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Abstract: *»Die politischen Eliten in den USA unter George W. Bush und Barack Obama: Struktur und Außenpolitik«.* The article is devoted to a comparison of different U.S. administrations' foreign policy in the beginning of the 21st century. This period was chosen because it appears to be a critical moment in American history. The analysis shows that, despite the differences in party adherence and other ideological affiliations, successive administrations tend to follow identical or similar guidelines while implementing foreign policy. The author suggests several possible reasons for this continuity. First, there is the stability of the institutional and decision-making systems and mechanisms, which, in turn, are based on a stable system of interest representation. More broadly, it is the persistent system of values and basic attitudes, political and philosophical traditions, ideology and long-term behavioral patterns – those phenomena forming the core of political culture – that are the most important non-institutional factors driving the continuity of American foreign policy. So, comparison of the foreign policy courses of the Bush and Obama administrations leads to the conclusion that the mechanism of U.S. foreign policy is impersonal to a great extent. The key biographical parameters of the politicians play an only limited role in defining their political course.

Keywords: Political elites, foreign policy, strategic decisions, political power, military might.

1. Focus, Research Question, Hypothesis, Approach

The United States is the most powerful actor in world politics and will remain so for the foreseeable future, despite the serious challenges that it faces. Hence the importance of understanding the factors that determine contemporary American foreign policy and the dominant approaches of the key figures involved in its formation and execution.

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It is too early to assess the presidency of Donald J. Trump, not least because there has been a lot of turnover in the senior ranks of the Trump administration. However, some patterns emerged during the first one and a half years of his presidency. Each of the past three presidents – Bush, Obama, and Trump – were not typical for the American political tradition (albeit for various reasons), and it was not by chance that each of them came to the White House as a radical critic of his predecessors. Bush went down in history as the author of a "militant" presidency; Obama – the first African American to hold the office of president – was elected at a critical period, as a crisis manager in domestic affairs and peacekeeper in foreign policy; and Trump entered the White House as an outsider pledged to "drain the swamp" in Washington, and who faced investigations that critics hoped would lead to his impeachment. The beginning of the 21st century is a critical period of American history – not only because of the events of 9/11, but also because it became increasingly clear that the global leadership of the United States that was acquired after the Cold War had entered a phase of protracted crisis.

The U.S. foreign policy elite pool is quite wide and includes not only the key officials but also influential think tank fellows, some corporate actors, the security community, mass media, lobbying groups of various natures, and others. This paper deals with the *core of the U.S. foreign policy elite, which comprises politicians, policy experts, and the officials in charge of making U.S. foreign policy*.

The article aims to research the factors that determine the formation of dominating approaches and attitudes of the key figures that make U.S. foreign policy, through a comparison of the core foreign policy elites during the Bush-Junior and Obama presidencies.

As a hypothesis, it can be assumed that among the determining factors are the following: the career paths, personal characteristics, and personal experience of politicians; their ideological/religious beliefs; the interest groups having opportunity to influence political decision-making; the mechanism of making foreign policy decisions inside complicated political systems; public opinion and mass media that shape perceptions of foreign policy.

The beginning of the 21th century represents the culmination of the "American century" that began in the wake of World War One. The end of the Cold War was the peak of U.S. power: for the first time in its history the country gained the status of sole superpower. At that point, the attitudes of the U.S. political elite determined not only American foreign policy, but also the content and main trends of world politics.

The foreign policy attitudes and orientations of the U.S. political elite rested on an updated version of the American "mission" and "predestination of destiny," which had played a significant role since the founding of the republic. By the early 21st century, however, it was clear that the U.S. faced a number of serious challenges – a weaker economy (the lingering effects of the crisis of

2008-2009, large debts of all types, China's growing economic power, etc.); military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq/Syria; difficulties in relations with its allies and partners; and anti-Americanism in various world regions. As the veteran of American foreign policy Henry Kissinger noted, in the apogee of its power the U.S. found itself in an ambiguous situation: in the face of the most profound turmoil that the world has ever faced, they were not able to offer ideas adequate to the new reality (Kissinger 2001, ch.1).

Examining the Bush and Obama administrations also provides a comparison of the foreign policy approaches of Republicans and Democrats. Opinions differ on the extent to which partisanship affects U.S. foreign policy making. Looking back at many years of research, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs concluded in 2012 that "Democrats and Republicans are very similar in their views on foreign policy," while Peter Gries, the author of the book *The Politics of American Foreign Policy: How Ideology Divides Liberals and Conservatives over Foreign Affairs*, argues that "to claim that partisanship does not affect American foreign policy would be a consequential mistake" (Gries 2014, 8).

2. Essential Characteristics of Recruitment Key Figures

The most important foreign policy decisions in the United States are made within the consultative councils under the President (National Security Council, the Council of Homeland Security, and the Council for International Economic Policy). Accordingly, the U.S. elite core in terms of foreign policy-making includes the permanent members of these councils. The "Big Four" of the Cabinet are the Secretaries of State, Defense, Treasury, and Justice, along with the Secretary of Homeland Security. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of National Intelligence, the President's chief of staff, the Advisor to the President for National Security Affairs, and the Vice-President are also involved in making strategic foreign policy decisions.

This article examines the biographies of all the people who occupied the five key positions of the Cabinet (the Secretary of State, Defense, Treasury, Justice, and Homeland Security) during the period 2001-2014, according to the following parameters: age, place of birth, education, religion, party affiliation, and career chronology (including military service and business interests).[1] In total the biographies of all 61 representatives were considered: 34 from the Bush administrations and 27 from the Obama administrations. According to historical tradition in the United States, recruitment is realized through such

[1] The empirical survey was realized by O. Frolova, PhD, University of Peoples' Friendship, Moscow, Russia.

institutional channels as political parties, the education system, business activity, the army, and others. Belonging to an influential family also sometimes facilitates political promotion.

The analysis revealed the following trends:

First. The average age of the officials when they took office in the administrations of Barack Obama and George Bush Jr. was identical in both Cabinets and amounted to 59 years. The lowest was the average age of the Ministers of Homeland Security – 54 years. The average age of the Attorney General and the Minister of Finance when they took office was 58 years, the Secretary of State – 61, the Minister of Defense – 67.[2] In comparison with Clinton's administrations, the average age of the inner circles of Barack Obama and George Bush Jr. increased by five years; in comparison with Ronald Reagan's administrations – by three years; in comparison with George Bush's Sr. Cabinet – by a year (Orlov 2001). *In general, over the past 50 years, the "aging" of the inner circle of the President was almost 15 years – compared to the presidency of John F. Kennedy, when the average age of the team was 45 years (*Garbuzov 2003). *So, the politicians of Bush Jr. and Obama were socialized during the Cold War period, and one can surmise that their personal views to a great extent were shaped by the black and white realities of that time.*

*Second***,** the political elites maintained their relative homogeneity in spite of the significant differences in the declared political course of the Republicans and Democrats: biographical analysis of both Barack Obama administrations and those of George W. Bush does not reveal systematic differences.

Third, a comparison of the impact of different promotion channels (political parties, government agencies, businesses, religious organizations, the army, etc.) shows the dominant role of the education system (with a prominent role for Ivy League universities; and more than half of the members were holders of a doctoral degree), while the role of such channels as family and religious affiliation has been falling. The majority of the observed group had public service experience prior to their Cabinet appointment. One third of Bush appointees previously belonged to the presidential advisers' pool; others had recent experience in the federal government, business, regional institutions, academia, and the military.

A distinctive feature of the Obama Cabinets was the presence of some Republicans representatives in the immediate presidential circle – notably the Defense Secretaries Robert Gates (in the first Administration) and Chuck Hagel (during the second Administration). Almost one in six in the overall group possessed military service experience.

Career path is not necessarily a secure guide to political attitudes and dispositions. For example, General Colin Powell (Secretary of State 2001-05) was a

[2] According to the data of the empirical survey conducted by O. Frolova.

career military officer yet he is attributed by most experts to the "doves" camp, while civilians such as assistant Secretary of Defense in 2001-03 Richard Perle and Paul Woldowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense in 2001-05, lobbied for a sharp increase of military spending from three to four percent of the GDP in the first Bush administration. Neither Wolfowitz nor Perle had completed any military service.

Opposite to the examples of Wolfowitz and Perle is Chuck Hagel, a former Republican, who was Secretary of Defense in the Obama administration in 2013-2015. Hagel had served as an infantry sergeant in Vietnam, where he was wounded twice. He was an early Republican critic of the Iraq war and a harsh opponent of the Bush administration. In his reckoning, it was the "the most arrogant, incompetent administrations [he had] ever seen or ever read about"; it was led by men "whose intransigency was unmatched by a personal record of military service" (Akers and Kane 2007). He believed there was no military solution to the problems of Iraq and Afghanistan. Hagel repeatedly demonstrated a preference for compromise over the use of force. He was convinced that the long-term U.S. security interests hinged on alliances, coalitions, international institutions, and the U.S. reputation in the world, as well as to correct assessment of the limits of U.S. power. "Hagel was conscious of the limits of American power and could serve as a potential check on militarism in a manner career bureaucrats like Leon Panetta never could" (Idrees Ahmad 2012).

3. Ideological Divisions within the American Foreign Policy Elite

An important point for the analysis of the U.S. political community structure is party affiliation. Peter Gries (2014) argues that within a broad value consensus, American liberals and conservatives differ on cultural, economic, social, and political issues.

3.1 The Republicans

Experts distinguish four main groups within the Republican Party on the basis of the foreign policy views of its representatives.

Libertarians. When an active group of libertarians emerged inside the Republican Party in the beginning of the 1990s, many of its members were former members of the Libertarian Party. The Libertarian segment of the Republican Party is an ideological successor of conservative isolationists. A new round of interventionism clearly manifested itself in the American foreign policy in the early 1990s and early 2000s, drew sharp criticism from the libertarian camp. Libertarians believed that America was wasting its resources trying to play the role of a "global sheriff," so they persistently lobbied for reduction of U.S.

international obligations. During the first of Obama's terms in 2008-2011, libertarians significantly strengthened their political position in the Republican Party. Those arguing for a "more restrained" foreign policy included for example former congressman Rand Paul, now a senator. The most influential Libertarian "think tank" is the Cato Institute.

The conservative realists. This group includes people with extensive foreign policy experience in previous Republican administrations. On one hand, they still see the U.S. as a genuine superpower with global interests, who must play the role of leader of the international system. However, despite the U.S. superiority over the other leading world powers, they are not the only center of power and they cannot solve the problems and answer global challenges alone. America needs to match its goals with its available resources. This means that the U.S. should limit its military presence to the countries and regions of its vital interests (Europe, Middle East, Japan); and should prevent the emergence of a regional hegemony in any part of the world using mostly diplomatic and economic methods. Among the well-known conservative realists are foreign policy patriarchs Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft, and George Shultz, as well as experts Paul Saunders and Dmitry Simes of The National Interest Center (formerly The Nixon Center).

Right conservatives advocate preserving U.S. military superiority, preferring to rely on the traditional system of U.S. military and political alliances that was built during the Cold War, and using *hard* rather than *soft power*. Most right conservatives are not unilateralist and consider it important to maintain cooperation with allies. They do not approve a "crusade" for global democratization as a priority American foreign policy. Among the prominent right conservatives are Condoleezza Rice, Senators Jon Kyle and John McCain, and political scientists Kim Holmes and Ariel Cohen. The largest right-wing conservative research centers are Heritage Foundation and the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace.

*The Neoconservatives***.** Having emerged as a group in the 1970s, this group borrowed from liberal circles an idealistic emphasis on the "uniqueness" of the U.S. role in the world. Neocons joined this idealism with the conservative adherence to hard power. They consider the U.S. to be the only actor in the world responsible for the promotion of liberal-democratic ideas, and defend the need to change undemocratic regimes by any means – as evidenced by their active lobbying for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Unlike right conservatives, neocons do not think that the U.S. must rely on assistance from European and other allies. Among the well-known neoconservative figures are former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, former U.S. permanent representative to the U.N. and currently Presidential National Security Advisor John Bolton, former employees of the Defense Department Wolfowitz and Perle, and writers Robert Kagan and William Kristol. The most prominent neo-conservative think tanks are

the American Enterprise Institute, and the "New American Century Project," which existed in 1997-2006 (Woodward 2002; Mann 2004; Tarelin 2012).

3.2 The Democrats

It is possible to distinguish three main groups within the Democratic Party on the basis of the foreign policy views of its representatives.

The liberal interventionists that are also known as the "liberal hawks" or "hard" Democrats, the right wing of the Democratic Party. They are in favor of maintaining U.S. global leadership, considering it necessary to promote liberal ideas by all means, even by force. For them, it is important to preserve the leading role of the U.S. in international organizations. They support an increase of the country's military budget and the use of force to maintain order in key regions of the world. Many liberal interventionists occupied key positions in Clinton's second administration and had a significant impact on hardening the U.S. approach to relations with Russia. By "liberal hawks" we mean figures such as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Madeleine Albright, and Richard Holbrooke. The most prestigious think tank with a predominant influence of the liberal interventionists is the Council on Foreign Relations. Many liberal interventionists are also members of the Brookings Institution and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The liberal internationalists. Liberal internationalists are the left wing of the Democratic Party. Being the main heirs of traditional "idealists," liberal internationalists believe that respect for human rights and international law should be the foundation of international relations. Liberal internationalists believe that the U.S. should spend a significant deal of its might and resources for maintenance and development of the international order. In their view, the U.S. should not act alone, nor oppose itself to other states or go into a conservative isolationism. Liberal internationalists oppose the indiscriminate use of military force as the main instrument for foreign policy implementation, but do support intervention to stop gross violations of human rights. Liberal internationalists include such figures as former U.N. ambassador Samantha Power, former U.S. ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul, Director of Policy Planning in the State Department in Obama administration Anne-Marie M. Slaughter, and her academic husband Andrew Moravcsik.

Liberal realists are the moderate center of the Democratic Party. Being typical liberals and defending the primacy of liberal values and international law, they favor a more flexible, pragmatic approach to international relations. Liberal realists tend to borrow elements of conservative realists' foreign policy settings. Liberal realists oppose forcible promoting the American democracy model outside its borders. They stand up for negotiation – even with unfriendly regimes. Among the prominent liberal realists – Barack Obama, former senator Sam Nunn, political scientists Robert Legvold, Andrew Kuchins, Charles Kup-

chan, and Angela Stent. Liberal realists work in a number of leading think tanks, among them – the Brookings Institute, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (for more details see Tarelin 2012).

While considering all aforementioned ideological circles, one can note the functional heterogeneity of all these groups – they include both practical politicians and NGO (think tank) fellows. Among the most influential institutions in terms of participating in foreign policy developing are five institutions – the Brookings Institution, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the RAND Corporation, and the Council on Foreign Relations. Among the fellows of these NGOs are former employees of presidential administrations, intelligence agencies, and business corporations. Think tank participation in foreign policy elaboration is realized through two main mechanisms. The first implies that think tanks act as an external actor that promoting some proposals for decision makers. In the second case, NGOs are directly involved in the political process and submit analytical papers for the most significant U.S. government agencies.

4. The Bush Elite: Is It Really an Aberration?

John Higley, a prominent scholar of political elites, argued that the team of Bush Jr. was essentially different from the U.S. typical elite model (Higley 2006). In terms of structure the American elite has usually been fragmented and pluralistic. Meanwhile George W. Bush's team was exceptionally cohesive: it was highly integrated and well organized; the key figures knew each other well before coming to power in 2000. They were united by shared political and ethical principles, and by views on the U.S. role in the world and on international policy issues. Their views were formatted in an extremely ambitious program that was developed long before the dramatic events of 9/11, which opened an opportunity for implementing this program. The core of the elite was constituted by numerous members of the big Bush family and the most trusted and close advisers. As the most important centers, Higley singled out the following circles: neoconservatives, nationalists, democratic imperialists, and conservatives of the old school. The neoconservatives became the most influential, and their views formed the basis for Bush foreign policy.

The inner core, dubbed "Vulcans" by critics, consisted of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis Libby, Condoleeza Rice, Steven Hadley and others (Higley 2006; Mann 2004; Chernykch 2003). The influence of the "Vulcans" substantially grew after Bush's reelection in 2004, when politicians such as General Colin Powell and officials in State Department and CIA who were deemed insufficiently loyal, were removed and replaced by unconditional loyalists (Higley 2006).

Bush's strategic program, *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century* (published in 2000 by a neo-conservative think tank, the Project for the New American Century) was based on ideas that were developed since the early 1990s. After 2001, much of the program was realized: the USSR-U.S. 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty was canceled; the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq was overthrown; a lot of efforts were made to destabilize the regimes in Iran and North Korea; preparation for the deployment of the new missiles defense system in Europe was launched; and the military budget was increased from three to four percent of the GDP. The *National Security Strategy* adopted in 2002 implied a rejection of the containment strategy as a Cold War relic and legitimized the possibility of preventive strikes against the countries that could potentially pose a threat to the U.S. It pledged the extension of the U.S. military bases around the world to prevent the achievement by any country of equality or superiority to the U.S. in military power (Higley 2006).

One more direction of the implementation of strategic guidelines for unilateral global superiority was the expansion of U.S. influence in the post-soviet space that began under Bush – previously this region remained beyond the U.S. interests. Some color revolutions took place in the post-soviet space – in Georgia in 2003, in Ukraine in 2004-05, in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. A similar attempt, that failed, took place in Uzbekistan in 2005. American influence over events in Ukraine had a personal dimension: the wife of Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko (who was actively supported by the U.S.) was American citizen Ekaterina Chumachenko. Before marriage, Chumachenko worked in the office of the Deputy Secretary of State, as Deputy Chairman of the Public Relations Office in the White House, in the U.S. Treasury and the U.S. Congress. The former head of president Yushchenko's administration, Viktor V. Baloha, testified that Yushchenko did not take any meaningful decision without Chumachenko's approval (Baloga 2009).

It would seem that the highly cohesive Bush team, with a scrupulously planned strategic program and an aggressive commitment to its implementation, should have succeeded in its foreign policy mission. However, the Bush presidency failed on many fronts: from the defeat in military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan to the deep economic crisis that began in 2008.[3] Bush's last year in office was overshadowed by the economic crisis which represented a profound shift also in global politics, signaling the failure of the international institutions that the U.S. had crafted to regulate the global economy (Best and Higley 2014). These critical circumstances help explain the rise to the presidency of the African-American Barack Obama: he seemed to represent an

[3] To be fair, it should be noted that economic dynamics has its own logic and sources, and is not always the result of political leadership failures.

extraordinary response to an extraordinary crisis. Obama found himself playing the role of a crisis manager.

Obama's domestic policy kept to the traditional line of favoring corporate business interests. The Obama administration bailed out the "sacred cows" of Wall Street and flooded the economy with government money. Obama's main domestic accomplishment was reforming the health care system ("Obamacare"), which extended medical insurance for about 30 million Americans who had previously been without coverage.

As to foreign policy, Obama was sharply critical of Bush's strategy, which he saw as based on the utopianism of the unipolar world, the "new American age" concepts and Bush's unconditional stake on military force. Obama had to handle a number of critical issues, including the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, preventing Iran and North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons, restoring collaboration with the Arab world and "resetting" relations with Russia. The complexity, multiplicity, and multidimensionality of the challenges seemed to demand a radical break with the traditional foreign policy approaches.

Indeed, Obama's presidency got off to a promising start. Obama announced his intention to substantially reduce the U.S. military budget and his unwillingness to fight two wars simultaneously. With reference to U.S. policy in the post-soviet space, a declaration to remove the accession of Georgia and Ukraine to NATO from the agenda was appreciated by Moscow, which supported Washington in a number of its sensitive issues.

The conviction of the global community in Obama's peacekeeping prospective (and his own intentions to pursue a peace-loving policy as opposed to Bush's militant course) was so strong that it led the Nobel Committee to award Obama the Nobel Peace Prize *in advance* of his expected actions, an unprecedented step.

Observers disagree about how to assess Obama's foreign policy. Some scholars believe that his policy corresponded to the ideas of Wilson's liberal internationalism. According to other experts (Palacio 2016), Obama's foreign policy does not fit into any of the four main foreign policy paradigms that were identified by Walter Russell Mead, who named them *Hamiltonians* (mercantilism), *Jeffersonians* (isolationism), *Jacksonians* (militarism) and *Wilsonians* (liberal internationalism) (Mead 2002).

Two key ideas constituted the "Obama doctrine." First, it was a denial of the widespread thesis of America's inevitable decline, resisting it by all means, including a new emphasis on multilateral partnership. Second, it was about shifting the emphasis in achieving foreign policy goals from military force to diplomacy. This shift in the *methods* of foreign policy implementation was captured by Joseph Nye in his multidimensional idea of *smart power* – that is, the skillful integration of both soft and hard power (which includes both military force and economic strength) (Nye 2009, 2011). So, the principal differ-

ence between the foreign policies of Bush and Obama was the recognition by Obama of the vulnerability of the unilateralism strategy, and the need for cooperative interaction with allies. Under Bush the main diplomatic agency was the Pentagon, while under Obama the State Department regained its legally prescribed status as the key institution of foreign policy.

Among the key achievements of Obama's foreign policy were the curtailment of unsuccessful wars in Iraq (in December 2011 the end of the military operation was announced) and Afghanistan (in late 2014 the U.S. and other NATO countries announced the completion of their "combat mission"). The aspiration to restore relations with the Arab world (Obama's speech at Cairo University in June 2009 became symbolic) was undoubtedly also important. Of course, we should mention the limitation of nuclear weapons proliferation by reaching the historic agreement that was signed in Geneva in 2013 between Iran and the six international mediators, which confirmed the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. Important steps were taken to improve relations with European allies. An attempt was made to restart relations with Russia: in April 2010 Russia and the U.S. signed a new treaty on strategic arms limitation (START III), which envisaged a mutual reduction of nuclear arsenals by almost a third. The refusal of the U.S. administration to deploy anti-ballistic missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic was announced. In response, Russia took an unprecedented step in opening a transit air corridor for NATO flights to Afghanistan across Russian territory. Through this corridor almost 20 percent of all shipments to and from Afghanistan were delivered. Last but not least – American-Cuban relations were normalized. So, notwithstanding the neocons' criticism of Obama for his "softness" and "pacifism excesses" and despite the disagreements within the White House itself (Mann 2012) Obama managed to achieve substantial results during his first term in office.

5. Obama's Second Term: Forward to the Past?

But in Obama's second term the accents were substantially changed: he clearly drifted towards an offensive foreign policy vector, and a renewed emphasis on maintaining the U.S.'s globally dominant position. This shift is evident in the *State Department's Strategic Plan for 2014-2017*.[4] Its main goal was promoting democracy without recognition of any alternatives, and a reaffirmation of American values. The plan called for the promotion of democratization in 25-30 countries around the world. The fact that the document contains the same guidelines for promotion of democracy that inspired Republicans, indicates a

[4] Strategic Plan FY 2014-2017: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/223997.pdf> (Accessed December 1, 2017).

high degree of dogmatism of the U.S. foreign policy elite, regardless of its party profile.

Having stated at the beginning of the first presidency his rejection of the Bush administration's commitment to regime change, Obama later eventually returned to this practice in a number of regions. Under Obama, the U.S. conducted military operations in Libya and Syria. Regarding Libya, Obama later said "At that time I thought it was right," but admitted that failing to plan for the aftermath of President Gaddafi's removal from power was the "worst mistake" of his presidency (Guardian 2016). In relations with Russia, the Secretary Hilary Clinton gave to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov the button titled "reset", that symbolized the US intention to re-start the dialogue with Russia. But the title of the button contained a grammatical mistake: it meant "перегрузка" (meaning "overloaded") instead of "перезагрузка" ("reset"). This seemed to symbolize the lack of understanding of Russia's position. The U.S. still seemed set on limiting Europe's dependence on Russian energy and pushing it out from arms export markets. In 2012, the Senate, having canceled the Jackson-Vanik amendment (a measure dating back to 1974, which restricted Russia's trade status), went on to replace it with the Magnitsky Act, sanctioning individuals accused of human rights violations in Russia. The U.S. administration revived plans for deploying missile defense systems in Poland, Romania, Turkey and even in Alaska and Japan. At the end of Obama's second term, U.S.-Russian relations had arguably reached the most critical level since 1945, comparable only with the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The U.S. supported the E.U.'s *Eastern Partnership* program promoting closer cooperation with six post-soviet states, treating them as a counterweight to Russia and ignoring Russia's vital interests in the region. Obama also continued the policy of supporting the "color revolutions" in the post-soviet space. The U.S. played a particularly significant role in Ukrainian politics, supporting the Maidan revolution that toppled President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014. Michael McFaul, an academic, who was a strong advocate of promoting democracy around the world (McFaul 2009), was appointed as Obama's Presidential Advisor on Russia in 2009-2012 and as ambassador in Moscow in 2012-2014. The senior official handling Ukraine in the State Department was Victoria Nuland. A frequent visitor to Ukraine, Nuland supervised the formation of the first post-Maidan government in Kiev. Senator John McCain also appeared in Kiev with speeches on Maidan. The U.S. Vice-President Joseph Biden became the most senior U.S. supervisor of Ukrainian affairs. As he frankly admitted: "I think we may have logged close to 1,000 hours on the telephone. I think I tend to be more in direct conversation for longer periods of time with the president than with my wife. I think they both regret that" […]" (Podgornyi 2017). In December 2015, Biden became the first high-ranking U.S. official to deliver a speech in the Ukrainian parliament. He even made decisions concerning potential correction of the Ukrainian Constitution in January 2016 (Korrespondent.net

2016). It is worth noting that Hunter Biden, the son of the U.S. Vice-President, is a board member of the largest private Ukrainian oil and gas company "Burisma."

Of course, we should not ignore the differences between Bush's and Obama's policies – for example, in dealing with Israel – but these differences were more in style than substance. Bush's neocons were replaced by Obama's liberal internationalists and liberal interventionists (sometimes called *liberal hawks*). So, despite the changes in personal composition and ideological profile of the White House team, foreign policy in the final term of Obama's presidency returned to the traditional settings. It is rather symbolic that Victoria Nuland is married to the famous proponent of neo-conservatism Robert Kagan, who prefers the term "*liberal interventionist*" to describe himself (Horowitz 2014).

So, eventually the Obama administration found itself committed to the fundamental approaches of Bush era: the U.S. should maintain its global leadership in shaping a new geopolitical order; military superiority is the main factor in ensuring the U.S. global domination, and the armed forces should remain the basis of national might.

In this context, it is worth looking at Donald Trump's political evolution during his first year in office. Trump came to the White House as an outsider promising to "drain the Washington swamp." He initiated a number of steps that undoubtedly looked like a pronounced departure from previous political traditions, including publically questioning the relevance of NATO and the reliability of the U.S.'s European allies. Trump unilaterally withdrew from some of the signature achievements of the Obama administration: the 2015 Paris climate change agreement; the nuclear deal with Iran; and the negotiations for a Trans-Pacific Partnership that was signed in February 2016 by Obama. Trump tried (and failed) to abolish "Obamacare" and devoted a lot of attention to the question of immigration, declaring his intention to expel 11 million illegal immigrants from the country and to build a wall on the border with Mexico. He also struck down many of Obama's presidential directives and memorandums on environmental policy, civil rights, and other issues. So, one can define his course as strikingly unlike that of his predecessors.

Trump found himself in a vocal and vigorous conflict with the establishment (numerous conflicts with the media, the judiciary, FBI, the State Department). The political intensity was exacerbated by deep rifts within the Trump administration, which resulted in the departure of many key officials within his first presidential year. Towards the end of his first year, Trump seemed to shift towards more mainstream attitudes such as an emphasis on the use of military force. Under the pressure of the establishment, Trump reconsidered his critical view on NATO, towards the main U.S. allies and military intervention abroad, and refused to withdraw from NAFTA.

It is no coincidence that businessmen in the White House were quickly replaced by the hawk-generals, and that U.S. military spending increased. Ac-

cording to the SIPRI database, in 2016 U.S. military spending amounted to $611 billion (Tian et al. 2017). As for 2018, the Congress approved Trump's $700 billion request for Pentagon budget (Blankenstein 2018).

In the same line one should mention the return to unilateralism in foreign policy, as well as the return to hostility towards Russia, which promptly replaced the pre-election promises to improve relations with it. Under Trump the reduction of diplomatic contacts with Russia, begun under Obama, was continued with the closure of Russian consular facilities in New York, Washington, San Francisco, and Seattle as well as the U.S. General Consulate in St. Petersburg. In March 2018, 60 Russian diplomats were expelled from the U.S. in the wake of the notorious poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the U.K. In February 2017 National Security Adviser Michael Flynn was replaced by "a hawk", General Herbert R. Macmaster, who in turn was replaced in March 2018 by "the super-hawk" John Bolton, who had served Bush as Deputy State Secretary of State (2001-05) and as ambassador to the U.N. (2005-06). Bolton is known as a convinced opponent of the very idea of agreements with Russia. In February 2018, the relatively moderate Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who had extensive business contacts in Russia (which, incidentally, did not affect his policy), was replaced by the hardliner Michael Pompeo. Although the Russian dossier was not the principal factor in Tillerson's resignation – the main impetus was the contradictions between the President and Tillerson on Iran and North Korea – his removal will not contribute to a warming atmosphere in the relations between the U.S. and Russia.

Trump did appoint some moderate officials. For example, he nominated Jon Huntsman, former ambassador to China and presidential candidate, as ambassador in Moscow. The senior director for Russia in the National Security Council (NSC) is Fiona Hill, a Brookings Institution scholar who served on the NSC under Obama, and who is not seen as particularly sympathetic to Putin. Peter Rutland in commenting on these rearrangements notes that

> we see continuity in some of the most important and sensitive branches of the National Security Council – those dealing with Russia, nuclear weapons, and the Middle East. (Rutland 2017, 53)

Having come to the White House as an opponent of the establishment in order "to return power to the people," Trump evolved towards the traditional settings of the administration: the famous system of checks and balances is evidently able to correct the President's arrogant policy. In the conflict between Trump and the administration one can see both primary and secondary motives. On one hand, Trump and the administration differ in their views as to what are the vital interests of the U.S. Trump is more focused on the conservative attitudes and interests of the U.S. white middle class. In the economy this means the return of the industrial facilities to the country; a reduction of U.S. contributions to NATO maintenance; and conservative attitudes towards social issues, while his opponents are more inclined to advance globalist ideas. However,

aside from policy disagreements, Trump's personality also plays a role. His authoritarian habits and unpredictable behavior, his inexperience and his propensity for risky simplified decisions, especially in crisis situations inside and outside the country, are the cause for serious concern not only among liberals. The *New York Times* columnist Nick Kristof, assessing the results of Trump's first 100 days in the White House, stated:

> Checks and balances have constrained Trump, courts have blocked his travel ban, journalists have provided oversight, and the public has hounded members of Congress. Alarm that the U.S. might slip into a fascist dictatorship has diminished – but it's a long three years and nine months still ahead of us. (Kristof 2017)

In turn, it seems that Trump is motivated not only by ideology, but also by an "instinct borne out of his own resentment of elites who, in his view, have never given him the respect he deserves" (Baker 2017).

The above analysis characterizes Trump's foreign policy during the first year of his presidency, when his main attention was focused on domestic policy issues due to the fierce struggle with opponents who hoped to justify his impeachment. Some stabilization of Trump's position at the beginning of the second year of presidency allowed Trump to pay more attention to foreign policy, which became more and more unpredictable and clearly different from the policy of his predecessors. Trump has pulled out of several major international treaties, has upset a G7 summit, offended his long-term Western European allies, and has met Kim Jong-Un. All these steps break the traditional way of foreign policy-making. But at the moment it is too early to discuss foreign policy of Trump – there is still a lot of time ahead.

Returning to discussing Bush and Obamas policies, we can talk about proximity of the dominant approaches of different political elite segments – both Republican and Democratic – that determine the U.S. foreign policy at the beginning of the 21st century. Regardless of party affiliation and despite some differences on specific issues all of them share adherence to power use and offensive foreign policy in accordance with their understanding of U.S. national interests. This circumstance is especially prominently seen while comparing the foreign policies of Bush and Obama administrations.

6. Has Bush a Chance to Stay an Aberration in American History?

While analyzing Bush policy, John Higley wondered whether the Bush elite is an aberration or a harbinger of a new governance type in the U.S. (Higley 2006). To answer this question one should scrutinize American foreign policy not only in the 21st century but in a longer historical perspective. In particular, it is worth mentioning the trend in the intra-elite relations that emerged during

the eight years of Clinton's rule. During this period, the military, without public scrutiny or debate, came to surpass its civilian leaders in resources and influence around the world (Priest 2004, 42).

> Spending on diplomacy continued the decline that began in the 1970s, while military spending increased, as it had done massively during the preceding Reagan and Bush Senior administrations. Tasks that were once civilian responsibilities were assigned to the military: clearing landmines; disrupting drug trafficking; countering terrorism; disaster relief; even allowing the military's powerful four-star regional commanders-in-chief to conduct diplomacy. (Higley 2006, 162)

In 1998, Clinton initiated sustained bombing in Iraq's "no-fly zones" and under heavy pressure from the elite that was gathering around George W. Bush, he made "regime change" in Iraq an official U.S. policy. Madeline Albright, while serving as Clinton's ambassador to the U.N. and arguing for military intervention to stop the bloodletting in Bosnia, had famously exclaimed to General Colin Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: "What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it" (Priest 2004, 52; Higley 2006, 163). In 1999, as Clinton's Secretary of State, Albright championed "coercive diplomacy" against Milosevic and without approval by the U.N. Security Council Clinton initiated the 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia that led to Milosevic's downfall. During their 2004 presidential campaign, Democratic candidates John Kerry and John Edwards criticized the Bush administration for rushing into war in Iraq, for mishandling Iraq's subsequent occupation, for failures in reconstructing Afghanistan and hunting for Osama bin Laden. But they did not disavow their Senate votes for the Bush policies, they pledged to "stay the course" in Iraq and the wider "war on terror," and the central thrust of their campaign was playing up Kerry's military experience and toughness (Higley 2006).

If we deal with the earlier period, it is pertinent to quote the results of at least two surveys that cover the foreign policy attitudes of American elites. One of the surveys was conducted by Andrew Bacevich (2005), another by and Gwen Moore and Stephanie Mack, *From Vietnam to Iraq: American Elites' Views on the Use of Military Force* (2007).

Bacevich argues that U.S. elites' propensity to use force is not an exceptional policy of the Bush administration but is a long-term trend, at reaction against the post-Vietnam backlash against the use of military force (Bacevich 2005, 5-6). Bacevich argues that over the past twenty-five years an elite and public consensus has emerged that "American military supremacy is an unqualified good" (Bacevich 2005, 15). After the Cold War, under Clinton, military spending fell by one third, but in the 2000s it rose again, meaning the U.S. preserved its role as the sole military superpower (Walker 2014). As Bacevich notes, in the recent decades the U.S. has been using military force on a continual basis (Bacevich 2005, 19). In his later book Bacevich wrote that the U.S. was a "state

of national security," where everything was subordinated to the aim of maintaining the U.S. might in all the regions of the world. No U.S. government will dare to break with this historical tradition (Bacevich 2010, 109-45; see also Bacevich 2009, 2013).

In the survey *From Vietnam to Iraq: American Elites' Views on the Use of Military Force* (2007) Gwen Moore and Stephanie Mack analyzed the attitudes of American elites over the past three decades – from the end of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam in 1975 to 2004 during the "war on terror." With data from quadrennial surveys of the U.S. elites' foreign policy attitudes sponsored by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations since 1975, Moore and Mack learned whether elites had become more militaristic or whether such views had been a long term characteristic of the U.S. elites. The important advantage of this survey was that it covered a wide range of dimensions: the authors compared attitudes of political and nonpolitical elites; of Republicans and Democrats within the political elite; attitudes of elites inside and outside of the federal government; trends in elite consensus or dissensus on the use of military force and trends over time and the extent of agreement between specific groups, including that of women and men elites.

The surveys showed that U.S. leaders in and outside of government, as well as Republicans and Democrats and women and men in government, voiced overwhelming support for the use of American troops if necessary to defend their allies against invasion and to combat terrorism in 2000s. There were slight differences by sector, gender, and party on some measures, but the pattern is clear. In 1975, months after the United States' withdrawal from Vietnam, few leaders supported the use of military force abroad. In the three decades since, those anti-militaristic opinions have shifted to strong support for the use of military force in a variety of possible international situations. By 1986 most of the post-Vietnam reticence to use force had reversed. In general, opinions became more militant after 1986. These findings indicate a long term trend toward higher levels of approval among the U.S. leaders for the use of military force. Perhaps the anomaly was the temporary reluctance to do so after the Vietnam War.

Systematic empirical surveys of elites' views on militarism before 1975 regretfully are not available. However, in this context we can quote C. Wright Mills who in the mid-1950s worried that the power elite had developed a military view of reality:

> the American elite does not have any real image of peace–other than as an uneasy interlude existing precariously by virtue of the balance of mutual fright. The only seriously accepted plan for 'peace' is the fully loaded pistol. (Mills 1956, 185; see also Moore and Mack 2007)

So, regretfully we can find few reasons to consider the U.S. political elites' foreign policy attitudes at the turn of the 21st century to be an aberration among other U.S. political elite generation cohorts. Higley and Pakulski define

this type of the elite as *leonine elites*, not greatly dissimilar to the Bush elite and which may become the norm as the U.S. and other Western countries (Higley and Pakulski 2007).

7. The Roots of the Continuity in American Foreign Policy

There are various possible explanations for the continuity of American foreign policy over time. First, one can note the stability of the institutional and decision-making system and mechanisms, which, in turn, are based on a stable system of interest representation, above all, of economically dominating interests. William Domhoff wrote about the mechanisms of the dominating interests' translation to the political sphere:

> The corporate community's ability to transform its economic power into policy influence and political access, along with its capacity to enter into a coalition with middle-class social and religious conservatives, makes it the most important influence in the federal government. This combination of economic power, policy expertise, and continuing political success makes the corporate owners and executives a dominant class, not in the sense of complete and absolute power, but in the sense that they have the power to shape the economic and political frameworks within which other groups and classes must operate. (Domhoff 2006, XIII-XIV; see also Domhoff et al. 2018; Harfst, Kubbe and Poguntke 2017)

The second factor behind the stability of elite attitudes is the existence of formal and informal institutions that ensure the social and ideational cohesion of the elites. Higley argued that ruling elites in Western countries, including the USA, during the second half of the 20th century were

> enmeshed in extended circles and networks of political influence and personal acquaintance, that tied together several thousand of the uppermost figures in politics, government administration, business, trade unions, the media, and assorted interest groups [...]. Through such circles and networks, individuals and factions, rose to executive power, osmosis-like, through lengthy careers in elective, party, administrative, and other politically relevant arenas. (Higley 2006, 155; Higley 2016, ch. 3; Best and Higley 2018, ch. 21)

Intra-elite cohesion is achieved within a wide range of social institutions: "gated neighborhoods, private schools, exclusive social clubs, debutante balls, and secluded summer resorts, nonprofit organizations – e.g., tax-free foundations, think tanks, and policy-discussion groups" and "a sense of group belonging, a 'we' feeling" has been created (Domhoff 2006, XII-XIII). Several decades earlier C. Wright Mills describing relative unity of the American power elite, mentioned that it also rests upon "the similarity of origin and outlook, and the social and personal intermingling of the top circles from each of the hierarchies" (Mills 1956, 292).

Such a high level of interlocking of elites and the complexity of established institutions prevents radical innovations in political courses:

> Truculent congressional or parliamentary supporters had to be placated; political debts incurred during the rise to power had to be paid; preparations for the next election tempered actions; the power of elites in other societal sectors had to be respected; the personal behaviors and political decisions of the ruling group were subject to intense media scrutiny and criticism. All in all, a single-minded pursuit of political aims that broke sharply with what had gone before was exceedingly difficult. (Higley 2006, 155)

American political culture is the third – the last but not the least – reason for the foreign policy continuity. At the core of U.S. political culture is a set of political and philosophical views that emerged by the mid-twentieth century on the basis of historical ideas that arose at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among the basic principles of American identity are the messianic ideas of the United States as "predestined" to serve as a kind of "beacon state" for the rest of the world. The U.S. global leadership is considered not only as the U.S. prior national interest, but also as unconditional good for the world. As Henry Kissinger noted, "no serious American maker of foreign policy can be oblivious to the traditions exceptionalism by which American democracy has defined itself" (Kissinger 2001, 20). Such national self-consciousness automatically removes the question of the limits of American influence since the whole world becomes the zone of responsibility of the USA. The messianic political culture of the United States has had a significant impact on the institutional matrix within which the U.S. foreign policy is developed and implemented. Such views are the subject of society's consensus and determine the consensual character of political elite.

So, despite the significant differences in organizational structure and the foreign policy agenda among different elite groups, *the U.S. foreign policy elite can be regarded as consensually united* in terms of Higley's approach because all elite groups share a general system of political beliefs and values, and recognition of the rules of the game. As Higley and Burton noted, a national elite is consensually unified when its members share a largely tacit consensus about rules and codes of political conduct amounting to a "restrained partisanship" and participate in a more or less comprehensively integrated structure that provides them with relatively reliable and effective access to each other and to the most central decision-makers (Higley and Burton 2006, 19). This consensus argument may sound surprising, given the fierce disagreements between the Bush and Obama teams. But when one looks at their policies one finds more continuities than discontinuities, which is evidence for the consensus hypothesis.

Elite consensus does not prevent a sufficiently high level of diversity: the U.S. elite is certainly not a monolithic conglomerate. It is structurally and functionally a complex system that includes the career bureaucracy of federal min-

istries and departments, members of Congress in conjunction with bureaucratic and expert apparatus of the parliament, interest groups, securitocracy, the expert community, the media, think tanks, and other segments. However, being pluralistic in terms of structure, it is consolidated in term of values, ideology, and political culture. This circumstance is especially prominently visible while comparing the foreign policies of Bush and Obama administrations.

Thus, the process of making foreign policy decisions appears as the interaction of institutional and non-institutional factors (value systems, traditions, ideology, behavioral patterns) and converting the results into a practical course in accordance with political culture patterns and behavioral settings of the key figures.

8. Conclusion

Comparison of the structure and foreign policy courses of the Bush and Obama administrations allows us to conclude that the mechanism of U.S. foreign policy making is largely impersonal. The key biographical parameters of the politicians play only a limited role in defining political courses – the key factors are similar values, political attitudes, and political institutions that are based in turn on a stable system of interest representation. The institutional functionality and the consensual nature of the U.S. elite provide continuity to the policies of various administrations. American elites, being pluralistic in terms of structure, are consolidated in terms of adherence to the similar values and consensual political culture.

During the second half of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, despite the differences in party adherence or any other affiliation, successive administrations followed similar or close guidelines while developing foreign policy. This continuity is a manifestation of the consensual nature of the U.S. political elite and is conditioned by the attitudes of the U.S. dominating political culture. Among these attitudes are the prevailing conviction in the advisability of unilateralism in U.S. policy and U.S. dominance in global politics and economy, which are viewed not only as in the U.S.'s national interest, but also as a goal, corresponding to a global "force for good." The U.S. role is still treated in terms of exceptionality – as a "lighthouse" for the rest of the world. These attitudes and orientations are not coincidental – they themselves are the result of a complex interaction of a wide range of factors – institutional and individual, psychological and rational, systemic and random.

The mechanism for making foreign policy decisions is a complex and internally dynamic, but highly stable system that includes institutional and non-institutional factors. Among the non-institutional factors are certain beliefs, including exceptionalism and belief in a specific mission and specific vocation

of the U.S. as a "shining city on the hill," while the institutional basis includes the system of interests representation.

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