

TRUMP, BREXIT AND THE CRISIS OF THE LIBERAL WORLD ORDER**

Abstract. *The article aims to analyse the relationship between President Trump's new policies, Brexit and the crisis of the liberal international order. The author's main hypothesis is that the current liberal order is in serious crisis. While Brexit may be described as the biggest change in European politics since the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is argued that Trump's new foreign policy is the most important change in world politics since the Second World War. President Trump is the first American President since then to: 1) choose moderate isolation over cooperation and multilateralism; 2) not promote democracy as a vital feature of US foreign policy; 3) be actively hostile to liberal internationalism; and 4) hold different views to his predecessors on the issues of trade, alliances, the environment, and international law. The author concludes that the world is heading towards a new international order that features the USA, China and Russia as the key players.*

Keywords: *liberal international order, crisis of democracy, international relations, American foreign policy, Trump, Brexit*

Introduction

Most Western analysts and scholars agree that after more than half a century the liberal international order is today in serious crisis (Ikenberry, 2018; Haass, 2019). Moreover, the crisis was already evident 20 years ago, following the terrorist attack on the USA, including the misguided Western policy on the Middle East and the ever more pronounced internal economic and political crisis in major Western countries that has seen the Western model of liberal democracy and international relations lose much of its

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attractiveness. The extent to which its attractiveness has been lost will be seen in the years and decades to come.

Following the Second World War, the world has been dominated by a liberal world order spearheaded by the USA. Although it was predominant during the Cold War, this order constantly faced security and ideological challenges mostly from the biggest communist countries: the Soviet Union and China. Its primary features included the USA's economic and political domination, free trade, a market economy, liberal democracy and security cooperation among Western countries within NATO. Consistent with the politically dominant theory of liberalism, the USA believed that economic openness would be conducive to general prosperity, while democratisation and the protection of human rights would lead to a more just society and efficient international cooperation, thereby facilitating its global domination (Sullivan, 2018: 15). At the end of the 1990s, it appeared to many scholars and analysts that the world was irreversibly and unstoppably moving towards progress and democratic and liberal values. Huntington's "The Third Wave" and Fukuyama's "The End of History" spoke of the ascendancy of democracy and the liberal international order.

However, just one decade following the end of the Cold War and the triumph of the West, the unsuccessful military campaigns waged by Western forces in the Middle East coupled with the great economic crisis of 2008 raised questions about the claims about the end of history and the triumphant Western liberal order. Donald Trump's victory in the USA and Brexit in the United Kingdom announced the end of an almost two-decade transitional period marred by several foreign policy mistakes and a growing number of problems in Western democracies.

The intention of this article is to point out the dramatic changes in global politics following President Trump's election victory and Brexit as well as to analyse the crisis of the current ruling liberal world order. Second, certain key elements of the UK's new foreign policy after Brexit will be examined. Third, we try to identify the internal and external causes of these changes.

Theoretical and methodological framework

A large number of political scientists considering such tectonic changes in global politics base their analyses on the opposing liberalism and realism theories. Those advocating a liberal approach to international relations promote the principles of free trade, multilateralism, promotion of democracy and protection of human rights (Doyle, 1986; Desch, 2008). For the representatives of this liberal school of thought, the main goal of US foreign policy, as the leading world power, is to turn as many countries as possible into a liberal democracy. It has constituted a way of protecting human rights and

fostering American hegemony across the world. However, Mearsheimer, a leading contemporary proponent of the realism school of thought, states that this “conventional wisdom is wrong”. “Great powers are rarely in a position to pursue a full-scale liberal foreign policy... great powers of all persuasions care deeply about their survival, and there is always the danger in a bipolar or multipolar system that they will be attacked by another great power” (Mearsheimer, 2018: 1-2). Adherents to the realist school of thought consider that in foreign policy states should foremost be guided by their national interests. Mearsheimer claims that the USA, following the liberalism theory, has wrongfully and harmfully to their own interests promoted liberal democracy around the world. He claims that, instead of spreading democracy, the USA has undermined peace and human rights on a global scale. Accordingly, he urges the USA to return to much more limited foreign policy goals based on nationalism and realism in its relations with other countries, especially with the major world powers of China and Russia.

In addition to the main dichotomy between liberalism and realism, one encounters other confronting theories and concepts dealing with modern world affairs created by Trump’s victory and Brexit. The USA elected a president who is opposed to traditional American views on crucial foreign policy issues like liberal vs illiberal hegemony, protectionism vs free trade, multilateralism vs bilateralism or the balance of power.

In the post-Second World War period, in line with its interests as well as liberal hegemony theory, the USA has sought to create an international system based on multilateralism, free trade, international law, and alliances (Ikenberry, 2018: 7-9; Nye, 2019: 63-67). However, some analysts contend that following Trump’s election victory the USA has ushered in a new strategy which they label illiberal hegemony. Thus, for example, Posen claims that Trump has taken much of the ‘liberal’ out of ‘liberal hegemony’, chiefly in reference to his giving up of the promotion of democracy and free trade. Yet, the USA still seeks to “retain its superior economic and military capability and role as security arbiter for most regions of the world” (Posen, 2018: 20-21). In line with liberal theory, free trade has been crucially important for the economic development of both the USA and Europe (John Ruggie, 1982). Nevertheless, President Trump has challenged this important principle of the liberal world order and theory by promoting an “America First” policy, imposing tariffs on other countries, abandoning the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, weakening the WTO and quitting certain trade agreements signed by the previous administration, thereby seeing a return to the USA’s protectionist policies from almost a century ago (Bremmer, 2018: 101-106; Johnson, 2018). He is also the first US president since the 1930s to have questioned the policy and theory of multilateralism. This concept was prominent in US policies after the Second World War and

was based on the assumption that building permanent international institutions was the best way for states to communicate and manage world peace (Russett and O'Neal, 2011). Such international institutions were also supposed to enable closer ties and relations between the USA and its allies. The USA had pursued this position ever since Wilson's Presidency, who believed that the "league of nations based on a collective security pact against aggressors would be more peaceful and just than a cynical alliance required to balance power" (Nye, 2019: 65). President Trump abandoned this theory, instead opting to develop bilateral economic and political relations with other states in the belief that this approach is more beneficial to US interests. It is hence no surprise that he so fervently supported the UK in its efforts to leave the European Union. Brexit itself is part of the same process in which leading Western countries, namely the USA and the UK, are giving up on the concept of multilateralism. To what extent the UK will succeed in compensating for its economic and political losses in the wake of leaving the EU by entering into new bilateral trade agreements with countries like the USA, Australia and Canada remains to be seen. An even bigger question is whether the UK, once out of the EU, will manage to fulfil its intention of retaining its major role in the international political scene. Answers to these questions will not only be interesting from the point of view of political practice but also for theory, which hitherto has largely maintained that on this issue multilateralism brings unquestionable benefits to states as opposed to a bilateral approach. The same is true of the free-trade theory compared to protectionism (Ikenberry, 2018: 14–16).

Since in line with liberal theory (Doyle, 2005: 463) multilateralism's main goal was to preserve peace, the question arises of what can possibly replace international organisations in their role of connecting states and preserving peace. Judging from President Trump's statements, some of that role should be taken over by three leading world powers: the USA, China and Russia, whose relations would be based on their power. However, history teaches us that a world based on a balance of power among big powers easily slides into conflict and war. The dramatic rise in conflicts in northern Syria between Russia, Turkey and Iran following the USA's withdrawal clearly shows that the balance of power among great powers is a changeable category and that former allies, like Turkey and Russia, can easily become rivals. Haass therefore warns that an alternative to the current order is a "world with little order – a world of deeper disarray. Protectionism, nationalism and populism would gain while democracy would lose. Conflicts within and across borders would become more common and rivalry between the great powers would increase" (Haass, 2019: 30).

In this article changes in the liberal world order are analysed using the case study method. This method means that one or a smaller number

of cases are studied in detail while relying on theory and triangulated methods.

In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain holistic and meaningful characteristic of real-life events – such as individual life cycles, small group behaviors, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries. (Yin, 2009: 4)

Apart from the case study presented in this article, various theoretical arguments and statistics (economic) data are to be analysed and compared. The main focus is a comparative analysis of President Trump's new foreign policy and the case of Brexit as seen within the historical context of crisis of the liberal international order. We also highlight similarities and differences between these two cases as part of the same historical process. An analysis is also undertaken of commentary provided by the most important political actors in international relations at the start of the 21st century.

Trump's victory and the end of the liberal international order?

The unipolar world that developed post Cold War and was based on absolute US domination is slowly disappearing. The USA and Europe, two key pillars of that world, are losing steam politically and economically. The former is abandoning its previous role in world politics while the UK is leaving the EU. "We seem to be entering an uncertain post-Anglo-Saxon world in which China and India will emerge as superpowers, while Russia and other emerging markets like Brazil, Nigeria, Indonesia, Mexico, Turkey and Vietnam will also play important role" (Rašković, Vuchkovski and Svetličič, 2019: 351). The weakening of their position begs a critical question: does the end of the unipolar world also imply the end of the liberal world order established after the Second World War, characterised by years of economic prosperity, liberal democracy, a global rise in living standards and the unprecedented advancement of science and technology?

The key problem is that both the liberal international order and democracy find it ever more difficult to offer a proper response to the problems of the world, thus questioning their own legitimacy, leading many analysts to conclude we are witnessing the end of the liberal international order (Mishra, 2017). Those less pessimistic place a question mark at the end: "The end of liberal international order?" (Ikenberry, 2018: 7).

Brexit and Trump's election victory have considerably altered the situation in international relations and world politics. President Trump is the first US President since the Second World War to question the biggest

elements of the liberal international order, such as the principles of free trade, economic openness, multilateral institutions, solidarity and security. Instead of joining international organisations and associations, the USA has chosen to leave them and replaced solidarity with moderate isolation. In a statement given at the UN General Assembly in September 2019, President Trump made it clear he was against the current globalisation concept which dominates and that the future belongs to patriots. “The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect their citizens, respect their neighbors, and honor the differences that make each country special and unique” (74th Session of the UN GA, 2019).

Instead of the policy previously based on a belief in the USA’s “missionary” role, President Trump asserts that US foreign policy must be based on a simple cost-benefit calculation. This means America will only engage when its immediate interests are at stake. Preferring a policy of bilateral economic and political relations over a multilateral approach, in just the first year of President Trump’s presidency the USA abandoned the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement that had brought together 12 close American allies like Chile, Canada, Australia and Japan, and been signed by the previous administration. In March 2018, the USA imposed a 25% tariff on steel, and a 10% on aluminium imports. Only the USA’s closest neighbours Mexico and Canada were exempted from this decision. President Trump also cancelled many Obama-era regulations connected with climate change that he saw as directly affecting the economic interests of US workers while announcing the USA’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. According to President Trump, the agreement favoured foreign states and companies and was against the interests of America and its citizens. Moreover, the President asked NATO member states to increase their defence spending and warned that if this did not occur the USA might leave the organisation that has been a linchpin of US foreign and security policy for the past 70 years. Immediately after assuming office, Trump enacted several executive orders introducing a visa ban on citizens originating from seven Muslim countries on account of the danger of terrorism. In addition, despite objections by his closest associates, he abandoned the Iranian nuclear deal. China in particular came under President Trump’s attack who had accused it of unfair competition practices, currency manipulation and intellectual property theft. For these reasons, President Trump imposed high taxes on Chinese imported goods to America and repeatedly called on US companies to leave China and come home. This new policy culminated in his decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, a process alienating America from most countries in the world that voted against this decision in the United Nations despite his threats. Even some of the USA’s closest allies like France and Germany voted against.

For the first time in 70 years, the promotion of democracy and human rights around the globe was no longer a priority of the greatest world power, nor an interest of its citizens. “Trump is an idiosyncratic realist who focuses on a narrow definition of American national interests and downplays democracy as a source of American soft power” (Nye, 2019: 68). Back in 2013, according to Larry Diamond, the Pew Survey suggested that even 80 per cent of Americans agreed that the USA should not be concerned with global issues and should instead focus on their problems at home (Diamond, 2016). Trump believed that the USA’s past efforts to promote and build democracies around the world had been costly and unsuccessful and he therefore rejected the concept of promoting democracy as a goal of his foreign policy.

Taking stock of Trump’s policies in terms of the opposing theories discussed earlier, it could be said that almost all aspects of the US President’s new policy fall fully within concepts opposed to liberal views. He opted for a policy of illiberal hegemony, protectionism, bilateralism, a new balance of power between the great powers and is very close to what Mearsheimer labels the theory and politics of realism and nationalism. Therefore, Mearsheimer rightfully claims that Trump has brought into question various aspects of liberal hegemony: “reminding voters time after time that it had been bad for America. Most importantly, he promised that if he were elected president, the United States would get out of the business of spreading democracy around the world” (Mearsheimer, 2018: 230). The platform that propelled Trump and Brexit to victory was the same – America First and UK First. In his presidential campaign, President Trump even promised he would build a wall with Mexico to protect the country from illegal immigrants, while the biggest reason for the UK leaving the EU was a fear of immigrants, especially from new EU members that are former socialist countries (Pribićević, 2018: 200).

However, even the harshest critics of Trump’s foreign policy, who mainly advocate liberal concepts, agree that the USA’s withdrawal from the global scene did not commence with his coming to power and that it will also not end with his departure. “The crisis of the United States’s post-Cold War foreign policy has been a long time in the making and it will last beyond Trump” (Cohen, 2019: 138). Some authors suggest that the USA’s withdrawal from global politics started as early as with President Obama’s administration. In his 2015 National Security Strategy, President Obama advocated US intervention only when his country’s lasting national interests were at stake. “Neo-conservative critics”, according to Joseph Nye, “saw more similarity than difference in Trump’s and Obama’s” strategies (Nye, 2019: 70). Professor of international relations Barry Posen emphasises that Trump is not an isolationist and that he seeks to have the USA maintain both its role

as a guardian of world security and its superior economic and military position, but that he has given up promoting democracy and abandoned many multilateral trade agreements. Posen claims that Trump remains committed to the geopolitical struggle together with other great powers and has kept many alliances inherited from previous administrations. To support his claim that Trump is not an isolationist, Posen refers to his conflict relations with North Korea, the continued war with the Taliban and ISIS in Iraq and Syria, including the delivery of anti-tank missiles to Ukraine. This new model of international relations Trump advocates is called the concept of “illiberal hegemony” (Posen, 2018: 20–21).

Even though some other analysts also claim that Trump’s foreign policy is not so isolationist or that much different from the previous one, given the examples of Syria, Afghanistan and Russia (Stokes, 2018: 136) while noting the novelties introduced by the Trump Administration previously discussed, according to us there is no question that this is a major U-turn in US foreign policy compared to the last 70 years. A good illustration of this is the warning given by German Chancellor Merkel who, after meeting with President Trump, announced that the old world order was gone, that the time of an unquestionable alliance with the USA was a thing of the past, and that Europe would have to fight for its own future itself (Merkel, 2019). Those supporting Trump and his policies would argue that what German Chancellor said was actually what they wanted in the first place – Europe and other countries like Japan should be more concerned with their own security and safety and pay more, with less financial assistance from America.

When on 7 October 2019 President Trump decided that US troops would leave northern Syria, this merely confirmed his resolve to break up with the foreign policy his predecessors had pursued for over half a century. President Trump declared it was time for the USA to extricate itself from ridiculous endless wars and leave Turkey, Europe, Syria, Iraq, Iran and the Kurds to deal with the problems in Syria (Trump, 2019). On the occasion, President Trump added that the USA would not defend its allies the Kurds from Turkish attacks, which led to Turkish troops entering northern Syria. Of course, President Trump’s decision immediately raised the issue of US loyalty to other allies around the world and made it clear that America had abandoned its former foreign policy.

Still, due to the overwhelming pressure of the media and his political opponents, relations with Russia remain one of the rare foreign policy issues for which Trump has continued in the footsteps of his predecessors (Abrams, 2019: 131–132). He condemned Russia’s military operations in Syria, the arrests of demonstrators in Moscow, stating that he expected Russia to return Crimea to Ukraine and extended the sanctions against

Moscow. On 2 August 2019, he withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. In his State of the Union address, after one year in the White House, President Trump singled out Russia and China as the two biggest rivals that challenge America's interests, economy and values. The conflict in connection with the internal turmoil in Venezuela in 2019 only further exacerbated the relations between the two powers. By all accounts, it would appear that the future relationship of these two states will largely depend on their internal political relations. If President Trump wins a second mandate, one may realistically expect him to try to improve relations with Russia as he wished and promised during his 2016 presidential campaign.

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, one can expect that in the years to come US foreign policy will focus on relations with China, North Korea, Iran and the fight against Islamic extremism. Two pillars of the USA's Middle East policy will be Israel and Saudi Arabia while at the same time more turbulence can be expected in its relations with Turkey.

The British reluctant to follow Washington's new political course

Important changes also took place in the other major Western power – the United Kingdom, with a very similar political pretext as the changes in the United States.

President Trump has made statements that, if affected upon, would effectively bring to an end America's role as leader of the liberal world order. Simultaneously, Britain's decision to leave the EU, and a myriad other troubles besetting Europe, appear to mark an end to the long post-war project of building a greater union. (Ikenberry, 2018: 7)

In fact, Brexit and Trump are part of the same political trend signifying the wish of two major western powers to pursue independent political steps (unconstrained by international institutions and organisations like the UN, WTO, NATO, and the EU) aimed at cutting the financial costs of their current role in the international political scene. The difference is that US President Trump has openly questioned the liberal international order and globalisation while the UK has left the EU with a view to assuming a new global role with the USA's assistance, but without questioning the existing liberal international order.

After 50 years, the UK decided to leave the EU and is attempting to act independently in international politics. The greatest consequence of Brexit at the level of international relations is that for the first time in half a century a process of disintegration was underway within the European community.

The post-Second World War period had been characterised by processes to integrate and establish common institutions, whereas today we face a reverse process.

Despite Brexit, both the UK and the EU will seek to maintain close relations not only due to their many shared interests, primarily in the field of defence and security, but also due to their shared values (Whitman, 2019). After leaving the EU, the UK will have less of an influence on the political situation in Ukraine, northern Africa, the Balkans and Turkey. However, the UK's shrinking role started even before Brexit, initially in connection with the Ukraine crisis where France and Germany assumed leadership roles and in the Balkans where Germany took over. Outside Europe, the UK will continue to play an important role given its status as a permanent UN Security Council member, the international political culture, the UK's colonial past and its nuclear weapons arsenal. Still, some authors (Gifkins, Jarvis and Ralph, 2019) already claim that after Brexit even its influence in the UN might come into doubt. Like before, the UK's foreign policy priorities will be its relations with the USA, the Commonwealth, Southern Asia (especially Afghanistan and Pakistan), the regions of sub-Saharan, the Gulf and Asia/Pacific.

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As the UK separates from the European Union, its relationship with the USA will be critical. Given his negative view on supra-national organisations, President Trump was a strong supporter of the UK's decision to leave the EU. On the other hand, Trump's victory has placed the UK in a new position because upon leaving the EU London is looking for a new role to play in the world while the USA has chosen a different role that may be defined as moderate withdrawal from global politics. Therefore, unlike the UK which is seeking to restore its global role in international politics, President Trump has time and again openly expressed his opposition to the globalisation policies discussed earlier. This policy of President Trump puts the UK in a very precarious position since London has counted on the USA's support as its most important economic and political partner to revive its global role. On top of this, while Trump has wholeheartedly supported the UK leaving the EU, Britain will become less important to the USA since London can no longer serve as a major instrument of America's influence within the EU (Pribićević, 2019: 151). Further, the international framework for the UK's activities is today less favourable than it was 10 or 20 years ago. China is today economically stronger while Russia has largely managed to return to the global political scene.

Despite a considerable number of the British political elite, intellectuals and journalists expressing great reservations about the policies of the new US President, especially his attitude to the Muslim population, Russia and the basic principles of liberal society upon which Western civilisation

has rested over the past decades, following Brexit, the UK pragmatically, although reluctantly opted to follow Washington's new course. On the other hand, the UK was fully in support of Trump's fight against Muslim extremism and his demand that NATO countries contribute their fair share and spend at least 2 per cent of their GDP on their defence.

The arrival of Boris Johnson as new British prime minister in July 2019 and the powerful support he was given by President Trump certainly warrants a consideration of the emerging closeness between the two countries, especially in trade and security. Moreover, despite its decision to leave the EU, with Boris Johnson as prime minister the UK, as the USA's closest ally, will be able to align itself with Washington as a third major global factor along with China and Russia. Still, Great Britain will hardly be able to compensate for the loss of an important instrument of its foreign policy, its economic and financial power, when outside of the EU (Pribićević, 2018: 204–205). It also remains to be seen how the UK will harmonise its strategy with Trump's policy of leaving the negotiations with Iran, the relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, and the relations with Russia and China. The UK and the USA do not hold the same positions on such issues and it might be said that the UK remains closer to the EU it just left than to the USA with which it has yet to start building a new strategic partnership.

Causes of the crisis of the liberal international order

What are the biggest causes of the huge crisis of the liberal international order? In his book "The Retreat of Western Liberalism", Edward Luce correctly notes that Trump is a symptom of the crisis rather than its cause (Luce, 2017: 11). Perhaps the strongest causal factor is the crisis of the authority of Western powers triggered by several misguided decisions made in the past 20 years, primarily in the Middle East.

Starting with Afghanistan, to Iraq and Libya, the Arab spring all the way to Syria, the West not only failed to bring long-awaited peace but managed to multiply already existing divisions and problems and ultimately brought these problems to its own backyard in the form of millions of refugees and many terrorist attacks. These mistaken decisions not only questioned the West's sincerity to help the Arab countries to solve their problems but also its competency and ability to do so. All of this brought about the biggest authority crisis of the West globally. (Pribićević, 2018b: 24)

Tony Smith states: "In its transformation from a hegemonic to an imperialist ideology during the 1990s liberal internationalism became the very

danger to the values it professed to champion” (Smith, 2017: 232), while Monica Toft notes that the USA was engaged in 46 military interventions between 1948 and 1991, while from 1992 to 2017 that number increased to 188 (Toft, 2017). British foreign policy expert Robin Niblett believes that for many world countries the USA and its allies are no longer an example to follow (Niblett, 2017: 24). John Mearshamer, adopts a particularly interesting viewpoint to the effect that while liberalism is the best political system it is at the same time a source of endless foreign policy problems.

Powerful states that embrace liberal hegemony invariably get themselves into serious trouble at home and abroad.... The principal source of the problems is that liberalism has an activist mentality woven into its core. The belief that all humans have a set of inalienable rights, and that protecting these rights should override other concerns, creates a powerful incentive for liberal states to intervene when other countries – as they do on a regular basis – violate their citizens’ rights. (Mearshamer, 2018: 218)

It was Western countries’ Messiah complex, disregarding the tradition and culture of Arab countries in the Middle East, to help and democratise those people that led to wrong decisions whose consequences are still felt today.

Second, the moment of the West’s triumph also signified the beginning of the end of its world domination. Having won the Cold War, the Western liberal international order also became the global order to which many states acceded, including China, Russia, Eastern Europe and many other countries. This has created a totally new situation compared to the previous situation when the liberal international order was only made up of Western countries which, even in the face of disagreement, were able to come closely together around their core values, from liberal democracy to a common foreign policy led by the USA and NATO. Following the end of the Cold War and the liberal international order becoming a global world order, many other states joined in, bringing along their own systems of values, goals and interests. In this period, the USA provided “global services – such as security protection and support of open markets – which made other states willing to work with rather than resist the American pre eminence” (Ikenberry, 2006: 14).

However, at the start of the 21st century the situation in international relations began to change with the emergence of issues like terrorism, migration, climate change, arms proliferation. “One of the deepest starting points is that in recent years crisis has developed into a serious structural crisis, involving all vital areas of human life in society, including values, social and health care, education, culture, politics, environmental issues and others”

(Grizold and Svetličič, 2019: 333). It had become ever more difficult for the USA and other Western countries to cope with these changes, especially since in addition to the crisis of authority these countries began to increasingly face a legitimacy crisis; namely, the third issue triggering the crisis of the liberal international order discussed in this article. Joseph Nye notes internal reasons that explain the crisis of international liberal order and the role of the USA. He claims “America’s place in the world may be threatened more by the rise of populist polices at home than the rise of other powers abroad” (Nye, 2019: 80). Not a great admirer of President Trump’s new policies, Elliott Abrams (Abrams, 2019: 133) states: “To many Americans, the system that elites ordained for them has come to seem unjust”.

Unlike in the period after the end of the Second World War when liberal democracies together with security enabled their citizens to enjoy the constant growth of living standards and prosperity, this is no longer the case. In past 20 years, inequality and poverty have soared in Western democracies, principally connected to globalisation of the international order. A book by Branko Milanović is often cited here since it clearly shows the biggest winners of globalisation have been workers in China and India whose revenues in urban areas have doubled or tripled, as well as the 1 per cent of the world wealthiest, while the biggest loser is the middle class in industrial countries (Milanović, 2016: 19). Of course, the loss of jobs is also certainly largely due to automation processes. The globalisation process in the USA and the UK was coupled with growing social inequalities and the meltdown of the middle class. In the book symbolically entitled “US VS THEM”, Ian Bremmer quotes a Pew Research study from December 2015, noting that “after more than decades of serving as the nation’s economic majority, the American middle class is now matched in number by those in the economic tiers above and below it”. Bremmer adds that in “1970 middle-income households earned 62% of aggregate income in the United States. By 2014, their share had fallen to just 43%” (Bremmer, 2018: 16–17). Economic stagnation is pronounced in America’s Midwest and in the north of England where old industrial centres have been run down while new technologies have been unable to create new jobs to fill the void left when big companies departed mostly for Asia. It is the discontent of these people in the USA and the UK that led Trump and Brexit to success (Pribićević, 2018b: 22). Their anger was primarily directed at the illegal workers and immigrants they felt were responsible for their economic and social hardship. Alan Abramowitz states that “racial resentment was the single strongest predictor for Trump among Republican primary voters, although economic and cultural concerns do not exclude each other and that Trump explicitly connected these issues by arguing that illegal immigrants were taking jobs from American citizens” (Abramowitz, 2018: 153). Ian Bremmer shares this view, adding that: “Many

Americans believe that some illegal immigrants, willing to work for less, take the low wage jobs that working class Americans are trained to do while others live off public assistance paid by US taxpayers” (Bremmer, 2018: 20).

Many authors claim that almost all of the progress and revenues made in the USA since the 1980s has ended up in the hands of the top 20 per cent of the richest (Ikenberry, 2018: 20). For the first time since the Second World War, the average American family cannot guarantee that their children will be better off than their parents, which has led to the crisis of the legitimacy of democracy that is increasingly unable to respond adequately to the issues and problems of its citizens (Luce, 2017: 12-13). Things appear even worse when we see the regression of democracy in so-called new democracies like Turkey, the Philippines and even Poland and Hungary. Many analysts believe that nationalism and populism are becoming the guiding ideas and ever more citizens hold the view that progress does not equal democracy (Diamond, 2019).

Conclusion

In the end, it remains to be seen what the world order will look like in the years to come. By all accounts, it will be much closer to what Mearsheimer and other realists claim than to what the advocates of liberalism were hoping to achieve: from abandoning the “missionary” role of the USA to promoting democracy and ushering in a new concept of illiberal hegemony; espousing a policy of protectionism vs free trade; leaving international organisations and treaties Trump considered harmful to US interests, including the shaking off of ideological prejudices in relations with Russia. Of course, it is now impossible to precisely imagine the future world order although one can indicate certain parameters that will surely influence the further development of great power relations. According to most assessments, China will not be able to replace the USA as a future world leader of a multipolar world but the USA will certainly lose its previous position, thereby lowering its chances of influencing international politics and shaping the new world (Cohen, 2019: 144). Many predict that, instead of seeking to destroy the existing order, China will try to increase its influence within it. In fact, China is one country that has benefited the most from the current international liberal order, especially from globalisation. Yet, despite predictions that perhaps in the next few decades China’s GDP will overtake that of the USA, in terms of per capita income, military power and even less ‘soft power’ such expectations do not appear to be realistic.

The USA’s reduced influence will be impacted by several factors. First, the decline in America’s economic power will cause a weakening of its military power. Second, turning towards its own problems will certainly diminish

Washington's capability to deal with other states' problems. Although the "America First" slogan itself did not ensure Trump's 2016 election victory, it is a policy that future US presidents will need to embrace while seeking to be elected. Third and most importantly, another great 20th century political theorist, Aron, noted that a great power loses its strength if it ceases to serve an idea. This is exactly what is happening to the USA that became leader of the world not only due to its military might but chiefly due to the power of the ideas it was advocating that became global following victory in the Cold War. By turning to itself and its economic problems at home, the USA will cease to be as attractive to other countries and people as before. Yet, this does not imply the end of the important role played by the USA and its Western allies in world politics. The USA is sure to remain a major world power for many years to come, especially since neither Russia nor China offer a model for domestic or international relations of appeal to other world countries, particularly for those on a higher development level. The EU is already the main target for Russia and China, explaining why it should stay close to the USA mainly for security and defence reasons. For a long time, China has been a major investor and important contributor to the UN's peacekeeping forces in Africa (Šabič and Pejič, 2019: 379), yet it can hardly be expected that Chinese policies or even less its internal order will be attractive to Latin American or European countries, let alone in Asia where India and Japan have a significantly different outlook on international relations than Beijing. Hence, it is more realistic to expect the world to move in the direction of a new international order with the USA, China and Russia as the dominant players, despite Russia being prevented from acting as an equal partner as Washington and Beijing due to its economic hardship (Haass, 2019: 30). This gives further support for Mearsheimer's assessment that China is the only country in the world with the potential to challenge the USA. However, the question is whether it will be able to realise this potential (Mearsheimer, 2018: 229).

Still, it is not only China and Russia which pose a challenge to Western policies at the start of the 21st century. I would even venture to claim that it is not the biggest challenge facing the USA and the UK. The greatest challenge is ideological in nature and concerns the crisis of the liberal policies pursued in these countries ever since US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. While generating great economic growth in those countries, at the same time these policies led to growing inequality and poverty among the working class and former middle class. The American Dream and a prosperous Britain are no longer as appealing to citizens or the citizens of other countries as they once used to be. People around the world, particularly in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, perceive the USA and the UK as great powers with mighty weapons but also

as countries pursuing the wrong foreign policy and countries with a rising number of poor and dissatisfied people. The endless rows of desperate refugees from Latin America and the Middle East swarming to the USA and the EU cannot be the sole criterion for determining how successful these societies are, let alone for the even less liberal international order that brought them to this position. Of course, having said this, we do not at all question that, despite all of this, Western countries still offer the best living conditions on our planet.

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