



The Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy and NATO

Continuity and Change From
The Cold War to the Rise of China

Chris J. Dolan

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Continuity and Change in U.S. Foreign Policy Toward NATO

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 reinvigorated the U.S. role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after years of tepid and reduced American support. After Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine began, media and the American public followed every development in what became the biggest land war in Europe since World War II. The Biden Administration and the U.S. Congress extended tens of billions of dollars in U.S. security and economic assistance to Ukraine. At the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, members united around their opposition to the Russian invasion, pledged to update deterrence measures and increase military spending, and approved plans for Finland and Sweden to join NATO. However, the war took a toll on the global economy and supply chains already hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rising cost of food and energy and the potential for a recession hung over the American economy and challenged America's position in NATO. Although most elites and the American public favored U.S. support for both NATO and Ukraine in the wake of the Russian invasion, events suggested caution for those assuming American support for both NATO and Ukraine would last forever.

More than a year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and unprecedented American support for NATO, it was predictable that critics of America's role in NATO would ask the same questions that were raised about the alliance since the U.S. ratified the Washington Treaty in 1949.

Why should the U.S. support NATO, an alliance that was designed to contain the spread of Soviet Communism during the Cold War? What could the U.S. gain from coming to the defense of wealthy European countries across a very wide Atlantic Ocean? Shouldn't the U.S. be more concerned with China than Russia? Most important, did Vladimir Putin's strategic blunder in launching the invasion and the Russian military's battlefield losses show that European NATO members can defend themselves against Russian aggression?

The answers to these questions lie in the long history of America's leadership role in NATO and the extent to which it is shaped by powerful domestic American political forces. It is also influenced by the historical evolution of America's position within the alliance from the Cold War to today. With an American public deeply polarized, China now as America's top competitor, and Russia's war in Ukraine, America's role in NATO is now being redefined especially as China and Russia are uniting to oppose the U.S. and its allies (Osnos, 2023). NATO is becoming less a conventional security alliance and more as a key asset in an American strategy to maintain balancing coalitions against China and Russia. In many ways, NATO is evolving into a transactional institutional mechanism for the U.S. to pursue its national security. This book highlights domestic political factors and the historical evolution of U.S. foreign policy toward NATO and Europe that shape those interests. It relies on theory and empirical research in foreign policy analysis, public opinion, neoclassical realism, liberalism, and constructivism to understand how domestic sources of foreign policy are driving the U.S. role in NATO.

The election of Joe Biden as president is important for the future of NATO because it has led the U.S. to adopt a more cooperative approach with NATO. As Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated (quoted in Mulligan et al., 2021), the Biden Administration would pursue a humble foreign policy that combines "humility with confidence," recommitting the U.S. to a foreign policy centered on diplomatic engagement and ending "forever wars." When Biden announced in April 2021 that he would follow through on Trump's promise to withdraw U.S. military forces from Afghanistan, this presented the U.S. with an opportunity to recalibrate America's worldwide military commitments (Cooper et al., 2021). As the U.S. continues to downgrade its military presence in the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific and Europe will become even more significant in U.S. foreign policy calculations (Kupchan & Trubowitz, 2021). Even though most Americans prioritize domestic affairs, retrenchment

from these regions would create opportunities for Russia and China to fill the void and overturn the U.S.-led world order.

If Trump were re-elected in 2020, it is highly unlikely that NATO would have survived given his hostility to democracies and alliances and his embrace of authoritarian governments. With Trump, there were many reasons to think NATO outlived its usefulness. Trump's views of NATO seemed to align with Kenneth Waltz's (2000) argument that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transatlantic alliance was no longer needed. As Waltz (1993) asserted, "NATO's days are not numbered, but its years are." As it turned out, the alliance not only lasted for decades, Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine revived NATO and forced the alliance to modernize and update its strategic orientation to some extent. And with likely admissions of Finland and Sweden, NATO will strengthen its defenses (Kirshner, 2021).

Although Biden rallied behind NATO and Ukraine, before his election, American foreign policy was moving away from globalization and interdependence. Under Trump, the U.S. began embracing an intense security competition with China and a more protectionist industrial policy that placed America's domestic interests ahead of everyone else's. This was consistent with populist trends in the American electorate.

The 2016 presidential election was a watershed moment. Donald Trump and Senator Bernie Sanders offered American voters new alternatives that criticized the foreign policy establishment and promised to highlight domestic needs, albeit for different reasons. As president, Trump disparaged traditional alliances, embraced autocrats and dictators, and pulled out of key multilateral agreements like the World Health Organization, Paris Climate Accords, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Senator Sanders was determined to halt the leading role of the military in U.S. foreign policy and end U.S. participation in multilateral trade and investment agreements he believed came at the expense of American workers (Friedman, 2020). When a hard nationalist and authoritarian in Trump was elected president and a socialist came close to winning the Democratic nomination for president in 2016, American voters were sending signals that the domestic political status quo in foreign policy was no longer tenable and significant attention was needed in domestic priorities.

While the Biden Administration has promised to return the U.S. to more predictable and stable set of foreign policy preferences and behavior, it pursued a domestic-themed "foreign policy for the middle class." Biden

had to reconcile his internationalist intentions with realist goals and nationalist impulses in a world order shaped by an intense security, technological, and economic competition with China and an American public demanding greater public investments at home. His presidency continued Trump's tariffs against China, slapped export controls on China's access to American technology, and invested heavily in American industrial production and manufacturing.

America has had a "love-hate" relationship with NATO since the U.S. ratified the Washington Treaty in 1949. While most American presidents have complained about European NATO members not shouldering more the financial and security burden, the U.S. has been committed to the alliance. Trump was different from his predecessors in that he openly chastised alliance members, warmed up to Vladimir Putin and other autocrats, and questioned the legitimacy of NATO. The Suez Canal Crisis, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the creation of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States defense arrangement has resulted in significant transatlantic disruption and debate. Despite what many would describe as an alliance of democracies, NATO has experienced as much tumult as it has unity. And much of this driven by domestic political concerns among the American people and U.S. foreign policy elites.

AMERICA'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL HEADWINDS

While critics highlight points of weakness and diverging interests among European NATO member states that could undermine alliance unity, the most significant threat to the alliance could come from domestic American politics. NATO's renewed confidence and legitimacy in the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine could become a footnote in history if hyper-partisanship and ideological divisions in the American political system expose critical weaknesses in American democracy and the alliance itself.

Americans have generally supported maintaining the U.S. military presence in Europe. They also support sending more U.S. troops to NATO allies in Eastern Europe in response to Russia's war in Ukraine. The U.S. Congress and domestic political pressures and public opinion can turn against Ukraine and undermine NATO unity. The far-right in the newly Republican-controlled House of Representatives will scrutinize U.S. security assistance to Ukraine, demand investigations into the departments of State and Defense, and question the benefits of American membership in

NATO. In October 2022, Republican leader Kevin McCarthy (quoted in Elliot, 2022) stated, that Americans would no longer write a “blank check” for Ukraine.

McCarthy was signaling to far-right Make American Great Again Republicans aligned with former President Donald Trump who announced his campaign for the Republican nomination for president in the 2024 election. Far-right MAGA Republican members of Congress and voters who oppose security assistance for Ukraine are aligned with some NATO allies who prefer that Ukraine negotiate with Russia and, quite possibly, cede territory to Russia taken by military force. But as President Biden (quoted in Santora et al., 2023) stated in a February 20, 2023 visit to Ukraine to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “For all the disagreement we have in our Congress on some issues, there is significant agreement on support for Ukraine.” At the 2023 Munich Security Council, Vice President Kamala Harris even accused Russia of committing crimes against humanity against Ukrainian civilians.

Far-right MAGA Republican opposition to both U.S. security assistance for Ukraine and the U.S. role in NATO raises questions about the extent of America’s overall security commitment to Europe. When President Biden met with allied leaders in June 2021, he (quoted in Bennett, 2022) stated that “America is back.” However, in response French President Emmanuel Macron asked, “For how long?” (quoted in Bennett, 2022). The percentage of Americans who think the U.S. is providing Ukraine too much security assistance increased from 7% in March 2022 to 26% in January 2023 compared to 20% who prefer the U.S. provide more assistance and 31% who think it is the appropriate amount (Dunn, 2023). A February 2023 poll showed declining American public support for sending additional security assistance packages to Ukraine with 48% of Americans favoring and 29% opposing weapons shipments (AP-NORC, 2023). Although bipartisan support was maintained in early 2023, Democrats (84%) are more likely than Republicans (70%) to support U.S. security assistance packages to Ukraine compared to 91% of Democrats and 74% of Republicans in support in May 2022 (AP-NORC, 2023).

Domestic political pressures could erode America’s commitments to Ukraine and NATO. While the Biden Administration rallied NATO members and led punishing new sanctions against Russia there is a sense that America’s renewed commitments to NATO may be vulnerable to

domestic divisions in the American political landscape. Although Republicans fared poorly in the 2022 congressional midterm elections and Democrats increased their control of the U.S. Senate, far-right MAGA Trump-candidates feel very compelled and confident to publicly object to U.S. military assistance to Ukraine and even express sympathy for Russia. While there was a sigh of relief in NATO capitals when isolationist, election-denying Republicans did not overtake Congress in a so-called “red wave,” the Republican Party controls the House of Representatives and could weaponize national security budgets to investigate and undercut the Biden Administration’s efforts to maintain NATO unity in the face of Russian aggression.

The 2024 presidential election will have significant implications for the U.S. role in NATO. There is greater urgency to lock in American support to NATO as much as possible in 2023 ahead of potential Republican victories in the presidential and congressional elections in 2024. Worries about an anti-NATO Republican nominee assuming the presidency in 2024 play into the hands of critics in Europe who argue that no matter the efforts made by the Biden Administration, European NATO members should no longer be dependent on the U.S. military to defend against Russian aggression. Should America’s attention shift away from Ukraine and NATO toward China and Taiwan, there is a possibility for Germany and France to push for increasing Europe’s role in NATO. But that may be too difficult as it could expose political differences with Eastern European members who have long called for greater American involvement and leadership in NATO.

Moreover, four years of Donald Trump’s “America First” brand eroded America’s global leadership position among allies and partners. The former president’s appeals to authoritarian regimes and his very public hostility toward U.S. international commitments empowered China and Russia. If Trump or a far-right Republican nominee returns to power in 2024, then European militaries will be forced to enhance their logistical, land, air, naval, and cyber capabilities, all of which are provided by the U.S.

If Trump wins the presidency in 2024, he will end American support for Ukraine, withdraw the U.S. from NATO and informal alliances in the Indo-Pacific, and end U.S. security commitments to Japan and South Korea. Aside from the outcome of the 2024 elections in the U.S., there is a small but not insignificant measure of support for Trump’s America First movement. NATO members cannot take U.S. security commitments

for granted and simply assume the U.S. will continue to fill security gaps in Europe. NATO's collective defense measures should be prepared to contend with both Russian aggression and American cynicism.

And while NATO members have increased some defense expenditures in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NATO is now being shaped more by Eastern European states that demand more American leadership and pulled into America's competition with China. With Sweden and Finland seeking NATO membership and with each already having close military cooperation with the U.S. in the face of renewed Russian aggression, the U.S. leadership position within NATO will strengthen. Therefore, vulnerable NATO members will become more attuned to America's domestic political pressures and focused on maintaining America's privileged membership status within the alliance.

The irony is that NATO will become more U.S.-led in its strategic orientation even if Americans grow wearier of the alliance and critical of sending security assistance to Ukraine. France and Germany are now mid-level powers and less relevant in the security and defense realms. Besides, France and Germany prefer greater leadership roles within the E.U. as opposed to NATO. With Russia a now critical threat to the Baltics and Eastern Europe, NATO will defer more to the U.S. and will be sensitive to its domestic political machinations. In many ways, if Trump or another far-right Republican captures the presidency in 2024, their grievances against NATO will fall silent as more NATO members will consent to American demands (McTague, 2022). The challenge for the U.S. will be to convince them to follow the rebalance to China and the Indo-Pacific.

Poor Republican performance in the 2022 congressional midterm elections due to Trump's inability to step aside and his legal challenges show, however, that his hold on the Republican Party is not ironclad. At least in 2023, while the public was expressing greater discontent with sending aid to Ukraine, there remains bipartisan legislative support for direct U.S. security assistance for Ukraine in its fight against Russia. As Hamilton (quoted in Bennett, 2022) argues "If you really look hard, there is a consensus among the Republicans in the Senate and the House on lethal aid to Ukraine."

Consequently, strengthening America's capabilities means the U.S. will continue to work with NATO partners at the same time it rebalances to the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. cannot contain China and Russia at the same time and on its own. America needs its NATO allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific to ensure that China does not dominate Asia

and Russia does not dominate Europe. NATO has allowed the U.S. to build a strong degree of credibility and legitimacy with European allies and a basis for expanding critical alliance systems in the Indo-Pacific like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and pursuing the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) defense arrangement. NATO provides military, political, and economic resources, assets, and capabilities to prevent Russia from altering the strategic balance of power in Europe. Defending Poland and the Baltic States from Russian aggression can be accomplished but only with multinational deterrence measures provided by the U.S. and its NATO partners.

For the U.S., NATO is one of the best bargains for advancing America's security interests. While the U.S. has invested heavily in European security and its security guarantee is at the center of NATO's political and security framework, that bargain has never really been one-way. NATO affords America a privileged strategic position of leadership that cements the U.S. within a transatlantic order that has provided economic prosperity and democratic stability for Americans. This security-economic connection provides the U.S. with an outsized role in trade and foreign investment, strategic basing privileges, access to defense markets to sell American weapons and military equipment, and cooperation on advanced technologies with military and civilian applications.

As conventional domains become more blended and blurred and as government intersects with the private sector in critical infrastructure sectors in physical and cyber realms, established military and civilian issues will be upended. Consequently, Americans will be more vulnerable to hybrid attacks as non-traditional threats and adversaries and malign actors will play greater roles in undermining democratic institutions and values. Cyberattacks, disinformation, climate change, migration, terrorism, and pandemics mean that resilience measures and crisis management operations must be enhanced on both sides of the Atlantic. The U.S. cannot address these threats on its own and needs its NATO allies to tackle complex and dynamic problems that defy conventional and traditional solutions.

The conundrum for U.S. foreign policymakers is less about adjusting the U.S. to these contemporary challenges and more about preparing the American people for keeping NATO and other U.S.-led alliance systems intact. The myriad of complex conventional and non-traditional threats shows just how much the U.S. needs NATO and other partners. If Americans are not fully prepared and the American political system not ready,

the U.S. is at risk of losing its economic prosperity, technological superiority, and strategic leadership position within the international system. NATO is at the center of the rules-based world order the U.S. built and maintained since the end of the Cold War. McInnis (2022) argues, “In a very real way, the security of NATO allies is inextricably linked with American interests.”

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book examines the domestic political factors shaping the U.S. role in NATO and assesses the historical evolution of U.S. foreign policy. Chapter 2 places the role of the U.S. in NATO and U.S. foreign policy toward Europe on the domestic level of analysis. It reviews the empirical research and theory on domestic politics and foreign policy, paying particular attention to the role of public opinion, elite-level and mass-level opinion, economic change, and bureaucratic and institutional factors that shape foreign policy. It also analyzes trends and patterns in the American economic and highlights the complexities of Americans’ foreign policy orientation and public opinion toward NATO and Europe.

Chapter 3 examines the evolution of the powerful American national security state and assesses how the militarization of containment strategy structured American priorities toward NATO and Europe from the Cold War to today. It highlights how U.S. foreign policy became driven by NSC 68, which boosted defense spending and increased America’s nuclear arsenal, and the extent to which containment became important domestic determinants of the U.S. role in NATO.

Chapter 4 focuses on the development of U.S. foreign policy anchored in the rules-based world order comprised of global institutions, norms, and formal and informal alliance networks premised on Euro-Atlantic integration. At the same time the U.S. was advancing a democratic agenda, China was rising and Russia resurrecting. Chapter 5 examines the domestic political implications of the Great Recession of 2008 and America’s deepening involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan with Americans more inclined to question the U.S. role in NATO during the Obama and Trump years.

Chapter 6 focuses on conflicting patterns during the Biden Administration. Far-reaching domestic political convulsions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the extremist January 6th insurrection, and U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan limited the new administration’s ability to

fulfill promises that “America’s back” in the world. In many ways, Biden’s “foreign policy for the middle class” rests on an industrial policy and Trumpian “protect agenda.” Biden also accelerated Trump era polices designed to contain China while also eschewing liberal globalization and interdependence. However, Russia’s brutal war in Ukraine led Biden to rally NATO allies and update the strategic orientation of NATO in ways that could keep the U.S. in Europe as its primary security guarantor even as the U.S. ramps up defense alliances in the Indo-Pacific to contain Chinese aggression.

However, for many, Biden’s foreign policy actions did not match his lofty promises as he led the very chaotic evacuation from Afghanistan, pursued a new defense arrangement with Australia and the U.K. (AUKUS), expanded the U.S. role in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, and pursued a “foreign policy for the middle class.” Biden’s approach is centered on a U.S. industrial policy and a “Buy American” trade policy designed to counter China and an approach to NATO that views the alliance through a transactional lens. But Russia’s war in Ukraine has made it incredibly difficult at a time when the American people are polarized and weary of American involvement in conflicts abroad.

Chapter 7 concludes that the domestic politics of U.S. foreign policy toward NATO will be challenged by hard realities in American politics. Russia’s war in Ukraine will become a defining feature in American politics in the 2024 presidential election and an important fault line in American foreign policy preferences and behavior. American security assistance packages to Ukraine have also depleted U.S. domestic weapons stockpiles that will force the U.S. to increase military spending and defense investments. This is elevating domestic pressures on “just in time” defense production and manufacturing. Furthermore, America’s prioritization of the Indo-Pacific region and its competition with China is leading the U.S. to promote a largely protectionist industrial policy.

The domestic politics of U.S. foreign making are at a cross roads. As America gets more engaged in a Cold War 2.0 security, economic, and technological competition with China, it is also becoming embroiled in Europe due to Russia’s brutal war in Ukraine. This has made NATO members, especially those along the Eastern flank, more vulnerable and dependent on the American security umbrella. The emerging “no limits” partnership between China and Russia has merged the Indo-China region and Europe in U.S. strategic calculations. As the U.S. continues rebalancing to the Indo-Pacific, it expects NATO to come along with it. But

the credibility of U.S. leadership of a balancing coalition against China and Russia is dependent on domestic American support, as opposed to the structure of the international system. The legitimacy and effectiveness of U.S. strategy relies on American public opinion and perceptions and the extent to which Americans believe U.S. foreign policy benefits them. Internal challenges to its own democracy from political extremism in the wake of the January 6th attacks and the stability of its system of constitutional government will determine the credibility of America's leadership of NATO in the struggle of democracies against autocracies.

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Public Perceptions and U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Europe

Presidents are generally elected on promises they make to do more at home and less around the world. These include Bill Clinton’s “it’s the economy, stupid” to George W. Bush’s “humble foreign policy,” Barack Obama’s “nation-building at home,” Trump’s “America first” and “make America great Again,” and Joe Biden’s “build back better.” Such domestic-themed brands use populist rhetoric to appeal to an American public that questions the extent of America’s role in the world, especially NATO. This is consistent with Hal Brands (2017) who described a benign and constructive “better nationalism” that “would not dismantle the post-war order and America’s post war project, but that would take a harder-edged and more disciplined approach to asserting U.S. interests.” In fact, significant gaps exist between the public’s preference for a restrained and reduced U.S. global role and the mostly internationalist views of America’s foreign policy leaders and elites (Fagan & Poushter, 2020; Hannah, 2019a, 2019b).

FOREIGN POLICY PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIOR

While the international system exercises significant influence over the foreign policy preferences and behavior of nation-states, purely systemic theories and concepts paint an incomplete picture as foreign policy is much more complex and dynamic. According to Hudson (2007, 4),

“One may be examining not a single decision, but a constellation of decisions taken with reference to a particular situation. Furthermore, decisions may be modified over time, requiring an examination of sequences of decisions.” Domestic political considerations should be integrated into understandings of foreign policy.

The foreign policy analysis literature has a wide range of empirical research and theory that incorporates domestic determinants of foreign policy behavior and preferences. Hudson (2007, 2) argues that foreign policy should include the “explanandum of foreign policy analysis includes the process and resultants of human decision making with reference to or having known consequences for foreign policy entities” (Hudson, 2007, 2). As a subfield within international relations, foreign policy analysis focuses on the foreign policy decision-making process (Mintz & Derouen, 2010, 3–36). Bueno de Mesquita (2002, 7) argues “when we examine international affairs through the lens of domestic decision making, we provide a way to think about how properties of the international system are shaped by local considerations as part of the larger strategic fabric of politics.”

Research demonstrates that foreign policy is shaped by individual- and group-level factors, such as public opinion, identity and perceptions, and culture that operate within the domestic context of a nation-state (Hudson, 2007, 37–124; Kaarbo, 2015). Some contend that foreign policy leaders and elites perceive retain considerable influence over foreign policy preferences and choices (Hess, 1963, 542–559; Holsti, 1970, 233–309). Others emphasize pressure groups (Chittick, 1970; Hagan, 1987), media framing tactics (Baum & Potter, 2019), and the power of public opinion in shaping the contours of foreign policy (Hayes, 2012; Holsti, 2002).

The argument that foreign policy elites are immune from public opinion and popular influence has been dismissed (Holsti, 2002). Scholars have observed that public opinion on foreign policy issues can be stable over time even when it responds to elite cues (Mueller, 1973; Page & Shapiro, 1992). Others suggest that public perceptions are consistent with core values or orientations (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2004; Mead, 2001). Moreover, foreign policy preferences factor into public evaluations of elites’ policy performance (Holsti, 2002) with leaders responding to alterations in public opinion (Foyle, 2004; Hayes, 2012; Sobel, 2001).

Mass-level and elite-level distinctions in foreign policy preferences and behaviors are especially important in shaping the formulation and conduct

of U.S. foreign policy. Roles and conceptions are also contested at the elite-level with conflicts among policymakers impacting foreign policy decision-making and foreign policy preferences (Cantir & Kaarbo, 2012; Kaarbo, 2015; Lobell, 2009). This is consistent with Rogowski (1999) who maintains that differences in foreign policy behavior and preferences among the mass public and elites influence foreign policy orientation, credibility, and stability.

Furthermore, political struggles among powerful groups and individuals with political influence in the foreign policymaking process shape U.S. foreign policy (Garrison, 1999). Allison and Zelikow (1999, chapter 6) argue foreign policy leaders and elites make decisions based on limited information and within a highly political context. As they observed in their research on the Cuban Missile Crisis, rational choices are limited by critical events, limited information, short-time frames, and impending threats. Organizational politics, which rests on standard operating procedures, bureaucratic culture, and routine and specialized processes and routines often limit the range of foreign policy choices. Different and competing interests in the foreign policymaking process and political games played by advisers depend, culture, and operational routine (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). Moreover, foreign policymakers can misinterpret or misperceive international factors, fail to identify appropriate policy responses, and often do not adequately assess their own actions (Cottam, 1986; Herrmann & Choi, 2007; Jervis, 1976).

Bureaucratic politics emphasizes the role of different interests in the foreign policy bureaucracy and organizational and organizational politics focuses on standard operating procedures and organizational cultures (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Halperin, 1974). Deeply entrenched and vested bureaucratic interests impede the conduct of U.S. foreign policy (Halperin, 1974). Foreign policy decisions flow from the push and pull among competing interests advanced by groups and individuals with domestic organizational cultures, advisory groups, individual-level cognitive factors driving the foreign policymaking process (Smith et al., 2008; Snyder et al., 1954; Sprout & Sprout, 1956). In the absence of an overarching theory of the foreign policymaking process, scholars highlighted the significance of bureaucratic and political factors (Allison, 1971; Jervis, 1976; Rosenau, 1966, 1968).

It would be logical to assume that liberal approaches highlight domestic political forces in shaping foreign policy and international relations. As Doyle (2008, 59) states, “liberals pay more attention to

domestic structures and individual differences than do realists.” Research also demonstrates that subnational political actors, namely interest groups, foreign policy elites, and individuals influence foreign policy decision-making (Morasevik, 1997). Moreover, Putnam’s (1988) two-level games integration of bargaining and negotiation on the domestic and international levels of analysis refocused attention on the domestic politics of international relations.

Liberal approaches accept the conception of the state as a sovereign actor but reject its autonomy given that national interests change and evolve. Keohane and Nye (2001) developed the notion of complex interdependence to capture the dynamism and fluidity of states, institutions, and non-state actor interactions in international relations. Some maintain that soft power is a great source of influence, allowing a state a measure of attraction via legitimacy of its policies and values (Nye, 2004). Nye (2002) adds that strategic use of smart power, the effective combination of coercion and attraction can lead produce positive foreign policy outcomes.

While democracy is a process of selecting leaders based on popular participation, liberal democracy emphasizes civil liberties and civil rights against abuses by autocratic leaders or majority rule as well as the rule of law by strong governing institutions (Zakaria, 2007). Political parties mediate, facilitate, and incorporate popular passions into public policy. However, for Zakaria (2007), in the absence of strong checks and balances on majoritarianism and authoritarianism, democracy can transform into illiberalism in which corruption, misinformation, attacks on political opponents, and violations of individual rights become routine practices (Applebaum, 2020). American political institutions were tested on January 6th, 2021, when Trump’s extremist supporters assaulted the U.S. Capitol to prevent the constitutional process of transferring power to incoming President Joe Biden.

Constructivism focuses on social construction of order in the world as well as identity in understanding global politics (Reus-Smit, 2013; Wendt, 1999). Whereas liberalism and realism assume identity already exists, social constructivists contend that identity is raised and shaped by shared ideas from which we understand action and behavior in contemporary international politics (Wendt, 1992). While social constructivism is not one uniform theoretical approach and distinctions exist among critical and conventional constructivists, the broader school of thought emphasizes thinking about identity, ideas, social relations, language, and ideational