

Chapter 6

Decoding the US– NATO Dynamics: A Thorough Analysis of Donald Trump and Joe Biden’s Foreign Policy Approaches

Akash Bag

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8820-171X>

Adamas University, India

Souvik Roy

Adamas University, India

Asif Iqbal Shah

St. Xavier’s University, Kolkata, India

ABSTRACT

The ripples of the shift in power in the USA were felt worldwide, not least in international security policy, where the USA has often chosen to be at the forefront throughout history. The country’s involvement in most international organizations had changed during the four years with Trump as president, and his mottos “America First” and “Make America Great Again.” The tone and fortunes surrounding NATO changed on January 20, 2021. This chapter has researched the national role conceptions of two American presidents, Donald Trump and Joe Biden, to see how their national role conception of the USA could affect the relationship between the USA and NATO with the help of the national role conception theory employed in this paper. It concludes that the presidents have partly different national role conceptions, with one role being the same and two being different. This chapter also concludes that different national role conceptions could affect the relationship between the USA and NATO.

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INTRODUCTION

Trump was particularly critical of the security policy organization NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and said that, among other things, the USA was “*exploited*” by the EU, as NATO favored Europe more than the USA. He also claimed that the organization was “*unfair*” (Clark, 2018). Even from NATO’s side, the relationship with the United States during Trump’s term of office has been described as difficult. Jens Stoltenberg (Secretary General of NATO) stated in a 2021 interview that the alliance had a challenging relationship with the Trump administration and that he had some difficult personal conversations with Donald Trump (Birnbaum, 2021). But since Joe Biden took oath as the President of the United States with his slogan “*America is back*” (Al Jazeera Staff, 2021). For example, he signed the Paris Agreement the day he took office as President (McGrath, 2021). During the 2021 NATO summit in Brussels, Biden addressed the remaining leaders and said that America’s commitment to the transatlantic alliance is unwavering (Garamone, 2021). The paper aims to explain the difference in the USA’s relationship with NATO during the Trump administration and the Biden administration using the theory of “*national role conception*” (NRC). With the purpose as a basis, we have formulated the following question: Can the difference in the USA’s relationship with NATO under Donald Trump and Joe Biden be explained by the national role perceptions of the presidents? The theory is based on IR (International Relations) and FPA (Foreign Policy Analysis). It is of the utmost importance that leaders’ decisions and national perceptions of roles are examined to understand the past, how international security policy should be managed, and what should be avoided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To justify this chapter’s contribution to already existing research, here is a section that takes a closer look at previous research on the USA’s relationship with NATO, previous comparisons between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, as well as examples of how the theory NRC has been used in previous studies. To get a good starting point in previous research, we intend to look closely at what we know about the relationship between the US and NATO. In his article “*NATO Enlargement and US Foreign Policy: The Origins, durability, and Impact of an Idea*” (Shifrinson, 2020, p. 342). Shifrinson examined how and why NATO has become an accepted and central part of US foreign policy. Using a mixture of congruence procedures and process tracing, Shifrinson concludes that NATO’s role in US foreign policy can be explained, among other things, by unipolarity, effect maximization for the US, and socialization. As Shifrinson writes in his article, NATO now has an obvious part in US foreign policy, which motivates this chapter about how a president (Donald Trump) can go against this obviousness in foreign policy statements.

In their article “*NATO Enlargement and US Grand Strategy: A Net Assessment*” (Menon & Ruger, 2020, p. 371). Menon and Ruger have also examined how NATO’s enlargement relates to the US’s strategy after the Cold War and how Russia has been affected by the cooperation. They write that the USA and NATO went hand in hand in their global security strategies after the Cold War, for example, when NATO allowed the USA and the leaders in Washington DC to influence Europe. According to the authors, Europe partially depends on protection from the United States through NATO. In the article, the authors emphasize that NATO’s continued existence ensures that Europe is a strategic subordinate to the US, but also tell how this has been and still is provocative for Russia.

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