

Obama's and Trump's foreign policies towards “difficult democracies”

FABIO FOSSATI

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, foreign policy will be studied through the “modern” political science instrument of the models, which is typical of the Italian school of political science. A model is like a Weberian ideal type and summarizes behaviors that obey conditions of simplicity and coherence. Each model represents how diplomacy, according to the main contemporary Western political cultures (conservative, liberal, neo-conservative or leftist constructivist) would work at the analytic level. Then, the empirical analysis will show if the behavior rigidly follows one of the models (that are like the primary colors: white, yellow, red, blue and black) or whether they disobey them, being flexible, volatile, incoherent, passive and so on. Thus, diplomacies would become green, orange, violet, gray, purple.

In the first section, the functioning of a political culture is emphasized; every political culture is seen as a mix of interests and/or ideologies, and power is only an instrument to reach those two objectives. Obviously, ideas and interest may be compatible or lead to the opposite directions, and the same may happen to different ideologies and/or interests. In conservatism, interests prevail over ideologies; in liberalism, neo-conservatism, leftist constructivism or Manicheanism, ideas overcome interests. In the second section, the four diplo-

matic models (conservative, liberal, leftist constructivist and leftist Manichean) and the three hybrids (neo-conservatism, neo-communism and xenophobic right) are presented. In the third section, the evolution of the American foreign policy, read through the lens of these models, is presented: during the Cold War, in the 1990s, and from 2001 to 2008. The fourth and the fifth sections focus on Obama's and Trump's diplomacies.

THE RELATION AMONG POLITICAL CULTURES, INTERESTS AND IDEOLOGIES

This essay focuses on foreign policy, which will be analyzed through the relation between political cultures, interests and ideologies (Fossati 2017). This is a complex theme that has already been studied by other scholars (Goldstein, Keohane 1993, Katzenstein 1996, Wendt 1999, Wiarda 2013); yet it needs further development. The "modern" approach of the Italian school of political science will be applied, by using the instrument of the models (Weber's ideal-types).

The first analytical effort in this regard is the identification of the main political cultures in Western societies and political systems. Political cultures (Geertz 1973) may be defined as coherent sets of ideas or ideologies (values and beliefs), that are "somewhat" (i.e. in a different way) linked to the promotion of certain interests. Values are pre-empirical orientations, while beliefs are post-empirical evaluations. The concrete way in which ideas and interests are linked depends on the particular political culture, and cannot be selected in an abstract way (see below). What are the main Western political cultures? There are two approaches in order to answer this question. The splitters' approach is to draw up a classification (or typology), for example, of party ideologies (Ware 1996). The list will be a long one, because these analytical instruments must be exhaustive. The lumpers' approach is that of devising models (Weber's ideal-types); of course, the list will be much shorter, because those categories are not exhaustive and identify only those behaviors that obey conditions of simplicity and coherence. Models are white, yellow, red, blue and black, while reality is also orange, purple, green, gray, violet... For example, Esping-Andersen (1990) elaborated three models of conservative, liberal and social-democratic welfare states; the relation between ideologies and political economy has been much more thoroughly investigated. Both inductive and deductive strategies must be used to build models. Empirical analysis is the first step in order to identify the main features of political behaviors for each political culture; then deductive analysis helps to translate those data into a model, that fulfills the conditions of simplicity and coherence.

Models were more often used during the modern phase (1950s/1970s) of political science, and tend to identify regularities, while historians and philoso-

ophers look at differences. Therefore, the models focus on the main features of liberalism in post-1989 world politics, whilst it is well known that there were several differences among liberal philosophers and liberal parties in the past. Of course, these models may also differ from theories of International Relations (IRs), usually labeled as “liberal”; there were many categories of (idealist, institutionalist, utopian, Kantian, rationalist, reflectivist) liberal scholars. These models do not consider possible differences between the European and the American collective perceptions of liberalism, on the assumption that Western populations share the same cosmologies (Galtung 1981). In fact, the main criticism that can be advanced against models is their partial artificiality, because they are constructed by observers, i.e. by political scientists.

The main purpose of this essay is to identify some post-1989 diplomatic models constructed through specification of the main features of each Western political culture. There have been some attempts in the literature to link the political cultures and diplomacies of individual states. Some studies have concerned the USA; for example, Guzzini (1998) and Gries (2014) focused on the conservatism-liberalism cleavage. Instead, very few generalizations have been applied to the West as a whole, because it is assumed that such categories change across countries and over the decades. This is true, and for this reason the analysis of this article is mostly limited in time to the post-1989 period. Instead, difficulties linked with the “space frontiers” can be overcome by emphasizing that it often happens that political actors apply labels to themselves that have different meanings (for several reasons) from political science. For example, Italian communists were in fact socialists because they rejected violence; French socialists were in fact social-democrats because they accepted capitalism; Margaret Thatcher’s government was liberal, and not conservative. Without any general category for ideas, political science would always remain dependent on political philosophy, while it has become more autonomous from international law (through regimes’ theory) and economics (through international political economy). In sum, the main assumption of this essay is that political events matter more than declarations, philosophers’ traditions, and IRs scholars’ theories.

THE FOUR DIPLOMATIC MODELS (AND THE THREE HYBRIDS)

Four diplomatic models have been developed (Fossati 2017) with reference to the main Western democratic political cultures: the conservative, the liberal, the social-democrat/constructivist, and the socialist/Manichean. Non-democratic cultures – Nazism/fascism and communism – are not commonly addressed in contemporary politics. A classification would lead to the identification of Social-

Christian, agrarian, green, regionalist political cultures, but the assumption of this article is that the latter represent the orange, the purple, the violet, and that they are less relevant. For example, Social-Christian parties are a hybrid between conservatism and social-democracy, while the greens between the leftist constructivist and the leftist Manichean ideology. Let us focus on the link between ideas and interests of each political culture.

Conservatism has always been influenced by the realist philosophical tradition; it is a big mistake to confuse it with the defense of the *status quo* (past-ism: in French, *passéisme*). In foreign policy, the emphasis has been on the defense of collective state interests (like security), which are often plural and become national if (as in Western countries) the (sociological) nation and the (political) state coincide. In conservatism interests are more relevant, and subsequently favor the consolidation of a nationalist ideology, which differs from Nazism/fascism because it is not imperialist. Interests may be both strategic (with the fight against Islamic fundamentalism and the control of foreign immigration) and economic (for example, priority to oil exporting countries, to former colonies or to close countries); thus, they are different and not always compatible. The conservative choice of isolationism has only concerned pre-1929 American diplomacies; since Roosevelt, and the end of the economic crisis, isolationism has been abandoned. Conservatism has also weakened its patronage of specific interests like those of rural producers in the last century. The conservative model is based on respect for Westphalia's international law, on sovereignty, and on the non-interference principle. Then, the conservatives rely more upon power and the use of force, prefer unilateralism, and pursue a great- (and not super-) power status¹, linked to some priorities (Europe, the Middle East, richer East Asia...). In economy, a conservative diplomacy promotes moderate *laissez faire* reforms, defending national producers and opposing "blind" privatizations; that's the reason why, for example, Ronald Reagan has not been conservative in political economy. In politics, conservatives do not promote democracy, because communist or Islamic fundamentalist parties could win elections. A conservative diplomacy is not interested in promoting national self-determination (of Palestinians, Kurds, Armenians...) against state interests, that are always defended, as nationalism may lead to conflicts, terrorism, wars, and damage state interests. Then, conservatives go to war only if their security or economic interests are at stake, according to Clausewitz's realist prescription; war is the continuation of politics by other means. The conservative model relies upon the threat or use of violence without the involvement of rigid global institutions, like the United Nations (UN). This is the foreign policy of the so-called *real-politik* that has been theorized

1 For a typology on power statuses of super, great, medium, small powers (and low profile), see Fossati (2017).

by Kissinger in the American diplomacy. In the Cold War, the US have often militarily intervened against the Soviet Union in the so-called “traffic light” wars (Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan), that have been fought by two local actors and only one of the two great powers. Before 1989, the conservative diplomacy has always been anchored to the “lesser evil” principle, because authoritarian (military or personalist) regimes were considered much better than communist parties, that could have won democratic elections, especially in Latin America.

The linkage between diplomacy and the defense of certain values, such as human rights, democracy, free market, and national self/determination, represents the core of a liberal foreign policy. Liberals trust in global institutions, alliances and negotiations, and promote multilateralism (or, better, “minilateralism”). However, NATO is preferred to the UN, because their decisions are made by the “concert” of democracies (like Kant’s *foedus pacificum*), while the UN suffers of vetoes coming from authoritarian states like Russia and China. As a consequence of the priority to universal values, a liberal diplomacy looks for a super- (and not great-) power status within a global diplomacy. In economy, liberals promote radical *laissez faire* reforms, by supporting privatizations. In politics, a liberal diplomacy promotes human rights and democracy, and applies political conditionality to some key decisions, like development co-operation; thus, Western foreign aid is tied to the respect of civil rights and democracy by a third-world country. Then, liberals promote national self-determination, leading to single-nations states, or federalism, through referenda, as cultural pluralism is preferred to state interests. A liberal diplomacy supports free movements of people, and objects to limits to immigration flows, but promotes a symmetric integration of immigrants that must respect the laws of the guest country. Then, the liberal model envisages a linkage between war and values whose philosophical reference is the tradition of *bellum iustum*. “Evil” must be fought, even if politically incorrect wars (against Third World states) are necessary. Wars against Nazism/fascism, communism and Islamic fundamentalism are considered legitimate. But violence is chosen only after severe violations of human and political rights. However, liberalism in continental Europe has always been weak, especially in the Mediterranean countries.

“Neo-conservatism” represents a hybrid, with liberal objectives (like the promotion of democracy) and conservative instruments (unilateralism and power relations), within the strategic doctrine of “offensive Realism” (Mearsheimer 2001): see the empirical section.

The leftist post-Marxist philosophy (Von Hayek 1976, Galtung 1977) has consolidated “constructivist²” (in Italy “reformist”) diplomacies based on ideas

2 Von Hayek and Galtung differently evaluated the (negative and positive) effects of constructivism, which will not be used in this essay with the meaning given to it by Guzzini (2000) and others: that is, as synonymous with “reflectivism”.

such as multi-culturalism, welfare state, political participation and active non-violence. These have usually been the strategies of social-democrat parties. Since 1989, the main value of constructivism has been “political correctness”, a post-modern attitude based on the perception that rational Western people can no longer manage reality. Political correctness aims at making equal what is different and at not criticizing under-privileged actors (underdogs) through language or politics. Political correctness stresses the priority of multi-cultural values in decisions concerning both Third World immigration flows and pluri-national armed conflict resolution processes outside the West. Constructivists neglect national self-determinations and referenda, and promote pluri-national states, based on consensus pacts, in conflict resolution processes. They are against radical terrorist Islamic groups (like Al Qaeda or Isis), but they favor moderate fundamentalist actors (like the Muslim Brotherhood party or the Iranian regime). Then, they promote free immigration flows, but political correctness has led to an asymmetric integration process with immigrants, that are not asked to respect the laws of the guest country. The moderate left accepts free market, even if corrected by a strong state governance: welfare state in domestic politics and foreign aid in world politics. In politics, constructivists prefer positive sanctions (increase of foreign aid or diplomatic support) to democratizing countries (democratic assistance), more than negative sanctions to authoritarian regimes (political conditionality). Thus, social-democrats promote privileged relations with post-communist countries of Eastern Europe or development cooperation with the poorest countries in the Third World. The Gandhian active conception of non-violence is the philosophical principle of constructivism; war is accepted, even if under exceptional circumstances (Galtung 1985). First, constructivists go to war only when weak non-Western actors are to be defended, such as Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo (but not catholic Croats). Second, aggressive states linked to the West (like Serbia, a small power) can be attacked, but not Third World countries (like Vietnam, Iraq, Libya, Hutus in Rwanda, or Arab Sudanese government). Politically incorrect wars are rejected because of the value of cultural relativism. Third, asymmetrical conflicts, for instance those involving medium powers, like Russia against Chechnya or China against Tibet, should not induce military interventions by the West, so as to avoid a risky escalation. Fourth, violence can only be used reactively; decisions must be made immediately, but only to stop the use of force by the aggressors. Constructivists follow the prescriptions of global institutions, like the UN, even if these decisions are not made by democratic states. Before 1989, this ideology was influential in the universities (for example among peace researchers), but not in world politics; it had some influence only on the diplomacies of Scandinavian countries and the *Ost-Politik* of Western Germany (since the 1970s).

The leftist neo-Marxist philosophy (without the violent inclination of communism), based on third-worldism and “passive” non-violence, leads to a “Manichean” ideology, because reality is interpreted under two rigid dichotomous categories (of white-good, black-evil: the USA, “neo-liberalism”). These (anti-NATO, anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-capitalist) ideas correspond to the strategies of socialist parties, but pro-democracy, movements in domestic politics. The socialist ideas have often been anchored to pacifism. Manichaeian peace movements chose a passive conception of non-violence whose philosophical reference is Tolstoy; they reject war even in an *ultima ratio* scenario (Bobbio 1984). Manichaeian peace movements mobilize when Western powers intervene, but remain silent if a Third World actor is violent. In economy, as socialism has failed, the post-1989 Manichean strategy is based on populism, with an increase of public expenditure, to protect the poorest citizens. Anti-capitalist values are also promoted by no-global movements.

Neo-communism is the second hybrid, with a “post-modern” synthesis between non-violent socialism and revolutionary (or terrorist) communism; neo-communists are not directly violent, but appreciate the “violence of the others” (the underdogs): Castro, Maduro, Chiapas rebels. Neo-communism combined two coherent (pacifist socialist and violent communist) models, and the outcome was a “false pacifism”, that was promoted (for example) by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) during the Cold War. Communism was naturally violent and has pursued its aims through revolution and “proletarian dictatorship”. In the West, it was promoted by communist terrorists, like the *Brigate Rosse* in Italy and the RAF in Germany. The PCI was a “neo”-communist party.

The third hybrid (between conservatism and Nazism-fascism) has emerged in recent decades in the USA and Europe: that of xenophobic right. This “Alt”-Right is ambiguous; it is not violent, and it is very politically incorrect; their leaders usually make intolerant declarations against non-Western immigrants or gays. This right has often been defined as populist, but that is conceptual stretching, because the xenophobic right has never been in favor of the increase of public expenditure.

Finally, there can naturally be foreign policies aimed at promoting neither interests, nor values/ideas, and these are uncertain, reluctant (Destradi 2017), passive diplomacies, based on wait and see, apathy, inertia... In fact, it often happens that interests or ideas are simply absent.

The analytic instrument of the models permits to overcome some superficial conclusions on the relations between interests and ideologies, that were advanced by the followers of some schools of thought. For example, some orthodox realists (Waltz 1979) and some post-Marxists (Carlsnaes 1986) assumed that ideologies merely reflect power relations. Only the interests of

states or classes would matter. The conservative defense of collective interests (security of citizens, limits on immigration) consolidated a nationalist ideology. Waltz's evaluation seems apt for the nationalist ideology, very strong in the Cold War, that was the derivation of states' interests. Instead, the thesis of the instrumentality of ideas induces an intellectual mistake for the other three political cultures, which were anchored to autonomous values. In liberalism, constructivism and Manicheanism, ideas precede interests. Democratic ideas favor the formation of pro-human rights and pro-democracy non-governmental organizations (NGOs); welfare state values lead to the consolidation of lobbies (unions); anti-American beliefs produce no-global groups and Manichean peace movements. This is the most innovative analytical shift of this article with reference to the previous literature. Precisely because "trans-country" models of the main Western political cultures have never been identified, the crucial link between ideologies and interests has been missed. In sum, liberal and leftist political cultures begin with ideas and then consolidate interests, while conservatism starts with interests and then crystallizes a nationalist ideology. Conservatism is more "intensive" in interests, and the other three are more "intensive" in ideologies, even if they are often labeled as ideologies in the literature. Power is always important, but it is not an aim; it is an instrument to get interests, ideas or both.

The promoters of the schools of thought have also tried to manipulate the empirical analysis. For example, reflectivists wanted to underestimate the role of interests, and for example Wendt (1999) emphasized that interests and ideas always coexist; all interests would have an ideological dimension. But this is a form of conceptual stretching, because only the empirical analysis – coupled with the analytic instrument of models – can show whether interests or ideologies can prevail. Also neo-classical realists (Rose 1998) undermined the role of ideologies. They linked interests to the subjective perceptions of the various actors; as they always change, ideas would never matter. For example, Johnson perceived that in Vietnam there were strong American interests and attacked Ho Chi Min; then, Nixon perceived that US interests were low and decided to abandon that war. A correct empirical analysis (based on the analytic instrument of models) would support the second diagnosis; thus, Johnson decision has been influenced by ideas and not by interests. Let's make another example. Bush Jr. perceived that there were strong US interests in Iraq to make war against Saddam Hussein in 2003. After the war, he realized that those interests were probably low and that the outcome (Isis conquering large part of Iraq) was contrary to American interests. A correct empirical analysis (based on the analytic instrument of models) would support the second diagnosis; Bush Jr.'s decision to attack Iraq was influenced by ideas and not by interests. Neo-Realists

have done a permanent “trial to intentions” to show that ideas never matter, but this is intellectually incorrect.³

DIPLOMATIC MODELS AND US FOREIGN POLICY

The hypothesis anchored to diplomatic models is that Republican presidents should follow the conservative model, while Democratic leaders the liberal one (Fossati 2017). Instead, during the Cold War conservatism prevailed over liberalism, and Democratic presidents almost always applied the conservative model. Values were sacrificed because of the “lesser evil” principle, that was the cornerstone of conservatism. Neither Republican nor Democratic presidents promoted democracy in the third world, because they wanted to avoid that communist parties (the “absolute evil”) could win free elections, and kept supporting (military or personalist) authoritarian governments, which represented the “lesser evil”. During the Cold War, conservatism has been applied in most armed conflicts, which were anchored to American interests, except the “liberal” war in Vietnam, where values – to defend that country from communism according to *bellum iustum* tradition – overcame limited interests. Vietnam was a poor (on the contrary of South Korea) and not strategic (on the contrary of Indonesia) country (Morgenthau 1969). In fact, that war was decided by a Democratic president (Johnson), while a Republican president (Nixon) halted the Vietnam War, because he (and Kissinger) perceived that an American defeat would not have had dramatic consequences. After Vietnam, all Democratic Party presidents abandoned the *bellum iustum* tradition. The US emphasis on liberal ideas in the Cold War has mostly been rhetorical, without major effects on politics; thus, the USA did not export peace in the Third World, where many “traffic light” wars (Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola, Mozambique...) were fought against the USSR.

In the 1990s conservatism remained the prevailing political culture in the US diplomacy. Some wars (in Kuwait and Afghanistan) were threatening American interests. Kuwait (a sovereign country, allied with the USA) had been attacked by Saddam Hussein, destabilizing the oil market; the Afghan Taliban were allies of Al Qaeda and supported Bin Laden. The new lesser evils were the Islamic fundamentalist actors; the conservative diplomacy led to support military or personalist regimes in Arab-Islamic countries, like in Algeria in the 1990s. Instead, US interests were limited in the Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo

3 The contribution of the schools of thought was great in the last century, but then they became counter-productive; a conference on “The end of IRs theory” was organized by the European Journal of IRs in 2013 (VV.AA. 2013).

(1998) wars; Milosevic was repressing national groups, like in many other conflicts in Eastern Europe. The two decision-making processes, being a novelty, were long and difficult. After 1989, liberalism had more influence in diplomacy, like in former Yugoslavia's (Bosnia and Kosovo) "just" and politically correct wars (with limited interests), decided by Clinton and Blair, and supported by many European governments of the moderate left (like D'Alema in Italy). Then, the other two post-1989 military interventions were both "just wars" (against tyrants), and compatible with interests: in Kuwait (against Saddam Hussein) and Afghanistan (against the Taliban). In the 1990s Clinton has promoted democracy in Latin America, sanctioning (with cuts to foreign aid) presidents who had dissolved parliaments: Fujimori in Peru and Serrano in Guatemala (Fossati 2017). He also tried to apply trade sanctions to China after Tienammen's repression in 1989, but then he withdrew them and returned to a conservative diplomacy.

Then, Bush Jr. abandoned conservatism, as the 2003 war against Hussein in Iraq was against a "lesser evil", and followed the "ideologies-intensive" neo-conservative diplomacy, with liberal objectives and conservative instruments. In that war, the conservative diplomacy was promoted by France and Russia. After the war, Bush Jr. could not give support to their declared security commitments based on the defense of two interests: avoiding the Hussein-Bin Laden alliance, and preventing the deployment of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. That alliance and those weapons were absent. The liberal objectives of the war had been stronger, and were anchored to values (the defense of Israel, a "civilization ally", thanks to the role of the Israel's lobby) – the "tyrant" Saddam Hussein had to be sanctioned for his support to Palestinian terrorists -, and not to American interests – Hussein was not directly threatening the USA (Mearsheimer, Walt 2007). Exporting democracy was another ideological objective of the neo-con diplomacy; an elected government could have fought Islamic fundamentalist actors much better than corrupted (military or personalist) authoritarian regimes, supported by the "old" conservators. Neo-cons also applied the typical unilateral (conservative) strategy of refusing the concert of democracies within the UN. Instead, Italy and Spain followed the mainstream liberal diplomacy, by supporting the "just war", but only under the UN umbrella.

In sum, from 1990 to 2008 interests prevailed, but ideologies were relevant too (Fossati 2017); the exceptions were the just and "politically correct" wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, and the neo-con war in Iraq. An intentional alliance arose between the promoters of conservatism and liberalism in Kuwait and Afghanistan. Bosnia and Kosovo wars were supported by both liberals (Clinton) and constructivists (Blair and D'Alema); democratic values and weak people (but no strong interests) had to be defended. In the neo-con Iraq war

of 2003, there were two parallel alliances: between neo-cons and liberals, and between old conservators and constructivists. Democracy had been promoted in the 1990s by Clinton, but since 2001 that priority has been weakened by Bush Jr.; political conditionality was substituted by democratic assistance, that had very low political impact.

OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN DIFFICULT DEMOCRACIES

At the beginning of his mandate (2009), Barack Obama was more willing not to do certain things, like wars and democracy promotion, rather than doing something (Nau 2010, Shively 2016). His diplomacy was anti-conservative, anti-liberal (Kupchan, Trubowitz 2010), and anti-neo-con. His strategies against Al Qaeda were intelligence research, torture, and attempts to kill (and not capture) leaders, like Bin Laden's murder in May 2011 (Mc Krisken 2011). That outcome was coherent with conservatism.

But Obama's most challenging decision was his reaction to the Arab Spring since December 2010. He decided not to support anymore the (personalist) authoritarian regimes of Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen. Thus, the conservative diplomacy of the "lesser evil" has been abandoned by Obama in the Arab Spring; Mubarak, Ben Ali and Saleh were the lesser evils of Islamic fundamentalist actors.

Then, the 2011 NATO war in Libya was against Gaddafi (Ackerman 2011), who had also been previously perceived as the lesser evil of Islamic fundamentalism. Liberal values emerged in that war "against the tyrant", promoted by France and the United Kingdom⁴; the conservative diplomacy was promoted by Germany, that objected to that decision. The 2011 Libyan war was coherent only with liberalism; it was a just and politically incorrect war against a violent Third World leader.

In 2013, the armed forces staged a coup in Egypt, even if without any relevant US aid, but al Sisi was supported by Israel and Saudi Arabia. As a consequence of the Arab Spring, Obama decided to promote the moderate (not ter-

4 France was against Gaddafi because of the war in Chad; the United Kingdom because of the Lockerbie terrorist attack. But those "subjective interests" were less relevant than the liberal value of the war against the tyrant that pushed Obama to intervene. After Gaddafi's death and the long war among Libyan clans, Obama admitted that the US diplomacy had been weak; it became evident that Western interests would have been better guaranteed by the lesser evil diplomacy. But the neo-realists' diagnosis was wrong also in Libya. French and British objectives were not subjective interests, but were values: to punish Gaddafi for his use of violence. Instead, the conservative principle of the lesser evil accepts some violence of that authoritarian regime, as the alternative (a war among clans and Islamic fundamentalists) is worse.

rorist) Islamic fundamentalist actors (Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Libya, Ennahda party in Tunisia, Erdogan in Turkey, and the Iranian government, but not the Houthis in Yemen), that is a typical “politically correct” diplomacy of the constructivist left.

Then, some radical Islamic fundamentalist groups emerged, and in June 2014 Isis proclaimed the new caliphate, by uniting large parts of Syria and Iraq (after the US withdrawal in 2011), and conquered some towns in the north of Libya. Moderate Shiite al Houthis and radical Al Qaeda emerged in Yemen. The typical conservative answer would have been a “high intensity” military intervention against Isis or the support of a military coup of Haftar in Libya. The only conservative war was the French military intervention in Mali (in 2013). Instead, Obama started only “low-intensity” aerial (drone) bombings – the so-called “surrogate warfare” (Krieg 2016) – against Isis in Iraq and Syria (since 2014), that had limited effects. Obama hoped that not making a real war against Isis in the Middle east would have avoided terrorism in Europe, but that “tacit agreement” failed after Isis’ terrorist attack in Paris of November 2015. Even after that event, the US bombings in Syria remained limited, and at the end of 2016 Isis had lost few territories. The US priority did not seem to defeat the enemy, but to limit American human losses. Obama did not apply any model against Isis; he was not conservative, by refusing to attack Isis and to support the lesser evil (Assad), but he did not launch either a liberal “just war” against the tyrant: Assad. In Syria, Obama kept supporting moderate Sunnis (and Kurds in the north); thus, he indirectly favored Isis, as Assad had to fight two enemies. In July 2015, Obama also signed the nuclear agreement with Iran (Parsi 2017). The constructivist support of moderate fundamentalist actors had already emerged in the Arab Spring.

However, in August 2016 the USA bombed Sirte, a town in the north of Libya that had been conquered by Isis, and helped the government to recapture it. Also Al Qaeda bases in Yemen were bombed by the US drones (since 2010). Drone bombs were also launched against Al Shaabab in Somalia, and against Isis and Taliban in Pakistan. In Afghanistan there was a partial withdrawal of US troops, and the war between the Taliban and the government continued. All those were “low-intensity” military interventions without relevant political effects. The promoters of radical Islamic fundamentalism were no longer fought with the usual conservative strategies of the American diplomacy (“high intensity” wars and “lesser evil” principle) or with the liberal ones (“just wars”).

While Clinton and Bush Jr. promoted conflict resolution in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq, Obama only promoted (without success) two consensus pacts (coherent with constructivism): in Yemen between pro-Iran Houthis (Islamic fundamentalist) Shiites and pro-Saudi Arabia Sunnis, and in Libya be-

tween Haftar's army and al-Sarraj's government. Obama did not promote a consensus agreement neither in Syria, nor in Afghanistan, as he did not want to have diplomatic relations with Assad (Calculli 2018) and the Taliban. In 2014, Obama refused Putin's proposal of a Ukrainian federal agreement, that was coherent with liberalism; he did not prevent the Donbass war, and there was not any US mediation capability in the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian minorities (Pisciotta 2018). Obama was not able to mediate either in the conflict between Palestinians and Israel, and relations with Tel Aviv (and with Saudi Arabia or Egypt) worsened (Freedman 2017).

Obama did not promote democracy either (Carothers 2013); he did not apply negative sanctions (with cuts to foreign aid) to authoritarian regimes of the Egyptian and the Thai armed forces after their military coups: in 2013 and 2014. In May 2009, he criticized neither the massacre of the Tamil tigers by the Singhalese government, nor Erdogan's repression of the promoters of the *coup d'état* in Turkey (in July 2016). Then, his "anti-liberal" rapprochement with Cuba was done without any democratic progress of Raul Castro. He did not react against the new president Maduro in Venezuela, who had become authoritarian after Chavez's death in 2013, and against Ortega's semi-authoritarian government in Nicaragua, whose political performances decreased after 2016 presidential elections. All those decisions were far from constructivism, because also leftist rewards come after democratic progresses. Thus, Obama has also been far from a liberal diplomacy, except in the Libyan war.

In sum, at first Obama changed three models of diplomacy: first the conservative (Bin Laden's murder), then the liberal (Libyan war), finally the constructivist (support of moderate Islamic fundamentalist actors in the Middle East and promotion of consensus pacts in Libya and Yemen). Obama probably tried to be constructivist, but without coherence, as he did not promote a consensus pact in Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. Obama was not fully constructivist, and he abandoned conservatism and liberalism. He was too volatile, but in the first phase he was more incoherent than "intentionally" pragmatic. Then, when Isis conquered parts of Iraq and Syria, he relied upon that tacit agreement, that failed after Isis' terrorist attack in Paris of 2015. By supporting moderate Sunnis, he indirectly favored Isis. After 2015, Obama kept refusing any coherent (conservative, liberal, constructivist) strategy; he had become passive and uncertain in both war decisions and conflict resolution. His diplomacy was anchored neither to interests nor to values, and Obama abandoned any American great power's ambition; with him, US governance capability in world politics strongly decreased (Fossati 2017).

The Isis' terrorist attacks in Paris (in November 2015), Brussels, Nice, Berlin, Manchester, Barcelona (in 2016 and 2017) could have led to a revival of the conservative diplomacy, with the promotion of new lesser evil dictators (like Haftar in Libya), and of new "high intensity" wars (in Syria and Iraq) against Isis. Since 2017, Trump and Russia increased bombings in Iraq and Syria. In 2017 and 2018 most Isis' territories were recaptured by Iraqi, Syrian and Libyan armies, but the involvement of the US armed forces was limited; it was a "surrogate warfare": only 75 American soldiers died in Iraq and Syria. US and Russian bombings aided Assad against moderate Sunnis, but not against Kurds, as Trump stopped to support the former but not the latter. Trump's abandonment of moderate Sunnis (and not increased US bombings) seemed the main reason why Isis was weakened in Syria; Assad could better fight Isis. In Iraq, Trump did not support Kurds' request for secession after the referendum of September 2017; the Iraqi federal government could also better fight Isis. Haftar increased his military control in Libya in 2017/2019, with a military support from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but he did not defeat al-Sarraj's government, sponsored by the UN and the European states.

Trump kept being involved in many low-intensity ("surrogate warfare") military interventions (with aerial bombings): in Libya, Iraq and Syria against Isis, in Afghanistan and Pakistan against the Taliban and Isis, in Yemen against Al Qaeda, and in Somalia against Al Shaabab. Trump does not seem to want to win those wars, but to avoid that those radical fundamentalist groups conquer power. Another (not declared) objective of those wars could be the attempt to catalyze violence in the Middle East, avoiding terrorist attacks in the West – which diminished after Isis' loss of territories. Trump has declared that the USA will reduce its military forces in Syria and Afghanistan – negotiations with the Taliban started in February 2019 -, as they are less prior than oil-exporting Iraq. The first decision is compatible with a conservative diplomacy, as Isis was weakened and Assad is the lesser evil, but not the second; the Taliban are a strong radical fundamentalist actor.

Trump's diplomatic efforts are limited; he is not involved in any relevant negotiation on conflict resolution. He abandoned Obama's constructivist proposals of consensus pacts in Libya and Yemen. Trump has changed Obama's diplomatic priority in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia and not Iran – the 2015 nuclear agreement was frozen –; relations with Israel and Egypt also improved. And he has abandoned Obama's constructivist priority for moderate Islamic fundamentalist actors.

Trump is not interested in democracy promotion, being far from both neo-conservatism and liberalism (in Cuba, Venezuela, Thailand, Myanmar),

weakening the world order projects of the 1990s (Ikenberry 2017, 2019, Patrick 2017, Peterson 2018). He accepted Russia's and China's middle powers' leadership ambitions in their regions, and did not raise any objection in Ukraine or in North Korea. In Venezuela, Trump is politically supporting the leader of the moderate right (democratic) opposition Guaidò, against the radical left (authoritarian) president Maduro; this soft diplomacy is coherent with conservatism. Before 1989, American presidents never hesitated to use violence to fight third-world leaders in Latin America; that was a "hard" version of conservatism. Thus, Trump has not only frozen democracy promotion, like Obama did (even if with a different, conservative versus constructivist, ideological attitude); he is comfortable with many authoritarian leaders, that at the same time do not perceive anymore the world order climate of the '90s.

Trump has not been volatile and uncertain like Obama, but his diplomacy is very "reluctant". He is materializing a "soft" conservative diplomacy and the label of "soft power" seems to be perfect for him. He has accepted Assad as the lesser evil of Isis, even if Trump is not making a "high intensity" war in Syria. In Libya, he is politically supporting Haftar, but not for a military coup. Then, in Venezuela, he is in favor of Guaidò's opposition to Maduro, but only with diplomatic pressure, like most of European and Latin American governments. American interests appear "shy" in Trump's reluctant (Destradi 2017) diplomacy, but those interests highly overcome ideologies, that have become marginal in his diplomacy (Dian 2018, Jervis et al 2018).

Another feature of Trump's foreign policy is his unilateralism (Druckman 2019, Nye 2019), as he is not inclined to coordinate his decisions with other Western governments, but that's typical of mainstream conservative (see for example Bush Jr.'s decision to attack Iraq), on the contrary of (usually multilateral) liberal, diplomacies. Then, the label of "Jacksonian diplomacy" (Mead 2017), focused on potential power and on the selective use of violence, is a simplification of Trump's foreign policy. Trump is "shy", because he is fast and assertive in declarations, but he is slow and reluctant in actions. These two sides of his diplomacy are linked; Trump is assertive and arrogant, precisely because he is conscious that he is able to do few things in foreign policy; for that reason, he is not really "Jacksonian". Trump has not become isolationist, but seems to rely more on the search for prestige and reputation (Clarke, Ricketts 2017a, Williams 2018, Wolf 2018), by "displaying" more than by using power (Morgenthau 1948).

Moreover, it is meaningless to label Trump's foreign policy as populist, like Stangel, McDonald and Nabers (2019) or Bouchier and Thies (2019) did, because he is not populist either in domestic political economy, where he supports moderate *laissez faire*, with some protectionism to defend national producers: however, that is mainstream conservatism. Other Republican presidents, like Reagan,

became liberal in political economy. Populism is a radical left ideology, based on both expansion of public expenditure (Dornbusch, Edwards 1989) and plebiscitarian appeals to the population (Geddes 1994). Trump made those plebiscitarian appeals to the population, and rightist conservative leaders usually do such kind of things (see for example De Gaulle in France or Berlusconi in Italy), but this does not automatically convert them into populist. Latin American leaders like Peron, Allende, Garcia, Chavez were populist, not Trump, De Gaulle or Berlusconi.

In sum, Trump is using low-intensity military force against radical Islamic fundamentalist actors, both to avoid that those groups conquer power and to catalyze violence in the Middle East, as Islamic terrorism has to be prevented in the West. Then, he is not interested in mediation and conflict resolution. His foreign policy of “soft conservatism” is quite coherent, but it is not anymore a “great power” diplomacy, and, according to Drezner (2019), “this time is different” (thus, it is independent from both Obama and Trump) and “US foreign policy will never recover”. Cohen (2019) also argued that the crisis of US foreign policy will last beyond Trump. However, leaving Syria is compatible with conservatism, because Isis has been weakened and Assad is the lesser evil. His main contradiction is represented by negotiations with the Taliban, that are a radical Islamic fundamentalist group. Trump is not promoting a constructivist diplomacy, aimed at reaching a consensus pact between Ghani and the Taliban, but if the USA sign a peace deal and leave Afghanistan, then the Taliban will probably defeat Ghani and conquer power. Negotiations with the Taliban contradict even the soft version of a conservative diplomacy. What can explain this contradiction in Trump’s diplomacy? The most convincing hypothesis is that negotiations between the US and (Sunni) Taliban are encouraged by Saudi Arabia, that has always financed them since the 1990s, because they seem the only actor able to fight Isis in Afghanistan. Taliban are also supported by Qatar, and a latent conflict has recently emerged between the two monarchies; also on the mediation process between the Taliban and the US. This empirical evidence shows that the US has not a “Grand Strategy” anymore, and that the American Middle East policy is probably suggested by local powers: Saudi Arabia for Trump and Iran for Obama. In sum, both diplomacies seem to have been elaborated more by those two Middle East countries, than by the US.

CONCLUSIONS

The following table summarizes the three diplomatic models (conservative, liberal, constructivist), to be applied to Obama’s and Trump’s foreign policy decisions in “difficult democracies”.

FP Decision	CONSERVATIVE MODEL	LIBERAL MODEL	CONSTRUCTIVIST MODEL
Al Qaeda	Killing of Bin Laden OBAMA	Just war against Al Qaeda	No war because politically incorrect
Arab Spring	Support of lesser evil: military or personalist regimes	Democracy promotion in single-nation states	Support of moderate Islamic fundamentalists OBAMA
Libyan war	Support of lesser evil: Gaddafi	Just war against Gaddafi OBAMA	No war because politically incorrect
Post-war Libya	Promotion of military coup: Haftar	Promotion of federalism	Support of moderate Islam and of consensus pact OBAMA
Egypt	Promotion of military coup: Al Sisi	Democracy promotion with political conditionality	Support of moderate Islamic fundamentalists OBAMA
Isis (Iraq, Syria)	High intensity war against Isis	Just war against Isis and promotion of federalism	No war and promotion of consensus pact
Syria (Assad)	Support of lesser evil: Assad TRUMP	Just war against Assad	No war and promotion of consensus pact
Yemen	High intensity war against Al Qaeda	Just war against Al Qaeda and promotion of referendum	Support of [moderate Houthis and] consensus pact OBAMA
Afghanistan	High intensity war against Taliban	Just war and promotion of referendum	No war and promotion of consensus pact with Taliban
Venezuela	Promotion of military coup against Maduro	Democracy promotion with political conditionality	Democracy promotion with democratic assistance
Ukraine	No war but diplomatic pressure on Russia	No war and promotion of federalism	No war and promotion of consensus pact
North Korea	No war but diplomatic pressure on China	Democracy promotion with political conditionality	Democracy promotion with democratic assistance

At first, Obama has been pragmatic and volatile: with something of conservatism (Bin Laden's killing), of liberalism (the war against Gaddafi), of constructivism (with the support of moderate Islamic fundamentalist actors after the Arab Spring: in Libya, Egypt and Iran). But his diplomacy was not fully constructivist, as he did not support moderate fundamentalist actors in Yemen (Houthis) and did not promote consensus pacts in Syria (including Assad), Afghanistan (including Taliban) and Ukraine (including Russians). When Isis emerged, Obama became passive and uncertain, by disobeying any model. At the end, his diplomacy has not been coherent, and has promoted neither interests nor values. The label of "smart power" (Nye 2012), that is to say a combination of hard and soft power, has been used for Obama; in fact, his diplomacy has been soft, but the problem is that compliance was not stabilized; thus, Obama's "power" has been very low.

Instead, Trump stabilized some compliance, and for example Isis has been weakened in Syria and Iraq, but only with "surrogate warfare". Trump has not become isolationist, and his diplomacy is quite (even if not fully) coherent, but he is materializing a "soft" conservative diplomacy, with a "reluctant" defense of interests. This may appear a paradox, because his communication style is rude and assertive, but he combines fast declarations and slow actions, and they both appear as the two sides of the same coin. This evaluation is similar to Starr-Dealen's (2018) emphasis on Trump's "principled realism". The only mainstream conservative diplomacy is applied in Syria, where he is promoting (together with Russia) Assad, the new lesser evil (and not for example a consensus pact). In Libya he is supporting the lesser evil Haftar, but not with the typical conservative instrument: the support of a military coup. Then, the USA are using "low intensity" violence ("surrogate warfare"), with aerial bombings in several Middle east countries, against some radical Islamic fundamentalist groups. A mainstream conservative diplomacy should have led to high intensity wars against Isis in Iraq and Syria, Al Qaeda in Yemen and Taliban in Afghanistan. However, Trump's negotiations with the Taliban contradict even the soft version of conservatism, that would never support a radical Islamic fundamentalist actor; this has probably happened because those talks have been encouraged by Saudi Arabia. The planned reduction of US military forces in Syria, but not in Afghanistan, is coherent with conservatism. Then, Trump is supporting Guaidò's democratic opposition to Maduro in Venezuela, but only with diplomatic pressure (soft conservatism); a mainstream conservative diplomacy should lead him to organize a military coup against Maduro. Finally, he is not making any relevant diplomatic pressure, typical of a great power, on Russia in Ukraine and on China in North Korea. However, Trump has abandoned the defense of liberal and constructivist ideas, typical of the 1990s, or of neo-conservatism (in the 2003 Iraq war); both

“just wars” (like in Bosnia and Kosovo) and democracy promotion only seem a memory of the past (Norrlof 2018, Stokes 2018). Constructivism (with an emphasis on consensus pacts) is being firmly refused by Trump; it is currently proposed (even if without any relevant political effect) only by the UN, by the EU commission (“Lady Pesc” Mogherini), and by some European governments.

In sum, US foreign policies of both presidents have abandoned their previous great power’s ambitions (Nye 2019, Walker 2018), whose main feature is governance capability (Fossati 2017).⁵ Obama was not able to influence international politics, while with Trump some compliance has been stabilized -Isis has been weakened -, but the USA does not seem to be willing anymore to try to “govern the world”. For example, the American Middle East policy seems to have been elaborated more by local powers (Iran for Obama and Saudi Arabia for Trump), than by his presidents.

5 Here is a list of essays on Obama (Bose 2019, Brands 2016, Cutler 2017, Dueck 2015, Henriksen 2017, Kaufman 2016, Keller 2015, Lofflmann 2017, Maas 2018, Walt 2018) and on Trump (Abrams 2017, Brands 2017, 2018, Daalder, Lindsay 2018, Dombrowki, Reich 2017, Edwards 2018, Jarhi Milo 2018, Maillet 2018, Oliva, Shanahan 2019, Singh 2016). Moran (2017) labeled Obama’s diplomacy as declinist. According to Clarke, Ricketts (2017b), Obama’s diplomacy was an attempt of “decline management”, while Trump’s foreign policy was aimed at a “decline denial”. According to Posen (2018), Trump is looking for a primacy “without a purpose”. Jeffrey (2017) has emphasized the continuity, even with a different personal tone, between Obama and Trump. Powaski (2019) wrote about realism and idealism, but those are categories of political philosophy or of schools of thought of IRs scholars, while conservative or liberal diplomatic models are categories of political science. Finally, there are some rigid scholars (Mearsheimer 2018, Porter 2018), who are simply nostalgic of the past, and are incapable of reading whatever diplomatic change.

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