

# THE NEW AUTHORI- TARIANISM

edited by  
Alan Waring

VOL. 1:  
A RISK ANALYSIS OF  
THE US ALT-RIGHT  
PHENOMENON



*ibidem*

# **The New Authoritarianism**

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## Dedication

This two-volume book is dedicated in memoriam to the Lord Peter Temple-Morris QC, who inspired and encouraged the editor to embark on the project. Originally scheduled to contribute the Foreword, throughout 2017 and into 2018 he battled with much fortitude against increasingly severe illness and operations and became too frail to write. Sadly, he died aged 80 on May 1, 2018.

Lord Temple-Morris's British parliamentary career as an MP ran from 1974 to 2001, for the most part as a Conservative of the liberal 'One Nation Tories' group, before crossing the floor of the House to Labour in 1997. He entered the parliamentary upper chamber (House of Lords) in 2001. His strong distaste for authoritarianism (which he saw as increasingly prevalent in the Conservative Party), and an equally strong belief in justice and moderation, characterised his world-view. Serving variously on the Justice and Foreign Affairs Select Committees and others, he was also a key member of the British-Iranian All-Party Parliamentary Group from 1989 to 2005, and in 1990 launched the British-Irish All-Party Parliamentary Group. He is credited with a substantial contribution to the Northern Ireland peace process that culminated in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

This book is a fitting tribute to his sense of justice and moderation and 'jaw-jaw' approach to difficult political issues, especially in foreign policy areas.



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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, political party)
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
BCE	Before Current Era
BNP	British National Party
BP	British Petroleum
CED	Comprehensive Economic Dialogue
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPAC	Conservative Political Action Conference
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DACA	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
EC	European Commission
EDL	English Defence League
EHS	Environment, Health, and Safety
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOP	Grand Old Party (synonym for the US Republican Party)
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Iran)
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ITC	International Trade Commission
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KKK	Ku Klux Klan

KP	Kyoto Protocol
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual
MMR	Measles, Mumps, and Rubella
MP	Member of Parliament
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Neo-con	Neo-conservative
NHS	National Health Service
NIHCE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (UK)
NPL	National Policy Institute
NRA	National Rifle Association
NSA	National Security Agency
Obamacare	Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act 2010
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCA	Paris Climate Accord
PRC	People's Republic of China
QC	Queen's Counsel (UK barrister-at-law)
QRA	Quantified Risk Assessment
RWA	Right Wing Authoritarianism
SDO	Social Dominance Orientation
TPP	Trans Pacific Partnership
UHC	Universal Health Care
UK	United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations
UNCAC	United Nations Convention Against Corruption

UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USTR	United States Trade Representative
US	United States (of America)
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two





## Foreword

This two-volume edited collection of papers comes at a crucial time for Europe, the United States, and the wider world. Momentous economic and political changes of the last few years continue to have impacts. Waring, a prominent author in risk, its assessment and management, provides the reader with a refreshingly different analytical focus for the phenomenon of resurgent authoritarianism now evident in populist and radical right-wing politics. The subject matter is controversial, and the temptation to descend into polemic is resisted by the weight of scholarly analysis from such a range of distinguished international authors. My close personal and professional relationship with Alan may have affected my view of this book, but it has been a long time since I felt that I craved to read a book chapter after chapter! The Alt-Right's vivid relationship, with both current events and perseverant effects, makes it a living book. I feel honored to have had the opportunity to be one of its first readers.

*The New Authoritarianism's* eminently qualified contributors bring to the task an eclectic range of specialisms and expertise on the subject matter. The book also comes with some unique features. It is the first book on the Alternative Right to explicitly frame the narrative around a risk analysis. The expected political analysis, which so often on its own can seem rather sterile, is encompassed within a much broader structured analysis focused on risks for various parties—society, governments, sectors, individual citizens, and the Alt-Right themselves. In addition, there is a special early chapter examining the psychological aspects of the Alt-Right phenomenon, which include the promulgation of fear as a political tactic, the psychological characteristics of nationalist and supremacist ideology, as well as how best to consider allegations of mental instability and personality disorder against particular politicians.

The book's working definition of the Alt-Right is twofold: (1) as an ideology, the spectrum of right-wing world-views outside traditional conservatism, which begins with a dissatisfaction with the mainstream political process and character and frustration by perceived impotence of traditional conservatism, and runs through populist, far-right, and extreme-right ideology; (2) as an identifiable group, those having such world-views.

*The New Authoritarianism* seeks to explain the Alt-Right phenomenon on a global level as well as nationally. Chapters show that the Alt-Right ideology is shared transnationally—with prominent examples not just in the US but also in all western democracies, as well as Russia and other nationalist authoritarian regimes. Evidence of considerable transnational collaboration between Alt-Right groups in different countries is discussed. Volume 1 focusses on the Alt-Right phenomenon relating to the United States, while Vol 2 addresses the phenomenon in Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Norway, and Russia, as well as far-right activities in Hungary and Italy.

The book captures not only the relevance of recent history in international relations, such as the continued jockeying between the US, Russia, and China for superpower status and the subsequent changes and risks this brings, but also the interplay between domestic Alt-Right influences and foreign policy. For example, the Alt-Right assumption of an inevitable continuation of US exceptionalism and supremacy (i.e. uniquely capable of defying ‘the laws of history’), expressed in ‘America First’ and ‘making America great again’ rhetoric, is critically assessed. The current high profile Alt-Right exemplar of President Trump and his Administration provides a rich source of evidence of the Alt-Right ideology at work in the US and the strategies and tactics employed. Chapters cover the Trump phenomenon, Trump Administration, and Alt-Right approaches to foreign policy, terrorism, Islam, immigration, trade, Iran, global warming, human rights, and fake news. For example, Waring’s intimate knowledge, experience, and study of Iran over 45 years provides a fascinating insight in his chapter on the US Alt-Right’s ‘anti-Iran project’, and a counterpoint to ‘armchair expertise’ on Iran that typically suffuses western commentary.

The book’s message is that the over-riding thrust of the Alt-Right in western democracies is to achieve a permanent Alt-Right stamp on the governance of each country. They seek to achieve this by persuading, subverting, and as necessary bullying, mainstream and populist conservatism to shift its centre of political gravity firmly towards the far-right. The objective of fascist movements in the 1930s to overthrow the state and replace it with a totalitarian regime has been modified to one where the Alt-Right today are largely content (at least in the short-term) to exert a modifying and attenuating influence on electable mainstream conservative governments i.e. to get the latter

to 'correct' themselves and become more nationalist and authoritarian.

The book argues that to achieve this the Alt-Right seek the normalization and public acceptability of their nationalist and white supremacist ideology, and so Alt-Right leaders and opinion formers are typically keen to portray their ideology and policies as a reasonable, fair, just, and necessary response to what they assert are dangerous liberal ideas and weak mainstream governance. The Alt-Right portray themselves as society's saviours, as the only protection against being overwhelmed and destroyed by foreigners, immigrants and their alien ideas, creeds, and cultures.

The book asserts with evidence that, in the Alt-Right coda, any and all means are permissible in pursuit of their ends e.g. deliberate dissemination of lies, fake news, and invented 'alternative facts'; seeking to replace representative democracy by direct democracy. Both flagrant and subtle defamation in the form of fake global conspiracy propaganda against Jews and Muslims is commonplace, especially using the Internet and social media, the subversion of which the book examines critically in detail. For the far- and extreme-right elements, intimidation, hate crimes, and violence are also acceptable tactics, and the book examines numerous examples.

At the conclusion of each of 9 chapters in this volume, in which specific examples of the US Alt-Right phenomenon are addressed, a summary list of risks is included. Towards the end of the volume, these risks are collated and individually analysed heuristically for impact, probability and risk rating in a special chapter, making this a unique contribution to an examination of the Alt-Right. As the author emphasizes, this is neither a definitive risk analysis nor the pronouncements of a 'Risk Oracle' and the assessment is open to debate. This chapter, in effect, becomes a reference utility and one that is available for application, debate, and further development by anyone who wishes to use it.

The penultimate chapter examines the overall strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in relation to the Alt-Right, and posits five different potential scenarios for the US Alt-Right's future. While one scenario suggests that the current democratic status quo could be retained, the other four are increasingly authoritarian of which the final two involve Alt-Right coups d'etat. A prognosis is made for which of the scenarios are more likely to occur in the US.

The book's final chapter includes detailed discussion of a range of strategies for combatting what the chapter's authors conclude is an Alt-Right threat to democracy. These include legislation and judicial strategies; Internet and social media; education; political and economic strategies; and grassroots and mass action. The book ends on a call for 'muscular moderation' to combat the Alt-Right threat, a difficult but nonetheless compelling challenge.

**George Boustras**

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- Professor George Boustras, Professor in Risk Assessment and Director of the Center for Risk and Decision Science (CERIDES), European University Cyprus.

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- Professor Matthew Feldman, Director of the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR); formerly Emeritus Professor at the Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies at Teesside University, UK.
- The Lord Peter Temple-Morris QC (see Dedication).
- Paul Sheils, formerly managing partner of a leading law firm, London.

For advising on the book's development and reviewing drafts of various chapters:

- Professor Ali Ansari, Professor of Modern History and Founding Director of the Institute for Iranian Studies, St Andrews University, Scotland.
- Associate Professor Dr Ian Glendon, School of Applied Psychology, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Queensland, Australia.
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Dr Anton Shekhovstov, Valerie Lange and colleagues at Ibidem Verlag for their support, guidance, professionalism, and efficiency throughout the lengthy publishing process.

Last, but by no means least, my wife Mehri, who put up with numerous periods of my detachment from family life during the creation of this book.

# Introduction: Risk and the Alt-Right

*By Alan Waring*

## **The Book's Target Readership**

Readers of this book are likely to fall into a broad spectrum of professional groups that have, in some way or other, a need to unravel and consider the impact of resurgent nationalism and ultra-conservative agendas on risk issues affecting governments, institutions, corporations, the judiciary, businesses, the media, individual citizens, and others, as well as protective strategies against such threats. In addition to a wide range of scholars and academics, such readers will include risk analysts and risk managers of various kinds, politicians and political analysts, intelligence officers, corporate security specialists, corporate ethics and integrity managers, economists, investment analysts, lawyers, journalists, psychologists, sociologists, and civil society leaders and professionals.

Students on a range of Masters and other post-graduate courses are also likely to find the book of value, in such subjects as business administration, risk management, security and counter-terrorism, corporate ethics, government administration, political science, and international relations.

## **The Book's Rationale**

This book considers, from a risk perspective, the current phenomenon of the new Alt-Right authoritarianism that began to emerge in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and whether it represents 'real' democracy or an unacceptable hegemony potentially resulting in elected dictatorships and abuses. Potential threats and risk exposures, whether to democracy, human rights, law and order, social welfare, racial harmony, the economy, national security, the environment, or international relations, are identified and analysed. Potential strategies to limit threats that might arise from Alt-Right ideology and activities are proposed. The book acknowledges the particular relevance of and contribution to its analysis by such authors as Lyons (2017a and b), Michael (e.g. 2003, 2016, 2017), and Neiwert (2017) on the American



right-wing and the emergent Alt-Right phenomenon, and, on the right-wing in Europe, Eatwell and Goodwin (2010), Feldman and Pollard (2016), Goodwin (2011), and Wodak (2015 and *passim*).

It is axiomatic to state that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are fundamental to a democratic society. The American constitution cites these fundamentals explicitly, but they are implicit to all democratic societies. Democratic freedoms naturally threaten the very existence of dictatorships, totalitarian states and pseudo-democracies, as well as putative states run by terrorists such as Da-esh/IS (Islamic State). None of these can exist unless they impose abusive and degrading conditions on their populations, so as to cow them into submission. Although the existence of coercive and often barbaric regimes may seem self-evident, and there are plenty of examples, perhaps a less obvious threat comes from internal extremists within democratic societies who seek radical change by undermining or destroying basic freedoms. While these obviously include IS followers, others just as insidious and dangerous are lurking among us. Ironically, some of the worst internal extremists are those who justify themselves and their often draconian and abusive acts by claiming to offer the public true democracy, true freedom, true security, and true protection against alleged threats. The label Alternative Right or Alt-Right has arisen in recent years to encompass not only the spectrum of beliefs, values, attitudes, opinions, and positions within the Alt-Right worldview, a view more strident, authoritarian, and harsher than conventional conservatism and now regarded by many as extremist, but also the exponents of Alt-Right ideology.

The new Alt-Right authoritarianism that is sweeping the western world could easily be described as neo- or proto-fascist in general character. Traditionally, the fascism label has been applied almost exclusively to right-wing authoritarianism, such as Hitler and Nazism, the Pinochet regime in Chile, the Orban regime in Hungary, and by some even to the Trump administration in the US. However, by virtue of some of its tactics, it could apply equally to left-wing extremism, such as the Chavez and Maduro regimes in Venezuela and the totalitarian regime in North Korea. As a further example, the widely reported bullying and anti-Semitism by authoritarians now controlling the hard-left Momentum faction within the British Labour Party has all the tactical hallmarks of fascism (see e.g. Fisher 2018; Maguire and Fisher 2018; Zeffman 2018). Although this book focusses very much

on the Alt-Right (because of its current rapidly growing presence across the west), one should nevertheless also be alert to neo-Marxist extremism wherever it flourishes, to right-wing authoritarian regimes in the non-western world, as well as to IS extremism.

Fear of immigrants and concern about allegedly weak immigration controls became the main driving force of the Trump campaign in the 2016 US presidential election. The common theme among Trump supporters was that 'the Establishment', i.e. government and the traditional political parties, were not listening to them about their concerns on such things as immigration, national control, job losses from cheap imports, or jobs moving abroad. Some of these complaints may well be valid up to a point. However, many of their complaints do not bear much scrutiny in factual terms. False beliefs and exaggerated fears among an electorate about immigrants, for example, are easy for skilled demagogues to whip up into nationalistic frenzy whereby voters become convinced that their only salvation is to vote for the authoritarian candidate who will 'protect' them. However, whatever the merits of their grievances, they have absolutely no right to demand pathological solutions and political leaders have absolutely no right to offer them much less deliver them.

It is often said that truth is the first casualty of war. That could equally apply to politics. It is generally accepted that politicians and their acolytes are likely to cherry pick 'the truth' and massage it and finesse it to their best advantage. Presenting their best case is, perhaps, the acceptable face of politicians. The public tolerates it. However, what has been emerging in recent years, and very much so in the US Presidential Election campaign of 2016, is the 'post-truth' phenomenon, an altogether different proposition. Post-truth refers to the deliberate fabrication and dissemination of plausible but false news stories, or stories comprising a mixture of fact and damaging fiction, in order to assist in a black propaganda campaign against a political target. Fake news became a weapon-of-choice of the Alt-Right movement in support of Donald Trump's presidential campaign, perhaps unsurprisingly in view of the fact that one of his campaign directors was Steve Bannon, the doyen of Alt-Right propaganda and former editor of *Breitbart News*, the leading Alt-Right promotional medium. Potentially damaging fake news stories were disseminated about Trump's electoral rival Hillary Clinton. See, for example, Neiwert (2017).

Since President Trump's inauguration, however, it became evident that the post-truth fake news tactic had become an integral part of his Presidential policy, whether from his own mouth, his *Twitter* account, or a variety of official spokespersons. The world was expected to swallow unabashed such demonstrable falsehoods as: a non-existent terrorist massacre at Bowling Green, Kentucky, the number of people celebrating Trump's inauguration near the Lincoln Memorial far exceeding those at President Obama's 2009 inauguration, and an accusation that the media barely covered terrorist attacks in Nice, Paris, Berlin and some 75 other locations. Furthermore, when challenged, the lies were either denied, or brazenly repeated, or dismissed as trivial errors. It is instructive that Steve Bannon was appointed by President Trump as his Chief Strategist in his inaugural cabinet, along with other senior Alt-Right representatives (see chapter 5). The implications of the widespread use of fake news and fake facts by the Alt-Right presidential machine are addressed in more detail in chapter 11.

### The Editor's Perspective

Throughout the book, the editor and primary author applies an analytical concept called 'world-view' that has proven over many decades to be a very useful descriptive and analytical tool for understanding the stance of particular individuals or particular groups. The modern world-view concept, or *Weltanschauung* in the original German, is ascribed to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Dilthey although it has antecedents in the philosopher Kant. According to Kluback and Weinbaum (1957), who provided an introductory glimpse of Dilthey's proposition, world-view refers to a complex set of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, values and motivations that characterize how an individual or group of people interpret the world, their own existence and how the two inter-relate. World-view represents a set of characteristic biases from which it is possible to predict the likely stance and behaviour of those who hold a particular world-view. However, only a small proportion of world-view as personally expressed by the individual is conscious, and pre-conscious processing (Dixon 1981) largely determines overall world-view and actions as observed by others.

As expressed above, the editor understands the world-view concept in the way typically used in the social sciences by sociologists and psychologists (see, for example, Burrell and Morgan 1979) and by other disciplines such as systems science (see, for example, Ackoff 1971; von Bertalanffy 1992; Checkland 1981; Checkland and Scholes 1990). The fine structure of world-view as recognised by such disciplines is lost in the ill-defined and variable colloquial use of the term, where it may mean simply ‘attitude’ or ‘stance’.

In addition, the disciplined use of world-view recognizes that, in ascribing a particular world-view to a particular individual or group, the analyst is influenced by his or her own world-view used as a lens or viewing instrument seeking to reveal the world-view characteristics of the subject or subjects. This process of abduction (Denzin 1978) is bound to be affected by inherent biases of the viewer. No observer, researcher, analyst or commentator can ever be free of bias, no matter how hard they may try to be ‘objective’. The art is to try to make the objectifier’s biases as explicit as possible so that readers may judge to what extent these may have affected the analysis and conclusions.

The editor values order and justice in society and believes that extremism of whatever kind is not only an affront to order, justice, and humanity but represents a real threat to democracy and, in some instances, national security. A liberal conservative, who in the Brexit context might be labelled a Eurosceptic Remainer, he rejects Alt-Right authoritarianism and extremism as much as he does that of the Marxist hard-left or any other group.

## **Risk and the Alt-Right Context**

In contrast to other books on the Alt-Right, this book is not just a philosophical, sociological, political, or economic examination of the phenomenon but is also explicitly a risk analysis. The risk concept itself is, of course, not without controversy and the risk analysis and assessment discipline encompasses the spectrum of both pure and opportunity/speculative risks (Waring and Glendon 1998; ISO 2018; Waring 2013). Assessment techniques appropriate to pure risks areas such as engineering, fire, safety, white collar crime and credit control may not be appropriate to speculative risk areas such as political risk, investment, HR strategy, IT strategy, foreign policy, and international relations, where more qualitative and heuristic assessment methods

come to the fore (Glendon and Clarke 2016; Shrader-Frechette 1991). This book therefore adopts a primarily qualitative and heuristic approach to the Alt-Right risk narrative, using a risk assessment technique applied systematically in chapter 12.

In pursuing a risk analysis, this book recognizes that there should be no *a priori* assumptions about what risk exposures exist in a particular context or who is 'at risk' from them. Certainly, it may be convenient to assume that the Alt-Right represents a source of threat(s) to various likely parties who, therefore, may be subject to a variety of risk exposures as a result. However, such a uni-directional model is unrealistic and, indeed, a cogent analysis must also consider what risk exposures affect imputed risk sources themselves. For example, although many may regard the Alt-Right as a threat to democracy, and be alarmed at the perceived threat posed by electoral successes by populist and far-right parties in recent years, the speed with which the latter voting successes may go into sharp reverse shows up a major risk exposure for such parties. For example, by May 2017 the number of UK Independence Party elected officials at both national and local levels had all but disappeared in less than a year and political oblivion beckoned. Similarly, the far-right Party for Freedom of Geert Wilders in Holland and the Front National of Marine Le Pen in France were both beaten badly in general elections in 2017, following years of growing success. Dubious credibility, relentless unpleasant rhetoric from such parties, and their propaganda based on fear and faked facts, are likely to eventually combine to motivate rejection at the ballot box. The risk of hubris and no longer being acceptable or taken seriously by an electorate is a political risk faced by any Alt-Right (or indeed any) party but, of course, electoral demise does not eliminate their ideology or its core supporters.

## **The Book's Style, Content, Authors, and Structure**

This book follows academic discipline and seeks to provide evidence and references to support particular statements or at least make clear any necessary distinctions between facts, assertions, arguments and opinions. However, with such a controversial subject, and potential evocation of strong emotions (whether for or against a particular ideology or exponents of it), there is a temptation for authors to slip into polemical expression in their narratives. Indeed, there is currently an

unresolved debate among academics about whether traditional scholarly neutrality must be maintained or whether authors could legitimately take a strong for/against position and use polemic in support of it. The editor took the view that the traditional approach should prevail. However, should any traces of polemic remain, he takes full responsibility for any criticism that may arise.

The potential scope for the content of a book such as this is huge and, if fully comprehensive, its size would be prohibitive. Indeed, two volumes were required even for a limited coverage. Moreover, with the inherently fast-moving nature of current affairs and developments, it is not possible to capture all relevant events and to be up-to-date, which in any event is the task of journalists and the news media. From systems science, a holistic approach only requires to include the perseverant essence of the whole and not every ephemeral component of the whole (von Bertalanffy 1972; Checkland 1981). Therefore, in deciding on content, the editor has taken a selective approach to a number of areas in an attempt to provide a reasonably representative coverage of key issues. This unashamed pragmatism and selectivity may, of course, cause some readers to question why, for example, such major topics as the Alt-Right approach in the USA to the North Korea, Russia, China, and Syria issues are not covered as distinct chapters for each country rather than in a single chapter on foreign policy (chapter 6). Which illustrative US foreign policy issues to include or exclude in chapter 6 is a result of the editor's judgement. US foreign policy on Russia is addressed in chapter 6, whereas the Alt-Right ideology in Russia is covered in chapter 11 in Vol 2. A separate chapter is devoted to the US Alt-Right approach to Iran (chapter 7).

The book is fortunate to benefit from contributions from an eclectic group of authors with backgrounds in psychology, sociology, history, political science, international relations, and risk analysis, who variously have specialised in studies of the populist and far-right in the United States, UK, mainland Europe and elsewhere. A number have also been engaged in comparative studies of the populist right and far-right in different countries. Details of the authors' affiliations are presented in the section About the Editor and Authors.

This volume is in three parts. Part 1 on the nature of Alt-Right ideology comprises two chapters. Chapter 1 considers how best to define the evolving Alt-Right phenomenon. Chapter 2 examines the psychology, and especially the emotional origins and motivations, of the

Alt-Right as an aid to understanding their behaviour and potentially predicting future actions.

In Part 2, while addressing in some detail the Alt-Right phenomenon in the US, where it already succeeded in securing the US Presidency with the inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017, the nine chapters also consider such particular issues as the US Alt-Right stance on domestic policy, terrorism, foreign policy, immigration and mass migration, the environment, human rights, the judiciary, and the media and fake news.

Part 3 Conclusion comprises three chapters that synthesise the various analyses from Parts 1 and 2. One chapter provides systematically a common risk analysis and assessment framework to all the risks identified in Part 2. The penultimate chapter considers how far Alt-Right ideology and practice represent a threat to democracy and western civilisation, and makes a prognosis for how the US Alt-Right phenomenon might develop and how far it is likely to increase its influence. The final chapter identifies potential strategies to limit the Alt-Right threat in so far as it may exist.

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**PART 1:**  
**THE NATURE OF THE**  
**ALT-RIGHT IDEOLOGY**



# Chapter 1: Defining the Evolving Alt-Right Phenomenon

*By Alan Waring*

## **Abstract**

This chapter examines right-wing world-views outside the realms of traditional conservatism, which are more strident, more intolerant and increasingly extreme the further to the right is their location. Populist, far- and extreme-right parties and groups in western societies and others (e.g. Russia) are identified and characterised by nationalist, nativist, anti-liberal, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and white supremacist rhetoric and policies. The Alt-Right emergence in the US is examined and transnational collaboration between Alt-Right groups in different countries is discussed. Collectively labelled as the Alternative Right or Alt-Right, such groups typically have a strong desire to legitimize and normalise their ideology for electoral appeal purposes e.g. the Trump presidency in the US. Noting the difficulties in defining the evolving Alt-Right, a working definition is proposed.

**Key words:** Alt-Right, ideology, nationalism, nativism, transnational, Trump

## **The Conservative Tradition**

Conservatism, in a general sense, refers to adherence to traditional, normative values and a reluctance to welcome change. In a political context, conservatism or the so-called 'right-wing' exhibits such characteristics as these found within the population, but also extends the general concept to extol the virtues of individual endeavour and self-reliance as well as favouring free enterprise, private ownership, low taxation, and socially conservative ideas. Conservatism emphasizes personal responsibility and eschews collectivism and any kind of socialist or left-wing agenda, such as an emphasis on public spending, high taxation of businesses and high earners, trades union power, and a de-emphasis on defence spending.

Traditional conservatism has never been monolithic and has always included identifiable co-existing factions, ranging from the more liberal centre-right (e.g. the so-called Mainstreet Republicans in the USA; the One Nation Conservatives, Tory Reform Group, and Conservative Party Europhiles/Brexit Remainers in the UK); through to right-wing conservatives, such as the Paleoconservatives, NeoCons, Tea Party, and latterly Trumpists in the USA, and the Thatcherites, Eurosceptics, and EU Brexiteers in the UK.

Further right still, and outside the realms of traditional conservatism, exist world-views that are more strident, more intolerant, and increasingly fascist the further to the right is their location. Ultra-right parties and groups in western societies are characterised by strongly nationalist, nativist, anti-liberal, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and white supremacist rhetoric and policies, for example in the UK, the British National Party, Britain First, and English Defence League. Similar parties and groups have arisen in many countries. Some, in view of their extremist and violent proclivities, are classed as terrorists e.g. National Action proscribed in the UK, and Aryan Nations and National Alliance in the USA (FBI, 2002). Lyons (2017a and b), Michael (2003; 2008; 2014; 2016; 2017), and Neiwert (2017) refer to a range of right-wing extremist groups in the United States. However, as discussed below, it should be noted that, although attention to the far-right is typically focussed on the west, far-right characteristics are also evident in many non-western countries.

## **The Alternative Right**

The so-called Alt-Right (short for Alternative Right) is generally considered to encompass the spectrum of right-wing conservative world-views that begins with those who have become dissatisfied with the mainstream political process and character and frustrated by what they regard as the impotence of traditional conservatism. This spectrum ranges from the populist Alt-Right to all those having a hard-right, ultra-right, or extremist ideology. ADL (2018) described in detail a less extreme group within the Alt-Right, which it termed the Alt-Lite. However, although informative, this distinction appears to be more pedantic than substantive. Although coined initially with reference to populist right-wing and far-right groups, ideas, and activities in the United States, the term Alt-Right has since been extended to

cover similar characteristics evident in western countries generally, as well as in non-western countries such as Russia and Ukraine (see Vol 2).

The term Alt-Right, although adopted originally in the US by Gottfried (2008) (see later), has taken on a more global coverall meaning but is not used as such everywhere e.g. in the UK. This has led to confusion in the UK, where some people call Britain First, for example, a far-right group, others call it extremist, while others call it populist. In Italy, 5 Star is often called populist yet its rhetoric and policies appear much more far-right, and some might argue extremist.

The author decided to use the term Alt-Right in this book in a coverall way simply to ensure that the spectrum of right-wing views outside and beyond mainstream conservative parties is fully captured. That spectrum ranges from populist parties not far removed from mainstream conservatism but definitely outside it, all the way through more authoritarian far-right parties and fanatical groups frequently prepared to advocate if not use violence, up to and including extremists and proscribed terrorists.

However, although the Alt-Right term is usually applied in a coverall shorthand way as above, and is how it is applied in this book, it should be noted that there are also Alt-Right characteristics evident in other countries, regimes, ethnicities, and religions. For example, the Duterte regime in the Philippines may be described as far-right authoritarian, repressive, and proto-fascist. In Myanmar, although attempting to adopt some strands of democracy following decades of absolute military dictatorship, in 2016–2017 the Bhuddist nationalist regime engaged in wholesale atrocities against, and ethno-religious cleansing of, Rohingya Muslims. Many countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa exhibit far-right characteristics in the form of quasi- or actual dictatorships, anti-democratic repression, judicial abuses, and human rights abuses. Similar charges have been aimed at North Korea and China, both of which are formally communist states i.e. far-left rather than far-right. Then there is the IS/Al Ghaeda/Boko Haram bloc of Islamist extremists who, while flying a false Muslim flag for justification, portray authoritarian, repressive, and proto-fascist characteristics strikingly similar to those of the ultra-right in the west, many of whom fly a false Christian flag for justification. For example, Michael (2006) has examined such similarities regarding the US far-

right and, in particular, the seemingly paradoxical conceptual convergences between, on the one hand, neo-Nazis, Holocaust deniers, and white separatists, and, on the other hand, Islamist extremists in a number of countries. The paradox is sharpened by the fact that the Alt-Right generally in the west is anti-Muslim, and professed Islamists are generally anti-Christian. However, they share a common hatred of Jews, Israel and American foreign policy. Nevertheless, it is reported that Geert Wilders, leader of the right-wing racist Party for Freedom in Holland is a “serious case of philo-Semitism” and is very pro-Israel (Engelhart 2013)—see van der Valk, chapter 9 in Vol 2. Another paradox is the upsurge in anti-Semitism in the British Labour Party, especially among the hard-left Momentum group, which contradicts the traditional anti-racist philosophy of the Labour Party (see e.g. Fisher 2018a; Maguire and Fisher 2018; Zeffman 2018).

Whereas the ideologies, strategies, tactics, and justifications used by authoritarian, repressive, and fascistic entities of whatever declaration and in whichever country appear to be remarkably similar (despite their often purported inimical differences), the scope of this book is limited to the Alt-Right as conventionally understood i.e. western countries (primarily US and European) and non-western European countries (e.g. Russia).

Table 1.1 in Appendix 1.1 lists prominent examples of Alt-Right groups in the US. The list in Table 1.1 is incomplete. New small groups arise from time to time and frequently groups alter their name or merge with other groups, especially in the United States (see e.g. Neiwert 2017). While it may appear that Alt-Right groups enjoy a large membership or level of support, typically each one has followers in the hundreds or low thousands. For example, in the US the estimated number of KKK (Ku Klux Klan) members and committed supporters in June 2017 was some 3,000 spread across 42 local groups (or Klans) in 33 states (ADL 2017). This small total compares with a national membership of some 4 million in the 1920s and between 6,000 and 10,000 in the early 1990s. There are frequent splits, fragmentations, and name changes of far-right groups. For example, following a split in 2005, National Alliance fell into decline but remains active (Kelley 2018). Chapter 3 discusses in more detail the ebb and flow of support for such groups in the US and what inferences may be drawn.

The Alt-Right is neither a political party nor is it a movement in the sense of a cohesive movement or a group having a defined philosophy, constitution, organization, policy, membership and so on. To that extent, it may be described as a phenomenon whereby large numbers of individuals, across a broad spectrum beyond and to the right of conventional conservatism and conservative political parties, share an ideology based primarily on racism and white supremacy, anti-immigration, and antipathy to perceived government interference in the daily lives of citizens. Of course, not all Alt-Right supporters are white or believing in white supremacy. For example, a number of prominent Alt-Right supporters are or have been from ethnic minorities e.g. some former *Breitbart News* staffers. Nagle (2017) described the Alt-Right as a meta-group of semi-divergent right-wing sub-cultures in broad coalition seeking to overturn and replace the established order in society. Some argue that the Alt-Right is like a religious cult in some respects, as evidenced by the idolisation of particular zealots and their expressed ideas and by the invention of obscurantist language and symbols that only committed supporters are likely to understand (see, for example, Sonnad and Squirrell 2017). However, Neiwert (2017) argued that the Internet has revolutionised communication between disaffected right-wingers, especially young people, to such an extent that they are now able to rapidly encourage each other towards radicalisation and, for some, to extremism. The anarchic revolutionary zeal of some younger recruits to the Alt-Right and their fixated, self-absorbed immersion in on-line obscurantism formed the substance of the examination by Nagle (2017). Such 'new elite' elements are likely never to be regarded as more than an eccentric and largely incomprehensible oddity by the majority of populist Alt-Right supporters. As potential recruiters and persuaders of mainstream conservatives to move decisively rightwards into the Alt-Right, the very eccentricity, secretive language and esoteric condescension they display to outsiders is likely to weaken their appeal.

Neiwert (2017) also explained in some detail that, in common with earlier manifestations of the American populist radical right such as the Patriots and the Tea Party, the US Alt-Right movement has conjured up an alternative universe to that of verifiable reality, with alternative explanations for an entire world of known facts, and eagerness, even passion, for believing in easily disprovable falsehoods and



conspiracies involving these (Kahan et al 2017; Shermer 2018). Some examples are discussed in chapters 9 and 10.

Although the Alt-Right spectrum in each country is unique, a common pattern permeates them all to a greater or lesser degree:

- Racism, specifically white supremacy, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim world-view.
- Anti-immigrant priorities.
- Anti-central government/anti-federalist world-view.
- A fundamentalist world-view, both religious and political.
- Anti-establishment/anti-government conspiracy theories.
- Strident Alt-Right fanaticism that often spills over into social settings and social media in the form of hectoring and propaganda rants.
- An over-riding hatred for such groups as non-whites, ethnic minorities, non-Christians (especially Jews and Muslims), immigrants, foreigners, liberals, socialists and other left-wingers, federalists, mainstream politicians, and bankers and financiers.
- An over-riding scepticism about established science or facts of any kind that do not support, or that contradict, ideological positions and beliefs of the Alt-Right, and a willingness to believe in an alternative universe of invented 'facts' that support Alt-Right contentions (see e.g. Kahan et al 2017; Shermer 2018).

There is much anecdotal evidence that the Alt-Right is not monolithic and there is no fixed dogma spanning the entire phenomenon. However, the further to the right is the political party or group of an Alt-Right supporter, the more likely it is that all eight characteristics will be exhibited.

From their experimental study of how different political groups in the US respond to information, Kahan et al (2017) concluded that scepticism about truth and accuracy is (a) very much dependent on subject matter context, and (b) is biased by the individual's pre-existing beliefs. Confirmation bias looms large in how individuals select some facts and ignore others so as to support their prejudices (Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008). The eight characteristics listed above may also be commonly linked psychologically to an authoritarian pre-

disposition manifested by low curiosity, lack of open-mindedness, dislike of surprise or challenging information, taking comfort in rigid hierarchies of social and political order, feeling insecure about diversity and liberalism, and a dislike of and unwillingness to accept change that challenges their world-view.

Other more particular subsets occur that are not listed in Table 1.1. For example, one strand of Alt-Right followers are misogynists who believe that not only are they victims of government-led suffocation of their individual rights and freedoms but also that they are specifically victims of a conspiracy by government, liberal elites, and feminism to downgrade men's dominant role in society, an alleged transgression that they stridently seek to combat (see e.g. ADL 2018).

The 'them' against 'us' character evident in all the Alt-Right rhetoric and posturing across the range of different issues in the Alt-Right agenda points to an underlying paranoia in their perception of threats (real or imagined) facing them. The psychology of fear and risk and its importance to understanding the Alt-Right world-view and predictions of Alt-Right behaviour is addressed in detail in chapter 2.

## **The Alt-Right Emergence in the United States**

Resurgent nationalism in the US, including the emergence of the Alt-Right phenomenon, is addressed in detail in chapter 3 and the following is a brief introduction. Lyons (2017a and b), Michael (2016; 2017), and Neiwert (2017) provided an extensive descriptive summary of the Alt-Right 'movement' in the US and its rapid evolution as an increasingly populist phenomenon, from lowly beginnings and small numbers of supporters in 2008 to the unexpected electoral success of Donald Trump in November 2016 as US President. ADL (2018) provided mini-biographies of leading Alt-Right (and Alt-Lite) figures, and indicated how interconnected they and the many sub-groups and factions are. Openly committed to an Alt-Right agenda (if, indeed, he was fully aware of the full implications), and contemptuous of both the traditional conservatism of the Republican Party and, of course, the Democrats, Trump made no secret of his view that many traditional Republicans were too close ideologically to Democratic thinking. His rambling book (Trump 2015) represented a classic 'salvation' proposition used in sales and marketing, in which buyers are told that they

have a major problem (which may be true, or an exaggeration or completely untrue) and that only the company's product will solve the problem and save them: Trump asserted that America is crippled and that only he knows how to "make America great again".

Nevertheless, Trump himself did not emerge politically from the Alt-Right. Rather, it is more likely that the headline-grabbing issues promoted by the Alt-Right became a convenient opportunistic vehicle for Trump's election campaign. Trump is not a career politician and was much more interested in using the presidency to advance and promote the Donald J. Trump brand as part of a long-term business strategy. Moreover, as Lyons (2017a) and Neiwert (2017) asserted, the Alt-Right movement also judged support for Trump as an opportunity both to promote their agenda, and to weaken the Republican Party. A kind analysis is that, as President, Donald Trump became an unwitting Trojan horse for the Alt-Right, whereas a less kind analysis (e.g. Neiwert 2017) suggested that Trump was well aware of his Alt-Right role and remained more than happy to pursue an Alt-Right agenda. Either way, with no formal party and no electoral candidates, it could be argued that the Alt-Right achieved a bloodless political coup of staggering proportions, as discussed further in chapter 5.

According to Michael (2017), in 2008 Paul Gottfried, a conservative academic, while addressing the H.L. Mencken Club on "The Decline and Rise of the Alternative Right", implied that the 'alternative right' was a dissident far-right ideology that rejected mainstream conservatism. The latter address (Gottfried 2008) is a somewhat self-absorbed pseudo-intellectual dissection of the minutiae of what Gottfried claimed to be wrong with the right-wing in America, in particular his distaste for what he regarded as a perfidious neo-con hegemony that had marginalised Gottfried himself, and had subverted right-wing conservatism. He asserted that "We are convinced that we are right in our historical and cultural observations while those who have quarantined us are wrong". In arguing for a vigorous resurgence of a viable true right-wing based on this certitude, and on an equal certitude of white racial superiority (e.g. "the fact that not everyone enjoys the same genetic precondition for learning"), ironically Gottfried's elaborate discourse undermined his fervent expectation that he was creating the basis "to gain recognition as an Intellectual Right". The so-called intellectual basis for the Alt-Right appears to be little more than an attempt to gain falsely some measure of credibility, respectability

and social acceptability for what was, and is, a set of prejudiced beliefs in the primacy of inequality and the fostering of racial discrimination and white supremacy.

Nevertheless, from such small beginnings in 2008, the Alt-Right momentum in the United States took off following the appointment in 2011 of the voluble right-wing intellectual Richard Spencer as head of the National Policy Institute (NPI), a white nationalist ‘think tank’ founded in 2005. Spencer and his coterie of NPI writers have published prolifically on the white supremacist philosophy and agenda under the *Radix* imprint e.g. Spencer (2012). Gottfried, MacDonald, and the Spencer writers arguably are the closest that the Alt-Right gets to the creation of an appearance, albeit dubious, of rational intellectual discourse.

However, the pretence of intellectualism was not central to the rapid rise of the Alt-Right. The cleverness of the Alt-Right ‘movement’ in the US, or at least those Alt-Right leaders in positions to manipulate public opinion, was to capture the growing disillusionment of broad swathes of the population about the ability, indeed willingness, of the traditional mainstream political parties to address effectively concerns about jobs, tax, the economy, health care, education etc. and lay the blame for it at the door of: (a) an allegedly weak and self-serving political establishment in cahoots with big business, and (b) the alleged predations of immigration and globalisation. The introduction in 2016 of Donald Trump, a business tycoon with no political background or experience of office, as a renegade Alt-Right Republican candidate for the Presidency, with such populist slogans as “Making America Great Again” and “draining the establishment swamp in Washington”, and “We’re gonna build a wall” (referring to a border wall to keep out illegal immigrants from Mexico and Central and South America), was sufficient to coalesce all strands of disaffected voters and get him elected in November 2016. Surrounded by an Alt-Right dominated cabinet and team of officials and advisers, the Alt-Right ideology and agenda could now be enacted—see chapters 3 to 11.

Evidence has emerged that extremist elements in the US have taken advantage increasingly of right-wing populist advances since 2008 (e.g. Johnson 2012). For example, the white supremacist KKK that had been relatively quiescent for decades actively supported Donald Trump’s presidential election campaign and, following his election, became more vociferous in openly praising Trump and his

anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and anti-liberal policies. After several decades, the KKK and other far-right groups re-engaged in street protests and marches to promote their ideology. At such events, their members and supporters openly gave the Nazi salute, noisily expressed their hatred for non-whites, immigrants and ethnic minorities, gave adulation to Trump, and engaged in violent hate crime against anyone daring to challenge their views. For example, on August 11, 2017, there was a torch-lit Unite the Right march of white supremacists through the centre of Charlottesville in Virginia. From video evidence, some were armed with clubs and firearms. David Duke, a still-active former KKK leader, was reported to have said about the march: "We're going to fulfil the promises of Donald Trump to..... take our country back".

A young white supremacist drove his car at speed into peaceful counter-protesters, killing one person and injuring 19 others. According to eye witness reports, the ramming was deliberate. The suspect was arrested and charged with second degree murder and other offences. However, President Trump's response to the incident was one of equivocation in which he blamed "many sides" for such hatred, bigotry, and violence (White House 2017a). Curiously, Trump's televised statement made on August 12, 2017 was not listed in the White House official statements. Only following widespread condemnation from Congress members, the mayor of Charlottesville, mainstream politicians both Republican and Democrat, the media and commentators, did the White House issue a clarification on August 14 mixed within a statement on foreign trade. Also televised, this statement (White House 2017b) suggested that in his original condemnation Trump had automatically implied white supremacists etc.: "Of course, that includes white supremacists, KKK, neo-Nazi and all extremist groups". Nevertheless, both his implication that the violence of the perpetrator had a moral equivalence with the relatively peaceful behaviour of the victims, and his reluctance to condemn the perpetrator and his allies as domestic terrorists, led many to question whether the President covertly agreed with such right-wing extremists. After 48 hours of increasing political pressure, Trump issued a third statement in which he unequivocally condemned white supremacists, the KKK and neo-Nazis for their violent behaviour. Nevertheless, the following day, during a White House press conference scheduled to outline the president's infrastructure policy and development, he launched into a

lengthy tirade against the media in which he re-iterated and amplified his original assertion that anti-fascist demonstrators were equally to blame for the violence in Charlottesville. Blaming the victims of fascism for their own demise is a well-exercised tactic of the far-right, for example denial of the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews in WWII, while nonetheless stating that any harm that might have befallen them was entirely their own fault for having parasitic characters that naturally attracted hatred.

The renewed aggression of US far-right extremists and their vocal support for Trump and his policies suggested that they felt encouraged and emboldened by an Alt-Right dominated Trump administration to enact their ideological beliefs, secure in their presumption that Trump agreed with them and was likely only ever to grudgingly censure their actions if and when forced to do so. The resurgent far-right in the USA is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

## **The Trans-National Appeal of the Alt-Right**

Although the histories of the American and the UK right-wings are significantly different, ideologically they have much in common. It is unsurprising that openly there was considerable sharing of ideas on strategy, tactics, marketing, and public relations between leaders of the populist British Alt-Right UKIP (UK Independence Party) and the Trump team and coterie of the US Alt-Right, both during the lead up to the UK's EU Referendum and to the US Presidential Election. UKIP leaders, such as Nigel Farage and Arron Banks, had frequent meetings in the United States with Trump's senior team members, and Farage even gave a personal endorsement to Trump at one of the latter's major campaign rallies. The close involvement of US Alt-Right protagonists in UK politics continued into 2018 on British soil e.g. attendance at populist- and far-right gatherings by Steve Bannon, support for EDL by congressman Paul Gosar, and unofficial meetings between John Bolton and British right-wing politicians (Fisher 2018b).

The recognition of common cause, and the sharing of information and ideas on advancing their individual agendas, evolved transnationally (Engelhart 2013) to the extent that the erstwhile notion of the Alt-Right ideology being a purely American matter no longer holds. Far-right political parties across Europe (many predating the rise of the US Alt-Right) have promoted agendas and policies

broadly similar to those of the Trump administration and those of the US far-right. The nationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-globalisation rallying cries of Front National in France, Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, AfD and PEGIDA in Germany, Northern League and 5 Star in Italy, Freedom Party and People's Party in Austria, and Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary, for example, are in tune with those of UKIP and the US Alt-Right. The American Alt-Right revolutionary Steve Bannon spent most of 2018 touring Europe giving pep talks to far-right parties and groups and setting up The Movement, a pan-EU Alt-Right foundation dedicated to forming a far-right bloc within the European Parliament (Waterfield 2018). Moreover, their common ideology is also in tune with much of the autocratic and increasingly far-right populist character of the Russian administration of Vladimir Putin (see Klapsis, chapter 11 in Vol 2). For example, in March 2017, Putin sent an envoy to Italy to sign a mutual cooperation pact with the far-right Northern League and also made a similar pact with the far-right Freedom Party in Austria (see Wodak and Rheindorf, chapter 6, Vol 2). During the US Presidential campaign, Putin openly expressed his admiration for Donald Trump, as did many of the deputies in the Russian Duma. There is, of course, the on-going unresolved controversy as to whether the Russians covertly attempted to subvert the presidential election to favour Trump and whether Trump and/or any of his team cooperated unlawfully in any way with the Russians to influence the election outcome or US foreign policy in a way that ultimately would favour Russian strategic interests.

The far-right parties in these various countries also share another characteristic: the strong desire to legitimize and make respectable their ideology and agenda by presenting them as being fair, virtuous and reasonable, and offering real democracy, real freedom and real security to the population—or at least to the majority who are white, non-immigrant and non-Muslim or of other minority religion. The far-right have sought to draw intellectual legitimacy for their cause from individuals who variously have sought to present the Alt-Right ideology as a necessary and inevitable antidote to alleged harmful liberalism, for example, Richard Spencer (e.g. *Radix Journal*), Jared Taylor (e.g. Taylor, 1993), Samuel Huntington (e.g. Huntington 2004), Glenn Beck (e.g. Beck 2015) and Kevin MacDonald (e.g. MacDonald 2002; 2004).

There is some dispute as to whether the contemporary upsurge of the Alt-Right is qualitatively similar to that of fascism in the 1930s. For example, academics such as Niall Ferguson argued that it is not (Ferguson 2012; Long 2016; McDougall 2016), whereas others have argued that although recent contexts are different to those of the 1930s the underlying ideology is broadly the same (Engelhart 2013; McDougall 2016). Moreover, the strategies and tactics of the Alt-Right today have evolved and become more sophisticated and nuanced compared to fascism of the 1930s. Whereas in the 1930s, the fascist goal was to gain absolute control of the state, the Alt-Right now in the main do not appear to be seeking a totalitarian takeover but instead seem content for now to exert such a powerful influence on mainstream conservatism that it 'corrects itself' and shifts its centre of political gravity firmly towards the far-right. Rather than coup by force, it is more about subversion of mainstream conservatism to ensure a permanent Alt-Right stamp on national governance.

Chapter 2 delves further into the emotional and motivational character of the evolving Alt-Right and how it is possible for seemingly different, even opposing, interests between different countries to have so much in common. Also examined are the world-views informing some of the inconsistent, if not misleading, claims of many far-right parties to represent freedom, democracy and benign policies while at the same time promoting policies advocating repression and denial of human rights for disfavoured classes of person.

## Defining the Alt-Right

Both Lyons (2017a and b) and Michael (2016; 2017) suggested that defining the Alt-Right precisely is difficult because it is a continually evolving phenomenon. What emerges is that the Alt-Right, particularly in the US, is a somewhat chaotic melange of disaffected, disgruntled and angry people. Neiwert (2017) referred in particular to the 'producerist' core of the populist Alt-Right (i.e. angry citizens who see themselves as hard-working patriots sandwiched between a nefarious, oppressive, corrupt elite of corporate owners, officials and politicians above them and a parasitic underclass of feckless, lazy, immoral, unpatriotic, and undeserving 'others' beneath them). No more is this anger exemplified than in the utterances and publications of Milo



Yiannopoulos (Neiwert 2017), a British-born former staffer on *Breitbart News*, the Alt-Right media organ—although ADL (2018) categorized him as Alt-Lite. Yiannopoulos is a notorious self-publicist who deliberately courts media attention by making outrageous statements on a number of topics. When he made a controversial statement that could have been interpreted as advocating underage sex, the company originally contracted to publish his book *Dangerous* (Simon & Schuster) withdrew and the author eventually self-published it (Yiannopoulos 2017). Bubbling, visceral anger was also evident in such leading Alt-Right exponents as Steve Bannon, President Trump’s former chief strategist, and Dr Sebastian Gorka, a former national security adviser and former Deputy Assistant to the President (see chapter 5). In TV media interviews, for example, neither person sought to disguise their angry contempt for public accountability or being questioned pointedly on matters of public interest (e.g. Gorka interviews on *BBC Newsnight* January 31, 2017 and *CNN* July 24, 2017).

The outward anger towards their objects of hatred that characterises the Alt-Right is also frequently directed internally within Alt-Right groups and between them. For example, in the US, the KKK leadership has periodically engaged in destructive power struggles. In the UK, similarly these have occurred within UKIP, BNP, EDL, and Britain First. Over the period 2014 to 2017, UKIP appeared to be in a permanent state of self-destructive in-fighting (see chapter 3 in Vol 2). In 2014, BNP’s entire membership list was leaked onto the Internet by a disgruntled official. Senior officials of BNP and Britain First have traded angry accusations, and defections between the groups appear to have damaged mutual good will. Self-destructive behaviour evident within and among the Alt-Right is addressed in chapter 2.

A definition of the Alt-Right raised by Michael (2017) derived from Gottfried, namely ‘a dissident far-right ideology that rejects mainstream conservatism’ is probably no longer adequate to express the Alt-Right in its current evolved state. The editor’s own definition, namely as an ideology, ‘the spectrum of right-wing world-views outside traditional conservatism, which begins with a dissatisfaction with the mainstream political process and character and frustration by perceived impotence of traditional conservatism, and runs through populist, hard-right, ultra-right, and extreme-right ideology’, is probably also inadequate but may serve as a working definition for the

purposes of this book. For example, how does one satisfactorily capture the characteristic indignant anger in a definition of the Alt-Right? Redefinition may well become necessary as the Alt-Right evolves further.

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## Appendix 1.1 US Alt-Right Representative Groups and Parties

It should be noted that the categories in Table 1.1 are not mutually exclusive and it is possible, indeed likely, that a particular group may be classified under more than one category.

**Table 1.1: US Alt-Right Exemplars**

Country	Populist	Separatist/ Anti-Central Government	White Supremacist/Christian Identity/Nativist/Anti-Muslim/Anti-Semitic	Neo-Nazi /advocating nationalist policies akin to Third Reich	Extremist Militias (examples)	Officially Classified Terrorist or Proscribed Group (proscribing authority indicated)
United States	Paleo-conservatives and Trump supporters on far right of Republican Party	Sovereign Citizens; Militias e.g. Praetorian Guard; White Mountain Militia; Nationalist Front; American Freedom Party	Ku Klux Klan; Aryan Nations; National Alliance; American Nazi Party; National Vanguard; White Revolution; Nationalist Front; American Freedom Party; Atomwaffen	Ku Klux Klan; Aryan Nations; American Nazi Party; National Vanguard; White Revolution; Atomwaffen	Ku Klux Klan; Aryan Nations; White Mountain Militia; North Florida Survival Group; Atomwaffen	Aryan Nations (FBI); National Alliance (FBI); World Church of the Creator (Creativity Movement) (FBI)

Sources: official websites of listed organizations and groups; FBI.

# Chapter 2: Psychological Aspects of the Alt-Right Phenomenon

*By Alan Waring and Roger Paxton*

## **Abstract**

This chapter seeks to make sense of the harsh, non-egalitarian, Alt-Right ideology and world-view, the often indignant and angry authoritarian rhetoric that characterises them, and the Alt-Right's internal contradictions, such as claiming to offer freedom to some but also advocating loss of freedom and human rights to others. The relationship between psychological factors and political preferences are discussed in terms of personality (notably the 'the Big 5 theory', Right-Wing Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Orientation, and the 'dark triad' of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy), the psychology of fear and risk (notably fear of foreigners and immigrants, globalisation and job losses, and experts), motivation, and the political psychology of anger. Also examined is the issue of confirmatory bias and its relevance to alternative or fake facts and political preferences. Allegations of personality disorders against Alt-Right leaders (e.g. Trump) are discussed but cautioned as unproven and unsafe.

**Key words:** Alt-Right, psychology, personality, motivation, emotion, risk

## **Making Psychological Sense of the Alt-Right**

The over-riding impression given by Alt-Right leaders, opinion formers and followers is one of anger and indignation, of disaffected and disgruntled people who are determined to bring about radical change in the political system, national governance and society. However, it is not at all clear that there is a coherent political logic and structure to what is evidently a fairly chaotic melange of frequently contradictory emotions, attitudes and motivations within the Alt-Right 'movement'.

As noted in chapter 1, the Alt-Right is more a collection of people having a broadly shared world-view than a well-defined movement. However, the term 'movement' will suffice for this book's purposes.

Some individuals of the Alt-Right want to change the existing political system and so-called establishment, others want to destroy it and replace it with a white nationalist dictatorship or even no government at all. Some in the US Alt-Right cite an anti-Semitic justification for their cause, others are anti-Muslim and yet others are anti-Hispanic, and some are totally against all non-white, non-Christian and non-US born citizens. Some favour an isolationist and non-interventionist America, whereas others demand that the US crushes militarily any foreign group or country that dares to challenge the United States or in some way represents a perceived threat. Some are strongly in favour of homophobic policies, while others are themselves openly gay (for example, the Alt-Right commentator and author Milo Yiannopoulos). Some are misogynist and anti-feminist and champion men's rights at the expense of women's, whereas others are neutral or indifferent. See, for example, Lyons (2017a and b) on the array of differing Alt-Right values and motivations.

So, in the absence of any theoretical or practical coherence presented by the Alt-Right itself, how can sense be made of the Alt-Right phenomenon?

At a high level of abstraction, one might observe that the Alt-Right world-view represents a conscious rejection of and reaction to what Fukuyama (1989; 1992) referred to as "the universalization of western liberal democracy as the final form of government". In essence, the Alt-Right assertion is that, on the contrary, not only has western liberal democracy failed as the ultimate form of successful government, but also it is the cause of what are portrayed as intolerable injustices to those who should rightfully inhabit and control the world i.e. those having an Alt-Right world-view. The Alt-Right dystopian view of the present, whatever the merits of their analysis and however exaggerated some of their negative assertions, is necessary for them to project in order to be able to justify the solutions they put forward. In a curious way, the Alt-Right stance against liberal democracy is not that dissimilar to the neo-Marxist slur against the 'neo-liberal' policies of western democracies and the post-modernist accusations of Ulrich Beck (1992) against the collective power of western

governments, industry and the establishment to perpetuate an unfair distribution of risks in society.

But, where do such negative world-views come from? Some might argue that there is an inherent desire of white people to assert their supposed superiority over all other races, whereas others might argue that it is common-sense to protect oneself against such 'obvious' threats as being swamped by mass immigration, losing one's job owing to globalisation and 'unfair' foreign competition, being exposed to perceived violent crime from immigrants, or being exposed to terrorist attacks by immigrants. All such beliefs and anxieties, including those that may have some degree of factual foundation, are paranoid in nature. To understand such anxieties and paranoia, and the attitudes, motivations and political preferences stemming from them, it is necessary to appreciate the psychological factors involved.

## Psychological Factors and Political Preferences

Do people coolly weigh up the appeal of different political parties or candidates to decide which will most advance their economic interest, and then vote accordingly? Much evidence shows that political preferences are rarely so straightforward. Several kinds of psychological factor affect political affiliation. These are briefly reviewed before turning specifically to the psychology of the Alt-Right. The central question is: are there particular psychological factors that make people susceptible to the appeal of the Alt-Right?

Personality (an individual's characteristic enduring ways of thinking, feeling and behaving) was famously linked to extreme right-wing views through the concept of the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al 1950). The latter presented evidence for the existence of a 'potentially fascist' personality type—one associated with susceptibility to authoritarian and anti-democratic political beliefs. The book was subsequently widely criticised on various methodological grounds (Martin 2001), and is now generally seen as of only historical interest. However, much recent research has shown reliable links between personality and political preferences, using the Big 5 theory (McCrae and Costa 2003), the most broadly supported current personality theory. The Big 5 dimensions are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. The most consistent finding, from American and European studies, is



that people on the political right are low in openness to experience (Caprara and Vecchione 2013). Other recent research in this area has focussed specifically on the relationship between personality and right-wing attitudes, and confirmed that at least two dimensions are involved. Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) (Altemeyer 1996) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (Sidanius and Pratto 1999) are two constructs that have been widely investigated and shown to be reliably related to right-wing ideology. RWA is a personality characteristic comprising three traits: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism (Altemeyer 1998). RWA involves belief in coercive social control, obedience to and respect for conventional authority, and traditional moral and religious conformism (Duckitt and Sibley 2010). SDO is a general attitude concerning preference for equal versus hierarchical relationships between social groups. People scoring highly on SDO believe in social and economic inequality rather than equality, and in the right of powerful groups to dominate weaker ones (Duckitt and Sibley 2010). Extensive research from North America and elsewhere shows that RWA and SDO are strong predictors of a range of social attitudes associated with right-wing ideologies, including social and economic conservatism, generalized prejudice, nationalism, ethnocentrism, and anti-democratic views (Altemeyer 1998; Duckitt 2006; Sibley et al 2006; Roccato and Ricolfi 2005).

Another personality concept that appears relevant to the psychology of political preferences is the 'dark triad' of Machiavellianism (manipulativeness), narcissism (egocentricity and grandiosity), and (subclinical) psychopathy (callousness and impulsivity) (Paulhus and Williams 2002). These three dimensions are psychometrically independent (i.e. they do not measure the same thing) but appear to share a core of callous manipulation (Furnham et al 2013). Substantial evidence shows the dark triad is related to a range of antisocial behaviours (Jones and Paulhus 2011). There is currently little on its relationship to politics but one important study is mentioned below, and its deployment in political psychology is likely to grow. The edited collection of papers in Cruz and Buser (2017) also addresses specifically the topic of narcissism in the Trump era.

A few studies have investigated links between RWA and SDO and other personality features such as the Big 5 mentioned above. Some suggest that conscientiousness and lack of openness to experience

fuel RWA, and others that a lack of agreeableness and lack of openness are at the root of SDO (Caprara and Vecchione 2013; Sibley and Duckitt 2008), but these relationships remain uncertain. Regarding the dark triad, unsurprisingly perhaps, all three measures correlate negatively with agreeableness (Jakobowitz and Egan 2006). Overall, the evidence summarised above shows strong links between personality and political views.

Closely related to personality is motivation (the particular factors that drive the individual). Caprara and Vecchione (2013, 39) summarise the evidence on the relationship between motivation and personality as follows: "People's predispositions and needs are turned into habits and values, depending on their early socialization and personal experiences. Likewise, situations provide the challenges and opportunities that allow values to turn into habits and action". Personality is thus one of a range of factors influencing each person's political affiliation, and motivation is another. 'Needs' and 'motives' are sometimes used synonymously, and political conservatism is related to a high need for cognitive closure, that is, a tendency to process information in such a way as to maximize stability and reduce change and uncertainty (Jost et al 2003). Social and moral values are an important motivational category here, and Jonathan Haidt's moral foundations theory is prominent in this literature. From extensive research Haidt (2012) showed how very different moral value systems underpin the widening left-right ideological divisions in American politics. Haidt demonstrated that six 'foundations' underlie both moral judgements and political preferences in America and elsewhere. The foundations are: 1 care/harm, 2 liberty/oppression, 3 fairness/cheating, 4 loyalty/betrayal, 5 authority/subversion, and 6 sanctity/degradation. For liberals, foundations 1 and 3 are important, and they have little concern about the others. The more right-wing the person's preferences the more the others are salient. A second very important finding from Haidt's research is that people at opposing ends of this moral spectrum differ not just in terms of preference or affiliations but also in their ability to understand or respect the other's views as representing a moral standpoint at all. This finding will receive further attention in the final chapter (14) when potential strategies to limit the Alt-Right threat are considered.

Closely linked to both motivation and needs is emotion, as, for instance, when people seek to maximize stability and reduce uncertainty they clearly do so to avoid negative emotions. Fear is the emotion that has been most studied within political psychology (Brader and Marcus 2013), and below the authors show how evoking fear in order to change opinions or bolster support has been a common tactic used by Alt-Right politicians.

## The Psychology of Fear and Risk

Glendon and Clarke (2016), albeit it with a human safety focus, provided a detailed exposition of the current state of knowledge on the psychology of risk, in which fear forms a component. Previously only partly integrated areas of the subject, such as risk cognition, emotions, individual factors, and external factors such as social environment, are now organized into an integrated multilevel framework of five levels:

**Table 2.1: A Multi-Level Psychological Framework for Exploring Risk**

Psychological Level	Illustrative Variables
Socio-cultural	Peer/family influences, socialization, social environment, political/economic circumstances, organizational memberships/policies/values.
Individual differences	Age, gender, personality, habits, motivation, attitudes, experience, disposition (e.g. risk-taking tendencies, anti-social tendencies, narcissism, sociopathic/psychopathic disorders).
Risk-related behaviours	Task difficulty/complexity, skills, abilities, training, moderating controls—in a range of situations (e.g. drug-taking, drinking excess alcohol, engaging in anti-social activity, promoting ethnic hatred), workload, fatigue, distractions.
Cognitions and affect	Memory, learning, risk perception, decision-making, judgement, mood, biases, stress, awareness, understanding, emotions (e.g. fear, anger, hate).
Neural correlates	Developmental stage, processing efficiency, attentional capacity, integrated reward/affect circuitry, decision-making circuits, response/behavioural inhibition.

Source: adapted from Fig 1.1 of Glendon and Clarke (2016).

Earlier authors (Glendon 1987; Glendon, Clarke and McKenna 2006; Waring and Glendon 1998), introduced the term 'risk cognition' as an all-encompassing label for the sense-making activities of the brain relating to risk (whether risk in general, or specific categories or specific exposures). Glendon and Clarke (2016) suggested that 'risk perception' rather than risk cognition would be a more suitable term, as it incorporates both sensory perception of risk (seeing, hearing etc) and cognitive perception of risk (thinking, awareness, appraisal etc) including threat perception.

The emotion of fear relates to a feeling within the individual of a lack of control and uncertainty about the nature and/or scale and/or outcome of a particular perceived risk (threat). The greater the feeling of lack of control and uncertainty, the greater the fear that the perceived uncontrolled threat will become realised and will cause unacceptable harm to the individual and probably to others he or she loves or values. For example, an individual who feels great uncertainty about uncontrolled immigration and its potential consequences, and who is unable to conceive of any effective controls ever being implemented, may fear a negative, even terrible, outcome.

However, an individual's perception of a particular threat, and his or her estimate of how large the risk is and how likely it is to be realised, may not accord well with reality. Such perception is notoriously faulty, and typically individuals tend to greatly inflate their estimation of threats they particularly fear. Social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al 1988; Pidgeon et al 2003) is a factor in this phenomenon. Two such perceived threats are those associated with immigration and Muslims. Studies have shown that people typically over-estimate by orders of magnitude both the numbers of immigrants in the population and the proportion of the population who are Muslim. For example, an international survey of public perceptions of immigration (Ipsos MORI 2014) showed that in every country surveyed respondents grossly over-estimated immigrant numbers. For example, whereas the actual proportion of immigrants in the UK population is 13%, respondents in the UK believed it to be 24%. Similarly in the US, respondents estimated the US immigrant level at 32% as against an actual 13%. Nevertheless, a report from a right-wing policy group (Palmer and Wood 2017) asserted that in the UK immigration figures are far higher than in Office of National Statistics reports (ONS 2015; 2017), owing to illegal immigration. On the more specific topic of the

proportion of the population that is Muslim, UK respondents to the Ipsos MORI survey believed it to be 21% in the UK as against an actual 5% while US respondents believed that 15% of their population was Muslim whereas it is only 1%. See also Duffy and Frere-Smith (2014) and British Future (2014).

Ignorance of facts and possession of wildly inaccurate, or even simply faulty or biased information, on perceived threats is likely to fuel fears and encourage inappropriate or even extreme responses. This is seen as an opportunity for exploitation by politicians, policy advisers, and opinion formers, and no more so than those of the Alt-Right or even mainstream conservatives who claim to offer the public true security and true protection against such alleged threats as immigrants, Muslims, asylum seekers, globalization, unfair foreign trade, and liberalism and socialism in a variety of guises. Wodak (2015) discussed the right-wing politics of fear explicitly. Right-wing media, politicians, demagogues, and intellectuals knowingly play their part in the social amplification of risk and promulgation of fear and then offering control solutions. While some solutions may have some merit (e.g. encouraging greater integration and assimilation of immigrants into society; appropriate trade tariffs and anti-dumping policies), clearly any solution that appears to offer some kind of salvation or magic antidote, particularly to perceived threats subject to many complex and difficult-to-control variables, is unlikely to deliver its promise. Waring and Glendon (1998) and Waring (2013) warned of the caution required when considering the adoption of any proposed salvation model of risk control.

Kakkar and Sivanathan (2017) conducted a large-scale survey in which respondents were asked to indicate their preference for the character and style of national political leaders under a number of different hypothetical circumstances of threat e.g. economic uncertainty, increased unemployment, terrorist attack. They argued that the results showed that the psychological threat imposed by an individual's environment increases the appeal of an external agent who might help to assuage this threat and the "psychological sense of lacking control over one's life". Specifically, they argued that to assuage this threat, people prefer a leader who is perceived to be decisive, authoritative, and dominant as opposed to one who is respected, knowledgeable, admired, and permissive. This survey provided a potentially plausible

explanation for why authoritarian leaders such as Trump, Putin, Marine Le Pen (and even Hitler and Mussolini in their day) have proven popular.

Nevertheless, individual attitudes to risks are multi-dimensional and complex and preferences expressed in attitude surveys, while suggestive, are open to other interpretations and are not necessarily compelling. Revealed preferences are usually more significant. As Waring and Glendon (1998) noted, actual risks, perceived risks, and expressions of concern about them are fully coincident in only two of eight possible combinations. What a person says about a particular risk may not match either what they actually believe or what they do in relation to the risk. Also, individuals themselves are frequently inconsistent in what they report about risks, both qualitatively and over time (see Schulz 2010; Waring and Glendon 1998, 33–35). Confirmation bias or self-biasing to confirm pre-conceptions (Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008; Nickerson 1998; Zimmerman 2011), whether conscious or pre-conscious, also may play a significant part in framing attitudes towards objects of fear, as discussed later in this chapter. There is a tendency for individuals to seek out information that appears to confirm their pre-existing beliefs about matters of importance to them, while ignoring or rejecting information that appears to disconfirm those beliefs.

There is much to say about anxiety and fear in the origins of the Alt-Right. A number of specific fears feature frequently in the rhetoric and expressions of concern emanating from the Alt-Right, namely:

- Fear of foreigners and immigrants
- Fear of globalization and job losses
- Fear of experts

The following three sections briefly examine these fears.

### **Fear of Foreigners and Immigrants**

One of the memorable expressions widely used by UKIP supporters and those of the far-right during the Brexit Referendum campaign in 2016 was “Give me back my country”, an expression also used by Trump supporters during the 2016 US presidential campaign. This plea encapsulated the belief of such people that their respective country was being taken over by foreigners and immigrants. Indeed, the

much-used term in the UK has been ‘swamping’, indicating that they feel that the indigenous British population is being swept over by a relentless tide of immigrants.

Such a fear is not new. Anti-immigrant emotions have been prominent in both the US and the UK for at least a century. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the British Brothers League was spewing out anti-immigrant propaganda about Jews newly arriving from the continent, in terms remarkably similar to those of the Alt-Right towards the immigrants of today. Others, such as the Chinese, faced similar antipathy in the same era. In the 1930s, Europeans, especially Jews seeking asylum in Britain from the Nazis, were made to feel unwelcome by right-wing elements—see for example, Kushner and Valman (2000) and Magens (1971) on the so-called Battle of Cable Street on October 4, 1936. The latter was a provocative march by an estimated 2,000–3,000 of Oswald Mosley’s Black Shirts of the British Union of Fascists, flanked by some 6,000 police officers deployed apparently to keep the peace, who tried to intimidate and force out Jewish immigrants from the East End of London.

As raised above, official government reports on current immigration show that such a belief of being swamped is not based on current reality and the Ipsos MORI (2014) report suggests that those who fear immigration typically grossly inflate the number of immigrants they believe are in the country compared to the actual number. Since the number of immigrants who are in the country illegally are not recorded and can only be estimated, no one can say for sure how many there are. Illegal immigrant numbers would, necessarily, be additional to the official figures based on legal migrants. Estimates of illegal immigrants by right-wingers, whether members of the public or research bodies (e.g. Palmer and Wood 2017), are likely to be higher than reality for the same reasons that estimates of legal immigrants are inflated. However, the legitimacy of any case against illegal immigrants should be based on their lack of legal right to be in the country and not on any alleged damage to the economy, even though there may be an element of truth in the assertion, for example in relation to undeclared earnings.

Second order fear-based assertions (typically unsupported factually) of the Alt-Right arising from the primary fear of immigration include:

- Crime inevitably increases since immigrants are inherently more criminally orientated. This is the essence of the official statements and policies of the Trump administration e.g. a justification to build a wall between Mexico and the US to keep immigrants from Central and South America out of the US.
- Muslim immigrants inevitably increase the threat of terrorism i.e. conflating the fear of Muslims and immigrants with the fear of terrorism. This is the essence of the statements and policies of the Trump administration to justify banning immigrants from a number of predominantly Muslim countries (see chapter 10).
- Immigrants take away the jobs of indigenous citizens by accepting lower pay. This may be true of lower paid unskilled manual jobs. However, in view of their relatively small proportion of the population, any job losses would also be relatively small.
- Immigrants are unfairly granted generous welfare benefits and public housing when they have not contributed to National Insurance and taxation, while indigenous claimants who have contributed are rebuffed; they are not only undeserving, but they also typically engage in benefits fraud.
- Immigrants refuse to integrate, learn the host country's language, and accept its values. This is almost exclusively a problem relating to older immigrants and those coming from poorly educated and conservative backgrounds.
- In the UK, swamping by immigrants is resulting in the British national identity being altered permanently into a diluted multi-ethnic, multi-cultural chimera. As the ONS and Ipsos MORI data show, this assertion appears to be unsupported when looking at the UK overall, although there are undoubtedly 'hot spots' of high concentrations of immigrants where it may appear that such an assertion has some foundation.

All such fears and assertions, repeated often enough, add to the social amplification of the risks of immigration.



### **Fear of Globalisation and Job Losses**

President Trump has made the objectives of keeping jobs in America, cutting foreign imports and promoting US-made goods as high priorities. There is nothing intrinsically wrong or sinister about such objectives. However, the practical problems of achieving them are major. Moreover, in seeking to achieve them, there are likely to be unintended adverse consequences.

Since the early 1990s, the growth of globalization, or the location of capital, production units, labour sources and sourcing of goods wherever in the world is the most cost-effective and cost-efficient, has become the de facto position of international trade. National governments have accepted that their economies have to work within such an environment. There are undoubted benefits from globalization, such as access to markets, cost and price reduction, corporate efficiency etc. However, by sourcing goods abroad rather than locally and outsourcing production abroad rather than locally, there is an almost inevitable threat to local jobs and to local companies that are unable or unwilling to follow suit.

The fear of globalization and the potential adverse consequences of it, particularly among blue-collar workers in the US, is based on real examples of factory closures and job losses across America's industrial centres, although factors other than globalization per se are almost certainly also involved. For example, companies become uncompetitive because they fail to adapt to changing markets, to new technology and new production methods, to the need to upgrade their employee skills base. This remains the case regardless of sourcing and outsourcing overseas. There are multiple threat issues arising from globalization and Le Coze (2017) emphasizes the systemic nature of such threats.

### **Fear of Experts**

Antipathy towards the 'Establishment' and the elites among them is a hallmark of the Alt-Right but not exclusively so. As O'Rourke put it in his polemical deconstruction of the 2016 US presidential election, it was a 'War of Incivility':

"The war is not between Republicans and Democrats or between conservatives and progressives. The war is between the frightened and what they fear. It is being fought by the people who perceive themselves as controlling nothing. They are besieging the people they perceive as controlling everything. We are in the midst of a Perception Insurrection, or, depending on how you perceive it, a Loser Mutiny". (O'Rourke 2017, 189)

Experts feature prominently among the elites that the Alt-Right apparently fear, as they demonstrate quite openly in their negative comments about experts. Trump advertises his rejection of experts, when it suits him, as a badge of honour and some of his cabinet members and advisers appear to be of like mind. The Trump administration's rejection of expert knowledge, advice and opinion includes:

- Rejection of scientific expertise on global warming. Scott Pruitt, Trump's appointee as the head of the now much diminished Environmental Protection Agency, has stated that carbon dioxide is not the primary contributor to global warming (see chapter 9). Trump announced on June 1, 2017 that the US would formally withdraw from the international Paris Climate Accord that aims to attenuate the causes of global warming. Trump also slashed the budget of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- Trump publicly stated his disbelief in the safety of vaccines and in particular the MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) vaccine given routinely to children worldwide. Moreover, he has publicly endorsed Andrew Wakefield, a British former doctor who in 2010 was struck off by the UK's General Medical Council for falsifying and manipulating research data to show that use of the MMR vaccine significantly increased the risk of autism. Wakefield called for parents to refuse MMR vaccinations for their children. Trump's support for Wakefield directly contradicts the policy of the US government's Centers for Disease Control and directly interferes with MMR prevention.
- Trump diminished the role of the Council of Economic Advisers and, in August 2017, dismissed its two key committees following multiple resignations of business leaders who were committee members in protest at Trump's public statements.
- Trump has publicly suggested that the accuracy and quality of reports from the US intelligence agencies are suspect.

At the surface level, the rejection by the Alt-Right of facts, and sources of facts, that do not fit their ideology and narrative (see Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008; Kahan et al 2017; Nickerson 1998; Schulz 2010; Shermer 2018; Zimmerman 2011 on confirmation bias, certitude, and responses to factual error) represents a fear of being found out and

discredited in the minds of the public at large. It is a fear that experts will be listened to and that Alt-Right ideological dogma and policy positions that do not accord with scientific or other expert-based facts will be rejected by the public. Experts, unless they happen to fit the Alt-Right narrative, are seen by them as meddling and dangerous. The Alt-Right's penchant for generating fake facts to counter actual facts is relevant to their desire to discredit experts whose information is inconvenient—see chapter 11. However, as noted elsewhere in this book, attempts to discredit the counter-arguments or positions of opponents by using fake facts are not exclusive to the Alt-Right, although they tend to be more vocally aggressive, strident, and laden with personal invective seeking to discredit the character of individual experts.

However, at a deeper level, there are broader fear-related social-psychological processes at work. Both Bate (1999) and Durodié (2002; 2005a and b) suggested that increasingly since the 1970s there has developed in the population a growing suspicion of experts. In the modernist era after the Industrial Revolution and up to the early 1970s, governments, state agencies and the scientific community were largely accepted by the public as the authoritative source of factual information, direction and guidance on such matters as health, medicines, food safety, disease prevention and control, nuclear safety, as well as a broad range of other matters affecting their lives. Now, in the post-modernist era, large numbers of people are unconvinced and not persuaded by such official and expert advice e.g. rejection by some parents of the MMR vaccine for their children. Douglas (1992, 11) also noted “the baffling behaviour of the public” in ignoring or even doing the opposite of expert advice.

It could be argued that such contrary responses may reflect an increasing disillusionment in society with science and its ability to deliver effective public safety, health and social improvements. For example, so-called alternative medicines and alternative therapies having no or dubious scientific validation are increasingly popular. Coupled with such rejection may be an increasing disillusionment with and decreasing engagement with established political structures and processes. Politicians, their officials and the risk experts they employ or commission exert both obtrusive and unobtrusive power to identify, scope, define, measure, assess, and evaluate risks, and determine risk treatments and methods (Hardy 1985; Dekker and Nyce 2014).

Other legitimate voices, including the anticipated beneficiaries of such expertise and official decisions, may be drowned out or ignored. Beck's dystopian anti-establishment view of risk in modern society, with Durodié concurring (Beck 1992; Durodié 2002; 2005a and b), was that the erstwhile unchallenged authority and acceptance of official and expert positions in the modernist era had given way to a much less deferential, less trusting, more cynical and more contrarian, even antagonistic, populace. Durodié extended his argument to assert that the population's cynicism has created an increasing disengagement and detachment from the traditional political process in favour of populist tactics, a development also noted by Paxton (2017).

### **The Political Psychology of Anger**

Anger has been less often investigated, but is another negative emotion of great importance in political psychology, particularly because of its motivational effects, or 'action tendencies' (Frijda 1986). Different emotions are associated with different actions, and fear and anger, in particular, have different effects on both risk perception and risk-taking behaviour. For instance, in a nationwide American study Lerner and colleagues (Lerner et al 2003) found that after the 11<sup>th</sup> September terrorist atrocity of 2001 people whose main emotional response was fear perceived greater risks and took more precautionary actions than those who responded primarily with anger. The angry group perceived less risk and took fewer precautions. Similarly, Brader et al (2010) showed that, compared with people who were mainly fearful, citizens who were angry when faced with a potentially fatal viral outbreak were more likely to take legal or other action against those responsible. Fearful people took preventive or protective measures. Further insights on the relation between emotions and action come from the theory of affective intelligence (Marcus et al 2000) which deals with the effects of different emotions on decision making. Much evidence supports the claim of the theory that anxiety or fear increases attention to contemporary pertinent information, whereas both anger and enthusiasm lead to reliance on pre-existing beliefs. The political judgements of anxious people are more influenced by media messages and campaign information than those of angry or enthusiastic people, whose judgements are more tied to predispositions or existing attitudes (e.g. Parker and Isbell 2010).

## Personality, Values and the Alt-Right

The Alt-Right ideology, summarised earlier, is consistent with the values shown by Haidt (2012) to be most important to conservatives: liberty/oppression (a concern with resisting perceived domination); loyalty/betrayal (nationalism and localism rather than the universalism favoured by the left); authority/subversion (respect for traditional hierarchical relationships); and sanctity/degradation (respect for traditional religious and national symbols). Conservatives and liberals share concern with fairness/cheating, but this similarity is superficial, because of the elasticity of the concept of fairness. Haidt demonstrates that for liberals fairness is connected with equality whereas for conservatives it means proportionality; rewards should be in proportion to contributions. However, all this is only to say that the Alt-Right is essentially conservative in its values. What distinguishes the Alt-Right psychologically from other ideological conservatives?

A survey of 447 American Alt-Right adherents carried out following the 2016 American election provides important information on measures of personality, emotions and motivation. Forscher and Kteily (2017) used a battery of psychological tests and compared the scores of the Alt-Right group with those of a group of 382 non-adherents. Alt-Right supporters were higher on the dark triad traits and SDO, they reported higher levels of aggression, and exhibited extreme levels of intergroup bias, including overt dehumanization of ethnic minority groups. Forscher & Kteily's analysis revealed two subgroups of their Alt-Right participants; one more populist and anti-establishment, and the other more supremacist and motivated to maintain existing hierarchies. As discussed in Vol 2 (e.g. chapters 3 and 4), this distinction parallels two rhetorical strands typically used by populist radical right leaders: attacking and blaming both a remote elite establishment and some supposedly alien group, usually identified by religion or ethnicity. At this point, it should be noted that Donald Trump as a Presidential candidate and as President has repeatedly used these rhetorical devices to generate anger and thus divert attention from current opposing information and re-evoke prejudices in order to strengthen and motivate his support base: "crooked Hillary", "lock her up", "the fake media", "build the wall", and so on.

## Other Psychological Factors Evident in the Alt-Right Phenomenon

The issue of confirmation bias was raised earlier in this chapter (see Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008; Nickerson 1998; Zimmerman 2011). Confirmation bias may be defined as the result of seeking out and/or interpreting information that tends to confirm the individual’s preconceptions about a particular topic, while also avoiding, ignoring or rejecting information that tends to disconfirm those preconceptions (see also Kahan et al 2017; Shermer 2018). Although confirmation biasing is frequently a conscious process, a large degree of pre-conscious processing is likely to be involved (Dixon 1981). Such cognitive bias is likely to result in systematic error i.e. the individual’s beliefs, while reinforced, may not be born out by the facts. How that individual responds to factual challenges to his or her beliefs, backed up as the latter are by ‘incontrovertible evidence’ of their ‘unassailable truth’ collated by the individual’s confirmation biasing activities, has been examined by Schulz (2010) in her book *Being Wrong*. What is evidenced in much of the Alt-Right’s rhetoric, especially from the Trump administration, has a close fit with the five defence strategies that Schulz argued individuals adopt in the face of challenges on truth, especially on evidence of success or failure, summarised in Table 2.2 below.

**Table 2.2: Individual Defence Strategies in the Face of Challenge on Success or Failure**

Defence	Defensive Narrative for Failure	Example
Time-frame	Unconditional prediction that a certain thing would happen by a particular time failed to be born out, but it was only a delay and it will happen sooner or later. It is not a failure.	Trump’s predictions on: building the wall between USA and Mexico to deter illegal immigrants and make Mexico pay for it; repeal and replacement of Obamacare health care legislation (Affordable Care Act) by Trump’s own bill.
Near miss	Unconditional prediction that a certain thing would happen that did not, but it almost did and so the prediction was a	Trump’s predictions on: building the wall between USA and Mexico to deter illegal immigrants and make Mexico pay for it;

	pretty good one. It is not a failure.	repeal and replacement of Obamacare health care legislation (Affordable Care Act) by Trump's own bill; \$1trillion new investment promised for infrastructure versus maximum \$200bn actual Federal funds for infrastructure (Chao 2017).
Unexpected event	Unconditional prediction that a certain thing would happen which did not. It almost happened as predicted, save for a completely unforeseeable occurrence out-of-left field. It is not a failure.	On US troops in Afghanistan: Trump's U-turn on his promise not to increase troops; national security review cited (August 21, 2017).
Transference and blame	I was only wrong because of you. I failed because I placed too much trust in the advice and actions of others. You people would not do as I wanted or directed. It is a failure but you are to blame.	On the Russia conspiracy allegations, Trump's sacking of: General Mike Flynn; FBI Director James Comey; Trump's and his team's critical rhetoric against: Attorney-General Jeff Sessions, Chief of Staff Reince Priebus; Trump's cancellation* of the Singapore summit of June 2018 with North Korea's Kim Jong-un, which Trump blamed on China (*subsequently reinstated); Trump's blaming of his enforced separation of children from undocumented migrant parents on Obama and the Democrats for failing to support his Mexican Wall project.
Innocence and precautionary wisdom	I made the best judgement I could on the basis of what information had been given me. Erring on the side of caution, and 'better safe than sorry', I had no alternative. It may be a failure but I am innocent of any wrongdoing.	US President G W Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's decision to invade Iraq on the basis of WMD (weapons of mass destruction) threat (although clearly not an Alt-Right example).

Source: based on discussion in Schulz (2010).

Transference and blame became especially prominent in the Trump White House, particularly when the latter's attempts to avoid or block

in-depth FBI investigation into alleged improper contacts by various Trump officials (including his son Donald Trump Jr and son-in-law Jared Kushner) with Russian officials and go-betweens during the Presidential election campaign, allegedly seeking to influence the election outcome in Trump's favour. The *Twitter* attacks on the Attorney-General Jeff Sessions by Trump in July 2017, describing him on 24<sup>th</sup> July as "weak" and "beleaguered", in effect for acting correctly and ethically in not replacing the acting FBI Director by a Trump-compliant alternative, were unprecedented for a sitting US President (see chapter 5).

There then followed over several weeks a succession of highly publicised resignations (some forced) from the White House staff, including the Chief Press Secretary, Sean Spicer, and Chief of Staff, Reince Priebus, precipitated by the appointment of former hedge fund entrepreneur Anthony Scaramucci. Within days, Scaramucci was publicly denigrating both Sessions and Priebus on *Twitter* and in media interviews, including a particularly foul-mouthed vitriolic outburst on 27<sup>th</sup> July in an interview with *The New Yorker* magazine (Lizza 2017) in which he implied that Priebus had leaked to the press information damaging to the President, and implied in very coarse terms that Steve Bannon, Trump's then Chief Strategist, was a self-absorbed, self-serving, political parasite feeding off the President.

Being in denial and selectively biasing information received is part of a particular individual's psychological defence strategy. It is fear-related in multiple ways—the fear that the beliefs they hold dear may be weak or delusional, the fear that the basis of their own identity will collapse if their beliefs are crushed, the fear that weak or delusional beliefs masquerading as strong and valid ones may be exposed to public ridicule or anger, and so on. Public approval ratings, voter disapproval and ballot box risks weigh heavily in the Alt-Right psyche. The fear that in the US, for example, President Trump and his Alt-Right political agenda might only be a short-term 'wonder' and might be swept away early is too terrible for Alt-Right populists to acknowledge as a possibility. Therefore, the Alt-Right has adopted a 'by hook or by crook' approach to the task of Trump staying in power. False facts and fake news propaganda are all part of that approach to denial of verified facts and challenges to weak or delusional beliefs of the Alt-Right. See chapter 11 for further discussion on post-truth and fake news.



Paxton (2017) echoed much of the foregoing on the psychology of the far-right. Of course, it should be noted that denial, transference, blaming, lying and so on are not exclusive attributes of the Alt-Right. These are also features of many political parties, movements and individuals. However, with the Alt-Right, such features have become core characteristics to such an extent that the public anticipates it as normative conduct of Alt-Right politicians, commentators and supporters. For the Alt-Right, the 'truth is what I say it is' is perfectly acceptable since the end justifies the means. Paxton noted the wide acceptance of the dishonesty of post-truth politics and a lack of concern about morality in public life that Trump's presidential victory has brought.

Much has been written about embedded social inequalities allegedly providing a root cause in modern times of many societal problems including poverty, criminality, clinical depression, substance abuse, extremism and so on. However, whereas there may well be associations between inequalities and such problems, such associations do not prove causation. Nevertheless, it may be posited that inequalities may lead, among those allegedly adversely affected, to feelings of powerlessness to alter their conditions and situation for the better, which in turn may lead to anomie, hopelessness and disaffection. Although such theories may have some validity, they raise a paradox as far as the Alt-Right is concerned. A fundamental principle of the far-right is that of maintaining inequalities—between races, between religions, between owners of capital and the proletariat, between rich and poor, between political authority and the compliant masses (see, for example, MacDonald 2002; Beck 2014). Yet, many of the disfavoured groups in such inequalities are the very people who voted for President Trump in decisively large numbers. They apparently accepted his promises to save them from their situation, but with little apparent awareness of either the fundamental inequality basis of Alt-Right ideology or the practical difficulties Trump would face in delivering their salvation.

Others, such as Glynos and Mondon (2016), have noted an 'enjoyment' motivation of far-right supporters, whereby they and their fellow supporters share a jealously guarded sense of 'rightful ownership' of 'their' country. They indignantly rail against all those whom they perceive have robbed them of their enjoyment of such entitlement, such as liberals, elites, immigrants, and Muslims. An enjoyment

is also evident in vituperative far-right rhetoric in which their dystopian assertions of danger from immigrants and Muslims may also be projections of wish fulfilment—despite expressing fears of public disorder and violence involving immigrants and Muslims, they actually want this to happen as a means of accelerating the enforced departure of such people from ‘their’ country.

## The Issue of Alleged Personality Disorders

There has been widespread media speculation (e.g. Lexington 2016; Pavia 2017) concerning whether President Trump is suffering from some form of personality disorder that might explain some of his often bizarre and outrageous behaviour. For example, his almost daily habit of issuing comments via his *Twitter* account that use very un-presidential language and frequently contain wild allegations, invective against anyone he believes has crossed him, and slurs against high profile persons (politicians, government officials, journalists, actors, singers, film stars etc) is unique and unprecedented from a President (see chapter 11 for examples).

Trump’s *Twitter* attack on the Mayor of London, while the latter was grappling with the immediate impact of another terrorist outrage in London on June 3, 2017 (the London Bridge/Borough Market attack), provides another poignant example of his personality and character. Mayor Sadiq Khan had made a public statement advising Londoners that they would “see an increased police presence here today and over the course of the next few days. There’s no reason to be alarmed”. This statement was clearly referring to the potential alarm that people might have in seeing large numbers of armed officers in a country where armed police are the exception not the norm, Britain still being a relatively non-violent society with strict gun control, unlike the US for example. Trump responded on *Twitter*: “At least seven dead and 48 wounded in terror attack and mayor of London says there is no reason to be alarmed!”

The mayor’s office immediately corrected Trump’s interpretation but this just provoked a further *Twitter* outburst from him: “Pathetic excuse by London mayor Sadiq Khan, who had to think fast on his ‘no reason to be alarmed’ statement. MSM [mainstream media] is working hard to sell it!”

The reaction in the UK (political, public, media) was one of outrage at what was generally interpreted as a wilful, or certainly negligent, misinterpretation of Khan's words by Trump and then compounded by an even worse second *Twitter* comment (see, for example, Aaronovitch 2017). Public anger swelled, not only at the attitude displayed by Trump to the London emergency, but also his thinly veiled swipe at the Mayor of London because he is Muslim. The sub-text in Trump's attack on Khan appeared to be 'If the Mayor had not been a Muslim, this terror attack would have been dealt with correctly. What was London thinking of in appointing a Muslim as Mayor?'

Some commentators have suggested that Trump may be a narcissist and/or psychopath (see Cruz and Buser 2017). Indeed, on June 21, 2017 in an outburst of supreme irony, none other than Kim Jong-Un, the leader of the Democratic Republic of North Korea and a notably unstable and cruel personality, described President Trump as a psychopath. If such a diagnosis were true, clearly it would have major implications for whether his decision-making and actions could be trusted not to be reckless or damaging to the nation. Entertaining though such speculation may be, it rarely comes from individuals entitled to render a qualified opinion about such matters, let alone from anyone who has actually undertaken a psychiatric examination of him. Concurring with the psychiatrist and political psychologist Jerrold Post (2015) and with Klitzman (2016) and Singer (2017) and the so-called Goldwater Rule, this book takes the view that it is unsafe and improper to characterize Trump as suffering from any specific personality disorder. Various psychologists in Cruz and Buser (2017) suggested there is evidence in Trump of a strongly narcissistic trait but this does not necessarily connote a personality or mental disorder. Post (2015), Klitzman (2016), and Banschuk (2014), also pointed out that the trait of narcissism is evident in most people to some extent and is not necessarily dysfunctional or destructive. Positive narcissism reveals itself in ambitious achievers. For a discussion on whether presidential narcissism can ever be positive, see Schwartz-Salant (2017). Clinical discussion on psychopathic disorders is presented in APA (2013); Hare (2003; 2016); Hirstein (2013); Kiehl and Buckholtz (2010); and Walton (2007a and b; 2010). For non-clinical analyses of Trump's conduct, see Green (2017), Krugman (2017), Neiwert (2017), Nutt (2017), Warner (2017) and Wolff (2018).

Trump's evident flamboyance, egocentricity, insistence on winning, and immature reactions to perceived rejection or insult, are more consistent with those of another businessman turned politician, Silvio Berlusconi the former Prime Minister of Italy (Post 2015; Haglund et al 2017). As Singer (2017) observed, Trump carries around "the longest selfie-stick in the world". Larres (2017) also referred to Trump's enduring self-promotion in his turbulent administration.

Of course, Trump's shocking assertions and provocative language may have been all part of a deliberate façade or act, a drama that he carefully orchestrated so as to ensure high profile publicity. A speculation by some (see, for example, Krushcheva 2017) is that in foreign policy matters, such as North Korea, Trump may have been deliberately acting when he threatened their annihilation. This speculated application of the 'madman theory' of war and diplomacy attributed to President Richard Nixon and his collaborator Henry Kissinger in the late 1960s (Burr and Kimball, 2015; Wellen 2013) is discussed further in chapter 6.

The same caution also applies to the characterization of some other Alt-Right leaders who have also displayed a variety of signs of apparent personality disorder. Whether any of them in the US will ever undergo a psychiatric examination whose results will become available publicly is unlikely. It is more likely that control and deterrence of their potential excesses will come via electoral failures, policy failures, congressional stumbling blocks, and legal procedures such as congressional inquiries, prosecutions, civil law suits and, for the US President, potential invocation of the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment or potential impeachment.

At the populist level, Alt-Right supporters are generally a disgruntled, fearful, and angry group who believe that most of the problems of their country are caused by foreigners and, more especially, immigrants and, more especially still, Muslims. In the vernacular, the more extreme Alt-Right exponents appear to be maladjusted personalities with a massive chip on their shoulder. While some will actively support far-right groups such as KKK in the United States and attend their rallies and protest marches, far more show their support in on-line blog comments to newspapers or on social media. The relentless and fanatical on-line outpouring of vile anti-immigrant, anti-foreigner, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim invective is indicative of a deep-seated

paranoia and possibly some level of personality disorder in such comment authors.

## Conclusion

Many of the far-right in different countries claim to promote freedom, democracy and benign policies while, confusingly, promoting policies advocating repression and denial of human rights for disfavoured classes of person. Some far-right parties even have the word 'freedom' in their title—see chapters 6 and 9 in Vol 2 for specific examples. Such confusion needs to be seen against the febrile, visceral emotions of disgruntlement, frustration, hatred, and anger that characterize the Alt-Right as a whole. They do not appear to care about such internal confusion. What matters to them is to win political control or, failing that, act as a thorn in the side of the mainstream political parties, to be a noisy nuisance, encourage hate crimes and to weaken and subvert the mainstream parties. The behaviour of far-right parties exemplifies their 'end justifies the means' approach based on promulgation of fear.

Internal confusion is also evident in many of the American Alt-Right also being heavily involved in Christian fundamentalism and taking authoritarian or even extreme positions against abortion, scientific theories of evolution, multi-culturalism, immigration, and liberal modernism in general. Many Alt-Right supporters seem at ease with, on the one hand, portraying themselves as fully-committed Christians, while, on the other hand, espousing and enacting very un-Christian aspects of Alt-Right ideology. For example, the prominent Alt-Right Republican senatorial candidate in Alabama in 2017, Roy Moore, openly argued that homosexuality should be made illegal, Muslims should not be allowed to serve in Congress, and that he was standing as the candidate of Christian values. Meanwhile, he stood accused by nine women of various past acts of sexual misconduct, including one involving an underage 14-year-old girl, all of which he denied.

The emotional, ideological, and motivational commitments of the Alt-Right are so focussed on fear-based 'them and us' issues such as immigration and race that they typically fail to develop any coherent and comprehensible policies on the major issues of concern to the

public, such as the economy, health, employment, pensions, and education.

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**PART 2:**  
**THE ALT-RIGHT IN THE US**



# Chapter 3: The Alt-Right and Resurgent US Nationalism

*By Roger Paxton*

## Abstract

This chapter reviews the history and current state of US nationalism, and more particularly examines systematically nationalism in relation to the populist radical right and the ideology and rise of the American Alt-Right. Nativism, as a combination of nationalism and xenophobia, is discussed, as well as the relationship of these characteristics to racism and anti-democratic features of Alt-Right ideology. Trump's 'America First' and 'Make America Great Again' slogans, and his executive orders against immigrants and foreigners, are examined as examples of the Alt-Right ideology. The chapter also identifies a number of risks arising and considers how they could be managed.

**Key words:** Alt-Right, nationalism, nativism, xenophobia, Trump, risks

## Historical Perspective

Nationalism has a long history. Herodotus, in the fifth century BCE, wrote, "Then there is our common Greekness: we are one in blood and one in language ... and there are our habits, bred of a common upbringing...". And Plato, in *The Republic* said, "I assert that the Greek stock is, with respect to itself, its own (as if of the same household) and akin; and with respect to the barbarian, foreign and alien" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). However, in spite of this pedigree it has acquired a bad reputation. The connotations of nationalism now are overwhelmingly negative. In the words of cultural and literary theorist George Steiner (1967), "From being a nineteenth century dream, nationalism has grown to a present nightmare. In two world wars it has all but ruined western Culture". When we think of nationalism we are likely to think of American white supremacists, the Front National in France, Golden Dawn in Greece, the Freedom Party in Austria, the

Northern League in Italy, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Britain First, and of course German National Socialism of the early twentieth century—all illiberal, overtly or covertly racist, and anti-democratic. Nationalism (along with xenophobia, racism and anti-democratic sentiments) is a feature shared by extreme right-wing groups around the world (Carter 2011). Nevertheless, especially when we look to the future and consider what can be done, we need to ask whether nationalism is necessarily opposed to democracy. Some authors have seen it as compatible with democracy and morally neutral. There have been times when it has clearly been a force for good, as for instance in the dark days of World War Two when Churchill used British nationalism and patriotism to lift morale and contrast democratic values with the evil of Nazism. History and context are important in understanding nationalism. In the case of America—the focus of Part 2 of this book—their importance is particularly salient if the relationship between nationalism and the Alt-Right is to be unravelled.

This chapter investigates the place and importance of nationalism in the ideology and rise of the Alt-Right in the United States. However, first the concept of nationalism is explored, followed by its importance within populist radical right ideology globally and in attracting supporters to politicians and parties of the extreme right. The American Alt-Right is one of many populist radical right movements, and extending the investigation here to include other similar movements elsewhere gives access to a broader research base and allows comparisons. The author turns then to the history and current state of American nationalism, which is distinctively different from nationalism in other developed countries, before moving on to the role of nationalism in the ideology and rise of the Alt-Right. Risks presented by the version of nationalism promoted by the Alt-Right are considered, and how these risks might be managed.

## Nationalism

Nationalism is the belief that national identity should be given political importance, that nations have rights to both autonomy and sovereignty, and that members of the nation should collaborate in defence of these rights (Walzer 2005). The fact that this statement contains several ‘shoulds’ illustrates that nationalism has moral as well as political elements. If nations have rights it follows that other nations and

organizations (such as multinational companies) should respect them. Secondly, it follows from the definition that members of a nation have an obligation to defend the rights of their nation. Although nationalism is usually associated with the political far-right, it also follows that this is not inevitable. Similarly, nationalism is inherently neither good nor bad. It becomes a problem, for instance, when it is given overriding moral and political importance. This bloated nationalism is more correctly labelled chauvinism, and the two differ in the way that self-regard differs from selfishness. Nationalism can and should respect the rights of other nations, whereas chauvinism is concerned only with one's own national interest—'my country right or wrong'. As this chapter reveals, nationalism can be problematic in other ways too.

Nationalism implies the existence of a nation, which is also a complicated notion. Scruton (1990) identifies four elements that need to be shared for a community to be a nation: language; associations (allowing the development of social ties); history (and therefore a shared historical narrative); and culture (art forms, beliefs and ways of doing things). A nation is therefore not something that exists entirely objectively; as Scruton says, it exists "through a conception of itself". Patriotism, defined as loyalty to one's country, is an emotional component of nationalism. Miller (1993) points to five similar factors: national communities are constituted by belief; nationality embodies historical continuity; national identity is active, in that national communities do things together; national identity connects a community to a place; and the people of a nation share features, including a culture, which distinguish them from others. Nationality, Miller said, contains the three themes of identity, duty and rights: it is part of someone's identity (and for some people a very important part) that he or she belongs to a particular national group; we owe special duties to our co-nationals; and the people of a nation have a right to self-determination. The generality of these definitions leaves room for disagreement as to what constitutes a nation, and indeed, around the world a number of such disagreements rumble on. The Catalan region in Northern Spain; the Kurdish people in Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq; and the French speaking Canadian province of Quebec are examples, but probably more complicated politically is the idea of Native American Nations. Nationalism can have different foundations, both ethnic



and civic. Recent history shows that when states fail ethnic nationalism can emerge powerfully and brutally, as in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

With these definitions in mind, a case can be made that nationalism can be not just neutral but good. The most common argument for this view (proposed by Scruton et al 2002 and others) is that it is useful or even necessary for social cohesion. By itself, this is a weak argument because nationalism can do great harm while at the same time supporting social cohesion: e.g. Hitler used it to achieve unity. Scruton (1990) added more, arguing that nationalism is intrinsically justified as a matter of obligation: as members of a community, we owe it to one another and to succeeding generations to safeguard the shared cultural resources transmitted by our nation. But this, too, is not a watertight argument: protecting cultural resources such as languages, threatened communities, and art objects or other artefacts is a desirable thing to do regardless of their or our national origin. Nevertheless, although nationalism can be a force for division rather than unity, and although Scruton overstates his case in terms of cultural duties, it does appear that in practice nationalism at least sometimes contributes to both social cohesion and cultural preservation. Just as we feel particular concerns for and obligations to our families, and perhaps local communities, so the same is likely to apply, but more weakly, to fellow members of our national community and to the culture we share. Moreover, in modern multicultural western societies, nationality may be one of very few factors that are shared by all. Several social psychological theories also suggest how nationalism can be rewarding for the individual, as well as socially useful: group identification and membership can contribute to a sense of social identity (Huddy 2013). A further complication is that the dynamics of nationalism are bi-directional: it can be a pre-existing source of group solidity that politicians need to take account of, as well as a resource that is strengthened and manipulated by political leaders to secure or increase their power (Breuilly 2011).

## **Nationalism and the Populist Radical Right**

Despite the possibility of moral or left-right neutrality, nationalism has been and is primarily a feature of the political right, and evidence of its importance in extreme right-wing ideologies is available from a

range of countries. The Alt-Right movement encompasses the populist radical right, the recent rise of which is evident around Europe, notably in the illiberal turns of the Hungarian, Polish and Turkish governments, the recently increased popularity of Marine Le Pen's Front National party in France, and in the rise of the far-right in Austria and Germany. All display a core ideology comprising nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Mudde 2015). Nativism involves a combination of nationalism and xenophobia; the belief that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of 'the nation'. Authoritarianism means a commitment to strong government without democratic accountability, a strictly ordered society with individual freedoms subordinated to the needs of the state, and infringements of authority punished severely. Populism is an ideology that sees society divided into the pure people (the common man) and the corrupt elite. It involves adulation of the common man and his values, and a critique of the establishment. Populist politicians claim to speak directly for 'the people' and appeal directly to them, preferring direct rather than representative democracy. For them, politics should be an expression of the 'general will' of the people (Mudde 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Right wing populists are typically strongly opposed to 'big government' and socialist policies, and also against big business—seen as part of the establishment, and further disliked because of economic globalization and the resultant pressures on home industries and employment. Trump, for example, made numerous statements railing against big government and undue influence by big business (e.g. 'draining the swamp'), although paradoxically he himself has a close relationship with particular industries and companies (e.g. coal industry) and also retained his own business interests while President.

The racism that is a part of nativism has been investigated by Rydgren (2008), studying voters in six European countries. Although the findings cannot be assumed to apply generally to America, they deserve consideration, not least because they may have a bearing on ways of managing the risks presented by the Alt-Right. Rydgren found three kinds of anti-immigrant attitudes: immigration scepticism, xenophobia and racism. Immigration sceptics want fewer immigrants. However, this is not necessarily because of a xenophobic or racist view, but for instance, because they dislike culture change or believe that immigration depresses wages or increases unemployment. Xenophobes have a disposition to be averse to immigrants, but this only

becomes an issue for them if the number rises to a level that is too high in their opinion, or if the outsiders seem to pose a threat in some way. Racists straightforwardly dislike other ethnic groups, sometimes because of beliefs in a biological hierarchy and sometimes through rejection of other cultures, seen as incompatible with the host culture. These different kinds of opposition to immigration can be fuelled and used by populist politicians as a part of their exploitation of nationalist sentiments. Notwithstanding this, it may be useful for political opponents of right-wing populism to appreciate the different attitudes that can underpin opposition to immigration; not everyone opposed to immigration is an incorrigible racist.

It seems clear (as noted, for instance, by Eatwell 2003) that far-right parties seek to use nationalism as a means to attract support by associating themselves with national traditions. In Britain, as demonstrated by UKIP for example, independence and parliamentary sovereignty are stressed. It is evident that in America independence and sovereignty are indeed an important factor. In general, however, the importance of nationalism in comparison with other factors is not immediately clear. A prominent view is that a main motivation for supporting the radical right is protest (Mudde 2015). That is, people feel alienated from the political elites and the political system, and vote for radical right politicians because the latter are not part of this, rather than because their policies are appealing. A version of this theory is the 'left behind thesis' (Hochschild 2016), based primarily on data from 'rust-belt' America. The economic changes caused by globalization, especially the decline of manufacturing industry, the exporting of low-skilled jobs and consequent unemployment at home, together with widening inequalities, and cultural changes accelerated by immigration all lead to resentment and a sense of being left behind economically, and forgotten by the political elites, both left and right. The people affected then protest against the establishment parties, turning to the populist radical right (the Alt-Right in America) who offer a simpler old-fashioned nationalism. A weaker version of the protest theory is that voters do care about the far right's policies but hold views that are less extreme than those in their manifestos. On this view, voting for the far-right is instrumental, intended to get mainstream right-wing parties to move further to the right. If they did so,

support for the radical right would then be expected to collapse. Overall however, although protest voting may be a factor in this support, it does not seem to be the main cause (Arzheimer 2017).

Arzheimer's review shows that most Europeans who support the populist radical right do so because of their anti-immigrant policies. These voters have a sense of frustration and alienation stemming from mainstream parties, in their view, not responding to anti-immigrant concerns. Many European countries have experienced an immigration crisis in recent years, and Islamist terror attacks in European cities have further strengthened concerns about immigration. America has been largely untouched by the immigration crisis and Islamist terror, and so for this reason and others, findings from Europe cannot be assumed to be applicable to America. However, with instant global interconnectedness, problems in Europe will have raised awareness in the US and probably heightened sensitivities about immigration. President Trump's ban on entry to America by citizens of certain Muslim countries suggests that he was affected, at least in the sense of using European problems as a means to foment populist anti-immigrant sentiments in America. It is likely that in America as well as Europe, nativism, a common component of nationalism, has been strengthened.

## American Nationalism

The argument that nationality may be one of the few factors, or perhaps even the only factor, uniting the people in a country, applies convincingly to America. Pei (2003) noted that America, a nation of immigrants, cannot rely on shared history and culture as the basis for a sense of nationhood. Instead of these factors or ethnicity, American nationalism has centred on a belief in the superiority of the country's democratic ideals. This is the first of several distinctive features; the content of American nationalism—the superiority that is the basis of American exceptionalism and 'the American creed'. Pei raises other indications of its distinctiveness—what he regards as two paradoxes: firstly, although in fact highly nationalistic, America does not see itself as such; and secondly, in spite of its own largely unacknowledged nationalism, it fails to appreciate the power of nationalism abroad. On this view, American nationalism is perhaps unusually introspective and unreflective. Pei was writing in 2003 and much has changed since,

but these features appear, if anything, to have grown, and certainly not diminished as nationalism is resurgent.

A third and very important characteristic is the near-universality and personal importance of American nationalism. Zelinsky (1988) saw it as a 'civic religion'; Americans love America. Surveys repeatedly find that they express more national pride than the people of any, or almost any, other nation (Wolak and Dawkins 2017). Lieven notes the astonishment of foreign visitors at the way in which ordinary Americans glorify their country's beliefs, institutions, laws, and economic practices. Nationalism is central to the values of Americans in a way described as unique by political scientist Samuel Huntington (quoted by Lieven 2012, 49): "it is possible to speak of a body of ideas that constitutes 'Americanism' in a sense in which one can never speak of 'Britishism', 'Frenchism', 'Germanism', or 'Japaneseism'. Americanism in this sense is comparable to other ideologies and religions... To reject the central ideas of that doctrine is to be un-American... This identification of nationality with political creed or values makes the United States virtually unique". This value-ladenness contributes greatly to American exceptionalism and the American creed. The personal strength of American nationalism is further demonstrated by the findings from Duina's (2017) interviews with more than 60 economically struggling Americans. Despite their impoverishment, compounded by their country's social benefits being worse than those of almost every other developed country, the patriotism of almost all remains unshaken. The American dream of upward mobility has not come true at all for them but they still love their country and attach no blame to it. Instead they continue to see their country as 'the last hope' for themselves and the world. They still believe that hard work can bring success in their rich and generous country, and they are still proud of it—the home of freedom. Strong religious faith, especially adherence to the fundamentalist Protestantism so firmly embedded in American nationalism, is similarly distinctive, and clearly a part of the personal strength and importance of nationalism. Lieven cited statistics from a Pew Research Center survey carried out in 2002: 59% of American respondents declared that, 'religion plays a very important role in their lives', compared with 30% in Canada, 27% in Italy, and 12% in France and Japan. In this regard, America is much more like Mexico (57%), Turkey (65%) and Pakistan (91%) than other developed nations. The Pew 2014 US Religious Landscape Study (Pew Research

2015) showed that America's religiosity is a stable feature. Although there has been a fall of a few percentage points in the numbers of people who say they believe in God, pray daily, and attend religious services, 89% are still firm believers. The small decline in the numbers of believers is largely attributable to a rise in the number of mainly young adults who do not belong to any organized faith. This group still forms a tiny minority.

Duina (2017) asked why impoverished Americans have not risen up to demand more from their country; for them, in several ways, nationalism seems to be the opium of the people. Thus, nationalism in America is peculiarly strong both in terms of the personal commitment it attracts and in the number of people so committed.

American nationalism is different next in its devotion to the past, and particularly to the Constitution as something to be venerated and strictly adhered to, without changes, despite it now being more than 200 years old. This point is powerfully illustrated by the loud appeals to the Second Amendment (the right to bear arms) whenever there are calls for gun controls after yet another random gun massacre. History is extremely important within American nationalism, and this links to another critical feature; its two distinct versions, the development of which is described by Lieven (2012).

American nationalism, Lieven argued, has taken two opposing forms. The first, a benign and optimistic civic nationalism has usually dominated. The second, from a darker nativist tradition, is defeatist and suspicious, with its most vociferous proponents drawn from the embittered American heartland. The first is the nationalism described by Pei. It is common to all in the USA; celebrating freedom and democracy, the constitutional separation of church and state, the guarantee of equal civil rights for all citizens, and the bountiful prosperity of the American way of life; the 'American creed'. This is the basis of American exceptionalism—the belief that America is special and has much to show the rest of the world—first noted by de Tocqueville in 1831, and frequently commented upon since. We can see it operating in a positive way in America's military rescues of Europe in both world wars and in her huge spending to rebuild Europe through the Marshall Plan after World War II. But many Americans, particularly in the South, supplement this optimistic creed with a self-pitying defensive white Christian nationalism—oblivious to the incompatibility of the

two. Lieven traced the development of this second version of American nationalism to the presidency of Andrew Jackson, between 1829 and 1837. Jackson appealed to the ordinary white man, propounding hostility to other ethnic groups and a tough antipathy to refined Northerners, intellectuals and other elite groups—portrayed as parasites. A similar phenomenon was described by Richard Hofstadter in his classic essay *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Hofstadter 2008), first published in 1952. This referred to a “sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness and conspiratorial fantasy”, typified by McCarthyism in the 1950s but which Hofstadter traced back to the eighteenth century. The Jacksonian message met a receptive audience of resentful Southerners after the defeat of Confederate nationalism in the Civil War, and subsequently—especially during the Vietnam war—this Southern resentful nationalism spread to Northern blue collar workers angered by middle class liberal anti-war protesters. The Republican Party steadily moved rightwards and became, in Lieven’s words, the Nationalist Party. Conservative America adopted cultural activities and symbols associated with the South: including an obsession with guns, fervent evangelical Protestantism and the proud display of the Confederate flag. Nationalism is resurgent, but how important is it in the rise of the Alt-Right?

## The US Alt-Right and Nationalism

Several aspects of the relationship between the American Alt-Right and nationalism need to be considered: the importance of nationalism as a component of Alt-Right ideology, its role in the growth of the Alt-Right, and its importance in attracting supporters to the alt-right movement. As noted in chapter 1 the Alt-Right encompasses a range of political movements and parties with views that vary but coalesce around racism and dissatisfaction with establishment politicians. The importance of nationalism within this is strikingly illustrated by the slogan ‘Make America Great Again’, endlessly used (and even patented by Donald Trump, although it was first used by Ronald Reagan) during and since his campaign for the presidency (Tumulty 2017). Trump is the de facto leader and most public face of the Alt-Right. The success of the slogan is shown in its wide adoption by his followers, and in the frequency with which it has been borrowed or parodied; for instance ‘Make Trump Debate Again’ (from presidential opponent Ted Cruz),

and ‘make our planet great again’ (from French President Emmanuel Macron). As Trump and his advisers are well aware, every parody and even every attack is free publicity for them. The slogan is pure nationalism with no specific content at all—nothing about the economy, social justice, education, or health, or anything else that might be of political concern. It denotes nothing in particular but connotes much, evoking the powerful and long-established sentiments and beliefs that are the stuff of American nationalism.

The Alt-Right exploits and builds on America’s distinctive nationalism in several ways:

Firstly, the nationalism that has been resurgent in America in recent decades has been the second kind described by Lieven and summarised above. This is Jacksonian white nationalism, described back in 2002 as developing at the centre of resurgent nationalism (Swain 2002). It includes the belief that the primary belongingness and therefore allegiance of white people is or should be to their ethnic group, and with this the assumptions of white superiority and supremacy, and sometimes also white separatism. It is this nationalism that is at the heart of the Alt-Right, even though it is usually veiled, as with Trump’s repeated questioning of President Obama’s place of birth and religion, his derogatory remarks about Mexicans and his even-handed approach to neo-Nazi marchers and a neo-Nazi murderer on the one hand, and anti-Nazi demonstrators on the other, in Charlottesville in August 2017. When, after several days, Trump denounced the white supremacists he did so reading from a teleprompter, “like a little boy forced to eat his spinach, or to rat on his friends” (Shatz 2017). This was a barely coded signal to Alt-Right supporters; ‘I don’t mean a word of it’. The significance of the whole affair is the message that racism is an acceptable part of nationalism at the highest level. This also illustrates the bi-directional relationship between nationalism and the Alt-Right: nationalism provided the foundation for its development and is a main theme within it; and simultaneously the Alt-right movement strengthens the old bitter ideas of Jacksonian nationalism. Green (2017, 208) calls this “exhuming the nationalist thinkers of an earlier age”.

Nationalism is important not just in current Alt-Right thinking but also in its development. This resurgent nationalism and the Alt-Right movement with which it is entwined did not spring from nowhere in recent decades. As noted above, especially from the work of



Lieven (2012), resurgent nationalism resonates with much older traditions. For some people, it is almost as if the American Civil War has not ended. Main themes from the history of American nationalism are prominently visible in today's Alt-Right thinking, strongly suggesting that nationalism has been important in its recent emergence and growth. In particular, the Alt-Right displays the appeal to the common man, and the racism, anti-intellectualism, anti-elitism, and resentment of Jacksonian nationalism, with the modern phenomenon of anti-globalization added.

Why are these new trends emerging now? Several writers have commented on the importance of political opportunities in the rise of the far-right generally (for instance, Caiani 2017, 6) and this is evident in the case of some of the promises of the Alt-Right against the recent socio-economic background of continuing non-white immigration, differing fertility rates between Americans of European and non-European origin, and economic globalization. Seven factors supporting the growth of white nationalism and its development at the centre of resurgent American nationalism were described by Swain (2002). Since then, the importance of almost all seven factors seems to have been confirmed, and their place in the Alt-Right world-view is likewise clear. First is the growing pressure of non-white immigration, and the likelihood (partly due to different fertility rates) that Americans of white European origin will soon be in a minority. This anxiety feeds white nativism. Secondly, economic globalization (and continuing digital automation) are reducing the number of high wage production jobs available for low-skilled workers, stoking anti-globalization and antagonism to free trade, and therefore recruiting support for the 'America first' slogans of the Alt-Right. Thirdly, Swain notes continuing white resentment and hostility regarding the perceived unfairness and debatable constitutionality of race-based affirmative action policies (likely to have been provoked further by the election of a black president). This is at the centre of Jacksonian nationalism, further driving the racism of the Alt-Right. Fourth, the rising expectations of ethnic minority groups, and the squeeze on traditional unskilled jobs, together fuels more resentment. Finally, Swain expected the growth of Internet connectedness to accelerate all these effects. She has proven to be especially prescient on this last point, as well as the others. Swain included continuing black-on-white violence as another factor, but this is much less evident, and is dwarfed by white-on-black

killings, including those by police officers. In fact these killings, together with the 'black lives matter' campaign stimulated by them, suggest the resultant white backlash as another factor. The slogan 'white lives matter' appeared, and in a speech in July 2017 President Trump explicitly encouraged rough tactics by police officers. As Swain (2002) saw early on, demographic and economic changes have provided the opportunity and fuel for the rise of both white nationalism and the Alt-Right.

What attracts people to the Alt-Right and similar movements is not immediately clear, because of the range of views and aims they profess, but the importance of white nationalism in this regard is confirmed by Forscher and Kteily's (2017) survey data. They used a battery of measures to investigate a sample of 447 Alt-Right adherents, whom they compared with 382 non-adherents. Their purpose was to probe the psychology of Alt-Right supporters, and, although they did not directly ask participants what attracted them to the movement, understanding their attitudes and beliefs, and comparing them with those espoused by the Alt-Right enables reasonable inferences as to what they find attractive about the Alt-Right. Inevitably this is imprecise because of the range of views encompassed, but informative nonetheless. Forscher & Kteily described Alt-Right motivations as opaque, but summarised the spectrum of views as ranging from a focus on anti-globalization and anti-establishment views (summarised as populism) at one end, to anxiety about perceived threats to the status and power of US-born whites at the other (white supremacy). These different emphases lead to different motivations: in the first case, the goal is the transfer of power from elites to ordinary people, and in the second the promotion of the interests of white people. Their data showed that their sample of Alt-Right supporters fell into two groups that matched these two main ideological themes. The slightly larger group was distinguished by its concern with government corruption and suspicion of mainstream news media. The other group was marked by dehumanizing views of ethnic and religious outgroups and opposing political groups. These results suggest that nationalism (of the Jacksonian kind—white nationalism) is an important factor driving support for the Alt-Right, but not the only one. This is only one study and so conclusions drawn from it must be tentative, but this finding is in line with the prominence of white nationalism in Alt-Right rhetoric. Even tentative knowledge of the forces driving the

Alt-Right is potentially valuable in terms of practical politics as well as academic enquiry.

## The Future of the Alt-Right and Nationalism

American nationalism is strong, pervasive, and apparently permanent. Commandeered as it has been by the Alt-Right, where might it lead? The Alt-Right has been described here as a phenomenon, a set of world-views, an ideology and a movement, but it is probably more than all of these. Green (2017) saw it as a ‘populist uprising’ led by Donald Trump. Trump’s rise was noted, for instance by Gage (2017), as worryingly similar to that of the fictional character Buzz Windrip in the 1935 novel *It Can’t Happen Here* (Lewis 2017). Windrip campaigns for the presidency as the champion of ‘forgotten men’, complains about the mainstream press and ‘highbrow intellectuality’, and once elected dismantles the checks and balances of American democracy. Trump has not carried out any such dismantling but several times seemed to come close, for instance with his repeated claims before his election that the process was rigged, his refusal to confirm that he would accept the result if he lost, and then his verbal attacks on the judiciary when they handed down inconvenient judgements. His confidant Roger Stone speaks of “violent insurrection” if Trump is impeached as a result of the current investigations into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 American election (Lima 2017). In a poll carried out in August 2017, half of the Republican voters surveyed said they would support postponing the 2020 election if Trump proposed it (Malka and Lelkes, 2017). The framework of American democracy is being eroded. Rosenfeld (2017) undertook a more systematic consideration of the Alt-Right as an uprising, referring to Lewis’s book, and showing the real possibility that the rise of fascism in America is underway. He emphasised fascism as action rather than ideology; a movement towards a common destiny. Rosenfeld drew on Paxton’s (2004) five-stage model of ‘fascism in motion’: 1. The creation of fascist movements, 2. Their rooting as parties in a political system, 3. The acquisition of power, 4. The exercise of power, 5. Radicalization. The model, based on the study of twentieth century fascism in Italy and Germany, gives much food for thought when applied to modern America. The idea of a movement towards a common destiny fits the plans for nationalism and the Alt-Right, summarised by Lyons (2017)

as a ‘metapolitical’ strategy, seeking to transform the entire culture. In the words of one Alt-Right enthusiast quoted by Lyons (p.13): “When the idea of white nationalism has taken root among enough of our people, the potential to demand, demonstrate, and act will be superior to what it currently is”.

Others in the Alt-Right quoted by Lyons saw this strategy as unrealistic because America is, from their point of view, on the way to becoming a failed state, too far gone, and no longer their nation—too multi-ethnic and too liberal. An alternative aim then is political secession; the establishment of a white ethno-state in North America. This is not the only risk of secession; in reaction to the Trump presidency, there is talk of the inverse of this; blue state secession (see for instance, Blest 2017) in which Democrat controlled states would withdraw as much funding as possible from the federal government, replacing affected federal programs with state initiatives, and thus effectively seceding, to preserve their version of nationalism in their state. So, in one way or another, the rise of the Alt-Right threatens to split American nationalism even more than it is at present. These ideas represent risks to America as a nation, but even if neither occurs, American nationalism has already been further damaged. Trump and the Alt-Right have shifted the boundaries of the politically and morally acceptable within American nationalism.

## Conclusion

This chapter began with a reference to the long history of nationalism, and its continuing importance, both politically and personally, has been evident at many points. Its likely permanence needs to be taken into account when one considers how the risks noted here might be managed. As discussed, it is at least arguable that nationalism is not inherently racist or otherwise bad, and indeed it can be argued that American nationalism of the first kind—the American creed—has been a force for good. With political divisions widening and genuine political debate all but disappearing, it seems vital for people in the political mainstream to re-engage with those who are attracted by but perhaps not unshakably committed to the Alt-Right. Nationalism appears to be a major part of its attractiveness, and further evidence of this comes from Jonathan Haidt’s (2012) extensive studies of the

moral values underlying political affiliations, as summarised in chapter 2. Haidt showed how people on the political left are concerned about care, the welfare of the individual, fairness, and equality, whereas those on the right value individual liberty, loyalty and authority. These right-wing values are main ingredients of the first kind of American nationalism. Haidt showed that the differences in value systems between the two sides are so great that there is little understanding or respect, let alone room for agreement. Mainstream politicians should perhaps therefore seek to rehabilitate nationalism from its Jacksonian transformation and more actively acknowledge its importance for many people. Rydgren's and Haidt's findings can aid understanding of nationalist views and suggest ways to re-engage with people seduced by the Alt-Right because of concerns about changing cultures and immigration. Nationalism is an important part of the problem of the Alt-Right but might also be part of the solution.

In summary, the key risk issues arising from resurgent nationalism in the United States are:

### **Risks for America.**

#### *Risk 1. Divisive inequality policies*

Increasing imposition of divisive inequality policies based on white supremacy, and anti-Muslim, anti-Hispanic, and anti-immigrant theories and prejudices, all likely to result in multiple adverse effects for those discriminated against e.g. in housing, employment, income, health care, and a reduction in social cohesion.

#### *Risk 2. Disaffection*

Stirring up of discrimination, hatred and hate crimes against ethnic and religious minorities in the US, leading to their disaffection and potential backlash.

#### *Risk 3. Foreign policy missteps*

Nationalist agendas (e.g. America First, Making America Great Again) leading to foreign policy missteps, either via (a) increasing US isolationism, anti-foreigner actions on trade barriers and tariffs, anti-Muslim visa blocks, and general gratuitous insults by Alt-Right politicians against particular nations, religions and leaders, or (b) precipitate military action against nations classed as enemies of the United States.

*Risk 4. Long-term threat of secession*

Sustained ultra-nationalist agitation creating a longer-term threat of gradually increasing support for secessionism, so as to create (a) white supremacist states and potentially including ethnic cleansing, and (b) blue (Democrat) states withdrawing from federal government policies and programs so as to preserve liberal values.

**Risks for the Alt-Right***Risk 1. Voter disillusion*

Upsurge in extremist rhetoric and public displays of violence by committed Alt-Right supporters resulting in loss of potential support among mainstream and undecided voters.

*Risk 2. Alt-Right weakened by factionalism*

Continuing fragmentation of hard-right and far-right and increasing competition between factions and groups to control the Alt-Right ideology and agenda, leading to a weakening of the Alt-Right overall and a loss of its limited credibility among the wider population.

*Risk 3. Dilution of conservative votes overall*

Aggressive Alt-Right electoral campaigns against mainstream Republican candidates resulting in a dilution of conservative votes that not only fails to deliver wins by Alt-Right candidates but also may deny wins by Republican candidates, thereby ensuring election of Democrat candidates and potential loss of control of Congress.

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# Chapter 4: The Trumpism Phenomenon

*By Timothy Wyman McCarty*

## Abstract

This chapter examines the notion of Trumpism and how far it is warranted as a phenomenon distinct from other pre-existing US political classifications, such as the interrelated political ideologies and movements that contributed to Donald Trump's rise as a political figure. These include not only the Alt-Right, but also movement conservatism, the Tea Party, white nationalism, and paleo-conservatism. While different to Buchananite paleo-conservatism, the author suggests that Trumpism is a neo-paleo-conservatism, and considers whether beyond the Trump presidency a future Trumpist doctrine might become a source of party political realignments. Risks arising are identified.

**Key words:** Trump, Trumpism, (neo)paleo-conservatism, Alt-Right, realignment, risks

## Does Trump Warrant an 'Ism'?

"Intellectuals, whether they are for or against Trump, want to construct an "ism" into which they can fit his politics: an "ism" that includes opposition to free trade, mass immigration, foreign interventions that aren't necessitated by attacks on us, and entitlement reform. But Trumpism doesn't exist. The president has tendencies and impulses, some of which conflict with one another, rather than a political philosophy". (Ponnuru 2017)

"Trumpism will go forward with or without Trump. If conservatism and the Republican Party can't be convinced to come along for the ride, then they must be forced to accept for themselves the "creative destruction" they claim to favor for the economy". (Anton 2016)

This chapter recognizes that it is risky to attempt to say anything definitive about the nature of Trumpism. It remains an open question whether Trumpism is or ever will be a 'thing', to say nothing of the prospects of a "sensible, coherent Trumpism" (Anton 2016a) of the sort hoped-for by some far-right intellectuals. Perhaps, rather than a

distinct phenomenon, what gets called Trumpism is merely a new label for an old set of ideas (e.g. movement conservatism, reactionary populism, or paleo-conservatism), a “psychological phenomenon” (Goldberg 2018) rather than an ideology; or maybe it is simply an incoherent muddle of ideas that happen to swirl round the person of the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States (Ponnuru 2017). Therefore, although Trump will undoubtedly leave a lasting mark on American politics, it is unclear whether Trumpism will.

Additionally, at the time of writing (April 2018), Donald Trump had not even made it through his first midterm election as President and did not have much of a political career to draw upon (although there are some helpful indicators in his past). Any conclusions about the nature of Trumpism made at this juncture may prove to have been premature. Such are the dangers that attend any attempt at forward-looking political analysis.

Mindful of these challenges, this chapter explores the hypothesis that there is—or someday will be—something that we can call Trumpism and that it is, at least partly, distinct from many of the interrelated political ideologies and movements that contributed to Donald Trump’s rise as a political figure. These include not only the Alt-Right, but also movement conservatism, the Tea Party, white nationalism, paleo-conservatism, and any number of other identifiable components or precursors. Each of these political ideologies/movements bear some responsibility for the ascendance of Trump, but none of them is so wholly synonymous with it as to be deserving of being considered the totality of Trumpism. This chapter argues that Trumpism may be understood as a unique fusion of style and substance that, in the person of Trump, has proven to hold out significant potential for electoral success in American politics. Little of the style or substance is truly unique to Trump—instead, what is unique is the way he has drawn together various elements of right-wing politics in order to craft something distinctive. It’s not novel ingredients, just a new recipe.

It is, of course, entirely possible that no such thing as ‘Trumpism’ really exists, or ever will exist. Some have argued that Trump is merely a manifestation of the tendencies of the conservative movement, and therefore there is nothing particular about Trumpism (Robin 2017; Robinson 2018) Others have argued that his failure to further a policy agenda narrowly tailored around the explicit (and implicit) platform

laid out in his campaign suggests that Trumpism does not exist (Klein 2017; Lowry 2017a). Still others see in him a cult of personality around whom there is no stable or coherent vision of policy, ideology, or politics (Goldberg 2018). This chapter seeks not to prove these perspectives wrong, but to hypothesize what it might look like for these perspectives to be wrong—assuming Trumpism is a ‘thing’ and will continue to be a thing after his Presidency is over, what kind of a thing is it?

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. The first section outlines the scope of the author’s conception of Trumpism. The second section explores the substance of Trumpism, interrogating its connections to conservatism, the Alt-Right, and paleo-conservatism. The third section explores how his style and substance come together to produce Trump’s approach to the politics of race and resentment. Finally, the fourth section explores a potential scenario in which Trumpism may serve to ground a future realignment of the major political parties in America (Drutman 2016).

## The ‘Trumpism’ Concept

It would be reasonable to define Trumpism as the things that got people to vote for Donald Trump; or, as the explicit policy platform articulated by his campaign; or, as the implicit governing philosophy laid out in his campaign speeches; or, as the things that Donald Trump himself believes; or, as the totality of things that Donald Trump will do as president. However, instead of focusing on why he got elected, or what he truly believes, or trying to predict what he will actually do in office, for the purposes of this chapter, the author seeks to understand Trumpism as the likely political legacy of the political career of Donald Trump. This essay thus defines Trumpism as the particular stamp that his candidacy and presidency will put on American political culture.

The author addresses Trumpism as a mode of politics that captures some element of his beliefs, actions, and style, is attentive to what is particular and peculiar about him, and is constrained by what his voters will endorse (or will tolerate) and by what others can associate themselves with in intellectual, political, and rhetorical contexts. It is therefore not impossible that Trump himself is not really a ‘Trumpist’, nor is it impossible that future Trumpists won’t find a way

to refine Trumpism and be even more successful at campaigning or governing as a Trumpist.

Another way of thinking of this is to ask: when a future aspirant for office emerges claiming to be a Trumpist—or is labelled one by others—how will anyone know how to evaluate that claim? What will a Trumpist candidate or political movement look like if it emerges long after Trump has receded from view? Certainly, the label will be thrown around a lot. Any candidate who loudly promotes immigration restrictions, protectionism, racial resentment, and right-wing populism of any kind will likely get called a Trumpist, as will the next bombastic celebrity who throws their hat in the ring for public office. But, what are the features that will mark out a Trumpist as distinct from another kind of conservative, populist, racist, or celebrity candidate?

In outlining this understanding of Trumpism, the author does not claim to have looked into the mind of the man himself to determine his values or preferences, or even that these somehow determined the principles by which we can accurately predict his actions. When people talk about a political ideology associated with a particular figure in power, they are more often than not using that person as a figurehead for a set of ideas that predated their emergence and will outlast their exit from public life.

In some cases, e.g. Jefferson, Mao, or Churchill, the political agent is a theorist in their own right, whose own ideas and writings stand alongside their actions in power as a baseline for the political ideology that bears their name. In other cases, a charismatic figure emerges as a focal point and spokesperson for an ideology that had already cohered prior to their emergence; Reagan is a good example for this model (Perlstein 2014). Finally, in still other cases, the political agent represents an organizing principle around which to gather a set of ideas and arguments that had not previously found a way to come together into a semi-coherent ideology. We might think of 'Clintonism' this way—such ideas as 'triangulation,' hawkish liberal internationalism, technocratic approaches to social policy, and mostly symbolic affirmations of identity politics had all existed in various forms, but had no real reason to coexist in the same ideological locus until Bill Clinton employed them together to create a successful campaigning and governing philosophy (Bai 2007).

Given that Trump is certainly not himself a theorist of the first rank, the author's best guess is that Trumpism is some combination of

the second two models: a charismatic figure drawing on some elements of a pre-existing ideology, combined with a rhetorical and governing style that is strongly associated with the particularities of the man himself. In other words, the likely factors that will determine what Trumpism is and will be in the future are: the ideas and modes of political discourse that helped propel the Trump candidacy, the things Trump does and says as president, and which elements of those ideas, modes of politics, and actions persist after his exit from office. With this in mind, the next three sections seek to develop a picture of Trumpism that takes into account the substance of his politics, some elements of his particular political style, and the ways in which style and substance come together in his approach to the politics of race and resentment.

### The Substance of Trumpism: (Neo)Paleo-Conservatism

Donald Trump is not known to be an ‘ideas man’. In fact, one of the most consistent charges against him from the political right is his lack of ideas or fealty to ideology. In the words of the *National Review* editorial opposing Trump’s candidacy:

“Trump is a philosophically unmoored political opportunist who would trash the broad conservative ideological consensus within the GOP in favor of a free-floating populism with strong-man overtones”. (NR 2016)

Notwithstanding his well-known tendencies toward inconsistency, hypocrisy, and mendacity, there is substance at the heart of Trumpism, as has been noted by proponents and opponents alike. Because Trump himself is not a political thinker of the first rank, it is more illuminating to investigate the ideological frameworks he seems to have inherited, as well as the thinkers explicitly seeking to mould a vision of Trumpism that can serve as a basis for politics in the future. That pre-existing ideology is paleo-conservatism and the thinkers seeking to mould Trumpism are those writing at the *Claremont Review of Books*, *American Affairs*, and the defunct *Journal of American Greatness*, especially Michael Anton (known pseudonymously as Publius Decius Mus). In the words of historian David Greenberg (2016), Trumpism can be thought of as “a post-Iraq War, post-crash, post-Barack Obama update of what used to be called paleo-conservatism.” It is through this lens that the author will try to unpack the substance

of Trumpism. First, however, it is worth considering Trumpism's connections to Conservatism generally and to the ideologies of Steve Bannon and the Alt-Right.

### Conservatism

Among observers on both the left and the right, there has been fierce debate over the question of whether or not Trump should be understood as a manifestation of or departure from American conservatism. Some observers, particularly those on the left, such as Corey Robin (2017), have emphasized the continuity between Trump and Conservatism, cautioning against what Nathan Robinson (2018) called "Trump Exceptionalism." The most prevalent commentary, however, has been to treat Trump as a departure from the most familiar modes of conservative thought and politics. Historian Rick Perlstein (2017) wrote that the rise of Trump had caused him to doubt what he thought he knew about the right-wing in America. Rich Lowry (2017a) argued that he represents "the end of Reaganism". Mona Charen, who was booed at CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference—see Glossary) in 2018 for criticizing the Trumpist shift in American politics, speculated that Trump's ostensible conservatism was nothing but a performance to get votes:

"Is Trump a liberal? Who knows? He played one for decades — donating to liberal causes and politicians (including Al Sharpton) and inviting Hillary Clinton to his (third) wedding. Maybe it was all a game, but voters who care about conservative ideas and principles must ask whether his recent impersonation of a conservative is just another role he's playing". (Charen 2016, n.p.)

Charen was far from alone in this judgment. The *National Review* symposium opposing then-candidate Trump—from which this passage was taken—featured over 20 prominent conservative writers and thinkers, each of whom had their own particular reasons for opposing Trump, but all of whom were united in judgment that he was not, in any recognizable way, conservative. Even Barack Obama got into the game, declaring in his speech at the Democratic National Convention, "what we heard [at the RNC] wasn't particularly Republican—and it sure wasn't conservative" (Obama 2016). The author's view is that a clear understanding of Trumpism requires attention to the ways in which it displays both continuities and departures from various strains of conservative thought.

If what is meant by conservatism is a disposition toward steadiness and tradition over innovation and radical change, characterized by the likes of Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeschott, then the answer is definitely no. Similarly, if what is meant by conservatism is what Hawley (2017) called the “three-legged stool” of movement conservatism in post-WWII America—hawkish neo-conservatism, business-friendly free-market capitalism, and socially conservative Christianity—then the answer is also likely to be no, although less definitively so. However, if conservatism signifies a broader characterization of right-wing politics in America, including not only the GOP Establishment and all its hangers-on, but also old-right stalwarts, isolationists, white nationalists, trade protectionists, agrarian localists, neo-reactionaries, the ‘Alt-Right’, and Buchananite paleo-conservatives, then yes, Trumpism should be thought of as a kind of conservatism (Hawley 2016).

Insofar as Trumpism seems to represent a departure in style and substance from both the conservative temperament and the Goldwater-Reagan model of movement conservatism that has dominated American politics since the 1980s, it is worth at least provisionally treating it as a phenomenon of its own (Perlstein 2017). If, ultimately, everything under the umbrella of Trumpism can be reconciled with familiar notions of conservatism, as Robin (2017) has repeatedly argued, then this will have merely been at worst a clarifying exercise. Mindful of the pitfalls of “Trump exceptionalism”, this chapter now seeks to identify what may turn out to be particular about Trumpism.

### **Bannon and the Alt-Right**

Throughout much of the first year of his presidency, many critics expressed an assumption that Bannon should be seen as the true ‘ideas man’ behind Trump, and thus that Trumpism should be understood as a front for Bannonomism. As Krein (2018) noted, “Since Trump himself has never offered a systematic formulation of Trumpism, it is usually sought for in the *Corpus Bannontium*.” Yet, as Krein also observed, since Bannon’s exit from the Trump administration (see chapter 5), this assumption seems to have faded from the popular political imagination. Given that this is a book looking explicitly at the Alt-Right, and Bannon famously declared his ambition to turn *Breitbart* into a “platform for the Alt-Right,” it is worth highlighting why the connection is not as strong as once believed.



There is no doubt that a symbiotic relationship exists between Trumpism, Bannonomism, and the Alt-Right, but it is probably most accurate to think of the connection between Trumpism and Bannonomism as, at best, a marriage of convenience. Bannon suggested as much in a profile prior to the 2016 general election:

“When I talked with Bannon, he expressed a wariness about the political genuineness of the Trump campaign persona. Trump is a “blunt instrument for us,” he told me earlier this summer. “I don’t know whether he really gets it or not”. (Stern 2016, n.p.)

It appears that the picture of Bannon as a political genius or intellectual guru only really emerged after Trump won and elevated him to a high profile role in this cabinet. The best example of this kind of post-hoc mythmaking might be Joshua Green’s *Devil’s Bargain*, which strains credulity in its depiction of Bannon as the true puppet-master of a campaign he didn’t even join until after the RNC (Green 2017). Bannon is certainly a canny strategist, polemicist, and opportunist, but not a true intellectual force in conservative politics or campaign savant. His disastrously failed advocacy for Roy Moore seems to have deflated the myth of Bannon as a master campaign strategist (Prokop 2017).

As for the Alt-Right more generally, the author judges that the rise of Trump and of the Alt-Right are deeply related, but ultimately distinct phenomena. There is a Trumpism without the Alt-Right and there is an Alt-Right without Trump, but it is fair to say that neither of them would have had the success and prominence they have enjoyed in recent years were it not for the strange alchemy of their interaction. However, just as there will almost certainly continue to be an Alt-Right without Trump, so too may there be a Trumpism without the Alt-Right. Thus, without in any way discounting Trump’s ideological connections with Steve Bannon in particular and the Alt-Right in general—which Greenberg (2016) suggested has been oversold as a key to understanding Trump’s politics—the author is not convinced that these are ultimately the best places to look for the substance of Trumpism.

### **Paleo-conservatism**

One of the more extraordinary documents that attests to the truly surprising nature of the 2016 Presidential campaign is George Hawley’s

*Right-Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, which was published in February 2016, just as Trump was beginning to gain control of the GOP (i.e. the Republican Party—see Glossary). What makes this book so remarkable—other than being an excellent work of scholarship—is that despite articulating almost exactly the key features of paleo-conservatism that played a role in the rise of Trump, Trump’s name does not even appear in the book, likely because it went to print some time in 2015. In this context, Hawley described paleo-conservatism as “a spent force” (Hawley 2016, 178) and concluded that it “never achieved real power and probably never will” (205). However, in describing the tenets of paleo-conservatism, the echoes of the Trump campaign are undeniable. He noted that Pat Buchanan, “the most important public figure” of paleo-conservatism, ran for president on a platform that included opposing foreign entanglements such as NATO and the invasion of Iraq, a rejection of free-trade agreements such as NAFTA, and a critique of American immigration policy, specifically objecting to “the porous southern border of the United States, as well as the lack of will to end undocumented immigration and lower the high levels of legal immigration” (187). In the words of historian David Greenberg:

“The hidden history of Trumpism suggests that the president-elect may be not simply an opportunistic showman but the leader of an at least semi-coherent ideology—a new iteration of the populist and nationalist paleo-conservatism that has long lurked in the shadows of American politics”. (Greenberg 2016, n.p.)

As these writers suggest, attention to the tenets of paleo-conservatism help to reveal the degree to which “Trump’s policies are not *sui generis*” but instead “draw upon a pre-existing intellectual tradition, albeit one that previously had only a limited impact on national politics” (Thompson 2017, 2). Trumpism may not be exactly paleo-conservatism, but it is through examining paleo-conservatism that a better sense of what it might actually be emerges.

Scholars of American conservatism tend to view paleo-conservatism as either a harkening back to the Old Right (i.e. pre-Goldwater conservatism), a reaction to the rise of neo-conservatism in the 1970s, or some combination thereof (Nash 2006, 567–570). Such figures as Samuel Francis, Mel Bradford, Paul Gottfried, and especially Pat Buchanan, were particularly important to the development of paleo-conservatism (Hawley 2016, 178–206). In his authoritative intellectual

history of American conservatism, George Nash described the basic outlines of paleo-conservatism in terms that are likely to be familiar to any observer of the Trump phenomenon:

“Fiercely and defiantly ‘nationalist’ (rather than ‘internationalist’), skeptical of ‘global democracy’ and entanglements overseas, fearful of the impact of Third World immigration on America’s Europe-oriented culture, and openly critical of the doctrine of free trade, Buchananite paleo-conservatism increasingly resembled much of the American Right before 1945: before, that is, the onset of the Cold War. When Buchanan himself campaigned under the pre-World War II, anti-interventionist banner of “America First,” the symbolism seemed deliberate and complete”. (Nash 2006, 568)

As Nash suggested, paleo-conservatives, much like Trump, have been regularly dogged by charges of racism and anti-Semitism, in part due to their willingness to draw upon tropes and rhetoric that are barely subtle enough to be called ‘dog whistles’ (see Glossary). Whether or not paleo-conservatives are deserving of charges of racism and anti-Semitism depends largely upon which figures are being spoken of, and who is doing the accusing. For example, Buchanan is a controversial case, whereas there is general agreement that “Francis was certainly a racist as the term is generally used” (Hawley 2016, 196). As Hawley noted, concerns about racism and anti-Semitism played a significant role in marginalizing paleo-conservatism, as figures like William F. Buckley worked to exclude such elements from movement conservatism and the GOP. Indeed, many of these same elements—such as Buckley’s *National Review*—similarly sought, but seem to have failed, to prevent Trump’s takeover of the GOP (cf. NR 2016).

Thus, although Hawley did not make an explicit comparison between Trump and paleo-conservatism, it should be no surprise that many observers have subsequently made this connection. Nash noted the continuities between Trumpism and paleo-conservatism during the GOP primaries of 2016:

“Intellectually, Trumpism bears a striking resemblance to the anti-interventionist, anti-globalist, immigration-restrictionist, America First worldview pro-pounded by various paleo-conservatives during the 1990s and ever since”. (Nash 2016, n.p.)

Pat Buchanan himself supported Trump and has repeatedly noted the affinity between his own positions on immigration, trade, and foreign

policy. He reported being pleased to see that Trump had seemed to pick up the paleo-conservative baton, slogans and all:

“I was elated, delighted that Trump picked up on the exact issues on which I challenged Bush [...] And then he goes and uses my slogan? It just doesn’t get any better than this.” (Alberta 2017, n.p.)

The observation that Trump draws on both the ideas and rhetorical tropes of paleo-conservatism is helpful for appreciating the ways in which, despite the undeniable novelty of his campaign, he was able to find success on the campaign trail. Although paleo-conservatism has never before been a mainstream force in Republican Party politics, it has nonetheless been an element of right-wing politics in America. This history helped to pave the way for Trump to succeed in both substantive and stylistic ways that had been previously outside the mainstream of GOP politics.

For example, a stylistic aspect of Trump’s politics that connects him to paleo-conservatism is how much he seems to engage in an almost apocalyptic pessimism. This element of his style and appeal may seem perplexing and strange to a liberal audience or an audience that is largely satisfied with the modes of political discourse that have dominated American electoral politics since Reagan (Skowronek 1993). This is because Reagan in many ways set the terms for our contemporary norms of political discourse, with his soaring, optimistic rhetoric about America’s greatness. Prior to Reagan, a President could afford to reflect the mood of the country or to have a disposition that was idiosyncratic to their own temperament or experience or ideas. Think of Johnson, Nixon, and Carter. Since Reagan, however, Americans have looked to presidents to lift their spirits, to pull them out of their doldrums, and model the kind of can-do spirit they want to—but don’t always—feel. As Rick Perlstein argued in *The Invisible Bridge*, ever since Reagan, “Something almost like a cult of official optimism—the *greatest nation in the history of the earth*—saturates the land” (Perlstein 2014, xx). For Reagan, and for conservatism in his wake, a rhetoric of optimism was inextricable from the belief in American greatness and exceptionalism:

“Reagan’s America would embrace an almost official cult of optimism—the belief that America could do no wrong. Or, to put it another way, that if America did it, it was by definition not wrong”. (Perlstein 2014, 748–749)

This is why conservatives attacked Obama for supposedly apologizing for America, leading Mitt Romney to title his campaign book *No Apology: The Case for American Greatness*. Perlstein noted that in 2013, when called to account by Senator Marco Rubio for referring to “crimes” committed or supported by the United States, Samantha Power said “America is the greatest country in the world and we have nothing to apologize for” (xix).

Nevertheless, three short years later, America would elect the candidate whose campaign book was titled *Crippled America* and who famously decried “American carnage” in his inaugural address. Michiko Kakutani described this element of his rhetorical style, which she noted had been a consistent theme in his books:

“The grim, dystopian view of America, articulated in Mr. Trump’s Republican convention speech, is previewed in his 2015 book, “Crippled America” (republished with the cheerier title of “Great Again: How to Fix Our Crippled America”), in which he contends that “everyone is eating” America’s lunch. And a similarly nihilistic vision surfaces in other remarks he’s made over the years: “I always get even”; “For the most part, you can’t respect people because most people aren’t worthy of respect”; and: “The world is a horrible place. Lions kill for food, but people kill for sport”. (Kakutani 2016, n.p.)

This is the kind of apocalyptic gloominess seen in Anton’s “Flight 93 Election” and many of the other defences of Trump in the *Journal of American Greatness* (Sanneh 2017). Perhaps as an indication of the staying power of this element of Trumpism, observers of conservative discourse have noted a marked shift toward more gloomy language:

“Perhaps most manifestly, the shift at CPAC has made hyperbole and alarmism the norm. No one bats an eye when a video message from the Tea Party Patriots warns that America is doomed unless its patent system is strengthened. Every head nods when former White House adviser Sebastian Gorka [see chapter 5]—who shoved one reporter at the event, and threatened at least one other—says Trump must finish two full terms, followed by two for Pence, because, “We need a minimum of 16 years to get back our republic.” It’s par for the course when radio host Mark Levin says the nation is “at a precipice” and warns that the left is going to defeat Trump “over our dead bodies”. (Alberta 2018, n.p.)

Although a radical departure from Reagan’s sunny optimism, this kind of pessimism is the typical of paleo-conservatism. Pat Buchanan, for example, is fond of declaring “the West is doomed” (Pfeiffer 2016) and has written books about contemporary politics with titles like *Suicide of a Superpower*, *Day of Reckoning*, *The Great Betrayal*, *State of Emergency*, and of course, *The Death of The West*. Such apocalyptic rhetoric,

while perhaps shocking to those whose exposure to conservative discourse is largely confined to prominent Republicans, will be perfectly familiar to those who have spent much time listening to right-wing talk radio, reading *Breitbart*, or watching the opinion shows on *Fox News*. This kind of alarmist pessimism is their stock-in-trade.<sup>1</sup>

Insofar as Trump draws on many of the policies and rhetorical tropes of paleo-conservatism, one may be inclined to suggest that it is simply a case of a set of ideas whose time has come, owing to the arrival of the proper historical moment or an effective spokesperson, or both. This is likely to be the preferred interpretation of paleo-conservative Trump supporters. This is also, to some degree, the interpretation of Greenberg (2016), who suggested that the failure of the Iraq war, the 2008 crash, and “the prospect that whites would soon constitute a minority in an increasingly multiracial, polyglot society,” all of which came together in the focal point of President Barack Obama, helped to create the space for a rebirth of Old Right ideologies. Indeed, when considered in broad strokes, it is tempting to conclude reductively that it is “the movement that explains Donald Trump” (Matthews 2016), but doing so involves oversimplifying both paleo-conservatism and Trumpism. Despite the undeniable association, it would be a mistake to conclude that Trumpism is simply paleo-conservatism, or that Trump himself is a paleo-conservative. To understand the success, appeal, and potential future for Trumpism, there is a need to recognize how it departs from—and perhaps adds to—paleo-conservative politics.

The clearest point of difference is that Trump does not share with paleo-conservatism a commitment to social conservatism, traditionalism, or a “strict constructionist” view of constitutionalism, which was probably most famously displayed in Buchanan’s “Culture

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<sup>1</sup> To fully appreciate Trump’s style and, its appeal to conservative voters, it is essential to appreciate the degree to which his rhetorical approach to politics has been adopted from the discursive norms of a particular sub-culture that exists in the right wing media, including *Fox News*, *Breitbart*, and perhaps most importantly, talk radio. This is something that should be kept in mind when thinking about the sources and future potential of Trumpism. Unfortunately, there is not the time or space in this chapter to fully explore all of the particularities of this complex sub-culture. Perhaps the best introduction to the particular discursive norms of right-wing talk radio is David Foster Wallace’s brilliant essay, “Host,” which profiles a third-tier radio host named John Ziegler (Wallace 2005). Albert Hirschman’s classic, *The Rhetoric of Reaction* is also an excellent source for insight on this measure (Hirschman 1991).

War” speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention. Even Buchanan himself, despite his enthusiasm for Trump’s candidacy, disagreed with the notion that Trump could be called a paleo-conservative, mostly because he is not a true social conservative (Pfeiffer 2016; Alberta 2017).

Along similar lines, conservative writer Thomas Hydrick argued in a piece for *Front Porch Republic* that Trump could not be seriously considered a paleo-conservative because “[w]hile Trump’s positions on immigration and trade are understandably appealing to paleo-conservatives, the man and his beliefs are incompatible with any definition of traditionalism properly understood” (Hydrick 2016). Hydrick lifts up two claims by Russell Kirk—who is taken by some to be a kind of paleo-conservative, (cf. Hawley 2016)—to highlight this incompatibility. Kirk argued that traditionalists endorse a belief in “an enduring moral order” and “the need for prudent restraints upon power and human passions,” and the inapplicability of these principles to Trump as a man or a political figure leads to Hydrick’s conclusion that “Trumpism is a fundamental betrayal of the traditionalist spirit” (Hydrick 2016).

Ultimately, the relationship between Trump and paleo-conservatism is probably best summed up by a June 2016 editorial in *The American Conservative*—a flagship for paleo-conservative thought—which declared, “Trump is no paleo-conservative, but he has independently discovered something that sounds a lot like paleo-conservatism” (AC 2016).

Notwithstanding these distinctions, it is entirely possible that the political legacy of Trumpism could prove to be a re-invigoration of traditionalist paleo-conservatism. Indeed, a future candidate or movement with stronger connections to social conservatism could avoid many of the complicating factors of Trump himself, using the political opening provided by Trump to tie a more traditionalist agenda to a platform of anti-immigration, quasi-isolationist foreign policy, and economic nationalism. If Trump’s particular vices e.g. allegations of sexual assault, corruption, or dishonesty, prove to be a political liability moving forward, it may take squeaky-clean traditionalists to carry the Trumpist torch forward.

### (Neo)Paleo-conservatism

The best way to understand how Trumpism may be distinct from movement conservatism, the Alt-Right, or paleo-conservatism is to look toward the loosely connected group of intellectuals associated with the *Claremont Review of Books*, *American Affairs Journal*, and the now-defunct *Journal of American Greatness*, who have been working since Trump's emergence as a candidate to craft a vision of, in the words of Michael Anton, "a sensible, coherent Trumpism" (Sanneh 2017; Pippenger 2018). Their work certainly shares affinities with Bannonism, paleo-conservatism, and the Alt-Right, but insofar as they are explicitly engaged in the project of determining what Trumpism is and can be, they are particularly worthy of attention for the purposes of this study.

Perhaps the most noteworthy figure among these is Michael Anton. Known only pseudonymously during the campaign as Publius Decius Mus, Anton served as head of strategic communications for the National Security Council until April 2018, when he departed and took a position at Hillsdale College. He wrote what many think was the most intellectual defence of Trump and Trumpism during the campaign. He was a speechwriter for George W. Bush, did graduate work at St. John's College and Claremont Graduate College, and is undoubtedly obsessed with Machiavelli. The essay that got Anton noticed was called "The Flight 93 Election," in which he made the case for Trump as a last-ditch effort to save America from the devastating forces of Clinton-fuelled progressivism. However, the more illuminating argument about the nature of Trumpism came in his essay called "Toward a Sensible, Coherent Trumpism," written not—as in the Flight 93 essay—in September 2016 when it looked like Trump was going to lose the general, but in March 2016, when it looked like he was going to win the primary. It is more substantive, less hyperbolic, and ultimately more enlightening as to what a real Trumpism could possibly be. This is how he defined Trumpism in that essay:

"The answer to the subsidiary question—will it work?—is much less clear. By "it" I mean Trumpism, broadly defined as secure borders, economic nationalism, and America-first foreign policy. We Americans have chosen, in our foolishness, to disunite the country through stupid immigration, economic, and foreign policies. The level of unity America enjoyed before the bipartisan junta took over can never be restored". (Anton 2016a)



Thus, his picture of Trumpism is largely in conformity with paleo-conservatism, but his further arguments make clear some important distinctions.

Importantly, Anton noted that although Trump campaigned on his (supposed) opposition to the Iraq War and remained critical of international organizations, multilateral trade agreements, and other foreign entanglements, his articulation of “America First” is not nearly as strictly isolationist as the paleo-conservatives:

“Trump is also superior to the paleos, defeatists and isolationists in that he recognizes that America still faces dangerous enemies and is willing to use American power to defend American interests. Moreover, as a commercial republic, America’s interests do not end at our borders. The nature and purpose of our alliance structure and global responsibilities are widely misunderstood by paleos and neo-isolationists, whose hearts may be in the right place—waste no more American blood and treasure in futile, grandiose adventures—but who equate every movement of the American military beyond American soil as such an adventure”. (Anton 2016a)

That he was right about this element of Trumpism can be seen in Trump’s bellicose posturing toward North Korea and Iran as well as his appointment of the extremely hawkish John Bolton to replace H.R. McMaster as National Security Advisor. It is also highly unlikely that the paleo-conservatives would be nearly as solicitous toward Israel as Trump has been, up to and including his decision to move the American embassy to Jerusalem.

Trump’s version of “America First” is one that replaces strict isolationism with an aggressive vision of nationalism that focuses less on disengaging from the world than on making sure that America’s place in the world is on top. It is no secret that Trump’s world-view is one that fetishizes winning, and it is this fixation that propels his nationalism. His criticism of internationalism does not come from a commitment to isolationism, but from anger that internationalism appears to him to be a game at which America has been losing:

“At the heart of his worldview is a conviction that the United States is getting a poor deal from the liberal world order. In essence, he argues, the U.S. has provided protection for nations such as Germany and Japan at the same time that those countries run large trade surpluses. The U.S. has paid the security bills, he contends, while Berlin and Tokyo have gotten rich. To make matters worse, as Trump tells it, all of this has come at the expense of the American worker, who has seen his wages fall dramatically in real terms, if he is lucky, or seen his job shipped overseas if he is not. Trump has vowed to end this state of affairs by

negotiating better deals with allies and trading partners, imposing punitive tariffs if necessary, and even seizing strategic resources such as oilfields". (Thompson 2017, 2)

Where previous paleo-conservatives may have at least framed their isolationism in strategic or principled terms, Trump brazenly advocates disengagement from the global order by way of a kind of politics of national resentment. This kind of resentful nationalism is probably inextricable from his personality and political style, and was on full display in the infamous incident in which Trump shoved Montenegro's Prime Minister out of the way so that he could stand at the front of a photo shoot during a NATO meeting in Brussels in May 2017.<sup>2</sup> A true isolationist might not have even gone to the meeting, let alone angrily demand to be at the front of the line.

Trump's unapologetically petulant nationalism dovetails with another way in which his approach to politics diverges from paleo-conservatism: his seemingly complete disregard for norms and traditions of any sort. Anton treats Trump's lack of concern for traditionalism and political norms as a good thing insofar as they allow for a radical disruption of what he sees as a status quo that is hurtling toward disaster at the hands of progressivism:

"Can Trump be erratic, obnoxious, and offensive? Of course, he can be all that and more. But while these qualities are not virtues, they may well have helped him punch through the Overton Window, in which case I am willing to make allowances". (Anton 2016c)

Anton cheers Trump's disregard for traditional norms, and chides the paleo-conservatives for being overly concerned with traditionalism, arguing "there is no mention of tradition, culture or heritage" in the Constitution (Anton 2016a). He explicitly advocates voting for Trump as the incautious, radical choice rather than as the sensible conservative choice, nowhere more clearly than in his attention-getting Flight 93 analogy:

"2016 is the Flight 93 election: charge the cockpit or you die. You may die anyway. You—or the leader of your party—may make it into the cockpit and not know how to fly or land the plane. There are no guarantees. Except one: if you

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<sup>2</sup> This aspect of his politics is almost certainly inextricable from his various other vices, not least of which is his misogyny. Sociologist C.J. Pascoe (2017) has demonstrated the degree to which both Trumpism and the critical response to Trumpism tend to devolve into toxic and childish competitions over manliness.

don't try, death is certain. To compound the metaphor: a Hillary Clinton presidency is Russian Roulette with a semi-auto. With Trump, at least you can spin the cylinder and take your chances. To ordinary conservative ears, this sounds histrionic". (Anton 2016b)

Indeed, it sounded histrionic to many ears, conservative and otherwise. What this demonstrates is that much of what Anton likes about Trump is exactly what makes him anathema to many conservatives, and even some traditionalist paleo-conservatives (Doherty 2016). Indeed, since his emergence as a candidate in 2015, Trump continually disregarded many of the established discursive, diplomatic, and governing norms associated with running for and then serving as President. Observers have long ceased waiting for a so-called "pivot" (Montenaro 2017) or expecting Trump to become normalized by the demands of the office. Instead, he has continued to disregard the norms of politics and the presidency, to the delight of his core supporters:

"Trump, who has an uncanny ability to read an audience, intuited in the spring of 2011 that the birther calumny could help him forge a powerful connection with party activists. He also figured out that the norms forbidding such behavior were not inviolable rules that carried a harsh penalty but rather sentiments of a nobler, bygone era, gossamer-thin and needlessly adhered to by politicians who lacked his willingness to defy them. He could violate them with impunity and pay no price for it—in fact, he discovered, Republican voters thrilled to his provocations and rewarded him". (Green 2017)

Given such electoral rewards, it is likely that a future Trumpism will be one that shares his ostentatious flouting of norms. Supporters like Anton frame this aspect of Trumpism as a refreshing disregard for the false and calcified niceties of politics as usual. Those who object see it as a paleo-conservatism grounded in demagogic populism rather than traditionalism or social conservatism. Whether it should be understood as a rejection of false pretences that impede necessary changes or a dangerous abandonment of the norms and mores that have kept our democracy afloat is, perhaps, subject to interpretation (cf. Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

Ultimately Anton's arguments highlight the degree to which, although paleo-conservatism serves as a core foundation, what makes Trumpism unique is its abandonment of the focus on traditionalism (understood both in terms of social conservatism and respect for political norms) and old orthodoxies of isolationism. In place of isola-

tionism and traditionalism, Trump has substituted a kind of dominance-oriented nationalism and a norm-defying demagogic populism. Thus, the substance of Trumpism could perhaps best be described as a kind of ‘populist neo-paleo-conservatism’, notwithstanding such a term’s ugliness.

One final, and frankly unsettling, innovation that Trumpism seems to have introduced into the paleo-conservative framework is the way he has engaged the politics of race and resentment. His approach is one that draws on many elements of existing political discourse, but the way it comes together is relatively unique, thus giving a window into an aspect of Trump’s politics that is likely to be a feature of any future Trumpism.

### **Race, Resentment, and Anti-PC Politics**

As noted earlier, paleo-conservatism has long been seen as a movement fuelled at least by white racial resentment and at most by out-and-out white supremacy. Such prominent paleo-conservatives as Samuel Francis, Joseph Sobran, John Derbyshire, and even Pat Buchanan himself, found themselves on the receiving end of efforts by such conservative leaders as William F. Buckley and publications e.g. *National Review* and *The Weekly Standard* to purge the conservative movement of racist and anti-Semitic elements (Hawley 2016). Many who have noted the connections between Trumpism and paleo-conservatism have highlighted the degree to which Trump traffics in a similar kind of politics of racism and resentment (Greenberg 2016; Matthews 2016). It is evident that racism, misogyny, and various other forms of bigotry and resentment seem to be elements of Trump’s character, were a significant factor in his election, and continue to inform much of his governing and rhetoric.

Yet when looking toward a potential future Trumpism, it is worth asking whether there could be a Trumpism that isn’t intertwined with bigotry. The author thinks that it is unlikely, but nonetheless possible. Given that Trumpism is so intertwined with a kind of nostalgic populism, and to a vision of the past in America to which those with populist inclinations are attracted, it is difficult to imagine any kind of full-throated anti-racist Trumpism. It is hard to see how one could be an America-first, immigration-sceptic nationalist without engaging at least to some degree in racism, racialized politics, or

dog-whistle politics. Any future Trumpism, to remain identifiable as such, will almost certainly have to involve the kind of politics that is appealing to those motivated by some level of white racial resentment. At the same time, however, the possibility should be left open that a future Trumpist could avoid trafficking in the kinds of obvious bigotry and misogyny that makes Trump particularly odious and perhaps even actively oppose the elements of white nationalism and far-right extremism that Trump has repeatedly failed to disavow, most notably in response to the “Unite the Right” rally and violence in Charlottesville in August 2017. It is at least possible that a future Trumpist will not be nearly as prone to charges of racism.

However, it is precisely in the way that Trump has responded to those charges of racism that reveals one of the core elements of the appeal of Trumpism to many of his core supporters. One thing that makes Trump distinct is that he seems ostentatiously unafraid of being called racist. Many of the writers who support Trump have said they are tired of conservatives pussyfooting around ideas for fear of being called a racist (Anton 2016b; Sanneh 2017). They accuse these conservatives of seeking absolution from the left for not being racist, which motivates them to propose comprehensive immigration reform or fail to call out Islam and talk in platitudes about these things when there are (they assert) good policy solutions that conservatives ought to be pursuing, but from which they run fleeing because they are afraid of being charged with racism. Trump—for whatever reason—is able to absorb a charge of racism and move on without seeming to blink. If somebody calls Trump racist, he bats it away saying, “I’m the least racist person in the world”, and then moves on, which is something very few politicians are capable of doing.

Thus, while opponents of Trump may criticize and become distressed about racism, misogyny, bigotry, and hate, they may fail to recognize that it is more or less axiomatic among his core supporters that such charges are shibboleths of leftists, who they assert wield them in bad faith in order to shame or shout down people or ideas they don’t like or don’t want to talk about substantively (Gray 2018). Liberals may recall during the Bush Administration how it felt to be called unpatriotic or a traitor or a “letting the terrorists win” if one criticized the efforts of the War on Terror, and later the Iraq War. Not only was the charge offensive, but its expression also necessarily shifted the conversation from the substance of the argument—this war is a bad

idea, torture is something worth being mad about, Hussein didn't have anything to do with 9/11, etc— towards either an academic argument about what words like “patriotic” mean, or an argument about the character of the person whose patriotism has been impugned. Rhetorically, responding to someone who advocates building a wall or banning Muslims by saying that it is racist has the same effect: the only coherent responses are to get into an argument about what “racism” does or doesn't mean, to interrogate the character of the person who was just called a racist, or to shamefully slink away wounded by the charge. This frustrates rational discussion about such policies.

Of course, this could be right and good. Racists should probably feel bad and frustrated. They probably should feel ashamed of shameful things like racism. A large part of why Trump supporters get so angry about such accusations is that, especially if they actually do think racism is bad, they nonetheless think these terms are wielded unfairly in their own case. The primary reason the charge of ‘racism’ stings is that it is one that the object of the charge implicitly recognizes is in some way worthy of shame. Lester Maddox or Bull Connor might not blink at being called a racist because it was a core part of their identity. However, most white people today do not want to think of themselves as racists. As countless scholars have demonstrated, most Americans have internalized the idea that to be racist is a bad thing without necessarily abandoning attitudes, beliefs, biases, and behaviours that are racist. (Lopez 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2017) This phenomenon tends to go under the name of ‘colour blind racism’ or ‘implicit bias’ and is a deeply insidious problem that played an undeniable role in the rise of Trump (Mills 2007).

What makes Trump exciting to such supporters is that he could not be shamed by charges of bigotry. Those who think charges of racism are generally made in bad faith and used to shut down conversations and shame conservatives out of their ideas may very well see in Trumpism an exciting new mode of politics. This is not entirely unlike how Sanders was exciting to leftists because he couldn't be shamed by charges of socialism. Unlike Sanders, however, Trump didn't do it by reclaiming the word. He just did it by deflecting it, appearing wholly unscathed, and soldiering on with the policy or argument that had just been called racist. That is genuinely strange in this day and age. He didn't shrink from being called a racist; he wasn't afraid of being charged with bigotry. He would encounter a highly plausible charge of

bigotry and either simply ignore it or respond with outrageous claims about being “the least racist person.”

Although it is undeniable that much of this can be attributed to particularities in Trump’s personality—his own racism, his dishonesty, his shamelessness—it is worth being mindful of how much this approach to charges of racism is an element of explicit political strategy among many right-wing movements. In fact, it is in this performative indifference to the charge of racism that reveals perhaps the most enduring connection between Trump and the Alt-Right. As George Hawley notes in his study of the Alt-Right:

“Although mainstream conservatives and libertarians howl with outrage when they are labeled racists, the Alt-Right seems collectively to shrug its shoulders when it encounters this accusation. As one prominent figure in the Alt-Right put it, “We just don’t care what you call us anymore”. (Hawley 2017, 3)

Although this serves as a basis for Trump’s connection to the Alt-Right and white supremacist groups, there is a broader contingency of support for the refusal to take charges of racism seriously. In this way, Charles Kesler suggested that it is Trump’s defiance of what gets called political correctness that is key to his appeal:

“It’s the spirited way Donald Trump has defied the P.C. mavens, I think, that’s been the key to his success so far. The crucial thing for him, at least at this stage of the campaign, is to stake out a tough position in tough terms, to be as politically incorrect as possible on his selected issues”. (Kesler 2016)

Angela Nagel has documented the degree to which opposition to political correctness fuels the Alt-Right in general and support for Trump in particular (Nagel 2017a and b). Much has been made of the degree to which Trump has not only emboldened outward displays of racism—as in the Charlottesville rally in August 2017—but also inspired what journalist Osita Nwanevu aptly labelled “a willingness to say the quiet parts loud” among more mainstream conservatives who had previously tended to retreat into euphemisms and dog whistles (Nwanevu 2018). Reporting from CPAC, Nwanevu suggested the unifying power of being anti-PC:

“It was hard to escape the feeling, listening to them, that the rhetoric of opposition to political correctness is expanding to fill the vacuum in conservative cultural politics left by the collapse of the Christian right”.

This has been a theme Steve Bannon loudly trumpeted, both as a Trump adviser and since leaving the White House (Kuttner 2017). He not only encouraged Trump to disregard charges of racism, saying, “We polled the race stuff and it doesn’t matter [...] It doesn’t move anyone who isn’t already in her camp” (Green 2017), but also gave a speech to the French National Front party in which he said, “Let them call you racists. Let them call you xenophobes. Let them call you nativists ... Wear it as a badge of honor” (Nossiter 2018). It is quite likely that a future Trumpist will at least seriously consider such advice.

It is also worth noting that opposition to political correctness is a theme championed not only by Trump and the Alt-Right, but also by ostensibly anti-Trump conservative figures like Ben Shapiro. This is why Nwanevu commented that this element of conservative politics suggests “Trumpism and the forces it has unleashed on the right will have a shelf-life beyond Trump.” Indeed, at CPAC, Shapiro framed his critique of Trump in the context of the ‘war against PC’:

“When President Trump complains that everything negative anyone has ever said about him isn’t true, or when President Trump says he had the biggest inauguration crowd in history, or when the president says there were good people marching in Charlottesville, that is not him waging an effective war against PC,” Shapiro said. “It is nonsense. It is immoral. And it actually helps those who push PC”. (Alberta 2018)

For these reasons, whether or not a future Trumpism traffics in racism to the degree that Trump himself does—and has for the entirety of his public life—it will almost certainly be unapologetic in its refusal to take the charge of racism seriously. Whether that means that it will merely reject ‘identity politics’ in favour of a supposedly non-racialist politics, or will make the kind of full-throated critique of political correctness that animates conservative pundits, is unclear. Whatever it looks like, it is difficult to imagine that any future Trumpism could be affirmatively anti-racist in orientation.

## Realignment and Political Risks

To attempt to put this argument in terms of risk analysis, perhaps the most immediate reason for specifically interrogating Trumpism is the possibility that it proves to be a force that brings about a realignment of the dominant partisan cleavages in American politics. While even the moderate shifts that occur in every election cycle—what might be



called readjustments rather than realignments—have policy consequences, major partisan realignments tend to be associated with dramatic shifts in social, economic, and foreign policy (Key 1955; Burnham 1970; Sundquist 2011). Of course, imagining future party realignments is a favourite pastime for political observers, and predictions about realignment should be taken with a grain—perhaps a pillar—of salt (Mayhew 2002; Azari 2016). The author is not suggesting that a Trumpism-fuelled realignment will occur, but simply that the greatest potential for future success of Trumpism will likely come in the context of at least a mild degree of partisan realignment.

If Trumpism is going to serve as a source of partisan realignment—or if it has already begun that process—then it is almost certainly going to do so by establishing a broad populist constituency drawn in by both the style and substance of Trumpist politics. It will likely borrow the criticisms of free trade, foreign entanglements, and immigration from paleo-conservatism, but mixed with Trump's relative indifference to social conservatism and traditionalism. It will likely appeal to voters through a mix of pessimism, performative bombast, and reductive simplicity. It will almost certainly be critical of identity politics and political correctness. If a candidate or movement manages to find a way to put all of this together without alienating voters with the kind of blatant bigotry and misogyny, appearances of corruption, seeming lack of competence, and other vices broadly associated with Donald J. Trump, then it may well find enduring success. In particular, whoever figures out how to craft a Trumpism that can attract a significant segment of the more populist Left—one that provides just enough plausible deniability on matters of race and gender—could be a force to be reckoned with. That such a candidate is imaginable is the sort of thing that ought to keep liberals up at night.

Although the author does not believe it sensible to call Bernie Sanders the Trump of the Left, there are undeniable similarities in their platforms and approaches to politics that a future Trumpist candidate could seek to capitalize upon. Both Trump and Sanders appealed to voters who were at least in part motivated by a scepticism of free trade, a hatred of party elites, a disdain for financial capitalism (but not productive industry), a disdain for hawkish foreign policy, an impatience with identity politics, a seeming belief that complex technocratic solutions are ineffective or untrustworthy, and a hunger for

radical transformation. And, they each did so with a brash, uncompromising style that is dismissive of the niceties of conventional politics. Reports that up to 12 percent of Sanders supporters ended up voting for Trump would seem to validate fears of a future Trumpism that could appeal to the so-called Bernie Bros (Kurtzleben 2017). However, such numbers may be misleading, given that most data suggest that an even larger percentage of Clinton supporters ultimately voted for McCain over Obama in 2008 (Henderson et al. 2010). This could simply be a natural outcome of a contentious primary, or it could signal the makings of some kind of realignment.

Potential realignments should at least be a concern to liberals and Democrats thinking about how to build their coalitions moving forward. If those members of the current Democratic coalition who backed Bernie Sanders and want to see the party move in the direction of a more left-leaning populism feel unrepresented in coming elections, they may find themselves looking elsewhere politically. Miller and Schofield (2003) suggested that realignments can be partially explained by candidates manoeuvring to appeal to disaffected voters who may feel unrepresented by the dominant party agendas:

“Striving to put together a coalition that adds a group of mobilized disaffecteds to the cadre of current party activists, candidates create what appears in two-dimensional ideological space as a “flanking” move. Roosevelt’s consolidation of an economically liberal New Deal coalition, Nixon’s Southern strategy to woo social conservatives, and Clinton’s move to the center in economic policy while appealing to social liberals all constitute such flanking coalition-building efforts”. (Miller and Schofield 2003, 259)

They argued that it is not party activists—who tend to be forces for maintaining the stability of the present coalition—but ambitious candidates who reach out to disaffected voters and in the process shift the cleavages of the parties:

“Party activists are a force for stability; they have chosen to be party activists because of the existing party alignment, and they discourage by the possibility of their exit any substantial changes in party ideology. The desire of candidates to construct winning coalitions is, on the other hand, a dynamic force. When disaffected activists have enough to offer, party candidates may seek to establish coalitions on the contract curve between existing and disaffected voters”. (Miller and Schofield 2003, 259)

At present, there are potentially two groups of disaffected voters that an ambitious candidate may find a way to peel off from their current

partisan attachments: populists in the Democratic Party and libertarians (or, as Miller and Schofield define them, cosmopolitans) in the Republican Party. Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner (2016) analyzed American National Elections Study data from the 2008 general and 2016 primary elections to suggest that Trump successfully appealed to populist voters in the kind of “flanking” manoeuvre outlined by Miller and Schofield. They further noted that libertarians are the group most diametrically opposed to populists:

“Populists and libertarians thus have a set of policy preferences that are opposite of one another; they are just as polarized from each other as liberals are from conservatives. But they are alike in one fundamental regard, a regard that sets them apart from liberals and conservatives: neither libertarians nor populists have policy preferences that align with the ideological divide represented by the two major parties”. (Carmines, et al. 2016, 388)

Of course, the potential for this kind of realignment should not be over-estimated. The most recent data from the Voter Study Group report indicated that libertarians comprise the smallest segment of the electorate by far, suggesting that a shift among libertarian-leaning voters would not be likely to have a terribly significant impact (Drutman 2017). Additionally, some political scientists have called into question the grand claims made by realignment theory, suggesting they lack empirical validity (Mayhew 2002). Others have argued that realignments should not be understood as rapid shifts but “glacial” changes in the nature of the parties and the electorate, which means it may already be the case that “the new cleavage line in American politics has moved from one that separates liberals from conservatives to one that separates populists from cosmopolitans [aka libertarians]” (Victor 2016). If so, then rather than speculating about further radical shifts to come, efforts should focus on comprehending the unexpected changes that are occurring. At this point, if the likely party shifts have already occurred, then probably the last people to know about it will be the party elites and the political media, both of whom continue to speak in the language of the more familiar liberal-conservative divide.

Nonetheless, political elites do have some agency in this matter. In the coming elections, the Democrats may very well choose to follow the model laid out by the Clinton campaign: seek to capitalize on disappointment with Trump and peel off moderate Republican votes by appealing to some kind of middle-ground. Or, they may try to outflank Republicans by appealing to libertarians turned off by populism. Both

strategies may work, but at the cost of alienating left-leaning populists in their own coalition. What may exacerbate this disjunction in the parties is if political elites begin to explicitly re-sort themselves in terms of this realignment. In particular, if waves of ‘never-Trump’ Republicans switch their partisan affiliation, it could have the effect of pushing some more populist-inclined Democrats to jump ship in reaction. Should members of the Bush family decide to switch their party affiliation, it is almost certain that they would be embraced and given positions of some prominence—at least publicly—in the Democratic Party. Asking leftists to choose between their two least-favourite living presidents—Bush and Trump—may well push them out of the Democratic coalition. Whether these disaffected Democrats fight to change their party, disengage from politics, align with a third party, or find a way to embrace a future Trumpist candidate who is trying to build a coalition of populists and nationalists, is an entirely open question.

## Conclusion

Against the advice of many wise observers who have suggested that there is no such thing as Trumpism, this chapter has attempted to suggest what it might mean for Trumpism to be a political force that outlasts the current occupant of the Oval Office. Given what is known about the strategies employed by the Trump campaign and the writings of the most thoughtful of his supporters, the author has sought to develop a picture of what that might look like. A candidate or movement deserving of the label Trumpist will be one that (a) draws on the paleo-conservative criticisms of free trade, foreign entanglements, and immigration; (b) rejects identity politics and political correctness, and (c) appeals to voters through a mix of pessimism, performative bombast, and reductive simplicity. For such a movement to truly find success, it will likely have to serve as the basis for a realignment of the dominant partisan cleavages in America, shifting from liberal vs. conservative to something like populist vs. cosmopolitan or nationalist vs. globalist.

The author’s goal in writing this chapter has been not only to attempt to comprehend the nature of Trumpist politics in the present, but also to think about the ways in which it may evolve as it develops independently of its namesake. Whether any of this will come to pass

is entirely uncertain. By considering potential futures for Trumpism, hopefully the next time Trumpism makes a claim on American politics, the American people, society, and institutions will be better prepared.

In summary, the risks arising in relation to Trumpism (assessed further in chapter 12) may be stated as:

### **Risks to Party Elites**

#### *Risk 1. Realignment threats to party elites*

Trumpism may catalyse a realignment of the dominant party cleavage (Republican vs. Democrat), as party elites scramble to retain vestiges of electoral support from voters enamoured with Trumpist populism.

### **Risks to US Governance**

#### *Risk 1. Further migration from traditional values*

In recognizing the dynamic character of US conservatism and its gradual de-emphasis of traditional values e.g. social conservatism, Trumpism may herald a further move away from traditional principles towards a more emotion-driven, demagogic, ephemeral, and populist approach to right-wing governance, which may be harmful to America e.g. to democracy, human rights, the economy, foreign relations.

#### *Risk 2. Longer-term Alt-Right influence*

After Trump is no longer president, there is the potential for continuing or re-emergent Trumpist Alt-Right leaning administrations that may be harmful to America e.g. to democracy, human rights, the economy, foreign relations.

### **Risks to Society and Social Cohesion in the US**

#### *Risk 1. Discriminatory policies harmful to vulnerable groups*

Deliberate Trumpist policies of inequality based on white supremacy and anti-immigrant theories and prejudices are likely to result in multiple adverse effects on those discriminated against (e.g. in employment, income, housing, health care) as well as damaging social cohesion.

## *Risk 2. Anomie and disaffection*

Discrimination and hate crimes against immigrants and ethnic and religious minorities in the US may lead to their increasing alienation and potentially their disaffection and backlash.

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# Chapter 5: President Trump's Administration

*By Alan Waring*

## **Abstract**

President Trump's world-view, Alt-Right agenda, approaches to problems, and observed conduct are examined, including controversies over whether he has been erratic, ephemeral and inconsistent in his policies and whether the White House has been a cauldron of chaos, sycophancy, and dysfunctionality. The de facto inner and outer cabinets of his team are described and analysed, including Tillerson, Pompeo, Sessions, and Matthis and various departures and replacements during his first 18 months in office. The influence of such Alt-Right ideologues as Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka is also examined. Allegations against Trump team members of unlawful collusion with and influence by Russia are discussed in the light of the Mueller FBI investigations. Risks are systematically identified.

**Key words:** Alt-Right, Trump, White House, Bannon, Mueller, Russia

## **Trump's Approach to the Role of President**

The previous chapter examined the phenomenon of US President Donald Trump, his apparent neo-paleo-conservative attitudes and style as President, and the idolisation of him by large numbers of Americans, all summed up by the term 'Trumpism'. This chapter also considers some aspects of the President's apparent world-view and observed conduct, while focussing on the structure, membership and tone of Trump's governmental administration, including a number of high profile issues and controversies that have characterised his presidency. The role and effects of the Alt-Right agenda, both originating from Trump himself and from influences within his administration and from external influences, are analysed. Rather than presenting a comprehensive examination, the chapter focusses on salient elements that have characterised the administration. Other chapters examine particular aspects of his administration in more detail.

Donald Trump was an avid user of his *Twitter* social media account before becoming President, and continued unabated as President. As the graphic examples in chapter 11 portray, he has had few qualms about expressing his personal likes and dislikes and using invective and undiplomatic language against a wide range of individuals and groups, including senior US government officials, judges, foreign politicians and heads of state, as well as sportspersons, journalists, film stars, and celebrities.

What do such examples reveal about the President and how he believes that a President should behave? Chapter 2 provides, from a psychological perspective, an attempt to understand and explain the nature and characteristics of Alt-Right thinking and behaviour in general. It also considers the particular characteristics of President Trump as the most high profile exemplar of the populist sector of the Alt-Right, but firmly cautions against rushing to judgements regarding the numerous suggestions that he may be suffering from a mental illness that might explain his bizarre behaviour. Although some aspects of some kinds of personality disorder may be apparent, such observations alone do not warrant 'armchair' attribution of mental illness.

Despite a fall in public approval of his presidency over the first six months of his presidency to about 40%, and to between 32 and 36% by December 2017, Trump continued to enjoy the backing of his core supporters who voted for him in 2016. See, for example, Inglehart and Norris (2016) who examined Trump's relationship with his supporters and why they voted for him. In examining the power of charismatic leader-follower relationships, such as that displayed in Trumpism, the psychiatrist Post (2015, 217) asked "Why do followers cling so long to narcissistic leaders whose grandiose façade is so patently false?" Post suggested that such leaders provide an idealized fantasy 'other', a projection of how these followers themselves would like to be. However, if he failed to deliver on his promises, not only would his core supporters evaporate but they would probably also develop what Post called "the rage of disillusion" and would be unforgiving. If Trump proved to be inadequate, it would make his core followers feel inadequate i.e. recognition that they had been deliberately deceived by him.

Trump's approach to his job as President was heavily influenced by his previous long-term career as a businessman and head of a large

corporation heavily focussed on hotels, golf resorts and other real estate ventures. As his books *The Art of the Deal* (Trump and Schwartz 1987) and also Trump (2000; 2015) demonstrated, he regards all relationships as transactional, and that the focus and emphasis should be on making deals. There is, of course, an element of substance in applying his approach to politics in that all political processes are by nature transactional, involving negotiation and reaching an agreement on trades and compromises—the art of the possible. However, in politics, deals as well as policy actions need to be based on close understanding of all relevant factors, otherwise they are likely to fail to deliver what the parties expected.

Close understanding demands considerable cerebral examination of complex matters and an intellectual grasp of the significant issues. This pre-requisite has put Trump at his weakest, since he eschews intellectual activities. He has preferred instead to engage in *Twitter* commentary, play golf, attend ball games, and soak up the adulatory roar of approval of his demagoguery at supporter rallies. According to Wolff (2018), he rarely reads any substantive document.

His apparently efficiency-based rectilinear and superficial thinking about complex matters may lead him towards precipitate actions having potentially catastrophic consequences for many countries including the United States, e.g. his actual bellicose threats against North Korea, and his additional sanctions and implied bellicose threats against Iran (see chapter 7). In foreign policy matters regarding nuclear weapons in particular (see chapter 6), Trump appeared to be trying to replace the MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) doctrine, which had operated since the end of WWII and the start of the Cold War, with a kind of fantasy hero approach in which he, the sole hero, saves the world by dint of veiled bellicose threats to use nuclear weapons as a first-strike preference. Neiwert (2017) identified Trump's tendency to project himself as a lone man of destiny, America's saviour, as one of six fascist traits allegedly within Trump's personality, although carefully stating that such traits did not mean that Trump was an actual ideological fascist in thought and deed (see chapter 13).

For many observers, Trump's leadership and overall conduct as President appeared erratic, ephemeral, and inconsistent, although some (e.g. Simms and Laderman 2017) argued that he was in fact not at all erratic or inconsistent. Certainly, however, he did not show the basic requirements of well-established government policy-making as

discussed in Vickers (1983). In place of clear strategy and policy based on solid reasoning and factual evidence, what emerged was a loose collection of positions and executive orders based on Trump's personal prejudices and emotions, backed up by the ideology of Alt-Right advisers and courtiers to the White House and assertions of powerful sectoral interests (see chapters 9 and 11).

## **Trump's White House Team**

The White House Administration comprised the President Donald J. Trump, Vice-President Mike Pence, First Lady Melania Trump, Mrs Karen Pence, and The Cabinet.

The Cabinet numbered twenty-four, including the Vice-President plus 13 Secretaries of major functions, the Attorney General, the Directors of National Intelligence and the CIA, the White House Chief of Staff, the US Representative to the UN, the US Trade Representative, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Administrator of the Small Business Administration.

During the first year of Trump's presidency, adjustments to cabinet post holders included the forced resignation of retired General Michael Flynn following revelations about his communications with agents of the Russian government (see later), and the appointment of retired General John F. Kelly as White House Chief of Staff, having previously held the cabinet post of Secretary of Homeland Security. Kelly replaced Reince Priebus, who had resigned in late July 2017 following intense personal vilification by Anthony Scaramucci, the relatively new White House Communications Director appointed by Trump over Priebus's head.

The appointment of General Kelly as Chief of Staff proved to be a turning point that rapidly curbed the previous disorder in the White House. Up to then, there appeared to have been few procedural controls for access to the President (Wolff 2018). Reporting and authorisation lines were blurred or open to bypass. The result had been that a wide range of functionaries believed that they enjoyed a right of uncontrolled access to the President. Within days of Kelly becoming Chief of Staff, Scaramucci (see Lizza 2017 for background) had been sacked, apparently as one of Kelly's preconditions for his taking the appointment. Kelly also introduced access control procedures and

protocols via his office so as to ensure only screened bona fide appointments with the President. Kelly also despatched two of Trump's high profile advisers, both of whom had enjoyed unfettered access to the President, Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka. These two were committed Alt-Right nationalist ideologues (see below) who had been heavily engaged in supporting Trump's presidential election campaign.

With Kelly in charge of White House management, many observers felt that a modicum of proper governance had now been introduced, at least in the White House (Wolff 2018). This development and the removal of Bannon and Gorka, coupled with the steadying hand of experienced and loyal establishment figures in the Cabinet such as Rex Tillerson, General Mattis, Mike Pompeo and Jeff Sessions, was hoped by many to herald a reining in of Trump's more erratic and emotional policy decisions and even a curtailment of his *Twitter* outbursts and public statements. However, while a somewhat more cautious and measured Trump became outwardly evident in the months following the advent of Kelly, there was still much evidence of Trump the Cavalier breaking through in his unsupervised and unscripted pejorative assertions and personal attacks during press conferences and other public events—for example, the series of highly criticised White House press conference statements delivered by Trump following the Charlottesville neo-Nazi attacks in August 2017.

Regarding his *Twitter* attacks, these continued unabated (see examples in chapter 11). If anything, they increased during the second half of 2017. Trump's habit of issuing barrages of invective and insults that betrayed his inner thoughts, proclivities, and emotional state to millions of *Twitter* followers across the world, including America's enemies, presented an obvious threat to the US, whether by creating an impression of emotional or mental instability open to ridicule or by providing enemies with insights into his weaknesses that might be exploited. Moreover, his *Twitter* statements could be interpreted by some as statements of actual White House/US government policy, even if made informally and on-the-hoof, with all the attendant dangers that would bring. Indeed, in a White House Press Conference on June 6, 2017 (White House 2017), White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer, in answer to a journalist's query about his tweets, stated "The President is the President of the United States so they're considered official statements by the President of the United States" (Landers

2017). Many people might regard such behaviour on social media as not only demeaning to America's standing but also as encouraging its enemies. Attempts by Cabinet heavyweights to persuade Trump to cease such uncontrolled communications appeared to fail.

As to the Cabinet members, these fell into two main virtual groups, the inner cabinet 'heavyweights' and the outer cabinet 'lightweights'. There was no formal or constitutional formation of these two groups, simply their apparent informal existence that was discernible to observers.

Up to March 13, 2018, the inner cabinet 'heavyweights' comprised Generals Kelly and Mattis, Mike Pompeo, Dan Coats, Rex Tillerson and Jeff Sessions. Vice-President Mike Pence was also a member although considered by many (see Mayer 2017) as a political make-weight whose real value to Trump lay in his close links to the Republican establishment and wealthy old-guard oligarchs. With the exception of Tillerson, these all brought lengthy experience of public office to the Cabinet. Tillerson, while not a diplomat or career politician, was CEO of Exxon Mobil from 2006 to 2016 and, in addition to directing such a large multi-national corporation, had considerable practical experience of overseas operations and dealing with foreign leaders e.g. Putin. This inner cabinet acted like an executive committee and dealt especially with major issues of policy. The inner cabinet members were seen as a, or rather the only, moderating influence capable of steering Trump away from dangerously impetuous actions. Indeed, it is some irony that in contrast to traditional expectations of relationships between a President and the US military, whereby it is the President usually seeking to curb any gung-ho or jingoistic urges among the military, in Trump's presidency it was the two generals in his Cabinet representing the US military world-view, and backed up by Tillerson, who were restraining him from dangerous military adventurism (Luce 2017).

According to Larres (2017), Tillerson fully backed Trump's 'America First' foreign policy, which he talked of in terms of national security and prosperity rather than traditional US democratic and humanitarian values. While Tillerson is a right-wing conservative pragmatist, the other members of the inner cabinet clearly had a strong ideological affinity with the Alt-Right. For example, the Attorney General Jeff Sessions was an Alabama Senator and lawyer whose nomina-

tion in 1986 to the US District Court for the Southern District of Alabama was turned down by the Senate Judiciary Committee, following allegations by several former colleagues of his racist language and behaviour. Sessions always denied these allegations by rejecting some outright as falsehoods or by downplaying others as jokes or misunderstandings. Other charges made against Sessions included persistently being against the improvement of civil rights for blacks, civil rights legislation and civil rights organizations. Unsurprisingly, his appointment by Trump as Attorney General was controversial. Regardless of the veracity or otherwise of the various allegations against him, Sessions was undoubtedly a conservative nationalist of the populist Alt-Right and a loyal Trump supporter. For example, Trump could rely on him to back legislation against illegal immigrants being able to normalise their US residence status, legislation stopping citizens of named countries having predominantly Muslim populations from getting US visas, trawl arrests of racially profiled persons on suspicion of illegal immigration, and the deportation of undocumented migrants denied due process. Chapter 8 discusses the Alt-Right stance on immigration in more detail.

As for Coats, Pompeo and Mattis, they made no secret not only of their strong anti-Muslim beliefs and attitudes but also their intense dislike of and disdain for Iran in particular. Nevertheless, as noted above, the military self-discipline and professionalism of the two Generals ensured that at least any reckless military adventurism against Iran by Trump using presidential prerogative was scotched. The unshamed anti-Muslim prejudice of Trump and much of the inner cabinet did not apparently extend to anti-Semitism. For example, Trump is very pro-Israel and his own son-in-law Jared Kushner is Jewish. This selective prejudice based on religion remains an unexplained curious aspect of the Trump administration. For example, a central plank of the proposition of Trump's far-right supporters was the rejection, relegation, or subjugation of all non-whites and non-Christians. Trump's support for far-right extremists such as the KKK (e.g. in his election campaign and in response to the Charlottesville violence), and the far-right Britain First, seemed at odds with his pro-Israel stance, unless it stemmed from their shared authoritarian credo. See chapter 7 for further discussion.

The outer cabinet 'lightweights' comprised the remaining members of Trump's Cabinet. There was nothing particularly interesting



or exceptional about them. They were all ambitious individuals who variously had some background, but not necessarily expertise, in the functional areas they had been appointed to head. The appointments appeared to have been made primarily on the basis of loyalty to Trump and at least a modicum of Alt-Right affinity. One of Trump's oldest friends and admirers and a long-term adviser in the Republican Party establishment, Tom Barrack, warned that Trump had too many 'yes men' around him (Kranish 2017). In a sense, they were analogous to apparatchiks of the old Soviet *nomenklatura* who could be relied on to toe the party line. For example, Scott Pruitt was appointed Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, not because he had any known substantive expertise in the science or management of the environment but because for many years while Attorney General of Oklahoma he had taken a robustly negative stance against the EPA. For example, he had taken 14 lawsuits against the EPA, accusing it of having an activist agenda and exaggerating air pollution charges against specific industries. Thus, Trump could rest assured that with Pruitt in charge of the EPA the organisation's regulatory activities could be corralled and truncated to suit his pseudo-scientific beliefs and prejudices (e.g. that global warming is a myth) and his willingness to accept unsubstantiated lobbying assertions from prominent industrial corporations that their sector (e.g. coal mining) had gone into decline as a result of environmental regulation. See chapter 9 for further discussion on the inversion of science and economics by political decree in the Trump era.

Trump demanded unwavering loyalty from his Cabinet members. The evidence suggests that he largely received this, at least during 2017. Indeed, Cillizza (2017) reported that not only was loyalty expected during their day-to-day work but Cabinet members were also expected to demonstrate their loyalty further by openly voicing their praise for Trump. As evidence, Cillizza reported on a video-recorded Cabinet meeting held on June 12, 2017: "President Donald Trump held a super weird Cabinet meeting Monday afternoon. In it, he sat silently as each member of his Cabinet lavished praise on him and his policies. Seriously". Cillizza then quoted from the transcript examples of obsequiousness from each Cabinet member present. While too lengthy to repeat them all here, the following examples typify the sycophancy revealed and validate Barrack's warning about 'yes men' (Kranish 2017):

Secretary of the Treasury, Steven T. Mnuchin: "It was a great honor traveling with you around the country for the last year and an even greater honor to be here serving in your cabinet".

Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Mick Mulvaney: "Thanks for the kind words about the budget. You're absolutely right: We are going to be able to take care of the people who really need it. And at the same time, with your direction, we are able also to focus on the forgotten man and woman who are the folks who are paying those taxes".

Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue: "I want to congratulate you on the men and women you've placed around this table—This is the team you've assembled that's working hand in glove with—for the men and women of America, and I want to—I want to thank you for that. These are—are great team members and we're on your team".

Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tom Price: "Mr President, what an incredible honor it is to lead the Department of Health and Human Services at this pivotal time under your leadership. I can't thank you enough for the privileges you've given me and the leadership that you've shown. It seems like there's an international flair to the messages that are being delivered. I had the opportunity to represent the United States at the G-20 Health Summit in Berlin and at the World Health Assembly in Geneva. And I can't tell you how excited and enthusiastic folks are about the United States leadership as it relates to global health security".

It is unclear how much of this adulatory tableau was orchestrated by Trump for the cameras and how much was the result of every Cabinet member being aware of the need to keep stroking his ego and vanity and so avoid his displeasure.

In a sense, the Cabinet and especially the inner cabinet became a more publicly acceptable face of the Alt-Right. The nationalist agenda could be pursued and gain a measure of respectability while eschewing more extreme right-wing demands, at least for the time being. The efforts of Tillerson, Kelly and Mattis to moderate Trump's more cavalier policy making and uninhibited conduct added to their public stature as the respectable voice of reason in the White House and helped to alleviate somewhat a growing public concern about Trump's volatile nature. Tillerson's sacking and replacement by Pompeo, the CIA Director, in March 2018 and the appointment of John Bolton as National Security Adviser, heralded a less inhibited and more aggressive Trump on foreign policy, particularly a threatened US withdrawal from the JCPOA nuclear agreement with Iran (see chapters 6 and 7). Such changes and further sackings such as David Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and other departures in March 2018, revealed an alleged power struggle described by Shulkin as reflecting a "toxic, chaotic, disrespectful and subversive" environment to replace moderates

with hard-line Trump loyalists who would not seek to restrain him (Deng 2018).

## Trump's Advisers and Aides

Trump appointed a large number of advisers and aides. The following are two high profile examples of individuals who were particularly controversial:

### Steve Bannon

Immediately after President Trump's inauguration, Steve Bannon was appointed as Trump's Chief Strategist at the White House. This was not a Cabinet post but to all intents and purposes Bannon acted as if it was. Although having no security background or expertise, he was also a member of the top committee of the National Security Council. Trump and the Cabinet members (some more than others) indulged him in all this up until August 2017 when he was forced to resign.

Steve Bannon is undoubtedly one of the Alt-Right's high profile protagonists (Neiwert 2017; Wolff 2018) and arguably the doyen whose advice and guidance to Donald Trump personally, plus his sophisticated propaganda machine, cyber manipulation techniques, and electronic media outlets, energised voters and convinced enough of them for Trump to win the presidency. For example, a year-long *Guardian* investigation (Cadwalladr 2018) suggested that Cambridge Analytica, a specialist data mining company of which Bannon had been a board member both prior to and after becoming Trump's chief strategist in 2016, had been engaged in personality profiling of millions of Americans using their *Facebook* profiles. The *Guardian* report alleged that the profiling data and social media account data were then used to target specific tailored pro-Trump political messages on behalf of the Alt-Right to some 50 million voters directly, in a campaign described by the originator of the Cambridge Analytica technique used as "psychological warfare"—see chapter 11.

Green (2017), and observers in general, credit Trump's electoral victory to Bannon's pivotal role as chief strategist late in his campaign. Ideologically driven, unlike Trump and his Cabinet members Bannon is a fixated believer in the absolute necessity for a radical nationalist shift away from Republican conservatism and much more towards the far-right (see Inglehart and Norris 2017). Bannon is a revolutionary

who seeks to overturn the present Establishment and its norms and replace it with an Alt-Right Establishment and radical-right norms. Trump obviously liked and embraced Bannon's ideas in soundbite and personal inclination terms, especially their joint fixation that Hillary Clinton was the font of evil. However, it is doubtful whether he ever fully understood Bannon's overall objective, which was to ensure a permanent hard-right nationalist shift in the governance of the United States and the imposition of authoritarian policies.

Bannon, a former banker, had been executive chairman and chief editor of *Breitbart News*, a radical right-wing electronic news website dedicated to challenging the so-called liberal elites, the Democratic Party, the Clintons, and a perceived conservative paralysis in the Republican Party, and promoting a strongly Alt-Right ideology and agenda. He described himself as an economic nationalist (Neiwert 2017). In 2012, he founded the Government Accountability Institute which commissioned *Clinton Cash* (Schweizer 2015), a book suggesting that the Clinton Foundation had improperly received donations from foreign sources, thus implying that Hillary Clinton, the Democratic presidential candidate, was corrupt. In August 2016, he became Trump's campaign chief and is credited with using both his Internet skills and propaganda drafting skills to directly address the mass of disaffected young people, especially men, with Trump's vision of 'America First' and 'making America great again', to thereby gain Trump crucial extra votes. It was perhaps inevitable that Trump would want Bannon close to him in the White House.

In effect, as Green (2017) alluded, Bannon had engineered a stunning bloodless coup by stealth whereby he, on behalf of an unelected Alt-Right movement having no identifiable political party, manifesto or election apparatus, was now in a position to directly manipulate the President on a daily basis. According to Wolff (2018), Bannon now saw himself as the "auteur of the Trump presidency". Alt-Right supporters paranoid about perceived threats to white culture and feeling downtrodden, ignored, and abandoned by government (Forscher and Kteily 2017) now had in Bannon a champion in the White House who would advance their nationalist and supremacist values and interests. He acted like the political officer of an Alt-Right politburo, constantly reminding, cajoling, and exhorting Trump to show some backbone and stick to his right-wing instincts and nationalist promises made during his Presidential election campaign to

override the enfeebled Republican Party (Dochuk 2015; Trubowitz 2016). To many observers (e.g. Sherman 2017), over the first six months of Trump's presidency it seemed more like Bannon the President's chief strategist had become the President's puppet master, if not preparing his own future presidential candidacy. McCarty (see chapter 4) downplays somewhat this 'puppet master' view and argues that the relationship was more a marriage of convenience.

In that early period, Trump and his Cabinet indulged Bannon and took note of his Alt-Right persuasiveness e.g. taking a strongly anti-immigration, anti-Muslim, anti-Mexican stance; an isolationist, protectionist approach to trade; an aggressive attempt to deconstruct key legislation from the previous Obama presidency e.g. the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Obamacare); and embarking on a rapid diminution and politicisation of government departments deemed to be too liberal and orientated against the new Alt-Right thinking e.g. the EPA, the State Department.

Bannon himself had long developed a gruff, unkempt, and antagonistic persona, and he was well known for his polemical *Breitbart* articles and recorded fiery utterances against perceived enemies of the Alt-Right. He rarely smiled and appeared driven by an absolute, almost fanatical, conviction that the certitudes of the Alt-Right ideology were correct. He dismissed mainstream Republicans, and any conservatives unwilling to support without deviation or hesitation the new Alt-Right agenda of the Trump White House, as a 'cuck' or 'cuckervative'. The latter is a pejorative term invented within the Alt-Right and used among its supporters to mean a conservative who had allowed their true conservative ideals to be trampled on and were too timid to fight back, rather like a cuckolded husband who failed to confront his adulterous wife.

Having such an unattractive personality and, like Trump, a propensity to lash out in undiplomatic language against those who failed to meet his expectations, Bannon made few friends in the White House. Gradually, the tolerance of him by Trump and the Cabinet wore thin. A turning point came when it was reported that Bannon had called Jared Kushner, Trumps' son-in-law and an aide, a 'cuck' behind his back and that this had angered Trump's daughter Ivanka, another aide. The mutual dislike between Bannon and Kushner and his wife (Bannon called them "Jarvanka") became evident (Wolff 2018).

The first step in reducing Bannon's influence came when he was removed from membership of the National Security Council's top committee, ostensibly on the grounds that he lacked the security expertise needed to make a contribution. Shortly after, Trump ordered a cruise missile strike against Syria, thus directly rejecting the isolationist foreign policy demanded by the Alt-Right and strongly advocated to Trump by Bannon. Trump began to show that he was his own man and not beholden to Bannon, or at least that he was willing to listen to non-isolationist arguments on particular issues from Cabinet members and other aides and advisers.

On August 18, 2017, Bannon was forced to resign, with Trump explaining that he was really his own strategist and therefore no longer required Bannon's services but thanking him nonetheless for his valuable input. With characteristic ebullience, Bannon immediately launched into a vitriolic attack on Republican Party leaders, accusing them by name of deliberately sabotaging the White House's nationalist agenda and trying to neutralise the 2016 election of Trump. Moreover, he threatened a grassroots populist campaign in the lead up to the 2018 mid-term elections to nominate and support candidates against Republican senators who failed to back Trump's nationalist policies i.e. failed to back the wishes of the Alt-Right. An early example was his high profile support for senatorial candidate Roy Moore in Alabama (Sherman 2017), despite Moore's controversial status as an Alt-Right candidate being mired by allegations against him of sexual impropriety, involving teenage girls, when he was in his thirties.

Bannon returned to running *Breitbart News* and continued in his erstwhile mode as a leading political commentator and agitator for the Alt-Right, including promoting far-right candidates against Democrat and mainstream Republican candidates in Senate elections. Wolff's book (2018) included numerous damaging quotations by Bannon about Trump, to which Trump characteristically responded aggressively via *Twitter* and threatened law suits. The book provoked such a backlash against Bannon by Trump and his allies, and by financial backers and advertisers, that Bannon was forced to resign from *Breitbart News* in January 2018. Nevertheless, Bannon's relentless political self-promotion had raised the question as to whether he saw himself as a future US President properly worthy of the Alt-Right cause (Sherman 2017).

Commenting on Bannon's 2018 speaking tour of European far-right parties and rallies, Rifkind (2018) referred to his unashamedly racist demagoguery as "Bannonism". For example, in France in his address to the National Front conference to which he received rapturous applause, he was quoted: "Let them call you racists. Let them call you xenophobes. Let them call you nativists. Wear it as a badge of honour" (Pasha-Robinson 2018). He also advised the AfD in Germany in March 2018 (Charter 2018).

In July 2018, in a radio interview on *LBC* in London (*LBC* 2018), Bannon stated his reverence for Tommy Robinson, the British far-right leader who has a long history of multiple criminal convictions and who was then in jail for contempt of court. He described Robinson as "the backbone of this country".

Also in July 2018, he announced his grand plan to form a European foundation called The Movement, seeking to unite populist- and far-right groups across Europe and to create an Alt-Right 'supergroup' within the European Parliament (Alexander 2018).

However, such overt engagement by an American citizen in foreign national and EU politics runs the risk of state authorities deciding that some of his commentary and agitation may have crossed the line into subversion and attempts to undermine public order and safety by fomenting political and social unrest i.e. a threat to national sovereignty and security. In March 2018 in the UK, for example, three far-right foreigners (one American, one Canadian and one Austrian) were refused entry into the UK on the grounds that "their presence in the UK was not conducive to the public good" (Hosenball 2018). In the American's case, part of the reported reason for refused entry was her planned meeting with Tommy Robinson, the former leader of the far-right EDL.

Bannon's departure did not, of course, signal that all his prior influence on Alt-Right-linked policies and thinking had disappeared from the Trump White House. However, after Bannon there was now more scope for flexible realpolitik responses to complex issues that were unlikely to be solvable by the over-simplification and naivety inherent in the 'rapid salvation' policies based on Alt-Right authoritarian dogma. As Vickers (1983) noted, effective policy-making requires a capacity for weighing and matching, for optimizing and balancing, rather than expectations of certain success from any particular option.

It is about satisficing rather than achieving a perfect outcome, a principle that Bannon either did not understand or rejected.

### **Sebastian Gorka**

Dr Sebastian Gorka was appointed as a deputy assistant to President Trump in January 2017, where he worked closely with his former colleague from *Breitbart News*, Steve Bannon. Gorka is an enigmatic and controversial figure. The following summarises his CV variously in the public domain (e.g. IICT 2017; IWP 2017). Born in England of Hungarian parents who had escaped after the failed Hungarian Uprising of 1956, he obtained a modest 2.2 university degree in philosophy and theology. Soon after graduation in 1992, he moved to live in Hungary where he stayed until 2008. In 2002, he began a political science doctoral programme at Corvinus University and completed his dissertation in 2007. During this period, Gorka took on adjunct roles with a US Defense Department funded research centre in Germany and another at MacDill US Airforce Base in Tampa, Florida. In the following years, he took on a variety of senior adjunct and part-time roles at academic institutions in the United States, focussing on military theory and counter-terrorism, before joining *Breitbart News* in 2014 as an editor on national security matters.

Gorka appeared to bring to his White House job a wealth of knowledge and qualified expertise on the subject of national security. However, serious questions were raised among US academics regarding his PhD from Corvinus and, in particular, whether his dissertation met the basic requirements of a doctoral thesis and whether the doctoral examination process at Corvinus had been severely defective. Reynolds (2017), for example, provided a detailed critique of the evidence on these questions and in particular charged that his dissertation was “short on theory, evidence or academic rigor” but “long on Islamophobia and the unsubstantiated claims of the polemicist”. See also Nexon (2017) and Engel (2017) for similar academic criticisms. Other academic critics are quoted in a *CNN* investigative report (Devine et al 2017), which also included serious criticisms and reservations by acknowledged terrorism experts about Gorka’s actual expertise in the subjects he claimed.

The singular thesis that constitutes the essence of all his published work (e.g. co-author in Gallagher et al 2012; Gorka 2016; 2017;



chapter in Harmon et al 2011) and public statements is that all terrorism by Muslims is an inevitable consequence of the ideology of Islam and its innate and fundamental violence towards non-believers, who must either be converted or exterminated. Gorka's thesis is that the issue is a simple one, namely that Islam itself is the base of the terrorism threat to the western world, and therefore the west and the US in particular needs to adopt an aggressive defence strategy seeking to crush ideologically and, if necessary, militarily all instances of 'radical Islam'. Gorka's thesis is weak on several counts, the most obvious being that it flies in the face of known facts about IS and similar groups and their supporters. Few would disagree that IS, al Qaeda and the Taliban, for example, are a dangerous threat but that is because they are terrorists and not because they are Muslim. Despite their rhetoric about 'fighting for Islam', the evidence so far suggests that the vast majority comprise a motley group of criminals, psychopaths, sexual predators, paedophiles, misfits, and opportunists who merely chant Islamic rhetoric without conviction in order to cloak their crimes so as to make them appear somehow justifiable.

The thesis also ignores the complexities of the Middle East in terms of history, national and ethnic conflicts, wars, poor governance, corruption, poverty, injustice and other societal ills that have long been recognized in the State Department and National Security Council as being highly relevant to understanding and defeating terrorism. See, for example, comments on Gorka's thesis by former senior counter-terrorism and national security officials in Simon and Benjamin (2017). Moreover, Gorka's thesis implies that he accepts at face value the IS propaganda position that there is an ideological war between Islam and the west, and thereby unwittingly he validates and strengthens their propaganda.

Another weakness in Gorka's thesis is the concept of *jihad* or holy war that is central to his argument that Islam itself is the terrorist threat (Gorka 2016). The *jihad* concept has been applied by various groups within the confines of particular national boundaries e.g. in the Syrian conflict from 2011 onward, and in the Afghan civil war in the 1980s (as the *mujahedeen*, the Shia version of the Sunni *jihadis*). IS has also sought to claim that it is fighting a holy way to establish an Islamic State caliphate across all the Middle East and beyond. However, so far as the author knows, *jihad* (an overwhelmingly Sunni concept unrec-

ognized in Shiite Iran) has never featured substantively in any campaigns or any military strategy or any state doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran where the concept is regarded now as an historical artefact (see e.g. Arjomand 2016; *Economist* 2014). The closest Iran came to extolling *jihad* was during the Iran-Iraq War 1980–1988, when its national survival against superior Iraqi forces caused Ayatollah Khomeini to advocate any means necessary to win, the *baseeji* suicide squads exhorted by the leadership to embark on a holy journey of self-sacrifice to a divine paradise being a particular example. Yet, according to Trump, Bannon and Gorka, despite having no jihadist policy Iran represents the greatest existential terrorist threat in the world. It is unclear how, if at all, Gorka seeks to incorporate the Iranian anomaly into his dogmatic thesis. This is not to say that Iran presents no threat to the west, but it is not a jihadist or radical Islamic terrorist one. See chapter 7.

The discrepancies identified above raise a number of important security questions:

1. How did Gorka apparently manage to pass the normal 'positive vetting' background checks expected on any individual having such close contact with the President and with the highest levels of policy making and access to highly sensitive information? How closely were his alleged contacts with the far-right in Hungary investigated? As someone having substantial experience in 'due diligence' background checks on candidates applying for sensitive posts, the author finds it extraordinary that alleged flaws in Gorka's claimed qualifications and expertise were not, apparently, identified (see Corporate Due Diligence, chapter 7 The Abuse of Trust, in Waring 2013). If they were identified, on what justification were they ignored, as they cut to the essence of his truthfulness and integrity?
2. What motivation did Gorka have for apparently inflating his credentials? Was it on behalf of a foreign agency to gain access to the upper echelons of government and sensitive information? This is doubtful, given Gorka's self-created high profile rather than remaining obscure and unnoticed. Was it simply self-aggrandisement and exaggeration as part of some Walter Mitty pretension? Was it to facilitate a

- burning desire to bend US foreign policy to his Alt-Right views and especially his Islamic jihad thesis?
3. How exacting is due diligence on all individuals having dealings with the President, White House etc? If it failed in Gorka's case, was this a one-off aberration or an example of a systemic defect in vetting procedures? For example, see below on the federal grand jury indictments against Paul Manafort and Richard Gates and the admissions of George Papadopoulos, all of whom had close contacts with Trump during his election campaign, and in Papadopoulos's case, in the White House. Were they adequately vetted? See also Harding and Rouse (2007) on the weaknesses of corporate due diligence in practice.
  4. Why were Gorka's agenda and influence on Trump and White House policy allowed to continue for so long? Bannon's nationalist and anti-Muslim views on US national security were closely aligned with the enthusiastic, almost evangelical, populist approach of Gorka. Both focussed on action not careful deliberation, and were antagonistic towards perceived elites in the national security establishment getting in the way of action. Trump shared their views and for a time wiser counsel among the Cabinet was overridden. It has been suggested that Trump and Bannon colluded to block at least one attempt on security grounds to oust Gorka.

Gorka won few friends in the White House and the wider administration, primarily because of his unattractive, bullying personality, especially during interviews if he thought the questions were too critical or challenging his views. See, for example, *BBC Newsnight* January 31, 2017 and *CNN* July 24, 2017. Gorka was asked to resign ten days after Bannon's departure and, like Bannon, returned to work for *Breitbart News*.

### **Allegations of Unlawful Collusion with and Influence by Russia**

Arguably the most damaging allegations against President Trump personally, and members of his Cabinet and others, that surfaced shortly after his inauguration were that both his election as President and his

subsequent policies and actions as President had been compromised by Russian government subversion (NIC 2017). In particular, the various allegations that developed since mid-February 2017 fell into three main categories, namely:

1. That during the 2016 presidential election campaigns, the Russian government interfered in a variety of ways that had the objectives of (a) undermining US public confidence in its government and democratic processes and disrupting social stability, and (b) harming the Clinton campaign and aiding the Trump campaign, all with an ulterior goal of aiding Russia's strategic interests and weakening America. The methods alleged to have been applied (NIC 2017; Watts 2017) included hosting seemingly independent blogging websites that ran fake news stories and analyses likely to raise doubts in reader's minds and thereby influence their blog 'likes' and voting intentions in favour of Trump. Russian sourced covert advertisements on American political issues were probably seen by over 120 million people via *Facebook* during and since the 2016 presidential campaign, according to *Facebook* (Correll 2017; Shaban et al 2017). Another tactic was to insert false blog comments on legitimate news websites in the US (Parfitt 2017). Russian agents were also alleged to have sought to influence directly various members of the Trump campaign team and its senior supporters by offering to provide supposed evidence of bad or questionable conduct by Hillary Clinton that could have jeopardised her election if made public. Federal indictments on the above matters against thirteen Russians or Russian companies were subsequently raised in February 2018 (USDoJ 2018) , and against twelve GRU agents on July 13, 2018.
2. That during the campaign and the pre-inauguration period, agents of the Russian government had direct contact on a number of occasions individually with a number of Trump's White House Cabinet team and aides, with the ultimate objective of influencing White House policy in favour of Russia's strategic interests. While such contacts per se may have been acceptable if properly logged and formally reported, it transpired that a number went unreported and, further, several individuals gave to the Senate

Intelligence Committee false testimony that hid, denied or downplayed these contacts (see below).

3. That Trump himself had become personally compromised through past business dealings in Russia that involved questionable sources of finance when his business empire had been in difficulties, and also allegations of sexual impropriety in Russia that had been secretly recorded by Russian intelligence agents, thus rendering him vulnerable to potential blackmail. Observers asked whether this explained why Trump had appeared to be unusually accommodating towards a number of Russian foreign policy positions.

What sparked off this major potential scandal was leaked US intelligence data which indicated that General Michael Flynn, Trump's National Security Adviser, had had unauthorised discussions (at least five) in December 2016 with the Russian ambassador about US sanctions against Russia and had then misled the Vice-President and other senior White House staff over whether these discussions occurred. It was alleged that Flynn's failure to disclose had made him vulnerable to Russian blackmail. Trump denied any knowledge of Flynn's unauthorised contacts prior to being alerted by the Department of Justice on January 26, 2017, although a few days earlier reports were circulating that Flynn was already under FBI investigation on this matter. Flynn then resigned on February 14.

By March 2017, the FBI had begun a separate investigation into whether Trump's former election campaign chief Paul Manafort had colluded with the Russian government to assist in ensuring that Trump was elected. Manafort had a long association as a political consultant, both to oligarchs closely associated with Putin and to Viktor Yanukovich, the pro-Russian president of Ukraine before he was ousted in the civil uprising of 2014. Millions of US\$ relating to a failed Ukraine deal, and originating from Oleg Deripaska a Putin ally, had been traced to Manafort offshore companies and bank accounts but remained unaccounted for. Revelations about his Ukrainian activities forced him to resign from the Trump campaign in August 2016 and he came under various investigations as described below.

During March and April 2017, the multiple FBI investigations continued while in parallel the Senate Intelligence Committee began its own investigation into allegations of Russian interference in the

2016 presidential campaigning and possible collusion by the Trump campaign in that interference. The new Attorney General Jeff Sessions then became embroiled in his own failure to disclose during his Senate confirmation hearings contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian officials in 2016. At first, he denied flatly that he personally had any communications with the Russians. When it emerged that he had in fact spoken twice with the Russian Ambassador, he sought to pass these off as being trivial and not germane to anything important (Blake 2017). Later, when questioned by the Senate Judiciary Committee in October 2017, Sessions admitted that he had had three such meetings in 2016 but could not recall what was discussed but conceded that Trump's policy positions may have been discussed (Borger 2017).

Despite admissions by firstly General Flynn, then Sessions, and then Trump's aide and son-in-law Jared Kushner and Trump's son Donald Trump Jr that they had all had meetings with Russian officials during the campaign and some during the pre-inauguration transition period, President Trump and numerous White House officials continued to flatly deny that, apart from General Flynn's, these had occurred (Cohen and Cohen 2017). Bannon later confirmed one such meeting took place, describing it as potentially "treasonous" (Wolff 2018).

During March and April 2017, it is evident that Trump sought to deflect the growing political, public and media focus on the Russia allegations by putting pressure on James Comey, the Director of the FBI, to downplay the FBI investigations into the Trump campaign and instead mount a determined investigation into his allegations about Hillary Clinton. In addition, it was reported that Trump had demanded a pledge of personal loyalty from Comey. When Comey refused to accede to either, Trump tried to get Sessions to force him to agree or else fire him. When Sessions equivocated, Trump sacked Comey on May 9, 2017 and then made public statements that Comey had been an ineffective FBI Director, that the FBI had been in organizational turmoil, and that Comey was a "showboat" and a "grandstander". Comey later (June 8, 2017) told the Senate Intelligence Committee hearing that he was "fired because of the Russia investigation" and that Trump's allegations that the FBI had been poorly led by him were "lies, plain and simple" (Blakely 2017a). Comey's book (Comey 2018) described Trump as being a person who is "unethical" and "ego-driven", and his induction by Trump as being like a "Cosa Nostra induction ceremony",

while Trump retorted via *Twitter* on April 13, 2018 that Comey was a “liar” and a “weak and untruthful slimeball”.

In mid-May 2017, the Department of Justice appointed a special counsel, the former FBI Director Robert Mueller, to conduct an additional investigation into the alleged links between the 2016 presidential campaign and Russia. Mueller’s inquiry quickly included an examination of whether Trump personally had tried to obstruct justice, and the formation of a grand jury. Although Trump was clearly infuriated by these developments, there was little he could do to stop them. Nevertheless, in July 2017 he warned Mueller not to examine his business empire and family finances as part of the investigation.

On October 27, 2017, twelve indictments were issued (see Federal Grand Jury 2017) against Paul Manafort and his business partner Richard Gates, including conspiracy against the United States, conspiracy to launder money, failure to register as an agent of a foreign principal, and making false statements to the Department of Justice. While these charges related to aiding and abetting Russia in its interference in Ukraine, suspicions also arose that Russian funds may also have gone indirectly to assist the Trump election campaign, especially as Manafort had offered his services as campaign chairman for no fee. Gates also worked for the campaign. These suspicions grew when it emerged that another campaign aide with White House access, George Papadopoulos, had pleaded guilty to federal charges that he had had several contacts with Russian agents regarding support for Trump, including information to discredit Hillary Clinton. Gates later pled guilty (Blakely 2018).

In December 2017, Flynn appeared in a federal court and admitted that he had lied to the FBI about his contacts with Russian officials. This followed a plea deal with the Mueller investigation. Of particular note was his admission that he told the Russian ambassador that, once elected, Trump would ease sanctions on Russia (Blakely 2017b). At that stage, Flynn had no legal authority to engage in foreign diplomacy let alone offer political favours. More damaging was his later assertion that, far from acting on his own initiative, he had been instructed to have these contacts by a very senior person in president-elect Trump’s White House.

The Mueller investigation and others continued into 2018 (e.g. USDoJ 2018a and b; Deng and Philp 2018) and, until completed, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about their findings. However,

the 'Russia scandal' undoubtedly damaged Trump's credibility and standing and, moreover, proved to be a seemingly endless distraction and drain of time and energy on his policy agenda. Achieving key policy objectives of his election promises, such as his American Health Care replacement for Obamacare, remained stubbornly elusive as he lacked sufficient support from within the Republican Party to push his bills through. Even his tax cuts bill took nearly the whole of 2017 and multiple amendments before just scraping enough votes to get passed.

## Conclusion

Trump's personal style defined him as President as well as the character of his administration. Although that style is his personal expression of the Alt-Right ideology, it is perhaps as much a display of an apparently dysfunctional and insecure personality who has hijacked a populist cause and agenda for his own ends. Neiwert (2017) prolifically revealed Trump's personal affinity for far-right views, but more as a willing 'fellow traveller' than a rabidly committed extremist. However, Trump is absolutely committed to his self-advancement and self-image, for which the Alt-Right agenda provides a convenient vehicle. For their part, the Alt-Right are only too delighted to have Trump as President, since he is seen to espouse Alt-Right ideology even though he may not really understand it or fully believe in all its requirements. That does not matter to them, since they can rely on their more solid supporters among the White House Cabinet and presidential aides and advisers to maintain an Alt-Right influence on policy, the departure of Bannon and Gorka notwithstanding.

President Trump's election represented an Alt-Right coup by stealth, orchestrated largely by Bannon. The latter's legacy was a White House Cabinet and administration dominated by hard-right thinking but seemingly more respectable than during the short-lived Bannon/Gorka era. So long as Cabinet heavyweights such as Tillerson, Kelly and Mattis were able to maintain discipline and keep in check Trump's erratic and bull-in-a-china-shop approach to policy, diplomacy and action, damage limitation might be the hallmark of their success. The departure of the relatively moderate Tillerson in March 2018 and his replacement by the hawkish Pompeo as Secretary of State, as well as the appointment of John Bolton as National Security



Adviser, was likely to see a more aggressive foreign policy, especially towards Iran.

At the time of writing, the legitimacy of the Trump election victory and his White House administration vis-à-vis the Russian subversion allegations remained an as yet unanswered question, largely dependent on the eventual findings of the various ongoing investigations.

As far as Trump's grand electoral promise to "drain the swamp" and eschew a traditional cosy relationship between the political establishment and big business, the evidence of his first 18 months in office suggests that little had changed. The so-called liberal elites and lobbyists he so publicly despised had merely been replaced by illiberal elites of ultra-conservatism and the Alt-Right and different lobbyists, all of whom he embraced unashamedly. These new elites included sectoral business interests that suited his beliefs and White House policies. See also Burleigh (2018a and b) on similar observations about the leaderships of insurgent Alt-Right movements and parties in Europe merely seeking to establish themselves as new elites.

Although most of the major policy changes and objectives promised in his election campaign remained stalled at the end of his first 18 months (tax reforms being an exception), Trump's grassroots support among his core electorate remained high. The longer these objectives remained unfulfilled, the more likely that support would ebb away, especially if voters' incomes and employment fell and personal debts rose.

The risks in general terms arising from the Trump administration may be summarised as follows, with their assessment in chapter 12:

### **Risks Accruing to Trump and his Administration**

#### *Risk 1. Congressional resistance*

Chronic inability by Trump to secure enough votes among Republicans in Congress to get his key bills passed smoothly and timely, thereby undermining his credibility among core supporters and encouraging their disillusionment.

*Risk 2. Key rhetorical objectives unfulfilled*

Key rhetorical objectives unfulfilled e.g. building of border wall between US and Mexico to stop crossing by illegal immigrants; clean-up of undue political influence in Washington by vested interests.

*Risk 3. Steve Bannon seeks to undermine Republican senatorial candidates*

Steve Bannon mobilises Alt-Right candidates to challenge mainstream Republican candidates in Senate elections, thereby splitting the conservative vote and enhancing the possibility of Democrat wins.

*Risk 4. Russia scandal threatens Trump presidency*

Continuing Russia scandal undermining public trust and confidence in President Trump and his administration, especially if the investigations find against any named individuals. If evidence found against Trump personally, he could be charged with offences and be liable to impeachment.

*Risk 5. Apparent weaknesses in White House security background checks*

Apparent weaknesses in 'due diligence' security background checks on all those who are required to, or who seek to, have access to the White House are likely to enable individuals to gain access who have false bona fides (e.g. bogus qualifications, inflated CVs) that imply dishonesty and questionable motives.

*Risk 6. Squabbling, dysfunctional White House*

Trump's widely exposed undisciplined personality and a squabbling, dysfunctional White House combine to threaten his leadership and question his mental capacity to remain President.

*Risk 7. Short-term gains turn to long-term detriment*

(a) Short-to-medium term improvements to economy that benefit businesses and taxpayers, resulting from tax reforms, deregulation, and trade protectionism, turn to (b) medium-to-long term non-sustainability and detriment e.g. increased government debt, increased unemployment, trade wars.

## Risks for America and Beyond

### *Risk 1. Trump policies widening divisions in society*

Trump's attitudes, policies, Executive Orders and legislation that unduly favour illiberal elites, big business and sectoral interests may accentuate existing divisions, disparities and tensions in US society associated with class, race, education, employment, income, and health care.

### *Risk 2. Damage to public trust and confidence in US democracy*

Scandals involving alleged impropriety and possibly criminal conduct by Trump, White House Cabinet members and others may undermine public trust and confidence in US democracy and governance.

### *Risk 3. Trump's attacks on press freedom*

Trump's sustained attack on the media, so as to reject and avoid scrutiny, may undermine press freedom and inhibit its fundamental role in ensuring public accountability in a democracy.

### *Risk 4. Presidency damaged by Trump's invective*

Trump's *Twitter* attacks and egregious commentaries are likely to make him both a figure of fun and attract widespread disapproval, to the extent that respect for the US government and for the institution of the presidency itself is damaged, while foreign enemies gain comfort and intelligence insights from such behaviour.

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# Chapter 6: The Alt-Right and US Foreign Policy

*By Alan Waring*

## **Abstract**

US foreign policy under Trump is examined in relation to America's longstanding superpower status and US exceptionalism. Trump's 'America First' and 'Making America Great Again' mantras and related policy actions imply a strong unilateralism but more interventionist than isolationist. The difficulties in accurately defining Trump's foreign policy and its character are discussed, and the notion that US exceptionalism can defy the laws of history is examined in detail. The effects of Alt-Right ideology and Trump's zero-sum world-view on foreign policy are addressed, as are the effects of the deconstruction and marginalisation of the State Department. Relations with Russia, China, North Korea, and the Middle East are individually summarised. Although radical in language and presentation, Trump's foreign policy is surprisingly conventional. Risks are systematically identified.

**Key words:** Trump, foreign policy, nationalism, exceptionalism, unilateralism

## **America's Superpower Status**

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States' relationship with the rest of the world has been of major importance to all affected, the more so as the US became much wealthier and much more powerful economically, militarily, and politically as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed. After WWII, the United States soon became a superpower, along with its rival the Soviet Union, and currently remains so. After the gradual collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc of Warsaw Pact countries of Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, and the final dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States became in effect the sole superpower, with all the attendant responsibilities, obligations, risks, benefits, opportunities, temptations, and dilemmas that such a unique role brought. However, meanwhile the economy and the military

power of the People’s Republic of China were growing rapidly, as was its political influence, and by the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century China’s ascendance to superpower status was well underway.

America’s status as sole superpower did not last long. Even as China was beginning to flex its muscles on the world stage, Russia was already reasserting itself through the nationalist determination of Vladimir Putin, as President from 2000 to 2008, while Prime Minister 2008–2012, and again as President from 2012, to re-establish Russia as a superpower. He largely achieved this—see chapter 11 in Vol 2. Thus, President Trump entered the White House at a time when US foreign policy was confronted by challenges not only from such multiple existential threats as international terrorism, illegal narcotics, regional instability (e.g. Middle East), nuclear proliferation, and climate change, but also from its superpower rivals.

This chapter examines US foreign policy of the Trump administration, and the implications of Alt-Right influence.

## The Scope of US Foreign Policy

Whereas US foreign policy obviously encompasses the US government’s relationship with other sovereign nations, individually and severally, in fact the scope is far wider and includes particular policy positions on a range of topics. Sixteen are cited by the US Department of State:

**Table 6.1: Subject Areas of US Foreign Policy 2017**

Anti-corruption	Food Security
Climate and Environment	Health Diplomacy
Counter-terrorism	ISIS
Cyber Issues	Non-proliferation
Democracy and Human Rights	Oceans and Arctic
Drugs and Crime	People Trafficking
Economic Affairs and Trade Policy	Refugees
Energy	Women’s Issues

Source: US Department of State [www.state.gov/policy/](http://www.state.gov/policy/)

## Trump’s ‘America First’ Policy and US Exceptionalism

President Trump made clear even before his inauguration that American foreign policy would change significantly when he came to power, and that emphases and approaches to the subject areas listed in Table

6.1 would change in line with his ‘America First’ and ‘Making America Great Again’ goals. His first year in office did show significant changes in policy towards climate and environment (see chapter 9), non-proliferation (notably North Korea and Iran—see later and chapter 7), economic affairs and trade policy (e.g. TPP withdrawal (USTR 2017a), NAFTA dispute (USTR 2017b), his APEC speech in November 2017), immigration and people trafficking (e.g. his Mexican wall), counter-terrorism (e.g. visa ban on citizens of seven countries allegedly major sources of terrorists), and his announcement in June 2018 of 25% global tariffs on steel and other products.

Although these rapid changes may signal merely that Trump was someone who kept his word, they revealed an underlying belief that America is exceptionally superior in all its endeavours, as expressed in his shorthand as ‘America First’ and ‘Make America Great Again’. According to Restad (2016), Trump’s rhetoric and actions are only a much stronger version of the US exceptionalism traditionally espoused by US Presidents, for example George W. Bush’s claim in 1992 that America had “won the Cold War”, Ronald Reagan’s “Let’s make America Great Again” speech in 1980, and even Barack Obama’s “What makes us exceptional—what makes us American” second inaugural speech in January 2013. Other US politicians and presidential contenders have also followed the exceptionalism theme, e.g. Romney (2010).

Restad (2014; 2016) argued that American exceptionalism is a comparative concept that encompasses three crucial ideas:

- The United States is both different to and better than the rest of the world in total, not just Europe and the ‘Old World’.
- The United States enjoys a unique role in world history as the prime leader of nations.
- The United States is the only nation in history that has thwarted, and will continue to thwart, the laws of history in its rise to power, a power that will never decline.

The exceptionalism thesis underscores a belief not only in the US-dominated ‘New World Order’ heralded in the 1990s, in which the US had emerged for a time as the sole superpower, but also that its superior status is warranted and inevitable. There is no place in exceptionalism for the US to accept a *primus inter pares* role in relation to Russia

and China, no matter what facts or diplomacy may suggest to the contrary. Trump has appeared to push his version of exceptionalism, both rhetorically and in action, in his foreign policy (Mead 2017; Payne 2017; White House 2017c).

One of the uncertainties of the Trump administration's foreign policy has been whether his policy was isolationist or interventionist. Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, US foreign policy veered back and forth on this issue but since WWII had been largely interventionist, seeking to determine and control regimes, events, conflicts, national and regional allegiances, and outcomes—all to suit US strategic interests. That interventionism was missionary, seeking to mould the world outside America into a pro-American emulation of American policies, democratic values, and culture. Both Mead (2017) and Payne (2017) pointed to the Jacksonian echo in Trump's foreign policy, which was no longer truly interested in prominently engaging in nation building, democratisation, and human rights in other countries, despite what his National Security Strategy document stated (White House 2017c).

There has been much commentary on Trump's apparent inconsistency and incoherence in his foreign policy. For example, on the one hand Trump indicated strongly that the US would no longer act as the world's 'policeman' and made equivocal statements about long-term US support for NATO, while on the other hand ordering two major missile strikes on Syria (April 2017 and April 2018), increasing US military manpower in Afghanistan, and making thinly veiled threats of possible military strikes against Iran and North Korea. Kinney (2017), suggested that such wavering incongruity resulted from a mixture of (a) Trump's long-term personal beliefs e.g. that other countries take unfair advantage of America, and his thoughts on US response to threats posed by rogue nations (e.g. in Trump 2000), (b) his more recent beliefs formed ad hoc during the 2016 election campaign e.g. that Israel deserves strong support, and (c) his emotionally conceived beliefs, especially in reaction to such events as Syrian bombing of civilians using chemical weapons (provoking two punitive US missile attacks) and overseas terrorist atrocities (provoking a US visa ban on citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries).

While Trump's attitude was seen by some as isolationist, Restad (2014) rejected the idea that Trump's 'America First' vision was either a clear statement of isolationism or that his apparently contradictory

isolationist and interventionist stances were a demonstration of incoherence. Both Simms and Laderman (2017) and Kahl and Brands (2017) also rejected the suggestion that Trump's foreign policy was impulsive, inconsistent and improvised. Rather, Restad suggested that Trump had been developing unconsciously a hybrid strategy of 'unilateral interventionism' i.e. taking a predominantly unilateral stance and intervening or not overseas, case by case, as determined by what was perceived to be in US strategic interests. In a sense, unilateral interventionism is a continuation of US foreign policy since WWII (see, for example, Owens 2017) but with Trump placing far greater emphasis on unilateralism and on the absolute primacy of US benefits (at least in more immediate, populist terms). Leverett (2016) argued that Trump was more interventionist than Obama, for example. Whereas more liberal predecessors may have held some notions of multilateralism and mutual benefits for other countries from US foreign policy (for example, Owens 2009 cited the Bush Doctrine as 'benevolent primacy'), such considerations were edited out of the Alt-Right dominated lexicon of the Trump administration (see e.g. Krauthammer 2017; Mead 2017; Payne 2017).

FPRI (2016) and Haines (2016) referred to Haines's earlier description of Trump's view of America in a complex world as being one of 'detached primacy', which clearly has close association with Restad's 'unilateral interventionism', and Haines affirmed that unilateralism is not isolationism. He also argued that pre-emption and unilateralism were key tenets of Trump's national defence and foreign policy doctrine. However, Trump is first and foremost a practical wheeler-dealer who was likely to cut deals (Kahl and Brands 2017 and Dian 2017 referred to 'amoral transactionalism') rather than engage in exhaustive formulation of treaties and alliances, which he disliked intensely. His early withdrawal from both TPP and the Paris Climate Accord, and his withdrawal from the JCPOA nuclear agreement with Iran, is evidence of detached primacy. His repeated complaints about NATO member countries failing to pay large enough contributions, and his implication that US long-term membership is not guaranteed if they fail to pay their dues, is another example.

Invented terms such as 'detached primacy', 'unilateral interventionism', and also 'democratic nationalism' (Rosefielde and Mills 2016) and 'amoral transactionalism' (Kahl and Brands 2017; Dian 2017), indicate a frustrating search by political analysts, observers

and commentators for an adequate shorthand description of what was evident about Trump's policy. With no up-to-date and clearly articulated manifesto or statement of doctrine beyond what may be gleaned from his two books (Trump 2000; 2015), Trump's strategy throughout 2017 was just a superficial description of intended actions without any obvious coherent rationale. As Tierney (2017) noted on Trump's foreign policy, "In terms of a real order in the world, we have next to nothing". For example, his 'new strategy' towards Iran of October 2017 (White House 2017a) was a 5-page diatribe saying essentially 'We hate Iran', followed by a long list of bullet pointed actions (see chapter 7). However, his National Security Strategy of December 2017 (White House 2017c) did bring together in a single 56-page document a coherent, clear, and articulate statement that covered the full spectrum of both foreign and domestic policy issues. With a "peace through strength" theme, it laid out Trump's vision for putting the safety, interests, and wellbeing of Americans first, in line with the founding principles and values of the nation. In many ways, it could be described overall as a 'Fortress America' concept. However, while very descriptive of his policy intentions and actions, sometimes explicitly, sometimes by allusion, no completely new foreign policy doctrine was evident that could set it apart from preceding post-WWII administrations. Although clearly in presentation and rhetorical terms the new Trump strategy may have appeared as a radical doctrine, in reality it was much more of a toughened up continuation of longstanding US approaches, adapted to changing circumstances, and with a more 'unilateral interventionist' tone (see Restad 2014). This was as Kahl and Brands (2017), Payne (2017), and other observers had predicted would happen.

Indeed, Lissner and Zenko (2017) asserted that "it seems there never will be a Trump doctrine. In resisting the careful patience required to develop and execute a purposive course of action over time, the administration's method of policymaking is explicitly anti-strategic". They charged that this deficiency resulted from three operational and philosophical principles that oriented the President's decision-making:

- A fixation on winning, especially perceived triumphal wins however pyrrhic, ambivalent or short-term in reality (e.g. the spectacular launch of 59 cruise missiles against Syria in

April 2017 that had little military or deterrent effect on Syria).

- A zero-sum world-view, in which every win for another country, whether ally or adversary, is a loss for the US and so US policy must be to deny them any such wins unless narrow self-interests coincide for both parties (e.g. TPP withdrawal even though the TPP text heavily favoured the US; threatened NAFTA withdrawal; PCA withdrawal; punitive 219% tariff favouring the American company Boeing against Canadian company Bombardier's British factory for supply of aircraft to US Delta Airlines—later blocked by the ITC (Dean 2018)).
- An intuitive adoration of authoritarian foreign leaders, regardless of allegations of their despotic or inhumane actions, which Mead (2017) and Payne (2017) cite as Jacksonian (e.g. Russia's Putin, Egyptian President al-Sisi, Philippines President Duterte).

Lissner and Zenko (2017) termed Trump's decision-making based on these principles as 'tactical transactionalism'. One might equally term it as 'Fortress America' or 'defensive protectionism' but these too fail to adequately encompass the phenomenon and such terms join the list of other 'isms' that have been applied to Trump's enigmatic Alt-Right world-view e.g. patriotism, chauvinism, jingoism, and ethnocentrism, as well as 'unilateral interventionism', 'democratic nationalism' and 'amoral transactionalism' cited above. None of them completely satisfies what is observable.

In rejecting the suggestion that Trump lacked a grand strategy on foreign policy, Kahl and Brands (2017) asserted that his *de facto* strategy comprised four pillars:

- Economic nationalism, as forcefully promoted by his former chief strategist Steve Bannon (e.g. TPP withdrawal, NAFTA withdrawal, tax penalties against US companies refusing to repatriate production to America).
- Extreme homeland security (e.g. the Mexican wall, mass deportations of illegal immigrants, and extreme vetting of visa applicants from Muslim countries).
- Amoral transactionalism with other countries, regardless of their track record on human rights, anti-corruption, and



- democracy (e.g. cutting deals with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Philippines etc to advance US grand strategy).
- Muscular but aloof militarism, to be used as necessary but sparingly.

They further argued that Trump had clearly jettisoned the long-held belief that American exceptionalism and US global influence are rooted in the concept of America and the values it represents, not just its material power (see also Mead 2017). Trump rejected absolutely such a liberal, multilateral, 'soft power' notion, although this is masked by the smooth language of the relevant section in his National Security Strategy (White House 2017c).

Whatever descriptive labels are used, how likely was Trump's foreign policy to succeed in delivering long-term benefits, advantage and protection to the United States? Kahl and Brands (2017) suggested that the Trump cabinet's singular failure to adopt a disciplined, well-articulated 'due process' in strategy formulation was itself a great weakness, as it encouraged a view that amateurism in policy formulation was not only acceptable but actually preferable to well-informed professionalism. It is this allegedly arrogant rejection of traditional well-honed White House practice of past presidencies that created an impression that Trump's foreign policy was ad hoc and incoherent (see e.g. Mead 2017).

That weakness apart, Kahl and Brands observed that Trump's apparent strategy emerging from this irregular process was fraught with problems, contradictions and dilemmas on many fronts, not the least of which was how he would be able to reconcile the inherent contradictions of cutting deals with Russia and Syria (Lynch and Gramer 2017) on tackling ISIS when both of these countries had such close relationships with Trump's arch-enemy Iran. Similar complexities related to his Israel-Palestine policy, his Iraq policy, NATO protection of Eastern Europe against Russian expansionism, relations with China on many issues, relations with Mexico and other Central and South American states, and so on. Trump's instinct when confronted with complexities was either to try to simplify them to something that at least he could understand (even if such simplification was unwarranted in terms of real understanding), or to ignore them, or to deny that they existed. Kahl and Brands' prognosis was not optimistic.

However, perhaps the key weakness for the long-term lay in the empirical observation by Restad (2014; 2016) that US exceptionalism dictates that the US will continue to believe that uniquely it can defy the laws of history and that its supreme power will never decline relative to other nations. The 'laws of history' refer to what is essentially a population ecology model of nation states (Lowery and Gray 2015) that has been extended from the model's earlier application to organizations (Hannan and Freeman 1977; Hannan et al 2007). In this model, which is analogous to biological functionalism, nations grow, mature, and decline in competition for access to and control of markets, resources and assets of all kinds, according to their inherent or acquired attributes, strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and policies.

Implicit in the population ecology model is the life-cycle concept, which incorporates an inevitability of eventual decline. Empirical observations of history suggest that just as no biological entity can live for ever, so too must every nation anticipate that eventually it will decline, if not cease to exist. The life-cycle model applied to products and business organizations is well known, as attributed to B.D. Henderson at Boston Consulting Group in the late 1960s, with its sequential phases of introduction, growth, maturity and decline (e.g. see Gardner 1986). These cycles are broadly similar to the four 'turnings' of growth, maturation, decay, and destruction posited by Strauss and Howe (1997) in their exploration of America's history and its likely future as the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds.

The history of the world is replete with examples of the empirical truism that 'all empires eventually die': Persian, Greek, Roman, Spanish, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Japanese, British, and so on. Nation states too that have expansionist, if not imperial, aspirations rise and fall e.g. the Third Reich, the Soviet Union. The self-styled Islamic State is already in sharp decline following devastating military failures in 2016 and 2017. However, with the exception of the losers of major wars, the decay and destruction phases are rarely so rapid and more usually pan out over decades or even centuries e.g. the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Persian dynasty and empire. Moreover, nations rarely simply disappear and reincarnation in different forms is more normal—which presupposes (a) an acceptance by them that notions of national superiority are no longer appropriate (if they ever were) or always beneficial, and (b) a preparedness to adapt to the country's new less powerful status in the international

order. This acceptance-and-adaptation lesson has been learned with varying degrees of success by Britain, Turkey and most of the European nations that at one time or another have had empires or colonial territories. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, senior British civil servants had concluded that the British Empire was unsustainable and unmanageable and would have to be deconstructed (see Brown and Louis 1999; Porter and Louis 2001). First to go as Dominions were Canada (1867), Australia and New Zealand (1907), Union of South Africa (1910), followed by the Irish Free State (1922). The independence programme, interrupted by two World Wars, restarted in earnest after WWII and was largely complete by 1963, with residual independencies e.g. Rhodesia/Zimbabwe (1980) or territory reversions occurring (e.g. Hong Kong) up to 1997. The dissolution of the British Empire was designed to be as graceful and as bloodless as possible, but did not always achieve that e.g. the partition of India, and the independence of Kenya, Cyprus and the Irish Free State.

The United States, of course, has no emperor and it is not an imperial nation. It has only a small number of minor overseas territories. However, what it lacks in direct physical control of overseas territories and natural resources, it more than compensates for through manipulation, persuasion and control of other regimes, events, conflicts, national and regional allegiances, and outcomes. For example, it proffers or withholds military equipment and assistance; it proffers economic aid but dependent on a commitment to buy American goods rather than from other countries; it supports pro-US regimes and blocks others; it backs US corporations in securing long-term domination of natural resource extraction in foreign countries and keeping out foreign competitors. In addition, the US dominates access to information, information technology, information analysis, and electronic transfer of funds worldwide. With its combination of overwhelming military power, cyber power, and electronic funds transfer control, overlain by a 'soft power' blanket of American values, culture, and lifestyle attractions, all of which are difficult for other countries and their citizens to avoid, it could be argued that the US has a *de facto* virtual empire. Indeed, Payne (2017) asserted that Trump had indicated neo-colonial views on some aspects of foreign policy e.g. a desire to control the oil of Iraq and Libya.

Yet, despite the above, doubts about the unparalleled exceptional power of the US have clearly arisen inside the United States and

especially among some on the conservative right. It is not just a concern that America might be in danger of losing its exceptional status—it is a fear that it has already lost some of it and an anxiety about the implications. For example, President Reagan’s 1980 exhortation “Let’s Make America Great Again” clearly implied that he thought the US was no longer great. The pivotal word ‘again’ cannot imply anything else. Further, Trump’s resurrection of the “Making America Great Again” (note the ‘again’ qualifier) suggested that he too deep down felt that the US had lost some of its exceptional status.

It would be perfectly natural for any politician to want to achieve the very best for his or her country and it would be unreasonable for observers and commentators to criticise Trump for that alone, or for believing that something should be done to try to preserve the US’s exceptional status. However, it is perverse to pretend that somehow in reality such supremacy can actually be maintained for ever, especially in the face of clear evidence that China in particular will fairly soon (probably later in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) eclipse the US on all the main parameters—economic, military, and political. China only need bide its time and let its inexorable growth eclipse the US naturally. Whereas China accepts and embraces the US as a necessary economic partner in its master long-term strategy, the US only grudgingly and warily accepts this role openly. But, in reality the Alt-Right is much more inclined to believe that US supremacy really can be assured for ever, as evidenced by Trump’s continual adverse public comments against Asian countries’ alleged bad trade practices (a thinly veiled reference to China), and vociferous support for South East Asian countries with territorial disputes with China.

According to Rubin (2017) and Peters (2017), Trump’s rhetoric on ‘making America great again’ and ‘America first’ was heavily dosed by his then strategy adviser Steve Bannon’s enthusiastic interpretation of Strauss and Howe’s 1997 book cited above. However, instead of inferring from the book that the US should adopt an adaptation strategy for America’s long-term survival, based on an albeit reluctant recognition that no nation can remain supreme for ever, Bannon’s almost panic-stricken apocalyptic interpretation seems to have pushed Trump into believing that the US was already well into the decay phase and on the verge of destruction. Campbell (2014) argued that all US foreign policy is based on fear and Bannon’s expressed views support this argument. The only way out and to pre-empt a terminal

crisis, Bannon urged, was to adopt as a matter of urgency not only the radical domestic policies of the Alt-Right but also radical Alt-Right foreign policy, in a kind of aggressive 'Fortress America' mode. Trump appeared to accept Bannon's apocalyptic problem-solution vision and carried it forward regardless of Bannon's departure from the White House in August 2017 (see chapter 5).

## The State Department under Trump's White House

One item on Bannon's pre-election list of alleged sins in US governance was the long-term perpetuation of an over-bloated civil service doing the bidding of a suffocating and self-serving 'Establishment' that failed to address the threats to American greatness. Top of Trump's list requiring radical change was the department responsible for administering US foreign policy, the State Department. He and Bannon, and the Alt-Right generally, believed that over many decades and successive presidencies the State Department had been the prime example of how US policy had become compromised by the values and beliefs of liberal elites who favoured multilateralism and a world order dictated by the interests of other countries. Trump decided on a multi-pronged project to control and rationalise the State Department:

- Appoint Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State, a career business leader having held no political office and with no State Department experience, but whose loyalty Trump could rely on and who would bring a fresh business-like corporate management approach to determining the Department's scope, policy work, operations and activities, rather than a 'business as usual' traditional approach.
- Replace as far as possible all State Department officials who had supported the Democratic Party (and especially President Obama and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton), or those whose views were suspected of favouring traditional foreign policy approaches, with individuals favouring Trump's vision.
- Reduce the number of departments and functions in the State Department and drastically cut staff numbers overall.
- Demand from State Department officials a declaration of loyalty to Trump.

- Replace as far as possible US Ambassadors and diplomatic staff known or suspected of having liberal leanings or supportive of President Obama's policies.

Whereas such unprecedented moves would probably deliver eventually a State Department that suited Trump's wishes, the likely success it would bring in foreign policy and diplomatic terms is highly debatable (see, for example, Fuchs 2017; Ioffe 2017; Labotte and Gaouette 2017; Larison 2017). For, in essence, Trump and his Cabinet who are all amateurs in the area of foreign policy appeared to believe, and expected the electorate and the world at large to believe, that they knew far better about the complexities of international relations and foreign policy than did those having formal qualifications and deep experience in the subject. The 'fear of experts' that characterized the Trump administration (see chapter 2) had much to do with fact-based expert opinion and advice that may not have conformed to the ideological, prejudicial, or emotional positions of Trump and his entourage. Rather than consider and weigh in the balance expert opinion, they preferred simply to remove it from their orbit so that their policy-making could not be upset by unwelcome but nonetheless pertinent and, on occasion, crucial analysis. Alternatively, they would listen only to experts or pseudo-experts whose narratives fitted their own i.e. confirmation biasing (Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008; Kahan et al 2017; Shermer 2018).

The deliberate 'we know better' amateur approach to foreign policy adopted by Trump, Tillerson (and his successor Pompeo) and the Cabinet heightened the risk of dangerous miscalculations and missteps in relation to such highly sensitive areas as North Korea, Iran, the Middle East generally, Russia, and China.

Another negative impact on the US government's position was the damaging effect that Trump's politicisation and biasing of the State Department's traditionally more neutral role as 'independent' advisers to the government had on US allies. This may also have affected the Department's relationship with matching departments of friendly nations, which traditionally had enjoyed a good and candid relationship with their State Department counterparts, if they felt that new Trump era incumbents were political 'plants' rather than foreign policy experts. Both historical trust and individual experiential trust

built over time with overseas counterparts were potentially damaged and this could not be good for the US.

Moreover, Trump's clear out of staff in the diplomatic section that started soon after his inauguration was so draconian that at the end of 2017 several hundred ambassadorial and senior diplomatic posts remained empty. Senator Ben Cardin, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wrote to Tillerson in August 2017 to register his deep concerns about the consequences (Cardin 2017). Senators Bob Corker and John McCain added their own concerns (Baer 2017; Blakely 2017). Large numbers of foreign governments therefore were no longer able to gauge quickly what the US government's position was on any particular matter or to gauge nuances that could only come from personal ambassadorial contact. This left them to either 'fly blind' and hope for the best or perhaps address their concerns directly to Rex Tillerson or the State Department in Washington. Such a development may indeed be what Tillerson wanted. However, apart from the potential log-jamming this centralisation of diplomacy may cause in the State Department headquarters, another downside arose on the intelligence front. US embassies, ambassadors and their diplomatic staff provide a vital source of 'bread-and-butter' intelligence beyond what practically could be obtained by covert officers of the US intelligence agencies. With such a denuded diplomatic presence around the world, US intelligence data was bound to be depleted and this could not be good for the US.

A skeleton diplomatic service (which eventually may be refilled) also adversely affected the capacity to engage locally in 'soft diplomacy' that had long sought to foster a favourable image of the United States that other nations and peoples would desire to emulate. However, as noted above, in the world-view shared by Trump and his cabinet, soft diplomacy and the promulgation of American values and culture abroad, no longer had a role in US exceptionalism and 'making America great again'. Nevertheless, Trump's National Security Strategy (White House 2017c) sought to portray a State Department and diplomatic service that was completely devoid of any of the problems and issues described in this section. However, it is clear that Trump became increasingly dissatisfied with Tillerson's moderating influence and he was abruptly sacked in March 2018. His replacement by Cabinet colleague Mike Pompeo, a much more hard-line supporter of Trump's foreign policy ideas, suggested higher risk strategies ahead.

## Major US Foreign Policy Issues

To do justice to US foreign policy on a country-by-country basis or covering every major issue, would require a dedicated book and realistically this cannot be delivered in a single chapter in this book. Therefore, in order to cope with such severe length restrictions, the author decided to adopt in this chapter a highly selective illustrative approach, in addition to those major foreign policy issues that are covered to varying degrees in a number of other chapters, namely:

- IS and terrorism (chapter 7)
- Iran (chapter 7)
- Immigration (chapter 8)
- Environment and global warming (chapter 9)
- Russia (chapter 5 in this volume, and chapter 11 in Vol 2)
- Israel, Syria, other Arab states and Middle East (chapter 7)

US State Department ‘Diplomacy in Action’ reports on each country reveal very little of value that might inform an incisive analysis. The CIA World Factbook country sections are equally unrevealing. Independent sources, such as Dollar et al (2017) and Fischer-Baum and Vitkovskaya (2017), provided some topic-by-topic analyses and assessments of Trump’s handling of foreign policy issues during the first year of his presidency. In essence, they suggested that Trump’s aggressive rhetoric on a number of issues going back to 2016 had either altered significantly, or blown hot and cold, or been only partly fulfilled in policy action, or not been fulfilled at all. The following four sections examine examples.

### China

On China, Trump’s rhetoric blew hot and cold (Blake 2017b), ranging from strong complaints and an implied threat of a trade war, to a continuation of the high-level economic dialogue between Chinese leaders and Presidents Bush and Obama, now termed the Comprehensive Economic Dialogue or CED (Dollar et al 2017), to a public display of mutual admiration between Trump and China’s President Xi Jinping in November 2017 on Trump’s official visit to the PRC. In Beijing, Trump described Xi enthusiastically as a “very special man” and stated that the CED had produced deals that were a “very, very good start” (Tang 2017). By that time, Trump was blaming all the bi-lateral trade



problems between the US and China on his predecessors. Nevertheless, Trump and Xi were poles apart on the fundamental matter of whether the US-China trade relationship should be bi-lateral (Trump's position) or be part of a multilateral set-up (Xi's position). Within only a couple of days, Trump had reverted at the APEC meeting in Vietnam to lambasting unnamed Asian countries, accusing them of unfair trade practices, "audacious theft of intellectual property", extorting technology rights in return for market access, unfair state subsidies, cyber attacks, and industrial espionage (Parry 2017). The latter two accusations were clearly a thinly veiled attack on China, which alone had been accused of such wrong-doing on a large-scale. Indeed, by December 2017, Trump's new National Security Strategy had thrust China to the forefront of its perceived challenges (Manson and Donnan 2018; White House 2017c) and his announcement in March 2018 and introduction in late June 2018 of large tariffs on foreign imports such as steel signalled a potentially damaging trade war, especially with the EU and China. The latter retaliated with equally large tariffs on a range of products hitting key US industries and employers e.g. pork and other foodstuffs.

Despite the apparently good personal relationship between Trump and Xi, it was unlikely that trade relations would improve sufficiently in Trump's terms, and Trump, both by nature and to impress a restless US electorate, needed quick wins. By contrast, China is playing a long game and is prepared to ultimately triumph through patience and undramatic persistence rather than aggressive, short-term zero-sum tactics. The other two major US concerns about China, namely its role in controlling North Korea and its expansionist territorial claims in the South China Sea (Fischer-Baum and Vitkovskaya 2017), were also unlikely to receive any significant changes in China's policy and actions that would meet those concerns. In combination, the calm long-term intransigence of China's foreign policy on these three key issues (trade, North Korea, South China Sea), which would long outlive Trump's current presidency and any potential second term, served to demonstrate the impotence of the US in this new context and the beginning of a gradual decline of its superpower status. From a rational perspective, it signalled that permanent US superpower exceptionalism, that cornerstone of Alt-Right beliefs, could not be guaranteed and was more a matter of faith and wishful thinking than reality. However, to the Alt-Right, such a possibility is anathema.

## Russia

Since first coming to power as President of the Russian Federation in 2000, Vladimir Putin had an overriding political and emotional mission, that is to restore Russia's former status as a superpower, in what might be called his own Russian version of Trump's 'Make America Great Again'. Putin's objective remained unaltered throughout his two consecutive terms as President, then as Prime Minister, and then as President again. For Putin, it was not just a matter of personal affront and indignation that Russia had been utterly humiliated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and Soviet bloc, but there was also the imperative of redressing the humiliation of the Russian people. He was determined to demonstrate to the Russian people that they were once again a superpower with which other nations, particularly America, would have to reckon. His success in this latter aim was reflected in the retention of overwhelming popular support for him personally and his United Russia party, which won over 55% of the vote in the 2016 parliamentary elections and four times the next largest party (see Vol 2 chapter 11) and again Putin won the 2018 presidential election overwhelmingly.

Putin's fear of a rapidly growing western influence on Russia's immediate neighbours that were all formerly Soviet Union or Warsaw Pact countries provided a ready excuse for a 'defensive' military strategy that would also restore the national pride of the Russian people. Ukraine, which had overthrown its pro-Russian president Yanukovich in February 2014 and was actively seeking membership of the EU and of NATO, became Russia's proxy battle ground with the west and an object lesson for other countries in the former Soviet sphere. By April 2014, using military force, Russia had annexed the Crimea from Ukraine, and had fomented a pro-Russian insurrection in East Ukraine. The international community including the UN have been unable to achieve any resolution of the conflict. Grumbling, inconclusive fighting has continued for years along semi-permanent battle lines between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian rebels. The stalemate suited Putin, as it prevented Ukraine from moving forward unfettered with its EU and NATO plans and also served as a clear warning to other neighbouring states in Eastern Europe not to switch allegiances from being pro-Russian to being actively pro-western. The Russian population overwhelmingly supported Putin's actions in

these matters and continued to enthusiastically accept Russian government and Russian media outputs that sought to justify these actions as saving Russia from western aggression.

In addition to his military strategy, Putin was also accused of instigating a major and sustained programme of cyberwarfare attacks, disinformation, and subversion against the west, notably the United States, Britain, and EU member states. The US State Department stated:

“In addition to aggressive acts in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia has also sought to use information operations which appear to be designed to weaken core institutions in the west such as NATO and the EU, and to cast doubt on the integrity of our democratic systems. Russia’s method is not to advance ideas to compete with ours, but to undermine and question all narratives, creating confusion and diverting attention from Moscow’s own actions”. (USDoS 2016a)

As discussed in chapter 5, this programme is alleged to include in relation to the US:

- Interference in the 2016 US presidential election campaigning (NIC 2017; USDoJ 2018) to (a) undermine US public confidence in its government and democratic system, (b) disrupt social stability, and (c) harm the Clinton campaign and aid the Trump campaign.
- Applying cyberwarfare methods (NIC 2017; USDoJ 2018; Watts 2017) including (a) hosting websites that ran fake news stories and analyses likely to influence voting intentions in favour of Trump, (b) placing Russian sourced covert advertisements on American political issues on *Facebook* and other social media (Correll 2017; Deng and Philp 2018; Shaban et al 2017; USDoJ 2018a and b), and (c) inserting false blog comments on legitimate news websites in the US (Parfitt 2017).
- Improper contacts by Russian officials or agents with Trump’s election team, White House team, state officials, advisers and aides (see, for example, Blake 2017a; Borger 2017; Cohen and Cohen 2017), (a) offering to provide supposed evidence of improper conduct by Hillary Clinton that could jeopardise her election if made public, and (b) seeking to influence US policy to Russia’s benefit. These allega-

tions are among those under scrutiny by special investigator Robert Mueller (see indictment examples in Federal Grand Jury 2017)—see chapter 5 for further details.

- Exerting undue influence, and possibly blackmail, on Trump personally, arising from his questionable business relationships, activities, and deals with Russians and his personal conduct while in Russia over several decades prior to 2016 (e.g. Euronews 2017).

US sanctions against Russia over its various Ukraine violations, including downgraded bilateral political and military relations and economic and general cooperation, preceded Trump's election as President. Part of the Mueller investigation cited above covered allegations that various Trump personnel, on various occasions during the election campaign and prior to his inauguration, discussed with Russian officials or agents Russia's desire to see the US sanctions lifted or softened.

Even before his election, Trump demonstrated an astonishingly mild attitude towards Putin and declined to engage in the much more vigorous criticism by America's own national security chiefs and US allies of Russia's policy and conduct towards a range of issues: Ukraine, the Baltic States, Syria, cyberwarfare and subversion against the west etc. Trump even made favourable statements about Putin and Russian policy e.g. on Ukraine and Crimea (Dollar et al 2017) and made clear his wish that Congress would not renew or extend US sanctions against Russia (Hoyle 2017). Congress refused to oblige. In addition, Tillerson and the inner cabinet did not support Trump's *laissez-faire* attitude and ensured a more 'critical engagement' policy, in which Russia remained a threat (USDoS 2016a), sanctions remained, and dialogue continued. By August 2017, Trump was making *Twitter* comments to the effect that US relations with Russia were "very dangerously low" (Blakely et al 2017). Nevertheless, on several occasions throughout 2017 (e.g. his Tweets on January 7 and November 11, 2017), Trump made statements rejecting outright any suggestion that Putin had organised a multi-pronged attack in 2016 to influence the outcome of the US Presidential Election in Trump's favour. Putin, unsurprisingly, refuted all such allegations and Trump accepted his word on this. However, Former Director of the CIA, John Brennan, and former Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, confirmed

earlier intelligence reports e.g. NIC (2017) and expressed their opinion on *CNN* that Trump had been duped (Watkins 2017). After all, Putin is a former KGB officer who has been thoroughly trained in deception and lying convincingly.

At a superficial level, it is understandable that Trump would seek to deny that his election had been based on Russian manipulation. However, that alone does not adequately explain his puzzling behaviour. Without the benefit of the Mueller investigation outcome, it is not possible to conclude whether the Russian interference found by the FBI, CIA and NSA (NIC 2017; USDoJ 2018) was sufficient to alter the voting outcome or whether some other undue influence affected Trump's policy towards Russia. Putting the more nefarious potential explanations to one side, what else might explain the enigma of Trump's apparent reverence for Putin?

As noted above, Lissner and Zenko (2017) identified Trump's fixation with winning as being one of his key characteristics—see also Payne (2017). In essence, within Trump's world-view he has a 'survival of the fittest' or population ecology component (Lowery and Gray 2015) in which he divides people into two mutually exclusive groups: predators (winners) and victims (losers). He has great respect for winners/predators (such as himself) and almost none for losers/victims, who are in his eyes worthless, expendable and unworthy of survival. For example, while other world leaders made powerful statements about victims of wars, atrocities, and natural disasters and sought to give practical aid, comfort and support to them, Trump kept a noticeably low profile e.g. the Myanmar government's ethnic cleansing of Rohingya, the Saudi Arabian-led coalition bombing of Yemeni civilians and blockade of emergency humanitarian supplies as mass starvation and disease took hold, his dismissive taunts at Puerto Ricans pleading for assistance after Hurricane Maria. His one exception was to lambast Assad for chemical weapons attacks on civilians in Syria, especially children, perhaps as an excuse to justify his mass cruise missile punitive attacks. Such attacks were also clearly aimed politically at Syria's allies Russia and Iran, to send them a clear warning message (White House 2018). Russia explicitly threatened retaliation. At the time of writing, the likely repercussions of Trump's April 2018 attack on Syria were unclear.

Trump's intuitive adoration of authoritarian foreign leaders, regardless of allegations of their despotic or inhumane actions, also

identified by Lissner and Zenko (2017) and Payne (2017), may also explain why Trump was so indulgent of Putin. Trump admires those whom he believes share with him a similar world-view, even if such a belief is not fully warranted. To an extent, Trump and Putin do share a similar ruthless self-belief and goal-directed singular determination. They are also both pursuing right-wing authoritarian agendas, with Putin actually having started his programme more than a decade before Trump's election (see Klapsis' discussion in Vol 2 chapter 11). The formal alliances struck by Putin's United Russia Party with far-right groups in Europe (e.g. Italy's Northern League; Austria's Freedom Party) underscored his right-wing credentials. Trump would dearly love to have had Putin's authoritarian freedom, devoid of the constraints of US democratic process. However, Trump lacked the education, training, and intellectual grasp and, moreover, the self-discipline that Putin has. Putin was a career KGB officer stationed in East Germany for some years. He speaks fluent German and passable English. He is a martial arts fanatic and portrays himself as an outdoors action man. Although Putin has cultivated a reasonably warm personal relationship with Trump, which Trump enthusiastically reciprocated, it is unlikely that in Putin's mind this was anything more than necessary impression management and dissimulation designed to stroke Trump's ego and make him more malleable. For his part, throughout 2017, Trump appeared to accept Putin's 'friendship' at face value, despite the clear warnings from his national security chiefs. By December 2017, the latter appeared to have convinced Trump, as evidenced by Russia being identified clearly as a key threat, along with China, in his National Security Strategy (White House 2017c). In March 2018, following further revelations about the extent of Russian cyberwarfare against America and the west generally, and the attempted murder in Britain of a Russian former GRU agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter using a Russian-invented *novichok* chemical weapon, the US joined other western countries in issuing heavy sanctions against Russia, including expulsion of 60 undeclared intelligence officers posing as Russian diplomats in the US and financial and other sanctions against a list of Russian billionaire oligarchs and senior Russian government officials (Blakely et al 2018).

The joint press conference after the Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki in July 2018 provided an extraordinary display of Trump's deferential, almost sycophantic, reverence for Putin. On camera, he

openly backed Putin's denial of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election and rejected his own government's intelligence reports on this, taking the opportunity to criticise Hillary Clinton, the Mueller 'witchhunt' and fake news about his alleged campaign's collusion with Russia (Philp 2018a and b). Trump's conduct received highly negative responses in the US from outraged senior politicians of both main parties. Former CIA Director John Brennan called Trump's inexplicable siding with Putin against official US intelligence assessment "treasonous". European leaders were left suspecting that Trump's capitulation and appeasement of Putin also signaled his support for Putin's anti-EU and anti-NATO agendas (Philp 2018b). Despite all this, Trump hailed the summit as a success. What the US may have gained remains unclear.

Russia has strong ties with President Assad of Syria that the US does not enjoy. For a time, Trump pursued a unilateral line seeking the departure of Assad as an essential prerequisite for peace in Syria. However, when it became obvious that Assad and Putin were not prepared to entertain either US imposition of a solution or indeed a primary role for the US in resolving the crisis, in July 2017 Tillerson advised the UN that the US would defer to Russia in deciding on Assad's fate (Lynch and Gramer 2017). This move was a tacit admission not only that Assad would be the likely victor in the civil war but also of the limits to US power. Whether such deference would produce beneficial results for the US remained to be seen.

Russia also retained the Central Asian Republics within its orbit, after their independence from the Soviet Union. These peoples share historical, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties with Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Whereas most speak Russian, Turkic, and Persian dialects, few speak much English. They will retain their traditional allegiances rather than forsake them for the US, no matter what inducements the US may offer.

Russia has cleverly wooed Iran over many decades, in bilateral trade, economic cooperation, and crucially Iran's nuclear power generation programme (see chapter 7). From Russia's perspective, Iran is a stabilizing non-aligned state on its southern flank between Turkey, the Caucuses, Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics, which helps to combat IS and related insurgencies across the region. The cordial Russia-Iran relationship, of course, does not sit well with the US but there is little they can do to alter the status quo.

Russia, Turkey and Iran have also been cooperating on the ISIS insurgency and post-ISIS situation in Syria and Iraq, which the US will have to come to terms with. In effect, this means the US accepting that Russia and Iran (both Assad's allies), with Turkish agreement, will significantly determine what happens.

### North Korea and the Madman Hypothesis

The exception to Trump's adoration of despots was North Korea's Kim Jong-Un (see below). This exception appeared to have been made primarily because Kim Jong-Un repeatedly rebuffed all overtures and attempts by the US to persuade him to curb voluntarily his nuclear weapons programme (USDoS 2016b), while at the same time so publicly and vehemently issuing personal insults against Trump. They even traded insults via *Twitter*. For example,

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 2:30 PM—Oct 1, 2017  
I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man...

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 12:48 AM—Nov 12, 2017  
Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me "old", when I would NEVER call him "short and fat"? Oh well, I try so hard to be his friend—and maybe someday that will happen!

King Jong-Un's vitriolic outbursts and bombastic threats against the US of missile attacks, with hints of nuclear warheads, provoked Trump to match him with oblique threats of North Korea's total annihilation. Kim Jong-Un has variously called Trump "old", "a psychopath", and a "mentally deranged dotard" (an archaic term for someone suffering from mental frailty, especially senility) and has threatened him with a death sentence.

While such undiplomatic and unstatesmanlike exchanges may be entertaining, they deflect attention away from the very serious nuclear threat that North Korea's continues to pose and on an increasing scale, not only to the Asia-Pacific region but also now to the United States, Middle East and Europe. Despite immense international efforts via the multilateral Six Party Talks between 2003 and 2009 (<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/c15455.htm>), these failed to deliver a commitment by North Korea to de-nuclearize, and instead it carried out numerous nuclear tests and missile tests and regularly



boasted of rapid advances in its nuclear weapons development programme (USDoS 2016b).

US frustration at the inability of the international community to rein in North Korea's nuclear ambitions is exemplified by statements from Trump and also advisers, such as H.R. McMaster his then National Security Adviser who on November 3, 2017 indicated that US patience was limited and that "we're running out of time". However, the majority view from diplomats, the State Department and intelligence chiefs was that Trump's rhetoric on North Korea should be toned down substantially, as Kim Jong-Un's delusions, paranoia and temper might cause him to exaggerate the threat of an imminent pre-emptive US attack and be panicked into a pre-emptive strike of his own. Trump's interpretation of 'tone down' was to issue Tweets that instead exuded irony, subtlety and mockery in a passive-aggressive style (see example above on November 12, 2017), whereas his wise counsel probably meant by 'tone down' that he should cease commenting altogether.

While Trump may have belatedly dropped an aggressive tone from his Tweets and public statements on North Korea, throughout 2017 there was speculation by some (see, for example, Krushcheva 2017) that Trump may have been deliberately acting when he threatened North Korea with annihilation, should it ever attack a US target or one of its allies. The 'madman theory' of war and diplomacy is attributed to President Richard Nixon and his collaborator Henry Kissinger in the late 1960s (Burr and Kimball 2015; Wellen 2013), whereby a president seeks to shock, unnerve and inhibit an adversarial counterpart abroad by pretending to be so deranged and unpredictable that, at all costs, he should not be provoked. Trump's behaviour did not fit the 'madman' hypothesis well, as he did not appear to be either deranged or pretending to be deranged. If anything, it was the mental health of Kim Jong-Un that gave cause for concern and the risk that he may actually carry out his threats. Rather, Trump appeared to be behaving fairly predictably in the face of personal insults and bombast from Kim Jong-Un i.e. Trump always matches or exceeds any slur or insult and will keep up a rhetorical battle until he feels that he has won it. He has to have the last word.

On November 20, 2017, Trump restored North Korea to the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism (White House 2017b). See also White House (2017c). However, in an unexpected move

barely one week before Tillerson's sacking in March 2018, Trump announced that he and Kim Jong-Un had agreed in principle to talks. As well as opportunities, such talks would also be fraught with dangers of Trump being out-manoeuvred by the North Korean leader. At the time of writing, initial talks announced for Singapore June 12, 2018 had just been cancelled by Trump, who blamed China for encouraging Mr Kim and his ministers for suddenly issuing vitriolic personal criticisms of Vice-President Mike Pence containing "tremendous anger and hostility" (Deng et al 2018; Philp et al 2018). The offending statement by Vice-Minister Choe Son-hui referred specifically to Pence's undiplomatic analogy between North Korea and the nuclear deal with Libya's President Gaddafi. North Korea clearly interpreted this analogy originated by Bolton to mean that even if it were to make a deal with the US (as Gaddafi had with the US, UK and others) then Kim Jong-un should expect nevertheless that America would subsequently instigate his downfall and ignominious murder. The gaffe of Pence and Bolton may be an example of the consequences of Trump's dismissal of foreign policy expertise in favour of amateurism and emotional prejudice. The Singapore summit was in fact resurrected in June 2018 but, despite an apparent agreement by Kim Jong-un to dismantle his nuclear weapons capability, no details of any specific program or timetable emerged for "complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearisation", which had been the primary US requirement (Deng and Parry 2018; Philp 2018c). Whether further dialogue between Trump and Kim Jong-un will achieve more remains to be seen.

### **Middle East and Bogeymen Targets**

The enduring complexities, longstanding enmities, and intractable problems of the Middle East have defeated a succession of US Presidents' (Reagan, G.H. Bush, Clinton, G.W. Bush, Obama) best efforts to find even working solutions for peace, let alone any lasting ones. A viable solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict and guaranteed long-term peaceful co-existence of Israel and its Arab neighbours seem as far away as ever. The Israel-Iran conflict (see chapter 7) has added another layer of complexity. The civil war in Syria, the ISIS insurgency in Syria and Iraq, and since 2016 the Saudi Arabia-Iran conflict becoming transparent and more intense, have added yet further layers of complexity.

The approach of Trump and Tillerson to this maelstrom was to take a reductionist view and assume or hope that a simpler, more direct approach to finding or imposing solutions would deliver the desired results. The Trump Cabinet took a much more unilateral interventionist (Restad 2014; 2016) stance in the Middle East than Obama, in which the US now focussed support on pro-US 'winners'. For example:

- Trump shared with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel not only a unilateralist propensity but also a right-wing authoritarian and nationalist outlook.
- The Trump administration returned to unreserved US backing of Israeli policy, following Obama's more critical, moralistic stance on Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.
- Despite much positive rhetoric about a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians e.g. during his visit to Israel in May 2017, in reality Trump appeared to relegate the Palestinians to the status of 'losers' whose existence and rights, if any, were solely in the gift of Israel (see Spencer and Pfeffer 2017). For example, in November 2017, he announced that the US would transfer its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which delighted Israel and enraged the Palestinians for its apparently flagrant abrogation of the US's neutral position since 1967. The sub-text US policy as opposed to its official policy was that any peace deal with the Palestinians would be one imposed by Israel. The proposed 'two state' solution (Fisher 2016), based on multiple UN resolutions and initiatives since 1974 and stalled by Israeli and Palestinian disagreements, appeared effectively dead.
- Trump continued US policy of backing Kurdish forces against ISIS in Iraq and Syria (whereas Syria, Russia, Turkey and Iran did not). However, when ISIS had been virtually defeated, Iraq moved to prevent the Kurds from creating an independent state, with Syria, Russia, Turkey and Iran in full support of this obstruction. The US backed off, thus effectively killing Kurdish independence in yet another sign of the limits to US power.
- Trump enthusiastically backed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia in his various pro-US policies

and actions in the Middle East, even where these greatly conflicted with other US allies e.g. Qatar.

The Crown Prince bin Salman gained a positive reputation in the west for upgrading Saudi state security and combatting Al Qaeda and IS, after years in which Saudi-based Wahhabi funding of and support for such terrorists received widespread complaint e.g. HJS (2017), Monique (2013). He was also not only pro-US but also pro-Trump and his Alt-Right ideas, so much so that in 2017 he began a program remarkably analogous to Trump's 'draining the swamp' concept. For example, in November 2017, he ordered the mass arrest of dozens of members of the royal family, including Princes and other influential figures, on corruption charges (Kirkpatrick 2017). Although the Vision 2030 program seeks to introduce better governance (USDoS 2017), and, relaxation of some restrictions e.g. women are now allowed to drive, bin Salman's program appeared more to signal populist authoritarianism and a power grab than a new enlightenment. For example, arrest without charge or trial and other alleged human rights abuses would likely continue and Trump would be unlikely to complain (Dollar et al 2016).

Saudi Arabia also embarked on an aggressive foreign policy in the region, seeking to establish the country as the regional power to which all neighbours should show respect and deference in relation to Saudi diktat. Defeating Iran is at the epicentre of Saudi Arabia's determination to impose its will and control on the region. As discussed in chapter 7, Iran has its own legitimate desire to attain regional power status (HoL 2017) and, as the leader of the minority Shia Muslims, a great fear of being obliterated by sheer weight of numbers of the Sunni Muslim majority in the region, led by Saudi Arabia. In the Saudi strategy against Iran, it has engaged in a bloody war in Yemen against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, tried to bully neighbouring Qatar into being less friendly towards Iran by blockading Qatar and demanding that it shut down the *Al Jazeera* news HQ, and appeared to detain the Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri allegedly to coerce the Lebanese authorities into controlling or eliminating Iranian-backed Hezbollah, even though the latter have elected MPs in the Lebanese parliament (Spencer 2017). Further, on May 2, 2017 bin Salman threatened to move the battle between the two countries "inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia" (Reuters 2017). Saudi Arabia enthusiastically endorsed

Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA deal with Iran in May 2018. However, the prospect of Saudi Arabia embarking on its own nuclear program counters UN non-proliferation agreements and threatens Middle East security.

Astonishingly, Israel and Saudi Arabia were reported (Pfeffer 2017) to be collaborating against Iran and its allies through shared intelligence, analyses, and tactics, presumably on the basis of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. Crown Prince bin Salman went further (Goldberg 2018; Spencer 2018) and, striking a radical policy change in the Arab world, stated his belief that Jews had a right to exist as a nation state "in at least part of their ancestral homeland". Trump signalled his personal satisfaction and backing of these new developments, which he appeared to believe heralded a possible Arab-Israeli peace deal, an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a decisive stand against Iran and its allies. Thus, Iran, Hezbollah, and the Palestinians became the linked bogeymen that justified an alignment of US, Israeli, and Saudi Arabian foreign policies for the Middle East. This alignment, demonstrating confirmation bias (Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008; Nickerson 1998) and what some might describe as amoral transactionalism (Kahl and Brands 2017; Dian 2017), became possible in part because of the apparent sharing of right-wing authoritarian winner/loser attitudes by Trump, Netanyahu, and bin Salman and their common fear of Iran.

## Emergent Themes

From the preceding sections, a number of themes emerge. First, the Trump administration took a narrower view than predecessors of the scope of US foreign policy, despite the official position of the State Department and the contrary expansive impression created by the December 2017 National Security Strategy document (White House 2017c). Intervention overseas would be unilateral and not multilateral, and be much more limited and focussed on 'America First' benefits, with very much a 'Fortress America' character to foreign policy as relating to national security (Kahl and Brands 2017; Mead 2017; Payne 2017).

Second, signalling a basic mistrust of other nations, the multilateralism of predecessors and especially Obama would not only be re-

placed by a unilateralism, but also focussed on 'America First'. Multi-lateral treaties, agreements and protocols would be eschewed as far as possible. Alliances would be offered sparingly and only to those countries having pro-US regimes i.e. 'winners' in Trump's world-view; other regimes (i.e. 'losers') would be ignored or abandoned.

Third, a surprisingly conventional policy of containment towards not only rival states but also those deemed to be enemies, such as Iran and North Korea. The policy on this adopted by the Obama, Bush, and Clinton administrations had barely changed. Despite much threatening rhetoric from Trump towards these two states, the actions taken have all been arms-length non-military sanctions designed to frustrate their regimes and damage their economies and capacity to operate normally.

Fourth, a conventional belief that US exceptionalism (Mead 2017; Payne 2017; Restad 2014; 2016) will endure for ever and will ensure not only that the US retains its supremacy (military, political, economic, technological, cultural) but also that specifically China and Russia will never surpass the US. This faith-based belief assumes that, unlike all other nations, the US is not subject to the laws of history (Restad 2014; 2016).

Fifth, a tendency to over-simplify complex issues and make over-confident predictions of US policy success (e.g. global warming, terrorist threats, Middle East conflicts), while eschewing State Department and other expertise in favour of populist beliefs and non-expert opinion.

When examined closely, Trump's foreign policy is fairly conventional. What has undoubtedly changed compared to predecessor administrations is not the substance of foreign policy but (a) the tougher language and method of public presentation e.g. Trump's voluminous and aggressive *Twitter* messages on foreign policy matters, (b) the relegation of State Department expertise in favour of amateurism and prejudicial, populist beliefs, and (c) the Alt-Right orientated 'Fortress America' attitude.

## Conclusion

In the view of Trump and his Cabinet, the Alt-Right infused approach to US foreign policy, including the marginalisation, downsizing and politicisation of the State Department, was precisely fit-for-purpose in

the plan to put 'America First' and 'Make America Great Again'. There was an absolute certainty in their belief that America's exceptional supremacy—military, economic, political—could be assured literally for ever, however unlikely this certitude was in the face of the laws of history. In reality, America's superpower status is already being challenged, not so much by direct military threat of war from the two other superpowers Russia and China (although such a threat does exist) as by more subtle strategies and asymmetric methods of adversaries.

Trump and his entourage were not noted for understanding, or wanting to understand, subtleties or sensitivities before acting and were therefore more likely than not to encounter major problems when dealing with real-world complexities, such as the Middle East, Russia, China, and North Korea. Reductionism and rectilinear thinking are ill-suited to such matters. Trump's model of predators (winners) and victims (losers) is historically not a good predictor of long-term outcomes.

In the context of Trump's Alt-Right administration, significant threats arising from US foreign policy may be summarised as follows:

### **Risks for US and the Trump Administration**

#### *Risk 1. Trump's unstatesmanlike comments*

Trump's impromptu unstatesmanlike comments on US foreign policy issues, especially emotional outbursts via social media, may cause uncertainty, alarm, and disdain among the international community, whether friend or adversary, regarding US intentions. US reputation and standing may be diminished.

#### *Risk 2. Denuding of State Department expertise*

The culling and downgrading of State Department officials and expert foreign policy assessment and advice, the continuing non-replacement of US Ambassadors and diplomats overseas, and the general politicisation of the State Department to serve an Alt-Right agenda, may interfere with accurate and timely evaluation of foreign policy issues by the White House as well as diplomatic relations with other countries.

*Risk 3. Long-term decline of US exceptionalism and supremacy*

US assumptions of exceptionalism and permanent superpower supremacy are likely to be increasingly challenged by a combination of (a) unsuccessful outcomes of Trump's unilateral 'America First' decisions and actions on foreign policy issues concerning trade, protectionism, the Middle East, Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, (b) the inexorable growth of China's economic, military and political power that will surpass that of the US, and (c) the long-term inevitability of relative US decline.

**Risks for International Peace and Stability***Risk 1. Foreign policy miscalculations*

The potential, through ideological and emotional biasing, for the Trump administration to misinterpret and misjudge the intentions of Iran and North Korea and miscalculate the threat levels they pose, thereby leading to escalation of tensions and a risk of a pre-emptive first strike by any party.

*Risk 2. Failure of reductionist models for major conflict resolution*

An over-simplified view of solving longstanding complex conflicts in the Middle East, such as the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the Israel-Arab conflict and the Iran-Saudi Arabia regional supremacy conflict, by backing Israel and Saudi Arabia against other parties, leading to further instability and conflict rather than a comprehensive lasting peace.

*Risk 3. Ideologically driven trade war with China and the EU*

For 'America First' ideological reasons and to mollify populist demands from the US electorate, provoking a trade war with China and the EU, with the risk of damaging the US at least as much as it does its trading partners.

*Risk 4. Weak response to Russia's aggressive foreign policies under Putin*

Failing to challenge Russia robustly enough on (a) its expansionist threats and aggression against neighbours, (b) its cyberwarfare and other subversive acts against the US (and other western targets), and



(c) its close connections with far-right groups in Europe, may encourage Putin to continue or increase such conduct, thereby undermining peace and stability.

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# Chapter 7: The Alt-Right Anti-Iran Project

*By Alan Waring*

## **Abstract**

The hawkish membership of Trump's Alt-Right cabinet and coterie has amplified and extended pre-existing anti-Iran policies. The chapter examines such pertinent issues as the Iranian revolution, Iran-Iraq War, the 1979–80 US embassy hostages crisis, terrorism, anti-Iran sanctions (US unilateral and UN), nuclear proliferation, Iran and regional conflicts, paradoxical Iran-Israel relations, and Iran's relations with Arab states. The 2016 JCPOA nuclear agreement, its vulnerability to US withdrawal, and a move away from containment to potential US military attack, are discussed. The mirror-image paranoid xenophobia and crisis culture in both Washington and Tehran are noted. A diplomatic alternative is posited. Risks are systematically identified.

**Key words:** Trump, Iran, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, sanctions, regional conflict

## **The Alt-Right View of Iran**

The Trump administration continued the practice of previous administrations (Reagan, Clinton, G.W. Bush and, to a lesser extent, Obama) of placing Iran (with a predominantly Muslim population) in a special category of risk, as being 'evil' and the pre-eminent 'sponsor of state terrorism'.

The rhetoric about Iran emanating from the US President-elect's top team throughout 2016 was cast in negative terms typically used by the Alt-Right. This is unsurprising, since Trump's senior supporters and campaign leaders included such Alt-Right champions as Steve Bannon, former editor of the right-wing on-line *Breitbart News*, retired Lt. General Mike Flynn, who is renowned for his anti-Muslim rhetoric, Senators Mike Pompeo and Dan Coats, both of whom have taken an unashamedly anti-Iran stance, and last but not least retired General James 'Mad Dog' Mattis, who was reported to hold a long-



standing grudge against Iran e.g. Perry (2016), although not as ideologically driven as Flynn's. All five were formally appointed to President Trump's top team on his inauguration in January 2017, although Flynn was forced to resign early (February 14) following a major protocol scandal involving his communications with the Russian government (see, for example, Miller and Rucker, 2017 and chapters 5 and 6). In addition, there were others exhibiting hard-line anti-Iran commitments in the President's entourage, for example John Bolton, the former US Ambassador to the UN, Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York, and until his departure in August 2017, Sebastian Gorka, a national security adviser.

From such a prelude, it was likely that the new US administration would be far more aggressive towards Iran than had been the case for the previous decade, although it should be noted that Hillary Clinton had also signalled an intention to take a tougher line than Obama if she were elected President. Trump voiced his clear dislike of the nuclear non-proliferation deal—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—signed on July 14, 2015 between Iran, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany, and the EU, and implemented on January 16, 2016. That clearly expressed dislike, accompanied by threats that the US might unilaterally rescind the deal, as well as continuing the US sanctions against foreign banks facilitating funds transfers into and out of Iran, was sufficient to dampen foreign investment and trade with Iran. Equally, the Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini expressed an unenthusiastic view of the limitations of the deal.

Initially, it was not certain what form Trump's anti-Iranian policy would take. However, in line with Trump's public statements, it was likely that his administration would try to cancel or disrupt the Iran nuclear deal. In addition, existing US sanctions against Iran were likely to be continued, if not added to, and indeed an Iranian ballistic missile test prompted a set of additional US sanctions on February 3, 2017, accompanied by anti-Iranian statements by Trump and several of his top team. Sanctions were tightened again later in 2017. In June 2017, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) appointed Michael D'Andrea as Head of the CIA's Iran Department, which heralded what many expected to be a more proactive and robust programme against Iran (e.g. Rosenberg and Goldman 2017).

Trump's Iran policy was clarified in his 'new strategy' statement of October 13, 2017 (White House 2017a), a five-page cantankerous document that portrayed the Iranian regime in the most pejorative terms. While, as anticipated, seeking to discredit Iran's commitment to the nuclear JCPOA agreement, and therefore justifying US opposition to it, the majority of the new strategy focussed on combatting alleged Iranian regional expansionism, and especially the activities of the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps). For example, the alleged "Threats from the Iranian regime" included:

"The reckless behaviour of the Iranian regime, and the IRGC in particular, poses one of the most dangerous threats to the interests of the United States and to regional stability" and "The Iranian regime has taken advantage of regional conflicts and instability to aggressively expand its regional influence and threatens its neighbors with little domestic or international costs for its action". (White House 2017a)

The new strategy focused on "neutralizing" and "constraining" Iran (see Maloney 2008 on weaknesses of containment strategy) but fell short of an explicit threat of US military action against Iran. Trump avoided making a unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA, passing the deliberation and decision instead to Congress.

After the new strategy of October 2017, the US administration also embarked in early 2018 on a more subtle strategy of joining with Saudi Arabia and others to establish that Iran's distal activities in relation to Yemen had created a regional security threat in non-compliance with UN Security Resolution 2216 (Parsi 2018a). If successful, a new UN Resolution would result in an all-out security containment of Iran with sanctions on all fronts—weapons, oil, trade, economic, financial, political engagement, travel. The March 2018 sacking of the more moderate Secretary of State Tillerson and his replacement by the anti-Iran hawk Mike Pompeo, CIA Director, pointed to a possible renewed drive to scupper the JCPOA. This expectation was increased by the replacement, also in March 2018, of National Security Adviser General McMaster by John Bolton, a well-known anti-Iran hawk. Indeed, there was much speculation about whether (a) Trump would decline to renew US support for the JCPOA, and whether (b) Iran would cease scrupulous compliance with JCPOA, having seen the negotiating benefits that Kim Jong-Un had derived from defying the US on their nuclear issue (Parsi 2018b). That speculation ended on May

8, 2018 when Trump formally announced the US unilateral withdrawal from JCPOA in a live televised statement (White House 2018). This rancorous statement about Iran's "malign behaviour", going way beyond the scope of the JCPOA, included a number of factually inaccurate assertions about Iran (e.g. that it supports "the Taleban and al-Qa'ida")—although see Loyd (2018) who later reported alleged Iranian training of Taleban fighters. A similarly vituperative address by the US Secretary of State (Pompeo 2018) made clear that unless Iran complied with his list of 12 demands on 'behaviour change' then it would face crippling further sanctions and, by implication, either the Iranian leadership's capitulation or regime change. Citing old Israeli intelligence from 2000, widely regarded as of historical significance only, these two statements closely mimicked assertions and accusations against Iran made by Israel's President Netanyahu on April 30, 2018.

Both the US administration and other countries have the right, indeed the obligation, to tackle effectively strategic threats to their national security or to the broader security of the world. There are very real and challenging threats. Although this chapter constructively criticises some aspects of the Alt-Right's stance towards Iran, the objects of concern should be its rationale and quality of evidence supporting it, risk issues, implications and likely consequences of their worldview and agenda, and whether there is a more effective alternative.

Before embarking on an examination of the US-Iran standoff since 1979 and its manifestations in the Trump era, it is beneficial to consider Iran's modern history and relevant developments, as in the following sections.

## **A Brief History of Modern Iran 1850 to 1979**

The political and economic decay of the Safavid era continued under the Qajars throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as each new crisis lurched on to the next (Ansari 2003; 2006). By 1911, Iran had become an important supplicant of a growing number of foreign powers, each vying for influence and control over Iran's geo-strategic location and its natural resources, including latterly its newly discovered oil. Russia, Britain, France, and the United States had all extracted large concessions from Iran on its natural resources and bi-lateral trade, and mostly these had

not been favourable to Iran. Ansari (2006) cited several examples including the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, later AIOC owned by BP (Bamberg 1994), which paved the way for British domination of Iranian oil production and exploitation for the next 50 years.

However, in Iran turbulence and instability were never far away and, in February 1921, Reza Khan Pahlavi led a coup and in 1925 was appointed Shah (king) by parliament as Reza Shah Pahlavi. Following the outbreak of World War II, in 1941 Britain and Russia jointly invaded Iran to prevent its oil coming under Nazi control. Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in favour of his young son Mohammad Reza Shah and went into protective exile, dying in South Africa in July 1944.

After World War II ended and Iran was returned to full sovereignty, the western-educated Mohammad Reza Shah was only 21. As constitutional monarch, he left much of the nation's governing to ministers and courtiers, who continued to be heavily influenced if not manipulated by the west, including Britain and its oil interests and the United States, both of which were keen to counter any Soviet influence.

By the early 1950s, public demands for a better share of the country's oil wealth vis-à-vis the foreign oil companies were growing. In April 1951, the Iranian *majlis* (parliament) ratified the oil nationalisation bill which had the full support of the appointed Prime Minister Dr Mohammad Mosaddegh. The British government and AIOC refused to accept it, at first raising challenges in international law. When this failed, Britain resorted to engineering a world-wide boycott against buying Iranian oil, so as to cripple the Iranian economy and bring Iran to heel. Mosaddegh broke off diplomatic relations with Britain in 1952 and anti-foreign imperialist emotions welling up in Iran turned against the United States as well as the British.

Things came to a head in 1953, as described by Pollack (2004) and Mousavian and Shahidsaless (2014). Britain persuaded the Shah via the Americans that Mosaddegh was an existential threat who would lead to a Russian-backed communist takeover of Iran and the removal of the 'peacock throne'. Under the codenames Operation Ajax and Operation Boot, the CIA and the British jointly orchestrated a coup on the August 19, 1953 during which several hundred people were killed.

The 1953 coup ensured that Britain retained a significant control of Iranian oil, and the Anglo Iranian Oil Company was renamed British

Petroleum in 1954. The US now had a dominant influence on the government, foreign policy, military and economic affairs. In effect, the Shah had become the compliant puppet of the Americans. From a western perspective at the time, the coup had succeeded in thwarting any attempt by the Russians to control Iran. However, the coup was a reminder to Iranians of their vulnerability to foreign perfidy, their virtual loss of sovereignty to the US and Britain, and the weakness of the Shah. The seeds of a pretext for the 1979 Revolution had been planted, and also a long-term mistrust of the US.

In 1961, the Shah embarked on his '*enghelab-e sefid*' or White Revolution to modernize Iran, with the themes of secularisation, industrialization, education, land reform, and female emancipation (Ansari 2006; Waring and Glendon 1998). It succeeded in parts, and by the 1970s there was a growing western-educated and western-orientated middle class. However, in the author's personal experience in Iran at the time, it was evident that all was not well, ranging from educated English-speaking young Iranians revealing covertly their contempt for the Shah and his corrupt elite, to the poor, uneducated conservative masses, whose lives centred on traditional Muslim piety and observance, who were also unhappy. Encouraged by radical Muslim clergy, such as the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers inside Iran, resentment and anger against the Shah began to fester.

The Shah and his sycophantic entourage believed that his White Revolution was a success from which the whole of society, and especially the masses, was benefitting, whereas in reality it was being watered down and corrupted by the hierarchy of officials across the country [as witnessed by the author]. The Shah basked in this delusional glory and increasingly projected himself as the embodiment not only of Iran's modernised destiny but also of its grand imperial history and national identity. In 1971, he organized a spectacular and very costly state celebration (Kadivar 2002) of the 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire, all aimed, as Ansari (2008) alluded, at restoring Iran to its former position as the rightful regional power. During all this excess, the impoverished masses and their radical Muslim mentors could only look on with resentment and disgust.

The Shah, the so-called '*shah-e chemodan*' (see Glossary), was becoming increasingly disconnected from the population and the realities of their existence, safe in the fragile illusion that his people loved him (see e.g. Alam 2003; Zonis 1991).

## The Iranian Revolution 1979

Discontent and social unrest had been brewing throughout the 1970s. As Ansari (2006) noted, by now the British government as the main villain in the Iranian middle class psyche had been eclipsed by the perception of rude and arrogant Americans who threw their weight about. The Americanisation of every aspect of Iranian life, work and society had begun, much to the consternation of many sectors of society who normally would probably disagree with each other but who, in this matter, shared a common dread of what became known as *gharbzadegi* i.e. 'westoxification' (al-e Ahmad 1982) or US cultural hegemony. This accusation of 'cultural aggression' has been made frequently by Iranian leaders and others ever since the Revolution, variously citing Barbie Dolls, MacDonalds restaurants, alcohol, and wild parties as examples of western licentious abandonment undermining Iranian civilisation and Muslim culture. See, for example, Mara'shi (1995), Zarif (1996) and Waring and Glendon (1998).

Despite economic dangers, the Shah formulated reckless economic policies and planned to pursue his grandiose vision of Iran as a major economic, military, and political power. Nuclear power stations would be built, Iran's military forces would be expanded and equipped with all the latest weaponry and equipment, and all funded by the vast revenues from oil. Increasingly, the Shah ignored warnings from advisers about the over-heated economy while his ministers also ensured that he was kept isolated and largely ignorant of negative developments.

Increasingly, the concerns of middle-class educated professionals along with left-wing intellectuals, radical Muslim clergy, nationalists and university students began to coalesce as they saw the US and UK supporting the Shah. Common cause was emerging among them in which the nation's salvation required a regime change that would, at the same time, rid Iran of foreign domination and interference.

As 1978 rolled on, increasingly Ayatollah Khomeini, an exiled radical Muslim fundamentalist, was being hailed openly as the protesters' leader. Anti-Shah demonstrations and riots of increasing number, scale and ferocity occurred in Qom, Tabriz, Isfahan, and Shiraz. On Friday September 7, 1978, martial law was declared in Tehran and eleven other cities. Troops fired on demonstrating crowds in Jaleh

Square in Tehran and at least 87 were reported killed (Ansari 2006). The scope for negotiation and compromise was evaporating fast.

Shapour Bakhtiar, the Iranian National Front leader, received *Majlis* backing on January 3, 1979 to form a new democratic and Islamic government if the Shah went into exile, which he did on January 16. Khomeini arrived in Tehran from Paris on the February 1, 1979 to tumultuous crowds of supporters.

The possibility of an anti-Shah revolution arising and succeeding had been identified as early as 1972 by the British Foreign Office. However, that possibility was played down by the west. A detailed critical analysis of the west's misjudgement, and the reasons for it, is provided in the official UK government report by Browne (1979).

Many in the west believe that on the day of Khomeini's return the Islamic Revolution had been achieved to all intents and purposes. However, this is a selective distortion of the facts. Certainly, Khomeini's agents and supporters had a major leading role in ousting the Shah but they would almost certainly have failed without the cooperation and support of all the spectrum of other groups and interests sharing a keen desire for radical change—intellectuals, socialists, Marxists, nationalists, democrats, *bazaaris*, workers, technocrats, students and so on. It was as much a popular revolution as it was an Islamic one. Many of these were expecting the formation of a secular parliamentary democracy with pluralistic representation. Their hopes and expectations were soon to be disappointed.

A referendum was held in March 1979 on what kind of state should now be created. In a huge voter turnout (98%), the vote to create the Islamic Republic of Iran was overwhelming (99.3%) (Axworthy 2014). However, the very high apparent support for an Islamic republic did not accurately reflect a fully informed choice in which all voters clearly understood the choices and their implications, a problem shared with many other referenda (see for example the Brexit referendum, chapter 3 in Vol 2). It is unlikely that those who were not already committed to an Islamic republic really understood what the concept implied and what sort of outcome would result. Ayatollah Khomeini as Supreme Leader organised the writing of a new constitution, which he and the Prime Minister approved in October 1979.

During the crucial first two years of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini as Supreme Leader, the Islamic Republican Party and their supporters systematically eliminated, repressed or outlawed all

groups whom they felt might oppose the fulfilment of an Islamic state. The Freedom Party, the National Front, the National Democratic Front, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq, the communist Tudeh Party, Marxists, and all manner of moderates, found themselves removed from what otherwise might have become a parliamentary democracy. The Iraqi invasion of Iran on September 22, 1980 also created a febrile wartime environment in which the Supreme Leader and the government could justify control of potential political threats in the name of national security.

## The Islamic Republic of Iran and its Constitution

The Islamic Republic's state organisation and government have been designed to ensure that the Islamic state and its constitution cannot be undone or bypassed, even by the President or parliament. The principle of *velayat-e faghih* (Ehteshami 1995), or the absolute right of the Supreme Islamic Jurisprudent (usually known as the Supreme Leader) to have the final say in all matters of governance and policy, ensures the over-riding permanence and power of Islamist control. Waring and Glendon (1998) summarised the fundamentalist philosophy of the Islamic Republic. See also Axworthy (2014).

The organisational structure of the state and government is complex. For details, see for example, Ehteshami (1995), Home Office (2013), and Waring and Glendon (1998). All political parties must be approved by the Guardian Council. For details of approved and banned parties, see for example Hadian (2016). A variety of other parties representing social democrats, constitutional monarchists, the revolutionary left and so on have also been banned. Members of a number of banned reformist parties now operate as self-styled moderates in coalition with approved reformist parties.

The history of the post-1979 Islamic government reveals that whenever reformist presidential candidates arise they encounter resistance, with the Guardian Council and Supreme Leader typically backing non-reform candidates. A similar picture emerges once a reformist President has actually won. Typically, they have found it difficult to push through popular reforms voted for by the *Majlis* which may then be vetoed by the Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader.



## The US Embassy Invasion and Hostage Taking, 1979

In the aftermath of the revolution, western governments, including Britain and the US, continued to operate their embassies and diplomatic activities in Iran as normally as was possible. Britain had quickly accepted the factual reality of the revolution and decided that engagement with the new Islamic leadership was the only sensible option, declaring that they would not interfere in Iran's sovereign affairs. Britain waited to learn from the new Iranian leadership what they were seeking to achieve in their foreign relations and what sort of a working relationship would be possible.

According to Ansari (2006), while diplomats at the US Embassy also strongly advocated a positive and pro-active engagement with the Provisional Government, back in Washington there were many voices calling for a 'wait and see' approach, in case the revolution faltered and an opportunity arose for the US to back counter-revolutionary forces in Iran. However, from the perspective of the new Iranian leadership 'business as usual' was going to be very difficult. The gulf of their mistrust in the two main western supporters of the Shah was huge and, as far as Iran's new rulers were concerned, any foreign relations with the US and Britain would now be dictated by Iran's needs and interests and not those of the US and Britain.

Coupled with mistrust and wariness of the US and Britain at the official levels of the interim government, there were also groups of student revolutionary activists, many of whom were volatile, impetuous and difficult for the new fledgling authorities to control. Token invasions of the US Embassies, in Tabriz and Tehran, by such groups in February 1979 were dispersed after intervention by the Revolutionary Committee HQ in Tehran. However, on November 4, 1979, a large group of student revolutionaries managed to invade and take over the US Embassy in Tehran. Some of the students were armed and clearly fired-up and determined to humiliate the United States.

The embassy invasion lasted 444 days and 52 US citizens were held hostage. According to Ansari (2006) and Mousavian and Shahidsaless (2014), while there is no evidence of any direct instruction from the Provisional Government to carry out such a flagrant act and they condemned it, it seems likely that Ayatollah Khomeini quickly saw the students' impetuous act as conveniently adding urgent pressure to get the new constitution accepted.

Undoubtedly, the US was humiliated not only by the embassy takeover and hostage crisis but also the length of it. What may have started as a short-term revolutionary gesture by students became a strategic opportunity for the Supreme Leader, to be milked for as long as possible. The US's humiliation was compounded when an attempted military rescue mission by US forces failed. The embassy and hostage crisis came to define the future relationship between the two countries (see Pollack 2004), one based on mutual hostility accompanied by much recrimination, angry rhetoric and intransigence, summed up as 'mutually assured paranoia' (Waring and Glendon 1998). The intensity of that status quo ante has been ratcheted up by the Trump administration's Alt-Right ideology and agenda. There is a palpable sense that Trump and key administration members have been seeking revenge for the 1979 humiliation—see e.g. Bolton (2018) who openly admitted such a motivation.

### **The Iran-Iraq War 1980–1988**

Iraq attacked Iran on September 22, 1980 in what turned into an 8-year war ending in August 1988. The Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had predicted that the war would be over in four days, with the Iranians totally defeated. This war was particularly vicious, with very high casualties on both sides. The Iraqis made night-time rocket attacks on Tehran and western Iranian cities for several years, and used chemical weapons against both military and civilian targets. In addition to conventional forces, the Iranians deployed 'human wave' attacks, *baseeji* (volunteer mobilized forces) suicide units, self-organized local militias, and special forces (e.g. Yahosseini and Houshang 2015).

The Iranians were up against Saddam Hussein who had considerable support from the west (primarily the US) and neighbouring Arab states, all in their own ways fearful of an Islamic state such as Iran whose Supreme Leader was very hostile and, in the case of Arab monarchies, had been urging their peoples to overthrow them. The Americans and the French, for example, made sure that the Iraqis were supplied with the latest weaponry, while the Americans also supplied satellite data and battlefield intelligence. Nevertheless, despite being disadvantaged, the Iranian forces managed to turn the tide in 1981 and 1982 and eventually expel the Iraqis from most of Iran and then begin invasion campaigns into Iraq. However, Iran was

forced back and gradually over the next five years it became clear that neither side was capable of achieving an outright victory. Both were becoming exhausted—militarily, economically and psychologically. A UN-brokered cease fire came into effect in August 1988.

The Iran-Iraq War has had an indelible impact on the Iranian people. Few families avoided casualties and many suffered irreparable loss of their homes and assets. National survival became coincident with survival of the Islamic revolution. It could be argued that in a major way Saddam Hussein's attack ensured absolutely the survival of the revolution by making the population believe (with help from the Supreme Leader's exhortations) that their only salvation would come from fighting to the death for the Islamic Republic.

Waring and Glendon (1998) put forward three non-mutually exclusive reasons for the Iraqi attack:

- The western view of opportunistic adventurism by Saddam Hussein, encouraged by his strengthened political and military position after his 1975 Algiers pact with the Shah (Ehteshami 1995).
- The view of the Iranian anti-Islamist revolutionaries (*mujahedeen-e khalq*) that the constant tirade from the mullahs in Tehran against Saddam Hussein provoked him to attack pre-emptively, as he feared Iran would attack Iraq first.
- The fundamentalist view in Iran that the Iraqi attack was part of a US-led western plot to overthrow the Khomeini regime under the cloak of Saddam Hussein's adventurism (see, for example, Mousavian and Shahidsalless 2014).

A lasting product of the Iran-Iraq War is the amplification in the Iranian leadership's view that the 'Great Satan' [the US] had deliberately encouraged Saddam Hussein as its proxy to start and then prolong the war and, further, had supplied Iraq with massive armaments and intelligence support. To the Iranian leadership, it was just another example of the US perennial desire to dominate Iran and, failing that, to destroy it. To them, the Trump administration's attitude is no different, only harsher and they fully believe from the expressed intentions and bellicose statements of his cabinet members e.g. Bolton (2018) that a pre-emptive US military attack on Iran is now probable rather than conceivable.

To the Americans, the conduct and outcome of the war were a somewhat alarming display of failed US foreign policy in which, far from being defeated and crushed, Iran emerged damaged but unbowed and with its Islamist state intact if not strengthened. That legacy has heavily influenced all subsequent US administrations but particularly the Trump administration's zero-sum antagonistic approach to Iran.

## **The Iran Nuclear Question, Nuclear Sanctions and Oil Sanctions**

Many in the west have long assumed that Iran does not need nuclear power for its internal energy demands. After all, Iran is one of the largest producers of oil and also has natural gas reserves and hydro-electric schemes. This superficial view ignores three crucial facts. First, Iran has a rapidly growing population (some 81 million, UNdata 2017) with a growth rate that shows no signs of falling. Second, Iran's post-war economic recovery has created a huge and growing energy demand from its own industry. Third, Iran's oil and gas reserves are finite and currently are expected to run out around the end of the 21st century, a situation commonly facing other Middle Eastern oil producers although, unlike Iran, many of the other regional producers have only more recently begun to address the 'what comes after?' question. Ansari (2017) noted that in 1974 the Shah was already very concerned that Iran's reserves would run out by the mid-1990s. While the Shah's advisers' estimate was pessimistic, the general rationale of oil being a finite resource was correct. The current estimate of Iranian reserves is only 80 years' worth, rendering an economically exploitable first half-life of 40 years. Most of Iran's fields are already in their increasingly difficult and unproductive second half-life, according to the Iranian Fuel Conservation Company (Vakili 2017).

In combination, the three factors cited above have been putting increasing pressure on Iran's over-riding need to sell its oil and gas on the world market. Diverting oil to its internal market at the expense of international revenues is unsustainable in the long term. This strategic problem and dilemma, first recognised during the 1970s, only came back into play in the Islamic Republic after the Iran-Iraq War. It greatly influenced the series of 5-year economic plans starting in 1990, each of which has been predicated on a basic assumption of

*'ekonomy-e bedoun-e naft'* or 'an economy without oil' i.e. that Iran's oil and gas reserves would run out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. See, for example, IRI-PBO (1996) and Waring and Glendon (1998).

Other forms of energy would be essential, firstly to complement and then gradually to replace Iran's reliance on oil and gas, whether its own or imports. Iran's own refinery capacity is also limited. Inevitably, as for many other countries, nuclear energy became the leading option. The country's first, and currently only, nuclear power facility at Bushehr was originally started by the Shah in 1974 using Siemens as the lead designers and constructors. Three other nuclear power stations at other locations formed part of this grand project but they, and others variously commissioned with France and China, never materialised (WNA 2017). In the mid-1970s, there was even a well-advanced joint venture plan with Britain to form the Nuclear Company of Britain and Iran (Ansari 2017). Despite a great deal of time, effort and goodwill committed by both sides, the latter project failed to materialise owing to multiple intractable problems—technical, resource capacity, political—and by March 1978 was considered to be closed. With the 1979 Revolution, the new Islamic government dismissed the nuclear programme as a profligate distraction from exploiting Iran's vast natural gas reserves. In any event, the Bushehr plant was badly damaged during the Iran-Iraq War. However, by 1984 the Islamic regime had re-evaluated its policy and unobtrusively had reactivated the nuclear programme. In 1994, Iran signed an agreement with the Russian government for them to take over and complete the project as a 1000 MWe light water reactor and the plant became operational in 2013. As yet, the proportion of electrical power entering the Iran grid from nuclear generation is small but increasing (WNA 2017).

Whereas Iran's right to nuclear power generation for civilian uses (e.g. electricity, medicine, research) is generally accepted, its right to develop nuclear weapons outside of the International Atomic Energy Authority's control and the UN Non-Proliferation Treaty is a completely different matter and one that has caused a huge row and stand-off between Iran and the west but primarily the US. In essence, the US government under a succession of Presidents (G.W. Bush, Obama and Trump) has accused Iran of developing nuclear weapons which are feared could be used against Israel and possibly Saudi Arabia and generally to intimidate the region. While conceding that there had once been a fledgling nuclear weapons research programme, the

Iranians assert that it was abandoned in the early years of the Islamic Republic and they categorically deny having any nuclear weapons under development or any desire to have any. The US has countered that such a denial contradicts Iran's large-scale fissile material enrichment programme based at Natanz which, the US asserts, goes far beyond the needs of civilian uses.

With the Iranians refusing to give up their Natanz activities, a series of economic and financial sanctions on Iran were imposed from 2006 onwards by the UN, the EU, the US, and some other countries. Iran entered into negotiations with a group of nominated countries from the UN Security Council (the P5+1 group) to remove the sanctions. In 2013, an interim agreement was reached whereby Iran agreed to curb its uranium enrichment and allow UN nuclear inspectors to examine their facilities, in return for US\$7bn in sanctions relief and access to US\$4.2bn in restricted funds. A final agreement (the JCPOA) was reached on January 16, 2016 in which most of the sanctions were lifted and Iran agreed to a 10-year limit on its nuclear materials programme.

Both before and after the sanctions-lifting, the US consistently voiced its concerns that the deal should not be taken as a guarantee from Iran and that continuing vigilance is required. However, President Trump went further, calling the deal a bad one and implying that he might tear it up. In October 2017, (White House 2017a) Trump's 'new strategy' reiterated his total rejection of the deal, which included his threatened refusal to certify the UN nuclear compliance inspection reports and to withdraw from the JCPOA [actioned May 8, 2018 (White House 2018)]. Such was the level of mistrust of, and in some instances hatred for, Iran in a succession of US administrations, Trump's merely being the latest and most antagonistic.

Mousavian and Shahidsaless (2014) argued that although some of the US concerns may have been legitimate to some degree, their real reason for so vehemently opposing Iran's nuclear programme was a straightforward strategic interests one, namely to protect energy resources in the region that may have security and economic significance for the US. The asserted potential threat to Israel became a useful emotional propaganda cover for their more prosaic own interests. Caution on this interpretation is warranted as Mousavian was, for much of that time, a key member of Iran's nuclear negotiating team and therefore may not be impartial.

While the Iran oil embargo under UN sanctions was pursued publicly with much fanfare by successive US administrations, covertly it was a very different story. Well-placed sources have reported for some years that American companies have been prominent in the largely successful oil sanctions busting by Iran but documented evidence to support such reports is absent. However, whatever the case, the public rhetoric of successive US administrations on the Iran oil sanctions has not always matched its enactment. It is unclear whether Trump's Alt-Right administration has continued the double standards in practice. However, with China (Iran's largest trading partner and major oil consumer) responding rapidly to the US withdrawal from JCPOA and its imposition of super-tough sanctions by creating non-US\$ facilities for Iranian oil sales, agency facilities for Iran to purchase other sanctioned supplies, and sponsoring Iran's membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the US may find the effectiveness of its sanctions vitiated.

The apparent double standards towards the Iran oil sanctions predated the recent rise of the Alt-Right. So too did the double standards towards the UN embargo on arms sales to Iran, in which in the mid-1980s the US authorised covert arms sales to Iran as a means primarily to covertly fund the Contra rebels in Nicaragua (Ansari 2006; Mousavian and Shahidsaless 2014). The plan involved using Israel as the go-between cut-out to physically supply the arms to Iran via intermediaries for payment, and then get resupplied by the US. After the scandal broke, a number of senior US government officials were prosecuted and several were convicted but punishments were lenient and subsequently the convictions were either overturned or the individuals pardoned. If nothing else, the scandal also demonstrated that, where strategic interests and benefits are concerned, not only were both Iran and the US prepared to engage in highly flexible real-politik with each other, but so too were the arch-enemies Iran and Israel, an issue discussed at length in Parsi (2008).

## Iran and Terrorism

Factual evidence of Iranian terrorism outside Iran has been verified in particular criminal investigations, prosecutions, and convictions, such as fatwa-inspired overseas attacks following the Salman Rushdie 'Sa-

tanica Verses' affair (e.g. a publisher shot three times in Norway, a Japanese translator stabbed to death, an Italian translator seriously wounded), and two political assassinations in Germany in 1997 [the Mykonos restaurant incident, see Hakakian 2014]. Other cases include the 1991 assassination of former Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar in Paris by three assassins thought to be Hezbollah proxies working on behalf of the Iranian regime, for which one (Ali Vakili Rad) was apprehended, convicted, and served 16 years in prison. Dissidents and political opponents appeared to be the primary target of such assassinations (see also, for example, Hennerbichler 2013; Dehghan and Rankin 2018).

In addition, there is also a welter of allegation, assertion, suspicion, innuendo and negative opinion against Iran but little hard verified evidence. Many of the allegations (e.g. White House 2017a; 2018) centre on the Iranian state sponsoring others outside Iran, by way of funding, training and general support, that enables such groups to plan and carry out terrorist attacks of their own. The Lebanese Shia militia group Hezbollah is prominent among those allegedly financed by Iran and which is blamed for a long list of terrorist attacks in a number of countries. However, assertions that Iran is engaged in jihadist terrorism against the west have been dismissed by e.g. Arjomand (2016) and *Economist* (2014)—see later.

Was the invasion of the US Embassy in Tehran by a revolutionary student mob in 1979, and the holding of US hostages for 444 days, an act of terrorism? President Jimmy Carter described it as such. Part of their anti-American justification (as the more extremist revolutionaries saw it) no doubt stemmed from seeking revenge for the CIA's successfully directed coup in 1953 against the Prime Minister Dr Mosaddegh. However, embassy invasions and hostage-taking are never justifiable, morally or legally, and are also counter-productive as the impact on Iran-US relations since 1979 has shown. Nevertheless, among the more hard-line Iranian revolutionaries, memories are long and unforgiving, both on this matter and on the fact that the US backed Saddam Hussein to the hilt when he attacked Iran in 1980 and throughout the 8-year Iran-Iraq War.

In July 1988, the USS Vincennes shot down an unarmed Iran Air civilian airliner on a routine scheduled flight 655 from Shiraz to Dubai, with the loss of all 290 passengers and crew. According to the sobering detailed account by Ansari (2006), human error, poor training and



panic among the Vincennes crew resulted in the airbus being mistaken for a threatening aircraft. Mousavian and Shahidsalles (2014) also concurred on the details of the tragedy and also noted the grudging reluctance of the US government to accept full culpability for it, even in the face of the overwhelming evidence presented in the US Central Command's official investigation report. As Ansari noted:

“What remains shocking about this incident is not so much the criminal negligence that led to it but the whitewash that followed, in particular President Reagan's decision to award the Captain with a medal for distinguished service—this was in addition to the standard service medal the crew received”. (Ansari 2006, 115)

The US government paid compensation at local cost of living rate but refused to accept responsibility. Iran has accepted that the shooting down was not deliberate and has not treated this incident as an act of US state terrorism. However, it is hardly likely to forgive the refusal to accept responsibility, much less the lauding of the Vincennes captain and crew. Was the miserable attitude of the US government after this tragedy a sign of deep-seated resentment over the 1979 US hostages affair and a determination to get a measure of revenge?

These various examples are presented not as indicating any form of moral equivalence but to indicate that regimes of all kinds sometimes do reprehensible things. Two ‘wrongs’ do not make one ‘right’. They do not cancel each other.

In contrast to Alt-Right assertions (e.g. White House 2018), the Iranian regime has viewed Da-esh, IS, Al Qaeda and the Taleban with abhorrence, primarily because as Sunnis these groups reject not only the Shia branch of Islam practised in Iran but also the Iranian modernistic view of Islam, which embraces industrialisation, science and technology, universal education and universal health care as well as formally encouraging female emancipation (up to a point, but much further than in the Middle East generally). These extremist terrorist groups regard the Iranian model as anathema, as they want to regress to the laws and mores of the 8th century. That partly explains why Iran has backed anti-ISIS groups in Iraq and Syria and supported the Afghan government. The mutual hatred goes back to the period of Taleban control in Afghanistan, when in August 1998 ten Iranian diplomats and a journalist kidnapped by the Taleban in Mazar-e Sharif were murdered in cold blood. This nearly provoked a major Iranian

military invasion but that was called off, perhaps because Iran did not want to get sucked into the Afghan quagmire. However, Loyd (2018) suggested that some level of rapprochement between Iran and the Taleban may have been achieved recently.

Despite the above, a great deal of anti-Iranian propaganda exists to the effect that Iran is a terrorist state and is hand-in-glove with all the various IS and similar terrorist groups. Caution is urged in accepting such assertions at face value and their source should be carefully examined. As the historian Dr Gwynne Dyer noted (Dyer 2017), US Presidents all the way back to Reagan have regularly recited “the misleading mantra about Iran being the leading state sponsor of terrorism”. He pointed out that Iran is no worse than many of America’s allies in the region (and better than some) in its treatment of its own citizens. Further, it is no more prone to interfering in its neighbours than they are, viz. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt. Why then, he asked, is Iran treated as a rogue state posing such a unique threat to peace in the region? He answered his own question thus: “Because it defied the US and got away with it. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 overthrew Washington’s puppet, the Shah, and the US government has never forgiven Iran for that ‘crime’”.

However, it should also be noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran was established on the basis of a revolutionary credo that sought to overthrow established order, primarily but not exclusively in Iran. To that extent, it seeks to exert influence in those countries in the region which are controlled by regimes that it considers are despotic, particularly those that are antagonistic towards Iran or towards Shia Muslims or where Shia political control or power sharing is contested or threatened. It ‘meddles’ by backing and assisting those in such countries who can further Iranian strategic interests and foreign policy or who can counter anti-Iranian policies. Thus, even though, as Dyer observed, Iran has not really meddled externally any more than other states in the region, the long-term wish of the leadership is for either regime changes or policy changes that will promote Shia Islamist influence. However, Arjomand (2016) stated categorically that Iran’s foreign policy aims in recent years are geopolitical influence and Iranian sovereign security rather than exporting religious ideology, their earlier attempts at the latter having failed so badly. Nevertheless, countries with majority or significant Sunni populations view potential introduction of Iranian revolutionary fundamentalism with alarm.

Similarly, the Trump administration formally elevated the regional threat of Iranian political and ideological expansionism to a higher priority in its 'new strategy' statement in October 2017 (White House 2017a) and JCPOA withdrawal (White House 2018).

Iran itself has been the subject of several terrorist attacks. In the south-eastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, Sunni extremists killed 39 people in a bomb attack on a mosque in 2010. On June 7, 2017, IS terrorist gunmen carried out two separate attacks in Tehran in which a total of 12 people were killed and more than 42 injured. Whereas the US State Department promptly sent Iran a statement of condolences to the bereaved and empathy to the Iranian people (White House 2017b), it included the following admonishment: "We underscore that states that sponsor terrorism risk falling victim to the evil they promote", thus implying that the victims were to blame for their own demise because they were Iranian and therefore inherently evil. In the vernacular, they were 'asking for it'. President Trump also issued an unpleasant *Twitter* statement in similar vein. Such a blame reversal tactic has been used by a wide range of ultra-right wing interests around the world seeking to blame racist attacks and even Nazi genocide on the victims. The underlying thesis and message is that by their own bad nature and behaviour they invite being attacked. Unsurprisingly, Trump's message did not go down well in Iran and helped to seal his characterisation there as the epitome of evil, the supreme representative of *shetan-e bozorg* (The Great Satan).

## Iran-Israel Relations

Although widely believed and promulgated by Israel supporters, including the Trump administration, it is highly unlikely that every member of the Iranian regime wants to wipe Israel off the map, although undoubtedly some of them do. This alleged threat is usually attributed to a statement made by Iranian President Ahmedinejad in 2008. Mousavian and Shahidsaless (2014), quoting his official statement, noted that he referred only to his wish and hope that the Zionist Regime would be 'wiped off the map' and made no mention of the people or the land of Israel. They argued that calls for regime change in other countries were commonplace by governments and politicians, for example both the US and Israel have called for regime change in

Iran. Nevertheless, their clear implication that Ahmedinejad's statement was altogether benign and devoid of any malice may mislead. It would be naïve to believe that this statement was anything but a thinly veiled threat to destroy Israel as a Zionist state and to convert the land of Israel into a state occupied and controlled by the Palestinians. Despite inflammatory hyperbole from Israeli nationalists and pro-Israel hawks in the US who have repeated the 'wipe off the map' threat as justification for their virulent anti-Iran posture, the colourful phrase 'wipe off the map' is not evidence that Iran really does have a diabolical anti-Semitic plan to annihilate the entire Jewish population of Israel. However, the clear sub-text of Ahmedinejad's statement is that unless the Jewish population agreed to become Palestinians they would be expelled, or worse.

Whatever the facts and whatever the rights and wrongs on the complexities of the Iran-Israel conflict and why it has become so intractable, what appears to count more is the stripped-down reductionism in the respective stances of Iran on the one hand and the Israel-US duo on the other. Each party is utterly convinced that the other is evil and beyond reason and control, whereas they themselves are paragons of virtue who always act reasonably and realistically. Or, put another way, they exhibit mutually assured paranoia and mutually assured intransigence. The advent of Trump's Alt-Right administration has intensified the antagonistic US position.

It could be argued that the anti-Israeli rhetoric of Former President Ahmadinejad is no more representative either of the Iranian regime or of Iranian society than is President Trump's anti-Muslim and anti-Mexican rhetoric representative either of the United States government or of the American people. As noted above, strong anti-Israeli or anti-Semitic views are not apparent universally in the regime. Also, from the author's personal observations in Iran over many decades, whereas the general population in Iran may dislike the Israeli regime for its anti-Palestinian excesses, that does not translate into a deep hatred of Israelis or Jews in general. That is reserved for right-wing nationalists such as the current Prime Minister Netanyahu and extremist supporters who refuse to recognize the rights of Palestinians under international law, UN resolutions, and common humanity. For example, at a mundane level, in 2016 and 2017 the songs *White Dove* and *All My Joys* by Iranian-born Israeli pop star Rita were as popular in Tehran as in Tel Aviv. While undoubtedly Jews faced repression in the

early post-revolution years, and most emigrated, the small remaining Jewish population numbering some 20,000 are guaranteed a parliamentary seat under the Iranian constitution. Jewish-owned businesses and synagogues still function, and similarly, the various Christian minorities (e.g. Armenian, Ashouri, Catholic, Anglican) do not appear to be persecuted e.g. the large congregations who regularly attend the Armenian Orthodox Church on Karim Khan Zand Avenue in Tehran.

More intriguing, perhaps, are reported but unverified covert trade and technology deals between Israel and Iran, long after the Iran Contra deal (see, for example Alaco 2016; Parsi 2008). Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel was reported early in 2017 as softening his outright opposition to the Iran nuclear deal, following intelligence reports citing recognized benefits for compliance monitoring, although his apparent hesitancy did not last. Retired Brigadier-General Uzi Elam and former Director-General of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission was also reported to back the JCPOA as being the "best of options" (Pfeffer 2017). It should be noted that up to 1979, Iran and Israel were close allies. Although an eventual Iran-Israel rapprochement may be possible, the current mutual hostility makes this a longer term possibility rather than short-term, and certainly not while Trump's Alt-Right regime is in the White House.

## **Iran's Relations with Arab States**

Iran's Muslim population is overwhelmingly of the Shia Islam faith whereas the populations of Arab states are primarily Sunni Muslim, although there are significant numbers of Shiites in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. The Shia-Sunni schism dates back to 661 when the Muslim leader Ali, who claimed to be the rightful successor to the Prophet Mohammad, was assassinated. The followers of Ali created the Shia branch of Islam, which currently represents 10% of all Muslims.

Despite the Iran-Iraq War 1980–1988, Iran's relationship with Iraq has recovered remarkably well, especially since the fall of Saddam Hussein, and this may be attributed in part to Shiite solidarity and perceived mutual economic and security interests. In addition, the populations of the UAE, Bahrein, Qatar and Kuwait include large numbers of citizens having Iranian ancestry and heritage. Many citizens

are bi-lingual in Farsi and Arabic, regardless of whether they follow the Shia or Sunni branch of Islam.

The relationship between Iran and Syria has been close for many years. President Assad of Syria belongs to a Shia sect. Iran has closely supported the regime in its long-running civil war against rebel groups ranging from moderate freedom fighters to a variety of Daesh/IS terrorist groups.

In recent years, there has been an increasing Sunni assertiveness in the Middle East, stemming especially from within Saudi Arabia where the ultra-orthodox Wahhabis are reported to enjoy considerable influence with the Saudi royal family, government and throughout society. The Wahhabi ideology of regressive Islamic fundamentalism is indistinguishable from that of the Islamic State and Salafist terrorist groups. Indeed, in 2013 the European Parliament reported (Moniquet 2013) that Wahhabis were the main source of global terrorism, in terms of ideology and funding. A number of the terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks in New York and other attacks were Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia. In 2017, an influential right-wing 'think tank' reported (HJS 2017) that Saudi Arabia was foremost among foreign countries funding Islamist extremism in Britain and had been doing this since the 1960s. See also HoL (2017).

Steadily, Wahhabis have infiltrated and replaced mainstream Sunni Muslim control of religious schools across the Arab world. At the same time, Saudi Arabia has been flexing its military muscles, most notably by its aggressive campaign to oust the Shia Houthi rebels in Yemen. For its part, Iran has sided with the Houthis and made available weaponry, materiel and expertise. This conflict has turned into a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, based on mutually assured paranoia. Iran fears a Saudi-led intimidation, if not annihilation, by an overwhelmingly Sunni dominated Middle East. Saudi Arabia fears that Iran may scupper its aim to become the *de facto* regional power as well as inspire an anti-monarchy revolution in Saudi Arabia unless its influence and activities are curbed. The young Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman supports the US anti-Iran policy and notably has issued bellicose public statements about attacking Iran first rather than waiting to be invaded. He has supported Israel in its anti-Iranian stance (Goldberg 2018; Spencer 2018). Following a cross-border missile attack into Saudi Arabia by Houthi rebels in Yemen in November

2017, he further accused Iran of direct military aggression tantamount to an act of war, while failing to acknowledge the motives for its own aggressive Yemen campaign. According to Parsi (2018a), Saudi Arabia was also prominent in conspiring with the Trump administration and others to obtain a new UN Resolution condemning Iran as a regional security threat vis-à-vis Yemen, with massive across-the-board sanctions against Iran. Whereas Saudi Arabia may cite fear of encirclement by Iran and its proxies as a justification for its robust anti-Iran policy, Iran's equal fear of Saudi-led Sunni encirclement and domination is more credible, given the factual realities of the geography and population numbers involved. Compared to Iran's Shia population of 81 million, the total Sunni populations of the Arab Middle Eastern states number an estimated 190 million, ignoring the *maghrebi* states of North Africa (source [www.worldpopulationreview.com](http://www.worldpopulationreview.com)). Pakistan has a further 198 million, Turkey 80 million and Afghanistan 26 million.

The propensity for Saudi Arabia to bully its smaller Arab neighbours into accepting the Saudi world-view and agenda on Iran, and on matters generally, has been exemplified by the 2017 blockade of Qatar that it led, supported by three other states. The pretext was the allegation that Qatar was supporting terrorism by virtue, among other things, of having too close a relationship with Iran. This was followed by an attempt to coerce Lebanon into neutralising Hezbollah, politically and militarily, within its country. The irony of this terrorism support claim vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia's own Wahhabi/Salafist terrorism support has been widely discussed. Nevertheless, Trump's Alt-Right administration has enthusiastically supported the Saudi position and actions. Whether this will extend to Saudi Arabia's reported uranium enrichment program and potential nuclear proliferation remains to be seen (Philp 2018).

### **Attempts at Post-War Liberalisation**

In the early 1990s, the post-Iran-Iraq War reconstruction programme was underway, steered by the first 5-Year Economic Plan. As the mid-1990s approached, it became evident that President Rafsanjani was very much a pragmatist who recognized the necessity of good international relations and trade. He himself led a huge family import-export business. The early signs of a thaw in Iran's relations with the

west under Rafsanjani accelerated with the election of the next President (Khatami) in 1997. The author was among the first round of foreign consultants allowed to visit and work in NIOC refineries since 1979, for example. Western-style supermarket chains appeared in Tehran and other major cities. Major infrastructure projects got underway, such as the Tehran Metro.

However, this relative relaxation was not without stumbling blocks. Conservative elements in positions of power remained paranoid about western influence and would continue to harass and sabotage undue liberalism wherever they thought it necessary. The principle of *velayat-e faghih* and the Guardian Council could, and did, ensure that conservative views thwarted many of President Khatami's liberalising policies. See Ansari (2006; 2008) for a detailed exposition of the Khatami presidency.

According to Ansari (2008), Khomeini systematically sought to undermine public confidence in Khatami, while at the same time successfully backing the conservative presidential candidate Mahmoud Ahmedinejad at the next election. For a time, Ahmedinejad's various populist programmes received wide support, but eventually their cost became a fiscal headache for the government. In addition, his controversial radical views on Israel and the west caused such world-wide condemnation that the Iranian public started to see him as a liability. On top of this, there had been large-scale intermittent public protests demanding freedom and democracy. The Iranian Green Movement (which pre-dated the Arab Spring) attracted open support from reformist past-Presidents and many establishment figures. Numerous students and others were killed, injured or arrested in violent attacks on protestors by Revolutionary Guard Corps members and *baseeji* in election protests against Ahmadinejad in 2009 and 2010, and then again in 2011.

Ayatollah Khomeini distanced himself from Ahmadinejad who had become too much of a maverick. By 2013, the public mood had turned against Ahmadinejad and his policies. President Rouhani was elected on a clear reform ticket and immediately opened up dialogue with the west. However, he received a far warmer response from Britain and the EU than from the US, owing to the long-standing mistrust from conservative elements within the US administration and political system, and the even more hostile attitude and sanctions of the subsequent Trump administration.



President Rouhani experienced many of the frustrations experienced by Khatami, with his reform programme being slowed down or blocked by conservative MPs, the Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader himself. Nevertheless, at the Presidential election of 2017, he was re-elected with an increased majority, indicating that the public were weary of all the state propaganda and ineptitude and blamed the conservatives for the country's economic woes and international isolation. It had become clear that for the Islamic Republic to remain intact, its leaders would have to accept reforms demanded by the public or else run the real risk of provoking popular unrest and potentially their own demise. An example of such unrest surfaced in late December 2017 and early January 2018, with violent street protests across the country against food prices, general austerity, and suffocating state interference in citizens' daily existence. While disorganised and uncoordinated, these protests for the first time involved overwhelmingly working class people who, from 1979 until then, had formed the reliable core support of the regime. Many protesters were demanding regime change. Under threat of an IRGC clampdown, the protests quickly died down but widespread anger and dissent remained. Further street protests and strikes by *bazaari* shopkeepers against austerity, water shortages, and the near collapse of the currency following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and renewed sanctions, occurred from late June 2018 onwards. Nevertheless, Ansari (2018) warned that most of the underlying economic woes stemmed from chronic economic mismanagement and not simply to more recent actions by Trump.

### **The Weaknesses of the Alt-Right World View on Iran**

All the preceding sections are necessary to inform any reasonable understanding of the background to Iran as it is today and therefore how well the Alt-Right beliefs, attitudes, judgements and opinions regarding Iran reflect reality.

In the days of the Bush administration in the US, 2001–2009, hostility towards Iran increased substantially. The Al Qaeda terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York created a paranoia in the United States, and no less so in government, that an amorphous undifferentiated Muslim 'them' in the Middle East were intent on attacking

and destroying the US in every respect—its people, its values, its government, its institutions, its very way of life. However, this understandable fear and anger quickly became directed at the one country that most Americans already knew of in especially negative terms because of the US Embassy hostages, namely Iran. Despite there being absolutely no evidence of Iranian involvement in the 9/11 attacks, Iran soon became the lightning rod for all that was perceived as evil in the Muslim world. The authoritarian so-called Neo Conservatives (Neo-Cons) surrounding President Bush, such as Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, stoked the anti-Iranian fire just as much as they did the anti-Iraqi one (see Sick 2001). In a speech in 2002, Bush accused Iran, Libya, and North Korea of forming an ‘Axis of Evil’ that had to be crushed. This negative view of Iran carried forward into the Obama administration, even though Obama himself tried to show a more open approach towards Iran, see for example (Limbert 2009; Maleki and Tirman 2014; Parsi 2012; 2017).

Meanwhile, the neo-con legacy became absorbed into the fledgling Alt-Right movement. By the time that Trump was a presidential candidate, the anti-Iran rhetoric of the Alt-Right was already suggestive of how embedded their hatred of Iran was (see, for example, Beck 2015).

Whereas the Trump administration’s ‘all stick, and no carrot’ approach to Da-esh, IS, Al Qaeda and their extremist fellow travellers (who falsely claim to be acting for and on behalf of Islam) may be valid, it does not make sense if and when applied undifferentiated to all others who comprise the vast majority of Muslims. In particular, an unquestioning acceptance of a blanket jihadist thesis (e.g. Gorka 2016) ignores the non-jihadist Iranian anomaly (see chapter 5 on Gorka, and also Arjomand 2016; *Economist* 2014).

Alt-Right negative assumptions about and pejorative characterisations of Iran appear to lie in inaccurate knowledge. Although anti-Iran rhetoric is legion in the United States, see Gove (2016) for a vituperative example in the UK. There is good reason to be concerned about many aspects of the Iranian regime, such as its support for Hezbollah and Assad, various religious fatwas inciting murder of named individuals, human rights issues and, of course, the nuclear issue. However, it is a non-sequitur to suggest or imply that therefore the Iranian regime is just a bunch of psychopaths like IS. Ignorance and prejudice about ‘the other’, whether in Washington or Tehran, has

been around a long time. As Ansari (2006) noted, the paranoid xenophobia and crisis culture that has characterised parts of the Iranian regime for years is little different to that which has long existed in parts of the US government. Trump's Alt-Right Cabinet has continued and intensified the paranoid xenophobia. In many respects, the US and Iranian administrations are mirror images of each other.

Each side (US and Iran) typically asserts that the other's statements, policies and actions are wrong, full of lies and inventions, and born of evil intent, and therefore their respective interests and positions are mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. However, self-righteous pride and mutually assured paranoia have resulted in a damaging standoff for nearly 40 years. Neither side is prepared to acknowledge the legitimate rights, concerns, and interests of the other.

The evidence suggests that far from being a simple conflict between those who the Alt-Right might assert to be 100% 'saints' (i.e. the US) and those deemed to be 100% 'sinners' (i.e. Iran), what emerges is far more complex. Loathing of 'the other' comes from fear—the fear of domination or of losing dominant power, fear of an unfamiliar culture, fear of threats (real or imagined), fear of cultural annihilation or creeping cultural takeover, and so on. Fear of the other is fuelled by ignorance about the other.

The anti-Iran project became a cause celebre of the Trump administration, especially Bannon, Gorka, Pompeo, and Mattis. John Bolton's anti-Iran commitment stretches back over several previous administrations. There is evidence in the project of a toxic mix of autistic hostility (d'Estree and Shapiro 2017; Newcomb 1947), religious and ethnic hatred (e.g. Beck 2015), personal pique, a determination to exact revenge for all Iran's past wrongs—whether real, such as the US Embassy hostages e.g. Bolton (2018), or imagined—and a demonstration that the Alt-Right philosophy of US supremacy as exemplified by Trump's stated America First zero-sum policy will prevail.

The Trump team's ideal was that Iran would soon undergo a regime change that would get rid of Islamic political control. They envisaged this resulting from a popular uprising inside Iran, exacerbated by increasing economic damage and public weariness and disillusionment caused by years of sanctions and isolation. The option to aid the process of collapse by covert subversion, sabotage, and military strikes remains on the table and the appointment of Michael D'Andrea

to head the CIA's tougher anti-Iran programme (Rosenberg and Goldman 2017) was notable, as was the appointment of known anti-Iran hawks Pompeo and Bolton. The premise has been that the Islamic regime is a monolith of extremist 'mad mullahs' who cannot be tolerated and who must all be swept away, by hook or by crook. Bolton in particular openly called for regime change in Iran (Bolton 2018), and unashamedly over several years has addressed rallies of (and allegedly received payments from) the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK) (Parsi and Costello 2018), the anti-regime group that the US government proscribed as a terrorist organization until 2012 (Reid 2018).

The Trump team's view of the Iranian regime as a monolith has been at odds with the facts. Within one regime there are two main factions that constantly jockey for ascendancy. The conservatives certainly tend not to want rapprochement with the west but only a minority of them are extremist in the way that the Alt-Right rhetoric suggests. A 'steady-state' coexistence between the conservatives and the reformists/modernists has built up. Hardliners control one set of ministries, the Revolutionary Guard Corps and the armed forces, while modernists control other ministries and functions. While the modernists and the majority population want change and rapprochement with the west, few want another revolution, given the bloodshed of the one in 1979. The majority population are also fiercely patriotic and they will rally to the flag at any sniff of externally sponsored uprising. Hawks in the Trump administration would be ill-advised to contemplate underwriting a Bay of Pigs style invasion or a Najaf-style uprising. The region remembers how the US provoked the Najaf uprising in Iraq in 1991 and then sat back, refused to supply the rebels with arms and supplies, and allowed Saddam Hussein to massacre them.

Trump's 'new strategy' (White House 2017a) clearly underscored the traditional perception of the IRGC being the operational arm of the Supreme Leader's policies and decisions. In many respects this is correct. However, the IRGC has also developed for itself a large degree of autonomy. For example, it owns and controls large numbers of businesses and there have been accusations of involvement in trafficking (e.g. USDOT 2012). Its armed power, massive resources, and capacity for independent action raise the possibility of it becoming a major determinant of both policy and action.

The Alt-Right analysis also fails to address cogently why Iran is engaging in multiple conflicts within the Middle East, which implies simply that it's because the Iranians are evil, terrorist expansionists (e.g. White House 2017a; 2018; Pompeo 2018). There are four main reasons for the Iranian stance in the past 25 years:

- Defence of sovereignty and territorial integrity and bitter memories of the CIA/MI6-sponsored coup in 1953, and then the 1980 invasion by Iraq fully backed by the west.
- Fear of encirclement by hostile regimes (especially Sunni dominated) or proxies of hostile western regimes. Iran's 80 million Shia population is surrounded by countries with Sunni populations totalling more than 350 million and some neighbours, notably Saudi Arabia, are hostile. It is sometimes overlooked that Sunni-dominated Pakistan, while not immediately hostile, is a US-ally with nuclear weapons, and in theory may represent a bigger potential threat to Iran than does Israel.
- A desire to change established orders in other states in favour of Islamic republican principles, and thereby gaining pro-Iranian allies—but see Arjomand (2016) on Iran's failures in this area.
- Resurgent nationalism. Iran was the regional power for 2,500 years. It now seeks to re-establish itself as the 'natural' power holder and wielder in the Middle East, acting as a stabilizing buffer between the chaos of Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, and domination of the Gulf states by Saudi Arabia. Developing good trade and diplomatic relations with Turkey, Russia, China, India, the Central Asian Republics, and the Gulf states helps cement the role.

In general, the US intelligence community and that of many other countries does not apparently share fully the Trump administration's view of Iran. Sober assessments by CIA experts and NSA reflect the evidence-based thinking of professional intelligence experts, whereas the White House view has reflected the Alt-Right ideological imperatives and emotional desires of the Trump entourage for revenge, putting Iran in its place, and bringing Iran back under US control (e.g. Bolton 2018). With the March 2018 appointments of the known anti-Iran hawks Mike Pompeo and John Bolton (respectively as Secretary of

State and National Security Adviser), Trump's ideological and emotional position for action against Iran was likely to take precedence. The House of Lords report (HoL 2017, 54) was highly critical of the Trump administration's approach to Iran, which it described as having "a dangerous escalatory logic", and made clear that the UK would continue to support the Iran nuclear deal, with or without US support.

From an Iranian perspective, its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, Assad in Syria, the anti-IS forces in Syria and northern Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen is necessary for its own long-term sovereign defence, as per Arjomand (2016). Whereas the US accused Iran of creating an arc of control from Iran to Lebanon in order to export its Islamic Revolution and destabilize the region, Iran might argue that such an arc has helped to defeat IS and stabilize the region while helping to deter malevolent Saudi expansionism and Sunni extremism that put Iran at risk. The Middle East is Iran's backyard and it wants to keep out undesirables (as it sees them), just as the US forced Russian missiles out of Cuba in the 1960s and has maintained a healthy vigilance against hostile regimes in Central and South America.

The centrally located Iran, with its 30-year history of stability compared with most neighbouring countries and its well-organised state apparatus and infra-structure [its chronic economic mismanagement notwithstanding (Ansari 2018)], might provide the region with a much-needed stabilizing hub beneficial for peace in the Middle East. For example, Putin has long recognized Iran's stabilizing role in Russia's southern backyard. Indeed, the House of Lords report (HoL 2017, 54), noted that in responding to Iranian foreign policy and any provocations, the external parties to the Iran nuclear agreement "will also have to recognize that Iran has legitimate security interests and needs to be recognised as having a role as a regional power". Others also have a legitimate claim for roles as regional powers. However, the continuing hostility of the US and Israel, as well as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, is likely to scotch any such possibility regarding Iran.

The Iranian fear and mistrust of the west is not all-consuming. In his latest visit in 2017, the author observed that there continued to be no evidence of any popular hatred in Iran towards either the British or the American people, rather a mood of resignation to the status quo, a disdain for Trump and his coterie, and incomprehension of the Alt-Right's anti-Muslim and anti-Iran stance. While Trump was popu-

larly derided, the 'Down with America' mural on Karim Khan Zand Avenue and the '*marg bar Amrika*' (death to America) chants at political rallies had become a faded irrelevance to most Iranians. The long closed US Embassy on Dr Moffateh Avenue looked forlorn but apparently officially protected, save for some falafel hawkers who had commandeered a side entrance. Trump and his team were being dismissed by the regime as a mystifying parody of presidential conduct and good governance. The policy appeared to be to remain calm, not engage in anything that might unduly provoke Washington, and wait for a new and hopefully more reasonable US President and administration. However, the US unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018 and the re-imposition and extension of US sanctions may well exacerbate US-Iran hostility, a reactivation of Iran's nuclear programme, a raised likelihood of US military attacks on Iran, regional instability, and US political isolation as the sole JCPOA signatory to withdraw from it (e.g. Parsi 2018b). Moreover, instead of encouraging a moderate regime to evolve in Iran, the US abrogation of JCPOA and its further hostile actions are more likely to strengthen the hand of Iran's hardliners and relegate President Rouhani and other moderates to the side-lines (Parsi and Costello 2018). Meanwhile, both Iran and the other co-signatories have pledged to continue the JCPOA without the US, if possible (Bennetts 2018).

The risk of US military attack on Iran has risen from 'conceivable' to 'likely' but not immediately. Further bellicose statements on July 21, 2018 from Trump via *Twitter* and from Pompeo at an Iranian-American meeting in California (Blakely et al 2018), also strongly suggested that the Trump cabinet were now actively aiming for regime change in Iran by imposing crippling economic hardship and fomenting social unrest and, ultimately, revolution (Morello 2018). Pompeo's character assassination of individual Iranian leaders was in line with the administration's portrayal of Iran as '100% sinners', in contrast to the US being '100% saints'. As Parsi (2018c) argued, both the statements of Trump (White House 2018) and Pompeo (2018), [suggesting that the JCPOA failed because Obama failed to pressure Iran into a much better deal and therefore Iran must be pressured anew to capitulate and agree a comprehensive super-tough new JCPOA, under threat of crippling new sanctions and ultimately military attack], were based on several flaws. Since the Iranian regime and people have

withstood nearly 40 years of hostility and sanctions, an 8-year imposed war, and much privation, without capitulating to external pressure, it is unlikely that they will start now. Moreover, if such new US pressure fails, the US may push itself into war as its only remaining option, and this Iranian toughness will be a huge challenge to US military supremacy especially if, as is likely, US ground troops would have to be committed inside Iran. It will not be a theatre like Iraq or Afghanistan. Iran is four times the area of Iraq and double the population, for example. This is not a war that the US could win by copying the conventional methods employed in Iraq and Afghanistan or the application of technology and overwhelming firepower. The Iranians, battle-hardened from the Iran-Iraq War and fighting ISIS in Syria and Iraq, are masters of low-tech asymmetric attritional warfare designed to demoralise and erode an enemy's capacity to win. Invading US forces would lack an inherent motivation to fight, whereas the Iranians would be fighting for their homeland. With a hostile population of over 81 million to control, the US might be faced with fielding a long-term occupation force subject constantly to popular resistance and unpredictable attacks. It is inevitable that US casualties would mount. In the worst case, a debacle on the combined scale of the two Gulf Wars and the Iraq and Afghanistan insurgencies might ensue, with no conclusive US win and a real possibility of humiliating failure.

However, if the US opted for lesser military action, such as punitive attacks on targeted facilities and infra-structure, rather than invasion, this would undoubtedly provoke retaliation, quite possibly against US assets and interests around the globe. Whether this would develop into an endless tit-for-tat vendetta or be limited is difficult to predict. However, limited US military action is also unlikely to result in a capitulation by Iran or the behaviour change specified by Trump, Pompeo and Bolton.

## Conclusion

Given Trump's personality and the Alt-Right ideologists informing him, it is unlikely that his antagonistic policy towards Iran will soften. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile considering a potential alternative. The analysis and five principles posited by Maloney (2008) are particularly apposite, and especially the first two, which emphatically recommend diplomacy as the *sine qua non*, with containment as a viable but



poor second best. Also, principle four of Maloney's suggested strategy supports a broad international coalition as the best influence on Iran, as in the P5+1 JCPOA approach to the 2015 nuclear accord. Of course, diplomatic reciprocity from the Iranian leadership is also required.

In relations with Iran, greater understanding, emotional intelligence, and communication are needed rather than an aggressive, zero-sum knockout approach. Western-style efficiency-based rectilinear thinking in dealing with Iran is ill-matched to the more helical long-term Iranian approach to negotiation and problem-solving. With a long imperial history, Iran is a master of the 'long game'. As the past 40 years have shown, modern Iran is highly resistant to foreign pressure and remarkably resilient against sanctions. Rather than aggression, it may be better for the US to put itself in Iran's shoes, to understand their perspective and reasoning while not necessarily agreeing with it or accepting it. The EU's 'critical dialogue' policy towards Iran, for example, has been productive but of course anything with the 'EU' tag is likely to be dismissed by Alt-Right prejudice.

The risks arising from the Alt-Right anti-Iran project may be categorized, in no particular order, as follows and are assessed further in chapter 12. Of course, most of these risks arose before the Trump administration and therefore cannot all be blamed on the Alt-Right as such. However, Trump's avowed Alt-Right credo, stated threats, and actions concerning Iran have amplified them all:

*Risk 1. US policy misdirection*

US policy on Iran driven by Alt-Right prejudice, emotions and ideology rather than evidence-based intelligence, may lead to potential misinterpretation and policy misdirection to the detriment of the US.

*Risk 2. Isolation of US position*

Potential isolation of Alt-Right orientated US government attitude and policy towards Iran vis-à-vis US allies, leading to realignments potentially unfavourable to the US.

*Risk 3. Unilateral US withdrawal from JCPOA leading to Iranian nuclear proliferation*

Unilateral US withdrawal from the UN-brokered (P5+1 group) nuclear materials agreement with Iran may provoke an uncontrolled uranium

enrichment programme by Iran, leading ultimately to nuclear weapons capability.

*Risk 4. Unilateral US sanctions on Iran antagonizing US allies*

Antagonism of foreign governments and businesses, arising from continued application and extension by the US government of financial sanctions against Iran, by disrupting international electronic payments and prosecuting foreign banks and businesses trading with Iran.

*Risk 5. Continued denial of US access to Iran market*

Continued denial of the lucrative Iranian market to US investment and trade.

*Risk 6. Pre-emptive US military action leading to backlash and regional instability*

Pre-emptive US military action against Iran, seeking either to deter Iran from undertaking suspected development of nuclear weapons capability, or to deter Iran from extraterritorial engagement in conflicts in the region, or to punish Iran for an alleged transgression, or to facilitate regime change. Potential regional instability and increased tensions. Potential Iranian backlash against US interests globally.

*Risk 7. US integrity in agreements with foreign governments no longer trusted*

The US unilateral withdrawal from JCPOA, and the manner in which it was orchestrated, may reduce among foreign governments perceived trustworthiness and credibility of the US on any other agreements, thereby damaging US strategic interests.

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# Chapter 8: The Alt-Right, Immigration, Mass Migration and Refugees

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## **Abstract**

This chapter examines President Trump's controversial approach to immigration, mass migration, refugees, and humanitarian response to external disasters. His disdain and antagonism toward undocumented migrants (e.g. Mexican wall project, deportation) is discussed, including revocation of the DACA program for children. The author argues that Trump's antagonism toward Mexico may harm cooperation between US and Mexican authorities on combating drugs cartels, leading to a breakdown of law and order in some Mexican states, and a 'failed state' threat on America's border. Other topics include Trump's demonization of minorities (e.g. immigrants, Muslims, refugees) and his equivocal response to hate crimes. Risks are systematically identified.

**Key words:** Trump, Alt-Right, Mexico, immigration, minorities,  
hate crimes

## **Prelude to a Provocative Presidency**

Speaking at a presidential election rally in Reno, Nevada in August 2016, Democrat party candidate, Hillary Clinton, expressed concern at the "divisive rhetoric" used by her Republican opponent. Donald Trump, she claimed, had "built his campaign on prejudice and paranoia", and was "taking hate groups mainstream and helping a radical fringe take over one of America's two major political parties".

Lest her audience be in any doubt as to her meaning, she noted that "Race-baiting ideas. Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant ideas" were "all key tenets making up an emerging racist ideology known as the 'Alt-Right'". This had been described by the *Wall Street Journal* "as a



loosely organized movement, mostly online”, that “rejects mainstream conservatism, promotes nationalism and views immigration and multiculturalism as threats to white identity”.

Although there had always been “a paranoid fringe” in American politics that was “steeped in racial resentment”, it had “never had the nominee of a major party stoking it, encouraging it, and giving it a national megaphone. Until now”. “No one should have any illusions about what’s really going on here” she warned, “the names may have changed...Racists now call themselves “racialists”. White supremacists now call themselves “white nationalists”. The paranoid fringe now calls itself “alt-right”. But the hate burns just as bright” (*Politico* 2016a).

The emotive nature of Clinton’s address can, in part, be viewed as partisan political rhetoric in the closing months of a long, bitterly fought, campaign. At the same time, it reflects the extent to which racially charged and anti-immigrant sentiments were an integral part of Trump’s candidacy.

The tenor of his campaign was established at the outset. Announcing his bid for the Republican Party nomination, at Trump Tower, New York City in June 2015, the real-estate magnate sparked media controversy by his remarks on Mexican immigration to the United States. “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best”, he observed, “they’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people”. His solution to the problem was simple. “I will build a great, great, wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall” (*Washington Post* 2015).

Although Trump subsequently lamented the extent of press attention devoted to these remarks, they ensured that his campaign launch received widespread media coverage, or as one commentator observed “a lack of attention was one problem Trump would not have to confront—not then, not ever” (Trump 2015, 19; Green 2017, 163).

## The Mexican Wall

Albeit seemingly unscripted, Trump’s comments need to be viewed in the context of a succession of alarmist populist works on Mexican immigration by academics, journalists, politicians and self-publicists

who could be included broadly in the category “Alternative-Right” (Brimelow 1995; Buchanan 2002; 2006; Huntington 2004; Haygarth 2006; Tancredo 2006; Hansen 2007; Coulter 2015; Ashurst 2016).

The practical difficulties involved in the building of a border wall are formidable. The US-Mexico border is almost 2,000 miles long. Even if in some areas physical barriers are already in place, or the terrain too severe for migrants to cross, this would, by Trump’s admission, still require a wall around 1,000 miles in length (Trump 2015, 23–4, 205). Much of the construction would be in remote, inhospitable, landscape, including desert, mountains and adjoining rivers that flood on a seasonal basis (Rogers and Stylianou 2017).

Trump’s projected cost for a border wall was \$26 billion. Even if he could succeed in making Mexico pay for it, which is by no means certain, the timescale needed to achieve re-imburement could be lengthy. In the interim the construction costs would need to be borne by US taxpayers and be subject to Congressional approval. The latter has been notably unforthcoming (*BBC News* 2017a). Although Congress approved \$1.6 billion in federal funding for the wall in March 2018, this was a long way off the \$25 billion the president had sought. It also came with stringent conditions, most of the expenditure being authorized for the repair of existing border fencing, rather than new construction. This *impasse* prompted Trump to deploy up to 4,000 National Guard members to maintain security at the border as an interim measure until a wall could be built (*BBC News* 2018a).

Then there are the legal difficulties. Much of the land on the border is privately owned and would necessitate lawsuits and agreed compensation packages for the federal government to secure possession. This process could take a decade or more to complete (Dickinson 2017).

Given these issues, it might have been supposed that Trump’s promise to build a border wall, like his pledge in respect to his opponent Hillary Clinton to “lock her up”, was no more than campaign rhetoric that would be quietly dropped after his election. This has not been the case. The president has reaffirmed his commitment to construct the wall at every opportunity, in high profile speeches, policy statements and online tweets (*BBC News* 2017b; White House 2017, 10; *The Guardian* 2018).

Steve Bannon, former White House chief strategist and member of the National Security Council, recalled that Trump had “re-emphasized to me 100 times: *We must build the wall*”. The wall had “totemic value” for the president who was “bound and determined. And by the way, if that takes shutting down the government, you know, he may have to do it” (Koffler 2017, 173). This resolve reflects the fact that the wall is an article of faith for the Alt-Right. Any suggestion that Trump might abandon his commitment to it would be seen as an act of betrayal. Consequently, the construction of a border wall remains a high profile public policy objective of his administration, even though for financial, legal, and logistical reasons it is unlikely to be met.

The ongoing public debate and discussion over the wall has had damaging political consequences. It has led to a marked deterioration in US-Mexican relations. In January 2017, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto axed a planned visit to the White House after a Trump tweet stating “If Mexico is unwilling to pay for the badly needed wall, then it would be better to cancel the upcoming meeting” (Wolff 2018, 77–8). Peña Nieto has publicly rejected any suggestion that Mexico will make any contribution to the cost of the wall. (Zurcher 2017a; *BBC News* 2017c; Dixon and Skidmore 2018, 100). In 2018, the political sensitivities of the wall were heightened by the impending Mexican presidential election in July, with both leading candidates forthright in their denunciations of the wall. Left-wing front runner Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador declared that Mexico “would not be the punch ball (or piñata) of any foreign government”, whilst conservative candidate Ricardo Anaya Cortes pointedly observed Trump should “deal with security issues on his own side of the border” (*BBC News* 2018b).

Trump has responded to what he sees as a lack of Mexican cooperation in preventing illegal cross border migration by threatening to withdraw foreign aid to America’s southern neighbour and by ending the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States, Canada and Mexico (*BBC News* 2018c). Such actions would have far-reaching implications.

Although denounced by Trump during the 2016 election as “perhaps the greatest disaster trade deal in the history of the world”, since its introduction in 1994 NAFTA has led to a major expansion of trade in the region (Presidential Debate 2016). The value of US trade with Mexico rose from just over \$100 billion a year in 1994 to \$493.5 billion by 2012. In 2014, Mexico bought more US goods than the rest of

Latin America combined. Mexico is the first or second largest export market for 22 US states, including not just border states, such as California and Texas, but the likes of South Dakota, Nebraska and New Hampshire. NAFTA regulates a \$19 trillion regional trading market that includes some 470 million consumers (Ganster and Lorey 2016, 225; Hills 2014, 2, 4; Eichstaedt 2014, 62; O'Neil 2013, 7, 11).

In respect to foreign aid, most US funding for Mexico is spent on collaborative measures against illegal drugs and other cross-border initiatives. In recent years, Mexico has seen an alarming expansion of criminal activity by drugs cartels. Highly organized and willing to resort to acts of extreme violence, the largest cartels, like Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation, effectively took over control of state governments in some regions of the country (Dear 2013, 127, 146).

In 2006, incoming president Felipe Calderon declared a war on the cartels, a policy continued by the Pena Nieto administration elected in 2012. This commitment has come at a price. Since December 2006 more than 200,000 people in Mexico have either been killed or disappeared as a result of drugs related crime (Tucker 2018). Such progress made in the restoration of law and order has been achieved in collaboration with the United States. Under the 2008 Merida initiative Congress committed \$1.3 billion in funding over three years for joint actions with the Mexican government against the cartels. This included the purchase of high tech equipment like helicopters and surveillance aircraft (NSFA 2010, 37; O'Neill 2013, 135).

Trump and Alt-Right spokespersons have blamed the cartels and lax law enforcement by the Mexican authorities for the prevalence of drugs related crime in the United States. The reality is more complex. The rise of the cartels, which began in the 1980s, was, in part, a result of displacement of drugs related crime as the United States authorities worked with governments in south and central America to close off the Caribbean drugs corridor. The growth of the cartels was only made possible because of the insatiable demand for illicit drugs north of the border. The United States has the largest illicit drugs market in the world, estimated by the US Office of National Drug Control Policy in 2006 as being worth more than \$100 billion a year. The cartels are sustained by the estimated annual profits of \$10–25 billion that are gained from this trade (NSFA 2010, 17, 20, 33; Maril 2012, 289; Dear 2013, 132; Eichstaedt 62; Sanders 2017, 379).

Moreover, the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has estimated that 90 per cent of the guns confiscated from the cartels originate in the United States. American gun manufacturers have increasingly moved to the marketing and sale of military style assault weapons that appeal to the cartels. This has been part of a strategy to offset a decline in the traditional market for sporting and hunting rifles. There has also been a long-term contraction in the US gun market with the proportion of American households owning guns falling from 54 per cent in 1977 to 34.5 per cent by 2006 (NSFA 2010, 2-3, 43, 50, 52; Dear 2013, 132).

In short, the growth of the cartels is the result of a number of developments in the United States and Mexico. It will require collaboration by the authorities in both nations for cartel activity to be curtailed in the future. It is a war that neither nation can afford to lose.

Although the activity of the cartels is the subject that receives greatest media coverage, it is one of a number of cross-border issues that can only be effectively addressed by US-Mexican cooperation. Such problems include water and air pollution, the disposal of hazardous waste, protection of the environment and endangered wildlife, preventing the spread of disease, and reducing the high levels of TB prevalent in the border region (USGAO 2011, 10, 16, 35).

Trump has sought to prepare Alt-Right supporters for the possibility that his election campaign promises on the border wall and ending illegal immigration may not be met, by blaming political opponents in Congress and federal judges for thwarting his objectives. This strategy brings risks. It damages his relationship with Congressional leaders, including prominent Republicans, and has the potential to undermine public faith in the independence of the judiciary.

## Other Anti-Migrant Initiatives

In the absence of substantive progress on the wall, Trump has sought to reaffirm his commitments on immigration by a series of related initiatives where the authority of his office gives him greater freedom to act. This includes a 40 per cent surge in the arrest of suspected illegal immigrants during his first one hundred days in the White House and the US Justice Department setting federal judges a target of processing 700 immigrant deportation cases a year from April 2018 (*BBC News* 2017d, e, f; 2018c).

Such measures put at risk the future security of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States, the large majority of whom are law abiding, hard-working and resident in their adopted home for five years or more (Sanders 2017, 39). In particular jeopardy are the 800,000 undocumented immigrants brought illegally into the United States as children by their parents. In 2012, immigrants in this category were granted temporary work and study permits by the Obama administration under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The future of the DACA “dreamers” as they are known was put in doubt by an announcement by the Trump administration that DACA would end in March 2018 and that agreement on any replacement scheme would be contingent on Congressional approval of funding for a border wall. In April 2018, the fate of the dreamers remained uncertain, subject to ongoing political discussions and legal appeals (Zurcher 2017b; *BBC News* 2017g; *BBC News* 2018d, e, f, g, h). The controversy and widespread condemnation of Trump's DACA decision was then eclipsed in May 2018 by his new policy of arresting and criminally charging undocumented adult immigrants and immediately dispersing their children across America, with little or no prospect of their being readily reunited, unless and until the parents agreed to be deported. Video footage of distraught, crying youngsters being held in cages in detention centres provoked widespread outrage across the US and globally, while Trump and his supporters denied they were doing anything wrong, legally or morally. In the face of continuing protests, the family separation policy was reversed by Trump on June 20, 2018, but between May 5 and June 9 more than 2,300 children were taken from their parents and held in separate government centres, according to the Department of Homeland Security (*BBC News* 2018r; Blakely 2018a-e; Hoyle 2018; Pavia 2018).

In addition to demonstrating his tough credentials on immigration, Trump's ending of the DACA program can be seen as retribution against Democratic leaders in Congress who supported the scheme for their refusal to authorize funding for a border wall. In similar vein, the President has threatened to cut federal funding to so-called ‘sanctuary cities’ in the United States that refuse to cooperate with federal authorities in identifying undocumented immigrants (Trump 2015, 27). If implemented, such measures could exacerbate inner city problems

in leading urban centers across the United States, including Los Angeles, Chicago and New York.

The demonization of immigrant and ethnic minority groups is a recurring feature of Alt-Right rhetoric. This seeks to appeal to basic human fears and anxieties. “When people feel left out, left behind, and left without options”, Hillary Clinton reflected of the 2016 election campaign, “the deep void will be filled by anger and resentment or depression and despair about those who supposedly took away their livelihoods or cut in line” (Clinton 2017, 277). “It’s comforting to concentrate crime fears by imagining that all criminals are foreign”, as one mental health professional has observed. “It’s comforting to imagine that job insecurity and low salaries can be solved simply by getting rid of immigrants. It’s comforting to reduce complex problems to us-against-them solutions” (Frances 2017, 122–3).

The result of such thinking is that immigrant communities are portrayed as “non-or sub-human beings whose presence is felt as a form of degradation” (Neiwert 2017, 36). Rather than being viewed with compassion, as groups and individuals seeking to escape poverty and political instability, unauthorized immigrants are depicted as being akin to a natural disaster, threatening to “flood” the United States “in a sea of foreigners”, or as part of an alien invasion (Massey, Durand and Malone 2003, 3).

Crimes committed by individual immigrants are seized upon to make sweeping condemnations of entire ethnic groups. Author and broadcaster Anne Coulter has thus stated that “outside of the West, all countries have flourishing rape cultures” and that “the rape of little girls isn’t even considered a crime in Latino culture” (Coulter 2015, 166, 191–2). No matter that a succession of sociological studies have found that first and second generation Hispanic migrants are actually less likely to commit crime than native born Americans, despite the fact that they are more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods. This phenomenon is so well documented that it has been dubbed the “Latino paradox” (O’Neil 2013, 51–2; Klaas 2017, 136).

During the 2016 campaign, Trump encouraged the Alt-Right scapegoating of immigrant communities. Accepting the Republican Party presidential nomination in July he warned of the almost “180,000 illegal immigrants with criminal records, ordered deported from our country” who were “tonight roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens”. Illegal immigrants were “being released by the tens of

thousands into our communities with no regard for the impact on public safety or resources". He proceeded to highlight the tragic, high media profile, cases of Sarah Root, Kate Steinle, and other Americans who had been murdered by illegal immigrants. In a speech in September in Phoenix, Arizona, on immigration, he claimed that "countless innocent American lives have been stolen because our politicians have failed in their duty to secure our borders and enforce our laws", before inviting the grieving families of murder victims on to the stage (*Politico* 2016b; *New York Times* 2016).

In office, the President has acted in similar vein. In early 2017, his administration began publishing lists of crimes committed by immigrants and the Department of Homeland Security opened a special hotline for members of the public to report "crimes committed by removable criminal aliens" (Klaas 2017, 136). In his address to a joint session of Congress in February 2017, he highlighted the tragic cases of Jamiel Shaw, Susan Oliver, Jena Oliver and Jessica Davis, four Americans murdered by illegal immigrants (*BBC News* 2017b). In December 2017, he expressed his outrage at the "disgraceful" acquittal of Jose Ines Garcia Zarate, an illegal immigrant on trial in California for the murder of Kate Steinle (*BBC News* 2017h). In his first state of the Union address, in January 2018, the President lamented the tragic "loss of many innocent lives" to immigrant criminals and gang members (*The Guardian* 2018).

Such sentiments are understandable. The taking of any innocent life is a personal tragedy for the victim and a source of lifelong heartache for their family and friends. What is disturbing is the way in which Trump has sought to exploit public feelings of anger and emotion generated by such cases for political ends, whether it be to demand funding for a border wall or seek support for anti-immigration measures put forward.

There is a danger that Trump's inflammatory rhetoric will promote an atmosphere of fear and hatred towards all immigrant communities, with the risk that they will be subjected to intimidation and acts of violence. There is already evidence that this is the case. In 2017, 17 people in the United States were killed and a further 44 injured in attacks by Alt-Right extremists, making it the most violent year in the history of the movement (Neiwert 2017, 13, 89; Hanks and Amend 2018, 2).



## Trump's Attitude Toward Hate Crimes

In marked contrast to his statements on immigrant-related crime, Trump has done little to speak out on behalf of the victims of hate crimes. When civil rights activist Heather Heyer was killed by James Alex Fields Jr, a neo-Nazi sympathizer, at an Alt-Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, the President condemned Fields's actions but refused to make any distinction between white supremacist groups at the event and counter-demonstrators. "I'm not putting anybody on a moral plane", he informed journalists. "You had a group on one side and a group on the other and they came at each other with clubs -there is another side, you call them the left, that came violently attacking the other group. You had people that were very fine people on both sides" (*BBC News* 2017i; *The Guardian* 2017; Klaas 2017, 14, 58).

Trump's comments attracted widespread criticism, including from such leading Republicans as former presidential candidates John McCain and Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, Speaker of the US House of Representatives. Despite this, the President repeated his remarks less than two weeks later, claiming "when you look at really what's happened since Charlottesville, a lot of people are saying and people have actually written, "Gee, Trump may have a point" (*Eggert* 2017; *BBC News* 2017j).

## Trump's Attitude Toward Muslims and Developing Countries

On the international stage, Trump's actions have followed a similar pattern. In December 2017 and in a final ruling in June 2018 (*Deng* 2018a), the United States Supreme Court upheld the president's travel ban, barring residents from six majority Muslim countries, Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, from entering the United States, pending ongoing legal challenges. Trump justified the measure, introduced by presidential executive order in January, as necessary to safeguard the United States against acts of Islamic terrorism (*BBC News* 2017k, l; 2018i). This is despite the fact that no Americans have been killed in a US-based terrorist attack by nationals originating from any of the countries subject to the ban. Moreover, of 201 documented

cases of domestic terrorism between 2008 and 2015, 115 were committed by right-wing extremists compared to 63 Islamic inspired acts of terrorism and 15 by left-wing extremists (Klaas 2017, 175; Neiwert 2017, 13).

Trump's comments on Islamic countries have a similar impact to his remarks on immigrant crime, encouraging the view that *all* Muslims should be seen as potential terrorists. In November 2017, he sparked further controversy by retweeting anti-Islamic videos posted by the far-right British political organization Britain First. He has maintained a vendetta against London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, himself a Muslim, and incorrectly attributed rising crime in England and Wales to the "spread of radical Islamic terrorism" (*BBC News* 2017l, m; Zurcher 2017c).

In a global context, Trump has made statements on race that are consistent with the racist philosophy of the Alt-Right. In a January 2018 Oval Office meeting, he was widely reported to have denounced Haiti, El Salvador and African nations as "shithole countries", and that the United States should refuse to accept immigrants from any of them. Shockingly offensive, and detrimental to US relations with the states in question, such remarks have far-reaching implications (*BBC News* 2018j, k, l).

They cast doubt on the commitment of his administration to provide humanitarian relief for the victims of natural disasters and human conflict in other countries, or to offer a haven for refugees from such events in the United States. This concern is reinforced by a number of actions on the part of the Trump administration during his first sixteen months in office.

## **Trump's Attitude Towards Humanitarian Disasters and Refugees**

In September 2017, the US Territory of Puerto Rico was hit by a hurricane that killed more than 1,000 people and wiped out all power supplies on the island. Notwithstanding the fact that Puerto Ricans have American citizenship the Trump administration was widely criticized for the speed and scale of relief provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In January 2018, FEMA announced that food and water shipments to the island were to be ended, even though nearly half a million residents were still without

power, and Trump made no more than a passing reference to Puerto Rico in his State of the Union address (Shugerman 2017; Chavez 2018).

In October 2017, Trump announced that the United States would cut the maximum number of refugees it would admit from 110,000 a year to 45,000. In the six months that followed, only 10,548 refugees were allowed entry. In January 2018, 200,000 refugees allowed to live and work in the United States after a series of earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001 had their residency permits cancelled and were given until 2019 to leave the United States or face arrest and deportation (*BBC News* 2018l, m; Safir 2018).

There is a further risk that the United States will fail to provide international leadership in seeking to prevent war crimes or the ethnic cleansing of minority groups that are the catalysts for mass migration and refugee crises. In 2017, the Trump administration made virtually no response to the persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority by the military authorities in Myanmar and the resulting exodus of more than 600,000 refugees into neighbouring Bangladesh. In a 12-day visit to Asia in November, the President made only one public comment on the crisis, welcoming “the commitments by the government of Myanmar” to end the emergency (Diamond 2017; Nichols 2017; *Washington Post* 2017). Disturbingly, Trump has expressed public admiration for autocratic heads of state with troubling human rights records, including Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt and President Erdogan in Turkey (Albright 2018, 209–11).

In March 2017, the Trump administration announced it would no longer be seeking the removal of President Assad in Syria (Frum 2018, 165). Admittedly, Trump did respond to the Assad regime’s killing of civilians by way of a unilateral missile attack against government airbases in May 2017, followed by a further multilateral strike with Britain and France in April 2018. At the same time, he made clear that this action was in direct response to the use of chemical weapons. He made no commitment to intervene in respect to conventional bombings or the killing of civilians by government ground forces. There were also indications that Trump’s core supporters saw the strikes as a betrayal of his promise to pursue an “America first” foreign policy (*BBC News* 2018n, o).

## Consequences of Trump's Alt-Right Credo

In summary, the willingness of the Trump administration to embrace Alt-Right beliefs and policies on immigration, mass migration, and refugees has a number of potentially negative, far-reaching, consequences.

The president's election campaign pledge to build a 1,000 mile wall along the border with Mexico has led to the construction of 9 meters high by 9 meters wide prototypes near San Diego, California (Bowes 2017). The formidable combination of financial, legal and logistical problems involved in building the wall means there is unlikely to be any further progress of note on the project during Trump's presidency, even if he were to be re-elected to a second term of office in 2020.

At the same time, the oft-stated objective of building a wall, however unrealizable it may be, will have a damaging impact on US-Mexican relations. This matters to both countries. Mexico is the second largest trading partner for the United States after Canada. In 2013 it purchased some 14 per cent of all American exports, more than France, Germany, the Netherlands and United Kingdom combined. The US Chamber of Commerce has estimated that some six million American jobs depend on this cross-border trade (Hills 2014, 2, 4).

It is important that the United States and Mexico work together to counter the increasingly serious threat posed by Mexican drugs cartels. Despite a sustained campaign against organized crime by successive Mexican governments since 2006, the level of cartel activity and violence has escalated in recent years (Tucker 2018). In 2017, there were some 18,500 cartel-related murders in Mexico (*BBC News* 2018p). The Mexican authorities need the assistance of their American counterparts to stop the repatriation of drugs profits from the United States and the large scale illegal cross-border gun sales to the cartels.

If such cooperation is not forthcoming, there is the risk that local government officials and the police and military will struggle to maintain law and order in some Mexican states. In January 2018, the United States State Department assessed the levels of violence and criminal activity in the states of Colima, Guerrero, Michoacan, Sinaloa, and Tamaulipas as comparable to war-torn countries like Afghanistan, Iraq,

and Syria (*BBC News* 2018q). A threat to civil authority of this magnitude could in turn de-stabilize Mexico's continuing transition to a multi-party democracy since 2000 after more than seventy years of effectively one-party rule. The election of the new left-wing President Obrador in early July 2018 adds a new and uncertain dimension to US-Mexico relations. Obrador, taking office in December 2018, had been forthright in his criticisms of Trump during the election campaign, promising to "make him see reason" and "put him in his place". However, in the aftermath of this victory, Obrador's relationship with his American counterpart became more cordial, with both men pledging mutual cooperation and respect (*BBC News* 2018s; *Fox News* 2018).

Within the United States, President Trump has sought to blame Democrat politicians in Congress for his failure to make progress on a border wall because of their refusal to allocate federal funding for the project. He has threatened to retaliate by making funding for a wall a precondition for the support of his administration on immigration related issues favored by the Democrats. In particular, this puts at risk the continued right to live in the United States of the more than 800,000 DACA dreamers who were brought into the United States illegally as children. If the president succeeds in carrying out his threat to deport the dreamers, it would have traumatic consequences for families and communities across the United States. It would also be a divisive issue for Republicans in Congress, with leading members of the party strongly opposed to such action.

Trump's commitment to the deportation of illegal immigrants is likely to lead to continued tensions in the relationship between his administration and the 'sanctuary cities' across the United States that refuse to cooperate with such expulsions. Such mutual enmity, involving the possible withdrawal of federal funding, can only have negative consequences for the quality of life and provision of services in the urban centres involved, which include some of the leading cities in the United States.

In US society at large, Trump's demonization of immigrants as "drug dealers" and "rapists" can only serve to encourage vigilante attacks on members of ethnic minority communities by members of Alt-Right groups and those in sympathy with them. Disturbingly, this extends to evidence of racially discriminatory behaviour on the part of law enforcement forces across the United States (OCOPS 2015, 5; Comey 2018, 139–42).

On the international stage, the president's use of racially charged language and anti-Muslim rhetoric puts at risk US relations not just with third-world and Islamic countries but also western nations with significant Muslim communities, such as Canada, France and the United Kingdom. Moreover, such sentiments, combined with the negative Alt-Right perceptions of migrants and refugees espoused by Trump, suggest that during his time in office the role of the United States in taking the lead in providing humanitarian aid in response to natural disasters and refugee crises will be greatly diminished.

Similarly, the Trump administration will be less likely to speak out against human rights abuses and the persecution of ethnic or religious minority groups around the world that are often a catalyst for mass migration. Indeed, on June 29, 2018, the US announced its withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council (Deng 2018b). Within the United States, there is a risk that some terrorist-related incident or temporary national crisis could lead to Trump asserting the right to extra-legal powers to restore law and order or to safeguard the nation from danger (Klaas 2017, 143; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 193).

## Conclusion

Viewed in historical perspective, Alt-Right perceptions of migrants and refugees can be seen as a recurring phenomenon the United States. The rise of the "Know Nothing" movement in the 1850s reflected the growth of anti-immigrant prejudices in that era. (*BBC News Magazine* 2016; *BBC News* 2018t; Jones 1992, 126, 134) Similarly, during the "golden age" of immigration, 1880–1920, the popularity of pseudo-academic white supremacist tracts by authors like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard were indicative of the widespread nativist attitudes of the day (Grant 1916; Stoddard 2011). Such views could transcend the political divide and attract some unlikely advocates. In 1910, radical socialist Jack London thus published a short story, *The Unparalleled Invasion*, which imagined the use of biological warfare and genocide by western powers to counter Chinese expansion into their colonial territories (London, 1910).

Such bouts of xenophobia have typically occurred at times of crisis or national self-doubt. Albeit disturbing, it is important to note that historically the popular appeal of such sentiments has been of limited duration, fading away with the return of economic prosperity or the

revival of national self-confidence (Jones 1992, 126). Notwithstanding the rise of the Alt-Right during the Trump administration, this is the most likely outcome in the present-day.

The mainstream American political tradition has been more enlightened, recognizing the diversity and opportunities for growth provided by immigration. The United States, as John F. Kennedy observed, is “a nation of immigrants”. Immigrants have contributed to “every aspect of our national life. We see it in religion, in politics, in business, in the arts, in education, even in athletics and in entertainment. There is no part of our nation that has not been touched by our immigrant background. Everywhere, immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life” (Kennedy 1964, 3).

Nevertheless, meanwhile there is a range of risks that arise summarized as follows, and which are further assessed in chapter 12:

*Risk 1. Damage to Trump’s relationship with Congress*

By blaming political opponents in Congress for his failure to fulfil election campaign promises on the border wall and ending illegal immigration, Trump’s relationship with Congressional leaders, including prominent Republicans, may be damaged

*Risk 2. Public faith in an independent judiciary*

By blaming federal judges for his failure to fulfil election campaign promises on the border wall and ending illegal immigration, Trump may undermine public faith in the independence of the judiciary.

*Risk 3. Temptation to invoke necessity for suspension of democracy*

A terrorist-related incident or temporary national crisis within the US could lead Trump to assert the right to extra-legal powers (e.g. martial law, arrest without trial, suspension of constitution) to restore law and order or to safeguard the nation from danger.

*Risk 4. Reneging on DACA program and accelerating immigrant deportations*

Immigrant deportation measures put at risk the future security of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the US, especially 800,000 child migrants brought illegally into the country and previously granted temporary work and study permits under the DACA program.

*Risk 5. Promulgation of hate crimes against immigrants*

Trump's inflammatory rhetoric may promote an atmosphere of fear and hatred towards all immigrant communities, with the risk that they will be subjected to intimidation and acts of violence.

*Risk 6. Failure of US leadership on prevention of war crimes and ethnic cleansing and in the relief of humanitarian crises*

The US may fail to provide international leadership in seeking to prevent war crimes or ethnic cleansing of minority groups who are catalysts for mass migration and refugee crises, and in the relief of humanitarian crises from natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes.

*Risk 7. Threat to US from inadequate US support to Mexico in combating drugs cartels*

If cooperation between the US and Mexican authorities on combating drugs cartels is not robustly supported by the Trump administration, local government officials and the police and military will struggle to maintain law and order in some Mexican states, thereby creating a 'failed state' threat on America's border.

*Risk 8. US foreign relations damaged by Trump's racist and anti-Muslim rhetoric*

On the international stage, the president's use of racially charged language and anti-Muslim rhetoric may damage US relations not just with third-world and Islamic countries but also western nations with significant Muslim communities, such as Canada, France and the United Kingdom.

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# Chapter 9: The Alt-Right, Environmental Issues, and Global Warming

*By Alan Waring*

## **Abstract**

This chapter examines Trump's ideological and emotional approach to environmental policy and its conflict with environmental science, technology and economics, reflecting the Alt-Right denial and rejection of the existence of climate change and global warming. Fear of expert opinion that contradicts non-expert Alt-Right opinion has led to the US rejection of the Paris Climate Accord and the downgrading of the EPA and its enforcement activities. The anti-expert counter-culture is based on an 'alternative universe' of invented facts and strange explanations to replace known facts and scientific explanations, and a keenness to believe in easily disprovable falsehoods. Confirmation bias and social amplification of risk are involved. Bad science is extended to support false economic arguments for justifying downgrading of environmental protection in favour of polluting industries. Risks are systematically identified.

**Key words:** Trump, Alt-Right, environment, climate change, science, economics

## **Climate Change and Other Environmental Issues**

The negative effects of long-term climate change, allegedly caused by human-created global warming, have risen up the environmental and political agendas steadily since 1990 (e.g. Corfee-Morlot et al 2007). By 2015, climate change had become one of the most pressing environmental issues politically. One hundred and ninety nations agreed a common agenda seeking to curb global warming through control of carbon emissions (so-called 'greenhouse gases', such as carbon dioxide) from industrial activities, combustion engines, and burning of fossil fuels, and finding low carbon substitutes for carbon energy

sources—the so-called Paris Climate Accord (PCA) of December 2015 (UNFCCC 2015).

Trump, both during his presidential campaign and since coming into office, took a particularly negative and antagonistic stance towards environmental issues in general and climate change in particular (see e.g. Bomberg 2017). Despite the PCA consensus, Donald Trump as US President directed a volte-face by the United States, which in effect withdrew from the PCA in June 2017. Nevertheless, his National Security Strategy document of December 2017 (White House 2017) espoused a more benign attitude towards environmental matters than is evident from what he has enacted. This chapter considers the underlying contrarian motives of the Trump regime and the Alt-Right generally for rejecting the PCA, as well as the potential environmental consequences, and the potential political and economic consequences for the United States. The chapter also addresses lower order environmental issues other than global warming, since these are also affected by Alt-Right thinking and policies of the Trump administration.

## The Paris Climate Accord

The Paris Climate Accord came into force on November 4, 2016, following a conference of the parties. The PCA represents a consensus of the 190 signatory countries on the need to cut ‘greenhouse gases’, which the international scientific community overwhelmingly believes to be the cause of an unprecedented and dangerous increase in global temperatures and climate change. This overwhelming scientific consensus is evidenced by the fact that some 200 scientific organizations world-wide representing more than 97% of climate scientists have formally stated their agreement that climate change and global warming are occurring and are caused by human activities (NASA 2017). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its Fifth Assessment Report (IPCC 2014), which reinforced the concern about global warming and undoubtedly influenced the PCA. The UK, for example, had already implemented the UK Climate Change Act 2008, which among other things requires the UK Committee on Climate Change to undertake five-yearly risk assessments of the climate change threats to the UK (see, for example, ASC 2016).

The PCA updated and expanded the scope of the previous UN Kyoto Protocol of 1997 (UNFCCC 1998) which came into force on February 16, 2005. The Kyoto Protocol (KP) required a limited number of developed countries to meet their individual targets by way of three market-based mechanisms:

- International emissions trading (so-called ‘carbon trading’)
- Clean development mechanism
- Joint implementation

These KP mechanisms sought to stimulate ‘green investment’ and help the parties meet their individual emission targets in a cost-effective way. However, the United States withdrew from the Kyoto protocol and some others failed to comply with it (McCright and Dunlap 2003). The effect of the PCA was to expand greatly the number of countries in agreement and to aim to meet the following objectives:

- Hold global temperatures to considerably less than 2.0°C above pre-industrial times, with a target of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
- Limit the quantity of greenhouse gases emitted by human activity to the level that can be absorbed naturally by soil, vegetation, oceans and other surface water, with a start date between 2050 and 2100.
- Review every five years the contribution of each country to cutting emissions to ensure that targets are met.
- Richer countries to help poorer ones by providing financial facilities to cope with climate change and to transfer to renewable energy sources.

The PCA reportedly met some early difficulties, primarily in relation to financing and time scales. The national targets to cut emissions were also voluntary and thus success relies to a large extent on self-regulation country by country, with some being more committed and assiduous in compliance than others. Nevertheless, there has been a general acceptance that adherence to PCA is required so as to avoid a potential global catastrophe that unchecked continued global warming would probably bring. The Trump regime has been a rare exception by refusing to acknowledge that global warming exists, or by ar-

guing that if it does exist then it is not a significant problem. The underlying Alt-Right ideology that informs this contrarian attitude is discussed below, following a summary of factors important to understanding the nature and science of the environment.

### **Different Meanings of ‘Environment’**

The term ‘environment’ has a number of meanings. In relation to global warming, environment refers to the macro-level natural physical environment of the world, such as its oceans, forests, land masses, ice masses, and climate. The physical environment may be envisaged as comprising a systemic hierarchy of interacting component systems, each contributing to the next higher level. Climate represents the perseverant product of weather systems in the physical environment that are created and affected by complex interactions between lower order systems and components. For example, a continued or increasing amount of fossil fuel burning by industry across the globe will add to the carbon dioxide in the upper atmosphere, which becomes trapped in amounts large enough to upset the world’s heat gain-loss balance and resulting in perseverant temperature rises. In turn, the rise in temperature affects the oceans, other water masses, land masses, stability of ice masses, and so on, causing adverse effects such as rise in sea temperatures, sea level rises and flooding risks, shrinkage of inland seas, lakes and waterways, soil erosion and drought affecting agriculture (e.g. IPCC 2014; NASA 2017). The damaging effects are likely to be on a scale large enough to threaten the safety, livelihoods, food supplies, and amenity of large numbers of people and, in some cases, whole populations. This, in essence, is what the PCA is meant to prevent, or at least to delay and reduce the impact of it. The UK’s Committee on Climate Change, for example, issued its 2017 Risk Assessment Report (ASC 2016), which identified six priority risks to be addressed over the next 5 years, namely flooding and coastal damage; public health and wellbeing; natural capital; future water shortages; global food system; and new and emerging pests and diseases.

The global physical environment as addressed in the macro-level context of the PCA does, of course, impact on other kinds of environment—economic, social, and political. Glendon and Clarke (2016, 332–351) discuss a wide range of research evidence relating to such interactions. Appreciation of the systemic nature of these interactions

and the emergent effects is relevant to the Alt-Right world-view and the Trump administration's rejection of the PCA.

The term 'environment' also refers to particular lower levels within the global physical environment, where environmental pollution from particular industrial processes at particular locations, as well as other potential pollution sources such as jet aircraft and ships, may occur. At this level, the pollution is often observable or detectable by the human senses, although not always. This is the level at which the higher order goals of the PCA are expected to be addressed in a variety of practical ways. However, at this lower level, elimination and control of greenhouse gas emissions is only one pollution issue. Other non-PCA pollution includes chemical and oil contamination of land and water, non-CO<sub>2</sub> air pollution, illegal dumping of waste, and so on.

At these lower levels, most emissions and pollution (whether PCA or non-PCA) are subject to pre-existing national protective legislation. For example, in the US the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) oversees and enforces a range of acts and regulations that require organizations to carry out practical policies to protect the environment. Similarly, in the UK the Environmental Protection Act 1990 rationalized and updated a swathe of pre-existing environmental legislation placing responsibilities on duty-holders as well as corporate entities. As far as the US is concerned, within months of President Trump's inauguration, his administration signalled not only its withdrawal from the PCA but also that the EPA's budget, staffing and scope would be cut. Although the curbs were, according to Trump and his various spokespersons including Scott Pruitt the newly appointed EPA chief, aimed primarily at its climate change activities, inevitably the EPA's capacity to oversee and help enforce conventional environmental protection legislation would also be affected adversely (see e.g. Krugman 2017; Krupp 2017). Such an outcome would also fit with Trump's stated antipathy to the EPA overall. For example, in October 2015, Trump had threatened to cut EPA funding on the grounds that its activities were allegedly crippling US businesses. Once in office, in February 2017 he issued an executive order to repeal the Clean Water Rules. Environmental controls on the US coal industry were also relaxed. In March 2017, the EPA budget cuts and curbs were announced as part of a range of federal budget cuts. The expressed and revealed justifications of the Trump administration's anti-environmental project as enacted are discussed further in sections below.

## Environmental Pollution and Related Major Hazards

Any significant reduction in environmental regulation (in any country), is likely to have a negative impact on hazard control. Therefore, the Trump anti-PCA and anti-EPA programme was bound to adversely affect the US. For example, to appreciate the likely negative impact of it in terms of low frequency-high impact events (as opposed to higher frequency-lower impact exposures), it is instructive to consider the history of environmental disasters since 1975, the findings of official investigations and inquiries, and the recommendations to prevent recurrence. Some prominent examples are listed in Table 9.1 below.

**Table 9.1: Examples of Human-Created Environmental Disasters**

Environmental Disaster	Country/ Region	Additional Significant Human Health & Safety Impact	Year
Seveso toxic release (HSE, 1980; Wilson, 1982)	Italy	Y	1976
Bhopal toxic release (Shrivastava, 1987)	India	Y	1984
Chernobyl nuclear reactor failure (IAEA, 1992)	Ukraine	Y	1986
Sea Empress oil tanker grounding and environmental disaster (Edwards, 1998)	UK	N	1996
Buncefield gasoline storage fire and explosion (HSE et al, 2011; Newton, 2008)	UK	Y	2005
PetroChina Jilin fire, explosion and Songhua River environmental disaster (Bruyninckx et al, 2007)	China (and into Russia)	Y	2005
BP Texas City refinery fire and explosion (USCSHIB, 2007)	USA	Y	2005
BP Deepwater Horizon offshore installation fire, explosion and environmental disaster (Deepwater Commission, 2011; Reader and O'Connor, 2013)	USA	Y	2010
Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor core meltdown and widespread radioactive contamination (NAIIC, 2012; Perrow, 2011, 2013)	Japan	Y	2011

Source: adapted from Table 1 in Waring (2005; 2015).

The environmental disaster cases in Table 9.1 are indicative of fundamental management failures in the operating organizations involved, as the many official inquiry reports concluded. However, as Waring (2015) observed, there are underlying questions that such reports typically do not address, either at all or in any depth, notably:

1. Why is there such an apparently large gap between the well-established ideal and reality vis-à-vis major hazard accident prevention?
2. Why do boards and individual directors and executives so frequently apparently ignore rational common-sense requirements (and, indeed, statutory requirements and professional good practice) for environment, health and safety (EHS) risk management intended ultimately for the protection of shareholder/stakeholder interests?
3. What motivations drive them to apparently ignore or relegate safety and environmental protection?
4. Is it simply a gambling mentality and a “what can we get away with?” culture? (see, for example, Waring, 2013, 54).
5. Is it the result of an intellectual appraisal in which beliefs, values, attitudes and motivations relating to their prioritized perceptions of corporate risks and their management are weighed against an often stated desire to put EHS ‘first’, for example if EHS requirements are perceived (rightly or wrongly) to incur undue costs and thereby counter corporate profitability (i.e. the ‘amoral calculator’ approach to compliance and discretion—see Black, 2001 and Kagan and Scholz 1984)?
6. Is it the result of unobtrusive social processes that force them pre-consciously towards seemingly unwise decisions and actions? (i.e. the socially constructed emergence argument of Perrow’s ‘normal accidents’ proposition Perrow, 1984; Vaughan 1996; 2004)?
7. What risk assessment and risk-decision rationale and methods, if any, do they apply and are they appropriate and applied competently? (see e.g. Shrader-Frechette 1991).



8. To what extent are psychological and social-psychological factors such as ignorance and bounded rationality, authority, conformity and group-think, failures of foresight and organizational learning, dysfunctional power relations, and weak safety culture responsible for such major hazard incidents (see discussion in chapter 12)?

To some extent, questions 3–5, 7 and 8 have been answered in relation to specific cases by government-led official inquiries. For example, in both the Deepwater Horizon and the Buncefield inquiries, the final reports stated that the company managements had put time-saving and money-saving before safety in their risk-decision making (Deepwater Commission 2011, 125; HSE et al 2011), implying that amoral calculations had been made. The BP Texas City inquiry (USCSFIB 2007) also implied that time-saving and money-saving had been important motivations that had adversely affected safety decisions. The deep-seated safety mismanagement problems, failures of hindsight, foresight, and organizational learning (Turner 1992, Turner et al 1997) and weak safety culture of BP could be traced back as far as six earlier major hazard incidents at its Grangemouth refinery (three in 1987 and three in 2000) when the same underlying issues as found later at Texas City and Deepwater Horizon were discovered (HSE 1989; 2003). The Fukushima Daiichi inquiry concluded (NAIIC 2012, 43) that an “organizational mind-set” had arisen from a “cozy relationship between the operators, regulators and academic scholars” who had prioritized their own interests over public safety.

Nevertheless, as Waring (2015, 263) pointed out, “Judicial and public inquiries rarely delve beyond manifest evidence and therefore explanations of risk decisions and the underlying decision-making processes involved tend to be third party post hoc rationalizations and conjecture rather than first person accounts by directors themselves”. Senior executives are notoriously reluctant to bare their souls publicly or to make themselves available for interview by academic researchers. Their reluctance may be understandable if they fear that anything they reveal may be subsequently discoverable legally in the event of a major hazard incident or legal proceedings. However, other motivations include self-image. For example, Waring (2013, 47; 2015, 263) cited a case where directors refused to act on a report recommending a formal risk management system because, as the chairman

reported, they believed that as experienced big businessmen they automatically managed risks, and any additional measures would be an affront to their dignity and self-image. Thus, in considering the espoused and observable responses of industry, both to conventional environmental hazards, regulatory requirements, and (in the USA) the EPA, and to greenhouse emissions, a large degree of speculation and interpretation of the motivations of industrial leaders is inevitable.

The author does not share Beck's dystopian view of what he called 'reflexive modernism' (Beck 1992), supported by the human-created disaster examples he described, such as Bhopal (Shrivastava 1987) and Villa Parisi in Brazil. Beck's view was that industry is inherently engaged in maximizing its financial interests by deliberately enforcing unfair EHS risk distribution between itself and society. A similar view to that of Beck emerges from Perrow (2011; 2013) in relation to industrial and establishment groups involved in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. See also Zachmann (2014). To be sure, such cynicism is likely to exist and to have a detrimental effect but, as examples show later in this chapter, it is not universal and, for example, many US companies do not agree with the Trump administration's stance on the PCA, the EPA, environmental science, environmental risks and environmental protection. It could be argued that unequal risk distribution in society is inevitable to some extent, in view of the fact that powers (economic, industrial, political, information, technical expertise and so on) are distributed unequally in society and such powers will determine which issues are deemed important and which are downplayed or ignored, how problems and solutions are defined and addressed, and the policies, processes and outcomes (see, for example, Dekker and Nyce 2014; Shrader-Frechette 1991). See also Le Coze (2017) on the possible impact of globalization on risk-decisions in high risk major hazard systems. For good or ill, it is inevitable that technical risk experts, business owners, and indeed politicians, will all exercise both obtrusive and unobtrusive power (Hardy 1985) to identify, scope, define, measure, assess, and evaluate risks and to decide on appropriate risk treatments and methods.

### **Alt-Right Rejection of Environmental Science**

As discussed in chapter 2, one of the prime fears that characterize the Alt-Right is the fear of experts. The concept of global warming and all

its ramifications is a product of experts in the environmental sciences—climatologists, oceanographers, atmospheric chemists, and so on. Similarly, other environmental scientists are expert in the areas of pollution prevention and control, whether major EHS hazards or more routine processes and sources of pollution. Collectively, such experts around the world number in the tens and hundreds of thousands, all sharing a basic agreement on the science of the environment, the causes of environmental damage, the effects, and the prevention and control measures required. Certainly, as in any area of science, there will be differences of opinion that arise from time to time among environmental scientists on particular issues. However, remarkably an overwhelming consensus of them has agreed about the nature and causes of global warming, its consequences and what needs to be done to curb it, as expressed in NASA (2014). At the pollution prevention and control level, any differences of scientific opinion that may have arisen have been relatively minor and non-controversial. As a scientist previously engaged in measuring trace airborne combustion products, the author declares his personal view that, on the balance of probabilities, climate change is a real phenomenon caused by human activity.

Nevertheless, on the global warming issue, as discussed in Corfee-Morlot et al (2007) there has been a small minority of environmental scientists who, especially since the turn of the millennium, have challenged the consensus on at least one of the following grounds:

- Inaccuracies (the estimates and forecasts for temperature rises and timescales are subject to inaccuracies and uncertainties e.g. McIntyre and McKittrick 2003)
- Not human-created (global warming is the product of natural and not human causes e.g. Bellamy and Barrett 2007)
- Cause unknown
- Effects exaggerated (if global warming is a real phenomenon, its effects are not sufficiently large to cause undue concern e.g. Bellamy and Barrett 2007)

The controversy involves contradictory perceptions and certitudes, in which social amplification of risk by the media has played a part (Kasperson et al 1988; Leiserowitz 2005; 2006a and b; Pidgeon et al 2003). Despite such minority challenges coming from qualified scientists,

some of whom are highly respected, they have failed to dissuade their majority colleagues from the consensus view.

Nevertheless, it is the scientific minority view that has been seized upon by the Alt-Right in general and the Trump administration in particular as sufficient evidence (in their view) that global warming either does not exist or, if it does, is not man-made and will not have any significant adverse effects (e.g. CFACT 2017; Pooley 2017). Whenever an article or statement about global warming appears from a scientist in the minority camp, it is seized upon by journalists, commentators, and politicians on the Alt-Right as clear and incontrovertible evidence that global warming is either exaggerated or a myth in itself, or that the scientific consensus is a myth (see Dror and Fraser-MacKenzie 2008; Kahan et al 2017; Nickerson 1998; Shermer 2018; Zimmerman 2011 on confirmation bias). Such interventions affect the social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al 1988; Pidgeon et al 2003) in the public's mind (in this particular case, attenuating the perception of global warming risk). The impression is also given that the Alt-Right set out to hunt desperately for examples (i.e. confirmation biasing) that they believe will justify President Trump's rejection of the PCA, the curbing of the EPA, and the relaxation of environmental regulations on industry. Indeed, a *Times* article on Trump's climate change denial policy (Boyes 2017), stated: "Seen from afar, and through the prism of the US press, today's Washington seems like a throwback to 15<sup>th</sup> century Spain: a fanatical inquisition hunting for heretics and a society in ferment, split between true believers and deniers". Ignoring the journalistic hyperbole, the article did expose the ideological hegemony involved in the policy's enactment within the Trump administration and the wider civil service, and repeated the widely reported edict that the phrase 'climate change' must no longer be used in official US communications. Boyes also asserted that, despite Trump's position, the US military were regarding climate change as a serious driver of global insecurity and therefore a significant foreign policy issue.

The outright rejection of experts whose opinions do not conform to one's prejudices or ideological position is a characteristic of the Alt-Right, although not exclusively so. The anti-expert counter-culture of the Alt-Right thrives on the notoriety it attracts and validates (in their minds) the certitude that they are right and the mass of experts who disagree with them are all wrong. Moreover, it enables them to project

themselves as the perennial victims of a gigantic conspiracy by 'so-called experts' and evoke sympathy, at least among those in the population who feel that they are constantly being repressed by overbearing officialdom, liberal elites, vested interests, and self-serving liberal politicians, all of whom they apparently believe are in cahoots with experts whose real expertise they doubt or reject (Neiwert 2017).

The alacrity and vehemence with which the Alt-Right publicly rejects experts whose opinions do not accord with Alt-Right ideology is a remarkable demonstration of not only their fear of experts per se but, more especially, their fear of experts whose opinions contradict their own inexpert opinions. That fear undoubtedly has as much to do with the potential for the Alt-Right's ideological and policy positions to be exposed publicly as being based on scientific ignorance, the fear of populist rejection, and ridicule of Trump's ideology-based policies. Durodié (2002; 2005a and b) argued that under the contemporary salience of a post-modernist orthodoxy of social theories of risk sparked by Beck (1992), the long-standing conventional scientific approach to risk (with all its attendant benefits and dis-benefits) had now swung too far the other way. As a result, he argued that in society multiple views of risk (whether expert or non-expert) were regarded as being of equal value or, worse, non-expert views were being judged as superior to expert opinions. While not suggesting that non-expert opinions had no value or relevance, he lamented that judgements, opinions, and advice of qualified experts were frequently side-lined in favour of populist theories, that there were paranoid fears prevalent among the public about risks being foisted on them without conscience, and that there was a widespread mistrust of authority, industry, science, and politicians. Bate (1999) raised similar objections to attempts to marginalize or discredit sound science for political or other purposes where risk issues were in debate.

Evidence in support of Durodié's assertions is provided by the populist anti-science reactions of the Trump administration and the Alt-Right generally to the global warming issue, the EPA and EHS. Further evidence of the inversion of science is also supplied not only by Trump's personal rejection of the common position of the American Medical Association and the government's Centers for Disease Control about the importance of continuing the long-standing MMR vaccination programme for children, but also his personal endorsement of a

disgraced British former doctor and his campaign to stop MMR vaccination because he alleged that it causes autism in children, a claim universally rejected by medical authorities. A similar problem arose in France, where the Health Minister blamed conspiracy theories for undermining public trust in vaccines, which had resulted in a measles epidemic. Doctors cited the far-right Front National as being partly responsible by promoting the false idea that vaccines are dangerous (Sage 2018). A similar position has been taken reportedly by the populist 5 Star Movement in Italy.

Some Alt-Right supporters who reject conventional medical expertise have also reported to the author a belief in the writings of the arch-conspiracy theorist David Icke who, in his videos released in March 2014 and July 2017 (Icke 2017), rejected outright the notion that global warming is caused by humans and called global warming “a scam”. Thus, to the ‘alternative science’ community (not all of whom belong to the Alt-Right), the concept of global warming and the PCA response is just another conspiracy to be fought. Neiwert (2017) discussed the Alt-Right’s perverse ‘alternative universe’ of invented facts and strange and often conspiratorial explanations to replace known facts and scientific explanations, and their keenness to believe in easily disprovable falsehoods. Incidentally, one of Icke’s conspiracy theories, revealed in his *The Lion Sleeps No More* seminars, is that many world leaders share alien reptilian DNA, which encourages them to meet and conspire to control the world’s human population.

It is fair to ask how far in some individuals is cynicism, mistrust and fear of conventional science and experts, and an over-riding fear of conspiracies, a symptom of paranoid delusions or other clinical disorders. One might argue that it is an individual’s right to choose which theories, advice and recommendations to accept and, in general terms, most people would support that position. However, that right cannot be allowed to take precedence where to do so would probably, if not inevitably, cause significant harm to that individual or to others. Uninformed non-expert opinion cannot be allowed to endanger the public as a result of rejection, by political ideologues, of an expert consensus on sound science in favour of an eccentric minority opinion. Political leaders have an implicit duty of care towards the populations they serve and, for members of a profession, an explicit ‘do no harm’ obligation. In the US, at least, President Trump and his administration appeared to have dismissed that duty as not applying to them.

## Alt-Right Economic Arguments Against Environmental Protection

In addition to its anti-science rejection of the PCA and global warming, the Trump administration led the Alt-Right campaign on economic and business efficiency grounds to curb the EPA and roll back environmental legislation, both PCA and EHS-related.

Soon after inauguration, Trump appointed as the new head of the EPA Scott Pruitt, a Republican politician and former Attorney-General of Oklahoma. Prior to this appointment, Pruitt had for some years taken an aggressive line against the EPA and was on record as regarding the EPA as having granted authority to itself that had not been granted by Congress. Over a period of time, Pruitt had taken 14 lawsuits against EPA and had accused it of having an ‘activist agenda’ and over-estimating air pollution levels from specific industries, implying that the EPA had been excessive in its regulatory enforcement role and activities.

Thus, by appointing such an antagonist as Pruitt to head the EPA, Trump presumably expected that Pruitt would ensure absolutely that the EPA’s authority and activities would be severely curtailed and marshalled primarily towards meeting the political agenda of his administration and not towards the protection of the environment and the public—Krugman (2017) described this as “sabotage from the top”. In addition, the EPA, which for so long had infuriated the Alt-Right and sections of the business community, would be publicly humiliated and forced to respect the ideological ‘bad science’ diktats of the Trump administration. Whether this outcome is ultimately delivered, or whether hubris and the law of unintended consequences thwart the President’s wishes, remains to be seen. It would take only another environmental disaster on the scale of Deepwater Horizon to severely challenge the Trump administration’s stranglehold on the EPA.

It should be noted that the alleged unacceptably high cost to industry of environmental regulations was a prime justification of the campaign by Trump and his Alt-Right allies against such legislation and the EPA. Van Nostrand (2016) challenged the high cost assertion. Clearly, such a position also ignores the unacceptably high cost of environmental disasters caused in most part by failures by industry to observe such regulations. In the Deepwater Horizon case, for example,

in 2013 it was widely reported that the financial cost to the Deepwater Horizon operator BP America stood at US\$41 billion, of which US\$30 billion was for civil claims payments and US\$4.5 billion was for criminal penalties. Much of this total was uninsurable loss. By July 2015, BP had agreed to settle all federal, state, and local authority claims for a maximum of US\$18.7 billion (BP 2015), and the total cost had risen to US\$54 billion. In July 2016, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that BP expected the total pre-tax cost of the disaster to be US\$61.6 billion.

For comparison, the estimated clean-up cost of the Fukushima Daiichi disaster was US\$188 billion (Pagnamenta 2017), but this was a provisional estimate and the actual final cost is likely to be higher.

The normalization of deviance that Vaughan found at NASA in relation to the Challenger disaster (Vaughan 1996; 1999) was also detectable in other major hazard disasters involving environmental damage, for example Buncefield (HSE et al 2011; Newton 2008), Deepwater Horizon (Deepwater Commission 2011; Reader and O'Connor 2013), and BP Texas City (USCSHIB 2007). Deviance from EHS procedures is more likely to occur where individual employees at any level believe that such procedures are either unnecessary on technical efficacy grounds or on cost and inconvenience grounds. Perceived unacceptable cost factors are likely to weigh heavily in individuals' own risk-decisions and actions, especially if individuals believe that superiors and senior executives have a strong antipathy towards 'unnecessary' EHS provision. Such deviance is thus compatible with Alt-Right thinking.

The speed with which the new Trump administration in early 2017 relaxed the environmental regulations affecting the US coal industry (as Carswell 2016 had predicted), also highlighted the influence of corporate vested interests on political thinking. For at least a year prior to his election, Trump not only publicly championed the coal industry as deserving a much-needed regeneration but also stated categorically that he shared the view promulgated by the coal industry that it had been deliberately and unfairly targeted by the EPA and the Obama administration using punitive environmental regulations. As van Nostrand (2016) noted in an on-line opinion, "Trump has embraced the 'war on coal' narrative that has been a staple of political discourse in coal-dependent regions of the country for the past several years". The essence of the coal industry's argument, fully en-



dorsed by Trump, was that the primary reason for the US coal industry's rapid decline (since 2008, its supply of US power generation had fallen from 50% to 32%) was the crippling effect of compliance with environmental regulations. However, as van Nostrand and many independent observers noted, there were four much more compelling factual reasons for the decline:

**Economics:** The increasing abundance of cheap natural gas from shale fracking. By 2017, natural gas as a source of US electricity generation had risen to 33% and had eclipsed coal which, in the previous ten years, had fallen from 50% to 32%. Also, utility companies are increasingly integrating with natural gas and carbon-free renewable energy sources such as solar and wind as they become cheaper, at the expense of coal.

**Geology:** Fossil fuels are finite. Coal production had been decreasing in many US fields owing to accessible seams becoming depleted and remaining seams and reserves becoming more difficult and costly to extract. Coal extraction has become a more costly proposition.

**Climate change:** US coal exports dropped sharply since the PCA and the decision of PCA signatory countries to reduce their use of coal. For example, Canada, a major importer of US coal, announced that it was phasing out coal by 2030. It was reported that US coal exports overall fell 23% in 2015 and a further 32% in the first half of 2016.

**Consumer demand for clean energy:** Many large US corporations have zero- and low-carbon energy usage objectives that inherently rely on renewable energy sources. Energy utility companies will have to cater for such demand, thus diminishing coal's market share.

Thus, the expectation of Trump and much of the coal industry that simply relaxing environmental controls would restore the fortunes and employment opportunities of the industry is unlikely to be fulfilled, as it is based on a false cause-effect model. Krugman (2017), for example, refuted that coal jobs would return, no matter what Trump did. Moreover, the backward-looking almost sentimentalist view of coal warranting such a high profile, regulatory derogations, and favoured state treatment, at the expense not only of other energy sources but also of environmental protection, is out-of-step with the 190 PCA countries. A political consensus and focus on climate change in those countries has followed closely behind the scientific consensus and agreed technological responses. For example, prior to PCA, in the

automobile industries PCA countries had forged ahead with electric-only engines and hybrid gasoline-methane-electric engines. By mid-2017, Volvo in Sweden had announced that within two years its new vehicles would be all-electric and the French government announced that in France new vehicles would be all-electric within five years with a complete ban on new gasoline-based vehicles by 2040. On July 26, 2017, the British government announced a similar ban by 2040. Such developments put at a disadvantage any non-PCA country or company wishing to sell their old technology or non-compliant vehicles into PCA countries. Nevertheless, the United States does have a major opportunity for its high-tech industries to engage with the rest of the world's markets (essentially the PCA countries) by designing and producing a broad range of technological products aimed specifically at PCA-generated needs and demands. However, in order to do this, it requires that US technology companies reject the 'bad science' and anti-environmental assertions and policies of the Trump administration.

In demurring to those industrialists and business leaders who still believe that they have a vested interest in removing environmental protection, countering PCA arguments and agendas, and generally maintaining a traditional economic status quo based on right-wing dominated corporatism, Trump exposed a paradox. One of the high profile claims in his presidential campaign was that he alone would, as President, stand up for 'the little man' against the alleged predations of big business, as much as against foreign political and commercial adversaries such as China who were allegedly taking away American jobs. He was going to "drain the swamp" as he described it, a 'swamp' that involved the mutual sleaze of lobbying by big business of politicians in Washington for legislation or executive decisions favouring their particular industry or company, in return for their endorsement and possibly large contributions to election campaigns. However, during his own election campaign, Trump had enthusiastically accepted the coal industry's lobbying for relaxation of environmental regulations and within months of his inauguration had signed the necessary executive order. Was this a genuine belief on Trump's part that the coal industry had a just cause, notwithstanding the low probability of its success in reversing the coal industry's long-term fortunes and bringing large number of jobs back permanently? Krugman (2017) suggested a baser motive, namely that Trump's anti-

environment agenda would “be worth billions to certain campaign donors”.

Or, was it an example of cynical electioneering and a willingness to knowingly lie about being able to eradicate market and commercial threats to the coal and other industries by removing environmental controls?

Or, did he genuinely believe that his executive order had a high probability of success? Some have likened Trump’s executive order to the famous command for the waves to retreat, attributed to King Knut (995–1035). Knut (a Dane) became King of England in 1016 and then also of Denmark in 1018. Knut was regarded during his reign as a wise king, and the apocryphal fable of him commanding the waves to retreat is thought to have arisen to demonstrate both his humility and his strength of character in countering sycophantic courtiers who had told him that he could indeed successfully command the waves to retreat. Thus, the Knut analogy is a poor one, since Trump’s executive order seeking to restore the coal industry (and boost industry in general) was not done out of humility or to counter sycophantic courtiers. On the contrary, it was done not only to fully endorse their advice and recommendations but also demonstrate that he, President Trump, was all-powerful and could by decree roll back the adverse impact of multiple threats arising from globalization, major changes in the energy market profile, the PCA, technological advances and clean energy demands. Le Coze (2017) has discussed some aspects of globalization and systemic impacts on high-risk systems where adverse EHS outcomes are possible.

In contrast to all that Trump had said and done that cemented his anti-environmental credentials, both while campaigning in 2016 and since his inauguration, his National Security Strategy launched almost one year into his presidency stated under his ‘Embrace Energy Dominance’ strategy that “It ensures that access to energy is diversified, and recognizes the importance of environmental stewardship” (White House 2017, 22). The document also asserted that “The United States will remain a global leader in reducing traditional pollution as well as greenhouse gases, while expanding our economy”, and also referred obliquely to “climate policies” and to “coal” as an on-going integral component of energy resource exploitation, yet any acknowledgement of global warming or mention of the PCA was absent. It is clear that Trump still saw environmental issues and environmental

protection as an over-rated nuisance and hindrance to meeting the ‘real’ objectives of the economy. Indeed, the document was dismissive of “onerous regulation” and “an anti-growth energy agenda”, thus implying that environmental protection was very much secondary to unfettered free-market industrial activities.

Many have commented (e.g. Lissner and Zenko 2017) on the strong impression that so-called policy emanating from the Trump White House did not appear to have been arrived at through any calm, rational, impartially informed, and systematically ordered, process that would normally be expected from a President, his cabinet and advisers. Instead of such processes, and the matching and weighing activities so eloquently described in detail by Sir Geoffrey Vickers in his study of governmental policy making (Vickers 1983), what emerged was an apparently emotionally dominated discourse in which ideology and prejudices were allowed to take precedence over evidence and prudence. The results are exemplified in the PCA withdrawal, the President’s executive order to severely curtail environmental protection, and his unrelenting excessive support for the coal industry—the implied contradiction of such actions in his National Security Strategy notwithstanding.

## US Public Reactions to Trump’s Environmental Agenda

Since his inauguration, a number of public opinion polls and surveys have shown consistently that a clear majority of American voters are not in favour of Trump’s environmental policies. In December 2016, a Reuters/Ipsos online poll of 9,935 people found that a majority wanted the EPA to be retained as a strong environmental regulator, and not in the weakened version announced by Trump (Kahn 2017). Some 39% wanted the EPA to be strengthened or expanded while another 22% wanted it to remain the same. Only 19% reported that they wanted the EPA weakened or eliminated. Of Republican respondents, 47% wanted the EPA to remain the same, while 35% wanted it weakened or eliminated.

An independent national survey by Quinnipiac University (2017) in March 2017 (sample size and stratifications not reported) found that overall 61% disapproved of how Trump was handling the environment as against 29% approving and 9% don’t know/not answering. Although Democrat and Independent respondents were the

most disapproving (89% and 65% respectively), 19% of Republican respondents were also disapproving with 13% don't know/not answering. When analysed for age, however, overall 79% of respondents in the 18–34 year age group were disapproving. Moreover, 63% of Republicans in that age group were also disapproving, higher than the 57% of Democrats and 51 % of Independents.

A subsequent national sponsored poll by different researchers in June 2017 of 1,000 presidential year voters (GHY 2017; Roberts 2017) found overall approval/disapproval responses broadly comparable to the Quinnipiac study (50% unfavourable against 27% favourable). In this sample, 49% reported that they had voted for Hillary Clinton, while 47% reported that they had voted for Trump. White non-college educated white women, a group who had overwhelmingly voted for Trump, were also unfavourable (40% as against 28% favourable).

On Trump's specific environmental policies, the GHY study revealed the following:

- 56% of respondents disapproved of Trump's decision to quit the PCA, with 34% approving;
- 20% of Trump's voters in 2016 disapproved of Trump's decision to quit the PCA;
- 58% of respondents disapproved of Trump's proposed cuts to EPA funding;
- 47% of non-college educated white males among respondents (Trump's core support base) disapproved of Trump's proposed cuts to EPA funding;
- 62% of respondents disapproved of Trump's proposed cuts to funding for development of clean energy technologies, with 27% approving;
- 30% of Trump voters in 2016 disapproved of Trump's proposed cuts to funding for development of clean energy technologies.

It is unclear what proportion of those voters who reported favouring Trump's environmental agenda did so because they firmly believe in his purported scientific and economic justifications for it, or because they have an unswerving Alt-Right commitment to all its policy manifestations, or because, for example, as populist Trump supporters they regarded his stance on environment as supporting their concerns about over-regulation and 'big government' controls.

Nevertheless, all these survey and poll results suggest Trump's environmental agenda has only minority support in the voting population and this could prove troublesome for him and the Republican Party electorally in 2020. By then, new young voters will be voting for the first time and, as the Quinnipiac study indicated, the 18–34 year age group are the most dissatisfied with Trump's environmental policies, with the 35–49 year age group also very dissatisfied. The GHY study also reported that Trump's environmental agenda would adversely affect people's attitude towards Senators and Congressional representatives if they were to support these policies.

## Conclusion

The Alt-Right policies on environment in the US are to relax, dilute, reduce and, if possible, remove environmental controls on industry. In this, there is significant support from some large companies, primarily in traditional heavy industries that involve inherently polluting processes that may require significant costs to achieve pollution control standards. The essence of the argument put forward by such companies is that pollution controls not only affect their profitability and competitiveness but also threaten jobs and, in extreme cases such as coal extraction, threaten their very existence. They demand salvation. In response, the Trump administration directed a major reduction in environmental controls and also the EPA's role as regulatory enforcer. It also rejected outright the overwhelming scientific consensus worldwide supporting the Paris Climate Accord.

The likely outcome of the Trump edict from a pollution control standpoint was that in the United States both carbon-based PCA-related pollution, as well as other non-PCA forms of pollution, would increase. This was likely to impinge negatively on the amenity and health of the population, especially in industrial areas and for populations affected by them. In addition, the gross adverse contribution of the US to global warming and climate change was also likely to increase significantly, since the US is a major industrial economy. Nevertheless, the Trump administration and its Alt-Right supporters were likely to ignore this likelihood and have no conscience about the adverse outcomes, since they deny there would be any such outcomes, having rejected outright both (a) the consensus scientific case that global warming exists and the PCA mitigation demands and (b) the

economic, medical, economic, ethical, and moral arguments for maintaining EHS controls, whether PCA or non-PCA related.

However, the removal of environmental controls is unlikely to bring the corporate and commercial benefits to US industry that both the Alt-Right ideology and the Trump executive order expected. The causes of decline of particular sectors and companies (e.g. coal) are predominantly those of major changes in markets, cheaper alternatives, technology changes, and so on, and not environmental regulation. Salvation risk control models rarely deliver what they promise and, indeed, are likely to increase risks by raising false expectations that risks can be effortlessly controlled and thereby encouraging lack of vigilance. In addition, less controls increase the probability of major environmental disasters. Recognition of a more plausible cause-effect risk scenario, and the likely negative impact on the US of PCA withdrawal, prompted the CEOs of sixteen large US corporations to write a joint letter to Trump urging him not to withdraw and twenty-five similar CEOs sent him a *Twitter* message in the same vein (Lui 2017; McGregor 2017). Perhaps surprisingly, at least two large coal industry companies (Cloud Peak Energy and Peabody Energy) were included in the attempt to avert the President's decision. Major oil and gas companies, such as BP and Shell, were also included and separately Exxon Mobil and Chevron had expressed similar views. Their expressed concerns included their view that PCA membership would not only stimulate the US economy, create jobs, and reduce business risks but also provide an opportunity to negotiate from within as opposed to demanding and begging from without. Their pleas to the President were rejected.

The anti-science, anti-expert ideological beliefs of the Trump administration and the Alt-Right, which led among other things to the PCA-withdrawal, not only made the US more isolated politically and added to global mistrust of Trump's personality and motivations, but also placed US industry at distinct disadvantage in world markets dominated by PCA-adherent economies. Selling non-PCA compliant products into the PCA-dominated world will become increasingly difficult. Whether traditional US companies can adapt fast enough to catch up with PCA-compliant competitors is uncertain, but to do so would require them to reject or ignore Alt-Right ideology-based pseudo-science. Non-traditional high-tech companies in the USA that

are already globally orientated are likely to fare better in the PCA-world outside America.

In summary, risks arising from the US Alt-Right position on environmental issues and global warming are:

*Risk 1. Political isolation*

The non-participation of the US in the PCA and the Trump administration's continued active support for major polluting practices may result in a degree of political isolation of the US.

*Risk 2. US competitive disadvantage in PCA-dominated markets*

The non-participation of the US in the PCA and the perpetuation of outdated and non-PCA compliant products is likely to result in US companies being disadvantaged in competitive PCA-dominated markets involving 190 countries.

*Risk 3. Reduced environmental regulation fails to deliver commercial regeneration*

US companies relying on a fettered EPA and relaxation of EHS legislation for commercial regeneration and success may be disappointed in the results.

*Risk 4. Multiple adverse health and other effects of reduced environmental regulation*

A fettered EPA and relaxed EHS legislation are likely to result in poor environmental controls that adversely affect the health, safety, livelihoods, food and water supplies, and amenity of nearby communities and populations.

*Risk 5. Increased frequency of damaging climatic events in US*

Failure to apply PCA programs in the US may result in increased frequency of damaging global warming-related climatic events in the US e.g. drought, forest fires, extreme weather.

*Risk 6. Voter rejection of Trump's environmental policies*

Trump's policies on global warming, PCA withdrawal, derogation of environmental controls, and neutralizing the EPA may adversely affect voter intentions towards Trump, other Alt-Right politicians, and the Republican congress members who support such policies.



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# Chapter 10: The Alt-Right, Human Rights, and the Law

*By Alan Waring*

## Abstract

This chapter considers to what extent long-standing American principles of individual freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law have been eroded under the Trump administration. Notions of freedom and human rights have become manipulated so as to accentuate individual rights at the expense of obligations to fellow citizens and the public good. For example, ideological aversion to universal health care denies millions of citizens health care provision. In the Alt-Right hierarchy of human rights, the right to bear arms is regarded as sacrosanct and gun control is anathema, despite numerous gun massacres. The Alt-Right primacy of inequality has encouraged discrimination against immigrants and minorities to become normalised. The rule of law and the independence of the judiciary are threatened by a variety of Trump's actions. In a battle for Congressional supremacy, Trump-compliant Republicans have abandoned the bi-partisan accord on many issues. Risks are systematically identified.

**Key words:** Trump, Alt-Right, human rights, law, judiciary, discrimination

## Inalienable Rights

The United States has long been regarded as the leader of the 'free world' and, as such, a paragon of the defence of its citizens' liberties and rights, whether as individuals or identifiable categories. The Declaration of Independence in 1776, which marked the end of British colonial rule and the inception of the United States of America, referred explicitly to "certain inalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness", and the subsequent first ten amendments to the Constitution became a de facto Bill of Rights.

More than 170 years later, the United Nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948) containing thirty Articles



covering a comprehensive list of specific human rights commitments, that Member States, including the US, pledged themselves to achieve.

Despite such august and lofty declarations, backed by the protection of the US Constitution, many controversies have arisen regarding whether the US adequately addresses its human rights obligations, for example: retention of the death penalty in many States, in contrast to all other western countries; alleged institutionalisation of police brutality; instances of judicial impunity for alleged murders by police officers; denial of health care to the poor and vulnerable; retention of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution (the right to bear arms) in the face of numerous gun massacres and an unprecedented (in western terms) murder and gun crime rate; alleged failure to prevent and prosecute sexual impropriety and assault by politicians and public officials who abuse their powerful positions; discrimination by official policy or conduct against sexual minorities, religious minorities, racial minorities, particular nationalities, classes of immigrant; alleged abuses of immigration controls. In addition, other complaints centre on alleged US human rights abrogation outside America (Aaronovitch 2017).

Owing to space limitations, it is not possible to consider all such controversies in detail in this chapter. In addition to alleged attacks on the key democratic principle of an independent judiciary, three particular human rights issues that are current controversies are selected as illustrative: health care, uncontrolled guns, and immigration controls.

This chapter examines to what extent the advent of the Trump administration and the Alt-Right ideology has amplified pre-existing allegations of US human rights abuses and added to them, as well as considering apparent attempts to interfere with the independence of the judiciary.

## **Trump's Problems with the Judiciary and Department of Justice**

A central requirement of a true democracy is having a judiciary that is independent of both the legislature and executive branches of government, in so far as its determination of cases before it is concerned. Absolute independence of the judiciary itself cannot be guaranteed since, for example, judges have to be appointed by the state and, further,

each individual judge is bound to hold political and other beliefs and opinions that are likely to affect their judgements, no matter how hard they try to be impartial. See Introduction for brief discussion on world-view biasing. Some judges in the US are known to have liberal leanings, whereas others are more conservative or even very conservative. However, a system of checks and balances, including Senatorial scrutiny, vetting, and ‘advice and consent’ approval of appointment of judges nominated by the President, is meant to ensure that justice is delivered fairly (Rutkus 2010; 2016).

As Rutkus (2010, 2) noted on the particular matter of the lifetime appointment of Supreme Court Justices, “such job security conferred solely on judges and, by constitutional design, helps insure [sic] the Court’s independence from the President and Congress”. Nevertheless, he acknowledged: “The political nature of the appointment process becomes especially apparent when a President submits a nominee with controversial views, there are sharp partisan or ideological differences between the President and the Senate, or the outcome of important constitutional issues before the Court is seen to be at stake”. As Supreme Court vacancies are rare events in the lifetime appointment regime, when one does arise it is an opportunity for a President to fundamentally alter the liberal/illiberal complexion of the full bench (if he or she so chooses). Thus, the Senate’s involvement via the scrutiny and vetting of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and the Senate Floor Consideration for final approval, is a crucial check on Presidential nominees who may hold strong political or ideological views that might compromise their impartiality. These same principles and procedures apply to the appointment of the US Attorney General and any member state Attorney General.

In principle, the separation of powers and functions, the constitutional design of the judiciary, and the Senatorial advice and consent procedures, are all meant in combination to ensure that the judiciary is as independent as possible and that it is not subject to any direction, coercion, bullying, or subversion by government or the President. In practice, these protections have worked reasonably well for a long time and there was much speculation as to what the new President Trump’s attitude would be towards them.

An early glimpse of Trump’s attitude was provided at the end of January 2017 when he sacked the Acting Attorney General Sally Yates for refusing on the grounds of its illegality to enforce his temporary

'extreme vetting' Executive Order against refugees and citizens of seven named countries with predominantly Muslim populations (see below). Trump sought to justify the sacking by suggesting that the Acting AG was putting American lives in danger.

USDOJ (2014) set out the principal duties of the Attorney General as head of the Department of Justice. The role of any Attorney General is to ensure the unbiased administration and delivery of justice for all, without discrimination and without favour. Clearly, an Attorney General cannot meet that high standard if he or she is subject to demands to do the President's bidding on any particular matter. The more over-bearing, coercive and bullying a President's demands, the more beleaguered and compromised the Attorney General's position becomes.

After appointing a replacement Acting AG, Trump fairly quickly nominated Jeff Sessions for the position of Attorney General. As noted in chapter 5, although Sessions had been the AG for the State of Alabama, he was not without controversy. For example, the Senate Judiciary Committee had refused to approve his appointment as a US District Court Judge on account of allegations of his racist language and behaviour. Whether such allegations were well-founded or not, Sessions was undoubtedly a nationalist conservative exemplar of the populist Alt-Right, whose loyalty to Trump and backing of Trump-generated Executive Orders and legislation was assured. Despite objections to his suitability on grounds of political and ideological partiality and racial bias (e.g. Germanos 2017; Rupar 2017), Sessions gained Senate approval and was confirmed as Attorney General on February 8, 2017.

Seen by many as 'Trump's man', the new Attorney General soon fell foul of Trump's expectation that the Attorney General's duty was to accede to his views on justice. Trump apparently saw him more as his executive to instruct than as his chief legal adviser. Indeed, Senator Patrick Leahy, a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, was quoted as saying about Sessions "He's supposed to be the chief law enforcement officer, but he talks like he's going to be Trump's personal attorney" (Germanos 2017).

Trump's 'extreme vetting' Executive Order refusing visas to refugees and citizens of seven countries having predominantly Muslim populations (see below) saw Sessions endorsing the President's interpretation that this order was perfectly legal, even though it was

blocked by several Federal judges as being unlawful and took Trump until December 2017 on appeal to the Supreme Court to get the ban reactivated and finally confirmed in June 2018 (Deng 2018). So long as Sessions backed Trump, he was safe. However, when the politically explosive allegations about Russian manipulation, and collusion between the Trump election campaign and Russian government agents, surfaced and escalated throughout the Spring and early Summer of 2017 (e.g. Blake 2017; Blakely 2017a; Borger 2017; Cohen and Cohen 2017; Dollar et al 2017; Hoyle 2017; NIC 2017), Trump became increasingly angry in his public statements and *Twitter* comments about it (see chapters 5, 6 and 11). Ironically, Sessions himself was among those alleged to have had unregistered contacts with the Russians.

Trump's denials about Russian involvement sought also to deflect attention by blaming and discrediting others and casting political opponents as the true villains. As part of this, Trump sought to humiliate and coerce Sessions into forcing the FBI to do his bidding (see chapter 11 on Trump's *Twitter* attack on Sessions). Trump publicly blamed Sessions for the failure to get his own way (Blakely 2017b, c and d).

The way that Trump conducted himself in relation to the judiciary, the Attorney General, the Department of Justice, and the FBI throughout 2017, demonstrated what many saw as a contemptuous and cavalier attitude towards them and the whole concept of laws, legal constraints and due process that apply to every citizen including the President. As President, Trump was supposed also to be an exemplar, arguably the prime exemplar, of integrity, probity, honesty, and humanity. However, while his public display was widely regarded as a self-indulgent abuse of office and unprecedented in the presidential history of the United States, Trump supporters generally disagreed with such censure.

Trump's attitude towards the law appeared to be that it could be circumvented to get what he wanted. Indeed, one of his personal lawyers John Dowd was quoted (Allen 2017) as stating that the "President cannot obstruct justice because he is the chief law enforcement officer....", although this assertion that in effect he was above the law was dismissed by most observers and legal experts. Nevertheless, he appeared to view discrimination laws and welfare laws as an unjustified nuisance that he could either get round or doctor until he was able to get his own way. Accompanied by *Twitter* and other statements, his

repeated attempts to pass bills that would enable discriminatory immigration controls on Muslims, and his determination to dismantle Obamacare, bear witness to this attitude.

Trump's actions are further evidence of the dichotomous Alt-Right model of people and populations that he apparently applied i.e. the Alt-Right primacy of inequality and the distinction between predators/winners like himself and victims/losers such as the poor and the vulnerable. The Alt-Right view of the latter harks back to the Victorian conservative assertion widely held in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain that paupers were poor by choice owing to their "indolence, improvidence, prodigality and vice". See, for example, Hansard record of comments in the parliamentary Poor Laws debate by Mr John Walter (Walter 1843). In Alt-Right terms, the poor are undeserving parasites, an abominable underclass. Indeed, Neiwert (2017) referred explicitly to the populist Alt-Right 'producerist' view of themselves as hard-working patriots compared to the worthless, non-contributing 'others' below them who should be 'eliminated'. The 'survival of the fittest' (Spencer 1864) and natural selection theory are used by the Alt-Right to justify imposition and maintenance of inequalities and injustices. Despite the UN Declaration (1948) and the US Constitution, legislation designed to protect human rights therefore thwarted Trump's views. In turn, the judges who consistently uphold such laws were seen by Trump as an enemy, a view he made clear in various *Twitter* outbursts. Trump appeared to reject the very idea that principal functions of the judiciary exist to ensure that (a) no one, not even the President, is above the law, and (b) government does not abuse its position of power and resources against the human rights of anyone.

The following three sections illustrate the current Alt-Right dynamics that appear to militate against human rights.

### **Health Care Attainment versus Health Care Capability in the United States**

Among advanced nations, it is generally recognised that the United States is still the wealthiest and most economically powerful. In terms of medical technology, availability of medicines, and general medical resources, these are consistent with the nation's wealthy status. Despite such an enviable predisposition, a major paradox has become evident and one that Trump's Alt-Right agenda has amplified:

How can such a wealthy country, which spends more than any other on medicine and which has the most advanced health care technology and numbers of qualified doctors and other clinicians, have one of the lowest attainments of health care in the developed world?

According to OECD (2015), health expenditure as a share of GDP was much higher in the US than in other OECD countries on 2013 data, and at 16.4% of GDP is 50% higher than the next four countries (all in Europe). OECD (2015) also reported that the United States compares poorly with most other OECD countries on many key measures of health. For example:

- “Life expectancy in the United States is lower than in most OECD countries for several reasons, including poorer health-related behaviours and the highly fragmented nature of the US health system.
- The proportion of adults who smoke in the United States is among the lowest in the OECD countries, but alcohol consumption is rising and obesity rate is the highest.
- The quality of acute care in hospital in the United States is excellent, but the US health system is not performing very well in avoiding hospital admissions for people with chronic diseases”. (OECD 2015)

The negative data on key indicators is also reflected in US mortality rates, which over many years were consistently higher than for most other countries, both for overall mortality and specific mortalities such as infant mortality; circulatory system diseases; respiratory diseases; nervous system diseases; endocrine, nutritional, and metabolic diseases; mental and behavioural disorders (Dorn 2008; Gonzales and Sawyer 2017; MacDorman et al 2014; Martinson et al 2011; Science Daily 2016; WLE 2017).

In the light of the data cited above, what might be underlying causes of the US’s relatively poor performance? The OECD (2015) report suggested that “the highly fragmented nature of the US health system” is a key issue. In what respects is the US health system fragmented, and why has it become fragmented?

Fragmentation of the US health system has arisen as a result of how health care provision is funded, which is essentially by the patient. Increasingly since WWII, individuals have taken out private medical insurance as a cost-bearable way to pay for rising medical

fees. Nowadays, medical charges are so high that private medical insurance is the only viable option for most Americans. Many individuals are also fortunate enough to have their medical insurance paid by their employer. Military veterans may also benefit from full or subsidised health care and retirees and others can avail themselves of federal government-funded Medicaid and Medicare. However, by the turn of the millennium, a large number of Americans (estimated in 2002 to be 40 million or some 16% of the population, including 30 million of working age, IOM 2002) were without medical insurance for a variety of reasons, but primarily inability to pay owing to low income (Gould and Wething 2012), unemployment, high premiums, and also having medical complaints not covered by insurance, or for which premiums, exclusions and policy conditions were prohibitive. The foreword to IOM (2002) stated that the report challenged “assumptions and assertions that health insurance is not an essential component of access to quality health care or to healthy outcomes in America”, and notably the false assumption that because people are not seen dying on the streets in America due to inaccessible health care, therefore without health insurance they must be managing to obtain the health care they need.

Dorn (2008) confirmed and reinforced the findings of the 2002 IOM study and updated them, specifically on the impact of non-insurance on mortality. With overall population increases year-on-year over the period 2000–2007, by 2006 the non-insured percentage of the population in the 25–64 age group was 18.7%, with uninsured excess deaths of 22,000 over expected.

Over several decades and consecutive presidencies, there had been increasing attention among the medical and social welfare professions on the need to provide health care for such a large number of US citizens having no insurance. The IOM (2002) and Dorn (2008) studies added to growing demands for government policy action to address the problem (for example, Cutler 2005), which essentially was a demand for a universal health care system (UHC) as adopted by most other developed countries. Trump’s Alt-Right agenda, however, not only concurred with the Republican Party’s long-term objections to UHC but also took a far more aggressive stance against it.

UHC developed shortly after WWII and especially in the United Kingdom, mainland Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. UHC has two principles commonly shared by such systems: (1) cradle-to-

grave health care provision funded by or on behalf of the state for all citizens regardless of age, status, income or means, and either subsidized or free on demand at the point of care, and (2) state funding drawn from the population and employers either from general taxation or, more usually, by a combination of general taxation to fund capital and payroll demands, plus compulsory national social insurance or nominated health insurer for all those of working age, typically deducted from wages at source. UHC is thus, in principle, an attempt to defray total health care costs evenly and fairly across the population.

Hand-in-glove with UHC is the establishment of a National Health Service (NHS) charged with delivering it. Currently, for example, all EU Member States have established an NHS, Cyprus being the final one from 2019. There is no set template for an NHS, and in practice countries have developed a range of different schemes, all with greater or lesser involvement of state or state-backed insurance schemes and patient contributions (Gold 2011). There is little evidence in such countries of large percentages of the populations being non-insured or unable to obtain medical care owing to inability to pay. Health care standards and performance have also been consistently higher in such countries than in the US (OECD 2015).

President Obama was the first US President to succeed in pushing through legislation, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act 2010 ('Obamacare'), intended to address the problem of nearly 50 million Americans who were without health insurance. According to DeNavas-Walt et al (2012), in 2012 some 48 million individuals or 15.4% of the population aged under 65 were without health insurance. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO 2016) estimated that on average some 27 million of the same group would be uninsured in 2016. The US Census Bureau report for 2015 (Barnett and Voronovitsky 2016) showed that in 2014 the comparable figures were 33.0 million (10.4%) and for 2015 were 29.0 million (9.1%). The US Census Bureau report for 2016 (Barnett and Berchick 2017) showed the figures falling further to 28.1 million (8.8%). Thus, it could be argued that the effect of Obamacare over its first 5–6 years was to see a 20 million fall in non-insured—significant but nevertheless not a complete solution to the problem.

In the US, however, there was and remains a widespread antipathy among the political class, Republican and Democrat alike, towards



any system that connotes explicitly or implicitly an expression of socialism. For example, the concept of a welfare state is regarded by them at best as a symbol of outmoded and failing 'Eurosoci-alism' and at worst as only one step away from communism and therefore, either way, totally alien to the US capitalist model. The fact that such National Health systems abroad had developed almost exclusively in capitalist economies, in which socialism or socialist politics are not of a hard-left extremist kind but part of a pragmatic eclectic approach to social order and modernity, is either unknown or ignored by them. For example, in Britain although the NHS was introduced by a Labour government in 1948, it has been retained by all mainstream political parties (including the Conservatives) ever since. The UK NHS is not seen as an ideological artefact of one political creed but as an all-party agreed necessity for a civilised society and mindful that the provision of health care for all is a human right guaranteed by the UN Human Rights Declaration (UN 1948). Disagreements between the major political parties are not about whether an NHS is needed but usually about how much public money should be invested in it. The NHS is so popular that for any British political party to suggest that it should be scrapped would amount to its political suicide. A broadly similar picture is evident in other NHS countries. Their contrast with traditionally conservative attitudes in general in the US, and Alt-Right attitudes in particular, towards the NHS concept, is striking.

The relative success of NHS systems does not, of course, mean that they are without problems and various reforms have been necessary from time to time—see e.g. DHSS 1983; Gorsky 2010; Lewis 2014; Reed and Anthony 1991; Waring and Glendon 1998. The internal markets model and commoditisation of health care applied to the UK NHS from the late 1980s to late 1990s largely failed, although in 2018 the government proposed reintroducing a partial 'consumer markets model' in the form of individual patient 'personal health budgets'. However, regardless of consumer-choice approaches, the minimum standards, targets for clinical and care excellence, and evaluation of attainment and cost-effectiveness introduced by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NIHCE) have been judged a success. Cutler (2005; 2014) has long advocated for the US an NIHCE-type approach.

Demographic changes and public funding pressures affecting UHC/NHS countries also apply to the US. However, there is no intrinsic reason why the US model could not function well. For example, the Belgian state-backed system shares many features of the US insurance 'markets' model but it is reported to work well (Gold 2011). America's health care problem of fragmentation, lack of national coherence and standards, poor performance and poor value-for-money (Cutler 2005; 2014), and millions without health cover, appears to lie in an entrenched long-term ideological and political conservatism in the US that has strongly opposed UHC and which succeeded in thwarting its introduction prior to Obamacare in 2010. The Alt-Right world-view merely expresses such opposition more vehemently. This conservatism lies not just within the political class but also within society at large and is bound up in the concept of liberty enshrined in the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the founding Constitution, which is qualitatively different to that understood generally outside the US. The American view of liberty is atomistic and focussed entirely on the supremacy of individual freedom unfettered by obligations to others. Of course, such a sense of individual liberty is almost bound to come into conflict with all manner of obligations and requirements imposed on the individual by the system of laws and law enforcement that any democracy must have. Many groups within the Alt-Right regard the federal government of the United States itself as a repudiation of their liberty and challenge or reject the operation of federal laws, institutions and agencies (see, for example, the various Alt-Right separatist extremist groups listed in Table 1.1 in chapter 1).

Within the American concept of liberty lie very conservative beliefs about moral and social obligations. For example, a YouGov poll in the United States (Moore 2014) found that only 37% of respondents said that the duty to contribute to public services via taxation has a stronger moral argument than the right to keep earned income, with 53% disagreeing. This finding is starkly different to the results of a similar YouGov poll in the UK (Smith 2017; NHS Confed 2017), in which 63% of respondents said that the duty to contribute to public services via taxation was the morally superior argument. The British Social Attitudes survey report for 2017 (BSA 2018) reported a similar finding. Thus, it is likely that within the American public there would be an emotionally and culturally mediated ideological reluctance

among many to support UHC or indeed any nationally or federally orchestrated system. Such opposition is a key characteristic of the populist Alt-Right, as well as the position of many mainstream Republicans.

Despite such entrenched conservatism, a reformed system offering some moves towards UHC finally arrived in the form of Obamacare in 2010. As noted above, its headline impact was to reduce the number of individuals aged under 65 without medical insurance from 48 million in 2010 to 28.1 million in 2016 (Barnett and Berchick 2017). If Hillary Clinton had been elected President in 2016, it is inevitable that Obamacare would have been retained and backed as part of her policy. However, throughout the campaigning and even earlier (e.g. Diamond 2015), Donald Trump made very clear his outright opposition to Obamacare. His arguments, which were never cogently articulated (Cutler 2016 accused him of “waffling”), appeared to centre on unverified assertions that Obamacare was costing a lot of Americans more than pre-Obamacare arrangements and that this would worsen since, it was asserted, the inevitable economics of Obamacare were forcing the insurance companies involved to raise premiums. Trump promised that, if elected, he would scrap Obamacare and introduce his own system called American Health Care which would reject a migration towards UHC, would offer more individual choice, and cost less for everyone.

Trump’s much repeated assertions, on the evils of Obamacare and on his own salvation model that would replace it, were telling conservative and Alt-Right supporters what they wanted to hear. It was as much about upholding the Alt-Right notion of individual freedom against perceived overbearing federalism as it was about genuine improvements in the health care system. It appeared that the tens of millions still without medical insurance were air-brushed out of the Trump anti-Obamacare manifesto. It soon became clear, however, that Trump’s grand vision of American Health Care (AHC) was deeply flawed in its poorly researched assumptions on how the US health care market actually worked. For example, he was encouraging a cross-state health insurance purchasing market that had already been shown to be flawed in the US (akin to the old failed UK NHS internal markets model of the 1990s). According to Cutler (2016), there was simply no way that Trump’s model could work to the benefit of any party other than the insurance companies involved, unless he ensured

consumer protection regulations would apply i.e. the very protections his plan would remove. The free markets model, which includes patients choosing suppliers, is inherently flawed by the 'knowledge deficit' problem, since patients as consumers have only limited data to inform their choice compared to the vast amount of information available to suppliers. This imbalance also facilitates market abuse, whereby suppliers may over-supply and/or over-engineer treatments with a view to boosting revenues via insurance claims.

Nevertheless, true to his promise, one of Trump's first actions in office was to launch his American Health Care Bill. Although likely to be supported or not along party lines in Congress, in fact Republicans raised as many objections to aspects of it as did Democrats. There was much concern about the likely impact of repealing Obamacare without having in place a genuinely effective working replacement, and throughout 2017 there was insufficient cross-party confidence not only about the cost-benefit claims for AHC but also the complex market interdependencies involved and, especially, the concern that the number of non-insured might bounce back to pre-Obamacare levels. AHC remained a Bill that was in limbo unless and until there was sufficient support in Congress. Obamacare was still functioning but Trump remained determined to kill it, for example by stopping in October 2017 federal subsidies to insurance companies intended to incentivize their coverage of lower-income Americans (Cillizza 2017).

Trump's Alt-Right position and actions on health care recognized and played to the underlying conservatism and beliefs about individual liberty, and also resistance to perceived government interference in citizens' lives, which are heavily ingrained in American society. Such characteristics are particularly salient among the conservative right and even more so among the Alt-Right. The latter's views encompass the implicit ideological principle of maintaining fundamental inequalities between the rich and successful (deserving) and those who need welfare and state health care—the poor and feckless (undeserving) in Trump's winners/losers model. Despite Trump's campaign claim to be against big business, in pursuing his American Health Care Bill, he had few qualms about advancing the positions and interests of the insurance, medical, and pharmaceutical sectors (Cutler 2016), since they coincided with his Alt-Right agenda. The Alt-Right rever-

ence (shared by Republicans and conservatives as a whole) for unaccountable free market provision, fear of socialism, and hatred of liberalism, pervaded the Trump AHC vision.

In addition, however, Trump apparently harboured such a deep personal dislike for Obama and all that his presidency stood for that he persisted in suggesting that Obama did not have an American birth certificate, was actually a Muslim, and that every policy and action taken during his administration was defective, dangerous, damaging to the US, or just plain un-American. Trump set about removing or neutralising as much of Obama's legacy as possible e.g. withdrawal from the JCPOA deal with Iran. The destruction of Obamacare became a far more important objective in itself than whether AHC would do any better. For Trump, the hoped-for success of AHC would be on top of the final humiliation of Obama. Indeed, as Cillizza (2017) noted, "Trump's entire political life.....is positioned against all things Obama". This also fitted well with the Republican Party's anti-Obama fixation. Thus, potentially the human rights of millions of non-insured Americans appeared to be relegated in favour of Trump's Alt-Right ideology, his hatred of Obama, and the benefit of the affluent, the fortunate, and the corporate interests of insurers and health care suppliers.

Ku et al (2017) challenged the assumption of long-term employment and economic benefits of the draft AHC bill, while Jost (2017) examined in detail the pros and cons of each element of it. Jost concluded that, whereas three groups in society would probably fare well from AHC as a result of tax breaks (the wealthy, younger families, and corporate entities including insurers), other groups such as the old and poorer people would be worse off. Voter opinion polls have tended to indicate a majority disapproval of Trump's handling of health care. For example, a Quinnipiac (2017) telephone poll showed (sample size not reported) 56% of respondents disapproving including 24% of Republican voters, while NPR (2017) on a telephone poll of a 1,205 sample indicated 65% overall disapproving of the Republican Party's handling of health care, including 33% of Republican voters. However, caution is required with such poll results, especially with small samples. Of course, only if and when AHC is implemented would it be possible to judge its degree of success and whether in fact millions of Americans had been denied health care as a consequence.

## The Right to Bear Arms vs Gun Control

The incidence of gun-related deaths in the United States has long been the highest among developed countries. The US incidence rate is not just marginally higher but several times higher. According to the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC 2017), data towards the end of 2017 showed the number of all firearm deaths at 33,594 with a corresponding incidence rate of 10.5 deaths per 100,000 population. The comparative study by Grinshteyn and Hemenway (2010) showed the US rate then to be 10.2 per 100,000. This rate was three times that of the next highest among high-income countries (Finland at 3.6) and for 18 of the other 21 countries their rate was less than 2.0 per 100,000. When the homicide-by-firearm rate is considered, the US also had the highest rate at 3.6 per 100,000, which was seven times the next highest (Canada at 0.5). Sixteen of the other 21 countries had gun homicide rates at least 18 times lower than that of the US. As Quealy and Sanger-Katz (2016) noted, “the US is in a different world”.

The United States is also exceptional among developed countries for its high number of mass shootings by lone actors. By mid-November 2017, there had been 317 mass shootings in the US that year; for the whole of 2016, the figure was 483. See also reports on GVA (2017). Such mass shootings tend to involve small numbers of deaths (3 to 6) and injuries but there are also spectacular shootings involving dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries, for example the Las Vegas Mandalay Resort and Casino massacre on October 1, 2017 with 59 killed and more than 500 injured, and the Orlando nightclub shooting on June 12, 2016 with 49 killed and 58 injured.

How has this uniquely American phenomenon (in the developed world) of astronomically high rates of gun deaths arisen? There are a number of contributory hypotheses that could be proposed, for example:

- The US is an inherently violent society, having high rates of homicide and assault even where firearms are not involved.
- Large numbers of citizens own firearms out of fear of attack and a belief that possessing a firearm might deter attack or enable a successful defence against attack.

- US citizens have a right under the Constitution to bear arms and are encouraged to do so by politicians and other interests.
- Citizens are willing to use firearms to settle disputes and scores, to intimidate, or to defend themselves.
- Criminals are uninhibited in the use of firearms in the pursuit of crime.
- Law enforcement officers are uninhibited in the drawing of firearms as a preferred method of detaining suspects for all types of offence, and 'if in doubt' the discharge of firearms to disable or kill suspects.
- Firearms are readily available to the public in a largely unrestricted manner (compared to other developed countries).

While such potential explanations may have good face validity, they provide associative rather than causal explanations. There are also considerable variations in rates between different regions and between different cities. Nevertheless, HICRC (2017) stated that numerous studies have shown that the major determining factor that applies commonly to and within the United States and across other high income countries is gun availability (Hemenway and Miller 2000; Hepburn and Hemenway 2004; Miller et al 2002; 2007). More recent studies e.g. Webster and Vernick (2013) reinforced the centrality of the gun availability vector in the phenomenon.

Further, in the specific area of homicide rates among law enforcement officers, a study over the period 1996 to 2010 (Swedler et al 2015) showed that differences in rates of homicide of such officers across US states are best explained not by differences in crimes and crime rates but by differences in household gun ownership. For example, law enforcement officers are three times more likely to be murdered in states having high gun ownership than in low gun ownership states.

If gun availability is at the heart of the exceptionally high firearm death rate in the US, a reasonable assumption might be that the greatest impact in reducing this would be to introduce stringent gun availability controls. However, while there has been growing pressure in the US for such controls in recent years, such an obvious solution has persistently met with stiff and successful resistance from conservatives among the American public, right-wing politicians, the firearms

industry, and various interest groups, including the NRA and Alt-Right supporters (see e.g. Neiwert 2017).

Objections in the US to gun control variously fall into three main categories:

- Denial that gun-related deaths are cause for major concern, based on political, ideological, cultural, or interest-related perceptual defence or other cognitive biasing (e.g. Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008; Edwards 2017; Kahan et al 2013; Kahan et al 2017; Pierre 2015).
- Refutation of the suggestion that level of gun ownership or gun availability has any causal link or strong association with firearm deaths or violent crime (e.g. Edwards 2017).
- Constitutional right to bear arms (e.g. Lund 2017; Winkler 2017; Stevens 2014a and b; 2018).

The denial that guns are a vector in gun deaths generates incomprehension among people in other countries where gun controls are strict and gun death rates are tiny compared to the US. Perceptual defence and denial in the face of incontrovertible facts (e.g. the exceptionally high gun death rate in the US compared to peer countries) elicits such pro-gun arguments as: ‘it’s not guns that are a danger, it’s the people who use them’, or even ‘possessing a firearm deters possible violent attack and therefore actually reduces the likelihood of death or injury’.

In addition to denial, the constitutional right argument seeks to present as inviolable the right of every citizen to bear arms. This right refers to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution, passed by Congress on September 25, 1789 and ratified on December 15, 1791. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment states: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed”. The meaning of “right of the people” has long been interpreted by many in US society as ‘right of each individual’ and this remains the prevailing interpretation. However, over the years, federal laws have been introduced that restrict the scope of this right. For example, in the nation’s capital, nearly all citizens are forbidden to possess handguns. Lund (2017), Winkler (2017) and Stevens (2014a and b; 2018) discussed more recent Supreme Court decisions that have overturned some federal gun laws. In the 2008 case of *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the Supreme Court ruled that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment protects a private right of individuals to have arms for



their own defence, not a right of the states to maintain a militia. The Supreme Court ruling in *McDonald v. City of Chicago* (2010) similarly struck down federal restrictions on gun possession in relation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment and state restrictions in relation to the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

Lund (2017) noted, however, that the individual right to bear arms is not absolute, for example in the case of violent criminals, and individual citizens are not allowed to bear arms in the form weapons of mass destruction. Nevertheless, the right protected by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment is to bear arms, not just to own or keep them. This fundamentalist or purist interpretation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, which appears to be backed by the Supreme Court and embraced by the pro-gun lobby, the Alt-Right and large sections of the public, appears to be frozen in time. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment was written, there existed various existential threats which, together with less robust systems of law and order, warranted the right to bear arms for self-protection. Some 230 years later, the situation is entirely different and the need for guns to be freely available to citizens has receded, a change recognized and responded to in other developed countries.

Former Supreme Court justice John Paul Stevens (Stevens 2014a) included a specific critique of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment and argued that its original intent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century context was to protect the citizen's right (and duty) to keep and bear arms when serving in a state militia, not primarily the right to self-defence as this was already protected by common law. Up until the 1980s, federal judges uniformly understood that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment right was limited in two ways (Stevens 2014b): (1) it applied only to keeping and bearing arms for military purposes; (2) while limiting the power of federal government, it did not impose any limit whatsoever on the power of states or local governments to regulate the ownership or use of firearms.

However, pro-gun groups such as the National Rifle Association (see, for example, Edwards 2017) disagreed with that position and mounted a sustained campaign asserting that federal regulation was severely restricting citizens' 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights. Stevens (2014b; 2018) quoted retired Chief Justice Warren Burger as stating publicly in 1991 that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment "has been the subject of one of the greatest pieces of fraud, I repeat the word 'fraud', on the American public by special interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime".

The relentless campaign by pro-gun interests eventually led to the Supreme Court rulings cited above, which Stevens (2014b) argued were misinterpretations of the law and “profoundly unwise”. He argued that public policies on gun control should be decided by the elected legislatures not by federal judges, who may have too narrow a perspective compared to elected representatives. He further argued that the uncertainties and anomalies could be readily avoided by revising the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment by inserting the words “when serving in the Militia” after “the right of the people to keep and bear arms”. However, following further gun massacres, including that at Parkland School Florida in February 2018, Stevens went further and called for an outright removal of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment (Stevens 2018).

It could be argued that passionate advocacy and angry demands by pro-gun supporters neither certify nor sanctify the asserted right to bear arms, any more than pedantic dissection and narrow interpretation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment that ignores the 21<sup>st</sup> century context provide them with a sound legal justification. To many in the outside world, not cursed with the US’s alarmingly high firearm death rate, the whole issue is obvious and speaks for itself. The endless US debate and inaction in the face of gun violence, which Stevens argued is readily correctible by both federal and state legislatures if they so wish and have the will to act, appears to ignore the priority human right of life.

The contrast of, on the one hand, a widespread and deep paranoia about violent threats to life and limb of citizens who seek to justify unfettered gun control for self-protection, and, on the other hand, the relentless death toll arising from unfettered availability of firearms, continues to astonish the world outside America. The excessively high death toll is a very negative example of US exceptionalism. As noted in the section above on health care, underlying conservatism and beliefs about individual liberty anchored in Constitutional Amendments, inform and encourage resistance to perceived government interference in citizens’ lives, even when such intervention is intended for the overall public good. Such heavily ingrained characteristics are particularly strong among conservatives and especially among the Alt-Right. President Trump made it abundantly clear, both before and after his election (Neiwert 2017), that he strongly favoured a relaxation of gun controls and was a resolute supporter of the NRA, of which he is a lifetime member. For example, in his speech at the

2017 NRA Convention, he enthusiastically endorsed the NRA's campaign to ensure a fundamentalist interpretation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment and minimal gun controls (Shear 2017). Other senior Alt-Right figures, such as Roy Moore the Republican senatorial candidate for Alabama and Steve Bannon, also stated their support for the Trump and NRA position. Even after the Parkland High School gun massacre in February 2018, Trump's response to demands for greater gun control was grudging and minimalist, with the NRA and the Alt-Right overall resolutely opposed to it, despite opinion polls showed a noticeable increase in public demands for such controls (CBS 2018; CNN 2018; Shepard 2018), even among Republicans.

In effect, the Alt-Right position on guns implies a belief that some human rights are more important than others. There is no evidence of Alt-Right protagonists expressing such a hierarchy explicitly, and indeed they may not be conscious of such a hierarchy being revealed in what they say and do. In the as-revealed Alt-Right hierarchy of human rights, the rights of gun owners, keepers, bearers, and users appear to far outweigh those of other sectors of society and other human rights, despite the fact that gun rights and the right to bear arms are not even recognized as a human right in the 1948 UN Declaration. This unobtrusive Alt-Right hierarchy of human rights fits perfectly Trump's apparent model of society in which there are winners (such as himself and gun owners) and losers (such as anyone who does not own a gun or who is not prepared to use one in their own interests).

## Discriminatory Immigration Controls

In November 1883, the poet Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) wrote a short poem entitled *The New Colossus*, intended to convey to the thousands of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island port of entry that at last they could feel free from tyranny, discrimination and misery. Her poem, enshrined in a bronze plaque of 1903 and now located in the Statue of Liberty Museum, contains the following emotional plea:

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me”. (Lazarus 1883)

Such inspiring eloquence is testament to how the United States at that time saw itself as the natural and welcoming destination for immigrants. The plaque's exhortation contains no reference to any qualification or exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, religion, country of origin, or political beliefs. Certainly, once landed in the United States, an immigrant's rights are broadly protected under the Constitution to similar extent as for a citizen. However, in recent years there has been a growing repudiation of this liberal humanitarian policy that welcomed immigrants and its replacement by increasingly strident calls to curb immigration, if not stop it altogether. The upsurge of populist anti-immigration clamour has been fuelled by fears that many of America's current problems are the result of foreign malevolence and enmity, unfair trade practices of foreign countries, and alien religions, cultures, values, attitudes and customs of foreigners that render immigrants 'un-American' and a threat to the safety, stability and future of the United States. The orchestration, manipulation, and amplification of such fears have been undertaken enthusiastically by the Alt-Right, and no less so by President Trump. The antipathy of the Alt-Right in general, and Trump in particular, towards immigrants was made clear throughout the presidential election campaign. Their rhetoric included several key assertions and allegations, namely:

- That Muslims represent an 'obvious' terrorist threat, and therefore their entry and presence in the US should be strictly controlled (see Neiwert 2017; Vitali 2016).
- That Mexicans and other migrants crossing illegally from Mexico into the US are a threat because a high proportion of them are criminals, murderers and rapists who are responsible for much crime in the USA (Neate 2015a and b).
- That undocumented illegal migrants living in America should be rounded up and deported (see Hoyle 2018; Neiwert 2017; Vitali 2016).

On January 27, 2017, President Trump issued a six-page Executive Order (White House 2017) of eleven sections, whose title sought to convey that the order was designed to protect the nation from foreign terrorist entry into the US. While much of the order's content did appear to be directed towards its stated aim and was relatively uncontroversial (e.g. tightening up on visa application screening and vetting procedures; roll-out of biometric data screening), the thrust of the order

focussed on the temporary banning of visa applicants from seven named countries deemed to be high risk sources of terrorism: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen. The order also suspended visa entry to all refugees from Syria and cut by more than half the Obama administration's annual refugee cap of 50,000.

Although clearly addressing fears of terrorism, the order went much further and included in section 1 the intention to deny visas to any persons who engage in human rights violations, such as "acts of bigotry or hatred (including 'honor' killings, other forms of violence against women, or the persecution of those who practice religions different from their own) or those who would oppress Americans of any race, gender, or sexual orientation". In addition, by including in section 3(c) the objective to "prevent infiltration by foreign terrorists or criminals", the order's scope was extended even further. Thus, by conflating several different classes of undesirable (both terrorist and non-terrorist threats) under the catch-all justification of "protecting the nation from foreign terrorist entry", the order appeared to reflect a much broader composite agenda in Trump's mind based on his personal fear, loathing and prejudice as shared by his various Cabinet chiefs (Germanos 2017; Rupar 2017). In essence, he was saying that, unless and until proven otherwise to the US government's satisfaction, all citizens of the named countries henceforth would be considered to be terrorists, and/or human rights violators, and/or criminals.

The Executive Order caused an immediate uproar, both in the US and globally, with the controversy continuing throughout 2017. Much of the criticism focussed on the fact that all seven countries had populations that were predominantly Muslim, and that therefore the ban was simply based on ethnic and religious discrimination disguised as something innocent and reasonable. Indeed, Trump's own public comments throughout 2015 and 2016 on his negative views on Muslims and his intentions to act against them if he became President (Neiwert 2017; Vitali 2016), made it difficult for him to deny that he was prejudiced. For example, on December 7, 2015 Trump released a policy proposal calling for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on". The following day, when asked about his proposal on *MSNBC's* Morning Joe program, Trump referred to the detention and internment of enemy aliens during WWII. Throughout

2016, during a variety of public speeches, TV interviews and appearances, he continued his anti-Muslim rhetoric, including a need to monitor mosques and his willingness to close them if necessary, as well as the need to suspend immigration from an amorphous unnamed group of countries he deemed to be terroristic e.g. “in particular for certain people coming from certain horrible—where you have tremendous terrorism in the world, you know what those places are. But we have to put a stop to it” (June 15, 2016).

Another criticism of his Executive Order centred on the curious inclusions and exclusions of banned countries. For instance, whereas the named countries may well have links with terrorism, so far as is known none had any of their nationals involved in any terrorist attack against the United States mainland. A Yemeni-born terrorist did, however, threaten to blow up a NW Airlines plane mid-air on a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit on December 25, 2009 but was overpowered. Of the 19 known Al Qaeda terrorists involved in the 9/11 atrocities, 15 were nationals of Saudi Arabia, two were from UAE and one each from Egypt and Lebanon. In more recent attacks, these have been by Chechens of Kyrgyzstani origin (the Boston Marathon bombings, April 15, 2013), or by Pakistanis (the San Bernardino attack, December 2, 2015), or by an Uzbek (the Manhattan truck attack, October 31, 2017). Moreover, Saudi Arabia as the prime source country for Wahhabi and Salafist sponsored anti-western terrorism (HJS 2017) was strangely absent from the list, despite fifteen of the 9/11 bombers and the prime mover Osama bin Laden all having Saudi nationality.

Thus, there are grounds to question the credibility of Trump’s banning list and his motives for including or excluding particular countries. It was widely speculated that both Saudi Arabia and Egypt were kept off the list because their leaders are staunch US allies, which tends to undermine Trump’s justification of the ban: if it really were aimed at preventing terrorists gaining entry to the US, then necessarily Saudi Arabia would have to be on the list, and arguably also Egypt in view of its Muslim Brotherhood problem. Perhaps this is another example of Trump’s predisposition to amoral transactionalism (Dian 2017; Kahl and Brands 2017). The Saudi leadership may well be pro-western in general terms and in key matters of their own interests and survival. However, there have been decades of ambivalence, laissez-faire and the turning of blind eyes towards Sunni extremism in

their midst that has provided cover for the financing of terrorism and export of extremism (HJS 2017).

Within days of the Executive Order, numerous legal challenges on the grounds of its unconstitutionality were raised in the courts. Federal Judge James Robart raised a temporary restraining order against it after hearing arguments from the States of Washington and Minnesota that it was unconstitutional, a violation of federal law, and inflicted irreparable harm on their economies, universities and people (Hamilton 2017). After a Federal Appeals Court upheld the restraining order, Trump then issued a new Order that retained the main thrust of the original but with modifications such as retaining 120-day suspension of the refugee program but no longer banning Syrian refugees indefinitely (Siddiqui et al 2017). Within days of the new Order, two federal judges in different States ruled that it too was unlawful and could not be implemented (Gerstein 2017). One of the judges, US District Court Judge Derrick Watson, described the government's assertions as "fundamentally flawed" and observed that Trump's anti-Muslim campaign statements amounted to "significant and un rebutted evidence of religious animus driving the promulgation" of both Executive Orders. The other, Judge Theodore Chuang, cited Trump's anti-Muslim campaign comments as evidence of his prejudiced animus in making the Order:

"These statements, which include explicit, direct statements of President Trump's animus towards Muslims and intention to impose a ban on Muslims entering the United States, present a convincing case that the First Executive Order was issued to accomplish, as nearly as possible, President Trump's promised Muslim ban. In particular, the direct statements by President Trump and Mayor Giuliani's account of his conversations with President Trump reveal that the plan had been to bar the entry of nationals of predominantly Muslim countries deemed to constitute dangerous territory in order to approximate a Muslim ban without calling it one—precisely the form of the travel ban in the First Executive Order.....Such explicit statements of a religious purpose are 'readily discoverable fact[s]' that allow the Court to identify the purpose of this government action without resort to 'judicial psychoanalysis'". (Chuang 2017)

Despite these further knockbacks, Trump appealed to the Supreme Court and in June 2017 received an interim ruling allowing parts of his Order to be implemented. On December 4, 2017, the court allowed the travel ban to go into immediate effect, although legal challenges remained. At that stage, the list of countries affected had been altered to six predominantly Muslim countries (Chad, Iran, Libya, Somali,

Syria, and Yemen) plus North Korea and some categories from Venezuela. Finally, in June 2018, Trump received Supreme Court confirmation by a majority ruling that his travel ban had been upheld. The majority of judges appeared only to be concerned about whether a President had the authority to issue such a ban, not on whether its content was morally defensible. The dissenting minority of judges, however, argued that it was discriminatory and morally reprehensible (Deng 2018).

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a statement that Trump's Order "breaches the country's human rights obligations" and is "clearly discriminatory" (OHCHR 2017). Nevertheless, on this matter Trump and his Cabinet remained defiant and consistent with their authoritarian Alt-Right ideology.

## Conclusion

For over 200 years, the United States has been widely lauded as a paragon of democracy-in-action, a nation founded on its constitutional bedrock of guaranteed individual liberty and human rights. Throughout this period, there have been many challenges seeking to erode or undermine these freedoms and rights but, in general and overall, such challenges have been thwarted. There has been a large measure of Democrat and Republican bi-partisan unanimity on the need to preserve the cherished essence of the republic and the land of the free and the brave, not only for its indigenous citizens but also for immigrants.

However, since the 1980s, increasingly this shared non-partisan vision of the 'American way' has been fading. For example, for most of the Obama presidency (2009–2017), major reforms and new legislation (much of it seeking to better the lives of the population) were blocked in Congress owing to bitter inter-party feuding. Stopping the President's programs, e.g. Obamacare, no matter how beneficial they were meant to be for the citizenry, became the prime objective of Republicans and vested business interests. In the US, tens of millions without health care has become normalized and is not regarded as an abrogation of the UN Human Rights Declaration. Since the late 1980s, there had also been concerted and largely successful attempts by pro-gun interests to portray attempts to cut America's horrendous firearm death rate as an attack on citizens' constitutional rights and freedoms.



The right to possess, bear and use a firearm as a human right has become accepted by American society as being more sacred than an individual's right not to be injured or killed by ubiquitous uncontrolled guns. As a human rights rationale, such gun primacy is difficult to defend.

The convergence of the views and aims of self-styled libertarians (not to be confused with liberals), conservative politicians, right-wing extremists, and other vested interests created a momentum for the emergence of the Alt-Right in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in which populist authoritarian antagonism against Muslims and immigrants was also a natural bedfellow. President Trump unashamedly carried forward the authoritarian Alt-Right agenda he espoused during election campaigning and demonstrated his apparent unconcern about the law and human rights obligations and an indifference to the harm his actions had caused to many people. His agenda, and its Aristotelian disdain for the victims (i.e. 'losers'), may well increase the scale of social welfare problems and exacerbate societal divisions within the US, all with economically and politically costly consequences. Abroad, America's 240-year-old reputation and standing as the bastion of democracy, law and order, and human rights have been damaged, possibly irreparably. Whether Trump has any concerns about this remains uncertain.

The issues discussed in this chapter reveal a number of associated risks, which may be summarized as follows and which are assessed in chapter 12:

### **Risks for US**

#### *Risk 1: Damage to US democracy*

The combination of (a) non-redressed evasion of legal constraints, usurpation of the Attorney General, and attacks on the independence of the judiciary by the Trump administration, (b) non-redressed violations of human rights in relation to denied health care, and lack of effective gun controls, and (c) non-redressed violations of human rights in relation to discrimination against immigrants, religious and ethnic minorities, specific nationalities, and other categories, is likely to undermine US democracy, exacerbate societal divisions, and damage the reputation and standing of the United States.

*Risk 2. Economic and financial cost of violations*

Human rights violations by US authorities may incur unacceptable direct and indirect financial costs to the public purse e.g. civil actions, criminal proceedings, costs of remedial programs, loss of economically and fiscally productive individuals, corporate and institutional disinvestment on ethical grounds.

**Risks for Individuals***Risk 1. Healthcare denial*

Contrary to human rights obligations and constitutional protections, those on low incomes or otherwise vulnerable may be denied insured healthcare if Obamacare is replaced by American Health Care, especially if the latter proves defective and/or too expensive for them. The number of uninsured citizens may rise again from 28 million to possibly 50 million.

*Risk 2. Firearm-related death or injury*

Failure to introduce strict firearm controls is likely to result in a continuation of the exceptionally high levels of firearm-related deaths and injuries, contrary to human rights obligations.

*Risk 3. Harm from discriminatory policies*

Discriminatory Alt-Right policies (whether against immigrants, minorities of all kinds, the disabled, the poor, the unemployed, or any other group) are likely to cause them harm, contrary to human rights obligations and constitutional protections.

**Risks for the Alt-Right and the Republican Party***Risk 1. Undermining of constitutional rights leading to voter disaffection*

If voters begin to perceive that the revealed Alt-Right agenda undermines rather than protects and strengthens their constitutional rights, as well as imposing unacceptable and un-American authoritarianism, they are likely to vote against both openly Alt-Right candidates and more generally against Republican candidates (for example, the unexpected defeat of senatorial Alt-Right Republican candidate Roy Moore in December 2017).

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# Chapter 11: The Alt-Right, Post-Truth, Fake News, and the Media

*By Roger Paxton*

## **Abstract**

This chapter considers the era of post-truth politics, in which the Alt-Right has been at the forefront of disseminating false news and ‘fake facts’ in the media and social media, as a means to manipulate public perception in its favour. The generation and dissemination of such untruths, while attacking inconvenient information from other sources as being fake, is seen not only as evidence of confirmation bias but also of a decline of both a normative view that reason warrants universal admiration and a moral basis for politics. The manipulation of crisis perception as a pretext for promulgating Alt-Right solutions is discussed. President Trump’s *Twitter* rhetoric is examined as an example of social media abuses favouring the Alt-Right. Risks are identified and their management outlined.

**Key words:** Alt-Right, post-truth, fake news, Trump, crisis, risks

## **The Assault on Truth**

According to *The Economist* (2016), politicians have always lied but, in recent years, a qualitatively different kind of assault on truth has appeared. This is the era of post-truth politics, characterised by a reliance on assertions that ‘feel true’ (to the people who form the intended audience) but have no or little basis in fact. Donald Trump is the most prominent exponent of post-truth politics but is by no means its sole practitioner. This approach to truth, falsity and evidence is not confined to politicians. News media, for example, have changed in number, kind, and the principles on which they operate, so that the world of post-truth politics is complemented and bolstered by that of fake news. Fake news, like post-truth politics, is much more about

feelings than facts. The purpose of both is to reinforce the prejudices of current or likely supporters, rather than to convince opponents.

This chapter describes the nature and rise of fake news and the age of post-truth politics. Focusing on the particular role of social media, it considers cause and effect, and shows how the Alt-Right has both helped to bring about changes in the dissemination of ideas, information, and opinions, and exploited them to advance its cause. The damage already done is reviewed, along with the risks of further harm. Finally, how might the risks be managed and can respect for evidence and honesty be rebuilt?

## Post-Truth Politics

Facts hold a sacred place in western liberal democracies (Davies 2016), or at least they used to. Historically, when voters were being manipulated or politicians were being unusually evasive, facts provided a consensual route forward. This was the case after the Dreyfus affair, the Suez crisis, and Watergate. Many other examples could be listed. However, facts now have much less power to promote consensus. About seventy percent of Donald Trump's 'factual' statements have been shown to be mostly or completely false (Davies 2016), often by his own shift to a contradictory position. However, publicising this serial dishonesty made no discernible difference to the views of his supporters or to their support for him.

'Post-truth' is an adjective, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "relating to or depicting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". However, the much-reported phrase 'alternative facts', used in January 2017 by senior White House aide Kellyanne Conway, suggests that this definition does not quite capture the extent of what is happening to 'truth'. It is not just that facts have become less influential than appeals to emotion and belief; if there are facts and alternative facts, the very existence of truth (defined as agreement with reality) appears to be denied.

The post-truth era also differs from the much older traditions of political lies, 'spin' and falsehoods in the public response when lies are shown to be lies. Outrage has given way to widespread indifference and even collusion: lying is regarded as the norm, as D'Ancona (2017) pointed out. This is paralleled and encouraged by a further difference;

the reaction of Alt-Right politicians and their aides. Not only is there the idea of alternative facts (that is, there are no objective facts, we can all have our own) but facts do not matter anyway. This is the “who cares?” response, sometimes explicit, and at other times implied, when a refuted claim or statement is dropped without correction or apology, or rapidly reversed or contradicted (D’Ancona 2017).

## Fake News

Fake news is a prominent feature of the post-truth era. As Carson (2016) observed, there is nothing new about bending the truth for political gain: the use of propaganda—biased communications, whether blatant or subtle—can be traced back at least to ancient Rome, and was commonplace and used by both sides in World War Two. Fake news shares the main aim of propaganda i.e. distorting the truth for emotional persuasion, but goes far beyond propaganda in its spread and potential effects. Fake news is different firstly in its sources: propaganda used to be a government product but the new social media and online publishing platforms enable anyone to generate and circulate information that looks like news. The spread of politically useful falsehoods has become cheap, fast, instantly global and hard to regulate, let alone stop. The resultant proliferation of ‘news’ sources adds the further dimensions of variety and choice, in contrast to the era of a single stream of government-generated propaganda, perhaps challenged only by propaganda from an enemy government. The consequence is that people choose the sources that reinforce their current opinions (see Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008; Kahan et al 2017; Shermer 2018; Nickerson 1998 on confirmatory bias) and so thereby intra-societal political and social divisions may be widened.

Carson suggested that fake news works in a number of ways. First, it can be intentionally deceptive, perhaps telling downright lies, such as falsely reporting that a particular celebrity has endorsed a candidate. Second, satirical comments or jokes can be spread onwards as facts, and third, mainstream media may innocently pick up and further spread lies or distortions. Fourth, fake news can also result from selective reporting of evidence, as for instance with the dissemination of apparent facts opposing climate change evidence (see chapter 9). Finally it may be spread accidentally by reporters assuming certainty

in areas of uncertainty or clashing opinions, as is sometimes the case with territorial disputes, for instance.

Some of Trump's most outrageous fake news stories were the claims that the father of his Republican presidential candidate opponent, Ted Cruz, had been involved in JFK's assassination; that President Obama was not born in the USA; and that climate change is a hoax. Other notable Trump headlines during the 2016 election were: 'Pope backs Trump', 'Hillary sold weapons to ISIS' and 'FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead'. In typical fashion, Trump also repeatedly used the term 'fake news' to attack mainstream news media in an aggressive and Orwellian reversal of the truth by the champion of fake news. An organisation dedicated to undermining objective news reporting, recently described by David Aaronovitch (Aaronovitch 2017), is similarly Orwellian in its name—*Project Veritas*—and aggressively devious in its operation. Its method, which may initially appear paradoxical, is to add to complaints against far-right politicians, but to do so with false complaints which are then exposed as false and thus throw doubt on the veracity of genuine complaints in mainstream media. Aaronovitch noted that *Project Veritas* should, of course, be called *Project Falsitas*.

## Post-Truth, Fake News and the Rise of the Alt-Right: What Caused What?

How has this state of affairs arisen? Although the term 'post-truth' has become widely used only in recent years, the post-truth era has arisen insidiously by several means. First may be the development of techniques of propaganda beyond the idea (attributed to Churchill) that history is written by the victors. D'Ancona (2017) quoted George Orwell looking back on the Spanish Civil War, remarking that "the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world". Orwell commented on the terrifying success of the propaganda of the Fascist victors in Spain, who would then go on to write the history books from their slant. However, he also wrote about the lies spread by the other side, and expected their version of history also to be partisan. The significance, as D'Ancona noted, is the abandonment of the idea that history *could* be written truthfully—a premonition of the age of post-truth.

Baggini (2016) suggested a second, longer term, causal factor: the decline of reason as something almost universally admired. Since Aristotle, reason (the systematic use of evidence and logic) has generally been accepted as the firmest basis for decision making, and even as what sets humans apart from other species. Baggini, however, claimed that it is now widely unfashionable, denigrated and in decline: reason is cold, pedantic and unfeeling, unlike emotions, intuitions and beliefs. Strong beliefs, which demonstrate and rely on emotional commitment, are commonly resistant to change through reasoned argument. Religious faith is one example. The failure of reason to achieve such changes can then be seen as showing the weakness of reason itself, thus compounding the problem. In the current intellectual climate, the inconsistencies and obvious falsehoods of the post-truth world are not remarkable. Appeals to emotions and beliefs, even highly unreasonable appeals, are increasingly likely to be successful. Rather hypocritically, Baggini gave little evidence in support of his claims, which although credible, might well have existed for decades or even longer. Nevertheless, an intellectual climate favouring beliefs and emotions over reason, however long it has prevailed, is a fertile environment for proselytizing by the Alt-Right.

A third likely background factor is the weakening of a shared moral basis for politics. This is powerfully illustrated not just by the flagrant dishonesty and racism of Trump and his supporters but also by the continuing failure of the vast majority of his fellow Republicans to criticise or even distance themselves from him and what he represents. Electoral futures and party power evidently come before adherence to the moral principles embodied in the constitution and institutions of the United States. Prominent contemporary American philosopher Michael Sandel (2013) wrote of “the moral vacancy of contemporary politics”. Sandel linked this deterioration to “market triumphalism”; the extension of the market mechanism and market values into more and more spheres—moving from *having* a market economy to *being* a market society. President Trump, businessman, property dealer, and negotiator, who brings all these components of his professional past to the office of President, perfectly represents market triumphalism. The President proudly and ostentatiously embodies and displays market triumphalism in his gold-encrusted properties and his approach to the presidency: taxes must be cut to let the market rule, the ‘socialist’ interference of Obamacare must be abolished to

free the market in health care, and when Trump is not threatening first use of nuclear weapons he is the man to cut deals to solve the world's problems. The moral vacancy of contemporary politics is further illustrated by the breaking of the guardrails of democracy (Frum 2016), discussed below.

Fourth, some reasons for the success of post-truth and fake news communications may be their reliance on established principles of rhetoric. This is not to assume that these communications have been deliberately constructed on the basis of rhetorical principles, only that the principles help to explain how they work. For instance, classical rhetoricians encouraged speakers to use commonplaces—references to beliefs or moral values that are familiar and shared by audiences (Condor et al 2013). This includes the use of 'virtue words' such as 'community', 'change' and 'choice'. Recent research summarised by Condor and colleagues has tracked the deployment and specific rhetorical functions of these words. Another piece of classical advice is that audiences are swayed not just by the style and content of an argument, but also, and probably often more, by the character or identity projected by the speaker. This may include taking or avoiding sides, explicit appeals to common group membership, constructing aspirational identities, and use of the pronoun 'we'. All of these themes are strikingly evident in Donald's Trump's public communications: his slogan 'make America great again' contains his most commonly used virtue word; his verbal style displays the character of a blue collar ordinary man (despite his extremely white collar income and lifestyle); he vigorously and promptly takes sides on most issues, but avoids doing so in some egregious ways when it suits his purpose, as with his failure to criticise President Putin or the white supremacists in the Charlottesville march and violence in September 2017; he almost always uses 'we' rather than 'I'; and he presents an ambitious (but completely vague) aspirational identity—we are the people who are going to make America great again.

Fifth, these developments have been enabled by the resurgence of the far-right in America, which in turn was made possible by external conditions present for several decades. Neiwert quoted a report by the United States Department of Homeland Security, released in 2009, which warned that

"...rightwing extremists during the 1990s exploited a variety of social issues and political themes to increase group visibility and recruit new members. Prominent among these themes were the militia movement's opposition to gun control efforts, criticism of free trade agreements (particularly those with Mexico), and highlighting perceived government infringement on civil liberties as well as white supremacists' longstanding exploitation of social issues such as abortion, inter-racial crimes, and same-sex marriage. During the 1990s, these issues contributed to the growth in the number of domestic rightwing terrorist and extremist groups and an increase in violent acts targeting government facilities, law enforcement officers, banks, and infrastructure sectors... Historically, domestic rightwing extremists have feared, predicted and anticipated a cataclysmic economic collapse in the United States. Prominent antigovernment conspiracy theorists have incorporated aspects of an impending economic collapse to intensify fear and paranoia among like-minded individuals and to attract recruits during times of economic uncertainty...". (Neiwert 2017, 121-2)

However, populism, including the Alt-Right version, rises not simply by riding on the back of external events but through manipulating the public perception of them. This is the sixth factor that helps to explain the rise of the Alt-Right. The received wisdom, according to Moffitt (2015), is that a crisis is a necessary trigger, or at least precondition, for the growth of populism. This was the view, for instance of Mudde (2007), one of the most prominent writers in the study of the populist radical right in Europe. Mudde saw it as a constant in studies of both historical and contemporary populism, as for instance with the universal or near universal acceptance that Hitler's rise was triggered or enabled by the economic slump of the 1930s. He acknowledged as a key problem that the nature of the relationship between economic, socio-economic or political crises and populism is unclear, and also noted that the notion of crisis is itself unclear: when is a period of economic slump or a rise in unemployment a crisis, rather than just another downturn in the economic cycle? He pointed out that several recent periods have been labelled crises, without the radical right rising significantly: in the 1970s there was said to be a participation crisis, and in the 1980s the crisis of political parties.

The somewhat uncertain notion of crisis, and problems of recursion in describing and defining crisis, has been addressed in Fischbacher-Smith (2014), who suggested that a crisis is defined by those who witness or experience it. He also discussed the phases of crisis development such as incubation and systemic failure (Turner 1992; Turner and Pidgeon 1997), and predisposing factors such as cultural



mediation and legitimization of deviancy (Vaughan 1996; 2004). Crises are characterised by intense and often dramatic uncertainty and conflict relating to a topic that is central to the stability and existence of a system (e.g. government, organization, economy, public order), involving perceived loss of control, acutely unstable conditions, and potential collapse.

Moffitt (2015) argued that the causal relationship is less clear: populism can trigger a crisis as well as the reverse relationship, and more importantly, the notion of crisis cannot be conceptualized in a neutral or objective way: it is something that is perceived on the basis of some ‘performance’ or mediation. This occurs because crisis is usually *signified* by failure—failure of the financial system, political system, public policy and so on, but this failure is only a precondition according to Moffitt. When a failure is widely regarded as salient through its mediation into the political, cultural or ideological spheres, then it is seen as symptomatic of a wider problem: “a crisis only becomes a crisis when it is perceived as a crisis” (Moffitt 2015, 197) echoing Fishbacher-Smith (2014).

Moffitt described six steps in the populist ‘performance’ of a crisis. The first step is to identify a failure, as, for instance, how right-wing politicians in Europe, Australia and New Zealand labelled immigration policies as failures in recent years. The second is to elevate the failure to the level of a crisis by linking it to other failures. This is exemplified by the American Tea Party movement’s tactic in 2009 with its Taxpayer March, during which speeches extended from taxation to healthcare reform, abortion, big government, similarities between President Obama, Hitler and Stalin, and Obama’s ‘true’ nationality. A looming crisis was created: Obama’s ‘socialist’ plan for America. The temporal dimension is important in this stage: urgent action is needed to prevent terrible things happening. The third step is to identify those responsible for the crisis and to frame them as opposed to ‘the people’ who are the ones who will be most adversely affected by the crisis. European radical right politicians have typically identified immigrants along with establishment bureaucrats, journalists, and academics as guilty. Fourthly, news media are used to disseminate information about the crisis, and maintain a continuing sense of crisis. This information can be presented in dramatic and salacious ways, examples of which are too numerous to require mention here. Fifth, simple

solutions and strong leadership are offered, and Donald Trump provided many examples, the best of which is perhaps the endlessly repeated promise that “we will make America great again”: a simple and unforgettable claim, and Trump is the strong leader, and the only man capable of achieving the promised outcome. Finally, the crisis must continue to be propagated, as when Trump missed no opportunity to highlight and retaliate verbally against threats or provocative missile launches from North Korea. In reacting this way, he also contrasted his approach not only with that of his predecessor but also with that of an almost all-encompassing establishment, including the rest of the world’s leaders, and his own Secretary of State, all of whom had spoken of the need for calm and a path towards negotiation.

Drawing this section to a close, the main conclusion is that the causal links between the rise of the Alt-Right, fake news, and the realm of post-truth are complex and mutually reinforcing. This suggests that it will be important to take them all into account when considering ways of managing the risks presented by the Alt-Right.

## The Role of Social Media

From the range of factors involved in the rise of the Alt-Right, it is appropriate next to concentrate on the part played by social media. These new media, including *Facebook* and *Twitter*, convey obvious benefits through their instant, cheap, and global communications. The social interactions of billions of people around the world have been vastly broadened, and the economic benefits of instant communication are surely also huge. However, even before the role of social media in the rise of the Alt-Right is considered, very serious drawbacks are evident alongside the benefits. For instance, former *Facebook* executive Chamath Palihapitiya, in a recent public interview, quoted by Harris (2018), said: “The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created are destroying how society works. No civil discourse, no cooperation, misinformation, mistruth...So we are in a really bad state of affairs now, in my opinion”. Perhaps surprisingly, or perhaps not, Steve Jobs, the main force behind the iPhone and iPad, when asked in 2010 about his children’s use of the iPad, replied: “They haven’t used it. We limit how much technology our kids use at home” (Harris 2018).

Liberal democracy, the system of government cherished in the west, is only possible if certain preconditions are met. These are generally taken for granted and rarely if ever made explicit, but to appreciate the effects and importance of social media they need to be spelled out. To begin with, J. S. Mill, who thought much about both liberty and democracy, regarded it as self-evident that every citizen should be educated, and that this was necessary for democracy to function (Gaus and Courtland 2011). Similarly, and linked to this, it follows that citizens need also to be informed. This point was made by Crick (2013) in his now classic text, *In Defence of Politics*, first published in 1962. Therefore, news media that report information rather than propaganda or misinformation are essential too. Newspapers have always had their political affiliations and therefore biases, but the position now, with new social media having become the main information source for most people, is radically different. What social media often spread is not information, not even misinformation, but, according, to *The Economist* (2017), poison; that is, stories that reinforce biases, peddling the politics of contempt. Crick noted that one of the great benefits of liberal democracy is that it is a political system that enables people with different beliefs to live and thrive together peacefully. Nobody gets *exactly* what they want but everyone broadly has the freedom to live the life of their choosing. However, for this to work requires civility, tolerance and conciliation, as well as information. Without these there is no barrier to the tyranny of the majority or even coercion. On the face of it, social media offer the prospect of more information shared more democratically, but the reality is very different. *Facebook* acknowledged that between January 2015 and August 2017 146 million people may have seen Russian misinformation relating to the American election on its platform (*The Economist* 2017). Social media spread falsehoods and outrage, corroding judgement and aggravating divisions, and thus eroding the conditions necessary for the survival of liberal democracy.

Social media are different from established news media in three ways: first, they are open for anyone to post 'news' and there is no editorial control; second, they 'learn' each user's interests and target information accordingly; and third, what is posted is dominated by pettiness, scandal and outrage, more so probably than even the most unsavoury tabloid publications. These features have three main ef-

fects, beginning with the reinforcing of existing views and biases. Second, because people on different sides perceive different ‘facts’, the room for understanding and empathy, and therefore compromise, is diminished. Third, the emphasis on pettiness and personal attacks loses the subtlety, civility, and tolerance that Crick saw as necessary for liberal democracy, and replaces it with a dangerous winner-takes-all approach.

Nagle (2017, 2), seeing social media as a cultural battlefield, was similarly pessimistic, writing of “...the death of what remained of a mass cultural sensibility, in which there was still a mainstream media arena and a mainstream sense of culture and the public. The triumph of the Trumpians was also a win in the war against this mainstream media, which is now held in contempt by many average voters...”. Nagle illustrated how social media’s anonymity and lack of regulation have encouraged the spread of ‘Internet memes’ i.e. images or ideas that spread widely and rapidly (‘virally’), and which, on bulletin boards such as *4chan*, have transmitted large-scale attacks and threats against other websites or people. Neiwert (2017) also regarded the characteristics of social media summarised here as having dangerous consequences: the easy anonymity, wanton disregard for facts and rules of evidence, and the loss of basic interpersonal regard mean that the functioning of civil society is put at risk. Neiwert suggested some reasons why interactions of social media easily result in disagreements and the trading of insults: there is no exchange of body or facial language and none of the nuances of vocal expression. Intentions cannot be read online as they can in ordinary conversation.

### **Trump's *Twitter* Wars**

The use of social media in the furtherance of political agendas and public relations is graphically illustrated by President Trump’s *Twitter* messaging. To describe President Trump’s conduct and attitude after he became President as ‘unusual’ would understate the case. No previous US President had behaved with such a seemingly cavalier disregard for diplomatic norms and protocols, whether in his dealings with public officials within the governance of the United States, or foreign relations and heads of state, or the media, or social media, or communications with individual citizens. No previous President had, on an almost daily basis, used his personal *Twitter* account to deliver

egregious abuse to anyone or any group to whom he took exception. The collection of papers in Cruz and Buser (2017) on Trump's personality is particularly relevant.

The following examples illustrate, with minimal authorial comment, the nature of how the President expressed himself on a variety of issues and occasions:

### **American Athletes Charged with being Unpatriotic**

During the playing of the national anthem at American football games, the respectful convention is for football players to stand upright and face the Stars-and-Stripes national flag. However, while playing for the San Francisco 49ers in a National Football League (NFL) game in August 2016, Colin Kaepernick remained seated during the anthem. He advised the NFL that he was doing this as a protest against the government for failing to tackle alleged racial oppression, exemplified by a succession of killings of unarmed black men by white police officers in different cities from which no convictions arose. Neither his team nor the NFL apparently objected to his right to sit rather than stand. A few days later, two fellow 49ers team players joined his protest but this time took to dropping on one knee and bowing, in the style typically used as a mark of honour and respect at the graveside of a fallen military comrade.

By the end of October 2016, the so-called 'Kaepernick effect' had spread to other NFL teams and other sports. Moving into 2017, this method of protest spread further and 'taking a knee' during the national anthem became increasingly synonymous not only with the 'Black Lives Matter' movement but also with a growing concern that racism allegedly was still embedded in the institutions of government, the judiciary, the police, and, with the election of Donald Trump as President, the White House itself.

By September 2017, 'taking a knee' had become commonplace in American football and other sports. On September 23, 2017, President Trump issued the following *Twitter* statements on the subject:

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 7:11PM—Sep 23, 2017  
If a player wants the privilege of making millions of dollars in the NFL, or other leagues, he or she should not be allowed to disrespect.....

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 7:18PM—Sep 23, 2017  
 ...our Great American Flag (or Country) and should stand for the National Anthem. If not, YOU'RE FIRED. Find something else to do!

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 11:44AM—Sep 23, 2017  
 If NFL fans refuse to go to games until players stop disrespecting our Flag & Country, you will see change take place fast. Fire or suspend!

### Response to Puerto Rico Hurricane Disaster

On September 20, 2017, the US Caribbean island territory of Puerto Rico was struck by Hurricane Maria, leaving its 3.4 million population beleaguered by floods, landslides, impassable roads, swathes of destroyed houses, no electricity, and no telecommunications. Medical services were overwhelmed with casualties and millions were without water. Food shortages grew rapidly and some 1.9 million people were without piped water supplies. It was reported that communities cut off by the devastation and without bottled water supplies resorted to drinking from streams. The emergency response from the US federal government was reportedly very slow to deliver practical aid and supplies. In addition, it took 8 days to waive a law that banned foreign ships from delivering goods to the island, thus greatly hampering an international relief effort. Although the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) did organize a relief programme, it was its slow delivery that began to raise disquiet, coupled with appeals from officials and politicians in Puerto Rico and in the United States for prompt US action.

Carmen Yulin Cruz, mayor of Puerto Rico's largest city San Juan, took the initiative to appeal for more help from mainland USA by giving media interviews. During one such interview with *CNN*, Ms Cruz sought to emphasize the scale and urgency of the assistance needed thus: "I keep saying it: SOS. If anyone can hear us; if Mr Trump can hear us, let's get it over with and get the ball rolling".

Instead of taking Ms Cruz's request as a desperate humanitarian appeal, in his immediate *Twitter* responses President Trump appeared to have interpreted it as an unacceptable personal slight and a political attack on him as President:

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 12:19PM—Sep 30, 2017  
 The Mayor of San Juan, who was very complimentary only a few days ago, has now been told by the Democrats that you must be nasty to Trump.

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 12:26PM—Sep 30, 2017  
 ...Such poor leadership ability by the Mayor of San Juan, and others in Puerto Rico, who are not able to get their workers to help. They....

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump 12:29PM—Sep 30, 2017  
 ...want everything to be done for them when it should be a community effort. 10,000 Federal workers now on Island doing a fantastic job.

Later, Trump Tweeted his belief that the poor US federal response to the Puerto Rico disaster was all a fiction of the media designed to discredit him, accusing *CNN* and *NBC* in particular of broadcasting ‘fake news’. Other senior Trump officials added their own pro-Trump comments on the subject.

### Journalists

President Trump made it clear that he disliked the media generally (unless he received favourable coverage) and held an intense dislike for particular television news channels, newspapers, and journalists where they had challenged his policies or approaches to various matters or had been in any way critical of him. He regarded them all as part of a grand conspiracy against him (see Uscinski 2016 on Trump’s conspiracy theories).

Among targets of his ire were Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough, the co-hosts of *MSNBC*’s ‘Morning Joe’. On June 29, 2017, Trump Tweeted that the show was “poorly rated” and that he no longer watched the show as “Joe speaks badly of me”. He also referred to “low I.Q. Crazy Mika, along with Psycho Joe”. In a further Tweet, Trump referred churlishly to his refusal to allow Ms Brzezinski to join him at a party because “She was bleeding badly from a facelift. I said no!”

Megyn Kelly, the former *Fox News* presenter and latterly *NBC News* anchor-woman, was dismissed by Trump at various times as a “highly overrated anchor”, “crazy”, “sick”, “a lightweight”, and “so average in so many ways”.

### Senior US Government Officers

Both the US Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the former FBI Director James Comey came under attack by President Trump for (in his opinion) failing to properly investigate his allegations that during the 2016 presidential election campaign Hillary Clinton had engaged in

unlawful activity. His allegations came after evidence emerged that the Trump campaign may have been involved with agents of the Russian government seeking to ensure that Trump won (see chapter 5). Trump's demand for an aggressive FBI investigation into Hillary Clinton was regarded by many as a counter-attack to deflect attention and pressure away from the revelations about Russian government connections of Trump campaign officials and Trump's son-in-law as well as Trump's own Russian business connections. However, FBI Director Comey refused to accept Trump's interference and agree to go lightly on the FBI investigation into the Trump-Russia connections and ratchet up Trump's hoped-for investigation into Hillary Clinton. Comey was then sacked and Trump anticipated that the new acting head of the FBI, Andrew McCabe, would be more malleable. When this turned out to be false, Trump turned his attention to pressurizing the Attorney General to force McCabe to do his bidding. The following exemplify his *Twitter* statements on the subject:

Donald J. Trump @therealDonaldTrump 1:49PM—Jul 24, 2017  
So why aren't the Committees and investigators, and of course our beleaguered A.G., looking into Crooked Hillary's crimes & Russia relations?

Donald J. Trump @therealDonaldTrump 11:03AM—Jul 25, 2017  
Ukrainian effort to sabotage Trump campaign—"quietly working to boost Clinton". So where is the investigation A.G.

Donald J. Trump @therealDonaldTrump 11:12AM—Jul 25, 2017  
Attorney General Jeff Sessions has taken a VERY weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes (where are E-mails & DNC server) & Intel leakers!

Donald J. Trump @therealDonaldTrump 11:21AM—Jul 25, 2017  
Problem is that the acting head of the FBI & the person in charge of the Hillary investigation, Andrew McCabe, got \$700,000 from H for wife!

Donald J. Trump @therealDonaldTrump 1:01PM—Apr 12, 2018  
James Comey is a proven LEAKER & LIAR. Virtually everyone in Washington thought he should be fired for the terrible job he did—until he was, in fact, fired. He leaked CLASSIFIED information, for which he should be prosecuted.....

Donald J. Trump @therealDonaldTrump 1:17PM—Apr 12, 2018  
.....untruth slimeball who was, as time has proven, a terrible Director of the FBI. His handling of the Crooked Hillary Clinton case, and the events surrounding it, will go down as one of the worst "both jobs" of history. It was my great pleasure to fire James Comey!



### Comedians, Satirists and Celebrities

The Hollywood film actor and TV star Alec Baldwin achieved popular acclaim for his biting satirical impersonations of President Trump on the *Saturday Night Live* television show. For obvious reasons, politicians are always popular targets for satirists. Most people, including political targets themselves, would probably judge satirists' performances as highly amusing exaggerations and distortions of the real individuals they impersonate and not semblances to be taken literally. Trump, however, appeared to find Baldwin's satire of him as highly insulting and treated it as if *Saturday Night Live* were a rival political party or a serious news programme rather than an entertainment show:

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump Nov 20, 2016  
I watched parts of @nbcnl Saturday Night Live last night. It is a totally one-sided, biased show—nothing funny at all. Equal time for us?

ABFoundation @ABFalecbaldwin 2:56PM—Nov 20, 2016  
Election is over. There's no more equal time. Now u try 2 b Pres + ppl respond. That's pretty much it.

Also targeted by Trump via *Twitter* were film star Meryl Streep, whom he described as “one of the most over-rated actresses in Hollywood” after she commented negatively on him in a Golden Globes Award speech. Hollywood star and former Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger was berated by Trump when he hosted the ‘*Celebrity Apprentice*’ TV show.

Other pejorative outbursts from Trump via *Twitter* included his highly criticised personal attack on the Mayor of London (see details in chapter 2), and his attempt (via both *Twitter* and official White House press statements, some televised) to portray victims of neo-Nazi violence in Charlottesville as being as culpable as the perpetrators (see White House 2017a and b and discussion in chapter 1).

In late November 2017, Trump retweeted some video clips sent out by the far-right extremist group Britain First (see chapters 3 and 4 in Vol 2) that falsely attributed the imagery to Muslims attacking whites in Holland and elsewhere. His inflammatory action was roundly condemned by Prime Minister May and the British Parliament as boosting far-right extremism, and indeed Britain First's leader confirmed that Trump's intervention had greatly boosted the group's support (Simpson et al 2017; Elliott et al 2017).

As the above examples show, social media enabled President Trump to communicate frequently and immediately with millions of people, including his loyal supporters. The hastily written and instantaneous communication style of *Twitter* is precisely Trump's own personal style. However, the effects of this blizzard of opinions on its recipients are not known, and will undoubtedly vary between his supporters and other readers. In general, the extent to which social media have contributed to a reduced importance of truth is unknown. As previously noted, today there seems much less concern with truth than in the past, but *The Economist* (2017) commented that a very recent survey found that only 37% of Americans trust what they get from social media, and this is half the figure for printed newspapers and magazines. This might be seen as reassuring in that perhaps people find fake news entertaining, but do not believe it. However, this finding perhaps illustrates that truth and falsehood simply matter less. Also diluting optimism here is the evidence, summarised by Neiwert (2017), of how widespread is belief in various conspiracy theories in America. A 2013 survey of American voters carried out by Public Policy Polling found that thirty seven percent of voters (and fifty eight percent of Republicans) believed global warming was a hoax; twenty eight percent believed that a secret elite is conspiring to rule the world through an authoritarian world government; and twenty eight percent believed Saddam Hussein was involved in the 9/11 attacks. It appears that many people have eccentric criteria for judging truth, or perhaps no such criteria at all. For them, truth and evidence seem to be slippery and unimportant concepts.

In early 2018, evidence emerged of a different use of social media to influence electoral processes. This was the unauthorised use of personal data from *Facebook* to target millions of voters with highly individualised advertising aimed at influencing their electoral choices. The *Observer* and *Guardian* newspapers (e.g. Cadwalladr 2018; Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison, 2018a and b) published several reports based on the testimony of Christopher Wylie, a whistleblower, who had worked for Cambridge Analytica, a company specialising in data mining and analysis. Wylie reported, and subsequent investigations confirmed, how personality test data from large numbers of American voters were correlated with information on 'likes' and other personal matters from their *Facebook* accounts. A five-part *Channel 4 News* investigation also showed covert videos of Cambridge Analytica

senior executives volunteering how they apparently abused data protection and electoral laws to assist political clients in various countries, which included a boast that their company's covert messaging and propaganda machine had been primarily responsible for the success of the Trump presidential campaign.

In 2014, Steve Bannon (then executive chairman of the Alt-Right news network *Breitbart*, and also a board director of Cambridge Analytica, a company he helped set up) saw the political potential of this questionable use of massive data sets. Relationships between particular *Facebook* 'likes' and political concerns and preferences were revealed, and the procedure was then extended to 50 million *Facebook* 'friends' of the initial sample. *Facebook* acknowledged that a total of 90 million users were affected. This enabled personalised targeting of political propaganda on a vast scale, to support the Trump presidential campaign and the Leave campaign in the British EU referendum. The approach was described as targeting people's "inner demons". Bannon retained his Cambridge Analytica links during his time as Trump's campaign director and, after Trump became President-elect, it was reported that Bannon lobbied for Cambridge Analytica to be granted lucrative White House contracts. At the time of writing, both Cambridge Analytica and *Facebook* were under official investigations by legislatures and regulators on both sides of the Atlantic in connection with the lack of consent for this use of *Facebook* data, as well as other potentially criminal acts such as corruption and breaches of electoral law (Bridge 2018; Bridge et al 2018; Kenber et al 2018a and b). Although it is not yet clear who was guilty of what, it does seem clear that this use of personal data was illegal, indicating that the legal framework within which social media operate may need to be reviewed (see chapter 14).

The effects of online dissemination of fake news and extremist propaganda in the process of recruitment to radical Islamist groupings has been studied over some years, and Neiwert (2017) suggested that the findings from this research can help to understand online recruitment to the Alt-Right cause. Berger, summarised by Neiwert, identified four stages in this recruitment:

- Initial contact with a potential recruit.
- A 'micro-community' is generated to form an 'echo chamber', focusing radical ideas towards the target person.

- A shift to private communication.
- It is decided what kind of contribution the recruit should make to the cause.

This appears to be a potentially effective use of online media which might be used by the Alt-Right. Neiwert presented no evidence to show that it is actually used, but Berger (2015), a long-term student of Islamist radicalism, agreed that the new media have the potential to spread white nationalist radicalism faster than the Islamist variety. He reasoned that once such ideas are no longer dormant or unexpressed, white nationalists could rapidly become more organized and exploit the anonymity and enormous spread of social media. Neiwert (2017, 261) argued plausibly that social media are important to Alt-Right recruitment by taking in “the bigger picture” to “change what’s acceptable to talk about” in public and in the media. For instance, potential supporters are exposed early on to over-the-top jokes that celebrate Nazism or other kinds of grotesque behaviour, which attract attention by their extremeness, and through their circulation make the spread of similar material more acceptable. Likely effects are to begin to inure people to hateful rhetoric and allow people harbouring such views to express them. Another technique that Neiwert suggested is to circulate statements or incitements that are so wildly and crudely racist and pro-Nazi that they make less extreme and superficially more intellectual material more acceptable by comparison. An example of the latter kind of material is the idea of forming a separate white American nation.

Evidence of one particular effect of fake news propagated by social media was provided by Howard and Kollanyi (2017). They investigated its likely effect on the 2016 Presidential election from data on the amount of “misinformation, polarising and conspiratorial content” spread by *Twitter*, and the extent to which it was targeted at voters in swing state, in particular, the six states where Trump’s margin of victory was less than 2%. They found firstly that *Twitter* users received more of this kind of content than professionally produced news, and secondly that levels of misinformation were higher in swing states than elsewhere, even when states were weighted for the size of the *Twitter* user population. Their conclusion was that voters in swing states simply did not get the information they needed to make “good”, that is evidence-based, decisions. Overall therefore, in several ways,

clearly social media have been important in aiding the spread of Alt-Right ideas.

## Where Could this Lead? What Are the Threats?

### *Risk 1: Continued degradation of political discussion*

The first risk presented by the growth of fake news in this post-truth era is the continued degradation of political discussion into fact-free rants, and leading to corruption of public and political life. This would be likely to cause a spiral of increasing unconcern with truth, evidence, and morality, and in turn even more disrespect and distance between political opponents.

### *Risk 2: Demise of democracy*

The second, and most serious risk created by the post-truth fake news phenomenon, is the demise of democracy itself. It was noted earlier that liberal democracy requires an informed public and an atmosphere of civility. Moreover, if political discourse consists only of people presenting their stance and attacking that of their opponents, without regard for evidence, and without anyone ever changing their position, there is no real discourse and the exercise is valueless. For debate to have a chance of being productive requires both rationality and reasonableness. Rationality means logical coherence and responsiveness to evidence in justifying an argument. Reasonableness is a feature of discussions. Discussion that is reasonable involves avoiding accusations, tolerating irreconcilable differences and crediting opponents with good faith (Rawls 2005). With a population that is increasingly lacking political knowledge and decreasingly concerned with truth as something objective, with polarised political parties, and with a slide from rationality accompanied by the decline of reasonable political debate, Frum (2016) argued that the ‘guardrails of democracy’ are being damaged and are in danger of being lost. The seven guardrails—conventions, previously accepted by politicians of all parties, but now increasingly abandoned, especially by Donald Trump, are:

- Pursuit of some vision of a common good.
- Trustworthiness.
- Knowledge of public affairs.

- Adherence to a set of principles (which would vary between parties, but all would still be guided by principles).
- Acceptance of the primacy of national security.
- Tolerance.
- Respect for political opponents.

Assessed against the guardrail criteria, Trump fails to meet any of them:

- His vision is much less about the common good and much more about self-aggrandizement, as his incessant prickly and personal Tweets illustrate.
- His lack of trustworthiness needs no further illustration: his lies are innumerable, and not even denied by his supporters. Frum (2016) reported that, as late as March 2016, in a *Washington Post* survey, more than half of Republicans and Republican leaders described him as “dishonest”. They voted for him all the same.
- Many commentators have remarked on his ignorance and complete lack of experience of public affairs.
- Apart from the vacuous slogan about making America great and the promises to repeal Obamacare and cut taxes, Trump has shown repeated policy inconsistencies, for instance, over China, NATO, Iraq, Syria and gay marriage. His foreign policy statements are, in Frum’s words, “...so careless and so seemingly poorly considered...”.
- So far as tolerance is concerned, his racism, sexism and demonization of Muslims are well documented elsewhere in this book.
- National security is clearly of little concern, as illustrated by his repeated attacks on his own security services, combined with his failure to criticise Russia, during the continuing investigations of possible Russian tampering with the 2016 Presidential election.
- On numerous occasions, Trump has been disrespectful in the extreme towards political opponents and, indeed, anyone who criticises him.

*Risk 3: Increasing Alt-Right support and extremism*

A third risk is the further swelling of the Alt-Right and the likelihood of its ideology becoming increasingly extreme. As described above, social media have particular potential to gain more recruits, to make acceptable the previously unacceptable and therefore to allow the Alt-Right to develop and broadcast ideas that are further and further away from the democratic mainstream. Taken together these are very serious risks indeed.

## Conclusions

Fake news and post-truth may seem like very recent ideas but both have been in evidence for decades, reflecting the fact that reason and honesty have been in decline for a similar time. What caused what is unclear, but it does seem clear that the devaluation of reason and honesty has been accelerated by social media. The growth of social media has fuelled a style of communication that is superficially democratic, in being open to everyone, but is actually deeply anti-democratic, in that social media have become vehicles for communications that are impulsive, emotional and petty rather than reasoned and respectful. For democracy to work requires civility, tolerance, and conciliation. As this chapter has shown, this puts democracy itself in danger. Mushrooming communications of this kind on social media have aided the spread of fake news in this post-truth era, and the Alt-Right has used these media effectively to spread its fake news and to attack the idea that there are moral and factual absolutes.

So-called 'fake news' is continually embraced by Trump and his supporters, not simply as a term to denigrate honest, mainstream news media, but also hypocritically to issue fake news and fake facts of their own. In such a world-view, opinions are no longer distinct from facts, and everything is up for challenge. Neiwert, whose ideas have been discussed at several points above, is a long-term student of the American far-right, and his serious concerns noted here, seem justified and should be shared. So too should his belief that progress is possible, and his determination to try to achieve it. Despite widespread pessimism, suggestions have been reviewed for better regulation of social media (in line with the legislation governing traditional news outlets) and for politicians and other opinion leaders to voice

and display moral principles and re-establish these principles in public life. Social media have contributed to the decline of truth, but they still need to be used to present moral as opposed to commercial values, disseminate facts and evidence as distinct from opinions, and display understanding of and empathy with the values of conservative Americans. It is also vitally important that mainstream politicians defend the reputable, independent journalism of traditional news media and refrain from disingenuous accusations of bias in attempts to score short-term political points. Truth must be resuscitated, and the vast social and political divides that are so evident now urgently need to be bridged.

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**PART 3:**  
**CONCLUSION**



# Chapter 12: A Risk Analysis and Assessment of the US Alt-Right and its Effects

*By Alan Waring*

## **Abstract**

The risk evidence and interpretations from preceding chapters are subjected to a systematic analysis and assessment. Such relevant factors as objective and subjective risk, pure and speculative risk, assessment methodology, and psychological factors affecting risk analysis and assessment are discussed. From the collated assessments, a number of key observations emerge, including six common themes among the identified risks concerning unchecked resurgent nationalism, nativism, and Alt-Right agendas.

**Key words:** Alt-Right, risk assessment, Delphi technique, heuristic, themes

## **A Collated Risk Analysis and Assessment**

The preceding chapters provided a detailed description and analysis of a wide range of topics and risk issues on which the US Alt-Right world-view, agendas, and actions have significant impacts. These impacts are closely shared in the European context, as discussed in detail in Volume 2. In one direction, the Alt-Right presents threats and risks to a range of individuals, groups, entities, populations, and nations. In another direction, the Alt-Right attracts threats and risks to itself. Both sets of risks warrant attention.

This chapter provides a risk analysis based on the evidence and interpretations provided in preceding chapters. However, before addressing the particular risk exposures revealed in those chapters, it is worthwhile reconsidering a number of matters of relevance to any risk analysis of this kind. In particular, how each individual conceives of risk, and risks of different kinds in different contexts, is not uniform across a population or across humanity. There are wide variations.

Even individuals may be inconsistent in their beliefs and attitudes e.g. an individual may be a heavy cigarette smoker or engage in highly dangerous sports, yet avoid vaccination against dangerous diseases.

### **Risk as a Cognitive Phenomenon: Objective and Subjective Risk**

As noted in chapter 2, Table 2.1, the integrated multi-level conceptual framework for exploring risk (Glendon and Clarke 2016) incorporates cognitive perception of risk (thinking, awareness, appraisal etc including threat perception). However, problems arise from the notion of risk as a cognitive phenomenon. First, the terms used to describe and communicate risk are fluid and variable. The recursive and interchangeable nature in everyday speech of such terms as ‘hazard’, ‘danger’, and ‘risk, as well as ‘assessment’, ‘analysis’, ‘appraisal’, ‘estimation’, and ‘evaluation’, even among risk specialists, creates fertile ground for ambiguity and confusion. Second, since its character, form, qualities, and scale are the product of a cerebral judgement, a particular risk is always subjective. Analogous to such concepts as love and power, a risk has no ontological, reified existence as a tangible object. Whereas many people may agree that a particular risk exists, and concur about its description and likely impact, that consensus cannot objectify the risk. Further, any individual who analyses or assesses a risk, whether risk specialist or lay person, comes to the task bearing the baggage of their individual life experiences, world-views, cognitive biases (Douglas 1992; 1994), and pre-conscious biasing (Dixon 1981). Such a statement counters the claims of some (e.g. Chicken 1996) that objective risks are those determined by experts, whereas subjective risks are determined by non-experts, one implication of such claims being that expert risk assessment is inherently more accurate, reliable, valuable and trustworthy than that of a non-expert. As Waring and Glendon (1998, 37) pointed out, “Because of its essentially judgemental nature, risk assessment cannot be neutral or value-free, whoever carries it out and however impartial they seek to be”. Risk assessment techniques may be objective in the sense that they use validated methodologies consistently. However, the risk assessment process itself is always subjective, because the choice of which particular methodology to use involves personal judgement, even if this is expert judgement. Similarly, most individual determinations about probabilities,

frequencies, projected outcomes and other aspects of risk assessment, although they may be based on good or even best available evidence, are nonetheless judgemental. For a detailed discussion of the subjective/objective issues, see Shrader-Frechette (1991); Durodié (2017).

However, as Durodié (2002; 2005a and b) warned, it may be unwise in general to give equal weight to expert and non-expert risk perception and assessment or, worse, automatically to give precedence to non-expert views. It should be recognized that, by definition, an expert in a particular topic is expected to possess enhanced knowledge and experience relating to it beyond that of a non-expert and, so far as humanly possible, impartiality in rendering judgements about it. An expert is required to focus on facts and substantiated evidence and to guard against emotionality, prejudice and wishful thinking, whereas a non-expert may have no such constraints. For these reasons, it is usual to rely on expert rather than non-expert opinion on a wide range of risk issues, for example, in medicine, public health, aviation safety, and nuclear safety. Nevertheless, every individual is fallible and therefore even an expert is capable of error, misperception, and faulty judgement.

A prominent example of where expert judgement appears to have been faulty is the Grenfell Tower fire disaster in London on June 14, 2017, in which fire safety assessments and risk decisions had involved a variety of experts responsible for external cladding of high-rise residential blocks. Although the official public inquiry into the disaster did not start until August 15, 2017, early investigations revealed that apparently large numbers of Grenfell residents (i.e. non-experts) had raised concerns for several years about fire safety, including their doubts about the cladding, but allegedly these had been dismissed as exaggerated fears by the managing authority and its expert suppliers, executives, and advisers, both internal and external.

A recognition that experts are fallible is not, however, a valid argument for discrediting them or downplaying their vital role in risk analysis and assessment, as some critics (e.g. Trump) have done selectively when expert pronouncements have inconveniently challenged their prejudices. What is important is that expert risk analysis and assessment should take account of significant contexts and non-expert valuations, not to unduly influence their expert judgement but to ensure that pertinent matters of significance are not overlooked. This is not intended to patronise non-expert views but to ensure that



they are accounted for, even if in a particular instance they may not be well substantiated by facts or evidence.

A further broad and related area of psychology is also relevant to this chapter, as summarised in Appendix 12.1: Factors Affecting Risk Perception and Therefore Risk Analysis.

## Pure Risk and Speculative/Opportunity Risk

Two classes of risk are generally recognized (IRM 2010)—pure risks (sometimes referred to as ‘downside risks’) and speculative or opportunity risks (which may be either ‘upside’, ‘downside’, or more usually a combination of the two). The distinction is significant to risk analysis, since the two classes warrant different approaches.

A pure risk relates only to negative or undesirable events and impacts and is one that is characterized by (a) the probability or likelihood that the undesirable event will occur, and (b) the scale of the potential or likely undesirable event or impact. In common parlance, a pure risk is one where the best that can happen is that nothing bad happens. Thus, management of pure risks prioritizes the elimination and prevention of threats and hazards (i.e. sources of pure risk exposures) as well as risk reduction and control methods. Typical examples of pure risks are: hazards to environment, health, and safety; product liability; disaster/crisis preparedness; natural hazards; IT systems failures; information and cyber security threats; piracy; fraud; intellectual property theft; trafficking (people, weapons, drugs); tax evasion; terrorism.

In terms of computation or estimation, a pure risk is measured as the product of the likely scale of impact/severity of the undesired event and the probability of occurrence:

$$\text{Pure Risk} = (\text{Scale of Negative Impact/Severity}) \times (\text{Probability of Occurrence}).$$

An opportunity or speculative risk may result in either a desirable outcome (benefit, gain, advantage), or an undesirable outcome (detriment, loss, disadvantage), or a combination of desirable impacts in some aspects and undesirable impacts in others. Usually, opportunity risks involve a mixture of good and bad effects, although efforts may be made to maximize desirable outcomes and minimize undesirable ones. Typical examples of opportunity risks are: market credibility;

bargaining power; strategic alliances; sales growth; brand enhancement; mergers and acquisitions; political risks; economic risks; foreign policy; new technology; investments.

In terms of computation or estimation, an opportunity risk is measured as the product of the likely scale of impact (positive, neutral or negative) and the probability of occurrence:

$$\text{Opportunity Risk} = (\text{Scale of Impact}) \times (\text{Probability of Occurrence}).$$

It should be noted that some risks may appear to be both pure and opportunity risks or exhibit ambiguous characteristics. In such cases, an analysis should enable sufficient deconstruction to clarify matters. For example, at first glance it may appear that environmental issues and global warming, addressed in chapter 9, would be classified exclusively as pure risks. However, whereas environmental risks and global warming risk per se are best classified as pure risks, associated political, economic and social risks are really opportunity risks.

In this chapter, the author has chosen to approach all the identified risks for estimation as opportunity risks, as these overwhelmingly predominate in this book's context. Pure risk elements, such as environmental damage covered in chapter 9, are encompassed for this chapter's purposes as negative impacts within the opportunity risk estimation formula applied.

## **Risk Analysis and Assessment Methodology**

Risk assessment may be defined (Waring and Glendon 1998, 20–47) as: “the process of estimating and evaluating a defined risk in order to determine whether current risk strategies are appropriate and adequate”. The ultimate purpose of risk assessment, therefore, is to inform decision-making about whether the current level of a particular risk is acceptable, and whether further action is required to manage the risk more effectively. That principle applies regardless of whether the assessment is being done by a risk expert or non-expert. Clearly, processes of identification and analysis of any relevant hazard, threat or opportunity would need to precede any estimation or evaluation.

There is no single, 'standard' method for risk assessment and, for example, methodological differences exist between assessment of pure and speculative risks respectively. IRM (2010) has recognized

the eclectic range of potential techniques in risk assessment methodology.

However, the basis of all risk assessment comprises this sequence of linked processes (Royal Society 1992):

- Identification of hazard/threat/opportunity (as in chapters 3 to 11)
- Analysis of hazard/threat/opportunity (as in chapters 3 to 11)
- Establishing risk acceptability/tolerability criteria
- Risk computation/estimation
- Evaluation of risk estimates against acceptability/tolerability criteria

As noted in Waring and Glendon (1998), two broad approaches to risk assessment technique have arisen—*heuristic* and *scientific*. A *heuristic* approach is primarily qualitative and relies on the judgement (mediated by knowledge and experience) either of the individual conducting the assessment, or of a number of individuals collectively. A *heuristic* approach is essentially ‘rule-of-thumb’, usable both by experts and non-experts, and may involve modest quantification, typically in the form of risk scores and ratings e.g. the Delphi technique—see later. Although some individuals may find the scoring and rating processes challenging, since they require the cerebral collapsing and merging (consciously and pre-consciously) of many ill-defined sub-component variables into a single measure, in fact this process approximates systematically the ‘how big?/how small?/how frequently?/how soon?’ judgements that humans make naturally, and often informally, in their daily lives when addressing the multitude of risk exposures they face. See Shrader-Frechette (1991) for further discussion on scientific and other approaches to risk assessment.

Glendon and Clarke (2016, 364) pointed out that increasingly the complexity of risk issues has been reflected in the plethora of sophisticated risk assessment methodologies, models, and statistical procedures that continue to emerge, and that a “considerable diversity, almost a profusion, of conceptual frameworks and methodologies is available for the study of risk. This reflects the complexity and multidimensional nature of risk concepts”, as discussed further by Durodié (2017).

Some risk experts believe that a scientific approach, employing quantitative modelling and probabilistic computation, is inherently superior to that of heuristics. However, such an assertion suggests a structural/functionalist world-view (Burrell and Morgan 1979), which has been challenged in the risk assessment context by such authors as Burgess (2015); Douglas (1992; 1994); Durodié (2017); Mudu and Beck (2012); Toft (1996); Waring and Glendon (1998); and Waring (2013). As Glendon and Clarke (2016) noted, current trends in risk research involve increased adoption of multi-disciplinary approaches, as well as socially constructed and multi-scalar definitions of key risk terms across a range of dimensions. This book follows such trends, for example by acknowledging the well-established risk principles of redundancy (multiple analyses by different authors), diversity (range of different analyses reflecting different disciplines), and triangulation (fusion of analyses to highlight agreement and disagreement), as applied in a variety of risk contexts.

Appendix 12.2 provides a systematic narrative compilation of the risks identified in all the chapters in Part 2. This is followed by Appendix 12.3, a reference utility which adopts a relatively simple risk-rating heuristic approach, based loosely on the well-known Delphi technique originated in the 1950s by the Rand Corporation (Linstone and Turoff 1975; 2002). Appendix 12.4 summarises the rating and scoring heuristics used in Appendix 12.3.

## Findings and Conclusion

This volume's sub-title, 'A Risk Analysis of the US Alt-Right Phenomenon', clearly states its primary focus. This chapter has provided a risk evaluation in relation to the array of risks identified and analysed in chapters 3 to 11. A number of points that require comment emerge from this analysis and evaluation.

1. All the evaluated risks in Appendix 12.3 indicate negative impacts, with the exception of one in chapter 5—Risk 7a (short-to-medium term improvements to US economy arising from the Trump Administration's policies). The overwhelmingly negative evaluations reinforce the view that the Alt-Right phenomenon presents a multi-dimensional threat to society, human rights, and liberal democracy, as well as to itself.

2. All the evaluated risks in Appendix 12.3 fall within the range of medium-high-exceptional, and a majority fall within the medium-high range. Only a handful has been evaluated as being exceptionally high. This evaluation should be a signal neither for alarm nor complacency, but for timely actions appropriate to eliminate, reduce, or control the threats and risk levels.
3. Although the risk evaluation covers Alt-Right risks relating to the individual countries examined (the US in this Vol), it does not address directly the higher order threat of the trans-national appeal of the phenomenon, and its internationalisation. Some symptoms of this threat include those relating to Putin's connections with foreign Alt-Right groups (see Klapsis in Vol 2 chapter 11), US far-right groups' connections with those in Europe and Russia, and cross-border funding. This higher-order threat is also addressed in the following chapter.
4. Common themes among risks identified across the chapters are that unchecked resurgent nationalism and Alt-Right agendas are leading to (1) polarisation in societies, discrimination against minorities of all kinds but especially immigrants and Muslims, hate crimes, and loss of social cohesion; (2) a variety of human rights abuses; (3) attacks on press freedom; (4) attempts to normalise both egregious government policies and conduct and acceptance of hate crimes and Internet and social media abuses by far-right elements; (5) threats to representative democracy; (6) threats to international peace and security.
5. Some of the identified risks are strategic in nature, while others are more operational. Some may respond to relatively quick controls whereas others will require longer-term action. Some will require multiple, different interventions by different agencies or parties, possibly in parallel or perhaps at different times. There is no 'quick fix' or 'single solution' to most of the risks identified, a message taken up in the final chapter.

6. Whereas the risks are those identified by the individual authors, the risk evaluations are those of this chapter's author in collaboration with them. They are not the absolute declarations of a 'Risk Oracle' applying universal laws of risk, since no such laws or certitudes exist. Others may disagree with some of the identified risks or the extent of them, and others may disagree with the risk evaluations or even many of them. Indeed, such differences of opinion are almost inevitable. As Durodié (2017) noted, "All risk assessments then—despite any objective seeming representation—are inevitably contestable as well as being contingent". However, hopefully the evaluations provide both a basis for discussion and debate i.e. a reference utility for development and pointers to the furtherance of attenuating harm associated with the Alt-Right.

The following chapter 13 considers, on the basis of the preceding analysis and risk evaluations, how the US Alt-Right may develop in the short-to-medium term and various scenarios that might unfold.

## **Appendix 12.1: Factors Affecting Risk Perception and Therefore Risk Analysis**

In addition to sensory defects and potential interferences with sensory perception, a range of psychological and social-psychological factors (e.g. the individual's world-view in relation to risk) potentially affects risk perception, and therefore risk analysis and assessment as well as risk decision-making. The considerable array of such factors, and the literature on these, is too extensive to examine closely in this chapter. For brevity, an illustrative list of factors prominent in the literature is summarised below, based on Waring (2015):

### **Failures of Hindsight, Foresight and Learning**

The contribution of organizational learning, hindsight and foresight to understanding human-created risk failures has been addressed by Le Coze and Dechy (2005), Toft (1990), Toft and Reynolds (1997), Turner (1992), and Turner and Pidgeon (1997). The assumption that organizations are likely not only to seek to learn from risk failures (their own and those of other organizations) but also to seek to take actions that would help to avoid such failures has been challenged by

Fischhoff (1975), Toft (1990), Turner and Pidgeon (1997), and Waring and Glendon (1998). In many organizations, despite multiple organizational and human failings having been identified as factors, there is frequently a prevailing culture of denial of failure and disasters being explained away as 'freak events'. For example, as discussed in chapter 9, the various BP disaster cases over a period of decades (Deepwater Commission 2011; HSE 1989; 2003; Reader and O'Connor 2013; USCSHIB 2007), with often broadly similar causal factors, have suggested failures of hindsight and organizational learning. See also Kastenbergh (2014) and Pidgeon (2012) on similar findings about the Fukushima Daiichi disaster. Financial disasters, such as the collapse of Barings Bank (BoBS 1995; Leeson 1996; Glendon and Waring 1997; Waring and Glendon 1998) and the failure of the Royal Bank of Scotland (FSA 2011) further exemplify the issues.

### **Ignorance and Bounded Rationality**

Bounded rationality (Johnson 1987; Kahneman 2003; March and Simon 1958; Morgan 1986; Simon 1972) concerns the inherent limitations on what an individual or a group can know and understand about a particular matter and how this may influence their decision-making about it. However, recognition of such limitation does not justify neglectful ignorance. Corporate and elected political leaders, along with their various senior executives and advisers are expected to show due diligence in acquiring the necessary breadth and depth of knowledge about risks—economic, financial, political, and others—as well as the various risk management requirements that may affect their areas of responsibility. Johnson (1987) and Morgan (1986) have commented on the potential negative effects of bounded rationality whereby individuals, groups and organizations may settle for decisions that are 'good enough' based on simple routine procedures and limited information. Whereas such an approach may be generally acceptable to those responsible for risk decisions, it may prove inadequate for coping with significant risks. For example, in some cases *laissez-faire* directors, boards or administrations may be content to wait to receive periodic risk reports from subordinate units and accept them with minimal examination. In extreme cases, such reports may never be examined at all, e.g. the Buncefield Disaster (HSE et al 2011).

Confirmation bias (Dror and Fraser-Mackenzie 2008; Nickerson 1998, Zimmerman 2011), which relates to a self-bounding of

knowledge, may be defined as the result of seeking out and/or interpreting information that tends to confirm the individual's preconceptions about a particular topic, while also avoiding, ignoring or rejecting information that tends to disconfirm those preconceptions. Although confirmation biasing is frequently a conscious process, a large degree of pre-conscious processing is likely to be involved (Dixon 1981). Such cognitive bias is likely to result in systematic error i.e. the individual's beliefs, while reinforced, may not be born out by the facts. The Trump administration has provided numerous examples of confirmation bias.

### **Groupthink, Authority and Conformity**

Groupthink (Janis 1972; 1982) describes a tendency for groups to form a consensus attitude and view on a particular topic. Typically, such a consensus forms around an authority figure, even when that figure's views may not always be supported by facts or be in the group's best interests. For example, Leeb (2006) attributed the 'herd behaviour' frequently exhibited by investors to a combination of authority, conformity, and groupthink. In contrast to recognizing risks and reacting rationally in response, for example by researching the risks and forming their own judgement, the groupthink principle asserts that investors tend to follow what trusted, respected or authority figures recommend or do. Groupthink is evident in the development of such high profile corporate investment collapses as Madoff (Kirtzman 2010), Enron (Maclean and Elkind 2004), and Stanford International (US Department of Justice 2012). The term 'groupthink' may also be applied to inappropriate risk decision-making and actions of people in organizations in the build-up to major hazard disasters, see for example: Dekker and Nyce (2014), Ferraris and Corveth (2003), Le Coze and Dechy (2005), Lunenburg (2010), NAIIC (2012), Toft and Reynolds (1997), and Vaughan (1996; 1999).

Authority and conformity are recognized as characteristics of power relations, whether obtrusive or unobtrusive (see, for example, Bacharach and Lawler 1980; Fincham 1992; Hardy 1985; Pettigrew 1973; Pfeffer 1981). Although power relations within organizations have frequently been examined within the topic of organizational culture (which encompasses shared characteristics), Waring and Glendon (1998) argued that power analysis tends to focus on differentials and resulting power relations and political processes. Power relations



within boards, cabinets and their subordinate organizations (e.g. the White House and the President's administration) are likely to be relevant to risk decision-making, risk decisions and the general tone and culture of an organization. Power attributes, in the form of leadership and direction from authority figures, are likely to be significant in either promoting or downplaying risk management. However, sometimes power relations become 'toxic' (Walton 2007), which may have negative implications for a range of organizational matters (e.g., the evident power struggles in 2017 among President Trump's cabinet members, executives, and advisers and between Trump and the Attorney-General and successive Directors of the FBI).

Perceptions or cognitions of risks are often coloured by the culture of a particular profession, department or 'silo' in which an individual works. Authority, conformity and groupthink of the particular sub-culture, plus the fear of being perceived as different and no longer trusted by one's peers, may create complacency towards particular risks within a sub-culture.

### **Risk Perception and Risk Attitudes**

Risk perception or risk cognition is a comprehensive term applied to an individual's sensory, perception, and cognitive processes, including thinking, reasoning, evaluating, comparing, judging, learning and deciding (Glendon 1987; Glendon, Clarke and McKenna 2006; Glendon and Clarke 2016; Waring and Glendon 1998). Knowledge, and sense-making, of a risk topic, preferences an individual applies, conclusions that are drawn, and decisions that are made are all clearly significant to the individual's general behaviour towards that risk and any specific actions regarding it. Memory, learning, and experience are clearly relevant, as are moods, emotions, and motivations.

A risk attitude is a predisposition, specifically acquired and influenced by learning and experience, whether towards risk in general, or to a particular class of risk, or to a particular risk topic. A risk attitude is significant to risk perception and may predict judgement, behaviour, and actions, whether in the White House, or the corporate boardroom, or elsewhere in an organization, or in the general population.

### **Risk Appetite**

Risk appetite is relevant as an implicit (and, in some cases, explicit) attitude in risk decision-making. Risk appetite applies to individuals, and in its corporate form may be defined (IRM 2011) as “The amount of risk that an organization is willing to seek or accept in pursuit of its long-term objectives”. Risk appetite relates primarily to speculative or opportunity risks in, for example, business, commerce, banking, and finance (see, for example, Aven 2012; Gai and Vause 2006; Hillson and Murray-Webster 2011; 2012), rather than to pure risks such as security, environment, and safety. If a board makes a strategic decision to invest in a new capital project, for example, the underlying speculative risk decision assumes a healthy return on capital employed. A number of risk issues will be evaluated in reaching that decision, but if the board’s risk appetite is large enough then it may over-ride these so that the project may proceed. An analogous application of the concept would be to risk issues affecting government policy decisions on such matters as defence, foreign relations, foreign trade, taxation, immigration, and health care.

### **Risk Tolerability**

Risk tolerability or acceptability refers to a level of risk that is neither unacceptably high nor negligible but somewhere in between. A tolerable risk level is typically less than ideal but enables a trade-off of time, cost, and effort against risk reduction and control benefits up to a pre-set limit. Slovic et al (1982) discussed risk tolerability at the individual level, and Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) at group level, while corporately, IRM (2011) defined risk tolerability as “Boundaries of risk-taking outside of which the organization is not prepared to venture in the pursuit of its long-term objectives”. The latter implies that risk tolerability is a strategic issue that is most likely to be applied to speculative risk evaluation at senior management levels. Risk tolerability may also be applied to pure risks and, for example, the principle is central to major hazard risk assessment such as EHS risks (Baybutt 2013; HSE 1988; Jonkman et al 2003; Kasperson and Pijawka 1985; Slovic et al 1982; Waring and Glendon 1998). As with risk appetite and other personal factors, risk tolerability varies between individuals and therefore risk tolerability on a particular topic will vary widely within the general population and between different interest groups.

### **Motivation and Expectancy**

The expectancy theory of motivation (Campbell and Pritchard 1976; Lawler and Porter 1967; Vroom 1964) is generally taken to explain motivations in risk decisions. Expectancy theory asserts that the strength of a particular motivation attributed by an individual to an expected outcome of a relevant decision or choice is the product of valence (the value attributed to the desired outcome), instrumentality (the effectiveness of the proposed method of attainment) and expectancy (the expectation that the desired outcome will result). See also Glendon et al (2006) and Glendon and Clarke (2016). Strong motivations supported by strongly held beliefs may sometimes override caution and competent risk analysis so as to propel individuals, groups, or even organizations into taking precipitate action that may cause harm to many parties including the protagonists themselves, and this is especially so where ideological, political, or religious convictions are involved. Examples include the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, the unravelling of Obamacare, and the Mexican wall project.

### **Risk Decision-Making**

Risk decision-making theories such as expected utility theory (EUT), originated by von Neumann and Morgenstern (1944), and examined by Mosher (2013) and Rabin (2000), and prospect theory (PT) (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Wakker 1995), are relevant to investment, financial and other speculative risk decision-making (see, for example, Barberis 2013). Glendon et al (2006) asserted that EUT assumes an essentially rational choice model devoid of complex influences likely to be found in reality. In certain contexts, EUT may therefore be regarded as an example of bounded rationality whereby speculative risk assumptions and criteria applicable to financial, economic, or political matters might be misapplied to risk decisions where different assumptions and criteria are salient. For example, a moral imperative implicit in decision-making relating to environmental risks may be absent from speculative risk evaluations and decisions. Whereas the probability of a major hazard accident may be low, moral and regulatory criteria should ensure that the consequences factor outweighs the low probability factor, a deliberate biasing that economic models such as EUT and PT may not recognize.

See also Arai, Yamamoto and Makino (2005), Durodié (2017) and Jongejan and Vrijling (2009).

### **Cultural Effects**

Various authors, such as Davies (1988), Deal and Kennedy (1986), Schein (1985), Smircich (1983), Westrum (2004), and Wilkins and Dyer (1988), have examined the nature of organizational culture. Waring and Glendon (1998) defined the phenomenon as: a set of unwritten, and relatively unobtrusive, attitudes, beliefs, values, rules of behaviour, ideologies, habitual responses, language expression, rituals, quirks and other features which characterize a particular organization or a defined part of it. According to Waring (2013), organizational culture provides a continuous psycho-social reference frame through which its members interpret their existence within that organization and enables them to consider what is good and bad, right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, imperative and taboo. An individual's sense of identity and what it means to be a member is strengthened by organizational culture, which also provides some unique characteristics that distinguish one organization from another. The purposive and unobtrusive 'identity protection' function of organizational culture may explain why organizational members may resist attempts to change it (see, for example, Beer et al 1990; Westley 1990). Organizational culture may be more predictive than official policy of what actually happens and how, within an organization, and this applies to risk and risk management as much as to any other aspect of an organization. See, for example, Douglas (1992); Douglas and Wildavsky (1982); Durodié (2017); Glendon (2008); Glendon et al (2006); Glendon and Clarke (2016); Le Coze (2005); Turner (1988; 1992; 1994); Waring and Glendon (1998); and Waring (2013).

Other cultural effects on risk perception are likely to arise from an individual's memberships of different sub-cultures, such as professions, peer groups, interest groups, and organizational units (see, for example, Douglas 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Durodié 2017). For example, employment as a technical specialist within the EPA is likely to confer a perception of environmental and global warming risks that is significantly different to that of a political functionary employed in the White House administration of President Trump. See Vaughan (1996; 1999; 2004; 2006; 2014) on NASA and the Columbia

disaster. Wider cultural effects on risk perception are also likely to operate, for example values and beliefs about particular risk issues shared by a particular community, religion, or regional populace that might not accord with government policy or mainstream scientific views (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982).

### **Socially Constructed Emergence**

A social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967) is based on the theory that how individuals make sense of the real world is mainly determined by societal structures, relationships and processes that are largely unobtrusive and over which they have little control. Cultural effects arising from shared ideas, beliefs, and values among members of an identifiable group form part of a socially constructed view of reality, as do the effects of inequalities, power differentials, and power relations between different groups or parties.

Applied to risk perception and risk assessment (Burgess 2015; Johnson and Covello 1987), the theory predicts that, for example, particular threats will be viewed differently by different parties in society because their experiences, objectives, motivations, and expectations differ markedly as a result of their different societal loci. In a dystopian extension of this view, Beck (1992) separated society into risk 'perpetrators' (i.e. industry, government, and the 'Establishment') and risk 'victims' (i.e. powerless citizens). Less pejoratively, job security threats are likely to be perceived differently by blue collar workers in traditional industries, contract 'gig' workers, skilled IT workers, and qualified professional workers. Health care risks are likely to be perceived differently by care-home workers, hospital clinical staff, patients, hospital administrators, civil servants, private health insurers, and government ministers.

Language expression, as evidence of individuals' risk world-views, is regarded by social constructionists as a determinant of an individual's reality rather than as describing risks as objective realities. Social amplification of risk (Kasperson et al 1988; Pidgeon et al 2003), for example as a result of repetitive communicated discourse across society, is relevant. The social constructionist view has led to an emphasis on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), ethnographic, and discourse analysis approaches to the study of risk contexts (for example, Perrow 1984; Vaughan 2004; 2006; 2014). Wodak (2015) and Wodak et al (2013) applied critical discourse analysis to

the European Alt-Right—see also Wodak and Rheindorf in Vol 2 chapter 6. The interplays of language expression, and widely differing meanings and perceptions of risks, is evident in such concepts as ‘Brexit’, ‘asylum seekers’, ‘Muslim’, ‘global warming’, ‘right-wing’, ‘globalisation’, and ‘national identity’.

## **Appendix 12.2: Qualitative Risk Analysis of the US Alt-Right Phenomenon**

The following sub-sections provide a collation of the risks identified in the preceding chapters of Part 2. This summary analysis is necessarily that of this chapter’s author, although steps were taken to validate it with the other relevant authors and to highlight if and where significantly divergent opinions exist. The author takes into account all the caveats and cautions raised in the preceding appendices of this chapter and requests that the reader does likewise.

### **Risks Relating to the Alt-Right in the US**

#### **Resurgent US Nationalism (chapter 3)**

##### *Risks for America*

1. Increasing imposition of divisive inequality policies based on white supremacy, and anti-Muslim, anti-Hispanic, and anti-immigrant theories and prejudices, all likely to result in multiple adverse effects for those discriminated against e.g. in housing, employment, income, health care, and a reduction in social cohesion.
2. Stirring up of discrimination, hatred and hate crimes against ethnic and religious minorities in the US, leading to their disaffection and potential backlash.
3. Nationalist agendas (e.g. America First, Making America Great Again) leading to foreign policy missteps, either via (a) increasing US isolationism, anti-foreigner actions on trade barriers and tariffs, anti-Muslim visa blocks, and general gratuitous insults by Alt-Right politicians against particular nations, religions, and leaders, or (b) precipitate military action against nations classed as enemies of the United States.

4. Sustained ultra-nationalist agitation creating a longer-term threat of gradually increasing support for secessionism, so as to create (a) white supremacist states and potentially including ethnic cleansing, and (b) blue (Democrat) states withdrawing from federal government policies and programs so as to preserve liberal values.

#### *Risks for the Alt-Right*

1. Upsurge in extremist rhetoric and public displays of violence by committed Alt-Right supporters resulting in loss of potential support among mainstream and undecided voters.
2. Continuing fragmentation of hard-right and far-right and increasing competition between factions and groups to control the Alt-Right ideology and agenda, leading to a weakening of the Alt-Right overall and a loss of its limited credibility among the wider population.
3. Aggressive Alt-Right electoral campaigns against mainstream Republican candidates resulting in a dilution of conservative votes that not only fails to deliver wins by Alt-Right candidates but also may deny wins by Republican candidates, thereby ensuring election of Democrat candidates and potential loss of control of Congress.

#### **Trumpism Phenomenon (chapter 4)**

##### *Risks to Party Elites*

1. Trumpism may catalyse a realignment of the dominant party cleavage (Republican vs. Democrat), as party elites scramble to retain vestiges of electoral support from voters enamoured with Trumpist populism.

##### *Risks to US Governance*

1. In recognizing the dynamic character of US conservatism and its gradual de-emphasis of traditional values e.g. social conservatism, Trumpism may herald a further move away from traditional principles towards a more emotion-driven, demagogic, ephemeral, and populist approach to right-wing governance, which may be harmful to America

e.g. to democracy, human rights, the economy, foreign relations.

2. After Trump is no longer president, there is the potential for continuing or re-emergent Trumpist Alt-Right leaning administrations that may be harmful to America e.g. to democracy, human rights, the economy, foreign relations.

#### *Risks to Society and Social Cohesion in the US*

1. Deliberate Trumpist policies of inequality based on white supremacism and anti-immigrant theories and prejudices are likely to result in multiple adverse effects on those discriminated against (e.g. in employment, income, housing, health care) as well as damaging social cohesion.
2. Discrimination and hate crimes against immigrants and ethnic and religious minorities in the US may lead to their increasing alienation and potentially disaffection and backlash.

#### **Trump Administration (chapter 5)**

##### *Risks for Trump Administration*

1. Chronic inability by Trump to secure enough votes among Republicans in Congress to get his key bills passed smoothly and timely, thereby undermining his credibility among core supporters and encouraging their disillusionment.
2. Key rhetorical objectives unfulfilled e.g. building of border wall between US and Mexico to stop crossing by illegal immigrants; clean-up of undue political influence in Washington by vested interests.
3. Steve Bannon mobilises Alt-Right candidates to challenge mainstream Republican candidates in Senate elections, thereby splitting the conservative vote and enhancing the possibility of Democrat wins.
4. Continuing Russia scandal undermining public trust and confidence in President Trump and his administration, especially if the investigations find against any named individuals. If evidence found against Trump personally, he could be charged with offences and be liable to impeachment.



5. Apparent weaknesses in 'due diligence' security background checks on all those who are required to, or who seek to, have access to the White House are likely to enable individuals to gain access who have false bona fides (e.g. bogus qualifications, inflated CVs) that imply dishonesty and questionable motives.
6. Trump's widely exposed unstable personality and a squabbling, dysfunctional White House combine to threaten his leadership and question his mental capacity to remain President.
7. (a) Short-to-medium term improvements to economy that benefit businesses and taxpayers, resulting from tax reforms, deregulation, and trade protectionism, turn to (b) medium-to-long term non-sustainability and detriment e.g. increased government debt.

#### *Risks for America and Beyond*

1. Trump's attitudes, policies, Executive Orders and legislation that unduly favour illiberal elites, big business and sectoral interests may accentuate existing divisions, disparities, and tensions in US society associated with class, race, education, employment, income, and health care.
2. Scandals involving alleged impropriety and possibly criminal conduct by Trump, White House Cabinet members and others may undermine public trust and confidence in US democracy and governance.
3. Trump's sustained attack on the media, so as to reject and avoid scrutiny, may undermine press freedom and inhibit its fundamental role in ensuring public accountability in a democracy.
4. Trump's *Twitter* attacks and egregious commentaries are likely to make him both a figure of fun and attract widespread disapproval, to the extent that respect for the US government and for the institution of the presidency itself is damaged, while foreign enemies gain comfort and intelligence insights from such behaviour.

## **US Foreign Policy (chapter 6)**

### *Risks for US and the Trump Administration*

1. Trump's impromptu unstatesmanlike comments on US foreign policy issues, especially emotional outbursts via social media, may cause uncertainty, alarm, and disdain among the international community, whether friend or adversary, regarding US intentions. US reputation and standing may be diminished.
2. The culling and downgrading of State Department officials and expert foreign policy assessment and advice, the continuing non-replacement of US Ambassadors and diplomats overseas, and the general politicisation of the State Department to serve an Alt-Right agenda, may interfere with accurate and timely evaluation of foreign policy issues by the White House as well as diplomatic relations with other countries.
3. US assumptions of exceptionalism and permanent super-power supremacy are likely to be increasingly challenged by a combination of (a) unsuccessful outcomes of Trump's unilateral 'America First' decisions and actions on foreign policy issues concerning trade, protectionism, the Middle East, Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, (b) the inexorable growth of China's economic, military and political power that will surpass that of the US, and (c) the long-term inevitability of relative US decline.

### *Risks for International Peace and Stability*

1. The potential, through ideological and emotional biasing, for the Trump administration to misinterpret and misjudge the intentions of Iran and North Korea and miscalculate the threat levels they pose, thereby leading to escalation of tensions and a risk of a pre-emptive first strike by any party.
2. An over-simplified view of solving longstanding complex conflicts in the Middle East, such as the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the Israel-Arab conflict and the Iran-Saudi Arabia regional supremacy conflict, by backing Israel and Saudi Arabia against other parties, leading to further instability and conflict rather than a comprehensive lasting peace.

3. For 'America First' ideological reasons and to mollify populist demands from the US electorate, provoking a trade war with China and the EU, with the risk of damaging the US at least as much as it does its trading partners.
4. Failing to challenge Russia robustly enough on (a) its expansionist threats and aggression against neighbours, (b) its cyberwarfare and other subversive acts against the US (and other Western targets), and (c) its close connections with far-right groups in Europe, may encourage Putin to continue or increase such conduct, thereby undermining peace and stability.

#### **US Anti-Iran Project (chapter 7)**

1. US policy on Iran driven by Alt-Right prejudice, emotions and ideology rather than evidence-based intelligence may lead to potential misinterpretation and policy misdirection to the detriment of the US.
2. Potential isolation of Alt-Right orientated US government attitude and policy towards Iran vis-à-vis US allies, leading to realignments potentially unfavourable to the US.
3. Unilateral US withdrawal from the UN-brokered (P5+1 group) nuclear materials agreement with Iran may provoke an uncontrolled uranium enrichment programme by Iran leading ultimately to nuclear weapons capability.
4. Antagonism of foreign governments and businesses arising from continued application by the US government of financial sanctions against Iran by disrupting international electronic payments and prosecuting foreign banks and businesses trading with Iran.
5. Continued denial of the lucrative Iranian market to US investment and trade.
6. Pre-emptive US military action against Iran, seeking either to deter Iran from undertaking suspected development of nuclear weapons capability, or to deter Iran from extraterritorial engagement in conflicts in the region, or to punish Iran for an alleged transgression, or to facilitate regime change. Potential regional instability and increased tensions. Potential Iranian backlash against US interests globally.

7. The US unilateral withdrawal from JCPOA, and the manner in which it was orchestrated, may reduce among foreign governments perceived trustworthiness and credibility of the US on any other agreements, thereby damaging US strategic interests.

### **US Immigration, Mass Migration and Refugees (chapter 8)**

1. By blaming political opponents in Congress for his failure to fulfil election campaign promises on the border wall and ending illegal immigration, Trump's relationship with Congressional leaders, including prominent Republicans, may be damaged
2. By blaming federal judges for his failure to fulfil election campaign promises on the border wall and ending illegal immigration, Trump may undermine public faith in the independence of the judiciary.
3. A terrorist-related incident or temporary national crisis within the US could lead Trump to assert the right to extra-legal powers (e.g. martial law, arrest without trial, suspension of constitution) to restore law and order or to safeguard the nation from danger.
4. Immigrant deportation measures put at risk the future security of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the US, especially 800,000 child migrants brought illegally into the country and previously granted temporary work and study permits under the DACA program.
5. Trump's inflammatory rhetoric may promote an atmosphere of fear and hatred towards all immigrant communities, with the risk that they will be subjected to intimidation and acts of violence.
6. The US may fail to provide international leadership in seeking to prevent war crimes or ethnic cleansing of minority groups who are catalysts for mass migration and refugee crises.

7. If cooperation between the US and Mexican authorities on combating drugs cartels is not robustly supported by the Trump administration, local government officials and the police and military will struggle to maintain law and order in some Mexican states, thereby creating a 'failed state' threat on America's border.
8. On the international stage, the president's use of racially charged language and anti-Muslim rhetoric may damage US relations not just with third-world and Islamic countries but also western nations with significant Muslim communities, such as Canada, France and the United Kingdom.

### **Environmental Issues and Global Warming (chapter 9)**

1. The non-participation of the US in the PCA and the Trump administration's continued active support for major polluting practices may result in a degree of political isolation of the US.
2. The non-participation of the US in the PCA and the perpetuation of outdated and non-PCA compliant products is likely to result in US companies being disadvantaged in competitive PCA-dominated markets involving 190 countries.
3. US companies relying on a fettered EPA and relaxation of EHS legislation for commercial regeneration and success may be disappointed in the results.
4. A fettered EPA and relaxed EHS legislation are likely to result in poor environmental controls that adversely affect the health, safety, livelihoods, food and water supplies, and amenity of nearby communities and populations.
5. Failure to apply PCA programs in the US may result in increased frequency of damaging global warming-related climatic events in the US e.g. drought, forest fires, extreme weather.
6. Trump's policies on global warming, PCA withdrawal, derogation of environmental controls, and neutralizing the EPA may adversely affect voter intentions towards Trump, other Alt-Right politicians, and the Republican congress members who support such policies.

**US Alt-Right Approach to Human Rights and the Law (chapter 10)**

*Risks for US*

1. The combination of (a) non-redressed evasion of legal constraints, usurpation of the Attorney General, and attacks on the independence of the judiciary by the Trump administration, (b) non-redressed violations of human rights in relation to denied health care, and lack of effective gun controls, and (c) non-redressed violations of human rights in relation to discrimination against immigrants, religious and ethnic minorities, specific nationalities, and other categories, is likely to undermine US democracy, exacerbate societal divisions, and damage the reputation and standing of the United States.
2. Human rights violations by US authorities may incur unacceptable direct and indirect financial costs to the public purse e.g. civil actions, criminal proceedings, costs of remedial programs, loss of economically and fiscally productive individuals, corporate and institutional disinvestment on ethical grounds.

*Risks for Individuals*

1. Contrary to human rights obligations and constitutional protections, those on low incomes or otherwise vulnerable may be denied insured healthcare if Obamacare is replaced by American Health Care, especially if the latter proves defective and/or too expensive for them. The number of uninsured citizens may rise again from 28 million to possibly 50 million.
2. Failure to introduce strict firearm controls is likely to result in a continuation of the exceptionally high levels of firearm-related deaths and injuries, contrary to human rights obligations.
3. Discriminatory Alt-Right policies (whether against immigrants, minorities of all kinds, the disabled, the poor, the unemployed, or any other group) are likely to cause them harm, contrary to human rights obligations and constitutional protections.

*Risks for the Alt-Right and the Republican Party*

1. If voters begin to perceive that the revealed Alt-Right agenda undermines rather than protects and strengthens their constitutional rights, as well as imposing unacceptable and un-American authoritarianism, they are likely to vote against both openly Alt-Right candidates and more generally against Republican candidates (for example, the unexpected defeat of senatorial Alt-Right Republican candidate Roy Moore in December 2017).

**US Post-Truth, Fake News and the Media (chapter 11)**

1. Growth of fake news in this post-truth era adding to a continued degradation of political discussion into fact-free rants, and leading to corruption of public and political life and a spiral of increasing unconcern with truth, evidence, and morality, and in turn even more disrespect and distance between political opponents.
2. Post-truth fake news accelerating the demise of democracy itself by undermining and destroying political discourse that relies on an informed public and an atmosphere of civility, rationality, and reasonableness.
3. Social media abuses increasing Alt-Right support and extremism, by making acceptable the previously unacceptable and therefore to allow the Alt-Right to develop and broadcast abhorrent and anti-democratic ideas.

### Appendix 12.3: Risk Assessment Summary Tables

**Table 12.1: Risks Relating to the Alt-Right in the U.S.**

The risk scores may be interpreted by reference to Table 12.4 in Appendix 12.4

<b>Risk Exposure (as listed in Appendix 12.2)</b>	<b>Desirable/ Undesirable Score (+5 to -5)</b>	<b>Desirable/ Undesirable Rating</b>	<b>Probability Score (1 to 5)</b>	<b>Probability Rating</b>	<b>Risk Score (+25 to -25)</b>
<u>Resurgent US Nationalism</u>					
<i>Risks for America</i>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 2	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 3	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 4	-4	Major detriment	3	Conceivable	-12
<i>Risks for Alt-Right</i>					
Risk 1	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 2	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 3	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
<u>Trumpism Phenomenon</u>					
<i>Risks for Party Elites</i>					
Risk 1	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
<i>Risks for US Governance</i>					
Risk 1	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 2	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
<i>Risks to Society &amp; Social Cohesion</i>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 2	-4	Major detriment	3	Conceivable	-12



<b><u>Trump Administration</u></b>					
<i>Risks for Trump Admin</i>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 2	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 3	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 4	-5	Exceptional detriment	4	Likely/high	-20
Risk 5	-3	Moderate detriment	3	Conceivable	-9
Risk 6	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 7a	+3	Moderate benefit	4	Likely/high	+12
Risk 7b	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
<i>Risks for America and Beyond</i>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 2	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 3	-4	Major detriment	3	Conceivable	-12
Risk 4	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
<b><u>US Foreign Policy</u></b>					
<i>Risks for US &amp; Trump Admin.</i>					
Risk 1	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 2	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 3	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
<i>Risks for Intl. Peace and Stability</i>					
Risk 1	-5	Exceptional detriment	4	Likely/high	-20
Risk 2	-5	Exceptional detriment	4	Likely/high	-20
Risk 3	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 4	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16

<u>US Anti-Iran Project</u>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	5	Very Likely	-20
Risk 2	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 3	-5	Exceptional detriment	4	Likely/high	-20
Risk 4	-2	Minor detriment	4	Likely/high	-8
Risk 5	-2	Minor detriment	4	Likely/high	-8
Risk 6	-5	Exceptional detriment	4	Likely/high	-20
Risk 7	-4	Major detriment	5	Very likely	-20
<u>US Immigration, Mass Migration and Refugees</u>					
Risk 1	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 2	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 3	-5	Exceptional detriment	3	Conceivable	-15
Risk 4	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 5	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 6	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 7	-5	Exceptional detriment	4	Likely/high	-20
Risk 8	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
<u>Environmental Issues and Global Warming</u>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 2	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 3	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
Risk 4	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 5	-5	Exceptional detriment	4	Likely/high	-20
Risk 6	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12

<u>US Alt-Right Approach to Human Rights and the Law</u>					
<i>Risks for US</i>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 2	-3	Moderate detriment	4	Likely/high	-12
<i>Risks for Individuals</i>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 2	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 3	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
<i>Risks for Alt-Right and Republican Party</i>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
<u>US Post-Truth, Fake News and the Media</u>					
Risk 1	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16
Risk 2	-5	Exceptional detriment	4	Likely/high	-20
Risk 3	-4	Major detriment	4	Likely/high	-16

### Appendix 12.4: Rating and Scoring Heuristics Used in this Chapter

The risks evaluated in this book are predominantly opportunity risks or may be viewed as such. For example, the pure risks of global warming may be viewed as negative opportunity risks. For opportunity risks, the rating and scoring schema in Table 12.2 reflects the fact that impacts may be positive, negative, or neutral, and that in some instances a combination of both positive and negative impacts.

**Table 12.2: Rating and Scoring Heuristic for Estimation of Opportunity Risks**

Desirable/Undesirable Rating	Desirable/Undesirable Score
Exceptional benefit	+5
Major benefit	+4
Moderate benefit	+3
Minor benefit	+2
Negligible benefit	+1
Neither benefit nor detriment	0
Negligible detriment	-1
Minor detriment	-2
Moderate detriment	-3
Major detriment	-4
Exceptional detriment	-5

Source: based on Waring and Glendon (1998)

Application of the scores from Table 12.2 in the formula Opportunity Risk = (Scale of Benefit/Detriment) x (Probability of Occurrence) will produce a risk level score in the range -25 to +25.

**Table 12.3: Probability Heuristic for Estimation of Risks**

Probability Rating*	Probability Score
Very unlikely	1
Unlikely/low	2
Conceivable	3
Likely/high	4
Very likely	5

\*as presently controlled, unless a particular risk is a future or theoretical possibility.

Source: based on Waring and Glendon (1998).

**Table 12.4: Rating Heuristic for Estimation of Risk Levels**

Risk Level Scores	Risk Level Rating
- (20 to 25)	Exceptional negative
- (12 to 20)	High negative
- (8 to 12)	Medium negative
- (4 to 8)	Low negative
- (1 to 4)	Insignificant negative
+ (1 to 4)	Insignificant positive
+ (4 to 8)	Low positive
+ (8 to 12)	Medium positive
+ (12 to 20)	High positive
+ (20 to 25)	Exceptional positive

Source: based on Waring and Glendon (1998).

Negative risk level ratings imply a corresponding degree of urgency required in relation to threat/hazard elimination and risk reduction and control. It should be noted that with pure risks the impact/severity component should always take precedence over the probability component. Such deliberate biasing provides a means for a realistic evaluation of high impact/low probability events for risk management purposes. For example, the probability of a significant nuclear accident at a nuclear power station may be very low (the typically design standard being less than one significant accident in 10,000 operating years), but the negative impact would probably be catastrophic, as in the example of Chernobyl (IAEA 1992). For major hazard risk exposures (nuclear, chemical, oil and gas facilities, aircraft, and so on), a low probability factor should not be unrealistically or unreasonably emphasised, at the expense of safety prudence. A similar reasoning may be applied to negative opportunity risks that are rated high or exceptional.

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# Chapter 13: A Prognosis for the New Authoritarianism

*By Alan Waring*

## **Abstract**

A SWOT analysis of the Alt-Right is used to examine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and their implications. Five projected scenarios for an evolving Alt-Right are identified, ranging from maintenance of the current status quo of (typically) democratic order, to manipulation of democratic process, and increasingly authoritarian positions up to and including coups d'état. The potential for the United States to split into a Confederation of Liberal Progressive States and a Confederation of Nationalist Conservative States is discussed. The chapter concludes that, whereas extreme scenarios are unlikely, manoeuvring by Alt-Right groups and parties to normalise their policies through mainstream parties, either through the latter copying them to attract votes or through coalition, is already on the increase.

**Key words:** Alt-Right, SWOT, political evolution, prognosis, US, Trump

## **A Potential Alt-Right Future**

The first two Parts of this volume examined the spectrum of characteristics and issues relating to the new authoritarianism arising from Alt-Right ideology and nationalist activism in the United States. The preceding chapter also provided a summary of risk analyses and evaluations derived from the chapters covering the Alt-Right in the US. This chapter draws together all the preceding content to consider potential scenarios for how the new authoritarianism may unfold in the US, and makes a prognosis for the most likely outcomes. A similar examination of Alt-Right ideology and nationalist activism in a range of European countries including Russia is provided in Vol 2 of this book.

The following four sections present a conventional SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis (Humphrey

2005; Learned et al 1965; Weirich 1982) of the Alt-Right before finally considering potential scenarios for what might happen in relation to the Alt-Right in the short-to-medium term.

## Relative Strengths of the Alt-Right

In most countries, the Alt-Right has emerged from pre-existing disaffected elements within the conservative establishment, joining with equally disgruntled elements among the mass population and the far-right to express a common dissatisfaction with the ideology, tone, and product of traditional 'liberal' administrations. Despite asserting that they specifically reject mainstream conservatism and what they regard as the weak and corrupt liberalism of the conservative political establishment (e.g. the tired Republican Party in the US, the Washington 'swamp', the pandering to quasi-socialist ideas, the deals made by politicians to favour vested corporate or sectoral interests), the fact remains that the political backbone of the Alt-Right comprises individuals from that very milieu. One has only to consider the make-up of the Trump Cabinet and senior figures in the White House administration, which reveals a cast of characters each of whom has substantial experience working in 'the Establishment'—the Senate, state legislatures, state judiciaries, the military, big corporations. A similar picture emerges in other countries, where thus far Alt-Right politicians have been drawn largely from existing conservative political parties or backgrounds (see e.g. Burleigh 2018a and b).

The Alt-Right is seeking to create a new illiberal political Establishment made up of leaders and senior and middle-ranking functionaries drawn from among self-imposed exiles from the traditional liberal establishment they so despise. They therefore bring to the task considerable knowledge and experience of how existing government works at different levels, as well as networks of personal contacts both within and beyond any political party they nominally espouse or represent, for example, the Republican Party in the US, the Conservative Party in the UK. All of this knowledge and experience is invaluable to the furtherance of the Alt-Right movement, and is a strength relative to that available to any new political movement or party starting from scratch without such resource to draw on.

The Alt-Right also enjoys considerable financial support and patronage from a cadre of wealthy business owners and professionals

who espouse the nationalist authoritarian cause. In the US, these include William Regnery II (Roston and Anderson 2017) who finances the white supremacist National Policy Institute, alongside its wealthy director Richard Spencer, and Robert Mercer, a successful hedge fund manager who has backed *Breitbart News* and other Alt-Right operations (Hermansson 2017). Mercer was among a group of billionaires who individually backed the Trump election campaign (Hackett 2016), most of whom previously had been backers of the mainstream Republican Party.

In the earlier stages of the Trump campaign in 2015, there had been conjecture that the brothers Charles and David Koch, owners of Koch Industries, might inject some of their \$889 million donor fund into the Trump campaign. After all, they had previously helped the anti-establishment Tea Party in 2009 and 2010. However, the Tea Party had since evolved from a populist anti-‘big government’ movement into being part of the strident anti-immigrant nationalism of the Alt-Right, which was anathema to the Kochs (Vogel 2016). None of their funds went to the Trump campaign.

Depending on what kind of government is in power, a thriving economy may either attract or repel populist Alt-Right support. For example, a liberal regime in power during a period of a strong economy, with likely low unemployment and other indicators beneficial to the mass electorate, is less likely to witness an upsurge in populist Alt-Right support. Conversely, if a populist right-wing regime is in power (as during the Trump administration), and the economy is good and improving, then the regime’s popularity will probably be enhanced. As the first year of the Trump administration progressed, there was some evidence of US economic recovery and growing business confidence, as well as Trump’s core supporters reporting satisfaction with his policies. His major tax reforms heralded a potential boost to employers and the stock market, and also to a lesser extent to ordinary voters. Thus, at least in the short term, the Trump regime and other Alt-Right politicians in the US were likely to enjoy popularity among core supporters and also those less committed floating voters who were still feeling vindicated in their contemporary support. However, Trump’s proposal in February 2018 for a \$4.4 trillion budget that would increase spending massively, both on US military programs and on infrastructure renewal projects, effectively abandoned the Repub-

lican mantra of reducing federal deficit and instead signalled its enlargement to more than \$7 trillion. Trump's assumption appeared to be that the US economy is 'too big to fail' and implied a calculated gamble. Notably, on assuming the presidency, Trump had promised to balance the books over ten years. This may happen, but there was a real risk that it would not. His stated determination in March 2018 to impose a 25% tariff on a range of imported goods, so as to support his 'America First' agenda, also threatened a global trade war that could badly damage the US economy. A heavily debt-driven economy is vulnerable to a myriad of unforeseen and unforeseeable factors and events that may create an unwelcome crisis, and one that may be difficult to grapple with. Sudden draconian austerity measures and job losses arising from such a crisis would immediately impact Trump's supporters.

Moreover, regardless of specific government policies, any national economy may take a serious downturn. This is a probable occurrence in any economy, given the cyclical nature of economic performance and the multiple variables that are difficult to control, even ignoring economic incompetence of an incumbent regime that may accentuate a downturn. The state of the global economy, and the national economy's inter-relationship with it, will also be a factor.

Up to the time of this book's publication, grassroots support for Trump remained high in the older industrial 'rust belt' areas historically dependent on such industries as coal mining and steel making e.g. Pennsylvania, West Virginia. Some early signs of economic revival became evident in such areas, but whether sufficient or sustained enough to turn the clock back to the golden days of the 1950s to 1980s is unlikely. If large numbers of voters are hit by renewed unemployment, reduced incomes, and other negative impacts, such support for Alt-Right policies is likely to wane, save, perhaps, for a minority of die-hard supporters who remain in denial that such policies have failed to be their saviour. While such hard core support is undoubtedly a strength, their numbers are not sufficient to ensure continued electoral success. Non-committed, floating, and frustrated protest voters determine election outcomes.

It could also be argued that the trans-national inter-connections, amoral ideological support and encouragement, and financial support from abroad, together create a systemic strength for the Alt-Right that goes beyond what is identifiable in any single country. The activities

and apparent gains by the Alt-Right in one country seem to energize and encourage their counterparts in other countries in a kind of social contagion (e.g. Germany, Austria, Hungary). Indeed, it is not simply a case of tacit acknowledgement among the Alt-Right in different countries of what the others are doing and their apparent successes. Evidence presented above and in other chapters and Vol 2 demonstrates active trans-national collaboration between them, from which collaborating parties presumably derive synergetic benefit. For example, during 2017 and much of 2018, the US Alt-Right ideologue Steve Bannon ran a campaigning tour delivering pep-talks and speeches to far-right parties and groups in France, Germany, Italy, Hungary. He even claimed that the support of his Alt-Right propaganda vehicle *Breitbart News* for Nigel Farage and UKIP had been instrumental in the success of the Brexit referendum campaign. Globalisation of the far-right has also certainly extended beyond the US, UK, Europe, and Russia to e.g. South Africa, Philippines, South Korea.

Nevertheless, as noted in chapter 1, there is evidence (e.g. Michael 2006) that far-right groups in the US have also sought to gain strength through conceptual and potential practical alliances with foreign terrorist organizations outside the far-right. More particularly, Michael highlighted the extraordinary ideological alliances apparently made with Islamist extremists overseas i.e. with groups whose ideology the far-right explicitly hates. While it would appear from statements made by far-right leaders that such paradoxical alignments arose from shared anti-Semitism and anti-US foreign policy positions, and a common desire to tear down the US power elites, nonetheless any potential strength gained through this by the Alt-Right also became a weakness once the fact of the alliances became public. Indeed, such alliances also became a threat to the Alt-Right, in terms of unfavourable public perceptions of them supporting IS terrorism.

### **Relative Weaknesses of the Alt-Right**

The Alt-Right suffers from an inherently conflicted ideology, an observation not unique to the Alt-Right. On the one hand, its clarion call is that the Alt-Right represents individual freedom against alleged oppression by national and/or federal government and alleged abuses by large corporate interests. On the other hand, the Alt-Right is pred-



icated on an absolute conviction of white, nationalist supremacy combined with supremacy of society's 'natural masters' i.e. the Alt-Right, with a concomitant relegation of the poor, the vulnerable, immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, and political opponents to an underclass of victims/losers. Such Aristotelian primitivism necessarily denies freedoms to the underclass, as it reserves freedoms only for those whom the Alt-Right regards as the most deserving (i.e. themselves and favoured classes). While some of the populist Alt-Right may not hold this stark model *in extremis*, preferring to leave its more rigorous and strident pursuit to less squeamish far-right fellow travellers, the fact remains that the 'freedom' they all strive to obtain necessarily comes at the denial of freedoms (and, moreover, human rights) of other sectors of society.

The freedom whose threatened loss so energises the Alt-Right is not some abstract monolithic concept having an agreed meaning shared by them and their opponents, such as liberals and those adversely affected by the Alt-Right. They are not competing to grab the same freedom. The freedom the US Alt-Right so desperately campaign for includes the right for citizens to bear and use firearms without controls, regardless of the unwarranted threat of injury and death this poses to other citizens; the right not to have universal health care, regardless of the consequential denial of health care to millions of vulnerable citizens without insurance; the right to treat immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, the unemployed, poor people, and other vulnerable groups as an underclass who should be denied full citizens' rights, and who should be repressed and eliminated as far as possible e.g. the essence of Trump's six traits identified by Neiwert (2017)—see later section. The Alt-Right especially values 'freedom of speech', but only in the sense that they should be allowed to utter whatever racist, misogynist, anti-religion, or other hate-filled views or allegations they think fit, including intimidation and threats of violence. Such abuse of the freedom of speech represents a weakness in their case; if their case were strong, they would not need to resort to such egregious tactics.

A further weakness of the Alt-Right is the contradiction between its claim, on the one hand, to be the champion of 'the people', and especially the ordinary masses, against uncaring self-serving elites, and the reality on the other hand of renegade members of that class cynically having "adopted 'the people' in the way a regiment acquires a

goat as a mascot” (Burleigh 2018a). Alt-Right leaders and supportive populist demagogues are liberally represented by members of the aristocracy (e.g. Duchess von Stork, deputy leader of AfD), wealthy oligarchs, financiers, newspaper proprietors, and business tycoons (e.g. Robert Mercer, William Regenerly II, Silvio Berlusconi—and of course Donald J. Trump), the very Establishment that the same Alt-Right say they will overturn. Trump may have attacked pre-existing Establishment elites, only to create new ones that suit his interests; ‘the people’s’ interests are unlikely to feature much in the latter.

Widening the inequalities gap in society, and the denial of freedoms and human rights to the underclass, are essential parts of Alt-Right ideology. The inherent authoritarianism further contradicts its claim to offer ‘freedom’. Moreover, the Christian values oft-proclaimed by Alt-Right protagonists and supporters are at odds with the manifestly un-Christian rhetoric and behaviour of some of them e.g. Trump, Roy Moore (see chapter 10, Sherman 2017, and Sherwood 2017). Such contradiction, or hypocrisy in some people’s view, is of course not unique to the Alt-Right. However, this contradiction has become publicly associated especially with Alt-Right predispositions because of (a) policy statements of far-right groups that explicitly boast of their Christian beliefs and motives (e.g. in Austria, Hungary, Russia, and US), and (b) similar public statements by high profile Alt-Right politicians, especially in the US.

In short, as with many other ideologies, a major theoretical if not practical weakness of the Alt-Right in terms of its attractiveness to non-committed voters is the incoherence of its ideology, which is riven with serious internal contradictions and invented ‘facts’ that seek to validate Alt-Right assertions and positions. While such obvious contradictions and alternative-reality falsehoods are unlikely to be of concern to committed Alt-Right supporters (Neiwert 2017), and indeed who in the US, for example, seem oblivious to the litany of scandalous statements and behaviour of Trump, they may well be of concern to undecided and floating voters who frequently decide the outcome of elections. The more extreme rhetorical assertions of the Alt-Right are likely to fail to match the reality of most people. The apparent strength of Trump’s combative personality, and his ‘sticking to his Alt-Right manifesto guns’, may also be a weakness in many voters’ eyes. The manifest anger, paranoia, fanaticism, and egregious policies of the Alt-Right will be objectionable to many. In the US, for example,

while pursuing a nationalist populist agenda, the Trump administration has tacitly gone along with some of the much more strident and objectionable demands of far-right extremists. This may backfire eventually at the ballot box, although Frum (2018) has expressed concerns that it may not. The widespread exposure of Trump's capricious and often volatile personality, coupled with an equally exposed dysfunctional White House (e.g. Green 2017; Neiwert 2017; Wolff 2017), is a further weakness of the US Alt-Right.

## Opportunities for the Alt-Right

The Alt-Right ideology lacks a 'first principles' attractiveness to the majority of voters, who may be anticipated to follow a Normal or Gaussian distribution on a range of attitudes towards related issues (political, economic, social, income, taxation etc) e.g. Rice (1928), Page and Goldstein (2016). Of the nominal 50% of the population who range from politically neutral to extreme right-wing, 34.1% (i.e. two thirds of the 50%) would be expected to fit within the first standard deviation from the mean i.e. showing weak to moderate right-wing views more in keeping with mainstream conservative parties. However, higher concentrations of Alt-Right supporters may occur in particular locations where they have migrated to be with people like themselves e.g. Alabama. "And more of America is becoming like this and has been for decades. People move to the place where folk are like them and not like those others" (Aaronovitch 2017). As chapter 3 notes, such 'tribal osmosis' raises the possibility of political secession (Blest 2017). Nevertheless, the further that Alt-Right principles stray towards authoritarian, nationalist harshness, the fewer the citizens who are prepared to vote for them. This predisposition in the population presents the Alt-Right with limited opportunities to acquire political power via normal democratic means, the success of e.g. Trump in the US, the FPÖ in Austria, Jobbik/Fidesz in Hungary, AfD in Germany, and Lega/5 Star in Italy notwithstanding.

However, it is perfectly possible to manipulate the democratic process to create an authoritarian right-wing regime, even an elected dictatorship, using appropriate opportunities. This is the gist of Frum's book *Trumpocracy* (Frum 2018; Pavia 2018), going so far as to assert that we "are living through the most dangerous challenge to the

free government of the United States that anyone alive has ever encountered". Of three identifiable, non-mutually exclusive, democratic opportunities to achieve an Alt-Right takeover, the first involves much guile, ingenuity and audacity, and two arguably different approaches have become evident: sneak infiltration (or Trojan Horse), and camouflage:

### **Sneak Infiltration**

The most high profile example of sneak infiltration is how Steve Bannon orchestrated an unelected Alt-Right control of the Trump White House and undue influence on Trump's policies, as discussed in chapter 5 and Green (2017), Neiwert (2017), Sherman (2017), and Wolff (2017). The cleverness of Bannon and others such as Gorka was to proclaim their Alt-Right views loudly and unashamedly while promoting a supposedly Republican Party candidate who was in fact an Alt-Right fellow traveller i.e. Donald Trump. Their nastier ideas were presented as being not only reasonable but also as 'right and American'. This 'hiding in plain sight' tactic, plus considerable skills in media and on-line campaigning, succeeded in the Alt-Right duping or convincing many voters and getting 'their man' Trump into the White House.

### **Camouflage**

Trump, Bannon, Gorka, Moore and other high profile Alt-Right political operators in the US succeeded in using the Republican Party as a stepping stone to achieving an Alt-Right power base. However, they could not have achieved this without considerable support from other incumbent Republican politicians who had already covertly positioned themselves as de facto Alt-Right supporters but masquerading as normal mainstream Republicans. It will be increasingly difficult for such individuals to hide their true Alt-Right views from the electorate. Whereas running up an Alt-Right flag may have been an electoral virtue for such politicians in 2016, it may become an electoral poison pill in future elections.

Political camouflage tactics have also been used widely by the Alt-Right in Europe. A range of examples are examined in Vol 2 e.g. in the UK, France, Austria, Hungary.

A second democratic opportunity arises from a chance confluence of a charismatic demagogue, a naïve but disgruntled and angry

population, and a right-wing salvationist manifesto within a democratic system. The most obvious example is the rise of Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party) in the 1920s and early 30s. By convincing a major proportion of largely disaffected voters that his policies offered them salvation from post-WWI humiliations, unemployment, economic disaster, and external threats (all symptomatic of an alleged global Jewish-communist conspiracy against Germany), Hitler manipulated the democratic process to make the Nazis the largest elected party in the Reichstag and himself appointed as Reichskanzler in 1933. More recent examples have arisen in contemporary Austria (see chapter 6 in Vol 2) and Hungary (see chapter 13 in Vol 2).

A third opportunity arises from seeking to apply direct democracy in a setting where representative democracy is the constitutional requirement. In a representative democracy, a successful candidate is elected to the legislature as an individual who is meant to represent the interests of every member of the particular constituency i.e. for the overall public good and not biased towards partisan or sectoral interests. Even though probably being a member of a political party, and therefore favouring that party's policies, the elected member may exercise latitude according to his or her personal views or conscience when voting on a particular issue. The elected member is not sent by constituents or local party committee as a delegate to vote according to their instruction. In addition, in public referenda, the mere fact that voters may have clearly indicated a preference for a particular proposed outcome does not (or should not) bind the government to pursue that outcome or in a way that some voters want. Binding governments by popular vote in a referendum is a form of direct democracy, and as such allows little scope for experiential wisdom or moderation. It is a recipe for grass roots 'inverted authoritarianism'.

A recent example of inverted authoritarianism and demands for direct democracy is furnished by UKIP in the Brexit referendum of 2016 in the UK, as discussed in chapter 3 of Vol 2. Another example is that of the Italian 5 Star populist Alt-Right movement which firmly believes in 'will of the people' direct democracy over-riding representative democracy and whose success alongside the far-right Lega Party in the 2018 general elections ensures a sharp move towards harsh right-wing authoritarian policies.

Beyond democratic opportunity always lies the possibility of a right-wing coup in which democracy is overturned by force. Violence and intimidation have always been a hallmark of the ultra-right but their relatively small numbers have usually kept violent conflicts localised (e.g. Charlottesville ultra-right attacks, August 2017) or confined to singular acts of terrorism (e.g. Oklahoma City bombing in 1995). However, in order to stage a political coup capable of withstanding the armed forces of the legitimate government, even at local state or regional level, would require substantial resources of trained personnel, military equipment, and communications facilities and these would be way beyond the combined financial resources of the far-right in any country. Although small self-styled armed militias have sprung up among the far-right, especially in the US, they are self-limiting fantasists who are never likely to be more than a noisy nuisance involved in isolated acts of violence. A similar picture emerges in the UK, where a small number of arrested members of the proscribed terrorist group National Action have been charged for being members and allegedly planning acts of violence against individual political targets. Such groups are under close surveillance by state security services and it is unlikely that would ever have a capacity to undertake an armed coup against the government, much less a successful one.

A bigger concern would be if Alt-Right politicians and fellow travellers within the 'Establishment', frustrated by what they regard as unacceptable liberal policies of the ruling government, joined up with rogue right-wing elements at senior level in the armed services to plan an armed coup. There are precedent coups, such as that by the right-wing military coup in Greece in 1967, followed by seven years of the Junta, and similarly the right-wing coup by General Pinochet in Chile in 1973, followed by seventeen years of authoritarian rule.

### **Threats to the Alt-Right**

A robust, burgeoning economy with low unemployment takes away one of the main propaganda weapons of the Alt-Right, namely that tired economic policies of a corrupt status quo political system have brought hardship to the population, and all exacerbated by liberal policies opening the gates to a flood of immigrants who take away native

citizens' jobs, block public services, and live parasitically off the taxpayer. However, whereas most politicians seek to achieve a robust and stable economy, in the real world it is rarely possible to both achieve and sustain one for very long periods. There are simply too many variables and factors that are difficult to control. Typically, economic success varies cyclically. Thus, whereas a robust economy tends to weaken Alt-Right propaganda, its perseverance cannot be relied upon. However, as noted above under Strengths, a lot depends on the character of the incumbent government. A robust economy under a liberal regime is an electoral threat to the Alt-Right, whereas under an illiberal, Alt-Right dominated regime (e.g. the Trump administration) a robust economy tends to validate and strengthen the Alt-Right.

The first eighteen months of the Trump administration saw the US economy strengthening, partly owing to the global economy but also owing to announcement of public infrastructure projects, major tax reforms, a gathering de-regulation programme, and a generally 'business friendly' administration. His 'America First' policy and trade protectionism, while welcomed by some sectors and their workforces, was not guaranteed to boost the economy and protect US jobs in the medium and long-terms, since it ignored the primary weakness of American companies and products becoming outdated and uncompetitive in global terms. Moreover, his trade protectionism was likely to have little impact on China's long-term strategy to become the next superpower—economically, politically and militarily. Trump's salvation manifesto was more likely than not to show signs of faltering within his first term, with a potential drop in his popularity and electoral support. Further, his cavalier approach to, and antagonistic Alt-Right rhetoric on, foreign policy appeared to raise regional and international tensions and threaten international peace and security.

Trump was a miraculous gift to the US Alt-Right in terms of exercising Alt-Right ideology and policies. However, there was no guarantee that he would survive a first four-year term as President, let alone get re-elected, although Frum stated his belief that Trump may well be a strong candidate in 2020 (Pavia 2018). Nevertheless, there will be increasing anxiety among the Alt-Right in America that Trump may be a presidential one-term wonder. Trump was unique in many respects, and certainly in his larger-than-life presence and populist persona and rhetoric. It is difficult to identify another Alt-Right candidate who could possibly emulate him or eclipse him. This could well

herald the departure of the Alt-Right from any serious presidential candidacy, and a return to slates of more conventional Republican candidates, although McCarty (see chapter 4) also considers the possibility of ‘Trumpism’ being a longer term prospect.

Apart from Trump and the US context, arguably the biggest threat to the Alt-Right is itself. The Alt-Right is only fully appealing to a minority of voters. Although some aspects of its ideology have a broader appeal, such as immigration control, anti-globalisation of trade, and not exporting jobs, most other aspects only appeal to extremists. Expecting a populace to vote for an Alt-Right party or candidate whose manifesto includes ideas and policies they find objectionable is unrealistic, and so such candidates may resort to linguistic camouflage. Their attempts at moderating their campaigning language are likely to be undone by sufficient numbers of committed supporters who are only too ready to noisily communicate the unvarnished fanaticism and nastiness of the Alt-Right ideology. However, whether rhetorical assertions and propaganda of the Alt-Right are presented in a raw form, or disguised by euphemism or dissimulation, they are likely to fail to match the reality of most people. To most people, the Alt-Right ideology is regarded as a distasteful irrelevance, promoted by cranks and fixated zealots. In short, the Alt-Right is its own worst enemy.

In many countries, the Alt-Right has long demonstrated not only its fragmented character, with typically dozens of unconnected small groups, but also its fractious nature, with such groups competing for ideological recognition and supremacy as unequivocally the true representatives of the Alt-Right. See, for example, Lyons (2017), Michael (2008; 2014) and Neiwert (2017) on the Alt-Right ferment in the US. All such antics threaten not only their functionality and public credibility but also their membership numbers and finances.

## **Alt-Right Evolution**

As already noted, the power relationships in society as desired by the Alt-Right rely on maintaining, and hopefully widening, inequalities between ‘the deserving’ (i.e. WASPs, the rich, the business/property owning classes, and those having an Alt-Right mind-set) and ‘the undeserving’ (i.e. immigrants, ethnic minorities, Muslims and other non-Christian religious minorities, the unemployed, the poor and low paid,



the disabled, and those having a non-Alt-Right mind-set). As also noted earlier, the Alt-Right ideology is inherently conflicted by professing to offer ‘freedom’, but only to the ‘deserving’, while doing so via authoritarian and repressive means against the ‘undeserving’.

Given such a predisposition and the relatively short history of the US Alt-Right since 2008 (notwithstanding the history of its precursors), how is it likely to evolve? The final chapter Fascism and Our Future in Neiwert (2017) offered an insight. Although focussed on the US, there is much to draw on when considering other countries.

Neiwert considered first the history of fascism and its characteristics, before addressing how these have shown up in modern America and especially in the Trump era. He cited Paxton’s (2005) consideration of fascist development, which noted that while fascism is defined by its ideology it can only be understood by also addressing what it does. Paxton also identified nine key characteristics that empirically have driven all fascist movements. Many of these have been identified throughout this book in relation to the Alt-Right, for example:

- Paranoid anxieties about invented or exaggerated threats leading to a sense of overwhelming crisis that demands radical, or even extreme, solutions.
- Dread of national decline as a combined result of perceived negative influences, such as liberalism, multi-culturalism, multilateralism, class conflict, immigration, and alien religions.
- A belief that one’s national group is a victim of other groups (e.g. ethnic, religious, immigrants, elites) and that any action, without restriction, against such groups is warranted.
- The destiny and right of the ‘deserving strong’ to dominate, control and, if necessary, eliminate the ‘undeserving weak’ in a Darwinian supremacist struggle.

Neiwert (2017) identified six fascist traits in Trump:

***Eliminationist rhetoric and actions:*** stopping categories of ‘undesirables’ alleged to threaten the safety and economy of the United States from entering the country; visa blocking of Muslims; building a wall along the Mexican border; dehumanizing Hispanic immigrants by labelling them “criminals”, “killers”, and “rapists”; plan to deport all 12 million undocumented migrants.

***Paligenetic ultra-nationalism:*** race-baiting, ethnic fearmongering, and assumptions of US exceptionalism; “we’re going to take the country back”; labelling particular nationalities as “criminals”, “killers”, and “rapists”; labelling particular nationalities as “terrorists”; “Make America Great Again”; “America First”.

***Deep contempt for both liberalism and mainstream conservatism:*** “cleaning the swamp”; blaming America’s problems on the alleged corruption of traditional two-party politics, former Presidents, and political opponents (Democrat and Republican); dismantling legislation of the Obama administration based on hatred of Obama rather than on substantive evidence of its lack of efficacy.

***Projecting America as a victim:*** assertions that America has become a victim of trade abuses by China and other countries; assertions that America had become a “laughingstock” in the eyes of the world; assertions that illegal immigrants are treating America as a ‘soft touch’ and abusing the country’s hospitality through tax evasion, sex crimes, and other criminality.

***Projecting himself as a lone man of destiny, America’s saviour:*** an ego-maniacal conviction that he alone will save America using his supreme intellect and instincts and invented ‘facts’, while ignoring or denigrating scientific evidence and real facts that counter his prejudice; global warming denial; insistence that the American Health Care Bill is vastly superior to Obamacare, contrary to professional consensus; making impetuous foreign policy decisions and ill-advised threats against unfriendly countries, implying a countdown to war.

***Contempt for perceived weakness in others:*** denigrating Senator John McCain as “not a hero” because he had been captured in the Vietnam War; appearing to ignore 28 million citizens currently uninsured for health care and possibly a further 20 million citizens who may become uninsured under his proposed American Health Care Act; publicly mocking the disability of a disabled *New York Times* reporter; enthusiastically endorsing the pro-gun lobby and the National Rifle Association in ensuring ready uncontrolled availability of firearms to ordinary citizens, implying that gun controls only benefit weaklings; publicly denigrating Attorney General Jeff Sessions on *Twitter* for “weakness”.

Andrew Sullivan’s review of Sunstein’s book on contemporary authoritarianism in America (Sullivan 2018; Sunstein 2018) charged Trump with being a “cult leader of a movement that has taken over a

political party” [i.e. the Republican Party] and who “specifically campaigned on a platform of one-man rule”. The implication is that, in parallel with actively pursuing a “creeping authoritarianism”, Trump is also encouraging his elevation from being (in Neiwert’s terms) simply a lone man of destiny as America’s saviour to an almost god-like all-powerful status beyond question, challenge, or criticism.

However, while all of the above (Paxton’s analysis, Neiwert’s list, and Sullivan’s characterisation) apply to Trump and his administration to varying degrees, Neiwert cautions about assuming that Trump is a full-blown fascist. He argued (as does the author in chapter 5) that he is not a committed far-right ideologue but rather an opportunist who is comfortable with Alt-Right ideas and is happy to implement them in the furtherance of his self-aggrandisement and ambitions for the Trump brand. As Neiwert put it, “Trump’s only real ideology is worship of himself, ‘the Donald’”. More graphically, Singer (2017) wrote that Trump carries around “the longest selfie-stick in the world”. Real ideological fascists act out a rigid adherence to a consistent, totalitarian world-view that would involve paramilitary enforcement of the leader’s will and diktats, whereas Trump, while enthusiastically echoing much of the far-right’s nastier rhetoric, acts out only some aspects of their wishes and soft-peddles on fully endorsing their views. Occasionally, he has even condemned the far-right. This is the mark of a right-wing populist demagogue, an opportunist but not a fascist dictator.

Nevertheless, Trump’s very seductiveness to voters feeling aggrieved and ignored by the mainstream political establishment is dangerous, in that it may encourage and embolden more hard-line elements to become more publicly assertive in their demands for a permanent Alt-Right stamp on the governance of the United States. The authors in Sunstein (2018) warned of the creeping authoritarianism of the Trump era. This possibility is already in evidence from protagonists such as Trump’s Cabinet members, Steve Bannon, Richard Spencer, and failed senatorial candidate Roy Moore, as well as a slate of right-wing current or former congress members such as Michele Bachmann, Louie Gohmert, Paul Gosar, Steve King, Ted Cruz, and Ben Carson (e.g. Mudde 2017). Right-wing extremists such as Richard Spencer and former KKK leader David Duke have been fulsome in their public praise of Trump and his policies, and for the first time in years the KKK has reactivated its aggressive street protests. Trump’s

weak apologia and unwillingness to condemn the far-right thuggery evident in the fatal Charlottesville street attacks in August 2017 received much endorsement from right-wing extremists across the US.

Neiwert warned against what is evident so far, namely a proto-fascist right-wing populism à la Trump, being allowed to evolve into true fascism as a result of public brainwashing by a relentless exposure to Alt-Right ideology and propaganda. See also Cooper (2015). What today may seem extreme and repugnant to the majority of citizens, may eventually seem to them more reasonable, acceptable and normal, as happened in Nazi Germany. Existing proto-fascist elements are becoming empowered. As Neiwert noted about Trump, intentionally or not “.....his alt-right-Tea Party brand of right-wing populism is helping these groups grow their ranks and their potential to recruit new members by leaps and bounds. Not only that, he is making thuggery seem normal and inevitable. And that is a serious problem”.

### Projected Scenarios for Alt-Right Evolution

The situations and conditions in each country are different, and it would therefore be nonsensical to project a common evolution for the Alt-Right for all countries. With this limitation in mind, the author has sought to identify a level of abstraction at which national differences are sufficiently unimportant to potential scenarios that may be posited.

The author puts forward five potential scenarios:

1. Despite winning some elections (most notably Trump in the US), the inability of the Alt-Right to retain seats and expand elected representation leads to it remaining a noisy, fragmented, minority protest movement, albeit harbouring hate criminals and violent elements. (i.e. current democratic order maintained). Possible examples: some US states; UK; France; Netherlands; Nordic states.
2. A slow rightward societal drift occurs and entrenchment into an illiberal democracy, relying on determined Alt-Right candidates, weak mainstream candidates, and populist Alt-Right votes. (i.e. elected autocracy). Possible examples: some US states; UK; France; Netherlands; Italy; Austria; Germany.

3. Takeover of current democratic parties, institutions, and government by Alt-Right activists and supporters, using stealth infiltration and 'entry-ist' techniques, relying on inertia, complacency, or intimidation of mainstream parties. (i.e. coup by stealth, followed by pseudo-democracy or dictatorship) Possible examples: some US states; US federal government; Austria; Germany; Poland; Hungary; Russia.
4. Crisis leading to rapid collapse of current democratic order and opportunistic takeover of particular local/regional governments and possibly national government by Alt-Right elements, possibly using armed force. (i.e. opportunistic coup by separatists or other dissidents, followed by pseudo-democracy or dictatorship). Possible examples: some US states; US federal government.
5. Rapid takeover of particular local/regional governments and possibly national government by Alt-Right elements, using armed force. (i.e. armed coup planned by separatists and Alt-Right politicians and probably involving armed forces dissidents, followed by dictatorship). Possible examples: some US states; US federal government; Russia.

A confident prediction is not possible. However, on the balance of probabilities and based on the evidence presented in the preceding chapters, the most likely scenarios of those above are 1, 2 and 3. In the United States, for example, there has been evidence of all three scenarios in the making. Steve Bannon orchestrated a spectacular Alt-Right coup by stealth in getting Donald Trump elected as President. While there is no evidence of the US yet being turned into a pseudo-democracy or elected dictatorship, in Trump's first year in office there was much evidence of his determination to ensure a permanent rightward societal drift and entrenchment, into what (unless unchecked) might well eventually become a proto-fascist pseudo-democracy with harsh authoritarian policies relying on determined Alt-Right candidates, weak mainstream candidates, and populist Alt-Right votes. Frum, (2018) argued that Trump had been greatly enabled in this by tacit Alt-Right "appeasers" among Republican Party leaders and donors. Nevertheless, Verney (see chapter 8) concludes that the current Alt-Right upsurge and electoral success in the US may only be temporary, as part of a historically long-wave waxing and waning cycle of far-right nationalism and nativism.

The senatorial candidature of Roy Moore for Alabama exemplified scenario 2 and doubtless, had he won, from his own public rhetoric and statements it is clear that he would have been very dictatorial against the human rights of Alabama citizens.

In other states, such as California and the New England states, scenario 1 prevails. However, as Paxton noted in chapter 3, the possibility cannot be ignored that some 'red states' may become so imbued with Alt-Right ideology that they withdraw from as much federal control as they are able i.e. pseudo-secession (scenarios 2 and 3). Alternatively, 'blue states' may adopt their own version of pseudo-secession (Blest 2017) by using state budgets and funds to ensure that only more liberal policies are enacted, while ignoring or side-lining any harsh Alt-Right federal policies. Any attempt at actual secession or any armed insurrection (scenarios 4 and 5) is unlikely and would almost certainly result in swift federal intervention to restore law and order and democracy. However, the net effect of scenarios 2 and 3 might be to divide the country into two different universes in conflict. Demographic changes would likely follow, as a result of people migrating to be with those having a similar world-view (Aaronovitch 2017) or because they are unable to tolerate the political, social or economic climate of the state where they live. Liberals would migrate from 'red states' to 'blue', whereas Alt-Right supporters would migrate from 'blue states' to 'red'. Two different confederacies may emerge: the Confederation of Liberal Progressive States, and the Confederation of Nationalist Conservative States. What such a polarised country would mean for America and the world in general is open to debate and beyond the scope of this book.

## Conclusion

The Alt-Right ideology is all about ensuring inequalities between 'the deserving' (i.e. WASPs, the rich, the business/property owning classes, and those having an Alt-Right mind-set) and 'the undeserving' (i.e. immigrants, ethnic minorities, Muslims and other non-Christian religious minorities, the unemployed, the poor and low paid, the disabled, and those having a non-Alt-Right mind-set). Those inequalities can only be maintained and deepened via authoritarian and repressive

means against the 'undeserving'. Thus, in professing to offer 'freedom', the Alt-Right ideology is inherently conflicted, as such freedom is offered only to the 'deserving'.

Conflicted ideology, making unsubstantiated and often contradictory assertions, and issuing inflammatory false propaganda are just some of the weaknesses of the Alt-Right that add to its central characteristic of racial, ethnic and religious intolerance manifested increasingly in intimidation of minorities, hate crimes, and violence. The majority population find the overall Alt-Right proposition objectionable and therefore refuse to vote for such candidates. However, although in most countries those having an Alt-Right commitment are a relatively small proportion of the electorate, there are some Alt-Right issues, such as fears relating to immigration, that are of concern to the broader population and which the Alt-Right readily exploits. This has seen an upsurge of support for populist Alt-Right parties or candidates, although significant electoral success has occurred only in some countries e.g. US, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Italy. In other countries, despite robust campaigning, noisy rallies, and inflammatory rhetoric, the Alt-Right has been unable to secure any significant electoral success e.g. UK, Nordic countries, Holland, and France.

Nevertheless, in some countries (e.g. Hungary), ruling populist Alt-Right parties have secured an assured majority in the legislature by forming coalitions or cooperating with smaller hard-right parties. In others (e.g. Austria, Netherlands), manoeuvring by Alt-Right groups and parties to normalise their policies through mainstream parties, either through the latter copying them to attract votes or through coalition, is already on the increase. Such manipulation of the democratic process and electoral system is becoming an Alt-Right 'weapon of choice' to gain either formal power or strong influence. Such developments raise the prospect of a drift towards either elected dictatorship or coup by stealth, and ultimately a potential fascist state. In the United States, continued electoral success by the populist Alt-Right may result in a similar drift, and ultimately a 'permanent' separation of states into those that are liberal progressive and those that are nationalist conservative (i.e. Alt-Right controlled). The effects and implications of such potential developments are incalculable. However, overall, the author concludes that extreme scenarios involving coups and separatist splits are unlikely.

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# Chapter 14:

## Potential Strategies to Limit the Alt-Right Threat

*By Alan Waring and Roger Paxton*

### Abstract

Overall, Alt-Right leaders, advocates, and opinion formers seek to subvert, persuade, and as necessary bully, mainstream and populist conservatives to permanently shift their allegiance firmly towards the far-right. Six overall objectives in combating potential Alt-Right domination and excesses are posited. To meet these objectives, five broad categories of preventive strategy are discussed in detail: 1. Legislative, law enforcement, and judicial; 2. Internet, social media, and related approaches; 3. Educational; 4. Political and economic; 5. Grassroots and mass action. A determined, multi-faceted response of ‘muscular moderation’ is advocated.

**Key words:** Alt-Right, authoritarianism, threat, prevention, moderation, strategies

### Addressing an Existential Threat

In this final chapter, the authors consider what strategies, and in what combination, may be required to limit the Alt-Right threat to western society and democracy. In doing this, the authors necessarily take a position that the Alt-Right ideology, policies, and activities represent not just a theoretical but also an existential threat—see e.g. Abramovitz (2018), Hackenbroich and Shapiro (2018), Neiwert (2017), and Roth (2018).

As previous chapters have shown, Alt-Right leaders, advocates, and opinion formers seek the normalisation of their ideology, so that its implementation in various forms is less likely to be challenged robustly in society. Alt-Right leaders and opinion formers are typically keen to portray their ideology and policies as a reasonable, fair, just, and necessary response to dangerous liberal ideas and weak mainstream governance. The Alt-Right seek to portray themselves as society’s saviours, as the only protection against being overwhelmed and

destroyed by foreigners and immigrants, and their alien ideas, creeds, and cultures. By subverting and persuading mainstream and populist conservatism to shift its centre of political gravity firmly towards the far-right, they seek to ensure a permanent Alt-Right stamp on national governance. In the Alt-Right coda, any and all means are permissible in pursuit of their ends, including lies, fake news, and invented 'alternative facts', as a means to subvert the gullible and the disaffected and encourage the already persuaded. Violence and even murder are not off limits.

A major criticism of liberal western governments, mainstream politicians and political parties, institutions, public authorities, and corporate leaders, is that they generally fail to stand up to the Alt-Right or, worse, appear to be apologists for them, or worse still, endorse or collaborate with them. Indeed, Neiwert (2017) accused the liberal elites in the US of false moral superiority, condescension, and even contempt towards the parochial heartlands of the Alt-Right, while doing precious little to combat its rise. While this criticism is not unique to any one country, the US has provided a number of high profile examples of largely unchallenged Alt-Right excesses, and especially those involving President Donald Trump. Abramovitz (2018) also cited "violations of basic ethical standards by the new administration", Trump's admiration "for some of the world's most loathsome strongmen and dictators", and his threats to press freedom. He asserted that there had been "a faster erosion of democratic norms in the US than at any other time in memory". By behaving in this way, Trump went beyond being just a far-right appeaser and passive fellow traveller and demonstrated a more enthusiastic active participation.

The rise of the Nazis in Europe in the 1930s should be a sufficient warning from history that the more that liberal governments and mainstream society and its moderate leaders engage in appeasement, turning of blind eyes, and passive acceptance of and collaboration with far-right ideology, policies, and actions, the more that the Alt-Right will be encouraged and emboldened. As Rees (2005) noted, "...only with the collaboration, weakness, miscalculation, and tolerance of others could the Nazis come to power". Abramovitz (2018, 3) commented on the resurgent trend of "emboldened autocrats, beleaguered democracies, and the United States' withdrawal from its leadership role in the global struggle for human freedom". Roth (2018)

and Hackenbroich and Shapiro (2018) also referred to the rise of autocrats and the populist challenge to democracy. As Neiwert concluded:

“So it is vital for liberals, progressives, moderates, and genuine conservatives to link arms in the coming years to fight back against the fascist tide. It will require organizing, and it will require real outreach. And if this coalition wants to succeed, its members will need to break the vicious circular social dynamic that right-wing extremists always create, particularly in rural communities where their bullying style of discourse can stifle honest discourse. To do that, some self-reflection will go a long way”. (Neiwert 2017, 375)

Neiwert’s conclusion, of course, addresses the American context, in which both neglected rural and decaying industrial communities may be especially amenable to Alt-Right attentions. In other western countries, the urban-rural disjuncture may be less pronounced. However, the same concern about their bullying style of discourse applies wherever the Alt-Right operates.

Overall, whatever strategies and methods are employed to thwart the Alt-Right, they will need to consider carefully the warnings of Kaltwasser (2017) and Capoccia (2005; 2013) about the paradox of potential self-destruction for democracy in its fight against nationalist authoritarian threats. Liberal democracy is meant to be pluralist and inclusive but, if in its defence it adopts a militant or repressive strategy against the Alt-Right threat internally, then it could appear to be illiberal and anti-democratic. A ‘fighting fire with fire’ approach may perversely aid the populist forces’ discourse by enabling the latter to cast themselves and their supporters as victims. An accommodative rather than an oppressive approach (Kaltwasser 2017; Capoccia 2005) may therefore be preferable wherever justifiable, although clearly not to the extent that pathological outcomes result. If and when contain-and-convert approaches fail or are inappropriate, then contain-and-punish approaches must also be available.

Kaltwasser (2017) also warned against regarding both populist and more extreme elements as necessarily representing the same amorphous threat. For example, although sharing the same underlying loathing for what they regard as the dishonest and corrupt elite of the ruling-class political and economic ‘Establishment’, and the need to change or disempower it, many of the populist Alt-Right eschew the nastier rhetoric and violent tactics of their far- and extreme-right associates. As discussed in chapter 3 of Vol 2, for example, during the

Brexit referendum campaign the populist UKIP articulated widespread public concern in Britain about a perceived over-bearing and unaccountable EU, and posed legitimate questions. As UKIP was a properly registered and functioning political party within the British system of governance and representation of the people, their participation or ‘incorporation’ matched the short-term accommodative approach suggested by Kaltwasser (2017) and Capoccia (2005). However, in chapter 9 of Vol 2, van der Valk graphically describes how such a political strategy (‘poldering’) in the Netherlands produced a counter-intuitive result.

With the above caveats in mind, an overall strategy to combat the full spectrum of potential Alt-Right domination and excesses would require such objectives as:

- Accommodating the populist Alt-Right as far as possible within the normal democratic process, while seeking via robust debate and education to limit their appeal, challenge their manifesto, and isolate their far-right and extreme-right associates.
- Resisting the normalisation of far- and extreme-right ideology and policies in society.
- Treating far- and extreme-right ideology as a social and political deviancy—a dangerously pathological belief system to be challenged robustly. As Vaughan (1985; 1986) has shown in another sphere, normalisation of deviance is likely to have an insidious and corrosive impact on the domain affected.
- Challenging the false assertions and absurdities of Alt-Right lies, invented facts, and fake news.
- Condemning the inhumanity of far- and extreme-right ideology and its intimidating aura, including its violent tendencies.
- Prosecuting all crimes having far- and extreme-right motivations to the fullest extent of the law and ensuring tough sentencing.

To address these objectives, this chapter considers the most likely scenarios for Alt-Right evolution i.e. the first three of the five potential scenarios identified in chapter 13:

1. Despite winning some elections, the inability of the Alt-Right to retain seats and expand elected representation leads to it remaining a noisy, fragmented, minority protest movement, albeit harbouring hate criminals and violent elements. (i.e. current democratic order maintained, but only with vigilance and sustained preventative strategies).
2. A slow rightward societal drift occurs and entrenchment into an illiberal democracy, relying on determined Alt-Right candidates, weak mainstream candidates, and populist Alt-Right voters. (i.e. elected autocracy, as in e.g. Hungary). Robust preventative strategies required.
3. Takeover of current democratic parties, institutions, and government by Alt-Right activists and supporters, using stealth infiltration and 'entry-ist' techniques, relying on inertia, complacency, or intimidation of mainstream parties. (i.e. coup by stealth, followed by pseudo-democracy or dictatorship). Robust preventative and response strategies required.

The other two scenarios identified in chapter 13 (i.e. involving either, crisis and opportunistic coup leading to pseudo-democracy or dictatorship, or planned armed coup followed by dictatorship) also require appropriate preventive and protective strategies. However, the latter fall primarily within the area of national security, and therefore hopefully state intelligence and security services are best able to monitor dissidents and terrorists and thwart coup attempts. Attempts by a book such as this to offer substantive advice on national security would be unrealistic. Nevertheless, whatever may be done to combat scenarios 1–3 might also assist in dampening down the precursors to, and limiting the receptive environment for, more extreme scenarios.

With the above scope in mind, the authors suggest preventative strategies in the following categories, which are not in any order and which need to be combined:

- Legislative, law enforcement, and judicial strategies
- Internet, social media, and related strategies
- Educational strategies
- Political and economic strategies
- Grassroots and mass actions

These categories match in part the four domestic responder categories identified by Kaltwasser (2017) for dealing with populist threats, to which she also added four external actor categories (foreign governments, supra-national institutions, transnational civil society actors, and international federations of political parties). It should be noted that the authors' five categories cover generic precursors to risk reduction and control, and not necessarily solutions for every specific risk identified in chapter 12 and earlier chapters. These latter risks will require more particular responses.

### **Legislative, Law Enforcement, and Judicial Strategies to Combat the Alt-Right Threat**

Historical evidence shows that legislation, policing, and the criminal justice system, even in combination, are never likely to be able to deter, control, or modify egregious human behaviour to the extent desired. Nevertheless, such formal systems are essential in order to prevent anarchy, maintain law and order, and ensure public safety among other things (ECHR 1953). Moreover, such systems are also necessary to define and prescribe the envelope of societal acceptability, proscribe behaviours that are unacceptable, and determine punishments for offenders.

Nevertheless, it is arguable that one of the cynical weapons used by the Alt-Right, both against their opponents and as propaganda for public consumption, is to twist the precepts of democracy into arguments for societal and lawful acceptability of Alt-Right ideology, rhetoric, and actions. For example, the human right of freedom of speech, as enshrined in the constitutions of many countries, is manipulated by the Alt-Right to justify its exponents making speeches, issuing public rants, issuing inflammatory leaflets and posters, and sending letters, e-mails, text and social media messages, that are suffused with blatantly racist and/or religious hatred, including threats of or incitement to violence—see examples in chapter 6 in Vol 2. There seems to be little recognition among the Alt-Right that freedom of speech, as with other freedoms, has never been absolute and is conditional upon legal constraints aimed at protection of the public good. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR 1953), Article 10, identified the limitations to freedom of expression as encompassing instances that threaten the following:

- National security
- Protection of territorial integrity
- Public safety
- Prevention of disorder or crime
- Protection of health and morals
- Reputation or rights of others
- Laws against harassment, or incitement to crime, or libel and slander
- Disclosure of confidential information
- Maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary

One of the earliest pieces of legislation seeking to limit freedom of expression that would otherwise threaten sections of society was Section 24 of the 1881 French press freedom law (FPL 1881), which proscribed incitement to racial discrimination, hatred, or violence on the basis of one's origin or membership/non-membership of an ethnic, national, racial, or religious group. This section is now absorbed into Article 13-1 of the 1990 law of the same name. After the European Convention (ECHR 1953), the UN International Convention (UN 1965) sought to outlaw hate speech and criminalize the membership of racist organizations. Further national laws followed e.g. the UK Public Order Act 1986 made it a criminal offence to "stir up racial hatred" using threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behaviour or written material, and the Malicious Communications Act 1988 (S1) and the Communications Act 2003 (S127) added more specific offences (CSC 2017). The UK Human Rights Act 1998 enshrined the European Convention in British law, and has since been amended to include hate crimes based on religion. The UK Criminal Justice Act 2003 also made sentencing 'uplift' provisions for some hate crimes. Although many states had already done so, the EU Framework Decision of 2008 (EU 2008) sought to require all EU Member States to criminalize hate speech and hate crime motivated by racism and xenophobia.

Similar developments have occurred in the US, the first being the 1968 Federal Hate Crimes Statute (USDoJ 2018). This was followed by the Patriot Act 2001 (S. 802), the Hate Crimes Prevention Act 2009 (the so-called Shepard and Byrne Act), as well as other statutes that also contain anti-discrimination and hate crime provisions.

Nevertheless, despite such a welter of legislation, there have been concerns by some (e.g. Walters 2017; Walters et al 2017) that



either it does not go far enough, thereby leaving vulnerable groups unprotected, or the legislation does not work effectively enough. There are also counter-arguments that, no matter how repulsive, inflammatory, and dangerous some speech may be, it has a right to be made as a fundamental human right of free expression. This debate, and the limitations of an unfettered purist interpretation of ‘freedom of speech’, was examined at length in EHRC (2015). Overall, a purist interpretation of free expression has been widely rejected. Moreover, as bit by bit hate crimes are becoming more precisely defined and proscribed in legislation, the exclusion of hate crimes from free expression has become clearer and unequivocal.

Copsey et al (2013) noted that overall hate crime instances were of low-level verbal abuse and harassment, with less than 10% involving extreme violence. Notably, 74% of incidents reported to Tell MAMA (<https://tellmamauk.org>) in the UK related to on-line abuse and threats (Internet, social media, text messages). Rather than by organised far-right groups, reported hate crimes were committed mainly by sympathisers-at-large, characterized by their “ordinariness”, on an opportunistic or spontaneous basis. However, as EHRC (2015) discussed in detail, there are perennial problems which combine to make successful prosecutions in this subject area difficult to secure, especially with low-level hate crime.

Greater success has been achieved in the UK in cases where prominent members of far-right groups, typically at political rallies, protest marches, or contrived confrontations, have made flagrantly racist and/or anti-Muslim public statements that were likely to inflame tensions and provoke violence. Examples include a string of criminal convictions of the leader of Britain First, Paul Golding and his Deputy Jayda Fransen, for offences relating to hate speeches, harassment, using threatening or abusive language, breaches of court orders, and wearing a political uniform (D’Arcy 2017; Ferguson 2017; Gibbons 2018b; Hopkins, 2016; Paterson 2017; York 2016) and several further prosecutions were in process in 2018. See Taylor-Graham, chapter 4 in Vol 2. Despite such antecedents, President Trump had no qualms in retweeting flagrant Britain First racist and anti-Muslim propaganda (Dearden 2017). Members of other UK far-right groups such as EDL have a similar track record of arrests and convictions and, like Britain First, have established relationships with similar groups in the US and other countries (e.g. Lusher 2017).

Success has also been achieved in arresting and prosecuting far-right terrorists. These include members and alleged members of the proscribed far-right terrorist group National Action (NA). In 2017 and 2018, there were several waves of arrests and prosecutions of alleged members variously charged with NA membership, the commission, preparation, and instigation of acts of terrorism, and several were also charged with plotting to murder the Home Secretary, a Labour MP, and a police officer (Hamilton 2018; Hamilton and Gardham 2018). The various trials arising had not concluded before publication of this book.

In Kaltwasser's (2017) terms, proscription as a repressive response may to some extent aid the self-image of extremists and their supporters. Nevertheless, government's over-riding duty to protect the safety of the public against extremist threats is likely to take precedence.

The relative success of intelligence-led action by the police and security services in preventing acts of terror by far-right groups has not been matched by the ability to prevent lone-actor terrorists carrying out atrocities. A considerable number of the latter have been recorded in the US in recent years (*Al Jazeera* 2017), including the alleged verbal and physical abuse of two Muslim girls on a train by a known far-right supporter Jeremy Christian, and his alleged murder of two men and attempted murder of the third man who attempted to intervene to protect them. His court case is scheduled for June 2019.

Individual members of the US neo-Nazi paramilitary group Atomwaffen Division (AWD) have been charged variously (e.g. Samuel Woodward and Devon Arthurs) in 2018 for lone-actor murders, while AWD member Brandon Russell has been charged with terrorist offences (see chapter 10 in Vol 2).

Two prominent cases in the UK are the murder of Jo Cox MP by Thomas Mair in June 2016 (see details in chapter 5 of Vol 2), who was sentenced to life imprisonment, and the murder of Makram Ali and the attempted murders of nine others outside Finsbury Park Mosque on June 19, 2017, caused by Darren Osborne deliberately driving a van at speed at worshippers leaving the mosque. He was convicted in February 2018 and sentenced to two concurrent life sentences with a minimum of 43 years to be served (Rawlinson 2018). However, the UK police were able to apprehend and convict the neo-Nazi white supremacist Ethan Stables, a young 'drop-out' who was on his way to attempt

a planned machete slaughter of as many attendees as possible at an LGBT event in June 2017 (Swerling 2018a). Like Mair and Osborne, Stables had spent many months researching far-right websites on how to obtain or make firearms and explosives, and had amassed a stash of weapons, including knives, a machete and an axe, and bomb-making paraphernalia (Swerling 2018b).

The influence of far-right propaganda on Mair, Osborne, and Stables was also prevalent in the case of Anders Breivik, the notorious Norwegian far-right extremist who, on July 22, 2011, carried out the lone-actor terrorist bombing in Oslo which killed 8 people, and then went on to massacre 69 children and young people at a youth camp on Utøya island (see chapter 10 in Vol 2). Of course, not all mass killings are far-right motivated or indeed politically motivated, but a high proportion have been far-right inspired (ADL 2018; Freilich et al 2014).

From the small number of lone-actor terrorism cases, it is not possible to readily identify an obvious way to prevent such outrages. As Jackson notes in chapter 5 in Vol 2, prevention of this category of far-right terrorism points towards using a variety of existing professionals to better notice early signs of depression, mental disturbance, social isolation, blaming others, and anti-social or extremist rhetoric and behaviour in the individual patients and clients they deal with. This may result in better and earlier identification of potential 'risk' individuals, but on its own it may not ensure that appropriate public safety actions then follow. Therefore, beyond Jackson's suggested approach, is there also a case for a statutory notification of such suspicions to an appropriate authority for clear action? But what might that action to prevent terrorist acts comprise? For example, compulsory psychiatric evaluation and treatment, at best might only deal with a third of the cases, since roughly two thirds do not appear to suffer from mental health issues. Moreover, such a controversial move would require legislation, not to mention rigorous ethical procedures and doubtless considerable debate on the moral, ethical, medical, political, and legal issues arising. More work is required on developing appropriate practical strategies for preventing this kind of terrorism.

In addition, as noted above, evidence suggests that lone actor terrorists are typically influenced, if not provoked, by extremist images and propaganda they receive from far-right organizations, especially on-line via the Internet and social media. Such influence flows

not only from generalised, anonymous narratives and imagery but crucially also involves the demagoguery of named far-right ideologues—the far-right leaders whose poisonous invective provides individual personalities vulnerable to radicalisation both a cause to rally to and a justification for violence in the name of that cause. Such remote ‘heroes’ may cleverly avoid any outright exhortation to violence and instead rely on ambiguous ‘dog-whistle’ messages, innuendo, and suggestive hints, presumably in the hope that recipients will understand the sub-text and act on it. The next section addresses the specific issue of such provocative agencies and intermediaries, from legal, practical, and politico-cultural perspectives.

### **Internet, Social Media, and Related Strategies**

Nagle (2017, 120), concentrating on the spread and effects of social media, ended her book on a gloomy note, seeing no “easy way out of the mess that has been created”. Others have been less pessimistic. The first kind of suggestion for action concerns regulation of the new media that have clearly contributed greatly to the rise of the Alt-Right. *The Economist* (2017) suggested firstly that social media companies could be held accountable, as newspaper publishers are, for the material they disseminate. Libel and ownership laws could be extended and deployed. Secondly, such companies could be required to make clear whether a post comes from a friend or trusted source; and thirdly, reminders could be displayed warning of the harm caused by misinformation. Howard and Kolanyi (2017) made similar, quite specific, recommendations: although Facebook and *Twitter* do not generate fake news, they should be held responsible for serving misinformation to voters, and helped to do better. This could be achieved without interfering with free speech in the United States, for instance by using the Uniform Commercial Code to make both advertisers and social media companies adhere to basic anti-spam and truth-in-advertising rules. Paid political content should come with clear disclosures, and information on this should be filed with election authorities. Social media are now so pervasive, powerful, and full of misinformation (often stoking confirmation biases) that the success of democracy requires urgent legislative action by governments to strengthen regulation of them. It will be essential that the sanctions contained within

this legislation take account of the enormous wealth of the social media companies.

Therefore, is there a case for making those who in any way create, broadcast, disseminate, or publish far-right hate material (or indeed any hate material), liable for prosecution for this specific criminal offence? So far, when challenged by governments on this issue, Internet providers, search engine operators, and social media providers have claimed that they have no direct involvement in, or responsibility for, the content created by information providers and users, as they are not publishers but merely electronic communications facilitators. This claim to be entirely innocent and uninvolved has striking similarities to the *mens rea* legal defence once used by business owners and directors to avoid liability for corporate manslaughter. For example, in the event of a person being killed while at work, prosecution of an organization deemed responsible indirectly, by virtue of policy or managerial decisions, would nearly always fail because the prosecuting authority could not prove that any individual director knew or foresaw such a consequence. In Britain, the *mens rea* defence was removed by the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007, whereby the organization itself and individual senior executives are guilty of the offence if the way in which it was managed or organized by senior management led to a death (MoJ 2008; CPS 2018). A number of companies and directors have been successfully prosecuted under this Act and sentences have included jail terms, fines thus far in the range £385,000-£600,000, and compulsory 'name and shame' publicity orders (see e.g. Chan 2011). Although there is no upper limit to fines under this Act, sentencing guidelines suggest £20m for larger firms in view of their turnover and assets (SC 2016).

Many countries have been increasingly concerned at the reluctance of Internet providers, search engine operators, and social media providers to ban extremist content (e.g. Gibbs 2017). Thus far, although there have been some attempts to self-regulate, the evidence suggests that these have been superficial, slow, and ineffective. If this failure to self-regulate continues, despite pressure from governments, perhaps the only way to force such companies to behave responsibly is to legislate robustly against them (e.g. Griffin 2017). For example, a Prevention of Hate Crime and Terrorism (Internet Provider and Social Media) Act could compel companies to ban extreme content or else be

deemed guilty of aiding and abetting hate crime and/or terrorism. Using the corporate manslaughter legislation as an analogue guide, a *mens rea* defence would have to be removed, and individual senior executives deemed to be responsible would be made liable as well as the body corporate. As with corporate manslaughter, punishments for those convicted would need to be commensurate with both the gravity of the crime and their financial strength and assets. In view of the annual turnover of such companies being typically tens of billions of US\$ (e.g. for 2016, *Google's* revenue totalled US\$89.5bn, and *Facebook's* was US\$27.64bn—<https://www.statista.com>), fines would need to be proportionately large. Jail sentences for convicted individuals would also need to reflect the gravity and extent of the offence, as well as the person's attitude e.g. repeat offender, lack of remorse. The use of international arrest warrants may become necessary, if offenders seek to evade jurisdiction. There may even be a case for a compulsory public register of offenders, similar to that employed in various countries for serious sex offenders, whereby registration may be for a fixed number of years or for life.

The continuing failure of such companies to effectively curb extreme content led to the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, telling world leaders at the 2018 World Economic Forum (January 2018) that these companies must do much more, and that “No one wants to be known as the terrorists’ platform or the first-choice app for paedophiles” (Coates and Blakely 2018). She added that, if necessary, their major investors should force them: “Investors can play a vital role by considering the social impact of the companies they are investing in. They can use their influence to ensure these issues are taken seriously”. There was an implication that if self-regulation continued to fail, then legislation would be inevitable and damaged investors would have only themselves to blame for failing to act. In February 2018, the chief marketing officer of the Unilever group, which spends over US\$9 billion annually on marketing, of which one third is on digital advertising, threatened to withdraw its advertising from digital media companies unless they ceased distributing extremist, offensive, and illegal content (Gibbons 2018a).

In addition to the misuse of electronic communications to disseminate hate, the use of a vast set of *Facebook* data without participants' consent and seeking to manipulate voting intentions, revealed

in early 2018 and described in chapter 11, is a further and glaring illustration of the need for tighter regulation.

Thus, closing the “justice gap” probably needs to go much further globally than the scoping issues for hate crime identified by Walters (2017) and Walters et al (2017) in relation to the UK, and address the powerful commercial interests that control the vectors of hate dissemination known to potentiate radicalisation and extremist violence (of any kind: far-right, far-left, ISIS or whatever).

## **Educational Strategies to Combat the Alt-Right Threat**

Common sense suggests that education ought to be a prominent component within any overall strategy to combat any form of pathological or extreme ideology, whether left-wing, right-wing, religion-based, or whatever character. See, for example, DARE (2017), OSCE (2011), and several speakers in PCPRCI (2012). Kaltwasser (2017) also suggested education as a long-term accommodative response to populist forces. One of the common findings of PCPRCI (2012, 9) relating to Europe was that “The reason why the youth is in most cases more receptive to the ideas of the radical right is the lack of systemic education of democratic norms and values in schools, as well as the lack of fostering a debating culture in primary schools, high schools and universities alike (especially in Eastern Europe)”. Education would be anticipated to provide models of attitudes and behaviour that are not only socially acceptable and law-abiding but also safer and more respectful of others. As Neiwert (2017) noted, loss of respectful engagement is a characteristic of the Alt-Right era.

However, ‘education’ to counter extremism would need to target not only school children up to age 18 but also many other identifiable categories likely to be vulnerable to adoption of pathological or extremist ideas, e.g. non-school students, long-term unemployed, the low paid, the socially isolated, those having personality or mental disorders, those with grievances, and especially those who fall into several of these categories. With such a range of different targets, it is likely that preventive educational needs, objectives, and methods would also vary.

At school level, Davies (2008) argued that formal education alone does little to prevent people from joining extremist groups, nor does it equip young people with skills needed to identify and analyse

extremism. Like PCPRCI (2012), she argued that much more than descriptive literacy about such threats is needed, and that young people need to be taught how to think critically and constructively about human rights and societal, social, and political issues and how to apply such skills outside of school. In a way, it was a call in part for a modernised and expanded version of the Civics classes that were widespread in British schools in the 1960s. In Britain, the government's Prevent strategy for schools introduced under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 placed a duty on schools and childcare providers to, among other things, build children's resilience to radicalisation: "...schools can build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by providing a safe environment for debating controversial issues and helping them to understand how they can influence and participate in decision-making. Schools are already expected to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and, within this, fundamental British values" (Prevent 2015, 8–9). The Department of Education also supplies schools and childcare centres with standard guidance and practical resource packs on the Prevent duties.

Surprisingly, an intensive web search, including the US Department of Homeland Security (<https://www.dhs.gov>), failed to identify any strategy, program, or instruments in the US remotely comparable to the Prevent strategy. Although isolated references were evident on suspicious activity reporting and how to craft 'after the event' responses e.g. school crisis plans, there appeared to be no national program for providing pupils with a safe environment for debating controversial issues and helping them to understand why and how radicalisation arises and how to *prevent* it. However, following the gun massacre at the Parkland high school, Florida, in February 2018, it was reported that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had decided to produce guidance for schools (Mitchell 2018), although the details remain unclear and as at May 2018 no announcement or documentation on this was evident on the DHS website. At face value, the implication is that a more robust and comprehensive education-and-community program prevention of radicalisation is warranted.

Nevertheless, as Davies (2008) noted, any such educational efforts in relation to schools need constantly to keep abreast of the fast-moving extra-curricular global communications technologies (e.g. Internet, social media), a theme identified earlier by UNESCO (2003,



clause 17), in its nine priorities for the development of new educational approaches and teaching materials to combat intolerance and extremism.

The development among school children of constructively critical analytical skills advocated by Davies raises a parallel concern about university students. However, in recent years, the problem has been much less to do with such students becoming far-right enthusiasts (although a minority appear to have been), and much more to do with a growing tendency to protest and demand that university lecturers must not include any content in their lectures that these so-called 'snowflake' students consider objectionable, and that university authorities should ban lecturers or speakers whose intellectual views they do not like. Numerous press articles, on both sides of the Atlantic, attest to the level of concern, e.g. Burden (2018); Collins (2017), Fox (2016), Heller (2016), Sullivan (2018), and Turner (2017). In the polarised yah-boo 'snowflake' setting in universities, what emerges is not uplifting (Barber 2017; Turner 2017).

Turner (2017) reported that the Universities Minister in Britain now required universities to uphold free speech on campus or face being blacklisted, fined, suspended, or ultimately deregistered by OFS. Thus, combatting pathological or extreme ideologies at university level has become complicated by a battle of contradictory certitudes that seeks not to inform, enlighten, engage, and persuade by strength of facts and argument, but to bully, banish, and expunge with the weight of self-absorbed ignorance. For the time being, it would seem that success for an educational strategy at this level against far-right extremism will remain muted.

While UK educational strategies to prevent extremism, such as Prevent (2015) and Davies (2008), may be working at school and community levels and, according to Lambert (2017), at non-university further education level, it would be optimistic to expect large numbers of committed Alt-Right and far- and extreme-right adults in the population at large to convert into moderates as result of educational efforts. As Johnson (2017) observed on US strategies against the far-right, "We sometimes assume that education works such that if people know better, they will do better. We ask, 'How can we train people out of this?' We are missing so much because our strategies have been limited". Some adults may respond to education, and some may even undergo a dramatic conversion and then work tirelessly to

counter far-right extremism (e.g. Small Steps 2018). While necessary and to be encouraged, such educational efforts are unlikely to persuade the majority of hard-core far-right activists to recant, de-radi- calize, and convert to moderate attitudes and behaviour. For these, perhaps realistically only a combination of containment and punish- ment is possible.

## **Political and Economic Strategies to Combat the Alt-Right Threat**

The strategies considered in this section are those that could be adopted by mainstream and moderate politicians. Grassroots political strategies, mass political opposition and similar actions are discussed in a later section. In pursuit of the objectives set out at the start of this chapter, this section is concerned with three time scales:

- What can be done immediately.
- From a US perspective, what is needed in the short to me- dium term to (among other things) prevent Trump's re- election in 2020 (and the consequent further institutional solidification of the Alt-Right).
- What can be done to arrest the longer term rightward shift globally, of which the US Alt-Right and Trump are currently prominent indicators.

### **Tackling the Alt-Right Overall**

By analogy with economics, factors contributing to the rise of the extreme right (and which also can be targeted to counter it) may be cat- egorised as supply-side or demand-side (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). The supply-side comprises what is provided or offered to the electorate: that is, the populist leader or leaders, and the messages and promises made. The demand-side constitutes the characteristics and circumstances of the electorate that lead them to find these mes- sages relatively appealing. Mudde and Kaltwasser identified four sec- tors within the institutions of mainstream politics that are able to challenge the supply side of extreme-right politics: (1) mainstream politicians, (2) institutions dedicated to protecting fundamental rights, (3) news media, and (4) supranational institutions. Politicians and influential people and organizations in other countries should be

added as a fifth category. This section concentrates on political institutions, but inevitably touches on all the above institutions, which are addressed in other sections. It is logical to begin with the demand side, to review the concerns and characteristics of the people that politicians need to address with the messages and policies they supply.

There is a broad consensus that economic inequality is a main contributor to the rise of the far-right. Vast amounts of evidence, presented by Piketty (2014), Stiglitz (2013), and others, demonstrate this strong association and make the case for policies of investment, stimulation and growth, and more progressive tax structures, in place of long-term austerity. These findings are supported and extended by Wilkinson and Pickett's (2010) similarly huge international data set showing a strong relationship between economic inequality on the one hand, and various measures of mental and physical health, personal and social wellbeing, and (most relevant here) trust, social cohesion, and political stability, on the other. A second factor, closely related and also widely commented on, is the sense of alienation from mainstream politics and politicians, and being left behind, culturally as well as economically. As Kaltwasser (2017, 500) said, "Many citizens are angry at the establishment and feel betrayed by mainstream political forces". The effect has been described as "a crisis of political legitimacy" (Hawkins et al. 2017), and its importance in fuelling the rise of populism around the world has been widely noted. The point was demonstrated vividly in chapter 3 by Hochschild's (2016) research in rust-belt America where people reported feeling like 'strangers in their own land'. A third, and also related factor, is the vast political gulf in American society, from the government down. When politicians can barely agree on anything, including a budget, it is not surprising that many people completely reject those on the other side of the political fence, believing that they have nothing in common and nothing to say. Linked to this is a fourth point that is a main part of the reasons for this rejection; the huge gap in values and moral concerns that divides Americans. Fifth, there is no doubt, as previous chapters have shown, that public life has been morally degraded by the culture of fake news and post-truth. There is also the deeper problem, touched on in chapter 11, labelled by political philosopher Michael Sandel (2013, 13) as "the moral vacancy of contemporary politics", and related to what he called 'market triumphalism'—the belief that all of our interactions can be governed by market mechanisms. These

are the themes, emerging from earlier chapters, to which politicians need to respond.

Moving to the supply side, it is clear at the outset that in the US the Republican Party during the Trump administration has had much greater power than the Democrats to deal with all of these five demand themes and thus limit the Alt-Right threat. Not only have the Republicans had a monopoly of power in government, but also membership of the Alt-Right overlaps with that of the Republican Party. It is clear also that Trump, the Alt-Right figurehead, was able to retain power both in the short and longer term, not just because he retained grassroots support, but also because he has had the continuing support of most of the Republican Party establishment. Around the world, despite occasional instances of mainstream political parties forming alliances with the far-right in order to moderate their actions, by far the most common strategy has been to refuse alliances and directly attack them (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Examples are the response of all British parties, including the Conservatives, to such far-right parties as British National Party, and the Belgian cordon sanitaire around the far-right VB (Vlaams Belang), with refusal of any collaboration.

Similarly, as discussed in chapter 9 in Vol 2, the Dutch mainstream parties rejected any collaboration or collusion with the populist PVV and far-right parties. However, applying the ‘poldering’ concept (Bruning 2016), the mainstream parties instead chose to absorb the Alt-Right ideas of such parties and present them as their own, arguably as a cynical attempt to appease and attract populist voters. Thus, noble attempts at engagement with and inclusion of Alt-Right opponents in mainstream political processes may unintentionally result in a rightward shift of mainstream parties’ centre of political gravity—not what these parties really want but exactly what the Alt-Right parties want as a stepping stone to a more permanent far-right governance. Clearly, great care and caution are required in any attempts to attenuate radical-right parties by engagement and inclusion.

### **Tackling the US Alt-Right**

In America, however, mainstream Republicans (both politicians and supporters) have chosen overwhelmingly to collude with the Alt-Right, as represented by the Trump administration. Republican politicians—including Senators Bob Corker, Ted Cruz, Lyndsey Graham,

Rand Paul, and Marco Rubio—who earlier opposed Trump’s presidential nomination and criticized him, but then joined his administration, or just stopped criticizing, may have been seeking to moderate his views and actions. Alternatively, of course, they may have been less principled, simply seizing the opportunity to gain or retain power. This second interpretation is more plausible. With few dissenters, the Republican Party stood by as Trump repeatedly displayed bigotry, ignorance and contempt for science, facts, and the compromises required for democracy to function.

Support for Trump is robust. Coppins and Godfrey (2017) investigated Republican Party support for him, focusing on his statements after the violence and killing at the Charlottesville rally in August 2017 and, in particular, his failure for four days to voice any condemnation of the violent white supremacists, and then to do so only in the most reluctant and insincere manner. They asked 146 Republican state party Chairs and National Committee members two questions: whether they were satisfied with the President’s response, and whether they approved of his comment that there were “some very fine people” who marched alongside the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis. Only seven of the 146 expressed any criticism or disagreement. Chapter 3 showed how the party has moved over several decades to a position of extreme nationalism, but even so, other chapters have also shown that the recent rise of the Alt-Right and the Trump presidency represented a step change. As Republican politicians turned a blind eye to Trump’s repeated assaults on truth, tradition and morality, they placed the short-term success of their party and their own political careers before the values espoused in the American Constitution, and before military and climate security. As Freedland (2017) said, Trump is the face and voice of a deeper Republican malaise that has been evident for several decades, as described in chapter 3.

It seems unlikely, therefore, that Republican politicians and mainstream Republican supporters will rediscover the party’s deepest values and oppose Trump and the Alt-Right. However, there is still the remote possibility that, if things in the Trump White House worsened further, mainstream Republican politicians might decide that enough is enough. A number of potential breaking points emerge. First, Trump might adopt a more reckless and aggressive stance, perhaps towards North Korea or Iran, leading to military action, or the imminent threat of it. Second, Trump might go beyond his previous

history of derogatory remarks about judges who hand down decisions that are inconvenient for him, and interfere actively in the judicial process. This would be a direct assault on American democracy and the rule of law. Third, if extreme weather events and the resultant damage continue or worsen, and as more and more scientific evidence of human-induced climate change accumulates, it might become impossible to avoid facing the devastating and complex consequences of climate change denial. Fourth, if the President showed further and more explicit support for white supremacists and other anti-democratic movements, the resulting widening divisions and the risk of civil unrest would become inescapable. Fifth, although Robert Mueller's investigation into alleged collusion between the Trump team and high level Russian actors aiming to influence the outcome of the 2016 presidential election had not concluded at the time of writing, its findings might expose Trump and close associates to charges of unconstitutional or illegal conduct. The response of Trump and his supporters to such an outcome is unpredictable, but clearly any attempts to evade due legal process would likely meet powerful opposition. According to Cohen (2018), the institutions of government on which the President depends are demoralized by his behaviour rather than being swayed to support him. These institutions are unlikely to crumble or give way easily under pressure from the President. However, none of these potential breakpoints can be relied upon. Other political strategies must be considered.

For now, by far the most likely source of opposition to Trump and the Alt-Right is the Democratic Party. Supply-side strategies by them would need to address the demand factors summarised, aiming first to challenge the messages blaming the establishment, previous governments, immigrants and black people for economic decline and cultural changes. Second, they would need to tackle the enormous influence of Donald Trump, whose charisma, plain speaking and ability to empathize with ordinary people, have clearly magnified the impact of these messages. Making such challenges effective is enormously difficult, and a different approach is needed from the one led by Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential contest. A different message and a different messenger, both of which are able to engage with Republican supporters, would be essential components of a successful challenge. The Democratic party has been concerned rightly with possible illegal

interference with the 2016 Presidential election, but perhaps insufficiently concerned to examine what the party itself might have got wrong (Lears 2018), and what it needs to do differently to strengthen resistance to Trump and the Alt-Right, both in the immediate term and in order to win the 2020 election. Four areas for action emerge that will last beyond the contemporary Trump era.

First, learning not only from Trump's success but also from the growing world-wide worries about the negative consequences of economic globalization and neo-liberalism, there is an urgent need for the party to review its economic policies. A longer-term economic strategy is needed that is optimistic but realistic and which, unlike Trump's, would lift people in the economic middle and bottom, as well as achieving growth, and with fairer tax structures. The Democrats may need to proclaim policies centred on longer term investment, especially in rust-belt areas suffering from industrial decline which makes them responsive to Trump's promises to make America great again. Such policies would provide economic security and would be fairer and thus contribute to repairing social divisions and distress. It will be essential to explain how this approach will yield lasting and widespread gains, in contrast to Trump's support for such twilight industries as coal mining, the economic benefits of which inevitably will be short-term and will also exacerbate climate change.

Second, the Democratic Party's campaigning style and the style of its candidates would need to counter the perceived remoteness of mainstream politicians. Both the messenger and the message are central to Trump's continuing popularity. There are lessons here also from the Brexit campaign in Britain. The Remain campaign concentrated on predicted economic damage from Brexit, but the crucial factors favouring the Leave side seem to have been less tangible, more basic, and emotional: freedom for Britain to make its own decisions and close its borders rather than obeying European Union bureaucrats, even if Britons are worse off as a result. Defeating the radical right in Europe and America requires energetic use of the range of media, and more attention to emotions and values as well as economic facts and promises.

Next, emotional and moral divisions need to be overcome, especially in America. Opposition politicians should take more account of the values of people likely to be attracted to the Alt-Right. Haidt's (2012) research, discussed in chapters 2 and 3, revealed that the value

sets of Americans on the political left and right are so different that they hardly overlap, and the result is little mutual understanding or respect, let alone room for agreement. Mainstream politicians on both the left and the right need to acknowledge and respect the importance of individual freedom, nationalism, loyalty, and authority to very many people. These are the values that are distorted and used to draw people into the Alt-Right. In a similar vein, considering possible actions by other politically concerned people, as well as politicians, Neiwert (2017) and other writers reviewed in the Grassroots section below saw a great need for closer connection with the concerns of blue collar Trump supporters. These approaches aimed at bridging the political and social divide are all much needed for several purposes—to challenge the rise of the Alt-Right in the immediate term, as part of a strategy for the next election, and, in the longer term, beyond electoral politics to rebuild social harmony.

Lastly, there are the problems of the erosion of moral standards in public life. There is a clear need not just to show understanding of such right wing values as loyalty and authority, but also to promote and display other shared values that are threatened but perhaps hidden rather than destroyed by the post-truth culture. Politicians and other opinion leaders could, and arguably should, do more to counteract the slide of public morals that has been visible alongside and within this culture. Doing so requires the perhaps optimistic assumption that most people, of almost all political shades, share the belief that truth is better than lies, and share a desire to do what is right, rather than what just benefits them. These values are easily drowned out by the loud public voices of selfishness and political convenience, but they could begin to be revived if mainstream politicians took pains to demonstrate honesty, consistency, transparency and concern for others in both actions and words.

Turning from political institutions, Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2017) second sector is institutions whose function is the protection of fundamental rights. The most powerful of these in America is the Supreme Court. Its independence was demonstrated when it struck down Trump's travel ban on people from six Muslim-majority countries (although in December 2017 it allowed a revised version of the ban to be imposed until multiple legal challenges were resolved in June 2018). Its independence is not assured, however (see chapter



10). New nominations have to be approved by the Senate, and this approval process was handled differently in 2016, following the sudden death of a Supreme Court judge. For the first time, the Republican-dominated Senate refused even to grant Obama's nomination a hearing. As discussed in chapter 11, for liberal democracy to function requires the acceptance of norms and conventions as well as compliance with legal necessities. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) saw this erosion of state institutional norms, such as the treatment of Obama's Supreme Court nominee, as the greatest threat to American democracy and mainstream politics.

The third sector is the news media, whose importance in the rise of Trump and the Alt-Right has been widely discussed. Van Donselaar (2003), reviewing European responses to the radical right, suggested influencing public opinion through education as an effective method, but with the news media in America and widely elsewhere firmly controlled by the political right, this is difficult. Political strategies to limit the Alt-Right threat therefore must pay close attention to the media. The survival of democracy requires governments to legislate to ensure politically diverse news media in the face of the continual advance of *Fox News* and other right-wing sources. Such interventions are discussed in detail in earlier sections of this chapter.

The fourth sector, supranational organisations, such as the European Union (EU), the Organization of American States, and the United Nations, can bring moral pressure, retaining and displaying the values of internationalism and mutual aid which Trump and the Alt-Right reject with their America-first approach. It might be argued that moral pressure is unlikely to have any effect, precisely because it is this moral stance that is being rejected. At the very least, however, these supranational organizations should ensure that they do not follow the new American path or show active support for it. Maintaining their existing principles will also provide a message of hope and encouragement to the American opposition to the Alt-Right. The same considerations apply to politicians and other leaders outside America.

This section concludes with only guarded optimism. The greatest potential to counter US Alt-Right risks rests with the Republican Party, but so far this Party has overwhelmingly colluded with them, and ordinary Republican voters are largely untroubled by Trump and his support for the Alt-Right. The possibility of change in the Republican Party remains nevertheless. For the Democratic Party opposition,

much evidence is available on the reasons for the rise of Trump and the Alt-Right, and for their Party's failure in the 2016 election. There is much they could do to improve their standing in opposition and in preparation for the next Presidential election and beyond.

## Grassroots and Mass Action Strategies

Although the nature and causes of populism is the subject of much recent research, as Kaltwasser (2017) remarked, there is little research on how to respond to them. History may be instructive though. In the case of grassroots actions in relation to extremist right wing political movements, twentieth century history contains powerful and glaring object lessons. The importance of mass support in the rise of radical right political leaders is illustrated by the familiar but still striking newsreels of the adulation of Hitler and Mussolini, and it is unlikely that the adulation was all based on fear. There is a pressing need to learn, firstly because of the similarities, noted by Neiwert (2017) and others, between Trump's style and rise and those of familiar right-wing demagogues. Like twentieth century (and contemporary) demagogues, Trump retains strong core support in the face of repeated inconsistencies and demonstrated falsehoods. A survey (Blakely 2018) found that nine out of ten Republican voters believed Trump's first year a success, and four out of ten called it "a major success". In addition, the current rise of the far-right internationally, along with the changing geopolitical power balance, signals a troubled and uncertain historical period. We need to learn everything possible to deal with these threats.

Grassroots and mass actions refer here to what ordinary people rather than politicians and decision makers can do. Timothy Snyder (2017, 9) summarised how history can help: "History does not repeat, but it does instruct". Snyder drew twenty lessons from the politics of the twentieth century to guide actions against what he saw as a serious current threat of tyranny. The central idea, emphasised concisely by Stephan and Snyder (2017), is that tyrants' tactics, and the road to tyranny, require the consent of large numbers of people e.g. contemporary Russia. Conversely, and most importantly here, it should be possible for tyranny to be thwarted by grassroots movements and mass withholding of consent. The first lesson therefore is: don't obey in advance. This means taking stock of existing values and the existing

sense of patriotism rather than unthinkingly accepting new standards and new interpretations of patriotism. Hitler's rise was made easier, for instance, by 'anticipatory obedience' on the part of ordinary Austrians even before the Anschluss (annexation) of Austria. A second main theme in Snyder's often overlapping twenty lessons is personal courage. It often requires bravery to stand up and express a contrary opinion, to display a political poster when your neighbours all disagree, to object to racist or otherwise offensive statements, or to remove offensive material on public display. Courage may be aided by the realisation that if nothing is done, and the Alt-Right threat continues to grow, public life will become much more constrained and so, if opposition is delayed, it will require much more courage later, or will become simply impossible.

Another broad recommendation is civil resistance, and specifically non-violent resistance. There is strong evidence for the effectiveness of non-violent refusal to comply with anti-democratic government actions and new unacceptable norms. In an international study of 323 violent and non-violent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006, Stephan and Chenoweth (2008) found that 53% of the non-violent campaigns succeeded, compared with 26% of those that offered violent resistance. They argued first that non-violence enhances domestic and international legitimacy, and encourages wider participation and therefore greater pressure on the government. Second, when a non-violent rather than violent campaign is met with state violence and repression, the state action tends to backfire, reducing government support both domestically and abroad. A third theme from Snyder is defending institutions. When politicians or news media chip away at the independence of the judiciary, for instance (which Trump repeatedly comes close to, as noted earlier), this must be vigorously opposed. Every encroachment of this kind makes the next one less noticeable and therefore easier to get away with. Fourth, large numbers engaging in civil resistance and attracting the participation of diverse groups can separate authoritarian rulers from such pillars of support as economic elites, government workers and even the armed forces. The involvement of large numbers allows the growth of a virtuous circle, not only in terms of further increasing numbers but also by empowering other groups and influential people who are likely to be invigorated and their voices amplified. Snyder (2017) and Stephan and

Snyder (2017) stressed the need for a longer-term and strategic approach. This means persevering in the face of short-term setbacks, and learning from similar events and experiences elsewhere, noting the huge information resources that are now immediately accessible.

Other points are about uniting in opposition. This involves concerned people channelling their fears, anger, and frustration into constructive action by joining appropriate civil or political groups. Such collective action brings collateral social and psychological gains, as well as being more effective politically. Sennett (2013), for example, reviewed extensive historical and sociological evidence on the benefits of cooperation as opposed to isolation or competition. The most basic kind of constructive, collaborative, grassroots political action is voting, and of course if all the people who are now horrified by Trump as President had voted in the 2016 election, he would have got nowhere near the Presidency. Voting, rightly seen as a civic duty, is a small action with great importance in safeguarding the health of all democracies, beyond the current dangers posed by Trump and the Alt-Right. Uniting also involves collaboration between opposition groups and movements. It is obvious that disunity very often hinders opposition and liberation movements.

The idea of unity links also to the vast and potentially dangerous social and political divide in America. An important suggestion concerning a possible additional cause of this divide was made by Parker (2018), seeking to understand why, in spite of decades-long general shifts in values towards tolerance and social liberalism, anti-democratic beliefs persist in what he called 'the mass public'. Parker suggested, on the basis of current research, that reactionary conservatism is passed from one generation to the next. The lesson he drew is that this effect will diminish with the continuing relative shrinking of the white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian, heterosexual, native-born demographic segment in America. This could take many years, however, and much damage could be done by the Alt-Right in the interim. Another possible lesson is that this tentative finding reinforces the need for engagement with this group. Neiwert (2017) also advised empathy rather than rejection of, or disconnection from, the concerns of blue collar Trump supporters. He argued that it need not be inconsistent or insincere for liberals to pay explicit respect to some central traditional rural values, such as community, common decency and respect for traditions. A related recommendation was made by Mudde and

Kaltwasser (2017)—engaging with populists such as the Alt-Right by taking into account issues raised by them, rather than seeking to ostracize or fully oppose them. One aim of all such approaches would be to undermine the populist depiction of remote comfortable elites. Neiwert (2017, 371) expressed it thus: “If Americans of goodwill—including mainstream conservatives who recognise how their movement has been hijacked by radicals—can learn to start talking to each other again, and maybe even pull a few Alt-Americans out of their abyss along the way, then perhaps we can start to genuinely heal our divisions instead of relegating each other into social oblivion and, maybe eventually, civil war”. Neiwert (2017, 372) went on to advocate “powerful non-defensive communication” as a style of talking to Alt-Right supporters. This involves gathering information, genuinely trying to understand the views expressed, and seeking to make the interaction a dialogue. Lilla (2017), castigating Democrats for their fragmentation into the identity politics of interest groups, urged them to “come down from the pulpit” to mix with Republican supporters. These proposals may all seem unrealistic, and such interactions may be unsuccessful or even counter-productive if handled badly, as van der Valk warned (see chapter 9 in Vol 2), but Neiwert’s worry is evidently that the current situation is so serious and dangerous that all reasonable remedies should be tried.

To conclude this section, history suggests that grassroots and mass actions have great potential, which is often unrealised. Compliance and inaction, and therefore the failure of opposition to the rise of the Alt-Right, are common, and for good reasons, some of which are clear. Resistance requires engagement and empathy with political opponents, and also commitment, courage and organization—often in greater quantities than people are able or prepared to give. However, every person who makes a contribution in these ways makes it easier for others, and more likely that others will follow. Each grassroots effort can therefore be seen as potentially doubled, and so is doubly worthwhile.

## Conclusion

The evidence clearly suggests that the Alt-Right in western liberal democracies is not a movement whose often passionate beliefs are all

benign and who always offer a reasonable, fair, just, and necessary antidote to liberal ideas and mainstream governance. Although the Alt-Right portrays itself as society's saviour, it deviates from and resides outside traditional conservatism which it seeks to subvert. Overall, Alt-Right ideology requires widening of social inequalities, so that Alt-Right protagonists and their 'heroes' (winners/predators) are able to dominate society, government, and the economy and grab the benefits, all at the expense of their enemies (losers/victims) i.e. the vulnerable, the poor, immigrants, minorities, and anyone not sharing an Alt-Right world-view. The Trump presidency has provided one clear example of this, others being the current ruling regimes in Austria and Hungary, and the AfD party in Germany. The more extreme elements of the Alt-Right seek to impose a minority world-view on the majority of the population (just as do the hard-left and IS). Overall, Alt-Right leaders, advocates, and opinion formers seek to subvert, persuade, and as necessary bully, mainstream and populist conservatives to permanently shift their allegiance firmly towards the far-right. The Alt-Right consider any and all means to be permissible in pursuit of their ends, which includes both flagrant and subtle defamation in the form of fake global conspiracy propaganda against Jews and Muslims, a warning eloquently put by Finkelstein (2018). For the far- and extreme-right elements, intimidation, hate crimes and violence are also acceptable tactics. Subversion and manipulation of representative democracy to gain power and influence is a hallmark of the Alt-Right (as it is also of the hard-left).

To combat such a multi-faceted determined threat on the scale posed by the Alt-Right in recent years requires an equally determined and multi-faceted response. There are no panaceas or easy solutions. All of the categories and kinds of defence strategy suggested in this final chapter will be needed and applied in the best combinations identifiable. In this battle of moderation against authoritarianism and extremism, there is no guarantee that success will always result. Inevitably, some initiatives will fail but, overall, the weight of determination and momentum will seek to ensure all the rest succeed. Spielman (2018) called for "muscular liberalism" to combat intolerance. Certainly, in combatting a strident and emboldened Alt-Right, muscular moderation needs to replace the quiet *laissez-faire* tolerance of the moderate majority, lest it be mistaken for acquiescence, weakness and lack of resolve. However, muscular moderation must not be allowed

to descend into a blanket oppressive or repressive intolerance no better than that of the Alt-Right. Nor, in the thirst for votes, should mainstream parties allow engagement and inclusion of the populist Alt-Right to displace moderate policies in favour of harsh or pathological ones.

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# Glossary

## A

**ADL:** Anti-Defamation League, a US-based organization formed in 1913 and dedicated originally to combatting anti-Semitism in the US. Subsequently, ADL broadened its scope to address all forms of hatred and injustice based on religion, ethnicity, nationality, or minority membership.

**AfD:** Alternative für Deutschland, the largest populist Alt-Right party in Germany.

**Alt-Lite:** A notional grouping within the Alt-Right (in the US) that allegedly displays less harsh and more populist characteristics than the far- and extreme-right, as described by the ADL (Anti-Defamation League).

**Alternative-Right (Alt-Right):** (1) as an ideology, the spectrum of right-wing world-views outside traditional conservatism, which begins with a dissatisfaction with the mainstream political process and character and frustration by perceived impotence of traditional conservatism, and runs through populist, hard-right, ultra-right, and extreme-right ideology; (2) as an identifiable group, those having such world-views.

**amoral transactionalism:** An over-riding willingness to enter into deals with anyone or any nation who appears to share ones' own interests, no matter how abhorrent is the other party in terms of criminal conduct, human rights abuses, or other egregious factors.

**apparatchik:** Of Russian origin, literally 'a creature of the apparatus', meaning someone with a self-serving civil service attitude favouring the privileges of their position over the needs of the public.

**Aryan Nations:** An extremist far-right group in the US, proscribed as a terrorist organization.

**authoritarianism:** (1) A belief in or support for strict obedience to the authority of a particular orthodoxy, dogma, individual, or group, at the expense of personal freedom. (2) The overbearing and intimidating tactics frequently displayed by authoritarians.

**autistic hostility:** fantasised hostility, whereby an individual imagines that another party is hostile towards them, and so typically provokes a hostile reaction in the individual.

## B

**baseej:** volunteer rapid mobilization force in Iran; during the Iran-Iraq War 1980–1988, *basseejis* frequently carried out mass suicide attacks on Iraqi positions, particularly in Khuzestan province.

**bounded rationality** The inherent limitations on what an individual or group can know and understand about a particular topic. Decision-making is thus constrained by limited information (which also may be inaccurate or biased), limited capacity to process that information (which capacity may also be subject to biases), and limited time.

**Breitbart News:** A leading news and propaganda organ of the populist Alt-Right in America.

**Brexit:** The formal departure of Britain from the European Union, predicated on a referendum vote on June 23, 2016 and the implementation of the departure implementation programme started on March 29, 2017 with a formal Brexit date of March 29, 2019.

**Brexitteer:** A person strongly committed to Brexit.

## C

**Charlottesville:** A town in Virginia, US, in which on August 12, 2017 far-right militants, some armed with guns and other weapons, attacked a peaceful counter-demonstration. One person was killed when a far-right supporter driving a car deliberately rammed the crowd at speed. Charlottesville became synonymous with civic resistance to far-right violence and intimidation.

**climate:** In relation to weather, the perseverant product of weather systems in the physical environment that are created and affected by complex interactions between lower order systems.

**climate change:** A permanent change in the climates around the world, thought by scientists to result from outputs of uncontrolled industrial processes and other human activity.

**confirmation bias:** The result of an individual (often pre-consciously) seeking out and/or interpreting information that tends to confirm their preconceptions about a particular topic, while also avoiding, ignoring or rejecting information that tends to disconfirm those preconceptions.

**conservatism:** Adherence to traditional, normative values and a reluctance to welcome change. See political conservatism.

**Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC):** annual conference hosted by the American Conservative Union.

**control:** Action taken by a system to maintain its activity or output at a pre-determined level, rate or quality.

**corporate governance:** The set of values, principles, systems, and processes by which companies and organizations are directed and controlled in order to protect the interests of owners, shareholders and other stakeholders. Corporate governance is a primary responsibility of the board of directors.

**corruption:** (1) UNCAC definition: an abuse of (public) power for private gain that hampers the public interest. (2) EU definition: requesting, offering, giving or accepting, directly or indirectly, a bribe or any other undue advantage (to any public official), or prospect thereof, which distorts the proper performance of any duty or behaviour required of the recipient of the bribe. Some jurisdictions treat all forms of such behaviour as corruption, even involving companies or individuals and no public official.

**corruption of the spirit:** Corruption exhibited by a culture in which members lack the will or encouragement to act professionally, ethically and efficiently or to challenge manifest wrongdoing.

**crisis:** For an organization, a period of intense and often dramatic conflict and uncertainty about a topic which is central to the organization's current existence and involving loss of control and, if unresolved, possible collapse and chaos. Frequently, a crisis involves acutely unstable conditions and often leads to enforced major change in the organization.

**cuckservative:** Often abbreviated to 'cuck'; a pejorative term invented within the Alt-Right to mean a person who had allowed their true conservative ideals to be trampled on and were too timid to fight back, rather like a cuckolded husband who failed to confront his errant wife and her lover.

**culture:** A set of unwritten and usually unobtrusive attitudes, beliefs, values, rules of behaviour, ideologies, habitual responses, language, rituals, 'quirks' and other features which characterize a particular group of people; cultures may be identified at different levels e.g. nations, localities, societies, professions, organizations, departments, interest groups.

## D

**Da-esh:** Acronym of al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham, the Arabic term for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (known in the west as ISIS).

**dog-whistle:** A style of politics in which coded language is used to present an innocent meaning to the general population but having a hidden meaning to a targeted subgroup.

**due diligence:** The exercise by a party to a relationship, contract, transaction or deal which seeks to demonstrate an appropriate and adequate degree of searching examination of an individual or entity to establish their probity, honesty and bona fides, and to uncover any hidden relevant facts, from which it may be reasonably deduced whether or not that party should proceed with the relationship, contract, transaction or deal.

## E

**economic nationalism:** An ideology favouring protectionist policies that emphasize national domestic control of the economy, labour, capital resources, and foreign trade, at the expense of foreign interests.

**enghlab-e sefid:** The White Revolution of social, educational, economic, infrastructure, and land reforms instituted by Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s.

**environment:** (1) In relation to global warming, the macro-level natural physical environment of the world, such as its oceans, forests, land masses, ice masses, and climate. The physical environment may be envisaged as comprising a systemic hierarchy of interacting component systems, each contributing to the next higher level. (2) A particular lower level within the global physical environment, at which pollution or other adverse effects are often observable or detectable by the human senses, although not always.



**Establishment:** The Establishment is a euphemism for an ill-defined group in society perceived as exercising undue power and influence over matters of policy, opinion, or taste, and seen as being resistant to change.

**Europhile:** A shorthand descriptor for anyone who favoured the UK's continuing EU membership.

**Euroceptic:** A shorthand descriptor for anyone who had doubts about the UK's continuing EU membership. Gradually became the general term for anyone who definitely wanted the UK to quit the EU.

**exceptionalism:** The concept of a particular nation being inherently different to others in many key respects e.g. morally, politically, economically, militarily, culturally. The notion of US exceptionalism extends the idea to assert that the US is not just different but also superior to other nations, a status that will never change.

## F

**fake fact:** A falsehood invented malevolently to challenge a real fact, with the purpose of casting doubt on the real fact or on the credibility of those using or disseminating the real fact, and thereby influencing public opinion.

**fake news:** The deliberate fabrication and dissemination of plausible but false news stories, or stories comprising a mixture of fact and damaging fiction, in order to assist in a black propaganda campaign against a political or other target, and thereby influence public opinion.

**fascism:** An authoritarian, nationalistic right-wing system of government characteristically formed around an iconic national leader whose ideology, policies, demagoguery, and actions both epitomize and justify their pathological nature.

**Fidesz:** Populist right-wing political party in Hungary.

**Five Star:** The populist Alt-Right political party in Italy. Also known as M5S.

**fraud:** The abuse of position, or false representation, or prejudicing the rights of someone for personal gain. The essence of such fraud is a deliberate act of deception intended to permanently deprive another party of a valued asset (money, shares, property, elected post etc) which is rightly theirs. Most jurisdictions automatically treat all fraud as a criminal offence as well as a civil offence but a few jurisdictions are reluctant to treat fraud as warranting criminal investigation and proceedings.

**Front National:** The largest populist Alt-Right political party in France. In March 2018, the party proposed a name change to Rassemblement National (National Assembly).

## G

**gharbzadegi:** 'westoxification', a pejorative term coined in Iran after the Iranian Revolution in the 1980s, later broadened to accusations of western cultural aggression and cultural hegemony against Iran.

**globalisation:** The economic process of increasing global inter-dependency and integration of markets, products, location of production and product sources, and flows of money, ideas, human resources and technology, beyond the control of any one country.

**global warming:** A gradual rise in air and sea temperatures resulting from industrial and other human activity and having ultimately devastating effects on the planet and human existence; now thought to be irreversible but possibly still controllable through multilateral action by states, 190 of which signed the Paris Climate Accord to that end.

**governance:** The set of values, principles, systems, and processes by which an entity is directed and controlled in order to protect the interests of all stakeholders.

**Grand Old Party:** A synonym in America for the Republican Party.

**groupthink:** A tendency for groups to form a consensus attitude and view on a particular topic. Typically, such a consensus forms around an authority figure, even when that figure's views may not always be supported by facts or be in the group's best interests.

## H

**hazard:** A physical entity, substance, condition, activity or behaviour which is capable of causing harm.

**hazard identification:** The process of identifying a hazard and analyzing how it may cause harm, as a preliminary step in risk assessment.

**hegemony:** All-consuming application of power.

**heuristic:** An assessment technique using experience or rules-of-thumb.

**holism:** The study of whole entities, and especially attributes conferred only by the whole and which are not attributable to particular components, as in 'the whole is greater than to sum of its parts'. Holism encompasses the concepts of emergence, synergy, and systemic properties.

## I

**interventionism:** A foreign policy seeking to determine and control other regimes, events, conflicts, national and regional allegiances, and outcomes—all to suit one's own strategic interests.

**isolationism:** A foreign policy seeking to better protect a nation's own strategic interests by not intervening in other nation's problems.

## J

**jihad:** Arabic word meaning 'struggle' or 'fight'. (1) an individual's inner struggle to comply with conscience and religious ideals; (2) the Sunni Muslim concept of holy war in defence of or propagation of Islamic values.

**Jobbik:** Far-right political party in Hungary, having a white supremacy, Christian identity, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim credo.

**Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA):** A final agreement reached January 16, 2016 between Iran and the P5+1 group of the UN Security Council whereby Iran agreed to a 10-year freeze on its uranium enrichment programme and to allow UN inspections, in return for relief from UN sanctions and release of frozen funds.

## K

**KKK:** Ku Klux Klan, a far-right neo-Nazi organization in the US, having a white supremacy, Christian identity, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim credo.

## M

**madman theory:** A theory of war and diplomacy attributed to President Richard Nixon and his collaborator Henry Kissinger in the late 1960s, whereby a president seeks to shock, unnerve and inhibit an adversarial counterpart abroad by pretending to be so deranged and unpredictable that, at all costs, he should not be provoked.

**majlis:** The parliament in Iran.

**major accident hazard:** A hazard which in a single incident could result in the death or injury of large numbers of people and/or major damage to property and/or environment. Such hazards may be either natural in origin or human-created. Typically, human-created major hazards are named and defined by legislation e.g. EU Major Hazards Directive.

**management system** (1) A notional system relating to management of an organization or operation. (2) A structured systematic means for ensuring that an organization or a defined part of it is capable of achieving and maintaining high standards of specified performance.

**Militant Tendency:** A hard-left Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist 'entryist' faction active within the British Labour Party during the 1970s and 1980s. Many Militant Tendency members of the Labour Party were eventually expelled from the Party and a number of leading Militant figures joined the Socialist Party of England and Wales.

**misogynist:** A person who dislikes, disparages, or is prejudiced against women.

**Momentum:** A hard-left faction increasingly active within the British Labour Party since Momentum's formalisation in 2015. Whereas many senior Momentum figures are self-affirmed Marxist-Leninists and/or sympathetic to the old Militant Tendency ideas, Momentum has gained wider support from ordinary Labour Party members who favour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and his views. Both Momentum and Jeremy Corbyn have also attracted much public criticism for their reluctance to eradicate anti-Semitism in the Party.

**mujahedeen:** A term for revolutionary fighters in Afghanistan, Iran, and Persian-speaking regions; the Shia equivalent of jihadis in Sunni Arabic countries.

**multiculturalism:** The concept of recognition of and acceptance of the presence of several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society.

**multilateralism:** A belief favouring negotiations and agreements with at least three other parties as a means to better protect one's own interests. One foreign policy option.

**mutually assured destruction (MAD):** The doctrine of deterrence based on military superpowers each possessing such overwhelmingly destructive weapons that for any one of them to attack another would ensure their own destruction.

## N

**narcissism:** Deriving gratification by seeking affirmation from others that one's vain or egotistical admiration of one's own attributes is warranted.

**National Action:** An extremist far-right group in the UK, proscribed as a terrorist organization.

**National Alliance:** An extremist far-right group in the US, proscribed as a terrorist organization.

**nationalism:** The belief that national identity should be given political importance, that nations have rights to both autonomy and sovereignty, and that members of the nation should collaborate in defence of these rights.

**nativism:** A belief that the interests of native-born or long-established inhabitants of a country should be protected whereas those of immigrants should not.

**neo-con:** Abbreviation for neo-conservative. The Neo-Conservatives arose in the 1960s among hawkish US politicians disillusioned with Democratic foreign policy. The movement blossomed during the period 1970s-early 2000s and peaked in 2003 during the G.W. Bush administration. Neo-con ideas became absorbed into the Tea Party and then the Alt-Right.

**neo-fascist:** Contemporary follower of fascist ideology, applied to a modern context.

**neo-Marxist:** Contemporary follower of Marxist ideology, applied to a modern context.

**nomenklatura:** Of Russian origin, a class of people who are appointed to influential posts in government, public service, institutions, or industry by virtue of their being members of a particular ruling political party, rather than on merit; see also apparatchik.

**Northern League:** Populist and far-right political party in Italy, with nationalist, regional secessionist, and ant-immigrant policies. Also known in Italian as Lega Nord, Lega, and Carroccio.

## O

**opportunity risk:** See speculative risk.

**organizational learning:** A cumulative, reflective, experiential process through which all members of an organization learn to understand and continuously interpret the organization, its strengths and weaknesses and its successes and failures, so as to modify systems and behaviour and improve outcomes.

## P

**Paleo-conservative:** A follower of traditional US conservatism, with a firm belief in adherence to traditional Christian values, nationalism, and limited government. A minority faction within the Republican Party strongly associated with Patrick Buchanan, many of its followers migrated into the Tea Party and thence into the populist Alt-Right.

**palingenesis:** Exact replication, recreation, or rebirth.

**palingenetic ultranationalism:** Generic fascism defined by its core myth, namely that a 'national rebirth' will be achieved by revolution.

**PEGIDA:** An acronym of the German far-right nationalist and anti-Islam movement *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*, which translates as Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West.

**poldering:** A term used in the Netherlands to describe attempts by a mainstream political party to engage and include all competing or even hostile parties in the democratic process, with the ultimate aim of not only mollifying and tempering their impact but also reaching common agreement. See Bruning (2016).

**political conservatism:** Adherence to traditional, normative values and a reluctance to welcome change, plus extolling the virtues of individual endeavour and self-reliance as well as favouring free enterprise, private ownership, low taxation and socially conservative ideas. Political conservatism emphasizes personal responsibility and eschews collectivism and any kind of socialist or left-wing agenda, such as an emphasis on public spending, high taxation of businesses and high earners, trades union power and a demphasis on defence spending.

**population ecology:** A biological model in which different species and different populations of the same species coexist dynamically with others. As an analogy, nations grow, mature, and decline in mutual competition for access to and control of markets, resources and assets of all kinds, according to their inherent or acquired attributes, strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and policies.

**populism:** (1) The political primacy of the ideas, interests, fears, views, and opinions of the general public at the expense of those of the prevailing or ruling political class. (2) Direct democracy as opposed to representative democracy. (3) A polite euphemism for a belief in 'elective dictatorship'.

**post-truth:** Relating to or depicting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. Typically, arguments and positions based on fake facts and fake news.

**primus inter pares:** Latin expression meaning 'first among equals'.

**producerism:** A belief that those who produce tangible wealth are of higher value to society than those who either inherit wealth or who are otherwise non-productive. Neiwert (2017) attributed a 'producerist' view to US populist Alt-Right supporters who see themselves as hard-working patriots compared to the worthless, non-contributing 'others' below them who should be 'eliminated'.

**proto-fascism:** (1) Early ideas that preceded the birth of unequivocal fascism in the 1930s (e.g. Hitler, Mussolini, Franco). (2) Contemporary right-wing authoritarian ideas and behaviour that could develop and migrate into fascism.

**psychopath:** A person who causes harm to others without self-recognition of his or her harmfulness, no empathy for those harmed, and no conscience, remorse or guilt about it. Ruthless 'end justifies the means' and 'what can we get away with?' behaviour is often the hallmark of a psychopath. Psychopaths are usually unable to form any kind of normal emotional or social bond with anyone, although they may create a false cloak of normality.

**pure risk:** An absolute risk or one which relates only to harm. With a pure risk, the best that can happen is that nothing bad happens.

## Q

**QRA:** Quantified Risk Assessment. Risk assessment techniques based on scientific and mathematical relationships, typically applied in high risk contexts relating to nuclear, chemical, aviation and other major accident hazards, or to complex financial or economic forecasting risks.

## R

**realpolitik:** A system of political decision-making based on pragmatism rather than ideological or moral principles.

**risk:** (1) The probability or likelihood that (for a pure risk) a specified hazard will result in a specified undesired event, or (for a speculative risk) a specified event or course of action will result in a specified gain or enhancement and/or specified loss or detriment. (2) For pure risks, the product of the potential severity of hazard consequences and the probability that the undesired event will occur. (3) In undisciplined parlance, an alternative term for 'threat' or 'hazard'.

**risk acceptability:** Use of criteria, usually formally agreed criteria, to determine whether a particular level of risk is acceptable. Often assumes that acceptability determined by risk specialists broadly matches public acceptability, but this assumption may not be born out.

**risk acceptance:** The fact of accepting a particular risk or level or risk. May not mean that all those accepting a risk actually regard the risk as acceptable if their options are constrained or compromised or they are under duress.

**risk appetite:** The amount of risk that an individual or an organization is willing to seek or accept in pursuit of its long-term objectives i.e. the propensity to take speculative risks.

**risk assessment:** The process of estimating and evaluating a risk in order to determine whether current risk strategies are appropriate and adequate.

**risk cognition:** see risk perception.

**risk evaluation:** The process of interpreting risk estimates and the overall results of a risk assessment.

**risk management:** The overall process of ensuring that risk exposures are managed in the most cost-effective and cost-efficient way.

**risk perception:** A comprehensive term applied to an individual's sensory, perception, and cognitive processes, including thinking, reasoning, evaluating, comparing, judging, learning and deciding; alternative term for risk cognition.

**risk reduction:** A strategy seeking to reduce risk levels by prevention and control techniques.

**risk strategy:** An approach to risk seeking the best combination of avoidance, deferment, reduction, retention, transfer, sharing and limiting of risk exposures.

**risk tolerability:** Relating to a level of risk that is neither unacceptably high nor negligible but somewhere in between. A tolerable risk level is typically less than ideal but enables a trade-off of time, cost, and effort against risk reduction and control benefits up to a pre-set limit.

## S

**salvation model:** A model which, if adopted, proponents imagine and expect will offer instant and long-term protection without too much effort.

**self-regulation:** The purposeful and active interpretation and practical implementation by an organization of goal-directed legislation which applies to it, as opposed to waiting for external compliance enforcement by regulatory authorities.

**shah-e chemodan:** Persian, meaning 'suitcase king', a mocking term popular in Iran during the reign of the last Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, referring to his alleged suitcase always ready-packed in case of the need for a rapid flight overseas in the event of potential social unrest or threat to his safety.

**snowflake:** A pejorative term for someone in young adulthood who exhibits a precious, over-protected, self-indulgent, and non-resilient personality with a high sense of entitlement, and who believes strongly that they should not be exposed to any information, ideas or persons which they might find objectionable—otherwise they might 'melt'.

**sociopath:** A lesser form of psychopath with broadly similar characteristics but, unlike a psychopath, a sociopath can usually form some emotional and social bonds with family and friends and even colleagues but, although often functioning well socially among such people, he or she may show callous indifference to strangers and behave harmfully towards them without conscience.

**sovereign corruption:** A situation in a country where the scale of state-inspired corruption of all kinds (petty, grand, corrupted spirit) and its tentacles is vast and all-pervasive throughout society.

**speculative risk:** A risk which may have both beneficial and/or detrimental outcomes e.g. investment, human resources, product innovation, mergers and acquisitions, foreign policy. Also known as opportunity risk.

**strategic risk:** A risk which may damage or disrupt significantly an organization's over-all business/corporate strategy or the organization itself.

**subjective risk:** A personal view of a risk. In a sense, all risk is subjective as risk is a perceptual and cognitive phenomenon i.e. it exists entirely in the minds of individuals.

**sub-system:** An identifiable component of a system which itself has all the characteristics of a system.

**system:** The concept of a recognizable whole consisting of a number of parts which interact in an organized way; characterized by inputs, outputs, processes, a boundary, an environment, an owner, emergent properties, control and survival; addition or removal of a component affects both the component and the system.

## T

**Tea Party:** A right-wing movement within the US Republican Party, many of whose supporters moved closer to the Alt-Right during and after the 2016 Presidential election campaign of Donald Trump.

**threat:** An alternative term for 'hazard' used in some areas of risk such as security and politics. Also sometimes used interchangeably with 'risk'.

**Trumpism:** A unique fusion of style and substance that, in the person of Donald Trump, has proven to hold out significant potential for electoral success in American politics. McCarty argues that while offering little new as a political ideology, Trumpism is most closely aligned with paleo-conservatism and thus may be understood as a kind of neo-paleo-conservatism.

## U

**unilateralism:** A belief in making decisions and taking actions without agreement with, or possibly even consultation with, others. One foreign policy option.

**unilateral interventionism:** Taking a predominantly unilateral stance and intervening or not, case by case, as determined by what is perceived to be in one's own interests. One foreign policy option.

## V

**velayat-e faghih:** The absolute right of the Supreme Islamic Jurisprudent (usually known as the Supreme Leader) in the Islamic Republic of Iran to have the final say in all matters of governance and policy, thus ensuring the over-riding permanence and power of Islamist control.

## W

**WASP:** white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant; a reference to a class of Americans who are either self-ascribed or ascribed by others as having a superior status in the US compared to other classes; WASPs are traditionally perceived as ultra-conservative.



**Weltanschauung:** Of German origin, meaning 'world-view'.

**world-view:** A complex set of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, values, opinions, and motivations which characterize how an individual or group of people interpret the world and their existence; a set of characteristic biases.

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