



The Illusion of Making America Great Again

*the shifting positionality of states within the global
hierarchical structure*

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Abstract

Since the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 45th president of the United States of America, US policy has shifted towards isolation and protectionism, challenging initial patterns of cooperation among the states within the global political order, aiming at improving the American stance in the world. Thus, this paper will analysis whether the ‘Trumpian’ foreign policy approach might indeed be able to enhance the American stance in the international realm, by arguing that the breaking with initial patterns of cooperation provokes resistance with the American leadership, leading to a weakening of the American positionality within the global hierarchical structure and thus, weakening the structural power-capabilities of the US. In order to do so, the author applies a qualitative discourse analysis to the examination of documents, representing the voices of European decision-makers. The author concludes by stating that the American behaviour is eventually challenging the positionality of the US globally, provoking a restructuring of the global political order.

Keywords: Global Hierarchies, International Relations, Trump, Positionality, Discourse,

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1. Introduction

In January 2017, Donald J. Trump was inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States of America (White House,2018a). Under the slogans ‘Make America Great Again’ and ‘America First’ (Ettinger,2018;White House,2018b; White House,2018a), his election campaign for presidency in 2016 has directed its attention towards the empowerment of American people domestically, as well as the countering of the relative decline in terms of the unmatched dominance of the US internationally through strength (White House,2018b), by advocating an isolationist and protectionist foreign policy agenda (Biegon,2019:519). Challenging patterns of cooperation (as multilateral cooperation and mutual respect for the interests of each actor) that have governed the relationship between the Americans and its European allies (Flockhart,2007), Trump has highlighted the importance of ‘deal-making’, assuming a dichotomous relationship of ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ for one side of the agreement (Biegon,2019). Moreover, Trump has promoted the rejection of global liberal institutions, questioned the functionality and necessity of global alliances, and spurned international treaties and laws (WP,2017; WP,2019; BBC,2020). However, in the context of an understanding of American dominance to be based on a globalist strategy, that has been implemented during former periods of presidency in the US (Biegon,2019), the approach by Trump appears to be paradox. In fact, we might question the efficiency of this political stance in terms of achieving a strengthening of American hegemony. In that regard, the attempt to increase global domination by decreasing global participation in the context of a liberal political system seems to be puzzling. Resulting from that research puzzle, the paper asks the question *whether the ‘Trumpian’ foreign policy approach might indeed be able to enhance the American stance in the international realm*, leading to the opposing question whether the violation of patterns of behaviour by the American side towards its international allies might eventually weaken the dominant position of the US within the global political structure.

These questions will be answered through the proposition of the argumentation that by challenging the norms that govern the relationship among the units within the global political system via the (voluntary) transfer of sovereignty and freedoms to a higher authority (Lake,2009), the ‘Trumpian’ approach might actually endanger the exceptional dominant position of America within the system. In fact, it will be argued that the dominant position has been attributed to the US by its subordinated states, as e.g. Germany or France, through acts of compliance to American ‘rule’ and the discursive construction of superiority, as exemplified by Lake (2009). While it might be assumed that the focus on America’s coercive power capabilities

may increase the U.S'. compulsory power towards other states (*see* Barnett&Duvall,2005), the departure from the actual source of its dominance, the natural and voluntary transfer of freedoms and sovereignty (Donnelly,2006) within the liberal global order in turn, decreases the willingness of the subordinate states to comply with the (new) American rule and therefore weakens the American position and with it, the ability of the latter to steer the policy objectives of other states.

1.2 Research Purpose and Relevance to International Relations Scholarship

The special interest of the paper is directed towards the effects of foreign policy strategies that question the legitimacy of the global order and the structure of the units within it, as well as the ability of subordinate states to shape the power capabilities of the superior power. Thus, the author aims to contribute to the broader IR literature insofar, as he examines the durability of superiority, and in particular of the US, taking into account the social processes that inform the respective dominance in the first place. Furthermore, this paper proposes an critical stance towards traditional ideas of dominance solely based on material capabilities by rather directing its attention towards the importance of the structural processes and characteristics that constitute the positionality, and thus the access to decision-making power, of each unit. Finally, the author implicitly highlights the limited nature of superiority in global politics. As the theoretical approaches are argued to be widely applicable to various analytical foci, I argue that the account given through this paper can be considered to be a highly relevant contribution to the discourse of general IR scholarship.

While I am aware of the complexity of the global political structure beyond the existence of nation states, I have chosen a parsimonious theoretical approach for the sake of analytical clarity, whereby I argue that the broader theoretical considerations are applicable to a wide range of actors with respect to their initial standing in the global political structure.

1.3 Chapter Overview

In order to support the argument based on the research question, the paper will be structured in three main parts:

Namely, the first part will be introducing the core processes and theoretical considerations that are underlying the argumentation, by placing the research question into the scholarly debate of IR literature. In particular, by questioning the means of president Trump to reinforce American dominance in terms of the effects of his policies on the positionality of the US within the global structure, I will firstly discuss common approaches regarding the general global structure, arguing for the existence of hierarchical orders among the units within the system. Accordingly, I will debate the processes surrounding the ordering of the units, in terms of the

positionality that is being established, as well as the power dynamics that underly the dominant position of the US. Taking into account matters of the social creation of positionality, the paper, followingly, discusses patterns of interaction that inform the production of American superiority. In conclusion of the first main part, I will discuss the theoretical framework that has been established throughout the previous sections. Drawing from a social constructivist and poststructuralist ontological and epistemological basis, the paper argues for the importance of discourse for the production of reality and thus, the meaning that is given to the positionality of the US by subordinate states. Hence, the second part will be introducing the methodological tools that will be used to analyse the construction of the American positionality by European actors via discourse. In particular, I will be applying a predicate analysis for the examination of the meaning that is given to the US and its position within the global structure by representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Republic of France, as well as the Federal Republic of Germany. I argue that the findings, which will be discussed and assessed in the final part of the research paper, will answer the research question by widely supporting the assumption that the foreign policy behaviour by Trump is challenging existing patterns of cooperation, which provokes resistance by the American peers and leads to a restructuring of the global system through discursive means. The research paper will be concluded by discussing the relevance of the analytical findings through (re)placing them into the broader context of IR literature.

2.0 Theoretical assumptions driving the research

The following part will introduce the wider debate of IR scholarship by approaching the two-layered research question, whether the American foreign policy might actually strengthen or eventually weaken the American stance in the global realm, based on the puzzling contradiction between the predominance of a liberal rule based order through which American power is maintained (see below) and recent American foreign policies, challenging that very order. The chapter will be separated by the discussions regarding the global order, the creation and maintenance of positionality and the forms of power that it constitutes and finally, the characteristics that structure the relationships among the actors within the system.

2.1 The Global Political Order

Among scholars of IR-literature, much discussion has surrounded the question whether the international system is structured by the absence of a political authority, or by the unequal relationships of subordination and dominance (Lake,2007; Donnelly,2009). Nevertheless, as

the thesis is interested in the creation and deprivation of an actor's positionality within a systemic structure and its resulting effects on the actor's power capabilities, the analytical focus rests on orders that are based on ranked actors standing in unequal relations to each other (Donnelly,2009), and goes beyond the discussion of hierarchy and anarchy, directly into the workings of positionality within a hierarchically structured order. Thus, given the research question, whether we might regard the foreign policy behaviour of the US as negatively impacting its ability to determine the behaviour of its subordinate states, the importance of the analytical focus on hierarchies rests on its representation of inequality within the global political system. In simplistic terms, I argue for the existence of a global hierarchical order that is governed by international norms and dominated by the US.

Based on the alleged existence of hierarchical systems (*see* Hobson&Sharman,2005), scholars as Mattern & Zarakol (2016) argue for the functionality of hierarchies via the organization, ordering and stratification of actor's relations with each other through processes of differentiation. Similarly, Towns (2012:188) argues for an understanding of hierarchies, equal to social rank, as "ordering [...] actors as superior or inferior to one another [...]". On the other hand, Donnelly (2009) states that a conceptualization of hierarchy would merely indicate the hierarchical structure as a framework for unequally structured units but does not indicate the ways those units are arranged. Thus, we may argue for the importance of focussing on the units themselves and the ways their positionalities are created and produced instead of looking merely at the structure itself. Therefore, I argue that hierarchies are no ordering principles, rather, they consist of units that are ordered via the construction of their positionality which is established through norms (as patterns of behaviour (Towns,2012)) that determine the relationships and rankings among these units. The following part will conceptualize positionality or rank, in order to determine its impact on the global political structure, as well as to set the basis for an understanding of the workings of norms to the positionality of an actor.

2.2. Discussing the Concept of Positionality

Having established an understanding of the global structural surrounding of the US and its peers, the following part will debate literature regarding the construction and maintenance of positionality and the dominant positionality of the US. I argue this is necessary for the construction of the theoretical framework which implicates the importance of an actor's dominant positionality to the ability to influence the policy objectives of subordinated states.

Within the literature regarding the workings of status, positionality and rank, the conceptualizations of these terminologies range within a multitude of perspectives

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(Hobson&Sharman,2005; Donnelly,2009; Lake,2007, etc.), which might impede on a clear understanding of the different features these terms provide. Hence, for the sake of analytical clarity, I argue for a broader conception, based on the understanding of these terms by Wolf (2019) who defines social status, as “an actor’s position within a social hierarchy” (1211). Therefore, I will refer to status or rank as positionality and vice versa, being established through the social production and reproduction of each unit by, and in relation to the other.

In this manner, Jack Donnelly (2009) argues for the construction of rank via the differentiation of units among each other. As forms of differentiation might be diverse, he neglects the idea of differentiation solely based on an actor’s material power resources (MacDonald & Lake,2008). Instead, social acts of differentiation might involve behavioural patterns as the recognition of the dominant actor’s superior role through submission to its “[...] views, wishes, or commands [...]” (Wolf,2019:1191).

An actor’s positionality might depend on the interaction with weaker actors that recognize the dominance of the alleged superior power (MacDonald&Lake, 2008). Similarly, Freedman argues that an “[...] individual’s status is a function of social order and, as such, is dependent on the ‘social judgements’ and recognition of others” (2016:800). While the coercive power of a state might be important to bring the dominant into a position to be recognized as superior towards other states (Donnelly,2006), the lack of recognition might be argued to limit the superior’s structural power (*See* Barnett&Duvall,2005; Finnemore,2011) to steer the subordinates policy objectives. In fact, the actor’s socially constituted positionality within the institutional and structural arrangements determines whether the actor has the capabilities to act over the interests of others (*see* Barnett&Duvall,2005). Thus, the social production of positionality informs an actor’s power capabilities.

However, we might question the ability of each subordinate to voluntarily recognize an actor’s position within a system. Wolf (2019) argues for the authority of the superordinate towards the subordinate as being based on already established relations: In relation to the analysis of the system that has widely been established by the US since the end of World War Two (Ikenberry,2010, Lanoszka,2013), we may argue for the contemporary liberal global political system being defined through rules and norms governing political arrangements (Wohlforth et al,2011) and hence, arguably promote a certain degree of voluntarism among the actors within it.

Nevertheless, by recognizing the growing independence of the European states based on the European project (Lake,2013), incentives might decrease for the European states to recognized American authority, when expected benefits are low. As Lanoszka states, the dominant state,

in order to gain the recognition of other states in the system, must offer goods (as a stable social order, economic advantages, and security) that benefit the subordinate's submissive role (2013)(see Lake,2009). Thus, based on historic notions of security and the economic interdependence with the US (Ikenberry,2010; Mastanduno,2011; Walt,2011), we may argue for the advantages for European states to trade recognition of the American-led hierarchical structure for protection and economic benefits. In turn, the persistence of that recognition might therefore be dependent on the acceptance of the status quo and its underlying dynamics that govern these relationships. Furthermore, the change of the authority's role in form of the conducted policies towards its subordinates, informing the natural and voluntary transfer of sovereignty, might disrupt the relationship of the actors and thus, the recognition of the dominant actor's authority itself.

To gain a better understanding of the hierarchical dynamics underlying the Euro-American relationships, the following part will examine the creation of American dominance through social relations. This is necessary, as I argue, to understand the nature of the current global hierarchical structure, as well as the ways in which American dominance might be under jeopardy.

2.2.1 Elucidating the underlying power-dynamics of the Euro-American relationship

As an essential basis to answer whether a change in American behaviour in relation to the previous status quo provokes a change in the Euro-American relationships, a shift in positionality of the US and followingly a change in American power capabilities, we need to understand the very nature of the Euro-American relationships and their underlying power dynamics that inform and are informed by positionality. Thus, the following part will establish a theoretical understanding of power that explains the workings behind the Euro-American relationships. In particular, I argue on the basis of the understanding of power, introduced by Barnett and Duvall (2005) whereby IR scholarship may identify four basic features of power that may be used to examine the dynamics that underly the global political system. These forms of power include an actor's ability to directly control another actor (*compulsory power*); the power working "[...] through diffuse social relations of interaction [...]" in which one actor exercises indirect control over the other (*institutional power*); the construction of one actor's "[...] capacities in direct structural relations to one another" (*structural power*); as well as the social "production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification" (*productive power*) (Barnett&Duvall,2005: 44). In other words, power does not only work through the direct

exercise of it, neither can it be seen as being possessed by merely one powerful actor, rather, power works through various forms of social and political arrangements (*see*: Finnemore, 2011). Furthermore, these powers should be seen as inextricably reinforcing each other as, for example, the production of meaning and identity might produce the circumstances in which an actor is able to enact its direct control over another actor (Barnett & Duvall, 2005). Hence, the ability to affectively produce the actor's positionality might not only rest on the perception of the actor's power, but also informs the actor's status within the institutional and structural arrangements and thus, the power capabilities in accordance to the actor's positionality.

Accordingly, this paper aims to examine whether we might have a decrease in the structural positionality of the US and thus, in the power capabilities of the latter through the change in its social relations. Hence, I argue for the need to identify the very nature of these relationships. In doing so, we establish an understanding of the ways in which American dominance might be challenged or redefined, respectively.

Furthermore, this author argues for a social understanding of positionality through the production of reality which introduces the ranking of an actor within various structural and institutional settings and thus, influences an actor's decision-making power in the international realm. In turn, an actor's coercive, institutional, and structural identity or rank impacts the understanding of the actor itself and might lead to the discursive construction of a "new" identity and the meaning of an actor's actions via the discursive production of reality. Consequently, an actor's power capabilities could be measured through the examination of the production of an actor's identity as dominant or submissive, respectively, which, in turn, informs an understanding of an actor's positionality and therefore, the actor's institutional and structural power capabilities and vice versa. Hence, the recognition of the dominant actor's authority is essential for the creation of a superior rank within the hierarchical structure and might therefore be regarded to be the source of the dominance itself.

To examine American dominance over others within global structural arrangements as identified in the previous parts, as well as the reconstruction of it, the research paper should not only be able to provide clear insights into the domination via these forms of power by the US, (*see* Chapter 2.2.1.1), but to identify the reconstruction of its dominance through the actual challenging of its positional superiority via social relations with other actors.

While the forms of power are interlinked in their dynamics, these discursive acts of defiance need to be conceptualized in terms of the nature of the social relations through which American dominance is constituted.

2.2.1.1 Clarifying the social workings of American power

Many scholars of IR theory agree upon the material, institutional and structural predominance of the US since the end of the Cold War, leading to an understanding of the global order as being unipolarly structured under American authority (Wohlforth et al,2011). Despite its unquestioned dominance, American power is not total, but depending on the legitimation of the American authority, which has been achieved through the institutional and structural settings that provide a stable and relatively profitable political order to each subordinate state.(Finnemore,2011; Mastanduno,2011). While these settings may have diffused American power, they established a system of alliances in which American supporters gained tremendously from American leadership (Mastanduno,2011;Walt,2011;Lake,2013). Instead of coercion, this domination has been argued to be based on an understanding of the US as acting on behalf of European states through the control over Europe's military and economic development (Lanoszka,2013). This "benevolent" leadership (Lanoszka,2013:385), which has produced notions of "we-ness" (Bially-Mattern,2005:12), has led to the creation of a political hierarchical order (Ikenberry,2010), in which European states have traded their sovereignty through formal institutional settings as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as informal political arrangements to gain military and economic stability (Lake,2013).

These patterns of cooperation further defined the political structural arrangement through which American dominance works (Wohlforth et al,2011). Hence, I argue for the dependency of the American position on the upholding of these pattern of behaviour, for the sake of the recognition of its authority. Moreover, a break in the nature of the American authority might provoke resistance to comply with American leadership and recognize American dominance, which hampers the access of the US to European decision-making via these structural and institutional arrangements. Looking into previous examples as the politics resulting from the September-eleven attacks in 2001 or the global financial crisis in 2008 in which US policy behaviour has provoked resistance and the functionality of the global liberal order was under scrutiny (Buzan&Gonzales-Leaez,2005; Ikenberry, 2010), this author argues that the European's ability to act outside the American military and economic scope depends on the existence of dominant states that might replace the American leadership in economically and military important sectors, due to the persisting inability of the European community to act independently of the support of stronger states (Brattberg&Valášek,2019). Thus, alternative institutional and structural arrangements, benefitting European actors, threaten the inescapability of a social political setting under American dominance.

Either way, having identified the Euro-American relationship within the political structure, as well as the perils of change to the American authority, the following part will discuss whether the contemporary foreign policy behaviour of the US-leadership under Trump might actually endanger the very core of its own dominance, the recognition of the American authority by European states. I argue, that this part is essential for supporting the argument that the violation of norms, governing the relationship between the US and the European subordinate states within the hierarchically ordered structure, might lead to the challenging of the American positionality within the system and hence, weaken the American capabilities to determine European foreign policy.

2.3 Conceptualizing norms

2.3.1 The construction of norms

In order to understand the importance of the norms governing the Euro-American relationship and thus, shaping the positionality of the US, this part will briefly conceptualize norms. As the violation of norms that shape the Euro-American relationship and thus, inform the subordinates' understanding of American dominance, was argued to impact the power capabilities of the US, I will discuss whether recent foreign policy strategies of the US conflict with the established norms within the hierarchical system.

According to Towns (2012:180), norms can be understood as standardized patterns of behaviour, based on the identity of the respective actor. Changing norms might in turn entail the change of an actor's identity or role (Panke&Petersohn,2011). Drawing from IR constructivist scholarship, norms set the basis for appropriate behaviour, whereby the actors are constrained by them (Towns,2012). Therefore, contemporary decision-making of the US or Europe, can be argued to be ultimately constrained by their respective historic predecessors. Thus, any policy affecting the relationship between those actors is directly affecting the norms that govern those relationships, and vice versa.

On the other hand, the discursive promotion of norms can be seen to determine the appropriate behaviour within a given structure through the creation of the identity of an actor, and therefore limit foreign policy options. Thus, the European promotion of norms might not merely be a selfless action, but rather what Diez (2013) calls a hegemonic act, attempting to shape the variety of foreign policies of other states within the hierarchical structure. The violation of norms could, in turn, be seen as the abolishment of rules that order the behaviour within the hierarchical structure. Hence, one might argue, that the active discursive production of norms might be a means to restrict the capabilities of one actor to actively decide on policies

concerning both the political structure, and the neglect of norms might endanger the very basis of that structure.

2.3.2 The violation of norms under Trump

Based on the aforementioned assumptions regarding the impact of norms, this part highlights recent policy developments affecting the Euro-American relationship within the global hierarchical structure. Biegon has argued that the policy turn under Trump was highly motivated by the assumptions of America's relative decline proportional to its peers within the global political environment (2019). As a result, the Trump administration aimed to define American power via the symbolic representation of coercive power and the challenging of America's former liberal stance through the focus on nationalism and economic isolation (Biegon,2019; Magcamit,2017). The symbolic representation of economic and military power might be a means to enhance the American status through the demonstration of American superiority (Freedman,2016), the neglect of patterns of cooperation through formal and informal settings (Magcamit,2017; Panke&Petersohn,2017) and the increasing projection of coercive means might lead to a renewed perception of the American role (Ettinger,2018). This can, therefore, weaken the recognition of the American positionality by its European allies. Furthermore, the promotion of cooperation as "deal-making", resting on an underlying dichotomy of "winning" and "losing" (Biegon,2019; also Busby&Monten,2018), might create uncertainties regarding the benefits for European states under US-leadership. Therefore, while the focus on coercive capabilities by Trump, as well as the anti-liberalist sentiments might increase the opportunities on single states within the structure, the decrease in support might actually limit the opportunities to shape global politics in the interest of the American state. In turn, the lack of recognition of American authority within the hierarchical structure might be seen through acts of discursive defiance and the recreation of order outside of the American range, as will be further exemplified.

2.4. Theoretical conceptions as a framework

The previous parts have aimed to develop an understanding of the workings of positionality and norms, underlying my theoretical argumentation regarding the reconstruction of American positionality, based on the recognition of its superiority within the global hierarchical structure, by its subordinate states. Accordingly, while the workings of these features were exemplified, the significance of the following part rests on the need to develop a coherent theoretical framework, that can be applied to the analysis of the change in the nature of American

behaviour, contributing to a shift in American positionality through the recognition and reproduction of such by European states, in the last part of this paper.

As mentioned above, Mattern and Zarakol (2016) argue for the functionality of hierarchies as ordering and shaping the behaviour of units within the hierarchical structure itself. While varying in focus, they highlight the interworking of three logics that constitute hierarchy, whereby each logic draws from a distinctive ontological perspective. However, this author argues that, while each logic might give insights into the workings of an actor's behaviour, their theoretical framework fails to adequately conceptualize hierarchies in terms of their functionality towards the behaviour of states. As argued by Mattern and Zarakol themselves (2016), "[...] in its focus on actors' position-contingent interests and expectations, [their concept] points to a logic of positionality to explain outcomes in world politics" (638). Therefore, I will argue for the importance of positionality, as a defining feature of hierarchy, and their impact on the hierarchically structured system of actors. Consequently, despite the broad conceptualization, the importance of hierarchy does not diminish, but rests on the understanding of entailing a multitude of unequally structured units within one system. Thus, the change in behaviour of one unit, might directly impact the behaviour and positionality of the remaining units within the structure (*see* Donnelly, 2009). Therefore, as this paper argues for ranking as ordering, influencing, as well as enabling an actor's behaviour and capabilities, the two remaining logics of trade-off and productivity by Mattern and Zarakol (2016) will be conceptualized as defining factors for the positionality of an actor.

2.4.1 Trading in Positionality

Based on ideas developed within the social contract school of thought (*see* Ch.2.2), the positioning of each actor is not only based on material capabilities, but on the recognition of each actor's status by other units within the hierarchy (Mattern & Zarakol, 2016). Within this exchange of freedoms for a certain political arrangement (Lake, 2009; Mattern & Zarakol, 2016), authority is recognized, and positionality established. The lack of this exchange may be argued to lead to a lesser degree of authority and thus, a weaker position of the dominant actor. Thus, the denial to trade-in such freedoms can be seen as an active attempt to refuse a dominant actor the access to the decision-making of the inferior state. Furthermore, resistance might be based on the inability of a dominant actor to fulfil its assigned role within the bargain (Mattern & Zarakol, 2016). Therefore, the theoretical consideration of trade-offs entails two basic assumptions: Firstly, the dominant actor's position is dependent on the subordinate's recognition of its positionality and secondly, the inferior's recognition towards the positionality

is based on a successful functional bargain between the dominant and the subordinate actor. However, these processes are highly subjective and, while visible through policy adoption, most apparent within the discourse that is used to link action with meaning. Therefore, the focus of this paper is on the creation of the meaning of action through discourse.

To identify the trade-off via discourse, the analysis of the recent Euro-American relationship would need to show two essential parts to exemplify a weakened positionality of the US within the hierarchical system:

Firstly, the dominant state is unwilling or incapable of providing weaker actors with a political arrangement that satisfies the interests of the subordinate; and secondly, that this provokes resistance of the weaker states to comply to the foreign strategies of the dominant actor in areas of mutual interest.

As acts of resisting the dominance of the superordinate US within the structure might be based on a variety of political backgrounds, the theoretical framework attempts to highlight the importance of the construction and reconstruction of norms that limit or enable an actor's capabilities and possible choices of foreign policy strategies and hence, contribute to the positionality of an actor. Therefore, the following part will introduce the second part of the theoretical framework, based on a poststructuralist notion of the construction of reality via discourse.

2.4.2 Producing Positionality

According to Mattern and Zarakol (2016), the logic of productivity essentially implies the production of not only the scope of behaviour, but the identity of an actor within world politics herself. Based on the idea of the production of reality through the means of discourse (Milliken, 1999), this understanding entails the possibility of the use of discursive means to define an actor's role and thus, shape an actor's positionality within the hierarchical political structure. Furthermore, the subordinate might aim to define an actor's capacities via the construction of the scope of appropriateness of an act (Mattern & Zarakol, 2016). Hence, through discourse, an actor might not only shape the role of an actor as being superior or inferior, respectively, but might even construct the scope of actions possible within the normative framework of global politics.

To support this claim, the theoretical framework contains two basic assumptions that need to be supported through the application of the theoretical model on the analysis of the Euro-American relationship within the hierarchical structure.

Firstly, it needs to show that the subordinate's language actively produces an actor's role through differentiation, as applying a 'we-they' dichotomy to the Euro-American relationship.

Secondly, the analysis should exemplify the construction of norms of appropriate behaviour through discourse, as a means to restrict the superior's accepted opportunities to act 'as it wishes to', including the reconstruction of appropriate relations within the global structure.

I argue that these measures order and stratify the superior's capabilities via its assigned positionality and therefore, limits the active power capabilities of the US.

2.5 Concluding Chapter Two

After having discussed the research agenda and placed it into the field of IR scholarship, as well as having developed the theoretical framework, driving the research, the following part will introduce the methodological framework necessary to develop a coherent analysis that aims at answering the question *whether the 'Trumpian' foreign policy approach might indeed be able to enhance the American stance in the international realm*. Underlying the subsequent analysis are the assumptions formulated throughout the previous parts. In this regard, I have argued that the recognition of the dominant positionality of the US and the following transfer of sovereignty and freedom to act by the subordinate European allies is based on the provision of a stable social-political order. As a consequence, the disruption of these processes may lead to the reconstruction of the initial dominant positionality through the discursive production of the American role, a reconsideration of the Euro-American relationship, and followingly a reproduction of the global order. Thus, the upholding of the norms that have governed the relationships within the structure and have reinforced the respective positionalities is crucial for the persistence of American dominance, going beyond basic understandings of material superiority.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Methodological Research Context

The dominance of the USA within the global system, its source of domination in terms of the nature of its power capabilities, as well as the alleged demise of it, has shaped the study of IR scholarship in various ways. For example, Jack Donnelly (2006) has examined American power via the analysis of the unequal distribution of rights among the superior US and its subordinate countries by studying formal inequalities via the content of treaties, monographs and "multi-volume reference works" (Donnelly,2006:145). While the analysis of the contents paired with an historical methodological approach might help to understand the formal manifestations of

American superiority beyond military and economic resources, and might identify the origin and the development of its dominance more broadly, his methodological focus is hereby regarded as insufficient to analyse the ways American actions are perceived by its peers, and the ways positionality within the global hierarchical structure is discursively produced. Rather, this author aims to study the active production of the American positionality through the means of discourse, instead of the existence of American dominance, which is been regarded as a given fact.

Moreover, David Lake (2007) has developed a theory-driven methodological concept to identify the hierarchical relationship of the US and their hierarchic subordinates. He has developed a cross-national quantitative framework, looking at the effects of American dominance on the defence spending in several countries within a broader time period (Lake,2007). Additionally, he has aimed to identify US-American dominance in terms of military presence and economic dependencies (2007) in, and of, subordinate countries, via the quantification of troop deployments and shared or independent alliances between the countries, respectively. While his methodologies might be helpful to exemplify the presence of a dominant actor, the dependencies of the subordinates in regard to the military and economic security, as well as the effects of the provision of authority to the dominant actor in terms of military and economic sovereignty, the quantification of security dependencies between the US and their subordinates hardly grasps sentiments towards the superior power, nor does it help to analyse processes of the production of the legitimate authority in the first place. Thus, based on the research question, whether the recent foreign policy under Trump might prevent the American dominance from declining by breaking with patterns of behaviour that have initially led to the reinforcement of its dominance within the structure, this paper puts emphasis on the analysis of the discursive creation and continuation of structural arrangements that inform the provision of authority from subordinate states to the US and thus, enhance the structural and institutional power capabilities. Hence, the analysis will be conducted via the qualitative examination and interpretation of documents that are mirroring the perceptions of the subordinate states. In particular, the examination of the discourse of the actors may give insights into the perceived core functionality of the relationships between subordinate and the superior, widely irrespective of actual dependencies.

3.2 Predicate Analysis by Milliken

Driven by the theoretical assumptions that have been developed in previous sections, the author's methodological framework aims to direct the focus onto the study of the perception of

the American behaviour towards its allies and its effects on the production of the American positionality through the discursive ordering of the global hierarchical structure. In particular, drawing from the predicate methodological framework introduced by Milliken (1999), I aim to identify the creation of meaning and characteristics of a certain actor and its social context via discourse, through the recognition of adjectives, verbs and adverbs “attached to nouns” (Milliken, 1999:232). In practice, I will be examining the connections that are being made between the object of study, as the US, and the linguistic means that are being used to identify the subordinates understanding of the latter, as the interpretation or perception of the American role. Thus, the discourse analysis will consist of three steps: Firstly, identifying the object that is being perceived and constructed via the coding scheme, which will be exemplified below. Secondly, examining the ways the objects of study are identified and constructed via the means of discourse in form of adverbs, adjectives and verbs that can be associated with the object of study. Finally, assessing the impact on the structuring of the political order by discussing the theoretical implications, introduced throughout the first part of the paper.

This way, I argue to be able to identify the ways the American positionality is framed by European actors, through emphasizing the meaning that is being given to the American ally and its decision-making (see Milliken, 1999:232). Furthermore, via this method, I will be able to emphasise the discursive (re)production of a global order in terms of the characteristics of that order and the positions of the actors within it, as I argue. However, the identification of these predicates might be argued to be subjective and therefore selective, respectively fitting to the built argumentation, which this author is highly aware of. Nevertheless, I argue that the broad analysis and identification of these predicates persist in their value due to the meaning that they give to the subjects that are being identified throughout this paper, and the interpretative potential they have regarding the perceptions of the respective objects of study. As the choice of samples is argued to be decisive for the verification of the analytical value, the following part will introduce the data collection methods that are being used to collect the samples that are needed for the analysis.

3.3 Data Collection

As a basis for the study of the discursive production of the American positionality, the selection of data as well as the actors that are argued to produce American positionality is essential in terms of the impact of perception on the actions of these actors, as well as the abilities of those actors to shape American positionality. Moreover, the value that is being assigned to the predicates is arguably rooted in the initial understanding of the relationships among the actors, as has been exemplified in section 2 of this paper.

In this respect, Wolf (2011) has aimed to study the perceptions of “respect and disrespect” of subordinate states from a constructivist perspective, trying to look beyond the material interests of actors as a motivator for action, suggesting methods that analyse the subjective perceptions of actors through acts that appear unlikely in a given situation. Furthermore, Onea (2014) has tested theories of dominant power behaviour through the analysis of the discourse of decision-making bodies that demonstrate the rivalry between states due to status anxieties (Onea,2014). Both studies give important insights into the qualitative analysis of discourses that take into account the perceptions by subordinate states of the behaviour of the dominant, as well as the effects these perceptions have on the behaviour of the subordinate towards the dominant state, based on pre-existing social structures. Most importantly, both studies provide an important framework for the selection of data that supports my theoretical assertions. Therefore, drawing from general critique of both authors, I will outline several conditions for the collection of the data that are necessary, as I argue, to ensure the validity of the data itself.

Firstly, the actor’s analysed should be argued to be decisive for the positionality of the US within the structure. Thus, this research paper directs its focus towards European countries and institutional setting which are and consist of not only long-term allies of the US, but can be argued to have a crucial influence on the regional and global decision-making, as well as represent larger interest groups within the global hierarchical structure. Thus, the data selected will include statements by the European Commission (EC) (EC,2018) and its representatives at the United Nations (EEAS,2018a), as well as the former High Representative of the European External Action Service (EEAS) Federica Mogherini and the foreign ministers of the E3 (Germany, France, United Kingdom) (EEAS,2018b), and finally, the High Representative of the EU and the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom and Germany (EEAS,2019). As an institutional body that represents the foreign policy attempts of the EU (EEAS,2019b) and thus, a vast majority of European countries and their standing towards other countries (EEAS,2019b), the EEAS can be seen as the EU’s foreign policy agency. While the documents, differ in terms of the individual actors, the documents of the European Commission and the EEAS will be treated as a representation of the European community, including decisive state actors as Germany, France or the United Kingdom.

Secondly, the Republic of France as one of the major powers and founding member of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), as well as a military and economic “powerhouse” on the European continent, being, together with the United Kingdom and Germany, responsible for about 60 per cent of the EU defence budget in 2019 (Howorth,2019), will be used as another set of samples for my analysis.

Thirdly, the German Republic as one of the central partners for military and economic cooperation with the US in Europe (*see* Speck,2016) will be the final set of samples used. Moreover, both, Germany and France, are considered as two of the most important European players in terms of European trade policy (Schirm,2010).

Each of those actors can be argued to be decisive for European integration and foreign policy decision-making in Europe and are therefore, highly valuable for the analysis of the discourse, directed towards the US. Moreover, due to the diversity in their functions, socio-political backgrounds, and roles they inhabit within the EU, coupled with long term partnerships with the US, I argue for each of those actors, representing the larger European community to some extent and therefore valuable for the case of the construction of the American positionality by European actors.

Furthermore, as states themselves have been argued to be incapable of subjectively perceiving the behaviour of states and their respective status (Wolf,2011), the data should contain documents, representing the voices of individual decision-makers or groups of decision-makers. Thus, I have chosen to analyse documents of the representatives of these actors in form of the French president Emmanuel Macron, as well as the German chancellor Angela Merkel and her current foreign minister, Heiko Maas. Nevertheless, the documents conducted via the EEAS, including the statements by the EC, will be presented as one single voice, although encompassing a multitude of individual actors. This is due to the role as a coherent foreign policy institution of the EU, that I have ascribed to the EEAS.

However, each actor can be argued to be different in its approach towards the US and shaped by the domestic socio-political surrounding. Furthermore, each actor might be argued to be historically bound to national preferences. Nevertheless, I argue that the choice of actors is still sufficient for the analysis of the perception of American policies towards them, due to the generality of the statements regarding the consequences for the European community as a whole, partly exceeding domestic preferences.

Finally, I argue that the documents that are being analysed should decisively reflect the opinions and interpretations of those decision-makers and should be directed towards a broader audience with the alleged intentions to increase the awareness of the opinions that are being mentioned, in order to successfully shape the discourse and impact the positionality of the respective actors and, most importantly, the US. Thus, I will analyse press statements of the EEAS, a speech given by Macron at an ambassador's conference in Paris (Macron,2019a), an interview conducted with Macron by the British magazine "the economist" (Macron,2019b), two speeches given by Merkel at the "World Conference" in Davos (Merkel,2018a) and in front

of the European Parliament (Merkel,2018b), as well as one interview conducted with the German foreign minister, Maas, by the German newspaper “Die Süddeutsche Zeitung” (Maas,2018). I argue that these documents not only represent a wide range of European positions but enhance our understanding of the Euro-American relationship in terms of the variety of issues addressed, as well as socio-political surrounding in which they have been conducted. For example, Macron could be argued to be less adverse towards European independence than Merkel, based on the different historic notions of both countries towards independence (Brattberg & Valášek,2019). While one might question the specificity of the chosen documents in terms of the analysis of certain American behaviours, I argue that a general reflection of the perception of the American behaviour towards its European allies is valid in terms of the representation of the current state of the Euro-American relationship.

3.4 Methodological considerations

In order to develop a methodological framework that helps me to understand the impact of the Trumpian decision-making on the perception of its European subordinates, and as a consequence on the provision of legitimacy of authority to the US, through statements made by the chosen European actors, I argue for important points to be acknowledged. Firstly, drawing from IR constructivism, discourses are understood as “[...] structures of signification which construct social realities” (Milliken,1999:229). The construction of realities are essentially social processes in which meaning is produced (Milliken,1999; Holzscheiter,2014). In this view, knowledge is primarily subjective and bound by the interpretation and representation of it (Holzscheiter,2014). Furthermore, via discourse, social power is being displayed as meaning is constructed (Holzscheiter,2014). Thus, American authority cannot merely be measured through the analysis of its material and economic capabilities, but rather through the interpretation of its authority in the context of the subjective understanding of the American identity, as I argue. Hence, the American superiority and its positionality within the structural surrounding rests on the social reproduction of its position through the discursive means. Therefore, the analysis of the European discourse is not merely an analysis of the language applied in the given context, but must rather be seen in terms of the construction of the meaning this language applies to the social and political world (Milliken,1999).

Furthermore, in line with the theoretical assumptions on norms from the first, discourses can create and define appropriate practices and actions or can classify acts as inappropriate, respectively (Towns,2012). Thus, the analysis of the French, German and “European” (by the EEAS/EC) statements are not merely the examination of their perception of the relationship,

but also the analysis of a creation of a classification of the American foreign strategic behaviour. However, in this case, the classification of acts as norm-breaking might be rather broad. Accordingly, I argue a broad analysis of the general interpretation of the Trumpian policies that are detached from the complexities each single event bears, helps to better understand the sentiments towards its approach and its effects on the general positionality of the US.

3.5 Methodological implications and limitations

Furthermore, I will apply a qualitative interpretivist methodology that will deductively be driven by the theoretical framework. While one might highlight the subjective character of qualitative methods in terms of the interpretation of truth (Atkinson,2017), I argue that the analysis of the perception and the discursive creation of the American positionality by different actors creates the necessity of a certain flexibility regarding the identification of phrases as well as the identification of underlying meanings, based on a clear theoretical conceptualization. Furthermore, as outlined by Atkinson (2017), “[...] qualitative research methods help to gain insight into the processes involved in co- constructions of meaning, lived experiences, cultural rituals, and oppressive practice” (65). Thus, the qualitative methods applied are best suited to enhance the understanding of the meaning that is given to the behaviour of the US throughout the analysed documents

Considering the time-periods, each chosen document has been released after at least one year after inauguration of Donald Trump, as the author acknowledges the often time-delayed effects of political action on the assessment of policies by other actors in the system.

In terms of its external validity, I argue that the method and its underlying theoretical framework is applicable to a multitude of studies regarding the perception and reconstruction of American positionality within a global hierarchical framework, due to its underlying broadness in scope regarding the actors that are being analysed. However, each actor differs from the other and is influenced by its socio-political and historical backgrounds (Hanrieder,1965). By constructing a parsimonious theoretical framework, I argue to be able to overcome specific individual preference and successfully focus on the effects and processes of the discursive production of positionality. Nevertheless, in order to support this point, future research would need to extent the analytical concepts to a variety of actors in a multitude of backgrounds.

3.6 Coding scheme

As a final step of my methodological framework, the following will outline the coding scheme which will be used to identify the discursive production of a changing American positionality. The coding scheme will be necessary to assess the impact of American foreign policy behaviour

on the perception of the subordinated states and how, in turn, the American rank within the global structure is either maintained or reconstructed, respectively. Thus, the research question, whether American foreign policy behaviour might eventually weaken the American power position will be answered via the application of the following coding scheme, drawing from the previously established argumentative framework.

Namely, the analysis aims to identify the European perception of the American behaviour towards its European allies through the recognition of the violation of norms that have governed the relationship between European actors and the US. Therefore, the American role is reconstructed due to its perceived changing nature, and the initial Euro-American relationship reconsidered and readjusted. Consequently, the primal global order is questioned, and the structure among the actors within that order is newly created. Based on these theoretical assumptions, the coding scheme will provide the methodological tools to examine whether the documents display these relationships by analysing the recognition of **norm-violations** in terms of personal sentiments towards the behaviour of the US, contrasting previous norms with current attitudes towards them, and statements indicating diverging understandings of righteous decision-making. The framing of American decision-making as ‘wrong’, as ‘negatively affecting the European continent’, and notions of ‘disappointment’ are just three examples.

Furthermore, the **American role** might be portrayed through the recognition of its shifting nature, questioning American reliability, former American security-guarantees, and the American interests in the well-being of the European community.

Thirdly, the examination of the construction of a changing **Euro-American relationship** might include terms, identifying the willingness to reconsider, rethink, and readjust the initial partnership between Europe and America.

Finally, the reconstruction of the **global order** can be concluded through terms that identify shifting power balances, changing roles, and reconsiderations of the ordering of amities and rivalries, based on mutual interests.

By examining the documents, based on those identifiers, I argue to be able to coherently present my findings, highlighting whether the theoretical assertions may hold in terms of the reconstruction of the American positionality within the global hierarchical structure.

The subsequent analysis will be structured as follows: Firstly, the author will present the findings that have been conducted via the analysis of the respective documents in the context of the introduced coding scheme. The second part will discuss the findings in the context of the theoretical framework that has been introduced in the first part of this paper and finally, I will

assess the discussion by placing it into the scholarly field of IR through consideration of secondary IR literature.

For the sake of readability, the single parts will refrain from usual referencing in terms of the documents that are being analysed. In this case, the initial referencing will be reduced to the year of publication, as follows:

EEAS, 2018a	2018a
EEAS, 2018b	2018b
EEAS, 2019	2019
EC, 2018	2018

However, this schema will only be applied in section 4.1.1

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Analysis – Findings

The following part will introduce the findings of the analysis of the documents via the methodological scheme that has been discussed in the previous section. However, the characteristics of the respective documents differ which impacts the findings of my analysis to some extent. Nevertheless, I argue that the findings represent a broad support for the theoretical assertions that have been made throughout the research paper, aiming at assessing whether the foreign policy under the administration of Trump impacts the power capabilities of the USA. The second part will discuss the findings, based on the theoretical framework that has been developed in the first part of the paper in order to, finally, place the findings into the broader IR debate regarding the actual validity of my findings.

4.1.1 *The European External Action Service (EEAS)*

As argued above, the first set of samples is representing the discourse of the European community via the statements made by the officials of the EEAS/EC through channels as the United Nations Security Council, as well as the official public relations department.

The documents that are being examined are based on the topic of the American decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) that has been initiated and negotiated with the Iran by several global players, including the USA, as well as different European partners (EEAS,2018c). Hence, based on the methodological framework of the predicate analysis, the JCPoA is being presented by the EEAS/EC as an “successful” international agreement, “effective” (2018a;2018b), an economically “important agreement” (2018a), “positive” and “crucial” (2019), as well as “essential” for the European security

(2019;2018). The JCPoA has further been portrayed as being a representation of “successful diplomacy” (2018a), a “key for stability” (2019), and the result of multilateral unity and negotiations (2018a;2018b;2018). In contrast, the American decision to withdraw from the agreement has been noticed with regret and “concern” (2018a;2018b;2019). In this respect, the acts of withdrawing from or committing to the agreement, respectively, are based on the understanding of the JCPoA, as one might conclude. Thus, the commitment to the JCPoA has been formulated as committing to diplomatic and multilateral norms, “global peace”, “mutual benefits” (2018a), the protection of the economy (2018b;2018), the “respect” for international agreements (2018b), the “respect” for peace and international security (2018a;2018b;2019), as well as the commitment to international law (2019;2018). On the other hand, the withdrawal from the JCPoA has been displayed as challenging multilateral norms and diplomatic work, “destroying diplomatic efforts”, “undermining key multilateral negotiations” (2018a), endangering economic benefits (2018a;2018b;2019), disrespecting European law and United Nations resolutions (2018a), endangering European security (2019), and as having a “negative impact on European companies” (2018).

Furthermore, in terms of the implication the American behaviour has on the global system, the Euro-American relationships, the American role within the system, as well as the European strive for an autonomous foreign policy, independent from American dominance, the documents have been analysed as followed.

The recent Euro-American relationship has been described as being shaped by “disagreement” (2018a;2018b;2018;2019), non-cooperative and diverging in interests (2019;2018), while “maintaining the essential cooperation and remaining key partners and allies (2018). Moreover, the Euro-American relation is marked by a lack of acceptance towards the behaviour of the American administration, as well as the willingness to counter American decision-making (2018b;2019).

On the other hand, the American administration has been criticized for not protecting European and the global security (2018a;2018b;2019), for challenging Europe and the global order (2019) and for abandoning international law (2018b). In this respect, America as “partner”, “ally”, and “essential” (2018) stands in contrast to America as “unilateral” (2018b), “opponent” (2018b;2018;2019), and challenger (2018b;2018). As a consequence, Europe’s decision to commit to the JCPoA is being portrayed as the “only peaceful alternative” in which Europe acts as the protector of the rule based order (2018b;2018), as independent, choosing its own path (2018), and as more effective. Furthermore, alternative global relations are mentioned, independent of American influence (2018a;2018b;2018;2019).

In conclusion, we may see the recognition of the American decision-making as well as the evaluation of it as being counter European and global interests. Moreover, the violation of norms as multilateralism, international law and initial patterns of cooperation, as well as the missing respect for the commitment to international agreements has been recognized and assessed by the EEAS. Furthermore, we may observe consequences to the understanding of the American role, the Euro-American relationship and European positionality within the system, through the strive for a more autonomous and independent European community, as well as the establishment of systems of cooperation irrespective of American participation within it. The following part will present the findings of the second set of samples, namely, the analysis of the discourse that is being applied by the French president Macron.

4.1.2. The Republic of France

The documents assessed are both representing the opinions and attempted politics of the French president Macron. While the conducted interview with the British magazine “The Economist” (Macron,2019b) is directed towards a broader global audience, the speech is held at a French ambassador’s conference in Paris in front of French diplomats and civil servants (Macron,2019a). Both documents are similar in the multitude of topics addressed. As the choice of topics is rather broad, the analysis will directly focus on the framing of the global order, American dominance, the Euro-American relationships, as well as the consequences of American action for the European community.

In particular, Macron describes the global order as “disrupted”, implying the end of western and more importantly, American hegemony, which has informed the system in which the global community operates (Macron,2019a). Furthermore, he frames the system as being not only European but global, rule based and open (Macron,2019a) and formerly informed through the “preservation of world peace” with the US at the centre as the “ultimate guarantor” in a system of values (Macron,2019b). However, according to Macron, the order is shifting towards a bipolar centred order in which China and the US share their power (Macron,2019a), in which “notions of solidarity” are lost and in which the “ultimate guarantor” becomes “protectionist”, “secure alliances” are called into question, and the economic system “does not suit everyone anymore” (Macron,2019b). In this context, the American role is shaped by an end to its “dominance”, “due to mistakes”, “wrong decisions”, and the initiation of conflict by the “recent administration” (Macron,2019a). Furthermore, Macron frames the American decision-making as the “abandoning of treaties” through which solidarity appears to be not “inalienable” anymore (Macron,2019a). Rather, the American decision-making (as the termination of the INF

treaty (NYT,2019)) is provoking “escalation” and is a representation of “differences that took shape” between the US and its allies (Macron,2019a). Furthermore, American decision-making would have been “unthinkable five years ago” whereby the traditionally “benevolent United States” is shifting in its position from “acting as the ultimate guarantor of the system” (Macron,2019b) to “not acting as a friend” (Macron,2019a). In this manner, Macron states that “Trump does not share our idea of the European project” but his policy is rather “diverging from this project” by “turning the back on Europe” which provokes “instability” and “rising tensions” (Macron,2019b). Finally, the political and strategic arrangements preferred by Trump are “one-sided” as Trump is neither “prepared to pay for and guarantee a security system, nor “activating solidarity” within NATO for the protection of the European project (Macron,2019b). In the eyes of Macron, the US is promoting a “weak diplomatic standpoint” (Macron,2019a), is not sharing the same interests and is thus, “not functioning to its role” (Macron,2019b).

Consequently, the Euro-American relationship in which Europe was formerly “built to be America’s junior partner” (Macron,2019b) has to be “re-examined”, the “diplomatic and military strategy” rethought (Macron,2019a), and political and military independence promoted (Macron,2019ab). While America would remain to be a “major ally”, the “ultimate guarantor” has “no longer the same relationship with Europe” (Macron,2019b). Furthermore, the understanding of Trump regarding NATO is rejected by Macron, arguing for NATO being the “price” for “acting as the ultimate guarantor”. Moreover, the relationship is shaped by “differences” (Macron,2019a), a lack of coordination, and the danger of exposing Europe to “vulnerability by continuing to support the system” (Macron,2019b). In this respect, Macron argues that France and Europe should not let “third parties manage” the neighbourhood policies (Macron,2019b). Followingly, according to Macron, Europe would “need to draw conclusions from the consequences of American action towards Europe”, and must, therefore, have the “freedom to act” (Macron,2019a), “fully embrace that form of independence that is essential to [Europe’s] diplomacy and strategic autonomy” (Macron,2019b), and “regain sovereignty in defence terms” (Macron,2019a). Thus, Europe would have the “right to autonomy not just to follow American sanctions” (Macron,2019b). Furthermore, Macron states that America “cannot prevent [Europe] from speaking to other actors” and promotes “reassessing major relationships” with countries as Russia (Macron,2019a).

In conclusion, the previous part has outlined the framing of the American decision-making and its impacts the understanding of the global structure, the Euro-American relationship, the American role, as well as the consequences for Europe, drawn by Macron via his discourse. In

general, we may outline three important aspects: Firstly, Macron frames the decision-making under Trump as diverging from the initial American policy attempts and negatively effecting the stability and functionality of the global order. Secondly, he regards the US as shifting from a benevolent leader towards a protectionist power which disregards former arrangements for the protection of Europe, as well as general European interests. Finally, Macron draws consequences in terms of greater political and strategic autonomy and independence for Europe, and the promotion of an alternative systemic order in which traditional alliances and rivalries are reconsidered, and new partnerships established. Thus, we may argue, that Macron is promoting the renunciation of the malfunctioning contemporary global order and a reordering without the US being at the centre of European policy making.

4.1.3 The Federal Republic of Germany

The following, and final part of the presentation of my findings will portray the analysis of three documents that have been analysed in relation to the position of the Republic of Germany to recent developments of the policy objectives and strategies that have been implemented by the American administration under president Trump. Each document can be argued to be directed to a distinctive audience, whereby each individual actor is arguably presenting the German state as well as the European community in a broader sense.

Merkel presents the global order as preferably “multilateral” and “open” in contrast to “isolation”, “protectionism” and “unilateral” decision-making (Merkel,2018b). According to her, problems can only be solved by “working together in the world”, whereby the times for cooperation may not be easy and the probability that “interests can be asserted at global level by a single actor is steadily decreasing“ (Merkel,2018b). Moreover, Germany has “tried to strengthen the role of multilateral organisations” and “sought to promote an open global trade system”, whereat the US would be leading a different approach (Merkel,2018b). Thus, conclusions must be drawn “without the United States”, as the US would recently be focussing “more on itself” (Merkel,2018b). While she highlights the importance of the US to Europe (Merkel,2018b), she emphasizes the issues arising, as “old allies are calling tried and proven alliances into question” (Merkel,2018a). Thus, according to Merkel, the “times [Europe] could rely on others have ended” (Merkel,2018a). She further argues against means of “isolation” as being “not constructive”, and against “protectionism” as being “the right answer” (Merkel,2018b). Consequently, while Europe has “relied on the United States of America” in terms of foreign policy, she emphasizes the need to become more independent from the US by saying: “we need [...] to take our fate in our own hands” (Merkel,2018b). Due to the changing

nature of the Euro-American relationship Europe can only make their voices heard through an united Europe (Merkel,2018a). Consequently, “Europe must become more capable of taking foreign policy action” (Merkel,2018a) and must try to “preserve” global cooperation, despite the changing nature of the American position (Merkel,2018b).

On the other hand, Maas argued for a “departure from the multilateral order” (Maas,2018) [translated by the author] in which the US, and Trump in particular, are willingly accepting disadvantages for Europe, whereby Europe cannot rely on agreements anymore (Maas,2018). In particular, the American withdrawal from the JCPoA affects Europe’s security interests “gravely” which leads to the need to react to “America first” with an united Europe (Maas,2018). Moreover, according to Maas, one country is preferred over another, “Europe is challenged” and thus, the relationship with the US should be readjusted (Maas,2018). Furthermore, he rejects the idea to “yield to the American regime of sanctions” (Maas,2018). Thus, “since Trump is inaugurated”, the political order has changed, and therefore, Europe could “not rely on America under this administration” (Maas,2018). Therefore, Europe should choose new paths with Russia and China and establish new partnerships within a new structure around the globe (Maas,2018).

In summary, both actors are presenting the global order as shifting towards unilateral approaches and challenging traditional forms of cooperation, in which notions of solidarity and norms of cooperation are being challenged by the US under Trump. Similar to the previous documents, the conclusion that is being drawn is directed towards a more autonomous and independent Europe, as well as the extension of partnerships impartially from American interests. However, both documents mention the actual importance of the US to Europe and the importance of the participation of the US within a global multilateral and open structure.

4.2 Conclusion of Findings

The findings present a multitude of positions regarding the recent foreign policy behaviour of the US under the leadership of Trump. Some documents differ in terms of their direct confrontation with the leadership of the Trump administration, others diverge in terms of their focus towards general or single decision-making, respectively, as the withdrawal from the JCPoA or the INF treaty. In general, each document highlights the differences that can be seen between the European and American parties, as well as assess American actions as negative in terms of the prevailing global order, and the impacts those decisions have on the military and economic security of Europe. Furthermore, each document highlights the need to react to the American behaviour by establishing new relationships with third states, becoming more

autonomous, and promoting a global order that is contrary to the self-interested, isolationist and protectionist approach of Trump.

Thus, these findings can be argued to be valuable for the analysis of the impact the perceptions of American policies by European actors have on the Euro-American relationship and the positionality within the global system. While each actor mentions the persisting supremacy of the US towards Europe, the actors either promote alternative structures, argue for the importance of new partners, or aim to construct a Euro-American relationship in which Europe is less dependent on the benevolence of the USA. In order to adequately assess the findings discussed above, I will followingly apply the theoretical framework to the analysis of the discursive production of the American positionality.

4.3 Assessing the findings

As highlighted in the previous part, each analysed actor is directing its focus on the foreign policy decision-making of Trump, although from different standpoints.

While the EEAS is directly focussing on the withdrawal from the JCPoA, the French and German representatives are drawing a broader picture of their perception of the American foreign policies. Moreover, every actor is implicitly questioning the ability and willingness of the US to either uphold, or respect the current global order, based on rules and norms that determine the structure of the relationships among each actor, and the appropriateness of each action.

For example, the analysis of the EEAS/EC has shown, that the withdrawal from the JCPoA is seen as challenging Europe and the global order (EEAS,2019), disrespecting former modes of cooperation, their commitment to European and global security and the persistence of a stable and peaceful global structure (EEAS,2018b; EC,2018). Similarly, the French President Macron has shown his concern regarding the disruption of the global order (Macron,2019a), due to the questioning of existing alliances and the decline of American hegemony which has been an important part for the “preservation of world peace” (Macron,2019b). Furthermore, the German representatives have outlined the importance of cooperation and multilateralism as essential parts of the political order and have formulated their concerns regarding the persistence of these features (Merkel2018b; Maas,2018). In this regard, the first part of this paper (*see* Chapter 2.0) has outlined the existence of the global hierarchical order, consisting of unequally ranked actors, whereby rank can be produced via the recognition of an actors superiority by its subordinate states (Wolf,2019). On the other hand, the recognition rests on the provision of a stabile social order, from which each subordinate state can benefit (Lake,2009; Lanoszka,2013).

In this sense, by questioning the functionality, the appropriateness, as well as the utility of the structure that informs and reproduces American superiority, I argue that the order in itself, and with it, the superior positionality of the US at its centre not only lacks recognition, but is actually challenged via the statements of the European representatives. Furthermore, this lack of recognition cannot be argued to be arbitrary, but rather to be resting on the decisions that have been made by the American side, challenging the current international structure, as outlined by the previous section. Thus, the American policy, withdrawing from the current social order and establishing a rather protectionist and isolated approach, aiming at enhancing America's stance in the world (White House,2018a; White House,2018b) can be said to be weakening the acceptance of its superior positionality. Nevertheless, whether the American standing would be decisive for the consideration of their power capabilities will be discussed in the following paragraph.

While one might focus on the predominance of American influence due to its material and military capabilities, American power has been argued to be neither total, but intertwined with the systemic structure through which its power works (Finnemore,2011; Mastanduno,2011; *see* Chapter 2.2.1). Thus, the US can be argued to be highly dependent on, not only the recognition of its superiority, but the reproduction of its positionality through the transmission of sovereignty from the subordinate European states, to the US themselves (Lake,2013). Thus, to see American positionality affected, one must not only recognize the disruption of the political order that induced the trading of sovereignty, but the transition of sovereignty itself.

In this sense, the previous part has outlined statements, directly addressing the trading of sovereignty to the US. In particular, the EEAS has not only emphasized the reluctance commit to the implementation of American extraterritorial sanctions in regards to the JCPoA-agreement, but has highlighted the autonomy of European action via the discursive differentiation between American and European approaches to decision-making, highlighting the disagreement between the US and its allies (EEAS,2018; EEAS,2019), the rightfulness of the European actions in contrast to the actions of their opponents (EEA,2018; EEAS,2019), and the resulting willingness to implement its own strategy in terms of the JCPoA (EC,2018). Furthermore, the French and German representatives have questioned the indispensability of the US by highlighting the escalating nature of the American policies (Macron,2019a), differences in approaching global decision-making (Merkel,2018b), and the rejection of just following the American regime (Maas,2018). Therefore, while we may question the long term effectiveness of challenging American foreign policy strategies via the implementation of alternative tactics, the active rejection on the one hand, and the discursive differentiation

between the US and the European actors on the other hand, might weaken the implementation of, e.g., sanctions, and the ability of the US to exercise its control over third countries in general. In addition to the structural constraints, the differentiation of American and European approaches might hamper the decision-making through institutional channels in which American power might be defused, but likewise maintained (Wohlforth et al,2011; Finnemore,2011; Mastanduno,2011). Thus, seeing the European continent as decisive in terms of the reproduction of American dominance via the approval and support of American action, the resistance of these very allies might be strongly affecting the power capabilities of the US.

Moreover, the analysis has identified the production of an understanding of the American role through further forms of differentiation. In particular, the EEAS has contrasted the US from being an essential partner and ally (EC,2018) to being an opponent and challenger (EEAS,2018; EEAS,2019). On the other hand, the EEAS has expressed the importance of the preservation of Euro-American cooperation (EC,2018). Furthermore, while highlighting the initial role of the US as being dominant and benevolent (Macron,2019a, Macron,2019b), Macron has framed the US and its decisions as unfriendly towards Europe, as well as a sign of the personal neglect of Europe. Finally, the German foreign minister has argued for a lack of reliability and the threatening nature of the policy agenda under Trump (Maas,2018). Thus, as argued via my theoretical framework, the discursive production of an actor's role can directly be associated with the shaping of its positionality within the structure. In particular, the discursive production of an actor's role based on the perception of the appropriateness of its actions might determine the capacities of an actor within certain structural surroundings (*see* p.13-14) (Matter&Zarakol,2016). Thus, the neglect of the current structure by producing the American role as incongruous with the structural arrangement of the Euro-American relationship, and framing the actions as contrasting with the understanding of appropriate behaviour, the European actors not only set the terms by which European commitment to American policies is acceptable, but also determine the political framework in which the US may act. In this manner, any violation of that normative framework of appropriateness affects the role of the US (Towns,2012), and the internal characteristics of the global hierarchical structure, through which American power works, as I have argued above.

Finally, the previous section has not only put emphasis on the understanding of the global order by the European actors in relation to the American role, but also the interpretation and reproduction of the Euro-American relationship as well as the creation of alternative structural settings, apart from US-leadership. In particular, the EEAS has highlighted alternative global frameworks of cooperation in which the EEAS aims at continuing collaboration with countries

as Russia and China, irrespective of the American withdrawal (EEAS,2018; EEAS,2019). Even more distinctively, Macron has demanded a general reconsideration of former relationships and rivalries with Russia as a consequence of “American action towards Europe” (Macron,2019a). Furthermore, the German representatives highlight the necessity to “preserve” (Merkel,2018b) global cooperation even without the USA (Merkel,2018b), including establishing new partnerships with Russia and China (Maas,2018). Moreover, the findings highlight attempts to become more autonomous and independent, in terms of European foreign policy decision-making, European security, and global cooperation. Thus, the recognition of the norm-violating behaviour of the US, affecting the understanding of the global hierarchical structure, as well as the American role and the normative framework that enacts each actor’s policy opportunities, simultaneously leads to a reconsideration of the European position in relation to the American superordinate. Thus, the attempt to create alternative power structures beyond the American influence is affecting the importance of the current political structure, and with it, the significance of the US as global leaders. As I have argued in the first part of this paper (p.11), alternative institutional and structural arrangements threaten the inescapability of the prevailing social political setting and thus, the structural framework through which American dominance operates. Hence, similar to the idea that is being presented by Hobson and Sharman (2005) regarding the cohesion of a hierarchical structure via a belief system that defines the respective norms of appropriate behaviour, the discursive construction of appropriate alternative forms of the hierarchical structure and new norms of interaction by European countries may lead to the disruption of the current political formation towards a new hierarchical framework, increasingly incorporating states like Russia and China and decreasingly emphasizing the importance of the US-leadership, as highlighted in the previous finding section. Thus, we may state that the foreign policy strategy of Trump and his administration, to break with initial norms of cooperation that have determined the exchange of sovereignty for military and political stability, is negatively affecting the positionality of the US within the hierarchical structure via the construction of a new American role, and therefore, challenge the capabilities of the US to shape global decision-making.

However, we may still question the temporality of these effects on the actual power capabilities of the US within the global hierarchical structure. Therefore, the following part will discuss possible constraints to my theoretical assertions.

4.4 European Autonomy

The analysis of the statements of the representatives of the European community and individual states, as presented and discussed in the previous parts, has shown an increased preparedness to improve the conditions for a more autonomous European continent, drawing conclusions from the decreasing attention paid by the current American administration. Furthermore, as argued above, the construction of the American positionality via the representation of the US as diverging from its original role and its behaviour towards its allies has resulted into sentiments of balancing American access to foreign policy decision-making through greater European independence. However, the idea of European autonomy is not a new phenomenon but has developed over last decades, calling for a greater responsibility of the European community, especially in terms of its ability to determine its own neighbourhood policy (Brattberg&Valášek,2019). Nevertheless, it is argued that the European continent is far from achieving the capabilities to decouple itself from US-leadership (Brattberg&Valášek,2019; Billon-Galland&Thomson,2018; Chaudoin et al,2018). Thus, this part discuss whether recent developments, triggered by the foreign policy approaches of Donald Trump, have indeed a decisive impact into the American positionality and thus, its global power capabilities. For this purpose, this part will place the analytical findings of the previous sections in the academic debate of recent IR scholarship.

As argued by Brattberg and Valášek (2019), the strive for greater European autonomy, especially in the military-strategic realm, has been developed throughout the last decades, trying to accomplish a greater independence from NATO and US' protection. More recently, those ideas have even been expanded to diverse notions of foreign policy issues, as well as “[...] economic, and technology dimensions” (Brattberg&Valášek,2019:10). While these developments have been met with general support from previous American administrations, the understanding of the necessity of European independence and the consequences of increasing proponents on the European side, has provoked scepticism in America (Biscop,2020). On the European side, the declining confidence in the uphold of security guarantees by Trump (Drent,2018), the growing pressures on Europe from America to step up the military spending, as well as the shifting nature of American behaviour, from persuasion to economic coercion (Biscop,2020), has called into question the initial structure of the Euro-American relationship, as outlined through the findings of the statements of the European representatives (EEAS, Macron, Merkel & Maas). On the other hand, progress in terms of autonomy has been stuttering regarding the effectiveness of the mechanisms, aiming to block American economic sanctions (Biscop,2020), as well as the development of appropriate

military structures, able to independently defend the European community as well as intervene in external crises (Zandee&Kruijver,2019; Billon-Galland&Thomson,2018, *see* Ch.2.2.1.1). Institutional structures within the global realm, are continuously influenced by American policies, governing the economic and political relations globally (Chaudoin et al,2018). Moreover, the fact that Europe is lacking consensus in its positioning towards European autonomy and its independence from American decision-making impedes collective European action (Biscop,2020). Finally, the British determination of its membership within the EU means the loss of one of the most important military and economic powers of the Union (Brattberg&Valášek,2019). Thus, full European independence would ideally take decades to accomplish, as argued by Macron (2019a), largely exceeding the tenure of President Trump and its administration.

Nevertheless, the argument of this paper persists in its value for the analysis of the long-term positionality of the US within the global hierarchical structure. Namely, despite the continuous importance of the US in terms of the European defence, as well as the persisting dominance in terms of global decision-making, the US heavily relies on the coordination with its allies to influence institutional decision-making via multinational support (Chaudoin et al,2018), to ensure the continuation of open markets for America, fostering American prosperity (Chaudoin et al,2018), and to secure normative backing of American politics. Thus, changing the nature of the relationships with its allies to a coercive based domination might enhance the short-term room for manoeuvre (Chaudoin et al,2018), but endangers long term support for its leadership role. Hence, the lack of support for its dominant positionality, paired with the strive for greater independence through the establishment of new multilateral relations and institutions beyond US-leadership in the long term (*see* Ch. 4.2), will affect the structural positionality of the US and the power that encompasses. While some might emphasize Trump's newly emerging commitment to the NATO (WP,2017), the recent withdraw from the INF-treaty (WP,2019) and his most recent halt of funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) (BBC,2020) are only two examples of the continuing shift of the American foreign policy away from initial standards of global cooperation. Therefore, the foreign policy strategy of the USA, under the administration of Trump is provoking a repositioning of its allied states towards its leadership role within the hierarchical structure, widely affecting its ability to determine global decision-making in the long term and thus, eventually weakening the power capabilities of the US.

5.0 Conclusion

Throughout the research paper, the author has aimed to answer the question whether the positionality of the US, and with it its structural power position, is affected by the foreign policy strategy of the recent American administration under the leadership of Donald J. Trump. The research question has been based on the change of strategy by the US in terms of the behaviour within the global liberal order towards American allies, which has been regarded as puzzling in the context of the importance of that very system for the preservation of American dominance. In the following, the paper has put emphasis on the structural arrangements within the unequally ordered system and the construction and preservation of those arrangements for the sake of political stability. The author has argued for the importance of the subordinate states for the establishment of the leadership role of the US via the voluntary transfer of freedoms and sovereignty for political benefits as military and economic security. In turn, I have argued that these arrangements might be questioned as a result of the violation of patterns of cooperation that have informed the initial relationship between the US and its subordinate peers. Consequently, it was argued that the initial source of American dominance might be under scrutiny and thus, the American power position attenuated.

In order to support these assertions, the author has conducted a qualitative discourse analysis of documents that represent the voices of European decision-makers, examining the construction of the American role as a leader, and the reconstruction of patterns of cooperation within the global hierarchical order. The analysis has shown the fragility of support for American policies, as soon as the US are not committing to the behaviours that induce their dominant position within the structure. Thus, the leading positionality of the US has been demonstrated to be questioned, affecting the ability of the US to shape the politics of third countries. Hence, the anti-globalist foreign policy strategies by the Trump administration are indeed challenging the American global dominance, instead of halting its decline.

Nevertheless, the global political system is highly complex and shaped by a multitude of socio-political developments through which the parsimonious approach, applied throughout the paper, might be questioned in its ability to include and foresee various developments. Thus, future research would need to extend the research to a multitude of socio-political settings, as well as examine whether the theoretical assertion may hold over a broad time-period. However, as the analysis has shown, the understanding of the American positionality to be declining creates incentives for subordinate states to increase the strive for greater political independence from the US which will ultimately affect the future relationships between the US and its European allies. Therefore, the thesis contributes to the understanding

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of international cooperation and the effects of foreign policy approaches within the global structure. Furthermore, the research exemplifies the importance of discourse on the construction and reconstruction of positionality, puts emphasis on the significance of the recognition of dominance, and highlights the varieties of power and its creation beyond the military and economic terrain. Hence, the research findings are highly valid within the field of IR literature.

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