

Spyridon N. Litsas

US Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean

Power Politics and Ideology Under the Sun

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Thessaloniki, Greece

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Introduction

*I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the
steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission
or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing
or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.*

—Walt Whitman 'I hear America singing'

The idea for the *US Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean: Power Politics and Ideology Under the Sun* was given to me during a trip to the east coast of the United States of America. There, I was given the opportunity to conduct research in the field of the American Foreign Policy under the program “Study of the U.S. Institutes for Scholars” by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the State Department. For two months, in New York, Boston, and Washington, I attended great lectures, met influential academics and politicians, and came in contact with the foundations of the U.S. Foreign Policy and some of the main reasons that brought this great nation at the avant-garde of the international structure.

What triggered my interest the most was the fact that, unlike European states which seem more interested in trade, economy, technology, or culture, the U.S. operates in the international system with the deep knowledge that the foreign policy can be either the tip of the spear or the Achilles' heel for a state. Unlike academics who prefer to bring a Max Weber's essence in International Relations Theory, or politicians who still claim that *It's the economy and nothing else matters*, I prefer a more traditional approach that many opinion makers in the U.S. seem to share. A nation will not be able to produce wealth by international trade if its foreign policy is not

effective, or if its cultural capacity will never reach that climax to be able to produce an effective soft power, if its foreign policy mechanisms are not fully functional with the international structure. The U.S. is perhaps the only state in the world, until today, that gives so much importance to its foreign policy. This perhaps is America's true secret of success. Through failures and successes in the international scene, America trained itself to be active, to learn how to preserve its interest, and to set new ambitious goals globally.

This book focuses on the U.S. Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean since the First Barbary War in 1805, until today. The U.S. is a naval nation, and thus the Eastern Mediterranean played, and still plays, an influential role in shaping its foreign conduct since the dawn of time. This close connection between a nation that perceives itself to be an island with the Sea, offered me the inspiration to produce a monograph about the American Foreign Policy in the region of the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Eastern Mediterranean is a region that since the dawn of time, attracted the interest of politicians, soldiers, prophets, pioneers, and ordinary people from around the world. A region that magnetizes those who set their eyes upon it for the first time, or they lend their ears to its eternal sounds, like the song of the Sirens which tempted Odysseus and his companions, to their deaths, on the way back to Ithaki from the shores of Troy. This is the region where the United States of America decided to search for new horizons, in order to trade and seal diplomatic relations; the region where the U.S. established its overseas economic and military presence; the region where the U.S. verified its great power status; the region where America will be able to evaluate its status to the next day's geostrategic and socio-political necessities of the multipolar international structure. As a matter of fact, this monograph is all about the aspiration of the U.S. to follow its naval instincts under the bright sun of the Eastern Mediterranean from 1805, until today.

In the first chapter, I present a thorough analysis of the main schools of thought of the U.S. Foreign Policy, while I also add one more school contributing to the already existing typology. In the second chapter, I approach the First Barbary War, the Truman Doctrine, the Suez Crisis, the emergence of the Greek junta and the Imia Crisis. All these episodes, gave Washington the opportunity to exit its comfort zone and enter the Eastern Mediterranean, with the urge to play an upgraded role in the socio-political and geostrategic affairs of the region. In the third chapter, I present the U.S. Foreign Policy during the Arab Spring, a period that has been characterized by many analysts as one of the most unfortunate and less inspirational periods of the American Foreign Policy since the emergence of the nation in the international system. In the fourth chapter, the U.S. Foreign Policy in the Greek economic crisis is presented as a great success because it managed to keep Greece within the Eurozone and not disrupt the existing status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean; while the rise of a new multipolar era for the region and how China, Russia, and Turkey affect the American presence there, is presented in the fifth chapter.

The main goal of this monograph is not just to comprehend how the U.S. moves and functions in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is to combine a thorough foreign

policy analysis with the fundamentals of the International Relations Theory. My aim is to give the reader the opportunity to comprehend the main changes that the region has been through and to evaluate the role of Washington in this evolutionary process. This is not a normative target. On the contrary, the habitual political instability of the region blends, not always harmoniously, with the geostrategic targets of Washington, producing a dynamic mixture that in order to be presented correctly, it has to be seen not as a historical narrative but as a part of International Theory itself. Whether the task was fulfilled by the writer, remains to be identified by the reader at the very end of this book.

Writing is a lonely process, underlying the true magnitude of the well-known motto "Publish or Perish." However, the writer does, or must, not live in a bubble. For this reason, I have many people to thank, that supported me during the whole process. I must begin with Professor James Ketterer, who was kind enough to have a look at Chapter 1 and share his thoughts with me. I also would like to thank Professor Nikos Zahariadis, because during a coffee session in Thessaloniki, he put my thoughts on track regarding this book, and also for reminding me of the lyrics of the Marines' Hymn about the "shores of Tripoli." It was a great push to take the first step, and as every academic knows "well begun, is half done" according to Aristotle. I would also like to thank Katerina Sokou, a Greek journalist that gracefully balances between academia and media, for her help on the Greek economic crisis and the American role in the whole process. For their eagerness to discuss with me about their contribution to the U.S. Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, I feel the need to thank Ambassador Thomas Michael Tolliver Niles and Ambassador David Duane Pearce. Their kindness went way beyond the customary diplomatic amiability. I would also like to thank my students at the University of Macedonia, mainly because they continue to stimulate my mind and keep me hungry for knowledge. Keep it up and seek excellence in the four corners of the world *sons and daughters of Greece!* Lorraine Klimowich, my editor, should also be included in this list because she made me feel welcome once again at Springer Publishing. I also have to thank Dr. John Kittmer for always being available to give his valuable comments and views. It also gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the contribution of Robert H. Palm, Jr. Captain U.S. Navy (Ret.) to this monograph, who thoroughly read every single page while it was written, offering me his valuable comments and remarks all the way through. Robert has a profound love for the Eastern Mediterranean, a deep knowledge on international politics, a genuine kindness and generosity, and I feel that through the writing of this book, I earned a good friend. Captain Palm has all those qualities that make America a truly great nation. Last but not least, I thank my lovely wife Lena for her patience, for her unconditional love, her endless patience and support, especially when days were not bright, and there are many throughout the writing of a book.

Like everything I have produced after her birth, this monograph is dedicated to Elena, my daughter. The most enjoyable time of my day throughout the writing of this book was, when she was asking me about the progress of my research, and also when she was reminding me with her unique way that first and foremost I am her

father, thus I had to spend quality time with her instead of dealing with the perplexities of international politics in the Eastern Mediterranean. I thank her every day because being her father is the greatest achievement and the most praiseworthy title I will ever earn.

Thessaloniki, February 2020

Contents

1	The Theoretical Foundations of the U.S. Foreign Policy	1
1	Introduction	1
2	A Continental Country That Thought to Be an Island	2
3	The Three Pillars of Success	6
3.1	Individualism	7
3.2	Mobility	9
3.3	Exceptionalism	12
4	The Hamiltonian School of Thought	17
5	The Wilsonian School of Thought	19
6	The Jeffersonian School of Thought	23
7	The Jacksonian School of Thought	25
8	The Obamian School of Thought	30
9	Conclusions	33
	References	34
2	The U.S. in the Eastern Mediterranean: Historical and Political Considerations	41
1	Introduction	41
2	The U.S. and the Eastern Mediterranean: A Long and Steady Entanglement	42
3	The Barbary War of 1801–1805	48
4	The Truman Doctrine and the Eastern Mediterranean: The Beginning of a New Era	52
4.1	The Greek Case	53
4.2	The Turkish Case	56
4.3	Together We Stand	61
5	The Suez Crisis: New Ways vs. Old Habits	62
5.1	The Egyptian Conundrum	63
5.2	War Drums in Suez: The Climax of a Crisis That Never Meant to Occur	67

6	The Cradle of Democracy in Chains and the American Nonintervention	77
7	The Greek Junta and the American Nonintervention.	79
8	The Imia Crisis and the Goal of Nonviolent Friction	87
8.1	A Problematic Relation Since the Early Beginning.	87
8.2	Greece and Turkey: Parallel Courses of Profound Decadence	89
8.3	Imia: A Deep Interstate Crisis and the American Intervention	91
9	Conclusion	94
	References.	95
3	Obama's Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring: The Cases of Egypt, Libya, and Syria	103
1	Introduction	103
2	The Arab Spring: A Conceptual Analysis	104
2.1	Second Image Analysis	108
2.2	Third Image Analysis.	113
3	The U.S. and the Arab Spring in the Eastern Mediterranean: A General Approach	115
3.1	Even Monkeys Fall from Trees	116
3.2	Neither Able Nor Willing.	119
4	The Egyptian Spring	122
5	The Libyan Spring	129
6	The Syrian Spring	136
7	Conclusion	146
	References.	147
4	The Greek Crisis of 2015: A European Drama and an American Deus Ex Machina	155
1	Introduction	155
2	The Greek Crisis: A Sisyphean Condition.	156
3	SYRIZA in Power: The Beginning of a New Start?	161
4	The Role of the American Factor in the Greek Crisis: Leading from Above	169
5	Conclusion	176
	References.	178
5	The U.S. Facing the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Different Cases of China, Russia, and Turkey	181
1	Introduction	181
2	The Sino-American Competition in the Eastern Mediterranean	184

3	Russia vs. the U.S. in the Eastern Mediterranean: Moscow's Sui Generis Revisionism	192
4	The Turkish Neo-Revisionism in the Eastern Mediterranean	199
5	Conclusion	207
	References	209
	Epilogue	213
	Index	217

Chapter 1



The Theoretical Foundations of the U.S. Foreign Policy

*The law of the past cannot be eluded,
The law of the present and future cannot be eluded,
The law of the living cannot be eluded—it is eternal,
The law of promotion and transformation cannot be eluded,
The law of heroes and good-doers cannot be eluded ...*
Walt Whitman 'To Think of Time'

1 Introduction

This chapter argues that the United States of America is utterly influenced by the English tradition that penetrates the core of the nation, not only in cultural aspects but also in various details that have a direct link with the American foreign policy. This will lead the analysis to the three pillars of the American success in the steep paths of the international arena. I argue that (a) individualism, (b) mobility, and (c) a constant sense of exceptionalism not only make the U.S. unique among all the other states of the globe but they also attribute to the nation's outstanding capacities and motivation to perform with great confidence and effectiveness in the international arena. Nevertheless, this performance does not take place in void. On the contrary, it firmly rests on five schools of thought, (1) the Hamiltonian, (2) the Wilsonian, (3) the Jeffersonian, (4) the Jacksonian, and (5) the Obamian. These five different approaches construct a unique armor for the U.S. in the international arena, revealing the scientific way that the U.S. designs its foreign policy and functions accordingly. This makes the study of the fundamentals of the American foreign policy a fascinating spin among the theory of international relations, American and European history, and political philosophy too.

2 A Continental Country That Thought to Be an Island

It may seem as an oxymoronic approach, yet the United States of America, or at least parts of its political, economic, and academic elites, identifies itself as an island lying between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. For example, Robert Kaplan (2017: 135) argues in his most recent book combining Halford Mackinder's normative geographical analysis with his sharp socio-political approach:

If, as I must repeat, you think of Afro-Eurasia as the "World Island", in the words of the great British imperial geographer Halford Mackinder, then North America is the greatest of the satellite landmasses able to influence this World-Island.

This particular feeling is shared by a large number of the Americans regardless of where they live, either in the coasts of the Atlantic or in the Pacific oceans or in the American inland (e.g., Yamashiro 2014). This rather sui generis mentality can be identified, if not even before, in the way the American society has framed itself in the international arena since embattled farmers "*fired a shot heard round the world*"¹ against the British infantrymen at Concord's North Bridge on the night of 18 April 1775, and from the early days of the establishment of New England after *Mayflower* reached Cape Cod. The sea was the route that brought the first English settlers to the shores of North America, carrying with them not only bold hopes for a new beginning on a new continent, but also an islander's outlook. It may seem a bit cliché, but the United States' fate is closely connected with the sea, not only in the early settlers' days where the ocean was the only route of communication with civilization, but also today where the preservation of the free status of the sea routes around the globe is one of the most vital issues for the United States' ontological survival.

The American collective identity can be mainly identified in the way that the U.S. has formulated its foreign policy since the early days. Fundamental qualities and habits of islanders which an experienced anthropologist or an attentive tourist can identify in the code of conduct of an Englishman, a Corsican, a Sicilian, or a Greek can also be found in an American citizen as well. They are excessively fond for the land, have an amplified pride for historical past, hold a distinctive code of honor, and have an exceptional passion of freedom that can be either an appetite for unobstructed view of the big blue sea or a primordial desire to fight with the waves. The following poem of Timothy Dwight, written in the last pre-revolutionary period, reveals a rise of nationalism within the colonies which goes far beyond a mere tax collision between London and the North American British dominions, blended with a profound aura of naval expansionism that resembles more to the ancient Nordic hymns:

*Hail land of light and glory! Thy power shall grow
Far as the seas, which round thy regions flow;
Through earth's wild realms thy glory shall extend,
And savage nations at thy scepter bend.
And the frozen shores thy sons shall sail,
Or stretch their canvas to the ASIAN gale.*

¹This is a verse of the famous Ralph Waldo Emerson's Concord Hymn that was sung at the completion of the Concord Battle Monument in July 4, 1837.

No wonder why one of the pillars of the American literature is Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Many popular American shanties of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries are about brave American sailors and the affinity the Americans feel about the great big ocean (Cohen 2008; Knapp 2005). Perhaps, the most distinct socio-ideological feature of the U.S. is that the oceanic connection can be equally felt as an essential part of the collective American identity, by disparate groups: a direct descendant of the first settlers of Jamestown; an offspring of the Afro-American slaves from the cotton plantations of the South; a Jewish survivor of one of numerous pogroms of the nineteenth century in Europe who found shelter in Brooklyn's Crown Heights; a Greek, a Muslim, or an Armenian surviving the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the end of the WWI; and a moist *e pluribus unum* by sea breeze and the hopes for a better life in the New World. The inhabitants of the new *Shining City on a Hill* regardless of their ethnicity or cultural or religious origins were eager to make a new beginning, simply by searching for a new life in this continental island, separated from the Old World with a vast trench of blue, hard-to-cross, water. The adoption of an islander's endurance, one that promotes a fearless appetite for taming the unknown, would have surely seemed as an authentic endorsement for a new beginning by the newcomers in this part of the globe.

Islanders feel the urge to control the sea surrounding their ontological existence, like Ernest Hemingway's protagonist *Santiago* in the "*Old Man and the Sea*". The same can be said for the U.S., too. It is a state with the instinct of an islander, with the urge to fight with each and every wave surrounding its entity. Even during late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the era of high friction with Britannia, the ruler of waves, America set as one of its main goals the use of the Atlantic Ocean as a naval trade route to import and more important to export goods to the rest of the globe. That goal soon enough became an existential need and a political reality when in 1793 France declared war on Britain and it simultaneously opened its West India Trade to Americans (Slaughter 2016: 27). The first period of the U.S. as a nation state, immediately after the end of the War of Independence, was characterized by the military and political attempts of the Americans to acquire the Trans-Appalachian West from the British and the Native Americans (Furstenberg 2008; Zemler 2014). Simultaneously, the new state applied considerable pressure upon London to secure its *de jure* presence in the Atlantic waters. Characteristically, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams negotiated hard, and eventually succeeded, in securing grant concessions to the American fishermen in Canadian Waters by the British in the Treaty of Paris, September 3, 1783.² The signing of the Treaty was a spectacular achievement of the American delegation, showing that from the early days, unobstructed access to the seas represented one of the main goals of the American foreign policy. As Peter Swartz (2017, 2, 3) notes, showing the great importance the U.S. was giving to its naval policy since the very early days:

²The Treaty of Paris ended the American War of Independence, granting the status of a sovereign state to the newly born nation. For more regarding the political and legal significance of the Treaty of Paris not only for North America but for Europe as well since the Treaty also put an end to hostilities between Britain and the European powers that supported the rebels see Jedson (2006).

The United States has used its Navy as an important tool of national security policy since the very earliest days of the Republic. The Navy has participated significantly in all the nation's wars, since the American Revolution through Operation Enduring Freedom. It has also served as a significant tool of American diplomacy and international economic policy during times of prolonged peace. America is used to thinking of its Navy as one of its leading institutions, and calling upon it to carry out a wide range of diplomatic, information, military and economic policies. These are fundamental bases of the American use of naval power—and while not unique in the world, they differ markedly from the experience of many other nations.

By having access to the Canadian coasts, the American side profited in many aspects, i.e., fishing rights and trading goods, yet the most important was that the new state did not experience a period of naval isolation. Both the public opinion and the administration elite considered the Atlantic Ocean as an extension of the American sovereign territory and not as a natural frontier. It was never felt that beyond that line only the great European powers had the capacity and the “right” to be actively involved; therefore it can be argued that the newly born nation never developed a syndrome of geostrategic inferiority. It goes without saying that the transformation of the U.S. into the mightiest naval power took time, consumed immense amounts of public money, required innovative thinking, sacrificed American lives, to name a few. Nevertheless, the maritime arena had been considered by the Americans, since the early days, as a venue of creative competition and fierce antagonism for the strengthening of the state. This detail played a decisive role in the way that the fundamental strategic orientations of the U.S. were to be shaped (Daughan 2008, 2011; Symonds 2016: 12–22).

As I have already mentioned above, since the early days, the U.S. showed an old sea dog's instinct deriving from its English roots. This was fully revealed by the fact that for the American trade vessels and warships, access to the Atlantic Ocean soon proved insufficient for the nation's naval ambitions. Thus, few years after independence the Star Spangled Banner began to waive under the Mediterranean breeze in almost every major port. Yet, what led the American navy to include the region of the Mediterranean and in particular the eastern part of it to its greater strategic imperatives? The first reason can be found in the undisputable fact that the Mediterranean Sea is geographically the actual extension of the Atlantic Ocean, even in terms of natural resources, since the 71% of the Mediterranean water comes from the latter as a surface current, creating a sui generis form of interdependency (Phillips 2000: 5). Geography verifies the geostrategic dictum that in order for a state to impose its naval presence in the Atlantic Ocean it has to be strong in the Mediterranean Sea and vice versa. The examples of Elizabethan England (Nelson 2001: 82–123; Leyland 2011: 27–28), Phillip II's Spain (Martin and Parker 1999; Hanson 2004), and later on Louis XIV's France (Dull 2005) concerning the states' intense efforts to become formidable naval powers by simultaneously imposing their presence in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea underline the continual geographic interconnection between the two seas, a fact that is still producing various economic and military phenomena of balanced and asymmetric interdependencies as well. The second reason has to do with the early postrevolu-

tionary days of the U.S. and the orientation of the new state in the international arena. Undeniably, the newly born nation-state aimed to achieve an atypical form of political and military protectionism by keeping itself away from the European conundrums, yet not disconnected from the European socioeconomic developments.³ Thus, it proclaimed a complete form of neutrality.⁴ The new state was aware that in order to survive economically it had to, within a limited period of time, be a part of the world economic system. However, in order to survive politically and militarily it had to keep away from the European arena and begin to expand its hard power. Thus, the economic survival of the state entailed the establishment of an offshore naval trade, e.g., with China (Johnson 2012), as far and as soon as this was possible, while in parallel the avoidance of military frictions with the major international actors of that time became a pivotal goal.

Perhaps, this *sui generis* blend of an atypical protectionism, coupled with the vigilant form of naval dynamism, substantially added to the American collective efforts to show the flag in the open seas. Since the early days the American navy had established its presence in the seas in a much more systematic way than the power leverage of the state should have had permitted. It is hard to tell if this was the result of the esoteric call of the sea for the Americans, deriving from their inherent islander's psyche, or it was the product of a rational decision-making of the American political elite to build a formidable naval presence in order for the new state to be able to stand on its own feet in the international arena. Most probably, it was a combination of both. It was an utterly successful attempt of the U.S. to construct its appearance within such a limited period of time. This naval effectiveness gave the opportunity to America to establish a premier access for its commodities in all the major ports in the North Sea and in the Mediterranean as well. American goods were reaching some of the most prominent ports of that time: Barcelona, Marseilles, Venice, Genoa, Alexandria, Beirut, and Constantinople. This offered the opportunity to the newly established state to grow market share from the most prestigious part of the world's naval trade of that time, and establish an efficient trade connection with the rest of the globe. Last but not least, through the naval presence of the U.S. in the Atlantic Ocean and in the Mediterranean Sea, the state gradually established diplomatic, political, and cultural relations with the Middle East and the Black Sea regions, thus creating a cosmopolitan aura for itself that up until that moment was the privilege only of the great naval European powers. It also allowed the U.S. to maintain its prospects open for future geostrategic developments.

³According to the conclusions of a Congressional Committee back in 1784 "*The fortune of every citizen is interested in the fate of commerce ... for it is the constant source of industry and wealth; and the value of our produce and our land must ever rise or fall in proportion to the prosperous or adverse state of our trade*" (Adams 1997: 160).

⁴Characteristically, in his 1796 farewell address to the Americans, George Washington stated, "*Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence therefore it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships, or enmities*" (Avlon 2017: 303).

In essence, America managed the absolute rise in international politics. Though a fragile state immediately after the end of the War of Independence, it managed not to be a protectorate of any of the Great Powers of that time, though most of them were much more powerful. Furthermore, despite the fact that the U.S. proclaimed its unwillingness to be actively involved in the world politics of that time, it succeeded in showing and maintaining a naval pro-activeness, so much so that it was not restricted only in the Atlantic coasts of North America, but it reached the Eastern Mediterranean's major trade ports. As Bradford Perkins (1993: 7) in the Cambridge History of the American Foreign Policy rightly argues:

In the nation's early years, foreign commerce was an extremely important factor in the economy. Although what was essentially subsistence farming remained predominant, a market economy steadily developed, and foreign markets quickly became an important part of the system. At no other time has such a high proportion of the national product been exported, and the price level of many important commodities was essentially determined by export prices. At least until John Quincy Adams's presidency, every chief executive devoted much of his attention to the fostering of trade and the vibrant merchant marine that carried it.

It goes without saying that by investing substantially in its naval policy the U.S. immensely assisted the national economy to adopt an extroverted orbit in accordance with the world's capitalist trends of that time (Weaver 2016: 25–46; Walton and Rockoff 2017: 111–119). For this, the international developments immensely helped as well. The international balance of power, and in particular the outbreak of the French Revolution, kept the European powers preoccupied with each other giving space to the U.S. to efficiently grow fast. Accordingly, this offered the opportunity to the U.S. to promote its national interests without provoking the geostrategic reflexes of the main international actors nor generating multiple security dilemmas.⁵ However, this did not undermine the innovative skills of the American people or the political instinct and the profound merit of the early American political elites. Sometimes, as an ancient Greek proverb says, luck helps the bold ones. Yet, almost always, it willingly gives a hand to those who truly deserve it. The U.S. was, personally I strongly believe that it still is, the home of the bold and the land of the competent where opportunities are transformed into effective policies allowing the U.S. to elevate itself to the highest levels of international structure. This unprecedented structure of collective success does not derive from a superior DNA, but from an extrovert and dynamic way of perceiving the world affairs which has its roots in the early days of the Republic (Booth and Wheeler 2008).

3 The Three Pillars of Success

I still remember the summer of 2015, when I visited the North-Eastern coast of the U.S. as a fellow of a program of the State Department for scholars from all around the world, specialized on U.S. foreign policy. I asked each speaker in the program

⁵For more regarding the theoretical dimensions of the security dilemma in international politics see Tang (2009), Booth and Wheeler (2008), and Bourne (2014: 93–114).

what has been the secret of the American success. Interestingly, most of them were surprised and taken aback by this question, and in their response they avoided using of the word “success.” I believe that it is time to give a reply to my own question, but first it is important to understand the theoretical dimensions of the word “success” in international politics.

Before continuing with the United States’ secret of success, it is important first to clarify that overall a successful state is usually the one which commits the least number of failures. This is mainly due to the fact that the expectation of complete success in politics, domestic or international, is rarely met (McConnell 2010: 346). Therefore, a state that is able to commit fewer mistakes, either because it is highly observable and learns from the mistakes of other states, or able to draw useful lessons from positive foreign experience, or because it has the capacity to absorb its own failures by not harming vital state functions, is usually the one that is being attributed by the other states the successful label. From a general and at the same time utterly idealistic point of view, success in international politics can be seen as the sum of those policies that redress power imbalances and reduce inequalities (Taylor and Balloch 2005; Pawson 2006). From a more specific and realistic point of view, success in international politics is an act which is amenable to positive identification, first by the citizens of the state that implements this and second by other states too. Nevertheless, the ultimate test for a state in order to prove, first to itself and then to all the others, that it is successful is to maintain in its highest form and level the instinct of survival.⁶ An interesting fact about the American secret of success is that the U.S. foreign policy meets all the above criteria in the international environment with the utmost positive outcome.

For example, if someone monitors the territorial expansion of the U.S. after the end of the War of Independence, or the economic growth that had been achieved almost immediately after the birth of the American nation-state, then he/she will be able to notice that three main elements played a crucial role in transforming the U.S. into a major actor of today’s international system and the architect of the socio-political system that the Western world enjoys since WWII. These three elements are (a) individualism, (b) mobility, and (c) exceptionalism.

3.1 *Individualism*

The concept of individualism is widely acknowledged and analyzed in concepts related to the American culture (Girgus 1979; Naylor 1998; Turner 2012), focusing upon the idea that one provides for oneself and one’s family (Barlow 2013: 186). The American identity was heavily influenced by individualism, affecting in turn the way economic and foreign policy narratives evolved in this part of the American

⁶According to Kenneth Waltz (1979, 126) survival is the attempt of the states to maintain their position in the anarchic international environment. For more about the implications of survival policies see among others Odysseos (2002).

continent. However, why is American identity so closely connected with individualism? I argue that American individualism is closely connected with pioneering, the exploration of the American continent by small groups of internal immigrants that were required to move to the undiscovered vastness of the region in order to economically survive or thrive. Pioneering offered the opportunity to the Americans not only to tame the wild nature of the newly born state, but also to establish rural and urban centers deep inside North America. Thus this movement succeeded in establishing a rich economic diversity in the state's growth model.

Individualism does not disregard law and order, nor the Hobbesian principle of the need to form a collective base in order to attain survival from the state of nature (Wright 2004: 70–72; Bates 2012: 63–79). In this particular framework, individualism does not constitute a lack of sociability or nonobservance of prescribed laws. On the contrary, I argue that in the American collective identity, individualism plays the role of an indirect, yet intentional, incentive, since it offers the validation to those who believe that they have the skills to step forward and lead without having to engage with calcified bureaucracy and institutions, which may also require gaining approval against established social norms and paradigms. In other words, individualism can be seen as the capability of one to play the role of an avant-garde in order to pave the road for those who want to follow his/her lead. Perhaps, this is not easy to be fully understood by a European or an Asian where narcissistic historical analysis, collective identity, or strong religious ideas play focal role in the construction of national identities. On the contrary, Americans do not follow that pattern. For example, in 2014 during a Global Attitudes survey by Pew Research Center 57% of Americans disagreed with the statement “Success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control” (Gao 2015). This reveals a nation that strongly believes in its own abilities, a society that does not perceive itself as a whole body, but as a positive sum of individual will and ability. The American society instead of worshipping the post-rational dimensions of metaphysics, or giving credit to the postmodern rule of prevailing masses, seems to be much more inclined towards the two last verses of William Ernest Henley's *Invictus*: “*I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.*” This specific aspect of the U.S. national identity can also be seen as a distinguishable approach of the American foreign policy in the frequently inhospitable alleys of the international system.

The U.S. has played the role of the avant-garde in the international arena many times in the past, sometimes more reluctantly than some others and vice versa. However, especially since WWI the U.S. excessively made use of this individualistic approach in its foreign policy, to find a way out from the existing conundrum every time the legal, logistic, or political implications within the Western collective defense and security structure act as an obstacle, e.g., Operation Vittles during the Berlin airlift or the implementation of Truman Doctrine. It is important to note that this individualistic approach functions as the driving force for the establishment and

the perseverance of an effective and reliant capitalist system in the States⁷ and serves as the cornerstone of a vigorous and efficient foreign policy especially after the end of the American Civil War (Fischer 2008; Perkins 1994). Last but not least, individualism can also be seen as the main ingredient for the sui generis mixture of the two other main characteristics of the American identity, mobility and exceptionalism.

3.2 *Mobility*

Next element after individualism is mobility. The concept of mobility can be identified as the inner desire of the American people to discover new places, to establish new settlements, and to achieve growth and prosperity for family, the group, or the nation. Many analysts underline that the U.S. is a nation of immigrants. It is also a nation of pioneers. Those who explored the vastly unknown territories of the new state, in a quest to exploit, in their own favor, the great resources and the endless opportunities that America had to offer, could not be intimidated by the unknown. As Luther Ely Smith urges his compatriots:

You will recall ... there has grown up a new school of history in this country which has turned its eyes away from the exclusive attention that was formerly given to the Atlantic seaboard and has realized that the character of America was made not on the coastal plain of this great country but was forged in the frontier as the pioneers went out to grapple with the conditions which confronted them ... We owe this debt to the pioneers, to Jefferson ... to Daniel Boone and every one of these great men who trod this sacred soil ... Let us pay back the debt we owe to the American pioneers who gave us the American nation and gave us the American character (Bodnar 1992: 189).

For pioneers, no obstacle was insurmountable. Immigrants had an earnest understanding that this country was their last chance in this life, and that their survival depended on their successful explorations of new lands to accommodate them and their families. This urge to discover new opportunities, new power resources, and new territories also creates a constant mobility in the American foreign policy too. New ideas, new trends, new norms, and new doctrines arrive daily in the U.S., making the state a great melting pot not only of different ethnicities, but also of new beliefs and new practices. This emphatic belief in cosmopolitanism, consciously or unconsciously, constantly invigorates the American society. Perhaps, it

⁷This can be seen as the result of the combination of two different aspects of the individualistic methodology. On the one hand, as Yuxian Zhang (2013: 38) says, “*Traditional Americans possess a strong sense of personal independence. They think of themselves as independent individuals. Of course, family and collective attention are important, but personal independence and individual rights are supreme.*” While he continues, “*Individualists advocate that the social intervention to the private behavior should be limited to a minimum degree.*” The strong sense of personal independence and the equally strong detest towards social intervention upon private behavior can be seen as the womb and the cradle of the “*laissez-faire*” economic ideal which is the cornerstone of capitalism.

is the bounty of ideologies which unites the nation instead of dividing it during times of high necessity. Or maybe this mobility urge opens opportunities in the international arena, constituting the deep meaning of Richard Hofstadter's words that Americans do not embrace ideologies because America is an ideology (Lipset 1997: 18). Nevertheless, the result shows that from the early days of the Republic up until today, the nation managed to be a leading actor in the international scene by transforming the mobility urge into a fundamental doctrine of the U.S. foreign policy.

From time to time, the conviction, or perhaps the fulfilling prophecy, emerges that the U.S. becomes a "dispensable nation" (Nasr 2013). A characteristic example of that specific thought comes from Ian Bremer (2013). As he argues:

Since midway through George W. Bush's tenure, there's been a steady hum from the pundit class that America's best days are behind it. An overreaching foreign policy, rising public debt, and a growing wave of outsourced jobs means that America will soon lose its status at the world's preeminent power. America was quickly on its way to becoming Rome.

However, I argue that the U.S. is not declining. Perhaps the globe does not evolve anymore within a unipolar shell and hence multipolarity is the current systemic reality. Yet, the U.S. still is one of the leading actors in international politics and the most prominent Western state (Jones 2014; Kagan 2013; Nye 2012; Mead 2012a). The reason for this cannot be found solely in the unparalleled American hard or soft power. It has also to do with the fact that America is a nation of formidable collective narratives, and also a polity that reinvents itself through the formation of new ideas. It is the only nation in the world that failure, in any level, of the individual or in the collective manner, is not the end as long as the failure will be immediately replaced by a new effort. Once again, mobility is in the first line of the nation's core ontology. The right of the individual to preserve, promote, and protect its own ideology is sacred for the American state and one of the pillars of its institutional order as it can be seen in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, it is not surprising for someone familiar with American politics to see people marching in favor and against gun control, for example, at a very close distance to each other. This is the product of an exemplary constitutional tolerance that it may have on various contradictory implementations in micro-societal issues. Nevertheless, this institutional boost for free thinking and expression of beliefs allows to a large part of the American society to be open to anything new appearing on the horizon, thus establishing the foundations for mobility and progress on a social level.

Mobility can also be identified in the U.S. foreign policy as a constant search for the establishment of new spheres of American influence around the globe (Hybel 2014). It can be argued that the U.S. was the first power that adopted a "think and act out of the box" mentality many decades before this phrase acquired a comprehensible meaning in international politics. For example, the Louisiana

Purchase⁸ of 1803 was a pivotal act of territorial transaction in the international scene. While Europeans were promoting and perpetuating war and the demise of thousands of young people in the “field of honor” as the only possible and moral way to promote their geostrategic and political claims in Old World style, Washington was testing every possible way to maximize the power capabilities and increase the territorial capacity of the nation as the Louisiana Purchase shows. In other words, while the Europeans for a long period of time were choosing to resolve their political issues through violent means, the Americans were opting for innovative diplomacy. Yet, this must not be seen as a perpetual revocation of violence from the American side. On the contrary, violence or the threat to make use of it when necessary to support the national interests was on the table every time that diplomatic persuasion was not sufficient. However, while the European powers were not paying attention to the friction that the use of violence was causing to their economies and societies the U.S. was trying to pursue with its strategic goals without disbursing its power in vain. The concept of mobility in the U.S. foreign policy was emphatically evident in those cases where America was achieving its political goals without resorting to violence. Perhaps, the most characteristic example of that specific approach can be found in Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry’s gunboat diplomacy towards Japan in the Bakumatsu period (1853–1854). The U.S. presented a rather persuasive ultimatum, *do or accept the grave consequences*, demanding from Japan to put an end to the 220 years of isolation by opening its gates to foreign trade. As a consequence, Japan became an influential international trade hub, a decisive step that caused deep political changes in Tokyo with the collapse of the isolationist Tokugawa shogunate and the restoration of the extrovert Meiji regime (Teo 2013: 31–33). It is important to note at this point that this mobility doctrine is not always popular in the White House, the Capitol Hill, the State Department, or the Pentagon. This systemic reluctance however towards this specific societal characteristic is being put in halt immediately when the U.S. feels that it is being challenged or that its established interests around the globe are questioned. For example, the American initiative to establish open diplomatic channels with the isolationist regime of North Korea, a decision being forwarded by Donald Trump’s administration, shows the intensity and the immense capacity of the U.S. mobility to its full potential. Why this intensity is taking place? Because the cornerstone of the American mobility in the international arena is the so-called American exceptionalism.

⁸The failure of France to put down a slaves’ revolt in Tahiti led to the surrender of the French colonial authorities on November 9, 1803; the British naval blockade of France and the French fragile economy forced Napoleon to offer Louisiana for sale to the U.S. After continuous negotiations that lasted for some months the two sides agreed on the transfer of the Louisiana Territory, some 828,000 square miles of land for \$15 million. For more see Bush (2014).

3.3 *Exceptionalism*

Many students of the American studies think that Alexis de Tocqueville produced a eulogy for the U.S. in his study about Democracy in America. In reality, the French writer tried to produce a well-balanced analysis able to introduce the American political system to the European readers. Despite the fact that de Tocqueville sincerely admitted the American political system and the American society by attributing the word “exceptional” to the way the nation was established, he also noticed an unprecedented American nationalism that seemed to trouble him. According to his analysis (1835: vol. II, part III, Chap. XVI):

The Americans, in their intercourse with strangers, appear impatient of the smallest censure and insatiable of praise. The most slender eulogy is acceptable to them, the most exalted seldom contents them; they unceasingly harass you to extort praise, and if you resist their entreaties, they fall to praising themselves. It would seem as if, doubting their own merit, they wished to have it constantly exhibited before their eyes. Their vanity is not only greedy, but restless and jealous; it will grant nothing while it demands everything, but is ready to beg and quarrel at the same time (as cited by Restad 2015: x, xi).

However, the notion of exceptionalism was being attributed to the people of this corner of the globe much earlier than the Sons of Liberty decided to meet their destiny in the harbor of Boston. In 1630 the Puritan settler John Winthrop addressed his fellow pioneers, borrowing the idea from the Gospel of Mathews’ (5:14) description of the kingdom of God in earth, “*wee shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us*” (as cited by Camissa 2006: 29). Obviously, this form of pious exceptionalism was for internal use only among the first settlers, in order to boost their morale and to persuade those amid themselves who had second thoughts about their choice to leave England to reach the other side of the Atlantic that this decision was God’s will. However, as the decades passed since Winthrop delivered the above sermon, this almost hybrid form of religious exceptionalism had been blended with sociological and political elements producing a new theoretical foundation for the identity of the settlers and the character of their collective entity. For example, in its difficult decision to move against the mighty Great Britain, the American revolutionaries attempted to rationalize it as the direct intervention by the favorable divinity to their cause. As George Washington declared in his first inaugural address in the city of New York in April 1789:

Every step by which [the United States] have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency (as cited by Weeks 2013: 34)

Someone would be right to comment that it is not the first, nor the last time, that a group of people attribute their revolution to a divine call. The same aura of metaphysical call can be sensed in the Greek Revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire, in the *Risorgimento* or the Italian Unification (1815–1871), or even in the Mujahideen’s insurgency against the invading Soviet Army in Afghanistan in 1979. However, unlike all the other cases, the American rhetoric promoted the ideal that the pursue of liberty from the British did not happen just for themselves but it also