

**Robert Jervis, Francis J. Gavin, Joshua Rovner, Diane N. Labrosse, eds..** *Chaos in the Liberal Order: The Trump Presidency and International Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. xvi + 426 pp. \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-231-18835-7.

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*Chaos in the Liberal Order* contains thirty-two short, yet perceptive, essays on the Donald Trump administration. The quality of the writing is excellent and the perspectives of each author differ substantially. Seven sections cover issues involving the impact of Trump's election on international relations (IR) theory, on concepts of liberal internationalism, on the future of Pax Americana, on the United States and its global relations, on US human rights policies, and on the nature of the media and what has been dubbed as "fake news." The book concludes with a section titled "Is There a Trump Doctrine?," comprising one chapter by Frank Ninkovich, "Trumpism, History, and The Future of US Foreign Relations." This last chapter explores, in part, similarities and differences between Trump's unilateralism, protectionism, and willingness to deal with totalitarian governments and Republican Party policies of the 1920s. The essays are not all even in quality in terms of research. Although the vast majority are definitely worth reading and provide a unique analysis, the book as a whole does not quite achieve a larger synthesis of perspectives as to the nature of the Trump administration's "America First" global strategy and the administration's relations with, and policies toward, the global interstate system and the so-called liberal order.

The term "chaos" is immediately shown in the clash of views in the two opening chapters. The first chapter, "President Trump and International Relations Theory" by Robert Jervis, explicates clearly and as objectively as possible the Trumpian world in the neorealist "three images" approach of Kenneth Waltz (the interrelationship between the interstate system as a whole, states, and individuals). The second chapter, "What Is International Relations Theory Good for?" by Michael N. Barnett, offers a strong critique of the Waltzian perspective, while also critiquing liberal and constructionist theory. Barnett's contribution reminds the reader of the efforts of the Frankfurt school, which are generally not considered part of the IR theory canon, to explain the rise of authoritarianism and fascism, or really the rise of irrationality in a supposedly "rational" world, but which is only rational on the surface, as "rationality produced its own form of irrationality" (pp. 15-16).

These two opening chapters, and the chapters that follow, indicate not only the state of "chaos" of the liberal order but also the general inadequacy of most IR theories to explain both the so-called liberal order and the impact of Trump's ascendancy to power on that liberal order. Most IR theories also fail to explicate what might happen if there is

a total collapse of that order due to the apparent decline of American hegemony. Could American hegemonic decline lead, for example, to the spread of regional wars? Or even the possibility of a major power war in the not-so-distant future?

This chaos, for example, is further illustrated in two later chapters. On the one hand, Andrew J. Bacevich argues that Trump has shot down almost all liberal shibboleths ranging from human rights, to multiculturalism, to multilateralism. On the other hand, Stephen Chaudoin, Helen V. Milner, and Dustin Tingley argue that liberalism may appear to be down under Trump, but it is still not entirely out.

The neorealist Waltzian perspective dominated IR theory throughout the Cold War precisely because it appeared to reify the so-called bipolar US-Soviet dominated world order. And yet, when that “bipolar” order began to unravel in the late 1980s, Waltzian theory was largely at a loss to provide an explanation. The major weakness with the Waltzian theory was that the US and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies were never truly “equal” poles. Moscow only appeared to have reached a rough “parity” on the military-technological and nuclear weapons level, but this position of rough parity was temporary and misleading. The Soviet Union and its allies were always much weaker than the US and its allies in terms of geostrategic positioning, political-economic-financial-industrial capabilities, and sociocultural-ideological resilience. Ultimately, Moscow could not sustain its empire and rough parity with the United States.

Soviet collapse consequently led to a global interstate system that is best characterized by “highly uneven polycentrism”[1]—a global system that Trump’s contradictory statements, vulgarities, policies, and actions have been making even more unstable and dangerous. And as pointed out in the book, Trump’s accusations against the media and leaks of state secrets may appear provocative in the present era, yet they are not entirely

novel. Sam Lebovic notes that fake news and governmental leaks “are always a way of conducting politics by other means” and have been part and parcel of the American form of democratic governance (p. 366).

And from a deeper historical perspective, apparently comparable concerns and observations of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers may not be too far off in seeing the Trump administration as a sign of American sociocultural and geo-economic decline. This appears true as the United States appears to shift from aristocracy, defined as a public-spirited elite, such as the Kennedy and Bush families, to a new corrupt form of demagoguery and oligarchy under Trump. Arthur Eckstein notes that Trump appears to be boasting about his election, not only because he defeated Hillary Clinton as a member of the Clinton clan for the presidency but also because he defeated the establishment scion, Jeb Bush, for the Republican Party nomination. The question remains: Can America overcome its decline, as Trump believes he can make America great again? Or will Trump’s domestic and foreign and economic policies exacerbate that decline—in the process of further destabilizing the global system?

A number of chapters address and criticize Trump’s frontal attack on liberal multilateralism, in that Trump believes that economic protectionism and the rewriting of multilateral trade agreements (or their annulation, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership) will secure US economic predominance in the long term. And a major reason Trump opposed the UN COP-21 climate accord on global warming (an issue that is not adequately discussed in the book) is precisely because he believes he can assert American energy predominance by supporting fracking and shale oil and gas and what he calls “clean coal”—despite the potentially catastrophic impact on the climate and natural environment.

In general, the book does not do enough to thoroughly analyze Trump’s largely unexpected

turn away from neorealism toward what can be called “America First” arch-national conservatism. In terms of US global strategy, there are a number of chapters that criticize Trump for appearing to undermine the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in that he “could do a lot of damage to the trust and mutual confidence that make that [US-NATO] relationship work” (Stanley Sloan, p. 231). Yet in fact, after initially calling NATO “obsolete,” ostensibly because he did not believe the alliance had engaged fully in the global war on terrorism, while also initially questioning NATO’s purpose and its Article V security guarantee, Trump reversed himself and has swung in the opposite direction in support of a globally expanding NATO, while finally affirming his support for Article V in June 2017 (William R. Keylor, p. 326). After the book’s publication, Trump openly supported NATO membership for Brazil in March 2019, for example, which appears to indicate his support for a global NATO, at least at that time.[2]

In effect, Trump’s flip-flops against and then ostensibly for both NATO and the European Union have resulted in a newfound US backing for NATO expansion and for Ukraine in its bitter conflict with Russia over eastern Ukraine and Crimea since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, an annexation that is, in part, a result of Russian reaction to the “threat” of NATO and EU expansion to Ukraine. Yet Trump’s flip-flops have also tended to reenforce the Russian turn toward China in the formation of a Sino-Russian axis. As pointed out by Randall L. Schweller, NATO expansion is a result of US “unipolarity” that risks “push(ing) Russia toward China rather than drawing Russia toward Europe and the United States” (p. 34). In this regard, China has been working as closely as possible with Russia and other states in Eurasia, and in the wider Middle East and Africa, to finance and build its Belt and Road Initiative despite the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. And Trump’s strong support for Japanese efforts to boost defense spending (see Jennifer Lind, pp.

240-44), for example, coupled with US aid to Taiwan and his protectionist economic war with China, have likewise helped to push Beijing to tighten its political economic, financial, energy, and military ties with Russia and to seek new markets throughout the world.

Lind is at least partially correct when she argues: “Trump appears highly interested in certain issues (e.g., healthcare, taxes, immigration, a border wall) but reforming America’s alliances or re-making the international system do not seem to be among them. He will thus likely use his political capital to press for changes in his areas of particular interest, by default leaving foreign policy in the hands of the bipartisan foreign policy ‘blob’” (p. 243). And yet, from his perspective, Trump does want to change the international system, but in the American favor—so as to assure American global military predominance against all potential rivals for as long as possible. And Trump did hope to make the “denuclearization” of North Korea a major foreign policy goal that would appeal to his domestic supporters and obtain international accolades. In this regard, Trump has intended to boost US military expenditure in accord with his “peace through strength” doctrine, not only to sustain American predominance but also to pressure less powerful states, such as North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela, into peace accords on American terms. From this perspective, Trump does believe that he is changing the international system. The danger, however, is that efforts to change the international system through his “America First” and “peace through strength” strategy is actually pressing Russia and China closer together and into a closer alliance with such states as North Korea, Venezuela, and Iran. And rather than following the “bipartisan foreign policy ‘blob,’” as Lind argues, Trump appears to be following the foreign policy counsel of a new form of “America First” arch-national conservatives (p. 243).

The Trump administration accordingly appears to be stepping back from engaging in a liberal policy of “policing the world” (p. 34). At the same time, however, Trump has also appeared to have pulled back from following a neorealist “offshore balancing” strategy. Neorealists argue that the US should permit other countries to seize the lead in countering the rising powers in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf, while the US steps into the background and only intervenes when necessary. The risk, however, is that this neorealist “offshore balancing” strategy will tend to provoke “regional arms races and intense security dilemmas” in the words of Schweller (p. 35).

While neorealists have undoubtedly had a significant impact on Trump’s foreign policy thinking and actions, the Trump administration has nevertheless appeared to have moved toward a new, essentially arch-national conservative, neo-containment/regime change direction led by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Advisor John Bolton (who never considered himself to be a “neoconservative” as defined by the media[3]). These arch-national conservative advisors appear to oppose neorealist “offshore balancing” in the belief that relatively more autonomous US allies might engage in actions that are not in accord with their definition of American national interests. Arch-national conservatives accordingly want to reassert US predominance and oversight over American allies so as to better control their behavior toward the US itself and toward other American allies and rivals.

By contrast with both the neorealist “offshore balancing” strategy and the arch-national conservative neo-containment/regime change strategy, Robert Legvold’s chapter, “US-Russia Relations Unhinged,” points toward an alternative strategy that the Trump administration has not yet attempted to pursue but that is more likely to result in lasting peace. In picking up points made by the late Zbigniew Brzezinski—that the US, Russia, and China need to work together to support global sta-

bility—Legvold argues, “If order, rather than disorder is to prevail in the coming years, global governance will likely depend on a honeycomb of disparate collaborations: a G-10 or G-12 of the world’s largest economies to ensure global economic growth and stability, cooperation between the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and NATO to deal with instability in the Northern Tier, the six-party talks to address North Korean nuclear weapons (like the five-party effort in the Iranian case), bilateral and multilateral formats to constrain the most destabilizing developments among nuclear-weapons possessing states, and a restructured United Nations Security Council to manage explosive regional conflicts” (p. 295). Legvold’s above suggestion requires truly engaged cooperation between the United States, Russia, and China, on the first level, plus EU cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union, on a second level. This essentially liberal multilateralist approach differs significantly from that advocated by both neorealists and arch-national conservatives. Yet it appears that as long as Trump continues to pursue an “America First” arch-national conservative strategy, disorder, and not order, will prevail.

The danger is that Trump has continued to engage in policies that effectively undermine vital multilateral cooperation in the quest for bilateral deals between the US and both its allies and rivals that suit Trump’s definition of American interests primarily, and in situations in which he appears to treat allies with even less respect than he does US rivals. The irony raised here is that Trump’s repeated statement that NATO was “obsolete” has actually prevented NATO from engaging in significant reforms that could eventually help reach a compromise with Moscow and that could help prevent NATO’s eventual overextension and possible breakup. Trump has thus far been unable to check NATO’s open enlargement process, for example, so as to reach a “deal” with Russia over a neutral Ukraine.[4] Whether or not the new Ukrainian government under the comedian-

turned-president Volodymyr Zelensky will attempt to engage in a rapprochement with Vladimir Putin to end the conflict over eastern Ukraine and Crimea remains to be seen. Moreover, Keylor demonstrates how Trump's statements and policy flip-flops toward both an expanding NATO and EU risk undermining NATO and preventing the EU from being able to develop a common and autonomous European defense and security policy so that the EU could then engage in a rapprochement with Russia.

One of the weaknesses of the book is that the chapters do not fully venture into the risks of Trump's "America First" and "peace through strength" global strategy. In particular, the chapters do not fully address Trump's penchant to fuel the US military-industrial complex contrary to the warnings of the late Republican senator John McCain, and despite Trump's own claims that he hopes to cut defense spending and reduce nuclear weaponry through arms control agreements with Russia and potentially China. While boosting US defense spending, Trump has concurrently been cutting back the State Department budget, among other government agencies and programs traditionally supported by liberals. These factors will make it even more difficult to achieve far-reaching diplomatic settlements and arms accords with Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Venezuela, and other states. From this perspective, instead of pursuing a possible alternative strategy, involving US-Russia-China cooperation, Trump appears to be pressing US allies into an "America First" arch-national conservative neo-containment strategy that seeks to pressure and "encircle" Russia and China, while seeking regime change in Iran and Venezuela, countries that both are seen as aligned with Russia and particularly, China. (Tom Long and Max Paul Friedman further analyze the Trump administration's views of Chinese influence in Venezuela and Latin America.)

Here is where the "Thucydides trap," and the pre-World War I analogy in reference to the US-

China rivalry, come into play. Priscilla Roberts argues that the pre-World War I analogy may be more relevant than the "Thucydides trap" in that one of the major causes of the Great War was the perceived "threat" of "democratization" posed to elites in imperial Germany, Austria-Hungary, and tsarist Russia. At the same time, however, Athenian democracy was somewhat similarly regarded as a threat to Spartan elites and other Greek oligarchies.

While Trump has thus far at least appeared to downplay both liberal and neoconservative efforts to support presumed democracy movements in Russia, China, and elsewhere, he has nevertheless begun to support such movements in Iran and Venezuela. At the same time, Trump's efforts to gain military and political-economic paramountcy over Russia, China, and other states through protectionism, sanctions, and military-technological innovations remain fundamentally destabilizing. F. Gregory Gause III explains how Trump's efforts to strongly back Saudi Arabia and Israel and engage in regime change in Iran threatens to widen the conflict throughout the region.

Ironically, Trump's inability to reach a "deal" with Putin, not only because Trump has been handicapped by US congressional accusations of "collusion" with Moscow but also because his administration has thus far failed to engage in full-fledged diplomacy with Moscow so as to settle all actual disputes, including Crimea and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, may well forewarn of a massive conventional and nuclear arms race. Legvold adds speculation that Trump's decision to drop out of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) treaty, which had helped to end the Cold War, in response to alleged Russian violations of that treaty, could mean that the world is heading toward even rougher times in the not-so-distant future, with disorder prevailing.

In sum, the irony is that President Trump, who came to power criticizing the global system of US alliances and seemingly endless wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq, and who criticized what was then an alliance of liberals and neoconservatives (many of the latter publicly supported Hillary Clinton against Trump during the presidential election campaign), is now beginning to tighten US alliance commitments with NATO, Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, among other states, against a whole range of powers, including Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela, plus Russia and China—in what is essentially an “America First” arch-national conservative neo-containment and regime change strategy—minus most of the elements of traditional liberalism.

#### Notes

[1]. For an explication of the concept of “highly uneven polycentrism” and a critique of concepts of “polarity” and neorealist Waltzian theory, see Hall Gardner, *IR Theory, Historical Analogy, and Major Power War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 39-96.

[2]. “Trump Says Strongly Considering NATO Membership for Brazil,” *Reuters*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-brazil-nato/trump-says-strongly-considering-nato-membership-for-brazil-idUSKCN1R0240>.

[3]. Graeme Wood, “Will John Bolton Bring on Armageddon—Or Stave It Off?” *The Atlantic* (March 8, 2019), [https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/04/john-bolton-trump-national-security-adviser/583246/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=politics-daily-newsletter&utm\\_content=20190505&silverid-ref=MzQ2MjA3NTc3MTYzS0](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/04/john-bolton-trump-national-security-adviser/583246/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=politics-daily-newsletter&utm_content=20190505&silverid-ref=MzQ2MjA3NTc3MTYzS0).

[4]. See Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry, and the Vengeance of History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). See also Hall Gardner, *World War Trump: The Risks of America’s New Nationalism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2018).

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