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Security and polarisation in Trump's America: Securitisation and the domestic politics of threatening Others

Abstract

This article explores the relationship of foreign policy and domestic politics under Trump by making use of two complementary theories. We employ Gramscian theory to make sense of US foreign policy structures, conceptualising the Trump administration as engaged in a discursive war of position with detractors over narratives of national identity and security. Second, we use securitisation theory to conceptualise agency, change, and continuity within this. We analyse 1200 official, opposition and media texts to identify discursive changes over the 20 months following Trump's election. First, we consider Trump's attempted securitisation of immigration. Second, we explore the counter-securitisation of Trump as a threat to (progressive) America. Third, we analyse how the Trump administration securitised the opposition, conflating the constructed threat posed by immigration with political elites. We show how this led to the further polarisation of US political debate, which became underwritten by securitised language, with competing actors, referent objects, and audiences. We note that security's referent differed for both groups, with Trump's ethnocentric 'real' America opposed to the values-based patriotism endorsed by his critics. This poses important implications for how we understand change in US foreign policy, not least because it creates a favourable discursive landscape for Trump's re-election.

Key words: Discourse, Securitisation, US foreign policy, Trump, change

Word count: 7342, excluding title.

Introduction

This article uses a Gramscian understanding of discursive structure combined with securitisation theory as developed by the Copenhagen School of critical security studies as a conceptual framework to theorise foreign policy continuity and change during Donald Trump's presidency. As with all the papers in this special issue, our article responds to the academic debates over whether the Trump presidency represents a serious change from the status quo of American foreign policy, and, relatedly whether it poses a threat to the international liberal order. It seeks to shed theoretical light onto this debate by developing a framework through which change can be identified and understood. Specifically, we use securitisation as an analytical tool to argue that in the first 18 months of his tenure, Trump attempted a series of securitising moves that were intended to elevate issues such as immigration above the realm of 'ordinary politics'. We further argue that in the case of immigration, whether in the context of the Muslim/Travel Ban or the Mexican border wall, these securitising moves failed due to effective and emotionally affective counter-narratives that were deployed by speakers in the media and political opposition. The strength of these opposing narratives often lay in their capacity to speak to an imagined liberal American identity that valued immigration and sought to protect and support vulnerable groups, especially refugees. Opposition speakers were effective in weaving an alternative security story in which America stood to lose a key part of itself by pursuing Trump's policies. Through this story, key opposition figures attempted to securitise the Trump administration itself. Thirdly, and in turn, Trump swung back, securitising political opponents, unsupportive media elites and protestors, as a threat to the United States, imagined in particular racial and religious terms.

In all three instances, the language of security was crucial, contrasting the argumentative rhetorical mode that characterised debates in other areas, such as the imposition of trade tariffs, whereby the underlying logic of the Trumpian narrative was tacitly accepted, with contestation sought only regarding the effectiveness of tariffs as diplomatic tools. On immigration and when counter-securitising each other, the Trump administration and the opposition sought to articulate wholly alternative foreign policy stories. By invoking the language of security, America's political divisions were widened and polarisation increased. In particular, Trump connected foreign policy to domestic politics through the conflation of (constructed) threatening foreign others with opposition groups in the United States. This conflation and construction was not accepted by the opposition but has been contested through a parallel securitising move which does not directly engage with Trump's logic of security. This is

because the two logics derive from different securitising actors promising to deliver security for different referent objects for distinct audiences. On the one hand, Trump promises to secure white America from external threat and those he proclaims support, facilitate or represent threatening Others. On the other hand, Democrats promise to secure multicultural America, founded on a belief in shared values, from racial and religious discrimination. Although these logics 'talk past each other', they nonetheless stack the discursive deck in Trump's favour as the risk to him is appearing unconstitutional, whereas the risk to Democrats is appearing to sympathise with terrorists and criminals.

This study has constructed an original dataset to explore America's discursive war of position under Trump; it is also the first article to bring together securitisation and Gramscian theory in this cause. First, we make use of Buzan & al.'s (1998: 25) distinction between the (successful) process of securitisation, and the securitising act or move, which is liable to succeed or fail depending on a number of variables. Second, we use Balzacq's (2005) three faces of securitisation to categorise these variables into audience, speaker and discursive context. Third, we unpack the idea of audience and context using a neo-Gramscian understanding of discursive hegemony amidst a broader war of position. This builds on Wilhelmsen's (2017) attempt to return to the poststructuralist foundations of securitisation theory, as well as Van Rythoven's (2015) work which centres the role of emotions within this.

In order to explore this war of position, the article employs a rigorous computer-aided discourse analysis of 1200 foreign policy texts. These texts are equally divided between the Trump administration, Democratic opposition, and mainstream media (television, newspaper, and online). Our approach aligns with Lene Hansen's (2006) 'Model 2', with data representative of the official government, principal opposition figures, and key media outlets, in order that we can investigate debates across the American political landscape. Manual coding – for themes, narratives, and identities, as well as sentiments and emotions – was conducted inductively and deductively by a team of five coders, to produce a large, original dataset.

Finally, our findings are significant for understanding the broader implications of Trump's bombastic foreign policy language, including, crucially, how it relates to the domestic political landscape and further polarisation of American politics. We argue that an appreciation of the role of security discourse, story-telling, referent objects, and emotional affect is crucial to understanding the divided nature of America's discursive war of position under Trump.

The Copenhagen School and securitisation theory

The Copenhagen school concept of securitisation, first established by Ole Waever (1995), and further developed by Buzan & al. (1998), Thierry Balzacq (2005; 2015), Rita Floyd (2007; 2016) and Jeff Huysmans (1998; 2011) amongst many others, has in recent years, become increasingly mainstreamed in the fields of security studies and foreign policy analysis. Whilst scholars still regularly engage in ontological arguments over whether security is entirely socially constructed, or whether threat and/or risk can be objectively defined and measured, most now accept the basic idea that issues such as immigration and terrorism can become 'securitised' to an extent that often seems disproportionate to the danger expert analyses suggest they pose to a population or object. In contrast, less 'popular' threats such as climate change may be relatively ignored by policy makers despite posing a far more serious and widespread danger, albeit on a longer timeframe (Churchill & al. 2018; Balzacq, 2015).

In its most basic form, the Copenhagen school model of security as a speech act requires an actor with sufficient political authority to articulate a threat (often though not always specified as existential) to a referent object in front of an audience of 'functional actors' – that is to say actors with the power to authorise or otherwise legitimate security policy (Buzan et al. 1998; Floyd, 2016). If this is done successfully, the issue in question is elevated above the realm of 'ordinary politics' onto a higher 'securitised' plane at which decision making becomes more urgent, and therefore is exposed to less oversight and democratic debate, and extraordinary policies become possible. In Buzan et al.'s model, the articulation of threat, once accepted by the necessary audience, also frees up significant state resources that would otherwise be allocated towards more mundane areas. More recently, there has been debate over whether the resulting policies must always be 'extraordinary' (i.e. norm/rule breaking) (see especially Floyd, 2016, who argues this is not the case), however, within our study, cases of attempted securitisation by the Trump administration are characterised by a goal of bringing about extraordinary change.

The concept of audience or 'functional actors' in the context of the securitising speech act has been the subject of fierce debate in the literature. Authors such as Rita Floyd (2016) see the relevant audience as a tangible and finite body of practitioners holding the political authority to approve new policy. This view leads her to argue that for securitisation theory to be true to its constructivist roots, the success or failure of the securitising move can only be judged by the practitioners who make up its audience of functional actors, and not arbitrarily defined by academics (pp. 680-1). Conversely, Huysmans (2011: 372) has sought to break open the concept of the act to examine the role banal "little security nothings, such as programming

algorithms, routine collections of data and looking at CCTV footage" play in "displacing" existential speech acts. Côté (2016) and Wilhelmsen (2017) take similar approaches, both seeking to emphasise the discursive structures and processes at play in securitisation, and the agency of a wider, less rigidly defined audience in accepting or rejecting securitising moves. Coté sees the "discursive legitimation of security speech" by the audience as "imbu[ing] securitization theory with its intersubjective character" (2016: 544), whilst Wilhelmsen situates her analysis of the legitimation of war policies within poststructuralist theory, to "foreground the web of meaning and representation between a myriad of actors in society" through which the articulation, legitimation and, ultimately, public acceptance of security policy must take place (2017: 166). It is within this discursive structural understanding of securitisation that we situate our paper.

For our approach, we are primarily concerned with the roles played by the securitising actor(s) and the discursive context in determining when a securitising move succeeds and when it fails. From our dataset, we are not able to assess, as is the concern for some scholars (Balzacq & al, 2016: 500; Salter, 2008), which of the multitude of Trump's audiences had the capacity to give him the assent that ultimately would have permitted him, either legally or morally, to carry out policy acts such as the Travel Ban. Instead, following Wilhelmsen, our research is intended to shed light on the discursive context or structure within which the securitising move was made, and the changes and continuities that can be identified in that context thereafter. We therefore take a discursive approach to securitisation, in that the potential change we are interested in is located within the wider discursive setting of American foreign policy. This decision is in part due to our ontological approach, and in part down to our interest in the discursive war of position fought between Trump and the Washington foreign policy establishment (see also, *references removed for anonymity*).

Situating securitisation within the discursive war of position

Gramsci used the idea of the war of position to refer to "cultural conflict involving ideology, religion, forms of knowledge and value systems", and to differentiate this from 'wars of manoeuvre' associated with the territorial seizure of state infrastructure as seen, for example, in the Bolshevik revolution (Fontana, 2008: 93; Donoghue 2018; Gramsci, 1971). According to Gramscian Marxism, this war of position, or cultural hegemony can be seen as more important than purely economic factors in structuring capitalist societies. As a consequence,

the major divisions that structure these societies are not necessarily based in class (Jacobs, 2019: 296; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Instead 'historical blocs' or alliances are formed around powerful ideas and discourses, and struggle against one another to achieve hegemony. Laclau & Mouffe's (1985) influential work on hegemony then developed this framework according to a poststructuralist ontology, drawing on Derrida and Foucault to reconceptualise social structures as contingent, incomplete, and essentially fragile to human acts of articulation, despite the immense power they may hold over actors (Howarth, 2013: 15). These authors refer to a 'dislocated' social structure, meaning that, contrary to the claims of economic determinism, "society has no direction, no fixed future, no historical phases or eras, nor is it ever finished" (Jacobs, 2019: 297). The teleological view of society's progression under Marx is therefore replaced with the constant political and discursive struggle to form and maintain dominant patterns of meaning through acts of articulation. In this paper, we argue that securitisation theory, when situated within this understanding of social structure, can provide us with a robust theoretical framework to conceptualise continuity and change in US foreign policy under Donald Trump.

As Holland & Fermor (2017) have argued, the Trump administration can be conceptualised as engaged in a war of position over the common sense of American diplomacy, against detractors both from the conventional Wilsonian/Hamiltonian foreign policy establishment and from a more radical wing of critics that could be grouped together under a relatively 'leftist' umbrella. In the run-up to the 2016 general election, these latter camps were figure-headed by Hillary Clinton's campaign on the one hand, and by Bernie Sanders on the other. Parmar (2017; 2018), also writing from a Gramscian perspective, groups social movements Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street and Democracy for America into this leftist grouping, which since the 2018 midterms, has gained greater representation – and attention – in Congress. More recently, this group has been exemplified by outspoken lawmakers Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib, all of whom have attracted criticism from establishment Democrat and liberal media quarters as well as thinly veiled racial attacks from the president (Al Jazeera, 2019; Dowd, 2019; Emburey-Dennis, 2019).

We draw on research on the role of discourse (Hansen 2006; Jackson 2005; Krebs 2015) as well as securitisation theory. In particular, our focus draws on Campbell (1998) and Hansen (2006), in that we view political and foreign policy discourse as a site of production structured by the antagonistic opposition of self and other. Here, we use Campbell's (1998) understanding of foreign policy as the practice of creating a purpose and identity for the state through the

articulation of a threatening other. Securitisation theory is helpful in this context in understanding and analysing how threats are constructed and opposed to the self in developing a stable, dominant and eventually hegemonic image of the other. We also draw from Hansen's (2006) study of security and foreign policy discourses in using her concept of policy-identity constellations to illustrate the complex and interwoven relationship between the articulation of identities of national self and threatening others on the one hand and the formation of dominant security and foreign policy discourses on the other. Finally, in situating securitisation within the war of position, we take Wilhelmsen's view that "securitisation is not one utterance by one actor, but is produced over time through multiple texts that represent something as an existential threat" (2017: 167). We therefore focus our analysis on the individual acts of articulation that make up the wider production of stable securitised logics and discourses that in turn structure American foreign policy under Donald Trump.

A computer-aided discourse analysis of US foreign policy

Our findings are derived from a computer-aided discourse analysis of 1165 texts taken from the congressional record, the Trump White House website, and print and broadcast news media (retrieved using Lexis Nexis), as well as a range of other sites linked to leading opposition figures. As such, our dataset corresponds to what Hansen (2006) calls a 'model 2' analysis, that can account for 'official' US foreign policy discourses (i.e. that which can be read in White House documents and presidential speeches etc), as well as the wider political debate in the news media and across the Democratic opposition. This model enables us to go beyond the study of official securitising moves, to analyse the interplay of contested security narratives and discourses, across the spectrum of US political and media elites (e.g. see Krebs, 2015).

Amongst government officials, we included texts from the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, National Security Advisor, Attorney General, Ambassador to the UN, Press Secretary, Treasury Secretary, Secretary of the Interior, and various relevant officials (e.g. Chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers). Opposition sources included Congressional debates and Senate records, as well as speeches from leading opposition figures (e.g. House Minority Leader) and prominent opponents of Trump (e.g. Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden, Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, and Elizabeth Warren). Media sources included the New York Times, USA Today, MSNBC (TV), CNN (online), and Fox News (TV), as the five most visited, subscribed to, read and shared (on

social media) news websites, covering the political spectrum of mainstream media. We also included the Washington Post due to the national prominence of its political reporting.

In order to produce a manageable dataset, we collected texts from one-week time windows, following ten significant events in the Trump presidency (e.g. the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement). Texts were selected for inclusion based on window-specific keywords (e.g. Trump AND 'travel ban'). The dataset was cleaned for duplicates and irrelevant returns. The lead researchers imported the data into NVivo and developed a 'codebook' based on analysis of approximately ten per cent of the dataset, which comprised a three-level hierarchical coding framework made up of child and parent nodes, which included thematic, sentiment and emotion codes (following *reference removed for anonymity*). This combination of computer-aided methods and constructivist theory follows the examples set by Krebs (2015) and Holland (2013). NVivo techniques allowed us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the discursive environment than would have been possible through purely manual analysis. Using NVivo, we were able to code passages of text in which patterns of securitised language could be seen. For example, where a given referent object or a given threat appeared, NVivo enabled us to collate this data and highlight across the discourse where and when similar articulations were repeated. Similarly, the software allowed us to store the texts in categories according to whether they originated from official, oppositional or media sources, meaning that we could look at these corresponding discursive spheres separately and easily categorise securitising actors.

Competing securitisation discourses: Immigration, Trump and the Left as threats to America

The securitisation of immigration

> When a country is no longer able to say who can, and who cannot, come in & out, especially for reasons of safety & security - big trouble!
>
> @realDonaldTrump February 4, 2017a

The first and most obvious instance of an attempted securitisation move by the newly inaugurated Trump and his administration came in the form of the long-promised ban on Muslim travel to the United States, later re-named the 'Travel Ban' in an attempt to mitigate accusations of unconstitutionality due to religious discrimination. In this instance, the closest thing to what Balzacq (2015) would call the "ideal type" of the singular securitising speech act

came in the form of Executive Order 13769, signed by President Trump in front of an audience of politicians, journalists and camera lenses on January 27 2019. The order (which has since been revoked and replaced by Executive Order 13780) was evocatively titled 'Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States', and fulfilled each of the main requirements of the Copenhagen school's speech act by identifying a foreign, terrorist threat to the referent object of the nation and thereby opening the door to extraordinary measures in the form of a blanket ban on refugee and Muslim immigration.

Within the war of position context, and conceptualising securitisation as a continuous discursive process (Côté, 2016; Hansen, 2012; Huysmans, 2011; Wilhemsen, 2017), we recognise that whilst the signing of the Executive Order provided Trump with his favoured sense of spectacle, it constituted only a single moment of articulation. To stand a chance of changing the discursive structures of US foreign policy, the singular securitising move had to be repeated and (re)produced not only by the actors within the White House but also, ultimately, by elements of the audience it targeted (Jacobs, 2019; Marchart, 2014). Our analysis shows that the securitisation of immigration was indeed repeated and (re)produced at length by the administration, not least by Trump himself, through the medium of his personal Twitter account.

> Secretary Kelly said that all is going well with very few problems. MAKE AMERICA SAFE AGAIN!
>
> @RealDonaldTrump January 30, 2017b

> Everybody is arguing whether or not it is a BAN. Call it what you want, it is about keeping bad people (with bad intentions) out of country!
>
> @RealDonaldTrump February 1, 2017c

> We must keep "evil" out of our country!
>
> @RealDonaldTrump February 3, 2017d

Whilst our analysis focusses predominantly on attempts at securitisation, rather than the reception of these moves by legitimating audiences, we can nonetheless show that Trump received strong support from a small but vocal minority of members of Congress, exemplified here by Representatives Joe Wilson and Louie Gohmert:

> We will never forget September the 11th in the global war on terrorism. Thank you, President Donald Trump, for vetting refugees to protect American families.

Rep. Wilson, January 30, 2017

> These are seven countries where it shouldn't even be arguable among people of common sense that we do not have, have not received, and cannot get adequate information from which to determine whether people wanting to come into the United States are actually refugees or if they are part of al Qaeda, al Nusra, and ISIS, and they want to come kill Americans and end our freedoms and our way of life.

Rep. Gohmert, January 31, 2017

Although such voices were vastly outnumbered (at least in the sphere of the legislature) they were able to faithfully recreate the initial securitising speech act, again (re)producing a narrative of America in danger of being attacked by a nebulous but manifestly foreign and terrorist other. Often such articulations appealed to the nation's cultural memories of previous trauma. The memory of 9/11, when foreign assailants came, apparently out of nowhere, to commit mass murder on American soil, was chief among these, and carried with it significant emotional power. President Obama, speaking in 2011, summed up this power in describing 9/11 as a marker after which, "evil was closer at hand, and uncertainty clouded our future" (Obama, 2011). Here, speakers (re)produce this discourse of fear and uncertainty in seeking to legitimate Trump's foreign policy. Added to this, more recent images of the Islamic State's violence at home and abroad are also used to provoke fear and loathing in the mind of the listener. The common denominator between the two remembered threats was not just their violence, but their racial and religious otherness, which ultimately served as the 'logical' basis for the Muslim/Travel Ban.

While the Travel Ban deliberately targeted people from a specific region and of a specific religion, the securitisation of immigration (which did not start with Trump) went beyond these imagined communities and geographies. A prominent topic in the 2016 presidential campaign had been immigration across the Mexican border, with the proposed construction of a Mexican-funded wall becoming the centrepiece of Trump's platform.

> AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES ARE SAFER AND MORE SECURE: President Trump has worked to secure our borders, enforce our immigration laws, and protect the safety and security of American communities.

White House publication, June 4, 2018a

(President Donald J Trump's 500 Days of American Greatness)

> Democrats in Congress are also blocking urgently needed improvements to our border security. They don't want border security for two reasons. Number one, they don't care about it. Number two, they are afraid it's going to make me and the republicans look good and they don't want that.
>
> White House publication, June 2, 2018b
>
> (Weekly Address)

The securitisation of this immigration was not as dramatic as that which took place around Executive Order 13769. The articulated threat here was less existential, and less urgent, with the intention apparently being to demonstrate the usefulness of the Trump White House. The juxtaposition of threat and referent object was still present, and clearly produced a narrative whereby immigration posed a danger to the American public, however the overall effect is closer to David Campbell's (1998) vision of foreign policy (i.e. the discursive (re)production of a threatening other) serving to create a purpose for the state, than Buzan et al.'s (1998) model of securitisation opening the door to extraordinary policy. Nonetheless, an important development can be identified here in the willingness of official speakers to position the Democratic Party, and its supposedly 'soft' approach to immigration, as a secondary threat to ordinary Americans.

This evidence shows that Trump and his staff, through their articulations, were able to affect change within the official discourse, and used their unrivalled platforms effectively to communicate their favoured security narratives. The data also shows that while vocal support within Congress was minimal, and especially so after the introduction of the Travel Ban, it was nonetheless present and able to affectively and effectively (re)produce the official discourse. To that relatively modest extent, the administration therefore succeeded in changing the discursive structures of US foreign policy. The following section will go beyond these official attempts at securitisation to demonstrate how and why opposing voices were successful in resisting these narratives, and therefore managed, for the most part, to confine them to the official sphere.

Resisting securitisation: Progressive America, emotionally affective counter-narratives and the counter-securitisation of Donald Trump

The most noticeable common characteristic of the voices opposing and criticising Trump at the time of the Travel Ban's introduction is their appeal to powerful emotions. Van Rythoven (2015) has written on the need to theorise the role that emotions play in dictating the success or failure of securitisation processes, however he concentrates almost exclusively on the necessity of collective fears. Whilst he also identifies that humour plays a significant role in the failure of securitising attempts, he ultimately sees this as a consequence of the lack of necessary common or collective fears rather than as a primary causal factor that provokes failure. In our analysis, we find that specific emotional narratives, and especially those that appeal to the audience's shared sadness, anger or disgust, were pivotal in mobilising resistance to the attempted securitisation of immigration. In addition to this, narratives which appealed to an alternative fear, for example a fear of the illiberal future policies such as the Travel Ban could lead to, also made for effective counternarratives.

The initial organisational incompetence of the Ban, which saw Green Card holders refused re-entry to their home and families camping out in international airports across America generated stories of 'Kafkaesque' nightmares in the popular press. The following extract is taken from a story published in the New York Times, focussing on a child refugee in need of medical attention:

> Ms. Fleming said that the family wanted to live in the United States in large part because Sham [her daughter] could get excellent follow-up medical care there. She acknowledged that the family was now concerned about a backlash against Muslims in America and that "they are distressed by rhetoric that brands them as terrorists."
>
> Raphael Minder, February 1, 2017 (New York Times)

Such narratives were common throughout the media outlets included in our dataset, with all but Fox News consistently running similar stories in the two-week time frame. Even the O'Reilly Factor, one of Fox's most partisan shows, aired reports of people's strong negative emotional responses to Trump's actions, albeit in the guise of highlighting the 'hysterical' mood of the president's critics.

> We chose to punish ordinary men, women, and children, who are fleeing terrorism and violence, these people are the road kill of Trump's posturing.
>
> 'Unidentified Male' cf O'Reilly & Watters, January 30, 2017

In the legislative setting, prominent Democrats voiced obvious distaste for the new administration's immigration policies, with both House and Senate minority leaders, as well as

many more junior lawmakers making statements condemning the president in emotionally charged language. All of this demonstrates how little power and control the Trump administration held over the discursive structures of US foreign policy at this time, despite their attempts to perform the securitising moves that ought to have brought about significant changes.

> The president's action is not only unconstitutional but immoral.
>
> Rep. Pelosi, cf Newman, 29 January, 2017

> Folks were caught in detention at airports around the country, young children separated from their mothers, husbands from their wives, green card holders and legal residents being denied the right to see an attorney.
>
> Sen. Schumer, January 30, 2017

> I love my country, and I am saddened by these divisive and hateful actions being wrongfully taken in the so-called name of national security.
>
> Rep. Espaillat, January 31, 2017

> The xenophobic and racist tenor that has permeated our politics has far too many immigrant communities fearing for safety in the very country that prides itself on being a nation of immigrants
>
> Raul Grijalva 16 November, 2017 (USA Today)

In parallel and in synergy with these emotionally affective counter-narratives, an alternative securitisation process occurred more organically in the discursive spheres of the media and political opposition. This securitisation process was once again "produced over time through multiple texts that represent something as an existential threat" (Wilhelmsen, 2017: 167), as the same juxtaposition of threat and referent was repeated and (re)produced by a huge and diverse number of speakers with less authority than the president, but still with access to their own platforms. Here, Trump and his policies were systematically framed as an existential threat to an imagined liberal or progressive ideal of America:

> The country I saw this week doesn't look like the America I know and love.
>
> Murtadha al Tameemi, February 1, 2017 (New York Times)

> [The Travel Ban] is un-American. It undermines the truth of who we are. It is patently unacceptable.

Rep. Booker, January 30 2017

> Are you ready to fight for the values of this city and this country?

Bill de Blasio cf Burns, January 30 2017 (New York Times)

> This is un-American. It is wrong and it will not stand.

Gov. Inslee, cf Burns, January 30 2017 (New York Times)

Here, the media and Democratic opposition's counter-securitisation of Trump's language and policies conforms to what in Gramscian language could be labelled an antagonistic discourse. Antagonistic discourses are described by Jacobs (2019: 302-3) as resulting from logics of difference, which lead to "a structural dualism, where two large discursive structures stand opposite each other, dividing the world into two antagonistic camps". Laclau and Mouffe identify such antagonisms in their works on populism, where, for example, 'liberal' and 'nationalist' discourses and policies draw meaning from their opposition. Such a structure can be seen here, as critical media and democratic opposition discourses draw their 'liberal' identity from their differentiation from the Trump administration's securitised ethno-nationalism. In the language of securitisation, the referent object draws its liberal value from the existential threat it faces from Trump's Travel Ban.

Framing the American 'left' as threat

> 30-40 years ago, the left had no interest in the USSR. They felt the Cold War was a joke. They were hyper focused on American evil. Now it's 2017 and they are finally caught up. They're focusing on Russia […] and the new threat is not Russia, its Islamism. It's Islamism. So maybe in 2057, they will finally catch up and go, wow, what about this radical Islam thing I'm hearing about? And we will all be wearing burqas.

Greg Gutfield, 5 June 2017 (Fox News)

A final development in the war of position over US foreign policy can be read in a further reactive move by the Trump administration and its supporters, which sought to frame this liberal, progressive or left-wing criticism of the administration and its policies as a threat to America in its own right. This is especially visible in reactions to the sustained protests which followed Trump's inauguration and his anti-immigration policies, and in official and pro-Trump media framings of the developing Trump-Russia scandal, as can be seen above.

Initially, protestors were framed as lawless, antidemocratic mobs and professional anarchists, determined to disrupt the peaceful transition of power. On Twitter, for example, just days after the election Trump claimed "Just had a very open and successful presidential election. Now professional protesters, incited by the media, are protesting. Very unfair!" (Trump, 2016). In addition to the protests against Trump himself, the president framed civil disobedience by students at Berkeley as an attack on free speech, before accusing the institution of "practis[ing] violence on people with a different point of view" (Trump 2017e). The Trump administration's anti-protest discourse was then further developed throughout 2017, in response to the refusal of many black NFL players to stand for the national anthem. Here, players were accused of showing disrespect to the flag, and those who died for it, as well as a lack of gratitude to the police forces who kept America safe (Sanders, 2017; Trump, 2017f). Frequently then, protestors were opposed in official rhetoric to a particular understanding of the American self.

> In the Trump administration, we know whose side we're on. We're on the side of law and order—and we back the blue, not the criminals.
>
> Jeff Sessions, June 8, 2018

> [Trump] knew full well that the International Community would be opposed to him; it's only new there would be people in the United States opposed to him.
>
> Gen. Jack Keane, June 2, 2017 (Fox News)

> We must stop being politically correct and get down to the business of security for our people. If we don't get smart it [terrorism] will only get worse.
>
> @RealDonaldTrump, June 4, 2017g

The characterisation of protestors and critics by the Trump administration went beyond simple opposition however, as these were soon securitised and positioned as a threat to America, and to the Trump's administration's efforts to make the nation 'great again'. Members of the Trump administration accused Democrats of being soft on crime, immigration and terrorism, and of putting Americans at risk through their twin obsessions with 'political correctness' on the one hand, and Trump's potential wrongdoing on the other. At the same time, pro-Trump advocates such as Newt Gingrich and Rudy Giuliani appeared on Fox News, CNN and MSNBC to draw links between the 'left', the Democrats and the 'mainstream media'. Finally, Trump's contemporary critics were linked to the previous eight years of 'bad' foreign policy under Obama, which supposedly culminated in the 'terrible' deal with Iran, and the spate of ISIL terrorist attacks that occurred through 2016 and 2017. The Trump administration therefore

attempted to create a structure of US foreign policy according to which people either supported the White House or posed a threat to the nation.

These efforts were directly informed by Trump's foreign policy. Most starkly, this link was made apparent in Trump's racist calls for four female, non-white Democratic politicians to "go back where they came from". These discursive moves served to securitise the Democratic Party by linking the construction of threatening Others abroad to Others at home. By constructing a 'foreign' in the domestic landscape of US politics, the Trump administration created an existential threat to the United States, imagined through an ethno-nationalist lens. This situation created two securitised groups, speaking to different audiences, with diverging referent objects. On the one hand, leading opposition figures (such as Hillary Clinton) spoke of Trump as a threat to national security, in that they imagined and constructed the United States along civic nationalist lines; a vision which Trump directly threatened. On the other hand, Trump constructed Democrats as an existential threat to America, imagined through an ethno-nationalist lens, as under siege from non-American Others, both foreign and domestic. Despite the resonance of civic nationalist discourse, embedded in powerful narratives of American exceptionalism, Trump's racist securitising moves tapped into deep and enduring insecurities. While we have long known that foreign policy has a domestic politics, it is now the case that foreign policy is fully and explicitly imbricated within domestic politics. Two powerful securitising discourses therefore compete in Trump's America, contributing to the polarisation of US politics. They help to sustain and define each other. And they structure the conditions within which the next election will be contested.

Conclusion

This article explored US foreign policy discourses under President Trump by situating securitisation theory within the Gramscian concept of a discursive war of position. By embedding securitisation, understood as a repetitive process of articulation opposing a threat to a referent object, within the wider war of position, we have provided a theoretical framework through which to understand structure, change and continuity in US foreign policy during Trump's presidency. Using this framework in application to our dataset of over 1200 official, opposition and media texts, we have demonstrated three distinct securitising moves by two important groups of actors (or 'historical blocs') during this time. The first of these can be seen in the initial period of Trump's presidency, as the administration framed immigration as a major

threat to the nation, and used this framing to legitimate and defend two key policies: the Muslim/Travel Ban and the border 'wall' between Mexico and the US. In response to this, opposition figures and critical media voices began articulating a new discursive structure which framed the Trump White House as an existential threat to liberal America and its progressive 'melting pot' values. Finally, a third securitising move can be recognised in the sustained attempt by the Trump administration and its supporters in the media to establish the 'left' as a threat to Americans, through its imagined obsession with 'political correctness' and Trump's potential wrong-doing, which distract from the crucial battle to protect Americans from (Trump's identified) 'real' threats to America.

By situating these securitising moves within the Gramscian war of position setting, we build on the works of Balzacq (2005), Côté (2016) and Wilhelmsen (2017) to unpack the flow and contestation present in the formation and (re)production of (US) foreign policy, beyond the traditional understanding of securitisation as a singular moment of 'elevation' from normal to securitised politics. Furthermore, the Gramscian investigation of distinct coalitions or historical blocs competing for discursive hegemony allows us to unravel the complex and interwoven relationship between 'domestic politics' and 'foreign policy'. In doing this, we have shown how both official and opposition camps have attempted to frame the other as a threat to different imaginations of the national self, and in turn have used this to legitimate their own foreign policy agendas, whilst discrediting those of the other.

Finally, we conclude that these competing securitisations carry greater political risks for 'liberals', the left' and Democrats. This is because in Trump's discourse, these coalitions are framed as siding with America's enemies, and particularly with the terrorists and criminal gangs who would supposedly benefit from a softer immigration policy. In contrast, the Trump administration and its backers 'only' run the risk of being seen as unconstitutional or un-American. Having said this, these respective risks may only materialise where audiences 'buy in' to official and critical discourses. Our dataset allowed us to identify where these discourses resonated and were repeated in the news media, however further research is necessary here in order to triangulate the extent to which these elite discourses have been embraced or internalised by Americans more generally. Our research model and dataset enabled us to explore in detail security articulations or utterances by a range of actors with varying degrees of privileged access to platforms and power. In our framework, the resonance of the attempted securitising move was gauged by the extent to which it affected and changed the discursive structures that made up our dataset. There remains therefore an important avenue for future

research into the reception of these securitisation moves by key audiences. This includes audiences within the government – i.e. those functional actors who control the apparatus of the state – and the wider public.

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