

Commentary

*From SNAFU to FUBAR?*  
*Thoughts on the U.S. Election*

January 16, 2017

The 2016 American election put supermarket tabloids to shame but, not unconnected with this, seems to have provide gainful – if temporary – employment to online trolls and fakers, including several teenagers in Veles, Macedonia: an outstanding example of transnational relations at work. It firmly established terms such as “alt-right”, “post-truth” and “fake news” in our political discourse, the latter two joining and amplifying Stephen Colbert’s concept of “truthiness.” It did not, however, do much to advance coherent argument regarding the nature of the foreign and domestic policy challenges faced by the US, or what reasonable responses might be forthcoming. The result was shocking to “establishment” expectations both within the US and abroad, and was welcomed by, among others, groups and actors – also within the US and abroad – who inspire more concern than confidence. The commentariat now faces the task of prognosticating the future of the US, and the world.

To do so, observers – at least those outside the ranks of those already politically-committed – must navigate between apocalyptic hyperbole and wishful/hopeful thinking. Even to pose the challenge this way is implicitly to suggest that the potential/probable outcomes could likely range from “not good but not too bad” to “very, very bad indeed.” If nothing else, regardless of content, there is a generalized

current (outside of the ranks of the admirers) of fear of the unexpected, and of unpredictability or inconsistency. This fear may relax if and when a sense of policy direction emerges, depending on what that direction is. If, as seems likely, a Trump victory and a Trump presidency gives increased momentum to right-wing populism around the world, this will increase pressures on key countries in Europe and elsewhere, and on the current global order. President Trump could, in other words, be a blip, or signal a trying period, or could be a defining moment for both the prevailing international order and the 21<sup>st</sup> century – an ending to the post-World War II as well as the post-Cold War era. It is relatively hard – depending on your initial disposition and on whom you read – to think of it as an outcome with great positive potential. At the same time, long-entrenched American interests and political groupings might well counter or at least complicate some hypothetical possibilities.

Prediction is rendered more difficult given that new administrations always try to depict themselves as different from their predecessors, and that new moderate administrations will by definition tend to be moderate but new immoderate ones may be strategically patient when given a choice, biding their time until strength in the Senate and the House can be deepened in the mid-terms. Both may thus seek to reassure the losing side while restraining their more exuberant followers (though the GOP-controlled House made a serious initial misstep in this regard). Given that it is still early days, we are at the moment reading tea leaves and, depending on one's disposition, perhaps contemplating an accumulation of potential "terrible ifs." Guessing the future means assessing a series of complexly-linked questions touching on the man, the program, the team, the Congress, the American people, and not least, the world. The first three are highly entangled with each other, and with Congress regarding policy direction and implementation; the last two touch on challenges for and the reception of the new administration's direction and policies.

### **The Man**

Several key questions arise here. Will the new President be like the candidate – that is, is what we saw the "real" Donald Trump, and if so, will the office have an effect on the man? A tendency to "tweet" on issues of foreign and domestic policy is not reassuring. This is a fine way to keep in touch with one's base, but what seem to be off-

the-cuff as well as short and often premature comments are not a particularly sound way of conducting foreign relations. They reinforce, instead, the image of a person who “shoots from the lip” and then, at times, tries to walk back his comments when the reaction begins – or at other times, doubles down. Intemperate and unmeasured statements, while red meat to his supporters, will alarm rather than impress foreign governments, and strategies of walking them back, defiance, or outright denial will not fly very far with a foreign, official, audience. China has already commented on this matter. In one recent interview alone, Mr. Trump managed simultaneously to undercut Chancellor Merkel, NATO and the EU. Nor will playing foreign and domestic policy as a sort of permanent political theatre-cum-campaign be a constructive approach. “Will it play in Peoria?” is a valid question, but it can be pushed too far as a litmus test for policy.

Is there a deeper Trump than what was seen on the campaign trail? The signs thus far say “no”. A significant effort was made by opposing commentators to paint him as shallow, narcissistic, and lacking interest in detail or discipline. Others, equally not his fans, have tried to suggest long-standing attitudes (policy positions may be too strong a claim) on economic and other aspects of foreign relations that seem broadly resonant with several of his campaign positions. If these are not the result of significant exposure on these matters, but rather the sort of general and reflexive positions one might look for in someone not heretofore broadly concerned with foreign affairs, then the question is whether they will carry over into the new administration in strong form, at least to set broad directions, or will be modified to a greater or lesser extent, in general position or in the detail of implementation, as that administration becomes populated at its upper levels, as it gets down to work, and as it comes to grips with a reality (the G. W. Bush administration notwithstanding) not entirely of its own construction or required to agree with it.

While supporters made much of their candidate’s business acumen, significant questions also arise about the implications of his business experience. We hear much, from certain quarters, of the need to run governments “like a business” – surely indicating a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of government as compared to a business, and of the very different decision-making – indeed political – structures in both. The US government categorically cannot be run like a business, and if it was –

presumably a privately-owned rather than a listed business – that would be in clear disregard of the US constitution. Attempting to approach the United States in the same spirit as a business enterprise is likely to be a quickly disconcerting, and unsuccessful as well as politically very costly, way to start. More immediately troubling is the problem of disentangling Mr. Trump’s business interests from his new political position; actions and efforts thus far have not been particularly reassuring, but the blurring of the private and the public interest cannot be tolerated without danger to sound policy as well as to the republic. As well – touched on below – is the question of Mr. Trump as a “deal-maker.”

A final set of questions to raise here concerns whether Mr. Trump will be a hands-on or a hands-off president. All presidents have their priorities but, as George W. Bush discovered, the world may have other ideas. Even if his style is hands-off, Mr. Trump must rule over and reconcile the disparate interests within his administration – tensions not only among agencies but also among specific policies; nor will he find it easy to walk away from policy failures with a “you’re fired.” In either case, one major question is simply whether Mr. Trump will listen to his advisors, leaving aside for the moment who these are and what this advice might be. Given his lack of exposure to international issues, or to detailed domestic issues, this is a central matter. Failure to receive or recognize, much less follow, good advice, will contribute its fair share to the prospect for “interesting times.”

## **The Program**

Many positions of the Trump campaign, including the notorious Mexican wall, caused considerable concern. They certainly indicate some long-standing issues. Burden-sharing in NATO is hardly a novel theme. Protectionist impulses have long been a current in American politics, if not in its trade policy: even as free trade agreements developed in the 1980s and 1990s, the US stepped up unilateral pressures against what it perceived as “unfair” trading practices as well as tried to open markets for American services and protect American intellectual property. The larger question lurking behind the at times unfortunate mode of expression of these concerns is whether the naïve, knee-jerk suggestions of solutions really ought to be taken at face value or are, instead, campaign posturing – “to be taken seriously but not literally” –

rather than actual lines of response. Even if not to be taken literally, words are important, and intemperate, blustering words carry their own burdens, including the puzzle and dangers of others trying to divine true meanings and intentions from them, and perhaps failing – or succeeding.

A more general policy/program concern arises from the characterization, and self-characterization, of Mr. Trump as a “deal-maker.” All presidents must be deal-makers, whether at home or abroad. It was not for nothing that Richard Neustadt regarded presidents not as “men on horseback” but as “presidents in sneakers.” The real question is whether separate deals are merely separate, or whether they come together as part of an underlying strategy and, if the latter, what that strategy is. All general policies – foreign policies included – have their internal tensions and contradictions, their temporizing and their compromises, to be sure. All must face a complex domestic and global reality. As J. Cordell Moore, Undersecretary of the Interior, observed in 1966,

Few words so innocently incorporate into their basic meaning as much simplifying illusion as does the word policy. It means a settled, definite course of action, and yet by its very nature, policy needs to be formulated when there are complex, uncertain alternatives so difficult to analyze and resolve that it is almost impossible to settle on a single, definite course. The illusory qualities of the word have merit, however, for once the compromising, hedging judgements have been made, choosing, chances are, not one but several somewhat indefinite and conflicting courses, it is comforting to be able to describe them by a word implying such wisdom, certainty, and singleness of purpose.

Some policies and programs, however, may be more prone to internal disorganization and incoherence than others. If there is no overall coherent vision, the problem is further amplified.

If any general theme seems to emerge from the Trump campaign, it is one of “putting America first.” A first-order reading of this might seem straightforward, but would be potentially catastrophic for the international order, whether pursued in a disjointed or a coherent style in detail. Failing to recognize second-order effects – US policy must affect the world, and that in turn affects the US – could at best increase

strains in the current world order and at worst bring it down, closing a chapter in history beneficial to the US as well as to its allies and opening a new, far less predictable and far more disorderly era. This is evident not only in respect to US security policy but also to its international economic policy, especially in respect to trade. (Whatever some might think, international economic policy is strongly related at least in the long term to international security policy.) A sharp turn to bilateralism, possibly in the hope of maximizing the US bargaining advantage with individual trading partners, risks not only a massive disruption of an already ailing multilateral trade system but also harming relations with important allies (among others), yet will not address the major domestic causes of US woes. Nor will a series of specific, limited international “deals” with particular states on other issues necessarily add up to a systematic approach rather than a mere heap of outcomes.

### **The Team**

Details of Mr. Trump’s candidates for the upper level of his administration are now emerging, though the process of confirmation may make for some changes. This is one *caveat* applicable to any attempt to project from this point at the time of writing. Another is that projections of individual dispositions from interpretations of a nominee’s past could be deceptive. Rick Perry’s nomination for Energy and Scott Pruitt’s for the Environmental Protection Agency may indicate bureaucratic capture by hostile forces – as is suspected of other suggested nominees – but Treasury, for example, though long populated by financial industry figures, was capable of independent thought in 2008. With these warnings in place, however, some broad patterns are now emerging. In a number of areas primarily of domestic importance – the environment, health, labour, housing and other social programs, education, the Attorney-General – he seems to be favouring a staunchly conservative program. In other, largely economic, positions, his candidates (including for advisory positions) seem generally to reflect the current harder right of the Republicans and of major corporations and financial institutions, including on issues of the budget and of financial regulation.

In the economic portfolios, Republicans may find reassurance, yet there are also tensions and possible vulnerabilities. In the case of the US financial system, Dodd-Frank would be in peril, but would any workable alternative to the previous fragmented,

ineffective and ideologically-hamstrung regulatory apparatus be on offer? Would financial institutions regain freedom of action – to be exploited as wisely and with as much due regard to the public interest as in the past? On the other hand, might the Glass-Steagel separation of commercial and investment banking be re-instituted and, if so, with what effects? Mr. Trump’s suggested “trade czar” is well known as hostile to China, which would confirm that specific aspect of his policy. His designated US Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, was formerly deputy US trade representative in the Reagan administration, and a critic of China, adding weight to this likelihood. On the other hand, the naming of former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad as prospective US ambassador to China may qualify this somewhat: he is seen as having close connections with Chinese leaders and being more well-disposed to that state. As a more general matter, the large number of major business figures nominated, including to economic advisory positions, suggests that corporate America will potentially have a strong voice in matters of trade and other economic policy areas. But this presence must be squared with the stream of tweets denouncing specific American and foreign corporations for actions apparently contrary to the incoming administration’s desire to strengthen the American manufacturing sector.

In the defence, foreign policy and national security areas, signals seem to be mixed. The nominees for Secretary of State and National Security Advisor have been taken by some as evidence of a pro-Russian turn, though one might argue, more neutrally, that knowledge of the current Russian leadership is an asset. Tillerson’s nomination for Secretary of State, however, could be difficult to secure. General Flynn is not subject to confirmation, but his record with the Defense Intelligence Agency is not reported to be a happy one, and he must be able to move beyond his deployment experience focus on Muslim terrorists; otherwise he (and the administration’s potential broader attitude) could jeopardize the first line of American defence against jihadist attackers at home, the American Muslim community. The CIA nominee has distinguished himself as the Republican point man in the various partisan Benghazi inquiries, not necessarily the best recommendation. The nominated National Intelligence Director is noted as a critic of Russia, and has had harsh words for Mr. Trump. More generally, the apparent antagonistic relationship between the intelligence community and Mr. Trump, especially over the Russian hacking issue, is not a good

sign. The retired generals nominated for Defense and Homeland Security may be less problematic: both seem generally respected and, contrary to what some might believe, the military may be less enthusiastic about foreign adventures than arm-chair enthusiasts.

It is notable that, thus far in the confirmation hearings, at least some of Mr. Trump's candidates have publicly stated positions distancing themselves from campaign statements. This could indicate a generous open-mindedness on Mr. Trump's part – a welcoming of dissenting views – or could presage difficulties. How his Cabinet might cope with his Twitter habit will also be a matter of interest. How will strong-willed Secretaries get along with White House influentials who hold contrary views on major policy questions? Any administration has its court parties, but if Mr. Trump is relatively hands-off, will his administration be able to coalesce (and if so, around whom), or will it be a mere hot-bed of agencies, courtiers and current or aspiring favourites intriguing for access, attention and approval for pet projects? Would such a competition for grace and favour be part of his decision style?

The question of the role of Mr. Trump's children – who seem to have a trusted place with him both politically and in his business dealings – is a matter of concern. Will there be an informal "family kitchen cabinet" as well as a formal Cabinet? The naming of his son-in-law, Mr. Jared Kushner, as a senior advisor (he was a significant figure in both the election campaign and in the transition) for trade and the Middle East will test both this issue and the problem of separation of business and government, though in fairness to Mr. Kushner he is reported to be disengaging from his business interests.

Mr. Trump's White House staff (which includes General Flynn) includes some figures representing the Republican establishment – notably Reince Priebus of the Republican National Committee. The inclusion of his campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, seems unexceptional enough. Mr. Kushner's appointment raises some eyebrows, but Mr. Bannon – formerly of Brietbart – has caused the greatest discomfort. Who will emerge here as primary gatekeepers, influentials, spokesmen (the Press Secretary, Sean Spicer, is another RNC member) and damage-controllers, will be important.



## The Congress

An administration and a Congress all in the hands of the same party might seem a dream come true, although the slim GOP majority in the new Senate, combined with the rampant abuse of the filibuster rule evident in the past several years places some limits on this. However, the first move of the GOP majority in the House – attempting to gut an ethics oversight body, then backing down in the face of an imperious tweet and broader public disapproval – suggests the dangers that a Republican-controlled government could run if it presumes too much, too recklessly, or too soon about its victory. While replacing the Affordable Care Act is supposedly a priority issue for both the White House and the Congress, what such a replacement would look like is unclear, as is the timeline. More generally, Mr. Trump is not a classic or a consistent Republican: in some business-related areas he may well prove as hard-line as some of his Cabinet and his Congress, but in social areas, will he be hard, or soft, or “go-along”?

There will obviously be tensions between the Democrats and the Republicans, but of potentially greater interest will be tensions within the GOP and between the GOP Congress and the White House. Congressional gridlock has done much in recent years to lower general approval for Congress, but will a GOP-controlled Congress actually be able to act, particularly in terms of positive work rather than merely attempting to dismantle elements of policies and agencies it dislikes? There are also budgetary issues that could arise. Will Mr. Trump’s ambitions for infrastructure and the military (the latter a GOP favourite) clash with the hardline tendencies of his Office of Management and Budget, much less the GOP-controlled House and other fiscal conservatives? Would agreement be bought by tampering with entitlement and other programs? Suggestions of avoiding the infrastructure funding question through taxes on returning corporate income have been questioned by at least some economists. According to one report, the incoming administration might seek to fund the “Mexican Wall” initially through an appropriation – with the promise of somehow getting Mexico to reimburse. In the short term, this could pose a problem for budget hawks in the GOP; in the longer term, the prospect of trying to muscle Mexico into payment will raise a nice foreign relations issue. Trade policies that end up disrupting the American locations of

integrated supply chains will also create problems within Congress. Some possible signs of disagreement in the realm of foreign policy are found in the imbroglio over Russian hacking, and in the larger lurking issue of the administration's apparent interest in improving US-Russian relations.

As the administration and the Congress develop over time, potential difficulties in White House policies themselves, and between the White House and Congress, can be expected to accumulate. Not all differences will play out smoothly, nor will all be pleasing to all of Mr. Trump's supporters. Disparate pressures and diversions can be expected to develop, and divided responses to these if the new order in government does not live up to expectations. The drive to return manufacturing jobs to the US, precisely because of its headline value, is a particular point of interest here.

### **The American People**

A more general limit on GOP and administration ambition, if only for the wise, would arise from recognition of the deep divisions uncovered and indeed produced by the campaign and its results. Mr. Trump won – but it was a technical victory on points. It was not a clean knockout, as the popular vote reveals, despite some spin attempts to the contrary. Post-election demonstrations and other manifestations of resistance may turn out to be mere posturing, but could also serve as a warning flag: these adversaries may not yield to mere tweets. Hard-right ambitions may have to be tempered if domestic discord is not to be inflamed to a point that has both foreign and domestic ramifications. Social policies will be a particular sore point here, given the apparent strength of social conservatives in the incoming administration. So might be the dismantling of regulatory regimes that actually offer some benefits to the American people, though with a cost immediately to businesses – though the loss of those advantages could take a while to become felt. Here again, the Affordable Care Act is of particular interest, especially should a GOP alternative prove elusive or disappointing. Immigration – see the “Mexican Wall” above – and internal tensions with ethnic and other minority groups, women's groups and others on the cultural left will also be likely flashpoints. One foresees litigation becoming even more of a growth industry. More generally, addressing the entrenched problem of domestic economic inequality will require a sea-change in thinking. Rising tides have not lifted all boats equally – the

metaphor is faulty. Will a largely “market-based” – or perhaps “market-limited” is a better descriptor?—approach work, or is a more positive and active government a necessary element for a solution?

The Republicans generally must now produce in economic terms. A misfire in the economy – inflation, recession, financial problems – would be a significant blow. Trade policy, and particularly the rescue of American manufacturing, will be a central test case, however. American manufacturing output has increased, but American manufacturing jobs have not. Is the Trump/GOP approach simply a re-hash of old policies that offer simply the same failed consequences? It must move beyond mere appeals to tax and regulatory arbitrage, and corporate incentives, with the added spice of protectionist threats. It must move beyond tweeted threats to individual firms – something which the corporate sector (and those executives/former executives in a Trump administration) may soon tire of. It must move beyond seeing the problem as primarily external – “unfair” trade practices by others. It must move beyond the stale but easy practice of protection of existing, dying, industries and jobs. An aggressive line of “more of the same but with reinvigorated attacks on selected trade partners” may be politically attractive domestically and within the GOP, but will not work at home in the longer run while threatening dangers to US trade, the international trade order, and the US position in the world more generally, as well as to the internal order of the United States. US policy must recognize the significance of intra-firm trade and international supply chains: how much of Mexican trade (or Canadian, for that matter) with the US in manufactured goods is linked to US exports to those states? Trying to unmake the NAFTA omelette alone, much less other complex international supply chains, will prove very costly and quite disruptive domestically as well as internationally.

A more viable, more forward thinking strategy will require policy transformations – and money – for responses at home that will strain the “government is evil/taxation is theft” mantra of old-faith Republicans. The labour market is not frictionless in terms of factor mobility, but efforts to overcome difficulties here will have wider social and educational ramifications, as well as economic ones, that could inhibit positive action.

*The World*

The incoming administration has highlighted a general policy direction of “America First,” but where Mr. Trump may propose, God and the world dispose. As already noted, one major question is precisely whether the new administration has an overall vision, much less one that goes beyond American shores, or whether it will pursue an approach consisting of separate deals – or rather, given Dirk Gently’s inherent interconnectedness of all things, pursue separate bits of the internationally and domestically entangled issues it faces. Given the many inherent tensions among these, a coherent strategy would be difficult enough to pursue. A strategy of disconnected bits, however, will enhance contradictions in a way that, conceivably, could only be reconciled by a general scaling-back (more positively) or a broader collapse (more negatively) of the post-WWII order and the US place within it.

China may serve as one example. Trade with China will be an obvious sore point between the new administration and that state. Chinese activity in the South China Sea will be another. However, cancellation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, if other involved states are unable to construct an alternative, could drive them towards China, undermining the more general US position in the Pacific. Shortly after the US election, several Asian leaders indicated a turn towards a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, long promoted by China. It is already notable that the new regime in the Philippines is signaling a friendlier attitude to China on the South China Sea issue – as well as being at least initially receptive to Russian overtures. Disputes with China could also negatively affect any prospect of co-operation with regard to North Korea, or, indeed, in the case of the Iranian nuclear deal. China already is suspected of moving to position itself as a leader of the economic order; will the US, through withdrawal or excessive bilateralism, vacate the field?

Russia, however, is a premier example. The question of Russian hacking, disinformation and related operations with respect to the election (as well as similar activities directed at other governments) will present both domestic and international difficulties. Traditional Republican suspicion towards Russia will persist as a result though, opportunistically, some in the GOP seem more willing to overlook – if not forgive and forget – the alleged transgressions. This could signal a possible split within GOP ranks, a potential vulnerability if the US population (including Republican supporters) are less kindly disposed, and an opening for the Democrats. If, however, a

kinder, gentler view of Russia – or a broader indifference – is actually becoming more widespread in the US population, that in itself will have massive foreign repercussions.

Seeking a better relationship with Russia presents, in itself, a variety of globe-spanning and interlocking questions, much less the question of whether Putin would press vigorously in response. Would this set Russia up as the swing state in a US-Russia-China triad? What does this entail for any US intent with respect to the Iranian nuclear deal? With respect to what appears to be a strengthening Russia-Syria-Iran link in the Middle East – with implications for Israel, Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, among others? What of the somewhat rocky Turkish-Russian relationship, in light of Turkey’s apparently growing disillusionment with Europe? Would a softening on Ukraine and Crimea be implied – and implicit or explicit recognition of a Russian sphere of influence in its “near-abroad”? What would this mean for NATO – including both efforts to encourage greater defence spending by US allies and for the particular case of the Baltic states? (It should be noted that NATO forces are already moving into Poland and the Baltic states – what will that, much less increased NATO spending, mean for US –Russian relations?) What of Russian gestures towards the Philippines? Or Russian moral and more material support for right-nationalist parties in Europe?

The general rise in right-populist nationalism, but particularly in Europe, also presents a series of challenges. Poland and Hungary may already be testing the limits of the EU’s toleration for a move towards “illiberal democracy,” while the latter seems to be moving in a pro-Russian direction, as well. Strengthening nationalism within EU states could undermine, or at least cut back, the degree of European unity, a triumph for a long-standing Russian and Soviet policy objective and a threat to the US global position. Here as well, not only NATO-related issues but also Iran-related issues arise: there were, after all, three European states crafting that deal, too. The very forces that may have helped feed the Trump victory seem to resonate in Europe: would the Trump administration seek to oppose or temper abroad the effects of forces that favoured it at home?

It is specifically with respect to the US position in the world, and to the liberal economic and political order upheld above all by the US, that both the specific policies of the incoming administration and any question of an overarching vision attendant to

second-order consequences and not just a first order “America First” become of the greatest broad interest. We are, potentially, seeing the opening of a great natural experiment in the changing of that world order (not to mention the definitive erasure of the domestic policy-foreign policy distinction at the heart of “systemic” theories of IR and a clear indication of the relevance of “bread-and-butter” economic issues to national and international security). In responding to growing nationalist forces at home, will the US be willing, much less able, to check or limit similar potentially corrosive forces abroad? Will it be willing, much less able, to provide viable domestic remedies at home, much less provide leadership for a revised but still recognizable liberal institutional order? Or will it lack either the interest or the ability to attempt such a salvage operation, or indeed lead the way to a weaker, shallower, more fragmented and more difficult and dangerous world order?

One peculiar element of the challenge facing the US and the West more generally is that the apparent – real or prospective – decline in Western unity is not due to the absence of a Russian threat, as some Realists might have predicted. If anything, Russia is more active now than in the 1990s, but it is now attempting not simply to flex its muscles in the usual political-military way but also, more importantly, to exploit divisions in Western societies, stoking forces of nationalism there and exploiting the weaknesses now apparent in the domestic and the globalizing endeavors particularly of neoliberal economic policy and its conservative supporters. The complete answer cannot, then, be found simply in a lack of cohesion caused by absence of an outside threat, but must significantly include not only a failure of shared understandings and expectations, due largely to strains of globalization, such as refugees and immigration, sovereignty implications of the Euro, and especially the deficiencies of neoliberal and conservative responses to tensions generated by the current order.

There is a delicious irony here. Conservative (i.e., 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal) economics and ideology supporting the rise of neo-liberal policies both in the US and abroad, have contributed to the current difficulties, both in terms of policies followed and responses blocked, yet such forces seem nicely in power in the Trump administration. But if “more of the same” is unlikely to deal adequately with the fallout at home, will it be adequate as a global policy position? And nationalist conservatives and other – more disreputable – forces on the right (see, e.g., Richard Hofstadter’s classic, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*) have also benefited. These last, however, both

at home and abroad may be the chief threat to a hopeful, co-ordinated, outcome. That such varied American conservative forces should be simultaneously implicated in the deeper causes of the current US discomfort yet also should be the primary political beneficiaries of the resulting dissatisfaction is surely proof that God does love a joke – but may have a nasty sense of humour. Note that this does not absolve left/cultural liberalism from a certain degree of blame, but it has not reaped the rewards!

Writing in *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*, G. John Ikenberry argued (p. 258) that “Stable orders are those in which the returns to power are relatively low, and the returns to institutions are relatively high.” He went on to attribute the stability of the postwar international order to the great US investment in institutions. What we might now see, in far larger scale than in the “Nixon shock” of August 1971 or his opening to China, is American power deployed to change various central formal and informal institutions in that order – possibly to reconstruct them, possibly to scale them back, possibly to erode them, – yet without a clear sense of what end result might be intended, or indeed what a result might be, or perhaps even a lack of interest in these questions. Of the international direction of impending US policy, is there a there there? Will American power be deployed to increase its immediate returns to itself (“Make America Great Again” in a narrowly self-interested sense), encouraging others to do the same? Is the US reduced from regime-maker to regime-breaker? If there is a vision, does the US have the will and the power, and the ability to find a suitable common ground among leading states? If it does, where might that common ground be located, and how might it be sought out, articulated and given form? (We will not even begin to discuss climate change or such other global questions.)