: The Development and Erosion of Systemic Leadership*, (May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197534663.003.0005>.

⁵⁰ Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan – Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1985 – 1905*. 1988, Princeton University Press. Text from the back cover.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵³ Glenn. H. Snyder, and Paul Diesing, "Information Processing" in "Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises," *Princeton University Press*, (1977): 329, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x0wmf.10>.

Yet despite the strong presence of scholarship examining the direction of the transatlantic relationship after the Cold War,⁵⁴ only a scarce few do so with the hindsight of Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the literature uncovering opposing groupings of US foreign policy attitudes affords little room for the ideological spaces that exist in the real-world formation of foreign policy objectives – in concert with actual and emerging geopolitical challenges.

By establishing a typology of perceptions among key GOP elites, I provide an outlook of their foreign policy objectives post-Ukraine. This thesis will aim to contribute to a more issue-specific understanding of GOP foreign policy objectives while also serving as a tool for decision-makers whose understanding of the foreign policy tendencies of such factions is critical when it comes to estimating their own position in the international system.

2. THE HISTORY OF IDEAS IN THE GOP

'America is not to be Rome or Britain. It is to be America.'
Charles Beard, 1939.

2.1. The Progressive Era

At the dawn of the 20th Century, just as the United Kingdom wrestled with a period of relative decline, Germany and the United States overtook imperial Britain in terms of economic and industrial strength. This fundamental shift in productive capacity set in motion seismic shifts in the balance of power – within Europe itself, but also at a global level. As the US entered the 20th Century, it was quickly industrialising and urbanising. Through a series of expansionist moves overseas, the US acquired Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines following the one-sided Spanish-American War in 1898. America's ability to easily overwhelm the Spanish forces was a testament to its newfound military strength and an early reflection of a nascent Republican internationalism.

During this period of great economic, social and industrial advancement, competing ideas on how to manage such social and economic advancements emerged from within the GOP – which had been in power since 1897. On one side were the Republican progressives, led by Theodore Roosevelt who saw the opportunity to not only consolidate America's predominance in the Pacific and Caribbean but also carefully navigate US foreign policy around any potential great power competition.⁵⁶ Roosevelt's foreign policy style has been summed up by his borrowed African saying: 'Speak softly and carry a big stick'.⁵⁷ On the

⁵⁴ Nathalie Tocci and Riccardo Alcaro, "Rethinking transatlantic relations in a multipolar era," *Int Polit* 51, (2014): 366–389 <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2014.10>; Marianne Riddervold and Akasemi Newsome, "Transatlantic relations in times of uncertainty: crises and EU-US relations," *Journal of European Integration* 40 no. 5, (2018): 505–521, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2018.1488839>.

⁵⁵ Daniela Schwarzer, "The War in Ukraine and Its Challenges to European Security, Transatlantic Relations and EU-UK Cooperation," *Brexit Institute Working Paper Series* no. 4 (2023), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4599163>; Kjell Engelbrekt, "Beyond Burdensharing and European Strategic Autonomy: Rebuilding Transatlantic Security After the Ukraine War," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 3 no. 27 (2022): 383–400, <https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2022028>.

⁵⁶ Dueck, *Age of Iron*, 40.

⁵⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, in "Works of Theodore Roosevelt", ed. Hermann Hagedorn (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 13 1962): 474.

one hand, Roosevelt saw the need to speak softly by remaining tactful and patient in negotiations, while also recognising the underlying realist truths about statecraft, namely that diplomacy must always be backed up by a strong and capable military. Roosevelt's foreign policy realism matched the systemic environment in which he operated. America had reached the western frontier, acquired new lands and was quickly becoming a major world economy.

However, not everyone was as pleased as Roosevelt about the direction of US foreign policy in the early 20th Century. In his passionately written *Giddy Minds and Foreign Quarrels*, American historian and political scientist Charles A. Beard heavily critiqued what he perceived as a new 'era of universal American jitters over foreign affairs of no vital interest to the United States'. Beard placed the blame for this nascent 'imperialism and adventurism' squarely on the collective shoulders of Alfred T. Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry C. Lodge. Sparing no sense of sarcasm, Beard summarises their school of thought:

*America has grown up, has acquired man's stature and put on long pants; the frontier has passed; the continent has been rounded out; America must put aside childish things, become a great big world power, follow the example of Great Britain, France, and Germany, build a monster navy, grab colonies, sea bases, and trading posts throughout the world, plunge into every big dispute among European powers, and carry 'civilisation' to 'backward' races.*⁵⁸

Beard saw the Spanish-American war as a fateful culmination of this new American 'imperialism'. He saw the US willingness to intervene in foreign nations' affairs as a gross overextension of American power. Although he would probably never admit it, Beard shared Charles Mahan's scepticism concerning US possession of the Philippines following the war. Despite being the forefather of America's burgeoning Navy, Mahan was never in favour of fully-fledged British-style colonialism. Mahan was, nonetheless, an *expansionist*. Favouring a forward posture, particularly through naval dominance – a trait he fervently admired about the British Empire, Mahan was a staunch conservative and Republican. He openly opposed socialism, looked down on radical progressivism and remained deeply sceptical of government interference.⁵⁹

Despite never holding office, Mahan's list of personal contacts extended deep into the conservative political elite of the day. Mahan's ideas were an early incarnation of an activist approach to foreign affairs that has influenced GOP foreign policy ever since. Roosevelt was a fan of Mahan, having apparently devoured his influential book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* in one go.⁶⁰ Roosevelt's decision to send the US White Navy on a voyage around the world to promote American 'goodwill and diplomacy', was an ode to Mahan – if there ever was one.

On the other hand, Charles Beard's disdain for this new form of American foreign affairs activism (despite having initially advocated for prompt US involvement in the First World War), was an early manifestation of a non-interventionist worldview and a natural reaction to what he perceived as new and dangerous forms of foreign activism and American imperialism.

⁵⁸ Charles Beard, *Giddy Minds and Foreign Quarrels* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 17–18.

⁵⁹ David Milne, *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 27.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

Within the GOP itself, Roosevelt's two terms in office saw an increasing divide between GOP conservatives and populist progressives.⁶¹ Roosevelt's popularity within his own progressive circle and more populist-leaning Senators kept these divisions largely at bay. It wasn't until Roosevelt's self-chosen Republican successor William Howard Taft entered the White House that these internal divisions became felt in the foreign policy arena. GOP populists sought to avoid any foreign entanglements, while GOP conservatives tended to recognise the importance of necessary military interventions to protect US national interests at home or abroad.

2.2. The Great War and New GOP Factions

The outbreak of the Great War in continental Europe became a testing ground for these new GOP foreign policy ideas. Initially, the GOP was divided over how to respond to the violence in Europe.

While such internal divisions proved detrimental to the GOP's chances at winning the 1916 election, they ultimately provided a key inflection point for multiple competing factions that would shape the course of GOP foreign policy objectives for nearly a Century.

Two broad camps emerged: the establishment Republicans like Lodge, who, like Mahan, was an Anglophile and deeply repulsed by Germany's militarism. This group favoured higher military spending and the provision of military aid to the Allies. Lodge represented this new international conservative branch of the GOP – in many ways, the exact antithesis of Charles Beard.

On the other hand, GOP populists William Borah and Robert LaFollette were both firmly against military interventionism as a matter of principle. They perceived the Great War as a tussle between distant rival militaristic empires that did not concern the US – or its interests.

However, in his book *Age of Iron*, Colin Dueck notes that despite being on the same page regarding non-intervention in Europe, Borah and LaFollette differed on how US neutrality should be observed and protected. Dueck points to these differences as the first sign of divergence between GOP 'hawkish' hardline unilateralists and non-interventionists (isolationists).⁶²

As a staunch non-interventionist, LaFollette was opposed to any increases in defence spending and refused to support any form of US military action in the war. Borah, on the other hand, favoured a Mahan-inspired build-up of the US Navy specifically to protect US non-interventionism. For Borah, a strong US military was a 'necessary evil' to protect and punish any attempt by the great powers to violate US neutrality.⁶³ The subtle, yet key differences between Borah and LaFollette's perceptions of US neutrality and non-interventionism became a defining feature of GOP factions in the century to come.

Ultimately, it was up to Woodrow Wilson to decide the US response to the Great War in April 1917. Knowing that he could not simply declare war without a plan, Wilson simultaneously put forward a highly controversial pledge to consolidate world peace through a post-war League of Nations. Wilson's liberal world vision did not sit well with any of the

⁶¹ Dueck, *Age of Iron*, 43.

⁶² Ibid., 44.

⁶³ Ibid.

new Republican factions. Hardliners and non-interventionists like Borah and LaFollette rejected the idea of the League immediately and wholeheartedly. Under no circumstances were they willing to cede US sovereignty and limit its free hand in international affairs.

Even those internationalist-leaning senators in the GOP like Lodge, who had campaigned vigorously for war with Germany and favoured an alliance with Britain and France were sceptical of any far-reaching US commitments to global security. Ultimately, Wilson's League did not pass through the US Senate – and the seeds were sown for yet another test of US foreign policy activism in Europe.

2.3. Interwar period to the Second World War

The interwar period and the economic downturn that overshadowed the early 1930s was a chance for Republicans to re-group and find new ways to marshal support against Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

If Alfred Mahan was the forefather of hardline unilateralists, Charles Beard had become an inspiration for the non-interventionists. Beard railed against the economic policies of the GOP's new progressive wing, blaming their economic adventurism and internationalist policies for the woes of the Great Depression.⁶⁴

But Beard, who never entered politics himself, was not without intellectual peers of his own creed. Beard shared similar views on American foreign policy with the likes of isolationist Senator Robert A. Taft (son of former President William H. Taft) – who was elected to the Senate in 1938.⁶⁵ While they might have disagreed on domestic political economy, Taft and Beard would have agreed on the need to secure America's non-involvement in far-away conflicts.

The re-emergence of belligerent autocracies in Europe in the mid-late 1930s shoved the issue of US foreign policy activism back in the spotlight. With the new outbreak of war in Europe, the question facing American elites was once again, whether or not to intervene in the affairs of the Europeans. On a fundamental level, Beard believed that the US lacked 'the knowledge, the will, or the intention...to construct a formula for such a permanent economic peace [in Europe after the Second World War]'.⁶⁶ Based on his negative experiences of America's role in the First World War, culminating in the failure of the League of Nations, Beard argued that 'it [was] folly for...the United States to embark on a vast and risky program of world pacification.'⁶⁷

However, the strategic realities of the Second World War and the possibility of a British defeat pushed the non-interventionist ideas of Beard and the foreign policy tendencies of LaFollette and Taft further into the background, while the conservative internationalist ideas of Mahan, T. Roosevelt and Lodge were once again proving their strength and utility in the face of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. However, it was not only elites whose opinion of the war seemed to spur on US interventionism in Europe's new war. Public opinion within the US was also in favour of American involvement in the Second

⁶⁴ David Milne, *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy*, 130.

⁶⁵ "Robert A. Taft", *Britannica*, last modified April 10, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-A-Taft>.

⁶⁶ Charles Beard, *Giddy Minds and Foreign Quarrels*, 61.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

World War due to highly effective media campaigns and the politically invigorating journalism of the likes of Walter Lippmann. With victory in hand, the US had once again a free hand to mould the future of the European continent and along with it, its relationship to the major powers.

In perhaps the greatest abandonment of isolationist ideas, Republicans and Democrats worked together to deliver a swathe of post-war security commitments that would go on to shape the 20th Century and the Cold War. The creation of NATO in 1949 became the flagship alliance of a much broader and institutionalised transatlantic relationship.

Returning from war-ravaged Europe in June 1945, newly minted 5-star General Dwight Eisenhower was welcomed home as a hero. By late 1950, at the request of President Truman Eisenhower became the supreme commander of NATO.⁶⁸ It wasn't until 1952 that Eisenhower agreed to run as a Republican – pitting himself against non-interventionist and hardcore conservative Senator Robert Taft. Riding a wave of post-war enthusiasm and popularity, Eisenhower clinched the nomination and ultimately the presidency. Once again, the interventionists had won the battle of ideas.

2.4. Cold War and the New Republican Internationalism

Following the Second World War, US foreign entanglement exploded. With staunch internationalist Eisenhower leading US efforts to establish collective defence agreements and support post-war reconstruction in Europe and East Asia, Charles Beard's worst nightmare had only just begun. The emergence of the Soviet threat quickly provided US foreign policy elites with yet another *raison de l'action*. Despite some alarm in the non-interventionist and hard right wing of the GOP, there was a general consensus among internationalists, hardliners and even most non-interventionists on the need to counter the spread of Soviet Communism.

Eisenhower's activist foreign policy threw the GOP sharply in the internationalist direction. Building global alliances to counter communism was just the start of this new brand of Republican foreign policy activism. In 1953, using Truman's newly established Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Eisenhower authorised the overthrow of governments in Iran and Guatemala.⁶⁹ Eisenhower's popularity with the American people helped him win a second term – following which the GOP would struggle to maintain power until the election of Eisenhower's former Vice President, Richard Nixon.

In many ways, Nixon continued the more activist Eisenhower approach to foreign policy – even pursuing open relations with China which culminated in the Shanghai Communiqué and the formal US recognition of 'One-China' that included the island of Taiwan.⁷⁰ Nixon's presidency was also characterised by a more active role in fostering improved relations with the Soviet Union – signing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1970.⁷¹

⁶⁸ "Dwight D. Eisenhower", Britannica, last modified April 26, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dwight-D-Eisenhower>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Vietnam War" Britannica, last modified April 26, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Nixon/Foreign-affairs>.

⁷¹ "President Nixon and Non-Proliferation," Richard Nixon Foundation, last modified September 8, 2016, <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2016/09/president-nixon-and-non-proliferation/>.

Nixon's unique pro-engagement approach was both a natural continuation of the progressive era conservatives and a product of his time. The Cold War international order provided a foreign policy imperative for Nixon that made an activist approach both acceptable within his own party and to the American people. However, Nixon's dovish approach to China and the USSR was more of an anomaly, when considering his Republican successors. President Ronald Reagan presided over the final years of the Cold War - an existential struggle that had necessitated an 'all-hands-on-deck' approach from Republicans of all creeds, as well as interim democrats like John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Jimmy Carter.

2.5. Post-Cold War and the Triumph of Neoconservatism

By the time Republican George H. W. Bush won office in 1989, the world was a fundamentally different place compared to the one that Alfred Mahan had described in his seminal book exactly a Century ago. Mahan's vision for unbounded US naval power had come to fruition, with the US, despite periodic cutbacks, possessing the largest and most capable navy ever seen.

The relative power of the United States, had, despite the bounded bipolar international order, increased every decade since the Second World War. Fareed Zakaria argues that with shifting relative power comes shifting intentions,⁷² and with the Warsaw Pact in tatters, and the Soviet threat reduced, the US began to make structural shifts to its military accordingly. This effort included initiatives from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin L. Powell to shift US focus away from the European/former Soviet theatre towards a more dynamic and mobile force structure that could deal with regional conflicts.⁷³ President H. W. Bush accepted this proposal, agreeing with the Joint Staff planners that despite its waning influence, Russia would remain the key threat to the United States throughout the 1990s, and, at the same time, increasing regional instability in the Middle East and Latin America would require a more flexible US response capability.⁷⁴ Secretary of Defence Dick Cheney's *Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy*⁷⁵ underlined this exact goal. Declassified draft versions of this strategy show that the Bush Administration sought to actively 'preclude any hostile power from dominating a region critical to [US] interests, and also thereby to strengthen the barriers against the re-emergence of a global threat to the interests of the United States and [...] allies [in] Europe, East Asia, the Middle East/Persian Gulf, and Latin America.'⁷⁶

At the same time, it was clear to the GOP elites within Bush's Administration that nurturing international alliances was critical at this time of change. The 1993 strategy highlighted that its goal was also to 'strengthen and extend the system of defense arrangements that binds democratic and like-minded nations together in common defense against aggression...'⁷⁷ In navigating the early 1990s and the relatively new post-Cold War international system, Bush

⁷² Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*. 13–43

⁷³ Lorna S. Jaffe, "The Development of the Base Force, 1989–1992" *Washington, DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, (July 1993): 1, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Monographs/Base_Force.pdf

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁷⁵ Dick Cheney, "Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The regional Defense Strategy," (January 1990), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb245/doc15.pdf>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Senior was a foreign policy activist. Bush extended American involvement to multiple foreign theatres, unilaterally wielding American power in Panama, and despite alarm from GOP non-interventionists, increased US forces in the Persian Gulf in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.⁷⁸ Bush Senior pushed for a united European-Arab front against Iraq and ultimately restored Kuwait's independence. US victory over Iraq in 1990 was an easy win for Bush – who undoubtedly saw American power as a positive influence on the world.

Throughout the 1990s, Republican internationalism faced a challenge from political commentator and Bush critic Pat Buchanan. As a precursor to Trump, Buchanan sought to revive the isolationist tradition – on more populist-nationalist lines. Buchanan infused populism into foreign affairs debates while pushing protectionist-nationalist stances and casting doubt on the utility of foreign aid.⁷⁹ Having won the Republican primary vote in New Hampshire in 1996 when Bush Senior was up for re-election, it seemed for a moment that a resurgent form of 'American First-ism' could prevail.⁸⁰ The Democrats under Bill Clinton waved America into the 21st Century – more powerful than ever, and setting the stage for a Republican victory in 2001.

President George W. Bush belonged to a similar tribe of activist, hardliner Republican elites. The neoconservatives. The preference for foreign interventionism combined political resolve largely reflecting moral and even religious principles, and secondly, a sheer power capability that was unmatched globally. Some argue that neoconservatism is based on idealism, militancy, and internationalism, and the notion that America is a powerful force for good in the world – no matter its past record.⁸¹ Although they had clear hardliner tendencies, the neoconservatives certainly belonged to a hyper-activist wing of the GOP, viewing American power as a tool that should be used regardless of any foreign government's concerns or international agreements. The Bush doctrine was accompanied by what some call the 'unipolar moment.'⁸² This facilitated the pursuit of a vision of US national security underpinned by fervent unilateralism, pre-emptive use of force and foreign interventionism.⁸³

The 9/11 terror attacks fundamentally changed the calculus of an already hardline-activist Bush administration. In a similar way to how Republican non-interventionists coalesced around the need to wage war on Germany in 1917 or 1945 and counter the Soviet threat in the 1950s, the isolationist-leaning factions of the GOP lined up behind Bush to invade Afghanistan in 2001.

With the Bush Administration leading the war on terror – a state of hyper-interventionism reigned in the early 2000s, galvanising pro-interventionists and conservative hardliners – and even the dormant isolationists. In this factional landscape, Bush's declaration of war on Iraq

⁷⁸ "Presidency of George H.W. Bush" Britannica, accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-H-W-Bush/Presidency>.

⁷⁹ John Dumbrell, "Varieties of Post-Cold War American Isolationism." *Government and Opposition* 34, no. 1 (1999): 32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44482792>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Joshua Muravchik, "Neocon Wrongs and Rights." *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2010): 11–16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27000206>.

⁸² Charles Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World," *The American Enterprise Institute Press*, (2004), <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/text.pdf>.

⁸³ Georg Löfflmann, "The Bush Doctrine redux: changes and continuities in American grand strategy since '9/11," *International Politics* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-023-00461-9>.

in 2003 came almost naturally. For the conservative hardliners, a moral imperative for the war on terror proved irresistible, while for pro-interventionists, their natural tendency to exert power was all-encompassing, and there was a genuine belief in the ability of the US to effect positive change. However, throughout 2005-2006, the situation on the ground in Iraq deteriorated and thousands of American troops were killed and wounded. As Bush pushed forward with his campaign to eliminate Al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Iraq, popular opinion of the war was tanking and the 2008 elections were looming.

2.6. The GFC, ‘Yes We Can’ and the Working-class Revolt

With the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), military entrenchment in the Middle East, and after two terms under the Bush administration, it was not surprising that President Obama won the 2008 election, under the slogan ‘Yes We Can’. For the eight years that followed, seismic shifts in the balance of power shared among the Republican factions began to take place. Colin Dueck notes that this began with a splintering of the GOP factions back into their ‘perennial’ alignments on foreign policy: hardliners, internationalists and non-interventionists.⁸⁴

Spurred on by the anti-war sentiment that most of the country was feeling by this stage, the GOP non-interventionists finally had a popular rallying call that they identified with. The overstretch in Iraq, the financial doldrums of the GFC and an overall sense of powerlessness during the Obama years culminated in a call for winding back US military and economic commitments abroad. Later, following the 2011 Arab Spring, and with the War in Iraq still fresh in their minds, some conservative elites (especially the activist hardliners) began to re-think the role of the US in the Middle East. If the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq had not succeeded in bringing democracy and freedom to the region, then what was the point?

This turn inward was accompanied by the rise of the Tea Party Movement during Obama’s first term. This loose amalgamation of Republican elites may not have been the isolationist wave some expected, but it was a glimpse of what lay around the corner. Republican Tea Party members were generally sceptical of foreign aid, and the United Nations and displayed some of the characteristics of isolationism, without actually being true isolationists. They favoured a unilateralist approach to US dealings with the world but were by no means willing to exit existing collective security commitments abroad. This divergence of ideas and policy within the GOP has been criticised by many political opponents on the left, and centre, including conservatives themselves who point to these early signs of flirtation with non-interventionism as a symptom of the Republican moderates’ downfall.⁸⁵

At the same time, another major shift was taking place, not within the GOP elites themselves, but within their constituencies. With the after-effects of the GFC still lingering, and despite having avoided the worst of the recession, traditionally conservative GOP voters began to split into two key groupings – one pro-big business, favouring free trade and some form of hawkish interventionism (only where necessary), and another more vocal group, who were openly sceptical about the benefits of the globalised world. This emerging voter base was (and still is) highly critical of the establishment political class in Washington. They perceived themselves as outsiders in a world becoming culturally hollow, elitist, and out of touch with the realities of the working class. This sense of socioeconomic pain and disillusionment

⁸⁴ Dueck, *Age of Iron*, 100.

⁸⁵ Geoffrey Kabaservice, “Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, from Eisenhower to the Tea Party,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 492.

helped form a new anti-establishment movement, willing to take on the political elites of the day, and ‘drain the swamp’.

Thus, in a spectacular abandonment of traditional conservative preferences, a swathe of working middle-class voters shifted allegiance and voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election.

2.7. MAGA and the Neo-isolationists

Trump’s 2016 election win stunned the world. His outsider status and brash persona appealed greatly to his new army of primarily uneducated and working-class voters while alienating traditional US allies and friends abroad. As European leaders scrambled to make sense of this new wave of American populism, Republican elites likewise scratched their heads in disbelief. What would the world look like under a Trump presidency?

As it turned out, Trump, as a right-wing popular nationalist, was concerned primarily with the task of ‘Making America Great Again’ – not making the rest of the world great again. Trump’s isolationist policies therefore tended to be more nationalist and populist than overtly non-interventionist. Ultimately, Trump’s most isolationist policies materialised within the realm of political economy. In this sphere, Trump was eager to prove that he meant business: re-negotiating trade deals with the likes of South Korea, Japan, Canada and Mexico, leaving the Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement, slapping higher tariffs on steel and aluminium, including new tariffs on \$250 billion of Chinese goods.⁸⁶ Trump’s blatant economic protectionism helped consolidate his ‘isolationist’ image, despite practising an intensely hawkish approach to national security and counter-terrorism. Trump’s rise to power reflected a changing tide in the structure and makeup of the GOP’s power base. For any of these elites, it would be rare for them to self-identify as an ‘isolationist’. It is worth noting that the term ‘isolationism’ has rarely been used as a justification for actual political or economic isolation.⁸⁷ Isolationists are normally branded as such by their critics, who see their policies as eroding US primacy, and undermining liberal democracy at home and abroad.

What these critics fail to recognise is that today’s so-called ‘isolationists’ whether it be Trump, Gaetz, or Vance do not necessarily threaten to cut America off from the world. They simply prefer to re-position America’s strengths to serve America, and America first. Trump’s pressure campaigns aimed at allies in the EU and NATO are a prime example of this. Long dissatisfied with burden-sharing arrangements with many European NATO member states, Trump, throughout his 2024 election campaign, sought to instil doubts about his commitments to the alliance, even encouraging Russia to ‘do whatever the hell they want’ with chronically underpaying NATO allies.⁸⁸ The ramifications of this brinkmanship over alliances, funding and post-Ukraine priorities are discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

⁸⁶ “Trump’s Foreign Policy Moments” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed 29 April 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/trumps-foreign-policy-moments>.

⁸⁷ Brooke L. Blower, “From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941.” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 351. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26376561>.

⁸⁸ Kate Sullivan, “Trump says he would encourage Russia to ‘do whatever the hell they want’ to any NATO country that doesn’t pay enough,” *CNN*, February 11, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/10>.

While Trump enjoys pressuring his allies, he does harbour distinct non-interventionist views. The decision to pull US troops from Syria, and his early plans to set up the US withdrawal from Afghanistan (something that the Biden administration managed to complete in 2021, albeit poorly), reflect Trump's uniquely 'America-First' approach to international affairs, rather than a stone-cold isolationism.

Looking back, Trump's shifting perceptions of the Iraq War offer some insight into his present-day disposition. Initially, in March 2003, Trump offered no arguments against invading Iraq. After the war began, Trump praised President Bush, saying 'He's under a lot of pressure [...] He's — I think he's doing a very good job.'⁸⁹ But while Trump was perhaps hoping for a short and successful war, he remained clear-eyed about the pressing economic woes that were piling up in the background at home. Later the same month, Trump offered a more sobered impression, claiming 'The war's a mess' and only a few months later in July, he offered this critique: 'I would love to see New York City and some of the cities and some of the states get some of the money that's going toward Iraq and other places, because you know, they really need it.'⁹⁰ Less than a year later, Trump had ultimately decided that 'Iraq [was] a terrible mistake'.⁹¹

One cannot help but observe that Trump's current position on Ukraine, which is similar to that of his neo-isolationist compatriots is reflective of his penultimate views on the perceived disaster in Iraq. Trump's perceptions of the Iraq War are also reminiscent of Charles Beard's changing perceptions of the US involvement in the First World War, which author David Milne sums up as starting with 'pugnacity' and ending with 'profound disillusionment'.⁹² During the 2016 election campaign, Trump took the opportunity to use his misgivings about the Iraq War to back up his non-interventionist credentials. In 2024, Trump claimed that had he been president, the 'War in Ukraine would not have happened in the first place'.⁹³

Isolationism has a bad reputation these days. Yet, its usefulness as a foreign policy tool cannot be understated – and those in the neo-isolationist faction are acutely aware of it. They know it signifies a strength rather than a weakness; a luxury of statecraft, rather than a condition forced upon by external powers. Charles Krauthammer observed that 'of all the foreign policy schools in America, it [isolationism] has the oldest pedigree, not surprising in the only great power in history to be isolated by two vast oceans.'⁹⁴

Granted, America's splendid isolationism reflects a geographical reality and economic self-sufficiency that no other nation has been able to replicate. However, despite these favourable conditions, the US is (for better or worse) closely tied up in world affairs – and any new or resurgent isolationist foreign policy must also contend with this reality.

The term 'neo-isolationists' acknowledges this reality. Indeed, the present state of US entanglement globally was Charles Beard's worst nightmare. But while Beard's ideal level of

⁸⁹ Christopher Massie, Megan Apper and Andrew Kaczynski, "A Guide To Donald Trump's Shifting Position On The Iraq War," *BuzzFeed News*, February 20, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Milne, *Worldmaking*, 129.

⁹³ Piers Morgan, host, "War in Ukraine 'would never have happened if I was president': Donald Trump," *Sky News Australia*, April 26, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqMSEFtVFsl>.

⁹⁴ Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World," 3.

disengagement would look more like what President George Washington had advocated for when he called for ‘non-involvement in European wars and politics’,⁹⁵ this is a difficult proposition for a nation with nearly 800 military bases worldwide,⁹⁶ and collective security agreements with over 50 countries in 5 continents.⁹⁷

Trump’s election defeat in 2020 did not signal the end of neo-isolationism in the GOP. His re-run in the 2024 election, which was marred by multiple overlapping legal worries, has once again pitted foreign policy neo-isolationism against Biden’s version of globalist liberalism. The following chapter examines the perceptions of various GOP elites on a range of key foreign policy challenges facing the US in the post-Ukraine security environment.

3. GOP ELITE PERCEPTIONS POST-UKRAINE

‘This is bigger than Ukraine...this is a war about freedom and it’s one we have to win’
Nikki Haley, 2023

3.1. Who are the GOP Elites?

The GOP elites chosen in this study represent (7) elected politicians and (2) former elected officials who, despite not holding office at the time of writing, continue to influence US foreign policy in the 21st Century. The cross-section of profiles reflects a diverse range of GOP groupings including Moderates, Conservatives, Neoconservatives, Libertarians, Christian Right, and Trumpists. These groupings, while effective in describing certain GOP leanings on domestic and cultural issues, become cumbersome when analysing foreign policy objectives. For example, there is little evidence to suggest that similarities or differences exist between Conservatives and Moderates in the field of foreign policy. Indeed, both groups would automatically self-identify as ‘conservative’, yet their unique characteristics are better visible in their domestic policy.

Therefore, the following framework matrix, which takes elite GOP perceptions at face value, builds a more flexible and targeted methodology for their categorisation against key systemic challenges at the regional and country-specific levels.

3.2. What Are the Systemic Issues?

Having established that nine GOP elites will form the backbone of the perceptions framework, what are the key issues against which their perceptions will be measured? The table below engages four region-specific issues – from Ukraine and the EU/NATO to Iran/Middle East and China. The lower cells outline their prevailing foreign policy priorities and factional groupings. While some of the elite profiles foreground domestic issues such as immigration at the southern border, drugs and crime and economic backsliding, the below

⁹⁵ “American Isolationism in the 1930s”, Office of the Historian, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://history.state.gov/milestones>.

⁹⁶ David Vine, “Where in the World Is the U.S. Military?” *Politico*, July 2015, <https://politico.com/magazine>.

⁹⁷ Ben Watson, “Mapped: America’s Collective Defense Agreements,” *Defense One*, February 3, 2017, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas>.

analysis focuses specifically on their perceptions of current foreign policy challenges and how America should respond to such issues.

3.3. GOP Elite Perceptions Framework Matrix

Perceptions	N. Haley	S. Collins	J. Bolton	M. Pence	R. Paul	M. Gaetz	R. DeSantis	J.D Vance	D. Trump
Russia/ Ukraine	‘This is bigger than Ukraine...this is a war about freedom and it’s one we have to win.’ ⁹⁸	‘It is critical that the Administration provide Ukraine with what it needs in time to defend and take back its sovereign territory.’ ⁹⁹	‘Ukraine needs aid; Taiwan needs aid... It is all part of the same endeavour.’ ¹⁰⁰	‘A majority of Republicans [...] embrace our role as leader of the free world. I think you’ll see the Congress send to President Biden’s desk, a historic package of support for Ukraine.’ ¹⁰¹	‘Ukraine should not and cannot be our problem to solve. It is not our place to defend them... There is no national security interest for the United States.’ ¹⁰²	‘I don’t believe that the American people want to pay another 100 billion dollars to figure out which guy gets to run Crimea.’ ¹⁰³	‘While the U.S. has many vital national interests – becoming further entangled in a territorial dispute between Ukraine and Russia is not one of them.’ ¹⁰⁴	‘We have a complete absence of strategy [...] can we afford to send 61 billion dollars to Ukraine? I think [...] continuing to support the war in Ukraine indefinitely is a terrible, terrible mistake.’ ¹⁰⁵	‘...we’re giving away so much equipment, we don’t have ammunition for ourselves right now [...] if I’m president I will have that war settled in one day – 24 hours.’ ¹⁰⁶
EU/NATO	‘I am all for making NATO pay their fair share, but the reason that that has been the most successful organisation in 75 years is because Russia’s never invaded a NATO country. They know that together we’re united.’ ¹⁰⁷	‘NATO and the United States have no desire to see a war with Russia, but we will defend the territory and sovereignty of each of its members.’ ¹⁰⁸	‘Presidents can withdraw from any treaties they want, and he [Trump] could do it...it would be a catastrophic mistake for the US all around the world.’ ¹⁰⁹	‘I have no doubt in my mind, if the West were to falter and Vladimir Putin were to overrun Ukraine, it would just be a matter of time before he crossed a border that under article five, we as NATO allies would have to go and fight him.’ ¹¹⁰	‘I am adamant about the reality that NATO’s expansion will come at a cost, I [...] propose a reservation to ensure that this expansion will not come at the expense of losing our ability to determine when and where the US goes to war.’ ¹¹¹	‘If we had to pick Russia or Ukraine for NATO, one could reasonably make the argument that Russia probably provides more benefit long term [to counter long-term threat of China].’ ¹¹²	‘You know, Ukraine has all of Europe these European countries need to start pulling their weight.’ ¹¹³	‘NATO is not carrying its fair share of the burden [...] we have been subsidising European security to the tune of trillions of dollars [...] most of the economies of Europe [...] that has invited aggression.’ ¹¹⁴	‘...they’ve [the EU] gotta put up a lot more money – because they’re taking advantage of us like every other country did [...] they should equalise.’ ¹¹⁵

⁹⁸ Gregory Krieg and Eric Bradner, “Takeaways from CNN’s town hall with Nikki Haley,” *CNN*, June 4, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/04>.

⁹⁹ “Senator Collins Underscores Critical Need to Support Ukraine, Calls for Accelerated Delivery of Abrams Tanks,” *United States Senate Committee on Appropriations*, November 5, 2023, <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/news>.

¹⁰⁰ Ksenia Sokolyanskaya and Anton Zolotykh, “John Bolton Says Growing U.S. Isolationism Threatens Ukraine’s War Effort,” *Radio Free Europe*, April 16, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia>.

¹⁰¹ Stefen Grobe, “Mike Pence: US will continue to support Ukraine,” *Euronews*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/2024/04/19>.

¹⁰² Rand Paul, “Here’s how we prevent war in Ukraine,” *Courier Journal*, January 26 2022, <https://eu.courier-journal.com/story>.

¹⁰³ Matt Gaetz, “We Must Not Exploit War in Israel To Fund War in Ukraine!” *Fox News Live*, November 26, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta4jCndtjds>.

¹⁰⁴ Tucker Carlson, Twitter Post, March 14, 2023, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://twitter.com/TuckerCarlson>.

¹⁰⁵ James David Vance, “Just In: JD Vance Slams Ukraine Aid Bill, Delivers Terse Message To NATO Allies After Trump Comment,” *Forbes Breaking News*, February 12, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch>.

¹⁰⁶ Kaitlan Collins (host), “Trump won’t say whether he wants Russia or Ukraine to win war”, *CNN*, May 11, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L07fMoafVh4>.

¹⁰⁷ Nikki Haley, “Watch: Nikki Haley Reacts To Trump’s Shocking Comments About NATO Member Nations And Russia,” *Forbes Breaking News*, February 11, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT-IsNuW8pk>.

¹⁰⁸ Susan Collins: ‘NATO & The United States Have No Desire To See War With Russia’ *Forbes Breaking News*, August 5, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sg2rZFm9sz8>.

¹⁰⁹ Sokolyanskaya and Zolotykh, “John Bolton Says Growing U.S. Isolationism Threatens Ukraine’s War Effort.”

¹¹⁰ Grobe, “Mike Pence: US will continue to support Ukraine.”

Iran/Middle East	'...after the debacle in Afghanistan, all of our enemies felt empowered - and keep in mind there would be no Houthis without Iran, there wouldn't be Hamas without Iran, there wouldn't be Hezbollah without Iran.' ¹¹⁶	'We must do all that we can to support Israel in its quest to eliminate Hamas [...] it is not only in Israel's interest, it is not only in the interest of the countries of this region, it's in America's interest; it's in the interest of our world.' ¹¹⁷	'[The War in Gaza] is an Iranian war against Israel [...] to put pressure on the US... the conflict has already started [...] the question is whether we can establish deterrence in the region. Iran is a satellite of the Russia-China Axis' ¹¹⁸	'Iran has engaged in a unprecedented attack directly on Israel. I think the only message that I want my country and allies around the world to send Israel is that 'we are with you' I think it's important that we make it clear to Iran [...] that we will support Israel in doing whatever they need to do to restore deterrence.' ¹¹⁹	'I have nothing but sympathy for the Israeli people at this point [...] without question, Iran had their hands in this [...] there is an immediate reaction sometimes - let's get everybody [...] who's responsible [...] let's see where the facts lie [and let Israel do what they need to do]' ¹²⁰	'Let's not fund Hamas through Iran [...] through these USAID and other so-called humanitarian programmes' ¹²¹	'We have a relationship with [Israel] that's like no other... They require the US to be there to stand with them as a friend...' ¹²²	'We should be trying to de-escalate the situation [...] we need to have red lines, if the Iranians attack American troops [...] we need to be willing to respond. We should have some respect for their [Israel's] strategic imperative.' ¹²³	'Israel is at war, and the United States has to support Israel [...] at this time Israel and the United States need a very strong partnership and leadership [...] I withdrew the United States from the disastrous Iran Nuclear Deal [...]' ¹²⁴
China	'I dealt with China every single day at the United Nations, they never saw us as a competitor - they always saw us an enemy - that's why we have to look at them the way they look at us...' ¹²⁵ 'Communist China is the greatest threat to American security and prosperity by far, it has stated its goal	'China's brazen incursion of our airspace with a sophisticated spy balloon was [an] example of its aggressive surveillance that has targeted our country for years. Through hardware exports, malicious software, and other clandestine means, China has sought to steal	'...the China-Russia alliance is very different from the Cold War... China's the dominant partner and Russia's the junior partner...the threat that China poses along the Indo-Pacific periphery - we've seen it manifested with respect to Taiwan, South China Sea, border clashes...with	'We have to recognise that China's the greatest economic and strategic threat of the United States of America...I believe the US Navy can eclipse the Chinese navy in the Asia Pacific, and that will send a decisive message [...] China only understands strength.' ¹²⁹	'I'm no fan of the Chinese Communist government - I'm the least favourite person you'll ever find - or one of the biggest critics of the Chinese government.' ¹³⁰	'China buying influence and infrastructure in Argentina to collaborate on Space and Nuclear energy is a direct challenge to the Monroe Doctrine and far more significant to American security than our latest NATO flirtation in the plains of Eastern Europe.' ¹³¹	'...the U.S. has many vital national interests [...] checking the economic, cultural, and military power of the Chinese Communist Party' ¹³²	'I think we should defend Taiwan, I think if the Chinese took Taiwan, it would be catastrophic, [...] but let's be realistic here, if the cost of defending Taiwan is 500,000 American lives - then of course we don't do it [...] if however we can increase the cost of China invading Taiwan I think that fundamentally	'China is right now our boss [...] almost like we're a subsidiary of China [...] if [we] don't have tariffs, we have nothing whatsoever over them [China].' ¹³⁴

¹¹¹ Rand Paul, "Rand Paul Proposes Amendment To Prevent NATO Article 5 From Superseding Congressional War Authority," *Forbes Breaking News*, August 4, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33owOuQzgU8>.

¹¹² Eric Bolling (host), "Matt Gaetz Would Rather Have Russia Than Ukraine in NATO," *Newsweek*, July 12, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/matt-gaetz-would-rather-have-russia-ukraine-nato-1812588>.

¹¹³ Julia Manchester, "DeSantis: It is more critical to support Israel than Ukraine in respective conflicts," *The Hill*, December 12, 2023, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign>.

¹¹⁴ Vance, "Just In: JD Vance Slams Ukraine Aid Bill, Delivers Terse Message To NATO Allies After Trump Comment."

¹¹⁵ Collins (host), "Trump won't say whether he wants Russia or Ukraine to win war."

¹¹⁶ Nikki Haley, "Nikki Haley on the Middle East," *CNN*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch>.

¹¹⁷ Susan Collins, "We Must Do All That We Can To Support Israel In Its Quest To Eliminate Hamas," *Forbes Breaking News*, October 24, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZDa5ST-dT8>.

¹¹⁸ John Bolton, "US Mediation In The Middle East & Upcoming Elections: John Bolton's Analysis Of The Situation," *CNBC TV18 LIVE TV*, January 25, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9rP9v0DY7I>.

¹¹⁹ Mike Pence, "We will support Israel to the full - former Vice President Mike Pence," *Sky News*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA-PKqGW0Y>.

¹²⁰ Briahna J. Gray and Robby Soave (hosts), "Rand Paul Shuts Down Hawk Lindsey Graham's Call To Bomb Iran?; Ukraine Aid At End Of Rope: WH," *The Hill*, October 12, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzI0s4eLe8w>.

¹²¹ Bolling (host), "Matt Gaetz Would Rather Have Russia Than Ukraine in NATO."

¹²² Manchester, "DeSantis: It is more critical to support Israel than Ukraine in respective conflicts."

¹²³ Vance, "Sen. J.D. Vance says he wouldn't authorize use of force against Iran right now," *CBS News*, October 30, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYIW0gIwHQ8>.

¹²⁴ Donald Trump, "The United States Has To Support Israel: Trump Touts Israel Record, Slams Biden's," *Breaking News*, October 8, 2023 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omWb_DhT-Ho.

¹²⁵ Nikki Haley, "Nikki Haley says US should see China as the 'enemy'," *Reuters*, January 18, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfmaBqNEjU>.

	of diminishing American influence in the world... ¹²⁶	information in an attempt to gain a military and economic edge. ¹²⁷	India... ¹²⁸				has to be American policy here. ¹³³	
Foreign Policy Tendency	Interventionist Multilateralist Cooperative internationalist		Interventionist Unilateralist Militant internationalist		Non-interventionist Unilateralist Transactional protectionist			
Foreign Policy Priorities (in order of importance)	1. China / Taiwan + Indo-Pacific 2. Russia / Ukraine 3. Iran / Israel		1. China / Taiwan + Indo-Pacific 2. Iran / Israel 3. Russia / Ukraine		1. China / Taiwan + Indo-Pacific 2. Iran / Israel			
Faction	Conservative-internationalist		Activist-hardliner		Populist-neo-isolationist			

3.4. GOP Foreign Policy Objectives Following Ukraine

War in Europe has once again divided the Republicans as it has done in the past. Today, however, unlike the imperialist warring parties in the First and Second World Wars, the US faces a rising China, a revisionist Russia and a more pluralistic geopolitical environment with emerging great powers like India tussling for influence on the world stage.

In this context, the above framework matrix points towards GOP elites finding both common ground (recognising challenges emanating from China and Iran), while also diverging on others (countering Russia and supporting Ukraine/the EU and NATO). Some elites recognise all challenges not only as unique theatres for US engagement but as one larger interconnected challenge emanating from increasingly closer authoritarian regimes hostile towards US interests.

Generally, priorities differ from faction to faction, with some elites recognising Ukraine as a competing or complimentary priority to other major foreign policy challenges. For example, the majority of the examined cross-section of GOP elites perceive China as the primary threat and number one priority. Iran and Russia on the other hand, compete for relevance as the

¹²⁹ Mike Pence, "Mike Pence on UAW Strike, China, Trump, TikTok," *Bloomberg Television*, September 18, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkUZ87NPB7o>.

¹³⁰ Paul Rand, "Sen. Rand Paul breaks from colleagues in opposing TikTok ban | On Balance," *NewsNation*, March 13, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wZF1AGaF-4>.

¹³¹ Matt Gaetz, "Matt Gaetz Issues Warning On House Floor: China Is A Rising Power, Russia Is A Declining Power," *Forbes Breaking News*, February 7, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsWkHMnQksU>.

¹³² Carlson, Twitter Post, March 14, 2023, accessed 30 April 2024.

¹³⁴ Jay Clayton (host), "Former President Donald Trump: China is, right now, our boss," *CNBC Television*, March 11, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUzaApP52Rg>.

¹²⁶ Nikki Haley, "Nikki Haley warns about China, blames Trump and Biden," *Associated press*, June 27, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGSWVE24SYk>.

¹²⁷ "Senator Collins, Colleagues Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Tackle National Security Threats from Foreign Tech," Susan Collins, March 8, 2023, accessed 30 April 2024, <https://www.collins.senate.gov>.

¹²⁸ Bolton, "US Mediation In The Middle East & Upcoming Elections: John Bolton's Analysis Of The Situation."

¹³³ High Hewitt (host), "JD Vance on China, Taiwan, and Ukraine," *Salem News Channel*, August 17, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trBI0w5CtGI>.

second, and third priorities - with the exception of GOP Populists and neo-isolationists, who do not perceive the Russian war on Ukraine as a strategic priority for the US. Despite some differences, the above analysis shows that Republicans share a common understanding of the key threats and challenges facing the US. The sub-sections below break down the respective GOP factions' foreign policy objectives following Ukraine.

3.5. Conservative Internationalists

Overview and tendencies

Conservative internationalists are foreign policy realists 'without teeth'. They see America's role in the world as a positive force but are less likely than other factions to use force if it means upending a standing international commitment, or treaty obligation. In this way, they are the most multilateral-inclined of all the GOP factions, and as such, share a strong belief that through NATO and other alliances America can shape world affairs just as much at the negotiating table as on the battlefield.

This traditional conservative faction includes a section of Republicans who are known as GOP 'moderates'. GOP moderates are pro-establishment by nature and are perhaps the most liberal-leaning Republicans. Together, this internationalist wing is determined to defend Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. They believe they can be successful in this endeavour while simultaneously supporting Israel in its fight against Iran and its proxies, and also taking care of the biggest priority: China.

GOP conservative internationalists are traditionalists who, like most other factions prioritise the preservation of American power. For this faction, the underlying objective remains largely unchanged from the 1990s, which is to ensure that no foreign power surpasses the United States militarily. What makes them unique, is *how* they prefer to go about this. As opposed to other factions, the conservative internationalists are more likely to be inclined to look at all possible challenges to US hegemony – and act in response to all threats – in coordination with allies. As such, they are interventionist, and multilateralist and favour a cautious cooperative internationalism over unilateralist approaches.

GOP internationalists reflect urban and upper-middle-class constituencies and are what many refer to as establishment Republicans. Republican Senator Susan Collins (Maine) is the perfect example. For GOP senators like Collins, the role of the US in world affairs is clear: supporting allies abroad is a priority, no matter how far away; US treaty obligations are sacred and defending them whether diplomatically or militarily is an essential component to US deterrence abroad.

Former 2024 Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley represents a younger generation of internationalism within the GOP. Her extensive experience working within the United Nations informs her activist stance, while her support for Ukraine appears to be as much of a priority as supporting Israel or countering China at the systemic level. She advocated for 'smartly hitting' Iran to avoid the deaths of American soldiers – as opposed to 'randomly hitting' Iran, which could lead to an escalation.¹³⁵ Haley is not alone in this view – and her stance on Iran is reflected in other areas of the GOP. Haley's belief that China stands as the main 'enemy' of the US is also unsurprising and broadly representative of the activist/internationalist faction.

¹³⁵ Kylie Atwood, "Haley shows off foreign policy chops – and her contrast with Trump – as she details how she would respond to drone attack," *CNN*, January 30, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/30/>.

This faction is more open to the possibility that multilateral diplomacy will have a real impact on the course of other states' actions. As such, they are more likely to opt for economic sanctions over military means, which stands in contrast to their hardliner counterparts.

Objective: Counter China in all spheres, arm Taiwan

The Chinese threat in the Indo-Pacific (in particular in relation to Taiwan) represents perhaps the biggest challenge for US foreign policy planners. Denying China's access to advanced microchips will remain a key cornerstone of the push to ensure that the US remains ahead in the AI race. As Taiwan produces over 90% of the world's most advanced microchips needed for the AI revolution, defending Taiwan is key to this goal.

Objective: Support Ukraine as long as possible, while upholding commitment to NATO

For this wing, ensuring Ukrainian sovereignty via continued military aid appears to be a secondary priority, but optimised NATO burden-sharing is a desired part of this overall outcome.

Objective: Contain Iran and nurture Israeli-Arab normalisation

At the same token, Republican internationalists and moderates perceive Iran's malign influence over the Middle East to be another competing priority – deserving of serious diplomatic efforts to restart the Arab Israeli normalisation initiated by Trump under the Abraham Accords.¹³⁶

3.6. Activist Hardliner

Overview and tendencies

This faction comprises foreign policy idealists 'with teeth', who don't just see America's role as a positive force in the world, they are most likely to act coercively to re-affirm such a notion. Many GOP hardliners and hawks like Mike Pence agree with their internationalist counterparts on the need for continued US engagement with the world – whether that be with allies or adversaries. However, their perceptions of the challenges and the ways to address them differ greatly.

GOP conservative hardliners like John Bolton are sceptical about the role of international organisations and are more likely to place faith in unilateral acts, rather than coordinated collective responses. They advocate 'red lines' and are less likely than the internationalists to ignore them if overstepped by an adversary. At the same time, under the right circumstances, they are willing to overstep other's red lines. This is what makes them pro-interventionist, unilateralist and militant internationalists – willing to overstep boundaries to assert dominance.

While they might be idealists when it comes to the role that America plays in the world, they are more sceptical and realistic when it comes to the intentions of adversaries. They are more likely to see the string of foreign policy and systemic challenges like Iran, Russia, and China as deeply interconnected, and a long-term 'collective threat' to American primacy.¹³⁷ At their most 'dovish', they perceive China, Iran, Russia, and even North Korea as common enemies that must be countered economically (via much harsher sanctions), and militarily (by

¹³⁶ "The Abraham Accords Declaration," US Department of State, accessed April 30, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/>.

¹³⁷ See, for example, Chapter 4, views of John Bolton and Mike Pence.

increased military expenditure and building up the US Navy). At most hawkish, they perceive China, Iran, and Russia as an ‘axis of evil’ which collectively poses a systemic and even imminent threat to the US and its interests. At this extreme, activist hardliners favour pre-emptive strikes for example, on Iran and its proxies.

Objective: build a coalition against the emerging ‘Axis of Evil’

GOP Activist-hardliners recognise an urgent need to address the issue of China, Iran, Russia and North Korea simultaneously. This comes from their tendency to perceive threats emanating from different regions as connected and even coordinated. From their perspective, this requires an equal, if not greater counter-response. This faction of GOP elites sees the solution as being a concerted effort to preserve American interests abroad, and most importantly, ensure lasting American leadership in the 21st Century. Working closely with allies and partners is therefore essential. Despite their unilateralist tendencies, this faction sees the maintenance of strong and useful military alliances like NATO as critical to upholding America’s leadership of the free world.

Objective: get tough on Iran and other ‘Rogue States’

Despite a willingness to work with allies to counter the perceived ‘Axis of Evil’, the hardliners are more than ready to engage unilaterally with any form of aggression from Iran or North Korea thus securing regional security and American dominance in the Middle East and on the Korean Peninsula.

3.7. Populist Neo-isolationists

Overview and tendencies

The neo-isolationist wing of the GOP are foreign policy realists ‘with teeth’ and represent a growing populist movement within the party. This movement is not new, rather, it has laid relatively dormant since the start of the Eisenhower era and has only recently re-emerged with the advent of Trump. This group are not straightforward ‘isolationists’ per se, but rather *neo-isolationists* because they represent a contemporary version of the same non-interventionist ideas of Charles Beard and Robert Taft – only adapted to current times.

For Trump, DeSantis Vance, Gaetz and others in the neo-isolationist wing, it is difficult to imagine a fully ‘isolationist’ American in the 21st Century. Even Vance recognises the strategic imperative of defending Taiwan (with US money and guns, but not soldiers’ lives), while Gaetz is eager to stand up for Israel in the face of Iran.¹³⁸ Despite the bluster, even Trump’s economic policies during his first term acknowledge that some form of international engagement is necessary to conduct business with the world. Trump, who holds firm sway over the neo-isolationists, also highlights the necessity to re-negotiate international agreements in line with nativist American interests. Re-organising NATO burden-sharing is a prime example. This is what makes this faction non-interventionist, unilateralist and transactional-protectionist.

Nevertheless, the populist neo-isolationist wing of the GOP presents a vastly different foreign policy profile to their more moderate-leaning counterparts. Like other factions, neo-isolationists are acutely aware of the challenges posed by a rising China. Ironically, the difference is that the neo-isolationists are perhaps the most prepared to take meaningful action against China. Trump’s enormous tariffs on Chinese goods were a clear indication that America was finally taking China seriously. Vance also perceives the threat of China as a

¹³⁸ See, for example, Chapter 4, views of Matt Gaetz and J.D. Vance.

major priority, and despite remaining anti-involvement in Ukraine, acknowledges the need for US military support for Taiwan – precisely to avoid a conflict in the first place.

Generally, this faction seeks to maintain the US’ free hand in any action taken abroad. In this way, they are hardcore unilateralists. They prefer to solve multiple challenges separately, rather than simply lumping together policy responses. This is made clear by their attempts to separate and vote separately on the proposed military aid package for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan in April 2024.¹³⁹

Objective: Balance China by arming Taiwan and regional partners, implementing harsher tariffs

The populist neo-isolationists see countering China’s rise as their number one foreign policy challenge, and an opportunity to ‘kill two birds with one stone’ by implementing a series of protectionist policies that will (a) put the brakes on the Chinese economy and restrict their ability to advance in AI, while (b) re-shoring key supply chains and stimulating domestic job-creation.

Objective: Contain Iran by arming Israel and empowering Saudi Arabia

Although less likely to use force than their activist-hardliner counterparts, the neo-isolationists are convinced of the need to protect Israel by providing what it needs to defend against Iranian aggression.

Objective: Leverage the war in Ukraine to ‘re-balance’ transatlantic burden-sharing

In stark contrast to the other two major factions, neo-isolationist elites campaigned against sending funds to support Ukraine’s effort to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

For this faction, the War in Ukraine does not feature as a priority in the context of the US national interest. However, various elites within this faction are willing to leverage Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to either indirectly or directly re-balance the burden-sharing of NATO.

¹³⁹ Patricia Zengerle and David Morgan, “Uncertainty surrounds US Republicans’ plan for separate Ukraine, Israel aid bills,” *Reuters*, April 16, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us>.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND THE FUTURE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

With all three major GOP elite factions now perceiving the emerging geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific as the primary theatre, what does that mean for Europe and the transatlantic alliance? What should European policymakers make of such developments?

While the Russian-Ukrainian conflict remains a broad priority for the two internationalist-leaning factions, the resurgent neo-isolationist wing of the GOP regards it as a bargaining chip for a better deal on funding NATO. In other words, Europe needs to ‘pay up’.

The following chapters synthesise the historical analysis and perceptions framework to extrapolate the findings and provide some key takeaways for the European security architecture and the transatlantic alliance more generally.

4.1. Conservative Internationalists

‘Communist China is the greatest threat to American security and prosperity by far.’
Nikki Haley, 2024

Despite the broader tectonic shifts in the geopolitical alliance, a conservative-internationalist GOP foreign policy would largely uphold the existing security commitments to NATO, and military aid to Ukraine, albeit with some minor tweaks to the burden-sharing arrangements and expectations around dealing with China. With the strategic focus shifting toward the Indo-Pacific, this faction would view close and continued security cooperation with both continental European allies and the United Kingdom as key in their systemic struggle with China.

For European allies, a conservative internationalist foreign policy direction would mostly nurture the status quo when it comes to the current security architecture in Europe. With existing security commitments to NATO being upheld, and aid to Ukraine a given, European allies would need to show they are themselves serious about their commitment to better burden-sharing with the US.

With China the main priority for this faction, there would also be genuine expectations from the White House that the EU become more closely involved with balancing efforts in the Indo-Pacific, military and economic, the latter being where the EU has the most clout – and the most at stake.

The challenge for the EU in dealing with this faction will be managing expectations from the US about how to deal with China. Without a clear roadmap and buy-in from the EU on a common ‘transatlantic pathway’ to deal with China, this faction would not hesitate to leverage the Russian threat to gain concessions from the EU on China.

Despite naming China as an economic competitor and systemic rival,¹⁴⁰ the EU is likely hesitant to pivot to a more hawkish stance on trade with China. This, however, in the long term may prove an unsustainable approach, as the EU will need to prove to US policymakers that it shares the strategic goal of balancing China – in all spheres.

The Middle East and Iran are a strategic priority for all factions – especially the moderate internationalists. Here, Europe will also need to step up and take greater ‘strategic responsibility’ for its neighbouring region. The EU will need to become much more aware of the challenges that Iran poses to the region, and by extension to the EU itself.

Already, there are promising signs that the bloc can play such a role if needed. For example, the EU maritime mission to counter Iran-sponsored Houthi rebel attacks on global shipping routes in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden¹⁴¹ proved successful in maintaining regional security and freedom of navigation throughout late 2023 and early 2024.

The conservative-internationalist preference for a traditionally activist approach to foreign affairs will make it easier for the EU to place trust in US foreign policy objectives. In many ways, this will be the most predictable foreign policy suite. However, managing to maintain pace with US foreign policy on China and Iran will prove essential to preserving the transatlantic alliance.

4.2. Activist Hardliners

‘We have to recognise that China is the greatest economic and strategic threat to the United States of America.’

Mike Pence, 2024

A more powerful GOP activist-hardliner faction would necessitate a policy re-think from the EU. While remaining pro-interventionist in principle, the elites within this faction will represent a harder bargaining partner when it comes to engagement with China and Iran.

Luckily for the EU, this wing still views Russia’s War in Ukraine as a priority for the US. They also view a strong NATO as a force for good in the world and see it as another way for America to exert strength and leadership.

However, there are a few caveats. The price that this faction would be willing to extract for continued military support would be higher than their more international/moderate counterparts. Moreover, the tendency for this group to move forward unilaterally on any given issue (think of Iraq), poses a risk to the ‘side-by-side’ approach Europe is accustomed to after many years of Democratic and internationalist-leaning Republican leadership in the White House.

The strategic importance of the Middle East is just as, if not more important than Ukraine and

¹⁴⁰ “EU-China Relations factsheet,” European Union External Action, December 12, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-relations-factsheet_en.

¹⁴¹ “Security and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea: Council launches EUNAVFOR ASPIDES,” *Council of the European Union Press Release*, February 19, 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/02/19>.

Russia to this group of Republicans, something that is often overlooked by European policymaking elites. Europe has often struggled to come up with a comprehensive policy concerning the region.¹⁴² This failure by the EU to recognise the continued importance of the Middle East to the US shows a lack of strategic foresight and could become a rift in transatlantic relations. Should US foreign policy be directed by this faction, the EU will need to re-discover its strategic and diplomatic capabilities in this region and become a force for stability in Israel-Arab normalisation, as well as a reliable partner to the US in containing Iran.

Moreover, this faction's tendency to view the Russia-China-Iran nexus as a coordinated and connected threat will require some hard thinking from the EU on how to align or manoeuvre around a more openly critical US hardliner stance on relations with China in particular.

4.3. Populist Neo-Isolationists

*'We have the rising threat of China in East Asia, there are weapons the Taiwanese need that we can't send because we sent them to Ukraine. We have to Focus.'*¹⁴³
J.D. Vance, 2024.

Foreign policy directed by the populist neo-isolationist faction of the GOP would pose the most critical challenge to the transatlantic alliance, in particular to existing security structures like NATO. The push by those like Trump and J.D. Vance to rethink how the alliance is funded brings with it a certain unpredictability that is easy for European policymakers to catastrophise.

However, the goals of such a foreign policy shift are largely misunderstood by European policymakers. The challenges posed by this neo-isolationist wing of the GOP emerge from their perceived need to re-organise how America supports multilateral security arrangements – but not necessarily initiate their complete rollback or destruction. Instead, better balancing of the costs, and greater responsibility-sharing by allies is demanded from the US side.¹⁴⁴ This will be the main challenge for the EU and also for NATO member states, which are chronically over-reliant on the US security umbrella.

Next, there will be greater uncertainty about the willingness of the US to intervene in conflict abroad. Compared to the more activist factions, the neo-isolationists have distinct non-interventionist tendencies that challenge the utility and strategy of US nation-building, and democracy-promotion overseas. For the past 75 years, Europe has only known an America willing to restrain a dictator, empower a fledgling democracy or stand up for Europe in the face of Russian aggression.

What is increasingly clear is that those days may soon be over.

¹⁴² ELN London Office, "The Challenges of the Middle East – the European / EU Approach." European Leadership Network, (2015), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06736>.

¹⁴³ J. D. Vance, "J.D. Vance: The Math on Ukraine Doesn't Add Up," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/12/opinion/jd-vance-ukraine.html>.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 4: relevant quote from Gaetz and Trump.

However, this does not mean the US will suddenly shed its diverse interests abroad. Future populist neo-isolationist foreign policy will aim at unilaterally managing US interests abroad, acting more often in self-interest, rather than in coordination with traditional partners. Adjusting to this new reality will be a challenge for Brussels and an even greater challenge for individual EU member states.

The perceptions of populist neo-isolationists demonstrate that the ideological space between so-called ‘interventionists vs isolationists’ is not definite. It can shift, and opposing groupings may dissolve and re-coalesce around certain positions depending on domestic sentiment and their perceptions of the issue. The debate on defending Ukraine is a case in point. While neo-isolationists sought to strike down a \$60bn military aid package in the US Congress in early 2024, the more internationalist-leaning factions – aided by Democrats proved to be the majority, allowing the critical aid package to pass.¹⁴⁵ While the long-delayed aid package became an early campaign issue for GOP populist neo-isolationist holdouts in the context of the 2024 election, it remains a strong signal to EU and NATO partners about what this faction’s priorities are.

What transatlantic partners will need to understand is that this double tension between isolationism and internationalism and multilateralism and unilateralism reflects a vibrant and engaged conservative political class – intent on preserving traditional forms of local self-government and national sovereignty and indeed, preventing war. Populist neo-isolationist foreign policy objectives stem from a distinct form of conservatism nationalism nurtured since the country’s founding.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the oscillations towards isolationism in GOP foreign policy reflect a fundamentally human struggle between foreign policy realism and idealism that will continue to grip the political elites well into the future.

4.4. Towards a New Strategic Impetus for The Transatlantic Alliance

‘If [states] wish to survive, they must be willing to go to war to preserve a balance against the growing hegemonic power of the period.’
Nicholas Spykman, 1942.

As the US Republican party factions evolve to meet new challenges at the domestic and systemic levels, so too must their European partners. Both sides of the Atlantic must also choose which challenges to face – where, and how.

Fortunately for the transatlantic relationship, many of the external challenges facing the US are the same ones facing the EU. The threat of a rising China, simmering instability in the Middle East and a growing political synthesis between autocratic centres of power in Eurasia pose a systemic threat to the free West. However, for the first time in modern history, the fast-emerging and great powers of the world are no longer within Europe or the Western Hemisphere. They are in the East.

¹⁴⁵ Andy Carey and Tim Lister, “Our artillery is starving: \$60bn US military aid can’t come soon enough for Ukraine,” *CNN*, April 24, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/04/22/europe/ukraine-awaits-us-military-aid-intl-cmd/index.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Dueck, *Age of Iron*, 2.

However, despite having shaken off the Cold War bipolar system and having recognised the new reality of a multipolar world, Brussels and Washington still act as if the Euro-Atlantic sphere is what defines their strategic relationship. On one hand, Brussels blindly hopes that US support for Ukraine will remain a priority for at least a majority of Republican elites. Meanwhile, preoccupied with the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East, Washington wishes that Brussels would, at a bare minimum, take care of its own geostrategic backyard.

Some quarters of the EU are indeed taking steps to rectify this security deficit. However, as the bloc does so both outside and perhaps even in contradistinction to the NATO alliance, it risks further disillusioning those GOP factions which have been calling for a more ‘self-sufficient’ Europe in the first place. The question on neo-isolationists’ lips might well become: *Why are we sponsoring NATO when the EU now has its sights set on ‘strategic autonomy’?* For neo-isolationists like Trump, NATO burden-sharing is a ‘point of negotiation’¹⁴⁷, and will likely remain so in the future. Currently, Europe is not in a negotiating mood, nor is it well placed to do so.

Managing the transatlantic relationship has never been so important. As Chuck Hagel rightly points out: ‘The EU will represent one of the most significant power blocs of the twenty-first century. US foreign policy should recognise the EU as a geopolitical force in its own right, distinct from, although connected to, the NATO security alliance. Washington’s relationship with NATO will in fact be strengthened through recognition of the diplomatic and economic significance of the US-EU relations.’¹⁴⁸ Hagel’s call for the recognition of a ‘geopolitical Europe’ could not be more timely. Yet, while there are early signs¹⁴⁹ that Europe is having a moment of geopolitical ‘self-realisation’, only history will tell whether actions were taken fast enough.

The transatlantic alliance needs to find a *new strategic impetus*: one that acknowledges and responds to the world’s new and emerging centres of power that now lie outside the Euro-Atlantic area. To stay relevant, and to prove utility for itself *and* Washington, Europe needs its own ‘Asia Pivot moment’.

Therefore, a fundamental rethink of the strategic paradigm behind the US-EU partnership is well overdue. Such a revision should be based on a geo-strategic reversal of the traditional alliance’s Atlantic-centric orientation - to a more dynamic and global framework. For example, such a revised strategic paradigm would stretch from the continental United States across the Pacific and through Asia and the Middle East – back to Europe. Instead of looking West to Washington, European policymakers should look East, past Russia, to China and across the Pacific to San Francisco. Policymakers in Washington have already started to look Westward across the Indo-Pacific towards Europe.

In recognition of the combined threats of Iran-Russia-China and even North Korea, a forward-thinking EU-US alliance should re-orientate away from the Atlantic Ocean. It should wrap around the Indian and Pacific Oceans respectively – encompassing and embracing what

¹⁴⁷ Curt Mills, “What Trump Could Do in Foreign Policy Might Surprise the World,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/13/opinion/trump-foreign-policy.html?pgtype=Article&action=click&module=RelatedLinks>.

¹⁴⁸ Chuck Hagel, “A Republican Foreign Policy.” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 4 (2004): 73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20034047>.

¹⁴⁹ Nicholas Camut, “Macron wants to open ‘debate’ on European nuclear deterrent,” *Politico*, April 28, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-nuclear-weapons-europe-open-debate/>.

geographer and British parliamentarian Halford Mackinder conceived of as a Eurasian 'Heartland'. Mackinder's thesis was that whoever controlled the Heartland which contained a majority of the world's population and productive capacity – could control the world.

Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory adapted Mackinder's proposition – claiming instead that the geostrategic 'Rimland' connecting the Eurasian Heartland with the oceans and surrounding great offshore islands was the key to geopolitical power and whoever could control the Rimland, could ultimately control the Heartland – and hence the world.¹⁵⁰ Writing in the 1940s, Spykman concluded that for the US, its objective should be ensuring that no 'old world power centres' would 'unite against America's interests'.¹⁵¹ Spykman's warning is eerily relevant today. What the GOP activist hardliner faction perceives¹⁵² as a united 'Axis of Evil' composed of heartland states Russia, China and Iran, represents exactly the kind of old-world power convergence that both Spykman and Mackinder warned about.

Washington's focus has already shifted to China and the East. It now remains up to European policymakers to meet America halfway – in the new centre of the world: the Indo-Pacific. Such a revived US-EU strategic paradigm would engage more directly with Mackinder's World Island via a string of global investments and security engagements that leverage the EU-US relationship outside its traditional boundaries. Importantly, it would also better position the EU when dealing with the emerging neo-isolationist faction within the GOP.

This new re-orientation would provide for a more forward-looking and dynamic alliance that recognises the strategic imperative for countering China, Iran and North Korea. It would also facilitate new partnerships with like-minded states in the Indo-Pacific: Australia, South Korea, Japan and even India.

This would not mean NATO's re-purposing or winding down. Far from it. This would call for the strategic re-orientation of EU-US relations, outside the mandate of existing treaties, and perhaps foresee the establishment of new modes of collective security action. NATO is, for the moment, bound by its mandate. It also remains a critical cornerstone of the balance of power in the Northern Hemisphere. However, NATO should also not stand in the way of the US and EU pursuing complementary actions outside existing structures – if anything it will strengthen diplomatic capital in the process. To borrow Theodore Roosevelt's idiom, Europe and the US should speak softly and in unison while carrying a big stick with like-minded states in the Indo-Pacific.

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1944), 43.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² See, for example, the Hardliner Activist perceptions in Chapter 4.

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