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Laetitia Langlois

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Trump, Brexit and the Transatlantic Relationship: The New Paradigms of the Trump Era

Trump, Brexit et la relation transatlantique: les nouveaux modèles de l'ère Trump

Laetitia Langlois

“The convictions that leaders have formed before reaching high office are the intellectual capital they will consume as long as they continue in office.”

Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years*

- 1 Donald Trump became the 45th President of the United States on 20 January 2017, thus proving wrong a certain number of pundits, observers and scholars who had judged his election most unlikely. His election represents an unprecedented situation: Donald Trump, a multi-millionaire businessman and TV reality celebrity, who had never held public office before became the present incumbent of the White House. After an aggressive, divisive and populist campaign, his victory caused much fear and doubt abroad, raising questions about Trump's foreign policy choices and the US's role in global affairs in this new era. This article aims to assess the extent to which the relationship between the US and the EU is impacted by Trump's presidency. His support for Brexit, his biting attacks against NATO and blistering criticisms of the EU's trade practices during the election campaign foretold a radical change. Also, Donald Trump's main pledge of “America First” during the campaign sent a clear message to all America's partners and signalled a new era in US foreign policy, an era in which the national interest would prevail over other considerations, thus establishing a clear rupture with his predecessor's more inclusive concept of “common security for our common humanity.”¹ In *American Foreign Policy*, Bruce Jentleson underlines that “following the national interest is the essence of choices to be made in a nation's foreign policy.”² All American leaders prior to Trump pursued the national interest and made choices which could best serve the

American economy and security. But those choices, as Jentleson points out, were made “within the context of the international system.”³ This is where the Trump era marks a dramatic change in foreign policy strategy: all decisions, partnerships, trade agreements will be subordinated to the supreme interest of his country regardless of traditions, principles or ethics.

- 2 Bruce Jentleson distinguishes 4 core concepts that define American national interest: power, peace, prosperity and principles, the famous “4 Ps” of foreign policy.⁴ Foreign policy is often a mix of the “4 Ps” with some objectives prevailing over others, but power, without a doubt, is the concept that best defines “the essence of choice” in Trump’s foreign policy strategy.⁵ Power, domination and strength are key words to characterise Trump’s relationship with foreign countries. He imposes his decisions unilaterally, he humiliates his partners and deliberately causes chaos to better assert himself as a most powerful leader. We will see that this is particularly true as regards his attitude towards Brexit and Theresa May, the British Prime Minister. His support for Brexit was nothing but egotistical opportunism and Theresa May suffers today the consequences of Trump’s unpredictable behaviour. Also, behind this domineering attitude lies the desire to restore the image of the United States as the supreme world power, an image that some on the right deemed dented by Obama’s supposedly weak presidency. Prosperity also looms large in Trump’s foreign policy strategy. “America First” means that the economic benefit of his nation will be sought at all costs, even if this entails major rifts with allies or major breaches in the World Trade Organisation’s provisions. On the other hand, principles and peace seem to have very little place in Trump’s foreign policy approach. His repeated attacks against NATO and his unilateral decisions show his deep-seated contempt for international institutions or multilateralism. So far, he has already taken a series of unilateral measures which have had a tremendous impact on the geopolitical order, the most significant being his decision to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal on 9 May 2017.
- 3 In this changing world of new paradigms (protectionism, nationalism and unilateralism), new powers (China and Russia) and new threats (North Korea), what place is left for the transatlantic relationship? Is the transatlantic relationship an outdated paradigm for Donald Trump? What values and ideals will the US and the UE continue to share and defend together? Those are the main questions this paper will raise to get a better insight into Trump’s approach to the European Union and assess the role that Trump will assign to the transatlantic relationship during his term in office.

The Transatlantic Relationship: A Cornerstone in the History of American Foreign Policy

- 4 On 4 October 2016 in Brussels, John Kerry, then Secretary of State declared, “I cannot emphasize too strongly the twin propositions that unity within Europe, and partnership between the United States and Europe, remain absolutely indispensable to global security and prosperity.”⁶ He echoed a speech given by Barack Obama a few months earlier in Hannover in which he praised European unity and reminded the world of the achievements fulfilled thanks to American and European collaboration:

But from the ruins of the Second World War, our nations set out to remake the world – to build a new international order and the institutions to uphold it. A United Nations to prevent another world war and advance a more just and lasting

peace. International financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to promote prosperity for all peoples. A Universal Declaration of Human Rights to advance the “inalienable rights of all members of the human family” [...]. And today, more than ever, a strong, united Europe remains, as Adenauer said, a necessity for all of us. It’s a necessity for the United States, because Europe’s security and prosperity is inherently indivisible from our own. We can’t cut ourselves off from you. Our economies are integrated. Our cultures are integrated. Our peoples are integrated [...] A strong, united Europe is a necessity for the world because an integrated Europe remains vital to our international order. Europe helps to uphold the norms and rules that can maintain peace and promote prosperity around the world.⁷

- 5 Of all recent American presidents, Barack Obama was certainly one of the most articulate defenders of the transatlantic relationship and one of the most enthusiastic champions of European unity. All American presidents have praised the success of European integration and encouraged the process of enlargement of the European Union. Bruce Jones, expert in international security studies, mentions the “deep admiration” developed by American officials for the European project and the capacity for former enemies to work together.⁸ Yet, it has not always been an easy and smooth relationship between the two partners – the war in the Balkans in the 1990s and the war in Iraq in 2003 are among the best examples of those tensions. Nonetheless, Jones underlines that “for all its tribulations the transatlantic relationship remained the essential relationship in US foreign policy (along with the US-Japan alliance). As far as NATO is concerned, it remained a privileged instrument of security cooperation.”⁹
- 6 The transatlantic relationship was born out of the ashes of the Second World War, but it is really the Cold War and the fear of Communism spreading all over Europe which urged the Americans to take part in the European process and develop strategic partnerships on the continent. The transatlantic relationship was a priority and the cornerstone of American foreign policy, primarily institutionalised in NATO but other international organisations such as the IMF or the WTO were built to provide the norms and laws on which the Western liberal order would rest.¹⁰ With the fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical importance of it seemed less of a priority and voices could be heard in the United States asking for less intervention in European affairs and less financial contribution to NATO. But in this debate between the supporters of disengagement and the supporters of commitment, the latter group has always prevailed. Donald Trump’s election, on the other hand, represents a major test for the transatlantic relationship as the American president so far has looked more to the East than to the West and has repeatedly criticised NATO in different speeches or interviews.
- 7 Scholars agree that the Obama Presidency saw the “transatlantic renaissance”¹¹ with a renewed commitment to the ideals of the liberal world and the pursuit of common security. The National Security Strategy issued by the White House in 2010 exemplified this commitment:

We must focus American engagement on strengthening international institutions and galvanizing the collective action that can serve common interests [...] International institutions must more effectively represent the world of the 21st century, with a broader voice – and greater responsibilities – for emerging powers.
- 8 If the Obama era saw the revival of the transatlantic relationship, many Europeans fear that the Trump era might see its demise. During the campaign, NATO-bashing was part of

¹²

his ritual condemnations and in January 2017 his criticisms reached a climax when he called NATO “obsolete.”¹³ The resentment lies in the fact that, according to Trump, the US is paying too much compared to European countries – in particular Germany – which are not paying their “fair share.” In this interview, he also accused NATO of not “taking care of terror,” a major blunder considering NATO has been actively involved in fighting terrorist organisations since 9/11.¹⁴ Those declarations undermine the pillars of Western security built after the Second World War to avoid the repetition of tragic scenarios. It is difficult to know Trump’s intentions or the underpinnings of such a move, but a collective sentiment is growing among NATO allies that they might no longer be able to rely on an international system that secures peace and prosperity.¹⁵ Unlike his predecessor, Trump’s worldview is much less based on the principles of the international order and is much more transactional.

- 9 To assess the role that the transatlantic relationship will play under Trump it is necessary to keep in mind Trump’s “America first” motto. Trump will pay attention to the transatlantic relationship only in so far as it serves his interests but he will not be bothered by traditions, norms or respect for one’s partners when it comes to making a decision. In this, he is supported and even encouraged by the people around him who represent the key figures of foreign policy in his administration. Since he took office, there have been numerous reshuffles in Trump’s team and his presidency so far has been marked by a series of resignations or sackings. An analysis of the number of departures by the Brookings Institution reveals that “Trump’s staff turnover is higher than the five previous presidents.”¹⁶ This shows the chaotic manner in which the White House has functioned since Trump has been in power and the lack of continuity or coherence in strategy that this constant turnover necessarily implies. Four national security advisers have been appointed since January 2017, the latest change being John Bolton replacing H.R. McMaster after this latter was sacked by Trump in March 2018. Rex Tillerson who was Secretary of State was also sacked in March 2018 and replaced by Mike Pompeo. Those two appointments bear huge significance as the two men are known as “hawks,” that is to say, advocates of aggressive policies and dismissive of international institutions. John Bolton for instance is said to be “one of the most aggressive thinkers in the world of US foreign policy.”¹⁷ *The Guardian* reports that he once declared, “There is no United Nations. There is an international community that occasionally can be led by the only real power left in the world, and that’s the United States, when it suits our interests.”¹⁸ With two radical men in charge of American diplomacy, US foreign policy is bound to be highly controversial and cause huge turmoil in the years ahead. As far as the European Union is concerned, it means adapting to a completely new approach of the transatlantic relationship and accepting to be relegated to a very minor place.
- 10 Martin Quencez and Alexandra De Hoop Scheffer, political analysts at the German Marshall Fund, note that since Trump has taken the Oval Office, “all cards have been reshuffled in transatlantic relations.”¹⁹ While Barack Obama tried to maintain three circles of privileged relationships in Europe with Berlin, London and Paris, Trump on the other hand is not looking for an equilibrium in his dealings with the European partners.²⁰ Trump seems more drawn to Paris and the French president, Emmanuel Macron. However surprising it may be, the two men apparently enjoy a trusting relationship despite political disagreements. Emmanuel Macron was the first foreign leader invited on a state visit in Washington in April 2018, an undisputable sign of Macron’s privileged status in the eyes of Donald Trump. During this visit, the two men seemed so close to one

another that the term “hugs diplomacy” was coined to describe their relationship.²¹ Macron’s strategy is clear: to fill in the vacant place left by the UK and Germany.²² History has shown that American and European leaders could form strong tandems: Kennedy and Macmillan, Reagan and Thatcher, Obama and Merkel. Macron and Trump are an odd couple indeed, but Macron is trying to forge a privileged relationship with Trump to maintain him in the transatlantic circle.²³ So far, however, the seduction campaign has not paid off considering the American president’s unpredictable moves, including policy U-turns on the climate or on Iran. While journalists and commentators mock Donald Trump’s extravagance, while European leaders make incredible efforts to win Trump over, the president remains inflexible in his decisions. However hard president Macron tried to convince Trump to change his mind on the Paris climate agreements or on the Iranian nuclear deal, Trump has not budged. The hugs, kisses and slaps on the back are only postures that may be used to distract the international community’s attention. The rationale behind this last point is that as leader of the most influential and powerful nation, Trump has immense power in his hands and is determined to use it to impose his views.

- 11 In this new world (dis)order that Trump causes there is no convincing evidence that he cares much about Europe and old European ties. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel seems to have understood this perfectly, as she declared a few days after the NATO summit in May 2017: “The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over. I have experienced that in the last few days.”²⁴ In *Foreign Affairs*, Stewart Patrick, senior fellow in global governance and director of the International Institutions and Global Governance Program at the Council on Foreign Relations, emphasizes that the Europeans got the message of “America First” when Trump declared that “his country’s commitment to the alliance was contingent on their reimbursing American taxpayers for U.S. military expenditures while declining to endorse Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which covers collective defense.”²⁵ Although Trump has since then reaffirmed his commitment to Article 5 in his National Security Strategy document, his declaration could only be an explicit warning that the final days of the US’s global commitment have come. Besides, the American president’s scathing comments about NATO increase tension before each annual summit. In 2018, Trump said Germany was “a captive of Russia” and called members of the alliance “delinquents” because their contribution to NATO budget was too poor.²⁶
- 12 In that context, we can wonder along with Alain Frachon – editorialist at the French newspaper *Le Monde* – if the word “allies” still means something for the United States.²⁷ One European leader painfully experienced Trump’s contempt and neglect: Theresa May. As the PM in charge of successfully leading the UK out of the European Union, she relied on the US partner to provide support. But as the next part will show, unpredictability and unreliability are central to Trump’s behaviour and Theresa May could only realise that “she has no friend in Donald Trump.”²⁸

Donald Trump, Brexit and the UK: A Tale of Opportunism and U-turns

- 13 Donald Trump came to power at an awkward time for Europe: less than a year before, Britain had voted in favour of leaving the European Union, thus opening a period of uncertainty and doubt as to the political stability of the West. To make things worse, the

man who entered the Oval Office had been one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Brexit and cheered the decision made by the British voters. Trump never concealed his scepticism towards Europe. Already in 2000, in his book entitled *The America We Deserve*, Trump wrote “Pulling back from Europe would save this country millions of dollars annually. The cost of stationing NATO troops in Europe is enormous. And these are clearly funds that can be put to better use.”²⁹ Sixteen years later, Trump held exactly the same views on Europe and supported Brexit as an act of independence and courage. During Theresa May’s visit to the White House in January 2017, Trump claimed Brexit was a “blessing for the world” and a “beautiful, beautiful thing.”³⁰ No one could be more ecstatic than Trump about the British vote as it echoed his own populist themes and showed the sea-change that was happening in Western politics with the increasing popularity of anti-establishment candidates. Brexit was undeniably a warning sign that populism and nationalism were gaining momentum. It was not an isolated accident but a groundswell that would redefine political paradigms.

- 14 From Turnberry, Scotland, where he was visiting his newly-purchased golf resort, Trump tweeted: “Self-determination is the sacred right of all free people, and the people of the UK have exercised that right for all the world to see.” He then drew a parallel between the vote in favour of Brexit to what was happening in the US, concluding “People want their country back!”³¹ Gideon Rachman emphasises in the *Financial Times* that the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump “will forever be linked in history. The two events took place within a few months of each other. Both were populist revolts that appealed to similar constituencies.”³²
- 15 Brexit provided a tremendous platform for Trump: it gave legitimacy to his own call for “America First” and showed a global movement of revolt against the elite in Western democracies. Yet, in an interview to BBC Radio 4 *Today*, Michael Wolff, former presidential adviser and author of *Fire and Fury* (2018), claimed Trump did not know anything about Brexit and had never heard of the word until a few days before the crucial vote.³³ This ignorance about European affairs is no surprise considering that Trump never showed much interest in Europe. But when he realised he could exploit the themes raised by the Brexit campaign to his own benefit, he became one of its strongest supporters. Trump’s U-turns on the European question since then bears evidence of his opportunism. Since in office, he has shown more support to the work done by the EU and³⁴ last year, he described the European Union as “wonderful” and said he was “totally in favour of it.”³⁵
- 16 Trump supported Brexit in so far as it provided a resounding echo with his own campaign themes and could therefore sustain his “politics of anger.”³⁶ The pro-Brexit and the pro-Trump votes rest on the same dynamics: they are both angry votes against the elite, against immigration, against globalisation. It is no surprise then that Nigel Farage and Donald Trump are so close: as the embodiments of the rage against the system and the two populist voices in the anglosphere, they had common ideas, common targets and common objectives. And to reinforce this community of ideas, Trump invited Nigel Farage to one of his rallies in Jackson, Mississippi, on 24 August 2016. During his short address, Farage said that “[the UKIP] made 23 June our Independence Day when we smashed the Establishment.” He also added: “If the little people, if the real people, if the ordinary decent people are prepared to stand up and fight for what they believe in, we can overcome the big banks, we can overcome the multinationals.”³⁷ The strategy is transparent here: to appeal to the most vulnerable and destitute people who feel left aside by globalisation and the new digital era thanks to a carefully tailored speech. This

strategy is well-known and overused, yet it paid off as the two men were victorious. Since becoming president, Trump has met Farage several times and rumours spread that Farage could be Trump's unofficial adviser on US/UK trade. Farage was, it is interesting to note, the first British politician to meet Donald Trump after his election and Trump even went as far as suggesting to Theresa May that Farage could be appointed British ambassador to Washington.³⁸

- 17 In his joint interview to Michael Gove (for *The Times*) and Kai Diekmann (former editor of German newspaper *Bild*), Trump declared that he was “a big fan of the UK”³⁹ and extended an enthusiastic invitation to Theresa May. She was the first foreign leader to be invited to the White House in January 2017.⁴⁰ More than just a symbol, this invitation was a token of friendship and a way to revive the “special relationship” between the two countries, a phrase Trump used twice during his press conference. During this same conference, he praised the British vote in favour of leaving the EU as a “wonderful thing” and promised the UK, as a reward of sorts, a free trade deal.⁴¹ Theresa May expected this invitation and the promise of a trade agreement to boost post-Brexit UK and shore up the “special relationship.” Julian Borger in *The Guardian* emphasised, “The prospect of a successful or at least survivable Brexit is posited on a strong relationship with Washington. In that regard, May’s successful rush to Washington in January [2017] to become the first leader received at the Trump White House was presented as a coup.”⁴² Indeed, May’s ambitious design for a “Global Britain” could only rest on a solid partnership with the US.
- 18 However, the honeymoon between Trump and May has recently turned into bickering. The UK may have been a useful partner in the context of Brexit, but unworthy of respect or care when disagreements arise. Trump and May are in profound disagreement over a certain number of key policies, including the nuclear deal with Iran, the climate agreement or North Korea. But the catalyst of the tension between the two occurred last November when Trump retweeted Islamophobic videos by the far-right party “Britain First.” May’s condemnation was immediate and her spokesman declared that “British people overwhelmingly reject the prejudiced rhetoric of the far right which is the antithesis of the values that this country represents – decency, tolerance and respect.”⁴³ Knowing that Trump is a man who suffers no contradiction or criticism, he unsurprisingly reacted with utmost vehemence on Twitter: “Don’t focus on me, focus on the destructive Radical Islamic Terrorism that is taking place within the United Kingdom. We are doing just fine!”⁴⁴ Julian Borger in the *Guardian* wrote that this was “historic” and added “No US president in modern times has addressed a British Prime Minister with the open peevishness and contempt of Donald Trump’s tweet telling May to mind her own business...Not only is it personally demeaning, it is also politically toxic.”
- 19 The declarations made by Donald Trump prior to his visit to Theresa May in July 2018 reinforce this idea that the US and the UK are drifting further apart. Trump gave an exclusive interview to the British tabloid *The Sun* in which he declared that May had “wrecked” the Brexit by opting for the soft option and announced that the US-UK trade deal was over. He struck the final blow when he declared that Boris Johnson would make “a great Prime Minister.”⁴⁵ The last statement is an open provocation which only serves to humiliate the British Prime Minister and further weaken her stance in her party at a time when she was already highly fragile. With the resignations of two senior ministers⁴⁶ – David Davis, Brexit Secretary and Boris Johnson, Foreign Secretary – who disagreed with her soft Brexit approach, May’s government was plunged into a crisis and she faced a vote of no-confidence at the House of Commons over her EU position.⁴⁷ A week later, she had

to deal with a rebellion by anti-Brexit Tory MPs who disagreed with her decision to give in to a series of Eurosceptic amendments on Brexit legislation. Anti-Brexit Tory MPs voted with the Opposition and May only managed to win by three votes.⁴⁸ With sustained pressure from both her Eurosceptic and Eurofriendly wings, May has had to tread carefully to avoid a deadly split in her party. Therefore, in that context, Trump's disparaging comments on May could only add fuel to the fire.

- 20 Today, Brexit seems far away – and so does the walk hand in hand with Theresa May in the gardens of the White House. Trump is a president who asserts power through unpredictable moves from former statements or commitments. *Financial Times* reporter Gideon Rachman noted,

As the months have passed, it has become clear that Trump and Brexit are not, in fact, identical twins. They are more like distant relations who are growing further apart with the passage of time. The vote for Brexit and the election of Mr. Trump may have sprung from similar instincts. But they have ended up in very different places.⁴⁹

- 21 Theresa May seems closer to the positions held by the European Union than by the American administration. A strange situation considering that Brexit was precisely intended as a move away from Europe and closer to the United States. In a sense, Trump's Presidency shows to Britain that it has more in common with its European partners. Trump's Presidency might also help Europe move towards even greater integration, especially in terms of defence and security, for the transatlantic relationship is no priority for Trump compared to the Asian-Pacific region.

Donald Trump and the Transatlantic Relationship: An Outdated Paradigm?

- 22 Donald Trump, in spite of his Scottish and German roots, is not familiar with European traditions, history, geography and culture. Declaring that the EU had been “formed, partially, to beat the United States on trade” is not only wrong, it is also a profound misunderstanding of the *raison d'être* of the European Community built to maintain peace in this region after years of wars. Trump is totally ignorant of the process of European construction and could not care less about the spirit that animated the founding fathers – Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman – of the European Community. Professor Larry Sabato confirmed that idea:

I believe the record clearly shows that Trump knows little about Europe or any other region. His simplistic slogans of “America First” and “Make America Great Again” guide his views of Europe, which “isn't paying enough to NATO” and is now a source of Islamic terrorism due to lax immigration policies.⁵⁰

- 23 Larry Sabato then concluded, “Europe is unlikely ever to be a focus of the Trump Administration.” This was confirmed by another scholar, Pr. Michael Klare, whom I also interviewed on this question and said “I think he has little interest in the EU or NATO.”⁵¹ It is certainly in his interview with Michael Gove and Kei Diekmann given in January 2017 that Trump reached a climax of contempt and criticism of the European Union. He insisted that Brexit would cause the collapse of the European Union:

I think people want their own identity, so if you ask me, others, I believe others will leave [...] But I do think keeping it together is not gonna be as easy as a lot of people think. And I think this, if refugees keep pouring into different parts of Europe, I think it's gonna be very hard to keep it together cause people are angry about it [...]

Personally, I don't think it matters much for the United States. I never thought it mattered. Look, the EU was formed, partially, to beat the United States on trade, OK? So, I don't really care whether it's separate or together, to me it doesn't matter.

52

- 24 Never before had Europe been subjected to so much criticism or neglect by an American president. Since the end of the Second World War, American policy towards Europe has been characterized by extraordinary continuity. During the Cold War, the US protected Europe from the threat of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US intervened in European conflicts, most notably in the Balkans in the 1990s. American presidents have all supported European unity. Quite interestingly, Barack Obama went to London a few weeks before the referendum on the EU to give his support to David Cameron and the Remain camp. More importantly, American presidents have always seen in Europe a common set of values and a crucial partner for strategic interests. Therefore, hearing Trump hail Brexit and predict the collapse of the European Union with complete indifference is something of a shock.
- 25 Breaking with the position of his predecessors, and Obama in particular, might well be a political posture to distance himself from everything Obama stood for.⁵³ Obama supported the Remain camp; Trump supported the Leave camp. Obama and Merkel had a close and friendly relationship; Trump is highly critical of Merkel's immigration policy and of Germany's exports policy.⁵⁴ Obama placed great emphasis on preserving the international liberal order; Trump seems bent on undermining it. But the change runs deeper than mere personality differences and postures. Actually, Trump may not simply be an anomaly before things get back to normal but the sign of a new era in transatlantic relations. A changing world with new challenges and new threats imposes a redefinition of priorities. First, power has moved to the East, with Russia and China as the two leading players in the area and the two central threats. All analysts agree that attention will now be primarily focused on Asia, and primarily China:
- The Pacific Pivot of American foreign policy began under the Obama Administration and the term pivot was first used by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The growing challenge of China to American power and influence remains at the center of American strategic thinking and goes well beyond Trump. China, not Europe, has become the central relationship in the Trump administration.⁵⁵
- 26 The National Security Strategy issued by the White House in December 2017 provides an interesting insight into Trump's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific region. Throughout the document, "China" occurs 33 times.⁵⁶ Although it is referred to as America's "competitor," the tone is very critical and portrays China as a threat.⁵⁷ China is accused of expanding its power and influence across the world with unfair trade practices, information control and military power and of planning "to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests."⁵⁸ Last November, Trump visited five countries in Asia and the political significance of this Asian tour should not be underestimated.⁵⁹ According to the online review *The Diplomat*, the trip had three main goals: first, to garner support in the conflict with North Korea; second, to secure bilateral trade relationships to replace the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); and third, to introduce a new vision of a "free and open Indo-Pacific region."⁶⁰ Paramount commercial and strategic interests lie in this region of the world, which is why we can easily assume that the Indo-Pacific region will be the cornerstone of the Trump administration's foreign policy.
- 27 Second, all analyses converge to affirm the erosion of the commitment to multilateralism in the US. The widespread view is that multilateralism comes at the expense of America's

interests, hence an entrenched scepticism in Trump about the benefits of multilateralism. Two political analysts of the German Marshall Fund have stated that this “scepticism about multilateralism predates Trump,” as Obama had already started to redefine this approach.⁶¹ The two analysts explain that the US intends to cast off the burden of being the sole provider of world security. As regards NATO, the wish is to reach a more balanced distribution of responsibilities inside the organisation. The two authors suggest a possible “post-Atlanticist” era in which the US would break with its post-war engagement in Europe and Europe should therefore have to move towards more strategic autonomy.⁶²

- 28 Trump dealt a last blow in March 2018 when he announced he would impose 25% penalties on imported steel and 10% on imported aluminum from the European Union.⁶³ Trump accused the EU of unfair practices, thus justifying his decision:

We have a trade deficit of \$800 billion a year, and the European Union has been particularly tough on the United States [...] The European Union has not treated us well and it's been a very, very unfair trade situation. I'm here to protect our workers and our companies. We cannot lose our steel industry our aluminum industry. If the European Union takes off some of the horrible barriers that make it impossible for our product to go into there, then we can start talking. Otherwise, we're going to leave it as it is. We have no choice but to straighten it out.⁶⁴

- 29 This announcement caused a major outcry amid European allies and the European Union decided to retaliate with a whole array of tariffs imposed on American goods, including Harley-Davidson motorbikes, jeans or bourbon. To try and settle the trade dispute, Jean-Claude Juncker went to Washington in July 2018 but Trump did not change his mind. He only conceded to drop the tariffs on German cars in exchange for Europe importing more energy and more soy beans from the US. The joint statement published at the end of their meeting insisted on the two partners agreeing to “work together toward zero tariffs, zero non-tariff barriers” and to “launch a new phase of close friendship, of strong relations in which both of [them] will win.”⁶⁵ The words are reassuring but the reality is much bleaker. The trade war that Trump is launching with Europe is an element of serious disruption in bilateral relations and it is specifically designed as a showdown with Europe. Trump has neither friends nor foes, only interests. Europe must keep this in mind to overcome the difficult times that lie ahead.

Conclusion

- 30 In a campaign speech in April 2016 at the Center for National Interest, Trump declared “We, as a nation, must be more unpredictable.”⁶⁶ So far Trump has been up to the challenge, using unpredictability as a weapon against other nations in the world. As this article shows, in international relations, Trump deliberately causes chaos, division and disorder. He destroys instead of building, he humiliates instead of supporting, he imposes instead of cooperating. With Trump the “4 Ps” of American foreign policy have been replaced by the “4 Ds”: Disorder, Division, Domination, Disruption. Trump’s election has been a watershed event for Europe, forcing European nations to adapt to an out-of-control personality and a confused political strategy. The transatlantic relationship, which used to be a pillar of peace and a dominant paradigm of the geopolitical order, is now fraught with tensions, rancour and distrust. It is therefore a whole new world that is emerging with Trump’s election: the different attacks on the European Union, on NATO or other international institutions, combined with Trump’s populist and nationalist

positions severely undermine the Western liberal order. The US and Europe were the two defenders of this model of economic liberalism, universalism, freedom and democracy. Today, Europe is going through a severe identity crisis and anti-European parties are on the rise. In the meantime, the US can no longer offer a counter example in that domain. Trump is closer politically speaking to men like the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán or Matteo Salvini, Italy's Home Secretary, highly conservative and far-right politicians. Therefore, it is another major element of the American-European relationship that is seriously damaged: the belief in shared values and the belief in liberal democracy.

- 31 But in this gloomy landscape, there are reasons for optimism. After all, and although we should not underestimate the impact of Donald Trump's actions, he cannot alone wipe out and reverse years of history, traditions, cooperation and old ties. Trump is not alone in deciding about and shaping foreign politics. Diplomats and the civil society are also working behind the scenes to maintain the ties forged years and years before him. History is bigger than Trump and therefore the transatlantic relationship will survive the many challenges imposed by Trump's presidency.

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ABSTRACTS

On 27 January 2017 during a joint press conference with the British Prime Minister Theresa May at the White House, Donald Trump praised the vote in favour of Brexit as “a wonderful thing” and a ‘blessing for the world.’” Brexit was a fantastic opportunity for him as the themes raised by pro-Brexiteers echoed his own “politics of anger”: hostility against the élites, rejection of lax immigration policies, indictment of the effects of free trade and globalisation, etc. Therefore, his support for Brexit and for its main spokesman Nigel Farage is no surprise except in so far as it stands in sharp contrast with his predecessors’ stance who all defended the idea of a United Kingdom fully committed to the European Union. Donald Trump is not a president to be bothered with history and tradition: the liberal world order and old European ties do not faze him in the least. His only guides when it comes to making decisions are his short-term political needs. Thus, studying Donald Trump’s position towards Brexit and more largely towards the European Union will reveal some constant themes: opportunism, populism and unpredictability..

Le 27 Janvier 2017 lors d’une conférence de presse à la Maison Blanche avec le Premier Ministre britannique Theresa May, Donald Trump fit l’éloge du vote britannique en faveur d’une sortie de l’Union Européenne. Le Brexit fut une fantastique opportunité pour lui au moment de sa campagne présidentielle car les thèmes des pro-Brexit faisaient écho à sa propre « politique de la colère » : hostilité envers les élites, rejet des politiques d’accueil des réfugiés et des immigrés, critique des effets du libre-échange et de la mondialisation, etc. Ainsi son soutien apporté au Brexit et à son principal défenseur Nigel Farage n’a rien de surprenant, mais en faisant cela Trump s’inscrit en rupture avec tous ses prédécesseurs qui sans exception ont soutenu l’idée d’un Royaume-Uni engagé dans l’Union Européenne. Donald Trump n’est pas un président qui s’embarrasse de l’histoire et des traditions : l’ordre libéral mondial et les liens anciens avec l’Europe le laissent complètement indifférent. Ses seules priorités lorsqu’il doit prendre une décision sont ses intérêts politiques à court-terme. Ainsi, étudier la relation de Donald Trump au Brexit et plus largement à l’Union Européenne nous révélera les constantes structurelles de Donald Trump : opportunisme, populisme et imprévisibilité.

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AUTHOR

LAETITIA LANGLOIS

Laetitia Langlois est maître de conférences à l’Université d’Angers, France, et membre du laboratoire de recherches 3L.AM. Après avoir consacré sa thèse de doctorat à Edward Heath et la tradition conservatrice, elle se concentre désormais sur la relation entre le Royaume-Uni et

l'Union Européenne dans un contexte post-Brexit. Euroscepticisme, nationalisme et populisme sont les principaux concepts qui animent sa recherche.