

Managing an “America First” Strategy: Donald Trump’s transition from a private to a public executive

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Resumo

A eleição de Donald Trump surpreendeu o mundo. Ao longo de sua campanha presidencial, Trump assegurou ao eleitorado que ele resolveria os problemas da nação e implementaria uma estratégia assente sob o desígnio de “America First” que enfatizava o nacionalismo e a ação unilateral. Ele contrastou constantemente as suas habilidades enquanto gestor com a inépcia dos políticos de carreira e prometeu conseguir melhorar a capacidade negocial dos EUA. No entanto, o primeiro ano da presidência de Trump não gerou os esperados sucessos de política externa e a confusão e a incerteza surgiram em relação à liderança global da América. Muitas das dificuldades enfrentadas pela administração na implementação de sua agenda de política externa decorrem do estilo de gestão do presidente. O artigo analisa os desafios que Trump encontrou ao tentar implementar o seu estilo de gestão empresarial na Presidência e os efeitos que este tem tido sobre a capacidade dos Estados Unidos continuar a liderar a ordem internacional liberal.

Palavras-chave: “America First”; Donald Trump; estilo de gestão; liderança; política externa; setor privado; setor público

Abstract

The election of Donald Trump as America’s forty-fifth president took much of the world by surprise. Throughout his presidential campaign, Trump assured the electorate that he would solve the nation’s problems and implement an “America First” strategy which emphasises nationalism and unilateral action. He consistently contrasted his managerial skills with the ineptitude of career politicians and promised to make the best deals for America. However, the initial year of the Trump presidency has not generated the much-anticipated foreign policy successes and confusion and uncertainty have surfaced regarding America’s global leadership. Many of the difficulties the administration has faced in implementing its foreign policy strategy stem from the President’s unique management style. The current paper analyses the challenges Trump has encountered in employing his corporate management style in the Presidency and the effects it has had on America’s ability to lead the liberal international order.

Keywords: “America First”; Donald Trump; foreign policy; leadership; management; private sector; public sector

1. Introduction: Promises of an “America First” Foreign Policy

The election of Donald Trump as America’s forty-fifth president took much of the world by surprise. On the campaign trail, he displaced conventional rhetoric and behaviour by running the most unconventional candidacy in recent memory. Uncompromising, he attacked his opponents and allies alike and promised to upend politics in Washington and the world. Trump’s election has, therefore, generated a considerable amount of speculation regarding America’s role in international affairs. Several scholars and commentators have predicted that the Trump Administration’s foreign policy will cause irreparable damage to America’s longstanding leadership of the international order (Brands, 2017; Mead, 2017). Their main concern is that Trump will abandon America’s traditional internationalism by espousing a more nationalistic foreign policy and, in the process, drive off allies and expose the US to global instability and retaliation (Patrick, 2017). Others contend that the Trump presidency threatens the very existence of the post-war international order that the US created. According to G. John Ikenberry (2017, p. 2), the greatest threat to the liberal international order currently does not reside in a hostile revisionist power; “instead, the world’s most powerful state has begun to sabotage the order it created”. Following the end of World War II a consensus developed which posited that American security and economic interests were best served by embracing the leadership of an internationalist project of global order (Brands, 2017; Mead, 2017). This American-led endeavour has resulted in the growth and consolidation of an extensive and complex network of institutions embracing open trade, multilateral rules and norms, security cooperation, democratic communities, and cosmopolitan ideals (Ikenberry, 2017).

However, over the past few decades, American’s support for the liberal order has begun to wane^[1]. Support of free trade, globalization, and international interventions has been declining (Brands, 2017). Many Americans feel they have not benefited from the nation’s international commitments in these policy areas. As the global economy continues to integrate and many of America’s traditional manufacturing jobs relocate to other regions, large shares of the American electorate feel excluded from the alleged benefits of globalisation. Others are uncertain of the benefits of continuing to support allies through formal security agreements. For some Americans, many allies have failed to live up to their commitments by neglecting to share the financial burdens involved in international security. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, there have been numerous pleas for Washington to curtail its global military activities, namely by stopping allies from free-riding on America’s security guarantees. Moreover, some Americans fail to see how the national interest is safeguarded by involvement in foreign conflicts.

On the campaign trail, Trump was able to tap into the growing scepticism pertaining to American internationalism. Embracing a highly nationalist agenda, Trump consistently promised to “Make America Great Again”. Not only would he

1. Despite the growing scepticism regarding US internationalism, Brands (2017) does clarify that public opinion studies reveal that there is still considerable public support for the main features of American internationalism.

restore law and order domestically, Trump also promised to fashion a new direction for US foreign policy which “replaces randomness with purpose, ideology with strategy, and chaos with peace” (Trump, 2016a).

Throughout the campaign and in the initial months of his presidency, Trump and his associates repeatedly advocated for an “America First” strategy. The exact policies underlying this strategy are yet unclear, but its overarching objective is the denunciation of America’s project of upholding the liberal international order. In place of international institutions and multilateral cooperation, Trump’s strategy emphasises nationalism and unilateral action. The nationalistic tone of an “America First” foreign policy was underscored by two of the President’s most senior advisers after his first foreign policy trip abroad. In an opinion piece published in *The Wall Street Journal*, H. R. McMaster and Gary Cohn enlightened the public on the administration’s worldview: “The president embarked on his first foreign trip with a clear-eyed outlook that the world is not a “global community” but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage” (McMaster & Cohn, 2017)^[2].

An “America First” foreign policy, therefore, contemplates international relations as a zero-sum game in which any gain for a country may only come at the expense of another. This is concurrent with Trump’s alleged “realist” view of international affairs in which world politics is understood as the unrelenting struggle between states for survival, advantage, and dominance (Trump, 2016c)^[3]. As a result, Trump (2016b) pledged a wholesale policy transformation and declared “independence from the elites who’ve led us to one financial and foreign policy disaster after another”.

Trump presented himself as someone who can get things done. As he had done throughout most of his career, on the campaign he consistently contrasted his managerial skills with the ineptitude of career politicians. While others had failed and betrayed American’s trust, Trump assured the electorate that he would solve the nation’s problems and “Make America Great Again”. He has promised to employ his negotiating skills and do the best deals (see Bloomberg News, 2016; Krieg, 2017; Solotaroff, 2015; *The Economist*, 2017; Woodward & Costa, 2016).

Nevertheless, the first year of the Trump presidency has not generated the much-anticipated foreign policy successes. In their place, confusion and uncertainty have reigned. Trump has raised scepticism at home, alarmed many of America’s traditional allies, and isolated the US on several key international issues (Birnbaum & Paletta, 2017). In the absence of America’s leadership, China has sought to fill the void by trying to build greater political and economic relationships in Europe and Asia (Erlanger, 2017a; Gowan, 2017). Promises of quick resolutions to regional challenges in the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East have been deflated. Meanwhile, although Trump initially claimed he would favour diplomacy over destruction (Trump, 2016c), his short tenure has thus far led to an increase in US military

2. H. R. McMaster is the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Gary Cohn is the Director of the National Economic Council.

3. For a description of the key elements of realism see Jervis (1999).

involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and in the Sahel and sub-Saharan regions of Africa (Baldor & Burns, 2017; Klimas, 2017 ; Morgan & Bender, 2017; Schmitt & Sanger, 2017).

Many of the difficulties the administration has faced in implementing its foreign policy strategy stem from the political competition to define policy and the resulting mixed signals coming from within the White House. Some pundits such as Paul Ryan, Mitch McConnell, and Condoleezza Rice have dismissed the administration's shortfalls as being part of a natural learning curve (Carney, 2017; Fox, 2017; Glasser, 2017a). However, I argue that this state of affairs is the direct result of the President Trump's unique management style. While Trump has incessantly boasted about his managerial abilities throughout his career, he now faces an organisation unlike any he has led before. His management of the Presidency over the first year is consistent with a well-defined pattern of behaviour which is firmly ingrained and unlikely to change.

Accordingly, this article seeks to identify the challenges a corporate executive such as Donald Trump may encounter in implementing that style as the head of the Executive branch of the US⁴. In particular, it assesses how Trump's unique management style has influenced his administration's emergent foreign policy. In the following sections, I analyse Trump's management style by underlining its key characteristics. I begin by stressing the main similarities and differences between managing private and public organisations. Subsequently, I identify the key features of Trump's management style and the challenges he has encountered in employing that style in the Presidency. I conclude by reflecting on the importance of managerial skills for the presidency and their relationship to leadership.

2. Management Challenges in the Public and Private Sectors

There has long been a demand from citizens and politicians alike for running government more like a business. In the US, there is a traditional cultural expectation that government activity should be minimal since private sector values are considered more important than those of the collective citizen (Box, 1999; Boyne, 2002). In fact, since the late 1980s, the growth and consolidation of "new public management" (NPM) has sought to transform public administration by implementing management concepts, tools and techniques originally developed in the private sector (Metcalf, 1993; Wood, 1991). Ultimately, NPM tries to separate politics from administration and encourages managers to act in accordance with cost-benefit economic rationality unencumbered by the political whims of the moment (Box, 1999).

The rationale underlying NPM and other similar reforms of the public sector reflect the belief that government, is "too political". Rather than solving the problems

4. This is not to claim that private executives cannot be successful public managers. There are numerous examples of corporate executives who have been had successful political careers — e.g., Michael Bloomberg, Nelson Rockefeller, and Mitt Romney. The main concern of this paper is to assess Donald Trump's unique management style and how it has influenced his early presidency, namely highlighting the challenges faced in transitioning between different organizations.

of common citizens, critics argue that bureaucratic encumbrance, partisan belligerency, electoral considerations, and veiled interests hamper the government’s responsibility to uphold and promote the public interest (Blinder, 1997). NPM offers a politically neutral managerial framework of general applicability which could solve the management problems encountered in the most varied organisational settings, levels of government, and policy fields (Hood, 1991; Mair, 2006).

However, there is a long-standing debate over the management of the public and private sectors. Many commentators have argued that there are very few differences between the management of public and private organizations. While some distinctions were identifiable in the past, many academics contend that today “it appears that the two realms are affected by the same historical forces, not only blurring their boundaries but also moving them in unison” (Etzioni, 2016, pp. 53-54). Others, adamantly oppose such comparisons, when considering national government. As the Noble laureate Paul Krugman asserts, “a country is not a large company” (Krugman, 1996, p. 43). This distinction has been buttressed by many individuals that have been involved in managing both public and private organisations such as W. Michael Blumenthal, Alfonso Cervantes, Robert McNamara, Robert Ruben, and Donald Rumsfeld^[5].

In a similar manner, most academics generally admit that there are still discernible differences between both sectors. The volume of research over the past decades has led many to conclude that “there are many points on which public and private management differ in such abundantly different ways that to deny the distinctions becomes absurd” (Rainey & Chun, 2005, p. 79). For the sake of conceptual clarity, I identify four main organisational variables that contribute to the differences in managing public and private sector organisations: 1) organisational environment, 2) organisational goals, 3) organisational values, and 4) organisational structures and processes^[6].

2.1 *Organisational Environment*

Most scholars emphasizing the differences between the public and private sectors begin by identifying how the organisational environment — i.e., the external circumstances — affects management. In contrast to the private sector, public organisations, generally, do not operate and sell their outputs in economic markets (Rainey & Chun, 2005). This, in turn, generates several significant operational differences between the two sectors, particularly in terms of complexity, permeability, stability, and competition (Boyne, 2002).

To begin with, the level of environmental complexity in which public organisations operate is markedly higher. According to Les Metcalfe (1993, p. 292), this complexity

5. For counts of corporate executives that also served in government see: Blumenthal (1983); Cervantes (1983); Danker and Killefer (2007); McNamara (1996); and Rumsfeld (1983, 2011).

6. For the purpose of this study and to develop the synthesis of organisational variables I used the works of Allison (1994), Bozeman (2004), Boyne (2002), Rainey & Bozeman (2000), and Rainey & Chun (2005).

results from “the pace and type of change with which government must cope and the fact that government operates through networks of interdependent organisations rather than through independent organisations which simply pursue their own objectives”. Therefore, public organisations must, in many situations, take into consideration the demands of multiple external constituencies which often have conflicting values and interests. Logically, this induces the public sector, particularly government, to be more exposed to external influences. As George Boyne (2002, p. 100) points out, as opposed to private executives, “it is the responsibility of public managers to protect and promote this permeability of organizational boundaries, in order to ensure that services are responsive to public needs”.

In a similar vein, public organisations are prone to greater levels of instability. It may be argued that markets are in constant flux and demand constant adaptation and innovation from private managers. However, corporate executives are rarely faced with constant wholesale transformations of company strategies and policies. In contrast, the electoral cycle frequently determines the public sectors’ policies and behaviour (Bozeman, 2004). In the US, Congress experiences a change to its composition every two years and the executive branch is subject to change every four years. The regular rotation of power in democracies is auspicious to significant changes in political priorities and programmes. The acquiescence of this volatility is in large part the result of the lack of competitive pressure facing the public sector. As scholars and experts observe, governments offer a host of goods and services that private markets cannot or will not adequately provide (Rainey & Chun, 2005). Whereas there has been an increased emphasis on greater collaboration between the public and private sector in providing many goods and services, the public sectors’ more inclusive goals still dictate many of the conditions in the relationship. Moreover, even in areas where competition is available, the public sector actively seeks to maintain a dominant position in certain segments of the market — e.g., defence, security, education, health.

2.2 *Organisational Goals*

The argument regarding the goals of public and private organisations is straightforward. Each organisation establishes a set of goals that serve as the guiding principles informing top managers’ decisions (Farnham & Horton, 1996). The goals of private sector organisations are intimately associated with the market. The most basic objective is, therefore, to successfully respond to the demands of the market and make a profit (Farnham & Horton, 1996; Mintzberg, 2017). Public organisations, on the other hand, are created by political actors with the purpose of providing citizens with a wide assortment of public goods and services. The provision these public goods is all-inclusive which implies, as Mancur Olson (1971, p. 15) made clear long ago, that even “those who do not purchase or pay for any of the public or collective good cannot be excluded or kept from sharing in the consumption of the good”.

Public goals are considered more complex and ambiguous than those of the private sector (Eliassen & Sitter, 2008; Boyne, 2002; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000). To begin with, due to the number of actors involved in the political realm, public managers try to satisfy the multiple goals that are imposed upon them by these multiple stakehold-

ers. For instance, in the US, the goals of government are the result of the complementary, and sometimes conflicting, objectives of the three branches of government, the electorate, the bureaucracy, interest groups, state and local governments, etc. This places considerable more demand on public managers to reconcile these differences and contradictions.

That fact that these goals are driven by concerns regarding equity and accountability further differentiate the two sectors. The private manager’s focus on satisfying the needs of the market is measured by a company’s focus on financial performance gains. However, in accordance with the reigning judicial doctrines in democratic regimes, to protect the citizenry’s constitutional and statutory rights, governments and their officials are legally accountable for their actions (Farnham & Horton, 1996; Gil-mour & Jensen, 1998). In addition, while efficiency is always a commendable objective in public organisations, the demand for goods and services to be made accessible to the general population might imply activities that fall short on efficiency. Therefore, the public sector’s lack of sales and profit indicators and multiple value-laden directives hinder the straightforward identification and systematic evaluation of goals (Eliassen & Sitter, 2008; Farnham & Horton, 1996; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000).

2.3 Organisational Values

Over the years, scholars have increasingly focused on the values underlying the public and private sectors. Numerous studies have sought to assess the attitudes and aspirations of public and private sector managers regarding work and life in general. The key values underpinning private organisations have traditionally been associated with the market, namely with the principles of “free enterprise”, “free market”, and “free trade” (Farnham & Horton, 1996). In contrast, research has tended to emphasise the role the public service “ethos” has as a distinguishing feature. In other words, public managers and employees usually are considered to have the “desire to help others and to be useful to society” as a key motivational factor for carrying out their activities (Lewis & Frank, 2002, p. 402). This is consistent with studies that report that public managers are less motivated by financial rewards than their private sector counterparts (Boyne, 2002; Bozeman, 2003; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000). However, several studies have also questioned the level of organisational commitment of public managers. The highly regulated public sector is said to have difficulty in competing for managers’ dedication in comparison with the reward-based system of the private sector. The standard justification for this alleged difference stems from the assumption that “it is often difficult for public employees to observe any link between their contributions and the success of their organizations” (Boyne, 2002, p. 102).

2.4 Organisational Structures and Processes

The most commonly highlighted differences in the structural characteristics of public and private organisations deal with the degree of formality in the decision-making processes and the levels of managerial autonomy. Public organisations are regularly berated for their bureaucratic nature which stems from highly formalised and rule-

based processes. The public sector's broad goals of providing public goods to all citizens entails the implementation of a host of well-defined rules and procedures that can guarantee accessibility to citizens and necessary administrative control. Furthermore, Rainey and Chun (2005, p. 84) argue that "in the absence of markets as sources of incentives and controls on public management, other governmental institutions (courts, legislatures, the executive branch, higher levels of government) must use legal and formal constraints to impose external governmental control". This leads many observers to censure the public sector for overly emphasising rules and processes instead of results and outcomes (Boyne, 2002).

Some research has claimed that there are sectors which are more affected by formal procedures than others. The differences between public and private sectors are particularly salient in terms of administrative procedures involving personnel and purchasing decisions (Rainey & Bozeman, 2000). Personnel administration is subject to greater delays and constraints in public organisations than in their private counterparts. These differences are essentially due to the authority attributed to external oversight agencies that are pervasive in the public sphere. Accordingly, public managers, particularly at the mid-level and first-line, have less administrative authority over their organisations than private managers, thus hindering their capacity to react to evolving situations (Boyne, 2002; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000; Rainey & Chun, 2005). In addition, the policy specialisation typical of the public organisations also hinders general management functions. More precisely, the organisation of government agencies in accordance with their distinct policy missions obscures the delegation of authority by top executives (Bozeman, 2003).

The debate regarding the similarities and differences between the public and private sectors will certainly continue as studies persistently offer contradicting empirical evidence. Certainly, different methodological approaches to the topic might dictate different conclusions (Boyne, 2002) and different scientific disciplines also highlight different issues and themes. For instance, as Rainey and Bozeman (2000) acknowledge, while organizational theorists commonly disregard any distinctions between public and private organisations, political scientists and economists generally assume these differences to be self-evident truths. Others lay emphasis not on the distinctions between the public and private sectors, but rather on the differences ensuing from the factors such as organisational size, function, or market segment (Rainey & Chun, 2005).

However, despite this enduring debate, these differences are the result of something more than market forces. In particular, in the US, there is a deliberate effort to differentiate these two sectors. As Graham Allison (1994, p. 21) makes abundantly clear, underlying the "sharpest distinctions between public and private management is a fundamental constitutional difference". In other words, in crafting the American Constitution, the Framers purposefully sought to hinder the concentration of power and instead promote competition by distributing the functions of managing government amongst several different independent institutions — i.e., the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. James Madison articulated the Framers' general concern in avoiding the arbitrary exercise of power by assuring that:

[...] the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department [branch], consists in giving to those who administer each department [branch] the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others. The provision for defense must in this, as in all other cases, be made commensurate to the danger of attack. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place (Madison, 1987 [1788], p. 319).

Thus, rather than concentrating power in one individual or faction, the constitutional framework in the US forces compromise amongst that multiple actors for the management of government to be successful. In other words, it set up a system of mutual vetoes in which one part of government can block the others’ policy initiatives. The rationale is to try to develop policies that represent ultimately the broadest coalition of interests as possible (Fukuyama, 2014). This power-sharing scheme gives the American executive branch less power and policy discretion than in other systems. Therefore, the institutional framework set up by the Constitution does not lend itself to making the “amazing deals” promised by Trump. Rather, the American political system favours implementable deals achieved through cooperation and compromise (Malhotra & Powell, 2016).

3. Donald Trump’s Transition from a Private to a Public Executive

Over the past decades, research has shown that people tend to vote in accordance with the “image” cultivated by a candidate, rather than the candidate’s actual competence and convictions (Bartels, 2008). As referred to above, Trump sold himself as a “great” manager who can get things done. He blamed the current misfortunes of America on the ineffectiveness of the Washington establishment. In contrast, he claimed to possess the talent others were missing. For instance, when questioned early in the campaign about how he would deal with the issue of illegal immigration, Trump was callous in his response: “Government is incompetent. Guys like Bush and some others that I won’t name, they’re incompetent people. They don’t have it. They don’t have it. I agree, they can’t do it. But I’m a great manager. I know how to manage things” (Trump apud Cillizza, 2015). In an interview with Barbara Walters, he reiterated his administrative skills asserting “I’m a smart person. I know how to run things. I know how to make America great again” (Trump apud Schwartz, 2015).

Trump’s confidence that he could successfully run the country stems from the conviction that there are no significant differences between running a private corporation and the executive branch of government. In fact, Trump has compared the functioning of the real estate business to government on multiple occasions. When considering running in 2000 presidential race as the Reform Party candidate, he dismissed The New York Times’ Adam Nagourney’s question about his lack of political experience by claiming that he was the biggest developer in New York and “While that’s real estate and this is politics, are they really so different?” (Trump apud Nagourney, 1999). In his book *Trump: The America We Deserve* he appeared to become

more thoughtful about the differences between the world of real estate and government. Nevertheless, Trump discovered common traits in the challenges of managing these two worlds:

There's nothing really comparable to unleashing a squadron of bombers, but in the world of business sometimes you have to make quick, secret, decisive moves in order to gain a negotiating advantage. I've done so a number of times, in getting around the objections of would-be landmarks preservation people, in gaining the advantage in trying to secure air rights or a piece of property (Trump & Shiflett, 2000, p. 132).

Accordingly, Trump arrived in Washington confident he could implement his traditional management style and be as “successful” governing the nation as he allegedly was in running his corporate empire. Nonetheless, less than a year into his presidency, Trump's approval rating is unprecedentedly low in comparison to that of his predecessors⁷. Trump registered a mere 45% approval rating upon inauguration and quickly dropped below 40% after only six months in office (Gallup, 2017). At home, the president's legislative agenda is stalled (Merica, 2017) as members of the Republican Party and governmental institutions gradually shy away from him (Shear, Thrust & Haberman, 2017). Allies and adversaries alike increasingly rebuke his administration for being “chaotic” and “dysfunctional” (Pfiffner, 2017). Trump faces similar criticism and condemnation abroad. The president's visceral rhetoric has antagonised allies and stirred global anxiety by threatening to pull the US out of several international agreements and making blustery warnings such as that North Korea “will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen” (Trump apud Hennigan, Cloud & Bierman, 2017). As a result, many of America's traditional allies have lost confidence in US leadership and have come to openly criticise the administration, while other less friendly nations seem increasingly willing to call the President's bluffs (Cassella, 2017; Farrell, 2017; Erlanger, 2017b; Logan, 2017; Semple & Malkin, 2017). At home, the Trump's braggadocious claims have led Congress and military officials to reassess the powers of the president, namely his authority to launch a nuclear strike, seriously jeopardising a strategy focused on projecting unpredictability and the willingness to use any means necessary to address international challenges (Demirjianv, 2017; Diaz, 2017). In the meantime, rising powers such as China tentatively seek to rise to the role of global leadership (Erlanger, 2017a).

A careful review of the Trump administration's first year in office reveals the need to seriously consider the intrinsic differences in managing public and private organisations. Thus, the administration's shortcomings so far may be seen as resulting largely from Trump's failure to appreciate the differences between being a private and a public executive.

7. According to Gallup's Presidential Job Approval Center, while other Presidents have registered lower approval ratings than Trump throughout their presidency, none began their tenure in office with ratings below 50%. See Gallup (2017).

To begin with, Trump has failed to grasp the differences of his new organisational environment. The 2016 presidential election took place during one of the most politically polarised periods in modern American history. Over the past few decades, a chasm has been widening in the US which has increasingly divided American society in terms of demographics and political affiliation, values, and beliefs (Jacobson, 2016). During the campaign, Trump accentuated this division by routinely disparaging numerous ethnic and religious groups. After the elections, many commentators believed that president Trump would moderate his tone and behaviour and start taking steps toward reconciling the nation. This was particularly important considering many questioned his legitimacy since he lost the popular vote by almost 3 million votes. However, rather than uniting the nation, Trump has continued to foster divisions which further erode his administration’s standing with a large segment of the American public. As president, he has continued to make disparaging comments regarding Muslims and other groups of immigrants. Moreover, he has raised additional concerns by apparently mismanaging the administration’s reaction to the recent upsurge of extremist groups such as neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan.

These tensions have been amplified by the progressively adversarial relationship between the administration and the media. In democratic regimes, the media plays a key role in allowing citizens to monitor the behaviour and actions of their representatives and help keep them accountable and responsive to interests and needs of the public (Besley, Burgess & Prat, 2002). More precisely, as Joseph Stiglitz (2002, p. 28) reminds us, “free speech and a free press not only make abuses of governmental powers less likely, they also enhance the likelihood that people’s basic social needs will be met”. Since taking office, the president has intensified his criticism of most of the mainstream media organisations, denouncing them as “fake news” and “the enemy of the American people” (Grynbaum, 2017). While Trump actively sought media publicity as a corporate executive, he is now overwhelmed by the constant coverage of all aspects of his presidency and his personal life. The press has been unyielding in its coverage of the administration and has accentuated several issues — e.g., campaign relations with Russia, ethical issues and potential conflict of interests of members of the administration — which have exasperated the President, who feels he is being treated unfairly. Again, Trump has failed to appreciate the fact that because government officials are subject to greater public scrutiny they must continuously contend with the press and the media and be more open and transparent in their actions (Allison, 1994; Stiglitz, 2002).

Above all, Trump demonstrates an elementary lack of understanding about the division of powers enshrined in the American Constitution. In clear violation of the principle of separation of powers, Trump has repeatedly tried to force the legislative and judicial branches of government to act in accordance with his personal agenda. Examples of this proclivity for the centralisation of power are evident in the attempt to impose a travel ban on certain countries and the battle to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA). When these policy initiatives failed, his administration tried to assert presidential authority to overcome judicial challenges and called for processual changes in the way Congress legislates (Cohen, 2017; Korade, 2017). In

a similar vein, Trump's criticism and dismissal of several public officials, particularly the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), has further raised the question of the president's appreciation of the separation of powers and rule of law. Not surprisingly, over the months, several different government bodies have openly chastised the President. Defence officials have challenged his statements on racism and his intention to ban transgender individuals in the military. Congress has also promoted legislation that the president does not agree with such as imposing sanctions on Russia and has continued bipartisan negotiations on health reform after the Republican failure to repeal the ACA.

Whereas Trump monopolised the decision-making process in Trump Organisation, he has struggled to accept that the executive branch of government does not and cannot yield arbitrary exercise of unfettered power. This lack of sensitivity to the contextual differences between the public and private sectors have seriously hindered Trump's ability to implement his agenda and promote the political change at home and abroad he so wholeheartedly promised throughout his campaign.

In a similar manner, Trump has revealed considerable difficulty in defining the overarching goals for his presidency. On the campaign trail, Trump promised to "Make America Great Again" without providing much detail on how he would accomplish this. In the early tenure of his presidency, the administration has also found it hard to articulate its goals coherently. At home and abroad, the administration has focused on numerous issues creating uncertainty as to their priority in Trump's agenda. Domestically, the administration has concurrently tried to tackle policies on immigration, healthcare, tax reform, infrastructure, and government reform. Internationally, Trump has sought to renegotiate several international agreements, deal with the North Korean nuclear program, revise America's strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia, defeat the Islamic State, and solve the Middle East conflict. This approach is in line with Trump's behaviour in the past which was characterised by a tendency to try to take on too many responsibilities (Kruse, 2016a). In the past, his unrestrained appetite for "making big deals" led him to overstretch himself and seriously compromise his business dealings. So far, the administration lacks any significant policy achievements of its own. It would do well to learn from the lessons of past administrations and seek to successfully pursue a limited number of major goals, rather than to overload the political agenda and fail to deliver on any of it (Greenstein, 1994).

Likewise, the administration's tortuous articulation of its goals creates uncertainty. Trump tends to be vague in defining his goals and often focuses on the most trivial aspects of policies. It is customary for the President to define the strategic goals of his administration and leave the details to the government bureaucracy. However, Trump's unique management style has on multiple occasions led him to circumvent the standard decision-making process and undermine his own advisers. His impulsiveness has led him to alter his position on issues without notice, in effect catching his administration of guard^[8]. While Trump has long extolled his flexibility

8. For example, 12 April 2017, epitomizes this tendency. On that day, Trump altered his position on four different policy issues — i.e., hiring freeze, labelling China as a currency manipulator, endorsement of the

and his ability to change positions in accordance with the situation as an asset, he has failed to realise that in politics such conduct is viewed as inconsistent and damaging to a leader’s political capital (Blumenthal, 1983; Rumsfeld, 1983).

Trump has also had difficulty in grasping the values that Americans and the world expect from the President of the US. Trump’s career as a developer has entrenched a transactional approach to interacting with others. In business, Trump has always viewed negotiations as a form of exchange where he could achieve immediate, tangible rewards. Naturally, he has tried to implement this perspective in his political career, hence his continued obsessive emphasis throughout the campaign and the presidency on “winning”. A transactional approach reinforces Trump’s view of politics as a zero-sum game, particularly in international affairs. In this view, negotiations and agreements with other countries must provide tangible benefits for the US. Otherwise, other countries are seen as “taking advantage” of America. However, this view creates serious issues for US global leadership. Many of America’s international agreements are part a long-term comprehensive strategy to manage the liberal order and cannot be evaluated in accordance with short-term material gains. For instance, while Trump is correct in observing that the US does bear a disproportionately large part of NATO’s expenditures, how does the administration quantify its role in helping disseminate and consolidate democratic institutions in Europe for over half a century?^[9] In a similar guise, Trump has pulled the US out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) arguing that it was detrimental for American workers by potentially eliminating manufacturing jobs in the US. Yet, as Stephen Walt (2017) highlights, regardless of economic considerations, the decision ultimately “undermined the US position in Asia [and] opened the door toward greater Chinese influence” in the region. Therefore, Trump’s transactional approach to international politics eschews the traditional US values of multilateralism and cooperation and contributes to the erosion of America’s global standing.

Moreover, Trump’s valueless worldview also hamper’s the relationships with many of America’s closest allies by downplaying high-profile issues regarding human rights and humanitarian concerns. Trump has repeatedly claimed that the US will not interfere in the domestic issues of other sovereign nations. At the Arab Islamic American Summit in May, the president claimed, “We are not here to lecture — we are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship” (Trump, 2017a). He made a similar claim in outlining America’s strategy for Afghanistan by assuring “we will not dictate to the Afghan people how to live or how to govern their own complex society” (Trump, 2017b). In fact, in a draft revision of the State Department’s purpose, mission and ambition, democracy promotion has been dropped (Rogin, 2017)^[10]. Moreover, at home Trump has also revealed consid-

Import-Export Bank, and revising his view on NATO’s relevancy (Dawsey, Goldmacher & Isenstadt, 2017).

9. For an account of NATO’s role in promoting democracy in Europe see Epstein (2005) and Gheciu (2005).

10. However, while Trump has repeated that he favors a “principled realism”, where humanitarian values are not pursued, the administration has nevertheless succumbed to these values on multiple occasions – e.g., when ordering a missile strike in Syria after the regime employed chemical weapons on its own popu-

erable ambiguity regarding his political values, leading many of his early supporters to distance themselves from the administration, further weakening America's international standing (Gelles, Thomas Jr., Sorkin & Kelly, 2017; Stack, 2017). Even members of his administration have publicly distanced themselves from the president after his ambivalent reaction in the wake of the recent politicised Charlottesville protests (Phillip & Gearan, 2017).

Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change is an illustrative case of how the administration's values clash with allies and, ultimately, weaken America's global leadership. The Paris agreement, signed in 2015, binds nearly 200 countries to voluntarily cut greenhouse gas emissions emitted by human activity in order to try to keep global temperatures below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times. All signatories of the agreement pledged to submit detailed plans on how they would reduce global warming pollutants. President Obama had committed the US to reduce its carbon pollution by about 26% by 2025 (using 2005 levels as the baseline).

Despite the recommendation from several officials to keep the US in the agreement, the nationalist faction in the administration prevailed in persuading president Trump to withdraw from the accord (Shear & Cardwell, 2017). Trump justified his decision by returning to the arguments underlying his "America First" agenda and criticising the accord for harming the US economy and weakening America's national sovereignty. International condemnation immediately followed with numerous leaders from around the world openly criticising the decision. More importantly, despite Trump's position, political decision-makers throughout the globe rebuffed the US by pushing forward with the agreement. For instance, immediately after the US announcement, the European Union and China issued an unprecedented joint statement in Brussels committing both sides to fully implement the agreement (Volvovici & Mason, 2017). In November, at the United Nation's climate conference in Bonn, Germany, the international community continued to move forward with its climate agenda, as multiple US states formalized agreements with Canada and Mexico to meet their share of the US commitment to the Paris accord (Siders, Holden & Oroschakoff, 2017). Meanwhile, as the US retreats from its international commitments, China assumes a greater role in promoting multilateral cooperation by promising to take the "driving seat in international cooperation to respond to climate change" (Xi Jinping apud Sengupta, 2017).

In a similar fashion, the administration's unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, in December 2017, also generated significant international blow-back against the US. Trump justified the decision by claiming he was merely executing the Jerusalem Embassy Act, passed by Congress in 1995. The decision quickly drew international condemnation and placed America's role as the primary mediator between Israelis and Palestinians in question (Cowell, 2017). More ominously, the US suffered a humiliating international rebuff when the UN General Assembly voted

lation, in withholding aid payments to Egypt over human rights issues, and in denouncing numerous countries for curtailing religious freedom (Gaouette & Koran, 2017; Landler, 2017; Sinclair, 2017).

overwhelmingly to reject the administration’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. While largely symbolic, the fact that 128 members voted in favour of the resolution, despite significant diplomatic efforts by US officials, illustrates America’s increasing international isolation.

However, it is Trump’s inability to adjust his decision-making structures and processes that has been his greatest challenge. Many of the predicaments of the presidency have resulted from Trump’s insistence on running the White House in the same way he managed Trump Organisation. For decades, political scholars have highlighted the importance of organisational structures and processes for presidential decision-making. Since the Eisenhower administration, presidents have increasingly centralised the policy process in the White House staff and developed elaborate and orderly decision-making procedures (Pfiffner, 2011).

The Trump administration has lagged in its efforts to establish an orderly decision-making process. Despite several attempts to establish a more deliberative decision-making process, the first year of the administration has revealed a highly unstructured and informal governing style which Richard Haass (2017) has categorised as “adhocracy”. This lack of structure reflects Trump’s traditional unorthodox management style which is characterised by highly informal decision-making processes. In fact, despite having over 22,000 employees, Trump Organisation has always been a family structured operation with a small number of key staffers which acquiesced to Trump’s every demand. Trump Organisation differs from most private corporations due to the fact it lacks standard organisational protocols and procedures, as well as a formal business development strategy (Kruse, 2016a; O’Brien, 2016)^[11].

Trump’s unorthodox organisational management was patent during the presidential campaign. He ran for president using an unusually small and informal organisation founded on a few trusted friends and advisers^[12]. He maintained this pattern upon arriving at the White House. His administration has been one of the slowest in decades to nominate and fill key staffing positions in government. Six months into his presidency, Trump had yet to name advisers for over half of the top administration jobs. The State Department has been particularly affected as over two dozen assistant secretary and undersecretary position remained vacant in August 2017 (Schor, 2017). Trump’s penchant for hiring people based on first impressions, regardless of their qualifications, has exacerbated the staffing problems in his administration. Many commentators believed that Trump’s political learning curve could

11. In fact, despite his boastful comments regarding his entrepreneurial prowess, Trump’s role in his business organisation does not resemble that of a typical Chief Executive Officer. Trump Organisation is a family-owned limited-liability company (LLC). Contrary to publicly held companies which have to adhere to multiple legal obligations regarding corporate transparency and where the managers are subject to a substantial degree of oversight, an LLC does not have to abide by these rules. As a result, Trump does not have to answer to a board of directors or shareholders and is free to make corporate decisions without restraints from other internal stakeholders. The only time Trump led a public company — involving Trump Hotels and Casino Resorts — his management led to the declaration of bankruptcy on five different occasions (Spector, 2017).

12. As Kruse (2016a) reports, prior to the Republican National Convention, Trump’s campaign organisation only had 70 employees, in contrast to Hillary Clinton who had over 700.

be minimised by his advisers. However, Trump has surrounded himself with many advisers who are equally inexperienced in the management of government and have, thus far, been unable to assist the president in his transition.

Moreover, Trump's tendency to promote competition among his staff and employees has created confusion about the administration's policies, particularly regarding international affairs. In his private business, Trump encouraged employees to compete with each other in order to prove their value and loyalty (Coppins, 2017). However, as the initial twelve months of the presidency have demonstrated, this practice has hurt his administration. Trump's proclivity to favour informal personal interactions over formal processes led him to initially institute an "open-door" policy that led advisers to continuously try to engage the president directly. As a result, feuds have swelled amongst the president's advisers, as different factions have tried to push their own agendas by undermining other members of the administration (Dawsey, Goldmacher, & Isenstadt, 2017). Members of the administration have openly attacked each other, leading to the departure of many key staffers^[13].

One exception to the daily disorder in the administration is Trump's national security team. The president has given his military commanders a significant level of autonomy and they have increasingly dominated the administration's foreign policy debate^[14]. In particular, the president's closest military advisers seek to correct what they understand to be the policy failures of the Obama administration and, concurrently, moderate the president's nationalist disposition in order to limit the international rejection of American global leadership (Ryan & Jaffe, 2017). While many observers have praised the General's moderating influence on Trump's foreign policy, there are several risks in delegating too much policy discretion to the military without defining the overarching goals and strategies for America's global role. Several studies have highlighted the need to ensure the military's democratic accountability and responsibility (e.g., Ulrich 2011). The failure to do so can lead to a "delegation trap", where individual departments and agencies, in pursuing their own objectives, may work against other departments rather than support the governments collective agenda (Rasmussen, 2016). So far, this risk has been mitigated by the nature of the White House decision-making structure which still allows competing factions and ad-hoc interactions to circumvent the formal chain-of-authority and influence Trump's position on any particular policy (Kitfield, 2017).

The new Chief of Staff, John Kelly, has tried to impose greater discipline and order in the White House. Kelly has particularly sought to establish a much more formal and structured process of deliberation which can lead to more comprehensive and

13. In the first eight months of the Trump presidency several key advisers have resigned mainly due to internal feuding, such as Reince Priebus (Chief of Staff), Steve Bannon (Chief Strategist), Michael Dubke (Communications Director), Anthony Scaramucci (Communications Director), Sean Spicer (Press Secretary), Katie Walsh (Deputy Chief of Staff), Sebastian Gorka (Deputy Assistant to the President), and George Sifakis (Director of the Office of Public Liaison).

14. The main military leadership referred are General John Kelly (Chief of Staff), General James Mattis (Secretary of Defence), General Joseph Dunford (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and General H. R. McMaster (Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs).

coherent policies. With the assistance of the White House Staff Secretary, Rob Porter, Kelly has sought to control the information flow to the president, namely by limiting access to the president and reviewing all the documents submitted and developing “decision memos” that can integrate and evaluate the different views and options put forward by the different agencies and policy counsels (Johnson & Cook, 2017).

However, while Kelly has imposed greater discipline in the White House staff, he has struggled to curb the president’s long-established personal style. While the Chief of Staff and others may develop and implement a more deliberative process, they have found that changing Trump’s style will be a herculean task. Trump has repeatedly demonstrated he is his own adviser and does not always follow the advice of others. A brief review of his career as a corporate executive shows that on numerous occasions he rejected the advice of consultants and experts on business options and which ultimately resulted in failed business and deals — e.g., Trump Shuttle, Atlantic City casinos, United States Football League (Kranish & Fischer, 2017). This is not particularly surprising considering Trump’s known inattention to detail and distrust of expertise and specialised knowledge (Kruse 2016b; Nichols 2017). He made this point clear after the election when he rejected the idea of needing to have a daily national intelligence briefing (Gonyea, 2016).

More importantly though, Trump’s confidence in his instincts make him highly impulsive. For Trump, talent is something you are born with; you either have it or you do not (Trump & Schwartz, 1987). His penchant for instinctive decision-making has derailed all the processes his advisers and staff have developed so far and created significant damage to his presidency. Even his respect for the military has not shielded the US from suffering a serious blow to its credibility at home and abroad. Trump’s impulsiveness has led him to undermine his administration time and time again by contradicting them or making statements that catch them off guard. For instance, in June, Trump blindsided his national security team by changing the speech they had helped prepare without informing them. Trump decided to remove the reference to NATO’s article 5 from the speech, placing the national security team in an awkward position of having to subsequently explain publicly the US was still committed to the alliance (Glasser, 2017b). In his first speech to the United Nation’s General Assembly, Trump labelled North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un, “little rocket man” against the advice of his advisers who argued that personal insults and name calling would hamper further negotiations with the regime (Keating, 2017). In a similar fashion, frustrated by the slow pace of the policy deliberation process, Trump informed the public that the administration would ban transgender individuals from the military without previously informing his advisers and the respective departments and agencies. Lacking any official plan to deal with the issue, the Department of Defence and White House officials had to scramble to deal with the fall out (Dawsey, 2017). His impulsiveness is a key factor underlying his tendency to improvise and create mixed messages regarding the administration’s policies.

The administration’s decision not to certify the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) exemplifies how Trump’s penchant for promoting competition amongst advisers and making decisions based on his gut-feeling influence the policy-making

process. Throughout the campaign, Trump disparaged the agreement and promised to dismantle it once in office (Parsi, 2016). After begrudgingly confirming that Iran was complying with the obligations set out in the JCPOA in April and July, Trump grew increasingly frustrated with backing away from one of his signature foreign policy campaign pledges. In a meeting on 17 July 2017, Trump dismissed the consensual recommendation from his top national security advisers to submit the agreement for Congressional certification. While critical of the JCPOA, the president's advisers agreed that it was an element that afforded stability and other benefits (Gearan, 2017). Advisers scrambled to find a compromise plan which would satisfy the president's abhorrence of the agreement without completely invalidating it.

In the meantime, UN ambassador Nikki Haley actively endeavoured to convince the president to decertify the agreement. Playing on Trump's desire to reject the agreement, Haley received the president's approval to visit the International Atomic Energy Association in Vienna and inquire about Iran's compliance, despite Tillerson's opposition. Haley quickly capitalised on her visit by publicly expressing her reservations regarding the agreement. Within the administration, she was one of the most vocal sponsors of decertification of the JCPOA. She openly sought to provide Trump with options such as endorsing a policy which would refuse to certify the agreement and simultaneously involve Congress in the development of new conditions to try to bind Iran's behaviour (Johnson, 2017). Haley's efforts were bolstered by others outside the administration. For instance, former UN ambassador John Bolton, continued to impress on Trump the need for a more assertive policy. Despite Kelly's attempts to limit Bolton's access to the president, Trump's proclivity for informal and unconventional sources of information allowed the former ambassador to exercise a disproportionate amount of influence in defining the administration's Iran policy (Johnson, 2017). As a result, on 13 October 2017, Trump announced he would not certify the agreement due to Iran's violation of the "spirit" of the accord by allegedly continuing "to fuel conflict, terror, and turmoil throughout the Middle East and beyond" (The White House, 2017)¹⁵.

By snubbing his national security team's formal recommendations and embracing his "America First" agenda, Trump again isolated the US. China and Russia quickly cautioned the administration of the potential implications of the decision (Cockburn, 2017; Zheng, 2017). European leaders also issued similar concerns, calling for the US to maintain the agreement (Calamur, 2017). The European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini (2017), was adamant in refuting Trump's accusations against Iran and claiming that "renegotiation is not an option". Furthermore, the decision also limited America's capability to address the problem directly. As reports indicate, the Iranian regime has since rejected American overtures for direct contact between Trump and the Ira-

15. This despite the fact that speaking to the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier in the month of October, both the Secretary of Defence, Jim Mattis, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joseph Dunford, agreed that Iran was complying with conditions stipulated in the agreement (Gibbons-Neff & Sanger, 2017).

nian President Hassan Rouhani (DeYoung, 2017). According to the French sources that brokered the contact between US administration officials and Tehran, the Iranians snubbed the offer due to their distrust of America’s intentions.

As Patrick Haney’s (1994) research on the Nixon administration’s Middle East Policy illustrates, the objective of having a good advisory system in place is for it to be able to perform without the direct involvement of the president:

The decision-making structures that a president puts in place must be able to operate in an atmosphere of divided presidential attention, and perhaps the lack of presidential attention, should this occur. Furthermore, part of the goal in constructing an advisory system is for presidents to be able to have confidence in the advice they receive without having constantly to supervise the advisers (Haney, 1994, p. 954).

The failure to do so imposes significant hazards. As Haney (1994, p. 955) reminds us, the “lack of management, or the failure to use the structures of decision making, may have negative consequences for the quality of the decision-making process that emerges in a crisis”. The track record of the Trump administration so far raises serious concerns regarding Trump’s managerial abilities as President of the United States.

4. Conclusion: “America First” or “America Alone”?

Throughout his campaign, Trump promised to redefine US foreign policy and restore America’s greatness. However, the initial year of the Trump presidency has belied the candidate’s expectations. The US has isolated itself on several global issues, as many allies have become increasingly wary of the administration’s erratic behaviour. Also, uncertainty grows in many regions, at the same time the US intensifies its belligerent rhetoric and its military involvement in several international conflicts. Thus, it is not surprising that a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2017) found that Trump’s popularity and the US standing around the globe have both declined in comparison with past administrations.^[16] The growing antipathy towards the US can also be detected in the waning appeal it has on foreign visitors and foreign university students, which have both registered a decline during the president’s first year in office (Popken, 2018; Wermund, 2018). In fact, while optimistic regarding the resilience of America’s political allure, Joseph Nye (2018) has acknowledged that “Donald Trump’s presidency has eroded America’s soft power”. Even domestically, Trump has not convinced Americans that the US is “winning” on the international stage. In a Washington Post-ABC News poll conducted six months into his tenure, nearly half (48%) of those questioned believed America’s leadership in the world had

16. Out of the 37 countries surveyed in the Pew Research Center (2017) report, Trump only had a higher approval rate than Obama in two countries: Israel and Russia. In addition, the view of the US also dropped in all the countries surveyed, with the exception of Russia and Vietnam where American favorability ratings have increased.

become weaker since Trump took office. In contrast, only 27% answered that America's leadership in the world was stronger (Clement & Balz, 2017).

I have argued above that many of the problems encountered stem from the president's unique management style. Trump has sought to manage his administration and the American government in the same manner he managed his business. Despite recurrent claims regarding the blurring of the distinctions between public and private organisations, the fact remains that the two sectors maintain considerable differences. Ultimately, as businessman turned Mayor, Alfonso Cervantes (1983, p. 352), observed, "the business of government is government, not business". Like many businessmen, Trump has viewed business as a conflict in which his organisation seeks to triumph over corporate competitors and other economic actors. However, politics is best understood as the search for conflict resolution, in which political leaders seek to conciliate the different interests and values in a democratic society (Fukuyama, 2014; Heywood, 2013).

Accordingly, the presidency ultimately demands leadership, not management. There is a subtle difference between these two concepts that is not always properly appreciated. As Harvard's John Kotter (1990) clarifies, while a manager's main function is coping with complexity, a leader copes with change. This distinction explains managers' emphasis on planning and organising as tools for establishing order and consistency in organisations. Leaders, for their part, develop an organisation's "vision" for the future and align people by motivating and inspiring them to move in that direction. This requires more than implementing mechanisms of control. Instead, leaders can mobilise an organisation or society's values and ideals to articulate a shared vision (Kotter, 1990). As former secretary John Gardner (1993, p. 4) put it, leaders "reach and influence constituents beyond their jurisdictions, beyond boundaries", allowing them to "bind together the fragmented constituencies that must work together to solve a problem".

For decades, notwithstanding its inherent costs, numerous administrations promoted an internationalist vision and led the liberal international order. For American officials, any expenses were offset by the benefits of leading a thriving global economy, maintaining the stability and security of vital regions, promoting democratic regimes and human rights, and reigning over key multilateral institutions (Brands, 2017). Therefore, for over half a century, the US could build what Geir Lundestad (1986) once labelled an "empire by invitation" in which American international leadership and involvement was frequently welcomed by allies. Currently, the Trump administration is unable to construct a vision that can similarly inspire the international community and animate American global leadership. Rather, Trump's strategy of "America First" is rapidly leading to "America Alone". The president's erratic management of the executive branch has so far alienated allies and created uncertainty about America's global role. The continuation of this behaviour may, ultimately, prove to be detrimental to America's long-term strategic interests as opposition to the US mounts and other actors assume the leading role in international affairs.

It is still early in President Trump’s tenure and the situation may still improve. The initial setbacks do not necessarily hinder the administration from changing its strategy and reclaiming American global leadership. Bill Clinton faced similar criticism for his erratic executive leadership in the early months of his presidency. Nevertheless, he was capable of altering his leadership style and able to adopt a more measured and accommodating style which, ultimately, led to his re-election and a renewed period of American global preponderance (Greenstein, 1994). The likelihood that Trump can reverse the trailing of his administration is, however, more problematic. Political psychologists have found that political leaders tend to become more unyielding and uncompromising with age. Research suggests that “especially for narcissistic individuals, as a man grows older, he becomes more like himself. The same drives and needs that impelled the individual throughout his life are still present, only now the time is short, and for some the inhibitory effect of judgement is reduced” (Post & Robins, 1993, p. 138). Therefore, the challenges facing the septuagenarian Trump are greater¹⁷.

Leadership, however, ultimately hinges on competence and credibility. A leader can only guarantee the commitment of an organisation and the public if he or she can demonstrate competence and qualities that others admire (Zaleznik, 1990). In the sphere of international affairs, competence is evidenced by establishing a decision-making process that is disciplined and judicious and that weights America’s long-term strategic interests (Walt, 2017). A leader’s credibility rests on his or her track record, reputation for honesty and reliability, and the consistency between spoken words and actions (Kotter, 1990). Credibility in foreign policy is important in order to maintain allies’ trust and commitment to the American-led liberal order and to effectively dissuade contentious opponents from challenging it.

The initial year of the Trump presidency reveals an alarming deficit of both competence and credibility due to a patent incapacity to appreciate the differences of managing a public and a private organisation. Maybe Trump’s damaging of American global leadership will be unrepairable. I doubt that will be the case as history has demonstrated that the US is resilient and can redefine its international role as long as American’s are so willing. However, if the current trend continues in the White House, Trump may provide American’s with the necessary evidence that a good corporate manager is not necessarily a good political leader.

17. Several mental health experts have indicated that Trump exhibits many of the traits characteristic of narcissism. For a more complete account, see Lee (2017).

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